

CHAPTER I ~~~~~ *Unfulfilled Prophecies and Disappointed Messiahs*

A MAN with a conviction is a hard man to change. Tell him you disagree and he turns away. Show him facts or figures and he questions your sources. Appeal to logic and he fails to see your point.

We have all experienced the futility of trying to change a strong conviction, especially if the convinced person has some investment in his belief. We are familiar with the variety of ingenious defenses with which people protect their convictions, managing to keep them unscathed through the most devastating attacks.

But man's resourcefulness goes beyond simply protecting a belief. Suppose an individual believes something with his whole heart; suppose further that he has a commitment to this belief, that he has taken irrevocable actions because of it; finally, suppose that he is presented with evidence, unequivocal and undeniable evidence, that his belief is wrong: what will happen? The individual will frequently emerge, not only unshaken, but even more convinced of the truth of his beliefs than ever before. Indeed, he may even show a new fervor about convincing and converting other people to his view.

➤ How and why does such a response to contradictory evidence ← come about? This is the question on which this book focuses. We hope that, by the end of the volume, we will have provided an adequate answer to the question, an answer documented by data.

Let us begin by stating the conditions under which we would expect to observe increased fervor following the disconfirmation of a belief. There are five such conditions.

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1. A belief must be held with deep conviction and it must have some relevance to action, that is, to what the believer does or how he behaves.
2. The person holding the belief must have committed himself to it; that is, for the sake of his belief, he must have taken some important action that is difficult to undo. In general, the more important such actions are, and the more difficult they are to undo, the greater is the individual's commitment to the belief.
3. The belief must be sufficiently specific and sufficiently concerned with the real world so that events may unequivocally refute the belief.
4. Such undeniable disconfirmatory evidence must occur and must be recognized by the individual holding the belief.

The first two of these conditions specify the circumstances that will make the belief resistant to change. The third and fourth conditions together, on the other hand, point to factors that would exert powerful pressure on a believer to discard his belief. It is, of course, possible that an individual, even though deeply convinced of a belief, may discard it in the face of unequivocal disconfirmation. We must, therefore, state a fifth condition specifying the circumstances under which the belief will be discarded and those under which it will be maintained with new fervor.

5. The individual believer must have social support. It is unlikely that one isolated believer could withstand the kind of disconfirming evidence we have specified. If, however, the believer is a member of a group of convinced persons who can support one another, we would expect the belief to be maintained and the believers to attempt to proselyte or to persuade nonmembers that the belief is correct.

These five conditions specify the circumstances under which increased proselyting would be expected to follow disconfirmation. Given this set of hypotheses, our immediate concern is to locate data that will allow a test of the prediction of increased proselyting. Fortunately, there have been throughout history recurring instances of social movements which do satisfy the conditions adequately. These are the millennial or messianic move-

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ments, a contemporary instance of which we shall be examining in detail in the main part of this volume. Let us see just how such movements do satisfy the five conditions we have specified.

Typically, millennial or messianic movements are organized around the prediction of some future events. Our conditions are satisfied, however, only by those movements that specify a date or an interval of time within which the predicted events will occur as well as detailing exactly what is to happen. Sometimes the predicted event is the second coming of Christ and the beginning of Christ's reign on earth; sometimes it is the destruction of the world through a cataclysm (usually with some select group slated for rescue from the disaster); or sometimes the prediction is concerned with particular occurrences that the Messiah or a miracle worker will bring about. Whatever the event predicted, the fact that its nature and the time of its happening are specified satisfies the third point on our list of conditions.

The second condition specifies strong behavioral commitment to the belief. This usually follows almost as a consequence of the situation. If one really believes a prediction (the first condition), for example, that on a given date the world will be destroyed by fire, with sinners being destroyed and the good being saved, one does things about it and makes certain preparations as a matter of course. These actions may range all the way from simple public declarations to the neglect of worldly things and the disposal of earthly possessions. Through such actions and through the mocking and scoffing of nonbelievers there is usually established a heavy commitment on the part of believers. What they do by way of preparation is difficult to undo, and the jeering of nonbelievers simply makes it far more difficult for the adherents to withdraw from the movement and admit that they were wrong.

Our fourth specification has invariably been provided. The predicted events have not occurred. There is usually no mistaking the fact that they did not occur and the believers know that. In other words, the unequivocal disconfirmation does materialize and makes its impact on the believers.

Finally, our fifth condition is ordinarily satisfied — such move-

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ments do attract adherents and disciples, sometimes only a handful, occasionally hundreds of thousands. The reasons why people join such movements are outside the scope of our present discussion, but the fact remains that there are usually one or more groups of believers who can support one another.

History has recorded many such movements. Some are scarcely more than mentioned, while others are extensively described, although sometimes the aspects of a movement that concern us most may be sketchily recounted. A number of historical accounts, however, are complete enough to provide an introductory and exploratory answer to our central question. From these we have chosen several relatively clear examples of the phenomena under scrutiny in an endeavor simply to show what has often happened in movements that made a prediction about the future and then saw it disconfirmed. We shall discuss these historical examples before presenting the data from our case study of a modern movement.

‘Ever since the crucifixion of Jesus, many Christians have hoped for the second coming of Christ, and movements predicting specific dates for this event have not been rare.’ But most of the very early ones were not recorded in such a fashion that we can be sure of the reactions of believers to the disconfirmations they may have experienced. Occasionally historians make passing reference to such reactions as does Hughes in his description of the Montanists:

Montanus, who appeared in the second half of the second century, does not appear as an innovator in matters of belief. His one personal contribution to the life of the time was the fixed conviction that the second coming of Our Lord was at hand. The event was to take place at Pepuza — near the modern Angora — and thither all true followers of Our Lord should make their way. His authority for the statement was an alleged private inspiration, and the new prophet’s personality and eloquence won him a host of disciples, who flocked in such numbers to the appointed spot that a new town sprang up to house them. *Nor did the delay of the second advent put an end to the movement. On the contrary, it gave it new life and form* as a kind of Christianity of the elite,

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whom no other authority guided in their new life but the Holy Spirit working directly upon them. . . . [Italics ours.]¹

In this brief statement are all the essential elements of the typical messianic movement. There are convinced followers; they commit themselves by uprooting their lives and going to a new place where they build a new town; the Second Advent does not occur. And, we note, far from halting the movement, this disconfirmation gives it new life.

There is somewhat better documentation of millennial movements in more recent history. For example, the Anabaptists of the early sixteenth century believed that the millennium would occur in 1533. As Heath puts it:

But these high thoughts were obscured by Hoffmann's prediction that the end of all things was at hand. Strassburg, according to him, had been chosen as the New Jerusalem; there the magistrates would set up the kingdom of righteousness, while the hundred and forty and four thousand would maintain the power of the City, and the true Gospel and the true Baptism would spread over the earth. No man would be able to withstand the power, signs and wonders of the saints; and with them would appear, like two mighty torches, Enoch and Elias, who would consume the earth with the fire proceeding from their mouths. The year 1533 was the time in which, Hoffmann declared, the great fulfillment would begin.²

This adventist prediction was apparently proclaimed with vigor and was accepted by many persons who then acted accordingly, that is, they began to prepare for the Second Advent and the end of the temporal world. Heath says, for example:

. . . The followers of Rothmann [a disciple of Hoffmann], were at this time, as was their leader, distinguished for earnestness and self-sacrificing devotion. They sought to exemplify equality and brotherhood in their lives. Well-to-do Brothers and Sisters gave all their goods to the poor, destroyed their rent-rolls, forgave their debtors, renounced worldly pleasures, studying to live an unworldly life.³

Such was the situation in 1533, when the end of the world was due. Many people had accepted this belief and some were even

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disposing of their worldly goods. What happened as the end of 1533 approached and, indeed, when 1534 arrived, without the Second Coming having materialized?

From all accounts it would seem that instead of dampening the ardor of the Anabaptists, the disconfirmation of the predicted Second Coming increased their enthusiasm and activity. They poured greater energy than ever before into obtaining new converts, and sent out missionaries, something they never had done before. The following excerpts from Heath's study illustrate this increase of enthusiasm and activity following the disconfirmation:

. . . The year 1533 was almost at an end, the half-year during which it had been prophesied Hoffmann should be imprisoned had nearly elapsed, the two years' cessation from baptism had nearly run out when a new prophet [Matthysz] arose.

The Dutch Baptists felt that a leader had risen up amongst them, and they yielded themselves to his guidance. Matthysz began by sending out apostles . . . These apostles went forth announcing, among other things, that the promised time had come, that no more Christian blood would be poured out, but that in a short time God would overthrow the tyrants and blood-shedders with all the rest of the wicked. They travelled through many states and visited many cities, going to the gatherings of the faithful, and offering them the kiss of peace. They baptized, and ordained bishops and deacons, committing to the former the duty of ordaining others.

The new tide of enthusiasm rose higher than ever. Jakob van Kampen, who, assisted by Houtzager, worked among the poorer homes in Amsterdam, baptized in February, 1534, in one day, a hundred persons. About two months later it was estimated that two-thirds of the population at Monniaendam were adherents of Jan Matthysz, and it is said to have been the same in the neighbourhood of most of the great cities of Holland.⁴

Another, and rather fascinating, illustration of the reaction to disconfirming evidence is provided by the messianic movement of which Sabbatai Zevi was the central figure.⁵ Sabbatai Zevi was born and raised in the city of Smyrna. By 1646 he had acquired considerable prestige through living a highly ascetic life and devoting his whole energy to the study of the cabala. Indeed, though

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he was only twenty years old, he had already gathered around him a small group of disciples. To these disciples he taught and interpreted the highly mystical writings of the cabala.

Prevalent among Jews at that time was the belief that the Messiah would come in the year 1648. His coming was to be accompanied by all manner of miracles and the era of redemption would dawn. Sometime in 1648 Sabbatai Zevi proclaimed himself as the promised Messiah to his small group of disciples. Needless to say, the year 1648 passed and the era of redemption did not dawn and the expected miracles were not forthcoming.

There is but scant information about immediately subsequent events but apparently this disconfirmation of his messiahship did not daunt Sabbatai or his disciples. Indeed, it seems that after 1648 he made his claim known to the community at large. Graetz writes: "When Zevi's pretensions became known some years later, the college of rabbis, at their head his teacher Joseph Eskapha, laid him and his followers under a ban . . . Finally, he and his disciples were banished from Smyrna [about 1651]." ⁶ The significant point for our interest is that it was *after* the year 1648 had passed and nothing had happened that Zevi proclaimed his messiahship to people outside his small circle of disciples.

His banishment, however, certainly does not end the story. About this time some segments of the Christian world were expecting the year 1666 to usher in the millennium, and Sabbatai Zevi appears to have accepted this date. From 1651 until the autumn of 1665 he moved about among the cities of the Near East which had large Jewish communities, making known his claims to be the Messiah and gradually acquiring more and more followers even though the rabbinate continued to oppose him. By 1665 his following was very large and a number of disciples had helped him spread his name and pretensions throughout the Jewish world. The atmosphere in Smyrna had so changed by the autumn of 1665 that when he returned to his native city in that year he was received with great joy. In September or October of 1665 he proclaimed himself the Messiah in a public ceremony in Smyrna:

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The madness of the Jews of Smyrna knew no bounds. Every sign of honor and enthusiastic love was shown him. . . . All prepared for a speedy exodus, the return to the Holy Land. Workmen neglected their business, and thought only of the approaching Kingdom of the Messiah. . . .

These events in the Jew's quarter at Smyrna made a great sensation in ever-widening circles. The neighboring communities in Asia Minor, many members of which had betaken themselves to Smyrna, and witnessed the scenes enacted in the town, brought home exaggerated accounts of the Messiah's power of attraction and of working miracles, were swept into the same vortex. Sabbatai's private secretary, Samuel Primo, took care that reports of the fame and doings of the Messiah should reach Jews abroad.⁷

The movement gradually spread to almost the whole of Jewry, and Sabbatai was accepted and heralded everywhere as the Messiah. Furthermore, since this was no idle belief, people took steps to prepare for the promised events. They neglected their work and their businesses, and many prepared for the return to Jerusalem.

Since one of the predicted events was that the Sultan would be deposed (a necessary preliminary to the return of the Jews to the Holy Land), at the very beginning of the year 1666, Sabbatai together with a number of followers set out for Constantinople to accomplish this task. The party landed on the coast of the Dardanelles where Sabbatai was immediately arrested by Turkish officials and was brought in fetters to a small town in the neighborhood of Constantinople. Graetz writes:

Informed by a messenger of his arrival . . . his followers [from Constantinople] hastened from the capital to see him, but found him in a pitiable plight and in chains. The money which they brought with them procured him some alleviation, and on the following Sunday [February 1666] he was brought by sea to Constantinople—but in how different a manner to what he and his believers had anticipated! ⁸

Clearly, we may regard his arrest as a serious disappointment to the followers of Sabbatai and a disconfirmation of his predictions. Indeed, there were evidences of shock and disappointment. But then there began to emerge the familiar pattern: recovery of con-

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viction, followed by new heights of enthusiasm and proselyting. Graetz describes the ensuing events very well:

For some days they kept quietly at home, because the street boys mocked them by shouting, "Is he coming? Is he coming?" But soon they began again to assert that he was the true Messiah, and that the sufferings which he had encountered were necessary, a condition to his glorification. The prophets continued to proclaim the speedy redemption of Sabbatai and of all Israel. . . . Thousands crowded daily to Sabbatai's place of confinement merely to catch a glimpse of him. . . . The expectations of the Jews were raised to a still higher pitch, and the most exaggerated hopes fostered to a greater degree.⁹

The very fact that Sabbatai was still alive was used by the Jews to argue that he was really the Messiah. When he was moved to another jail and his incarceration became milder (largely through bribery) the argument was complete. A constant procession of adoring followers visited the prison where Sabbatai held court, and a steady stream of propaganda and tales of miracles poured out all over the Near East and Europe. Graetz states:

What more was needed to confirm the predictions of prophets of ancient and modern times? The Jews accordingly prepared seriously to return to their original home. In Hungary they began to unroof their houses. In large commercial cities, where Jews took the lead in wholesale business, such as Amsterdam, Leghorn and Hamburg, stagnation of trade ensued.¹⁰

The memoirs of a contemporary European Jewess vividly confirm Graetz' assertions:

Our joy, when the letters arrived [from Smyrna] is not to be told. Most of them were addressed to the Sephardim who, as fast as they came, took them to their synagogue and read them aloud; young and old, the Germans too hastened to the Sephardic synagogue.

Many sold their houses and lands and all their possessions, for any day they hoped to be redeemed. My good father-in-law left his home in Hameln, abandoned his house and lands and all his goodly furniture and moved to Hildesheim. He sent on to us in Hamburg two enormous casks packed with linens and with peas, beans, dried meats, shredded prunes and like stuff, every manner

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of food that would keep. For the old man expected to sail any moment from Hamburg to the Holy Land.¹¹

Finally, in an effort to cope with the problem, without making a martyr of Sabbatai, the Sultan attempted to convert him to Islam. Astonishingly enough, the plan succeeded and Sabbatai donned the turban. Many of the Jews of the Near East still kept faith in him. Explanations were invented for his conversion and many continued their proselyting, usually in places where the movement had not previously been strong. A considerable number of Jews even followed his lead and became Moslems. His conversion proved to be too much for most of his followers in Europe, however, and the movement there soon collapsed.

The Sabbataian movement strikingly illustrates the phenomenon we are concerned with: when people are committed to a belief and a course of action, clear disconfirming evidence may simply result in deepened conviction and increased proselyting. But there does seem to be a point at which the disconfirming evidence has mounted sufficiently to cause the belief to be rejected.

In the preceding examples many of the facts are not known, others are in dispute, and much is vague. There is, however, a more recent movement about which considerable detail is known — the Millerites, who flourished in mid-nineteenth-century America. Many of the original documents of the Millerite movement have been preserved and there are two fairly lengthy summary accounts available. One, by C. E. Sears,¹² tends to ridicule the Millerites while the other, by F. D. Nichol,¹³ is a careful and vigorous defense of them.

William Miller was a New England farmer with a belief in the literal fulfillment of biblical prophecy. In 1818, after a two-year study of the Bible, Miller reached the conclusion that the end of the world would occur in 1843. Nichol's account reads:

Specifically, he put his first and greatest emphasis on the prophetic declaration, "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." Daniel 8:14. Believing that the "cleansing" of the sanctuary involved the purging of this earth by fire, the "days" in symbolic prophecy stand for years,

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and that this time prophecy began about 457 B.C., he reached this final conclusion: "I was thus brought, in 1818, at the close of my two years' study of the Scriptures, to the solemn conclusion, that in about twenty-five years from that time all the affairs of our present state would be wound up." (William Miller, *Apology and Defense*, p. 5).¹⁴

For another five years he continued to study the Bible and to check his calculations before he acquired the confidence to talk much about it to others. Even then he talked only to his neighbors and to a few ministers, none of whom seemed to manifest much interest. He continued talking about his views, however. By 1831 he had evoked enough interest to receive invitations to address various groups. For eight years Miller continued to devote a great deal of his time to giving lectures in which he explained the basis for his prediction of the millennium in 1843. He gradually persuaded more and more people, including a number of ministers, of the correctness of his belief. In 1839 he met and convinced Joshua V. Himes, who helped change the movement from a one-man affair into an organized activity. A newspaper was started, and in 1840, only three years before the Second Coming was due, a general conference of interested ministers was called. Proselyting activity increased and Miller's views began to spread as the adventist prediction became the focus of a mass movement.

Many of the leading figures in the Millerite movement had still not fully accepted the specific date of 1843 as the time of the Second Coming. In the spring of 1842, a general conference was held in Boston. Nichol states:

In this conference the significance of the time element in the preaching of the advent came definitely to the front as indicated in this resolution that was passed:

"*Resolved*, that in the opinion of this conference, there are most serious and important reasons for believing that God has revealed the time of the end of the world, and that that time is 1843." (*Signs of the Times*, June 1, 1842, p. 69).

The very fact that an increasing emphasis was being placed on the time element meant that all who accepted this phase of the

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teaching felt an increasing sense of urgency in discharging their responsibility to warn the world. They believed that the time had come to proclaim with vigor what they described as "the midnight cry."¹⁵

In other words, as the year 1843 approached, belief in the correctness of the predicted date grew stronger. At the same time activity in spreading the word was on the increase. The general conference had decided to hold a series of camp meetings during the summer of 1842, and these were almost all highly successful. In four months, ending the middle of November, the Millerites held thirty camp meetings at which the attendance was in the thousands. The number of adherents was growing steadily.

In addition to the newspaper *Signs of the Times*, which had been started in Boston in 1840, the Millerite leaders now started another, *The Midnight Cry*, in New York. Many other newspapers were published in various cities for shorter periods of time, usually in connection with a special series of lectures being given locally:

For example, the *Philadelphia Alarm* was started in 1843, as an adjunct to a series of lectures. Thirteen numbers were issued. Thus a local color could be given to the literature in any city while an initial endeavor was being made there. Afterward the more permanently established publications could be used for promotion and educating the believers in the movement.¹⁶

While the movement was growing the opposition was also increasing. By the beginning of 1843 many ministers were preaching against the Millerites and newspapers were ridiculing them. Rumors were current and printed widely in the newspapers of the day that Miller's followers were fanatics and that his doctrines drove people insane. A single example should suffice to show the kind of attack directed against the movement:

The Millerites have very properly been shut out of the buildings in which they have for some time been holding their orgies in Philadelphia, and we are happy to learn that the grand jury of the Boston municipal court has represented the great temple itself as a dangerous structure. After some half-dozen more deaths occur and a few more men and women are sent to madhouses by

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this miserable fanaticism perhaps some grand jury may think it worth-while to indict the vagabonds who are the cause of so much mischief.¹⁷

In spite of such opposition, the movement continued to attract believers—so many that it became difficult to find a hall large enough for general meetings. Early in 1843, therefore, the leaders decided to erect a tabernacle in Boston. It was dedicated before an audience of some 3500 people—a capacity crowd that included a number of clergymen of the city. The new building made it possible to speed the word to even larger audiences in the city, while the campaign of pamphlets and newspapers continued unabated.

As one might expect, the beginning of 1843 coincided with an upsurge of interest in the specific date of the Advent. Until the beginning of the year, Miller had usually referred to the Second Coming as taking place “about the year 1843.” On January 1, 1843, Miller published a synopsis of his beliefs, and therein stated his expectations about the date:

I believe the time can be known by all who desire to understand and to be ready for His coming. And I am fully convinced that sometime between March 21st, 1843, and March 21st, 1844, according to the Jewish mode of computation of time, Christ will come, and bring all His Saints with Him; and that then He will reward every man as his work shall be.¹⁸

Nichol comments:

Miller set no date or day within this period. The leaders who were associated with him likewise refused to name a specific date. In the first issue of January, 1843, the *Signs of the Times* declared, in refutation of a widely circulated charge that the Millerites had set on a certain day in April:

“The fact is, that the believers of the second advent in 1843, have fixed NO TIME in the year for the event. And Brethren Miller, Himes, Litch, Hale, Fitch, Hawley, and other prominent lecturers, most decidedly protest against . . . fixing the day or hour of the event. This we have done over and over again, in our paper.” (*Signs of the Times*, Jan. 4, 1843, p. 121. See also issue of Jan. 18, 1843, p. 141, in which George Storrs, another Millerite

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minister, protests against the fixing of any day; also issue of April 5, 1843, pp. 33-35, 37.)

It is true that individual preachers or limited groups here and there sought to find a Scriptural analogy or by a certain reading of the prophecy a warrant for predicting the advent on some particular day during the year.¹⁹

The fact that Miller had specified an interval of time, namely, March 21, 1843, to March 21, 1844, rather than a single day, tended to be temporarily overlooked by many followers. Two predictions of specific days had some currency although it is impossible to be sure how widely they were believed. Some Millerites expected the Advent to occur on April 23, 1843, although the leaders never endorsed this date. Those who had given credence to the April date reacted to its passing in the following way:

At first there was evidence of surprise and disappointment among the Millerites, but it quickly gave way to renewed confidence. "After all," they reminded one another, "there is a whole year in which to look for the Coming;—we looked for it too soon, that was all."—and the singing and exhorting took on a new fervor.²⁰

Here once again we note the appearance of increased enthusiasm and conviction after a disconfirmation.

In spite of the official position of the leaders, that the end of the period in which the Second Coming was expected was March 21, 1844, many Millerites placed their hopes on the end of 1843. The leaders took note of this specific expectation and, early in 1844, issued statements concerning it. For example, the opening paragraph of a New Year's address by Miller goes as follows:

"Brethren, The Roman [year] 1843 is past [the Jewish sacred year would end in the spring of 1844] and our hopes are not realized. Shall we give up the ship? No, no . . . We do not yet believe our reckoning has run out. It takes all of 457 and 1843 to make 2300, and must of course run as far into '44 as it began in the year 457 before Christ."²¹

The situation generally at the beginning of 1844 is described by Sears:

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. . . Then a fluttering of doubt and hesitation became apparent in certain communities, but soon those were dispelled when it was recalled that as far back as 1839 Prophet Miller had stated on some occasion, which had been forgotten in the general excitement, that he was not *positive* that the event would take place during the *Christian* year from 1843 to 1844, and that he would claim the whole *Jewish* year which would carry the prophecy over to the 21st of March, 1844. An announcement to this effect was sent broadcast, and by this time the delusion had taken such a firm hold upon the imaginations of his followers that any simple explanation, however crude, seemed sufficient to quiet all doubts and questionings.

Having accepted this lengthening of the allotted time, the brethren who had assumed the responsibility of sounding the alarm entered into their work with renewed energy and outdid themselves in their efforts to terrify the army of unbelievers into a realization of the horrors that awaited them and to strengthen the faith of those already in the ranks.²²

Again fervor increased; Millerite conferences in New York and Philadelphia were thronged, and, in Washington, there had to be a last-minute change to a larger hall. Popular interest greatly exceeded even the leaders' expectations.

But March 21, 1844, also came and went with no sign of the Second Coming. The reaction of the non-Millerites was strong and unequivocal:

The world made merry over the old Prophet's predicament. The taunts and jeers of the "scoffers" were well-nigh unbearable. If any of Miller's followers walked abroad, they ran the gauntlet of merciless ridicule.

"What! — not gone up yet? — We thought you'd gone up! Aren't you going up soon? — Wife didn't go up and leave you behind to burn, did she?"

The rowdy element in the community would not leave them alone.²³

There was strong and severe disappointment among the believers, but this was of brief duration and soon the energy and enthusiasm were back to where they had been before and even greater:

. . . The year of the end of the world had ended, but Millerism had not. . . . Though some who had been only lukewarm in the

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movement fell away from it, many maintained both their faith and their fervor. They were ready to attribute the disappointment to some minor error in calculating chronology.²⁴

But in spite of the failure of the prophecy the fires of fanaticism increased. The flames of such emotions cannot be quenched at will; like all great conflagrations they must burn themselves out. And so it was in 1844. Instead of decreasing, the failure seemed to excite even greater exhibitions of loyalty to the expectation of the impending Judgment Day.²⁵

By the middle of July things were at a new fever pitch and the energy expended to convert more and more people was greater than ever. Miller and Himes traveled as far as Ohio to make converts, something that had never before been done. Himes described the general attitude of followers toward the Advent: "I have never witnessed a stronger, or more active faith. Indeed, the faith and confidence of the brethren in the prophetic word was never stronger. I find few, if any, who ever believed on Bible *evidence*, that are at all shaken in the faith; while others are embracing our views."²⁶ Following a visit to Philadelphia Himes, still very much aware of the disconfirmation in March, showed his elation at the revival of belief: "The trying crisis is past, and the cause is on the rise in this city. The calls for lectures in the vicinity were never more pressing than now. The minister in charge of the Ebenezer station, Kensington, (Protestant Methodist) has just come out on the doctrine in full."²⁷

As Nichol puts it:

From Cleveland, Himes wrote early in August of his plan to go to England in October, "if time be prolonged," for the purpose of quickening the interest already present there. Literature had been sent out. Various ministers in other lands had taken up the cry, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh." But Himes thought that now he and others with him from America should go forth to strengthen the endeavors abroad. Said he:

"If time be continued for a few months, we shall send the *glad tidings* out in a number of different languages, among Protestant and Catholic nations. . . .

"A press shall be established at London, and lecturers will go out in every direction, and we trust the Word of the Lord shall

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have a free course and be glorified. What we shall accomplish we can not tell. But we wish to do our duty." (*The Advent Herald*, Aug. 21, 1844, p. 20)

Thus even as Himes and Miller moved westward expanding the work, they envisioned a still greater work overseas.²⁸

About this time more and more Millerites were accepting a new prediction first promulgated by one of their number, the Reverend Samuel S. Snow, who believed that the date of the Second Coming would be October 22, 1844. Although it might not seem possible for the enthusiasm and fervor to exceed what had already been shown in the first few months of 1844, that is just what happened. The two partial disconfirmations (April 23, 1843, and the end of the calendar year 1843) and one complete and unequivocal disconfirmation (March 21, 1844) served simply to strengthen conviction that the Coming was near at hand and to increase the time and energy that Miller's adherents spent trying to convince others:

Perhaps not so much from the preaching and writing of Snow, as from a deep conviction that the end of all things could not be far away, some of the believers in Northern New Hampshire, even before summer began, failed to plow their fields because the Lord would surely come "before another winter." This conviction grew among others in that area so that even if they had planted their fields they felt it would be inconsistent with their faith to take in their crops. We read:

"Some, on going into their fields to cut their grass, found themselves entirely unable to proceed, and, conforming to their sense of duty, left their crops standing in the field, to show their faith by their works, and thus to condemn the world. This rapidly extended through the north of New England." (*The Advent Herald*, Oct. 20, 1844, p. 93)

Such conviction naturally prepared men to give a sympathetic ear to the proclamation that the day of the Lord would come on October 22. By midsummer a new stimulus had been given to Millerism in New England. Backsliders were reclaimed, and new ardor controlled those Adventists who accepted Snow's reckoning, as they went out to proclaim the cry, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet Him." Indeed, Snow declared that only now was the true midnight cry being given.²⁹

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It is interesting that it was the insistence of the ordinary members of the Millerite movement that the October date be accepted. The leaders of the movement resisted it and counseled against it for a long time but to no avail. A Millerite editor, writing in retrospect, commented:

At first the definite time was generally opposed; but there seemed to be an irresistible power attending its proclamation, which prostrated all before it. It swept over the land with the velocity of a tornado, and it reached hearts in different and distant places almost simultaneously, and in a manner which can be accounted for only on the supposition that God was [in] it. . . .

The lecturers among the Adventists were the last to embrace the views of the time. . . . It was not until within about two weeks of the commencement of the seventh month [about the first of October], that we were particularly impressed with the progress of the movement, when we had such a view of it, that to oppose it, or even to remain silent longer, seemed to us to be opposing the work of the Holy Spirit; and in entering upon the work with all our souls, we could but exclaim, "What were we, that we should resist God?" It seemed to us to have been so independent of human agency, that we could but regard it as a fulfillment of the "midnight cry."³⁰

In the period from mid-August to the predicted new day, October 22, 1844, things reached an incredible pitch of fervor, zeal, and conviction:

Elder Boutelle describes the period thus: "The 'Advent Herald', 'the Midnight Cry', and other Advent papers, periodicals, pamphlets, tracts, leaflets, voicing the coming glory, were scattered broadcast and everywhere like autumn leaves in the forest. Every house was visited by them. . . . A mighty effort through the Spirit and the word preached was made to bring sinners to repentance, and to have the wandering ones return."

The camp meetings were now so crowded that they were no longer orderly as they had been. If there had been a time when an undesirable element could be kept out, it was now impossible to do so; and as a matter of fact the world was so near its end, as they claimed, whatever precautions were taken before seemed hardly worth while any longer.³¹

The most active endeavors were made by the Millerites during these closing weeks to broadcast what they believed was the truth

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concerning the exact time of Christ's advent. Extra issues of *The Midnight Cry* and *The Advent Herald* were published. The editor of *The Midnight Cry* stated that in order to provide the literature needed they were keeping "four steam presses almost constantly in motion."⁸²

Further evidence on the extent of the conviction and the drive to persuade and convert others is the fact that now even many of the leaders were advocating partial cessation of normal activities on the part of believers so they would have more time to convert others and spread the word. An editorial in the final issue of *The Midnight Cry* proclaimed:

Think for eternity! Thousands may be lulled to sleep by hearing your actions say: "This world is worth my whole energies. The world to come is a vain shadow." O, reverse this practical sermon, *instantly*! Break loose from the world as much as possible. If indispensable duty calls you into the world for a moment, go as a man would run to do a piece of work in the rain. Run and hasten through it, and let it be known that you leave it with alacrity for something better. Let your actions preach in the clearest tones: "The Lord is coming" — "The Time is short" — "This world passeth away" — "Prepare to meet thy God."⁸³

A news story in *The Midnight Cry* stated:

Many are leaving all to go out and warn the brethren and the world. In Philadelphia, thirteen volunteered at one meeting (after hearing Brother Storrs) to go out and sound the alarm. . . . In both cities [New York and Philadelphia], stores are being closed, and they preach in tones the world understands, though they may not heed it.⁸⁴

And Nichol points out:

There were several reasons why the believers in a number of instances sold their possessions in part or in whole. First, they wished to have more money with which to support the cause. It took money to support four presses running constantly, pouring out literature on Millerism. Second, they wished to have all their dealings with their fellow men honorably concluded before the advent, including full payment of all their debts. Third, with the fervent love for others, which true religion certainly ought to generate in the hearts of men, Millerites who owed no debts themselves sought to help others pay their debts. Some Millerites,

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stimulated by the realization that soon earthly gold would be worthless, and warmed in their hearts with a love for their fellow men, wished to make gifts to the poor, both within and without the faith.⁸⁵

But October 22 came and went, and with it all the hopes of the Millerites. This was the culminating disconfirmation and, at last, conviction was shattered and proselyting was stilled. The plight of the heavily committed followers was pitiable indeed. They had to bear the taunts and jeers of a hostile world and many were left pauperized. Their cruel disappointment and the hardship are well attested to. Nichol quotes two extracts from the writings of convinced believers that tell the sad story:

"Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before. It seemed that the loss of all earthly friends could have been no comparison. We wept, and wept, till the day dawn. I mused in my own heart, saying, My advent experience has been the richest and brightest of all my Christian experience. If this had proved a failure, what was the rest of my Christian experience worth? Has the Bible proved a failure? Is there no God, no heaven, no golden home city, no paradise? Is all this but a cunningly devised fable? Is there no reality to our fondest hope and expectation of these things? And thus we had something to grieve and weep over, if all our fond hopes were lost. And as I said, we wept till the day dawn."⁸⁶

"The 22nd of October passed, making unspeakably sad the faithful and longing ones; but causing the unbelieving and wicked to rejoice. All was still. No *Advent Herald*; no meetings as formerly. Everyone felt lonely, with hardly a desire to speak to anyone. Still in the cold world! No deliverance—the Lord [had] not come! No words can express the feelings of disappointment of a true Adventist then. Those only who experienced it can enter into the subject as it was. It was a humiliating thing and we all felt it alike . . ."⁸⁷

The disconfirmation of October 22 brought about the collapse of Millerism. It had taken three or perhaps four disconfirmations within a period of eighteen months, but this last one was too much. In spite of their overwhelming commitments, Miller's fol-

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lowers gave up their beliefs and the movement quickly disintegrated in dissention, controversy, and discord. By the late spring of 1845 it had virtually disappeared.

The history of the Millerites shows again the phenomenon we have noted in our other examples. Although there is a limit beyond which belief will not withstand disconfirmation, it is clear that the introduction of contrary evidence can serve to increase the conviction and enthusiasm of a believer.

Historical records are replete with further instances of similar movements of a millennial or messianic character. Unfortunately for our purpose, however, in most instances the data which would be relevant to our hypotheses are totally absent. Even in cases where considerable data are available, there will frequently be some crucial point which is equivocal, thus destroying the cogent relevance to our hypotheses. The best instance of such a movement where there is one single controversial point on a crucial issue is the very beginnings of Christianity.²⁸

There is quite general agreement among historians that the apostles were both convinced and committed. None would question that the apostles fully believed in the things Jesus stood for and had altered their lives considerably because of this belief. Burkitt, for example, states that Peter, at one point, "exclaimed that he and his companions really had left all to follow Jesus."²⁹ Thus, we may assert that the first two conditions which we stated early in the chapter are fulfilled.

There is no denying that the apostles provided support for one another and that they went out to proselyte following the crucifixion of Jesus. Thus, we may accept as fact that the fifth condition we mentioned is satisfied, and that there was a point at which proselyting increased.

But the third and fourth conditions remain in doubt. Was there, in essence, something in the belief system that was amenable to clear and unequivocal disconfirmation and, if so, did such disconfirmation occur? In spite of many things which are not disputed, the major issue is shrouded in disagreement among various historians. There is general agreement that Jesus, in various ways,

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implied that he was the Messiah or Christ. More important, it is also clear that his disciples recognized him as such. For example, Scott states: "When directly challenged by Jesus, Peter speaking for the group of disciples said, 'Thou art the Messiah.'" ⁴⁰

It is also clear that, at least so far as other Jewish sects of that day were concerned, the Messiah could not be made to suffer pain. Thus Simpson states: "With equal certainty it may be affirmed that no department of Judaism had ever conceived of a suffering Messiah." ⁴¹ If this were all there were to it one would assert that the crucifixion and the cry Jesus uttered on the cross were indeed an unequivocal disconfirmation.

But this is not all there is to it. Many authorities assert unequivocally that it is precisely on this question that Jesus introduced new doctrine. Jesus and the apostles, these authorities state, did believe that the Messiah had to suffer and Jesus even predicted that he would die in Jerusalem. Burkitt says: ". . . we end with Peter declaring, 'Thou art the Messiah' and with Jesus saying, practically, in reply, 'Yes, and I go now to Jerusalem; but whoever wants to follow Me there must renounce all ambitious hopes and accompany Me — to execution.'" ⁴² If this view is maintained then the crucifixion, far from being a disconfirmation, was indeed a confirmation of a prediction and the subsequent proselyting of the apostles would stand as a counter-example to our hypotheses. The authorities we have quoted from above accept this latter interpretation and, in fact, they are in the majority.

But not all authorities agree. At the other extreme of interpretation is Graetz, who states:

When the disciples of Jesus had somewhat recovered from the panic which came upon them at the time he was seized and executed, they re-assembled to mourn together over the death of their beloved Master. . . . Still, the effect that Jesus produced upon the unenlightened masses must have been very powerful; for their faith in him, far from fading away like a dream, became more and more intense, their adoration of Jesus rising to the highest pitch of enthusiasm. The only stumbling-block to their belief lay in the fact that the Messiah who came to deliver Israel and bring to light the glory of the kingdom of heaven, endured a

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shameful death. How could the Messiah be subject to pain? A suffering Messiah staggered them considerably, and this stumbling-block had to be overcome before a perfect and joyful belief could be reposed in him. It was at that moment probably that some writer relieved his own perplexities and quelled their doubts by referring to a prophecy in Isaiah, that "He will be taken from the land of the living, and will be wounded for the sins of his people."⁴³

Was it or was it not a disconfirmation? We do not know and cannot say. But this one unclarity makes the whole episode inconclusive with respect to our hypotheses.

There are many more historical examples we could describe at the risk of becoming repetitive and at the risk of using highly unreliable data. Let the examples we have already given suffice.

We can now turn our attention to the question of why increased proselyting follows the disconfirmation of a prediction. How can we explain it and what are the factors that will determine whether or not it will occur?

Since our explanation will rest upon one derivation from a general theory, we will first state the bare essentials of the theory which are necessary for this derivation. The full theory has wide implications and a variety of experiments have already been conducted to test derivations concerning such things as the consequences of decisions, the effects of producing forced compliance, and some patterns of voluntary exposure to new information. At this point, we shall draw out in detail only those implications that are relevant to the phenomenon of increased proselyting following disconfirmation of a prediction. For this purpose we shall introduce the concepts of consonance and dissonance.⁴⁴

Dissonance and consonance are relations among cognitions—that is, among opinions, beliefs, knowledge of the environment, and knowledge of one's own actions and feelings. Two opinions, or beliefs, or items of knowledge are *dissonant* with each other if they do not fit together—that is, if they are inconsistent, or if, considering only the particular two items, one does not follow from the other. For example, a cigarette smoker who believes that

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smoking is bad for his health has an opinion that is dissonant with the knowledge that he is continuing to smoke. He may have many other opinions, beliefs, or items of knowledge that are consonant with continuing to smoke but the dissonance nevertheless exists too.

Dissonance produces discomfort and, correspondingly, there will arise pressures to reduce or eliminate the dissonance. Attempts to reduce dissonance represent the observable manifestations that dissonance exists. Such attempts may take any or all of three forms. The person may try to change one or more of the beliefs, opinions, or behaviors involved in the dissonance; to acquire new information or beliefs that will increase the existing consonance and thus cause the total dissonance to be reduced; or to forget or reduce the importance of those cognitions that are in a dissonant relationship.

If any of the above attempts are to be successful, they must meet with support from either the physical or the social environment. In the absence of such support, the most determined efforts to reduce dissonance may be unsuccessful.

The foregoing statement of the major ideas about dissonance and its reduction is a very brief one and, for that reason, it may be difficult to follow. We can perhaps make these ideas clearer to the reader by showing how they apply to the kind of social movement we have been discussing, and by pointing out how these ideas help to explain the curious phenomenon we have observed.

Theoretically, what is the situation of the individual believer at the pre-disconfirmation stage of such a movement? He has a strongly held belief in a prediction — for example, that Christ will return — a belief that is supported by the other members of the movement. By way of preparation for the predicted event, he has engaged in many activities that are entirely consistent with his belief. In other words, most of the relations among relevant cognitions are, at this point, consonant.

Now what is the effect of the disconfirmation, of the unequivocal fact that the prediction was wrong, upon the believer? The

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disconfirmation introduces an important and painful dissonance. The fact that the predicted events did not occur is dissonant with continuing to believe both the prediction and the remainder of the ideology of which the prediction was the central item. The failure of the prediction is also dissonant with all the actions that the believer took in preparation for its fulfillment. The magnitude of the dissonance will, of course, depend on the importance of the belief to the individual and on the magnitude of his preparatory activity.

In the type of movement we have discussed, the central belief and its accompanying ideology are usually of crucial importance in the believers' lives and hence the dissonance is very strong—and very painful to tolerate. Accordingly we should expect to observe believers making determined efforts to eliminate the dissonance or, at least, to reduce its magnitude. How may they accomplish this end? The dissonance would be largely eliminated if they discarded the belief that had been disconfirmed, ceased the behavior which had been initiated in preparation for the fulfillment of the prediction, and returned to a more usual existence. Indeed, this pattern sometimes occurs and we have seen that it did happen to the Millerites after the last disconfirmation and to the Sabbataians after Zevi himself was converted to Islam. But frequently the behavioral commitment to the belief system is so strong that almost any other course of action is preferable. It may even be less painful to tolerate the dissonance than to discard the belief and admit one had been wrong. When that is the case, the dissonance cannot be eliminated by giving up the belief.

Alternatively, the dissonance would be reduced or eliminated if the members of a movement effectively blind themselves to the fact that the prediction has not been fulfilled. But most people, including members of such movements, are in touch with reality and cannot simply blot out of their cognition such an unequivocal and undeniable fact. They can try to ignore it, however, and they usually do try. They may convince themselves that the date was wrong but that the prediction will, after all, be shortly confirmed; or they may even set another date as the Millerites did. Some

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Millerites, after the last disconfirmation, even ventured the opinion that the Second Coming had occurred, but that it had occurred in heaven and not on the earth itself. Or believers may try to find reasonable explanations and very often they find ingenious ones. The Sabbataians, for example, convinced themselves when Zevi was jailed that the very fact that he was still alive proved he was the Messiah. Even after his conversion some staunch adherents claimed this, too, was part of the plan. Rationalization can reduce dissonance somewhat. For rationalization to be fully effective, support from others is needed to make the explanation or the revision seem correct. Fortunately, the disappointed believer can usually turn to the others in the same movement, who have the same dissonance and the same pressures to reduce it. Support for the new explanation is, hence, forthcoming and the members of the movement can recover somewhat from the shock of the disconfirmation.

But whatever explanation is made it is still by itself not sufficient. The dissonance is too important and though they may try to hide it, even from themselves, the believers still know that the prediction was false and all their preparations were in vain. The dissonance cannot be eliminated completely by denying or rationalizing the disconfirmation. But there is a way in which the remaining dissonance can be reduced. If more and more people can be persuaded that the system of belief is correct, then clearly it must, after all, be correct. Consider the extreme case: if everyone in the whole world believed something there would be no question at all as to the validity of this belief. It is for this reason that we observe the increase in proselyting following disconfirmation. If the proselyting proves successful, then by gathering more adherents and effectively surrounding himself with supporters, the believer reduces dissonance to the point where he can live with it.

In the light of this explanation of the phenomenon that proselyting increases as a result of a disconfirmation, let us take another, and more critical, look at the historical examples we have offered in evidence. There are a number of grounds for feeling unsatisfied with them as proof.

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In the first place there is a scarcity of data of the sort required by our analysis. It is an understandable lack, for the people collecting historical records were not concerned with our particular problem, but it is a lack nonetheless. Even our best documented example, the Millerites, contains little evidence on actual proselyting behavior, especially among the mass members. Statements about proselyting must be inferred largely from evidence about the number of adherents and the size and frequency of meetings. But such signs as these are dependent not only on the effort made to proselyte—the desire to convince others—but also on the effectiveness of the efforts and on the state of mind of prospective converts.

Even where there is direct evidence about proselyting attempts, such as the number of speeches made, the fact that Miller and Himes traveled widely, or that the Millerite presses worked twenty-four hours a day, these are activities of the leaders. There is very little concrete evidence of the proselyting activities of the ordinary members, whose behavior is most significant for our purposes. Leaders of a social movement may, after all, have motives other than simply their conviction that they have the truth. Should the movement disintegrate, they would lose prestige or other rewards.

And if the Millerite case is inadequately documented for our purposes, our other examples are even more poorly supported. On the Sabbataian movement we have virtually no data concerning the initial disconfirmation in 1648, for the very good reason that the movement attracted little attention (and, hence, there were few records of it) until it became very large and important.

A second reason for considering historical data alone as inadequate is the small likelihood that this kind of data could challenge our explanation. Suppose we could find record of a mass movement that had apparently collapsed immediately after disconfirmation. In the absence of adequate measurement, we might well conjecture that the members' commitment to the belief was small—so small that the dissonance introduced by disconfirmation was enough to force the discarding of the belief. Alternatively, if the

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commitment could be demonstrated to have been heavy, it is still possible that there were attempts to proselyte following disconfirmation, but that these attempts had been unsuccessful. This would be a tenable contention since it is the results of proselyting efforts that generally find their way into historical records rather than the efforts themselves.

There is a type of occurrence that would indeed disprove our explanation — namely, a movement whose members simply maintained the same conviction after disconfirmation as they had before and neither fell away from the movement nor increased their proselyting. But it is precisely such an occurrence that might very well go unnoticed by its contemporaries or by historians and never find its way into their annals.

Since the likelihood of disproof through historical data is small, we cannot place much confidence in the supporting evidence from the same sources. The reader can then imagine the enthusiasm with which we seized the opportunity to collect direct observational data about a group who appeared to believe in a prediction of catastrophe to occur in the near future. Direct observations made before, during, and after the disconfirmation would produce at least one case that was fully documented by trustworthy data directly relevant to our purpose.

One day in late September the Lake City *Herald* carried a two-column story, on a back page, headlined: PROPHECY FROM PLANET. CLARION CALL TO CITY: FLEE THAT FLOOD. IT'LL SWAMP US ON DEC. 21, OUTER SPACE TELLS SUBURBANITE. The body of the story expanded somewhat on these bare facts:

Lake City will be destroyed by a flood from Great Lake just before dawn, Dec. 21, according to a suburban housewife. Mrs. Marian Keech, of 847 West School street, says the prophecy is not her own. It is the purport of many messages she has received by automatic writing, she says. . . . The messages, according to Mrs. Keech, are sent to her by superior beings from a planet called 'Clarion.' These beings have been visiting the earth, she says, in what we call flying saucers. During their visits, she says, they have observed fault lines in the earth's crust that foretold

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the deluge. Mrs. Keech reports she was told the flood will spread to form an inland sea stretching from the Arctic Circle to the Gulf of Mexico. At the same time, she says, a cataclysm will submerge the West Coast from Seattle, Wash., to Chile in South America.

The story went on to report briefly the origin of Mrs. Keech's experiences and to quote several messages that seemed to indicate she had been chosen as a person to learn and transmit teachings from the "superior beings." A photograph of Mrs. Keech accompanied the story. She appeared to be about fifty years of age, and she sat poised with pad and pencil in her lap, a slight, wiry woman with dark hair and intense, bright eyes. The story was not derogatory, nor did the reporter comment upon or interpret any of the information he had gathered.

Since Mrs. Keech's pronouncement made a specific prediction of a specific event, since she, at least, was publicly committed to belief in it, and since she apparently was interested to some extent in informing a wider public about it, this seemed to be an opportunity to conduct a "field" test of the theoretical ideas to which the reader has been introduced.

In early October two of the authors called on Mrs. Keech and tried to learn whether there were other convinced persons in her orbit of influence, whether they too believed in the specific prediction, and what commitments of time, energy, reputation, or material possessions they might be making in connection with the prediction. The results of this first visit encouraged us to go on. The three of us and some hired observers joined the group and, as participants, gathered data about the conviction, commitment, and proselyting activity of the individuals who were actively interested in Mrs. Keech's ideas. We tried to learn as much as possible about the events that had preceded the news story, and, of course, kept records of subsequent developments. The means by which the observers gained entree, maintained rapport, and collected data are fully described in the Appendix. The information collected about events before early October is retrospective. It comes primarily from documents and from conversations with

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the people concerned in the events. From October to early January almost all the data are first-hand observations, with an occasional report of an event we did not cover directly but heard about later through someone in the group of believers who had been there at the time.

The next three chapters are a narrative of events from the beginning of Mrs. Keech's automatic writing up to the crucial days in December just before the cataclysmic flood was expected.

These chapters provide background material. They will introduce the members of the group, describe their personal histories, their involvement in the movement, and the preparations they made for the flood. We shall also describe the ideology accompanying the prediction and some of the other influences to which the group was exposed. Such background is necessary to make understandable some of the behavior and the events that led up to the night of December 21. Much of this material is not directly relevant to the theoretical theme of the book, but we hope that these details will re-create for the reader some of the vividness of these months.

