

The Gilded Theosopher:  
A Short Life of Samuel Oakley Crawford

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[LONG VERSION]

In *Old Diary Leaves*, Henry Steel Olcott reflects on his tour of New Zealand, remarking that:

We sailed for Christchurch, September 3rd [1897], on the steamer *Te Anau*, and had a rough time of it... At 11 a.m. on the 4th we reached Christchurch, or rather Lyttleton, its harbor, some miles from town, where we were met and welcomed on behalf of the Branch by Mr. Rhodes and Mrs. Richmond, a lady who is known in India and Great Britain as well as in the colonies as an instructive platform speaker. I was the guest of Mrs. Fletcher, who made my stay most pleasant. At that time there flourished in that town the notorious bigamist and confidence-man, the "Rev." A. B. Worthington, a native of one of the Western States of America, gifted with great oratorical powers, a handsome person, persuasive in conversation, unscrupulous to the last degree; a man fit to teach high things but morally perverted; a woman-hunter whose career embraced a series of seven bigamous marriages in America and the pecuniary ruin of various wealthy ladies, whose money he got from them by lavish promises of mystical initiation and the acquisition of psychical powers. Just before my arrival he had made a great scandal in Christchurch by the seduction of a tall and handsome lady with whom he went through a bigamous marriage ceremony, but whose eyes were opened and heart broken by the discovery of still another liaison.

I was taken to see a fine church that he had built with the money of local dupes; a well-planned edifice with a spacious auditorium and a large round-fronted speaker's platform that recalled the one in Henry Ward Beecher's church at Brooklyn. His sermons, congregational talks and esoteric instructions to a select group of hypnotized men and budding prophetesses, were framed on Theosophical lines and he availed himself without compunction of the best things he could find in the books of Mrs. Besant and others of our writers. His villainy having been exposed by a male dupe, he fled the place, took refuge in another colonial town and with matchless effrontery began the same game over again. On the 10th of September the poor lady, the victim above mentioned and who had adopted the name "Sister Magdala", came to see me and excited my warm sympathies by her tale of woe. I can see her now standing before me, with her large eyes swimming with tears and her tall, graceful figure shaken with grief. I tried to give her some comfort and she brightened up for the time being, but alas! misery was her karmic inheritance for this life and since the interview in question she has committed suicide. The case of this man Worthington furnishes a romantic chapter for the history of the rogues of both sexes who have utilized the Theosophical teachings, sometimes as members and sometimes as non-members, for the promotion of vile personal ends. Worthington's is a sad case, however looked at, for, as said above, he was possessed of talents and, but for the perversion of his lower nature as regards women and money, for each of which he had an equal hunger—although he wanted money only to squander it—he might have been one of the most useful as well as eloquent religious teachers of the day. He taught a gilded Theosophy with surpassing eloquence, and when his crises came and he was sent to prison for terms of years (as he was, and is now) his followers had no natural rallying centre save in the Theosophical Society.<sup>1</sup>

Arthur Bentley Worthington, Olcott's gilded Theosopher, had indeed made life in New Zealand difficult for the Theosophical Society. His organization, the Students of Truth — based on Christchurch with a chapter in Auckland — claimed more than 2000 members at its height in 1893. When the Auckland chapter of the Students of Truth was opened, Worthington let it be known through the newspapers that its object was to undo Theosophy in the capital, and — when Worthington was exposed as a serial bunko artist and bigamist in June of 1893 — the ways in which Theosophy and the Students of Truth had become intermingled in the public mind was a source of concern for NZ Theosophy. One F. E. Herbert, writing to the *Auckland Star* in late June of 1893, suggested that:

Now that the Worthington scandal has shown up the Students of Truth in a new light, the Theosophists are very much exercised in their minds, and wish to impress the public with the fact that the Theosophical Society has no connection with the Students. Well, that may be, but I know positively that members of the T.S. have circulated Worthington's publications, and some of the persons now connected with the Students used to attend the meetings of the the Theosophists and used to, and do now, promulgate Theosophical doctrines. Your space is far too valuable, or you might place in parallel columns the teachings of Worthington with those of Theosophy, when the public would see them to be six of one and half-a-dozen of the other. But save your readers the infliction; they have had enough already.<sup>2</sup>

From my reading of Students of Truth material and published transcripts of Worthington's sermons, there are no obvious similarities between the teachings of the Students of Truth on the one hand and Theosophy on the other. If Worthington promised "mystical initiation and the acquisition of psychical powers" as Olcott suggested, there is no evidence of this in his published teachings and sermons, which are infested with the abstract noun clusters of Christian Science, but which offer no hint of Theosophical concepts.<sup>3</sup> But there were inner and outer orders to the Students of Truth, as well as separate developmental paths for men and women, and the teachings of the inner order are lost to us; Worthington was charged, by his critics, with teaching radically different doctrines to the outer and inner orders, and "infernal" ones to the inner orders; and, later in his life, in Australia, he taught a doctrine that included ascended Masters in the Himalaya, Rosicrucianism, astral projection and other occult ideas not inconsistent with early TS teachings.

Olcott's condemnation of Worthington — talent, wasted in chicanery — suggests a sublimated admiration of Worthington as a peer: perhaps on account of Worthington's organizing and recruiting skills, which were unmatched in the Anglo-American occult movement at the time, in my estimation.

But Worthington — whose real name was Samuel Oakley Crawford — was in no sense Olcott's peer, even if the Students of Truth was the Theosophical Society's primary competitor in New Zealand in the 1890s. Crawford was not, like Editha Diss Debar, one of the bad seeds of the occult movement, turning the demand of true believers for esoteric teaching into a large-scale grifting engine. He was, rather, the greatest con artist of his generation, practicing his craft in many disciplines, including the occult, for which he had no special affinity or skill. His time as a "theosopher" (and we should use that word advisedly) is merely one period in the life of a man whose talents embraced banking, state government, land speculation, commodities trading and insurance as well as Spiritualism and the occult, and who certainly deserves consideration as the single most prolific and brazen fraudster of the period.

## **1847-1872: The Development of a Grifter**

Samuel Oakley Crawford was born in 1847 in Saugerties, Ulster County, New York, the second son and third child of Samuel Crawford (b. 1801), a town worthy, and his wife, Susan Reynolds (b. 1810). In the 1850 Federal census, Samuel Sr. is listed as a deputy sheriff (presumably, of Ulster County) and in the 1860 Federal census as a customs house officer, indicating clearly his connections with the local power structure.

Crawford lived at home, as far as can be determined, until 1864, when, at 17, he enlisted in the Union Army, possibly in the 25th NY Infantry, serving until the end of the war.<sup>4</sup> Returning to civilian life, Crawford chose law as a career, matriculating at Columbia College and graduating in 1867, while living at 66 Congress Street in Newark, New Jersey.<sup>5</sup> At this time, Crawford may have become a member of a New Jersey Methodist congregation, and begun a career as a preacher; newspaper accounts of Crawford's career published in the 1890s and after occasionally assert this. Certainly, in early 1868, Crawford entered the law practice of John D. Townsend,<sup>6</sup> a NY criminal defense attorney perhaps best known for his defense of William "Boss" Tweed in 1885 and after, and shortly thereafter — in May of 1868 — Crawford married his first and only legitimate spouse, Josephine C. Moore, ten years his senior, and a telegraph operator. The two had a daughter shortly after the marriage.<sup>7</sup>

Apparently, Crawford and his family moved from New York to Philadelphia<sup>8</sup> some time in 1868 or 1869, but Crawford's business took him to New York, and it was in Albany that Crawford first went badly wrong, obtaining a loan from one Elias Vanderliss of \$250 "in money and board" by claiming that he, Crawford, had collateral for the loan in the form of "a bond and mortgage for \$3000 which had been given him by Amelia Reynolds."<sup>9</sup> Newspaper reports vary as to the number and type of charges against Crawford — one or two counts of either "forgery"<sup>10</sup> or "false pretenses"<sup>11</sup> — but whatever the charges, Crawford was found guilty, on October 10, 1870 after a short trial, and sentenced to two years in the care of the New York state correctional system.<sup>12</sup> At the time of his arrest, Crawford was also wanted by A. and E. C. Koodz, who were advertising for him in Albany papers to appear in Albany county court to answer charges related to the misappropriation of several hundred dollars from those two individuals.<sup>13</sup>

## **1872-1883: Running The Short Con**

Upon his release from prison, Crawford — without his wife and daughter — moved to Chicago, to live with his sister Mary and her husband Harry or Henry Talbot, who were in the patent match trade there. He stayed out of the public eye until some time in the spring of 1874, when he married (his first bigamous marriage) the wonderfully named Wealthy Gay Finefield (b. 1852), a young girl whose mother was noted in contemporary newspaper accounts as having been "a clairvoyant in Boston" some years before.<sup>14</sup> He remained in his marriage to Finefield long enough to extract cash from the Finefield family, and then migrated to Xenia, Ohio, where he adopted the name Eugene Samuel Bouvier Walton, and married May or Mary Barlow, the daughter of a Judge Barlow<sup>15</sup> — again, with a view to extracting money from his bride's family, and skipping town. As the *Boston Herald* told it, more than a decade later:

It was here that he...claimed that he had been a major in the army, showing his commission as an officer of that rank, as well as those of lieutenant and captain. One of his greatest pleasures in this little country town was to entertain the friends of his wife and his father[-in-law] with thrilling tales of his war experiences. It was here that he is first known to have developed his remarkable faculties of shedding copious tears or of expectorating blood whenever he considered the occasion suitable. He used to refer tearfully to the death of his brother William during the gallant charge at the battle of Gettysburg, where he was compelled to leave his side and continue fighting at the head of the column. This sad tale lost a good

deal of its effect some time later, when the residents of the town found that William had never been in the way, was still alive, and as great a scapegoat [sic] as his brother.<sup>16</sup>

Crawford was forced to leave Xenia in January of 1876 when he forged Judge Barlow's name on a bankrupting \$3000 note — or forged that note in order to raise money for his flight.<sup>17</sup> He may have left behind not only a wife but also a child.<sup>18</sup> In any case, by the start of 1876, one basic aspect of Crawford's pattern as a con artist was established; he had learned to raise money prior to his departure from the scene of a con, in order to be well situated financially when he arrived at the next town in which he needed to run a scam.

For some six months, Crawford moved through Midwestern towns (including Wichita, Kansas according to some accounts), operating under the name Eugene Bonner, until he arrived in Peoria, Illinois in June of 1876. There Crawford attempted what I think was his first long con, writing a letter to one Wilton Reynolds, a local financier and philanthropist, in which Crawford rehearsed a carefully-edited version of his education and personal history, and requested assistance in finding work. This letter led ultimately to Crawford's establishment — with Reynold's financial assistance — in law practice in Peoria, and Crawford might well have found Peoria a fertile long-term theatre of operations, were it not for the fact that Gay Finefield — with the assistance of Chicago private detectives — tracked him to Peoria, and journeyed there herself, to entreat him to return to Chicago and their marriage. Crawford put Finefield off with promises, sent her back to Chicago, and, in April of 1877, headed for San Francisco, with money and letters of introduction in his pocket from Reynolds to certain well-placed San Franciscans.

Crawford took no wife in Peoria, though what he might have done were it not for Finefield's arrival there is anyone's guess. In San Francisco, he joined the law firm of Lamar & Johnson, and almost immediately attempted to run his short marriage con, with one Miss Langley as his target, despite the fact that Miss Langley was already engaged to one Mr. Bourne. Crawford prevailed in his suit, but not in his intention, as the *San Francisco Bulletin* (quoting the *Napa Register*) detailed:

Some new and decidedly startling developments have just appeared in the case of Bonner v. Bourne, which occupied the attention of the public a few weeks ago. Yesterday was the day set for celebrating the nuptials of Major Eugene Bonner and Miss Minnie Langley at St. Helena....Last Tuesday afternoon the Major left San Francisco for St. Helena, accompanied by the minister who was to tie the marriage knot. On Tuesday, also, Mrs. Langley [Minnie's mother] received a letter, preceded by a telegram, from Major Bonner's sister, who had heard of her brother's love affair, and resolved to nip it in the bud. The telegram said to stay the marriage until the letter arrived, and the letter said that the Major is already married, and has a wife and child living in the States. To confirm this a telegram was received from a San Francisco lady, intimate with the Langleys, which contained information to the same effect. This lady obtained her information from a letter from Mr. King of Peoria of Illinois....On the arrival of the 7:30 PM train in St. Helena, Major Bonner at once proceeded to the Langley residence, where he was met at the door by Mrs. L., coolly invited in, and told what she had heard. The Major replied: "It is an infamous lie." Mrs. Langley then produced the letters and the telegrams, and confronted him with the evidence. The Major was dumbfounded, and, as the story goes, pulled out a revolver and attempted to shoot himself in the head. Some one present stopped him....<sup>19</sup>

Crawford exited St. Helena that evening, returning to San Francisco, apparently with several thousand dollars of his intended mother-in-law's money.<sup>20</sup> Still operating under the name Eugene Bonner, he traveled on to Salt Lake City, where he may have been accepted into the Church of Latter Day Saints, and allowed to preach in temple.<sup>21</sup> The anti-LDS local paper, *The Daily Tribune*, outed and targeted Crawford, reprinting material on the San Francisco scandal from Bay area papers, and saying:

It is a notorious fact that all outcasts of society guilty of bigamy or other criminal marriage relations inevitably find their way to Salt Lake to escape the just punishment of their wrong-doing. They are doubtless of the impression that where polygamy and concubinage are permitted to flourish in opposition to United States law, no danger is to be apprehended.<sup>22</sup>

Bonner — who perhaps would have been wise to have swapped aliases before arriving in Salt Lake — decided to stand and fight, writing to the *Daily Tribune* that:

My name is Eugene Bonner; I am the son of Samuel E. Bonner, who died in New York City some ten years ago. He was well known there as an honorable gentleman, and the statement that I brought pecuniary ruin upon him, is totally untrue, as he died leaving a comfortable competency, and I was no greater expense to him than that involved in my education, and such outlay as belonged to the life of the son of a man in his position. That I led a dissipated life in New York City, is equally untrue, as anyone who has ever known me can certify to; or that I broke my mother's heart, as she is still living, and our intercourse and affections are marked by daily letters and by a mutual confidence and esteem; and in the unfortunate notoriety I am now suffering she is my only comfort. She and my two sisters are now in Europe, and have but recently learned of what transpired....I now come to the statement which was contradicted by me in yesterday's Tribune, i.e., that I am a married man. In that contradiction I asked the time, place and person, when where and to whom I was married. Your copy from the Peoria Transcript says in some town in Ohio, but no name or time is given. I repeat my former query, and I also say that to say a man by the name of Waltin [sic] did so and so, is not to say that Eugene Bonner did it until you identify the latter as the former.<sup>23</sup>

Why Crawford chose to brazen it out, when he had so immediately departed the scene of the debacle in California, seems inexplicable unless we know that Crawford had, in the span of a week or so in Salt Lake City, set in motion a real-estate con, involving the profitable exploitation of a mineral-rich parcel of land he claimed to own in Sacramento, California, which required only a little ready capital, from Salt Lake partners, to return huge profits. He found that partner in one of Salt Lake City's leading citizens, Nicholas Groesbeck,<sup>24</sup> who advanced him several thousand dollars, so that Crawford could go to Sacramento and clear the property of a prior lien. Crawford left, with Groesbeck's money, probably in January of 1878, and was not seen again.

Crawford may have made it to Sacramento, with Groesbeck's money, as Colonel Eugene Bonner, but that name was so soiled that, by the time Crawford arrived in Sherman, Texas<sup>25</sup> in March of 1878, he was operating under a different name: Bannerton, variously Eugene, or E. T., an attorney. Crawford set up a law practice in Sherman, mixed in polite society, and made several propositions of marriage, none of which was accepted. But his time in Sherman was short. By August of 1878, he had again been exposed:

But whilst Bannerton was winning his triumphs in the social and fashionable circle of our city, he did not make much headway as a lawyer. He was not much sought after by those having business in our courts, and his receipts being consequently light, his manner of life and habits depleted rather suddenly his not over plethoric purse. But he assumed familiarity with many of those who are regarded as the solid men of Sherman, he managed to make a favorable impression on some of our shop men, whom he has victimized to a greater or less extent. But the brilliant career of this gallant of Sherman's fashionable society was destined to an early termination. For some days past suspicions have been whispered about that Bannerton might possibly be sailing under false colors, and was not the model young man that fond mammas thought him to be. And yesterday, those suspicions ripened into established, unquestioned fact, when a letter was received in this city, enclosing a photograph of Bannerton and giving a history of his exploits in other localities.<sup>26</sup>

And so, in late August of 1878, operating as Bannerton or perhaps Eugene Beneteau, Crawford moved north, to Chicago and then Detroit. Short of money — he having failed to touch a local citizen for cash before his exposure in Sherman — Crawford took up acting in Detroit, joining Helene Blythe's acting company, and married one of its members, Eliza Huntoon, in December of 1878, in Chicago.<sup>27</sup> The Blythe troop, according to contemporary newspaper accounts, foundered in New Lisbon, Wisconsin, and

disbanded, and Crawford and his newest wife took up residence there, where Crawford practiced law for until some time in 1882, when “being charged with embezzlement and forgery, he skipped once more, leaving his [law] partner to pay the bail-bonds, and his wife No. 4 to keep herself and her baby girl.”<sup>28</sup>

From his departure from New Lisbon in late 1882, until April of 1883, when Crawford arrived on his sister Mary’s doorstep in Boston, Crawford appears to have earned his living by traveling the rapidly expanding and spidering railroad routes in the north central part of the US, masquerading as an English nobleman named Lord Ashton<sup>29</sup> and bilking shopkeepers and bankers in small towns. No doubt this high-risk peripatetic existence exhausted Crawford, and he needed to go to ground, to work out a better model for funding his lifestyle.

### **1883-1889: Running The Long Con**

Crawford found that better model — the long con, in his case measured in months or years — when he settled into Boston in April of 1883, living with his sister Mary on Euclid Street in Dorchester, and operating under a variant of his own name, as Samuel Oakley. He entered a law practice at 34 School Street, and was quickly drawn into the Boylston Street Spiritualist community, and in particular to the circle around Mrs. E. J. Sargent, a Boston medium who kept a boarding house with her husband, John P. or John D. Sargent.<sup>30</sup>

Crawford spent nearly three years — from April of 1883 until February or March of 1886 — working to separate John Sargent from both his wife and his money, and achieved his objective, leaving Boston for Charleston, West Virginia in the spring of 1886, with a trail of unpaid debts, several thousand dollars of Sargent’s money, Sargent’s wife and — for added spice — the unmarried sister of Sargent’s wife, Miss Louisa Jenkins, also a Spiritualist.<sup>31</sup>

Arriving in Charleston in February or March of 1886, Crawford passed his mistress and her sister off as his sisters, and himself as J. Oakley Crawford,<sup>32</sup> a retired lawyer and judge with a history in the lumber business, a poor constitution, and more money than sense.<sup>33</sup> He immediately set himself up as a mark, letting it be known that he intended to make major investments in what was, at the time, still a frontier area of the country, to make himself the target of the more unscrupulous locals.

[In April 1885 Crawford] arrived at Charleston, accompanied by two handsome and accomplished ladies. He introduced himself as Judge H. T. [sic] Crawford, of New York, and the ladies as his sisters....He casually remarked that he was the guardian of his brother’s children, and would in a short time have the trifle of \$150,000 to invest for their benefit, and had a great mind to put it into West Virginia land in the vicinity of Charleston, and he regarded it as a wise investment to buy up a big block of land....This caused a big flutter among real estate men and speculators as they knew that the land could be bought [far less expensively than Crawford claimed]. A neat trap was set to catch the wealthy and unsuspecting Judge, and certain parties entered into careful negotiations with him, and while he was being beguiled a syndicate was formed among large land owners, who put their own real estate in, and brought [sic] other lands upon options, so that a block of 35,000 acres was all ready for the Judge’s hand as soon as he was ready to invest the money of his wards.<sup>34</sup>

Having fallen neatly into Crawford’s trap, the locals were ready for skinning. Crawford sold his personal possessions, and moved in with one of the lead speculators in the syndicate, ostensibly in preparation for the land purchase. Crawford then handed out drafts on a bank to the syndicate members — apparently dated at 10 days — before reporting that the transaction hit a snag.

About that time the Judge was greatly annoyed. All his wards had been notified and would be present within a few days to participate in the final consummation of the big investment, and among them were

two lovely girls in their teens. But one of the wards could not be heard from. He was in Montana Territory, and both the mails and the telegraph failed to catch him up.<sup>35</sup>

Crawford exchanged more of his future-dated checks for ready money from syndicate members, to fund his trip to the Montana Territory to retrieve the wayward ward, and in March of 1886, disappeared, leaving his household<sup>36</sup> and the expectant land syndicate high and dry in Charleston.

From this point forward, in his career, Crawford's schemes take on a scale sufficiently large to attract the attention of local newspapers while he is conducting them. Although he continues to run the short marriage con as a component of his new repertoire — and as a way to raise money, in more dire circumstances — Crawford graduates, after 1885, to the long con, and to city-scale chicanery. He chooses towns small enough to make his mark quickly — this will be a hallmark of his *modus operandi* for the duration — stages a splashy introductory event, and with or without a marriage sideline, operates as much to obtain power in the community as to obtain money. He also begins to exploit a newly-available facility: large-scale unsecured credit.

Charleston, West Virginia, therefore, is the scene of Crawford's transition to the long con. There, he succeeded in taking the land syndicate that intended to take him for something between \$5,000 and \$20,000 — and got a taste of what a well-planned well-executed long con could yield. He must have intended to do it again, forthwith. The Judge Crawford alias was abandoned on Crawford's way, south, to the scene of his next scheme: Griffin, Georgia. There, in the spring of 1886,<sup>37</sup> Crawford became Horace Oakley (H. O.) Wood, a handsome Union major from Boston who introduced himself to his fellow townspeople by spending lavishly, engaging in offhand discussions about local improvements and investments the scope of which boggled local minds, and — during the 4th of July celebrations in Griffin — giving a stirring North-South reconciliation speech before the annual gathering of the state's volunteer militias.

For four years I carried the musket and haversack and wore the blue. I met on many a field the boys who wore the gray and stand here as a living witness to your bravery, heroism and patriotism. During the war I respected your devotion to the cause for which you fought, and while I then and now differ with you in reference to that cause I yet honor you, and say that braver boys than those who wore the gray never went to battle.<sup>38</sup>

He was made the leader of one of those militias, the Spaulding Grays, and carried on a lavish lifestyle in town, courting and marrying Miss Elizabeth Hill, who came to the marriage with \$60,000 and a large parcel of land from her wealthy father (which Crawford mortgaged for cash the day after the wedding), in August of 1886. The two left on a European honeymoon immediately and remained in Europe until January or February of 1887. While Crawford and his newest bride were honeymooning, the mortgage of the marriage property, as well as Crawford's significant unpaid debts in Griffin, were common talk in the town, and Crawford returned to find himself the target of suspicious and aggressive townspeople. He decided on a confrontational strategy, accusing his accusers, and silencing them with dramatic indignation. The ploy worked, and Crawford was free to continue working his scheme.

In May of 1887, an announcement appeared in local papers, reading:

Griffin's new bank, with \$200,000 capital, will be started between July 1 and 15. The officers are: H. O. Wood, President; W. E. H. Searcy, Vice President; W. L. Goodrich, Book-keeper, and the cashier will be a gentleman who is thoroughly acquainted with the country, and who is a fine business man, who will merit the confidence and esteem of all. The bank will endeavor to do the business between Macon and Atlanta, which has heretofore gone to those places for accommodation. The bank will be known as the Merchants' National, of Griffin.<sup>39</sup>

Crawford had proposed the bank<sup>40</sup> initially, with his share of the capital coming from an uncharacterized Boston syndicate, and the remainder from local worthies; no stock in the bank was available for small-time local investors, despite their entreaties. Wood was holding unallocated bank stock, however, and in early June he began selling it, in private transactions, to well-to-do locals, netting about \$8,000 on these sales. With this money, as well as \$4,000 from a note on his father-in-law's account at the Gate City National Bank in Atlanta (predictably, forged), Crawford announced he was off to Cincinnati, to see to the manufacture of the Merchants' National Bank safe, and disappeared.<sup>41</sup>

Crawford left Griffin, without his wife, in mid-June of 1887, and the hunt for him was on almost immediately thereafter. A few days after Crawford's departure, the postmaster in Griffin, Georgia received a communication from the Eureka Detective Agency of Charleston, West Virginia, reading in part:

Arrest J. Parkly [sic] Crawford, confidence man, age 47, height 5 feet 7 inches, weight 140 pounds, good sized, dark mustache, clipped short, showing grey; dark hair, never worn very short, also showing some grey, steele [sic] blue-grey eyes, very expressive; sometimes wore eyeglasses; showing a neat, perfect set of teeth while talking. Wore neat fitting clothes, not flashy. The last suit was a gray and had the stamp of L. K. Devendor, of Washington, DC. Was a graduate of Columbia Law School. Was a fluent, easy talker; was thoroughly posted on politics; made Republican campaign speeches in 1884 in Ogdenburg, New York, and Schoharie [sic] and Chemung counties; claims special intimacy with public men; was a Union soldier, Company "B", Fifth New York. and gets a pension addressed to Catskill, New York; was wounded in the calf of one leg with a shell; is a social, pleasant, gentlemanly [sic] fellow in every way, and generally liked by both sexes. He will probably claim to own large tracts of land in West Virginia, which he wants to sell or trade.<sup>42</sup>

Before the end of July 1887, the connection between Judge J. Oakley Crawford and Major Horace Oakley Wood was clear, from Atlanta to Manhattan. But no one involved in the hunt for Crawford connected either of those men with Arlington Buckingham Wadsworth, who arrived in Spokane, Washington Territory, in late July of 1887.<sup>43</sup>

As Wadsworth, Crawford arrived in style, with money he led people to believe stemmed from California mining interests, and immediately began talking of opening a chain of banks. His local mark, A. M. Cannon, a banker of note, was drawn in to Crawford's banking scheme, in part no doubt because Crawford began paying his attentions to Kittie Clark, Cannon's stepdaughter.<sup>44</sup> When the Cannons went east, to Chicago, in the fall of 1887, Crawford followed them<sup>45</sup> — apparently, the business community in Spokane was becoming uneasy with the amount of short-term credit they had collectively extended to A. B. Wadsworth — and there Crawford married Kittie Cannon, on October 18, 1887, at the Palmer House, with A. M. Cannon's blessing.<sup>46</sup> Immediately after the marriage, Crawford asked Cannon to cash a large check for him, claiming he had deposited tens of thousands of dollars in Cannon's bank in Spokane prior to his departure for Chicago. Cannon wired his bank manager in Spokane; no such deposit had been made. Caught and cornered, Crawford apparently accepted a payment of \$600 from A. M. Cannon to depart immediately without Cannon's daughter, and did so.

Crawford's destination this time was Providence, Rhode Island, where he adopted the name A. B. Ward, and landed a job with a local newspaper. Identifying Miss Mary E. Perry as an eligible woman, with a mother of some means, Crawford wooed and married Miss Perry within a month, and after paying a quick visit to his sister in the Boston area (apparently to borrow money), Crawford packed his new wife and mother-in-law off: to North Forks, in the Dakota Territory.<sup>47</sup>

In North Forks, Crawford's schemes reached a level of complexity and finesse that boggles the mind, even today. By January of 1888,<sup>48</sup> within weeks of arriving in North Forks, Crawford — as A. B.

Ward — had set up a law practice with a local partner, become involved in territory politics and been marked as a coming man in the community. By May of 1888, A. B. Ward was a Republican delegate for the county,<sup>49</sup> and addressing the local post of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR).<sup>50</sup> He began taking on high profile public prosecutions, and his partner Wilder was offered a judgeship. In the fall, Ward's political credentials and elocutionary skills were sufficiently well thought-of for him to be invited to stump the Midwest for Buchanan; he spoke in several states on the candidate's behalf, including in Indiana and Minnesota.<sup>51</sup>

Early in 1889, Crawford must have felt untouchable. The *Grand Forks Herald* remarked, in late December of the prior year, that “the brilliant and versatile Gen. A. B. Ward is daily gaining new laurels. It is true that a great many of our politicians are jealous of his talents, and fear his growing popularity and endeavor to down him on every occasion; but, like Banquo's ghost, he will not down and bobs up serenely every time.”<sup>52</sup> I have the sense that Crawford believed his own press, for we find him, in late January of 1889, backing a political campaign of great local interest — one rumored to be fraught with voter fraud.

Gen. Ward is at Bismarck, conducting the case of Councilman Walsh in the contest between the latter and George B. Winship. There is no abler man or more brilliant orator in Dakota than Gen. A. B. Ward. Any community ought to be proud of such a man, but it is said that some of the leaders up in Grand Forks are so intensely jealous of him that they readily combine to keep him in the background. But such a man cannot be kept down. He is bound to come to the front and take a prominent part in the affairs of the new north star state.<sup>53</sup>

Crawford, as Ward, was in fact being promoted as a likely candidate for the US Senate seat (North) Dakota would be awarded once statehood was ratified. But he had chosen, unwisely, to back a candidate running in opposition to George B. Winship, a powerful figure who was the editor of the *Grand Forks Herald*, and had a strong desire to undo the Ward his paper had helped create. Learning that Ward had been identified as A. B. Wadsworth — by several individuals, in both Grand Forks and Bismarck — Winship arranged for an innocuous-looking insert to appear in the *Grand Forks Herald*, reading simply:

A. B. Wadsworth, of Spokane Falls, Washington territory, arrived in the city today.

As the *Herald* reported on February 4, 1889, when Ward was clearly gone from Grand Forks:

Mr. Ward got home Saturday afternoon. He was filled with delight over the success of his case in Grafton...It is presumed that he read the Herald and it is also certain that a great change suddenly came over his feelings. That evening he called a gentleman of the city...to one side and confidentially told him a queer story. He said he had collected \$500 for an eastern firm, and had loaned it [to Councilman Walsh] to help him get through the contest. He could not get it back on time. Winship and the district attorney had learned of the transaction and that afternoon had caused Judge Templeton to sign a warrant for his arrest. He must leave the country at once, and he must have money. He offered his watch as collateral and wanted the friend to raise him \$100....Monday morning, [Ward] went to Minto and is said to have collected \$250 — his fee for the Collins [murder] case. He then had someone drive him to the Northern Pacific, a few miles across the country, and took the train for Pembina. He registered at the Winchester house [in Pembina] Monday afternoon and that is the last known of him.<sup>54</sup>

Ward's life in North Forks collapsed immediately: on top of his wife, young child and mother-in-law. Loans were called in and could not be paid; collateral, itself not paid for, was seized by multiple parties. In every way, there was hubbub in the papers of the Dakota Territory over the collapse of the up-and-coming Ward, the Bismarck *Tribune* going far as to write a fairly lengthy piece of Shakespearean drama entitled “On the Flight of Gen A. B. Ward.”<sup>55</sup>

Just where General A. B. Ward had flown, was a matter of much speculation. He was seen in Chicago, and Toronto, and Minnesota. And in England. Papers across the country carried the story. Several<sup>56</sup> linked Ward to Samuel Oakley Crawford, but that connection was not uniformly made. The *New York Herald-Tribune*, reporting “Ugly Developments Following the Disappearance of General A. B. Ward,” remarked that “his name is not Ward, but Wadsworth, and...instead of coming from Providence, R. I., as he claimed, he came to Dakota from Spokane Falls, W.T., where he had swindled persons to the extent of about \$20,000. He is an orator of ability, and had won fame in Territorial conventions, which made him a prominent candidate for the United States Senate under the State Constitution, soon to be adopted in North Dakota. It is thought that he is in Winnipeg.”<sup>57</sup>

In fact, Crawford was, at that exact moment, in New York City, trying on a new alias: Arthur Bentley Worthington.

### **1889-1897: The Students of Truth**

I imagine that Crawford arrived, exhausted, broke and not a little frantic after the North Forks disaster, in New York City, in February of 1889, without any clear idea of what came next. He headed directly for New York City, I am sure, for the most obvious of reasons: it was the largest city in the US, and the easiest city into which to submerge.

Crawford was in New York by February 7 of 1889, certainly, because that is the date on which his next partner, the Christian Scientist apostate<sup>58</sup> Mary H. Plunkett, would later claim she met A. B. Worthington, and knew him at once to be her soul affinity.<sup>59</sup> Plunkett was legally married to John J. Plunkett at the time; the two had a son Paul and a daughter Pearl, and were leading a splinter faction of Christian Science in New York City, centered around their Christian Science school, and a magazine called *The International Magazine of Christian Science*. None of this was viewed as an impediment, by Mary Plunkett, to a repudiation of her marriage to Plunkett, followed by a public marriage ceremony in which she and Worthington proclaimed themselves one another’s soul-mates.<sup>60</sup>

Both the Plunketts had practiced celibacy as an aid to their ministry, but Mary Plunkett’s attraction to Worthington was clearly — in her husband’s mind at least — materially carnal and erotic.<sup>61</sup> Crawford was still a very attractive man, to be sure, but A. Bentley Worthington’s backstory was also attractive:

Mr. Worthington is 43 years old and lived in San Francisco from the time he was 4 years old until six months ago. He was interested in mines, and had some money, so that he didn’t have to work hard for a living. He was always interested in spiritual affairs, and studied other religions than the orthodox with eagerness. While on his way to Europe [in early 1889] he heard of Mrs. Plunkett’s teachings, and sought her. He became her student and gave up his trip to Europe. It did not take long for him to become intimately associated with the Plunkett establishment in both its domestic and business aspects.<sup>62</sup>

This backstory was torn to shreds by the *New York World*, in late July of 1889. The *World* named Worthington as:

General A. B. Ward, of Grand Forks, Dak., alias Arlington Buckingham Wadsworth, Major Horace Oakley Wood, Samuel Crawford, Eugene Bouvier Walton, Major Eugene Bonvier, Eugene Bonner, E. T. Bannerton, M. Bennateau, Arthur Wood, W. D. Wood and better known in New York as A. Bentley Worthington, editor of the *International Magazine of Christian Science* and husband of Mrs. Plunkett-Worthington (wife No. 8)...

Crawford treated the public to a sanitized version of his history, before going into hiding:

Nearly a quarter of a century ago, before I was twenty years of age, I told a falsehood in so small a matter that the money value involved was less than \$200, but the consequence was the blighting of a life otherwise full of promise and hope. From that day until last February, the tears were full of deceptions, mistakes and foolish efforts to hide [my] first offense by others of greater or lesser magnitude, until my life became a living falsehood. When the past caught up with me in one place I fled from it to another, often forced to do a wrong in the haste of the necessity of flight, compelled to take up the life at a new place, without a past to which I could refer....<sup>63</sup>

John J. Plunkett expressed his complete disgust, and filed for a divorce from Mary Plunkett.<sup>64</sup> Mary Plunkett went before her public:

I now declare that as soon as those whose names have been mentioned in the press as having cause for action against Mr. Worthington shall have presented their claims to me, fairly and squarely, I will, through the public press of New York City, ask him to return here and thereby prove our faith by our works. If he has the manhood I claim for him he will come when I call him, even if he knew it was to his death. He went away at my solicitation, and he will more readily return.<sup>65</sup>

This screening, along with what follows in their common history, fairly brands Plunkett as a collaborator in Worthington's deception, rather than as his victim or dupe. The victims of Crawford's schemes did come forward, to present their claims to Mary Plunkett (as she will detail, in a few year's time in New Zealand, when it becomes convenient for her to do so), and as a result, Plunkett, her children, Crawford, and a few close associates left New York for London, in September of 1889. Plunkett would never return to the US; Crawford would not return for twenty years.

The Worthington-Plunkett menage, in London, was expensive and short-lived. Mary Plunkett had left the US with several thousand dollars, but within a few months of their arrival in London, the cost of a first-class furnished house and Crawford's other tastes had reduced that sum by an order of magnitude: enough, as it happened, to pay for the group to travel from London, to Christchurch, New Zealand.<sup>66</sup>

Interestingly enough, news of the Worthington-Plunkett scandals had reached New Zealand before them, in September of 1889. The New York correspondent of the *Wanganui Chronicle* wrote a letter on the scandal in early September of 1889, remarking that:

Amongst the seekers after light and truth [from Christian Science] was a fascinating young convert named Worthington, who had boxed the compass in a number of professions, and not made a ten strike in any. But Worthington was hopeful; he had tried mining in California; he had wrestled with Blackstone Kent and Story, and failed to reach the Supreme bench. He had boomed Benjamin Harrison in the late Campaign, but had lived long enough to discover that Republicans are habitually ungrateful, for Benjamin hadn't even offered to make him a fifth class inspector in the Customs House, or a third class scrubber in the Navy Yard. As I said before Mr. Worthington went to Mrs. Plunkett in search of light, and he got it, and wonderful to relate he developed powers which astonished even himself, and that is saying a great deal, for Worthington is not easily astonished, — for he magnetized Mrs. Plunkett. Mrs. Plunkett discovered quite early in the action, that Worthington was the affinity that she had waited for so long, and six weeks after she gave [Mr.] Plunkett the grand bounce.... what made Mr. Plunkett particularly mad was, that Worthington had not only appropriated Mrs. Plunkett, body and bones; but he had also bagged fifteen thousand dollars of Mr. Plunkett's very hard cash, which Mr. Plunkett had *honestly* [emphasis original] earned in the science of Christian healing. Mr. Plunkett at the latest writing is resigned to the loss of Mrs. Plunkett, but not to the fifteen thousand dollars. He has commenced suit in court for the recovery of the money.<sup>67</sup>

Perhaps, if the *Chronicle's* correspondent had been more interested in setting down the facts of the matter, and less on sounding clever, he might have communicated some of the details, as well as the white-hot nature, of the scandal, and succeeded in getting the story picked up by other New Zealand papers. But that did not happen, and as a result New Zealanders did not, until it was too late to matter,

connect the Worthington and Plunkett of the Chronicle's letter with the two travelers who arrived in Christchurch in January of 1890, to begin building what would, by 1893, be a significant religious movement on New Zealand's South Island.

That movement — the Students of Truth — represents the pinnacle of Crawford's achievement as a con artist: a height he reached only with the willing collaboration, I think, of Mary Plunkett. The *Canterbury Star's* summary of the movement's early history, published in December of 1891, conveys a fair sense of how far the two were able to progress their cause, and how fast, after their arrival:

In connection with the laying of the corner stone of the building intended for the use of Mr. Worthington's Students of Truth, the following particulars of the progress of the organization may be of interest: — On March 27, 1890, the first private class was formed, consisting of 30 members, of whom nineteen are still in active association. The training class was begun in the Oddfellows' Hall, Montreal street north. This class now meets in the Oddfellows' chambers, and numbers nearly 200 students. Public lectures were first given on June 8, 1890, and public bible talks were begun on August 3 of the same year. In October following they were changed to services at 11 a.m. The Sunday school was started in January 1891, with twenty-five teachers and ninety-one scholars. The I. H. N. [In His Name] Class — Bible Class — was established soon afterwards. This class and the Sunday School, combined now, number nearly 400 scholars. The Kindergarten was begun in August, 1891, with a superintendent, six teachers and sixty pupils. It now has 100 scholars. The cash paid for the expenses of the work, in all its branches, has been £1153, and the receipts £782.<sup>68</sup>

The Work, as Crawford and Plunkett habitually referred to it, was enormous: a sophisticated machine for capturing believers. At its height, the Students of Truth movement boasted schools of various sorts, a social hall that put on regular, large-scale musical entertainments, a regular set of church services as well as public lectures, and a street ministry focused on capturing "roaming youths." By early 1892, even the most suspicious of newspapers were suggesting that the Students of Truth numbered nearly 1000, and more enthusiastic observers estimated them at several thousand. The Temple of Truth — the main building in the complex Crawford and Plunkett were erecting, with borrowed money entirely — was a church larger, in terms of seating, than Christchurch's cathedral — 1650 people's worth of preaching space at its opening in August of 1892.

This building...is of wood, on a foundation of stone and concrete, and has a roof of iron. The plan is in the form of a basilica, with the residence of the teacher, Mr. Worthington, on the north side. The elevation fronting Madras street is in the form of an Ionic hexastyle temple, with systyle intercolumniation. On each side of the columns is a mullioned window, and above the cornice rises a pediment, with a Mansard tower on either side. In the tympanium of the pediment, in raised letters, are the words 'God reigns,' and on the frieze is the inscription 'Temple of Truth.' A flight of seven stairs of bluestone leads to the entrance beneath the pediment...the ceiling is painted French gray, relieved by bands of a stencilled pattern in light blue, buff and pink, following the lines of the barrel vaulting and dividing the ceiling of the nave into panels. The friezes above the columns are maroon, and bear, in gold, symbols thirty-eight in number. Twenty-six of these are expressive of the history of the Cross in all its forms, from the first cross symbolized to the modern form of the cross...<sup>69</sup>

What precisely drew so many people to the Students of Truth — beyond the imposing features of the Temple of Truth — is, to my way of thinking, something of a mystery.<sup>70</sup> Such of its teachings as are recoverable today are banal, and contemporary newspaper reports of those teachings — as well as a half-dozen stenographic transcripts of Crawford's Bible talks — suggest a lack of substance: crowds of abstract nouns bound together with a sticky mind-before-matter thematic from Christian Science. There were, however, teachings for at least two circles within the Students of Truth — an inner as well as an outer circle — and those inner circle teachings were apparently more compelling, for, in October of 1892, the Christchurch Free Methodist community sent a deputation of women to Crawford

to condemn his teaching, and to complain of the pamphlets on sexology recently issued to men, but which, if placed in the hands of young people, they alleged, would do infinite harm to the morals of the community.... One woman asked [Worthington] if he would leave Christchurch, as he was doing harm to young people. He replied by asking if they could cite an instance of his teachings having misled anyone, but the women said they were immoral teachings, and if he would not leave when requested, they would petition for his removal. Worthington replies that he should not leave Christchurch till carried to the cemetery.<sup>71</sup>

I am inclined to believe these sexology teachings — apparently embodied in a pamphlet entitled *Talks to Men* — were frank talk about sexual pleasure<sup>72</sup> for adults, and they would have been, as such, consistent with rumors circulating in Christchurch that Crawford paid special attention to female Students of Truth of particular age and circumstance, paying personal visits to homes, late in the evening, to assist with these women's studies.

Crawford had miscalculated, as it turns out, when he stonewalled the Methodist deputation. They were organized and mentored by one Reverend John Hosking, who decided, after Crawford's dismissal of his committee, to investigate the history of Worthington and Plunkett (who had become known in Christchurch as Sister Magdala). Resourceful and more than a bit angry, Hosking sent out hundreds of letters, pored over newspapers and records, and pulled together what he learned in a 68-page pamphlet he entitled *A Christchurch Quack Unmasked, or, The Life and Teaching of A. Bentley Worthington, alias Samuel Oakley Crawford.... and Mary H. Plunkett, Exposed and Examined*.<sup>73</sup>

The production of his exposure took Hosking the first half of 1893 to complete. Meanwhile, the sexology issues percolated in Christchurch, and the US press caught up with Crawford. In June of 1893, the *Auckland Star* republished, without comment, an article from the *New York Herald*, detailing some of Crawford's prior incarnations, and containing an excerpt of one of John Hosking's probing letters to the States:

There are two individuals here named A. Bentley Worthington and Mary Bentley Worthington, who are operating a gigantic swindle under the cloak of religion. They came here in January of 1890. In a newspaper of July, 1889, there is an article about two persons of the same name. These persons were Christian Scientists in New York. They have managed to get very large subscriptions from the public of this city to erect three large structures at a cost of £12,000. These structures consist of a Temple of Truth, a social hall, and a residence. Many people have handed over their savings for years, mortgaged their little cottages, etc., to give them money. If you would see your way clear to supply me with information relative to these two persons you will confer a lasting benefit on the people of this city. I enclose a photograph and description of the man. The photo is the best I can get. He will not sit to have his portrait taken.... I also enclose a letter to Mrs. Ward, the woman he married before Mrs. Plunkett. I have not her address, but if you will kindly send this letter to her or ascertain her whereabouts, I shall esteem it a very great favour. We are trying to get this lady over here, and stop Worthington's career.<sup>74</sup>

Perhaps it was the recrudescence of Crawford's heinous past, or his predatory behavior with respect to female Students of Truth, but something pushed Mary Plunkett over the edge, into action, in May of 1893, while Crawford was in Auckland, setting up the Auckland chapter of the Students of Truth.<sup>75</sup> Plunkett revived her celibacy teachings and preached the same to the inner circle of female Students of Truth, called the Order of the Temple, in Crawford's absence.<sup>76</sup> This was the very community that, according to rumors in Canterbury, Crawford favored for his night-time sexual frolicking.

Enraged, Crawford removed Plunkett from the movement immediately on his return to Christchurch. Plunkett responded by denying that he had any right to do so, or to in any way control her teachings. Crawford escalated, offering Plunkett a cash settlement to leave the Students of Truth, and NZ. Plunkett accepted the settlement, and then decided to renege on her acceptance, and to allege

Crawford's mismanagement of organization funds. Plunkett and Crawford agreed that Plunkett's children should remain with him; Plunkett then led her children, in front of journalists, through a very public renunciation of their step-father.<sup>77</sup>

And, just at this time — mid-June of 1893 — Hosking's expose hit the streets of Christchurch. The pamphlet was viewed as exhaustive, well-documented, and damning, and the results were predictable: violence against the Students of Truth, and a split in the movement itself.<sup>78</sup> Plunkett did, in my estimation, a sterling job of manipulating the New Zealand press at this time, playing the discarded innocent, and garnering articles filled with details like this:

Instead of deserting his victim, [Worthington] is forcing her to leave him. Having lived on the money she received from her late [sic] husband, Mr. Plunkett, so long as that money lasted; having used Mrs. Plunkett's abilities, knowledge and experience to build up his present position; having gotten all he can out of her and being tired of her, he would now thrust her forth without money, name, children, or — if he could — friends. Only the day before yesterday, he forced her, under threats of driving her forth utterly destitute, to sign an agreement binding herself not to divulge his past life, not to bear his name any longer, and to quit the colony, leaving him free to enjoy his spoils, to complete his schemes, and to victimize some other unfortunate woman.<sup>79</sup>

And Plunkett placed her own materials directly into the Christchurch papers, in a somewhat different tone:

I shall never leave this City nor work until the Temple of Truth has been cleansed, and all the money-changers driven out. Truth brought me here, and so long as I remain true it will be my perfect defence. After this cleansing is accomplished, it is my intention to travel, lecture and establish in other cities the teachings of the Students of Truth, after which I shall give my special attention to the teachings of the Order of the Temple. In that connection I would like to say that I shall not again form an outward organization to be governed by stated rules. Persons desiring to belong with us can do so, after they have already decided to live a life of chastity and continence, by simply sending us word to that effect. They can even take a brother or sister name if they like to do so, and if any sister should desire to wear the gown [of the Order of the Temple], I will be most glad to send her the simple pattern.<sup>80</sup>

To be sure, Crawford owed Plunkett a significant debt. He had learned the trade he was practicing from Plunkett, and built his Christchurch scheme with seed money and materials supplied by Plunkett. Whether the complex structure of the Students of Truth, with its outreach programs and social events and schools and public lectures, and its inner and outer training disciplines, were Plunkett's or Worthington's, or the work of both, is not decidable. But, regardless, this was the falling-out of partners-in-crime, not the bedevilment of an innocent by a hardened grifter, and Crawford outmaneuvered Plunkett.

In the end, Crawford remained in place — with a diminished flock of now-less-ardent students — and Plunkett withdrew, with her children, to a period of exile in Australia, a new marriage, and in 1901 to suicide by drowning.<sup>81</sup> The scandal associated with his separation from Plunkett cost Crawford perhaps half his congregants, but his outrageous behavior continued unabated. In June of 1894, Crawford allowed the Students who had “handed over their savings for years, mortgaged their little cottages, etc.” in exchange for debentures payable through the Trustees of the Students of Truth to understand, clearly, at least one truth: they had no recourse for recovery of their money, or even the payment of the promised 6 per cent interest on their loans. Crawford had executed a little masterpiece of financial legerdemain, the centerpiece of which was that:

The land upon which the Temple is built was purchased for £1100, of which £1000 remained on mortgage at 6 per cent. For the money advanced by Students to erect the buildings there were issued debentures to

the value in round figures £4000, bearing interest at six per cent. When the Temple was built there was drawn up and duly executed a lease from the Trustees to Mr. W., whereby he obtained full possession of the whole property, hall, dwelling house and land, for the term of twenty years, for a rent of £240 a year, and with no obligation to pay rates, taxes, or insurance, the responsibility for which therefore falls on the Trustees.<sup>82</sup>

Crawford had no obligation to honor the terms of the debentures, and the Trustees could not do so — there was no cash flow to pay the interest on the notes. Crawford made public statements claiming he intended to honor the terms of the notes, but declined to formalize his offers in any legal way, and summarily removed from fellowship Students who pressed him on issues associated with the debenture transactions.<sup>83</sup>

Knowing where things were headed, Crawford prevaricated and delayed until January of 1895, when the mortgage on the Temple land was called in, and a forced sale of the property ensued. The auction was well-attended, and the property acquired by a Mr. Webber, for slightly more than £3000. Webber was revealed, immediately after the auction, to be Crawford's paid agent, and Crawford to have acquired the Temple property outright (on a new mortgage).<sup>84</sup>

Crawford then attempted to strong-arm the debenture holders, denying he had any legal obligations to them, but offering to allocate some £1750 — about 40% of the original invested capital — pro rata amongst the debenture holders. The proposal was eventually accepted, but Crawford was noncommittal about when or how this distribution would occur, and very specific that his offer was dependent on the debenture holders' lawsuit against the Trustees of the Students of Truth, then in court, being immediately withdrawn, which it was.<sup>85</sup>

Meanwhile, Crawford had other programs in which he was more interested. He was working mightily, in April of 1895, to get himself authorized to perform marriages in New Zealand — the real hallmark of a state-authorized faith — and he was planning another, obviously illegal, marriage of his own, to one of his congregants, Evelyn Maud Jordan, at a time when Mary Plunkett was in Australia and financially unable to return to New Zealand. The minister he selected to perform the ceremony felt obliged to consult the US consul to New Zealand about the planned marriage, and the US consul made it clear enough that the US government considered Crawford already married. The minister declined to officiate, and Crawford had the marriage performed in the registry office in Christchurch in August of 1895, despite public outcry, and the decision of several Trustees, the head teacher, three assistant teachers, the head caretaker and dozens of Students to resign from the Students of Truth and set up an independent Students organization.<sup>86</sup>

It seems, from a review of the press coverage of the Students of Truth in NZ from the marriage forward, that it was this marriage to Evelyn Maud Jordan, rather than the debenture scandal, Crawford's treatment of Mary Plunkett or Hosking's expose, that ultimately undid A. B. Worthington in Christchurch. In one ill-advised move, Crawford had confirmed all the worst accusations against him: sexual predation, bigamy, con artistry. But he pressed on after the marriage, despite the fact that the Students of Truth were falling away considerably, and the debenture holders were continuing to press for specifics on his promised repayment plan.<sup>87</sup>

Crawford addressed all those issues, in February of 1896, with an unambiguous gesture: he left Christchurch for Hobart, Tasmania — as close to the edge of Anglo-American civilization as one could get at the time. In Hobart, he gave secular lectures<sup>88</sup> for fees, and lived no doubt on money taken from the Students of Truth treasury. He engaged in a long-distance correspondence with the Trustees and Students in Christchurch, admitting that he had no intention of returning to Christchurch, and that “the

money expected from America” to discharge his obligations to the debenture holders “would not be forthcoming.”<sup>89</sup> The Temple of Truth was placed into liquidation by the Trustees, in March of 1896, and a group of former Students and local citizens prepared a list of charges against Crawford, to be sent to Hobart. Those charges included

That he inaugurated a series of lectures, and founded in this city a system of teaching, of which he claimed to be the compiler, whereas many of the lectures were plagiarised from Christian Science writers and teachers in America... That he emphasized certain doctrines of the said teachings, such as the non-resistance of evil and the universality of the Good in such a way as to blunt the perception of his followers to a sense of right and wrong, wrong [sic] with regard to his own actions, and to check any disposition on their part to oppose such actions as were not consistent with his professed standard of moral rectitude.... That after being separated from [Mary Plunkett] for about four months he entered into intimate relations with another lady, whose house he was in the habit of visiting at late hours of the night, under the pretense of assisting her in literary pursuits... That during the latter portion of his career in Christchurch, he gave bills of sale over all available moveable property in [Students of Truth] buildings, and also induced his most intimate followers to advance moneys to him personally, and to float bills for considerable sums of money at high rates of interest, promising to pay off the same with the money alleged to be expected from America.... That he left Christchurch without paying tradesmen’s bills owing by him for personal effects and apparel....<sup>90</sup>

With Crawford in Hobart, the Students of Truth persisted, in reduced circumstances and numbers, to offer services religious and social. Considering their list of charges, one would have thought the Christchurch Students were done with Crawford, but that was not the case. Rumors of his return to the Canterbury plains appeared in the South Island press from April of 1897 onward, and Crawford did — for reasons of pecuniary necessity I think — return to Christchurch, in late August of that year. His first public lecture, on September 26, 1879, drew between 6000 and 7000 people, and led to a confrontation between protestors and the police force, requiring a magistrate to appear before the protestors and read the Riot Act.<sup>91</sup>

Crawford lectured and preached in Christchurch until late in 1897, but there was apparently no opportunity to recapture his glory, or the significant cash flow he had enjoyed a few years before. So Crawford packed up his family, and sailed across the Tasman Sea, to new fields of endeavor in Australia.

### **1897-1902: Metaphysical Inmate**

Why Crawford returned to Christchurch in 1897 is beyond knowing. Having scorched the earth there with his debenture fraud and the bogus acquisition (and the subsequent loss) of the Temple properties, I can imagine only two motivations for his return: desperation, or hubris. I find the former more likely. Although the Students of Truth had dwindled, by 1879, to at best few hundred true believers, the congregation was large enough to sustain his immediate financial needs, and must have represented, in comparison to what were at best slim takings from the secular lectures in Hobart, a rich market, to a tired man with a family to support.

The move to Australia similarly seems desperate: the move to new and imaginably greener fields. They were not, in point of fact, greener. What Crawford did, in Australia, from his arrival in late 1897 or early 1898, until early 1902, was nothing less than fail, miserably, to re-establish a movement like the Students of Truth movement, in Melbourne. That he needed money is apparent from the public record; he pursued, in 1898, a civil court case in Christchurch, in an effort to secure what he claimed was £8 and change due him from the sale of a horse — and lost.<sup>92</sup> He ran small-scale scams, and may have had affairs as well, in Melbourne, but he was clearly strapped. One of the few mentions of Crawford in the Australian press of this period finds him:

At the Northcote Police Court yesterday, before Messrs, Morrison, P.M., and Knox and Macintosh, J.P.s, Arthur Bentley Worthington, describing himself as a metaphysical teacher, made application that two children who had long been members of his household should be committed to the care of the Neglected Children's department. One of the children, a girl, was a half-caste Chinese, whom the applicant said he had taken over on the breaking up of a children's shelter 10 years ago, she then being eighteen months old. The other was a boy aged 10. Prompted, apparently, by the fear that he would not get the boy back if committed, the applicant said he would not surrender him, the reason given to the Bench for this change of mind being that he knew the parents of the boy, who were both dead, and he would not care to part with him. The explanation he gave for taking action at all was that his income was reduced, and the support of his own family was as much as he could manage. The application was granted as regards the girl.<sup>93</sup>

Crawford moved to Sydney in October 1901, to take up a position as a Unitarian minister for the Liverpool Street Unitarian church. And it was while operating as the pastor for this congregation that he was arrested for his favorite offense — obtaining money under false pretenses, in this instance from one Madame de la Juveny — in September of 1902. At the time of his arrest, the *Melbourne Argus* reported that:

[Worthington] opened at Buxton's Art Gallery [in Melbourne], where he delivered addresses on Sundays, and gathered about him the nucleus of a congregation....[To de la Juveny, in Melbourne] he unfolded a comprehensive scheme, which included the establishment of a kindergarten and other institutions, along the lines he had followed in Christchurch. A large sum of money was required for such a purpose, but Worthington asserted that he had been recently left a legacy amounting to £16,000 by a wealthy aunt in America.... A plan of the land which he intended purchasing was submitted to Madame de la Juveny, who was, he told her, the "pyramid" of the cult in Melbourne, the highest honor which could be bestowed upon any woman... He told the "pyramid" that she was the reincarnation of the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis, and that he had an inward consciousness that he himself was none other than the great Osiris.... On many occasions he pointed out in the street persons who, though apparently quiet, everyday folk, he told the credulous Isis, were possessed of the souls of scriptural and historical characters. It was rather startling for the widow at first, but she got used to the idea, and was not at all astonished when one day Worthington showed her the photographs of five Hindoos, all of whose ages, he said, bordered on 100, though they did not look more than a quarter of those years. These, he explained, were the presentments of Mahatmas, who lived in remote ages on the fringes of the lofty Himalayas, and who were all powerful, all knowing and were among the immortals... Madame de la Juveny hastened to obey the order of the Mahatmas by raising £900 on promissory notes, which she handed to Worthington.... The building of the church, kindergarten and sanitarium was never carried into effect. About [1901] Mr. Worthington, whose reputation as a speaker and entertainer was beyond question, received a "call" from the Hyde Park Unitarian Church, Sydney. He gladly obeyed the call, and was accepted.... When it became evident that Worthington had no intention of returning to Melbourne, or of repaying the sums which he had borrowed, Madame de la Juveny wrote several letters to him, asking for a repayment of the money.... He replied, admitting his liability, but stating that he could not and would not pay her back at present.... "I would rather face any disgrace into which you may bring me," he wrote in one of his letters, "than be in your position and suffer what you will have to suffer at the hands of the Occult."<sup>94</sup>

The money from America was evidenced by Crawford in the form of a series of letters he claimed to have received from his US law firm (of which he was a partner), and in particular from one partner, Darius Dunn.<sup>95</sup> The firm and its partners were, of course, fictitious, Crawford having gone so far as to have the firm's letterhead printed, in Sydney.

Crawford was arrested and bound over for trial on four charges of obtaining money from de la Juveny by false pretense. As the trial unfolded, the mishmash of Crawford's occult teachings<sup>96</sup> became more and more apparent. Worthington had offered de la Juveny, according to her testimony, membership in, and a role in the leadership of, a Rosicrucian lodge; the Mahatmas he had shown her were Rosicrucians; after her initiation, they and other ageless Rosicrucians would visit de la Juveny, via astral projection. "Worthington had got me by this time so much muddled by his psychic training and mental

telepathy that I did really believe one of those Indians had visited me psychically,” de la Juveny confessed on the witness stand.<sup>97</sup>

The prosecution’s case was substantial, de la Juveny looked the dupe on the witness stand, and Crawford’s defense — essentially, that de la Juveny was Worthington’s lover<sup>98</sup> and collaborator, who expected Evelyn Maud Jordan Worthington (then ill) to die, and to take her place — may have damaged de la Juveny’s credibility, but was at best a dubious defense. Crawford was found guilty on all four counts by the jury after thirty minutes’ deliberation, and sentenced on October 31, 1902 to a cumulative seven years’ imprisonment on the four charges.<sup>99</sup> Though he made one or two attempts to get his sentence reduced on grounds of illness,<sup>100</sup> he served his full term, and was not released until October of 1909.

### **1909-1917: Home To Roost**

On his release from prison in Australia, Crawford gathered up his family and left Australia for the US, eventually turning up in the vicinity of Poughkeepsie, NY, as Arthur Worthington, a Unitarian minister desirous of conversion to Presbyterianism.<sup>101</sup> He was given a congregation in New Hamburg, NY, just south of Poughkeepsie, and tended to his flock, as pastor and fleecer, running a version of the complex inheritance con he had worked so successfully on Madame de la Juveny in Australia.

When, in October of 1916, the North River Presbytery deposed Crawford from his ministry and excommunicated him from the church, they did so because their private investigation — triggered by we know not what — had uncovered not only much of his past life (with the inevitable garbling of names, places and dates) but also several recent frauds.<sup>102</sup> The Rev. F.J. Stanley told the Presbytery’s investigating committee that Crawford had bilked him of \$1400, using documents attesting to an impending inheritance of \$40,000, signed by the Secretary of State and the clerk of the Court of Chancery for New Jersey. An elder of Crawford’s congregation, B. P. Wayne, testified to similar effect; in Wayne’s case, Crawford had claimed an impending inheritance of \$100,000, then in probate in England.<sup>103</sup>

The Presbytery turned over its information to Poughkeepsie police, and bench warrants alleging grand larceny were issued for Crawford’s arrest.

But Crawford had already left New Hamburg, without his family. He may have gone to Boston initially, but, in late November, the Wilmington, Delaware police advised regional newspapers that “the Rev. Arthur Worthington, the Poughkeepsie ‘love pastor’ ... wooed a young woman of this city and took about \$2,500 from her.”<sup>104</sup> Crawford posed, for this emergency swindle, as one Charles Graham Boone. His victim — usually named as Jennie Synder, or Jennie Showalter, in press reports — or a close relative, swore out a warrant for Crawford’s arrest.

Poughkeepsie police found Crawford first, hiding in the National Soldiers’ Home in Newport News, Virginia.<sup>105</sup> According to one syndicated press report “Worthington had entered the home in Newport News and had already won the confidence of the old soldiers to such an extent that they offered to make up a purse for his defense, several offering \$100 each on his assertion that he was innocent.”<sup>106</sup> Crawford waived extradition, was taken back to New York, and held in the hospital of the Poughkeepsie jail. There, Crawford claimed he had retained the well-known Manhattan attorney Paul Kravath — whose firm still bears his name — as his defense attorney. When his last victim confronted him in jail, in December of 1917, to make a formal identification, Crawford suffered a heart attack, and died.<sup>107</sup>

### **Crawford’s History Lesson**

The answer to the question of whether Samuel Oakley Crawford was, ultimately, a gilded Theosopher, as Olcott suggested, awaits an enterprising researcher willing to recover the Students of Truth materials published under Worthington's name, from the Australian and New Zealand libraries where they are today held.<sup>108</sup> On balance, the readily-available materials — a half-dozen public lectures — argue against such an interpretation.

Certainly, Crawford ranks as a candidate for the king of Victorian occult con artistry. And one has to look very hard indeed to find a schemer associated with the Victorian occult revival as accomplished as Crawford. Only Editha Diss Debar and perhaps Henry Slade offer him serious competition.

But Crawford's real value — beyond a longish footnote for an annotated edition of *Old Diary Leaves* — lies in the ways his life illustrates some of the fundamental instabilities and discontinuities of Anglo-American culture in the second half of the nineteenth century: instabilities and discontinuities that were exploited, routinely, by Spiritualist and occult figures for all sorts of reasons.

Crawford's career was enabled, obviously, by the speed and economy with which people could travel after 1850. The scope of his exploits was of a breadth unimaginable for any generation prior to his: three continents, at least a dozen cities, and hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Similarly, his career was both enabled, and ultimately derailed, by the speed with which information traveled in the second half of the nineteenth century, as well as by the distortions that the new mechanisms for information transmission introduced. Information traveled more slowly than people, until after 1870, but Crawford's life was lived during a time when — as he was made aware, time and again — newspapers could amplify and transmit information rather quickly, across large distances. But with that amplification came significant distortion, and the sifting of the newspaper reports on Crawford's career has been, for me, largely a matter of culling down thousands of assertions about his life — many of them contradictory — into the relatively small number of assertions that could be independently verified, or that seemed plausible. That process excluded a large number of assertions — and several aliases — that were simply incompatible with the known historical facts, but which, if taken up as evidence, could produce a radically different reading<sup>109</sup> of the life of Samuel Oakley Crawford.

Equally important was the impotence of the mechanisms of the law in the face of a mobile, well-funded and creative criminal. Crawford's career was impeded not by the official police forces of various locales, who figure not at all in his trajectory until his final arrest in 1917, but by several of the numerous private detective agencies operating in the United States: agencies that adopted the borderless, law-less behavior of the people they stalked. At various times, private detectives from Chicago, Boston and West Virginia were on Crawford's trail, and — like the newspapers — were entirely unreliable sources of information. Of those hunting Crawford, the Sampson's Legal and Commercial Agency, of Boston, seems to have had the best and most complete intelligence on Crawford;<sup>110</sup> others got his trajectory and deeds so badly wrong that they, in effect, helped shield his work for at least a decade by providing salacious and interesting but incorrect information to newspapers, which saw to it that the misinformation was broadcast far and wide.

Carried by fast rail and by fast steamer, chased by often garbled and inaccurate information (with photographs to follow) and often misinformed private detectives, tracked by newspapers that, even in the 1880s, were more interested in the salaciousness of the crime than in the criminal's apprehension, Samuel Oakley Crawford made use, again and again, of something we can hardly comprehend today, in a

time of pervasive documentation, identification and surveillance: the essential fluidity of identity in the nineteenth century. A new name and a few pieces of paper easily made up by a local printer were all that was required to, literally, start a new life. And, if tens of thousands of people (including some of his victims) made use of this fluidity to start a better life, Samuel Oakley Crawford certainly did not.

<sup>1</sup> *Theosophist*, February 1906, pp. 823-5. Olcott's arrival in NZ was announced, with modest (positive) biographical background, in August of 1897; a few of his lectures (including one in defense of Spiritualism, and another on faith healing as mesmerism) were summarized in several papers in September and October of 1897; but the press seemed as interested in Lilian Edger, the head of the NZ TS, as they were in Olcott, and on the whole he received less attention from the media than did Arthur Bentley Worthington.

<sup>2</sup> "Theosophy v. Worthington," *Auckland Star*, June 21, 1893, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Other than reincarnation, which Worthington taught. Theosophical material was apparently accessible to Worthington, however. Immediately after Mary Plunkett Worthington's death in Christchurch, in June of 1901, her companion Miss Franc Garstin commissioned Tonks, Norton and Co., a Christchurch auction house, to dispose of Mary Plunkett Worthington's personal possessions, which included "lot[s] of metaphysical, theosophical and Swedenborgian literature," in addition to more mundane household fittings.

<sup>4</sup> There is a wide variance in reports of his Civil War service as to company and duration. And there were at least four Samuel Crawfords in the Union Army from New York State alone. But all contemporary reports agree on his service during the war.

<sup>5</sup> *Officers and Graduates of Columbia College — General Catalog 1754-1894* (New York: Printed for the College 1894), p. 281. Either oblivious, or intent on ignoring his subsequent career, the *Columbia Alumni News* for January 25, 1918 (p. 415) noted the death of the alumnus Samuel Oakley Crawford, "on December 16, from heart failure."

<sup>6</sup> Townsend's obituary in the December 26, 1896 issue of the *New York Times* offers an excellent precis of Townsend's career.

<sup>7</sup> "Money and Wives." *The Boston Herald*, August 3, 1889, p. 1. The *Herald's* long story on Crawford, based on the investigations of a Boston detective agency, is the best and most accurate of the contemporary accounts of his life and doings. Newspaper reports suggest that Crawford and Josephine Moore had at least one child, a girl, but, while I have found a record of the marriage, I have been unable to find either Josephine or a child of the marriage in US census records for 1870 or later.

<sup>8</sup> Accounts vary. In at least one instance, Crawford is said to have moved his wife and child, and his sister and his sister's children, to Philadelphia, and then abandoned them all when he left for Albany.

<sup>9</sup> "Arrest of an Albany Operator." *New York Commercial Advertiser*, September 14, 1870, p. 4. Later newspaper coverage of Crawford alleged, without evidence, that Crawford's schemes had rendered his family of origin destitute; Amelia Reynolds may well have been one of his mother's relatives.

<sup>10</sup> "Arrest on a Charge of Forgery." *Albany Argus*, September 16, 1870, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> "The Courts — October 1st and 2nd, 1870." *Albany Argus*, October 4, 1870, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> "The Courts — October 10th, 1870." *Albany Argus*, October 12, 1870, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> "Supreme Court - County of Albany," *Albany Argus*, September 9, 1870, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Federal census records suggest that Wealthy Gay Finefield was the daughter of a Canadian steamboat captain, Amos Finefield, and his wife Mary Ann Cushman, of Erie County, Ohio. I can find no evidence in the Spiritualist literature of the period of any Finefield operating as a medium or medical clairvoyant. As late as August of 1875, Gay Finefield was using her maiden name in public life.

<sup>15</sup> The judge in question is almost certainly Moses Barlow (1819-1881) who figures in histories of Greene County, Ohio. Barlow and his wife Philipina Schroeder Barlow had four children, according to Federal census records: Henry (b. 1845), Philipina (b. 1851), Henrietta (b. 1855) and Amy (b. 1859). All three daughters apparently married legitimately. Which of these is “Mary” Barlow is a mystery, but birth dates suggest it was either Philipina or Henrietta. Judge Moses Barlow experienced “failed health” and retirement circa 1878, roughly coincident with Crawford’s depredations.

<sup>16</sup> “Money and Wives.” *The Boston Herald*, August 3, 1889, pp. 1-2. Indeed, Crawford had an elder brother, William, some four years his senior. His ability to produce blood spontaneously (reported by several newspaper accounts) reminds me of Diss Debar’s ability to do the same; she, from a rotten tooth in her lower jaw. The implication of spontaneous oral bleeding (tuberculosis) must have been a powerful effect in times of need.

<sup>17</sup> In July of 1889, when the *Xenia Daily Gazette and Torchlight* published an account of Crawford’s doings under a different alias, the writer was unable (or perhaps unwilling) to connect Crawford with the Eugene Bonner who had married Miss Barlow and bankrupted her father the judge. Judging from the deference paid to Miss Bonner — most newspapers declined to mention her name at all — I presume Mary recovered from her alliance with Crawford, and led a more or less normal, “respectable” life after his departure from Xenia.

<sup>18</sup> “A Villain on His Travels.” *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, August 16, 1878, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> “A Napa Sensation,” *San Francisco Bulletin*, December 8, 1877, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> “A Villain on His Travels.” *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, August 16, 1878, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> See for example “American Swindler Caught in Australia” in the *Riverside (CA) Press and Horticulturalist* for November 11, 1902. Crawford’s conversion to Mormonism, and his sermons in the Temple, were reported widely in US newspapers in the 1880s and 1890s, no doubt to discredit Mormonism: a frequent target for journalists. It seems unlikely to me that, in the 30 or so days that Crawford remained in Salt Lake City, he could have made such inroads into the Church hierarchy, if what I understand about its formalities at the time is correct.

<sup>22</sup> “Bonner in Town.” *Daily Tribune*, December 27, 1877, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> “Bonner’s Reply.” *Daily Tribune*, December 19, 1877, p. 2. The Salt Lake City papers were receiving substantial assistance in their efforts to expose Bonner from Willard Reynolds, of Peoria. When Crawford threatened legal action against Reynolds, Willard responded with a letter (published in the Salt Lake City papers) reading in part “If I hear anything more from you I shall use such money and influence as I possess to have you sent to the penitentiary.” Crawford withdrew immediately.

<sup>24</sup> Groesbeck (1819-1884) was born in Rensselaer County, NY and was an early convert (circa 1838) to Mormonism. He led an early LDS mission to England, and pursued mining in Utah, selling one of his mines to London speculators for \$500,000. C.f., Orson F. Whitney. *History of Utah* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1904), V4, p. 256-7.

<sup>25</sup> Some newspaper accounts mention a stop-over, between California and Texas, in Virginia City, Montana — then as now a tiny town near Bozeman — but I have been unable to find any evidence of Crawford's operation there.

<sup>26</sup> "Bonner." *Daily Tribune*, August 24, 1878, p. 3, quoting an article from the Sherman (Texas) *Daily Courier*.

<sup>27</sup> "A. B. Worthington Denounced." *Mataura (NZ) Ensign*, August 27, 1895, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> "A Holy Humbug." *Ohinemuri (NZ) Gazette*, November 8, 1916, p. 4. Though this episode is reported in substantially the same way in several different papers, I can find no records of a Bannerton or Bennateau (as the contemporary newspapers spelled it) family in New Lisbon, Wisconsin in the period 1878-1882. In the early 1900s, a popular actress, Kate Beneteau, is described at the time of her marriage to one F.A. Patrick of Minnesota as "the daughter of Eugene Thomas Beneteau of New Lisbon, Wisconsin, an attorney." This suggests to me that Crawford was operating as Eugene Thomas Beneteau in Wisconsin. Other newspapers report three children from his marriage with Eliza Huntoon, as well as Huntoon's return to the stage to pay her husband's debts in New Lisbon, and her early death. Hoskin's 1893 pamphlet makes similar connections.

<sup>29</sup> Crawford's time running the short con on these railroad routes is reported in several papers during Crawford's final exposure in 1916-17. Some of the reports suggest that Crawford was working in partnership with an English nobleman named Lord Ashton, but I am inclined to believe that is the alias under which Crawford worked, during this period, alone. See for example, "He Dies As 10th Wife Appears," in the *Trenton Evening Times* for December 14, 1917, p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> "Money and Wives." *The Boston Herald*, August 3, 1889, p. 1. Based on the available Federal census data, I am inclined to believe that the woman's name was Isabella Jenkins Sargent, and that her sister was Mary or Margaret Louise Jenkins. The *Boston Herald* provides significant details about the Sargents' life in Boston, but I can verify none of them based on available public records.

<sup>31</sup> In August of 1889, several Boston papers reported that Crawford had warrants out for his arrest, in Boston, for larceny and obtaining money under false pretenses, and that he jumped bail when he left Boston in 1886. There are also reports that Mrs. Sargent's daughter accompanied the group to West Virginia.

<sup>32</sup> Also H.T., J. H., J. B. and J. T. Crawford. He may have been in Wheeling, earlier in the year, as a short note in the *Wheeling Register* for February 25, 1886, reads: "J. B. Crawford, a judge from New York, is talked of for Congress by the Republicans in this District. The Radicals have become so tired of being defeated that a new idea has struck them and they will attempt to inveigle the stranger into the work of making a canvass [sic]. Since this announcement, Judge Crawford has declared that he is not a candidate for any office" (p. 2).

<sup>33</sup> "H. O. Wood's Former Career." *Columbus Daily Inquirer*, July 20, 1887, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> "A Very Neat Job." *Wheeling (West Virginia) Register*, April 19, 1886, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> "A Very Neat Job." *Wheeling (West Virginia) Register*, April 19, 1886, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> At the time, Crawford — as an attorney named S. O. Jenkins — was conducting divorce proceedings for Mrs. Sargent, presumably to raise money from a divorce settlement. The *Boston Herald* reported that “Mrs. Sargent returned [from West Virginia] to Boston with considerable experience, her daughter and her sister. . . . Today [1889], under an assumed name, she carries on a lodging house in Columbus Avenue. Mr. Sargent remains unreconciled, and it is understood that at the proper time he will endeavor to have the West Virginia divorce annulled and secure a new one in this state.”

<sup>37</sup> The reportage from Griffin has him arriving there in February or March of 1886 — immediately after his departure from West Virginia.

<sup>38</sup> “An Adventurer’s Career.” *Augusta Chronicle*, July 6, 1887, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> “The Georgia Press.” *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, May 24, 1887, p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> There is some evidence in local press reports that he proposed a new bank after failing to buy a local Griffin bank from its owners with a personal note.

<sup>41</sup> “Swindled by a Forger from Boston.” *New York Herald-Tribune*, July 4, 1887, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> “H.O.Wood’s Former Life.” *Macon Telegraph*, July 17, 1887, p. 3. The information that Crawford was involved in public politics prior to his stints in West Virginia and Georgia is tantalizing, but I have not yet been able to confirm this information, or identify an alias under which Crawford may have been working in Schoharie and Chemung counties.

<sup>43</sup> The Atlanta papers did make the connection between A. B. Wadsworth, Wood and Judge Crawford, but not until December of 1887, when he had become General A. B. Ward of North Forks, Dakota Territory.

<sup>44</sup> “Wadsworth, Crook, Dead.” *Spokane Spokesman Review*, January 8, 1918, p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> The Boston Herald August 1889 version of the story has Crawford renting a private railway car to transport Crawford and Kittie to Chicago, to announce their impending marriage to Cannon, already in Chicago.

<sup>46</sup> “Big Dead Beat.” *Xenia Daily Gazette and Torchlight*, July 23, 1889, p. 1. According to other news stories, Crawford had arranged to receive, while in Chicago, telegrams apparently from Chicago packing magnates, providing him with inside information on various commodities — all of which passed before the eyes of A. M. Cannon.

<sup>47</sup> “Money and Wives.” *The Boston Herald*, August 3, 1889, p. 2. Other newspaper version of the story emphasize the fact that Mary Perry’s older sister was herself the victim of a bigamist, and warned her sister against marrying Crawford.

<sup>48</sup> The hunt for Crawford’s prior incarnations was, similarly, picking up momentum. In January of 1888, just at the time Crawford was making a place for himself in the power structure of North Forks, the Wheeling, West Virginia newspapers were reporting that their Judge Crawford was also H. O. Wood of Griffin, Georgia, and A. B. Wadsworth of Spokane. See, for example, “Seeking Fresh Victims” in the *Wheeling Register* for January 2, 1888 (p. 2).

<sup>49</sup> “County Convention.” *Grand Forks Herald*, May 11, 1888, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> “G.A. R. Exercises Tomorrow.” *Grand Forks Herald*, May 29, 1888, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, “Too Much for Matson.” *Daily Inter-Ocean*, October 10, 1888: “Major A. B. Ward, of Dakota, addressed an audience of 300 or 400 at Republican headquarters here this evening. The speaker came out boldly for protection, and was roundly applauded at intervals in his speech.... Major Ward’s speech was by far the best and most able that has ever been made in this city and had a very telling effect on weak-kneed Democrats” (p. 6). At home, in Grand Forks, A. B. Ward was a General, rather than a Major.

<sup>52</sup> “The P. Ps. Veracious Correspondent.” *Grand Forks Herald*, December 24, 1888, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> Untitled. *Grand Forks Herald*, January 28, 1888, p. 2. The *Herald* is quoting the *Casselton Republican*, another Dakota paper.

<sup>54</sup> “Wardius!” *North Forks Herald*, February 4, 1889, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> “The Arena.” *Bismarck Tribune*, February 5, 1889, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> See for example “The ‘General’ Who Worked Dakota Republicans Proves to Be a Fraud of the First Water” in the *St. Paul Daily Globe* for February 6, 1889: “Several weeks since a detective was here for a few days looking up Ward. On his departure after failing to find his man the detective left a circular with the police, describing Ward’s appearance and offering a reward for information of his whereabouts. His real name is Samuel Oakley Crawford.... He has operated in the principal states of the Union as a political orator, spiritualist, litterateur and bigamist” (p. 4). The detective is almost certainly from the Boston detective agency retained to trace Crawford after his departure with Mrs. Sargent and her maiden sister. The same Boston detective agency that provided the largely accurate information for the *Boston Herald’s* August 1889 article on Crawford.

<sup>57</sup> “A Noted Dakota Politician Missing” *New York Herald-Tribune*, February 5, 1889, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Mary Hodgkins Plunkett completed her primary course in Christian Science in September of 1885 (not 1883 as is sometimes recorded), and was expelled from Mary Baker Eddy’s group almost immediately thereafter. With Emma Curtis Hopkins, she opened up an independent Christian Science school, in Chicago, before coming to New York. Her status, within orthodox Christian Science at this time, is perhaps best encapsulated by this comment, from *The Christian Science Journal* for March of 1889: “To this gathering of tried students and friends came Mary H. Plunkett, and pressed to take the hand of our Teacher [M. B. Eddy] and give the traitor’s kiss. It is necessary to say to the public [that is, orthodox Christian Scientists] that Mary H. Plunkett took a primary course only, and that her real character was long ago unmasked to Christian Scientists. She then set up as a lecturer and teacher of [Christian] Science at summer resorts and elsewhere. Students who are incorrect in the letter, and devoid of the Spirit, stand without credit or fellowship in the circles of Science. They speak soft words publicly of Christian Science which they need for their traffic, but in their private lives and communications are its worst foes” (p. 634).

<sup>59</sup> “Christchurch Students of Truth.” *Otago (NZ) Daily Times*, July 11, 1893, p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> The June 18, 1889 issue of the *Jackson (Michigan) Citizen Patriot* quotes Worthington, on his marriage, as saying: “Well, Christian Science is truth and teaches truth. So far it has not attempted the problem of sex — that of marriage; but we are the pioneers in this new field. That is why we fear there may be some among our own people who will not understand us. This is something new. We believe it will solve the question of the failure of marriage. Marriage laws, as they are, are unwise, unjust. Men and women who are not mated are tied together. They ought not to be kept in that bondage. There must be some fit method for their divorce. We hope to educate others so that in time this method may be made the method of the law. If the world could comprehend our motives it would not judge us harshly. No, we are not believers in free love, but rather in perfect marriage, and the marriage of today is not perfect, not honest, not Christian” (p. 5).

<sup>61</sup> Several witnesses in Plunkett’s divorce action were called by Mr. Plunkett’s counsel to testify to the carnality of Crawford’s relationship with Mary Plunkett.

<sup>62</sup> “New Christian Divorce.” *The Kansas City Times*, June 9, 1889, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> “Ward Confesses.” *Grand Forks Herald*, August 1, 1889, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> The two had declared their marriage “null and void” in the pages of *The International Magazine of Christian Science*, in the April 3, 1889 issue. The legal divorce was granted in December of 1889.

<sup>65</sup> “The Cause Greatly Injured.” *The Pittsburg Dispatch*, June 30, 1889, p. 6.

<sup>66</sup> “Christchurch Students of Truth.” *Otago (NZ) Daily Times*, July 11, 1893, p. 5. Plunkett dates their arrival in Christchurch to January 16, 1890. The source of the funds on which the Worthington-Plunkett crew were living at the time was recorded, in the press, as stemming from a settlement with John J. Plunkett, but (given that the divorce was not finalized until December) it may have been Mary Plunkett’s proceeds from a pair of insurance policies, in her name, on the life of Moses W. Field, the Wisconsin Congressman, Greenback party organizer and rake. Mary Plunkett was, for some period of time in the late 1870s or early 1880s, Field’s mistress. Mrs. Field’s attempts to recover all the money and property her late husband had bestowed on his mistresses, including Plunkett, was in the news at the time of the Worthington-Plunkett marriage scandal in New York: Plunkett was one of two named targets of those recovery efforts. This may go some way to explaining assertions by biographers of Mary Baker Eddy that Mary Plunkett was candid, in the mid-1880s, about the fact that neither of her children, Pearl or Paul, was the progeny of John J. Plunkett.

<sup>67</sup> “Broadbrim’s New York Letter.” *Wanganui Chronicle*, September 2, 1889, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> “Students of Truth.” *Auckland Star*, December 26, 1891, p. 3. This material is based on Worthington’s public address at the time of the corner stone ceremony, and may therefore be somewhat inflated. The earliest advertisements for public Students of Truth lectures, in Christchurch, date to June of 1891.

<sup>69</sup> “Students of Truth - The New Temple.” *The Star*, August 5, 1892, p. 1. The land for the Temple was purchased by the Students of Truth in June of 1891.

<sup>70</sup> A collection and analysis of Students of Truth material awaits some enterprising scholar or researcher.

<sup>71</sup> “A Women’s Crusade.” *North Otago Times*, October 13, 1892, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> According to the *Auckland Star* of June 6, 1893, the content was somewhat more radical. “Many were trying to find out what would be the ultimatum of [Worthington’s] teaching — what he was driving at. He gave a lecture to men only, and printed it, which quickly put some people’s minds to rest on this. It was found that he enjoined celibacy and continence, that man may be immortal in the flesh [via sex], that he may overcome sickness, poverty and even death itself. As a result of his teachings on the marriage question, many homes have been broken up, husbands and wives have separated, fathers and mothers have turned against their children, and children against their parents, and free-love takes the place of honour and fidelity to the marriage vow. All the teaching leads up to this climax — free love” (p. 8). Later, claims would be made in both New Zealand and the US that part of Worthington’s teachings included “heavenly marriages,” a concept he may perhaps have borrowed from the LDS Church. There is also evidence that Crawford was teaching, publicly, a “free thought” doctrine that denied the historicity of Jesus Christ — something the Methodists and Presbyterians in Canterbury found unacceptable, and countered in their own public lectures.

<sup>73</sup> Christchurch: H. J. Weeks, 1893. A photofacsimile copy of the instance of the pamphlet in the collection of the Auckland Museum can be found at [http://www.ehbritten.org/docs/christchurch\\_quack\\_unmasked\\_1893.pdf](http://www.ehbritten.org/docs/christchurch_quack_unmasked_1893.pdf).

<sup>74</sup> “Article from the ‘New York Herald’.” *Auckland Star*, June 5, 1893, p. 3. The original article, “New Dupes of an Old Offender,” was published in the *Herald* on April 19, 1893, and a similar piece ran in the *New York Times* for the same day. Hosking could find Broadbrim’s letter from New York, it seems, if no one else could.

<sup>75</sup> The Auckland chapter folded, silently, immediately after Crawford and Plunkett split in 1893. Accounts of the working relationship between Crawford and Plunkett, published at the time of her death, indicated that the two had been at loggerheads over the control of the Students of Truth for some time prior to the breach. The *Canterbury Press*, for example, remarked in its coverage of Mary Plunkett’s suicide, on June 8, 1901, that “[f]or some time after the occupancy of the Temple, matters between Mr. and Mrs. Worthington progressed, as far as could be seen, smoothly, although she made several attempts, which were always resisted by him, to obtain the ascendancy. She formed several societies in connection with the body, of which she was the head and moving spirit. The efforts made by Mrs. Worthington to stand forward prominently at last led to open rupture” (p. 7).

<sup>76</sup> Plunkett’s version of the celibacy doctrine, for the Order of the Temple, was that celibacy was essential for full spiritual development and was binding on both married and single women.

<sup>77</sup> For a reasonable summary of the high drama, see “The Trustees’ Statement” in the *Star* for June 3, 1893 (p. 5).

<sup>78</sup> At the time, the Students of Truth numbered, at most, 2,000. In 1896, the ranks of the Students of Truth stood, according to the *Feilding Star* of October 21, at 500. In 1901, according to the *Ashburton Guardian* of November 11 of that year, the religious affiliation figures for New Zealand included: Church of England (65,097), Plymouth Brethren (1141), Freethinkers (544) and Students of Truth (24). In 1907, the same census revealed that both the LDS Church (279) and the Swedenborgians (186) had made inroads in the country, while the membership roster of the Students of Truth had dropped to 18.

<sup>79</sup> “Additional Particulars. Worthington Denounced. Sister Magdala Interviewed.” *Auckland Star*, June 8, 1893, p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> “Sister Magdala’s Intentions,” *The Star*, June 13, 1893, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Mary Plunkett drowned in the basin of a fountain behind her residence at the Choral Hall (the former Temple of Truth) in a manner consistent with a planned suicide. See, for example, “Mrs. Worthington’s Death” in *The Thames Star* for June 10, 1901: “At the inquest on Mrs. Plunkett, who was found drowned in a pond, and which resulted in a verdict of suicide while temporarily insane, several witnesses deposed that though she was moody and brooding over her past life and recent marriage with [J. S.] Atkinson, a dentist, she was quite capable of knowing what she was doing. Her medical attendant was of the same opinion” (p. 4). A woman of many names, and none. Her daughter Pearl remained in New Zealand, Paul Johnson has determined, but we know nothing as yet of the fate of her son Paul, beyond a mention that he “went to America to his relatives.” At the time of her suicide, she was living with her long-time companion, Miss Garstin, and superintending the New Zealand School of Mental Science, which sprang from a Metaphysical Club Plunkett founded (along with a Mr. O’ Bryan Hoare, a former Anglican clergyman, and Miss Garstin) in Christchurch in 1898. The best summary of her later life is to be found in the *Hobart Mercury’s* article “The Recent Christchurch Sensation,” published on July 10, 1901 (p. 6). Miss Garstin remained in New Zealand, and was active in the broad movement, lecturing on “mental healing,” participating in women’s rights and temperance groups, and joining W. J. Colville’s New Thought lecture tour in New Zealand in 1901.

<sup>82</sup> “The Temple of Truth.” *The (Canterbury) Press*, June 2, 1894, p. 9.

<sup>83</sup> “Students of Truth.” *The Star*, September 12, 1894, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> “Temple to Truth.” *The Star*, January 21, 1895, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> “Meeting of Debenture Holders.” *The Star*, January 22, 1895, p. 5.

<sup>86</sup> “The Students of Truth — Another Split in the Camp.” *Taranaki Herald*, August 14, 1895, p. 2. The Herald reports Crawford’s portion of the registrar’s office entry for the marriage to read “Arthur Bently Worthington, aged 48, Teacher of Truth, bachelor, born in New York, the son of Arthur Bently Worthington, banker, of New York, and Florence Worthington, nee Bently.”

<sup>87</sup> Really, Crawford’s manipulation of the debenture holders constitutes his single greatest con. Up until the moment when he fled to Tasmania, Crawford held the debenture holders at bay with promises of vast sums of money arriving, any day now, from America. And the debenture holders, including Students of Truth trustees, took Crawford at his word. He succeeded in obtaining thirty-day delay after thirty-day delay, until he could make his escape.

<sup>88</sup> Topics included “Democracy,” “Famous Men” and educational systems.

<sup>89</sup> “The Students of Truth.” *Timaru Herald*, March 5, 1896, p. 3.

<sup>90</sup> “Mr. A. B. Worthington. His Christchurch Career.” *The Press*, March 27, 1896, p. 3. The unnamed woman with whom Crawford had a liaison was not Evelyn Maud Jordan.

<sup>91</sup> “A. B. Worthington of the Temple of Truth.” *North Otago Times*, September 28, 1897, p. 3.

<sup>92</sup> “A Students of Truth Case” *The Star*, August 22, 1898, p. 4.

<sup>93</sup> “A Metaphysical Teacher.” *The Argus*, February 13, 1900, p. 7. These were not Crawford’s children by Evelyn Maud Jordan, nor were they Plunkett’s children, Pearl and Paul.

<sup>94</sup> “Alleged False Pretences. Arrest of the Rev. A. B. Worthington.” *The Argus*, September 3, 1902, p. 7. If that is not ludicrous enough, it was reported in other Australian papers that Crawford’s evidence for his American inheritance included a forged telegram, reading in its entirety “Aunty dead. Everything yours.”

<sup>95</sup> Some of the letters were printed, in their entirety, in the Australian press, prior to the trial. Invariably written to “Buck”, they clearly took time to craft. One particularly bold letter can be found in the September 4 issue of the Melbourne *Argus* (p. 4).

<sup>96</sup> According to the *Adelaide Advertiser* of October 23, 1902: “[de la Juveny] mentioned that she had received from the accused a small symbolical pyramid and the accused explained the meaning of the marks on it. He said that the crescent and three stars referred to certain portions of the Bible in Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Numbers. The symbol with a cross on it was called ‘the anka,’ and meant, ‘the sacred mirror of creation.’ The symbol in the center meant the place where anyone who enters the pyramid must give their horoscope. (Laughter.) The figure on the right hand side, like two feathers, was ‘the illumination with the head of the lodge.’” (p. 7). Several other articles reproduce a key piece of the prosecution’s evidence, the “Mahatma letter,” written on pink paper, and including a kind of odd poem calling de la Juveny (as Isis) to Worthington (as Osiris) and closing with “Compel Osiris to accept./Take him or the Nile swallows/For another 1,500 years/Alpha, Mooc, the two Halls, Omega, Delta.”

<sup>97</sup> “Charge of False Pretences.” *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 24, 1902, p.7. Worthington talked on more than one occasion to the officers shepherding him, about his “mental communications” with his Rosicrucian leaders, whom the officers understood to be identical with his five “Hindoo” Mahatmas. The omnipresence of the Rosicrucians became something of a joke during the trial, if newspaper accounts of the trial are to be credited.

<sup>98</sup> Letters between de la Juveny and Crawford, introduced at the trial, make it plain that the two were sexually intimate. The presiding judge at the trial agreed, remarking in his closing statement to the jury that he considered it an established fact that de la Juveny was a self-confessed adulteress. And Evelyn Worthington claimed, in effect, that Crawford tried to create a menage, with his wife and mistress living in his household, but that she declined to permit it, triggering Crawford’s break with de la Juveny, her demands for repayment, and his arrest.

<sup>99</sup> Evelyn Maud Jordan’s defense of her husband, in *The Star* for November 29, 1902, is painful to read. Her claim: her illness and their children’s immediate needs for food, clothing and shelter, forced Crawford to steal money from de la Juveny. In the course of her defense of her husband, Evelyn listed the people she took to be Crawford’s inspirations as a teacher: “Professor Henry Drummond, A. P. Barton, the Rev. Charles Parkhurst, Emily H. Cady [sic], [and] Emma Curtin [sic] Hopkins....”

<sup>100</sup> In late 1905, his plea for release on grounds of illness was rejected when it was discovered that Crawford was “malingering so cleverly that he produced serious looking symptoms,” according to a report in the *Barrier (Broken Hill) Miner*, for November 2, 1905 (p. 1). One wonders if those serious-looking symptoms included TB-like oral bleeding. There are some indications, in Australian papers, that he may have been released, early, in 1907, but I am inclined to believe he served his full term.

<sup>101</sup> I have as yet been unable to find any record of a family of Worthingtons leaving Australia for the US in the relevant time period, nor any records of an Arthur Worthington operating elsewhere in the US before the Reverend Arthur Worthington appears in New York in 1909. The family is not present, in the 1910 Federal census, in the Poughkeepsie area. In the 1920 Federal census, Evelyn is living on Manitou Avenue in Poughkeepsie, with her daughter Eva (b. 1900, in Australia) and her son Roy (b. 1902, in Australia, while Crawford was on trial). Both Eva and Roy are employed. Evelyn lived until at least 1930, when the Federal census finds her in Montclair, NJ, in the home of her daughter, who has married a Walter L. Krahl.

<sup>102</sup> The charges against Crawford were: using a false name and blasphemy (for having taken a false oath that he had committed no offense unbecoming a Christian). The presbytery's hearings ran for a week, in secret. Crawford did not attend the hearings or offer a defense.

<sup>103</sup> "Minister Wed 7 Women." *The Sun*, October 27, 1916, p. 1.

<sup>104</sup> "Accuse 'Love Pastor.'" *Trenton Evening Times*, November 29, 1916, p. 5.

<sup>105</sup> "Accuse Ex-Pastor of Swindle." *The Sun*, January 19, 1917, p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> "'Rev. Worthington,' 71, is in Jail Again." *The Pawtucket Times*, January 24, 1917, p. 21.

<sup>107</sup> "Criminal Drops Dead When Confronted by Tenth Wife." *Elkhart Truth*, December 14, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>108</sup> For the curious, a photofacsimile version of the only Worthington Students of Truth document I have been able to find, a "Lecture on Classification" (part of the two volumes of "Worthington Lectures" on which the SoT movement was based, doctrinally), is available at [http://www.ehbritten.org/docs/worthington\\_on\\_classification\\_1892.pdf](http://www.ehbritten.org/docs/worthington_on_classification_1892.pdf).

<sup>109</sup> In August of 1886, when Crawford was preparing for his marriage and European honeymoon in Georgia, the *Baltimore Sun* reported him in Florence, Wisconsin (as J. Oakley Crawford), running a scam. Just after Crawford left North Forks in 1889, stories ran for weeks associating him (incorrectly) with an opium smuggling ring operating on the West Coast. Similarly, for some months in 1893, well after Crawford and Mary Plunkett had left the United States, a confidence man passing under the name of Darnley Beaufort was operating in the eastern US. Many newspapers of the period unhesitatingly identified Darnley Beaufort as Samuel Oakley Crawford, under one of his aliases. Beaufort may have been the "Lord Ashton" with whom Crawford was associated at one time (I think not) but was definitely a different individual.

<sup>110</sup> It was this agency's material that formed the basis for the *Boston Herald* expose of 1889. A nearly complete version of the agency's bulletin on Crawford can be found in *The Bismarck Tribune* for February 7, 1889. This bulletin mentions two aliases I have not investigated — Arthur Wood, and W. D. Wood — and appears to share information and turns of phrase with the bulletins released by West Virginia detectives.