

CREATING THE NEW AGE: THEOSOPHY'S ORIGINS IN THE BRITISH ISLES



The Blavatsky Lecture 2000
by Michael Gomes

£2.50

CREATING THE NEW AGE: THEOSOPHY'S ORIGINS IN THE BRITISH ISLES

by Michael Gomes

* The Blavatsky Lecture *

delivered at the Summer School of

The Theosophical Society in England

The College of Ripon & York St John, Ripon, Yorkshire

Sunday 31 July 2000

The Theosophical Publishing House
50 Gloucester Place, London W1U 8EA, U. K.

Artwork and design by Colyn Boyce

Photograph credits: front cover & picture of Michael Gomes, by Colyn Boyce

When an organization reaches a hundred years it is an occasion to pause and take note of its achievements. When an organization celebrates a century and a quarter of active work it is more than worthy of our attention. We stand at one of these moments. The Theosophical Society reaches its 125th year of existence in 2000. And while it is a time of elation, it is also a chance for sober reflection. For, as it has often been said, to see where we have come from is to know where we are going. Let us take the opportunity offered us at this vantage point and, looking backward, take note of the impetus that established this mighty movement here.

To understand the Society's achievements, it must be put in the context of how the early Theosophists saw their place in history. H. P. Blavatsky in the last chapter of *The Key to Theosophy* revealed that

during the last quarter of every hundred years an attempt is made by those 'Masters,' of whom I have spoken, to help on the spiritual progress of Humanity in a marked and definite way. Towards the close of each century you will invariably find that an outpouring or upheaval of spirituality - or call it mysticism if you prefer - has taken place. Some one or more persons have appeared in the world as their agents, and a greater or less amount of occult knowledge and teaching has been given out. If you care to do so, you can trace these movements back, century by century, as far as our detailed historical records extend.¹



Elsewhere she notes that such attempts to enlighten the West have been made since the time of the Tibetan reformer Tsong-kha-pa (1357-1419). But "up to the present day none of these attempts have been very successful."² Following her suggestion we see that at the end of the 15th



century Pico della Mirandola and others tried to integrate Cabala and Hermetica into the western tradition. Paracelsus lived at the beginning of the 16th century, but his writings that propounded a holistic world view were only widely published by the end of that century. The 17th century saw the spread of the Rosicrucian manifestos, and the 18th, freemasonry with the colourful figures of the

Count Cagliostro Comte de Saint-Germain and Cagliostro.

A unifying theme of these movements was the elevation of the individual (after the study of these subjects) as the master of his destiny. Pico della Mirandola in *De hominis dignitate* (*On the Dignity of Man*) idealized the magus, the mage, who had the capability to unite earth to heaven.⁴ Two hundred years later in England, we find Thomas Vaughan describing man's original condition as "a pure intellectual essence, free from all fleshly, sensual affections. In this stage the *anima* or sensitive nature did not prevail over the spiritual, as it doth now." Indeed, now, "we are all born like Moses with a veil over the face," and the "greatest mystery, both in divinity and philosophy, is how to remove it."⁵ This *renovatio*, regeneration, or new birth, was considered to be the great work.



Pico della Mirandola

But when we come to the 19th century, and especially by the time of the founding of the Theosophical Society, such concerns had faded considerably from public interest. The glorification of antiquity that existed had been eroded by the utilitarian and rationalist attitudes that followed. Science acquired the voice of authority about temporal matters that had been reserved for religion. The subjects that we are looking at were relegated to the level of "irrational-" or "pseudo-" science. Our familiarity with them today is due in great part to the initial work of the Theosophical Society in reviving interest in such things and must be considered as part of its contribution. To quote one of Mme Blavatsky's critics, "Such visionary views of man, nature, and the spiritual realm were rapidly dying out in civilized lands. But through the efforts of one woman, H. P. Blavatsky, there has sprung up a temporary revival of these moribund superstitions."⁶

Much has been made of the conflict between science and religion as a contributing factor in the growing secular attitude of the 19th century.⁷ After conceding that the earth was not the centre of the universe, the very age of the creation of the planet, 4004 B. C., worked out by patient divines, was now being challenged by the fossil record. The deciphering of Egyptian hieroglyphics by Francois Champollion in 1822, the translation of Indian scriptures, and the revelation of cuneiform tablets with their flood narrative revealed vast chronologies that dwarfed the biblical concept of time. The result was that many, not knowing what to believe, ended up believing nothing.

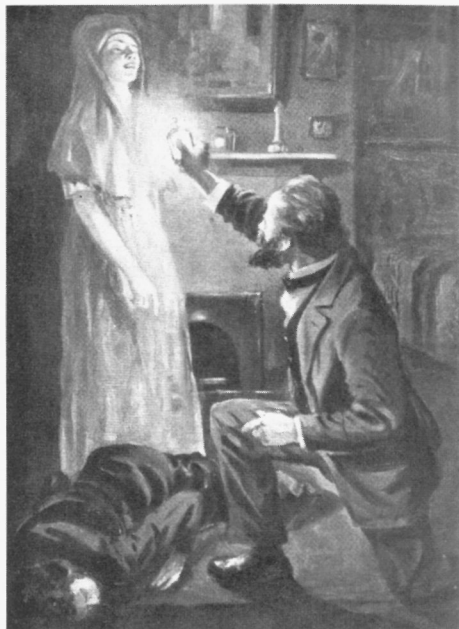
Religion in Victorian England has been described as being “of the crudest redemptionist type.”⁸ Sir Walter Besant, writing of a typical church service, reports that

The musical part of the service was . . . taken slow - incredibly slow; no one now would believe, who is not old enough to remember, how slow it was . . . hymns were sung; they were always of the kind which expressed either the despair of the sinner or the doubtful joy of the believer. I say doubtful because he was constantly being warned not to be too confident, not to mistake a vague hope for the assurance of election, and because, with the rest of the congregation, he was always being told how few in number were those elect, and how extremely unlikely that there could be many of those few in one flock . . . There were many kinds of preachers - the eloquent, the high and dry, the low and threatening, the forcible-feeble, the florid, the prosy, the scholarly - but they all seemed to preach the same doctrine of hopelessness, the same Gospel of Despair, the same Father of all Cruelty, the same Son who could help only a few.⁹

Non-conformist groups flourished at this time. One commentator, the Rev. Charles Maurice Davies, has left a vivid account of the numerous religious groups he personally visited in metropolitan London. His newspaper articles filled four hefty books. Included was his encounter with Spiritualism, for he felt that “perhaps there is no religious problem of the hour so puzzling as this one.”¹⁰

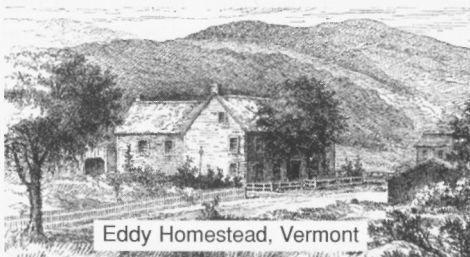
When the Theosophical Society was founded in 1875, it was from the Spiritualists that it drew its initial membership. The Spiritualist movement that swept through Europe and America by the 1870s was one that regarded itself as both scientific and religious. There were methods for testing mediums, describing how they could be fastened to a chair or how hands were to be held during a sitting thus preventing fraud. The messages brought through by the spirits of the departed (usually through a series of rappings where numbers or letters of the alphabet were called out) was one of hope and progress. In the spirit world social and racial barriers no longer existed. It called for not only the Fatherhood of God for all, but also the Brotherhood of men.¹¹

By the 1870s Spiritualist communications had developed beyond the early system of raps to that of trance speakers who delivered messages from the departed spirit (much like the channelers of today) to full form materialization. Here the medium would retire into a curtained off part of the room or a cabinet, and, when the lights had been turned down, the form of the deceased would come out. One of the spirits, Katie King, became something of a celebrity. The scientist William Crookes held sittings with her medium, Florence Cook, in his home in London and photographed Katie, sometimes simultaneously with the medium.



Professor Crookes looking at Katie King while Florence Cook is in a trance

It was the hope of witnessing one of these full-form materializations that drew forty-two year old Henry Steel Olcott, a New York lawyer, to visit a small farm in rural Vermont. At the Eddy brothers' home in Chittenden, Vermont, in October 1874, Olcott encountered something more remarkable than the shapes of ghosts. There he met Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.



Eddy Homestead, Vermont

From the beginning of their acquaintance Blavatsky tried to explain to Olcott that the spirit forms that appeared might not have been the individuals they claimed to be; how they could be thoughts drawn from the minds of the participants and then clothed by the astral body of the medium. But Olcott would not believe her, and, as he says, "our disputes were quite warm on occasion."¹² To illustrate her point she projected the image of a family servant. This form appeared from the medium's closet as the soul of one of the dead, even though it was later proved that the servant was still alive!

Col. Olcott and Mme Blavatsky joined forces early in 1875 to investigate the appearance of Katie King in Philadelphia through the Holmes mediums. The Colonel had been invited to take on the case by former U. S. Congressman, Robert Dale Owen, who had praised the ability of the Holmes in the press and was now forced to withdraw his assurances. Olcott later published a report absolving the mediums, though Blavatsky remained sceptical.¹³



Colonel Olcott

Olcott's report of his investigation of the Holmes mediums along with the narrative of his visit to the Eddys in Vermont was issued as *People From the Other World* in the Spring of 1875. The book caught the attention of William Stainton Moses in England who decided to review it. Soon a correspondence and a lifelong friendship would spring up between them. Moses, who was seven years younger than Olcott, was a leading figure in the British Spiritualist movement. A former curate, he taught English at the University College School in London. He was also a medium who was regarded as having brought through some of the most philosophical spirit teachings.¹⁴

On April 10, 1875, Olcott wrote to Stainton Moses of his gradual shift from the usual explanation of the Spiritualists, "Whatever we see of marvels in our day are merely duplicates of what happened generations ago" . . . I believe that the Universe was made for man, that man partakes of Divine powers and attributes, and that it is within his reach to exercise those powers over the spiritual as over the material world . . . I did not know this when my book was being written, but I know it now, for I have recently been furnished abundant proof through a lady whom I mention in my book - Madame de Blavatsky."¹⁵ Moses replied to him on April 27 and this drew another letter from Olcott on May 18 reiterating his belief that the answers to the riddles posed by modern Spiritualism would be found in the writings of the ancients.



Stainton Moses

Moses gave Olcott's book a detailed eighteen page review in London's *Human Nature* of June 1875, calling it remarkable. Olcott in turn wrote him on June 22

You speak in your review of my 'spiritual insight,' and I can assure you that the intuitions which have been awakened in me by my studies of the past year enable me to see, beyond the printed pages of these philosophers of two centuries ago, the dawning day of that spiritual light for which I have so long and vainly sought. For the first time in my life the plan of Creation seems to unfold itself before my inner sight, and I begin to get glimpses - and I fancy that finite man can never get more than a glimpse - of the boundless glory of the Infinite God - of the method by which the forces of the Universe are balanced and directed.¹⁶

We get a glimpse of Olcott's beliefs at the time from another letter to Stainton Moses a month later.

The occultist authors, of course, intended to write in such a way as that, while concealing the truth from superficial readers, they should nevertheless preserve it for the earnest, diligent student who might come after them. The main points of their philosophy relate: (1) To the nature and attributes of the First Cause - the En-Soph; (2) to the evolution of spirit and matter - their progressive changes, combinations, relations, attributes or properties, and destiny; (3) to the evolution of intelligences, moral faculties, and spiritual capabilities, and their embodiment in elementary spirits, in man, in angels, seraphs, and other entities.¹⁷

Mme Blavatsky's rooms in New York soon became a gathering place for those interested in information other than what was being offered by Spiritualism. At one of these gatherings on September 7, 1875, after George Henry Felt spoke about his discovery of the lost canon of proportion of the Egyptians and claiming that he could make visible by chemical means the creatures of the elements, Olcott passed a note to Mme Blavatsky inquiring whether it would not be a good thing to form a society for this kind of study. She nodded her assent, and a group was organised to follow up the matter.¹⁸

Among those who handed in their names as founders (or formers, as Olcott preferred it) of the proposed society was Charles Carlton Massey of England. The thirty-six year old Massey had come to America drawn by Olcott's narrative in *People from the Other World*. Before returning home, he spoke briefly to the group when they gathered on Saturday evening,

October 16, about his experiences with Spiritualist circles he had attended during his stay in America and described the situation in England.¹⁹ A barrister by profession, he had abandoned his practice to devote himself to spiritual studies. He read widely, “not only in the literature of theology, Eastern mysticism, and philosophy, but also in the emerging study of psychology.”²⁰

At the incipient meetings of what was to become the Theosophical Society, Massey would have encountered other Englishmen and women. Charles Sotheran (1847 - 1902) became the Society’s first Librarian. He had emigrated to America in 1874 to take up a position as assistant editor of *The Bibliopolist*, a monthly relating to books about America. He was also involved in some of the more exotic Masonic and Rosicrucian groups. Another recent resident, the well-known English trance-speaker, Emma Hardinge Britten, was named a councillor.



Emma Britten

Massey would also have met Mme Blavatsky. The H. P. Blavatsky he came in contact with would have been very different from the one we know.



Her life had not been clouded by the disappointment and betrayal she was later to know. Nor was she the “H. P. B.” of *The Secret Doctrine* and her later works. Olcott describes her as still fresh from the bohemian circles of Paris, witty and erudite at the same time. A newspaper account at the time describes her as being “handsome, with full voluptuous figure, large eyes, well-formed nose, and

A youthful H. P. B. rich sensuous mouth and chin.”²¹

On October 30 the Theosophical Society was organized. Olcott who had been elected President gave his inaugural address on November 17, 1875, and this has been taken as the date of its inception. The object of the Society was to collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe. The Preamble to the published by-laws spoke much in the same terms as Olcott had been writing to Stainton Moses: “The founders being baffled in every attempt to get the desired knowledge in other quarters, turn their faces toward the Orient, whence are derived all systems of religion and philosophy. They find our ancestors practicing arts now lost to us.”²²

The Society tried to carry out its purpose by testing mediums, but the results, often uneven, were not spectacular and eventually interest in this faded out. By the end of 1876 meetings ceased to be held and the rented hall was given up.

If the Theosophical Society had not lived up to its initial expectations, Olcott's enthusiasm was no less diminished. He was soon writing Stainton Moses in England about the new project he and Mme Blavatsky were working on: a book. "Wait until we have time to finish her book, and you will then find Occultism done into 'plain English'."²³ When the two volume work of over twelve hundred pages was published as *Isis Unveiled* at the end of September 1877 it would increase the growing rift with the Spiritualists.

Since her emergence among the Spiritualists in America in 1874, Mme Blavatsky had been suggesting alternative explanations for the communications received through mediums. Most of this had appeared as letters in the Spiritualist press, which was happy to have her as a champion of their phenomena if not quite agreeing to its rationale. In *Isis Unveiled* she put forth her major argument.

For fear of being misunderstood, we would remark that, while, as a rule, physical phenomena are produced by the nature-spirits, of their own motion and to please their own fancy, still good disembodied human spirits, under *exceptional* circumstances, such as the aspiration of a pure heart or the occurrence of some favoring emergency, can manifest their presence by any of the phenomena *except personal materialization*. But it must be a mighty attraction indeed to draw a pure, disembodied spirit from its radiant home into the foul atmosphere from which it escaped upon leaving its earthly body.²⁴ The book proceeded to marshal the evidence of antiquity and eastern philosophy on the subject.

This question of spirit identity was one that had agitated the Spiritualists themselves. Stainton Moses had written C. C. Massey, "I often ask myself whether the people who come and speak to me across the gulf are the same people as they were in the flesh: and the answer is, no. They are developments of the old, they are as much themselves as I am myself, but they are thro' the long gaps of time, changed utterly. Nay, a far more

pregnant question is raised by Olcott's last article . . . one that you have heard me raise before - How far is it possible for the body to be the vehicle of a band of spirits who use it for their own purposes? . . . The whole thing is perplexing, and almost makes me shudder."²⁵

While *Isis Unveiled* brought the criticism of the Spiritualists, it also brought H. P. B. to the attention of Hermetic, Masonic and Rosicrucian students. John Yarker, a Masonic writer, described her as a second Hypatia in a letter to her from Manchester, August 23, 1877. Warning that "like her if you are not cautious you will become a martyr also, for the world is by no means so enlightened as you suppose."²⁶ Soon Yarker was sending her certificates in those branches of Masonry that admitted women, manuscripts of books he was working on for her correction, and suggestions for organizing a Theosophic group in England.

The idea of forming a British Branch of the Theosophical Society, according to surviving correspondence, had been discussed throughout 1877. Moses wrote Mme Blavatsky on August 4, 1877, that he had met John Storer Cobb, Treasurer of the T. S., who was in England on personal business, and had discussed the possibility of a branch in London.²⁷ Emily Kislingbury, the Secretary of the British National Association of Spiritualists, who had joined the Society in 1876 and visited New York in the fall of 1877, says that "the charter for founding the first Theosophical branch in England was given into my hands in New York by Colonel Olcott in the month of November 1877."²⁸ Massey was also writing at the end of the year to Olcott and Blavatsky about starting of a British branch which would be more or less secret and not anti-Christian.²⁹

Stanton Moses gives more detail in a letter to F. G. Irwin, a fellow Mason who was interested in developing esoteric groups.

I have received word from the Pres. T. S. that he considers the time come for the organization of a branch in London. As a preliminary he sent over letters of instruction to the Treasurer who is now in this country, instructing him as to the platform which was to be taken up, and bidding him confer with the two original members of the Parent Society, Mr. C. C. Massey and myself, as to the Constitution, etc. He also intimated that, while the choice of President would rest with the English Fellows, he and the Parent Society would prefer to see Mr.

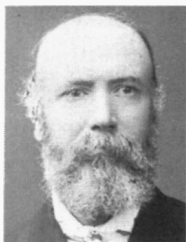
Massey in that position. In that recommendation alone I cordially agree, but neither I nor my two colleagues could accept the instructions and OB [Obligation] sent, and we accordingly made certain modifications and have sent them over to the Pres. for his acceptance. If he agrees to these the Society will be constituted forthwith. If not, I cannot have any part of it.³⁰

After 1875, and for most of the 1880s, members signed two forms of admission in the Theosophical Society: the Application for Fellowship and the Obligation of Secrecy, usually upon acceptance or “initiation” into the Society, when a grip and password were communicated. The Obligation that Moses was against stated that “in accepting fellowship in the Society organized under the foregoing preamble and bylaws, I hereby promise ever to maintain absolute secrecy respecting the proceedings of the said Society, except in so far as publication may be authorized by the Society or council, and I hereby pledge my word of honor for the strict observance of this covenant.”³¹ The Society that Moses envisaged in England was on Masonic lines, excluding women. When his conditions were not met, he resigned his membership in the Society.

Undaunted, Massey, Emily Kislingbury, C. Carter Blake, who had reviewed *Isis Unveiled*, Dr. George Wyld, and Dr. H. J. Billing, joined by John Storer Cobb representing the Parent Society, met at 38 Great Russell Street in London on the 27 of June 1878. With Cobb presiding, the group passed the following resolution: “That in the opinion of the English Fellows of the Theosophical Society of New York present at this meeting, it is desirable to form a Society in England in connection and sympathy with that body.”³² Massey was elected President and Miss Kislingbury chosen Secretary.

Olcott received the news on July 10 and noted in his diary that “they are such an incongruous lot. Pity I have not some Theosophical bird-milk to send them to nurse upon!”³³ Two days later after receiving further papers from the group, Olcott wrote Massey officially recognizing the new British Theosophical Society.

A. P. Sinnett, the last person who was able to utilize the Minute Book of the British Theosophical Society, reports in his 1922 study that



A. P. Sinnett

“the meetings of the new Society were not held frequently. The next after the inaugural meeting was held on the 1st of October, and then another month elapsed before there was a third. At that time no one seemed to know what to do. Many names were added to the list of members. A suggestion is made that books should be selected and discussed, also that mesmeric experiments should be tried, but this idea does not seem to have been followed up.”³⁴

The arrival of Olcott and Blavatsky in England at the beginning of 1879 galvanized the group, if only briefly. For some time H. P. B. had been voicing her wish to go to India. Olcott had notified Moses in 1876, “I wish you would ask Imperator [Moses’s spirit guide], with my compliments, if he can’t do *something*, in the psychological way, to prevent Madame Blavatsky from going to India. I am very anxious upon this point. I can do nothing myself. She is a changed woman these past few weeks. She is moody, reserved, and apparently desperate. The calumnies circulated in Europe and here have cut her so deeply; she feels such a disgust with our world; she so longs for her sacred Ganges and the society of her Brethren, that I am afraid we will lose her.”³⁵

At the end of 1877 the London *Spiritualist* was announcing, “there is some probability that Madame Blavatsky will visit England shortly, *en route*, for India.”³⁶ The news of the imminent arrival of the Theosophists was still being bandied about a year later. Moses wrote F. W. Irwin on December 21, 1878, “I hear Olcott is coming to London in January. But it has been so rumoured before. However Massey told me that he and Madame B. are going to India and that O. called here [sic] *en route*. I shall be glad to see him and tell him I have no faith in his Society. The English Branch is worse. I do not belong to it, and have resigned my Fellowship in the NY Order. This however they refuse to accept.”³⁷

The founders were to spend a fortnight in England. Their steamer arrived from New York on January 1st 1879, but due to the fog they were forced to anchor in the Channel another night before reaching Gravesend. On the afternoon of the 3rd they took the train to the London suburban home of Dr. H. J. Billing and his wife Mary, a well-known medium, with whom they were to stay. It became the focal point for members and friends, and

Olcott remembers the time spent as being “completely filled with odds and ends of Society business, receipts of callers and paying visits to the British Museum and elsewhere; the whole spiced with phenomena by H. P. B. and séances with Mrs. Hollis-Billing’s spirit guide, ‘Ski’.”³⁸

An example of the phenomena performed by H. P. B. during this stay is recorded by C. C. Massey.

I had come down to Norwood by train, and found a company of, I think, some half-dozen persons assembled in the dining-room of Dr. and Mrs. Billing’s house. Madame Blavatsky was not in the room when I entered, but joined us very shortly afterwards. I hung up my over-coat in the hall outside. I have a very faint recollection of what occurred until Madame Blavatsky turned to me, and asked if I would like to name some article for myself to be produced then and there. I think it was to be brought from India. Having for some time been in want of a card-case - a want I had certainly not mentioned to any one present, or, I believe, to anyone at all - I named the article . . . I recollect that I wished to substitute another choice, but was told I was too late. I was to go into the hall, and put my hand in the pocket of my overcoat. Be it observed - and this I can state most positively - that *no one* but myself left the room after I had asked for the card-case, and I went into the hall as directed, unaccompanied by anyone. The hall was just outside the room, which had no other door than the one I went out at. I at once put my hand into the pocket of my overcoat, and there, sure enough, was an ivory card-case, which I still have.³⁹

It must have been an exciting moment for the members of the infant British T. S. when Olcott and Blavatsky appeared at the meeting convened on January 5, 1879. The proceedings on that occasion, according to Sinnett’s reading of the Minute Book, were “of a formal character relating to Diplomas, initiation fees, and ‘obligations’ and only enlivened by an assurance from Madame Blavatsky that ‘the Society might expect the advent of competent instructors from India with confidence’.”⁴⁰ Many of their new acquaintances gathered to see them off to Liverpool where they would embark for Bombay.

The members must have been suitably impressed by this visit, for Massey gave a glowing account to the *Spiritualist*. “‘The Brotherhood of

Humanity' is with her [H. P. B.] and Colonel Olcott no mere sentimental phrase or visionary aspiration. To break down all the barriers of race and religion between man and man by the eradication of prejudice, and to emancipate the mind alike from its theological and materialistic trammels, are the main objects of the great Indian society of which she has been so active and efficient an agent in the West."⁴¹

As it looked eastward for further instructions to come, the British Theosophical Society was attracting more and more of those grounded in the western mysteries. The Rev. William Alexander Ayton (1816-1909), who was much interested in alchemy, joined on January 6, 1879. Isabel de Steiger (1836-1927), known then as a painter of somewhat mystical trends, joined on March 12th. She later translated Karl von Eckartshausen's mystical treatise *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary*, making it accessible to English readers. Maryanne Atwood (1817-1910), the author of *A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery*, joined with her husband, the Rev. Alban Thomas Atwood, on January 23, 1880. Peter Davidson, who joined on April 22, 1879, would go on to manage another influential occult group, the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor.



Maryanne Atwood

Massey's contributions to *The Theosophist* (a monthly magazine started by Blavatsky and Olcott in Bombay in October 1879), "Ancient Opinions Upon Psychical Bodies" (December 1879) and "True and False Personality" (March 1880), give an indication of the tone of the studies of the British T. S. "The London Society goes in for Self-Culture and the Regeneration of Soul and Body by a *gradual* process, in harmony with the highest inspirations and does not seek after magical manifestations as we can get them at Spiritual seances if we choose to attend such. Purity of Life, Self Denial and a desire to know the truth and to live it out with reverence to God and forbearance and love towards our weaker fellow creatures is our desire," George Wyld, who became President of the group in January 1880, wrote Abner Doubleday, Olcott's representative in America.⁴²

Meetings were now held at 4 p. m. on the first Sunday of every month at the Library of the British National Association of Spiritualists, 38 Great Russell Street. During the height of Wyld's presidency, the B. T. S. had

nearly fifty members, but since some were not resident in London the attendance at meetings averaged twelve. "We meet chiefly for the reading of papers and the discussion of various subjects relating to Theosophy." W. F. Kirby, the secretary of the group informed Doubleday.⁴³ We get more information from a list of business transacted during the first five months of 1882: the January meeting was devoted to the reading of the President's address; February, discussion on the loss of life by accidents and a paper on the English Spiritualist Thomas Lake Harris who had established a community in upstate New York and his system; March, mesmeric experiments; April, a paper on modern Egyptian Theosophy; May, discussion on "The Elixir of Life" that had appeared in the March and April *Theosophist*.

Wyld's presidency came to an abrupt end after he took offence to Blavatsky's words in *The Theosophist* that the Buddha "rejected the very idea of god, whether *personal* or *impersonal*."⁴⁴ Since the Founders were avowed Buddhists he felt such statements implicated their work. Wyld brought his grievance before the Council of the British T. S. urging that they cease to pay their dues to India and cease to be a branch and constitute an independent Society. Since no one wanted to go to such lengths, Wyld resigned his presidency. When he was re-elected a vice-president, he resigned that too.⁴⁵

H. P. B., receiving the news in India, wrote to Sinnett, "Fine *finale*! But what else could be expected with such a bigoted ass as Wyld at their head. My 'atheism' and Olcott's were perfectly known to them for the last five years since they knew we were Buddhists. Pretext all that, and *Divine* or godly Wisdom is not 'Wisdom of God'."⁴⁶ From the beginning of his presidency Wyld had been controversial. His Presidential speech delivered before the B. T. S. January 6, 1880, was printed in the January 16 and 23 *Spiritualist*, requiring Olcott to publish a notice stating that Wyld's heavily Christian views were his own and did not represent the Society or his branch.⁴⁷

Dr. Wyld's views about the state of the Theosophical Society just before his break is conveyed in a long letter to Abner Doubleday.

My chief aim has been to bring together those Spiritualists who had philosophic minds. We all believe in occult phenomena, and therefore



do not think it necessary to reiterate spiritual experiments of a phenomenal kind . . . For myself I am a Christian of the esoteric mystical school: the school of Bohme, Swedenborg, Zouler, St. Martin, etc. and I believe that the entire secret of the highest form of Theosophy is contained in the Sermon on the Mount . . . We are all scandalized at the violent attacks of

Swedenborg H. P. B. in the *Theosophist* against Christianity and Spiritualism but we all respect Olcott as a good-hearted, hard working, and truthful man: although I personally think he over estimates oriental and under estimates western Theosophy.⁴⁸

In her letter to Sinnett with the news of Wyld's departure, H. P. B. relayed the information that, "Djwal Kool says that the T. S. ought to be composed in London solely of mystics and not to allow in it one single biased sectarian. Mrs. Kingsford, Maitland, Isabel de Steiger F. T. S., Miss F. Arundale F. T. S., Massey, Palmer, Thomas, and have *Seers* in it; then would the *chelas* be sent to develop them at every meeting, to train them, and that the effect would be visible."⁴⁹ Maybe the suggestion was passed on to Massey who as Vice-President had to take over the duties of running the branch. In December 1882 he issued a three page leaflet titled "The Theosophical Society of Great Britain" stating he would nominate Anna Kingsford for President for the ensuing year, citing the "genius, moral force and entire devotion to spiritual ideas of this accomplished lady."⁵⁰

The thirty-six year old Mrs. Kingford had published *The Perfect Way, or the Finding of Christ* earlier that year where she propounded her theories of hermetic gnosis. With her co-worker Edward Maitland she joined the Society January 3, 1883, and they were elected as President and Vice-President on the 7th of that month. One of her first acts after returning on May 20 from the continent was to change the name of the British Theosophical Society to the London Lodge of the T. S.

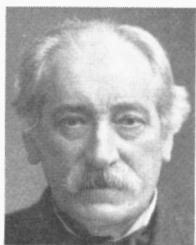


Anna Kingsford

"I am going to do my utmost to make our London Lodge a really influential and scientific body," she wrote her friend Lady Caithness in Paris. "Besides, we do not want to pledge ourselves to Orientalism only, but

to the study of all religions esoterically, and especially to that of our Western Catholic Church.”⁵¹ Mrs. Kingsford reinforced the popularity of vegetarianism in the Society (Wyld, the former President of the branch, had been a vegetarian) and advanced the cause against vivisection and for reincarnation.

The arrival of A. P. Sinnett in the spring of 1883 put an end to her plans for the Theosophical Society. Sinnett, the editor of the *Allahabad Pioneer*, had been dismissed from his position the year before, for, he believed, his involvement with Theosophy. He had initiated a correspondence with H. P. B.’s teachers, the adepts behind the Society, and had produced a book of their letters to him, *The Occult World*, in 1881, and a new work, a summation of their philosophy, was to be out that summer.

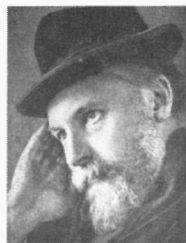


Edward Maitland notoriety.”⁵² His complaint seems to be that Theosophy was becoming popular!

At a public reception held for Sinnett at Prince’s Hall on July 17, Anna Kingsford as President of the Lodge, stressed their commonality in her opening address. “We are one at heart, for he has been taught by his Oriental Gurus the same esoteric doctrines which I have found under the adopted pagan symbols of the Roman Church . . . Greek, Hermetic, Buddhist, Vedantist, Christian - all these Lodges of the Mysteries are fundamentally one and identical in doctrine.”⁵³ This accord was not to last as the London Lodge began to polarize between the two. At the end of the year Kingsford and Maitland published a twenty-nine page pamphlet criticizing *Esoteric Buddhism*. Here they suggested that at the upcoming Lodge election at the beginning of 1884 two sections be created in the Lodge, one following the teachings of the Mahatmas with Sinnett as President, the other would study esoteric Christianity.

By now feelings were running high, the majority of members preferring to follow Sinnett. A flurry of pamphlets and letter writing between India and London ensued, Anna Kingsford at one point writing a letter of 4000 words to H. P. B. and one nearly as long to Olcott. Things reached a crescendo when Mrs. Kingsford produced a telegram from Koot Hoomi in India requesting that she “Remain President.”⁵⁴ Elections were postponed until the arrival of Col. Olcott in the Spring.

The meeting of April 7 drew a record crowd of almost eighty people. Col. Olcott, who had come from India, chaired the meeting. Sinnett proposed G. B. Finch, a young barrister, as President, while Maitland proposed Kingsford. The vote by a show of hands was unanimously in favour of Finch. Sinnett was addressing the group when suddenly Madame Blavatsky entered the room. The meeting broke up and people crowded around her. After order had been restored, the Minute Book of the London Lodge records that F. W. Myers “inquired whether documentary evidence could be obtained from India for the service of the Psychic Research Society in reference to cases in which the astral apparitions [of the Mahatmas] had been seen at various times and places.” Mme Blavatsky called on Mohini Chatterji, a pupil of the Masters who accompanied her from India, to give his testimony, and Col. Olcott expressed the “heartiest sympathy” with the newly founded Society for Psychical Research.



F. W. Myers

On May 2, 1884, the Council of the Society for Psychical Research appointed a committee “for the purpose of taking such evidence as to the alleged phenomena connected with the Theosophical Society as might be offered by members of that body at the time in England.”⁵⁶ Throughout May and June, Olcott, Mohini, and Sinnett met with the committee and answered its questions. When the founders left for India they must have been optimistic for the results of this interaction. But charges by two dismissed members of the Society’s Adyar headquarters in Madras and the subsequent publication of letters supposed to be



Mohini Chatterji from Blavatsky giving them instructions for fraudulent phenomena caused the S. P. R. to send out an investigator to gather further information on the spot.

Their choice, Richard Hodgson, spent four months in India. In his report covering over a hundred pages in the December 1885 *Proceedings* of the S. P. R., Hodgson charged Blavatsky with being a fraud who used Theosophy as a cover for her activities as a Russian spy! Based on his findings the committee ended its report on the phenomena connected with the Theosophical Society with its view that “we regard her neither as the mouthpiece of hidden seers, nor as a mere vulgar adventuress; we think that she has achieved a title to permanent remembrance as one of the most accomplished, ingenious, and interesting imposters in history.”⁵⁷



Henry Sidgwick

A pronouncement like this, coming from an organization made up of scientists and academics interested in verifying the case for psychic phenomena would have been devastating to anyone. The S. P. R.’s president was Henry Sidgwick, named professor of moral philosophy at Cambridge in 1883, and the Society had been started in 1882 based on the investigations into thought-transference and the like that a group of Sidgwick’s Cambridge friends had been carrying out.⁵⁸

Mme Blavatsky received a copy of the S. P. R. *Proceedings* on New Year’s Eve of 1885. Her only companion at the time, the Countess Constance Wachtmeister, has left a graphic description of the ensuing days that brought letters of recrimination and resignation in the T. S., until as the Countess says, “my heart used to sink every morning, when the postman’s ring was heard at the thought of the fresh insults which the letters would surely contain.”⁵⁹



Countess
Wachtmeister



Dr Hartmann

It must have been a painful time for Mme Blavatsky. After being feted the year before in London, she was now living in exile in the small German town of Würzburg. She had been forced to leave India in March 1885 because of her health. She confided to Franz Hartmann, who had left Adyar with her and was living in Bavaria, “there are situations in this life, when mental agony, despair, disgust, outraged pride and honor, and suffering, become so intense

that there are but two possible results - either death from a broken heart, or ice-cold indifference and callousness. Being made to live for purposes I do not know myself - I have arrived at the latter state.”⁶⁰

Madame Blavatsky’s response to the S. P. R. committee report is an interesting one and can be regarded as one of the greatest Theosophical phenomena. She sat down and turned her attention to writing her new book *The Secret Doctrine*. The writing would occupy her for the next two years and take her from Würzburg to Ostende in Belgium to London. Writing to Sinnett in London she declared defiantly, “It will show what a Russian *spy* can do, an alleged *forger*, *plagiarist*, etc.”⁶¹

Early in 1887 a few of the younger members of the London Lodge, feeling that they wanted to do more, began going over to Ostende to see about the possibility of Mme Blavatsky’s coming to London. After the S. P. R. report the London Lodge grew more formal. A. P. Sinnett became its president in January 1885. At that time the London Lodge held general meetings at Queen Anne’s Mansions, St. James Park, on the fourth Wednesday of every month. An Oriental Group, “formed within the Society for the study of Esoteric Philosophy,”⁶² met on the second Wednesday. A *Bhagavad-gita* class on the third Wednesday was led by a real Indian chela of the Masters, Mohini Chatterji, who went on to publish his own translation of this text. The subjects of talks ranged from reincarnation, mesmerism, to Krishna. By 1886 papers like “Theosophy in the Works of Richard Wagner” by William Ashton Ellis, a member who had translated Wagner into English, were being presented. H. P. B.’s settling in London would prove a serious drain on the Lodge and the group became even more insular, till by the 1890s it was almost an autonomous Society.

The state of the occult world at Mme Blavatsky’s arrival in England in 1887 was not a very encouraging one. Sinnett was beginning to retreat to Spiritualism and soon found a medium who would put him in touch with the Masters independently of H. P. B. Presentations at the London Lodge would reflect more and more the material that was now being received. Anna Kingsford’s hermetic dreams of a revival of the western mysteries had failed to materialize due to her ill health. She was to die in 1889 at the age of forty-two.

Col. Olcott had chartered a Hermetic Branch of the Theosophical Society in April 1884 with Kingsford as President and Edward Maitland as Vice-President. His ruling that members of the Society could not belong to more than one branch caused Mrs. Kingsford to form an independent organization outside the T. S. On May 9, 1884 the Hermetic Society held its first meeting, and offered a series of six lectures on the esoteric meaning of the Apostles' Creed. Subsequent lectures were given on Jacob Boehme, alchemy and the kaballah. Her condition by 1887 precluded any further meetings and the group disbanded with her death.⁶³



Jacob Boehme

Taking advantage of the dissension among Theosophists, a new group emerged. An advertisement for it in 1884 encouraged “students of the Occult Science, searchers after truth and Theosophists who may have been disappointed in their expectations of Sublime Wisdom being freely dispensed by Hindoo Mahatmas,” to send in their names to be considered for an Occult Brotherhood, “who do not boast of their knowledge or attainments, but teach freely and without reserve all they find worthy to receive.”⁶⁴ It was ideally suited for the individual, as its teachings were sent



Paschal Randolph

through the mail. For a fee the new member would receive manuscripts on symbolism, cycles, the use of crystals and magic mirrors, the nature and function of the sexes based on the teachings of the late American occultist, P. B. Randolph. The arrest of its secretary for mail fraud, and the departure of its head, Peter Davidson, for America in 1886, blunted the impact of this Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor in England. Still, it drew many Theosophists.

On May 1, 1887, H.P.B. returned to England settling at Maycot with Mabel Collins, the writer of the recently published inspirational little book *Light on the Path*. Her change in location was fuelled by the conviction that she had to form “a nucleus of true Theosophists, a school of my own, with no secretary, only myself alone, with as many mystics as I can get to teach them,” or die.⁶⁵ Eighteen days later a new lodge of the Society had organized around her.



Mabel Collins

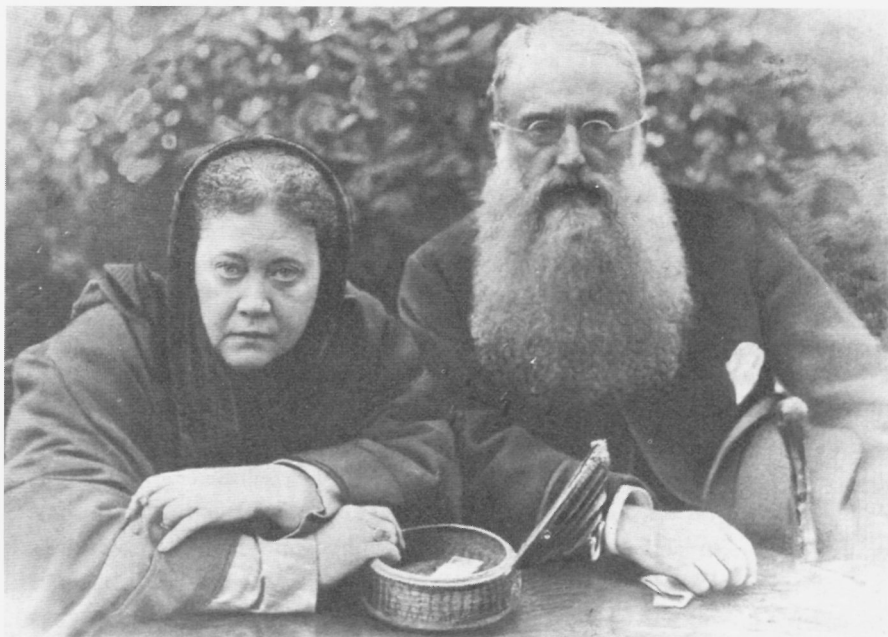
The Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society declared its aim to be one of active work. ⁶⁶ G. B. Finch was elected its President for its first year. At the next meeting at Maycot a week later, a publishing company was decided upon, Mabel Collins suggesting the name Theosophical Publishing Company, and a magazine was discussed, Ashton Ellis suggesting “Lucifer” as a title. In its printed statement, the special object of the Lodge was listed as “the spread of Theosophical teaching and Brotherhood by the individual and collective work of its members.” An innovation was the creation of a category of Associate Members, “who need not necessarily belong to the T. S. Their qualification was to be an interest in Theosophy and willingness to sign the following Pledge: ‘I pledge myself to study Theosophy and to defend it and spread it on all occasions to the best of my power’.”⁶⁷

A six-point pledge was also signed by those members of the Lodge who wanted to make a deeper commitment, but few seemed to do so.

1. I pledge myself to endeavour to make Theosophy a living power in my life.
2. I pledge myself to support, before the world, the Theosophical movement, its leaders and its members.
3. I pledge myself never to listen without protest to any evil thing spoken of a brother Theosophist and to abstain from condemning others.
4. I pledge myself to maintain a constant struggle against my lower nature and to be charitable to the weaknesses of others.
5. I pledge myself to do all in my power, by study and other wise, to fit myself to help and teach others.
6. I pledge myself to give what support I can to the movement in time, money and work.

So help me my Higher Self.⁶⁸

The Secret Doctrine was published at the end of 1888, and the Lodge took up study of the first volume on Cosmogony. These discussions featuring Mme. Blavatsky’s answers to questions relating to time, matter, and how the universe functions were published as *Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge*.⁶⁹ In the fall of 1889 a “course of instruction by H. P. B. on the Origin, History, authenticity and Esotericism of the New Testament was agreed upon,”⁷⁰ and the Gospel according to John was taken up. By October it was decided that the explanations being given were too abstruse



Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott in London in the 1880s

for many members of the Lodge and some subject of a more elementary nature should be attempted. Yet when Col. Olcott, who was visiting from India, spoke on Karma after this, attendance was only at 43. When George Chainey from America lectured a week later on the Hidden Meaning of the Hebrew Sacred Writings, attendance shot up to 60. Blavatsky's newly published *Key to Theosophy* was then taken up on November 21. A new member, Annie Besant, led the meeting.

Mrs. Besant had been drawn into the Society through the publication of *The Secret Doctrine*. After H. P. B.'s arrival in London in 1887 she turned over the three foot pile of manuscript to Archibald Keightley (1859 - 1930) and his nephew Bertram Keightley (1860-1945), who had facilitated her change of location. After going through it Bertram Keightley says it was "another *Isis Unveiled*, only far worse." Consultation between him and Archibald and H. P. B., who told them to go to Tophet, resulted in the arrangement of the book as it now stands: the stanzas and commentaries, chapters on symbolism and then science. A projected third volume would deal with the lives of some of the great occultists and a fourth on their teachings.

The thirty-two year old Annie Besant was given *The Secret Doctrine* by the editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette*, W. T. Stead, for review. Reading it was like having a bright light turned onto a number of problems in psychology that she could not explain. It led her to meet H. P. B., and she joined the Society in May 1889. The adherence of Mrs. Besant marked a radical change of public perception about the Theosophical Society.



Annie Besant

The story of Annie Besant's life has been the subject of many studies. The late Ellic Howe gave a succinct summation of her status at the time when he wrote

Mrs. Annie Besant was known all over the English-speaking world as one of the most remarkable women of her day. She was a freethinker; a consorter with materialists like Charles Bradlaugh; a agitator in Radical political circles, again like Bradlaugh; a feminist; an early convert to Fabian Socialism, through the agency of Bernard Shaw; a teacher of science; an author-editor-publisher; the first prominent woman to fight openly for what is now called birth control; a social and educational reformer; an orator whose power was so compelling and whose charm was so potent that Shaw was only one among thousands who extolled her as the greatest woman speaker of the century.⁷²

H. P. B. regarded Besant's joining as an "achievement", one that gave her "endless joy." "We lacked an eloquent orator," she wrote to her sister.⁷³ Later that year Annie Besant transferred the deed to her home at 19 Avenue Road, St. Johns Wood, London, to the Blavatsky Lodge, and it was refitted to become the Lodge's headquarters.

The news about Theosophy now began to spread beyond London. A monthly eighty page magazine, *Lucifer*, edited by H. P. B. and Mabel Collins, had been published since September 1887. The Theosophical Publishing Company that arranged its distribution and sales soon had to move to larger quarters at no. 7 Duke Street, Adelphi. By the end of 1888 there was enough activity to have the six existing Lodges in Britain - London, Blavatsky, Liverpool, Dublin, Cambridge and Glasgow - form the British Section of the Theosophical Society. Archibald Keightley was

elected the first General Secretary. With his departure for Australia in the summer of 1889, G. R. S. Mead, H. P. B.'s secretary, carried on the work until Walter R. Old was appointed in December.⁷⁴

Mrs. Besant was elected President of the Blavatsky Lodge in January 1890. Chapters on *The Key to Theosophy* were still being discussed at the weekly meetings at which H. P. B. was sometimes present. Attendance was now averaging sixty. The Lodge moved to its new home at 19 Avenue Road in July where a meeting hall had been added to the building. At its opening on July 3 some 250 people were present, far exceeding the capabilities of the room. "Every seat, every inch of standing room, was occupied, and a number of late arrivals found themselves compelled to stand outside the window and follow the proceedings as best they could," reported *Lucifer*.⁷⁵



Alice Cleather

Attendance at the Blavatsky Lodge was now over 100 at times. A Press Bureau had been established, run by Mrs. Alice Cleather. During 1890, 500 pieces had appeared in the press about Theosophy, due to the efforts of members writing letters and articles. There were now lodges in Newcastle, Exmouth, Brixton, Brighton and Birmingham. To reach the considerable number of unattached members, a small magazine, *The Vahan*, was started, printed on the Society's own press, the H. P. B. Press, run by James M. Pryse from New York. Mrs. Besant was increasingly in demand to speak on Theosophy, and further and further a field. She lectured in Dublin and Belfast in October 1890 and read Mme. Blavatsky's words to the American Section Convention in April 1891. On the way back from New York she received the news that Mme Blavatsky had died on May 8th.

Following H. P. B.'s wishes that no mourning clothes were to be worn, work continued on at the Lodge named after her. Annie Besant communicated the feelings at the London headquarters to Julia Campbell Ver Planck, whom she had met in America, "I must write you a few words to say all is well here, that we are hard at work, and that it is just as though H. P. B. had not left us at all. Her departure seems to have given fresh impulse rather than depression, and everyone is doing his very best to carry on all as she would have wished."⁷⁶

The news of Mme Blavatsky's demise was carried throughout the country. An analysis of the Press Scrapbook for May 1891 put together by the T. S. Press Bureau in London shows that over 100 papers throughout the British Isles carried notices of H. P. B.'s death.⁷⁷ Her passing was discussed in papers as varied as *Horse and Hare* and *The Ladies Pictorial*. *The Pall Mall Gazette*, *The Guardian*, *Birmingham Post*, *Belfast W. Northern Whig*, *News of the World*, *Manchester Examiner*, all covered her career in a more or less neutral way following the lead of *The Times* which gave a biographical sketch of sixty-eight lines stressing her travels. Theosophists also took advantage of the opportunity and sent letters to the papers.

The London *Review of Reviews* carried one of the longest articles on H. P. B.'s life, written by A. P. Sinnett. W. T. Stead, the editor, introducing the piece felt

What Madame Blavatsky did was an immeasurably greater thing than the doubling of teacups. She made it possible for some of the most cultivated and skeptical men and women of this generation to believe - believe ardently, to an extent that made them proof against ridicule and disdainful of persecution - that not only does the invisible world that encompasses us contain Intelligences vastly superior to our own in knowledge of the Truth, but that it is possible for man to enter into communion with these hidden and silent ones, and to be taught by them the Divine mysteries of Time and of Eternity.⁷⁸

Coverage of H. P. B.'s passing had barely left the papers when Theosophists were making the news again. Annie Besant had announced at her August 1891 farewell lecture at the London Hall of Science that she was in receipt of letters from H. P. B.'s teachers since her passing. It was later revealed that these letters came through the agency of William Q. Judge, General Secretary of the American Society and Vice-President of the Society.

Mrs. Besant thought highly of Judge. When Olcott decided to retire as President of the Society in 1892, she sent a circular letter to the Blavatsky Lodge recommending Judge as the "most suitable person to guide the Society."⁷⁹ But on a visit to India at the end of 1893, meetings with W. R. Old, the former General Secretary of the Society in Britain, E. T. Sturdy, Sydney V. Edge, members of the Blavatsky Lodge, along with Olcott, made

her doubt Judge's veracity,⁸⁰ and charges were brought against him of misuse of the Masters' handwritings. A Judicial Inquiry was called in London in 1894, but no decision was reached for it was feared that any statement pro or con on the existence of the Masters would compromise the neutrality of the Society.⁸¹ The matter became public when files meant for the Judicial Committee were turned over to the *Westminster Gazette* which published them in October and November 1894.



William Q. Judge

A Special Meeting of the Blavatsky Lodge was called on Saturday, December 15, 1894, to consider communications from members and the various lodges on the matter. At the Special Adjourned Meeting of January 5, 1895, Herbert Burrows put forth the following resolution

Whereas certain charges have been brought by Mrs. Besant against Mr. W. Q. Judge, the Vice-President of the T. S., which if true would unfit him for holding the office of Vice-President, and similar charges, supported by documentary evidence, have also been published in the *Westminster Gazette*, thus bringing Theosophy and the Theosophical Society into public disrepute, this general meeting of the London Blavatsky Lodge, T.S., hereby records its opinion that in the interests of Theosophy Mr. Judge should, as soon as possible, definitely reply to these charges, and that those interests also demand that till he does so he should cease to hold the office of Vice-President.⁸²



Archibald Keightley

Before the resolution was voted on, Archibald Keightley addressed the Lodge advising that it was not Judge who was on trial but the Lodge itself. "Is it possible at all that you are being hurried into a practical vote of condemnation upon suspicion and hearsay? . . . I would remind you that those ordinary Societies, standing upon a code which Theosophists professed to think all too low, demand proof before such impeachment."⁸³ The resolution

was carried 73 for, 18 against. It was voted that a Jury of Honour, composed of well-known and experienced members of the Society, should examine the evidence.

After these resolutions were passed a letter was received from Mrs. Besant at Adyar, Madras, dated December 25, 1894.

I cannot allow you, without your consent, to be compromised. I therefore place in your hands my resignation as President of your Lodge; I place my defence also in your hands, asking you to consider it; I offer myself for re-election, so that you may be free to keep me or reject me as you will. I hope you will keep me, but I will only hold your Chair with your goodwill, if you bid me fill it after you know of the dishonour done me by the press or by Mr. Judge.⁸⁴

All these points became moot because the American Section in Convention in April 1895 declared its autonomy and reconstituted itself the Theosophical Society in America. Col. Olcott, who was in Spain at the time, responded by cancelling the charter of the Section and the lodges that voted for such action.

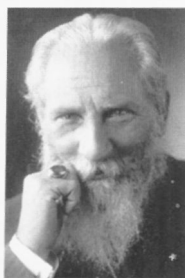
At the Annual Convention of the European Section of the Society held in London July 4 - 5, 1895, Olcott as chairman forbade any resolutions embodying censure or approval of the actions of Judge. "The Judge case is absolutely finished and a thing of the past," he told those assembled. "His accusers have presented their case, he has replied, and with his friends has seceded from the Society and set up a separate and independent one of their own. We have, therefore, nothing more to say or do in the premises."⁸⁵ But not all present thought so. Archibald Keightley tried to get a resolution passed, but he was defeated. As messages of loyalty were being read from the various branches, E. T. Hargrove stood up and asked those to stand who wished to protest the Convention's decision to let a letter from the new T. S. in America to remain unacknowledged. He left the meeting with some forty members.

Dissenting members following Judge's example formed the independent Theosophical Society in England. A year later Judge died at the age of forty-four. Katherine Tingley who had cared for him during his last illness became a leading figure, organizing a Theosophical Crusade around the world in 1896. She visited England in July, going on to Europe, giving "Brotherhood suppers" and lecturing. In 1898 she founded the Universal Brotherhood which merged the groups that supported Judge. Point Loma, near San Diego, California, became her headquarters, and it drew some of

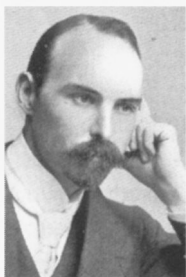
the most notable English and Irish members, including Henry T. Edge, Herbert Coryn, E. T. Hargrove, Charles Ryan, and many others. Their departure changed the character of the English lodges.

The years following 1895 till the end of the 19th century were trying times for the Society in England. Not everyone could afford to relocate to Point Loma in America, and those who stayed formed branches of that group, further confusing the public. Mrs. Besant could not devote her time as before to lecturing as she was much needed to help rebuild the American lodges. Herself and Countess Wachtmeister covered large portions of the western states promoting the Theosophical Society. The fall and winter were now spent by her in Benares, India, where she had established a home, "Shanti Kunj." With Francesca Arundale, a long time English member, she pioneered education for boys and girls along Indian lines.

With Mrs. Besant's absence from England two figures emerged to fill the vacuum, C. W. Leadbeater and G. R. S. Mead. Leadbeater, a former curate, had joined the Society in 1883 and gone out to India to help at the headquarters. He went on to work at the headquarters in Ceylon before returning to England in 1889. He became Secretary of Sinnett's London Lodge, but Mrs. Besant encouraged him to move to the Avenue Road headquarters in 1895 to take up the post of Assistant Secretary of the European Section of the Theosophical Society. Leadbeater was soon writing about the astral plane, investigating past lives of members and examining the occult structure of the elements with Mrs. Besant. He was to go on to become a popular lecturer.



Charles Leadbeater



George Mead

G. R. S. Mead at the time was General Secretary of the European Section. He had joined the Society in 1887 and had been H. P. B.'s secretary, editing and preparing her writings for publication. Along with Annie Besant he was co-editor of *Lucifer*, which mirroring the growing acceptance of the movement changed its name to *The Theosophical Review*. Mead was greatly interested in the Gnostics, and his numerous writings, including the first English translation of the *Pistis Sophia*, did much to introduce the subject to the public.

The destinies of Mead and Leadbeater seem to have been intertwined. Leadbeater was forced to resign from the Society when charges of teaching masturbation to certain boys were brought against him. Annie Besant was elected President of the Theosophical Society by an overwhelming majority after Olcott died in 1907. When Mrs. Besant invited Leadbeater to return, Mead resigned in 1909 and went on to start the Quest Society.

Mr. Leadbeater did return and while at Adyar identified a young brahmin boy, Jiddu Krishnamurti (1897 - 1986) as the vehicle of the imminent return of a World Teacher, thought to be the Christ. Mrs. Besant enthusiastically encouraged the cause and the resources of the Society were used to help prepare the way. But the coming did not occur as Theosophists expected, and in 1929 Krishnamurti closed the Order of the Star that had been created to further the work of the World Teacher.



Jiddu Krishnamurti

The Depression, the War, the pursuit of rebuilding all had its impact on the Society in England. The occult revival in the sixties and the wave of eastern spiritual teachers have all been weathered, and now we stand on the eve of a new century. Having looked at the origin and early development of the Theosophical Society in England, let us examine the movement's contribution.

The very notion of an esoteric tradition, of a continuity of alternative spirituality as described by Blavatsky, was introduced to the English reading public by Theosophists. Even the use of the terms esoteric, occultism, occultists, were first widely disseminated by the Theosophists. *The Oxford English Dictionary* gives Sinnett's 1881 *Occult World* as the sources for occultist and occultism. But the words were used by H. P. Blavatsky as early as 1875 in an article and received a definition in the glossary that introduced *Isis Unveiled* in 1877. The title of Sinnett's other book *Esoteric Buddhism* brought that term into circulation. Through Theosophists these concepts were passed on to those who helped the growing familiarity with the subject, such as Anne Judith Penny (1825 -1893), a friend of C. C. Massey and a tireless promoter of Jacob Boehme, and S. L. MacGregor Mathers (1854 -1918), whose Order of the Golden Dawn was a major influence on the occult scene.

As the nineteenth century exemplar of this stream of esotericism, the Theosophical Society was the first attempt by esoteric groups to come to grips with the democratization process. Although Masons had elected their officials, the Theosophical Society was the first chance for the membership as a whole, whether of the Society, a Section or a Lodge, to be involved in the decision making of the group. Part of this power sharing was the inclusion of women. Before the advent of the Theosophical Society, groups claiming occult status were male dominated. In the T. S., women could vote long before society gave them the right, could elect and be elected to positions in the group.

The two ideas most readily associated with the Theosophical Society at the time were reincarnation and karma. "This doctrine of Reincarnation has a weird repulsive aspect in the eyes of the western world," Annie Besant wrote in 1890.⁸⁷ Theosophists did their best to dispel this impression, rejecting the idea of metempsychosis or transmigration: the regression into animal forms. Sinnett had touched upon the subject in his popular *Esoteric Buddhism*, as did Blavatsky in her 1889 *Key to Theosophy*. Francesca Arundale, an English member, published *The Idea of Reincarnation* in 1893. And Annie Besant devoted the second of her "Theosophical Manuals" to the subject.

While reincarnation has gained currency through books and films, its rationale as explained by Theosophists has not. Writing to the New Agers of her time, the Spiritualists, and using C. C. Massey as an example, H. P. B. elucidated

There is a mighty difference in our Occult doctrine between an impersonal Individuality, and an individual Personality. C. C. M. [C. C. Massey] will not be reincarnated; nor will he in his next birth be C. C. M., but quite a new being, born of the thoughts and deeds of C. C. M.: his own creation, the child and fruit of his present life, the effect of the causes he is now producing. Shall we say then with the Spiritists that C. C. M., the man we know, will be reborn again? No; but that his divine Monad will be clothed thousands of times yet before the end of the Grand Cycle, in various human forms, every one of them a new personality.⁸⁸

The guiding force expressing itself through reincarnation is karma. "That which adjusts each effect to its direct cause; that which guides invisibly and as unerringly these effects to choose, as the field of their operation, *the right person in the right place*, is what we call Karmic law", Blavatsky explained.⁸⁹ Sinnett had dealt with karma in *Esoteric Buddhism*, and Mabel Collins had added an essay on karma as an epilogue to *Light on the Path*. Blavatsky had detailed aspects of the concept, such as racial, group, and national karma in *The Key to Theosophy*, as did Besant in her manual *Karma*.

Blavatsky, always the pioneer, had used the term karma as early as 1877 in *Isis Unveiled*, and contrasted its working against the popular idea of the time, Vicarious Atonement.⁸⁹

The effects of a cause are never limited to the boundaries of the cause, nor can the results of crime be confined to the offender and his victim. Every good as well as evil action has its effects, as palpably as the stone flung into calm water. The simile is trite, but it is the best ever conceived, so let us use it. The eddying circles are greater and swifter as the disturbing object is greater or smaller, but the smallest pebble, nay, the tiniest speck, makes its ripples. And this disturbance is not alone visible and on the surface. Below, unseen, in every direction - outward and downward - drop pushes drop until the sides and bottom are touched by the force. More, the air above the water is agitated, and this disturbance passes, as the physicists tell us, from stratum to stratum out into space forever and ever; an impulse has been given to matter and that is never lost, can never be recalled! So with crime, and so with its opposite. The action may be instantaneous, the effects are eternal. When, after the stone is once flung into the pond, we can recall it to the hand, roll back the ripples, obliterate the force expended, restore the etheric waves to their previous state of nonbeing, and wipe out every trace of the act of throwing the missile, so that Time's record shall not show that it ever happened, then, *then* we may patiently hear Christians argue for the efficacy of this Atonement.

H. P. B. held great hope in the dissemination of these twin doctrines of reincarnation and karma. In an 1889 editorial she warned

If Theosophy prevailing in the struggle, its all-embracing philosophy strikes deep root into the minds and hearts of men, if its doctrines of

Reincarnation and Karma, in other words, of Hope and Responsibility, find a home in the lives of the new generations, then, indeed, will dawn the day of joy and gladness for all who now suffer and are outcast. For real Theosophy is ALTRUISM, and we cannot repeat it too often. It is brotherly love, mutual help, unswerving devotion to Truth. If once men do but realize that in these alone can true happiness be found, and never in wealth, possessions, or any selfish gratification, then the dark clouds will roll away, and a new humanity will be born upon earth. Then, the GOLDEN AGE will be there, indeed. But if not, then the storm will burst, and our boasted western civilization and enlightenment will sink in such a sea of horror that its parallel History has never yet recorded.⁹¹

The urgency of her words may perhaps excuse the effort we have spent delineating the character of the previous centennial attempt of which we are heirs. In looking at the mission of the Theosophical Society we see what was done and what work still lies ahead. "Thus, the Past shall help to realize the PRESENT, and the latter to better appreciate the PAST."⁹²

REFERENCES

1. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy* (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1987), 306.
2. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings* (hereafter *BCW*), 14 vols., (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1966-1985), 14:431.
3. A similar pedigree of ideas is given in a letter Mme. Blavatsky wrote in 1875 before the founding of the Theosophical Society. See my *Dawning of the Theosophical Movement* (Wheaton, 1987), 62-63.
4. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (Washington, DC: Regency Publishing, 1996), 57.
5. Thomas Vaughan, *Anthroposophia Theomagica*, in *The Works of Thomas Vaughan*: Eugenius Philalethes, edited by A.E. Waite (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1919), 38, 40.
6. W. Emmette Coleman in *The Carrier Dove*, July 27, 1889.
7. Owen Chadwick's still readable *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, 1975, is a good starting place, while John Hedley Brooke's *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, gives a useful bibliographic essay on the subject.
8. James Laver, *Manners and Morals in The Age of Optimism 1848-1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 122.
9. Besant in *The Graphic Jubilee Number*, 1887, in Laver, *Manners and Morals*, 122-23. Sir Walter was the brother-in-law of Annie Besant.
10. C.M. Davies, *Unorthodox London* (1873, rept. NY: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969), 303. Aside from this volume Davies produced *Orthodox London*, 1873, *Heterodox London*, 1874, and *Mystic London*, 1875.
11. Background on Spiritualism in England can be found in Janet Oppenheim's *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914*, Cambridge University Press, 1985.
12. Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves* (NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1895), 1:10.
13. The Holmeses and their story is told in detail in my *Dawning of the Theosophical Movement*, 1987.

14. An overview of W. Stainton Moses' life (1839-1892) is provided in Leslie Price's *The Mystery of Stainton Moses*, London: Psychic Pioneer Publications, 1999.
15. Olcott to Moses, 10 April 1875, Moses, "The Early History of the Theosophical Society" - *Light* (London), July 9, 1892, 331.
16. Olcott to Moses, 22 June 1875, *Light*, July 9, 1892, 332.
17. Olcott to Moses, [1875], *Light*, July 23, 1892, 354. In this letter Olcott also explains that the common emanation in the Universe and man is called "Atma."
18. Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, 1:118.
19. Minute Book of the Theosophical Society, Meeting of October 16, 1875, Theosophical Society Archives, Pasadena, USA.
20. Oppenheim, *The Other World*, 31.
21. NY *Daily Graphic*, Nov. 13, 1874, *The Complete Works of H. P. Blavatsky* (London: Rider & Co., 1933), 1:16.
22. *Preamble and By-Laws of the Theosophical Society*, New York, 1875.
23. Olcott to Moses, [1876], *Light*, July 23, 1892, 355.
24. *Isis Unveiled* 1:320-21. For those who find the original work too daunting, Quest Books has a 250 page abridgment; this quote is found on pages 78-79 of that edition.
25. Moses to Massey, 23 August 1876, Archives, The College of Psychic Studies, London. I am grateful to Prof. Joscelyn Godwin for sharing this material with me.
26. Yarker to Blavatsky, 23 August 1877, T.S. Archives, Adyar, India.
27. Moses to Blavatsky, 4 August 1877, T.S. Archives, Adyar.
28. Letter in the *London Daily Chronicle*, October 1, 1891, p. 7.
29. Massey to Blavatsky, 2 December 1877, T. S. Archives, Adyar. See also his memo of 10 December 1877 in the Archives.
30. Moses to Irwin, 29 December 1877, John Hamill "Additional Light on William Stainton Moses and the Theosophical Society" - *Theosophical History* 7 (July 1997): 253-54
31. Minute Book of the Theosophical Society, Meeting of February 16, 1876, T. S. Archives, Pasadena.
32. In A.P. Sinnett's *The Early Days of Theosophy in Europe* (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1922), 11.

33. Olcott's Diary, entry of 10 July 1878, T. S. Archives, Adyar.
34. Sinnett, *Early Days*, 11. The Minute Book passed out of the Society when the London Lodge withdrew its connection in 1909; it left again after Sinnett's death.
35. Olcott to Moses, [1876], *Light*, July 23, 1892, 356.
36. *The Spiritualist*, December 21, 1877, 299.
37. Moses to Irwin, 21 December 1878, Hamill, "Additional Light", 254.
38. Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1974), 2:4.
39. *Light*, August 30, 1884, 360.
40. Sinnett, *Early Days*, 11.
41. "Madame Blavatsky and Col. Olcott in England" - *The Spiritualist*, January 24, 1879, 41.
42. Wyld to Doubleday, 15 November 1880, Doubleday Notebook 8, p. 85, T.S. Archives, Pasadena.
43. Kirby to Doubleday, 10 May 1882, Doubleday Notebook 7, 2.
44. Supplement to *The Theosophist*, May 1882, 6.
45. Wyld, "The British Theosophical Society" - *Light*, August 25, 1883, 383.
46. Blavatsky to Sinnett, 21 July 1883, *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1925), 22.
48. Wyld to Doubleday, [1882], Doubleday Notebook 7, 4-5.
49. *Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*, 26.
50. H.P.B.'s Scrapbook, Vol. XIV, 133-35, T.S. Archives, Adyar.
51. Kingsford to Caithness, 8 June [1883], Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, 3rd ed. (London: John M. Watkins, 1913), 2:119.
52. *Anna Kingsford*, 2:122.
53. *Anna Kingsford*, 2:124.
54. *Anna Kingsford*, 2:160. KH had telegraphed Sinnett that "Kingsford must remain President" on Dec. 3, 1883 and on Jan. 11, 1884, to postpone the election, Mahatma Letters Misc. Papers 45289 B, British Museum.
55. Sinnett, *Early Days*, 56.
56. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 3 (1885): 201.
57. S. P. R. *Proceedings* 3, 207.

58. Alan Gauld in *The Founders of Psychical Research* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968, 139) says of Sidgwick, "his reputation throughout the country was such that no one would think that a Society of which he was the head could be composed mainly of cranks or knaves".
59. Wachtmeister, "A New Year's Greeting" - *The Vahan*, London, January 1, 1891, and *Theosophical Siftings* Vol. 3, no. 17, p. 3.
60. Blavatsky to Hartmann, [early 1886], *The Path* 10 (February 1896): 334.
61. Blavatsky to Sinnett, 6 January 1886, *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* (Manila: Theosophical Publishing House, 1993), 456.
62. Notice in *Light*, November 3, 1885, 542.
63. Edward Maitland, her collaborator, started an Esoteric Christian Union in 1891 to promote her work, but it did not survive him.
64. Joscelyn Godwin, Christian Channel, and John P. Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1995), 306.
65. Blavatsky to Wachtmeister, [early 1887], Wachtmeister, *Reminiscences of H.P. Blavatsky and "The Secret Doctrine"* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1893), 67.
66. Minute Book of the Blavatsky Lodge, Meeting of May 19, 1887, Archives of the Blavatsky Lodge, London.
67. Minute Book of the Blavatsky Lodge, Meeting of February 16, 1888.
68. Minute Book of the Blavatsky Lodge, p. 252. An explanation of these rules is given by Archibald Keightley in "The Meaning of a Pledge", *Lucifer* 3 (September 1888): 63-67.
69. A facsimile edition of the *Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge* has been published by Theosophical University Press, 1994.
70. Minute Book of the Blavatsky Lodge, Meeting of September 19, 1889.
71. "Mr. Bertram Keightley's Account of the Writing of 'The Secret Doctrine'," in Wachtmeister, *Reminiscences of H. P. Blavatsky and "The Secret Doctrine"*, 91.
72. Howe, ed., *The Alchemist of the Golden Dawn* (Wellingborough, Eng.: Aquarian, 1985), 36.
73. Blavatsky to Zhelihovsky, [1889], V. P. Zhelihovsky, "My Sister" - *The London Forum*, July 1935, 7-8.
74. The London Lodge chose not to be part of the Section, see C. W. Leadbeater, "The London Lodge", in the *Report of Proceedings, First Annual Convention of the T. S. in Europe*, London, 1891, 37.

75. "Opening of the New Headquarters" - *Lucifer* 6 (July 1890): 431.
76. Besant to Ver Planck, 9 June 1891, "Leaves of Theosophical History" - *Theosophical Forum* 9 (September 1936): 173.
77. Now in the Boris de Zirkoff Collection, Theosophical Society in America, Wheaton, IL.
78. W. T. Stead, "Madame Blavatsky" - *The Review of Reviews* 3 (June 1891): 548-50.
79. Besant, *To the Members of the Blavatsky Lodge*, London: March 11, 1892.
80. Annie Besant's diary in the T. S. Archives, Adyar, shows her meeting with Old, Sturdy and Edge, on Dec. 20, 21, 22, after her arrival at Adyar, then talking with leading Indian members as they arrived for the Annual T. S. Convention. On January 13, 1894, she sent letters to London about the matter.
81. See Olcott's statement on this matter "The Neutrality of the T. S." - *Lucifer* 14 (August 1894): 449-54.
82. Minute Book of the Blavatsky Lodge, Adjourned Special Meeting, January 5, 1895.
83. Address by Archibald Keightley, Minute Book of the Blavatsky Lodge.
84. Minute Book of the Blavatsky Lodge.
85. *Report of Proceedings, Fifth Annual Convention, Theosophical Society, European Section*, London, 1895, 3.
86. See "A Few Questions to 'Hiraf'," *Spiritual Scientist*, July 15, 22, 1875, *BCW* 1:101-181.
87. Besant, "Theosophy for the Profane" - *Lucifer* 6 (April 1890): 117.
88. Blavatsky, "*Isis Unveiled* and *The Theosophist* on Reincarnation" - *The Theosophist* 3 (August 1882): 289, *BCW* 4:186.
89. Blavatsky, "Thoughts on Karma and Reincarnation" - *Lucifer* 4 (April 1889): 95, *BCW* 11:144.
90. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* 2:542-43, abridgement, 234.
91. Blavatsky, "Our Cycle and the Next" - *Lucifer* 4 (May 1889):188, *BCW* 11:202.
92. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, facsimile edition 1988), 1:xlvi.

75. Also in *The Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
76. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
77. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
78. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
79. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
80. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
81. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
82. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
83. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
84. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
85. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
86. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
87. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
88. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
89. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
90. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
91. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
92. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
93. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
94. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
95. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
96. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
97. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
98. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
99. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.
100. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 1950, 43, 1-2.

APPENDIX 1

SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF SPIRITUALISTIC INVESTIGATIONS



Isabelle de Steiger

Reference has been made to the popularity of Spiritualism before the advent of the modern Theosophical movement. Most studies while giving a great deal of information about the subject do not reveal what drew so many to Spiritualism. The following piece by Isabelle de Steiger appeared unsigned in The Transactions of the Scottish Lodge of the Theosophical Society, Part 8, 1893. It is a more personal account than is usually found and gives an insight into an individual's experiences with Spiritualism in London just before the founding of the Theosophical Society in England.

It is rather difficult to know how to begin. I was such a complete outsider, so horribly ignorant of all transcendental matters, so utterly unread in all philosophical or metaphysical matter. I don't think any one could have been more ignorant than I was of literature otherwise than that all *ordinary* authorities were somewhat known to me, and so I did not consider myself ignorant at all. I however *was*, and being of an inquiring turn of mind, and having no respect for authorities, as I had found none then, I fell an easy prey to the surface writers of the day, and I thought myself sufficiently well informed by becoming a materialist, practically an atheist. I don't regret that period, but I see now it was a very low level indeed. However, as by nature I was endowed with some of the higher gifts of man, art, poetry, and so forth, though I practically *was* an atheist, I always kept my mind in an open receptive manner for all crumbs of knowledge, and I fancy I was more fed than I was aware of just through art and poetry. Of theology I was ignorant, and I had a horror of the evangelistic exposition thereof. I was much afraid of death, but I did not think much about it. However, at a period in my life, when one's intellectual faculties begin to fully expand, I was left absolutely alone in the world - a death had robbed me of the only real friend and companion I ever had. But still I did not *think* much. However, one day I was in that charming world-known library in Florence, "Vieussieux", and I took up, *by chance*, a copy of, to me, an unknown "journal" called *The Spiritualist*. There my eye lighted on a letter purporting to be an account of "a spirit" who had just passed through the process called death, and how it felt, and so on. I can't say how it was, but it struck me as being extraordinarily true somehow. I took the address of the paper in London, and in a few weeks after my arrival there I became a member of the Society in Great Russell Street, the "British National Association of Spiritualists", then in its palmy days of investigating zeal, and, moreover, at a time when, no doubt, there were some

remarkable mediums and a flood of phenomena. It certainly was a most interesting and exciting time. Nothing either before or since has equalled that excitement.

Among the investigators I found many most interesting, intellectual, and cultural people. That in itself was a great charm, and I think, here I may as well say, that from the beginning of my investigations to the end, covering a space of about ten years, I came in contact with but little that I now regret. Providentially, moreover, as far as myself was concerned, I was encased in a body which was too concrete to admit of injury from the astral world. I neither could escape from my body, nor could any invasive spirit easily enter. I was not at all mediumistic; in other words, exceedingly sane. This fact, however, distressed me much then. I eagerly longed to be a medium, and enter behind the veil. Happily I did not, as my supreme ignorance at that time would have led me into much of the abounding error truthfully promulgated among the Spiritualists.

There were regular meetings held at Great Russell Street, and, oh! how wildly interesting they were. Mr. Stainton Moses was chairman usually, and he was an able and interesting one. Of course "phenomena" was the sole idea, and mediums were cherished and sought for. The first phase I came in contact with was the trance medium, a Mr. Colville; and on Saturday afternoons a chosen assembly listened in rapt awe and silence to his orations. He was a pale, pretty, innocent-faced young man about twenty, with a huge forehead, all ideality and no action; in other words, a medium. I don't think he said anything in the least new (I did then think it remarkable), but it was a well-delivered oration, a mixture of Platonism, Emersonism, I scarcely know what, certainly thoroughly admirable philosophy; but in later years, when I read some of these addresses in cooler blood, I found they were really so absolutely subjective as to be practically valueless. Like all astral teaching, it was involved and formless.

Mr. Colville still continues his career in America, but he has varied his "output" from time to time, and now, I believe, ranks among the Christian scientists. He was a harmless, steady young fellow, and it was touching to see how his brain was used by other "selves" than his own.

Then came the Fletchers, of course amongst others, but as the Fletchers were extraordinary mediums, I will pass over the others. Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher were a young couple from America, with important credentials from the American Spiritualists and their great organ *The Banner of Light*. At first they began mildly with duly arranged *séances* at the rooms of the Association, and I attended those. Their specialty consisted in phenomena called materializations when together, and when apart they, chiefly Mr. Fletcher, gave private *séances* to any one who wanted information from their "loved and lost" as the phrase is. I went to my first *séance* of this kind to Mr. Fletcher, and I paid a guinea, and I felt then ten guineas, if I had had them, would not have been too much.

To a person who really had the vaguest, if any, understanding at all, of any plane of existence but this, the first rush of feeling that there is a real one outside the senses, is very violent, and I remember shaking with emotion as Mr. Fletcher, with a deathlike face and convulsive twists of his body, gave a great sigh, and then in an entirely different voice to his own, began to talk to me, and in a few moments this voice told me a great deal of startling news, and seemed *au courant* with my private affairs.

I feel assured now that this was a genuine performance. Mr. Fletcher was quite as ignorant of my private affairs as any one to whom this paper was written. He was a stranger to London, I ditto. We have never met except "in a crowd", the crowd all strangers, and in London it is *not* easy to get to know about other people unless one is a private detective. The "spirit" gave me good advice, but flattered me exceedingly about my profession, saying the letter R wreathed itself about my head, by which was meant, I was told, that my presiding genius was Raphael; also, oddly enough, the initial letter of my husband's name. He died in Egypt three or four years before, and *certainly* his Christian name was utterly unknown to Mr. Fletcher or any other of the stray bohemians I then was meeting. We knew absolutely *nothing* about each other but names and profession - not always that - and I had the sense, as I considered it, to be very careful and chary of ever talking about my own concerns and relations, but, in fact, there was no need, and the Fletchers were then honest mediums. On Sunday evenings Mr. Fletcher used to give what was called "communications". These were highly interesting and curious. The meetings were in the "Cavendish Rooms", well-known public ones of a good class in the West End, and they were crowded with high and low - by *no* means a riffraff company.

Mrs. Fletcher used first to give a lecture, which was listened to with much admiration as are now those by Mrs. Besant. Indeed, excepting Mrs. Besant, I have never heard any woman with a greater power of oratory. She was supposed, like Mr. Colville, to be speaking under spirit control. He probably did, as his native intelligence was below the average somewhat, I should think; but Mrs. Fletcher's was not, and I have little doubt now that she was naturally a gifted orator, and she held her audience spellbound by her flow of really powerful language. Then she kept *her* eyes open, his were always shut, and she was a very handsome woman indeed, with a fine classical dark face. After her address was ended, Mr. Fletcher, who was on the platform with her, would then go into a trance, or be "controlled" as the phrase was, and standing up, he would proceed to give "communications" such as this: - "I see a young man dressed as a sailor - yes, a sailor. He looks very pale. Oh! I see, he says he has recently passed away, and he wants to say something to a lady who is here. He is standing by her. She is, let me see, oh, a lady in mourning on the fifth bench" (every eye would be turned to the lady in question, who, with bowed head, would listen intently). "Oh! he says he is her - her nephew, but she was like a mother, and he would go to sea, and he ran away, and he sailed in a

ship, the City of L - L - oh, London, and it went down; and he is come to say that she must not grieve. He is very happy; he often comes to see her; he loves her very much; his name is George". The poor lady would sob and be much moved, and then in a faint voice get up and just gasp out, "Yes, yes, it is my George".

Then again, Mr. Fletcher would say, "Oh! I see another, oh! so beautiful a girl, she has a wreath of - oh - such lovely flowers, and she says her name is Annie - Annie something, I don't know what. Oh, W-o, W-o-o-d - Wood. Yes! Annie Wood. And she says she is come to tell some lady here she is quite well. All her pain is gone, and she is *so* happy, and she is so beautiful; and - oh, she is gone; she says the air here is so dark, so heavy. No! I can't see her. Does any lady know?" And then there would be a faint cry and sound from some other bent lady, but the rule was that every one who recognized the description of a friend must waive private feeling and acknowledge the relation.

While thinking of some one else's feelings, and wondering if it were true, I all at once upon one occasion awoke to the fact that a relation of mine claimed me - a brother. It came about this way. It was the custom somewhat for any visitor so inclined, as the whole thing was gratis, the hall being hired by the Fletchers, to bring in flowers, and one Sunday evening I brought in two pot plants and I put them on the platform, and eventually they were put on the table where the glass and water stood. Suddenly Mr. Fletcher said, "There is a gentleman here, he says his name is 'Willie', and he wants to speak to the lady who brought these plants".

The Fletchers were not in the hall when I brought them, though some one might have told them. However, at the time I saw no one at all but the one or two friends with me. "Willie says he is now much happier than when in earth-life. He is very sorry he did not understand you better, but he says his other sister went the wrong way with him. His earth-life was sad, and he was weak under temptation", and so on. Generalities, but which to me exactly explained the matter. Then he went on, "He says his brother - oh, it is a curious name - I can't hear it, it is Vernon" (it was not Vernon, it was Verney) "is here too, and he is much happier than he was on earth. They both love you very much, and will watch over you". Now this was certainly vague and rambling enough, but at the time I felt sure that my two brothers, Verney and Willie, were both there. They both died as young men, and it was true somehow in sadness. It is possible that Mr. Fletcher saw their astral lives in "Devachan" somehow. I often think most of the "communications" were true. They were nearly all from young people who had died prematurely. They left a sense of comfort behind them. Perhaps one felt the spirit-world very near, only it was *not* the spirit-world we then thought it, but we knew no other, and it seemed a new kind of heaven; and yet if it were not heaven, we said, what was it? And besides, the spirits constantly said, "Oh, I shall not be able to come much oftener, for I am going up higher soon", but I won't here philosophise or give any later light on the question, as I want chiefly to narrate facts.

Well, the Fletchers for some time flourished exceedingly. They were both good-looking, and Mr. Fletcher willingly agreed to come to me to sit for his portrait, which I wanted to give them. He was a strange person. A young man about twenty-five, with a most beautiful, poetical, pale Italian face, large limpid dark eyes, and silky wavy hair. I was not then much of a physiognomist, or I would have noticed the weakness and self-indulgence in it. Anyway he was a tender, shrinking creature, and he certainly was less in this plane of existence than the next. He was fastidious about his clothes, and he used to arrive in a hansom in a wonderful long coat trimmed with fur, and gauntlet gloves and diamond studs, and my studio maid used to ask me with awe, "Is the prince coming today?" If I said "Yes", there was no need to give further orders for being ready. I looked forward to these sittings expecting to get some private revelations, and, in fact, to hear a good deal about "Spirit land", but I was disappointed. Mr. Fletcher seemed to forget all about Spirit land; he was absolutely vacuous, told me trifling gossip, and also betrayed his excessive personal vanity, such as he intended to have a long violet coat, and a large house in Portland Place, so like a child's prattle, that I was fairly amazed, and then the portrait was complete. I realized that the man, when in this plane of consciousness, was really a silly, almost unlettered young man - refined, gentle and amiable, the oddest compound. I was utterly puzzled. He was pleased with his portrait, and so was Mrs. Fletcher. I had a strong liking for both, and I really felt sorry, when after a long career of success, the sad inevitable end came!

Then there were *séances* at other mediums', when the "materializations" occurred. "John King" was the spirit best known to me. Upon one occasion I was asked by a Captain J _____, an old naval officer, who lived alone and spent his life in the *séance* room, to come to a very select one at his house - or rather rooms. He had lost a son, and this son had recently materialized, and he wanted me to see if the nose in the materialized form was not the same as his. He knew it well, but he would like me as an artist to judge. I did not think this much advantage; but as I then liked a good *séance*, and I knew Captain J _____, had rigid test conditions, and that I should know the other sitters, so I went. Besides it was considered a compliment, and spiritualists had their social ambitions like other people, and Captain J _____'s circles ranked high. You were presumably an authority if you were invited.

We had the usual darkened room - the medium, a young man called "Rita", and three or four chosen sitters and myself round a round table, which was lighted up, so to say, by a phosphoric slate. And we commenced singing, in the usual lamentably poor manner, "By the River", or some sentimental four part song, usually in unison, for tenors and contraltos, etc., were mere accidents, as well as having any voices at all; but singing was necessary, and sing we did. Captain J _____ used to quaver industriously all by himself. Then all at once - I am speaking of one special *séance* - we all saw a sort of mist in the middle of the table, and out of it a

form grew, and Captain J ____ , said, "Oh, there he is - John - John (I think it was John), I am glad to see you - come to me", and the form unquestionably turned into a man from the center of the table - half a man that is, well enveloped in a cloudy kind of drapery, with a dark bearded face. Captain J ____ , said, "Now, *do* look well, Madame S ____ . Do, John, go close to her and let her look at you - at your nose, if it is not like mine". Will it be believed, though really I shrank with a queer distorted sense of awe that was not awe, and yet it was a sort of dread, yet I laughed? it was such an odd mixture, and John did put his face near me, and I honestly tried to look at his nose, but it evaded me somehow. I am not quite sure if I did look as much as Captain J ____ wished, for it was eerie beyond words; however John waved off his head from near me, and I did catch a vague sight of a large nose, and I said, "Oh, yes, Captain J ____ , your nose", and John turned into a mist and sank into the table. That is all I know. Captain J ____ , was assured he saw his son. I saw the strange "simulacrum", and so did every one by the light of the phosphorescent slate, and also the figure itself was somehow self-illuminated.

I saw at another *séance* also the well-known "Katie Cook". I can't answer for the test conditions then. We all sat in the Fletchers' drawing-room, and all at once, she appeared, just a white mass of airy drapery, a white face not dead at all, with soft, dark eyes, and she just flashed through us, as it were, and went. They all called her "Katie Cook". She was the spirit belonging to a Miss Corner, who, as the medium, was lying in a trance on a sofa behind a curtain, not in white drapery, however. Then came a series of *séances* which were the most interesting of all, as one certainly got a good deal more mental food than was usual. I must say, all along a certain amount of spiritual education was going on. We heard of old authors, new ideas, strange theories, bold speculations, fresh light on old ideas, that by degrees were not without effect.

Well, at that time I was the friend of Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher, and as public mediums were extraordinary jealous of each other, I felt if I wished to see the celebrated new medium, Mrs. Billing, I must not tell the Fletchers. However, that course did not recommend itself to my mind, and I resolved I would be open and tell the Fletchers I was going to see Mrs. Billing. It did *not* do. Mrs. Fletcher was offended, and I felt I could not keep up both ladies as mediums and friends, and decided I would not see much of Mrs. Billing. However, one day I had a letter from a friend, not a medium, but a fellow-sitter, if I may say so. She said that orders had come to me from the spirit "Ski" to join their Monday evenings.

Now, I may as well say a spirit's orders were never disputed, and I agreed, and wrote to Miss A ____ , to tell Mrs. Billing I would. The terms were simple, a guinea for the course of six Mondays - or twelve, I forget. I shall not easily forget those evenings. Certainly the spirit "dear old Ski" was not worldly. The circle he had chosen were not remarkable for any worldly advantages, and we were drawn from all the corners of London, but by degrees we got to know each other very well

indeed, and lifelong fellowship began and remained throughout. Mrs. Billing was a friend of Madame Blavatsky, and The Theosophical Society was just forming. The spirit Ski purported to be a North American Indian, and the "control" of Mrs. Billing.

The circle then formed used to sit in her back drawing-room in her lodgings, and we were all very happy. Mrs. Billing was never entranced. She sat like the rest of us. Fortunately, in this circle we had a Mr. Wade who had a nice tenor voice, and he most patiently went over his limited repertoire with endless good-nature, and when at one point we all chimed in the chorus, "Hark, 'tis the Moorish drum" or something to that effect, the air would be full of fairy voices, whispers, and the song would cease, and then a faint whisper, "It's me, Elsie. I am so glad to see you, good-bye", or, "John, John, I am come". "Do you know me, Aunt Mary?" and so on. People held their little airy conversations. No one interrupted, but let them have their say, until the last goodnight floated in the air. Then would come a loud, strong guttural "Squaw - Squaw Stigum" - that was what he made of my name - or "Chief Way", and so forth, and the much beloved and respected Ski was known to be present, and intensely interesting conversations ensued - all in the dark, the voice seeming at the top of the chandelier. We all discussed the probability at other times of Mrs. Billing being a ventriloquist, and the voice being hers; but, as by degrees we knew more of her and of each other, we were never able to form any idea at all, and came to believe it really to be a materialized voice.

"Ski" became a sort of friend. He told us much that really has come to pass. He said he waited upon Madame Blavatsky; he said he was preparing some of us for the Theosophical Society. It proved true, I joined the next year. It was then in its infancy, a poor little band. He told us all about reincarnation, and moreover, that was fascinatingly interesting, our past lives, and he related incidents to each. Curiously enough, I have always a horror of being shut up or locked in, and did not enjoy going inside the Pyramids or Catacombs, etc.; indeed I have always had an exaggerated liking for open rooms - freedom of that kind. He told me I had been a nun, and been once shut up to die in a vault, and so forth. Somehow it seemed true to me, for I recollected the horror of being shut up as particularly vivid in childhood, but I had almost forgotten it of late years. He did not flatter us. Some of us he said had been very bad!

Our *séances* were finished by a memorable one. Hitherto we had never seen anything, but on this occasion we did. We sat in a half-faint light and the curtains were drawn. They were dark; all at once a sort of magic-lantern effect was seen on them in front of one of the sitters, and he and "Ski" had a little colloquy. Then the half darkness again, and our singer gallantly to the fore with his tenor voice, and the chorus, "Hark, 'tis the Moorish evening drum". No! that was not quite it, I forget the exact words, but I shall never forget the soft state of delicious exaltation and the silence, except a cab rolling outside, and the "Moorish drum" inside. Then, "Squaw - Squaw Stigum - look!" and lo! just in front of me on the curtain, a sort of oval of

illuminated light, a face in it like a magnified photograph, but coloured, alive. I saw a smile, and in a second I said, "Rudolph", my husband's name, and the oval faded into the dark of the curtain. Others had similar experiences, some more or less satisfactory. "Ski!" informed us it was the photography of the future, and that he had a present for us all. First he told us what our colours and flowers were. I forget the others. I naturally only remember mine (for it is now nearly ten years ago), and the colour was "yellow", and I was to wear "amber", and my flower was the lotus. I felt disappointed; I would have liked sky blue, which was called the mediumistic colour, and I did not like an ancient old Egyptian flower, but I have often thought it was more apt than I then knew. He then apportioned us each our presents - chiefly, I think, Mrs. Billing's own drawing-room ornaments, which she faithfully bereft herself of and gave. I was considered to have the best, namely, the teapot, said to be materialized by Madame Blavatsky. "Ski" said he brought it through the air. I have the teapot still. Its story was authenticated. "Ski" then said, "Goodbye, chiefs; goodbye, squaws. God bless you", and I never heard of "Ski" again.

Mrs. Billing went to America. Miss A ____, a fellow-sitter, kept a faithful record of all the *séances*, and last year we reread them together. After that, some of us joined the Theosophical Society, others left, and our circle broke up. We remained friendly to the last. I ceased to attend *séances* by degrees; fresh light appeared to me on many subjects, and that part of my investigation came to an end.

This is of course only a sketch of phenomena. I saw much more. I did not lay claim to any remarkable acumen, but I *felt* that things were not always right, and I stopped going to some circles; but in others, I feel somehow quite certain, whatever the real explanation might be, that of vulgar imposture, common trickery, and fraud were absolutely wide of the mark.

APPENDIX 2

LETTER FROM H. S. OLCOTT TO C. C. MASSEY

This letter from Col. Olcott to C. C. Massey and Stainton Moses has never been printed in its entirety. Extracts have appeared in Theodore Besterman's 1934 study Mrs. Annie Besant. As a source document it cannot be overrated, for it helped create the atmosphere of the fantastic that surrounded Mme. Blavatsky. I transcribe it from the original that covers twenty-two pages, and thank Dr. Joscelyn Godwin who brought it to my attention.

New York Mch 3rd 1877

Dear old Massey,

While the founders are casting a lot of pages of "The Veil of Isis"¹, there is a let-up in proofreading for a couple of days, so I will dash at you as many lines as I can find time to write.

Rely upon it, we have had you two constantly and affectionately in mind. The "Spiritualist" has kept us *au courant* as to your movements, and this, with the occasional direct letters from you both, has kept the magnetic cord stiff and taunt.

The book begins to look like an objective reality. We have over 150 pp cast, and the galleys are turned in to us at the rate of 12 or 15 pp. per diem. My hard work is now, for Isis² is not up in the technicalities of printing. What I have done heretofore in the book is, you may say, next to nothing - Isis has done the brainwork and writing, & I only the trimming of raw edges which my familiarity with our language enabled me to make. I have *studied* all these months in this cyclopedia of occultism, as one who is wise enough to know his chance when he sees it & make the most of it. I ask her sometimes if it doesn't make her head ache to know so much. She has seen more people this season than formerly - ladies and gentlemen, in and out of the T. S., and all go away marveling at her wisdom.

I say her, because it's a habit, but dear lord! boys, in my opinion she is no more a she than you or I. Putting aside her actions, habits of thought, masculine ways, her constant asseverations of the fact (which while made to third parties in *badinage*, nevertheless are deeply significant to one who has learnt to read her sub-cutaneously) - putting these aside, I have pumped enough out of her to satisfy me that the theory long since communicated by me to you was correct - she is a man, a very old man, and a most learned and wonderful man. Of course *she* knows just what my impressions are for she reads my thoughts like a printed page (and others' thoughts), and it seems to me she is not dissatisfied, for our relations have insensibly merged into those of Master and pupil. There is not a trace left of the old

sabreur Blavatsky ("Jack" as I nicknamed her to her great delight) so far as I am concerned. Now she is all sobriety, dignity, stern self-repression. Before others she is as of old, but the moment their backs are turned she is *Mejnour*³ and I the neophyte. This is a great satisfaction to me ⁴[]. Judge (my only fellow-neophyte here) said to me at the office today after a morning call at the house, "How totally she is changed! Formerly, she used to be so jolly and extravagant in speech: now she is as sober as a deacon!" I must tell you a good joke - my married sister, a staunch Presbyterian and the mother of six children - one who never was a Spiritualist or heterodox in any way, has become so delighted with Isis, that she spends always one day in the week & sometimes more with her. I tell her that I would wager \$500 that Isis and I could make her a full-fledged Buddhist inside of six months if I chose to try. She laughs.

I say Isis is a man. Let me add that *she* is (in my opinion) a Hindu man. At any rate, this thing happened tonight after my sister and her husband had gone home: Isis was leaning back in her chair, fooling with her hair, & smoking a cigarette. She got one lock in her fingers and pulled it, & fingered it in an absent way - talking the while, when lo! the lock grew visibly darker & darker until, presto! it was as black as a coal. I said nothing until the thing was done, when suddenly catching her hand I asked her to let me have this neat specimen of miracle-working as a keepsake. You ought to have seen her face when she saw what she had done in her brown study. But she laughed good-naturedly, called me a sharp Yankee, and cut off the lock & gave it to me. Stay - I will send you a bit of it as a talisman for Oxon⁵ and you. Mind you, this was cut off of Isis' head in my sight & under the full blaze of the chandelier. This one lock showed against the blonde silky & crinkled hair of Blavatsky's head like a skein of black sewing silk upon a light-brown cloth. Now what this teaches me is just this - The Blavatsky shell is a shell, tenanted by a copper-colored Hindu Solon or Pythagoras, and in this moment of abstraction his own hair - previously there only in its astral condition, as a part of the *scin-lecca*,⁶ became materialized & now stays so. Mind you these are my private speculations but believe me they are just about as near the truth as one can come. I saw another instance of this materialization on Thursday night. We were talking about Hindu costume &c, & she he (I will continue to say *she* as more convenient) told me that she wore a wrapper about the house there, that was delightfully cool. "See", she said, "I will show you, for *I always wear it wherever I go*"; and with the words, she lifted her left hand, & there was a large sleeve of lavender-colored silken tissue projecting from the tight sleeve of her merino wrapper. I felt it & inspected it closely. It was as thin as gossamer - a Chinese tissue - and presented the appearance of having been washed. She made a pass or two over it, and it was gone again. This again [proves ?] to my mind the fact that the adept who lives a foreign life in another body, is there *totis partibus*⁷ in his astral form - with the double of very part & portion of his own costume, and that in an instant (provided that he has the requisite knowledge) he can make any part or

the whole of himself and his coverings objective. Why, I can't tell you the number & variety of exhibitions of magical power she has given me and others during the past four months. They exceed all I had seen before. She has done her wonders before 4, 6, and 8 persons, some of them comparative strangers. On Monday night, in the presence of Dr. Billing, Dr. Marquette, Mr. and Miss Monachesi, Mr. Curtis (a *World* reporter) and myself these things happened in full light: she made the music of a musical-box to be heard in the air. At first faint & far, far away, it grew louder & louder until it sounded as if the box were floating around the room & playing at full force. Then it died away again, again approached, & then suddenly ceased. She carelessly put out her hand, & withdrawing it showed us a long string of those perfumed Oriental beads, whose fragrance filled the room. Holding them in one hand, she asked me if I wanted some, & at once pulled *duplicates* off, one by one, until she had given me 27. I strung them & after handling them awhile laid them on my writing-table (beyond her reach a good way) for a moment while I filled a pipe & upon taking them up again, there was a Turkish coin strung on the string with them! Still holding her own original necklace she pulled off (materialized) a bead mounted in gold as a scarf-pin, & upon our drawing lots Monachesi got it & has it now. Then four of the party happening to sit so they could look out of the window into the street (a room in second story of house), saw pass the windows *on the outside* the forms of two men. *One of them was a Brother I knew well*, & whose portrait was materialized instantly for me some months ago. The other was a younger Brother (an advanced pupil who can travel in his double.

O'Sullivan (JL) has been here *en route* to Paris, & made "Mme's" acquaintance & even stayed all night once with us. In his presence she materialized, on two different occasions, handkerchiefs of a beautiful fine & delicate Chinese silk crape with a satin striped border. In the corner, marked in ink, *was the name of a certain Brother* in the Ancient Zenzar character. I was present both times. I wish you might have seen O'Sullivan's consternation: he jumped for the hdk's [handkerchiefs] like a trout at a fly, & carried one off as a trophy. If you meet him get him to show it to you & tell the story: he's imparting it to everybody here. The original handkerchief was materialized two weeks ago Sunday in the presence of a French artist named HARRISSE. We three were talking of the delicate fabrics of the Chinese, & HARRISSE said that their crapes were much finer than those of Lyons. "Did you ever see their handkerchiefs, Madame?" he asked. "Oh! yes - see, here is one!" she replied, quietly grabbing the very article out of the *Astral Wardrobe*! This specimen I retained for myself, chiefly because it was strongly impregnated with the Lodge perfume that is so delicious to me. A few days later she made the first duplicate in O'S's presence, & the second the next evening. A fourth copy she made for my sister, who is so afraid it will take wings to itself that she goes & looks in the box where she keeps it, two or three times a day!!

But the greatest job of materialization was that of a lot of money - enough to furnish the whole "flat" in excellent style, buy herself a new piano, a fur-lined silk cloak, and all sorts of things - in short, at least \$2000. This also came out of the *Astral Bank for Savings*. She has doubled money for me at different times - latterly to the extent of several hundred dollars. Don't start: there is no criminality in the affair - no ground for charge of counterfeiting. When the doubling is merely done for the purposes of instruction (as when she made a \$500 bill in O'S's presence, the other day) the duplicates do not remain; they disappear as mysteriously as they came; but when otherwise then she merely rematerializes bills or specie that have been burnt or lost inevitably (by ordinary methods) in some other way. This is my theory anyhow: neophytes have to hatch their own broods of chickens. There was a necessity for certain changes in the apartments just now, in view of a large number of visitors who were to come, and the means were forthcoming to make them. The rooms now look charming. (Why the devil don't you send your picture, you father of all the mules, for stubbornness?)

Apropos of portraits, I have in my room over my bed the portraits of *four* Brothers. One I have had photographed on purpose to send you boys copies & get your impressions about him. This is one of the most wise & powerful of them. Tell me what you both think upon seeing it.

I saw a splendid exhibition of will-power recently. Isis and I were alone after dinner, in the parlor, when she bade me turn the gas very low & sit quiet at the other side of the room. I made the light very dim, & upon looking at her through the gloom in a few minutes I saw beside her dark figure (she was dressed in a dark gown) a *man's figure in white*, or light robes, & with a shawl wound in Eastern fashion about his head. She told me to look away for a moment, & then to turn up the gas. *She sat there with the very shawl transferred to her own head*, & no one else visible but us two. She gave me the shawl. It was powerfully perfumed with the familiar odor. *In one corner was worked the name of the same Brother above alluded to, & in the same Zenzar character*. It is on his portrait, in my bedroom.

So I might go on to fill a whole pamphlet with accounts of marvels of will-power witnessed by perhaps a dozen of cool & collected witnesses. I shall draw up a sort of resumé of some of them soon & send it to our Corresp Fellows with the attestations of witnesses. We have had no time for circulars, & reports & transactions, like other Societies. Fact is, that only the very few have seen anything for most of the crowd joined us merely as they would a Spt circle - to gorge themselves with magical surprises & so get filled with flatulency. These I have been waiting to "freeze out" & tire out. I have in a large degree succeeded. Soon I hope to boil down the T. S. into its concentrated essence, & then under the safeguard of our secrecy *all* will see what the few have so far.

I am ordered to tell you that you and Oxon may use the facts herein given in any public way you choose - only suppressing the names of Isis as the performer, making them vouched for by the T. S. "Section of Magic". Say that seven adepts in all have thus exhibited their powers to us- which is true - as, in fact, all I tell you is.

Oh! by the way, do *you* write the reply to Roberts for the Banner.⁸ Colby writes me he will print it, & I want this infernal shallow[] ass answered by somebody beside me. I don't want to do *all* the talking. Just you write on of your own motion - not upon my suggestion, & send to Colby direct.

Dear boys, how I would like you to be here, studying with me! I don't know how long it may be before I go to the East - but God grant it may be soon.

Yours ever aff

Olcott

P.S. As Oxon has never seen Isis I thought I would send a lock of *her* hair to compare the Indian lock by. Let him note (1) its color; (2) texture; (3) its natural crinkle. Could there be any greater contrast! On my word I think this one of the most striking manifestations of the magical power that I have seen. You can now believe what I told you when here - viz that I had seen Isis' hair grow three inches inside of a quarter of an hour.

Now, before I have time to finish this note (on Sunday afternoon) which was begun last night after 1 a.m., I have another phenomenon to report. Isis saw me putting the strand of black hair into the tin-foil & upon learning that it was going to you said, "Here, stop, I'll send them a lock myself!" and straightway putting *her* hand to *her* head, she seemed to separate a lock & I saw amid her blond wavy hair an ink-black lock hanging down. She separated this & sends it with her blessing. This is fair - I keep my share & you two have yours.

She says you may say what you like, as you like, about this only concealing her name. Give me as your authority. People won't believe the story anyhow so they might as well think me a liar as not: I don't care. I know it's true & that's enough for me.

REFERENCES

- 1 ["The Veil of Isis" was the intended name of Blavatsky's first book, finding that this had already been used it was changed by the publisher to *Isis Unveiled*]
- 2 [Olcott's nickname for HPB.]
3. [Mejnour was the name of the aged adept in Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Zanoni*.]
4. [Five lines following this, continuing Olcott's praise of Blavatsky, have been heavily crossed out and the words "Flapdoodle" written across them in blue pencil.]
5. [The pen-name of W. Stainton Moses. The lock of straight black hair is preserved in archives of The Theosophical Society, Adyar, India, along with a cutting of Blavatsky's frizzy light hair.]
- 6.[The astral double]
7. ["In all parts."]
8. [*Banner of Light*, a Spiritualist weekly published in Boston, USA.]

APPENDIX 3

INSTRUCTIONS TO BRITISH T. S., 1878

In the T. S. Archives at Adyar, India, there is a small notebook labeled by HPB "New York, December 1878" containing the instructions printed below. The first paragraph is in HPB's handwriting, the rest written out by Olcott. The information was probably communicated to the group in London during the Founders visit to England at that time, and would have been the guide for the incipient movement there for some time.

Translation from the original letter sent by the Chief in India to the Corres. Sec. of the T. S. of New York to be read to the Fellows of the London T. S. of A. S.¹

Long orders to independent and original minds superfluous. The following are the few but preeminently important rules to be communicated to the Fellows of the T. S. of London. Their President must preserve a copy and one printed bring into the meeting room.

The Theosophical Society comprises a parent body and branches. No branch can exist independently of the parent or under antagonistic rules: as well expect the limbs of a tree to flourish independently of the trunk. The Theosophical Society, the Arya Samaj, and many like organizations are themselves offshoots and dependencies of a greater, mightier, more ancient Body, nourished, supervised and guided by it, as they in their turn support, direct, and watch over their branches.

Fellows admitted to the parent Society thereby become members of all its branches, and, in like manner, each person accepted into the fellowship of any branch is thereby entitled to recognition as a fellow in any other branch and the parent Society. But the local concerns of each branch are under the exclusive management of its own fellows, subject to the general supervision and approbation of the Council of the parent Society as expressed through the President. The same rule applies to expulsions; one expelled from the parent body or either of the branches at once ceases to become a Theosophist, his diploma is cancelled, his expulsion must be certified to all the fellows throughout the world.

The same obligations taken by those joining the parent Society must be taken in all the branches, including that of London. It is forbidden to employ any ceremonial or adopt any form of creed that conflicts with the principles of the Eastern primitive philosophy. Such would be one which taught the existence of a personal, anthropomorphic God, composed of one or more parts. No book or books written by man can be accepted and endorsed by the Theosophical Society as the especial revealed Word of the Eternal Principle. Let individuals think what they may, the Society must not be entrapped into the acceptance of infallibility for any book or man.

There are three sections in London, as in every other branch, of the Theosophical Society, but the divisions of the fellows are known only to the Chiefs. The government of affairs rests exclusively in the Council of each branch, and their decision is final; subject, of course, to appeal to the President and Council of the parent society. The Council of the London branch may be either of three, five, seven, but none other. Each branch may regulate its fees for initiation and yearly dues as it pleases the fellows; but for each new fellow admitted there must be sent to the Bombay Arya Samaj the sum of £1 or 1 guinea, as voted by the parent Society.

1 [Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement with which the T. S. was temporarily affiliated.]

APPENDIX 4

RULES OF THE BRITISH THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY, 1880

1. The BRITISH THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY is founded for the purpose of inquiring into the hidden mysteries of nature, especially as contained in the Oriental and Western occult philosophy, and for investigating the nature and power of the human soul and the spirit by examination and experiment.
2. The object of the Society is further to establish a universal brotherhood founded on the general belief in a Great First Intelligent Cause and in the Divine Son-ship of the spirit of man, and hence in the immortality of that spirit and in the fundamental brotherhood of the human race.
3. The Fellows pledge themselves to the best of their powers to live a life of temperance, purity, truthfulness, and brotherly love. They also pledge themselves to retain in secret the passwords and signs, and such transactions of the Society as are confided to them as secrets.
4. The Society consists of a President, two Vice-Presidents, a Secretary who is Treasurer, and a Council of five, and of active, honorary, and corresponding Fellows.
5. Persons of either sex are eligible for admission.
6. The election and expulsion of Fellows, and the power to transact all other business connected with the Society, is vested in the Council.
7. The subscription by active Fellows is £1 initiation fee and £1 annually; but the Council can reduce these fees according to circumstances.
8. Notice in writing of resignation of Fellowship must be given to the Secretary before the 31st December, or liability for the succeeding year will be incurred.
9. Those seeking to join the Society must be proposed by two Fellows; and they cannot be elected unless they obtain the votes of two-thirds of the Council.
10. Fellows can be expelled by a vote of two-thirds of the Council; but they will receive two weeks' notice before the vote is taken.
11. The officers of the Society are elected annually by ballot, on the first Sunday in January.
12. Further information can be obtained by applying to the President.
13. I, the undersigned, if elected a Fellow of the BRITISH THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY, promise faithfully to abide by the above Rules.

APPENDIX 5

LETTER FROM HPB TO A LONDON GROUP, 1887

Early in 1887 members of the London Lodge began writing to HPB for advice on how to activate their branch in London. Her reply was copied into one of Countess Wachtmeister's Notebooks, now in the collection of the late John Cooper of Australia. The advice, more detailed than given elsewhere in her other letters, is worth reprinting for how she thought such a group should function.



I can do you no good if you yourselves fail to place yourselves in the atmosphere of Theosophy and the Masters; or rather, if you still fail to *sense Them* around yourselves - as you have done till now. As you say, the flesh is ever weak and the spirit only occasionally willing in human nature. Still, who of you can say that this sudden revolution in your minds - in the minds of a few chosen and exceptional Theosophists I mean - and the ensuing awakening after nearly a year of apathy and inactivity are not to due to a guiding hand? That [it] is a mere coincidence the effect of a cause *due to no chance!*

My dear colleagues, there is an uninterrupted concatenation of causes and effects, a *Nidana*¹ in the life of every *Theosophist*, if not of every member of *our* Society. And it is this which distinguishes it chiefly from other Societies whose motors are Science on the physical plane or *Faith*, on the gushing emotional plane, like that of the Salvation Army for instance. No one seems even to suspect the real, true nature of the T. S. - *which cannot die* were all Oxford, Cambridge and the Austrian, German and Russian secret polices to try to destroy it. Individual Branches may collapse - the Parent Body whether in Adyar or at the North Pole cannot be annihilated - for it is the nursery and granary of the Societies in the twentieth century. But it is only working on the lines traced by the Masters to prevent the said Branch-bodies from collapsing - and if I can prop up yours let me be used as the meanest pillar, or mortar on your trowels to cement and mend the cracked walls of the luckless London Lodge. But if the masons do not put first in order their material and prepare the bricks, what can the *cement* do? How can I create Theosophy in the hearts from which Theosophy has fled, perhaps for ever - if it has ever been there.

Please let me explain myself for once so that you may all know what I mean. I will not speak of Theosophists of the London Lodge in general, but will confine what I have to say to your own small group and let you draw yourselves your inferences and parallels therefrom. I just mentioned the *Nidana* (law of cause and

effects) in the life of every Theosophist who is in *dead earnest*. I must add a few words to this. To begin with, none of you, sons of your generation and environments seem to have paid the slightest attention to that mysterious Nidana, none - even amongst the most earnest has ever thought of watching, studying and profiting by the lessons contained therein - the web of life ever woven round each of you, yet it is in that intangible, yet plainly visible web (to those who would see) its workings in that ever open book traced in the mystic light around you, that you could learn - aye, even those possessed of no clairvoyant powers. But you probably think you cannot. If I came and asked you: why didn't you, helped merely by the light of your reasoning powers and intellects - on the physical, let alone the spiritual plane - why have you never followed those daily records in the life of every one of you - those trifling events of which that life is composed[,] for no better proof can you ever get of the invisible *Presence* among yourselves - what would you say? How could we know? would probably be the answer. But surely Mohini² must have told you! But whether he has or not, it is so. You speak of contact with the Master or Masters, saying you have striven to obtain it and you admit that you may have even shared it, "unconsciously and in a measure". I say you have, and that before you can hope to get more you have to realize that which you had.

I must confess - and it is better that I should - that you have received no active direct help from the Masters (except Mrs. Cook³ on the psychic plane) ever since the last collapse and the great trial of the London Lodge. For that trial has engulfed for ever those whom *They* had sent to help and work and who were the first to desert their duty and even turn traitors in their hearts to the cause they had pledged themselves to further. But the trial was meant for all the London Lodge not merely for those who had called the karma upon themselves. Nevertheless if the Masters had to withdraw from the London Lodge in general they have never ceased to have their eye upon isolated individuals in it; upon those who remained true - to *themselves and their personal aspirations*, if not to the cause and general good, as they ought to have done, *had they been Theosophists as well as mystics*. And I know that Masters have without interfering with karma - something even *They* have no right to meddle with - precipitated and in other cases retarded some events and contingencies in the lives of all and each of you who are earnest and true. Had you only paid attention to those casualties and little events, the working of these might alone have revealed to you a guiding hand. But, even you seem to have lost sight of a grand truth uttered by one of you, namely that the world, the work-a-day world, "in which men live and move and have their being as though there were no other, is only a semblance", and that "beyond these appearances there was hid a reality far higher, far nobler". You have seen in certain events nothing to which the above words in another connection would be applied to and thus you have failed to apply them to yourself as to those with whom you are working in your group. Yet it is the first rule in the daily life of a student in Occultism, namely to never take off your

attention from the smallest circumstances that may happen whether in your own or your fellow-workers' lives; to record and place them in order on those records, whether they may or may not be connected with your spiritual pursuits, and then bind (religare) them together by comparing notes with the records of the others, and thus extract from them their inner meaning. This you ought to do at least once a week. It is from these totals that you would find out the direction and path to pursue. It is the phenomenon of "thought-transference" and *guessing thoughts* of Bishop and Co. applied to the events in life. For once compared and summed up, those events (the most trifling are often the most determinative) grouping together and their course, would reveal to you, as a scarcely perceptible motion of a muscle in the hand (with which he is in contact) reveals to Bishop the direction he has to follow, the way you have to follow to get true light. Working by himself no man can achieve this - but when you are several it is comparatively easy. It is the method used for the youngest chelas, and answers several objects pursued. It concentrates their attention upon the *noumena* of the simplest phenomena or events in life (those events being guided and prepared by the invisible *Guru*) and draws their attention from things that would only interfere with their mental training. It sharpens and develops their intuition and at the same time makes them gradually sensitive for the smallest changes in the spiritual influence of their *Guru*.

But if proceeding on the old social lines, each fellow of your group prefers to see in every event or causality of his life the effect of either a cause produced by his own free agency or a simple chance, then you will never establish in your group the first requisite element - perfect unity of thought and harmony between your spiritual selves. You cannot proceed straight from the universals but have to begin from the particulars. Arithmetic and addition before Mathematics and *meta-mathematics*. Once an earnest mystic joins the T. S. he is invisibly and unconsciously to himself placed on quite a different plane than those around him. There are no more meaningless or *trifling* circumstances in his life, for each is a link purposely placed in the chain of events that have to lead him on forward to the "Golden Gate" or the "Gates of Gold". Each step, each person he meets with, every word uttered may be a word purposely placed in the day's sentence with the purpose of giving certain importance to the chapter it belongs to and such or another (Karmic) meaning to the volume of life.

REFERENCES

- 1 [A term used in Buddhism to describe the twelve links that constitute the chain of causation.]
- 2 [Mohini Chatterji, the Indian chela who had accompanied Mme Blavatsky to England in 1884.]
3. [Mabel Collins Cook, the writer of the recently published *Light on the Path*, who was a member of the London Lodge.]

APPENDIX 6

RULES OF THE BRITISH SECTION OF THE T. S., 1889

1. The British Section of the Theosophical Society shall consist of all Fellows of the Theosophical Society resident in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.
2. For all purposes of organization, the Section shall consist of all branches of the Theosophical Society within the above limits, provided that the said branches shall be duly chartered by the Theosophical Society, or by such other authority as shall be deputed for that purpose.
3. The government of the British Section shall be vested in a Council. The Council consists of the following: The Presidents of Branches, *ex officio*; one delegate from each Branch for every twenty-five members; the General Secretary; and such unofficial members of the present General Council of the Theosophical Society as are resident in the United Kingdom. The Council is an integral portion of the General Council of the Theosophical Society.
4. The General Secretary shall be elected annually by the Council; and during his tenure of office, shall have the voting power of a member of the Council, and shall be responsible for the carrying on of the routine business of the Section, and for the due execution of all instructions conveyed to him by the Council.
5. The General Secretary shall further keep a register of all members of the Section, and it shall be the duty of the Secretaries of branches to furnish him from time to time with the names and addresses of members of their branches. This register shall be open to the inspection of Presidents of branches.
6. No person shall be considered a member of the Section whose name is not on the list of the General Secretary.
7. The Council of the Section shall meet in London during the months of April and November, and at such other times as may be considered expedient. Notice of such meetings, together with notices of any resolutions to be moved, or business transacted, shall be forwarded to every Branch, at least twenty-one days before the date fixed for such meeting. Special Meetings shall be summoned by the General Secretary, at the request of the representatives of any two branches, in which case notice shall be given to all branches, as above.
8. At Meetings of the Council, the members present shall elect their Chairman for the meeting; during such election the General Secretary shall take the Chair *pro tem*; the quorum of the Council shall consist of one representative from each of two Branches.
9. Each Member of Council has one vote on any questions about which a division is taken. Proxies, general or special, shall be allowed. In case of a tie, the motion shall stand adjourned.
10. The Council of the Section shall have power to issue charters to Branches and diplomas to Members. It shall further have power to suspend charters or the diplomas of unattached members, pending an appeal to the President-Founder.

11. Each Branch shall determine for itself the qualifications of its Members or Associates. But no Member of the Section shall have power to vote or be eligible to office in more than one Lodge.

12. All difficulties or questions arising within branches or between unattached Members of the Section, may be referred at the desire of either party to the decision of the Council of the Section. And final appeal shall lie to the President-Founder.

13. The Section shall have its headquarters in London; where a room or rooms shall be provided and furnished as a reading-room for the use of members of the Section. A Library of works on Theosophy and Occultism shall be formed for their use; the expenses being defrayed out of the funds of the Section.

14. The expenses of the Section shall be defrayed by an annual subscription from each member thereof. In the case of members belonging to a branch, the Secretary of that branch shall be responsible to the Council for the collection of their subscription.

15. The Annual Subscription of each member of the Section shall not be less than 5s. per annum, but members residing within 20 miles of London shall pay an additional subscription of 5s.; this being subject to the action of the Council in special cases.

16. The contributions of the Section to the Theosophical Society shall be subject to the action of the Council from time to time.

17. Alterations of these Rules may be made by the Council, subject to the provision as regards notice, as above specified.

APPENDIX 7

THE EASTERN SCHOOL OF THEOSOPHY: HISTORY

No mention has been made of H. P. Blavatsky's group of students known as the Esoteric or Eastern School of Theosophy, for we have adhered to Mme Blavatsky's and Col. Olcott's statements that this organisation had no official connection to the Theosophical Society. To give some background of this group we print a historical sketch that was issued by the school early in 1895. It, of course, gives another view of the founding and inner purpose of the Theosophical Society. The document itself is quite lengthy, long extracts being given to changes in the pledge taken by members of this group at the time and regulations for the admission to American E. S. T. The present reprint omits such details not germane to the telling of the story. For those interested, the full text can be found in Theosophical History VI: January 1996.

When the Theosophical Society was first founded, it was made to consist of several degrees. An early draft of the constitution shews three sections, and three degrees in each section, the conditions becoming more stringent as the member passed inward. In the Rules of the T. S., as revised and passed at Bombay on Feb. 17, 1881, it is stated, with regard to these sections, that:

The administration of the two superior sections need not be dealt with at present in a code of rules laid before the public. No responsibilities connected with these superior grades are incurred by persons who merely desire ordinary membership.

Fellowship in the T. S. admitted to the Third Section only. If Fellows shewed special earnestness and capacity, they were allowed to pass into the Second Section, and this Second Section is the original form of what was later called the Esoteric Section, and later still the Eastern School. Anyone who passed into that Section passed in as a pupil of H.P. Blavatsky, and, if proven worthy or possessing Karmic claim, came in due time into contact with the Masters.

The Theosophical Society has never been a mere exoteric Society, without touch with the unseen world. It has been ever since its foundation a ladder, with its foot on earth but its top in the heavenly places, and any one stepping off the ground on to its first rung might climb upwards, if he possessed the capacity to do so. The obstacles to climbing lay in the incapacity of the member, not in the absence of the necessary steps.

When the great shaking of the Coulomb attack came upon the Society, it failed to pass successfully through the ordeal, and was for a time little more than an empty vessel, from which the spiritual life had run out; too many members were afraid of openly carrying the flag of Occultism, and rolled it away out of sight as

much as possible, though a few stood their ground. The Society became more and more wholly exoteric. In a written report of a conversation between her Master and H. P. B., He is recorded saying:

“The Society has liberated itself from our grasp and influence, and we have let go; we make no unwilling slaves . . . It is now a soulless corpse, a machine run so far well enough, but which will fall to pieces when . . . Out of the three Objects the second alone is attended to; it is no longer either a Brotherhood, nor a body over the face of which broods the Spirit from beyond the Great Range.”

H. P. B. kept on some pupils, but the inner grades of the Society no longer existed as such. But in due course the time came for their revival; she was much pressed to form Occult Lodges, and in *Lucifer* of September, 1888, an article appeared on “The Meaning of a Pledge”, in which there was published the pledge to be taken by the “members of a certain Occult Lodge of the T. S.” It ran as follows:

1. I pledge myself to endeavor to make Theosophy a living factor of my life.
 2. I pledge myself to support, before the world, the Theosophical movement, its leaders and its members.
 3. I pledge myself never to listen without protest to any evil thing spoken of a Brother Theosophist, and to abstain from condemning others.
 4. I pledge myself to maintain a constant struggle against my lower nature, and to be charitable to the weaknesses of others.
 5. I pledge myself to do all in my power, by study or otherwise, to fit myself to help and teach others.
 6. I pledge myself to give what support I can to the movement in time, money, and work.
- So Help Me, My Higher Self.

This is almost identical with the pledge issued on the first pledge-cards of the Esoteric Section; the word “factor” in clause 1 was, in the E. S. pledge, altered to “power”; to clause 2 were added the words, “and in particular to obey, without cavil or delay, the orders of the Head of Esoteric Section, in all that concerns my relation with the Theosophical movement”; and a 7th clause, not given above, pledged secrecy “as regards the signs and passwords of the Section and all confidential documents. To all of which I pledge my most solemn and sacred word of honour.”

The Esoteric Section was formed by an order, dated London, Oct. 9th, 1888, which ran as follows:

**THE ESOTERIC SECTION
OF THE
THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY**

I. To promote the esoteric interests of the Theosophical Society by the deeper study of esoteric philosophy, there is hereby organised a body, to be known as the "Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society."

II. The constitution and sole direction of the same is vested in Madame H.P. Blavatsky, as its Head; she is solely responsible to the members for results; and the Section has no official or corporate connection with the Exoteric Society, save in the person of the President-Founder.

Persons wishing to join the Section, and willing to abide by its rules, should communicate directly with Madme. H.P. Blavatsky, 17, Lansdowne Road, Holland Park, London, W.

*(Signed) H S. OLCOTT,
President in Council*

Attest:

H. P. BLAVATSKY,
Corresponding Secretary.

In the following number of *Lucifer*, that for Oct. 15th, this order was reproduced with the following heading:

**THE ESOTERIC SECTION
OF THE
THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY.**

Owing to the fact that a large number of Fellows of the Society have felt the necessity for the formation of a body Esoteric students, to be organized on the ORIGINAL LINES devised by the *real* founders of the T. S., the following order has been issued by the President-Founder.

The first three certificates issued were dated Oct. 27th, 1888.

Two months after the formation of the E. S., William Q. Judge was appointed by H. P. B. to represent her in America, by the following order:

ESOTERIC T. S. SECTION

As Head of the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society, I hereby declare that William Q. Judge, of New York, U.S., in virtue of his character as a chela of thirteen years standing, and of the trust and confidence reposed in him, is my only representative for said Section in America, and he is the sole channel through whom will be sent and received all communications between the members of said Section and myself, and to him full faith, confidence and credit in that regard are to be given. Done in London this fourteenth day of December, 1888, and in the fourteenth year of the Theosophical Society.

[Seal]

H. P. Blavatsky, ∴.

H. P. B. kept the power of admission to the E. S. entirely in her own hands - "all members shall be approved by the Head of the Section" - and clause 2 of the pledge was noted as to be agreed to "without reservation." To assist her in matters of organization, H. P. B. appointed a Council of seven members in America, and a similar one in England.

Before very long, objection was raised by some to the above second clause of the pledge and H. P. B. altered it to read as follows:

I pledge myself to support, before the world, the Theosophical movement, and those of its leaders and members in whom I have full confidence, and in particular to obey, without cavil or delay, the orders given through the Head of the Esoteric Section, in all that concerns my Theosophical duties and Esoteric work, so far as my pledge to my Higher Self and my conscience sanction.

To avoid the abuse of these qualifications, the decision on any dispute that might arise under this clause was to be remitted to seven members of the E. S. as arbitrators. It will be noticed also that the pledge of obedience to herself was altered to one of obedience to orders given *through* her. Objection was also raised to clause 3. It was argued that this forced a member to condone faults, and so made him a party to them; against this exaggerated construction of the clause H. P. B. protested, pointing out that the clause was directed against malicious gossip and not against a truthful statement as to wrong-doing (see *Lucifer*, Dec., 1888); but in order that even the mistaken construction of the clause might have no ground to stand on in the future, and ever ready to lessen honestly-felt difficulties, she altered it to run:

I pledge myself never to listen, without protest, to any evil thing spoken falsely, or yet unproven, of a brother Theosophist, and to abstain from condemning others.

The first two books of *Instructions* were issued for Jan-Feb., and March-April, 1889. Then a considerable delay occurred, in consequence of the breach of the pledge of secrecy by certain American members. To guard against similar difficulties in future, a more definite organisation of the Section was made. After much discussion in the London Council, and the submission by it of various schemes to H. P. B., the plans given in the subjoined letter to Mr. Judge and the American Council were decided on, and a new set of Rules issued, by which the groups of students, hitherto allowed to grow up naturally round some competent student, chosen by H. P. B., changed their character and were made compulsory; the duties of the Councils were also made more definite, and they changed from advisory into executive bodies, with disciplinary powers, but were bound "not to discuss the motives or actions of any member except in Council, and then only when the well-being of the whole body makes it imperative to do so."

**TO WILLIAM Q. JUDGE
AND THE AMERICAN COUNCIL OF THE E. S.**

Dear Sir and Brother,

H. P. B. declares most positively that the disclosure of the Esoteric Section circular to — has so shaken her confidence in the reliability of the members as regards keeping secret the teachings, that she will give no more teachings at all until the E. S. is reorganised on some basis which shall at least give some probability of secrecy being maintained.

This is H. P. B.'s positive declaration in accordance with her orders. Certain it is that many members have failed to realise the importance, the solemnity, and the binding nature of the pledge they have taken in joining the E.S. After much careful consideration and talk with H. P. B., the Council of the E. S. here have come to the following conclusions:

The only way available, under the actual conditions and purposes of the E. S., appears to be to render the pledge more solemn and impressive for the candidate by requiring that he shall repeat it aloud in the presence of several other Esotericists, as well as give it in writing over his signature.

[Here follows recommendations on admission of candidates and the re-structuring of "centres" in America.]

As no further Instructions will be given by H.P.B. to the members till a scheme of reorganisation, covering the ground sketched above, has been carried out, the Council desire to impress upon you the necessity of immediate and prompt action in preparing such a scheme for approval by the

Head of the Section. The above suggestions have been submitted and approved, and will therefore give the American Council a clear idea of what is required.

We beg again to call your attention to the urgency of the matter, and although we are fully sensible of the great difficulties which will have to be overcome in carrying through such a reorganisation as required, we trust that no unnecessary delay may be allowed to occur.

We would also suggest to the American Council that it would be well for them to send a circular, to all the members of the Section in that country, explaining the necessity of a reorganisation, and stating that the Instructions will be suspended during the carrying of it out.

Otherwise many complaints are sure to be made of the non-receipt of the May-June Instructions, while much dissatisfaction, and even unjust doubts as to the Head of the Section, might arise.

(Signed in her own writing),

Approved, H. P. BLAVATSKY

In the Book of Rules issued after this reorganisation the "Secretaries and Agents of the Head of the Section" were given as:

"Bertram Keightley and G. R. S. Mead for the general work of the Section at the London Headquarters. In America, William Q. Judge, P. O. Box 2659, New York City, U. S. A. In India, Colonel H. S. Olcott, P. T. S., Adyar, Madras, India."

In America and India all communications for H. P. B. were to be sent through these officials, whose duties were further defined as follows, the discretion given to Colonel Olcott being very wide:

William Q. Judge is authorised to establish regulations in his discretion in respect to the method to be followed in America for the transmission of communications, questions, and answers, and also in respect to the appointment of Assistant Secretaries. Colonel H. S. Olcott is appointed confidential agent and sole official representative of the Esoteric Section for Asiatic countries. All correspondence from residents in such countries relative to admission into, and resignation from, the Section shall be referred to him, and all instructions transmitted by him; and his decision is to be taken and accepted as given by the Head of the Section.

Some difficulties continued in America, and under date Oct. 23rd, 1889, H. P. B. wrote in a private letter to Mr. W. Q. Judge, who had wished to withdraw from his position as her agent:

The Esoteric Section and its life in the U.S.A. depend upon W. Q. J. remaining its agent and what he is now. The day W. Q. J. resigns, H. P. B.

will be virtually dead for the Americans. W. Q. J. is the Antaskarana between the two *Manas(es)*, the American thought and the Indian or rather the trans-Himalayan esoteric knowledge.

Dixi.

H. P. B., ∴.

P. S. - W. Q. J. had better show, and impress *this* on the mind of all *those* it may concern.

H. P. B.

Some members in America refused to comply with the new Rules as issued by Mr. Judge in H. P. B.'s name, though they were the same for the whole School, and the sending out of *Instruction III* was consequently delayed. Further, bitter attacks were made on Mr. Judge himself, and he was warmly defended in a memorandum sent out as "Preliminary Explanations to No. III of the *Instructions*". She wrote:

Now that which Colonel Olcott has accomplished in India and Asia, W. Q. Judge has done in America. He is the Resuscitator of Theosophy in the United. States, and is working to the best of his means and ability, and at a great sacrifice, for the spread of' the movement; and he is now being infamously attacked and schemed against for this by one who has never done a thing for the T. S., but is now trying to crush it out of existence.

She pointed to the efforts being made to overthrow the T. S., and "to build on its ruins another, a bogus Body of the same name", by one who repudiated the Masters, and "tries to substitute for them some bogus Adepts in the Rocky Mountains, and thus ruin the cause"; and she warned them:

The moment the T. S. falls in America (it cannot die in India, or even Europe, so long as the Colonel or I are alive) through your apathy or carelessness, every member of the E.S. who has not done his duty will go down with it. From that day there will be no more hope of acquiring true Eastern secret knowledge till the end of the XXth century.

After this, matters went a little more smoothly within the E. S., and in the summer of 1890, H. P. B. established the Inner Group, inviting those to enter it whom she considered ready to receive more definite teaching; several of those invited were unable to comply with the conditions, but she succeeded in gathering round her a few devoted members at the London Headquarters, 19, Avenue Road, N. W. Of these she wrote, much comforted, that she had at last found some pupils she could teach and trust, and who trusted her; she placed the administration of the Section, outside America, in their hands, making Annie Besant and G. R. S. Mead joint Secretaries, and adding to the number of this Council two old students and friends in whom she had great confidence, but who were unable to join the Inner Group.

In January, 1891, H. P. B. definitely organised the Section in India, where she had hitherto only accepted scattered pupils, refusing permission to form Lodges; and she then appointed Bertram Keightley as her sole agent in India, relieving Colonel Olcott, at his own wish, of any further responsibility or membership in regard to the Section. It was felt that the neutrality of the T. S. on all matters of opinion was likely to be compromised unless the Esoteric Section were very definitely set apart from it, and still more to mark this separation, H. P. B. changed the name of her band of students from "The Esoteric Section of the T. S." to "The Eastern School of Theosophy" (see *Lucifer*, February, 1891, "Comments on The T. S. and H. P. B.").

On March 27th, 1891, H. P. B. wrote to Mr. Judge, saying of Annie Besant that she was "My right hand, my successor, when I will be forced to leave you, my sole hope in England as you are my sole hope in America". She further, on April 1st, issued the following:

E. S. — ORDER.

I hereby appoint, in the name of the MASTER, Annie Besant Chief Secretary of the Inner Group of the Esoteric Section and Recorder of the Teachings.

H. P. B., ∴.

*To Annie Besant, C. S. of the I. G. of the E. S. and R. of T.
April 1. 1891.*

On May 8th, she passed out of the body, and on May 27th a Council of the whole E. S. T. was held at 19, Avenue Road, London, Mr. W. Q. Judge holding proxies for the entire American Council, and the European members being all present. A plan drawn up by Mr. Judge was laid before the Councillors by Annie Besant, and extracts from various letters from H. P. B. were read by her, shewing the position held by Mr. Judge in America by H. P. B.'s wish. The plan made Annie Besant and W. Q. Judge the joint Outer Heads of the School, and abolished the two Councils; it would probably have been accepted without demur, but was further endorsed by a slip of paper bearing the words in the script of one of the Masters connected with the School, "Judge's plan is right". (This message has since been repudiated.) The Council passed a minute, of which the following are the important points:

That it was resolved and recorded that the highest officials in the School for the present are Annie Besant and William Q. Judge, in accordance with the above quoted order to William Q. Judge of December, 1888, and with the order of April 1st, 1891, to Annie Besant, as well as with the written declaration of H.P.B. in a letter to William Q. Judge dated March 27th, 1891, which we now here have read, in which she wrote that Annie Besant should

be so considered.....

[Changes to the 2nd and 7th rules of the Pledge were then given]

That it was resolved that the said Annie Besant and William Q. Judge send notice to all members of the School, asking from them a declaration of allegiance to the School, and that they will reaffirm it in the new form above given. . . .

That the names of all members who shall reply in the negative to said notice, and of all who shall fail to reply, shall be stricken off the list and a return of all their papers and documents of the School be required to be made to the said Annie Besant and William Q. Judge.....

That this Council records its decision that its appointment was solely for the purpose of assisting H. P. B. in a consultative way, and that as she had full power and authority to relieve us from duty at any time, our office and that of each of us ends with the above resolution passed in order as far as possible in our power to place the future conduct of the School on the basis directed and intended by her; therefore we collectively and individually declare that our office as Councillors ceases at this date, and that from henceforth with Annie Besant and William Q. Judge rest the full charge and management of this School.

The School remained under this dual headship until July, 1894, when Annie Besant declined to act further as Joint-Head with Mr. Judge, on the grounds of the deceptions he had practised; it was then agreed to revert to the "arrangements made and left by her [H. P. B.] at the time of her passing away". These were: Mr. Judge as Chief Officer in America, Annie Besant as Chief Officer in the rest of the world. Neither had any authority to annul the appointment made by H. P. B. of the other, nor to interfere with the administration by the other in the territorial divisions defined by H. P. B. To do so would have been an unwarrantable usurpation. Some members complained that they were handed over without any choice of their own, and some blamed Annie Besant for leaving them under the direction of a man in whose bona fides she did not believe. But both forgot that she had no authority to tear away from Mr. Judge what H.P.B. had given, and could only discharge the duty given to herself, leaving further changes to Those Who had the power and the right to interfere.

In November, 1894, a sudden bombshell shattered the School. Mr. Judge issued, on November 3rd, an alleged order from the Master, in which he accused Annie Besant of being under the influence of Black Magicians, of having under this influence made psychic experiments on himself and on two others in Europe, one of whom in consequence suffered in health - an accusation of the direct practice of Black Magic by her and which he wound up by assuming full authority to himself and declaring himself "the sole head of the E. S. T."

Under the authority given me by the Master and H. P. B., (and under Master's direction, I declare Mrs. Annie Besant's headship in the E. S. T. at an end.

The tone of the circular led to its rejection by all the Indian members, by nearly all the Australasian, by a large number of the European, and a few of the American. The School was thus rent in twain, many members following Mr. Judge and many remaining with Annie Besant, and time alone can give a decision that will convince all alike as to the School on which the blessing of the Masters rests. It is not a matter for dispute. Both Schools acknowledge the same Teachers, and the fitness of the channel will, in due time, be proved by the teachings that flow through it. The right to teach is not proved by self-assertion but by the possession of knowledge.

The organisation of the Eastern School has returned, with some slight changes, to the simpler and more effective lines first chosen by H. P. B., for the elaborate organisation she later adopted was but an effort to adapt herself to Western exoteric methods, and was not crowned with much success. Occultism does not move easily in fetters of red-tape.

The Probationary Degree is a period of probation, to be passed through before taking the pledge, instead of after; a promise will be required of the Probationer not to show the papers entrusted to him, and he will be given elementary lessons in meditation and in the scientific building-up of the moral nature, as printed on p. 61 of the *Instructions*, the first three *Instructions* will also be given to him, as since Mr. Judge has removed for all who follow him the pledge of secrecy with which H. P. B. guarded them, it is impossible to impose silence in relation to them. H. P. B. often said that they would be published, and she was careful to withhold the key to their inner meaning; students can now utilise them in helping others, as well as in their own study, but they must not lend the book to anyone, nor indeed show it. The cancelling of the solemn pledge of secrecy given is most regrettable, but it is a *fait accompli*, and can only be accepted as such. At the end of the first year, if the student be ready, he will be allowed to take the pledge of the School, and will receive further *Instructions*, he will also be allowed to attend Lodge meetings, provided that there is a vacancy for him in a suitable Lodge. A Lodge will consist of only seven persons, save in very exceptional cases, and the members - who must reside in one place and attend the Lodge meetings regularly - will be selected for their suitability for common work, instead of passing in as a matter of course. An unattached student will be helped by correspondence, until an opportunity occurs of introducing him into a suitable Lodge.

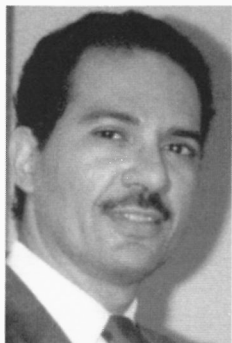
But it must be clearly understood that real Occult teaching has never been, and can never be, conveyed on the physical plane by purely intellectual instruction addressed to the brain, whether the teaching be by writing or by spoken word.

Books and oral teaching train the intellect and must not be neglected or despised, for they render the pupil more useful in the world of men, fit him for rendering service. Oral teaching is better than books, for through it the teacher's soul may wordlessly speak more directly to the pupil's. But the real teaching is given on the inner planes, when, by purification and meditation, the inner senses have been opened, and the barriers of the flesh have been broken through. Then it is that the aspirant becomes a disciple and receives spiritual teaching, which gradually steals down into the intellectual nature and illuminates what was previously obscure, until he recognises - perhaps suddenly and with a start of surprise - that the whole world is seen through a new atmosphere. Verily, as of old, the kingdom of heaven cometh not with observation, but - *it comes*.

One other preliminary word. Of old, every would-be disciple coming to seek a Guru came with sacrificial fuel in his hands. Thus must men come today. They must come ready to burn up the lower nature and to sacrifice all that the world holds dear. And they should also try to bring some gift of mind or heart to lay at the feet of the Teacher, some gift serviceable to man, some gift which they have made as valuable as they can make it; none should come empty-handed, but should bring his best, shaped and polished by his most strenuous efforts. The Great Ones only give special help to an individual when through that individual the help flows outward to the world, for they are the custodians of the spiritual energies needed for the helping of man, and may not give them individually save to such as pass them on. Therefore is it said by a great Teacher, "Give, and it shall be given unto you". Those who give nothing, to them shall naught be given, and for the selfish there is no place in the white spiritual world.

The following was written by a Master to member of the T. S. in 1885. It contains valuable instruction for every would-be Chela:

We accept no one, reject no one, until he has by his own endeavours attracted our notice. With your worldly distinctions, occupations and business we are not concerned. Humanity in the mass is the factor in our equation. If anyone aspire to have us regard him as an individual apart from the mass he must differentiate himself by his inherent force and without our help. Your appeal to us puts you on probation and the issue lies wholly with yourself. Struggle on and prove your worthiness to be considered, a chela. Words and promises count for nothing: let us see your deeds. When your worldly position was in doubt you abstained from doing ought for our cause. Then at the beginning your loyal help could have been of some value. Now that your footing is gained you begin to take some interest. But the Society has also gained its footing; it has powerful friends; you will therefore have to do far more now to make your connection with it valuable than you would then. So, let us see how you will act, and then you will see how we will recompense.



Michael Gomes is a Canadian writer, born in 1951. He is best known for his writings on Theosophy and his body of work charting the history of this movement exceeds that of anyone else alive. His 1987 study *The Dawning of the Theosophical Movement* was the first book devoted solely to the origin of the movement since the President-Founder, H. S. Olcott's *Old Diary Leaves* a century before. For this book Gomes spent a year at the Society's headquarters at Adyar, Madras, India, researching its archives. His examination of the events known as "The Coulomb Case" (which resulted in Mme Blavatsky's final departure from India in 1885) is generally regarded as the starting point for this complicated piece of Theosophical history, giving as it does a centennial survey of the events and the writers who have contributed to this case. His 1994 *Theosophy in the Nineteenth Century* brought together for the premier bibliography on the subject the vast amount of material written about Theosophy as well as providing a catalogue of the early literature of the movement. He has also catalogued Mme Blavatsky's personal collection of books, edited a centennial collection of her writings and located dozens of her letters.

Gomes' interest in archives goes back to the early 1970s when he was assistant to the designer Charles James. Maintaining the voluminous amount of press and correspondence amassed over James's career spanning fifty years, he constantly supplied museums with biographical material about the artist. He also edited a newsletter for the recording industry during the seventies, and his insights have been tapped for developing public relations programmes for the industry. During the 1980s he was employed by Columbia University working at its main library.

While a student at Columbia he had been awarded the Herman Ausubel Memorial Prize for achievement in history. Although he has lectured at Columbia University in New York, the University of Calgary in Canada, and Madras University in India, he has preferred to devote his time to research. His search for Theosophical material in libraries and archives has taken him through India, England, the U. S. and Canada. A member of the American Academy of Religion, he has been a participant at its Theosophy Seminar since it was instituted in 1994.

Over the years Gomes has concentrated more and more on documenting Theosophy, for he feels that such movements reveal the heart of human longing and offer an instructive lesson on how "the most exalted social ideals are degraded when raw power continues to speak in the language of brotherhood, and how this entails the corruption of truth and meaning."

