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WITHIN THE HEART OF EVERY HUMAN BEING: SARAH FARMER, HER LIFE, HER WORK, AND HER SEARCH FOR UNIVERSAL TRUTH

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers Sarah Farmer (1847-1916), the founder of the Greenacre Summer Conferences. Beginning in 1894 and continuing through 1916, Sarah Farmer hosted a program of lectures and classes intended as a continuation of the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago the year before. While the Parliament arranged representatives of the "world religions" speaking side-by-side, the Greenacre Conferences emphasized conversation between religious and social movements, as well as encouraging attendees to experience and practice elements of religions, experimental healing, and more. They also emphasized a program of comparative religious study. The Conferences were particularly notable in the history of Vedanta, Transcendentalism, New Thought, and Baha'i. Ultimately Greenacre acted as a major force in disseminating a new spiritual inquiry focusing on Universal Truth, and incorporating a cosmopolitan, global orientation toward religion, science and social justice. Farmer created, not only a generative space for discussion and intellectual exchange, but also an embodied space where the practice of religions was emphasized. Attendees were encouraged to listen without judgment and to engage in practice and experimentation in a unique way.

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by

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PROLOGUE

The snow was still on the ground as people began to emerge from the neat box of the Congregationalist church, blinking into the watery February sun and stretching out the stiffness from a morning spent in the hard, wooden pews. From the crowd, a murmuring that rose to a single shout: “Bittersweet is on fire!” To the north, a thick plume of black smoke rose above the pines.

In 1904, firefighting was a community affair; the men of Eliot gathered before the house, coughing in the terrible smoke pouring from the second floor. A kerosene stove had overturned, and the fire moved quickly through the rooms. It was too late to save the house, but the men rushed in and out of the lower floor, saving what they could: the elegant Chippendale furniture in the dining room, chairs and sofas, even the carved mantelpieces were pulled from above the fireplace were carried out.

Men wrapped wet cloths around their face and tried to climb to the second floor to retrieve trunks of valuables, but the choking smoke and heat turned them back. Frances Keefe had been apprenticed to Moses Farmer and adopted by the family. Though their engagement had been broken off years before, he had been a constant presence by Sarah Farmer’s side; he knew the house as well as anyone. “In the tower, in the tower!” he cried – here was Moses Farmer’s laboratory, with models of his inventions and records of his groundbreaking work in electricity, but the fire raced ahead. Bittersweet burned to the ground as Frances, overcome, knelt in the melting snow.

Sarah Farmer was in Georgia visiting friends when she received the news. Everything was gone – her father's scientific papers and records, mementoes of family and friends, and, terribly, the records of her work at Greenacre and her years of correspondence, organized and preserved in trunks and crates. Much – though not all -- of the early correspondence in the Farmer archive concerns financial difficulties, or her troubled, doomed working relationship with Lewis Janes, neither of which demonstrate the best of Farmer or of Greenacre. (All of the correspondence surrounding her falling out with Lewis Janes, as well as much of the financials, which he kept, was carefully put by in a neighbor's attic.)[1] Whatever Farmer's beliefs, justifications, or opinions she may have kept private went to ash with Bittersweet. Taking up her diary that night, Farmer wrote, "It is the Lord; let Him do as seemeth to Him good." Yet friends recall it as "the breaking of her".[2]

Bittersweet was all that remained of Farmer's fortune, the last of her personal financial security; she had given all she had to Greenacre long ago. She was 57 years old, and in poor health – a lifetime of illnesses was compounded by years of overwork and ascetic practices; a fever contracted on her travels had put an end to the cycle of confinement, convalescence, and feverish work. She had begun to shift more responsibilities to the Greenacre Fellowship, and spent more time resting at Bittersweet, tucked up in her enormous bed (friends describe the vast expanse almost completely covered with teetering piles of correspondence, bills, and magazines so that she could continue working during illnesses.) Now everything

[1] Natalie Mitchell describes finding this collection of letters, which were given by
[2] This account combines multiple recollections. See: Memoir by Louise Bosch, 2; Memoir by Anonymous, NBA B4F9. Charles Mason Remey. Reminiscences of Greenacre Vol 1, 54-55.

was gone; Farmer was completely destitute, dependent on the charity of friends for even the smallest personal needs. Soon, as her mind began to slip, she was placed under the guardianship of ___ and the very last of her independence was lost as well. She was committed to a sanitarium, and disappeared from public life.

Sarah Jane Farmer has been largely forgotten today. She was a prolific writer of letters, but any organized record of her thoughts was lost in the fire. She was a figure of enormous influence: her summer conferences brought together leading Progressive activists and social reformers, religious thinkers, reformers and leaders from around the world, important scholars from a range of fields, renowned artists – and ordinary people as well. Greenacre is noted as a significant moment in the development of religions including Vedanta, Brahmo Samaj, Liberal Judaism, Baha'i, Liberal Protestantism, and New Thought; it was the first place yoga was practiced in America, and the first Peace flag flew on Greenacre's opening day.

Farmer opened Greenacre in 1894 as an extension of the World Parliament of Religions (1893), which had brought together religious leaders from an exhaustive range of Christian traditions, but also representatives of the world's religions, an unprecedented event intended to highlight a common ethical ground across all religions, setting aside the intractable disagreements over practice, tradition, and theology.[3] The Parliament was a spectacle enjoyed by a public, non-scholarly audience, but it represented a developing scholarly field of comparative religion for a wide public. Farmer's conferences took this somewhat stagy platform,

[3] In fact, world religions referred to what were considered the "world's ten great religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam," according to Richard Seager in Dawn of Religious Pluralism, 15.

and made it practical, practiced. Where the Parliament was designed as consecutive lectures or presentations, Greenacre encouraged conversation, education, and intimate dialogue. The scientific study of religion focused within one of several smaller schools within Greenacre – the Monsalvat School for Comparative Religion – which took a rigorous approach to its material, but lecturers at Monsalvat also spoke to the general, and more eclectic, audiences, and taught informal classes. Farmer maintained an informal social code, which dispensed with formal introductions and other conventions, so that audience and speakers were undifferentiated outside of actual lectures. Greenacre also emphasized an embodied experience alongside spiritual and mental/educational experience, which shifted the lecture experience of the Parliament into practice; Greenacrites meditated, attended séances, practiced raja yoga, prayed to Buddha, worshipped nature – bits of rituals and practices. Farmer taught that all religions were true and valid for the self, and that one could choose aspects or elements that were meaningful and true to the self – that the significance of comparative religion was the unveiling of a universal religion, and particularities of tradition were building blocks of a personal spirituality, a groundwork for later manifestations of New Age and Spirituality. Sarah Farmer represents a nexus of disparate intellectual and social movements with a global reach – not only as a hostess or a gathering place for luminaries to shine, but as the power and animating spirit that shaped intersections of thought and practice that resonate today.

INTRODUCTION

Sarah Farmer founded the Greenacre Summer Conferences in 1894, inspired by the work begun at the World's Parliament of Religions held at the Chicago World's Exposition in 1893, intending to realize its promise of international unity and social reform offered by religion. Greenacre maintained a program of informal lectures or talks, alongside musical and dramatic performances. Though it is often remembered as a New Thought colony, Greenacre also brought together representatives of Hinduism, Buddhism (Japanese, Sri Lankan, Chinese, and others), Jain, Judaism and Christianity, as well as Theosophists, Spiritualists, Transcendentalists, social scientists, social reformers, musicians, and artists.[4]

Some of the popularity of and interest in the Greenacre Conferences can be inferred from the wide media coverage that they received each summer, both in special interest periodicals and in mainstream newspapers.[5] Media interest spans the perfunctory list of society attendees, lengthy articles summarizing the daily events or reproducing the content of talks, as well as attempts to analyze the significance of Greenacre's events.[6] Newspaper and magazine articles preserved in

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[4] Regarding the latter two, as demonstrated below, they are not distinct from the more explicitly religious attendees as contemporary mores suggest.

[5] The periodicals tend to be, but are not by any means exclusively, associated with New Thought; even these latter, however, represent a diversity of thought and interest, considering the diffuse and decentralized nature of this movement. It is not given that an event that drew the attention of one would be of interest to all.

[6] Newspaper and magazine sources are collected from the Baha'i Archives in Illinois, in addition to preserved, bound editions of periodicals such as *Mind*, *The Word*, *Twentieth Century Magazine*, etc., which are available through internet-based archives such as Google Books. Farmer's archive is Sarah J. Farmer Papers, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, IL., henceforth abbreviated as FP. In addition to these, the

the Sarah Farmer Papers at the Baha'i Archives emphasize the unique combination of "the brightest and best from all over the country", the ethical and humanitarian platform for progressive thought, and the feeling that "harmony is the watchword, for all is written in the key of love."[7] Despite the variety of topics and approaches present at Greenacre, a "wonderful sifting process" had worked to eliminate "the man with the personal '-ism,' the 'fad,' the so-called crank, and sometimes finding, in the abundance of what the world calls chaff, the kernel of wheat."[8] "In a word, Greenacre can best be characterized as a *centre*. It is not an organization; it is not an institution… but a great spiritual, formative *centre*, the trend of thought broadening with the times."[9]

Despite the presence and participation of the "brightest and best", it is clear that the vision and realization of Greenacre are the work of Sarah Farmer; contemporary accounts describe her as an "animating spirit in the place… [which is] a reflection of [her] nobility, purity and self-sacrifice… without any show of authority or rule on her part, her simple wish or expressed desire is as much respected as if backed by a regiment of soldiers."[10] As demonstrated in her own

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Greenacre School and the Eliot Historical Society, both in Eliot ME, have rich archives of photographs and local newspapers containing reference to Greenacre, as well as, in the latter case, documents pertaining to Farmer's family and to her work building the Eliot Library.

[7] Manning, Helen L. "The Greenacre Congress", *Universal Truth*, (n.d.) 235-237. FP, Box 5, Folder 17.

[8] Ingersoll, Anna Josephine. *Greenacre on the Piscataqua*. New York: The Alliance Publishing Company, c. 1900, 10.

[9] Ibid, 20. Emph. original.

[10] Mason, R. Osgood. "Greenacre-on-the-Piscataqua," *New York Times*; Sept 19, 1897; ProQuest Historical Newspapers; The New York Times (1851-2010) pg. IW6

correspondence as well as in numerous accounts of her life by friends,[11] Farmer dedicated her fortune, her property, and her physical and mental health to the enormous project of realizing the annual meeting, and ensuring it was free to anyone who wished to attend.[12]

The most remarkable aspect of Sarah Farmer's work, and the starting point of this project, is her ability to bring together such a disparate group of influential figures, and to organize an intellectual and spiritual inquiry encompassing and embracing complementary and contradictory schools and individuals, in service of her own vision of a universal truth and its revelation of a "New Day". Further, it was not simply learned men (and women) exchanging ideas among themselves, but also introduced these esoteric and intellectual trends to the variety of folk in attendance. Greenacre did not attract the same middle class attendees as the Chautauquas, the progressive Protestant camp meeting-cum-educational movement with which it shared some common features, it did attract the taste-makers, the writers of articles, the articulate individual who would return home to tell friends and family what they had learned. The summer programs were covered in both special interest publications like Universal Truth or Mind and mainstream media outlets like the New York Times, ensuring that news of them reached a wide and diverse audience.

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[11] One of the interesting features of the Baha'i Archive is an extensive collection of interviews and letters about Sarah Farmer as well as her efforts to create and support Greenacre. These testimonies were collected in the 1940s by Bahiyya Ford, as background for her own (unfinished) biography of Farmer. They offer an unusual glimpse into Farmer's personal life and habits, in addition to more general accounts of life events.

[12] Correspondence w/ Lewis Janes. Sarah Farmer Papers, National Baha'i Archives, Wilmette, IL.

That is, Greenacre was a point at which cosmopolitan and intellectual trends in comparative religion and spirituality moved into the popular culture through larger intellectual, scientific, religious and cultural trends.

This project will consider Sarah Farmer as a religious innovator, and contextualize her work from three areas of inquiry. First, I will consider the ways that the World's Parliament of Religions informed her and how (and why) she diverged from its aims. This will include a consideration of the groups she brought together, in particular New Thought, the Vedanta Society, social reformers, Transcendentalism and the Baha'i, and how their interaction shaped a particular mode of inquiry, that focused on experience and practice. Second, the project will consider the role of the aesthetic of place at Greenacre, especially as it relates to bodily and health concerns, the role of women in public and domestic space, and locating immersive religious experience within a particular rural environment. Third, the project will consider the role of embodiment in Farmer's life and beliefs, and in the form and realization of Greenacre. I will argue that Farmer's mode of innovation and ultimate contribution was not through traditional methods like theology and written works but through a kind of embodiment of thought. Through the Conferences, Farmer works through a place – Greenacre – to connect different schools of thought through a sensual experience that directs spiritual experience.

As I show below, the paucity of scholarly research on Sarah Farmer and Greenacre is notable, and brings into a sharp focus the particular and distinctly different ways her life is interpreted. This variety points toward the multiplicities

that Farmer held together, to the manifold influences of her work at Greenacre, and to the histories her experience intersects and elucidates. Each indicate different ways that her work bridged the rarified world of intellectuals and theologians and the (still somewhat rarified) genteel tastemakers that attended Greenacre each year. The variety of agendas Farmer can be used to illustrate marks the complexity of her life and work, her position as a nexus of complex social and religious forces, and her ability to create a space for these forces to work collaboratively and harmoniously.

While the literature on Sarah Farmer and on Greenacre is sparse, she is interestingly positioned at the intersection of a contemporary scholarly conversation about what exactly this difficult-to-categorize 19th century religious activity is, and its significance to contemporary spirituality or seeker culture. Is it Christian, a liberal Protestantism? Is it "popular occultism"? Is it a discernable strain of religious thought in American history, standing next to Evangelicalism and mainstream-denominational theories of American religion?[13] Further, what does it

[13] see for example: Albanese, Catherine L. *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007; Bednarowski, Mary Farrell. *New Religions and the Theological Imagination in America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.; Bender, Courtney. *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination*. University of Chicago Press, 2010.; Butler, John. *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.; Dorrien, Gary J. *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805–1900.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.; Fitzgerald, Timothy. *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity: A Critical History of Religion and Related Categories*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.; Judah, J Stillson. *The History and Philosophy of Metaphysical Movements in America.* Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967.; Schmidt, Leigh E. & Promey, Sally, eds. *American Religious Liberalism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.; Schmidt, Leigh Eric. *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005.

mean to "seek" religious meaning in this way, experimenting and sampling, entertaining all approaches as somehow "true", assembling a spiritual worldview for the individual self? What happens, then, in a community dedicated to the search, when its founder finds an answer? There is a well-established body of scholarship considering the spiritual malaise of the late 19th century, and in part this newer scholarship is a way of responding to the claims of malaise: maybe religion is manifesting in these less recognizable ways (if what you're looking for is Christianity). Part of this dialogue, too, is in answer to a contemporary question: what to make of the spiritual eclecticism and lack of religious affiliation today? Is it simply moral decay and consumer culture monetizing religion? Or is this part of a larger story? One not so easily reduced to corporate brainwashing, but rather a confluence of global exchange, new scientific understandings, new ideas about gender and the role of women in public life, the shift of the American population from rural to urban areas. Part of the work of this dissertation will be to negotiate both the historical tangle of personalities and practices in play at Greenacre, and how they fit into the contemporary conversation about what exactly "metaphysical religion" is, what "seeker" spirituality is, and their place in the narrative of American religious history and of the scholarship on that history.

There is a scarcity of academic work on Sarah Farmer or Greenacre; she is most often a footnote in other stories. The main secondary sources I have on Farmer

each approach her and her work at Greenacre as a case study or example to support a particular understanding of American spirituality.

The oldest, *Transcendentalists in Transition: Popularization of Emerson, Thoreau, and the Concord School of Philosophy in the Greenacre Summer Conferences and the Monsalvat School (1894-1909) : the Roles of Charles Malloy and Franklin Benjamin Sanborn Before the Triumph of the Baha'i Movement in Eliot, Maine* (1980) by Kenneth Walter Cameron, is interested particularly in Greenacre as interpreted by two of the surviving members of the Concord School of Philosophy; Sanborn and Malloy worked to ensure that the philosophy and writings of Emerson (and to a lesser degree Thoreau, and the Concord School more broadly) were translated into the religious vernacular of the eclectic attendees at Greenacre. For Cameron, the significance of Greenacre was its position at the very end of Transcendentalism and its role in disseminating the thought of, especially, Emerson in a popular voice, and its subsequent interpretation within the various movements represented. Sanborn asserted, for example, that all of the "swamis" he met had read Emerson, or wanted to.[14] While this text speaks to the position of Greenacre as a node of transmission, it focuses exclusively on Transcendentalism and thus approaches the pluralism of Greenacre generally and the role of the Baha'i specifically from a limited point of view. Though Emerson's philosophy was a point where many disparate groups found common ground, each group understood and mobilized particular ideas in

[14] Cameron, *Transcendentalists in Transition*, 168.

different ways. However, the text consists almost entirely of "primary resources"[15], with less than 20 pages of original argumentation, and so represents a valuable collection of original material, albeit assembled with a particular intent.

Tumber's *American Feminism and the Birth of New Age Spirituality* (2002) relies heavily on Cameron's account in her account of Farmer and Greenacre. She critiques Greenacre's pursuit of Universal religion ("gnostic syncretism") as fundamentally doomed in its "impulses to avoid politics and to escape into unworldly fantasies of childhood."[16] Ultimately, Tumber's book is a critique of New Thought and its legacy in contemporary New Age spirituality. She argues that New Thought and its New Age legacy is "a radically world-denying theology", which prioritizes the individual as the sole locus of truth. Though this modern Gnosticism is a response to "the failure of public life to mediate conflicting moral claims on the self", it also creates a culture in which no one has a stake in civil life, and thus permitted the erosion of the public sphere[17]. Thus "the gnostic theology of New Thought underwrote the spirit of corporate consumer capitalism".[18] Greenacre's experimentation with conventional manners and attempts to eliminate social artifice, along with the new, more visible roles it offered women, represent an example of the cultural experimentation that was one of New Thought's "most enduring cultural legacies".[19] Tumber's pessimistic view of New Thought's legacy

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[15] That is, of newspaper articles by Franklin Sanborn summarizing, in some detail, the events at Greenacre, as well as the programs from each season and a Baha'i publication on Greenacre's history.
[16] Tumber, 134.
[17] Ibid., 13
[18] Ibid., 173
[19] Ibid., 134

stands in contrast to much of the contemporary work on the history of spirituality or seeker culture in America, which seeks to legitimate and redeem it.[20]

The Subtle Body: the Story of Yoga in America (2010) positions Greenacre and Farmer as the inheritor of the ideals of the Parliament of World Religion, and as such Vivekananda's first opportunity to teach and speak with the public (in the form of the attendees at Greenacre, shortly after at the winter annex of the Cambridge Lectures at Sarah Chapman Bull's home). Under the Swami's Pine, Vivekananda first taught yoga to decorous Victorian women and men, and delivered many lectures. For Syman, Farmer's creation was the place where yoga – as an embodied practice, as distinct from the Vedantic philosophy of the Transcendentalists – first caught the interest and attention of the American public (albeit the mainly wealthy, liberal & presumably fairly outré Greenacrites).

Jacqueline Brady's *Wise Mother? Insane Mother?*: *Sara Chapman Bull and the Disarticulated Subjectivities of Turn-of-the-Century Motherhood* (2013) addresses Farmer primarily as a foil to Sara Chapman Bull, in considering maternal aspects of Chapman Bull's relationship with Vivekananda. While Chapman Bull as an Emersonian skeptic, Farmer is obsessed with the occult. Farmer's conversion to

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[20] A body of scholarship problematizing the "commercialization" of spirituality parallels Tumber's critique from the present day, beginning with Jeremy Carrette & Richard King's 2004 *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (Routledge, 2004), which positioned a nebulous "spirituality" of neoliberal capitalist ideologies commodifying "religion" by defining the self as the primary arbiter of traditionally religious values and ethics, and marketing an array of "spiritual" problems to that self through consumable "spiritual" solutions. Like Tumber, Carrette and King understand spirituality as an ideological tool benefitting capitalist ideology, rather than an attempt to negotiate both modern, liberal values alongside religious traditions that often reject them.

Baha'i is "straightforward submission to her *master* 'Abdu'l- Baha", while Chapman Bull's "position as the mother of Vivekananda was much more empowering."[21] Here, Farmer is a foil for Chapman Bull's relationship with Vivekananda, a woman similarly enraptured with a foreign guru figure, whose life parallels Chapman's own, but who ultimately demonstrates the wrong kind of relationship with 'Abdu'l- Baha, as well as the wrong kind of commitment to a single religion, abandoning the "Emersonian skepticism" Brady (who uses Cameron as her main source for information about Greenacre and Farmer) fashionable at Greenacre for a kind of thralldom to Baha. Chapman Bull, argues Brady, was attracted to Vivekananda because of the way he elevated women, and understood them as powerful social forces; if Farmer's relationship to Baha replicates the traditional subservience of women in religious relationships, Chapman Bull's maternal relationship with Vivekananda means that the power relationship between them is much more complicated. Thus for Brady Farmer functions only as a comparative tool, the opposite of Chapman Bull in every way; the analysis does not consider Farmer deeply, nor does it question what Farmer understood herself to be doing, or how she understood her relation to 'Abdu'l- Baha (or her own relationship to maternal power).

Leigh Eric Schmidt's *Restless Souls: the Making of American Spirituality* (2005) gives Farmer the most thorough consideration. Schmidt, however, understands Farmer as a key innovator in the history of religious liberalism. Here, Greenacre is a "grand experiment", gathering together spiritual teachers from

[21] Brady, Jacqueline. "Wise Mother", 210

diverse traditions in pursuit of a global spirituality.[22] Schmidt's larger goal is to situate a genealogy of seeker spirituality within the respectable confines of American religion. For him, Farmer's "occult tendencies", dream of universal religion, and conversion to Baha'i are enfolded into the capacious history of a religious liberalism that is thoroughly American, and fundamentally Protestant. Particularly, it is emblematic of the conflict between those who "preferred ongoing inquiry to actually finding one path to follow".[23] Schmidt describes the Transcendentalist and New Thought "wing" as allied in their search for "a heady sense of emancipation from authority and tradition", and the construction of a religious identity that was fundamentally "free-form and improvisatory, not fixed or ascribed."[24] For Schmidt. Farmer's conversion to Baha'i was entirely in opposition; Greenacre's pursuit of universal truth was fixed, for her, in relation to the discovery of that truth in Baha'i. "The liberal idealization of cosmopolitan variety in the expression of religious truth was paired with the ultimacy of the Baha'i version of that truth", that Bahá'u'lláh's teachings combine and realize all religious expression in themselves.[25] Farmer's conversion, beyond simply providing an end-point or organizing framework to the question of universal truth, also draws into high contrast the tension between the freedom so prized by the Transcendentalists and

[22] "Between its founding in 1894 and Farmer's death in 1916, Greenacre was among the greatest sources of religious innovation anywhere in the country." Schmidt, 185.
[23] Ibid., 186
[24] Ibid., 205
[25] Ibid., 208

New Thought-ers, and the self-surrender and obedience required by fidelity to a living prophet.[26]

In addition to these published texts which include Farmer to a greater or lesser degree, an unpublished 1967 MA thesis by J. Douglas Martin, *The Life and Work of Sarah J. Farmer, 1847 – 1916*, considers Farmer in the context of the adult education movement, in the establishment of Baha'i in America, and as an exemplar of the "intellectual climate of a vanished age".[27] While this thesis focuses at some length on the biography of Sarah Farmer, Martin seems to consider her religious contributions to have been fleeting, and of the moment, rather than of lasting import, and primarily relevant to the establishment of Baha'i in America. Because it was written in 1967, he does incorporate sources no longer available, particularly interviews with Farmer's surviving cousins, and a diary transcribed by Bahiyya Ford which appears to be missing from the archive at Wilmette.[28]

Additionally, there exist two hagiographies of Sarah Farmer, one claiming her as a disciple of Vivekananda[29] and the other (unpublished) as a disciple of Abdu'l-Baha.[30]

Supplementing these relatively sparse scholarly treatments, there is a wealth of archival data. The Baha'i temple in Willette, IL as well as the school in Eliot, ME both maintain extensive archives on Farmer and on Greenacre. Bahiyya Ford's

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[26] Ibid., 220 – 223.
[27] Martin, James Douglas. "The Life and Work of Sarah Jane Famer, 1847 – 1916", 2.
[28] According to my review of the archive and of the content list provided by the archive. Possibly it has been misfiled or mislabeled and further search may uncover it.
[29] Prabuddhaprana, "Sarah Farmer's Inspired Life," 81-98
[30] Ford, Bahiyya. Unpublished Manuscript c 1949. FP: B3, F36.

efforts at writing a hagiography collected interviews with surviving compatriots of Farmer, letters, newspaper and magazine clippings, and other documents and ephemera. Too, Farmer's expansive correspondence, and the popularity of Greenacre in influential circles suggest that some correspondence survives in Sara Chapman Bull's archive, in Lewis Janes' material, Horatio Dresser and possibly others. Vivekananda's writings also speak of Farmer and of Greenacre at some length. Greenacre and Farmer were widely covered by newspapers and by periodicals, including collections of essays and reprints of talks given at Greenacre.

Methodologically, I conceive of this project as primarily one of archival recovery, contextualized by the disparate scholarly conversations with which Farmer's story intersects. One of the challenges that archival research must address is a deepening of Farmer's philosophy in her own words; many speak for her, and Greenacre's philosophy is generally identified with her as its animating spirit (certainly Greenacre's annual program and shape is her own creation and she firmly ousted those who disagreed with her vision for the Conferences). Yet she published only a handful of short essays and pamphlets, and many of her private papers were destroyed in a fire. Further, she understood her leadership role in a particularly embodied way, as a model and manifestation of a divine spirit that radiated from her person to awake the same spirit in others. Thus, her philosophy and influence must be recovered from her many letters, and from the form of Greenacre itself & from its ephemera. In addition, Farmer's controversial conversion to Baha'i – and the maintenance of her papers by the Baha'i – require some consideration for shifting attitudes of her close acquaintance, and for the differing spiritual trajectory

of her fellow Baha'i, in contrast to her own apparent understanding that Baha'i was less a "conversion" than a fulfillment of her beliefs.

Farmer brought together significant people-- (from groups either formally unrelated or otherwise only loosely organized) -- at a key historical moment, as America transitioned into the 20th century, a newly cosmopolitan and global culture, and a moment of vigorous religious and social innovation. This moment, and Farmer's work at Greenacre, provides a crucial place for understanding a cosmopolitan shift to spirituality in American culture, but also for recalling the backlash to this religious and social innovation, also encompassed in the life of Sarah Farmer. For the reader's reference, below is a short outline of the chapters to follow.

Chapter 1: Becoming Sarah Farmer: 1847-1893.

This chapter considers Farmer's life before Greenacre, and the influences of her family, as a context for her later work.

Chapter 2: The Moment you Define it, you Commence to Limit it: Complexity at Greenacre.

This chapter discusses Greenacre from its origins in the World Parliament of Religions. It considers the movements within Greenacre, particularly their articulation of or contribution to Farmer's search for Universal Truth, and how the whole of Greenacre "worked" in the world.

Chapter 3: A Woman's Ideal Made Manifest: The Space and Place of Greenacre

In this chapter, I examine Greenacre's sense of place. The beauty of the landscape and the idyll of nature were often invoked to convey a more ineffable "Greenacre spirit", a heightened spiritual engagement and feeling of mental and physical health that dwelled within the borders of Greenacre itself. This chapter considers the ways that ideas about health and nature, as well as about the relationship between the spiritual and material worlds come together, and how Farmer uses these relationships, and her own embodiment, to produce Greenacre as a collaborative and spiritually powerful space.

Chapter 4: Universal Controversial : Gender, Power, and Self

This chapter addresses the end of Greenacre; that is, how Sarah Farmer lost control over Greenacre, and how the community collapsed when she did. It examines the tensions resulting from her conversion to Baha'i, and the furor that ensued as the Greenacrites battled the Baha'i for control of Farmer's estate, as well as the ways that Farmer – and her collaborator Chapman Bull – were portrayed as victims of sinister Eastern con men after they could no longer speak for themselves.

Conclusions:

Sarah Farmer's life and her Greenacre Conferences have been neglected by scholars, but the intersection of her life with major events and trends of the late Victorian period and early 20th century, as well as her orchestration of a collaborative space for so many whose influence continues to be felt today, argues for a dedicated appraisal of her life and work on its own merits. This dissertation proposes an examination of her life as well as a contextual consideration of Farmer's significance

and influence through situating her at an intersection of scholarly conversations on gender, cosmopolitan religious trends, and the role of a new aesthetic in religious practice.

CHAPTER ONE:

Becoming Sarah Farmer: 1847-1893

The idea came to her "fully formed", she said later – she believed it a vision from God. Sitting in a lecture hall in 1892, chafed by the heat, crowded by her neighbor, struggling to hear over the din from the city streets outside, Sarah Farmer thought of the cool breeze blowing off the Piscataquah River at home. Any speaker there would contend only with the trilling of the birds and the hum of the waves. Shifting on the uncomfortable wooden seat, she imagined how much more "receptive the mind and heart would be if the body were in such a cool and healthy environment …. One's mind and soul could be refreshed by helpful thoughts, under spreading pines, in green pastures, beside still waters."[31]

Before the talk was done, Sarah Farmer had her plan: an international summer forum where the most progressive thinkers in all fields of study would gather, in part to foster a conversation among activists, scholars and religious thinkers, and more importantly, to make this conversation accessible to a popular – that is, non-specialized -- audience.[32] They would gather in her home-town of Eliot ME with its considerable rustic charm, though only a short journey via the Boston

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[31] Quoted in Myron Phelps, "Green Acre", *The Word*, I-1 (1904), 55. FP B5, F7.
[32] As Farmer's project becomes more specifically religious, the idea of audience becomes universal, but here she seems to imagine a kind of general-interest, educated but not specialized audience, as she's interested in highlighting themes and connections across disciplines.

train or the newly built electric trolley connecting Eliot to Portsmouth and Dover across the border.

Greenacre would quickly become one of the great sources of religious innovation in the country, bringing together representatives of Vedanta, Buddhism, Reform Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism and Baha'i, of new esoteric movements such as Theosophy and Spiritualism. The leaders of New Thought met there each summer; the last Transcendentalists Franklin Sanborn and Charles Malloy kept the Emersonian spirit alive there. Music and the arts flourished. Progressive reformers discussed temperance, education, urban crowding, impoverished mothers. The list of speakers and attendees was a roster of the most celebrated intelligentsia of the day, drawn from the arts, reform movements, and religious leaders from around the world. Social formalities were not observed, experimentation was encouraged, ideas and inspiration bubbled forth. In the center of all of this activity, involved in every project from séances and scientific conferences about evolution, Sarah Farmer created a fertile, peaceful environment; she brought the finest thinkers and artists; she used her charisma and force of will to hold a multiplicity of disparate groups with disparate goals together, and inspired a unity of creative energy meant to perfect the world.

Creating Sarah Farmer: An Embodied Thinker

In the 1940s, Bahiyyah Ford began to write a biography of Sarah J. Farmer. Though Ford was an absolute amateur, she had grown up at Greenacre and known Farmer (her father Harry Randall had been a confidant of Farmer's, and he was the

administrator and a member of the board of trustees until his death).[33] She collected all of the papers and correspondence belonging to Sarah Farmer that she could find in Elliot; she contacted men and women around the country who had known Sarah or been to Greenacre and asked them to write their memories down. She painstakingly reconstructed Farmer's movements over decades.[34] She used a clipping service to acquire magazine and newspaper articles. Yet, in the end, the biography she wrote was only 22 pages long, and the Reviewing Committee for the Baha'i's press[35] returned it to her with a disparaging letter. Ford abandoned the manuscript, and it, along with all of the letters, publications, notes and records, was retired to the Baha'i National Archives.

To some degree, the Sarah Farmer that we can know is a creation of Bahiyya Ford and the archive she gathered. Though surely others still survived, Ford interviewed [primarily] Baha'is, most of whom had been at Greenacre only after 1900, and much of the surviving correspondence dates from after Farmer's conversion.[36] Ford's correspondents knew little of the founding years and much of what they remembered was – while generous to Sarah Farmer – embedded in memories of the dissent and dislike between the "old guard" and the new Baha'i, as

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[33] Atkinson. *Greenacre-on-the-Piscataquah, a Centennial*, 67.
[34] She was eventually joined by James Martin, who wrote his MA Thesis on Farmer. Together they accounted for her whereabouts for nearly every day of her adult life.
[35] The Baha'i require pre-publication approval of any manuscript concerned with official teachings and doctrine; though this short hagiography does not deal with such, the Committee evaluated its position within the purview of the committee. (see Cole. "Baha'i Faith as Panopticon, 1963-1997", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Jun., 1998), pp. 234- 248
[36] For his 1967 MA thesis, Martin conducts personal interviews with surviving family members and family friends of the Farmers. Whether they wouldn't speak to her or their stories were so familiar she saw no need to record their memories, there is no record in SJF's official archive of most individuals who knew her as a young lady, or before her conversion to Baha'i. Martin seems to have kept his notes private for his own purposes, though he appears to have contributed other work to the archive.

well as contextualized by 'Abdu'l-Bah'a's view that Greenacre (had always) supported Baha'i ideological claims about universality of religion. Too, decades had passed, and the first generation of American Baha'i were growing old.[37]

I don't believe Ford meant to obscure or even elide the early history of Greenacre, only that she was interested in Sarah as a Baha'i and her work in founding a Baha'i school, which had been of particular significance to 'Abdu'l-Bah'a, who in fact spent several weeks there on his only trip to America in 1906 – she meant to write a hagiography of sorts, and to preserve the memories of those early years. The Baha'i (that is, 'Abdu'l-Bah'a, the final prophet of Baha'i) believed that Greenacre, between 1894 and 1901, was outfitting a program for the study of Universal Religion, in order that Baha'i (which presented itself as the sum of all human knowledge, the Universal Religion) might have a school ready for its arrival in the US.[38] The archive tells a story, however, that tends to remember Sarah as a Baha'i visionary, in which all of Farmer's work at Greenacre prior to 1900 was in preparation for her revelation, and that Greenacre was meant ultimately to serve as a symbol of the religious universality so important in Baha'i. The early days at Greenacre were a story that culminated in the establishment of Greenacre as a Baha'i school. This is a story with which Sarah herself would likely agree.

But one of the challenges of this project has been finding other memories, of reading against this narrative that the archive itself suggests. Sarah's conversion to

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[37] Of course, memory can be jostled by well-phrased questions or a skilled interviewer. Ford seems to have used a standard form with broad questions intended to prompt stories of the old days. ("What do you recall most vividly about Miss Farmer?" "Do you recall any incidents either interesting, beautiful, humorous in connection with the people there?") See sample form FP B4F3, Juliet Thompson

[38] Tablet From Abdu'l Bah'a Collection, National Baha'i Archives, United States. Bah'a to Farmer, 3. B5.

Baha'i, and the increasing emphasis on Baha'i in Greenacre's schedule, alienated many Greenacrites. Too, Farmer's founding vision was different; it mapped nicely onto the Baha'i revelation, but its original intent and purpose is occluded by this reading, and further complicated by the probability that Bah'a helped to shape Greenacre in later years. The largest source of non-Baha'i information is the Last Transcendentalist, Franklin Sanborn, who generated thousands of articles for the Boston papers. Other sources are more piecemeal; letters from Sara Bull's archive have survived, and were a critical element of Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana's biography of Bull, as well as in other collections (including a very delightful account of a séance by William James). Vivekananda wrote of his summer there in 1894. The Baha'i collection does contain limited material from before 1900, as well.[39] There is also, within the archive and elsewhere, newspaper and magazine articles about Greenacre, by Greenacrites, special issues on Greenacre, regular dispatches throughout a season… Another aspect of the challenge of writing about Sarah Farmer and Greenacre is sifting through the countless voices that made the "Greenacre spirit" –the speakers and writers and thinkers at Greenacre represented a dizzying array of causes and movements and traditions; Greenacre tangles on through the work of Clarence Darrow, or Bolton Hall, or William James; it was an important space for the development of reform Judaism, for Vedanta.

Finally, Farmer published some few public pieces – articles and pamphlets. She kept a diary, but it is quite utilitarian, a record of her travels. She gave

[39] To clarify, it's not that Greenacre itself suddenly changed in 1901, when Sarah returned from Acca. Rather, Sarah's interpretation of her work changed, and relations between traditional Greenacrites and Baha'i changed Greenacre more gradually.

interviews to several publications – these are generally from Greenacre's most popular period of 1898-9, though not solely.

Bahiyya Ford's manuscript offers, as its frontispiece, a description of Sarah's significance, her particular contribution, which is not easy to name:

> There are geniuses in arts and sciences. Much less often the same creative force endows a man or woman with the gift of understanding his [sic] fellow beings, individually and collectively.
>
> This is the story of Sarah Jane Farmer, a genius in human relationships.[40]

Human relationships are not Sarah's only talent, but I like the way that Ford claims a genius for *human relationships*. Is this not a skill we see put to different work by famous charlatans, flim-flam women and confidence men? An ability to intuit inner workings and motivations, weaknesses and strengths, is remembered in infamy, but harder to pin down when the results are less material. This is why James Martin, in his unpublished thesis on Sarah Farmer, concludes that her primary significance is as an exemplar of a particular moment in American history, with no enduring legacy.[41] Rather, I see Farmer's genius, if that is what it is, as helping to create a new world – helping to shape the direction of the enormous change that America is poised upon, at the turn of the century. Perhaps this looks provincial because it is easier to point to specific materialities or modes of thought preserved in books and traditional kinds of religiosity. The kind of religion that was

[40] Ford, unpublished manuscript, FP Box 3 Fol 36.
[41] Martin, 237.

disseminated at Greenacre was too self-oriented, too dedicated to seeking out elements of the Universal, too personally meaningful, too focused on experience. and perhaps too female-oriented to claim traditional ways of remembering. Yet it did not disappear as times changed – Farmer's hand remains visible in New Age spirituality, in mindfulness practices, in yoga practices, in "spiritual but not religious", in wellness culture, in claims that you can create your ideal world by wanting it enough.

Rather than being a relic of her time, Sarah Farmer pulled together different but similar religious and social tendencies in her own time and created something more unified (although it resists unification) that enabled –and continues to enable – a contemporary "spirituality" (oft-critiqued, sometimes for good reasons): a cosmopolitan spirituality looking out into the world, a spirituality that often overlapped with the "science" of comparative religions and so brought popular science and scientific methods into its capacious multitudes, a spirituality that was concerned with the healthy body in novel ways.[42] Sarah brought together all of these people, these different projects, and made a conversation, a conversation which helped to transform the way Americans think about religion, about *other* religions, about the body, and about science. For example, by maintaining a school of

[42] White's book *Unsettled Minds* is fantastic in thinking about this, but this science/spirituality is right now. The California School system is experimenting with using Transcendental Meditation (funded by David Lynch's foundation) to assist students in low-income areas, struggling schools, or other stressors as the Quiet Time program. Students practice two 15-minute periods of quiet; techniques of TM are taught but not required. The article in the Times cites the fabulous results in controlled studies but nowhere does it mention a. a connection with any religious history or practice or b. that TM is an actual religious movement, not just "mindfulness". You literally cannot make this up, David Lynch disseminating TM through California Schools, but this is what Sarah Farmer has given us. (see: Rosenthal, Norman E, M.D., "Using Meditation to Help Close the Achievement Gap", New York Times (Well section, published 6/2/15) (http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/06/02/using-meditation-to-help-close-the-achievement-gap/ Accessed 6/15/16)

Emersonian thought (or, participating in a community of Emersonian interpreters) Farmer provided a genealogy of thought – a connection that led from the Puritans through the Transcendentalists and into New Thought/spirituality/New Age/Eastern practices. Greenacre made a space for Emerson's teachings to be applied in new ways, and to be incorporated into many of the young movements.

One of the most distinctive features of Farmer's philosophy is its total optimism in human nature and human potential. As the slightly later Social Gospel would expand upon, Farmer believed that the Kingdom of Heaven already existed within each person, and indeed could be manifested into the material world. It was her work to both model the Kingdom and to make it real, bringing about the end of human suffering and usher in the New Day.[43]

Farmer looked out on a world that was much larger than the world her father and mother had seen; she saw the beginnings of a global culture, and saw the promise of World Peace, of united humanity rather than warring nation states or regional interests. She saw a world teeming with people who each had something to offer to a greater good. Sometimes this seems hopeful, sometimes this seems brave, sometimes this seems incredibly naïve. Recently, it seems like a grim, grinding repetition of the shortcomings of liberalism, the idealistic striving undermined by its own shortsightedness and prejudices. Sarah Farmer seems foolish in the enormity of her ambition, ignorant in her fundamentally Protestant-inflected mindset, but she was absolute in her certainty, her unwavering faith that the world was headed for positive change and that she was a key part of that, that she was contributing in

[43] Farmer, "The Greenacre Ideal." FP B6 F7.

meaningful ways. Farmer gave everything, her money, her land, her friends, her health, her body, her sanity – she gave it all up for her convictions and her hopes, for her confidence that the ideal world she saw would come to pass.

By the time Greenacre commenced, Farmer was 47, dressed always in gray, and was renowned for her encompassing kindness and compelling charisma – many friends called her 'Mother-Heart', she is sometimes referred to as a priestess – there's a sense that maybe people don't quite know how to describe her, she's all gracious dignity but once spirit channeled her mother's St Bernard, she rejected sixteen marriage proposals but many of her suitors remained intimate associates for her whole life, she knows everyone from the local handyman Frederick Bangs to William James to Clara Barton, Baha'i prophet 'Abdu'l- Bah'a wrote her reams of personal letters (called Tablets). A "genius in human relationships" – her role at Greenacre was seldom (though it was also) teacher or speaker but she ensured its spirit of harmony, open-mindedness and peacefulness.

Sarah Farmer's power, in the memories of Greenacrites and contemporary descriptions alike, was in her presence. Like Greenacre itself, people often describe her appearance as a way of communicating what it is like to *be there*. Over 40 years later, Lydia Lear, who spent her childhood years at Greenacre and lived across the river, recalled Farmer in remarkable detail:

> "…I used to think of what a beautiful Madonna picture she made, when my small sister would carry her flowers from our home garden or something she had picked along the way… [She] favored simplified dress for women – we never saw her in street dress or evening dress, though she may have dressed

> quite differently when away from the meetings. On week days she wore the flowing (sort of Grecian) dress of a light gray – I think a slight lavender tint – and on Sundays a white dress of the same style."[44]

So many people remark on her dress, always gray or white, that she surely knew the power of her costume to communicate a mood and used it to effect. In formal photographs, she tends to peculiar, almost architectural hats – angular cascading veils that tie under her chin; tall loops that resemble a crown set far back on her head; a small rectangle rising high.

Sarah Farmer's actual affect was harder to convey. Stanwood Cobb, who claims to have been converted to Baha'i after spending half an hour with her, writes:

> "She not only created that atmosphere of friendliness and informality which brings an audience into harmonious relations with itself and with the speaker or performer; but she literally shone upon the audience a radiance that melted the heart, suffused the performance with joyousness, and lifted the whole even to an exalted plane. This she did… by merely sitting there and radiating her smiling joy and love."[45]

Another recounts:

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[44] Lydia S.C. Lear to Ford, 1942, FP B1 F75.
[45] Stanwood Cobb to Ford, undated but c. 1942, FP B1 F65.

> Her face was a blaze of light. That is the way I always remember her – in that same nun-like costume, her face like an incandescent lamp and strength and joy radiating from her.[46]

This sense of joy, or peace, or goodness, or kindness 'radiating' from her quiet, gray-clad person is constantly repeated in the reminiscences collected by Bahiyya Ford and in contemporary accounts. It seems to be this ability to communicate through stillness, through a small smile or a few words, a well-chosen gesture, that she best communicated with others.

The attention to Farmer's body, to her cultivated appearance, and to the power of her presence indicates the importance of embodiment in her work. She is plainly well-read – her writing is almost pastiche at times, so densely do references and quotations run together. Yet she is not a writer of notable skill, nor does she seem to have been an overwhelming public speaker. Rather, she has a sensual power. Her work is done "between four eyes" – between people in proximity. In combining strands of thought, she aims to create something new – a New Day or ideal world – but this is done, as she describes in the Greenacre Ideal, through individuals and between individuals. The power of Sarah Farmer's own presence, and the connections she fosters between others, allows her to create a kind of text through her person and through practice. This emphasis on embodiment is less about the limitations of the fleshly body than about cultivating a body that is healthy, through particular kinds of place, which facilitates spiritual growth. The

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[46] Juliet Thompson to Ford, 1942, FP B4 F3.

effect of her presence – both in appearance and in the radiant quality of her personality – is one of the means by which she creates change at Greenacre. Bahaiyya Ford calls her a genius of people, but I suggest instead an embodied thinker. It is not a manipulative quality, but rather a way of organizing thought to create a new conclusion, in the way that a writer organizes others' thought to create a new conclusion. The text Farmer produces is communicated between bodies, and emerges in Greenacre (which, I suggest later, is intimately linked with her bodily self). The mode of thinking within Greenacre is Farmer's creation, the contact between strains of thought like New Thought and Vedanta, and the way Farmer shapes that contact through embodied experience.

Sarah Farmer and her Family: Shaping Thought

Sarah Farmer was born on July 22, 1847 to Moses Gerrish and Hannah Tobey Farmer. Many scholars and devotees claim that, in order to understand Sarah, one must first understand her **father** and his influence on her.[47] If her father shaped her drive and ability to create a reality, her **mother** shaped the content of that reality: the intense spirituality, the total devotion to social work as the engine of change, the vision of mothers and children as the primary instrument of change. I consider her parents and family life in some detail because the Farmers -- Hannah, Moses and Little Birdie, as the family called her -- were extremely intimate and connected to each other, and the family's religious visions shaped Farmer's later work. It was only after her father's death (Hannah had died in 1891) that Farmer began the

[47] Martin, 1, for example, is explicit, but she is often linked with Moses Farmer in scholarship as well as contemporary biographical sketches. Her mother, Hannah, is seldom mentioned in these.

conferences at Greenacre, in her 40s; the majority of her life was spent as daughter and caretaker within the family circle.

The Farmers were an extremely close-knit family, though they had a large and illustrious social circle and Sarah, in particular, often visited family and friends on extended trips throughout the east. Hannah and Moses included Sarah in all discussions and decisions, whether domestic concerns and business arrangements, from earliest childhood. She was treated as an equal and an adult from her earliest days. They had little money, really none; Moses had abandoned his training to be a school teacher for the far less stable career of Inventor; Hannah was intermittently quite ill, and was renowned for charitable impulses so complete that she would immediately give the last penny they owned to someone in need.

They kept house in Framingham and Salem during Sarah's youth. Sarah grew up in a home filled with great people and great ideas – her parents had a wide social circle, and Hannah never abandoned an acquaintance once made. Hannah was wholly philanthropic and was acquainted with influential social reformers like Dorothea Dix, Elizabeth Comstock and Clara Barton. The Farmer family also counted among their friends artists and religious figures – John Whittier Greenleaf was particularly significant to Greenacre: he bestowed its name, and visited during his life (his favorite chair bore his name for many years.[48]

Moses was an inventor, really quite brilliant; he was captivated by the early research in electricity and made significant contributions (though some, like the

[48]See for example Atkinson, 11.

roller skates he built in 1834, were less weighty). The Farmers' home in Salem, Massachusetts was the first house lit by electricity (briefly); he invented a self-exciting dynamo (which channeled and stored energy as a precursor to the battery); a fire alarm system adopted by the city of Boston; an automatic printing telegraph and many other things. One obituary recalls that everything he built needed new specific apparatus and processes that were all, of necessity, "devised by him – for there were no such devices in existence and no experience."[49] He was driven by curiosity, and uninterested in the more prosaic, but lucrative details of marketing applications or filing patents. In one case, he improved the process for making window shades, explained it to a local manufacturer, and wandered away; the profits of the first run were about $20,000 but Farmer never saw – or regretted – a dime.[50] Later, Sarah often described his belief that his discoveries were literally revelations from God; to patent or profit from them was unsavory. Farmer upheld this belief as one of the central tenets of Greenacre, never charging for lectures or classes, despite stiff criticism and dire financial need.

Moses's work, in particular, prefigures his daughter's. His work as an electrician, finding small connections and channels between the mechanical and the inchoate and fantastical power of electricity – by being open to the currents of divine inspiration, frames Farmer's ideas about one's power to manifest an encompassing and universal force – the language of the New Day and a Light Breaking is not uniquely hers, but seems uniquely fit to the analogy. Both are

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[49] A.E. Dolbear. "Moses Gerrish Farmer", *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol 29 (3/1893 – 3/1894), 416.
[50] This is about $500,000 at today's value.

illustrative of the power of human will to shape the material world to its benefit (this is before Edison's graphic demonstration of the dangers of electricity, in executing an elephant), and an optimism about the possibilities of human ambition. There's an emphasis, as well, on a kind of selfless service – Moses refuses to monetize his innovations out of a conviction that they are divine gifts beyond ownership, Farmer resolutely refuses to charge any fee for Greenacre's classes and lectures (the Inn, and private residences, charged for board, though camping was free) on the same principles – it's integral, she tells Janes, to Greenacre's existence: "its character will change – its freedom will be hampered. Of this I am convinced.".[51] A devastating fire destroys Moses' laboratory and work, as if to emphasize the futility of claiming such ownership – a fire destroys Farmer's home and a lifetime of documentation, as well. Moses' death functions, symbolically, as another catastrophic break that allows for Farmer's divine inspiration or vision, but he also dies at a rather peak moment, as he is preparing his retrospective for an international audience at the Expo.[52]

We know quite a lot about Sarah Farmer's mother in part because Sarah commissioned a biography of her mother in 1892. It is written by a pen-for-hire named Augustin Caldwell and runs to 600 pages.[53] Hannah Tobey Shapleigh Farmer

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[51] Farmer to Janes, March 17, 1898, FP B 21 F24.
[52] Caldwell, *The Rich Legacy*, 419-420.
[53] Augustin Caldwell was a clergyman, antiquarian, and author, (1836-1908). His especial genre seems to have been genealogies of the local gentry, presumably by commission. Sarah Farmer is the copyright holder of *The Rich Legacy*, which is privately published in 1892 (a year after her mother's death). Although she is not a co-author, she provided information and documentation, and I believe, based on some language and narrative elements, was involved in shaping the content. I lend some particular importance to this document as a narrative that illuminates both

was a lifelong and enthusiastic letter-writer; she had many friends and acquaintance and never let one go that she could reach through the US Postal System. She was also a poet, who published under the pseudonym "Mabelle". So Caldwell had a true wealth of material to draw from.

A childhood friend describes Hannah as "*universal*. She was open to anybody, irrespective of notions or dispositions…"[54], a quality of character that Sarah brought to life at Greenacre. Caldwell's memorial emphasizes several themes, but they tend to be of circumstance – bereavement, physical suffering, etc. Hannah Farmer is universally maternal – her mother-love is boundless, all-good, all-encompassing, all-sacrificing.[55] Hannah's impulse to service transcended her own painful physical infirmities, and she was known as a philanthropist – she was involved in the Anti-Slavery Society and purportedly was a stop on the Underground Railroad sheltering at least two fugitives; she organized transient shelters, and visited dying children in their beds. When she was too ill to leave her bed, she made "pin flats" – many hundreds – to send to the soldiers on the battlefield.

Hannah Shapleigh (born 3/20/1823) was descended from two old Eliot families, the Shapleighs, and the Tobeys (much later the loyalties of the "Eliot

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Farmer's feelings about her mother, and about what a good woman is like. There are many parallels between Hannah's and Sarah's lives, and I believe that they reveal something about Sarah, as much as Hannah. For information about Caldwell: Herringshaw, Thomas William. "Augustin Caldwell," Herringshaw's National Library of American Biography. Chicago, Ill., American publishers' association, 1909-1914. 531

[54] Caldwell, 5.

[55] Sarah Farmer later in life was called "Mother-heart" by her close friends; Caldwell styles her mother similarly.

people" – the Tobeys in particular -- became a trouble for Sarah).[56] Hannah's father Richard, in particular, was a highly esteemed public figure, known particularly for his ability to resolve violent confrontations by silently, sternly staring at the participants until they went, chastened, away. Five of the 12 Shapleigh children survived past infancy, and his widow returned to Eliot after Richard, two sisters and brother died in rapid succession, of consumption, which nearly killed Hannah herself, leaving her weak and ill.

Richard Shapleigh died quite young in 1863, at 46; a tragedy for Hannah and her mother, who had so rapidly lost their whole family and were now alone in the world. Richard Shapley had, naturally, been scrupulous record-keeper and deed-filer – his own finances were in apple pie order. At the time, it was the custom to "lay out" the body in the home, often in a parlor or social room; family and neighbors would visit to pay respect to the deceased.

Shapleigh lay in his own study, where he kept all of his books and financial records, "as reliable as," he told his wife, "the notes of the bank."[57] But while the family was busily hosting, someone crept into Shapleigh's office, passed his dead,

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[56] Perhaps it is difficult to adequately represent the enormous pride and thorough record-keeping of the men and women who settled many of the towns in Southern Maine. Eliot celebrated its glorious founding as a victory in a series of battles against the local indigenous people, with many thrilling tales of derring-do and near escapes. They published, for some years, a monthly journal that featured items like, a list of every couple married from the date of incorporation to the present, or a list of each high school graduate from the date of incorporation to the present, and other, similar records that affirmed who "belonged" (the names of the Indian wars are the same names one sees at Greenacre), and its character as an organized, established, moral community.

[57] Caldwell, 53

sheeted body by, and emptied all of his cupboards and drawers of their contents. In the hustle and bustle, he or she was able to walk out of the house with all of the Shapleigh's worldly wealth. Mrs. Shapleigh "had already faced the painful fact of widowhood: now she was appalled by the sudden discovery of penury as well," Caldwell tells us.[58] Hannah, weak from the illness that killed her family, fell into despair: delirium and depression. The now impoverished family returned to live with Mrs. Shapleigh's parents at her family home in Eliot, ME in 1841. Hannah gave up her education – though it was terribly hard for her, and instead worked as a seamstress to help support the family.

Whether this story is strictly true or a exculpatory explanation for debts and a depleted estate left by a pillar of the community, as a narrative device, it parallels Sarah's own later experience; returning to the family land in Eliot is a place of last resort, a retreat when it is too humiliating to remain. For both Sarah and her

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[58] Caldwell 53-4, 65. This episode is also mentioned in Lidia Churchill's article ("Feast of Reason: Greenacre's Community of Genial Minds", *Boston Daily Globe (1872-1922);* Aug 18, 1895, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 28.) She did hire lawyers, although time passed, and Hannah grew sicker, then the move to Eliot, it is unclear if the assets were ever reclaimed. It seems so unlikely that the bank wouldn't have a copy? It doesn't seem like he was exactly keeping money under his mattress, but maybe that he had a blank check or form so that Olive (or a thief) could get a big pile of cash easily? Again, this seems – I'm no banker – sort of unlikely. Later, Caldwell suggests that the papers were *destroyed*, so that they couldn't present a legal case at all, and so just to be mean to a widow and her impoverished children? (65) It seems more likely that this story was embellished in order to cover up debts or far less money than Mrs. Shapleigh had expected. Perhaps some cash was stolen, which is still terrible, but more plausible. Certainly, as a narrative device, it serves to make Mrs. Shapleigh's return to her parents in Eliot a return to a place of healing (for Hannah), a safe haven from which she was recreated and new resolves were born. The horrible event of the death-theft simply could not happen here in such a small community – so that Hannah could trust and heal in her Grandparents' home.

mother, the move is a time of acute loss of innocence, ambition, and potential, first resented but then a safe haven to reimagine the future. Hannah's return toward the end of her life in similar circumstances; however, it is the place where she is finally able to establish Rosemary – the home for unwed mothers – she has spent much of her life attempting to establish.

Hannah, as represented in her quoted letters and journals, lived in a world completely saturated with the divine, filled with miracles straight from the hand of God.[59] During her youth, she regularly fell into a fugue-state in which she did not speak or eat or react to external stimuli – the family called them her "dream days" -- and she was reportedly afterward "overflowing" with high spirits and energy that were not otherwise customary.[60] Later in her life, through the connection of

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[59] Caldwell recounts many quasi-miraculous or supernatural stories: for example, on the day that Hannah's young brother Albert, died, he was playing in the barn and heard his mother calling. He ran to her, but she hadn't said anything and he went back to play. This happened several times; finally Albert said, "If it is not Mother calling, it must be God" and promptly died. In another case, Sarah's great-aunt fell ill with a bizarre disease in which her tongue swelled out so enormously it pushed out upon all her teeth; she was deaf, and couldn't speak or eat. No doctor could diagnose or treat her, and so she wasted away into her tenth birthday, when she frantically motioned for a pen and paper, and wrote out an "inspirational prescription" which had been "made known to me by some higher powers than there is on earth or ever will be till the day of judgment"; the ingredients for God's prescription were promptly obtained and applied. Within 24 hours her tongue was restored, and within 24 more, her teeth restored, and she was totally healthy, except still deaf. Mary continued, in writing, to profess her faith in God's design and intent. Several days later, there was a further miraculous event, her sister's infant was allowed to sleep upon her pillow by her head, and Mary woke at midnight, with her hearing restored. (Caldwell, 39-42)

[60] It's always engaging to diagnose historical figures with various diseases, and surely these symptoms would describe manic depression, migraine and more; of more significance, though, is that this state indicates some kind of mental affliction, which seems to have affected Sarah as well. The latter manifested peculiar ailments, such as blindness which only occurred when she read or wrote, or deafness which

bereavement or shared suffering with other women, she experienced visions on behalf of others, and through the sympathy of grief was capable of a kind of astral projection. Caldwell describes it as "actually t[aking] the spiritual, mental or physical states," physically manifesting to comfort a young widow, or ascending to pray with a heavenly host.[61] This transformation of suffering, or the power of suffering to heighten spiritual abilities, highlights a feminine power picked up in later New Thought, and emphasized by Farmer herself; this is a focus on self-lessness, a transcending of the material and of the ego. Hannah is not, here, withdrawn into grief and suffering, but uses them as a means of connection with others, a kind of radical empathy that elides the limits of embodiment, creating a vivid spiritual reality.

When Sarah was two, she fell ill very suddenly, with an undiagnosed malady (the narrative recounts). She hovered near death for three days, unresponsive to any medical intervention. Helpless, Moses and Hannah prayed for God to return Sarah to them. Hannah wrote:

> "We promised him that we would never hold her again as ours, but as his child, *loaned to us*, to be trained for a life of usefulness here on earth, and as a messenger for his service in heaven when she could no longer do his work and bidding here with us. The prayer was heard and registered. It was

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only occurred when she was in public. (see for example letter to Janes March 17, 1898.)

[61] See Caldwell, 353-4; recounting of specific visions and experiences beginning on 354 and 356

> answered here upon earth. A few hours later the tide of life turned slowly backwards; and 'God be praised, the child will live,' fell from the lips of our physician.
>
> From that day to this we have had God's own child in our care and keeping, until she has become to us our household evangel. If our life-work were to end for her this very hour, I think we could conscientiously say before him and the world that we have honestly and faithfully tried to keep the vows we made when she was given back to us as one raised from the dead, as well as when we accepted her at her birth as a gift from him." (emphasis original)[62]

The "vows" Hannah refers to here were not metaphorical; Sarah was literally dedicated to God for service in return for her life. The Farmers already emphasized the necessity of action in service of good, but for Sarah, even this "ordinary" obligation to help the poor and do good deeds was very explicitly understood to be God's work. Further, Sarah, and her family, believed that God would reveal to her a divine mission she was meant to fulfill, a particular work.

According to Caldwell, the idea that Sarah was consecrated to God was commonly mentioned; she would have felt the obligation of Hannah's vow, and that her life was consecrated to God's work in the world. For example, an aunt wrote to ask Hannah if her daughter might extend her visit by a few days, and asked if she would "lend her daughter". Hannah wrote to Sarah, in response, ""Tell Aunt Sarah that I cannot *lend* you to the Lord, because I *gave* you back to him when you were

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[62] Caldwell 125.

two years old; and I have never felt the least desire to recall the gift from that day to this. Ever since then it has been a mystery why he asked me to do it, but now it is all made plain. I thought I should have to wait until I saw him face to face to understand it. The vow I made then has influenced my whole life, and I can never be released of its obligations until he takes one of us to himself."[63] Surely this would have weighted Sarah's later understanding of her work, and is suggestive of the way she talks about Greenacre as her responsibility from God, and the scope of possibility for Greenacre she envisions.

This context helps to explain the deep significance Sarah saw in the "Greenacre spirit". Greenacre was not only a summer resort or school or series of conferences but generated a spiritual force moving out through the world and working active changes, and she understood herself to be entrusted by God to carry out this, God's work. Hannah's vow also lends perspective to Sarah's constant assertion that she wants nothing for herself, but that she is God's messenger here.[64]

In 1859, however, Hannah and Moses had a son who lived for a day and then died. This was a turning point for Hannah – she really never recovered from her grief, and spoke of Clarence constantly. She also never recovered physically, and was unable to walk more than a few feet – she spent the rest of her life as an invalid, in considerable physical pain – as well as deeply depressed for years. [65] Sarah would

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[63] qtd. Caldwell, 100.

[64] see Farmer to Janes, May 12, 1896; Sept 2, 1899. FP B21 F27.

[65] Hannah wrote about her depression, "In the last months of 1862 there was a weight upon me too great for human endurance. I tried to leave it all with Him who

have been twelve when Clarence was born and died, and it must have stung to be thrust out of the primacy in her mother's heart.[66] The Farmer family had been such an intimate, tightly knit unit, Hannah's grief, depression, and pain pushed Sarah and Moses away. Hannah wanted only to be alone with God, "it seemed as if the one who was all the world to me, or our sweet Birdie, would come between me and my dear, loving Father."[67]

Compounding the family's private mourning, the Civil War began soon after in 1861, and in Hannah's biography, the already omnipresent themes of (overcoming) death, suffering and loss heighten with the suffering soldiers and their widows that pass through the Farmer home. It is this communal grief that occasions Hannah's advancement to a kind of super-sympathy, in which she travels to the side of new widows to pray with them in person, comforting them with her physical presence; she also received visions of angels, and of deceased among them.[68]

Though Sarah finished high school, her plans for higher education were put aside because of a severe illness during Sarah's adolescence, although it is notable, as well, that her father's laboratory caught fire and burnt to ashes in the month

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bears the heaviest end of the cross, but I could not reach the sun- light with my will lost in that of my dear Father's. I could only wait and trust. I went out all I could, and far more than my weakness approved, if weakness only had been consulted. But I did not trust myself alone lest this grief should sweep over me like the torrent of the mountain. I did not dare to speak of it, and think I never did, with a single exception to husband." (Caldwell 230-1)

[66] "How often she [Hannah] said, "I have no boy to offer in sacrifice in this fiery day," as if, because she was sonless, all other sacrifices were uncounted! "Caldwell, 215

[67] Caldwell, 362. "Our sweet Birdie" refers to Sarah.

[68] Caldwell, 356,7.

before her graduation (1868) – all his years of work were destroyed, and he was plunged into a deep depression.[69] Instead, Sarah was provided with a variety of tutors to supplement the informal education she received in conversations with her parents' bright social circle. Martin suggests that the lack of a more formal curriculum resulted in a somewhat freewheeling education that lacked critical rigor; while she pursued an intense study of foreign languages in order to assist her father in his work, for instance, she otherwise devoted her study to religious philosophy and romantic literature with little academic context or structure.[70] Later, colleagues at Greenacre would criticize her for including "mediumship, astrology and … 'mental science'" in the program, arguing that these endangered the creation of a reasoned, serious, intellectualized environment for comparative religion.[71] At the same time, her policy of non-judgment and respect — at the core of Greenacre's work — required that one "never despise a rung of the ladder by which another is rising", an approach that challenged pre-conceptions about what was reasonable, and suggests her less orthodox education might have functioned as a source of innovation.[72]

What Sarah received from her parents might be broadly painted as an understanding of her purpose as a very literal God's work for which she was selected, requiring an investment of her individual contribution but equally an egolessness or sense that it is in no way about her own desires or even interpretations but only Divine Inspiration, and service to others. Too, her childhood

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[69] Dolbear, 418; Martin, 13
[70] Martin, 14.
[71] Letter from Sara Chapman Bull to Lewis Janes. Cambridge Historical Society, Curtis Papers, November 30, 1894.
[72] Lewiston Sunday Journal, "Greenacre's Mystic Charm", 8/12/99.

was suffused with a religious sensibility in which God was an incredibly benevolent impersonal force, but also a real-world mystical force that balanced or comforted this enormous amount of suffering – her mother's (and later father's) physical and mental suffering, their grief for their dead son an echo in the enormous national grief during and after the Civil War. This suffering and grief had purpose, and that was to comfort and ease the suffering others, in part through embodying loss and suffering oneself.

The Farmers moved several times during Sarah's youth, following Moses' work (he left one job because it "required much Sabbath attention" and followed his "conscientious scruples" to another job in Salem).[73] The real change in their fortunes, however, came with Moses' appointment as a consultant to the U.S. Navy on torpedo warfare, and an accompanying professorship at the Naval Academy in Newport, RI, in December of 1872. The position offered a much higher salary, a large home with servants to keep it, a laboratory and budget for Moses' research, and far more time to devote to his work. They lived there for ten years, and they were a wonderful time for Sarah. She had grown up conversing with many of the New England intellectual elite who were frequent visitors at the Farmers' home, but Salem was small town in comparison to Newport, which in those years was the summer literary colony for the intelligentsia of Boston and Cambridge. Sarah was twenty-five, charming, with a fine mind. She was free from the drudgery of housework, which was time consuming and exhausting. She was able to follow her

[73] Dolbear, A.E. "Moses Gerrish Farmer", *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol 29 (May 1893 – May 1894), p. 416

intellectual passions, and enjoy a vivacious social life, including a number of romantic attachments – the family was rather proud of the fact that she had received seventeen marriage proposals by the time she was 42 (1889).[74] She taught in Sunday school with a group of female friends[75], and developed a modest reputation for philanthropic work. The local paper wrote:

> …Professor Farmer and his estimable daughter are two of the best friends which the poor of Newport have ever found and many families are sought out by Miss Farmer, who need pecuniary and other assistance and her sweet Christian spirit, coupled with kindred graces, has illuminated many dark homes where want and distress were pictured in the faces of those who occupied them … done with the greatest secrecy.[76]

Socially esteemed, with good friends and romantic adventures, time to think and read; Sarah was happy in Newport, so it was a blow when the family was compelled to move again. For some two years (around 1879), Moses had become increasingly ill with a degenerative disease that left him quite paralyzed. Because of his increasing impairment and new leadership at the Naval base, his contract was not renewed; Moses and Hannah, humiliated and angered by the abrupt decision, decided to leave the Boston area altogether, and return to the place where they had begun – the old Shapleigh land in Eliot, Maine, where Hannah could work on charitable endeavors and both could benefit from the peaceful country life.

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[74] Martin, 22.
[75] Caldwell, 439.
[76] Caldwell, 496.

Exile in Eliot: A Revelation

Sarah was furious at being dragged out to the sticks, alone in the country with her two invalid parents, isolated from the social and intellectual world that gave her such pleasure. Like Hannah's own miserable return after the death of her father, Sarah was banished to the (then) rural shores of Maine, impecunious, lonely, bored, her father growing sicker. But her distress was for naught – they built a large house ("Bittersweet" Sarah named it, to mark her sorrow but acknowledge the beauty of the place)[77] on the Shapleigh land. Moses and Hannah continued to travel between sanitariums in search of some relief, the latter with some success in a perhaps ironic reversal of her belief that her pain enabled Moses' inventions. Sarah spent these winters as a guest of friends and family in various cities, where she could keep her intellectual and social interests alive.

But things had changed. Sarah was no longer a twenty-five year old ingénue, full of promise, God's own child, awaiting His direction. Now she was almost 40, unmarried (despite a rumored sixteen marriage proposals and several engagements broken off), a constant guest in others' homes, her parents increasingly ill and in need of care. A revelation from God had not arrived – her life was quite banal. Whether it was overwork or understimulation (sources vary), Sarah collapsed with nervous prostration and became quite ill. At this time, the cure for nervous

[77] Martin, 34.

prostration was a change of scenery, so her worried parents quickly booked passage for her on a ship sailing to Germany, where she would spend four months recovering. No direct accounts of this journey survive, and it is unclear what, precisely, happened, but at some point Sarah had a dramatic revelation.

> "It was on board the ship… that she heard and heeded the word that unto her became life, and learned the lesson taught in other years and in another manner to her mother that he that would save his life shall lose it.
>
> "'How shall I keep about me the outside world and be happy in its society?' had been the question of the woman whose passionate protests had sent her across the sea. 'How shall I enter the homes of these, my neighbors, and be of use to them?' was the query of her who landed from the returning ship."[78]

A second account of this experience was included in an 1899 article about Farmer and the Greenacre Conferences. Here, the revelation is more specifically linked to her unhappiness in Eliot:

> "And so she shut herself in and the Eliot world out, and in her proud and tormented isolation ruined her health and dwarfed her soul, until [she was sent to Europe]…. On the steamer was one of those whose work is making straight paths for the Lord, and swift, sure, strong and abiding came the truth and assurance that sent Sarah Farmer back to Eliot, consecrated, eager for the Master's work, knowing the beginning of peace and the upliftings and

[78] Lidia Churchill,"Feast of Reason", *Boston Daily Globe (1872-1922)*; Aug. 18, 1895; Proquest Historical Newspapers: The Boston Globe, p. 28

outleadings of righteousness."[79]

Whatever truly happened[80], Sarah returns with a fresh understanding of her work, and a rededication to service, ready to put childish things behind her. The temptations of the wide world must be painfully set aside so that work can begin – work rooted in place, and in history. Thus, it is not the death of her father (the second of three transformative sea journeys) that liberates Sarah, but self-reflection, self-realization that transforms her, catalyzed by a vision or divine intervention. The three great crises of Farmer's life – the move to Eliot, the death of her father, and the loss of the Monsalvat School all share – at least as recollection – a pattern. First, Farmer seems to be happy, successful, or poised to realize an ambition, an emotional high. Then, loss leads to despair and collapse into illness. A divine revelation (in the third case, it is meeting 'Abdu'l-Bah'a and converting to Baha'i) illuminates her path and restores her confidence, and she is able to exercise what must have been enormous strength of will to complete the next stage of her work ("the miracle of gaining all by giving all", writes Churchill).[81]

After returning from Germany a new woman, her first action is to organize a

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[79] Churchill, Lida A. "The Home of Stillness: Greenacre-on-the-Piscataquah," *Nickell Magazine*, Vol XII, July 1899, p 6. In SJF Papers, B5F7

[80] Though no author is credited for the Boston Globe article, and the two accounts of Farmer's revelation differ, the articles are both by Lida A. Churchill. Lida Churchill was a prolific author best known for writings on Personal Magnetism and New Thought; her several articles on Farmer emphasize a desire for service moving through generations to culminate in Farmer's work at Greenacre. As an apologetic for Greenacre – and as the only accounts of Sarah's shipboard revelation – the experience takes on something of a literary character. It parallels in both the mother and daughter a trauma that forces their return to their right place in Eliot, stating specifically what was alluded to in Caldwell's earlier work.

[81] Churchill, "The Home of Stillness," 5.

"library fete", a fair with proceeds going toward the purchase and stocking of the Eliot Library. Apparently it was quite the event, held two years running, featuring a number of tents representing the nations of the world; the lack of accommodation for out of town guests inspired the Greenacre Inn, which Sarah eventually owned a share in. She continued to fundraise in churches and town-halls, and build the library's collection. After the building opened in 1890, she continued to organize reading groups and classes, and the venture was a great success. People in Eliot took her seriously as a community member, and she had built an institution essentially from the ground, learning skills she would put to use at Greenacre.[82]

Sarah continued to live with her parents, caring for her invalid mother – who recovered her health somewhat before dying in 1891, and for her father, who had developed a degenerative muscle disorder, perhaps MS or ALS, becoming increasingly immobile and confined to a wheelchair, but as mentally cognizant as ever. Moses Farmer died in 1893, on the eve of the great Columbian Exposition; he and Sarah were in attendance in Chicago, before the official opening, supervising a display of his electrical inventions when he died. Though Sarah had travelled without her parents, and stayed with friends and relatives for extended periods, she had spent all of her 46 years in an extremely close relationship with her parents, making her father's work her own as well as working closely with her mother in Hannah's philanthropic efforts, caring for her, and keeping house.

Sarah left no writing about this period of her life. She often spoke of her

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[82] Martin cites private manuscripts, 21.

father with great admiration, and commissioned a laudatory biography of her mother. Her diary, though not a particularly introspective document, records "Dear Mother Went Home" on the page for June 27, and on May 25, "My beloved Father entered in – Chicago 3:50am" She immediately left Chicago, and sailed for Norway with childhood friend Sara Chapman Bull, whose mother had also recently died. They were abroad for a year.

Looking Forward

Farmer's spiritual work begins at a seemingly late age – she well embarked into her 40s at the first summer conference. It begins only after her father's death – whose work, up until this point, had almost wholly shaped Sarah's intellectual life and daily activity. Surveying biographies of other women spiritual activists from the period, however, reveals a commonality – that many women began their public careers late in life after working as caretakers for parents, younger siblings, or other family members throughout their twenties, thirties, even forties. After elderly parents die, or young children are grown, many women were unmarried, financially independent through an inheritance or income that is now supporting only one person, and are able to pursue their own interests and desires with no encumbrance. Dianne Sasson's biography of Farmer's contemporary Laura Holloway-Langford describes her freedom from raising her two younger siblings as the occasion for reckoning with a deep dissatisfaction. In H-L's case, she is particularly concerned with the failure of traditional family structures to support

the intellectual and spiritual fulfillment of women; through Shaker and Theosophical philosophies she stresses the deleterious physical effects of (particularly) childbirth on women's spiritual life and through them the lives of their children. H-L, though herself outside of a traditional family structure, is affected by her mother's marriage at 14 to a 28 year old widower with two children, who gave birth to an additional 14 children over the next 30 years – 12 of whom lived to adulthood. "My rights," H-L writes, "if I ever had any, were swallowed up by the interests of others…. My mother had so many babies that I marvel now that she ever gave me the slightest personal attention…. We were herded as cattle, and as one of the herd I grew to girlhood, and finally to young-lady-hood."[83] Thus her writings describe consummated heterosexual marriage as wholly incompatible with spiritual attainment.[84]

Farmer's close friend and collaborator – with whom she sailed for Norway in the aftermath of her father's death -- Sara Chapman Bull demonstrates another manifestation of this difficulty. Chapman Bull, best known as Vivekananda's American sponsor and key figure in the history of Vedanta as well as playing an important role at Greenacre, married a renowned Norwegian violinist, Ole Bull, and had one daughter, Olea. Ole Bull's death was concurrent with Moses Farmer's & the two recently bereaved women traveled together to Norway, strengthening a lifelong friendship. However, her husband's death was not similarly liberating for Chapman

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[83] Holloway-Langfield, *Beyond The Sunrise: Observations By Two Travellers*. New York, John W. Lovell company, 1883. 152-60
[84] Sasson. *Yearning for the New Age*, 48-55

Bull – she came into significant wealth and further social influence through Ole Bull (her family already was a wealthy and influential presence in Cambridge), but the extended illnesses of her daughter and grand-daughter required Chapman Bull's continuous presence at home, and prevented her, by her account, from fully participating in the intellectual and spiritual world she worked so hard to foster. It is not until very late in her life that she is able to travel to India, although she certainly accomplished a great deal from Cambridge.[85]

Farmer refers to her father frequently and admiringly, but her own mother was of course an invalid whose affections and attentions toward Sarah were shadowed by her mourning for Clarence, who died shortly after birth and dramatically influenced her mother's interest in spiritualism. As Sarah was 12 when Clarence was born & died – old enough to mark a particular emotional change – it is likely that the physical experience of childbirth was shadowed for her as well. Her commissioned biography of Hannah regularly highlights the physical suffering of Hannah and frames it particularly as a sacrifice on behalf of Moses – that one half of a married couple must suffer for the other to excel.[86]

While the biography also takes great trouble to describe the Farmer marriage as a happy and fulfilling one, this sense of suffering as chosen, as a deliberate sacrifice of the feminine body to support, in various ways, the happiness of the family, is important to understanding Sarah Farmer's later life. She seems to have deliberately eschewed the option of marriage and children, then, but later

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[85] see for example Prabuddhaprana, *Saint Sara*, 124.
[86] Caldwell, 525.

descriptions of her emphasize maternal aspects: the identification of her love for others as maternal through “Mother-Heart”, or the identification of Greenacre as her spiritual child. Thus her physical ailments are often connected to over-work and stress – she describes one bout of illness as a temporary blindness that comes on when she attempts to write or work; many of her chronic illnesses appear to have been in one guise or another “nervous” and brought about by obligations of care. The obligations are of course, to Greenacre; it is nearly axiomatic to describe her as having sacrificed her fortune, her health, and her mind for her creation, echoing the sacrifices of her own mother.

As Farmer turns her face into the sea breeze, and Chicago shrinks into the horizon, she mourns her father’s death and plans the first season of Greenacre. She is, for this moment, free from others’ needs and obligations, and poised to begin her own work.

CHAPTER TWO:

The Moment You Define It, You Commence To Limit It: Complexity At Greenacre

Journalist Helen Campbell wrote of Sarah Farmer: "Is it significant of the new thought of woman – the new hope that the work of the world must henceforth know the woman's hand as guiding side by side with that of man – that its founder and leader is a woman?" She continued, "… one was at once conscious of a peculiar sweet friendliness and open-mindedness. These are the distinguishing traits in the character of the organizer; and they are strong enough to have infused themselves into the life and spirit and all external expression of both at Greenacre."[87] This "character of the organizer" points to a conception of woman's leadership that resonates to the present day; the current attention to high profile political leaders like Nancy Polosi, who is also characterized as an organizer ("Speaking was never her strong suit. Her strong suit was the insider game, the coalition game, the organiser game.") [88] She also represents a uniquely female style ("I think this was an example that really speaks to women's capacity to lead, and to do it civilly, to do it with grace and to be strong and clear,"; "There was a consensus among everybody I spoke to that they felt comfortable and re-energized that they have Pelosi at the

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[87] Campbell, Helen. At Greenacre. *Outlook* (1893-1924); Oct 3, 1896; 54,14; American Periodicals, 625

[88] Elaine Povitch, quoted in Anothony Zircher, "Nancy Pelosi: The Remarkable Comeback of America's Most Powerful Woman". https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-46739947 Accessed 2/8/19.

table.")[89] Compare the characterization of her Senate counterpart Mitch McConnell, who is often presented as a tactician and strategist, or "winner of fights, not friends".[90] The differently conceived nature of female leadership highlights the way Farmer's memory is so frequently marshaled in service of other projects, the way Greenacre is categorized as a moment in the history of New Thought or Yoga in America or American Baha'i. If women foster communication and cooperation while men silence opposition, then women are subsuming the self to the group in a way that men are not; her own conceptions and ambitions – no matter how important they may be to forming a policy – are subsumed into another's narrative. Thus Farmer's own intentions are easily overlooked. What did she wish to create? In the following chapter, I will discuss the disparate voices that Farmer brought together at Greenacre, to better understand what she made out of them.

The complexity of Greenacre is first evident from the several religions or practices that claim it as their own. In various places, it is claimed by Baha'ism, Hinduism/Vedanta, Buddhism, New Thought, Transcendentalism. Looking at the list

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[89] Debbie Walsh, Nanette Diaz Barragan, quoted in Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Annie Karni, "Pelosi vs. Trump: 'Don't Characterize the Strength That I Bring,' She Says", New York Times, 12/11/18. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/11/us/politics/nancy-pelosi-trump.html Accessed 2/8/19.

[90] See: Ross K. Baker, "Trump is right: Mitch McConnell is one of the greatest Senate leaders of all time"https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2018/10/25/mitch-mcconnell-is-one-great-senate-leaders-all-time/?utm_term=.c01100060fe8; Heidi Przybyla and Leigh Ann Caldwell, "McConnell's legacy built on winning fights, not friends" https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/mcconnell-s-legacy-built-winning-fights-not-friends-n882131; Carl Hulse, "Mitch McConnell, Master Tactician, Faces Daunting Challenge: A Health Bill" https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/07/us/politics/mitch-mcconnell-senate-health-care-bill.html Accessed 2/8/19

of speakers who appeared there, it is evident that it attracted social reformers with various interests, and with names we recognize today: Clarence Darrow, W.E.B. DuBois, Jacob Riis, Josephine Locke. It played a role in the signing of the peace treaty ending the incredibly bloody Russo-Japanese War in 1905, for which Teddy Roosevelt won the Nobel Peace Prize the following year -- the PEACE flag raised in the Opening Ceremony each summer was the first one in the nation, and Farmer both hosted the Japanese delegation at Greenacre and was reputedly the only woman in attendance at the official signing in Portsmouth Naval Yard.[91] One could – and many have – include Greenacre in any number of histories.

Much of Greenacre's philosoph(ies) are recorded by others, in articles published in journals and newspapers, in diaries and letters. This multiplicity of authority is remarkable in its amicability – and in the pleasure Greenacrites seemed to take in it. Frances Keefe, companion and champion of Farmer, describes it thus: "What is Greenacre? Well, to be frank with you, Greenacre is just Greenacre. The moment you commence to define it, you commence to limit it – and Greenacre and the thought it represents are not to be limited."[92]

Scholarship on Greenacre tends to insert particular people or points of view as co-founders – Prabuddhaprana's book on Sara Chapman Bull credits Bull as co-founder, Cameron's writings on Transcendentalism at Greenacre credit Sanborn and Malloy as creators, and so on. There were many influential people at Greenacre, but contemporary sources nearly without exception credit Sarah Farmer as the

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[91] See http://www.portsmouthpeacetreaty.org/

[92] "Within Greenacre's Mystic Charm and Calm", *Lewiston Saturday Journal*, Aug. 12, 1899.

establisher and center of the colony: "the spirit and atmosphere of the whole place…are a reflection of the nobility, purity and self sacrifice of the projector and executive of the scheme; and without any show of authority or rule on her part, her simple wish or expressed desire is as much respected as if backed by a regiment of soldiers," writes the New York Times.[93] "Greenacre is like the circulation of the blood; the heart is Miss Farmer. The arteries and veins that carry the life fluid to and fro from the lungs are those she surrounds herself with to promulgate the work, but she is the anchor and the great aorta that communicates with every part of the body," reports the Lewiston Sun Journal.[94]

The World's Parliament of Religions

Greenacre's first 1894 program outlines Farmer's idea in a short introduction. It "proposes to add to its rural attractions and comforts a series of Lectures and Classes on topics which shall quicken and energize the spiritual, mental and moral natures, and give the surest and serenest physical rest to its guests. Or, in the more expansive expression of the Congresses of 1893, its purpose is to 'review the progress already achieved in the world, state the living problems now awaiting solution, and suggest the means of further progress.' To make this work possible and practical, it must be localized in centres [sic] of action all the world over. Therefore, with spontaneous delight and the culmination of desires which for years have stirred the hearts of several progressive thinkers, the following

[93] "Greenacre-on-the-Piscataquah," *New York Times*; 11/19/1897. FP B5 F27.
[94] "Within Greenacre's Mystic Charm and Calm", *Lewiston Sunday Journal*, 8/12/99.

program has been arranged for definite work at Greenacre Inn…."

The Parliament helped Farmer to refine her vague plans for a spiritual retreat at her home in Eliot, and the association helped to popularize the first season of the Greenacre Conferences. She also met – and enlisted as speakers – many popular figures including Vivekananda, Dharmapala, and Gandhi; other participants she knew already. How did Farmer transform the Parliament's idea that a Universal religion provided common ground from which social ills might be addressed into template for creating that religion, and manifesting that action?

Sarah Farmer visited the Columbian Exposition, before it opened, with her father; as a pre-eminent electrician and important innovator, Moses Farmer was invited to display some of his inventions there. On May 17, 1893, Sarah Farmer met with Charles Bonney, the director of the Religious Congresses, to speak about her plans for a 'spiritual retreat' at the Eliot Hotel. Though Bonney was, apparently, encouraging and enthusiastic, Moses Farmer took ill the next day, and in a week was dead.[95] Farmer returned to Chicago only in October of 1893, just after the closing of the Parliament, to a city still abuzz with the energy and excitement the Parliament had conjured.

Sarah Farmer returned to Chicago with Sara Chapman Bull, also recently bereaved of her mother (the two had spent the intervening months in sailing to Norway, grieving their losses together), and the two spoke with Charles Bonney and Richard Barrows, as well as befriending Vivekananda, Dharmapala, and other Asian delegates who had stayed in the hopes of giving lectures around the country. In the

[95] See Martin, 30-31.

electric optimism and glow of success left by the Parliament, Sarah Farmer saw the shape of the "spiritual retreat" she had been planning: it would be a continuation of the Parliament idea to "review the progress already achieved in the world, state the living problems now awaiting solution, and suggest the means of farther progress."[96] But Farmer's goal was to make these means possible, practical, to take the ideals espoused in Chicago and Progressive hearts everywhere, and make them manifest.

The World's Columbian Exposition was held in Chicago in 1893; these grand exhibitions had been held previously in Western Europe, and it was a chance to announce the United States as a new player on the world stage, an economic force, at the forefront of technological innovation.[1] The unspoken competition for the host country to reveal the greatest splendor created a series of spectacles familiar today: the Ferris Wheel was created specifically for the Columbian Expo, France's grand Eiffel Tower, and London's Crystal Palace (now destroyed, but an engineering marvel constructed manly of sheet glass). The spectacle was not confined to these monuments; there were thousands of exhibitions and demonstrations and entertainments, and the tremendous crowds of visitors to the Expositions were almost unprecedented in size.[97]

The World's Parliament was most high-profile of the various "intellectual"

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[96] Farmer chose this quotation to explain her purpose in the first Greenacre Program. See: Burke, *Vivekananda in the West*, 385. (No copy of the first season program appears to have survived in the official archive.)

[97] At London in 1851, about 20% of England's populace visited; Chicago hosted 27 million visitors, while the nation's population was approximately 66 million (Burrus xiv). It is perhaps worth noting that, although considered "global", it was most certainly a globe made in Victorian England.

congresses at the Expo; the pomp and spectacle were tremendous, and a sense of historical import suffused the whole undertaking. Led by the bombastic rhetoric of the organizers, many believed that "…the fair was no novelty, [but] the parliament was unique and unexampled," organizer John Burrows proclaimed, and indeed he marketed his 1000+ page, two volume account of the proceedings as "next to the Bible!"[98] (He also claimed that it was so significant that the greatest events of 19th century appeared "provincial", "even negro emancipation." [99]) The Parliament was wildly popular; it attracted almost 150,000 spectators over its 17 days, and hosted nearly 200 speakers representing 12 world religions.[100] It was breathlessly covered by newspapers all over the country, from the Boston Globe to the Goshen Weekly out of Indiana.

The Parliament offered "the emerging science of religion" as a path to world peace and understanding, an association that proved problematic for the academic discipline but perhaps more resonant for the practitioner or the layperson – though it flagged for several decades, the Parliament is still held today, and traces its lineage to the 1893 gathering.[101]

Traditionally, the Parliament has been, for academics, a moment in the history of

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[98] John Barrows. "Results of the Parliament of Religions" *The Forum* 18 (Sept 1894): 54-67; the advertising campaign for Burrows' book was national and can be found in many newspapers and periodicals in the year following the Parliament.
[99] Barrows. *World Parliament of Religions*. 2:1570.
[100] Bramen, 191.
[101] Ziolikowski, 172. The Parliament of Religions is held at irregular periods since 1988, and attracts many of the real luminaries of interfaith dialogue, like the Dalai Lama and Karen Armstrong. See www.parliamentofreligions.org (accessed 9/29/15).

the idea of "world religions", or (more tangentially) in the history of comparative religions as a topic for academic study, and this conversation has not been wholly abandoned. More recent scholarship on the Parliament focuses on the "encounter between East and West", and the multiplicity of ways we might understand the dynamics of power, of colonialism, of imperialism, of globalism, in this moment of professed optimism about the unifying powers of religion against "irreligion". This project is less interested in an intellectual history of the field, instead focusing on the happenings at the Parliament and the ways that Farmer interpreted and implemented them.

The notion of gathering "religions" together to discuss their "common aim and common grounds of union", or to help secure "the coming unity of mankind in the service of God and man"[5] did not spring fully formed from the Parliament. Rather, the claim that religion (really Protestantism) was the arbiter of values and behavior, and uniquely able to address social evils bedeviling modernity was already widespread. Though the Social Gospel begins in earnest ____ years later, mainstream Protestantism had already begun to turn toward social reform, deemphasizing sectarian and theological difference in favor of a more ecumenical message.

The Expo itself was a lavish and heavily symbolic event that presented America as a world leader in industrial innovation and material wealth. Great white monolithic halls dedicated to displaying the very latest technologies of Manufacturing, Agriculture, and Electricity were at the center of the fair, and the tremendous Ferris Wheel towered above, an answer to the marvelous Eiffel Tower and the Crystal Palace of previous years. Barrows and his fellow organizers

conceived the Parliament as a corrective to this hollowing of America's spiritual core – irreligion referred pointedly to the glorification of shallow materiality, and the human cost of industrialization.

Truly these men believed that they had created an epoch-making moment, in the Parliament. Bonney writes of his feeling that his entire life was in preparation for organizing and conducting the Congresses of 1893, from Sunday School right on up. "The movement was manifestly in the stream of the Divine Providence and carried forward by its mighty side… It was unavailing against the manifest will of God that a great advance in the religious unity of mankind should be accomplished in the year 1893," Barrows writes[102]; the language here echoes the language of Manifest Destiny, the hand of God is in the Congresses, but this religious work is also connected to the very destiny of America and of its role in creating a unified, peaceable world. "It will… stand in human history like a new Mount Zion, crowned with glory and marking the actual beginning of a new epoch of brotherhood and peace."[103] Bonney considered this conversation about religion to be the catalyst for universal understanding, he believed that religion (against irreligion) was the only response to the materialism of the 19th century, and that this international conversation would pave the way for further conversations and international cooperation. Bonney, in his opening speech, defines religion "… the world 'religion'

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[102] Bonney, Charles. "The Genesis of the World's Religious Congresses of 1893," *The New-Church review : a quarterly journal of the Christian thought and life set forth from the Scriptures by Emanuel Swedenborg.* Boston : Massachusetts New-Church Union, Vol 1.1 1894. 73-100

[103] Ibid., 96.

means the love and worship of God and the love and service of man."[104] Past arguments between religious groups have really been based on misunderstandings and misinterpretations, a failure to see that the inmost core of all religions is speaking to this simple, universal definition.

Amy Kittelstrom argues that the end of the 19th century – again, pre-dating the Social Gospel – marked "an international turn toward the social application of religion."[105] That is, for those that chose to attend (a group that, naturally, self-selected), "the ethical performance of a religion for the social good was considered more important than its doctrinal rectitude."[106] The continued relevance of Christianity in America was tied to its power to ameliorate the social ills and human suffering that shadowed modern life.

Kittelstrom's argument traces the different ways and reasons that each religious group represented at the Parliament was invested in a social application for religion. The majority of representatives were Protestant Christians. Though hardly a monolith, the Protestantism of the organizers, in particular, was devout but tolerant. Religion, in their view, was the cure for social ills because religiosity was understood as an innate human trait, as famed reverend Lyman Abbott argued on the fourth day of the gathering. The desire to experience and comprehend the infinite, he argued, is an innately human desire, and it is from this that religions develop.[107] It is not Christianity that answers this desire, he explains, but Christ.

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[104] Ibid., 96.
[105] Kittelstrom, 245.
[106] Kittelstrom, 247.
[107] Abbott, Lyman, "Religion Essentially Characteristic of Humanity", *World's Parliament*, 494-501.

That is to say, the specific doctrines that had been so hotly, even bloodily, disputed were at best human approximations of the divine, an edifice built over the essential, universal human truth of "the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man". Because religion is a universal human experience, it is a natural place to look for fundamental truths shared by all, and this unity fosters a feeling of unity ("brotherhood") and cooperation that has the potential for sweeping, global social reform.

John Henry Barrows, one of the two chief organizers, made clear, in his speeches, that this does not mean that all religions are correct, in whole or in part; he explained that "though light has no fellowship with darkness, light does have fellowship with twilight."[108] If there is some gesture toward the truth, however occluded, there is a possibility of revelation, clarification, understanding. Protestant Christianity was ultimately the sole realm of truth – "the only truly redemptive and the only progressive religion."[109] This gathering of religious leaders was not, for him, an attempt to synthesize or cherrypick but an opportunity to demonstrate the real thing. His God worked *through* Buddha and Brahma, and this was instructive, but the common ground – understood by the organizers as the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man -- were points where one could discern and demonstrate God working. The Parliament would thus reveal the simple truths of a universal Protestantism beneath the exotic rituals or complex hierarchies; "the idea

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[108] Barrows, 1: 26-7. Further, "religion" really referred only to the World Religions; Darwinian evolution, improperly applied and misunderstood, seemed to suggest a religious evolution that began with the primitive and fetishistic and culminated in Protestantism. Only sufficiently sophisticated religions made the cut.
[109] Barrows, 1572.

of evolving a cosmic or universal faith out of the Parliament was not present in the minds of its chief promoters," wrote Barrows.[110] Protestant Christianity would prove itself to be the true universal religion, capable of enfolding all the world because it accepted all comers, encompassed the solution to all problems, and eschewed the dogmatic pursuit of doctrine so that it might better work in the world.[111]

Charles Bonney – with whom Sarah Farmer met and briefly corresponded – brought a slightly different view. He saw the Parliament as an opportunity for humanity to stand together in peace, so that each religion might better understand and respect all others. Each stood, he wrote, "in its own perfect integrity, uncompromised, in any degree, by its relation to any other… Without controversy, or any attempt to pronounce judgment upon any matter of faith or worship or religious opinion…"[112] All religions offered common essentials upon which everyone could agree, and from these commonalities, understanding and cooperation would grow. This is not to say that he understood all religions as equal, or that his understanding of "common essentials" was not deeply Protestant; rather, it points to a more practiceable possibility that emerged at Greenacre. He highlights the idea that diverse peoples might agree to certain basic ethical standards – human suffering is wrong, protecting the vulnerable is good – because of the universal

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[110] Barrows, 27.

[111] However, it's salient to note that many Christians saw the Parliament as an affront. Perhaps most visible, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the head of the Church of England – wrote that it "assum[ed] the equality of the other… members and the parity of their position and claims." Further, it positioned the sacrality of faith as a position to be argued and debated logically. (see Barrows, 22.)

[112] Bonney, "Worlds Parliament", *Monist*, 334

impulse toward faith. By listening respectfully as each representative spoke about their religion's contributions to the whole, one could identify these points of agreement, and through them turn the vast, united resources of the world's religions to addressing social ills. The Parliament was an opportunity to demonstrate the "brotherhood" of religious communities, and the way that unity and goodwill could make religion a powerful tool for social reform.

These grand (though unspoken) visions the organizers had of a universal religion in the shape of Protestantism, other delegates did not share. The Catholic speakers described the Church as the universal, patiently waiting to welcome its prodigal sons and daughters back to their original home. "The Catholic religion alone is world-wide and cosmopolitan, embracing all races and nations and peoples and tongues."[113] Jewish speakers argued that the "universal" concepts of unity and brotherhood were, in fact, drawn from Judaism, even that Judea under the rule of David had been a kind of utopia with no social ills at all. Too, Judaism was the source of all Christian ethics – were they not given to Moses on Sinai?[114]

The Asian delegates (who are monolithic in no sense; here I intend to invoke the East-meets-West construction associated with the Parliament, and the group that was neither Christian nor Jewish) also interpreted universal religion on their own terms. Vivekananda began his opening address: "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance." The American

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[113] The Catholics also argued that they had excelled at social service, through the unity of their faith and their tradition of brotherhood stretching back to Jesus himself. Barrows 1: 1152. Kittridge discusses Catholicism pp 254-7.

[114] Kittridge, 257-60. She argues in much greater depth of both groups' claims to a history of social reform, as well as their use of the conception of universality to position themselves as mainstream (rather than "ethnic") American religions.

audiences were caught off guard. "They expected pagans. And pagans, they thought, were ignorant and impotent of mind. The Parliament was a stunning revelation."[115]

In his writings, Carroll Bonney is explicit about the firm separation between all of the religions represented: "In this Congress, each system of religion stands by itself in its own perfect integrity, uncompromised, in any degree, by its relation to any other. … Without controversy, or any attempt to pronounce judgment upon any matter of faith or worship or religious opinion…"[116] This "perfect integrity" was manifested in the (intended) format of the Parliament, which eschewed discussion, and had participants read from prepared papers, rather than responding to each other or debating any issues raised.

The actual production, however, was inevitably far messier than intended – speakers were hastily shuffled between buildings to accommodate the unexpectedly large audiences, which also proved both fickle and mobile, packing into a hall to hear the more exotic representatives like Vivekananda or Dharmapala only to depart as quickly as the far less popular (but far more numerous) representatives of Protestant denominations mounted the stage. Too, the audiences were not quiet or passive, but enthusiastically cheered and shouted approval during speeches or on only one singular occasion – the lone Muslim delegate's defense of polygamy in Islam – booing and crying "Shame!" in disapproval ("Storm of Hisses for Apostle of Islam: Doctrine of Polygamy Not Well Received" the Boston Globe trumpeted).[117] Besotted women mobbed the stage after Vivekananda and Dharmapala's speeches,

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[115] Little, Charles J. "The Chicago Parliament of Religions," *The Methodist Review*, Volume 54; Volume 76. 211.
[116] Bonney, "Worlds Parliament", *Monist*, 334
[117] "Purely Climactic," *The Boston Daily Globe*, September 21, 1893, 4.

turning over tables and chairs; pickpockets and robbers plagued the crowded halls, so bold that "a pair of diamond earrings were actually extracted from the ears of the fair wearer as she sat spellbound under the influence of the peroration of a Buddhist priest."[118] The speeches became more "cantankerous" as the days went by, especially in response to Joseph Cook's talk which "criticized the Hindoos sharply"; Vivekananda rebutted with equal candor: "We who have come from the east have sat here day after day and have been told in a patronizing way that we ought to accept Christianity because Christian nations are the most prosperous… Christianity wins its prosperity by cutting the throats of its fellow men. At such a price the Hindoo will not have prosperity."[119]

Carrie Tirado Bramen argues that Christian tolerance contributed significantly to the audience's response to – especially – the Asian delegates who criticized Christianity in various ways. Christianity, she explains, requires opposition, criticism and critique in order to highlight its tolerance; it answers angry words with a friendly smile – without the angry words, you're just smiling. Tolerance is especially significant at the Parliament for its role in conversion or missionizing: the generosity and hospitality foregrounded by tolerance might yet convert a reluctant sinner. It is tolerance, Bramen suggests, that explains the enthusiastic response of the Christian audience to the pointed critiques offered by the Asian delegates.[120] Rather than taking offence, the audience loudly applauded and cheered Protap Chandra Majumdar's description of Protestant Christianity as neglecting, through its

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[118] "Godly and Godless," *The Semi-Weekly State Journal*, vol xxvi, no 59, Sept 19,1893.
[119] ""Hindoo Criticises Christianity", *Chicago Daily Tribune* on September 20, 1893
[120] Bramen. "Christian Maidens and Heathen Monks," in *The Puritan Origins of American Sex*, ed Fessenden et al. New York & London: Routledge, 2001. 199-201

focus on Earthly things, "the great questions of regeneration, of personal sanctification, of truth and judgment and of acceptance before God."[121] Hooray! They thunderously cheered Hirai Kinzo's accusations against Christian ethics of hypocrisy, racism, imperialism abroad, and racist public policies against Japanese Americans at home, leaving him baffled and ultimately sympathetic to Christianity.

Tolerance becomes a way of including the outsider, regardless of their own desire to be included, within the Christian community. "The invited 'others' of the Orient were *by their very participation* already constituted by the Parliament as representatives who desired to be *included*."[122] The Protestant scaffolding of the Parliament, in this view, proves impossible to stand outside of, its rules subtly guide reactions and interpretations, both of the audience and of the delegates. It is true that Barrows, for example, felt until his death that the Parliament had demonstrated to the world the universality and inevitability of Protestant Christianity – if the Parliament could be understood as a debate, Barrows felt quite confident that his men had won.[123]

Universal religion was central to the Parliament, but it was not under construction. The organizers believed that it was all sorted, not even really a question. The actual Parliament subverted the easy definition, in part by contesting who best represented the ethics, unity, and service to humanity that universal

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[121] Majumdar, "The Principle of the Brahmo-Samaj," in *The World's Congress of Religions*, ed. JW Hanson. Chicago: Union Publishing House, 1894. 431.
[122] Ketelaar, James. "The Reconvening of Babel." In Ziolkowski, *A Museum of Faiths*, 274.
[123] Barrows. "Results of the Parliament of Religions" *The Forum* 18 (Sept 1894): 54-67.

religion represented. At stake, for some, was a place in mainstream American culture. For the Eastern representatives, it was an opportunity to demonstrate the richness and complexity, even superiority, of their own religious traditions, to critique imperialism and foreign missions, or to missionize to the Americans. But, the universality was not a theological map – it was a point of agreement, an opening to co-operation. It was an affirmation that religions shared an ethical framework, and could work together on the basis of it. Brotherhood meant, not sneaky conversion, but respect (or at least toleration) for other people where they were, a conception of a cosmopolitan world where differences would not interfere with actions for the betterment of all.

Sarah Farmer understood a different potential in universal religion. Where the Parliament's organizers gestured to the scale of social reform made possible by a mutual respect, Farmer sees something new being built. It is not a new religion; she isn't interested in a new system of belief. She believes every religion (every person) has some angle on the truth; "We began by accepting the world as it was, and by trying to get each coming "light –bringer" to share his vision of better things… to reveal the harmony which, in spite of discords and because of discords, enables all to unite for a common purpose – the spread of truth in the world."[124] One of the major shifts Farmer makes is an emphasis on *listening*, and on *engaging*. The Parliament at least intended a format of speeches, eschewing questions, responses, or discussion; everyone would set out their position and then sit quietly down. At Greenacre, there are scheduled lectures, but they are a beginning point: really

[124] Farmer, "Green Acre," Country Time and Tide, Vol 4 No 6, October 1903, 185. FP B5 F8.

everyone is hanging out together for months! There is a preponderance of time for unscheduled classes, conversation, questions. The Parliament emphasizes that each religion exists with its own integrity, its own boundaries. Farmer is bringing them together, taking them apart, and recombining them. She says "take what's useful to you, and leave the rest". Experience everything you can.

Greenacre after the Parliament

The creation of Greenacre began, in one sense, in March 1, 1890, when Sarah became the fifth partner in a venture to open a resort hotel in Eliot, alongside Martin P. Tobey, George Hammond, Dr. John L.M. Willis and Frances Keefe. Its first season advertised "a quiet resting place", "first class in all its appointments, and… conducted for the comfort and convenience of its guests", "[land] preserved in its natural state" and welcomed "all who are desirous of spending a quiet summer, and getting the benefits of real country life and fare… The convalescent will soon find health returning."[125]

John Greenleaf Whittier, whose poetry was hugely popular at the time, gave its' name: "We have heard of 'God's Acres', but I call this Green Acre."[126] Thenceforth it was Greenacre, or Greenacre-on-the-Piscataqua. As a hotel, it had a reputation for pleasant, healthful environs, and the possibility of glimpsing the elderly Whittier in one of his favorite nooks. Many of her parents' artistic and literary set spent time as well as Whittier's train of aspiring writers and poets. It was hoped that the Hotel

[125] see Ingersoll, *Greenacre on the Piscataqua,* 11.
[126] Ibid.

might become somewhat of an artists' colony – there were many along the coast, with Celia Thaxter's Shoals being perhaps the best known, and its proximity to the larger cities of Portsmouth and Boston were to its benefit. However, the hotel struggled to find its feet, and even closed for part of the season in 1892.

In June of 1892, however, Sarah Farmer was visiting Boston, when she had a "vision", which she believed was sent from God:

> "I was listening to a lecture by W.J. Colville on "The Abundant Life", through the forming of the Christ within. The day was hot and through the open window came the noise of traffic which almost drowned out the speaker's voice. The people were so eager for knowledge of themselves that they sat patiently two hours at a time, three times a day. I looked at them and thought of the spot which Whittier loved and found so restful – Greenacre-on-the-Piscataqua – and I saw them seated in a large tent on the green bank of this beautiful river, the cool breeze from the water fanning their cheeks, and I realized how much more receptive the mind and heart would be if the body were in such a cool and healthy environment; and I realized, too, how much more good would come of a summer vacation if instead of being burdened with the effort of finding amusement for leisure hours, one's mind and soul could be refreshed by helpful thoughts, under spreading pines, in green pastures, beside still waters. The details of the work came quickly before my mind and when we had left the audience room I had it all. At that time I had not heard of the Congress of Religions to be held at Chicago the

> following year; and I regard my conception of Greenacre as an instance supporting my father's claim that invention in inspiration – that it is the catching, by the opening eye and listening ear, of that which is being given in its fullness to some prepared soul. Charles Carroll Bonney of Chicago was then working out the details of a work which should embrace the whole world. I caught glimpses of it unconsciously, and he always felt that I too was 'called' and that Greenacre had a part in the great work of *Unification*."[127]

The initial vision of Greenacre, then, predates the Parliament, and was in fact conceived somewhat differently. The Eliot Hotel was failing to attract a steady clientele, and Farmer had thought to develop an international summer forum, hosting the most progressive thinkers from all fields of research. It would also be open to the public, but Farmer's thoughts were particularly for the still quite rural people of Southern Maine as well as the growing numbers of tourists frequenting the area. The forum would provide a place for scholars to freely exchange ideas across the traditional boundaries of field, discipline and academic customs, but it would also provide a continuing education in the most up-to-date academic work to the local people who often had access to education only through the public schools, and at such scope and curriculum as the local school-teachers provided.[128] Conditions of expense and travel time would, initially, perhaps constrain the pool of

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[127] This (extended) version quoted by Myron Phelps in "Green Acre", The Word, I-1, 1904. 55. For various reasons discussed below the Baha'i were particularly interested in connection with the Parliament of Religions; the version of this quote generally used ends with Farmer leaving the audience room.

[128] Prabuddhaprana, in her biography of Chapman Bull, has Amelia Thorpe (Chapman Bull's mother) blessing Farmer, and telling her instead to make a universal spiritual retreat out of the forum. See 82

speakers to the United States, but Sarah was confident that the forum's reputation would be such as to draw interest of European scholars before long. Significantly, it was also conceived as a pilot project, a model which would be created across the country.[129] It was a foreshadowing of the eventual Greenacre – the structure is there – but the real work is revealed after the Parliament, as Farmer's own reminiscences suggest.

After the Parliament, it was clear to her that religion was the ground from which action would best result. "The social turn," as Kittelstrom identified it, was global in scale; the apparent enthusiasm of religious leaders and people to take up social reform had been plain to see, even weeks after the event.[130] The conception of a space for scholars to work cross disciplines for progressive reform, became a place for religious thinkers and leaders to work together, and now global participation was foregrounded.

Broadly Ethical and Purely Humanitarian: the 1894 Season

A genteel curtain is drawn, in all of my sources, over Farmer's labors through 1883-1884 but the summer of 1884 saw Greenacre's doors opened wide, with a top-

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[129] From Ingersoll, Greenacre-on-the-Piscataqua, 6-7; G. Willis Cooke, "Green Acre" Country Time and Tide, III, 5; 1902 202; SJF to LGJ 3/17/98 (Box 3)
This early vision particularly reflects her family's long concern with bringing "culture" to Southern Maine, as well as their local philanthropic projects; one might trace a progression from Sarah's fundraising events for the Eliot library, (even her grandfather's creation of the library in the first place), or Rosemary Cottage, her mother's initiative to bring single mothers and their children from Boston for a wholesome country summer.
[130] Kittelstrom, 245.

notch list of speakers and attendees. On July 3, 1894, at 3PM, Sarah Farmer stood on a small platform among the pines. There are two versions of her opening words to the small group gathered there. Perhaps she quoted Devendranath Tahore "Harmonious may your efforts be, and harmonious your thoughts and hearts, so that beauteous peace may dwell in your midst."[131] Perhaps she spoke briefly of what she hoped would begin that day:

> Greenacre was established for the purpose of bringing together all who were earnestly looking forward to the New Day which seems to be breaking over the entire world. The motive was to find the truth, the reality underlying all religious forms, and to make points of contact in order to promote the unity necessary for… the coming Day of God… Recognizing the solidarity and interdependence of humanity, we welcome light from every source."[132] (emph. original)

Sara Chapman Bull gave the opening address, followed by Elizabeth Boynton Harbert, who had served as an organizer for The Congress of Representative Women in Chicago.[133] They raised a tremendous white flag[134] emblazoned "PEACE"

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[131] see Prabuddhaprana, 90.
[132] Boyle, Louise, "Green Acre", *Reality* (New York), Dec 1919, 3.
[133] Eg. Under Charles Bonney's oversight. Martin reads this as Bonney's imprimatur upon the proceedings, but Harbert was a peace, and women suffrage activist, and was involved in New Thought; it seems more likely that she came under her own imprimatur.
[134] A revealing anecdote about Sarah Farmer: She needed an American flag, as well, to fly along with the banner, so she went to the nearby Navy Yard to ask for the loan of one. "Well, it seems that flags belonging to the Navy had been borrowed before and they were returned in an injured state." The top brass instructed flags were not to be lent to civilians any longer. "I remember the pains my father went trough to

in green letters atop an old ship's mast, which flew each year thereafter. Farmer said of it later:

> In looking for an emblem we wanted something that would be a call to everybody, and fit everybody, and we felt that the message that had been brought to the world by prophet after prophet was the message of peace. So we have put it on a large banner over our heads: PEACE.[135]

The summer session lasted from (approximately) July 3 to the 31 of August. There was a formal lecture – occasionally several – outdoors, with a tent for inclement weather (a lecture hall was eventually built in 1897). There were informal lectures, and private classes. Musical performances or dramatic readings were enjoyed after dinner. People stayed in the Inn, boarded with local families, or camped on Sunset Hill. Others – especially as word of the first season spread – came for the day from Portsmouth, across the river.

One thing that is, perhaps, hard to truly imagine about Greenacre from the perspective of modernity is how *weird* it was. Photographs of ladies clad in voluminous white dresses, sitting under a tree look almost staid, but by their own standard they were next thing to nude without the complicated, restrictive corsets and undergarments they were obliged to wear the rest of the year. Lydia Lear

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explain all this to Miss Farmer… [Finally he said we would be] most happy to send her a flag if she had an order from the secretary of the Navy. Now Miss Farmer was not a person to be discouraged by a little thing like that. She telegraphed the secretary of the Navy in Washington and my father was ordered to loan the flag." See Remy, 4.

[135] Bjerregaard, 68-70

recalled a lecture on how to make a dress which, in its simplicity, was doubtless intended to make a clear statement on propriety: "…just cut a round hole to go over the head and a few seams and gathers and there you have your dress, and the speaker wore a dress made that way (sounds like magic doesn't it?)"[136] Another popular story recounts local farmers sneaking around for a peep of women with their dresses hauled up around their knees, that they might better absorb the morning dew through their bare feet and legs.[137] Charles Mason Remy, who grew up visiting Greenacre in the summer, recalls in particular the "long haired men and short haired women", and mocking women in men's clothes.[138] . Mental healers cured illness in a tent. People were channeling spirits, even the spirit of a Saint Bernard dog. It was the first time groups of American women practiced yoga under a tree, or walked in a moonlight processional to offer flowers to a holy statue of Buddha in the forest.

The social interactions at Greenacre were remarkably casual – at this time, one didn't chit-chat with a stranger, but was formally introduced; at Greenacre one could talk to anyone. Indeed, since many of the tents were open structures, there was a level of intimacy and camaraderie in the basics of the day (though many of the wealthier attendees and many of the speakers stayed in the Inn, or one of the other houses that were gradually constructed for private use.).

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[136] Lydia Lear to Ford undated but labeled 1942. FP B1 F75. The lecture was actually given by Hattie Flower, the wife of muckraking progressive journalist Benjamin O. Flower.

[137] The story of Kniepping and the scandalized farmers is *the* story about Greenacre; it is mentioned by all modern authors, no matter their approach or affiliation, and by many primary sources as well.

[138] Remy, 6.

Vivekananda, who taught his first American classes at Greenacre, found some of the people to be a bit outré:

> The Editor of the Universal Truth has settled herself down here. She is conducting religious services and holding classes to heal all manner of diseases, and very soon I expect them to be giving eyes to the blind, and the like! After all, it is a queer gathering. They do not care much about social laws and are quite free and happy...

But he finds many of the Greenacrites to be

> …healthy, young, sincere, and holy men and women. I teach them *Shivo ham, Shivo ham*, and they all repeat it, innocent and pure as they are and brave beyond all bounds. And so I am happy and glorified. Thank God for making me poor, thank God for making these children in the tents poor. The Dudes and Dudines are in the Hotel, but iron-bound nerves and souls of triple steel and spirits of fire are in the camp. If you had seen them yesterday, when the rain was falling in torrents and the cyclone was overturning everything, hanging by their tent strings to keep from being blown down, and standing on the majesty of their souls – these brave ones – it would have done your hearts good. I will go a hundred miles to see the like of them.[139]

Local newspapers offer a good sense of what it was like that first season. Far

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[139] Letter from V to Mary Hale July 31, 1894. Vivekananda was only at Greenacre for the first season of 1894; his colleague Abhednanda took his place in the following years. ("There is here Mr. Wood of Boston… He calls himself a mental healer of metaphysico-chemico-physico-religioso what not!")

from the hard wooden benches and humid Boston air, the afternoon's religious classes were held in a pine grove named Lysekloster Pines (they were reminiscent of or transplanted from Sarah Chapman Bull's home in Norway).

> All walk up over the hill… A person standing at a little distance can scarcely see that there are people beneath the tree, so lowly do the branches swing. A more delicious spot than one of these trees affords to listen I cannot conceive. The scene is far retired… The only sound is the chirp of birds and the voice of the speaker coming in mellowed tones from under the great tree.
>
> The listeners loll about on the ground as suits them best. A few of the elderly people have chairs. He middle-aged and young are entirely unconventional. Some lie on their backs listening and looking up into the blue arch of the heavens. Others lie resting on one elbow and meditatively pluck in pieces the leaves of the shrubs that surround, as they listen.[140]

After the first season, the general Greenacre Conference created several individual schools, most importantly the Monsalvat School of Comparative Religion, represented some parts of Greenacre's curriculum.[141] It invited the "teachers of all the religious systems in the world… to present their views under the conditions of a

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[140] "Within Mystic Greenacre's Charm and Calm", *Lewiston Saturday Journal*, August 12, 1899

[141] Along with Monsalvat, there was a school of Music, one of Arts and Crafts, and one of Nature. They operated under the general Greenacre Conference but had latitude in arranging their own speakers. See: Janes, Lewis, "Monsalvat School of Comparative Religion", *Mind*, v5:1, October 1899, 10-14

fair field."[142] Each religion was presented in a systematic fashion, and the lecturers were generally qualified through first-hand experience alongside academic credentials. It began under the directorship of Lewis Janes, president of the Brooklyn Ethical Association; he had previously organized Greenacre's Evolution Conference in 1895, which brought the foremost thinkers in the field of social evolution for a week-long discussion. It drew attention to Greenacre as an important site of progressive scholarship, and Janes desired that the Monsalvat School continue to offer a rigorous and intellectual program.[143] The several other schools were similarly run, but it was Janes' strong disagreement with Farmer over financial matters that led eventually to strife.

But What is Greenacre?

"Here at Greenacre we touch all the world more intimately than Jerusalem touched Palestine. We can affect the welfare of man, for good or evil, more than imperial Rome,"[144]

While Peace and Unity were the watchwords at Greenacre, it was well known that Sarah Farmer was the one who made it so. The New York Times wrote "The spirit and atmosphere of the whole place are admirable and are a reflection of the nobility, purity and self-sacrifice of the projector and executive of the scheme and without any show of authority or rule on her part, her simple wish or expressed

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[142] Phelps. 58.
[143] Letters from Sarah Jane Farmer to William S. Key, March 9, 1900.
[144] EP Powell, opening address of 1902, printed in Eliot Morning Sun, July 7 1902, 2.

desire is as much respected as if backed by a regiment of soldiers."[145] Farmer was transformed by the idea of a fundamental Truth that all religions attempted to reach – her interpretation of the Parliament's purpose. This Truth might come in a different guise to different people, but dwelt in every person's heart and opened the way for peace and joy throughout the world as the self was abandoned and service embraced.[146]

In 1897 she explained that Greenacre originated because "a few of us got a glimpse of what it is to be a son or daughter of God – to be in this world to manifest the wonderful power of God in the world… We realized that throughout the world, in every corner of the world, were devoted sons and daughters living the life of purity and consecration... we could, in our little corner, call [them] together, to confer about the wonderful kingdom of God… That gathering is Greenacre." That is, the purpose of religion is to help people live in a right way, so that they manifest God into the world. This isn't about specific religious practice, or a specific name of God.

Living in a right way, Farmer believes, is a practical communal project – that communal life manifests the kingdom of God, as an individual manifests the power of God.

> "The Kingdom of God is the one thing in the world that is practical, and it was to show its practicability and fitness for life that a few of us went…and sat down there in quietness, and invited the loftiest souls to come and tell us about there work and show how it was related to the kingdom of God. We

[145] "Greenacre on the Piscataquah." *The New York Times*, Sept 19, 1897, p IW6
[146] Letter from Farmer to W S Key, May 9, 1900

> realized there was nothing in the world without some good in it, nothing in which God may not manifest and speak. … [We felt that] all the problems that are agitating us… every question could be answered before the sun set, if every soul in the world had found the kingdom of God in its own soul, had found harmony and peace and were trying to bring it into the world. As soon as we find that harmony we become a law in ourselves.[147]

For Farmer, *what* one believed was secondary – perhaps tertiary – to the *contribution* one made to the movement Greenacre represented. "We begin by accepting the world as it is and trying to get each 'light bringer' to share with us the vision of better things which floods his life with joy…the harmony which, in spite of discords, enables all to unite together for a common purpose -- the spread of Truth in in the world!", she wrote in 1903.[148] The "light-bringer" may not be the "loftiest soul" (though they are not, say, the unwed mothers at Rosemary Cottage next door) but they have something to offer, some vision that further demonstrates or illustrates an underlying harmony in the world. The kingdom of God – a Christian concept – is a community of people living in harmony and peace, and trying to shine it around. For Farmer, this is totally universal: for everyone

Contributions could be material – her direction of Greenacre's precarious finances was guided by her insistence that attendance was absolutely free, and that financial support was a means of service and a privilege. Contribution was also simply being a part of the community – "the Green Acre sessions are all the

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[147] Bjerregard, 69.
[148] "Greenacre was founded because a discovery had been made." B6F31

spontaneous out breathings of those who come to impart the treasures of brain and heart — to give out that all may share in the riches of the world's beauty..." she wrote, and "…All may share in maintaining the common life".[149]

She insisted on the complete rejection of sectarianism, instead aiming to strengthen each "to follow [their] highest light, in order that by degrees [one] may know the truth for [oneself]" and so come to know doctrine."[150] She taught to greet "the stranger as a kindred spirit… No arguments, combative and rebellious, are permitted, but discussions are encouraged, and met with charity and appreciation of the ideas expressed, the main motive ever being the promotion of harmony, contentment and self peace."[151] Greenacre sought to introduce many teachings with the goal of unification, the identification of agreements and likenesses among the varied peoples and religions of the world, to promote the spirit of "brotherhood" and mutual helpfulness and most importantly to attain Peace, not merely the absence of war, but the real sense of realization of the universal oneness.[152] Greenacre was open to all; she forbid only iconoclasts: "The spirit of criticism will be absolutely laid down," she wrote, "if it comes it will be gently laid aside; each will

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[149] Letter fragment or draft from Farmer to Unknown, c. 1898FP B4 F5.
[150] *The Higher Law*, 26.
[151] *The Phrenological Journal*, 243
[152] *The Word*, 59 "During all these years, from the inception of Green Acre to the present time, the word which has best expressed the ideal which has been constantly maintained is *Unification* – the perception of the agreements and likenesses between different races of men and different types of thought and development – the promotion of the spirit of Brotherhood and mutual helpfulness among all – the attainment of *Peace*, not merely in the technical sense of the absence of war, but in the real sense of the realization of the universal Oneness."

contribute his best and listen sympathetically to those who present different ideals."[153]

There is a tension inherent in Farmer's writings, between the primacy of the individual as the locus of spiritual creation – one was required to listen impartially and generously but accept only what truths made sense to oneself, each person was understood to have a unique and equally valuable insight or offering that others could take or leave -- and the subsuming of the self to the service of a larger Truth, in order to bring about a material transformation in the world. She insists, however, on a wholly optimistic view of human nature that elides the possibility of or effect of permanent disagreement: "if they bring us anything which seems good to us we accept it… it is rare indeed that one comes who is not the bearer of some good message!" she writes. Each such good message is added to the "bulwark of our faith in the good or as a superstructure of a higher ideal." i[154]

It's perhaps a misnomer, for her, to think of Greenacre as "Summer Lectures" like someone talks and others listen and they all go off and think about – perhaps even act upon – what they heard. Rather, the lectures are intended to enable practical action, and not as inspiration but in their very occurrence. She describes Greenacre as an "Out-breathing" and she means that its existence is doing something beneficial in the world, not specifically the people in attendance or the ideas in circulation but its very being in the world, the energy it creates.

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[153] Letter from Farmer to W S Key, May 9, 1900
[154] "Greenacre's Mystic Charm", *Lewiston Evening Journal*, September 12, 1899

Transcendentalism: Emerson's Continuing Influence

There was a lot going on at Greenacre. Franklin Sanborn described Greenacre as a place where "exponents of Buddhism and Brahmanism ... come in contact with western thought, with the Concord School of Philosophy, with Christian Science, mind cure, latter day temperance teachings and sociology."[155] This was perhaps something of an oversimplification. To be clear, Farmer did not really understand these different groups to be relevant – they didn't matter. It's also misleading to say that these groups were even separate and distinct in the first place – most of the groups below are umbrella terms for a very diverse crowd, or they are ways of understanding that co-exist with other things.

Transcendentalism, for example, did not have a crowd of adherents at Greenacre who would have introduced themselves as Jane Jenkins, Transcendentalist. But there were at least two, remaining members of the Concord School, dedicated to keeping the memories and works of Emerson and Thoreau influential. Through them, the Transcendentalists had a significant role in the discourse, and a prominent position: Greenacre celebrated Emerson Day each year, for example, and the Emerson Pine stood proudly in the famous Lysekloster Grove. Franklin Sanborn (1831-1917) had been a great admirer of Emerson and Thoreau in his youth; after the Concord School ended, he had made several efforts to found a successor. He found it eventually at Greenacre. He had published biographies of

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[155] Franklin Sanborn, "Green Acre," *New England Magazine* 34, August 1906, 741-74

Bronson Alcott, Emerson, and Thoreau, and had preserved and published Thoreau's manuscripts. Charles Malloy (1823-1914) had been somewhat of a protégée of Emerson, who had lent the boy his own copy of the *Bhagavad Gita* – the dazzled Molloy copied it out in longhand. He gave 4 different lectures on the *Gita's* influence on Emerson in 1899 alone.[156] He often mused, in his lectures, on Emerson's semblance to Jesus: "Emerson was the finest man who lived since the light of the world rose in Galilee," "the most beautiful life since that one of the great prophet in Judea, 1900 years ago."[157]

Sanborn and Molloy were often theatric in their efforts – bringing Actual Letters from Emerson, telling "intimate" stories at annual celebrations of Emerson. Sanborn once covered for an absent lecturer by recounting the origin of the Concord School, ending with the poignant observation that when the school closed, there were 31 cents in the treasury, "which sum made up the salary of the secretary".[158] Sanborn wrote a column in the Boston Transcript that followed the events at Greenacre, with a particular focus on manifestations of Transcendentalist thought.[159] He was subsequently one of the major disputants with the Baha'i, and published extensively about Farmer's "plight"; he was the litigant in the legal dispute over Farmer's estate. His prolific writing, frequent lecturing, and prominent role ensured that Greenacre would be remembered as a Transcendentalist enclave,

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[156] see Cameron, Transcendentalists in Transition 115; Cameron, Table Talk; Molloy, A Study of Emerson's Major Poems; BO Flower, Progressive Men, Women and Movements of the Past Twenty-Five Years.
[157] Cameron, *Transcendentalists*, 75, 103
[158] Cameron, *Transcendentalists*, 75. Note that he did publish that same intimate detail in the Boston Transcript.
[159] These are collected in Cameron, *Transcendentalists in Transition*, a heroic work.

if for only those reasons.

Sanborn and Molloy may have wielded relics and remembrances as if Emerson might rise up and begin his healing ministry without deep effect, but Emersonian (and Thoreauvian) thought was prominent at Greenacre. One of the central assumptions was that one was totally free to develop, to pursue freedom and personal truth. Trusting thyself was basic, Farmer's words sometimes echoed "..living "[un]hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind."[160]

As Malloy so plainly recalled, the Transcendentalists[161] had been fascinated by the great religious texts of Hinduism and Buddhism, and referred to them often. Inasmuch as Emerson was an oft-invoked intellectual forbearer at Greenacre, his regard for the "ancient wisdom" offered by the Vedas served as an imprimatur in some ways, and as a model for articulating a particular kind of universal truth. As Santayana put it, "[Emerson] read transcendentally, not historically, to learn what he himself felt, not what others might have felt before him."[162] As a model of a search for wisdom, and a cultivation of self, Transcendentalism served many different agendas well. Even Sanborn and Molloy served to remind that these lofty figures were part of the legitimate history of universal religion, pre-dating the Parliament, and gesturing toward a longer, noble tradition of looking for Truth

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[160] Emerson, *Self-Reliance,* 16.
[161] Of course, the only Transcendentalists were not Emerson and Thoreau. Nor were they typical of all ideas in all of Transcendentalist thought. (In this example, Margaret Fuller was uninterested in Eastern thought.) However reductive, I will refer to the two of them, and their two representatives, as Transcendentalists, in a way that might imply that they represent the totality of Transcendentalist thought.
[162] Santayana, 43.

where it might be found.

New Thought: Health, Gender, and the Creative Power of the Mind

Though later an important figure at Greenacre, Franklin Sanborn writes dismissively of a group of "Hypatias", led by society lady "Martha Farmer" [sic] who "likes to get her friends together and have the views and causes she is interested in discussed by those who have something to say." The preponderance of attendees, he adds, are proponents of "mental thought for healing" : "a sign of the times, and an evidence of the advancing and organizing mind of women." [163] (He attended himself the following year.)

Greenacre is often recalled as a center for New Thought, particularly as it has been referenced in modern scholarship, but it was not always in easy relationship with other elements there. Sanborn is plainly dismissive of it, initially. The Monsalvat faction – Janes, Chapman Bull, and Moore – discuss it as one of the "dangers" of Farmer's philosophy, and warn that it will strike a frivolous tone, discourage pre-eminent lecturers, or even prevent the realization of its universal ideals and intellectual goals.[164] Chapman Bull explains that true spiritual gain is made by "turning to the source, only, for strength and guidance… That concentration toward submission… is the self-discipline. ….Mediumship that depletes the body and

[163] Cameron, (53), 218.
[164] Quot. In Prabuddhaprana, 106-7.

weakens the individual fibre seems to me too great a cost, and a very material thing to me, and I do not dare."[165]

The representatives of New Thought that came to Greenacre had many commonalities with other groups. They counted Emerson's teachings (in particular self-reliance and the over-soul) as foundational principles, and considered their beliefs (at least in part) an outgrowth of Transcendentalism, which taught "Jesus was a noble type of human nature; revelation was the disclosure of the soul; inspiration was the filling of the soul's lungs, salvation was spiritual vitality."[166] Thus the Transcendentalists and New Thought-ists aligned, particularly through Dresser and Sanborn's relationship. The basic teachings of New Thought emphasize the mental or spiritual world as the true reality; "matter" or all the trappings of daily life are a secondary creation of the mind. Humans, through the possibilities of the mind, have God-like creative powers: one creates their reality out of pure thought, just as God created all reality with pure thought. Of course, creative powers can be positive or negative – negative thoughts would manifest a negative reality. Further, there was a danger of "thought transference" – the mind was not a locked box, so one might receive the thoughts of those nearby, in error or deliberately.[167]

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[165] Quot in Prabuddhaprana, 106.
[166] Frothingham. *Transcendentalism in New England: a History*, 204
[167] Though Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, is an important figure in New Thought, I am not going to deal with her here. She taught many of the teachers of New Thought, and Christian Science shares many aspects with New Thought. But she felt that New Thought was a distortion and misapplication of her teaching, and she hated it. Eddy believed that all of this creative power comes from God (Jesus), but many of the New Thoughtists were less concerned in general with keeping Jesus at the center of creation (though many of them did; Farmer, in particular, considered New Thought a return to Jesus' healing ministry.)

The danger of the untrained mind wielding this kind of power seems evident. The first exercise is to control the senses, which provide all kinds of false information. Reliable information came from scripture, pure reason, and intuition, and training the mind to evaluate information on *this* basis, developing this mental discipline, enabled the creation of a perfect world.[168] This discipline was important, as mental distress creates emotional distress, along with physical distress and illness. A healer would work with the patient to demonstrate that their symptoms were illusory, created by mental distress, and thus the patient might allow them to dissipate.

As John Haller observes, New Thought was heavily indebted to Emerson, in particular the idea that "the human mind was capable of holding the very essence of things," but also the idea that God is incarnate in nature and humans too.[169] The principle of Self-Reliance was also important: trust in one's own intuition, which is insight into the soul; which is to know oneself completely. At Greenacre, an alliance between transcendentalism and New Thought was a natural one, helping to strengthen New Thought, and to transform Transcendentalism.

Despite many histories of New Thought featuring men as very important people, the movement was largely made up of women. It lacked much organizational structure; possibly their biggest accomplishment was adopting the umbrella term of New Thought Movement.[170] Its main concern was healing or restoring health,

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[168] One of the ways that New Thought differs from Christian Science, is the utility of reason and intuition; Mary Baker Eddy taught that only Scripture and her own divinely inspired writings were sources of truth.
[169] Haller, *The History of New Thought*, 5.
[170] Braden. *Spirits in Rebellion*, 297-8.

though it began to transform around the turn of the century to emphasize attaining prosperity and material happiness. Sarah Farmer, who was very engaged with New Thought, is interested in healing, but perhaps more interested in the creative potential:

> You think life a vale of tears, where only misery and trouble reign; change your thinking and you will know it to be the kingdom of heaven, where love, peace, and joy abound. This is what the phrase ***New Thought*** means. It is simply putting ourselves in new relation to the world about us by changing our thought concerning it. The moment that we begin to conceive of the creative power of thought, the abundant Life has consciously begun in us. [171]

The creative power of the mind to transform the world, this is why Farmer is interested in Universal Religion, or this *is* the universal. Greenacre then is about developing methods to discipline minds, as well as the work of transformation.

Though Vivekananda was puzzled by them – he thought they were Christian Scientists – later Vedantic teachers found themselves working closely with New Thought-ists, Dresser wrote "Both Miss Farmer and the Swamis spoke in New-Thought gatherings during the winter. This was the beginning of a common interest which endured for a number of years. ... Hence the New Thought found expression, and the meditation meetings led by its devotees had direct influence upon the religious development of the mental healing movement in later years."[172]

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[171] Farmer. The Abundant Life. *The Spirit of the New Thought*, ed. Horatio Dresser, 29-37.
[172] Dresser. *A History of the New Thought*, 179.

Some common ground (and legitimacy) might also come out of the kind of mystical experience espoused by New Thought.[173] They practiced meditation, and believed in thought transference, but they never sought to truly transcend reality or communicate with other realms – rather, they sought a balance between self-abandon and self-control. It was important to embrace *right*, not just positive, thinking, to understand and follow the great moral laws. Such right living and understanding allowed access to creative energy. Dresser argues that "complete responsiveness to the divine life" does not mean "mere receptivity". "Everything depends on what we look for when we become receptive. Mere abandonment without ideal avails but little."[174] As mind cure historian Gail Thain Parker argues, they "reached out to make contact with powers beyond themselves without ever losing a grip themselves."[175]

New Thought is a catch-all for a variety of beliefs descending from the work of Phineas Quimby (February 16, 1802 – January 16, 1866). The period between the 1870s and 1910s had a different focus than the later "religion of success"; this phase

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[173] New Thought is of course only loosely affiliated; particularly during the early years of Greenacre. The students of Phineas Quimby (date – date), The Dressers, Warren Felt Evans, and Mary Baker Eddy trained their own students; particularly in Eddy's case, rifts developed with and between her students, leading to independent organizations, schools and publications throughout the country. Further, the movement itself changed completely in 19xx; where once it had been mainly interested in questions of gender, liberal reform, and right living the focus shifted to achieving material success and the fulfillment of desire. References to New Thought here are to the New Thought practiced at Greenacre, who generally were those Beryl Satter classifies as "anti-desire" – they argued for self-denial, service, the salvific power of the spiritual (white) woman (as opposed to the acquisitive, aggressive (white) man). They believed they were practicing the true spiritual philosophy of life and happiness, a philosophy of optimism, in which one's highest ideals could be made manifest.

[174] Dresser. *The Spirit of New Thought*, 233.

[175] Thain Parker, 18

was generally embraced by white, middle-class, reform-minded women and men. New Thought – even by its male proponents – was generally considered to be a women's movement, a tool that would inaugurate a new "women's era". "[It] became in fact one of the signs that 'this is the woman's day'," Theodore Dresser wrote.[176] "Woman is at last free…because she has discovered the spiritual laws through which her work is to be accomplished," wrote Elizabeth Boynton Harbert to explain the implications of mental healing.

The central premise concerned mental healing; as spirit or mind or human thought has the power to transform matter, and to shape reality, illnesses of the body can be cured through the power of mind. Further, one's reality, the world, was subject to mental power as much as the body. New Thought "not only builds new and better bodies and better conditions, but should build a better character; new and better service and as an inevitable result a new and better civilization."[177] The properties of both matter and mind were contested – was matter illusory or real? "There is no life, no substance or intelligence in matter; there is no sensation or causation in matter, there is no reality in matter," according to frequent Greenacre lecturer Helen Van-Anderson.[178] Others were certain of the opposite (the former were generally represented at Greenacre.) Similarly what Morton Diaz calls "I-hood", or denial of Self-hood, ought to be suppressed; others said exalted.[179]

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[176] Dresser, A History of New Thought, 309
[177] James A. Edgerton, President of International New Thought Alliance, in *Spirit of New Thought,* 13
[178] Van-Anderson, *The Right Knock*, 122.
[179] Diaz, "The Human Problem According to Law," 620.

Part of the reason that New Thought was so particularly a women's religion has to do, as Beryl Satter argues, with the era's engagement with the meaning and roles of gender in a rapidly changing culture. A previous generation had worked to associate white womanhood with a sanctified notion of domesticity, in which the home was the nexus of virtue and moral influence, balancing the amoral masculine world of competition and industry. Women were innately and uniquely capable of spiritual morality and high minded love, and this was properly disseminated through the rearing and education of children, and the maintenance of a space of peace and tranquility for one's husband.

This sentimental idea was challenged as women moved into the labor force, and – particularly through the platform of abolitionism, and the popular religious movement of spiritualism – became vocal and active social reformers (both Progressive and otherwise). The conception of gender as rational/emotional did not disappear, but women began to argue that their innate spiritual qualities were the corrective for social ills and malaise on a broad scale. The proper balancing or valuing of these qualities was less clear. "Social Darwinists" believed "a defining feature of advanced civilization was the difference between men and women. Intellect was male, emotion female. An intellectual woman was by definition manlike, and even atavistic, since she erased a key sign of advanced civilization – the development of selfless reproductive women and passionate but rational and productive men."[180] On the other hand, "reform Darwinists" understood the civilizational balance in reverse: "the mind of competitive man was warped by his

[180] Satter, 11

raging desires, 'advanced' women lacked destructive desire. Instead, woman's 'mental force' was fueled by her 'heart force' – understood not as irrational emotion, but as high minded love and spiritual morality."[181] When Sarah Farmer is known as Mother Heart, it is to this heart force, conceived as maternal, that the name refers.

Vedanta and Comparative Religion

Vivekananda was an enormous presence at the Parliament of Religions in 1893; from his brightly colored silks – all the more brilliant against the black robes of Protestant clergy that made up the majority of the participants – to his powerful oratory, he caught the eye and imagination of the public.

Greenacre offered an extension and elaboration of this platform; an opportunity to teach students directly ("I had to talk on average [of] 7 to 8 hours a day," Vivekananda wrote), to eager listeners and new practitioners. Though he spent only one summer at Greenacre, it was significant: most important, perhaps, was the beginning of his friendship with Sara Chapman Bull, who would of course be one of his greatest supporters and friends, and instrumental in his American work. Mary Louise Burke describes Greenacre as Vivekananda's first opportunity to teach in the West, to practice and begin to experiment with methods of teaching: "this period can be thought of as a foreshadowing of that was to come – the beginnings of a new method of work."[182]

Though Vivekananda did not return to Greenacre, one of his brother monks

[181] Satter, 12
[182] Burke. *New Discoveries*, 150.

lectured nearly every year until Farmer's death – Swamis Abhedananda and Saradananda succeeded him – and Vedanta remained an important part of Greenacre's identity. The Lysekloster pines – named in honor of Chapman Bull's home in Norway – were about a mile from the Inn, within a little wood. Religious classes met, each beneath a different pine; Greenacrites "loll about on the ground as suits them best… Some lie on their backs listening and looking up into the blue arch of the heavens. Others lie resting on one elbow and meditatively pluck in pieces the leaves of the shrubs that surround, as they listen."[183] One of the oft-mentioned landmarks at Greenacre was "The Swami's Pine", marking the spot where Vivekananda and his successors taught. Sarah Farmer wrote in 1902, "What Greenacre owes to him cannot be put into words. A little band of people had started to prove the providing care of God… This great soul came into our midst and did more than any other to give the work its true tone, for he lived every day the truths which his lips proclaimed, and it was to us the living evidence of the power manifested nineteen hundred years ago…"[184]

Vedanta was one of the important religions at Greenacre – there was a Swami there early every year – because its claims of universality fit well with this important aspect of Greenacre and Farmer's work. Anna Josephine Ingersoll – who wrote a book about Greenacre in 1900, and -- presents this super-spirituality in an 1899 article "The Swamis in America". She describes Vivekananda's monastic order of Ramakrishnans, in India, as "the most ancient order of monks in the world" (she

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[183] "Greenacre's Mystic Charm", *Lewiston Sunday Journal*, 8/12/1899.
[184] Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana, "Sarah Farmer's Inspired Life", *Western Women in the Footsteps of Vivekananada*, 97

cites Max Müller and the Bhagavad Gita as her sources). In the present, she says, they are mainly students, who took up the spiritual life directly after completing their studies, and wander from village to village. As they go, "children are taught to read, the sick are cared for, the people are shown better habits of life, and the profound philosophies of the Vedanta are taught" -- further, they are a "voluntary, undogmatized brotherhood, with recognized freedom of thought… the true sannyasin may be said to represent no religion." The sannyasin is a saint, she says, who are living religion out as life as "a realization; it is not a theory." John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth were living the sannyasin life. These Ramakrishnan monks are explicitly separated from a particular kind of Hindu life – where "formerly" a sannyasin would retire from the world after he married and raised a family, they move directly from student to spiritual man. While this is a "calamity" for a Hindu family, in fact, it is the true nature of Hinduism, Ingersoll says. "Every nation has its ideal – its theme. To India it is *spirituality*." That is, Hinduism is really a universal religion – exemplified by Ramakrishna, who practiced many religions as expressions of one truth, and by the Vedas, which are a "treasure of spiritual laws, from any source at any time," discovered by both men and women. The India represented in the "monstrous system of caste and superstition" is a deviation from the real teachings of Hinduism, just as the "edifice of dogma and ceremonial" of the Christian church, nor the commercial and social systems of America are removed, by human error, from Christ's actual teachings. The Swamis in America are clearly wiser than Christian missionaries, who are blinded to their own hypocrisy and

error, because they understand that the outward forms of religion are occluding and distorting the central spiritual truth.[185]

Another important elements of Vivekananda's teaching at Greenacre was his emphasis on practice. Staphanie Syman observes that there was a great difference between admiring Indian philosophy, and practicing it – indeed, both Farmer and Chapman Bull were held up, after their deaths, as examples of the danger of eastern religion, ladies driven mad by eastern mysticism.[186] But Greenacre provided a space that helped to elide the difference between intellectual and practical, and Vivekananda taught in that space. He connected mastery of the body and spiritual attainment in a way that echoed beliefs of New Thought: "Our first step is to gain a knowledge of the automatic actions, the real idea being to revivify & make voluntary all automatic actions, to bring them into consciousness. Many yogis can control the action of their hearts," read Emma Thursby's notes from his lectures. They go on to describe the process of concentrating "nerve energies & all power lodged in the cells of the body" into one force, directing it through the spinal column (the seat of automatic actions) and until it reaches the pineal gland, "the seat of conservation of potential energy."[187] That is, the relation between body and soul, inner and outer, material and spiritual, is practical. The material self is not illusory, as for New Thought, but it is subject to the disciplined mind. There is a rational process for mystic experience that speaks to the New Thought belief that disease is an error in reasoning or perception, that suggests the world is reason-able, that speaks also to

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[185] Ingersoll, "Swamis in America", 16.
[186] Stefanie Syman. The Subtle Body, 59.
[187] Burke, 147-8.

Farmer's Universal Truth, which also can be identified and known by the disciplined mind.

Internal Controversy: Competing Visions of Greenacre

Aside from specific religious groups, there were internal controversies that were quite divisive, and led to a major crisis for Farmer. The first season at Greenacre was a bit of a free-for-all, with some pretty outré characters, and there were disagreements about what ought to be included. In particular Sara Chapman Bull felt that some of Farmer's selections were so ridiculous that they made serious work impossible. She, along with Lewis Janes, the future director of the Monsalvat School; and some other prominent Greenacrites had privately criticized Sarah Farmer for inviting – and believing – a more occult element. "It seems quite evident," Greenacrite Fillmore Moore wrote in an 1895, "that the [Christian] 'scientists' and the astrologers, etc. will flock to Greenacre in full quota… Surely that [the spirit of intellectual inquiry] is the side of the movement that must be supported and strengthened if it is to survive and grow in the direction of its ideal."[188] Sara Chapman Bull echoed this sentiment; she was concerned that Farmer was too interested in "occult" and spiritualist elements. "…I have reasoned with her, and thought her in agreement… [but] she is still dealing with mediumship, astrology, and phases of mental science quite apart… Those I count Miss Farmer's best friends feel that she cannot successfully carry on the occult side and keep the tone and the work

[188] Letter from Dr. Fillmore Moore to Sara Chapman Bull April 11, 1895, Cambridge Historical Society, Curtis Papers.

that she desires… I am glad for those who will help to hold for her what they deem the right standard, hoping that she will come to regard it so herself."[189]

Indeed, there were lectures on "The Spiritual Significance of Names and Numbers", or Spiritualists debating the moral caliber of spirits, or rowdy séances (featuring Henry James, no less) in which the manifesting spirit caused a dog – who apparently recognized her voice – to howl mournfully.[190] Vivekananda observed that "They are either intellectual or go after faith cure, table turning, witchcraft, etc etc. …Here God is either a terror or a healing power, vibration, and so forth."[191] Chapman Bull, James, and others felt that a standard must be set, but they could not move aggressively against Farmer.

Instead they prevailed upon Farmer[192] to host a special conference on Evolution, in hopes that an event of real intellectual quality would set the tenor of future seasons. It was, in fact, a great success, in particular for Lewis Janes. Though the idea that evolution had effects that could be seen within cultures and peoples was based on a deep misunderstanding of Darwin's argument, it was considered to be quite cutting edge, and its best-known supporters came to the conference.

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[189] Letter from Chapman Bull to Lewis Janes. Cambridge Historical Society, Curtis Papers, November 30, 1894.
[190] See Program for 1894; Rev T.E. Allen, "Spiritualism", *Theosophist: A Magazine of Priental Philosophy, Art Literature and Occultism*, ed. H.S. Olcott. V19.4 Jan 1898, 255.; *The Works of William James*, 146-7.
[191] Burke, *Vivekananda New Discoveries*, vol 2., 152-3
[192] Actually, there's no record of whether or not they prevailed upon Farmer. There are letters between Bull, Moore and Janes complaining that she is too weird, and certainly Janes played a leadership role in organizing the Evolution Conference. But it doesn't appear that Farmer was anything but enthusiastic about the conference, and it may certainly be the case that she found some of the shenanigans in 1894 to be a bit much.

Charles Bonney wrote to Farmer that the entire season represented "an enduring basis with a curriculum in which advanced ideas of Reform and Progress will be suitably strengthened by wise and conservative limitation and regulations. The merit and importance of the subjects and the eminence of the speakers were noteworthy."[193] This incident was not at all divisive, but it did reveal a kind of sub-group amongst Greenacrites, of individuals who were very invested in the intellectual image of Greenacre.

After the success of 1895, Sarah Farmer asked Janes to take the directorship of the new Monsalvat School, the center of Comparative Religion at Greenacre, which launched its first season in 1896. Monsalvat was one of several auxiliary programs providing "certain courses of systematic study in harmony with [the Greenacre Lectures]" – the others included a School of Literature, of Nature, of Applied Metaphysics, but Monsalvat was certainly the most significant to Farmer.[194] Monsalvat is prominent in her "Ideal" as a training ground for young men and women "ready to consecrate their lives to service in foreign fields. Before going to such service, they should decide before God which one is the chosen field. They should familiarize themselves with the language, literature, and history of that people; especially they should become acquainted with the purest ideals… able to find the unity of God in every individual, and by making points of contact, bring that individual to a fuller realization of this unity." It would have religious teachers in permanent residence, from all nations and faiths, who would teach the students "the

[193] Greenacre Voice, July 4, 1896, FP B5 F7.
[194] See 1897 Program, 22.

conquest of Self—the most important requirement of all." It would further support study in sociology, education, agriculture, artists, and other skills necessary to "found the City Beautiful… a visible illustration of the kingdom of God…" It would also have a school for young children, focusing on the development of the individual. Essentially it was a sort of utopian model serving all "classes" in which "all may share in maintaining the common life", surrounding an inner school of religious education preparing young ascetics for what is basically missionary work.[195] The Greenacre Lectures are only a footnote in the Ideal – she remarks later that "the Greenacre lectures were inaugurated merely s a stepping stone for the Monsalvat School, the School of Music, the Nature School, the Training School for Workers, the Mothers' School… and all the other movements which yet lie dormant in my brain."[196]

Farmer's ideal for Monsalvat was rather distinct for the actual operations of the School under Janes. Farmer believed that he had been "called" to Monsalvat, to shepherd it from its small beginning. "…[As the] possibilities of the work unfold before me, my whole soul is filled with awe and reverence and my prayer waking or sleeping is 'O God give me wisdom and send me man and woman pure-hearted and meek enough to handle the vessels of God intrusted to us [sic]!'"[197] Farmer is thrilled with Janes, and thrilled with his proposal for the first season and seems to give him latitude on all decisions. She and Janes began to fall out, however, after the

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[195] Pamphlet, "The Green Acre Ideal", an extract from a letter by Sarah Farmer in 1898 in answer to "What is the Greenacre Ideal?" and widely republished. SJF6.26
[196] Letter from SJF to LGJ, May 30, 1899. FP B21 F 27.
[197] Letter from SJF to LGJ, April 26, 1896. FP B21 F24.

1897 season.

This dispute seems to have crystalized the group that believed Farmer to lack the intellectual rigor they saw as key to Greenacre's success – Chapman Bull, Lewis Janes, and Fillmore Moore (who took the Monsalvat School after Janes' death). It also intersected with Farmer's absolute beliefs about the financial affairs of Greenacre. How much this dispute affected those beyond the inner circle is unclear – certainly later Baha'i sources do not mention it. Some was likely quiet, but some events were unavoidably visible, and led to a great deal of change.

Sarah Farmer's parents had, of course, been quite impoverished, but she herself had somewhat of a fortune along with the land and buildings in Eliot. It was Farmer, with contributions from others, that supported Greenacre financially in its first years, but her own money quickly ran out. Reading her letters and few published pieces, one notices that she talks about money a lot, and this is because it took money to keep Greenacre afloat, but she absolutely refused to charge for attendance at Greenacre or even to recommend a donation – that is, put it on a commercial basis. It was her belief that God would provide whatever was necessary, and that contributing to Greenacre – whether through labor or finances – was a spiritual benefit, a privilege offered to those who could afford it.[198] Each school could accept donations, and use that money to pay the travel expenses of the lecturers, but money above that was to be placed in a fund for general expenses.

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[198] At one point she attributes this idea to an idea of Emerson's: a school that would be free, as in no fixed fee, but each student was led to feel that it was his privilege to contribute to the upkeep and functioning of the school. Letter SJF to LGJ, May 4 1896.

These mundane operations were, for Farmer, a really vital part of demonstrating the practical nature of the kingdom of God. "[It is] simply an object lesson of what could be accomplished if all men could work together disinterestedly, and for the common good. …In order to receive spiritual return, the service must be given 'not grudgingly nor of necessity but cheerfully'", she admonishes Janes.[199]

For his part, Janes purports to be concerned for the future of Monsalvat if its finances are mixed with Farmer's. He is concerned that the Lysekloster Pines (the land on which Monsalvat is located) would be liable to Farmer's creditors; he claims that she has rescinded on their original agreement, which allowed him full independence in running Monsalvat. Her finances are "utterly hopeless" and "utterly unethical". She had claimed to form a Fellowship for the administration of Greenacre's property, but had not filed the papers; at a meeting, called without the knowledge of the other Fellowship members, she presented him with a clumsy forgery.

By the spring of 1901, Janes has decided that he will take Monsalvat School and reopen it nearby in Eliot under the same name, but independently of Greenacre. He claims to "have the cordial support of the Eliot people, and most of the old patrons of the School." Though this is terribly divisive, and some quietly express support for Janes' venture, others refuse to publically repudiate Farmer. Chapman Bull writes to her in support of Janes, but says noting publically. E.P. Powell, who in the past has had harsh words for Farmer's tolerance of "cranks" and "humbug", is

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[199] Letter SJF to LGJ March 24, 1899. FP Box 21 F25

enraged when Janes uses his name in print – he will not be involved in this controversy, he will not criticize the Founder of Greenacre.[200]

Ultimately Janes' greatest supporters were one of the co-owners of the Greenacre Inn, the Tobey family, who had considerable debt of their own, and are financially pressed, as well as another local family, the Bangs, who apparently hoped to profit from increased tourism. Janes told Farmer that he had taken control of the Monsalvat School and seceded from Greenacre. The owners of the Greenacre Inn, led by the Tobey and Bang families, met in preparation to dissolve the partnership and sell the property.

They waited for Sarah Farmer. But she was gone. Her friend Maria Wilson, alarmed by Farmer's poor health and distress, packed her up and the two women sailed for Europe and the Mediterranean. By the time they returned in 1901, Sarah Farmer had met 'Abdu'l-Bah'a and converted to Baha'i. Janes' school did open, as "the fifth season of the Conference School of Comparative Religion (formerly the Monsalvat School)", but to little fanfare. The affair ended when Lewis Janes died suddenly on September 4, 1901. The Monsalvat School returned to the Greenacre Conferences under the direction of Fillmore Moore.[201]

Baha'i: The Persian Revelation in America

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[200] Letter EP Powell to Lewis Janes, c. 1896; May 19, 1901. FP B2 F19

[201] Fillmore Moore was a physician and advocate of the simple life; he founded the Bungalow Open Air Camp at Eliot, and the Open Air Camp and School of Health in Aiken, SC. He had lectured at the School of Philosophy, Concord.

In 1900, on a trip to Palestine, Farmer had met Abdu'l-Bah'a and converted to Baha'i; on her return to Greenacre she eagerly incorporated it into the summer's programming. Farmer believed "the Persian revelation" to be the universal religion for which she and so many others had sought --- combining the great teachings of humankind into an ultimate truth.

The Baha'i were not wholly unknown in North America; they had been mentioned at the Parliament though apparently not in attendance. The first teacher – Dr. Ibrahim George Kheiralla, had departed Syria for America only in 1892. Baha'i was a young religion – it had developed out of an earlier religious movement called Babism,[202] which was a reform movement within Twelver Shi'i Islam, primarily in Iran. This sect believes that there are a series of twelve imams (beginning with Ali, Muhammed's cousin and son-in-law (d.661), and continuing through the final twelfth Imam, who remains hidden, or Occluded. It has a somewhat millenarian tone – the final imam will reappear to battle the forces of evil and usher in a day of judgment. Babism rose out of a moment of internal crisis – a contested secession, and centered on a man named Sayyid Ali-Muhammad Shirazi (1819-1850). Reputed to be a holy man, a seer of visions, he claimed to he the Bab – the Gate – to the Hidden Imam. Babism is generally dated from May 22, 1844, when the Bab won his first disciple. His significant text was closely modeled in style and content on the Quran, and made similar claims of divine inspiration and paralleled the Bab to Muhammad. This was not well received, and though the Bab and his followers spent several years alternately wandering, hiding from his many enemies, and writing

[202] This history below is quite indebted to Peter Smith. *An Introduction to the Baha'i Faith*, and Robert H. Stockman. *The Baha'i Faith: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 71-127

(over twenty major works). As he grew more popular and his followers more visible, as well as making more controversial claims (specifically, to be the twelfth, occluded Imam), he was placed under house arrest. Violent confrontations between the Babists and local authorities increased, and soon, the Bab was executed by firing squad in Tabriz in July of 1850. The remaining Babists attempted to assassinate the Shah in Tehran, and though they failed, were publically and bloodily dispatched.[203]

However, one of the Babists was imprisoned in The Black Pit, surely as horrible as it sounds; Bahá'u'lláh was freed in December of 1852 and went to join his brother and the remnants of the Babs in exile in Tehran. He was distressed to find such a discouraged group, rent by infighting and power struggles. Like the Bab, he began writing letters to the faithful, in Iran and Iraq. He gained power and prestige and a following, alarming the Iranian government as the Babist groups in Iran and Iraq revivified. Though he is clearly a man of spiritual authority at this point, his situation – teacher? prophet? is unclear. The movement had a "tradition of 'concealed truths and of the progressive unveiling of perceived realities"; though he experienced divine visitations in the unspeakable conditions of the Black Pit, and after, he only slowly began to make claims of real authority.[204] This culminated in the Ridvan (Paradise), a garden outside of Tehran, where on May 3, 1863, he revealed himself to be the promised one foretold by the Bab – a further Messianic figure, He Whom God Shall Make Manifest. He continued to write letters and books, in Persian and Arabic (as well as the Zoroastrian dialect of Persian). His amanuensis was forced to develop an even faster form of shorthand – "revelation writing" – to

[203] eg: Nasiri'd-din Shah (1848-1896)
[204] Smith 20-1

keep up with the rapidity of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. (He ultimately wrote over fifteen thousand letters and books that are considered to be revealed writings).

A power struggle between Bahá'u'lláh and his brother caught the attention of authorities; displeased, the Ottomans sent the family to house arrest in Akka in 1868 – where Sarah Farmer met 'Abdu'l-Bah'a in 1901. The result of this split between Bahá'u'lláh and his brother was a division in the community – those who remained with the prophet became known as Baha'i, while the brother's followers and those who declined to take sides remained Babis. The Baha'i, by the 1880s, were widespread, and had large communities throughout urban and rural Iran. Bahá'u'lláh maintained a sophisticated courier network to communicate across communities, as well as training teachers, which served to reinforce his central authority, even in exile.

As Bahá'u'lláh aged, his eldest son 'Abdu'l-Bah'a (1844-1921) took on more of the prophet's pubic and organizational obligations, and upon the older man's death in 1892 he assumed leadership of the Baha'i. After the 1908 revolution in Turkey, he and his family were increasingly free to move about; they relocated to Haifa. Bah'a was accepted as the authoritative interpreter of his father's writings, though he was careful to distinguish himself from Bahá'u'lláh, who was an intense, God-like presence – it was said that no one could look him in the face, or speak a full sentence in his presence. Bah'a was charismatic, but approachable, more human, though still embodying the divine.

Bah'a focused a great deal of energy on missionary work – in part because of the ongoing persecution in Iran – and new communities grew up in the US, East Asia,

and Europe.[205] The first Baha'i community in America was in Chicago; beginning with five converts under Ibrahim George Khieralla; by 1897 there were over 100 Baha'i converts in Chicago. Though some came from more traditional backgrounds, early convert Thornton Chase explained "[n]early all who have accepted teachings in this country… were not Christians, but of differing sects and beliefs, Spiritualists, Buddhists, Theosophists, Mental and Christian Scientists, Metaphysicians, etc."[206]

Phoebe Hearst, the fabulously wealthy heiress, arranged a voyage for a few American converts to meet 'Abdu'l- Bah'a in exile, including the primary teacher and exponent of Baha'i, Ibrahim George Khieralla. It sailed in September of 1898. One family, the Getsingers, were granted permission by Bah'a to remain in Akka to study Persian and to continue their study in Baha'i. It was at this point that it became apparent that Khieralla – who oversaw the conversion and education of literally every American Baha'i – had taught many things in contradiction to the teaching of 'Abdu'l-Bah'a, perhaps most significantly its relation to Christianity – 'Abdu'l-Bah'a, he taught, was the returned Christ. In fact, he was basically unfamiliar with Baha'i, having read short extracts from Bahá'u'lláh's writing, misunderstood their history, and misunderstood their interpretation of prophecy. Nonetheless, he correctly understood that Bahá'u'lláh fulfilled all prophecies of previous religions, including being the Promised One of the Bible. He did not teach ethics – important to the Baha'i. The scholar of Baha'i Edward Browne described the teachings as "modifications he introduced into Baha'i doctrine to adapt it to American taste and

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[205] One of his earliest acts had been to ban the Baha'i practice of polygamy, which surely helped the missionary efforts.
[206] Quoted in Stockman 103.

comprehension" without weakening or syncretizing the actual doctrine. He also read Baha'ism onto events in American history, allowing American Baha'i to see their own place in the faith. Khieralla left the Faith after his meeting with 'Abdu'l-Bah'a; however, it does not seem that his students held particular enmity or betrayal. Many left the faith as well, disillusioned, but the remaining members turned their attention to rebuilding the Baha'i community in America. With the relative ease of travel between America and Palestine, a more accurate teaching was disseminated, but Khieralla's influence did not disappear.[207]

Of particular significance to Sarah Famer was the mistaken teaching that 'Abdu'l-Bah'a was Christ. Though by 1901 Khieralla's teachings had been debunked, this was one of the most perseverant misinformation. The pilgrims were overwhelmed by the experience of meeting him, and could describe him in no other terms. Further, it indicates the degree to which Baha'i was not only a religion in the process of establishing its prophetic figures, it was still forming its teachings and traditions, and there was still a kind of interpretive possibility.

Thus, it is difficult to apply contemporary Baha'i beliefs and practice to Farmer's world, and as an American Baha'i, to know precisely the parameters of her beliefs. Certainly she experienced 'Abdu'l-Bah'a as a charismatic man, who radiated an intense spirituality. One of the central principles of Baha'i is Unity – the oneness of humanity, but also an ongoing process which, in its ideal form as a common prayer puts is,

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[207] This history of the early American Baha'i is drawn from Robert H Stockman. *The Baha'i Faith in America: Volume 1 Origins 1892-1900*. Wilmette IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1985.

> Is the spiritual unity which emanates from the breaths of the holy spirit… Human unity or solidarity may be likened to the body, whereas unity from the breaths of the holy spirit is the spirit animating the body. This is the perfect unity. It creates such a condition in mankind that each one will make sacrifices for the other… It is the unity which through the influence of the divine spirit is permeating the Baha'is so that each offers his life for the other and strives with all sincerity to attain his good pleasure.[208]

As part of the practical implementation of unity, the Baha'i teachings strongly support literacy and education. Under Bahá'u'lláh, the concept of 'impurity' or 'uncleanness' was abolished; he also abolished slavery.[209] He encouraged the community to reach out to minorities, resulting in converts from a variety of backgrounds. In the US, for example, racially segregated Baha'i meetings were not permitted, and supported woman suffrage.

The Baha'i teach that the individual must investigate truth for themselves, rather than passively receiving religious instruction. This precludes aggressive missionary work, or the conversion of spouses or children. It does not preclude public teaching, but it often emphasizes service as an expression of belief, generally education, social improvement projects, public health projects, etc. The spread of Baha'i is imagined as global but from a small scale – as Bah'a put it, "Simply enlarge

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[208] `Abdu'l-Bahá'. *Baha'i Prayers*, 101

[209] In Islam, uncleanliness often refers to non-believers – eg, one may not eat with an unbeliever, or associate very closely with them. As Baha'i became a global religion, this took on new meanings, depending on the local custom.

the circle of the household, and you have the nation. Enlarge the circle of nations and you have all humanity."[210]

Another teaching that resonated with Greenacre's intentions was the Lesser and the Most Great Peace. The Lesser refers to a global system of governance – a global language (the Baha'i support Esperanto), a world currency, an elected world legislature, and other global systems of support. The Lesser Peace – though it imagines world Peace – uses a world culture based on a set of universal values to create peace, rather than strategies for ending war. The Most Great Peace is analogous to the kingdom of Heaven – a world of eternal life and spiritual perfection.[211]

Abdu'l-Bah'a's teachings seemed to conform to the fundamental beliefs at Greenacre – certainly Sarah Farmer believed his teachings to be the universal religion she sought. Charles Remy was a contemporary of Farmer and an American convert to Baha'i who wrote several scholarly treatments of the new religion and explained its central tenet through a quote from Baha'o'llah (Abdu'l-Bah'a's predecessor): "The root of all knowledge is the knowledge of God." Remy continues: " Each of the world's great spiritual teachers has taught the same eternal Truth, revealing it in the measure and in terms applicable to the people of his time. This Truth has ever been the main spring and source of human advancement and

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[210] `Abdu'l-Bahá'. *Foundations of World Unity*, 100.
[211] For information about the Baha'i teachings, see Robert H. Stockman, The Baha'i Faith, particularly 9-30, 44-67. Peter Smith. An Introduction to the Baha'i Faith offers a more advanced guide to the Baha'i Faith.

civilization."[212] Baha'i was simply a new revelation of this already existing Truth, properly contextualized for the present age, to Farmer, and addressing the same goals, with similar methods.

[212] Remy, Charles. *The Baha'i movement for universal religion, brotherhood and peace: a sketch of its history and teaching*. Washington : Persian American Bulletin, 1912. 7

CHAPTER THREE:

A Woman's Ideal Materialized: Space and Place at Greenacre

The place, the geophysical reality of Greenacre is a vital context for Sarah Farmer's work; it is Greenacre that is the transformative element in her original vision, well before the World Parliament of Religions that lent its particular inspiration. It becomes the work itself, never losing its initial qualities of land/scape, of embodied pleasures, but gaining a spiritual power that contains the potential to transform the world, containing and defining and uniting the multiple communities, personalities, ambitions and visions within. Though Farmer was the force that animated Greenacre, that enabled the bridge from grass and wind and lumber to spiritual center, the movement did not coalesce around her, as a cult of personality, but around the "work", as she called it.

Recall her first vision of what would become Greenacre: a vision from God fully formed, as she sat, in the heat and dust and noise, Sarah Farmer thought of the cool breeze blowing off the Piscataquah River at home. She thought of the pine groves, and the daily splendid show of the sunset, and of the people around her "so eager for knowledge that they sat patiently two hours at a time, three hours a day. I looked at them and thought of the spot that Whittier had loved and had found so restful… and I saw them seated in a large tent on the green bank of this beautiful river, the cool breeze from the water fanning their cheeks." She imagined how much more "receptive the mind and heart would be if the body were in such a cool and

healthy environment …. One's mind and soul could be refreshed by helpful thoughts, under spreading pines, in green pastures, beside still waters."[213]

The refreshing, restful, sensory pleasure of Greenacre as a nurturing nest enabling expansion and edification of the mind and soul was a central tenet of the community. The location, the materiality of Greenacre – the gently sloping grass, the pines, the river – were never treated as incidental, the school could not have been held *somewhere else*. Recall that it was named by the poet John Greenleaf Whittier, a friend of the Farmers' and early guest at the inn: he exclaimed, the story goes, "We have heard of God's acres, but I call this Green Acre."[214] Later, the Baha'i prophet, 'Abdu'l- Bah'a (who visited Greenacre on his sole trip to America in 1906) emphasized the pun on the city where he had grown up in exile: Green Acca, "the Acca of the Western World", effectively collapsing Greenacre into the holy land itself.[215] This would certainly have enormous importance for Farmer herself, as well as for `Abdu'l-Bahá''s vision of Greenacre.

The importance of the physical and geographical location of Greenacre manifested in several ways. First, the connection of natural beauty, a rested body,

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[213] Quoted in Myron Phelps, "Green Acre", *The Word*, I-1 (1904), 55 (among other places, though the original letter has not survived). The reader familiar with the Bible will recognize the references to Psalm 23, which describes the Lord as a benevolent shepherd guiding his sheep through a pastoral, gentle landscape, and the shadow of the Valley of Death. Farmer often communicates in a kind of pastiche of references to diverse works, sometimes to illustrate a chain of authority or supporting voices. She also is deeply intimate with the Bible and sees its echo in the world, in actions or places, or people. Referring to the "still waters" and "green pastures" would certainly communicate the presence of the benevolent Lord as well.
[214] Miriam Henry. "Old and New Paths at Green Acre," *The Baha'i Year Book*, Vol. 1, New York: Baha'i Publishing Company, April 1925-1926. 87.
[215] Acca is now spelled Acre, and is in Israel, now. See *Early History of Baha'i Community*, Boston Mass. Compiled by Anise Rideout. National Baha'i Archives, Wimette, IL. 22.

and an engaged and energetic mind is promulgated in its mission statement, and frequently testified to by visitors. Its healing power is associated with both the landscape and the atmosphere of spiritual engagement and intellectual development, and is specifically envisioned to counter a particular type of physical/spiritual ailment that plagued the "brain-workers" and intelligentsia at the turn of the century. Second, the place of Greenacre, outside and away from daily life, fostered another significant quality, the suspension of various social norms which permitted an unusually informal interpersonal dynamic and encouraged an experimental, embodied approach to religious inquiry. I want to particularly think through, here, what it meant to "be there" – that the separation from one's daily life is a powerful disinhibitor, but there is a sense too that Greenacre itself is saturated with a spiritual power that is sustained and built through experimentation and inquiry. Finally, Farmer consistently understands Greenacre as a material place from which her "movement" emanates throughout the world. That is, the spirit of unity and common ground inspired by the Parliament of Religions is not an intellectual exercise; the practice of cooperation and understanding instead serve to build a spiritual power that emanates into the world as both (wholly metaphysical) Breath and as a material culture of satellite communities. While the location of the Parliament of Religions was quickly torn down and rebuilt as the Art Institute of Chicago, Greenacre remained, and remains a *place*.

Sarah Farmer's relationship to Greenacre was complex; it begun unhappily and was never free of struggle and pain. The Farmers' move from Newport to Eliot was met with great resistance from Sarah, who had enjoyed unaccustomed freedom

in the literary circles of Providence, RI, especially with a larger domestic staff to assist with the house and care of her mother.[216] But Moses Farmer's illness eventually prevented him from working any longer, and the family instead moved their housekeeping to Hannah's ancestral home in Eliot, ME. Sarah was devastated – banished to the sticks with her two invalid parents and little income to manage on would leave her isolated from the social and intellectual world that gave her such pleasure.

Thus Sarah's first experience of Greenacre was not as an idyllic land of spiritual flourishing and natural splendor, but as a place of exile, a severing of the invigorated mind from the isolated body. They built a house on family land – it had been dwelled upon by Shapleighs since 1670 – which Sarah named "Bittersweet", trying to express the conflict between the magnificent beauty of the landscape and the deep anger and loneliness she felt there.[217]

Eliot today is hardly rural – it is adjacent to the I95 bridge from New Hampshire to Maine, and in the summer bustles with tourists. But in 1877 it had not quite shaken all of its' frontier loneliness. The railway was not built into the area until 1893; the railroad also brought the first regular ferry service across the Piscatequah into the area, so it was relatively difficult to arrange transit.[218] The families that lived in Eliot were, for the most part, the families who had settled the area alongside the Shapleighs, Sarah's own ancestors, back in the 17th century; it

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[216] Diary of Sarah Farmer, 12/18/72; also Martin, 15.
[217] from 7/21/65 interview with Mrs. Flynn, referenced in Martin, The Life and Work of Sarah J Farmer, 27.
[218] Cummings, Osmond Richard, "Atlantic Shore Line Railway: its predecessors and its successors" (1957). Books and Publications. 26.

must have felt a provincial backwater, and quite far away from her friends in Boston and Providence.[219] Yet, she turned her focus to work, confident in her vision of a divine plan.

The Surest Physical Rest: Urban Ills and Nature's Cures

Farmer's first vision centers Greenacre at the nexus of natural beauty, a rested body, and an engaged and energetic mind. This concern for embodied comfort and physical health remained an important element of life at Greenacre.[220]

It is a preservation of Greenacre's first incarnation as a resort hotel, the Eliot Inn. It was opened in 1890 by four Eliot businessmen (Farmer bought into the Inn shortly after it was built and became a part owner), in hopes of attracting some of the summer visitors who were beginning to travel to Maine – several nearby towns had built small resort communities, including Isle of Shoals, a famous literary colony run by Celia Thaxter (1835-1894) on an island off the coast of Portsmouth, at its height a generation before, and frequented by luminaries like Thoreau, Longfellow,

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[219] Old Kittery

[220] For Farmer personally, physical health was an issue that dogged her throughout her life. Her mother spent most of her life nearly immobilized by pain, and her father, never healthy himself, spent his final years increasingly paralytic; the Farmers were lifelong regulars on the spa and clinic circuit. Sarah Farmer grew up surrounded by bodies in pain, though her parents were unbelievably prolific. Farmer herself was often ill in childhood, and as an adult suffered from a plethora of ailments – perhaps neurasthenic in origin, often described by her contemporaries as "exhaustion" caused by her total dedication to her work. Interestingly, in her illnesses, she did tend to leave Greenacre to recover elsewhere.

Hawthorne and Whittier.[221] Farmer described the inspiration behind the Inn:

> The Inn was conceived by Dr. Willis as a spot where weary brain-workers could find the rest and peace needful in the summer months to restore the nervous energy wasted in the pressure of the work in the winter. The more I have talked with people abroad and in Washington as well as here, the more I am convinced that the success of Green Acre consists in gathering to this ideal. It stands now in the minds of people who have heard of it, but have not yet visited it, as the oasis for which travelers, tortured with thirst and weary with travel long when crossing the desert.
>
> Hotels that cater to the craving for excitement have only a transient patronage. Green Acre with its good beds, clean linen and wholesome food daintily served will retain and increase its patronage, if the atmosphere is kept restful and uplifting..[222]

It is notable that this letter was written in 1901, well after Greenacre's rebirth.[223] This suggests Farmer never abandoned the idea of physical rest and

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[221] In many ways, Isle of Shoals pre-figured Greenacre, with its focus on the arts (writing and visual), and its charismatic founder, Celia Thaxter. However, it was more of a writer's colony – maintaining individuals' work – than a school and forum for discussion.

[222] SJF to Mr. Davis c. 1901 FP B1 F14. Willis is John Willis, physician and friend to the Farmer family. He was one of the original owners of the Eliot Inn.

[223] The Inn was a separate entity. Without dwelling excessively here on the very complicated finances of Greenacre, Farmer flatly refused, even under eventually crushing financial pressure, to charge an admission or fee at Greenacre. Anyone could stay for free in Sunset Camp, which consisted of tents and open-air cabins. One could also board with local folks, who charged what they wished. The Eliot Inn, now the Greenacre Inn, operated as a standard hotel – Farmer had possibly imagined that the revenue from the Inn would support the larger Greenacre project.

comfort as central to the work at Greenacre, even as her work became more universal and spiritual – moving away from the individual cure to the cure for the world. It was the connection between intellectual engagement and the distractions of the uncomfortable body that had planted the seed of Greenacre in her mind and it remained very significant to her conception of the place.

The healthy body was so central, in fact, that it was included in the mission statement of Greenacre, which was printed prominently on the front of each year's program – under Farmer's direction it was a lavish, many paged manual, listing each scheduled speaker and their topic, as well as descriptions of the several schools that addressed specific areas in more depth (the most significant being Monsalvat School for Comparative Religions, and other helpful information, peppered generously with inspirational quotations from diverse religious and literary figures.

The first mission statement :

> proposes to add to its [e.g. the Inn's] rural attractions and comforts a series of Lectures and Classes on topics which shall quicken and energize the spiritual, mental and moral natures, and give the surest and serenest physical rest to its guests."[224]

The serene physical rest – physical health -- is derived, here, from the

[224] "It" here is the Greenacre Inn; in later years the Greenacre Lectures becomes its own incorporated entity, but Sarah Farmer bought the inn as an investment property in concert with a small group of investors. The legal history of Greenacre is slightly arcane although at no point, until she was forced to, did Farmer relinquish her ownership of the property or the corporation (or whatever it was with the trustees etc).

energized natures. The "brain-weary" workers in the cities that Famer mentions have their nervous energies depleted from the stresses of modern urban life – these are mental and spiritual elements, but their loss effects the body in negative ways.[225] A loss of appetite, a common symptom, leads to unhealthy weight loss. Exhaustion leaves the body vulnerable. This nervous exhaustion is a widespread ailment at the end of the 19th century; it was named "neurasthenia" in 1880 by neurologist Miller Beard.[226] Its' symptoms were legion, but in general the nervous illness amounted to a paralysis of the will, and a morbid self-consciousness.

It was perceived to be a new disease, quickly gaining epidemic proportions (in the popular, not clinical sense of epidemic), caused by hyper-active nervous energies that required less and less stimulation, causing irritation, and excessively prolonged emotional reactions. Most understood neurasthenia to be caused by modern civilization in the unnatural urban environment: long hours at work, the tyranny of the clock which unmercifully sliced up the day, a lack of intense experiences. This psychic strain manifested in the body, and led to nervous collapse. The cure for neurasthenia was replenishing the nervous energies which had been wholly suspended, and the best way to do this was relaxation, leisure, rest.[227]

The idea that the mind might cause illness (and cure) in the body has an

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[225] The ease of this exchange is the product of an intellectual/spiritual tradition that collapses the distinction between spirit and matter, and is explained in more detail in chapter three.

[226] Lear, 50

[227] see T. J. Jackson Lears. No Place of Grace. 47-58. He considers neurasthenia to be an example of, of course, anti-modern sentiment, a manifestation of anxiety about the rapidly transforming world.

increasingly scientific justification today, but its roots are in the developing science of psychology. White argues that popular understandings of this developing science reimagined their spiritual selves, and the connection between mental and physical health. Nervous energy was not precisely defined; it functioned, then, as both a spiritual and material element, extrapolated from new research on the nervous system. These energies connected mental and physical functions, and were imagined to function in a variety of ways. They were key to New Thought models of mental healing; the nervous energies here were understood to be affected by external forces as well; the energy of the healer could repair the energies of the sick, negative surroundings and perspectives could damage one. Nervous energies were limited, argued George Beard, using a metaphor of electric current, "New functions are interposed in the circuit, as modern civilization is constantly requiring us to do, there comes a period sooner or later … when the amount of force is insufficient to keep all the lamps burning; those that are weakest go out entirely or as more frequently happens, burn faint and feebly… an insufficient and unstable light – this is the philosophy of modern nervousness."[228] Nervous energies were taxed by many of the changes and challenges of urban life, and their depletion led to both mental and physical ailments.[229]

The industrialized city was somewhat less pleasant than the contemporary city, even for middle class citizens. There was no traffic control, for example, no stop-lights, speed limits or crosswalks. Cars were extremely rare; vehicles were

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[228] Beard is quoted in Robert Fuller. *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1982. 4-5

[229] Christopher White. *Unsettled Minds,* 65.

horse-powered, leaving the streets redolent of their various byproducts, as well as dead horses. Too, many cities lacked effective waste management, leaving adjacent rivers foul with trash and sewage. There was little soundproofing or noise regulation, so it was extremely loud (as Farmer suggests in her initial vision). In the summer, many cities were, of course, quite hot, without even the comfort of occasional air conditioning. These unhealthful qualities both caused and compounded nervous ailments – recovering from nervous collapse required leaving the city.[230]

Greenacre always retains the element of restful healing, of leisurely vacation as one of its attractions. A letter to Farmer from one of the lecturers – presumably there for at least some mental exertion -- indicates that the educational aspects did not at all eclipse the restful quality, but rather enhanced it:

> The weeks I spent with you were very pleasant. I had not had a vacation for years and doctors told me I was on the verge of a collapse. The bracing air restored to me the boon of sleep. The restful hours, the river and the woods, the music and the intellectual stimulus brought back vigor of soul and body. Though for some time to come I shall have to husband my strength Greenacre marked the turning point. This alone would cause me to look back with gratitude to my visit.[231]

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[230] Peter Schmitt. *Back to Nature*, 37.
[231] Excerpt from letter from Prof Schmidt to SJF, quoted in letter to Lewis James (3/24/99)

Nervous collapse results when ones' store of psychic energy is wholly depleted; one spends it on things that provide no reward or enjoyment, that give nothing back. Farmer emphasizes the restorative properties of mental and spiritual stimulation – engagement with positive ideas and information replenishes depleted energies. "Rest through higher development," she explains. William James, occasional Greenacrite and researcher of nervous energies, believed that nervous energies were maintained and maximized through outer practices – exercise, yoga and other physical activity. This sort of discipline strengthens willpower, which helps one to moderate how nervous energy is expended, rather than being a passive victim of modern ills.[232]

The inheritance of the Greenacre Inn is not simply embodied comfort, relaxation, "getting away from it all", and its appeal to aesthetics and simple comforts are not separate or lesser than the headier aspects of mental and spiritual pursuit.[233] Rather, it is a kind of linchpin between them, a place where the cultivation of the self glimpses the cultivation of the world. The mutable nature of nervous energy, its ability to affect others, is one of the foundations of the spirit of Greenacre, a way in which the place itself creates, communicates and holds the community.

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[232] James was not a regular lecturer at Greenacre, but he was a friend of Farmer's and certainly his ideas were quite influential.

[233] The comforts of Greenacre were, to be clear, not luxurious (certainly not for the wealthier set). The accommodations at the Inn, as described above, prized cleanliness and simplicity. Though some few had houses built nearby (Sarah Chapman Bull, for example), or boarded with local families, the bulk of the attendees camped.

Being There: Embodiment and the Greenacre Spirit

Any description of Greenacre in contemporary magazines or newspapers, begins with a salute to its natural beauty – the rolling hills, the gentle, grassy sward sloping down to the shining river, the blue and purple smudges of the White Mountains in the distance. In general, they are not perfunctory, but quite florid, and often serve as a way to position Greenacre as a unique or uniquely spiritual place: "These are the first and visible signs of Greenacre; Greenacre the unique, which in its simplicity, its significance, its magnetism, differs from the usual Summer resorts as the soft luminosity of the Venus of young Spring nights differs from the glare of the midday sun."[234]

Its sunsets were said to be particularly beautiful, and for many an occasion for closeness to the spiritual: "The sunsets …. are an important part of the wealth that Greenacre has to give all who come within the horizon of its generous bounty. If we have ears to hear, the lecture-platform gives intellectual illumination; if we have eyes that can look with the earnestness of childhood, we shall find a spiritual inspiration of greatest value in [the sunset]."[235] Of course, there are beautiful sunsets everywhere, there's no particularity of Eliot that makes a superior sunset. But Ms. Tibbits positions the sunset at Greenacre as rather different after all. It is *Greenacre*, not Nature, that gifts these splendors, and they are, when understood

[234] Churchill, Lida A. "Greenacre: An American Ideal," p 1026. FP B5F8.
[235] Mabel Blidd Tibbits, "The Greenacre Sunsets". *Mind* 56-7

correctly, an equal offering among choice delicacies. More specifically, nature enables a different kind of engagement with the world – whatever ears you have can listen to the lecture but the lessons of nature require one to cultivate a particular attitude and way of looking. To recall the earnestness of childhood is to discard learned and preconceived knowledge about the world, to approach things as novel and wondrous and immediate. Nature, here, is the means of communicating spiritual truths (laboriously uncovered in intellectual work) directly, without mediation.

The prolific lecturer, mystic, and proponent of nature worship C.W. Bjerregaard, offers a similar testimony to the power uniquely present in Greenacre's landscape. He says, "You must not think that I am exaggerating in my description…The Greenacre landscape is the only one, of the thousands I have seen in various parts of the world, that has come near to upsetting my philosophy… that Nature is external mind and that mind is external Nature. [But at Greenacre] it seems to me that all things exist with a nature and characteristics of their own. These things communicate their nature and characteristics to me and I give them nothing. … The first evening I spent at Greenacre, I watched the sun set from "Sunrise Camp"… I did not see *with* my eyes, but *through* my eyes came to my soul the essence of that Golden Ball, and I heard it as 'Glory to God on High' – 'Peace on Earth' – 'Good-will among Men.' … The Great Being, self-luminous and self-reflected, lies upon the surface of everything at Greenacre."[236] Here the experience Tibbets classifies as the purity of childhood is expressed as a kind of bypassing or

[236] Bjerregaard, 108.

annihilation of the Mind or Self. – not as a cultivated way of seeing, but as a one-way communication from a separate and autonomous being. It is the place-ness of Greenacre, of the landscape at Greenacre, that is unlike any other, that enables through its own materiality a new spiritual understanding.

Horatio Dresser also attempts to articulate the particular qualities of Greenacre, lighting more specifically on the attitude there. The people are "sympathetically looking for the good," he explains, "They call out the best that is in one." This atmosphere transforms daily life, and makes it rather more vivid; it has the effect of making the place singular. "…After one has heard Emerson expounded underneath the pines, or listened to the Swami setting forth in his quiet way the venerable doctrines of the Vedanta, one is ready to exclaim that there are no such woods anywhere outside of Greenacre."[237] For Dresser, the power of Greenacre lies in the generous attitude promulgated there; one's own attitude rises to match it, and so changes what might otherwise be mundane into a unique, profound experience.[238]

It is a sentiment echoed in Greenacrite writings, unifying the jumbled diversity of beliefs and affiliations. The stock evocations of the beautiful scenery and glories of nature are in part a way to explain what it feels like to be there; that is, there is some particular alchemy at Greenacre that can only be experienced, and

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[237] Horatio Dresser. *Metaphysics at Greenacre. The Journal of Practical Metaphysics.* Vol II, No 2, November 1897. 56-7.

[238] Dresser, as a proponent of the New Thought, understood correct attitude as a transformative power; he also believed that attitude was habituated, so that a stay at Greenacre would create shifts in attitude and outlook that would then be carried back out into the world.

that transforms the self almost without conscious effort. The "spirit of Greenacre" saturates the place itself, empowering the spiritual through the material. Just *being there* is the catalyst for transformation. "A happy spirit of individual freedom pervades the atmosphere and one is growing better and broader in mind while he sleeps at night." [239] Here, an exchange between the individual and the community is at play. There is often a priority placed on personal transformation, healing, or liberation; this is enabled through the communal experience. There is a symbiosis between the way that Greenacre constructs individual experience as constitutive of community and the way that the material place of Greenacre becomes a transformative spiritual force. The transformative spirit of Greenacre is perhaps in part the collective energy of liberated individuals, but it is generated in embodied experience: the well, rested, vital body is produced by/necessary to spiritual and moral refinement.

As the body grew vigorous and healthy in the sun, and the mind grew accustomed to the wholly new energy of Greenacre, social conventions fell away as useless. Though plenty of men visited Greenacre, it was overwhelmingly attended by women (some arrival lists suggest a ratio of two to one) and women gave a large proportion of lectures. The atmosphere of radical experimentation and relaxed social codes incorporated various degrees of challenge to traditional social hierarchies. Socializing was wholly informal; it remained customary, in American society, to require an introduction on one's behalf, but this was unnecessary at Greenacre. Theoretically this elided class differences – one could chat casually with

[239] F. Edwin Ellwell, "The Soul of Greenacre," *Mind*, 52.

anyone else without mutual acquaintance – and more significantly it fostered a fluidity between formal lectures and later conversation, between invited speakers and their audience. Lydia Lear recalls

> ….. It was particularly easy to meet the speakers at Greenacre – they always seemed so accessible – just a few steps on the grass carpet and you could speak with them as they stepped down from the platform, there were no wings for them to side-step into or no scenery for them to dodge behind – and then they seemed pleased to meet their listeners. ….[240]

Ingersoll observes that this intimacy between speakers and audience gave many opportunities for "the individual to take his problem to the one best fitted to help him, and the personal contact has proved as great a factor in development as any words from the platform." This was one of the subtle ways that Greenacre made lasting, but less visible change in the larger culture; people who would perhaps never had a chance to exchange ideas were able to speak at length, without reservation. Representing a full spectrum of political, social and spiritual interests, Greenacrites (and short-term visitors) were marinating in practices, ideas, teachings mixing and intersecting in unexpected ways. And though this was important for the most famous and influential A-listers, there were also ordinary people, taking this heady mix home to their local communities, maybe teaching co-workers to chant "shivo am" on their lunch break, or sharing some new ideas about child

[240] Letter from Lear to Ford undated but labeled (in later hand?) 1942. FP B1 F75

development with the second grade teacher. The Greenacre spirit trailing them out into the world.

The bodily freedoms made manifest spiritual questions about the nature of divinity and the possible roles of men and women. Victorian thought held that women were innately spiritual, and men were innately desirous; thus some social reformers considered issues such as women suffrage to empower material change through women's innately more spiritual and virtuous leadership. Emma Curtis Hopkins, for example, spoke on the Motherhood of God, as a way of representing feminine power. the focus, at Greenacre, on social reform also took up this understanding of a transformative power in female leadership and leadership styles. Sarah Farmer, in her writing, is very clear that the spiritual ideal is self-sacrificing service, and writes of her plans to make Greenacre a kind of collective, self-sustaining farm that will teach young men and women to "consecrate their lives to service in foreign fields…. Ready to go out and found the City Beautiful in any part of God's world to which they may be called." Alongside this practical collective with global ambition, she envisions a School for Motherhood, where impoverished women can live in "the rest and beauty of the country" and learn "the sanctity and glory of Motherhood" – which is the absolute power to form the character of their unborn children through thought and word. "I want to put pictures of the Madonna and Child upon the wall," she writes, "…and above all to put at its head a great *Mother-Heart* capable of advising and guiding [these mothers]". That is, her priority is equally upon a specifically woman-imparted education, and a specifically non-

gendered spiritual one; an ideal of outward-looking global change requires as well an inward-looking personal change, that is in fact a correction of something mis-understood or never learned – for which there is no masculine counterpart.

One distinction or significance of bodies, then, is the power that bodies actually hold in shaping spiritual transformation, and through the power of the spiritual to transform the material (rather than the material power of the body to labor in the world), to realize the power of a universal Truth. The tension between the individual and the universal as the determination of a universal spiritual value is reflected in Farmer's vision of Greenacre as both outward- and inward- education,

The conflicted relationship with body and mind draws into clearer focus the role of practice, of the individual search for a universal Truth, and of Farmer's emphasis on the Christ-life or Incarnation. The practices at Greenacre often focus on de-emphasizing the self, instead understanding oneself as a manifestation of, and channel for, a divine or universal energy in the world. Farmer's own charismatic power is then an echo of Bah'a's charismatic power – she believes that one may radiate forth the divine, that this ability can be achieved through practices of controlling one's self- or I-hood (in Morton Diaz's words); Bah'a, like Christ, is the moment in which this is made possible.

"A Manifestation Of One Woman's Ideal": Embodiment and Sarah Farmer

Places are often understood to be imbued with sacred qualities. There are perhaps numberless roadside shrines and temples where a saint takes a special

interest, springs created through miraculous means, places special to the gods: the Second Temple, the Mecca, the Ganges River, the Black Hills. The long history of pilgrimage attests to the continuous importance of being in a sacred place, the power of that.

It's difficult, in reading the paeans of Greenacrites, to be sure when they are being sincere and when they are slightly carried away by their own literary prowess and romantic ideals. Sarah Farmer (not to mention her fellows) talked about Greenacre in ways that can seem quite different (though generally *spatial*). But wherever they had arrived, spiritually, most had come along the same path and so had a shared conception of the relation between material and spiritual, this world and the other world—such that Greenacre becomes, in some sense the a new holy land.

Catherine Albanese identifies this "particularly American religious mentality" as metaphysical religion, and suggests four themes present (to varying degrees); these will help elucidate Farmer's thought. Albanese first suggests a preoccupation with the mind and its power – not, that is, the brain alone, but "consciousness and all that derives from and returns to it – with emphasis ever on the mental awareness by which humans interact creatively with their environments." The power of the mind – at least, during this period – included capacities like clairvoyance, healing powers, and other phenomena we categorize as psychic.

Albanese's second theme is a predisposition to understand a correspondence between worlds, specifically a macrocosmic world of divinity and a microcosmic world of humanity and often particularly "nature". Both worlds, the smaller

modeled on the large, are made of the same "stuff', and one can identify symmetries, relations, or even ways to access aspects of divine power. The latter anticipates the importance of motion and energy – "action must move through all the spheres or the apparent fact of motion can be neither explained nor intuited."[241] Further, and particularly for the optimistic Greenacrites, motion/action is always seeking to correct, to restore, to reconcile lost things with their true nature.

> "Hence, and fourth, American metaphysics formed in the midst of a yearning for salvation understood as solace, comfort, therapy, and healing. …Sin and loss were graphically reordered and re-understood in social, cultural, and somatic terms. Sin meant the absence of loved ones… signified the body in pain instead of pleasure. …Metaphysics might be about what lay beyond the physical, but it was never totally abstract or theoretical… being aligned with the spirit (the goal) meant standing in the free flow of spirit energy. *This energy would heal and restore, bring correspondence with the macrocosm back again, and end the sin of separation that had been inscribed on bodies, minds, and the physical terrain*."[242] (emph. mine)

Though metaphysical religion can be quite esoteric, for Farmer in particular and more generally Greenacre, it is turned to pragmatic purpose; the stuff of the spirit, the stuff beyond material reality, becomes often quite material. One of the ways that this is most apparent is to consider Farmer's conceptions of the place or space of Greenacre through her connection to New Thought. Until she converted to

[241] Albanese. Republic. 14
[242] ibid, 15.

Baha'i it was her most significant religious commitment, alongside Christianity (though she would not have separated the two). Horatio Dresser wrote of her: "Miss Farmer approached the New Thought on its spiritual side. To her it was the same as Christianity at its best, also the same as the spirit which she found expressed by the Swamis who came from India to expound the Vedanta philosophy."[243]

Farmer consistently understands Greenacre as a material place from which her "movement" emanates throughout the world. That is, the spirit of unity and common ground inspired by the WPR is not an intellectual exercise; the practice of cooperation and understanding instead serve to build a spiritual power that emanates into the world as both (wholly metaphysical) Breath and as a material culture of satellite communities. "There are indications… that Greenacre is a vital center of spiritual force and may become a radiating point from which a vast regenerating influence may go forth."[244]

The aspect of Farmer's belief I want to focus on here is the idea that one could manifest ideals, such that the Kingdom of God is a practical place, and Greenacre's position in relation to this. The WPR called for a common ground – by which it meant, acknowledging that all humans are brothers and sisters, and thus describing a set of ethics (general, of necessity) common to all peoples and places. Primarily, perhaps, it succeeded less in finding a common ground than gathering all these religious figures together, in suggesting a conversation was possible. Farmer sought to create (reveal) a common ground – to build a space for it in this world,

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[243] Dresser. *A History of the New Thought*. 179
[244] Myron Phelps. Green Acre. *The Word*, 61

and to send it out to all people. This happens on multiple levels, in multiple ways – material and spiritual.

She refers to the *spatial* development of Greenacre particularly in "The Greenacre Ideal", describing her future plans. First, build infrastructure to house students and a farm to feed them. Second, staff the school with "representatives of the great faiths", those who have "risen above all temptations of the lower self", and "have consecrated their lives to the needs of the world." Third, provide an education in the language, literature, history, and purest ideals of the world's people, and an education in the conquest of Self. Fourth, a school instructing students to administer money, build cities, and adjudicate disagreements. Fifth, schools for children to develop each individual best for service. Sixth, a school for mothers. There are a lot of schools, a huge infrastructure that moves out into the world through individuals who can replicate it elsewhere (though it is apparent that it is, initially, in Eliot, an extension of the current grounds).

Though ultimately it is an enormous project, Farmer begins in specificity – free Greenacre from its obligations, cultivate the land and care for the animals that work on the land, build roads – and ends in specificity as well, the school for unwed mothers has "pictures of the Madonna and Child upon the wall, …music [in] the household". It's an Ideal, as the title indicates, but it is intended to be in the physical world, it is the culmination of what she understands Greenacre to be.[245] That is, it is already begun, it exists already in the world, it is underway. Greenacre is already teaching individuals and sending them into the world to teach others – it is a

[245] Farmer, *The Greenacre Ideal* (Pamphlet) FP B4 F5

question only of scale and perhaps thoroughness. She is demonstrating on a small scale, that the kingdom of God is practical, she is showing "its practicability and its fitness to every condition of life."[246]

Farmer also presents Greenacre as a spiritual building, an edifice built through contributions from all who come to share their vision.

> The foundation of our work here is constructiveness. … What [each speaker] brings we take and build on to what we have already constructed as a bulwark of our faith in the good or as a superstructure of a higher ideal.
>
> But we do not tolerate here the man who seeks only to tear down. … I have had some eminent men propose to come here and display their iconoclasm but I have had to ask them to stay away until they could come in the constructive mood to bring us something as building material—not a battering ram. And I must tell you that some of them have come here and have been conquered by the Greenacre spirit. [247]

Farmer seldom breaks from total optimism in Greenacre's work, and does not refer to any agent or force delaying or thwarting the spread of Truth. Here, however, she describes the only type barred from Greenacre – the iconoclast, who only destroys. They are individuals, but perhaps capable of great damage --- a "bulwark" is a defensive wall. That is, it implies a refusal to engage with doubt, but suggests that it might exist, and Greenacre might be vulnerable. It is not the material manifestation of Greenacre that is vulnerable, but the spiritual. New Thought teaches that one's

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[246] Bjerregard, 69.
[247] Lewiston Sunday Journal, "Greenacre's Mystic Charm", 8/12/99.

mental attitude creates one's physical circumstance; it also teaches the principle of attraction, in which good attracts good, while bad attracts bad. Too, right thinking is the means of understanding Truth and accessing the power of the mind.[248] Thus the mind or spirit is far more important than the physical body, which, if not wholly illusory, is constructed by thought. The mind is vulnerable, as well, to "thought transference", which can be involuntary. Though this is often how healing is effected, it also suggests that a particularly negative thought or ideology might appear in one's mind and from there, destroy one's outer world. Thus iconoclasm, which is only about tearing down, cannot have any place at Greenacre. The architectural language points toward the collaborative nature of Greenacre, but also toward the porous distinction between thought and matter – as the superstructure of the Ideal grows, so does the Ideal manifest in the world.

She told me she was [a] "builder of ideals," (sic) Jane Stewart recalled in her autobiography.[249]

Farmer refers very frequently to the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God, not as a future place or an inaccessible place, but as a present and immediate place. She suggests that Greenacre is a practical illustration of the kingdom of God in 1897; the following year she describes the City Beautiful (founded by Greenacre's Ideal students) as "a visible illustration of the kingdom of God."[250] In 1899 she emphasizes its worldly and present qualities: "The purpose of Greenacre is…to demonstrate that it is possible to live in the kingdom of heaven *now*. …[E]ven from a

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[248] Dresser. *History of New Thought*. 161-2
[249] Stewart. *I have Recalled: A Pen Panorama of a Life*, 85
[250] Bjerregaard, 69; *Green Acre Ideal*, 3

business standpoint alone the kingdom of God is the practical method of so administering *the* affairs of life that each may fulfill the purpose of his being."[251] She writes to Lewis Janes in 1901: "The one aim of all the work at Green Acre has been the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth..."[252] In her essay on New Thought, she writes:

> "'Repent, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,' was the warning cry of one in the wilderness. It had been to him a wilderness – he had found it the kingdom of heaven; and his warning cry, 'Repent!' means (literally translated) 'change your thinking!' You think life is a vale of tears, where only misery and trouble reign; change your thinking and you will know it to be the kingdom of heaven, where love, peace, and joy abound. This is what the phrase *New Thought* means. It is simply putting ourselves in new relation to the world about us by changing our thought concerning it."

Later she says that the world is waiting "for the manifestation of the Sons of God – waiting for you and me to turn from seeking after the things of the self and to give ourselves in gladness of heart, first to realizing within ourselves the fruits of the abundant Life, and then to bestowing it upon others by simply *being*."[253]

Here is the ultimate reason for being there, for the effortless transformation brought about just by sleeping or looking at the sunset at Greenacre. It also speaks to the nature of Farmer's power or ability to hold so many elements in harmony.

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[251] Farmer. "The Purpose of Greenacre". *Mind.* Vol 5 No 1, October 1899, 8.
[252] SJF to Janes Apr 25 1901, FP B2 F32
[253] Farmer. The Abundant Life. 33

The place of Greenacre, the person of Farmer (more accurately, her soul or heart), manifest the power of God in the world. Everyone, Farmer says, has the kingdom of God in her soul or heart; in finding it, she finds harmony and peace. Through right living and practice, that harmony and peace, the kingdom of God, becomes manifest in the world. For Farmer, this requires the sublimation of self, the elimination of selfish desire, the wholehearted consecration of oneself to a life of service.

She explains, "We give unto others only that which Emerson says we cannot give – that which emanates from us. To speak the word that shall impart the abundant Life we must consciously *be* that Life."[254] That is, on one level all of the knowledge shared at Greenacre is important, constructing this edifice of universal truth is important, but on another level – the level that transforms the weak, ill body and spirit, that makes the landscape more beautiful than any other – the important thing is being in the presence of this manifestation of God embodied in Farmer and in the place she created; the real transformation comes from her demonstration, from her *being*. As an embodied thinker, she communicated through her body, through a cultivation of sense, place, experience, and presence to create a new conversation.

[254] Farmer. The Abundant Life, 33.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Universal Controversial: Gender, Power, and Self

Overwrought and quite ill, Farmer arranged to sail from New York aboard the SS *Fürst Bismarck* on January 1, 1900, for Egypt and a cruise on the Nile. She and her close friend, Maria P. Wilson met two other friends on board who traveling from Egypt, in secret, to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Ottoman penal colony of Acca -- Sarah Farmer cabled ahead for permission to join them.

According to Bahiyya Ford's hagio-biography, the four women spent several weeks in Egypt, awaiting a meeting with Bah'a. They traveled on the Nile, gazed at the pyramids, rode donkeys through the desert in the moonlight. Farmer was entranced by the "romance of this ancient land". They had arrived in mid-January; by March 23, they were climbing into a carriage for the final, nine-mile leg of the journey.

> The high walls [surrounding the city] looked forbidding, and…the stench and confusion of the narrow street were appalling. They rounded a corner or two and entered a small courtyard… there they forgot all but the figure standing…at the top of a long flight of outside stairs – 'Abdu'l-Bah'a! [Farmer]… gazed into a face of such nobility of character that she knew she was meeting, for the first time in her life, a man of true spiritual distinction. …

In her diary that night she wrote this one sentence, "Heart too full for speech – received by our Lord."[255]

'Abdu'l-Bah'a: Meeting the Master

Farmer told, many times, the story of her first meeting with Bah'a (one of the missionizing forms in early American Baha'i was talking about one's own experience). She carefully wrote down all of her questions she had for him, and set the paper in her Bible. In the early morning rush to leave, the sheet of paper was forgotten, but Bah'a's first words were to reassure her (through an interpreter): "tell Miss Farmer that this is the answer to her first question. She will understand." One by one, Bah'a answered each of the questions she had written down. "It was not merely that he knew the words inscribed but that he lifted their burden from her soul, and all her being was stirred… Such instances might be multiplied, for this heavenly gift of breaking the bonds of the flesh in those who come to him is experienced by many guests of 'Abdu'l-Bah'a. It is the wakening which for the first time gives true life,… this awakening is the most precious result of contact with the Servant of God."[256]

At this time, Baha'i was still forming, with its prophet and ancillary leadership exiled and imprisoned; Baha'i communities throughout the Middle East were subject to pogrom-style mass executions, regarded as an heretical movement aiming to reform Islam. Though it is sometimes, in American press, contextualized in

[255] Ford, 13. In fact, she wrote several sentences. The full entry reads: "Acre / Drive by shore to island of Jean d'Arc – Heart too full for speech – Holy Family – Received by our Lord – Abbas Effendi" (Abbas Effendi is the family name of Abdul Bah'a)
[256] Mary Hannaford Ford. *The Oriental Rose*. 178

its relationship to Islam, the beliefs and practice of the newly converted American Baha'i have very little relationship to Islam, or to present day Baha'i. Many (though not all) converts had visited Bahá in person, and most conversion stories revolved around the compelling experience of the charismatic leader. Often Bahá knows something secret, as the forgotten questions; he also was said to have the power to heal the physical body (Bahá himself did not ever say this), as well as wakening of the soul or spirit, as Ford describes.[257] Though Bahá and Bahá'u'lláh both wrote copiously, little or none was translated out of Persian in 1900 – some converts did remain in Acca to acquire the language – excepting his letters to his American followers.

Early American Baha'i tended to focus narrowly on the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Farmer and her fellow converts knew, in many cases, very little Baha'i theology or practice, nor did Bahá emphasize it. Rather, the transformative experience , the conversion experience, was often meeting Bahá in person, and the feeling of being in his presence, his powerful ability to articulate each individual's spiritual desires and needs. The returning pilgrims regarded Bahá as the promised Messiah, the returned Christ. Phoebe Hearst wrote to a friend "Those three days were the most memorable days of my life… The Master I will not attempt to describe. I will only state that I believe with all my heart that he is the Master, and my greatest blessing has been to look upon His sanctified face… Without a doubt Abbas Effendi [eg 'Abdu'l- Bahá] is the Messiah of this day and generation, and we

[257] Mary Hannaford Ford, 173-4, in which he cures a woman of typhoid.

need not look for another."[258] The Revelation was through the presence and the body of 'Abdu'l- Bahá, a new Messiah born into the world to deliver God's message to the present age.

Baha'i, in its newness, recalls Dresser's reading of New Thought as a return to the healing ministry of Christ in order to shake off the accretion of flawed interpretation, belief, and practice. Farmer and others believed that history was a progression of divinely inspired prophets teaching the Truth for each generation, rather than a singular moment of divine intercession, as Christ is sometimes understood. It wasn't unimaginable that another prophet might appear; as Hearst indicates, Bahá was this figure. Bahá did not, himself, claim to be a messiah or Christ-analogue; rather, he was the perfect example of the teachings of God revealed through his father Bahá'u'lláh – he demonstrated the teachings through his life, his actions. It is a subtle distinction, and Bahá for his own reasons did not always clarify in personal meetings or Tablets (personal letters).[259]

For Farmer, the experience of meeting Bahá was an immediate religious conversion, and she remained devoted to his person. When teaching or speaking about Baha'i, her central topic was the three days spent in Acca, with "our Dear Lord". Her experience of Baha'i was incredibly personal, a mystic connection with 'Abdu'l- Bahá. She writes of Bahá, "Once we were permitted to look into eyes which answered, for us, once for all, the question – 'thou that are of purer eyes than to behold evil…wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest

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[258] Letter from Phoebe Hearst to Isaiah D. Bradford, dated Nov. 19, 1899, Quoted by Martin, 188.
[259] See

thy peace when the wicked swalloweth up the [righteous] man…' Those eyes were like deep wells of consciousness; through that 'unveiled face reflecting, as mirror, the glory of the Lord', we saw how we too must be transformed."[260] That is, his person is the location of revelation, he reflects the glory of God from his own body. Thus Baha'i, for Farmer, is powerful because it teaches that Bah'a (and Bahá'u'lláh) are offering again the moment when the Truth is revealed afresh and unencumbered through an embodied manifestation of the divine. Though this does not invalidate the Truth already out there, it does recontextualize it. "[It] is not that it reveals one of the streams flowing to the great Ocean of Life, Light and Love," she writes, "but that it is a perfect mirror of that Ocean. What in Greenacre was a vision and a hope becomes through it a blessed reality now."[261]

Rivalries and Struggles

When Farmer returned to Greenacre for the 1901 season she was filled with this new purpose. The dispute with Janes over the fate of Monsalvat had not yet been resolved, and seemed fated to play itself out. In his reporting at the opening of the season in July, Sanborn refers to a "slight dissention existing among the friends of the Greenacre lectures," and a "kind of rivalry between the free lectures carried on by Miss Farmer, and those requiring an admission fee, managed by Dr. Janes."[262] By August the slight dissention led to literal divisions in the community,

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[260] "Greenacre", *Country Time & Tide*, 186. Nb: the question is from Habbakkuk 1:13-4. The passage from 2 Corinthians suggests that looking upon the divine (here, Bahá) changes one.
[261] SJF to Dresser., 1902, FP Box1F49
[262] Cameron, 224 (61)

"symbolized by two tents, one overlooking the other, in which audiences somewhat different have gathered,"[263] Sanborn acknowledges, "and between them has been either armed neutrality or suppressed conflict."[264] The season's discord was certainly a result of the open split between Farmer and Janes; even before the season began and Janes removed Monsalvat from Greenacre's grounds, he and Farmer had sent out competing programs for the coming months. Even the most casual Greenacrite could not fail to notice something amiss. Sanborn suggests, too, that the introduction of Baha'i – "the new religion of Behaullah, or whatever it may be which the Persian and Syrian heretics call their reformed Mohammedanism" – was poorly received and exacerbated the discord.[265] Indeed, by the end of September, he expressed doubts that Greenacre could continue. "The divisions of this summer, increased as they have been by injudicious gossip, have alienated many who have hitherto taken pleasure in this peculiar effort to make the world better, and the novelty of the movement has rather worn off."[266]

However, Janes' untimely death before the end of the summer left his school with no (vocal) defenders, and it was brought back into Greenacre's fold. While the Baha'i remained outsiders, and generally were regarded with suspicion, they came in numbers great enough to reinvigorate the 1902 season. Sanborn notes that "peace reigns in the region which was last year distracted by jealousies," and that the conference has been unusually successful thus far.[267] Naturally Sanborn is not a

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[263] Cameron 229.
[264] Cameron 229.
[265] Cameron 229.
[266] Cameron 230.
[267] Cameron 231.

disinterested observer of Greenacre's fate. Inasmuch as maintaining Emerson's memory and legacy is his life's work, at Greenacre he (and Charles Molloy) have developed a very nearly ritual worship of the philosopher. There is an annual celebration of Emerson Day, reunions and reminiscences of the remaining members of the Concord School, endless anecdotes and analysis. But more significantly, Emerson's central position at Greenacre – and in New Thought – has given him prominence in the larger discourse of universal religion, and in the American interpretation of world religions. He claimed – not wrongly – that continuing the Concord School of Philosophy was as much a model and motivation in Greenacre's founding as the WPR, and asserted that nearly all of the foreign thinkers who were attracted to Greenacre were "either readers of Emerson, or eager to read him. …[His philosophy] pervades the atmosphere of Greenacre, and is heard in the teachings of the Persian Mirzas and the Indian Swamis, whatever else they may teach."[268] His position is illustrative of the kind of stakes many people had in Greenacre; it was a powerful platform that had a certain kind of global reach (alongside access to influential people in every type of progressive reform movement). The Baha'i, with their dedication to the singular figure of Bahá, and to the belief that Baha'i actually was the universal religion, seemed incompatible to other agendas. How could 'Abdu'l- Bahá read Emerson, when he did not even read in English?

Greenacre was, once again, united under Farmer's vision. But what did "united" mean, now? Farmer believed that Baha'i was the message that organized,

[268] Cameron 238 (79); 168 (47)

unified, and clarified the Truth she – that Greenacre -- had been searching for. In the 1901 program, she effusively declared:

> The motive [of the Greenacre assembly] was to find the Truth, the Reality, underlying all religious forms, and to make points of contact in order to promote the unity necessary for ushering in the Day of God.
>
> Believing that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, of Persia -- is the announcement of this great Day, -- the beginning of the Golden Age prophesied by all seers ,and sung by poets – and finding that it provides a platform on which the Jew, the Christian, --- the Mohammedan, as well as members of all other great religious bodies can stand together in love and harmony, each holding the form which best nourishes his individual life, Miss Farmer feels that her previous work has been but the preparation for the greatest of all joys – the giving of the message of Unity to all who are willing and ready to receive it, and who ask for it.
>
> As in previous years, there will be no sectarianism at Greenacre. The effort will be to inspire and strengthen each to follow his highest light in order that by degrees he may know Truth for himself from the invisible guiding of the Eternal Spirit.[269]

However, it became clear that not everyone felt that Baha'i was, in fact, a platform upon which all could stand. Many Greenacrites criticized her seeming abandonment of the prohibition against sectarianism, and attacked the beliefs

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[269] 1901 Program

themselves.[270] Farmer quickly moved to restore peace, attempting to separate classes and lectures on Baha'i, and contextualizing her belief. She writes, "[Baha'i] is a revelation of Unity such as I have never before found… I have entered into a joy greater than any I have hitherto known. Greenacre was established as a means to that end, and in proportion as we lay aside all spirit of criticism of others and seek only to live the unity we find, shall we be able to help others to the same divine realization."[271]

For five years after, Farmer kept Greenacre in a harmonious balance. She brought on a new Director for Monsalvat, Myron Phelps, who had traveled extensively and maintained relationships throughout Europe and Asia, ensuring a new pool of international lecturers. Several wealthy benefactors (including Frederick Ginn) repaired buildings, paid back-taxes and settled other financial debts.[272] The Greenacre Fellowship – long resisted by Farmer as an instrument of commercialism in corollary to charging for Greenacre's curriculum – was established in 1902, with a membership of two hundred, and a board of trustees, three selected by Farmer and two by the members.[273]

But Farmer was troubled by doubts, even as she kept a watchful peace. Only Bahá's half of their correspondence survives, but she is afraid that Greenacre is failing in its mission, she does not understand why Baha'i is not becoming popular.

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[270] Cameron, 249.
[271] Farmer to Dresser March 14 1902. FP B1 F49
[272] Farmer to Helen Cole August 9, 1903. FP B1 F2.
[273] "The Greenacre Fellowship: Charter and By-Laws", State of ME, Chapter 55, Revised Statutes, August 29, 1902. FP B2 F48.

Has she entirely failed in her life's work?[274] Greenacre returned to a more-or-less even keel, better prepared to deal with unexpected events and crises. Though the Baha'i were not fully accepted or trusted, Farmer used the force of her personality to prevent conflict.

The Frailty of the Body

It was clear, however, that Farmer was not well.

Farmer's life and work are deeply shaded by illness – the frailty of the physical – combatted by strength of will or the power of mind. Her youth and early adulthood were shaped by her mother's chronic illness and depression, as well as her father's progressive paralysis. She too has periodic health crises that often seem to be the catalyst for dramatic change: her childhood illness in which her parents consecrated her to God, her collapse after moving from Newport to Eliot, another precipitated the voyage which took her to Acca and 'Abdu'l- Bahá. One friend recalls the enormous bed in Farmer's room, covered in papers, correspondence, bills, books and periodicals, in which she worked assiduously when she was too ill to sit or stand. [275] She was generally understood to be subject to nervous exhaustion, others often speak of Farmer's health as a selfless sacrifice: she gave her fortune and her health to Greenacre and its work.[276] Greenacre's emphasis on curative rest and restoration give this narrative of sacrifice a dual meaning; a sacrifice for her ideals, but also for *you*, so that you might have health.

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[274] July 1 1908, FP B5
[275] Memoir Louise D. Bosch FP B2 F59
[276] See for example Cameron, 247.

After contracting a severe fever in late 1900, Farmer's health clearly became worse. Though she was present at Greenacre during the summers, she spent the winters convalescing. Then a series of calamities struck. In February of 1904, her family home, Bittersweet, was utterly destroyed by fire. An entire life of letters, records of Greenacre, her father's papers, her mother's papers were destroyed; worse, her last financial security – her home – was gone. She wrote in her diary "It is the Lord; let Him do as seemeth to him good", but she was now wholly dependent on the kindness of friends.[277] Though she organized the 1904 and 1905 seasons, by 1906 she was able to work for only an hour or two a day. The 1906 season, organized by the Fellowship, was unsuccessful – they lacked the experience and the contacts to continue at Famer's standards. In an effort to recover the 1907 season, she began her customary travels to plan and organize for the following summer. She was in Boston in March 1907, attempting to board a crowded trolley, when she was thrown violently to the ground, injuring her spine. She was confined to a sanitarium to recover, but was left permanently incapacitated.[278]

Farmer returned to Eliot; though her home had been destroyed, friends insisted upon building a replacement for her (she did not want it, and initially refused to live there after its completion). By all accounts, this was the end of Farmer's public life, with the exception of a short visit with 'Abdu'l- Bahá during his American tour in 1916. Her remaining years are a morass of competing legends and accusations, as the fate of Greenacre is angrily contested. According to the records at

[277] Entry Feb 28 1904. FP B4 B2
[278] Described in SJF's letter to her attorney, Clarence Hight, dated March 30, 1907 and his to her on April 30 1909 B2F42

Sara Chapman Bull's estate trial, Farmer began to follow her friend's ascetic regimen, purportedly based in Vedantic practices. According to court transcripts, these practices included lengthy fasts, all-night "vigils", Yogic exercises, herbal concoctions of uncertain composition, and other, presumably exaggerated, horrors. This did her little good (Olea Bull argued it killed her mother). Sanborn writes angrily that she was hidden away and denied medical care that might have saved her sanity. Various sources declare that she became mad, wandering through the forest barefoot, with bleeding feet, talking to herself and, at the sight of another, slipping away into the branches.[279]

Destitute, ill, mad, homeless, Farmer was placed under guardianship – a position which permitted the guardian to make medical decisions, and brings the estate of the ward into their possession.[280] She was installed by Sara Chapman Bull, under great secrecy, in an asylum in Waverly MA, in July 1910. However, Sara Chapman Bull's death in 1911 was a widely publicized spectacle (both in America and in Norway, where her husband had been, and remained, a wildly popular musician) as her daughter Olea contested her mother's estate, which she had left to

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[279] "Miss Farmer After Weird Adventurous Life", *Boston American*, August 10, 1913. FP B5 F27

[280] Though Farmer is often, in this period, said to have no money; she has, according to Sanborn, she has "a property appraised at $9,474, and from my knowledge of it worth probably $12,000." She also had a controlling vote in the Fellowship, and though the Inn had been sold, a lifetime lease of it. Sanborn lists her assets, and those shared with the Fellowship. The Fellowship possessed 12 acres of land (which he estimated as worth about $5000) and around $17,000 in assets bequeathed by Helen Cole. The Inn and its surrounding 10 acres was owned by Mr. Hooe, but reserved for Greenacre's use, with the Fellowship maintaining the buildings and paying taxes. Farmer seems to have owned some of the buildings, and some land adjacent to the Lysekloster Pines, the property referenced above. See Cameron, 250, also Sanborn, "On Behalf of Miss Farmer", 2, B6 F3

the Vedanta Society. Sherman Whipple, Olea's lawyer, argued that Chapman Bull had been mentally incompetent, invalidating her will, because Hinduism had driven her insane. "One of the strangest cases in the history of will contests in this country," declared the New York Times, as Whipple called an increasingly eccentric list of witnesses to describe Chapman Bull's erratic behavior in the years before her death. Her cooks and maids described fits of delusion, "upsetting furniture and screeching loudly for help from imaginary dangers," and her belief that enemies were exerting "malignant psychic powers," sending "killing thoughts over the telephone." She practiced astrology, and communed with the spirits of the dead (the exact beliefs which she had criticized Sarah Farmer for years earlier). She took strange medicines, and believed a spiritual person could live on grain alone. She coated all of the furniture in a tincture of olive oil and ammonia to dispel the killing thoughts sent by her enemies, meditated before an altar covered in images of Vivekananda, and burned incense. In testimony so scandalous it was given in closed court, and the transcript sealed by the judge, one Nicola Roberto described Chapman Bull as a practitioner of bhakti yoga. This was the culmination of the Raja Yoga Vivekananda taught, he said, where one attained "super-consciousness through love," a state he described as "the acme of love." His description of the "delights of the love stage" made clear that this love was not purely of the spirit.

This descent into lustful madness, Sherman Whipple argued, was no side effect of age and diet, but a consequence of yoga. "The mystic ritual of the 'Raja Yoga' cult brought not only shattered health and loss of reason, but death to members of the band of yogis and students who executed the psychic gymnastics in the home of

Mrs. Bull," led by sinister Hindu swamis as a means of obtaining the money and estates of wealthy and vulnerable women like Sarah Chapman Bull. He pointed to a second example of this terrible conspiracy – Sarah Farmer. She, too, had been driven insane by Vedanta: "sent to an asylum because of psychic overindulgence" in "psychic orgies."[281] In the end, the case was settled in favor of Olea Bull, delivering a verdict on the Vedanta Society as well.

The anti-Hindu sentiments that animated Chapman Bull's case were amplified in the papers that covered it, but the trial was a visible scandal in a larger trend. The nationalism that moved through Europe in advance of World War I worked on America as well. The Asian Exclusion League was founded in 1905; though they were particularly opposed to Chinese and Japanese immigration, they spared a thought for Hindus as well, complaining of the "undesirability of Hindoos, their lack of cleanliness, disregard of sanitary laws, petty pilfering, especially of chickens, and insolence to women." A 1907 riot in Bellingham, WA targeted a Hindu community working in the lumber industry, when 400-500 white men descended upon the workers' housing, violently forcing the entire community to flee the town – similar events echoed along the coast of Washington and British Columbia in subsequent months. Eventually, Congress would restrict immigration from "barred zones" including South and Southeast Asia in 1917, and by 1920 the National Origins Act closed immigration from nearly all of Asia entirely. Stephen Prothero

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[281] "Says Psychic Plot Swayed Mrs. Bull," New York Times, May 23,1911, 1. "Spirits Urges $25,000 Gift, Said Mrs. Bull," Boston Herald, June 15, 1911, 1. "Mrs. Bull Was Insane, Says Yogi Ruberto," Boston Herald, May 25, 1911, 1. "Tells Rites Observed in Bull House," Boston Post, May 24, 1911, 1. "Says Psychic Love Plot Swayed Mrs. Bull," New York Times, May 23, 1911. "Hindu Love Lord in Bull Will Case," New York Times, May 24, 1911, 2.

points out that anti-Asian rhetoric aimed primarily at the larger Chinese and Japanese communities on the West Coast, but specifically anti-Hindu discrimination posed a special circumstance. Racial categories were particularly meaningful in maintaining legal segregation, and distinguished Hindus – that is, immigrants from India – as Caucasian, while Chinese and Japanese immigrants were not. This meant that anti-Indian arguments emphasized religion as the distinguishing category, not race.[282]

Anti-Hindu immigration agitation of the Asian Exclusion League sort tended to be a phenomenon of the West Coast, which had large communities of working-class immigrants; the anxieties represented in Sara Chapman Bull's – and Sarah Farmer's -- cases were centered on the vulnerability of wealthy white women to the particular lures and promises of the East. Carrie Tirado Bramen argues that Vivekananda – who appealed in large part to highly educated, independent, upper class women – worked within a discourse of sexuality that contrasted celibacy as a demonstration of self-mastery and control, with an embodied sensuality or eroticism (his "dark, dreamy eyes", "fine physical presence", his "fine, intelligent, mobile face in its setting of yellows, and his deep, musical voice prepossessing one at once in his favor")[283] He is surrounded by adoring, unattached women, but as a Western masculinity succumbs to temptation and desire, his undesire represents a superior control of body through spiritual mastery.[284]

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[282] Stephen Prothero, "Hinduphobia and Hinduphilia in U.S. Culture," *The Stranger's Religion*, 25.
[283] *New York Critic*, Oct 17, 1893; *Lawrence American and Andover Advertiser*, May 18,1894;
[284] Bramen, "Christian Maidens and Heathen Monks", 203-5.

This would have particularly resonated with the New Thought discourse of gender and desire described by Beryl Satter. Here, female power is cast as a moral and spiritual strength that contrasts with male rationality and desire; authors like Ursula Gestefeld and Helen Van-Anderson (both regular lecturers at Greenacre) understood the female ability to control desire as a means of transcending the cruelty and pain caused by weak men in heterosexual marriage, in a society that had few or no alternatives for middle-class women. Vivekananda embodied a masculinity that also was able to transcend desire, to meet women at their potential for a wholly spiritual love.[285]

The anti-Hindu anxieties cohering around Farmer and Chapman Bull react to this very construction of desirelessness by positioning desire as something that cannot be overcome. Mabel Potter Daggett's 1911 article uses both Farmer and Chapman Bull as examples in her condemnation of Eastern mysticism. "Eve is eating the apple again," it begins. The apple: the desire for mastery of the laws of nature through occult knowledge. Daggett argues that the spirit of tolerance offered at the Parliament and continued at Greenacre as universal truth was exploited by unscrupulous Eastern mystics. What they offer seems beautiful, says Daggett, and harmless, but the greater menace comes as one reaches the inner circles and learns new mysteries. "The descent from Christianity to Heathenism is by such easy stages that the novice scarcely realizes she is being led." These horrible truths are several. The Divine Mother seems to recognize a feminine divinity in keeping with the ideals of the West, and resonates with the kind of female power the New Thought women

[285] Satter, 115-126.

describe. Yet, who is she really? The hideous Kali "represent[s] the power and influence of women – "the divinity of carnage and slaughter" on the one hand and the "unmentionable orgies" on the other – who actually tramples to death her own husband. In fact, Daggett continues, the real God here is the Guru, a man. Look at the women clasping the hem of Vivekananda's robe and kissing his sandals. Look at him walking through Greenacre surrounded by women shading him with an umbrella, fanning him with a palm leaf. "It was American women who did this!"

Look too, says Daggett, at the condition of Indian women, "the most degraded of anywhere in the world… Literally less than a cow is the woman in India. For a cow is held sacred." "What has your religion done for women?" is the question no Swami or mystic, however poised, can answer. "And the soft-speaking priest from the land of the serpent who lures the Western woman with his wiles, holds her also in like contempt. What did Swami Vivekananda, returning to his native land, tell of his fair American proselytes? The missionaries say that he boastfully spread the impression that they were even as the nautch girls of India." she concludes.

The article uses familiar tropes about desire and its consequences – Eve, the serpent – to demonstrate the naivety of these American women, who think they are like Goddesses, but instead are like whores. The idea of spiritual gain is wrongheaded to begin with – power over natural law is really only a desire for eternal youth and beauty – and the ideals of selflessness or desirelessness are really lies, meant to lead only to degradation. Daggett frames the entire project, from the Parliament of World Religions on, as guileless and misguided. The ancient wisdom of the Vedas is revealed to be nothing of the spirit, but rather bodies in their

grotesquery – the greed of the Guru, the abasement of the American women, the degradation of the Indian women – Daggett, despite reference to the Christian trope of Eden, is not concerned with religious error, but bodily reality.[286]

In a way, Farmer's story does end in a disillusioned bodily reality. As her mind and body fail, she becomes reducible to (as Daggett describes her), "a New England spinster… the study of many religions unbalanced her mind and she has been for several years an inmate of an insane asylum."[287]

What is Greenacre?

As a result of the publicity surrounding Sara Chapman Bull's death, Farmer's residence in the Waverly, MA asylum was revealed. Now under the guardianship of Edwin Ginn, an old friend, she was moved, in July of 1911, to a private facility in Portsmouth, under the care of an up-and-coming young psychiatrist Edward Cowles. Possibly Cowles was a crazed prison warden, keeping Farmer isolated and drugged. Her cousins claimed that they had been denied any opportunity to see Farmer, though "the followers of the school of philosophy at Greenacre were allowed to see her at any time" and complained that letters to her guardian Ginn went unanswered. Others claimed that when she arrived, Cowles "place[d] her in a padded cell."[288]

Possibly Cowles' care was, as Sanborn and many other old-time Greenacrites believed, a large factor in Farmer's eventual recovery. Beneficial, too, was her removal from the stresses of Greenacre. For, Sanborn argues, the Baha'i were not

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[286] Daggett, "The Heathen Invasion," *Hampton-Columbian Magazine*, Vol.17 No. 4, October 1911, 399-411.
[287] Ibid, 402.
[288] "Appointed Guardian" *The Portsmouth Herald*, December 19, 1912

friends of Farmer. He was shocked to see her nowhere mentioned in the 1912 program, and declared that they were not managing Greenacre as she would wish. He accused them of being "ignorant of the nature of her malady, which was a common form of insanity, and it had been hastened into its worst stages by neglect" despite warnings from her physician and friends.[289] Thanks to Cowles' intercession, Farmer, Sanborn argued, was now perfectly sane, and capable of managing her own estate and affairs.

Sanborn went on to accuse "residents in Maine" of creating a fictitious guardianship over Farmer (her guardian, Ginn, whom she apparently chose herself, was appointed in New Hampshire), and through this false relation, claiming her home and property in Eliot and remitting none of its income. Another of the catalysts, however, was the legacy left by Helen Cole; the anti- and Baha'i factions disagreed on what should be done with it. Farmer became terrified to go home to Greenacre – even to "set foot" in Maine, "lest her enemies might clap her into an insane asylum the moment she set foot on Maine soil." [290]

Further, the Fellowship had staged something of a coup; its board consisted of three members appointed by Farmer, and two elected by the members; in her absence, the board had appointed its own trustees, and could no longer be expected to act in accordance with Farmer's wishes, or – according to the antis, permit her

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[289] Cameron, 252

[290] That is, she had a guardian in New Hampshire, Ginn; and one in Maine, Hammond. Because her property was in Maine, Hammond had control over it through this guardianship; if she were to go to Maine, she would be under the legal control of Hammond, who could declare her insane. Ginn organized funds that she might remain in New Hampshire, and believed her sane and competent to direct her own affairs, but had no jurisdiction in Maine. "Fears Enemies will Put Her In Mad House", *Boston Post*, Aug 9 1913, B6F2.

freedom and well-being. With this move, Greenacre divided into two camps: the Baha'is – who, it must be noted, were not supported (at least publicly) by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who cancelled his second visit to Greenacre and returned to Syria.[291] They believed Farmer to be insane, and unable to act on Greenacre's behalf. The Antis or Farmerites were the Greenacrites of old, led by Sanborn, officially Farmer's lawyer. They argued Farmer was perfectly competent and that the Baha'i had schemed in various ways to box out Farmer.

Local papers did not hesitate to weigh in, or bother with measured arguments.

> "What nature has done, the promoters of freak religions are trying to undo…. Greenacre is torn by dissensions. Bahaists are seeking to capture it for their own and exclude all other religions and cults. … Greenacre should be converted into a truck farm long enough to get rid of the cults and the 'Abdu'l-s. In ten years, under intensive farming, it should be fit for occupancy and enjoyment again by sane and wholesome human beings. In the meantime a prohibitive tariff should be placed upon the importation of "foreign mystics" who gain high reputations for superhuman powers through their neglect to bathe regularly."[292]

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[291] Actually `Abdu'l-Bahá''s feelings were unclear, but he made no public comment. Sanborn and others of Farmer's supporters claimed his silence decisive – particularly as Farmer was still a Baha'i. see for example "Bitter Court Fight Coming", *Portsmouth Herald*, August 6, 1913, B6F4

[292] *Traveler*, June 28, 1913, B6F2

The battle for control of Greenacre was ultimately fought at the annual meeting of the Fellowship. Sarah Farmer was alive, and very much in her right mind, according to her supporters (antis), but she was too afraid to attend the meeting – at Greenacre! – lest Hammond's guardianship be enforced. She sent, instead, a letter – read by Sanborn – declaring the meeting illegal, and appointing two of the three trustees she was permitted. This was all she could do.

The meeting lasted for nine hours, and was attended by 300 members of the Fellowship. "At times…. It looked as though members of the opposite sides would come to blows, this in the headquarters of the colony where the watchword is 'harmony', The Boston Journal observed.[293] It is interesting to note that the townspeople of Eliot were the decisive factor in this outcome. Though they had been welcome at Greenacre, they had never been quite a part of it. Greenacre did, however, provide a living for many, from boarding guests to hiring carriages or boats, providing fresh food, various caretaking responsibilities, cooking, cleaning – the entire community had an interest, and Farmer was widely beloved (as was Frances Keefe; Sanborn accused him of working against Farmer and satisfying his own greed). The townsfolk appeared at the Inn and purchased Greenacre memberships. Their bloc vote was the determining factor in passing the Baha'i constitution.[294] In the end, the antis, defeated, withdrew, promising to see the matter in court.

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[293] "Bahaists Win in Greenacre Controversy" *The Boston Journal*, August 11, 1913 B6F4

[294] See Breed, B2F58

A Daring Rescue

Farmer had, with "an army ready to carry out her least whim".[295] She was, at her father's death, possessed of her own home, a comfortable inheritance, and a vast network of friends and acquaintances. She organized Greenacre in the space of a year (from the end of the Parliament in 1893 to its opening day in the summer of 1894), from scheduling a full slate of speakers, musicians and artists; to designing the elegant programs; to arranging for housing and board for all speakers and guests; to creating the spaces for lectures, classes, meals, and performances; to providing transportation to and from the train station, and countless other details. She did this for twelve years, working through illness, navigating perpetual financial troubles. But as her money ran out and her health[296] grew worse, her autonomy grew shakier. Her very freedom rests in others' hands – and she cannot control who is chosen. She sacrificed – really, freely gave -- her health and fortune to create Greenacre, but in the end the remains of that health and that fortune, small though they are, are snatched away. Though she had many friends, and some of them attempted to help her on the basis of friendship alone, ultimately the battle over Greenacre is not her battle. She states her wishes, but those statements are rendered meaningless by positioning her as insane, a mad, elderly woman who will sign any paper placed in front of her. Sanborn claims to speak for her, but he in fact never seems to speak *with* her.

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[295] "Greenacre's Mystic Charm," *Lewiston Saturday Journal*, Aug. 12, 1899.

Farmer lived quietly for several years, under Cowles care, but in the winter of 1915, Cowles' estranged wife alerted authorities that Farmer was being held against her will. Several accounts of the following events were recorded and kept in the Baha'i archives.

All along, recalls Carrie Kinney, 'Abdu'l- Bahá had been concerned about Farmer. He told her "Sarah Farmer is not insane. You must get her out of there, but you must do it in a legal way." Bahá believed that she was instead "exalted". An initial attempt to kidnap her failed, when the would-be savior, one Urban Ledoux, was caught by Cowles. The second attempt was somewhat better planned. They obtained a Writ of Habeas Corpus and raised $1000 to help get Farmer settled. Carrie and fellow conspirator Nellie Green infiltrated the asylum twice, once to alert Farmer to the coming rescue, and a second time on the day before the rescue to confirm she was in the same room. They also arranged a telephone code: when the operation was underway, Nellie would phone Carrie and say "How do you feel? Will you be up at 10:30? I'll be over for you." When Farmer was safe at home, Nellie would say "I can't come tonight after all," and Carrie would rush to her side, equipped with a hypodermic of morphine, should Farmer be (understandably) confused or panicked.

The rescue party -- Nellie Green, Urban Ledoux, the Portsmouth Chief of Police, and a chauffer – equipped a car with blankets and hot water bottles, and positioned it for a quick getaway.

The Chief rang the bell, Carrie recalled many years later. The door was opened by Cole [sic]. Chief shows writ and says "We've come to take Miss

> Farmer." "Over my dead body," said Dr. Cole [sic]. The Chief put his hand in his pocket, although he did not draw a gun, and ordered Dr. Cole [sic] to stand against the farther wall, keeping him so while Mr Ledoux went up and got Miss Farmer and carried her down to the car. In the confusion, with the door standing open, many of the inmates escaped. …The occupants of the car were certain that they were followed and for a wile the chauffer hid the car in some bushes, then they drove around til 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning before daring to take Miss Farmer [home]. …At first Mr Ledoux got 10 men to guard the house – afterward this was reduced to 2 or 3. Dr Cole [sic] sent many paid toughs after Miss Farmer… One day Dr Cole [sic] telephoned and said he was sending Miss Farmer's false teeth which had been left behind. Carrie refused to allow Miss Farmer to use them, in case of poison, and Dr. Durgan agreed with her, although they were never analyzed. … The drug Dr Cole [sic] used [was] analyzed for the court case, [Dr Willis] told the Kinneys that it was deadly.[297]

Farmer recovered somewhat, and received many friends who had been unable to visit at Portsmouth. She attended the celebration when Greenacre was lit for the first time by electric light and began planning a biography. However, she contracted pneumonia early that winter and died on November 23, 1916. She was buried with her parents in a private cemetery behind her home.

Greenacre still exists; it became, after all, a Baha'i School and no longer teaches the comparative religious curriculum.

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[297] Carrie Kinney, Recollection. B3F40

Truth and Self

It is possible to read this final drama of Farmer's life as wishful thinking on the part of the Baha'i, and certainly some parts of it seem wishful. Sanborn declares that the kidnapping drove Farmer insane, and that she died insane as a result.[298] Ultimately, when Farmer lost her money and lost her health, she also lost her own story. In the struggle for control of Greenacre, she was relevant only as a prop for Sanborn; the Baha'i seemed to use her freedom as a threat to keep her silent. She had no right to speak or act on her own behalf. Though the Baha'i memorialized her at Greenacre, with the Sarah J. Farmer Inn, she was not widely remembered outside of Eliot except, perhaps, as a footnote in histories of New Thought, and lately as an example of the development of contemporary seeker spirituality.

But if Farmer's legacy is the valorization of the Seeker, or of a search for individual meaning, it rests on a shifting understanding of the role of the Self in spirituality. It also rests on a shifting valuation of "truth" – that the perspective of the self defines it and thus invalidates its universal application.

The decline of Farmer's control over Greenacre, and its subsequent dissolution then involve the fracture introduced by Baha'i and the conflicting and irreconcilable understandings of self, it involves the precarious autonomy of women, it also reflects a larger change in cultural attitudes leading up to the first World War. Rising nationalism in Europe turned away from the global cosmopolitanism of imperialism, and to an attention to an inward-looking identity

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[298] Cameron. *Table Talk,* 319.

that curtailed conceptions of the brotherhood of man. Nationalism explicitly counters the guiding principle set forth at the WPR, that any common bond might overcome particularities of belief or culture, or even that one's own beliefs ought to be decoupled from creed to better accommodate others. Greenacre's suggestion that it indicated the cusp of an immanent spiritual transformation (E Everett) or shift in gendered constructions of power (Satter) or dawning of a New Age – its optimistic focus on a progressive narrative of humanity moving toward enlightenment – can obfuscate the ways that it inadequately accounts for the failure of the most enlightened humans to progress. The construction of a world supersaturated with the benevolent divine, in which suffering is an error of perception that can be overcome by understanding the error, is an edifice ill-equipped to incorporate the realities of gas attacks, trench warfare, and civilian casualties, the intimate butchery, of war time.

Farmer's understanding of the search for Truth was not a personal evaluation -- though it ultimately comes to permit this, or be critiqued for it – but the result of living a pure or consecrated life, of diminishing the ego, of living on the Christ-plane. The ability to discern the Truth without replicating the errors of interpretation that have obfuscated the message of prophets like Siddhartha or Jesus results from the conquest of self, the development of a new kind of vision – as the power of the sunset comes from seeing like a child. Truth can only be discerned with this unencumbered vision, one must peep past the filter of the self and its yammering, in an attempt to return to this initial moment in which the divine is bodied forth into the world, before the Truth is smudged over with human

interpretation. Thus Baha'i, for Farmer, is powerful because it teaches that Bahá (and Bahá'u'lláh) are offering this moment again, the moment when the Truth is revealed afresh and unencumbered through an embodied manifestation of the divine.

The criticism articulated by Jacqueline Brady, that Baha'i's conception of the prophet required a prostration and degradation of Emersonian individualism to the unquestioning authority of another, requires one to think that the individual is the correct arbiter of Truth; really Farmer believes the opposite. Her intent is not – even before she comes to Baha'i -- the valorization of the Seeker, or of a search for individual meaning, it rests on a shifting understanding of the role of the Self in spirituality. It rests on a shifting valuation of "truth" – that the perspective of the self defines it and thus invalidates its universal application.[299] Similarly Lee Schmidt's conclusion that she represents the difference between religious seekers and those that have found a tradition is challenged by the ambivalent (though certainly coalescing) nature of Baha'is, who are divided between those committed wholly to the faith, and those who view Bahá as the messiah of the present generation, or those that view it as "the Esperanto of religions", to be encompassed as an expression of the universal.[300] The decline of Greenacre hews so closely to Farmer's physical and mental decline that the conflicts between Greenacrites and Baha'i may not have been fatal; she had managed them adroitly on the occasions when she was well, but when she was unable to do so, the disagreements grew unchecked.

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[299] Brady*, Wise Mother, Insane Mother*, 49.
[300] Remey. *Reminiscences of Greenacre*, 17

CONCLUSION

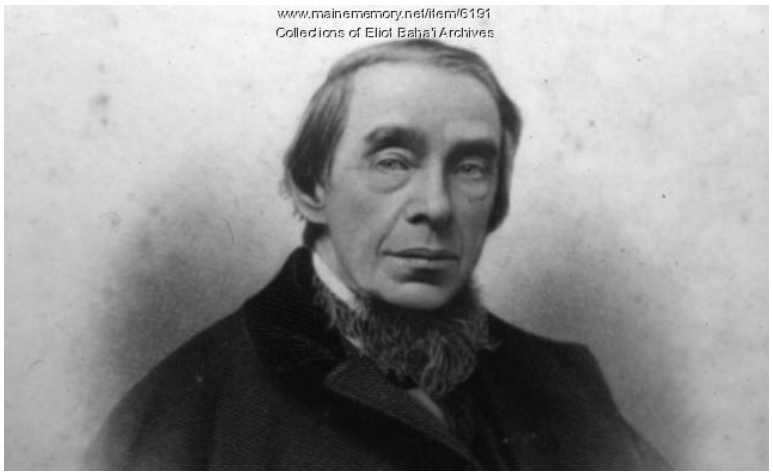
When Bittersweet burned, Sarah Farmer's vision of herself was lost as well. It is unlikely that she wrote a great theological or intellectual work – the nature of her contribution is not a text, but a practice, a bringing-together, a shaping. Her great work was Greenacre, her thought was practice, her great work dispersed at the end of each summer and returned the next. The dramatic shifts in the broader social fabric leading up to World War I made the notion of Universal Truth seem naïve, and cast sinister intent upon the international representatives that came to Greenacre. The New Day that Farmer saw emanating out from Greenacre seemed permanently eclipsed by nationalism and isolationism. The tendency of scholars to place her within a single school of thought reflects the difficulty in quantifying her work: what is left of the body after a fire? How do we think about religious innovation within the intersection of so many elements? How do we preserve this kind of embodied thought?

Further, the tendency in American scholarship to dismiss New Age, Contemplative, and Spirituality traditions as the tragic result of the erosion of religion and the selfishness of modern individualism makes it difficult to look at Greenacre seriously. Even redemptive projects like those by Catherine Albanese or Lee Schmitt attempt to demonstrate a continuous but hidden tradition stretching back into history. Sarah Farmer is certainly the product of many established traditions, and many established traditions branch out from Greenacre, but tracing an intellectual history occludes the complexity of Farmer's ambition, which is not

solely reducible to any one tradition or outcome. Further, Farmer is a difficult fit into traditional conceptions of intellectual history, as her method was not traditionally intellectual, and what she produced must be pieced together through many trajectories. Practices like yoga, like meditation, like a self-assembled spirituality are prevalent today. Sarah Farmer was one point at which Eastern traditions entered Western thought with an emphasis on practice, and a conscious decoupling of tradition in that practice. It is a movement from text to bodies, a knowledge that lives in and is claimed by a body, made meaningful through the lens of self.

APPENDIX A: PHOTOGRAPHS

Sarah Jane Farmer, date unknown (Eliot Baha'i Archives)



Moses Gerrish Farmer circa 1860 (Eliot Baha'i Archives)

Hannah Tobey Shapleigh Farmer c. 1880 (Eliot Baha'i Archives)

Sara Chapman Bull c. 1900 (Public Domain)

Franklin Sanborn. Date Unknown (Public Domain)

Greenacre Inn c 1895. View from the Piscataqua River. (Eliot Baha'i Archives)

Sarah Farmer on the S.S. Furst Bismark, the voyage that will lead her to Akka, with unknown companions. 1900. (Eliot Baha'i Archives)

Sarah Farmer c 1901 (Eliot Baha'i Archives)

Farmer at about 48 (Eliot Baha'i Archives)

Farmer with Emma and Louise Thompson. c. 1900 (Eliot Baha'i Archives)

Sarah J. Farmer c 1907 (Eliot Bahai Archives)

Vivekananda, Sarah Farmer, M. H. Gulesian of Armenia, Everett Hale. 1894 (Eliot Baha'i Archives)

Swami Abhedananda, actor Joseph Jefferson, Sarah Farmer 1899. (Eliot Baha'i Archives)

Farmer with ‘Abdu’l-Baha at Greenacre, 1912 (Eliot Baha’i Archives)

Class Under the Pines c. 1900 (Eliot Baha’i Archives)

August, 1894 Swami Vivekananda, Sarah Farmer (seated to his left), Charles Malloy (standing with walking stick) (Eliot Baha'i Archives)

Eirenon, or Hall of Peace c. 1910 (Eliot Baha'i Archives)

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