Chapter 1

EARLY YEARS

On the Streets of New York

Paschal Beverly Randolph was born in New York City on October 8, 1825, the son of Flora Clark and "a gentleman from Virginia." Randolph identified his father as William Beverly Randolph—one of *the* Randolphs of Virginia—but the man's name may have been the more prosaic William Randon.[1] Randolph was illegitimate, though he denied the fact. His mother, he explained, had been "the wife of two husbands"[2] and had apparently "married" Randolph's father when her first husband abandoned the family—only to be confounded when he subsequently reappeared.[3]

Randolph says little of his father, except that the man had not loved him and had abandoned him in the streets of New York.[4] He certainly took no role in raising the child, but Randolph appears to have kept up some contact with him, since he claims to have perceived his father's death clairvoyantly in 1842 and subsequently learned that his vision had been correct.[5] The father was supposed to have been a nephew or other relative of the famous and eccentric John Randolph of Roanoke, and may have been so, though no likely candidate appears in the Randolph genealogies.[6] In his later theories on human generation, Randolph attributed to parents a decisive influence on a child's character and life—an influence amounting almost to the view that the sins of the fathers were visited on their children—and consequently attributed to his father much of his own sufferings and "angularity" (eccentricity) as well as his weakness for beautiful women. He describes his father—in terms that clearly reflect his own vision of himself—as "willful, egotistic, boastful, haughty, vain, proud, conceited, sensual, sensuous, ambitious, dictatorial, intellectual, prodigal, unstable, variable, resentful, imperative."[7]

His adult view of his father's sensuality also probably reflects more on his own self-image than on any factual knowledge of the long-absent William Randolph. "I have loved not wisely but too muchly; and my father did so before me! For this inherited bias I have suffered and paid extremely dear."[8] "[I am] not a great sinner myself, yet I have suffered more than fifty malefactors' deaths; whence I conclude three things: that the sins of the fathers *are* visited upon the children; that mine must have been great rascals; and that I have fully paid their debt and my own to boot."[9]

Randolph was born at 70 Canal Street in New York City, a building long since torn down, and he grew up on the streets in the infamous Five Points, the heart of the New York City slums of the era.[10] A contemporary reported that in the Five Points "nearly every house and cellar is a groggery below and a brothel above."[11]

His earliest memories were of the death of his mother in the almshouse of Bellevue Hospital during the worldwide cholera epidemic of 1831 and 1832. The family had been taken there when Flora contracted smallpox, and young Randolph apparently spent a considerable period in the "large, sombre and gloomy old stone house on Manhattan Island."[12] He says of his mother that, unappreciated and unloved, she "fell back into herself, and then, with every tendril of her soul, turned and yearned toward the teeming millions of the dead" and became a seeress.[13] He describes in pathetic tones his life as a little boy in the almshouse, playing with the ghosts in the attic and trying to sleep while the spirits pulled down his sheets and made noises like the sound of cannon balls rolling in the garret.[14]

His half-remembered mother and her early death deeply marked his later life. In his mind his mother and his loss of her made him a medium and a genius and at the same time caused him to be "passional" and "angular"—eccentric and difficult to get along with; they also made him, in his own terms, "love-starved," a man driven by the need to be loved and befriended, and constantly and bitterly disappointed in his quest. Again and again in his writings he harkens back to his lost mother. He describes himself as

> a lonely man—one with massive and active brain, but thin, weak and puny body—therefore an unbalanced character. The woman who . . . had given him birth, had imparted her own sensitive nature to her child. . . . The son thus congenitally biased and tainted had grown to man's estate, and from various social and other causes, he being a *sang melée*, had suffered to such a degree that his soul was driven in upon itself to a great extent; which,

> while rendering him still more sensitive and morbid, also caused his soul to expand knowledge-ward, become wonderfully intuitive and aspiring, yet bound up by the affectional nature within his own personal or individual sphere. But such souls resist this damming up; hence occasionally the banks overflowed, and he became passional; forgot his dignity; was led to believe that whoever *said* love, *meant* love; was beset with temptation, and yielded, until at last his heart was torn to pieces, and his enveloping sphere became so tender and weak, that it could not withstand any determined attack thereon; and thus he, like thousands more whose spheres are thus invalidated and relaxed, became very sensitive to influences of all sorts and characters, and a ready tool and subject for the exploitations and experiments of disembodied inhabitants of the Middle State. He became a Medium![15]

For a few years after his mother's death, he appears to have lived hand-to-mouth on the streets of the Five Points.

> When [my mother] went to Heaven, my half-sister Harriet took me to bring up. Out of her hands I passed into those of a ci-devant English actress, of Simpson's Park Theatre, New York, named Harriet Jennings, née Whitehead, and those of her husband—*on the European plan!*—George Jennings, a high-toned sporting character, gambler, and so forth. Here I learned the art of begging, for *I* had to take my basket and solicit cold victuals from door to door to maintain the family larder, while he drove her to the sale of her charms to supply the domestic exchequer. Thus at less than ten years old I had become proficient in knowledge of the shady side of human nature, which had better have been postponed to a riper and steadier period of life. Up to my fifteenth year I was cuffed and kicked about the world; from my fifteenth year to the present time [1872], the pastime has been varied,—that is, I have been kicked and cuffed.[16]

It was under his sister's influence that he passed from atheism (into which his mother's death had cast him) into the Catholic church—a conversion he later repented because of the "Popish doctrine that nature is as God intended it to be."[17] For a time at least he was a bootblack on the New York City streets,[18] and by his early teens, he was in New England, perhaps attracted by some relations of his mother, who was from Vermont.[19] He then shipped as a cabin boy, another common occupation for blacks at the time, on the brig *Phoebe* out of New Bedford, apparently making the circuit from New England to Cuba to England and return.[20] He was miserable as a cabin boy, bullied and brutalized by the older sailors. He even thought of suicide to escape, but finally left the sea after an accident chopping wood.[21] For a time in the early 1840s he settled in Portland, Maine, where he learned the dyer's and barber's trades and also had a little schooling.[22]

Randolph's formal education was minimal and largely obtained the hard way: "Up to my fifth year I had attended school less than a year. In my sixteenth year I was a sailor boy; then I went part of one winter to school to a Mr. Dodge, in Portland, Maine, and *that* completed all the *outside* schooling I ever had,—but then I have had a deal of *under-side*, *top*-side and inside schooling."[23]

In true Horatio Alger fashion, Randolph claimed, probably truthfully, that he had taught himself to read and write on the streets. "One year's schooling only fell to his lot. He taught himself to read—his primers were the posters in the streets, his copybooks the fences, his pen a bit of chalk!"[24]

Despite these handicaps, Randolph became and was recognized as a remarkably literate and even learned man.[25] His writing style is lively and clear and at times humorous, in the manner of Mark Twain or Josh Billings. He mastered the nineteenth-century facility of easy literary allusion, and his writings reveal a better-than-nodding acquaintance with the authors of the Western occult tradition,[26] but his works are always original and never smack of the sterile antiquarianism of most contemporary writers on the occult. Above all else, his writings reveal him to be a seer, a man who was trying to relate what he knew first-hand rather than from merely recapitulating the works of his predecessors. He was also a linguist, acquiring a good knowledge of French and probably more than a smattering of Arabic and Turkish in his travels, and he seems to have been a fair musician.[27] His Rosicrucian novels (*Ravalette* and *The Rosicrucian's Story*) were very well received by critics even in the nonspiritualist press and are still quite readable today.[28] His scholarly abilities are most clearly shown by the quite impressive synthesis of contemporary geology, archeology, and paleontology he presented in his *Pre-Adamite Man* (1863).

The Black Man

A principal impediment to Randolph's advancement—and a constant refrain in his biography—was the color of his skin: he was a black man. New York had taken the first steps to free the children of slaves in 1799, but by 1820, five years before Randolph's birth, less than ten percent of the African-American population of New York City as a whole was free.[29] Even where technically free, African Americans in New York were far from equal and suffered a myriad of indignities. In 1821, a special law applicable only to free blacks, and specifically to those who lived in the city wards where Randolph grew up, effectively reduced to sixteen the number of black voters in Manhattan in the year he was born.[30] African Americans were also, in practice, kept from the professions and even in the mechanics' trades were restricted to a few of the more menial trades, such as barbering and the dyeing trade—both of which Randolph eventually took up.[31] They were even kept off the horse cars in the city until the 1850s.[32] While there was some Quaker-sponsored schooling available, and some public schooling in the 1830s, the "race riots" in Manhattan in 1834 (which occurred in the middle of the Five Points where Randolph was growing up) reduced its availability.[33]

Faced with this uphill battle for recognition, all his life Randolph equivocated on his ancestry, denying any admixture of African ancestry and alternately glorying in and exploiting it when it was to his advantage to do so. In his *Curious Life* (1872) his ancestry becomes a mixture of fiery Caucasian blood and royal blood "fresh from the Queen of Madagascar."

> My peculiar characteristics have usually been attributed to a strain of blood not a drop of which flows in my veins, for I, being tawny of hue, am taken for a half-breed Indian, Lascar, East India man, mulatto, quadroon, octoroon, and I know not what else. The facts are that on one side directly, the blood of THE RANDOLPHS bounds,—a fiery torrent, along my veins; Caucasian, aboriginal, and the darker strain mingling therewith is the royal blood, fresh from the veins of the Queen of Madagascar. Not a drop of continental African, or pure negro blood runs through me. Not that it were a disgrace were it so, but truth *is* truth.[34]

At times he boasted of native-American descent and even, through his father, descent from Pocahontas, and he claimed variously to be a mixture of three races or seven—none of them black African—buttressing the claims with vague references to the College of Heralds.[35] At his death, the local newspaper, undoubtedly relying on the story he was then using, called him "part Spaniard."

Conversely, in his role in the abolitionist movement and as a "red-hot politician" right after the Civil War, he touted his African descent.

In denouncing the plan espoused by the African Colonization Society (and at times by Abraham Lincoln) to ship American blacks to Africa, Randolph slipped easily into the "we" of racial kinship.

> We men of color were born here; so were our fathers, and mothers down a long line of ancestry: Our blood, bones, nerves—every material particle of our bodies was and is composed of American soil, air, water, and our souls are American all the way through.... What! Are we to go to the lands of our African ancestors because our skins are dark? Are all our sufferings to be rewarded by our removal to African deserts and barbaric climes and places. Ought we colored citizens to even tolerate the idea? No! Never! Here is our home, and here we mean to stay, and on this soil will die, and in it will be buried.... We are Americans, and mean to remain such—and Young Americans, too.[36]

Despite this, Randolph never completely made peace with his ancestry, and even when identifying himself with African-Americans, was careful to distinguish himself and his accomplishments from what he saw as the uneducated, passive mass of former slaves (see chapter 7).

Complaints of prejudice and refusal of recognition because of his race are the constant refrains of Randolph's life. Even in his chosen field of spiritualism, he believed with some justification that his faults were attributed to his race while his accomplishments were laid to the door of the spirits:

> If then I said anything remarkable or good, above the average intelligence of men of my lineage, why, even then spiritualists refused me the credit, as a general thing, openly taunted me with my natural, ethnological condition, and insulted my soul by denying me common intelligence, but said, by way of salve to the bitter wound, "You are now so extraordinarily developed that the dear angels of the spheral heavens can use you when wide awake!"[37]
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> You will, no doubt, long since have observed that my cuticular hue is not, in purity and clearness, quite up to the popular standard, and I know that Public Opinion has a thousand times tried me for that crime, found me guilty, and sentenced me to living death time and again. I had some few brains, the possession of which was also a high crime and misdemeanor, and therefore came additional executions and crucifixions without number,

> all of which made me angry, rebellious, and forever on the defensive. . . . I never had a genuine friend, save one, in all my life, male or female, or of any caste, race, or condition. Those who were cuticularly up to the standard hated me by instinct, because of my brains,—conjoined with the rete mucosum, which, by the way, needed just one-twelfth more of the popular sort to be up to the right figure in the social barometer. If I wrote a book or poem that evinced power or mind, and refused that to admit I either stole it bodily, got it from some one "away over in the Summer Land," or was inspired to its production by rum, gin, or druggery, I was voted an infernal scoundrel, crazy, loony, or an accursed fool.[38]

Emma Hardinge Britten, who was a tireless proselytizer for spiritualism and was later co-opted as a forerunner by the H.B. of L., the magical group that propagated Randolph's sexual magic in the 1880s and 1890s, scorned Randolph, despite her public stance as an abolitionist, and described the manager of the Boston platform where Randolph lectured in 1858 as a desperate man, "glad to accept anything short of negro minstrelsy" to fill his theater.[39] These sorts of small digs and indignities, rather than the larger, more abstract inequalities that began to be remedied after the Civil War, were Randolph's daily fare and must have contributed to the paranoia that is increasingly evident in his life. As we shall see, Randolph was a prodigious traveler at a time when travel was time-consuming and a major inconvenience, even for affluent and well-connected white men. He crossed the Atlantic as an adult at least three times, spent almost a year wandering in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Turkey and crisscrossed America repeatedly. The list of his travels is impressive for the time, but behind the mere recitation must lie an endless series of rebuffs and insults and a constant background tension as he braced himself against the inevitable challenge and insult. The diaries of Randolph's contemporary, the ex-slave Frederick Douglass, are filled with references to the constant battles he engaged in whenever he stepped onto a train or boat and faced the demand that he remove himself to the baggage car, and Randolph's travels must have been filled with similar abuse.

Although he was rejected because of his race, Randolph's ancestry and his attainments also gave him a recognized place in the turbulent years preceding the Civil War—that of the "educated Negro," dear to the liberal drawing rooms of the North and their habitués—a niche from which Randolph both profited and sought to escape and one in which his eccentricities and contrariety prevented him from attaining permanent recognition. His patrons included Gerrit Smith, William Lloyd Garrison, and Henry Ward Beecher, the first two of whom combined a passion for abolition and patronizing blacks with a taste for spiritualism.[40] Randolph's tours of Europe in the late 1850s and early 1860s promoting spiritualism are part of the established pattern of the educated African American's antislavery *Wanderjahr* through the capitals of Europe, and his spiritualist tours were aimed by and large at the same international liberal and reform audience as that addressed by the American antislavery advocates. It was also his race in part that allowed him briefly to rise to prominence as an educator and politician on the wave of northern benevolence and sentiment that sought to improve the lot of the newly freed slaves in the last years of the Civil War (see chapter 7).

Upstate New York, Spiritualism and Free Love

After leaving the sea about 1845, Randolph turned to the dyeing trade and barbering, and by the late 1840s was living in upstate New York.[41] By 1851 he wrote from Stockbridge, a hamlet in Madison County south of Syracuse, to the educator Horace Mann, seeking his opinion on "the proper course to be pursued by the free Blacks of the North towards Ameliorating their own condition" and on the role of education in the process.[42] In 1852 he was working in Utica as a barber and proclaiming himself the "barber-orator."[43] The next year the transformation was complete and he is listed in the *Utica City Directory* as "Dr. Paschal Beverly Randolph, clairvoyant physician and psycho-phrenologist." What led him to upstate New York may have been the benevolence of Gerrit Smith, his patron a few years later. Smith was one of the richest men in America at the time and was the largest single landowner in New York State. He was also a spiritualist and a reformer and rabid abolitionist—he was justifiably implicated in John Brown's raid. One of his projects was the settling of poor urban blacks on parcels of his land. In the late 1840s he had set aside 120,000 acres for that purpose, and Randolph may have moved originally to take part in this largesse. By 1858 Randolph was living on a parcel of farmland near Smith's home in Peterboro, New York, a farm he had bought with Smith's help, and was finding out that Smith's gifts had onerous strings and conditions attached (see chapter 4).

At some point in the 1850s Randolph married Mary Jane, a woman who is described, in an 1861 advertisement that touted their medicinal formulas, as "an Indian woman, descended from a long line of native

'Medicine Men.'"[44] The claim may have been true, but probably, like Randolph's own claims, it really masks the fact that she was of African-American descent. By the end of the decade they had three children, Jacob, Winnie, and Cora Virginia, only the last of whom appears to have survived childhood.[45] Randolph speaks vaguely of his daughter "Little Winnie" dying of hunger because of the betrayal of a friend, but he also blamed himself and his peripatetic work in spiritualism for her death.[46] By 1860, the family was in Boston,[47] but the next year Mary Jane at least was back in Utica, advertising their perfected chemical treatment for nervous and scrofulous diseases which, she claimed, "put life in hoary age and fire in the veins of ice."[48] In the same notice she claimed that Randolph's system had been transferred to her by deed—a fact which may foreshadow or indicate their separation. Whatever the actual cause of this may have been, Randolph himself attributed the break-up of the marriage to "radicalism"—by which he probably meant his wife's falling into the hands of "free-lovers"[49] —though, as we shall see, his own radicalism undoubtedly played a role as well. Randolph reappears in the *Utica City Directory* for 1863 through 1864, the same period in which Mary Jane Randolph is listed as publisher on the title page of one edition of *The Rosicrucian's Story*, but from 1867 through 1872, she is listed alone and is cryptically described as "Mary Jane Randolph, widow," although Randolph was still alive.

Upstate New York in the late 1840s and early 1850s when Randolph lived there was a hotbed of spiritualism and reform ideas generally. It was the original "burned-over district," exhausted by the excesses of revivalism and primed for novelty—especially spiritual and sexual.[50] The often-quoted remark of socialist prophet John Humphrey Noyes expressed the situation perfectly: "Religious love is a very near neighbor to sexual love. The next thing a man wants, after he has found the salvation of his soul, is to find his Eve and his Paradise."[51] In 1848 the area gave birth to spiritualism when the Fox sisters of Hydesville (near Rochester), New York, began to produce their mysterious rappings.[52] Randolph, as we shall see, was involved in spiritualism almost from the very beginning.

In these early days, Randolph appears to have accepted spiritualism completely and without hesitation. Although the new movement, stripped to its barest essentials, consisted merely in a belief that certain naturally inclined persons could communicate with the "spirits" of the dead, in practice spiritualism carried in its train a congeries of theories and attitudes, both religious and political, that Randolph was later to reject with disgust. Its earliest adherents were largely drawn from the "liberal" as distinguished from the "Evangelical" side of

Protestant Christianity, and they fashioned the new movement in their own image, denying all authority but that of the individual's own experience ("individual sovereignty"), rejecting the uniqueness of biblical revelation, the church and the role of Christ and rejoicing in the fact that death no longer promised judgment and threatened hell but instead was but the gateway to continued life.[53] On the scientific side—and spiritualism prided itself on being "scientific"—it gloried in eternal progress now and the perpetual progression of the soul through higher and more refined (though still earth-like) "spiritual worlds" after death. Spiritualism in its early days also universally rejected as rank superstition the accoutrements of ancient magic and mystery and all reverence for the mysterious East and for a vanished golden age of high, secret wisdom,[54] and the very existence of the new movement itself was seen as the clearest demonstration of progress over such mummeries and outmoded ideas.

On a more mundane, political level, it is fair to say that there was not a single early spiritualist who was not also a reformer and abolitionist and whose views on the spirit world were not intermingled with often radical theories on the abolition of slavery, marriage reform, fringe medicine, feminism, socialism, natural foods, dress reform (the "anticorset" movement, woolen "jaegers," "bloomers"), phrenology, prohibition, the abolition of taxes, universal insurance schemes, the water cure and the like.[55] It appears paradoxical now after the changes wrought later in the nineteenth century by "occultism," but with very few exceptions spiritualism and its related spiritual and religious beliefs in the 1850s really had nothing whatsoever in them of the mystical or transcendental or of individual spiritual development. In spiritualism's early days, the spirits who communicated with their mediums all across America most frequently announced themselves by the names of the great social reformers (Tom Paine, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and the like) and their messages were messages of social change. The great goal was social reform, here and now, in this world. "From the earliest announcement of modern spiritualism, it has been heralded by its advocates both public and private as a reform movement. The 'Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man,' 'Free Speech,' 'Free Press,' and Equal Rights under the law, whether the civil or higher law."[56] Individual spiritual development, progress, and attainment were largely unknown or were ignored as irrelevant. Most spiritualists, if they allowed any place at all in their thinking for such things, relegated them to the next world.

Spiritualism also provided a special role for women and had a special attraction for them, perhaps because mediumship provided an accept-able public forum for them in a restrictive world and, in trance speaking, allowed untrammeled freedom, largely without accountability. Radical views on feminism, sex, and marriage reform abounded even before the appearance of spiritualism, but these doctrines were enthusiastically received within the new movement and spiritualists by and large were agreed that marriage as currently understood was merely institutionalized oppression of women.[57] One consequence of this was the common perception in the days before the American Civil War that free love was a necessary corollary of spiritualism. While not all spiritualists were free lovers, it is probably fair to say that most free lovers were spiritualists.[58] The controversy over free love haunted Randolph all his life.

Free love, as the term was thought of in the decades surrounding the Civil War, was a complex phenomenon in which opinions ranged all the way from emphasis on "individual sovereignty" and simple opposition to "marriage-slavery" and the denial of women's rights, through Fourierist theories of "passional attraction," all the way to sublime ideas on eternally paired souls, originally created by God as twins and destined by him only for each other. At the far end of the spectrum were the outright and frank libertines, such as Moses Hull and Steven Pearl Andrews—both of whom, as we shall see, crossed Randolph's path. Most of free love's proponents, who were generally earnest and rather humorless reformers with inherently rigorous New England consciences and senses of morality, emphasized the feminist issues, while its opponents focused upon mate swapping and bacchanals.

To some extent, the free-love wing of spiritualism owed its origins simply to the radical doctrine of unrestrained individual freedom that was shared not only by the partisans of spiritualism but also by other American social and reform groups of the time. For obvious reasons, however, free love within the spiritualist movement gave a greater emphasis to the various theories of the "affinities" of souls which had their modern origin in the ideas of French utopian socialist Charles Fourier and their leading exponent in John Humphrey Noyes, who was himself a Fourierist for a time. All of these rested on the notion (itself based on pseudo-scientific theories of "magnetic" attraction) that feelings of "true love"—and not the mere legal relationship of husband and wife—were the best indicator of a person's God- or Nature-intended partner. Formal marriage, in other words, was irrelevant. At a more thoughtful level, "soul affinity" became enmeshed with variations on the Swedenborgian (and traditional) idea of the androgyne, in which the polar and eternally co-existent halves of the soul must seek each other out in this world or in the next to achieve wholeness and completion before they can, as a unity, proceed back to their divine origin.[59]

In the late 1860s, an old spiritualist described the situation as he had experienced it in the early days of spiritualism:

> Nine-tenths of all the mediums I ever knew were in this unsettled state, either divorced or living with an affinity, or in search of one. The majority of spiritualists teach Swedenborg's doctrine of *one* affinity, appointed by Providence for all eternity, although they do not blame people for consorting when there is an attraction; else, how is the affinity to be found? Another class, of whom Warren Chase is the most noted example, traveled from place to place, finding a great many affinities everywhere.[60]

Randolph (and especially the H.B. of L.) rang out the changes on these themes of affinities, though Randolph perhaps from his own unhappy personal experience with women rejected the "eternal" part of affinityism and opted for a theory of the change of affinities based on the development and progress of the individuals.[61]

An example of the type of milieu in which Randolph moved in the early 1850s is the Modern Times community on Long Island, New York. It was originally founded by Josiah Warren in 1853 on purely individualist-anarchist lines, but shortly thereafter, Stephen Pearl Andrews (the self-stryled "Pantarch"), a spiritualist and universal reformer, introduced the community to the notion of absolute sexual freedom. In his "recantation of spiritualism" in 1858, in which he renounced his early errors and excesses, Randolph reserved special venom for Andrews and his doctrines, and he continued to attack him until the end of his life as well as denouncing certain unspecified sexual abominations on Long Island with which he seems to have been suspiciously familiar.[62] He called Andrews the "head-centre of the foul brigade" of free lovers:

> Standing alone in his nasty glory was Andrews, the self-styled "Pantarch" and free-lover general, who, while pretending to be a reformer, really knew as much about social science as a long-eared jackass does of algebraic equations, yet had he brains enough to gather not a few cracked-head, passion-driven fools about him, all of whom considered rape and seduction a fine art and justifiable, and hailed concubinage as lofty gospel. But the theme is too vile for these pages, their creed too horrible and disgusting.[63]

The details are no longer available, but from the vehemence and evident familiarity of his condemnation it seems that Randolph involved himself with Andrews and perhaps with Modern Times as well in the early 1850s. At the same time also he must have met Thomas Lake Harris, another sexual mage, who broke with spiritualism when Randolph did (and for similar reasons) and whose name recurs in Randolph's works over the years.[64]

The brand of free love that Randolph later condemned (and undoubtedly shared early in his career) was that conjured up by its worst enemies, though it is hard to imagine Randolph ever being as cynical as Moses Hull and his followers who advocated the notion that a change of partners was as necessary for mental health as a change of scenery.[65] The practical possibilities and consequences of free-love views were apparent even to the earnest reformers who advocated them. Though their own rigid moral code appears to have restrained them from excess, others were not so high-minded, and spiritualism in the 1850s, with some justification, came close to being identified with libertinism. Andrew Jackson Davis was not the only leading spiritualist who took advantage of the notion of spiritual affinities to acquire a new companion.[66] Emma Hardinge Britten continually went to great lengths to refute a necessary, intrinsic connection between free love and spiritualism, arguing that the physical phenomena of spiritualism were equally convincing to the moral person and to the free-love devotee, and that, if nothing else, the variety of spirit claims on the subject must reveal "a very wide diversity of opinions in the spirit world."[67] In her opinion, no one had more fostered the view of a connection between spiritualism and free love than John Murray Spear, with whom also, as we shall see, Randolph was involved.[68]

Randolph's intimate involvement with this world of free love and shifting affinities was revealed to the world by Benjamin Hatch's *Spiritualists' Iniquities Unmasked and the Hatch Divorce Case* (1858), his diatribe against the debauching of his wife (the child medium Cora Hatch) and the philandering of Judge Edmonds (another leading spiritualist). Randolph appeared prominently, in the company of Andrew Jackson Davis, Moses Hull, Stephen Pearl Andrews, and John Murray Spear:

> P. B. Randolph, a popular Spiritual Lecturer, abandoned his wife and children, married another woman who, in turn soon abandoned him, and he attempted suicide; finally embraced religion, usurped the control of his own mind, confessed his faults and delusions, and like a true and honorable man, returned to the bosom of his family. In this last act he has set a worthy example for others.[69]

All of this radical "ultraism" forms the backdrop of Randolph's condemnation of spiritualism in 1858 (see chapter 4), but in the early 1850s he wholeheartedly gave his allegiance to the new movement.

The principal and continuing lack in spiritualism was a consistent philosophy of what exactly the new movement was dealing with in "spirits" and the "spiritual world." Theories abounded, usually simplistic and as various as the spirits that propounded them through the mouths of the mediums, but a universally accepted philosophical view of the nature of the spirits was lacking. To the extent that there could be said to be a philosophy of spiritualism, however, it was to be found in the voluminous, vision-induced tomes of Andrew Jackson Davis, whose hospitality Randolph shared and from whose early works he first drew many of his ideas.[70]

Davis (1826–1909) began his work before the appearance of spiritualism, and his efforts might have languished as yet another eccentric and isolated production had spiritualism not come along and taken up his harmonial philosophy as the filter through which it attempted to view its experiences.[71] There was really little novel in Davis's work, but his vision is powerfully (though diffusely) expressed. It certainly reflects a deep knowledge of Swedenborg, the eighteenth-century visionary, either—as Davis claimed—because his books were received in visionary trance from the spirit of Swedenborg himself, or—as appears more likely—because Davis had immersed himself in Swedenborg's writings (which began to appear in English in the early 1840s) as a youth. He was clearly a visionary, nonetheless. In the "superior condition," as he called it,

> my previous developments are not only enlarged, but all my mental faculties are set in perfect action. I possess the power of extending my vision throughout all space—can see things past, present, and to come. I have now arrived at the highest degree of knowledge which the human mind is capable of acquiring when in the state that I now am. I am master of the general sciences, can speak all languages—impart instructions upon those deep and hidden things in nature, which the world has not been able to solve—can name the different organs in the human system, point out their offices and functions, as I have often done, tell the nature, cause, symptoms of disease, and prescribe the remedies that will effect a cure.[72]

In his visions he saw a primordial vast globe of central fire, which was either God or in which God was immanent, and which threw off successive series of concentric universes. God was thus immanent in man himself and in nature, and man at death began his progress through ever higher and more refined spheres of the divine.[73] After an early Christian phase, Davis, like many other spiritualists of the time, became increasingly opposed to the Bible and to Christianity, rejecting the unique place of Jesus Christ and discarding the idea of the resurrection of the dead and other Christian doctrines. Davis also, through his own personal marital fickleness, became an embodiment of the worst fears of the nonspiritualist world about "spiritual affinities" and free love.

Davis's writings had an enormous influence on Randolph in his spiritualist career, and Randolph's early views can largely be defined by his acceptance or rejection of Davis's harmonial philosophy. Even to the end of his life, Randolph's cosmology is basically that posited by Davis.[74]

John Murray Spear

John Murray Spear (1804–1887) was another of the molders of early spiritualism who left his mark on Randolph. Even by the somewhat lax standards of normality obtaining in the spiritualist movement in the 1850s, Spear was notably eccentric and, at times, outright bizarre.

Like so many other of the leaders of spiritualism, Spear began life as a New England Universalist minister.[75] Before the advent of spiritualism he had settled down to life as a universal reformer. He was a demon of energy, a temperance advocate, and a leading opponent of capital punishment in the United States, and was active with his friend William Lloyd Garrison in the cause of abolition. All of this changed in 1851 when he became a convert to spiritualism under the influence of Andrew Jackson Davis's writings. He quickly realized that he was a medium himself and could diagnose and heal through the power of the spirits. He concentrated however, on trance writing, and through his agency the spirits initially uttered diatribes (even then commonplace) against slavery, the established church, oppressive society, and traditional marriage (especially men's domination of women), and called for reform in education and all other elements of life. By September 1852 his thinking entered a new phase, when his spirits informed him that a "General Assembly" of prominent spirits (Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Seneca, Socrates, Martin Luther, Rousseau, and Swedenborg among others) had made him its chosen instrument to establish the "Patriarchal Order" and usher in the new era in society.[76] The order was to consist of seven groups—called by such colorful names as the Associations of Electrizers, Healthfulizers, Educationizers, Agriculturalizers, Elementizers, Governmentizers and Beneficents.[77] Each of these groups was to receive from the appropriate spirits the fundamental wisdom about the causes of things appropriate to its area of expertise, and in turn each was to impart to society the practical consequences and developments of that wisdom. The overall goal was the general reform of society but that reform was viewed in very particular and specific terms: communism of wealth, women's liberation, and freedom from authority. Spear's spiritualism was "practical" spiritualism, devoted not to individual progress or elevation but to social reform.

In 1853, Spear and like-minded reformers gathered at Kiantone in upstate New York, the location of a spirit-discovered "Spiritualized Magnetic Spring" that Spear believed would revolutionize healing.[78] The next year this gathering began to be formalized as a community under spirit direction, but with clear elements of Fourier and Modern Times. The Kiantone community, as it was called, was to be the nucleus of the universal reform directed by the spirits. As in so many occult and utopian communities before and since, a special architecture was created to reflect the ideals of the new community. A circular city was envisioned, with each building to be modeled on the human body and its organs. As with many similar communities, goods were to be held in common, male dominance was to be abolished, and absolute freedom was to obtain. Authority was deemed unnecessary since as each individual grew under the tutelage of the spirits he or she would inevitably come to realize and strive for the common good rather than any individual advantage.

The same year, the spiritualist literature began to be filled with hints about the first practical result of the intervention of the General Assembly of Spirits in human affairs. Several of Spear's followers, following directions in his revelations (provided, of course, by the Association of Electrizers) began to construct a massive and intricate mechanism near Lynn, Massachusetts, that would provide mankind with limitless free power (the "New Motive Power") which would "revolutionize the whole world"—a perpetual motion machine, in short.[79] The work on the machine went on steadily for a year and a half with tantalizing hints of progress and lifelike movement—"The Thing Moves," announced the *New Era* in a headline—but the experiment came to naught and was finally terminated when the mechanism was destroyed in true Frankenstein fashion by local townspeople.[80]

While the experiment was going on, Andrew Jackson Davis was induced to visit the site and gave it his conditional approval, announcing that "no one can fail to see [in the new machine] the design of some intelligence superior in mechanical contrivances to these faculties in the head of John Murray Spear." He hedged his bets, however, by noting in ponderous jargon that "although the positive and negative, the male and female, laws of nature are very truthfully divulged and prescribed, theoretically, as the 'only rule of faith and practice' in the elaboration of this mechanism, yet, practically, as every student of nature will perceive, the adjustment of the poles, magnets, zinc, and copper plates, etc., are by no means in physical harmony with these laws."[81]

The fascination of the perpetual-motion fiasco lies in Spear's views on sex. He appears to have had from his spirit guides a general view that everything in the universe was sexually polarized, male and female, and that human sexuality and the human sexual union were but limited particularizations of this universal sexuality. With regard to his wonderful machine, Spear was convinced that for it to become "alive" and imbued with the necessary "love element" it would have to be begotten or impregnated and then born in ways analogous to human creation and birth.

> Inherent in the universe, as Spear viewed it, was a dualism in which every part of the universe could be delineated as masculine or feminine, according to observable positive or negative characteristics. Copulative activity involving complementary masculine and feminine phenomena was thought to produce increasingly complex forms, a process which would logically culminate in the perfection of the universe. In constructing his "electric" motor, Spear had paid particular attention to the importance of impregnating the machine with elements representing both masculine and feminine humanity.[82]

Rumors of the machine and the strange method of creating it were rife, making it difficult, as Emma Hardinge Britten remarked, to separate fact and fiction. "The prurient mind, stimulated by the awkward and most injudicious claims of a human parentage for a material machine, indulged in scandalous and even atrocious rumors, whose effect[s] have marked the parties concerned so injuriously that it requires the most unprejudiced consideration of the real facts of the case to disrobe it of its dark and obnoxious features."[83] On one level, at least, it seems clear that the method of impregnating the materials consisted merely in Spear's male and female disciples placing their hands on the machine in order to impart their Odylic, vital fluids to it.[84] When it came to parturition, a female medium from Boston was instructed by her spirits to visit the machine. While there she passed through the trauma of a spiritual and physical gestation and birth that appear to have been consciously patterned on the Virgin Birth. The *New Era* (which was edited by S. Crosby Hewitt, one of Spear's followers), in announcing that "the child is born" hinted that "the history of its inception, its various stages of progress, and its completion, will show the world a most beautiful and significant analogy to the advent of Jesus as the spiritual Saviour of the race."[85]

On another (and more secret) level Spear's spirits appear to have been teaching and Spear appears to have been following a rudimentary form of sexual magic. This is clear from the circumstances surrounding a second machine suggested by the spirits. In 1861, after years of poverty and failed attempts at organizing his reform movement on the spirits' principles—including managing a flotilla of barges that floated down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers toward New Orleans on a treasure hunt—Spear adopted a form of communal capitalism to develop and market a spirit-inspired "magical sewing machine."[86]

Unlike his previous efforts in which the sexual union served to instill life into the perpetual-motion machine, this time Spear taught that the sexual union of male and female would coalesce and heighten the creativity necessary to invent the perfect sewing machine. "Neither the male or female alone can construct a perfect machine. . . . Hence, salvation to man can come in true order by sexual as well as planetary conjunctions."[87] Spear's biographer remarks on the strange mixture in Spear's thoughts at this point, combining the decidedly eccentric underlying notions on sex with very detailed and commonsense instructions for bathing, rest, and privacy that were to accompany the efforts.[88] In a related attempt to generate revenue for his always-strapped organization, Spear, again on the direction of his spirits, later advised his long-time companion, Caroline Hinckley, to think about and if possible handle gold as much as possible, which would increase her "acquisitive" mental power. That power could also be increased by sex. "If the copulation be agreeable, and the mind be . . . upon . . . the accumulation of wealth, the power to get it will be thereby increased."[89] Randolph would later teach the same theory as one of the lesser elements of his sexual magic (see chapter 10).

Veiled hints and allegations of sexual misconduct had haunted Spear's community at Kiantone in upstate New York almost from its beginnings. In 1858, the year that Randolph recanted his adherence to radical spiritualism, especially the brand preached by Spear, the spiritualistic papers were abuzz with claims that Spear's guides had instructed the community, in another reprise of traditional millennialist and utopian thought, that they were to "cease to use clothing for the concealing of their persons."[90] Later the same year, Spear's "amanuensis," Caroline Hinckley, was found to be pregnant, and suspicion attached to Spear, who had abandoned his wife in order to live at the Kiantone community.[91] He denied the charge, but his denial may well have rested on his peculiar notions of paternity rather than on biology. Spear's spirit guides had taught him that it was possible for a pregnant woman to create a superior child by systematically infusing the foetus with the character of chosen spirits and to do so to the point that biological paternity was irrelevant—another idea that Randolph and the H. B. of L. were later to take up.[92]

Like Randolph at the same period, by 1859 Spear was persona non grata to the spiritualists. In late 1859 and early 1860, he attempted to regroup his forces and announced that 147 denizens of the spirit world (including John Hancock, Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry, Ben Franklin, Swedenborg, and Robert Fulton) acting as the General Assembly in the Spirit Life were now directing him to found the Sacred Order of Unionists to replace his earlier Patriarchial Order.[93] On a public level, the only apparent difference between the new group and the old was a tendency to recognize the power and desirability of a modified form of capitalism in the affairs of the group, a change that was to lead to the sewing machine venture. There was considerably more afoot, however, because one of the changes made in the Sacred Order was the institution of an oath of secrecy and the formation of a "secret body within a secret body."[94]

Spear's papers reveal little of the inner workings of the Sacred Order, but some indication is provided by Emma Hardinge Britten. She says that in the spring of 1862 "a rumor went abroad concerning a new movement permeating the ranks of spiritualism which had already enlisted in its interests some of the wealthiest and most distinguished citizens of the New England States."[95] At that point a trance speaker designated as "Mrs. E."—who is obviously Emma Hardinge Britten herself—appeared in Boston. She had learned, she says, of some of "the initiatory features of the new movement," and had been warned in advance by "sources both mundane and supra-mundane" that the movement could work irrevocable mischief on spiritualism. The agents of the new movement sought to enlist her, appealing to prospects of material and spiritual success and buttressing their appeals by angelic authority, but to no avail, and she took to the stage to denounce the veiled secret society with its unannounced principals that lurked behind the public movement. The movement, of course, was the Sacred Order of Unionists.

Emma Hardinge Britten's speech was followed by the defection of "two of the fully initiated, even the hierophants of the most interior mysteries."[96] A quasi-judicial proceeding was then held at Lyceum Hall in Boston in May 1862. Britten masks the names and details as irrelevant for her purposes, but states that Spear's former intimates denounced the "immoral practices, teachings, and tendencies" of the movement and revealed the spirit communications that lay behind the teachings. The upshot was a spiritualist manifesto denouncing "freelovism." Thereafter, the Sacred Order, "affected to drag on an effective existence for some time . . . but in reality it virtually ceased to be, from that hour."[97]

In 1863, a few years after the reorganization of his movement, Spear and Caroline Hinckley departed for England to try to find a market for the sewing machine and an audience for his ideas. Neither purpose was successful, though Spear was well received in the circle of magnetists around John Ashburner in which Randolph had moved a few years earlier.[98] He also met in England the Rev. J.B. Ferguson, who was traveling at the time as stage manager and chaplain for the Davenport brothers (whose biography Randolph was to write), and Ferguson seems to have played a major role in Spear's subsequent efforts to instill life in his Sacred Order. Ferguson also was to cross Randolph's path continually as we shall see.[99] By 1865 Spear was once again back in the United States, and there, except for a few brief appearances and at least one subsequent trip to England where he presented his testimony (along with Emma Hardinge Britten, Frederick Hockley, and a variety of Randolph's English spiritualist friends) to the London Dialectical Society in 1869, Spear and his movement, which by then was in total disarray, largely passed out of the public eye.[100] His last public crusade was in the 1870s, after Randolph's jailing for advocating free love in Boston in 1872, when he became involved in the movement formed to oppose Anthony Comstock's campaign against pornography, immorality, and free love—a movement in which Spear was associated with A. L. Rawson, one of Madame Blavatsky's earliest associates and her traveling companion in Egypt in the 1850s, and with D. M. Bennett, a free thinker who published Randolph's postmortem revelations from the spirit world and who was also singled out for special attention by one of Madame Blavatsky's mahatmas.[101] Although reduced to penury, Spear continued to travel and proselytize until his death, which occurred in Philadelphia in 1887.[102]

At some point in the early 1850s, probably about 1854, Randolph fell under Spear's spell, and it was to Spear's baleful influence that Randolph attributed the insanity and radicalism that characterized his behavior in the late 1850s.

> I met John M. Spear, and he filled my brain with some important mission which he said I had to perform. He made me believe that everything in society was corrupt and wrong. I swallowed those ideas, and believed that I had a great work to do on earth. I discovered that my wife was not my affinity. I went round the country preaching my scandalous impressions. I was crazy; these ideas of radical reform made me mad. This was four or five years ago [1855/1854]. I went to Europe, carrying my insanity with me, and I came in contact with no one who thought as I did; and by meeting so many with sane minds, I was finally magnetized back to sanity and returned home in a normal condition. And I became conscious that radicalism was abnormal, and its tendency was to degrade the race. It was then I said that I would abjure all radicalism, and would flee from the hell into which I had fallen.
>
> I returned to my family again, and since that time my home has been a heaven to me."[103]

Randolph the Spiritualist

All of these radical and reform theories and tendencies, harmonial philosophy and Kiantone came to constitute in Randolph's mind—when he rejected it in 1858—what he called "Pantheistic radical popular Harmonialism"[104] or "Atheistic, Ultra, Radical, Pantheistic, 'whack Moses'" spiritualism.[105] In his early days, however, he could not help being influenced by this potent mixture of ideas and tendencies. He gladly embraced and expounded the prevailing views.

In *The Unveiling: or, What I Think of Spiritualism* (1860), he states his career in the new movement succinctly:

> Everybody knows that P. B. Randolph is a sang melée—a sort of compound of a variety of bloods. It is so; nor is he sorry. With the great disadvantage of an unpopular complexion, and a very meagre education to back it, in the early days of what has since become an extended movement, I embraced Spiritualism; rapidly passed through several stages of mediumship, and finally settled down as a trance speaker.[106]

Although he claimed to have been a seer since the age of four,[107] his involvement with formal spiritualism came very shortly after the movement itself began. In March 1848, the Fox sisters of Hydesville, New York, near Rochester began to experience (or create) the mysterious "knockings" that inaugurated the new movement, and shortly thereafter Randolph says he traveled to Litchfield, Michigan, to see two women who were reputed to have powers similar to those of the Fox sisters.[108] Probably he was already publicly involved in the movement by 1852, when he described himself as a "barber-orator," because the orations he delivered himself of were undoubtedly spirit inspired. Certainly by 1853 in upstate New York he was listing himself as a "clairvoyant physician" and regularly appearing at seances where, fairly typically for the time, he was the entranced mouthpiece for the platitudes of a variety of the famous dead (including Zoroaster, Caesar, Mohammed, Napoleon, and Ben Franklin) and of course for his mother (who chided him on his susceptibility to any passing spirit's whim).[109] His mediumistic abilities, he always claimed, were derived directly from his mother's influence, and she first appeared to comfort him immediately after her death. Thereafter he lived "a strange, double existence" with her presence, a condition that he would eventually condemn as obsession.[110] More significantly for his later development, Randolph also began to be the trance vehicle for other less well-defined entities whom he then thought of as "angels" but who were, in any case, something other than the simple spirits of departed humans.[111]

The trance speaking toward which Randolph gravitated was no novelty in spiritualism at the time but rather was probably the norm. It manifested itself in various forms and was widely accepted by believers as an elevated state of consciousness, though questions were naturally raised about the accuracy of its productions since the spirits tended to contradict each other, and spiritualists contended about the primacy that should be attributed to it.[112] In Randolph's case trance seems to have come on automatically, frequently against his will, and to have manifested itself in a marked, abrupt change in personality and manner as the "spirit" took control—a change that only accentuated his natural angularities.[113] Even this early in his career Randolph was known as an eccentric. S. S. Jones, who later became editor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, recalled his first meeting with Randolph.

> We first became acquainted with him in New York City, in the year 1854. Within *thirty seconds* from the moment he stepped into our presence, he was entranced by the spirit of Dr. Benjamin

> Franklin, and gave us the most remarkable and deeply impressive dissertation upon the Philosophy of Life we ever listened to from mortal or immortal lips. . . . No sooner had Randolph [shaken hands than his] organism was seized by a spirit who ejaculated in a deep tone of voice, "Bind his eyes," thereupon a handkerchief was bound around Randolph's head, excluding all light from his eyes, when three electrical shocks passed through his system, causing heavy tremors from his head to his feet. . . .
>
> Dr. Randolph . . . was subject to the usual, aye, far more than the usual trials incident to mediumship. He was one of the most sensitive persons we ever met. Hence it followed that he was like a finely polished mirror that reflects the exact image of all that come within the rays of light forming the angle of incidence.
>
> As his surroundings brought spirits exalted in thought within the aura of his being, or spirits all the way along down the line of development, so he reflected their sentiments, diverse and contradictory, almost hourly from day to day.
>
> He told us of his trials and temptations. Suicide with him has been a matter of almost daily cogitation for over twenty years. . . . [B]arometer-like, [he] vibrated from ecstatic bliss to extreme despondency, according to the power and pressure of spirit presence.[114]

This eccentricity and fickleness are lifelong characteristics of Randolph. They amounted at times to what even Randolph admitted was insanity, but at the same time they formed in his mind the hallmarks of genius—in which he gloried. There can be no real understanding of Randolph and his changing opinions and constant friction with his benefactors and followers without taking this angularity into account.

> When was real true-born genius otherwise [than angular and eccentric]? Flora, his mother, was said to have been, as is likely, a woman of extraordinary mental activity and physical beauty, nervous, "high strung," and willful. . . . Given: a mother,—herself a composite of conflicting bloods, very nervous, somewhat superstitious, poetical, vain, imaginative, aspiring, deeply religious, confiding, stormy, intuitive, spiritual, imperative, imperious, ambitious, physically and mentally active, quick as lightning, exacting, gay and gloomy by turns; now hopeful, *then* despondent; to-day hilarious, to-morrow plunged in sadness; highly sensitive, refined, passional and passionate, tempestuous; now stubborn and headstrong; cold as ice; full of

> moods; then Vesuvian, volcanic, loving, yielding, soft, tender, gentle, proud, generous, warm-hearted and voluptuous. And what must the child of such a woman be—but as he is, a genius.[115]

One consequence of this inconstancy is that it is practically impossible to assert dogmatically that any doctrine or idea Randolph ever espoused was in fact his final verdict on the subject.

Driven by the importuning spirits, who announced through him in 1853 that he was to be their voice to the world,[116] Randolph gave himself wholeheartedly to the new movement, traveling, lecturing, and participating in the ephemeral spiritualist organizations of the time. He gloried in his notoriety and labored mightily in the years before 1855, first as an unconscious writing medium and then as a trance medium, completely in thrall to his spirits, to spread the new gospel of reform and "whack Moses" individual sovereignty around New York State.[117] In renouncing spiritualism in 1858 he claimed to have given 3,000 speeches, 2,500 of them in trance as part of his "Spiritual Destiny and Mission" to convert the world.[118] In his "Recantation Speech" Randolph says that he was

> a medium about eight years, during which time I made 3,000 speeches, and traveled over several different countries, proclaiming the new Gospel. I now regret that so much excellent breath was wasted, and that my health of mind and body was well-nigh ruined.... On the advent of the "New Philosophy," I hailed it with thousands of others, not only as the harbinger true and God-sent of the good time coming, but also as a religion, pure, true, sweet, and elevating; and it was only because I thought it would satisfy the religious needs of my soul that I accepted it as the guide of my life. What was the result? I will tell you. After embracing Harmonial Philosophy . . . I sought to be a medium—made experiments, and obtained my wish. Better had I found my grave! The rapping and other phenomena followed me, produced, as I then thought, by good human spirits. These were soon succeeded by the trance condition, to which I became subject, and the moment I yielded to that seductive influence, I ceased to be a man, and became a mere automaton, at the mercy of a power I believed to be demoniac, but which others accepted as Progressive-Spiritual, but which they cannot prove to be such, try as they may. Mind, I do not say it is not so, but aver that not the faintest proof can be adduced that it is so. As a trance-speaker I became widely known; and now aver that during the entire

> eight years of my mediumship, I firmly and sacredly confess that I had not the control of my own mind, as I now have, one-twentieth of the time; and before man and high Heaven I most solemnly declare that I do not now believe that during the whole eight years I was sane for thirty-six consecutive hours, in consequence of the trance and susceptibility thereto. I would have lucid intervals, an hour or two at a time, until the next circle. During these rational periods, I would, in words, assert myself, my manhood, and not unfrequently denounce the spirits, and then, in the very next circle, in the trance, retract it all; and for this I obtained the reputation of inconsistency, and having no "balance-wheel."[119]

In the early 1850s, however, the dangers of passive trance and subservience to unknown "spirits" were yet to be recognized.

Randolph's Medical Specialty: Sex

While Randolph continued through most of the 1850s as a trance speaker, his initial specialty in the new movement was as "clairvoyant physician," a role in which he acted as the "subject" for lucid medical diagnosis and clairvoyantly prescribed treatment, a process which usually but not necessarily involved trance.[120] The career was a common one—Andrew Jackson Davis followed it until the end of his life, though he eventually obtained a degree from an Eclectic medical school after the heyday of clairvoyant medicine had passed. By the summer of 1854 Randolph had moved to New York City and was acting for various doctors there, seeing fifty patients a day.[121]

> I had a specialty for the occult, and an early friend, whom I loved tenderly, became unhappy by reason of an accident, that for 10 years rendered him utterly wretched and miserable. . . . At that time, 1853, I was a mesmeric subject, and examined for two French physicians in New York,—Drs. Toutain and Bergevin. Here I first saw and prescribed for the man, who afterward became my personal friend. Himself and lady were kind to me, and kindness won my undying affection. I have had so little of it in this world, have so often been robbed, plundered, and traduced, by so-called friends, that when a real one appeared, I hailed it as the Greeks hailed the Sea. I sat one hundred and eighteen times for my friend and his wife, searching for the means to cure, made

> many costly experiments, and finally was rewarded by the discovery of that which the world knows to-day as Phymylle and its radical, Amylle.[122]

In the more broadminded midnineteenth century, Randolph very easily came to attach "Dr." to his name, defending its use by the thousands of patients he had treated and claimed to have cured.[123] Spiritualism boasted many similar "doctors" at the time, and the pages of the spiritualist press were full of ads for clairvoyant physicians who would consult either in their offices or by mail, and who frequently branched out—as did Randolph—into patent medicines and odd magnetic or electric devices which, it was claimed, would restore vigor and vitality.[124]

In 1854 he cured a sick friend of the problems arising from loss of "vital energy," and curing—especially that of sexual problems—became his lifelong work. He says that the

> necessity of conducting our researches in the sphere of causes, gave my mind that turn toward the occult it has ever since retained; hence I had no "gift" in hunting up lost or stolen property, or anything of that sort. I could only philosophize, deliver lectures from the clairvoyant standpoint in the clairvoyant state; nor do I believe that, of the 9,000 speeches I have made, 100 of them were delivered out of that condition. . . . I could only lecture, and cure those complaints that involved the affections, the passions, the nerves and brain, and that spring from disarrangements of the sexual system.[125]

Randolph's own love-starved background and the general reform feminism of the times, together with Randolph's cure of his friend, all combined to turn his attention to the treating of sexual problems, male and female. This sick friend, to whom Randolph returned over and over in his later works, suffered from depletion of the "vital forces"—a code word for the loss of vitality and will caused by masturbation. The fear of this loss was so pronounced in the circles in which Randolph moved and in America generally that one writer on the sexual foibles of the time has called it "the dominant sexual ideology of the nineteenth century."[126] The notion becomes a staple of Randolph's ideas on medicine and later of his sexual magic. In this light, Randolph's medicinal remedies and theories are simply part and parcel of the fringe medicine of the time, which sought to restore depleted energy by replenishing "vital fluids" thought to have been lost especially by sexual excess or abuse. Vital energy under a myriad of names was thought to form the basis for life, intelligence, happiness, and magnetic trance. The theory was simple. Food made blood, and blood made nervous fluid, and this in turn made "Od"—von Reichenbach's mysterious, all pervading "odylic fluid"[127]—which was the basis of all human mental and spiritual life.

In physiological terms, Randolph thought that the nervous fluid was distilled by the sexual glands and secreted as a fluid that he called "Physical Love."[128] In complete mutual sexual union, this fluid becomes part of the body of the future child and, in the sexual partners themselves, it is transformed into an "aeroform" state that transfuses the body and brain, replenishing vigor and giving joy.[129] Both in this world and in the afterlife,

> the love-organs perform the highest office in the spiritual, but not the psychical, economy; for they extract from the system and condense in suitable reservoirs that fluid white fire, which when set open in love's embrace, even here below, rushes like a whirlwind through man, plunges soul and body in a baptism of delight, as it sweeps along the nerves, giving a foretaste of heaven—the most exquisite rapture he is capable of enduring.[130]

In sexual excess and self abuse, the opposite result obtains, and humans are drained of energy. Love—the feeling or sentiment of love—in Randolph's view was thus dependent on this fluidic physical love, and at the same time the production of physical love was dependent upon proper sexual excitement and fulfillment both of the woman and of the man.[131]

Thus, in Randolph's medical views, human vital energy and happiness could be increased by mutual sexual fulfillment. They could also be replenished and increased by supplying the body with potions that directly replaced lost or depleted vital fluids, and the supplying of these elixirs remained a large part of Randolph's work for the rest of his life. He states that in 1854 (or, variously, 1860, which is more probable, given the contents of the elixirs), he discovered "the perfection of the Phosoxygen" of Lavoisiere and Humphry Davy, the "wine" mentioned by Campbell in *Hermippus Redivivus* and by Bulwer-Lytton and Hargrave Jennings, which he called in its various formulations "Phymelle," "Amylle," Phosodyn," "Phosogen," "Lucina Cordial," and "Protozone"—all of which he continued to manufacture and sell throughout his career.[132] The specific contents of these elixirs was a closely guarded secret. Their basic active ingredient, however, is no mystery. It was hashish, a fact that makes more likely the later date for Randolph's discovery, since Randolph was introduced to the drug in France and Egypt only in the late 1850s.

Randolph's general, nonoccult, views on sexual fulfillment and marital happiness were given in a number of books and pamphlets which began to appear in the early 1860s. Most of them, while still readable, are notable now mostly for the evident sincerity he reveals in urging mutual sexual satisfaction and in berating the obtuseness of current views on women's sexuality. Even at this early date, however, the books were really only "teasers," giving only a part of Randolph's complete science of sexual fulfillment, while the rest, the real secrets, had to be written away for—and paid for separately—and the answers returned in manuscript.

Randolph's earliest surviving work on sexual science is *The Grand Secret, or, Physical Love in Health and Disease,* which he published in San Francisco in 1861 just before he began his second trip to the Near East. In addition to the teachings on the replenishment of vital energy, discussed above, and to his usual nostrums on proper sexuality (consideration, cleanliness, affection, etc.) in *The Grand Secret* Randolph also adopted the theory of John Humphrey Noyes and others (which Randolph attributed to the Turks, Arabs, and Hindus as well) that men could be taught to control "the spasmodic ejaculatory muscle" and could engage in sexual intercourse for very extended periods without seminal emission and consequent loss of the vital fluids.[133] For a fee of five dollars he offered to send a pamphlet, "The Golden Letter, or Chart of the Polarities of Physical Love," detailing the technique of sex without male orgasm and without loss of strength.

This technique is what is best known today as "Karezza," the term popularized by Alice B. Stockham later in the century. In Randolph's day it was known as "male continence," after the book of that name published by John Humphrey Noyes in 1866. There can be no doubt that Randolph was familiar with Noyes's ideas, and several of his later theories—notably the "Vampyrism" (or "cannibalism," as Noyes thought of it) of ill-matched lovers who fed off each other's vital energies, the practice of "stirpiculture" (improvement of children by special techniques), and the fundamental doctrine of the exchange and replenishment of "nervous energy" and "vital fluids" through sexual intercourse—echo Noyes's ideas, but at the same time they are simply part of the *koiné* of the reform circles in which both men moved, and it is difficult to trace Randolph's adoption of all of these ideas to Noyes specifically.[134] Randolph's enthusiasm for karezza, however, was short lived and, after his longest trip to the Near East in 1861 and

1862, he came to believe that the moment of *mutual* orgasm was the point of supreme magical power, and he totally rejected Noyes's theory as destructive. "[U]nless both realize what God intended, ruin, sooner or later, is the inevitable result."[135]

All of these medical views on sex were also part of Randolph's larger theories on spiritualism and magic. The vital energy, especially magnetic energy, that flowed in proper sexual intercourse was the support of mediumship and clairvoyance and ultimately, as we shall see, was the energy that connected the human soul with the powers of the celestial spheres.

The two French doctors, Bergevin and Toutain, for whom Randolph clairvoyantly diagnosed in 1853 at the beginning of his medical career also played a very important role in his subsequent development, because Bergevin was associated with Société Magnétique in France and with the leading exponents of continental mesmerism, Baron Dupotet and Louis–Alphonse Cahagnet, and he was undoubtedly one of those who gave Randolph letters of introduction to those circles when Randolph left for Europe in 1855 to carry a spirit message from John Murray Spear to Robert Owen's World Convention in London.[136]