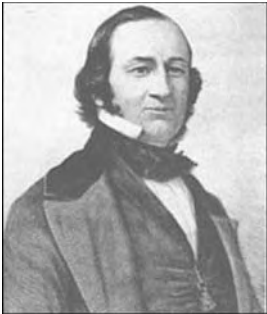


## CIVIL WAR PATRIOTICS: THE WYMAN CORRESPONDENCE

By Richard Micchelli



*John Wyman, Jr., a.k.a. Wyman the Wizard.<sup>1</sup>*

If you were to conduct a detailed review of the 190 Civil War patriotic covers illustrated in *NJPH* whole nos. issues **100** and **117**, or the [online exhibit of covers](#) shown at NOJEX, you can begin to see the emergence of some interesting patterns among the covers. An obvious pattern is that there are several different correspondences represented in the illustrated covers. After years of viewing them in the light of other historical facts, interesting accounts of the people represented in the addresses will provide possibilities of several stories behind the covers, not including a statistical review of the postmarked towns, the various stationery printers, destinations, or more importantly the sentiment of the soldiers and civilians who used these envelopes.

One particular correspondence can easily pique the viewer's interest and raised the question, for me repeatedly, who was "Wyman the Wizard?" Now this is certainly an unusual addressee, i.e., a Wizard. Looking further there were others addressed to Jane Wyman, who was eventually identified to be Mrs. Wizard, aka Mrs. Jane Wyman. A closer review of them begins to indicate a suspicion that another individual was part of the circle of friends or perhaps relatives of Wyman. Not all of the correspondence was just between husband and wife, but included "fan" mail to John at various cities he traveled to perform.



*Fig. 1: A Civil War Patriotic cover, addressed to Wyman the Wizard, sent from Newton, NJ on Aug. 5, 1861, to Wyman in Morristown. A devil sits on a cask of Confederate whiskey marked with a skull and crossbones.*

Years after starting this collection an advertising cover came to market from a philatelic auction house that became a must-have for the collection and was subsequently purchased. It was a very elaborate and finely detailed illustrated advertisement for "Wyman the Wizard" with

a picture of the wizard which was eventually proven to be an accurate likeness from other sources. It contained a circular announcing his appearance and performance at a forthcoming event in Connecticut and two complimentary 25c tickets for the organizer (see Figure 2). He was a ventriloquist and a magician.

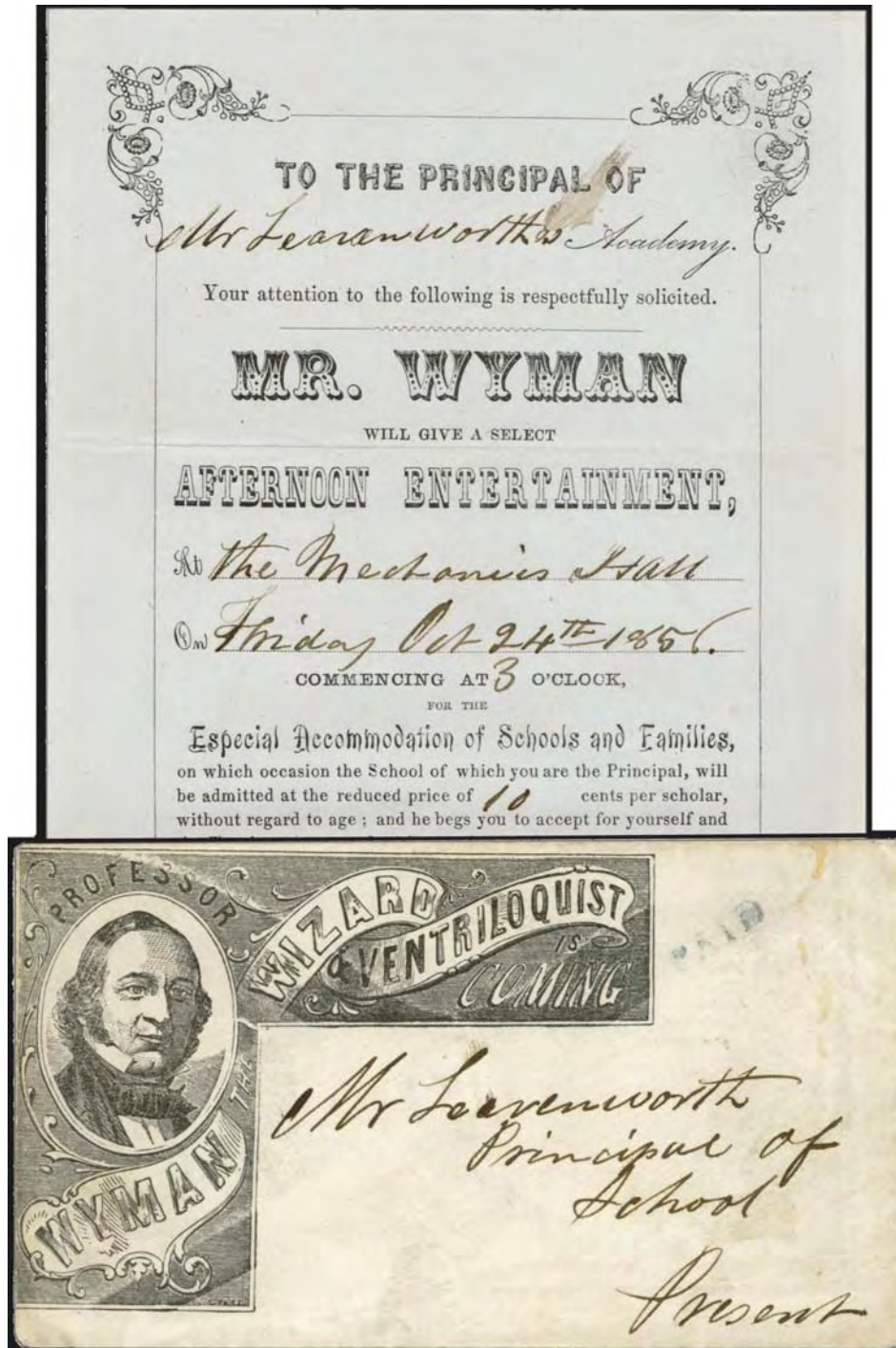


Fig. 2: A cover from Wyman addressed to the principal of a local school, enclosing a broadside announcing a ventriloquist performance at Mechanics Hall, October 24, 1856 – a stampless cover marked Paid, and a very early illustrated advertising cover.

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John was a member of The Society of American Magicians, the foremost society of magicians, at the time and still in existence today. He was one of four magicians among the top 15 wealthiest showmen listed over 150 years ago and just third from his friend P.T. Barnum, the richest showman in the world. Not bad considering they charged about 25 cents admission to their shows. Because of his notoriety, there is a good amount written about him. Since this is an information article principally about Civil War patriotics used in New Jersey, the following is a brief biographical sketch of the Wizard.

He was born John Wyman, Jr. in Albany, NY, Jan. 19, 1816 of a merchant father who planned a business career for him. After his graduation from Albany Academy he got a job behind the counter in a Baltimore auction house. Early in life he had shown a talent for mimicry and entertaining so soon he left the auction business and opened at the Baltimore Museum as a ventriloquist.

With his twin talents, ventriloquism and magic, plus a knack for getting his name in print, he was an early success. Before long he had performed for President Van Buren. Later his inexhaustible bottle trick was a source of great delight for Fillmore and his cabinet. Lincoln had Wyman entertain his guests at the White House on four occasions. For almost 45 years Wyman the Wizard performed tricks and ventriloquism and his performances featured prizes to those who visited his show. Such attractive items as \$40 gold watches, family Bibles, table sets, canes, silverware and pen-knives were given to lucky ticket holders, some ads promising a present for everybody!

Others not so reputable were also in the gift show field. Many of his competitors offered similar showers of prizes. But some of the gift show operators were swindlers pure and simple. They advertised costly gifts, sold tickets at a reasonable price, then skipped out the back door. Their only trick was the unexplained, but mob-provoking, disappearance of the advertised performer. Wyman, however, was “completely reliable, an honest professor of legitimate deception, a talented entertainer. If he advertised a \$40 watch as a gift, you can be assured the watch would not only be given away but be worth \$40.00.”<sup>2</sup>

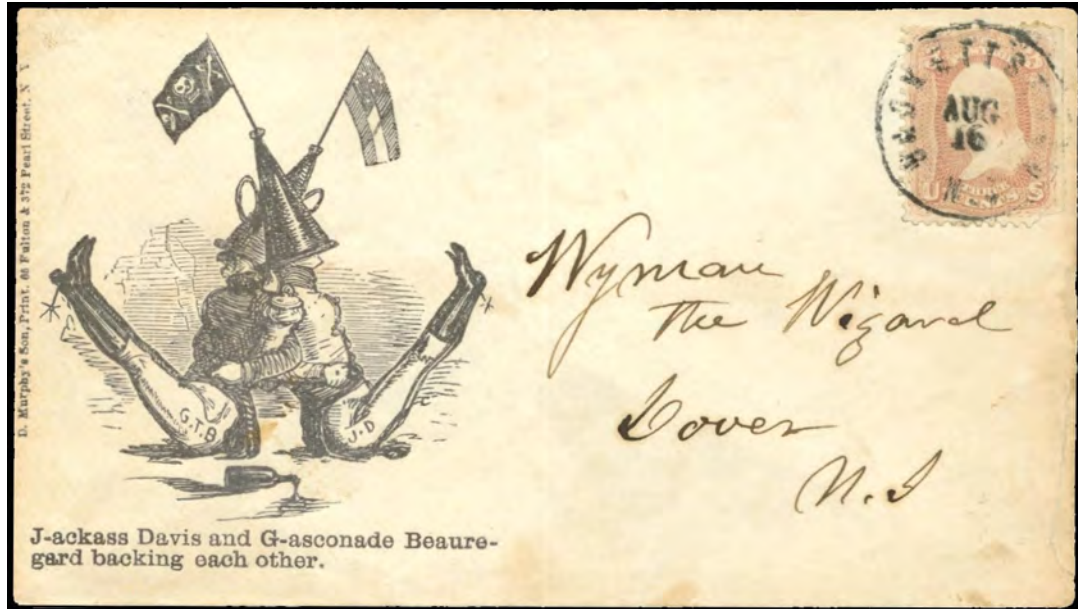
He was an early pioneering ventriloquist who achieved considerable reputation in the United States. He wrote a book on magic (1860) and another on ventriloquism (1861), both of which are still referenced today. He was an early pioneer of the ventriloquist’s (wooden) doll, the great grandfather of Charlie McCarthy. John flourished from the 1840s through the 1860s. As best that be could be determined from his correspondence, his travels were to the more populated northeastern states especially PA, NJ, and NY. He lived with his wife in Mount Holly, NJ, and later in Burlington. Wyman died in Burlington, N.J. on July 31, 1881. He was 65.

Nothing is yet known of the details of the entire correspondence, i.e. its provenance, its scope or size or when it was uncovered.

Fortunately John used the patriotic covers, as did his correspondents, in a selective manner. That is, all the used covers were the best designs of the era, specifically Magnus, Berlin & Jones, and McGee. We thank him for his unexpected legacy to philatelists.

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As a testimony to the amount of travelling he did, a display of these covers addressed to Wyman shows many of the cities in which he travelled, and only one in this collection is addressed to his home, when he lived in Philadelphia. Despite Wyman's wide reputation, he seemed to prefer to perform in the smaller American cities, and their smaller halls and school sites, instead of the larger venues.<sup>3</sup>



*Fig. 3: A cover dated Aug. 16, and sent from Hackettstown, NJ to Wyman the Wizard in Dover, NJ. Printed by D. Murphy's Son on Fulton and Pearl Streets in New York City. It shows caricatures of CSA President Jefferson Davis and General Beauregard.*



*Fig. 4: A cover sent from Paterson, NJ to Wyman The Ventriloquist in Newark, picturing Confederate General Beauregard shown as a bear.*



Fig. 5: An August 20, 1862 cover sent to Wyman the Ventriloquist at Millburn, NJ (Millburn August 22 receiver), redirected to Hackettstown, with a Due 3 marking. The illustration is a Jefferson Davis flag, with “J.D. His Marque” and skull and crossbones.

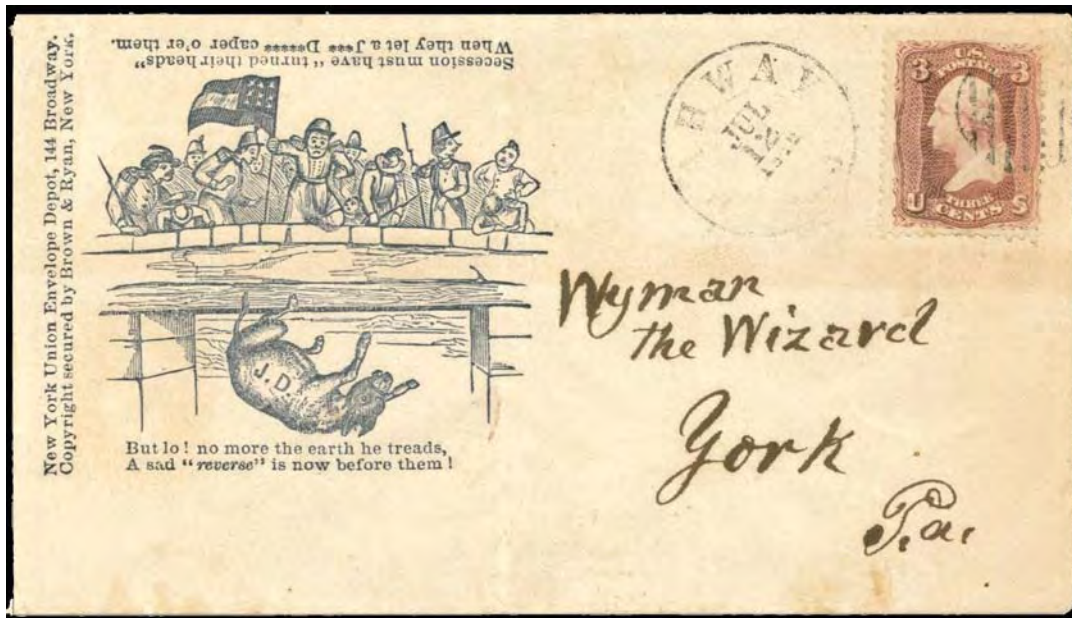


Fig. 6: Another cover, dated July 12, 1862 illustrating Jefferson Davis as a jackass, and text written both above and below, from Rahway, NJ to York, PA. The upper text reads, “Secession must have ‘turned their heads’/When they let a J\*\*\* D\*\*\*\* caper o’er them,” and below “But lo! No more the earth he treads,/A sad ‘reverse’ is now before them!” Printed by the New York Envelope Depot, 144 Broadway, copyrighted by Brown & Ryan, New York.



*Fig. 7: A cover sent from Rahway June 25 to Wyman the Wizard in Bordertown, showing Lt.-General Winfield Scott represented as the larger dog, trying to tempt Jeff Davis with the “bone” of Washington – with “A Polite Invitation.” Printed by D. Murphy’s Son, 65 Fulton and 372 Pearl Sts., N.Y.*



*Fig.8: A cover commemorating the new Statehood of Oregon (1859) with an early State seal. Although far from the battlefields, six companies of troops for the Union were raised in Oregon during the Civil War. Printed by C.A. Miller, 22 Ann St., NY, and sent from Rahway, NJ.*

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A number of the letters to Jane E. Wyman (née Jane. E. Prout), are addressed to her in Fall River, Massachusetts, which is where her original home was. It appears that these letters may have been written close together, perhaps to Mrs. Wyman on a visit home. John Wyman would be buried in Fall River in 1881,<sup>4</sup> as was his wife many years later in 1898.



*Fig. 9: A July 28 Plainfield, NJ cover with Union and Liberty symbols, and printed by Magee, 316 Chestnut St. In Philadelphia. 'Addressed to Fall River, MA.*



*Fig. 10: A cover addressed to Wyman's wife Jane, from Newark to Fall River, MA, dated July 31. The year date on these covers is difficult to read. This one shows a portrait of Washington.*

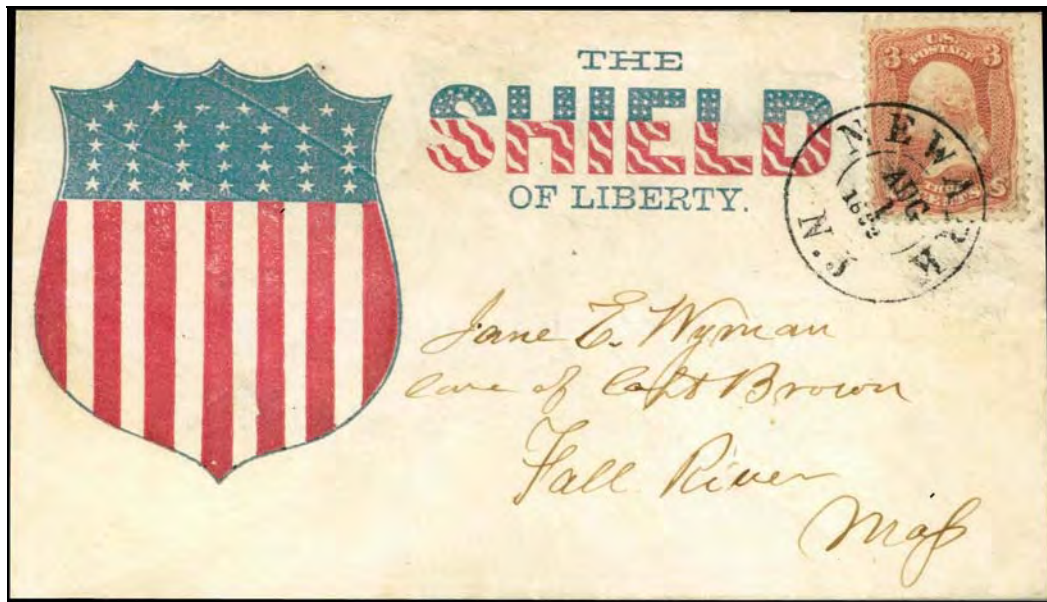


Fig. 11: A Newark, NJ cover dated Aug. 1, 1862 showing "The Shield of Liberty," and addressed to his wife Jane, in care of Capt. Brown in Fall River, MA.



Fig. 12: An August 4, 1862 cover from Newark to Jane in Fall River, showing "The Gallant 69<sup>th</sup> of New York ready to receive their Secessionist friends from the South. Arlington Heights, June 1861." The 69<sup>th</sup> was stationed at a fort renamed for their colonel - "Fort Corcoran," at Arlington Heights, Virginia. A D. Murphy's Son, Fulton & Pearl Sts., NY cover.



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On his retirement, John and his wife resided in Philadelphia, at 612 North Eleventh Street.<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 13: A Trenton double ring June 24, 1864(?) cancel on a cover addressed to Wyman the Ventriloquist, at 612 North 11<sup>th</sup> St., Philadelphia. The cover is printed by W.R. Wills in Norristown, PA, and shows a member of the 51<sup>st</sup> Regiment.

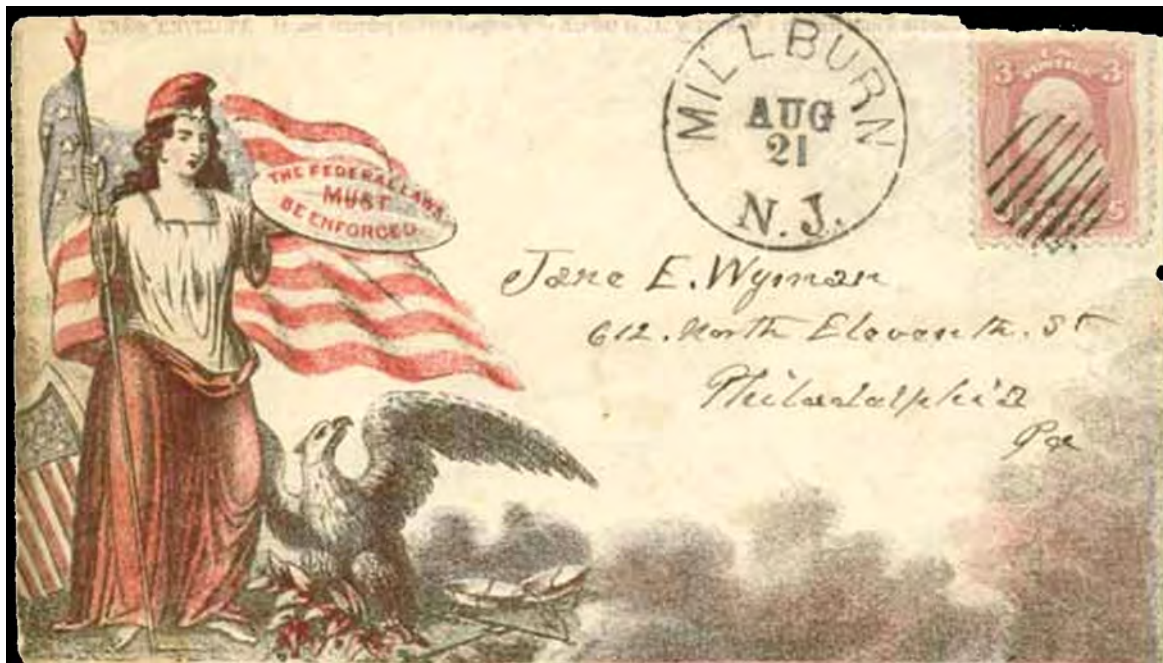


Fig. 14: Another cover addressed to Mrs. Wyman. This one, cancelled Aug. 21 in Millburn, NJ, includes a standing figure and eagle and the slogan "Federal Laws Must be Enforced."



Fig. 15: These two covers show different representations of a popular patriotic poem at the time, "The Girl I Left Behind Me." This one is cancelled at Belvidere, NJ on August 21.



Fig. 16: This cover, sent from Hackettstown, NJ on August 23, includes a section of the verse.

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Subsequently, the Wymans moved to Burlington, New Jersey,<sup>6</sup> where they had a home of some size. The following covers are all addressed to the corner of Union and St. Mary Streets in Burlington.



**Fig. 17:** A Charles Magnus design showing Fort Monroe and General Mansfield, addressed to Jane Wyman at the corner of Union and St. Mary Streets, in Burlington, NJ. Sent from Millstone.



**Fig. 18:** Another cover designed by Charles Magnus, 12 Frankfort St., NY, showing a portrait of General L. Blenker. Blenker organized the 8<sup>th</sup> NY Infantry Regiment, and commanded them for the Army of the Potomac. He was promoted to General for his service at Bull Run in 1861. . Again, addressed to Jane in Burlington, and sent from Plainfield, NJ on August 10.



*Fig. 19: A third and very attractive Charles Magnus cover, handcolored, and showing the first eight Presidents of the United States. Sent from Somerville on August 17, to Jane at the Burlington address.*

Wyman was certainly an interesting person, who happened to live in interesting times. It is our good luck that he lived and travelled so much in New Jersey during his career, and sent so many nice covers to his wife during this period. With the addition of covers he received from others, it is a serendipitous addition to the collecting of Civil War patriotic covers.

*[We will attempt to show other New Jersey Civil War patriotics to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civil War. If you are interested in seeing Richard's full exhibit, it is currently on view at McCulloch Hall in Morristown, for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civil War. It can also be viewed online in our Free Online Library at [www.NJPostalHistory.org](http://www.NJPostalHistory.org), or by going directly to <http://www.njpostalhistory.org/media/pdf/NJCWPats.pdf> .]*

## ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> From Vol. 42, No. 4 of M.U.M. (MAGIC-UNITY-MIGHT), Volume 42, Number 4, September, 1952, pps 97 - 99): Published monthly by the Society of American Magicians. Christopher Milbourne, ed., "45 Years a Wizard," on the Magical Past-Times website at <http://www.miraclefactory.net/mpt/view.php?id=81&type=articles>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Evans, Henry Ridgely, *The Old and The New Magic*, Chicago, The Open Court Publishing Company, 1906, accessed on GoogleBooks at [http://books.google.com/books?id=1\\_s-AAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=The+old+and+the+new+magic&hl=en&ei=DS3UToCdBMrk0QHysTyAQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDoQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=The%20old%20and%20the%20new%20magic&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=1_s-AAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=The+old+and+the+new+magic&hl=en&ei=DS3UToCdBMrk0QHysTyAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CDoQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=The%20old%20and%20the%20new%20magic&f=false) Nov. 29, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Milbourne, Christopher, *op cit.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Evans, *op cit.*