

Finding Fenwicke: Ernest's Brother's Spiritual Legacy

Jesse G. Jennings



As modern metaphysicians we are taught to focus on the present, mainly, since that is where our creative power is found. Wherever we go, it's always now, and this is always here. Naturally, while doing this, we will also look toward the future also, into the land of our goals and dreams. But there is another direction that has always pulled me, and where I have always gladly given in and followed. I like to look back.

The history of things sets the stage for today. Yesterday's treatments are this morning's demonstrations. What were our ancestors imagining, as passionately as we are doing now? Did they leave us wonderful gifts we may be overlooking? It's a human trait, almost a human necessity, to "reinvent the wheel." Yet looking at the old wheels that were under the chariots, wagons, and flivvers of bygone days, we see a consistent principle of transportation manifesting itself in ever-perfecting terms right up to this minute, ready to take us where we want to go. Hearing the voices of our forefathers and —mothers in this teaching ironically labeled New Thought, we rediscover wise counsel for effective living today. That said, here's a little history.

Ernest Holmes was the youngest of nine sons born in 11 years (1876-1887) to William Nelson and Anna Columbia Heath Holmes, in Lincoln, Maine, at that time a pulp mill and granite quarry town, between the Penobscot River and Mattanawcook Lake. (Seventy miles downstate was coastal Belfast, where two generations earlier another great New Thought figure, Phineas P. Quimby, had spent his youth from age two after the family moved east from New Hampshire. That Quimby and the Holmes boys should all come from the same stretch of road in rural America is quite a nice synchronicity.) You and I know Ernest as the founder of the Religious Science movement. One brother, Fenwicke Lindsay Holmes, left a legacy of empowering teachings of his own, sometimes in collaboration with Ernest, among others. It was actually Ernest, long before dreaming of the organization we have today, who helped Fenwicke start *his* church.

Sometime in the 1890s the Holmes family relocated westward in Maine from Lincoln to Bethel, near the New Hampshire border, and there several of

the boys including Fenwicke and Ernest were enrolled at Gould's (now Gould) Academy, where tuition was \$7 per term (and is today \$23,000 per academic year for non-boarders). Ernest left Gould's before graduating, though he would then attend a school of oratory in Boston, but from this foundation Fenwicke went on to nearby Colby College, the first all-male New England college to become coeducational, where he was editor of the "Oracle" yearbook and received his undergraduate degree in 1906. Then he entered the Hartford Seminary, fell ill, left school (1910) and took a job on a ranch out in southern California, where most of the family would ultimately arrive.

Fenwicke had embraced the liberal Christian teachings of the Congregationalist church, possibly while at Colby, though there

"Fenwicke Holmes was one of the great illumined teachers on the Laws of Life and the way of the Holy Spirit."

—JOSEPH MURPHY

had always been an open-minded, questioning religious sentiment among the family. So in warm and pleasant Venice, California, Fenwicke opened a new Congregational church and served as its minister, where Ernest and their mother Anna joined him in 1912 and helped with the Sunday school and fundraising. While there they also helped outlaw prizefighting in the community.

Meanwhile all were studying metaphysics. Resulting from the pervasive influence of the new Christian Science philosophy in their native New England, to reading Emerson and the Transcendentalists, then a correspondence course with Christian D. Larson (who wrote the Optimist's Creed and was later the associate editor of "Science of Mind"), and a thorough plumbing of Thomas Troward's works on mental science, Fenwicke's flock heard New Thought principles espoused in and through his more conventional sermonizing, to the point where a critical decision had to be made to go or stay as their minister. Fenwicke went, and with Ernest then taught classes and lectured, while starting in 1917 a magazine called "Uplift," which proclaimed that, "Every number contains invaluable instruction in health and happiness. By reading it you can learn how to heal and help yourself and others, and how to apply the law of supply." They also opened the Metaphysical Sanitarium in Long Beach which lasted about a year.

Starting in 1919 the brothers, still quite young, travelled back to the East, where Ernest studied briefly with Emma Curtis Hopkins while in the midst of a lecture tour, and Fenwicke found himself in Boston and New York, where he was sponsored by Julia Seton, and met a novelist named Katherine Eggleston Junkermann whom he would shortly marry. Ernest returned to California permanently in 1925, while Fenwicke assumed

leadership of a Divine Science ministry in New York called the Church of the Healing Christ, where he remained until 1934, when he again went on the road as purely a platform lecturer. Fenwicke and Katherine moved to Santa Monica from whence he lectured, wrote and in 1953 co-authored *The Science of Faith* with Masaharu Taniguchi (1893-1985). Taniguchi was the founder (1930) of the tremendously popular Seicho-No-Ie movement of Japanese New Thought ideology and author of the *Truth of Life* series, though at the time of their collaboration the two had not yet met, but exchanged ideas through the mails. Taniguchi and his organization survived World War II, and he toured the U.S. in 1952.

This next is conjecture as far as I know, but perhaps these two great minds were introduced to each other's work by a third Holmes brother, Jerome, who also attended the Hartford Seminary, was ordained to the Congregationalist ministry in 1912, and spent many years in Japan and then Hawaii as a missionary, until

With a wide-ranging intellect, and a deep curiosity to match his better-known brother's, Fenwicke Holmes made his mark both then and now.

1938 when he too joined Ernest's work at the Institute of Religious Science, then returned to Hawaii in the 1950s.

The date of Fenwicke's death is uncertain, though is usually given as 1973. He was considered the more intellectual brother, Ernest the more charismatic. Over the course of his career he authored over 50 books, the first of which was *Healing at a Distance*, with Ernest in 1917, more of a pamphlet really, that first appeared in "Uplift," and the last a posthumous publication, *Philip's Cousin Jesus: The Untold Story*, edited by Margaret McEathron. Like Ernest, he was small of stature, fair-haired, and slightly jug-eared. In later years he wore a beard. He and Katherine had an adopted son, Louis; there is no mention of other children.

Ernest loved reading and reciting poetry while Fenwicke enjoyed creating it. In the beautifully bound and foil-stamped *Songs of the Silence* (1923), we find 101 cheerful, inspirational little verses on choice over chance, change and the Changeless, peace, childhood, nature, and the Christ. Here is the title piece:

*Tossed by life's billows, yet never submerged,
The spirit within me, instinctive, is urged
Down the long trail of the light-o'-the sea
Away to the Land of Ever-to-Be.
Sailing, I sing, and singing, I sail
Out on my course in the sweep of the gale.
Knowing my word is a sail and a wing,
I sing as I sail and I sail and I sing.
Nearer and nearer the rim of the world,
I fling to the breeze every canvas unfurled:*

*Swept by the free winds from sunrise to star,
I make for the harbor that lieth afar.
Never alone on the breast of the sea,
I list to a voice that is singing to me
The songs of the silence. Its bird-wings afloat
Against the far light, with its musical note,
It glides on before me, proclaiming the way
That leaps from the sea-light into the day.
Everything moves to the voice as it speaks:
The word I have uttered, embodies and seeks
Expression in form; and the passionate thought
I spoke in the silence, my future has wrought.
So I sail; so I sing; so, free as a bird
I rule my own fate by the power of my word.*

Fenwicke's prose had its own poetic flow, and he found a knack for simplifying complex strands of metaphysical teaching. This is from his *Visualization and Concentration* (1927):

"The metaphysical movements which practice healing by mental and spiritual means are based on the principles of monistic idealistic philosophy, —the almost universally accepted philosophy of modern thinkers. It is monistic

because it claims there is but *one* natural order and principle, one system and One God. It is idealistic because it explains the ultimate reality as spirit, and the world of things to be really a world of ideas. Every phenomenon has its noumenon, every form has its soul.

"During the middle of the past century, at the time of the rise of modern metaphysical movements and applied psychology, the position of the religious leaders was that of dualism rather than monism. They taught, as many still do that there is both spirit and matter, but that the spirit incarnates in matter, uses and controls it for physical purposes, and discards it at death. The position of science was opposite to this...

"But the originators of the new movement which we call mental or spiritual science, came in with a new answer. They declared that the materialists were right in the statement that there is only *one* substance: but they affirmed the primacy of spirit as this one and only substance. They brought about an adjustment between science and religion by accepting the principle of unity advanced by science; and spiritual causation advanced by religion."

"Boxing and prize fighting were popular spectator sports and drew large crowds to the Venice Auditorium... But boxing was considered an evil affair by some and the Reverend Fenwicke Holmes led the opposition."

—<http://www.virtualvenice.info/print/1914-1916pt4.htm>

Almost 40 years later, near the end of Ernest's life, the two would again collaborate, this time on an epic poem, *The Voice Celestial*, whose title alludes to the "Song Celestial," or *Bhagavad-Gita* of Hinduism. Marilyn Leo's *In His Company: Ernest Holmes Remembered* contains a photo of the two brothers preparing this manuscript in a living room, binders of notes piled on the coffee table. It would be their tale of a Farer who comes home one evening and cries out in despair for a sense meaning in his life, to "know what I myself can know." This is narrated to us by a Scribe. Soon there comes onto the scene the Presence, which tells the Farer, "Fear not, for I am He who sits behind the veil." Complains the Farer,

*I cannot rest and I can find no peace,
I am a pawn of fate, a mere caprice;
There are so many lanes of wandering thought,
So many moods of doubt and fear are caught
Into the web of my uncertain mind,
I cannot sleep and leave them all behind.
Tomorrow holds such duties to be done,
My mind leaps up before the rising sun
And pits its strength against the new-born day
Before I let the old one fade away.*

Here they are attempting to illustrate the generic human condition. All of us want to feel a part of some grand enterprise but may be too busy reacting to daily demands to find a framing context in what we're doing and why. Though the Farer will ultimately have to find this within himself, the Presence is willing to hint at the answer:

*Yet even now a master waits your word,
A power within which by your voice is stirred
To life the weight of doubt, drive out the pain
Of throbbing drums that beat upon your brain –
The old regrets and stifled memories,
Suppressed emotions and uncertainties;
It bids confusion and all fear begone
That you may rest in peace until the dawn.*

And away they go, Farer and Presence, with the Scribe trotting along beside them, through such states and aspects of consciousness as faith and hope, life and death, and heaven and hell, then into audiences with, and observations upon, Rama, Zoroaster, Buddha, Hermes, Moses on down to Jesus, the "last of the great masters," and finally, in the Western esoteric tradition, to the Father, Mother, and Sun, till the Farer concludes,

*The search is ended, I myself am He
Who was and is. I am eternity
And shall abide forever in the Me.*

About a third of Fenwicke's books remain in print, while the rest can be found used in one condition

or another. *Joan's Voices* (1934), inspirational fiction, is very rare. Sun Books of Santa Fe, New Mexico, has reprinted *Healing at a Distance, Visualization and Concentration*, and *Being and Becoming* (1918). I especially recommend *The Science of Faith* with Taniguchi, partly for the lucidity of its teaching, but also for the delightful stories of applying these principles in everyday Japanese life, alongside Taniguchi's appreciation of who he regarded as one of the West's great spiritual figures: Oscar Wilde.



Copyright © 2008 by Jesse G. Jennings.
All rights reserved.

This article first appeared, in a slightly different form, in the August 2008 issue of "Science of Mind" magazine.