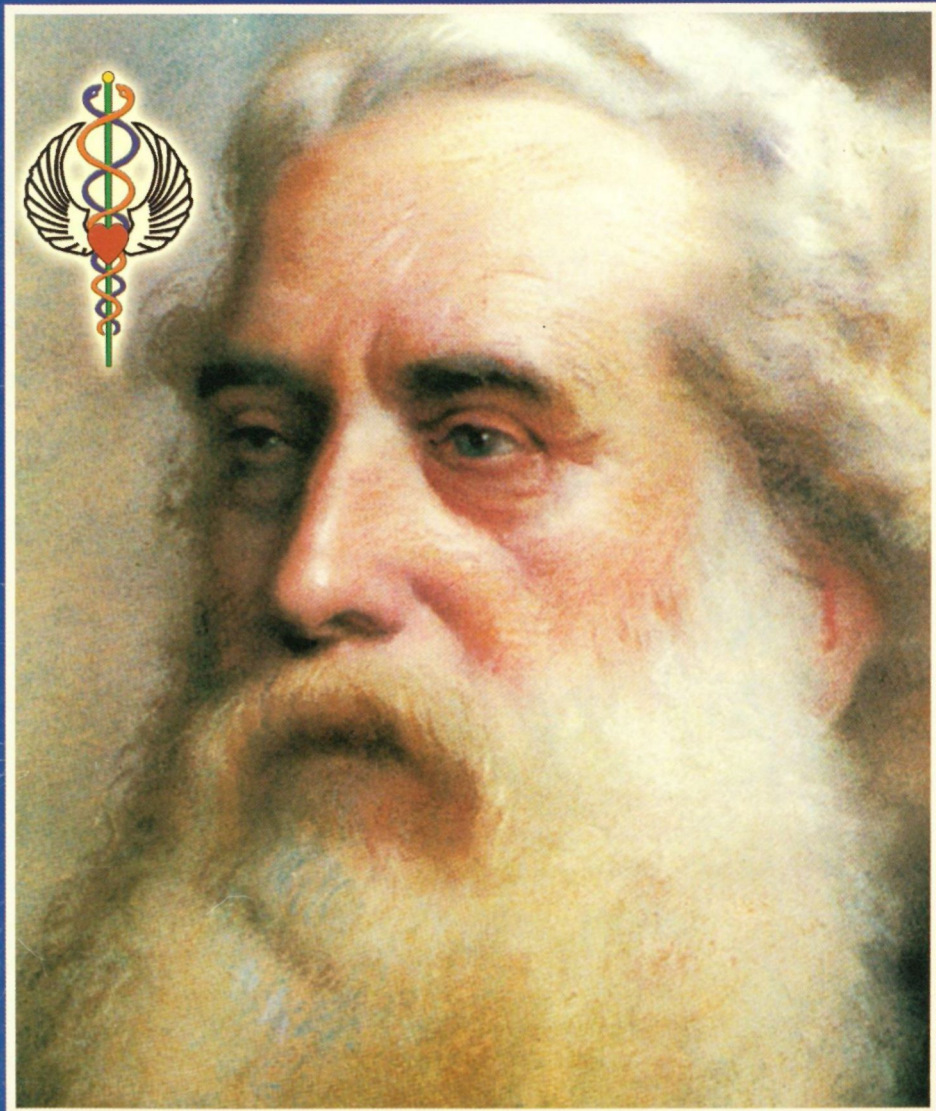


COLONEL OLCOTT & THE HEALING ARTS



**Blavatsky Lecture 2007
by MICHAEL GOMES**

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by Michael Gomes

* *The Blavatsky Lecture* *

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COLONEL OLCOTT AND THE HEALING ARTS

On August 29, 1882, Col. Olcott, President-Founder of the Theosophical Society, was in Galle, Ceylon, on a lecturing tour to raise funds for the opening of schools for Buddhist children. One of the people who came forward to contribute was a man whose arm and leg had been paralyzed for eight years. Olcott, who had read the literature on animal magnetism, or mesmerism as it was also termed, and magnetic healing in his youth, says he was moved to try some healing passes with his hands over the man's arm, telling him that he hoped he might feel better. Later that evening the gentleman returned to thank the Colonel, saying indeed his condition had improved. This encouraged Olcott to treat the arm again. There was a marked improvement when he returned the next morning, and, after two more days of treatment, he could move his arm and open and close his hand. Olcott also tried working on the man's leg, which responded well enough to allow him to walk freely and even run.



Henry Steel Olcott

To show his thanks, the now-healed man brought a friend who was also paralyzed. When he was cured, others came in increasing numbers, to the point, the Colonel recalled, "within a week or so my house was besieged by sick persons from dawn until late at night, all clamoring for the laying on of my hands."¹ Within the space of a year he would treat some 8,000 people, until, on the verge of his own health breaking down, he was ordered by his teacher to stop.

This little-known episode in the work undertaken by Olcott offers an instructive glimpse into the revival of alternative healing that was occurring at the time and which has now entered the mainstream.

WHO WAS H. S. OLCOTT?

Henry Steel Olcott was born in Orange, New Jersey, on August 2, 1832. He traced his descent from one Thomas Olcott, who had been baptized in London in 1613 and had emigrated to America between 1632 and 1635. Thomas Olcott settled in the new town of Hartford, Connecticut, about 1638, for he starts appearing in the town records for 1639. He was active in real estate, and had considerable success in mercantile and trading. He died sometime between 1653 and 1654 while on a business trip to the state of Virginia.²

Henry Olcott was the first of six children of Henry Wyckoff Olcott and Emily Steel (sometimes spelled Steele, from whom he took his middle name). At the age of fifteen he enrolled at the University of the City of New York (now New York University) where he remained a year. He left the city for the Midwest, where he took up agricultural work in Ohio on a farm near his mother's relatives, the Steele brothers. They were to have a lasting effect on him, for, as he later wrote, "I may almost regard [them] as my greatest benefactors in this incarnation, since it was from them . . . that I first learned to think and aspire along the lines which led me ultimately to H.P.B. and the Theosophical movement."³

After some four years he returned east to study at the farm school started by Professor James J. Mapes in New Jersey.⁴ He went on to start his own agricultural school near Mount Vernon, New York, becoming an expert in a number of related areas, and receiving medals of honour from the U. S. Agricultural Society.⁵ In spite of his recognition, his school was forced to close for lack of support. He travelled to England in the spring of 1858, hoping to stay for two years attending agricultural lectures at a university and visiting other agricultural schools there before proceeding to the continent, but he was forced to return to America before the end of the year.

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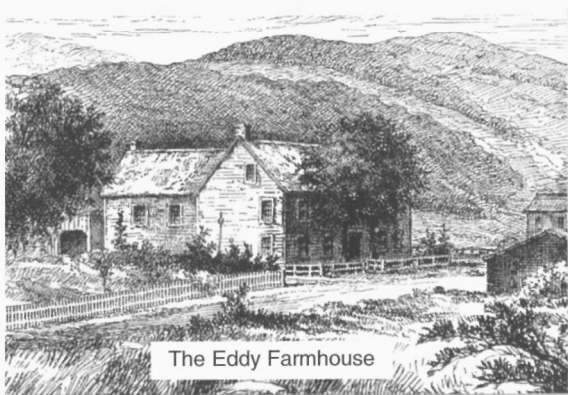
He now joined the staff of the *New York Tribune* as an associate agricultural editor. An example of the thorough scope of his knowledge of the field is shown in his reporting on a series of agricultural lectures delivered at Yale College in 1860, popular enough to be reissued as a book.⁷ His affiliation with the *Tribune* led him to other assignments, such as covering the hanging of the famous abolitionist, John Brown, on December 2, 1859, in Charleston, Virginia (now West Virginia). His newspaper work gave him enough financial security to get married in 1860 to Mary Eplee

Morgan, daughter of an Episcopal Church rector. His first son was born a year later. When the Civil War broke out that year he travelled with the Army on its campaign to South Carolina, sending back dispatches.⁸ Returning to New York at the end of 1863 he was assigned the job of investigating cases of fraud for the Army. He was given the rank of Colonel to assist him in his investigations. When President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in April 1865, Col. Olcott offered his services and was asked to come to Washington as part of the investigation. Later that year Olcott retired from his position of rooting out corruption for the War Department.

In 1868 he was admitted to the New York Bar. Specializing in insurance law, he set up his own practice with a partner. He was successful in his new endeavour, his reputation being such that the New York *Tribune* commented in an editorial, “Col. Olcott is a witness whose word nobody will question.”⁹ He was popular, describing himself as “a man of clubs, drinking parties, mistresses.”¹⁰ Perhaps he was too popular; he was eventually divorced from his wife on December 28, 1874.¹¹ He probably would have gone on to play a part in city and state politics except for his meeting with H. P. B. at the Eddy farmhouse in Vermont.

At the Eddys in the remote township of Chittenden, full forms of the departed were appearing.

If this was possible, it would have been “the most important fact in modern physical science,” Olcott believed, and he decided to go and see for himself. What he found was published in the New York *Sun* of September 5, 1874, as *The World of Spirits*, *Astounding*



Wonders that Stagger Belief. The mediums were two brothers, Horatio and William Eddy, described by Olcott as “hard-working rough farmers.” At night visitors would gather in a room above the pantry, and first William Eddy would enter a closet hung with a shawl across the doorway, the lights would be dimmed and soon form after form would step out. During his five-day visit, Olcott witnessed 32 forms emerge, which he described according to type, age, dress and height.

On his return to New York the illustrated paper, the *Daily Graphic*, commissioned him to continue his reporting on the Eddys. Olcott's twice-weekly letters from Rutland, Vermont, ran from September 29 to December 11. He brought a platform scale and would weigh the various apparitions. The numerous tests he devised for the mediums were such that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of the arch-detective, Sherlock Holmes, could write about Olcott's account, "it is difficult to suggest any precaution which he had omitted."¹²

His sixteenth letter to the *Graphic*, printed on November 27, told his readers that "the arrival of a Russian lady of distinguished birth and rare educational and natural endowments, on the 14th of October was an important event." He went on to speak of her "very eventful life, travelling in most of the lands of the Orient, searching for antiquities at the base of the Pyramids, and pushing with an armed escort far into the interior of Africa," adding that "in the whole course of my experience, I never met so interesting and, if I may say it without offence, eccentric a character."¹³

The meeting with this lady, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, would be more eventful than he imagined. He kept in contact with her after his return to New York, and they met again in Philadelphia where she was now staying and where he went to investigate another case of mediumship. In the spring of 1875 he tried to get the scientific community to become interested in the growing phenomenon of spiritualism, and started a "Miracle Club" to test mediums to be sent to St. Petersburg to take part in a controlled experiment at the University there, but his attempt proved futile. Undeterred, at a meeting at Mme. Blavatsky's rooms in New York on September 7 to hear a presentation on the lost canon of proportion of the ancients, he suggested they form a society to study the mysteries of ancient and modern religion, philosophy and science. By October 30, the Theosophical Society was organized, and on November 17, Olcott, who had been elected President, gave his inaugural address.



H. P. Blavatsky

Members expected it would be a revival of his Miracle Club, investigating and testing various forms of psychic phenomena, but Mme Blavatsky had something else in mind. She set to work on producing two massive volumes, *Isis Unveiled*, dedicated to the Theosophical Society, outlining the mysteries of antiquity. Membership dwindled down to the point where, Col. Olcott reports, it was only himself, Mme. Blavatsky, and

the chandelier, deputed to complete the necessary number to form a quorum, to execute the Society's business.

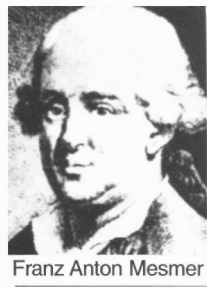
By 1878 Col. Olcott and Mme. Blavatsky were carrying on a correspondence with Buddhist monks in Ceylon and members of the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reform movement started by Swami Dayanand, in India. At the end of the year, Olcott, at the age of 46, left for India with Mme. Blavatsky and two brave members. A new life would now begin for him. As President of the Theosophical Society, Olcott travelled the sub-continent, lecturing on behalf of the Society, organizing branches, until by 1885 a network of 87 branches were established. In Ceylon, in addition to his lecturing, he helped start schools for Buddhist children. In 1883 alone he estimated that he had travelled 16,500 miles throughout India and Ceylon.¹⁴

The record of his work for Theosophy, *Old Diary Leaves*, conveys something of his journeying in all kinds of conveyances, from railway carriage to carts drawn by oxen. Representative is his itinerary in rural Ceylon, each day starting with "the arrivals at villages in the dawn; the people all clustered along the road to meet you; the curiosity that must be gratified; the bath under difficulties; the early breakfast of coffee and *appas* – a thickish sort of rice cakes – with fruit; the visit to the monastery; the discussions of plans and prospects with the Buddhist monks; the lecture in the open air, or, if there be one, the preaching pavilion, with a great crowd of interested brown-skinned people, watching you and hanging on your interpreter's lips. Then come the spreading of the printed subscription-sheets on a table, the registering of names, the sales of Buddhist tracts and catechisms; the afternoon meal, cooked by your servant between some stones, under a palm-tree; perhaps a second lecture for the benefit of newly-arrived visitors from neighboring villages; the good-byes, the god-speeds of rattling tom-toms and squeaky gourd-pipes, the waving of flags and palm fronds, the cries of *Sādhu! Sādhu!* And the resumption of the journey in the creaking cart."¹⁵

He also travelled to Burma and Japan, urging dialogue between the various Buddhist groups. When he died at Adyar on February 17, 1907, his funeral was attended by representatives of the various regional religious groups. In a letter to a colleague in 1893, he summed up his contribution when writing, "if I have worked for the Buddhists, so have I for the Hindus, the Parsis, the Mohammendans, the Jews, and received the blessing of each."¹⁶

MESMER AND HIS INFLUENCE IN AMERICA

When Olcott tried his hand at healing the paralytic brought to him in Ceylon, he drew on a tradition that traced its way back to the figure of Franz Anton Mesmer. Mesmer, born in Germany in 1734, had attended the University of Vienna, studying medicine. His thesis, submitted in 1766, dealt with the influence of the planets on the earth, defining this in terms of laws of attraction, or gravitation, but decrying belief in astrology. He also postulated the existence of “a force which is the cause of universal gravitation and which is, very probably, the foundation of all corporeal properties; a force which actually strains, relaxes and agitates the cohesion, elasticity, irritability, magnetism, and electricity in the smallest fluid and solid particles of our machine, a force which can, in this report, be called ANIMAL GRAVITY.”¹⁷



Two years after receiving his degree in medicine, he married and settled in Vienna. His circle of friends included Leopold Mozart, father of Wolfgang Amadeus, and his family. He developed a practice of treating patients with magnets. He discovered that magnetized objects produced the same effects as the magnets themselves, and that he in turn could magnetize patients through passes with his hands. But the medical establishment in Vienna was not sympathetic to his methods, and he proceeded to Paris in February 1778. Here he was more successful, and his treatment rooms were soon crowded.

A depiction of Mesmer's technique is provided by Adam Crabtree in his study of the roots of psychological healing, *From Mesmer to Freud*. “Typically, the patient was seated with his back to the north. Mesmer would sit facing the patient, knee against knee and foot against foot, to establish ‘harmony.’ While fixing the patient with his eyes, Mesmer would place the fingers of one hand on the stomach and make parabolic movements over the area with the fingers of the other hand. While this was happening, the patient would often experience feelings of cold, heat, or pleasure from the passes. Mesmer considered his hands to be two magnetic poles, one north and the other south. He believed that he caused a current of magnetic fluid to pass out of one hand, through the affected part of the patient, and back in through the other hand.

“To apply that current to the best advantage, Mesmer would vary his passes according to the problem being treated. For instance, for migraine he would place his hands on the patient’s forehead and back of the head; for eye problems, he would touch the patient’s temples and move his fingers around the area of the affected eye. Mesmer also made magnetic passes that traversed the whole length of the patient’s body. Putting his hands together and forming a pyramid with his fingers, he would begin at the top of the patient’s head and move his hands down the front to the bottom of the patient’s feet. Then he repeated the movement from head to feet in the back. Mesmer believed that these long passes produced a surcharge of magnetic fluid that could lead to a magnetic crisis and healing. Magnetic passes of another kind were made at a distance from the patient’s body, the magnetic fluid being transmitted and received through the fingers held in the shape of a pyramid or through wands of brass or iron.”¹⁸

At a time when medical doctors routinely prescribed harsh chemical medicines, purgings and bleedings as part of the cure, Mesmer’s practice of relying on the healing power of nature found a receptive audience. The clamour for official recognition of Mesmer’s discovery caused the king, Louis XVI, to appoint a Royal Commission chaired by Benjamin Franklin to investigate the matter. Their report published in August 1784 credited Mesmer’s cures to the imagination of the patient, as did a second report of the Royal Society of Medicine.

Mesmer had always been reticent about instructing others in his method, but eventually relented and his Lodge of Harmony, or as it was later known, the Society of Universal Harmony, was established on March 10, 1783. Members were required to pledge secrecy for what they were to learn from Mesmer. But the reports of 1784 and the defection of students caused the group to dissipate.

The death of his wife in 1790 saw him return to Vienna to settle her estate. He eventually took up residence in Switzerland where he died on March 5, 1815. He lived long enough to see many members of the royal commission that had rejected his findings be executed during the French revolution. Mesmer’s death did not put an end to his ideas, and through his students research in magnetic healing continued, often leading to new areas like somnambulistic trance, which developed into the study of hypnotism, paving the way for the field of modern psychiatry.

Mesmer’s ideas caught the public imagination in America in the 1830s. By that time his theories had been expanded through practice by his

students. It had been joined by a number of allied movements that acknowledged the individual's healing potential in a new way. Based on the work of the German physician Franz Joseph Gall (1757-1828), "phrenology" attempted diagnosis through the shape of the cranium, since the skull was viewed as simply a cover for the brain, the organ of the mind. His pupil, Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, brought Gall's practice to America and he died there in the midst of a lecture tour in 1833. His work was popularized by the team of Lorenzo and Orson Fowler and their brother-in-law, Samuel Wells, whose publishing house flooded the market with its literature. Similarly, the discovery by the Austrian chemist Baron Karl von Reichenbach (1786-1869) of an energy field perceived as a luminous glow around objects, termed by him OD, seemed to add credibility to these notions. There was also homeopathy.

Derided as "pseudo-science," there were some at the time who, although sceptical, saw in these movements an indicator of the public's urge for self-improvement. The American novelist, Nathaniel Hawthorne, observed, "Be the individual theory as wild as fancy could make it, still the wiser spirit would recognize the struggle of the race after a better and purer life, than had yet been realized on earth. My faith revived, even while I rejected all their schemes."¹⁹ Capturing the spirit of the time, Hawthorne used themes of magnetism and magnetizers in a number of his tales, including *The House of the Seven Gables*.

Through the pen of another American writer, Edgar Allen Poe, the subject of animal magnetism also gained wide credence. A series of short stories, *A Tale of the Ragged Mountains*, published in April 1844, *Mesmeric Revelation*, in August 1844, and *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*, in December 1845, dealt with the subject, and his account of the events relating to Mr. Valdemar was regarded as being so convincing that it was carried in a number of newspapers as fact, even appearing in the *Sunday Times* of London, January 4, 1846, as "Mesmerism in America: Astounding and Horrifying Narrative."

Poe's report, given in the first person by a practitioner of magnetism and presented in an almost clinical way, details the decline of the elderly Valdemar's health and approaching death. He agrees to be magnetized at the moment of death in hope of retarding its progress. This is done, and when questioned the patient announces that now he is free of pain and in the process of dying. When Valdemar declaims in sepulchral tones that he is now dead, the narrator tells us, "No person present even affected to deny, or

attempted to repress, the unutterable, shuddering horror which these few words, thus uttered, were so well calculated to convey. Mr. L—I. (the student) swooned. The nurses immediately left the chamber, and could not be induced to return. My own impressions I would not pretend to render intelligible to the reader.”²⁰

Valdemar remains in this suspended state for nearly seven months, and finally it is decided to bring him out of it. Making the mesmeric passes, the narrator says, “all in the room were prepared to see the patient awaken.” But suddenly, “within the space of a single minute, or even less,” the body “shrunk – crumbled – absolutely *rotted away* beneath my hands,” leaving upon the bed, to the horror of those present, “a nearly liquid mass of loathsome—of detestable putridity.”²¹

By the time Poe wrote his case-study a wave of itinerant magnetizers had travelled across New England. Passing through rural areas, from village to hamlet, they provided instruction, entertainment and medical advice. Patients magnetized often diagnosed their own illness and prescribed their own remedies. A notable example of this practice was Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910), whom Poe had visited in Boston. At the age of seventeen in the town of Poughkeepsie, New York, Davis, an apprentice to a shoemaker, having seen a travelling magnetizer, allowed himself to be entranced. In this state, Davis, who had only a rudimentary education, could locate the cause of the ailment of those who came to see him and prescribe the cure. He soon learned to self-magnetize himself and, in this condition, gave lectures describing his experiences in other spheres and offerings nostrums for the ills of society, which were published in a number of volumes.

Davis posited the existence of a spiritual body, which at death became the form or body of eternal spirit. To his clairvoyant eye, disease was “a want of equilibrium in the circulation of the spiritual principle through the physical organization . . . Disease is not therefore a thing, not a matter to be removed, but simply a condition to be altered.”²² Proper clothing, food, water, air, light, electricity and magnetism, were “the only true medicines in Nature, operating upon the body through the spiritual principle.”²³ Certain types of cloth, for instance, could conduct electricity to and from the body, while others have corresponding affinities for magnetism. The same could be said about food, water, light, and the rest. It was incumbent on the individual to learn these principles and become his or her own physician.

Both Olcott and H. P. B. knew of Davis and his work; the Colonel claimed having attended one of his readings as a youth,²⁴ and Blavatsky visited his bookshop on East Fourth Street in New York City. But Davis remained aloof from phenomenal spiritualism and Theosophy. He fell out with spiritualists when he divorced his terminally ill wife of thirty years and married a fellow student from the U. S. Medical College. He was still advertising himself as “physician to body and soul,” when he died at 83 in Boston.

COL. OLCOTT AND MAGNETIC HEALING IN INDIA

These were the ideas that Col. Olcott would have been exposed to as a young man and which were to influence his thoughts about healing when he undertook to cure by magnetic passes in 1882. He had experienced them firsthand in the 1850s, introduced and encouraged by his relatives, the Steele brothers in Ohio, for which he felt he owed them so much. As he informed a correspondent, "From early manhood – say from the year 1852 – I had felt an absorbing interest in the study of Practical Psychology as the master, if not the sole, Key to the mysteries of Man. I had devoted much time and my best thought to experimentation as well as reading the best authors on the subject. I had developed clairvoyance in my first Mesmeric subject and cured my second of an inflammatory rheumatism at a single sitting."²⁵

Treating his first patient in Ceylon lasted four days, but as his confidence grew he found that he could soon achieve the same result in half an hour. The news spread, and he says, "I would reach my stopping-place in my travelling-cart, and find patients waiting for me on the verandahs, the lawn, and in all sorts of conveyances."²⁶ The crowds of afflicted became so great that those he could not see personally had to be treated with water magnetized by him.

On his return to India, at the first meeting held at the new headquarters at Adyar on February 7, 1883, he gave a demonstration of magnetic treatment. On his lecture tour of Bengal in the spring, he began treating patients in Calcutta. As with his success in Ceylon, he was soon mobbed with invalids at every step of his journey. Aside from his giving lectures, organizing branches, having discussions, it was estimated that he had treated 2,812 sick people in fifty-seven days.²⁷ During his tour of South India in the summer, 5,000 people were treated by him, directly or with magnetized water.

Besieged along every step of the way, the Colonel relates an incident at one junction where, in the process of changing trains, he was accosted by an elderly Hindu gentlemen who begged him to heal an influential person. "Naturally, I refused the man's request; but he stuck to me like a leech, got into our compartment of the train, and urged, and fawned, and begged until he wore out my patience." At the next stop he found the invalid waiting. "In desperation, and to rid myself of the man's importunities, I got out, went over to the sick man, handled his paralysed limbs, made mesmeric passes

over them with a little massage, got his arm flexible, then his leg, made him stand, walk, put his bad foot on the chair, lift the chair with the just-paralysed hand, and then, as the engine whistle blew, salaamed the company and ran back to our carriage.

“All this while H. P. B. had sat at a window, smoking a cigarette and watching my performance: she had never seen me at this work before and was deeply interested. As the train started, we saw my cured paralytic walk off, followed by his party and by a servant carrying the chair; not one of them looking behind him. The effect upon H. P. B. was most comical to me and set me to laughing heartily. The language she used was choice and so strong, that if her words had been leaden shot and hurled at their mark by the full force of her wrath, the backs of the retreating company would have been well peppered.

“Such ingratitude, such base and disgusting ingratitude, she had never seen in her life,” the Colonel writes. “That beats everything I ever saw,” she exclaimed. “I told her that if she had travelled with me and seen my mesmeric healings, she would have realized that the number of patients who had shown real gratitude for benefits conferred were far less than one in a hundred: that if the other ninety-nine were really grateful, they concealed it from view, and left me to practise the rule that Sri Krishna gave to Arjuna, to do the necessary thing and care naught for the fruits of action.”²⁸

The volume of requests reached the state where he was forced to put a notice in *The Theosophist* stating that he would not receive any patients unless they had written to him previously and received his permission to call. “I cannot work miracles; and so can neither replace eyes, ear-drums, internal organs, nor limbs which have already been hopelessly destroyed by disease or accident, nor cure by a few passes or a bottle of vitalized water tumors, enlarged joints, clots in the brain, or other diseased growths which, if cured at all, can only be by gradual absorption of the healthy matter, molecule by molecule. The exercise of a little common-sense would have saved scores of patients from disappointment.”²⁹

As he explained, “I began my healings from the double motive of relieving to some slight extent the sad load of human suffering, and to prove to my fellow-members of the Theosophical Society and the intelligent public generally, that our Aryan progenitors were the masters of science as of philosophy. I never intended to set myself up as a physician, but only to teach physicians willing to learn the art of healing, so they might ennoble

their profession.”³⁰ He had never asked for nor had he received any payment for his healing work.

But the strain of having to deal with so many infirm had begun to take its toll on him. In October, before leaving for another lecture tour, he awoke to find his left forefinger devoid of any feeling. His cures now demanded far greater exertion than they had previously done, and there were a greater percentage of failures. The matter came to a conclusion when Mme. Blavatsky received a message in Madras from their teacher indicating the Colonel’s healings had to be suspended. She travelled to Bombay to relay it to him, and a notice by the recording secretary, Damodar Mavalankar, carrying the order appeared in the November 1883 *Theosophist*.³¹

Although Col. Olcott lists the types of cures that were effected by him – “an old woman afflicted with a paralysed tongue was cured; the bent elbow, wrist, and fingers of a little boy were freed; a woman deformed by inflammatory rheumatism was made whole”³² – the actual technique used in treating the cases of paralysis, deafness, blindness, etc., brought to him is not detailed. In one instance in Bengal, with a young man whose eyes could not close and whose tongue could not be used, he tells of “raising my right arm and hand vertically, and fixing my eyes upon the patient, I pronounced in Bengali the words: ‘Be healed!’ At the same time bringing my arm into the horizontal position and pointing my hand towards him. It was as though he had received an electric shock. A tremor ran through his body, his eyes closed and re-opened, his tongue so long paralysed, was thrust out and withdrawn, and with a wild cry of joy he rushed forward and flung himself at my feet.”³³

We are fortunate therefore to have a statement from the first person he treated in Ceylon in August 1882, K. Cornelis Appu. After indicating the nature of his paralysis, he writes that “the Colonel looking at me with a kind and steady gaze, took hold of my paralyzed hand, and laying his both hands upon my right shoulder, said he wished that I should be healed. I felt a curious sensation in the arm – a throbbing and swelling, though for more than eight years the arm had been benumbed, and dead as it were. He made a number of downward and circular passes over the arm, straightened out my fingers, which had been cramped and distorted, and then proceeded to treat my right leg and foot similarly. That night I felt myself better. My mind had for years been partially stupefied by my disease, and my memory badly impaired, but the next morning a weight seemed removed from my brain, and my memory was as clear as before my sickness.”³⁴

Since Olcott made reference to a number of writers on animal magnetism of the time, perhaps he felt it redundant to explicate further. He cited favourably the work of Joseph Philippe François Deleuze (1753-1835), whose *Instruction pratique sur le magnétisme animal*, published in Paris in 1825, had been translated and issued in America in 1837. Here, Deleuze gave in detail the steps to be followed:

“Cause your patient to sit down in the easiest position possible, and place yourself before him, on a seat a little more elevated, so that his knees may be between yours, and your feet by the side of his.” After the practitioner has brought himself into rapport with the patient, “take his thumbs between your two fingers, so that the inside of your thumbs may touch the inside of his. Remain in this situation from two to five minutes, or until you perceive there is an equal degree of heat between your thumbs and his; that being done, you will withdraw your hands, removing them to the right and left, and waving them so that the interior surface be turned outwards, and raise them to his head; then place them upon his two shoulders, leaving them there about a minute; you will then draw them along the arm to the extremity of the fingers, touching lightly.

“You will repeat this *pass*³⁵ five or six times, always turning your hands and sweeping them off a little, before reascending; you will then place your hands upon the head, hold them there a moment, and bring them down before the face, at a distance of one or two inches, as far as the pit of the stomach; there you will let them remain about two minutes, passing the thumb along the pit of the stomach, and the other fingers down the sides. Then descend slowly along the body as far as the knees, or farther; and, if you can conveniently, as far as the ends of the feet. You may repeat the same processes during the greater part of the sitting.

“When you wish to put an end to the sitting, take care to draw towards the extremity of the hands, and towards the extremity of the feet, prolonging your passes beyond these extremities, and shaking your fingers each time. Finally, make several passes transversely before the face, and also before the breast, at a distance of three or four inches; these passes are made by presenting the two hands together, and briskly drawing them from each other, as if to carry off the superabundance of fluid with which the patient may be charged.

“You see that it is essential to magnetize, always descending from the head to the extremities, and never mounting from the extremities to the head. It is on this account that we turn the hands obliquely when they are

raised again from the feet to the head. The descending passes are magnetic; that is, they are accompanied with the intention of magnetizing. The ascending movements are not. Many magnetizers shake their fingers slightly after each pass. This method, which is never injurious, is in certain cases advantageous, and for this reason it is good to get in the habit of doing it.

“Although, you may have, at the close of the sitting, taken care to spread the fluid over all the surface of the body, it is proper, in finishing, to make several passes along the legs from the knees to the end of the feet. These passes free the head. To make them more conveniently, place yourself on your knees in front of the person whom you are magnetizing.”³⁶ In addition, specific illnesses would require further passes over the area needing treatment.

With people waiting to be treated at every step of his tours, it is doubtful whether Col. Olcott would have had the time to carry out the full procedure Deleuze recommended, which would have lasted an hour. He may have resorted to an abbreviated form that Deleuze gave: “1. Establish the communication by holding the thumbs, placing the hands upon the shoulders, and making passes along the arms with a light pressure, and placing the hands upon the stomach. 2. Direct the current from the head to the feet, or at least to the knees. Touching is useless. 3. Make passes, or else magnetic frictions, along the legs, to the extremity of the feet; soothe the patient by several passes at a distance with the open hand; and, finally, throw off the superabundant fluid, by a few transversal passes.”³⁷

Where time did not allow for even this brief treatment, there was recourse to magnetized water, which Deleuze enthusiastically promoted. “To magnetize water, take the vessel which contains it, and pass the two hands alternately from the top to the bottom of the vessel. Introduce the fluid at the opening of the vessel by presenting the fingers close to it, several times in succession.” A pitcher of water could be magnetized in two or three minutes, a glass of water in one minute. The patient drank it either at or between meals. “It carries the magnetic fluid directly into the stomach, and thence into all the organs.” Deleuze thought magnetized water “one of the most powerful and salutary agents that can be employed.”³⁸

Olcott was also familiar with the work of James Esdaile (1808-1859), a Scottish surgeon who pioneered magnetic treatment in India in the 1840s. Esdaile was attached to a hospital near Calcutta and experimented with magnetism as an analgesic before operations. His success allowed him to

undertake difficult surgeries without pain to the patient. It brought him recognition, a promotion, but not government support. He retired in 1851 and returned to Scotland where he died. With the coming of chemical anaesthetics, such as ether and chloroform, his work was soon forgotten, and Olcott had hoped to compile a record of Esdaile's achievements in this field for posterity.³⁹

Even though the Colonel gave up his magnetic healing in October 1883, he still remained interested in the field and would occasionally use his talents for special cases. He turned his attention to the developing area of magnetic sleep, or hypnotism, that was being explored by the medical faculty in France. The two main schools were connected with the medical establishments at Salpêtrière, the Paris asylum for women, and at Nancy. At Salpêtrière, Jean Martin Charcot (1825-1893) developed the theory that the hypnotic state was another stage of hysteria, found in so many of his patients. At Nancy, Hippolyte Bernheim (1840-1919) saw hypnosis as a therapeutic means of dealing with psychological ailments, framing the explanation in terms of "suggestion" on the part of the practitioner.

In August 1891, Olcott was able to spend a fortnight visiting both groups. Charcot, whom he had met briefly in 1888, was away and so was only able to observe his students at work, but at Nancy he met Bernheim, who took him through the wards. He was also able to spend an afternoon with Ambrose Liébeault (1823-1904), whose experiments laid the groundwork for the school at Nancy. In his appraisal the Colonel concluded, "The Charcot school represents the materialistic theory of psychology, the Liébeault-Bernheim one, the psychical side of the question."⁴⁰

He was impressed by the school at Nancy and thought the results of their research would yield something positive, since "from birth to death, the whole family of mankind are acting and reacting upon each other by interchange of thought, called psychical suggestion, and by interblending of auras, resulting in sympathetic mutual relations; the ideal outcome of which should be, in that far distant day when humanity shall have progressed, the establishment of a reign of good-will on earth and a loving brotherhood of nations."⁴¹

THEOSOPHICAL APPROACHES TO HEALING

Madame Blavatsky had written extensively about Mesmer and his system of healing in her first book, *Isis Unveiled*. She quoted some of his theories on the nature of animal magnetism and gave the opinion of the Royal Commissions that had dismissed his work. She traced the lineage of Mesmer's discoveries back to the sixteenth-century doctor Paracelsus, who had written on the function of magnets and the correlation between sidereal influences and humanity.

"Healing," she writes, "to deserve the name, requires either faith in the patient, or robust health united with a strong will, in the operator. *With expectancy supplemented by faith, one can cure himself of almost any morbid condition.* The tomb of a saint; a holy relic; a talisman; a bit of paper or a garment that has been handled by the supposed healer; a nostrum; a penance, or a ceremonial; the laying on of hands, or a few words impressively pronounced – either will do. It is a question of temperament, imagination, self-cure. In thousands of instances, the doctor, the priest, or the relic has had credit for healings that were solely and simply due to the patient's unconscious will. The woman with the bloody issue who pressed through the throng to touch the robe of Jesus, was told that her 'faith' had made her whole.



Paracelsus

"The influence of mind over the body is so powerful that it has effected miracles at all ages . . . But, if the patient has no faith, what then? If he is physically negative and receptive, and the healer strong, healthy, positive, determined, the disease may be extirpated by the imperative will of the operator, which, consciously or unconsciously, draws to and reinforces itself with the universal spirit of nature, and restores the disturbed equilibrium of the patient's aura."⁴²

Elsewhere she explained how this occurred: "A person in health is charged with positive vitality – *prana*, od, aura, electro-magnetism, or whatever else you prefer to call it: one in ill-health is negatively charged: the positive vitality, or health element, may be discharged by an effort of the healer's will into the receptive nervous system of the patient: they touch each other, the fluid passes, equilibrium is restored in the sick man's system, the *miracle* of healing is wrought, and the lame walk, the blind see, deaf hear, dumb speak, and humours of long standing vanish in a moment! Now,

if besides health, power of will, knowledge of science, and benevolent compassion on the healer's part, there be also faith, passivity, *and the requisite attractive polarity*, on that of the patient, the effect is the more rapid and amazing."⁴³

In 1885, in reply to criticism that the Theosophical Society offered no practical work, she suggested, "why do not these persons and all our members who are able to do so, take up the serious study of mesmerism? Mesmerism has been called the Key to the Occult Sciences, and it has this advantage that it offers peculiar opportunities for doing good to mankind. If in each of our branches we were able to establish a homeopathic dispensary with the addition of mesmeric healing, such as has already been done with great success in Bombay, we might contribute towards putting the science of medicine in this country on a sounder basis, and be the means of incalculable benefit to the people at large."⁴⁴

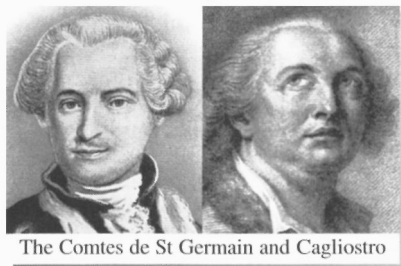
But, by the time she had relocated to England in 1887, she had begun to sound a note of caution about the direction that scientific investigators were taking in the subject. "One of the keys of Occultism is in the hands of science," she warned. "Woe to the ignorant and the unprepared, and those who listen to the sirens of materialistic science! For indeed, indeed, many will be the unconscious crimes committed, and many will be the victims who will innocently suffer death by hanging and decapitation at the hands of the righteous judges and the *too innocent* jurymen, both alike ignorant of the fiendish power of 'SUGGESTION.'"⁴⁵

A year before her death, Mme. Blavatsky published two major statements on the subject. One, *Black Magic in Science*, from June 1890, gave a résumé of the history of the branches of magnetic healing, with extensive reference to the contribution of Paracelsus and Mesmer. While in the past, "Animal magnetism (now called Suggestion and Hypnotism) was the principal agent in theurgic mysteries as also in the *Asclepieia* – the healing temples of Aesculapius, where the patients once admitted were treated, during the process of 'incubation,' magnetically, during their sleep," the growing interest in hypnotism promised only to usher in a "Maelstrom of Black Magic, by practising that which ancient Psychology – the most important branch of the Occult Sciences – has always declared as Sorcery in its application to the inner man."⁴⁶

The other, *Hypnotism, and its Relations to Other Modes of Fascination*, appeared in December 1890, and answered a number of questions from the standpoint of esoteric philosophy. "Hypnotism is the

new scientific name for the old ignorant ‘superstition’ variously called ‘fascination’ and ‘enchantment.’ . . . It differs from animal magnetism where the hypnotic condition is produced by the Braid method,⁴⁷ which is a purely mechanical one, *i.e.*, the fixing of the eyes on some bright spot, a metal, or a crystal. It becomes ‘animal magnetism’ (or mesmerism), when it is achieved by ‘mesmeric’ passes on the patient, and for these reasons. When the first method is used, no electro-psychic, or even electro-physical currents are at work, but simply the mechanical, molecular vibrations of the metal or crystal gazed at by the subject. It is the eye – the most occult organ of all, on the superficies of our body – which, by serving as a medium between that bit of metal or crystal and the brain, *attunes* the molecular vibrations of the nervous centres of the latter into *unison* (*i.e.*, equality in the number of their respective oscillations) with the vibrations of the bright object held. And, it is this unison which produces the hypnotic state.”⁴⁸

Two posthumously published pieces add an interesting coda to her views on the subject. In *The Theosophical Glossary*, the entry on Mesmer offered the following clue to his occult status. “He was an initiated member of the Brotherhoods of the *Fratres Lucis* and of Lukshoor (or Luxor), or the Egyptian Branch of the latter. It was the Council of ‘Luxor’ which selected him – according to the orders of the ‘Great Brotherhood’ – to act in the XVIIIth century as their usual pioneer, sent in the last quarter of every century to enlighten a small portion of the Western nations in occult lore. It was St. Germain who supervised the development of events in this case; and later Cagliostro was commissioned to help, but having made a series of mistakes, more or less fatal, he was *recalled*. Of these three men who were at first regarded as quacks, Mesmer is already vindicated. The justification of the two others will follow in the next century.”⁴⁹



The Comtes de St Germain and Cagliostro

Information on the Brothers of Light, *Fratres Lucis*, in *The Theosophical Glossary* consists of a brief account about the group from Kenneth Mackenzie’s 1877 *Royal Masonic Cyclopaedia* giving 1498 as its establishment in Florence. A further glimpse into this elusive order can be gained from a manuscript in the Grand Lodge Library in London purporting to give its purpose and function. “In Florence there now exists, and has existed for a great number of years a body of men who possess some of the

most extraordinary secrets, that man has known.” As in H. P. B.’s account, St. Germain, Cagliostro and Mesmer are counted among its members. “They have made animal magnetism their chief study and have carried it nearly to perfection. It was through being a member of this society that Mesmer practiced healing power and founded his Mesmeric Lodge on the principles of the Order. Swedenborg derived his Rite from the same source, and from it Count Cagliostro derived the knowledge that enabled him to found the Egyptian Order; those three Rites represent three of the four grades into which this society is divided.”⁵⁰

The second posthumous piece is a note attributed to H. P. B. appended to a pamphlet edition of two articles by Annie Besant from 1889 and 1890 reviewing the state of hypnotism. Its provenance is uncertain, but since it offers directions on the process of healing by passing of hands, I add it as an appendix. Whether its source is the incarnate or disincarnate H. P. B., I leave for the reader to decide its merit.



Annie Besant

The tone of concern about the dangers attending the practice of magnetic healing was kept up after H. P. B.’s death in 1891 by William Quan Judge, Vice President of the Theosophical Society, General Secretary of its American Section, and editor of the New York Theosophical monthly, *The Path*. Judge wrote a number of articles on mesmerism and healing for the *Path* in 1892. In “Replanting Diseases for Future Use,” he counselled that, “The seeds of disease being located primarily in the mind, they begin to exhaust themselves through the agency of the inner currents that carry the appropriate vibrations down upon the physical plane. If left to themselves – aside from palliations and aids in throwing off – they pass into the great crucible of nature and one is free from them forever. Therefore pain is said to be a kind friend who relieves the real man of a load of sin.



William Quan Judge

“Now the moment the practices of the mind-curer are begun, what happens is that the hidden inner currents are violently grasped, and, if concentration is persisted in, the downward vibrations are thrown up and altered so as to carry back the cause to the mind, where it is replanted with the addition of the purely selfish desires that led to the practice. It is impossible to destroy the cause; it must be allowed to transform itself. And

when it is replaced in the mind, it waits there until an opportunity occurs either in this life or in the next rebirth.”⁵¹

Judge’s articles were in response to a book by A. P. Sinnett, the recipient of the Mahatma letters. Sinnett’s *The Rationale of Mesmerism*, published in 1892, reviewed the history and literature to date on animal magnetism. Since Sinnett had used magnetism to put his sensitives into a trance state where he could contact the Masters after H. P. B.’s refusal to be used as an astral office, a large part of the book detailed the ability to develop clairvoyance in sensitives.



Alfred P. Sinnett

His comments are of particular interest, for, as his title indicated, he tried to provide the rationale of mesmerism. “Whether people understand what they are doing or not, if they try to mesmerize, and hold out their hands with that end in view, making passes or simply pointing the fingers, as they may choose, what they are really doing is this: they propel the magnetic fluid accumulated in their own system in the direction they choose that it shall go . . . by means of an exercise of will-power, which, great or little in its intensity, is the outcome of their wish to obtain success. The magnetic fluid does not simply flow from fingers because they are extended in one direction or another. Nothing whatever will pass without the hidden influence of the will-force in the background, any more than a bullet will pass out of a gun without the expansion of the gases in the rear.”⁵²

He also provided his own technique for achieving mesmeric trance, which he found to be more effective than the standard sitting in front of the patient with their legs between yours. He suggested putting the person in a large armchair with the operator sitting sideways on the arm of the chair. Rapport would begin by holding the hands or pressing the thumbs together. After a few minutes the practitioner would transfer one hand (presumably the left if he was sitting on the right hand of the chair) to the patient’s forehead while holding their hands in the other. It too would be then raised, both hands being held on the forehead with the fingers resting on the top of the head.

“The hands should be slowly parted downwards, stroking the side of the head until at the shoulders they leave contact with the sensitive, and then carried down as far as the waist, or as far as the position of the operator enables him to carry them without inconvenience. Then such passes are renewed, not again with any contact as regards the head, but from a position

in which the fingers point downwards above the top of the head, and then are drawn within an inch or two of the face, and so down the body.”⁵³

For Sinnett, “mesmerism, as conducted by people who comprehend the organization of that higher realm of existence into which they would introduce the spiritual consciousness of their sensitives, is certainly the most accessible avenue of higher knowledge concerning the possibilities of a spiritual evolution and the ulterior destinies of man which the opportunities of ordinary life leave at our disposal.”⁵⁴

Two years earlier, Alice Cleather, in her monthly London letter to *The Theosophist*, had noted, “Hypnotism seems to be ‘in the air’ – articles in magazines, notices and accounts of experiments, leaders in the daily papers, and what not, meet one at every turn.”⁵⁵ But by the time Sinnett’s book appeared, public perception of the subject had begun to take a negative turn. An indication of this change can be seen in Mabel Collins’ 1892 novel, *Suggestion*.



Alice Cleather

Suggestion relates the fortunes of Margery

Hawthorn engaged to Reginald (Rex) Heriot, the son of a local squire. The return of his dissolute brother, Oliver, casts a baneful shadow over their happy life. Oliver, disowned by his father, is hopelessly in debt. When Margery is found to be susceptible to his hypnotic suggestion at a social gathering in her home, he sees a way of relieving his financial situation. The arrival of a rich American, Amy Carruthers, complicates the matter, as she and Rex seem to be familiar. Consumed by jealousy, Margery allows herself to be put under by Oliver to divine their meetings.



Mabel Collins

Having her under his control, he begins using her to give him money. The death of his father increases Oliver’s resentment of his situation, for he has been left nothing but creditors. He gets Margery to give him her engagement present from his brother – their mother’s necklace of white diamonds – on the pretext of taking it to London to have the clasp fixed, but instead has it copied, returning the imitation. The wedding occurs, but in the meantime Oliver has rung up new debts and reappears. Alone, he meets Margery. “Suddenly she felt his hand on her forehead, and heard the dreadful word ‘Sleep!’ in her ears. She struggled against it – cried out inarticulately – tried to rise, but Oliver’s hand was passing over her face;

he reiterated the word of command. Her arms fell powerless at her sides, and her eyelids drooped as though weighed down by mill-stones.”⁵⁶

The only capital that Margery can dispose of is the necklace. Going into town she tries to borrow on it and finds out that it is a worthless copy. She then tries to get the funds from her husband, who discovers that his brother has been visiting her. Now it is his turn to feel deceived. Denied access to the money he wants, Oliver plants the suggestion for Margery to kill her husband, presumably to make her a wealthy heiress and more accessible to him. Margery’s health breaks down under the strain. The brothers have a confrontation and Oliver goes out on a wild ride on one of the horses and is killed by a fall. A semblance of normalcy now returns to the old manor house.

The image of the perils attendant to mesmerism/hypnosis occurs in a number of other tales at the time, but it was George Du Maurier’s novel *Trilby* that was to have the greatest impact. Initially serialized in *Harper’s* magazine, it was published in book form in 1894. Daniel Pick in his study of the issues surrounding the text – mesmerism, opera, Jewish identity, class differences – says that “*Trilby* is generally thought to have been the best-selling novel of the last century [the nineteenth].”⁵⁷ The story received even wider notoriety when Herbert Beerbohm Tree brought the theatrical version to the London stage in 1895.

Trilby (here I am using the stage version, adapted by Paul Potter and Tree, and approved by Du Maurier) is set in the bohemian world of Paris, and takes its name after its heroine, an artist’s model, patronized by three aspiring English artists. Into this Edenic setting enters the sinister figure of the Jewish musician Svengali, described in the play’s production notes as being “out of the mysterious East.”⁵⁸ Trilby, hypnotized by him, abandons the life she once knew and reappears years later as a great operatic singer whose vocal talents derive from his mental control over her. Recognized by her English friends, she is rescued after a struggle with Svengali, who suffers a heart attack and dies. Trilby loses her ability to sing on stage; her health declines, and she dies calling out “Svengali!”

As indicated in Daniel Pick’s study, there were a number of real-life situations that the story harkened back to. Mesmer early in his career had claimed to cure a blind young musician, whose talent and earning ability suffered as a result.⁵⁹ There was also the case of the “Swedish nightingale,” Jenny Lind (1820-1887), who shocked society by marrying her Jewish accompanist. One of Lind’s triumphs was her role in *La Sonnambula*, an

opera that features a sleepwalking bride-to-be that made its debut in 1831. Long after these events were forgotten, *Trilby* continued to exert an influence, being adapted for film in the twentieth century, including a 1931 version with John Barrymore as Svengali; its mesmerizing villain's name becoming synonymous with the familiar meaning of the influential impresario.

The negative public image hypnotism had acquired, coupled with Mme. Blavatsky's dislike of it, made Theosophists even more cautious about healing practices that seemed like suggestion. In her 1890 message to the American Section Convention, H. P. B., speaking of the emerging wave of metaphysical healing, counselled, "The cures effected by them are due simply to the unconscious exercise of occult power on the *lower* planes of nature – usually of *prana* or life-currents.

"The one feature common to most of them, a feature which presents the most danger in the near future, is this. In nearly every case, the tenor of the teachings of these schools is such as to lead people to regard the healing process as being applied to the mind of the patient. Here lies the danger, for any such process – however cunningly disguised in words and hidden by false noses – is simply to psychologize the patient. In other words, whenever the healer interferes – consciously or unconsciously – with the free mental action of the person he treats, it is – Black Magic. Already these so-called sciences of 'Healing' are being used to gain a livelihood."⁶⁰

John Lovell, one of the earliest members of the Theosophical Society in New York, gives some insight into the prevailing attitude about this issue among leading Theosophists in America in the 1890s with the following incident. He was taking the train with a group of Theosophists to attend the American Section Convention in Boston. Sitting across from him was Julia Campbell Ver Planck (known in Theosophical journals for her writings as Jasper Niemand) who was suffering from a severe headache. Lovell had attended classes with some of the leading Christian Science practitioners and decided to mentally treat her.

"Although I had not said a word," he reports, "she got up from her seat and, coming over to me said: 'I wish you wouldn't do that.' There are occultists who hold that spiritual powers should never be used for personal benefits of any kind and Mrs. Ver Planck preferred to suffer rather than have the pain removed by any exercise of such spiritual powers."⁶¹ He also describes a T.S. meeting in New York where a visiting speaker from the London headquarters was asked why Mme. Blavatsky did not use her

powers to relieve herself of her illnesses. “Mr. Judge immediately jumped up and said no true occultists would ever use Spiritual powers for personal ends of any kind, not even for the removing of physical ailments.”⁶²

Lovell had known some of the leading developers of what was to become the New Thought movement of metaphysical healing in America. Some had been pupils of Mary Baker Eddy, the originator of Christian Science, but eventually broke with her when they set up their own practice. Mrs. Eddy held a negative view of animal magnetism, and devoted a chapter to it in her 1875 statement of principles, *Science and Health*: “My own observations of the workings of animal magnetism, during the past sixteen years, not only convince me that it is not a remedial agent, but that its pernicious effects upon the human mind and system exceed those of all other dangerous agents.”⁶³ It was a fundamental error, as she calls it, because it did not stress that “sickness is an illusion, to be annihilated by science; that disease is a suffering of mortal mind.”⁶⁴

Apparently even discussion of these ideas were barred from Theosophical platforms, for Lovell tells of one of his Christian Science instructors wanting to give a talk about its healing methods at his lodge. The president, W. Q. Judge, refused, “on the grounds that Christian Scientists accepted money from their pupils and patients and that was a degradation of spiritual powers.”⁶⁵ Members interested in pursuing the subject, such as Ursula Gestefeld (1845-1921) of Chicago and New York, and Lilian Whiting (1847-1942) of Boston, would eventually transfer their energies from the Theosophical Society to that of the rising New Thought movement, where they would make their mark.⁶⁶ Gestefeld’s 1888 *Statements of Christian Science* was savaged by H. P. B. in a review questioning her premise that “all our diseases are the result of wrong beliefs.” H. P. B. reiterated that “disease, mental characteristics and shortcomings, are always effects produced by causes: the natural effect of Karma, the unerring Law of Retribution.”⁶⁷

After the publication of Franz Hartmann’s *Occult Science in Medicine* in 1893 nothing else on the subject would appear from a Theosophical imprint for almost a quarter of a century. Hartmann (1838-1912), a German Theosophist, was a doctor by training. His little book is a recapitulation of material from his earlier *Life of Paracelsus*. Utilizing ideas and terminology attributed to Paracelsus, he argued the case for what effective medical



Franz Hartmann

treatment should be. For Hartmann, “Disease is the disharmony which follows the disobedience to the law; the restoration consists in restoring harmony by a return to obedience to the law of order which governs the whole.”⁶⁸

In 1917 the Theosophical Publishing House in America issued *The Principles of Occult Healing*, a slim volume of “studies by a group of Theosophical students,” edited by Dr. Mary Weeks Burnett. Here disease was defined as “disharmony in matter.”⁶⁹ A number of means are given toward the restoration of that harmony which is health, such as through the agency of prayer, angelic helpers, music, colour, magnetism and mesmerism. The difference between mesmerism and magnetism (what she credits Col. Olcott with doing) is delineated. “In ordinary Mesmerism vitality, the health force from the sun’s rays, flows through the etheric portion of the physical body, and is directed by the will of the healer to the diseased part. In Magnetism the healer raises his consciousness to a higher level, as in the Colonel’s case, to the thought of the Great Master, and there, on that higher level the force is poured out through him, and he becomes a channel for the Health-Life.”⁷⁰

Four years later came Adelaide Gardner’s *Healing Methods: Old and New* from the Theosophical Publishing House, London. Here health was seen as the unblocked flow of the Divine Life through the various bodies, or vehicles of consciousness, disease a means for readjustment in a specific area. The growing influence of the field of psychoanalysis can be felt when she recommends that “our most common failures to heal



Adelaide Gardner

ourselves are due to inhibiting thoughts, both our own and other peoples’, concerning the fearfulness and fixed nature of our disease and also to the mental habit of expecting external aids to heal, rather than desiring so to alter our own natures that disease becomes an impossibility.”⁷¹ The book is of especial interest for the Chart of Treatments it provides, showing the levels of consciousness that are affected by different methods of treatment.

Mrs. Gardner followed her study with a manual in 1935 titled *Vital Magnetic Healing*, which was issued as a Transaction of the Medical Group of the Theosophical Research Centre. The idea of a Vital Body was integrated with the placement of the chakras and circulation of prana. Methods for the practice of spiritual healing were given, as well as

diagnoses for various maladies. Her books were quickly added to by those of Geoffrey Hodson. In his 1925 *An Occult View of Health and Disease*, he postulated, “health or ill-health of the body is *karmic* whether the cause be only one minute old, or belongs to a former life,”⁷² and in *New Light on the*



Geoffrey Hodson

Problem of Disease, 1930, claimed, “The root cause of every individual case of disease lies in a resistance to the right of the ego to rule his personality and a refusal to listen to the voice of conscience.”⁷³

Research in this field was continued by the Medical Group of the Theosophical Research Centre in England, and the results were issued as *Some Unrecognized Factors in Medicine*, 1939, and its sequel, *The Mystery of Healing*, 1958, which upheld and elaborated on the findings of the earlier studies. While investigation into the field of vital healing was embraced in the Theosophical Society, other Theosophical groups were not as welcoming. Two pamphlets in circulation in the 1950s provide an alternative viewpoint.

In 1956 Boris de Zirkoff, the compiler of H. P. B.’s collected writings, issued a 123-page booklet titled *Hypnotism-Mesmerism and Reincarnation*, that included relevant material from the writings of H. P. B., Olcott, Judge, G. de Purucker, and Annie Besant. Even though de Purucker, the Leader of the Point Loma Theosophical Society, could be cited as stating, “there is nothing wrong in healing sick and ailing people, whether by regular surgical and medical practice, or by a high-minded healthy, and compassionate ‘vital healer,’ even if the latter acts in ignorance of the philosophical rationale. This last case is not ‘damning back karman,’ because karman already is exhausting itself in the diseased person, and the healing is merely helping nature to bring restoration of health, to re-establish normal conditions in the sufferer,”⁷⁴ the overall tone was cautionary.



Boris de Zirkoff

The Laws of Healing, an undated pamphlet from the same period by the Theosophy Company of Los Angeles, presented the views of the United Lodge of Theosophists. While admitting that wise men in the past utilized the power to heal, it was not as approving of contemporary attempts. According to the group’s founder, Robert Crosbie, “All these healing systems are presented for one purpose – to enable us to relieve ourselves of the responsibility of our own acts. In Occultism that is a crime. We may

use natural bodily methods, but we may not try to drag the Spirit itself down to relieve us of the diseases that we have brought upon ourselves.”⁷⁵ The pamphlet also took on the issue of immunization, of which it was equally wary.

Another major statement of principles at the time was Alice Bailey’s *Esoteric Healing*. Published in 1953, four years after her death, the book was based on material transmitted to her during the 1940s from Djwhal Khul, whose amanuensis she had been for thirty years. Disease was seen as emanating from three main causes: “the psychological state of the patient, his karmic liabilities, and those which are incurred through his group relationship, enviroanal, national or planetary.”⁷⁶ The relationship between the healer and the patient, and the process of death are also dealt with. Ten laws and a half a dozen corollary rules are enumerated and elaborated on, starting with Law 1: “All disease is the result of inhibited soul life . . . The art of the healer consists in releasing the soul so that its life can flow through the aggregate of organisms which constitute any particular form.”⁷⁷ Seven modes of healing are given utilizing the system of the seven rays popularized in Mrs. Bailey’s books.



Alice Bailey



Dora Kunz

In the early 1970s, Theosophists took a renewed interest in healing when Dora Kunz and Dolores Krieger, Professor of Nursing at New York University, began their research into what would become Therapeutic Touch. Based on the premise that “healing is a process in which an individual in physical or emotional pain can be helped through another person, whom we can call the healer; or – in self-healing – by a willingness of the person who is suffering to change his way of thinking and feeling,”⁷⁸ the healer interacts with the various energy fields of the individual: physical, vital, emotional, mental, intuition, etc. This is facilitated by the passing of hands over the body of the patient, because, according to Dora Kunz, “The energy fields of the healer are focused through his hands and reach the energy fields of the patient and this helps speed up the innate healing power within the patient himself.”⁷⁹

Initially taught to health care-professionals, the practice has become a popular one among Theosophists. A recent writer in a Theosophical journal noted that Therapeutic Touch, or TT as it is known, “is taught and practiced in the Theosophical Society lodges throughout the United States and the world.”⁸⁰ It differs from laying-on of hands, for no physical contact is required. It is, according to the same writer, “an example of theosophy in action.”⁸¹

THE POWER TO HEAL

Once regarded as quackery, alternative healing therapies are playing a greater part in modern medicine, having received recent recognition through coverage in a number of national health-care plans. Considering the state of the medical practice at the time when these therapies appeared, it is not surprising at their initial acceptance. In his study of treatments pursued by doctors till the end of the nineteenth century, David Wootton writes, "Throughout this period surgery, particularly abdominal surgery, was fatal, while the most common therapies were bloodletting, purging, and emetics, all of which weakened patients."⁸² Before the discovery of antiseptics in 1865 the results were "at best ineffectual, and usually deleterious."⁸³

Robert C. Fuller, who has written extensively on mesmerism and alternative therapies in America, notes that while mesmerism eventually languished by the 1890s, it resurfaced in the new mental healing therapies that emerged at the same time and contributed toward research in the working of the mind and the popularity of psychology. "A psychological theory attracts a popular following not by virtue of its formal scientific status, but rather by promising practical solutions to problems which arise in the context of everyday life. In essence this means that it must be able to supply self-help guides for practical living."⁸⁴ It allowed individuals to take control not only of their health but their destiny.

That such practices are still very much with us can be seen in the self-help guides that proliferated during the 1990s. Caroline Myss, a popular writer in this genre, who declares herself an intuitive healer, while following the lines laid down by mind science that "our thoughts powerfully influence the health of our minds and bodies," cautions that "negative patterns are not always at the root illness."⁸⁵ Instead of seeing sickness as a negative and a punishment, she believes it can be a tool for transformation. "Disease is one of the most frequent eye-openers on the journey towards consciousness and self-discovery . . . Disease can be the means through which we encounter the power of our psyche and spirit."⁸⁶

It was Col. Olcott's hope that his work in the healing arts would in turn cause others to investigate the matter for themselves. "I am thoroughly convinced that Western science will be compelled in the near future to accept the ancient Eastern explanation of the natural order of things," he predicted. "We have had more than enough of talk about 'mysterious

providences' and extra cosmic interferences; we have outgrown superstition because we have conquered some of our ignorance; and since we see daybreak glimmering beyond the encompassing hills of our ignorance, we will never be satisfied until we have climbed to where the light can shine upon us. It requires courage still to profess oneself an uncompromising seeker after truth, but the whole race is moving in its direction, and those who first arrive will be those who, by keeping alert through a long and complicated course of evolution, have gained the knowledge and the strength to outstrip their contemporaries." ⁸⁷

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¹ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, Second Series (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House [TPH], 1954), 375.

² Nathaniel Goodwin's *The Descendants of Thomas Olcott*, revised edition by Henry S. Olcott (Albany, N.Y.: J. Munsell, 1874), remains a major source for material on Thomas Olcott; Mary L. B. Olcott's *The Olcotts and Their Kindred* (New York: National Americana Publications, 1956) reprints the information on him.

³ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, Fourth Series (Adyar: TPH, 1975), 408.

⁴ Mapes received one of the earliest patents in America for a phosphate fertilizer, U.S. Patent 26, 196, November 22, 1859.

⁵ His medals are on display in the T.S. Museum at Adyar. Olcott's agricultural publications at the time include *Sorgho and Imphee: The Chinese and African Sugar Canes* (New York: A. O. Moore, 1857), and an edition of T. Roessle's *How to Cultivate and Preserve Celery* (New York: C. M. Saxton, Barker & Co., 1860).

⁶ Olcott to John Jay, 21 March 1858, and 21 January 1858 (this must be an error for 1859 for he writes about the trip as already having occurred), Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

⁷ Published as *Outlines of the First Course of Yale Agricultural Lectures* (New York: C. M. Saxton, Barker & Co., 1860).

⁸ There is no record in the National Archives of Olcott having enlisted in the Union Army. Stephen Prothero suggests that Olcott joined the war effort as a civilian aide, "not an unusual practice at the time," *The White Buddhist* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1996), 194, fn 51.

⁹ Editorial, *NY Tribune*, September 22, 1871.

¹⁰ Olcott to HX [A. O. Hume], 30 September 1881, *Hints on Esoteric Theosophy* (Benares: TPS, 1909), 109.

¹¹ Stephen Prothero in his study of Olcott makes Blavatsky the reason for the divorce, but this is not so, for proceedings had already been filed before they met on October 14, 1874, Olcott, Divorce Papers, Hall of Records, N.Y. County, GA 719-0-1.

- 12 Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism* (1926, New York: Arno Press, 1975), 1:255.
- 13 Olcott, reprinted as *People from the Other World* (1875, Rutland, Vt: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1972), 293-94. The book edition adds “witnessing the mysteries of Hindoo temples” to the list of locations given for her exploits.
- 14 Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, Third Series (Adyar: TPH, 1972), 68.
- 15 Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, Second Series (Adyar: TPH, 1954), 305.
- 16 Olcott to W.Q. Judge, 28 September 1893, “From the Archives,” *Theosophical History* 10 (January 2004): 42.
- 17 Mesmer, *Dissertatio physico-medica de planetarum influxu*, in *Mesmerism: A translation of the original scientific and medical writings of F. A. Mesmer*, by George J. Bloch (Los Altos, Calif.: William Kaufmann, 1980), 14.
- 18 Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), 14. Crabtree’s bibliography, *Animal Magnetism, Early Hypnotism, and Psychical Research, 1766-1925* (White Plains, N.Y.: Kraus International Publ., 1988) delineates something of the vast literature produced at the time.
- 19 Quoted by Taylor Stoehr in *Hawthorne’s Mad Scientists: Pseudoscience and Social Science in Nineteenth-Century Life and Letters* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1978), 29.
- 20 Poe, “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,” *Collected Works of Edgar Allen Poe* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978), 3:1240-41. Each tale in this edition is prefaced with the relevant background indicating the sources Poe would have been aware of. The subject is further explored in Sidney E. Lind’s “Poe and Mesmerism,” *PMLA* 62 (December 1947).
- 21 Ibid, 3:1242-43.
- 22 Davis, *The Harmonial Philosophy of Andrew Jackson Davis* (London: William Rider, 1917), 346. This is a compendium from Davis’s voluminous output arranged according to subject by “a Doctor of Hermetic Science” [A. E. Waite]. No adequate biography of Davis exists; numerous anecdotes about Davis and his books are collected in John De Salvo’s *Andrew Jackson Davis: The American Prophet and Clairvoyant* (Lulu.com, 2005). Robert W. Delp, who has written a number of articles on Davis’s place in the upstate New York religious revival of the time, provides a useful overview in his “Andrew Jackson Davis and Spiritualism,” in *Pseudo-Science and Society in Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by Arthur

Wrobel (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1987).

²³ Ibid, 358.

²⁴ Olcott, Introduction to “Sorcery in Science,” *The Theosophist* 11 (May 1890): 442. “So far back as 1844, I saw Andrew Jackson Davis — then a lad himself — sitting in a second-story room in Pokeepsie [sic], and from a lock of a sick man’s hair held in his hand, giving an accurate diagnosis of the disease, its cause and remedy.” Olcott would have been no older than twelve at the time.

²⁵ Olcott to Sarah D. Cape, 27 September 1894, Archives of the Theosophical Society in America, Wheaton, Ill.

²⁶ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, Second Series (Adyar: TPH, 1954), 377.

²⁷ “Statistics of Col. Olcott’s Bengal Tour,” Supplement to *The Theosophist*, June 1883, p.11.

²⁸ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, Third Series (Adyar: TPH, 1972), 13-14.

²⁹ Olcott, “Healing — A Warning from Col. Olcott,” Supplement to *The Theosophist*, July 1883, p.12.

³⁰ Ibid, 12.

³¹ Mavalankar, “The President-Founder’s Circular,” 20 October 1883, Supplement to *The Theosophist*, November 1883, p.15.

³² Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, Second Series (Adyar: TPH, 1954), 377.

³³ Ibid, 399.

³⁴ Certified Statement of K. Cornelis Appu, in “Wonderful Mesmeric Cures Effected by the President Founder of the Theosophical Society, in Ceylon,” Supplement to *The Theosophist*, January 1883, p.7.

³⁵ “I employ here the word *pass*, which is common to all magnetizers; it signifies all the movements made by the hand in passing over the body, whether by slightly touching, or at a distance.”

³⁶ Deleuze, *Practical Instructions in Animal Magnetism*, translated by Thomas C. Hartshorn (Providence, R.I.: B. Cranston & Co., 1837), 22-24.

³⁷ Ibid, 32.

³⁸ Ibid, 233-34.

³⁹ "Colonel Olcott Lectures on 'Dr. Esdaile and Mesmerism in Calcutta, Thirty-six Years Ago,'" Supplement to *The Theosophist*, July 1883, p.7. Olcott's record never appeared, but Esdaile's contribution is given in Alison Winter's *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Ch. 8.

⁴⁰ Olcott, "My Hypnotic Research in France," *The Theosophist* 13 (November 1891): 63. Another visitor to Charcot was Sigmund Freud; the four months spent observing his work is credited with Freud's development of psychoanalysis, Maria M. Tatar, *Spellbound: Studies on Mesmerism and Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), 35.

⁴¹ Olcott, "My Hypnotic Research in France," *The Theosophist* 13 (April 1892): 402. Richard Harte, a colleague of Olcott, had planned a volume on the work of the French hypnotists as part of his *Hypnotism and the Doctors*, two volumes of which were published by Fowler & Co., London, and Fowler & Wells, New York, 1902-1903. Although the cover of the second volume indicates that it includes Charcot, this is not so. A third volume devoted to schools of Paris and Nancy was advertised as forthcoming but apparently never issued.

⁴² Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* (New York, 1877), 1:216-17.

⁴³ Blavatsky, "The Power to Heal," *The Theosophist*, April 1883, *Blavatsky Collected Writings* [BCW] vol. 4 (Wheaton, Ill.: TPH, 1969), 383.

⁴⁴ Blavatsky, "Spiritual Progress," *The Theosophist*, May 1885, *BCW*, vol. 6 (Los Angeles: Blavatsky Writings Publication Fund, 1954), 335-36.

⁴⁵ Blavatsky, "The Signs of the Times," *Lucifer*, October 1887, *BCW*, vol. 8 (Adyar: TPH, 1960), 103, 108.

⁴⁶ Blavatsky, "Black Magic in Science," *Lucifer*, June 1890, *BCW*, vol. 12 (Wheaton: TPH, 1980), 214, 228.

⁴⁷ James Braid (1795-1860), a Scottish surgeon, originated the use of the term hypnotism for the trance state induced by fixing the eyes on a small bright object distanced eight to fifteen inches away. Braid's role is discussed by Alan Gauld in *A History of Hypnotism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁴⁸ Blavatsky, "Hypnotism, and its Relations to Other Modes of Fascination," *Lucifer*, December 1890, *BCW*, vol. 12 (Wheaton: TPH, 1980), 394-95.

⁴⁹ Blavatsky, "Mesmer," *The Theosophical Glossary* (London, 1892), 214.

⁵⁰ "Ritual of Fratr[is] [sic] Lucis or Brethren of the Cross of Light," in Ellic Howe's *Fringe Masonry in England, 1870-1885*, second revised edition (Sequim, Wash.: Holmes Publishing, 1999), 23. The manuscript was probably penned in England in the 1870s, and while it may have little factual basis, certainly captures what was in circulation at the time. A. E. Waite devotes a chapter to the eighteenth-century origins of the Fratres Lucis in his *Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross* (London, 1924). Even less can be had for the Brotherhood of Luxor (not to be confused with the British/American production of the 1880s, the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor). The entry for it in *The Theosophical Glossary* mentions only that it drew its name from the city of Lukhsur in Baluchistan, echoing the reference in *Isis Unveiled*, 1:308 fn, "The name Luxor is primarily derived from the ancient Beloochistan city of Looksur, which lies between Bela and Kedjee, and also gave its name to the Egyptian city." Edward Pococke gives essentially the same information in his 1852 *India in Greece*, where he speculated that the Egyptian city of Luxor was "so named from 'Lukshur,' in Beloochistan, a place situated on the route from Bela to Kedjee, forty miles west of the former town," giving its coordinates as lat. 26° 14', long. 65° 52', in what is now Pakistan.

⁵¹ Judge, *The Path*, October 1892, reprinted in *Echoes of the Orient: The Writings of William Quan Judge*, compiled by Dara Eklund, vol. 1 (San Diego: Point Loma Publications, 1975), 276.

⁵² Sinnett, *The Rationale of Mesmerism* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1892), 115.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 220-21.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 210.

⁵⁵ Cleather, *The Theosophist*, June 1890, in *Alice Cleather's London Letters*, Theosophical Research Monographs, no 2 (1999), 6.

⁵⁶ Collins, *Suggestion* (New York: Lovell, Gestefeld & Co., 1892), 196.

⁵⁷ Pick, *Svengali's Web: The Alien Enchanter in Modern Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), 2.

⁵⁸ *Trilby and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 204.

⁵⁹ Mesmer's treatment of Maria Theresa Paradis and the complications it caused him is told by Frank Pattie in *Mesmer and Animal Magnetism: A Chapter in the History of Medicine* (Hamilton, N.Y.: Edmonston Publishing, 1994).

⁶⁰ Blavatsky, "Third Letter to the American Convention," 1890, *BCW*, vol. 12 (Wheaton: TPH, 1980), 155.

⁶¹ Lovell, "Reminiscences of Early Days of the Theosophical Society," *The Canadian Theosophist* 10 (July 1929): 133.

⁶² Ibid, *The Canadian Theosophist* 10 (August 1929): 170.

⁶³ Eddy, *Science and Health* (Boston: The Author, 1889), 212. This chapter, titled "Animal Magnetism," was changed in later editions to "Animal Magnetism Unmasked," reflecting Mrs. Eddy's growing phobia of the practice. Frank Podmore, in *From Mesmer to Christian Science* (1909, New Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1965), 288, credits the Rev. James H. Wiggan, a founding councilor of the T.S., with the 1885 revision of *Science and Health*.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 425.

⁶⁵ Lovell, *The Canadian Theosophist* 10 (August 1929): 170.

⁶⁶ The work of Gestefeld, Whiting and others from the Theosophical movement in the development of metaphysical healing in America is chronicled in Catherine Tumber's *American Feminism and the Birth of New Age Spirituality* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

⁶⁷ Blavatsky, "Christian Science," *Lucifer*, July 1888, *BCW*, vol. 10 (Adyar: TPH, 1964), 40.

⁶⁸ Hartmann, *Occult Science in Medicine* (London: TPS, 1893), [10].

⁶⁹ Burnett, *Principles of Occult Healing*, second edition (Hollywood: TPH, 1918), 30.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 113. Dr. Burnett's ideas about how healing therapies worked derive from C. W. Leadbeater's *The Hidden Side of Things and The Inner Life*.

⁷¹ Gardner, *Healing Methods: Old and New*, second edition (London: TPH, 1924), 56. Eliza Adelaide Gardner (1884-1960), an American by birth, was married to Edward Lewis Gardner, a leading English Theosophist. Both were General Secretaries of the English Section at various times, and each delivered the Blavatsky Lecture.

⁷² Hodson, *An Occult View of Health and Disease* (London: TPH, 1925), 9.

⁷³ Hodson, *New Light on the Problem of Disease* (London: TPH, 1930), 6.

- ⁷⁴ Purucker, quoted in *Hypnotism-Mesmerism and Reincarnation* (Los Angeles: Blavatsky Writings Publication Fund, 1956), 82.
- ⁷⁵ Crosbie, "Mental Healing and Hypnosis," quoted in *The Laws of Healing* (Los Angeles: Theosophy Company, nd), 15, revised and reissued as *Health and Therapy*.
- ⁷⁶ Bailey, *Esoteric Healing* (New York: Lucis Publishing Co., 1953), 521.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid, 532.
- ⁷⁸ Kunz, in *Spiritual Aspects of the Healing Arts*, compiled by Dora Kunz (Wheaton: TPH, 1985), 290.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid, 298. A visual demonstration of the techniques of Therapeutic Touch can be seen in Janet Macrae's manual *Therapeutic Touch: A Practical Guide* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988).
- ⁸⁰ Samarel, "Healing Based on Theosophy and Science," *The Quest* 94 (July-Aug. 2006): 127.
- ⁸¹ Ibid, 131.
- ⁸² Wootton, *Bad Medicine: Doctors doing Harm since Hippocrates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 67.
- ⁸³ Ibid, 67.
- ⁸⁴ Fuller, "Mesmerism and Birth of Psychology," in *Pseudo-Science and Society in Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by Arthur Wrobel (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 213-14. His other books include *Mesmerism and the American Cure of Souls* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982) and *Alternative Medicine and American Religious Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- ⁸⁵ Myss, *Why People Don't Heal and How They Can* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1997), 43.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid, 101.
- ⁸⁷ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, Fourth Series (Adyar: TPH, 1975), 360-61.

APPENDIX I

[While on a visit to England during the spring and summer of 1884, Col. Olcott was interviewed by London's *Pall Mall Gazette*. The result, "A Miracle Worker of Today," was printed in its issue of April 21, 1884. Appearing so soon after the Colonel ceased his healing work, it provides a revealing account of his beliefs at the time.]

A Miracle Worker of To-day

Colonel Olcott, president of the Theosophical Society, is at present in London on a mission from the Sinhalese Buddhists, who have considerable reason to complain of the manner in which they have been denied justice in their disputes with the local Roman Catholics. With that aspect of Colonel Olcott's mission, however, we do not propose to deal to-day. Suffice it to say, that Colonel Olcott and the petitioning Buddhists ask for nothing that should not be conceded as a matter of simple right to any body of religionists in any part of her Majesty's dominions. Much more interesting than the champion of the aggrieved Buddhists of Ceylon is Colonel Olcott as the Apostle Paul of theosophy, an archaic philosophy which, taking its rise in the remote regions of Thibet, is destined, in the fervent faith of its disciples, to spread over the whole earth. Colonel Olcott's account of his conversion affords a key to the whole of his present mission. The Colonel – a New Yorker, a prosperous lawyer, well-to-do in this world's goods, and with a prospect, almost amounting to a certainty, of being appointed State Director of Insurance of New York, with an honourable record of gallant services performed in the American Civil War – was much attracted by the study of Eastern philosophy.

The reason why Colonel Olcott abandoned his professional career in the United States was as follows: One night he had been meditating deeply and long upon the strange problems of Oriental philosophy. He had wondered whether the mysterious teachings of Mdme. Blavatsky were after all nothing more than the illusions of an overwrought brain, or whether they had really been revealed to her by those weird Mahatmas – a race of devotees dwelling in the remote fastnesses of the Thibetan Himalayas, who are said to have preserved intact for the benefit of mankind the invaluable deposits of archaic spiritual truth to be revealed in "the fullness of the times." His judgment inclined towards the latter alternative. But if theosophy as expounded by its latest hierophant were true, then was it not his

duty to forsake all that he had, and leaving behind him the busy Western world, with its distracting influences which indisposed the mind to the perception of pure spiritual truth, hasten to the East, the chosen home of repose and speculative calm? Yet should a step so momentous be taken without ample confirmation; nay, without absolute certainty of the truth for which he was expected to sacrifice all? Could such absolute certainty be vouchsafed to mortal man? Colonel Olcott pondered long, revolving these and similar questions, when suddenly he became aware of the presence of a mysterious visitant in the room. The door was closed, the window was shut, no mortal footstep had been heard on the stair; yet there, clearly visible in the lamplight, stood the palpable form of a venerable Oriental. In a moment Colonel Olcott knew that his unspoken prayer had been answered.

He was face to face with one of the mysterious brotherhood of the Thibetan mountains, a Mahatma who from his distant ashram had noted the mute entreaty of his soul, and hastened across ocean and continent to remove his lurking doubts. The Mahatma entered into friendly conversation with his American disciple, and in the course of half an hour succeeded in convincing him beyond the possibility of doubt that Mdme. Blavatsky's testimonies concerning the existence of the Mahatmas and the mission which invited him were simple transcripts of the literal truth. Ere the sudden visit was over, Colonel Olcott was a fast adherent of the new philosophy so strangely confirmed. But when the Mahatma rose to go, the natural man reasserted itself. "Would you not," he asked, "before you go, leave me some tangible token of your presence, some proof that this has been no maya — the illusion of overstrained sense? Give me something to keep that I may touch and handle." The Mahatma smiled a kindly smile; then removing his turban he wrought upon it a marvelous transformation. Colonel Olcott saw the shadowy folds of the Eastern headgear thicken and materialize under the fingers of his guest, until at last the shadow became substance, and a substantial turban rested on the head of the spectre. The Mahatma then handed the turban to the astonished Colonel, and vanished as mysteriously as he had appeared. That turban Colonel Olcott carries about with him to this day, he has it at the present moment, and it can be seen by the unbelieving, "the outward and visible sign" of the mysterious visit that completed his conversion. With that turban in his hand Colonel Olcott could doubt no longer. He ultimately threw up all his business engagements, and left New York for Hindostan. There he has remained until recently a weariless apostle of the theosophic faith which has the Mahatmas of the Himalayas as its sage oracles and Mdme. Blavatsky as one of its Delphic priestesses.

Such is the story which is told concerning Olcott's conversion, and, however strange it may be, it is the only explanation which is as yet forthcoming

as to how a shrewd Yankee editor – for Colonel Olcott edited the agricultural department of the *New York Tribune*, under the late Horace Greeley – has been for the last six years engaged in carrying on an active apostolate in India and Ceylon in favour of the ancient mysterious doctrines which are popularly known as theosophy. Colonel Olcott, who is at present, as we have already stated, in this country on an errand to the Colonial Office, in order to secure protection for the injured Sinhalese Buddhists, is about to undertake a mission through Burmah on the invitation of his Burmese Majesty, with a view to purifying and reviving Buddhism. After this tour through Burmah he proposes to make an itinerary through Siam. Subsequently he may visit China and Thibet. Mr. Sinnett vouches for the fact that Colonel Olcott, in the course of his tours in India and Ceylon, performed more miracles – using that term, of course, in its popular and unscientific sense, for the theosophists stoutly deny that there are such things as miracles *contra naturam* – than are recorded in the whole of the Gospels. Colonel Olcott himself modestly places the number of his psychopathic treatments at 8,000 in thirteen months. During that period he is said to have performed almost every cure as recorded in Old or New Testament. He has made the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, the blind to see; the paralysed have been restored to the full use of their limbs, the cripples have walked; and, although he cannot boast of having raised the dead or healed a leper, he asserts that he cured a man suffering from elephantiasis, who was the nearest approach to a leper which he had to do with. Colonel Olcott is rather chary of speaking of these cures, fearing, not unnaturally, that his life may become a burden to him if it is known that a “miracle-worker” of such power is within hailing distance of the innumerable sick and afflicted of London.

During his visit to our office Colonel Olcott obligingly explained to our representative the method of healing which he pursued. Its central principle seemed to be that of establishing a magnetic current between the right and left hands of the operator. Almost all disease, in Colonel Olcott’s opinion, arises from deficient local vitality, and can be removed by influx of fresh life from another person. Of course this in time tells upon the vital force of the healer, and Colonel Olcott himself was at the close of his healing campaign nearly paralyzed, and would, he maintains, have been altogether so but for the timely warning of his watchful Mahatma, who ordered him to desist before the mischief had gone too far. As it was, he had paralysis for some time in the forefinger of his right hand; but he is now perfectly recovered. During his recent stay in Nice, he asserts, he was the means of effecting a very remarkable cure on the person of Princess W., a Russian lady who had been paralysed in her right arm and leg for seventeen

years. Colonel Olcott in the course of fifteen minutes was able to restore to her the perfect use of both limbs, on which physicians had so long experimented in vain. Of these gifts, however, Colonel Olcott makes but small account. They are incidental, nor does he think that he is exceptionally gifted in this respect. Similar powers may be exercised by almost any healthy person, provided they go the right way about it. The Colonel was even obliging enough to instruct our representative how to work miracles; but hitherto, whether owing to lack of experience on his part or to the uncompromising nature of the human material on whom he tried his newly acquired art, the experiments so far have not proved successful. Colonel Olcott before he left India enjoyed another remarkable experience in the shape of a visit from another Mahatma. It was at Lahore, when he was in his tent at night, that he was visited by the sage in question *in propria personâ*. He recognized the person in a moment, and they entered at once into a lively conversation, at the close of which the Mahatma said, "You wanted something tangible when first you met your present teacher. You are going to Europe. Here, I will give you something to take to Sinnett as a message from me." With that the Mahatma encircled the Colonel's palm with the finger-tips of his right hand, and there gradually grew into substance, precipitated as it were out of thin air, a letter written in English characters, enfolded in Chinese silk, and addressed to Mr. Sinnett. Of the labours of this gentleman on behalf of theosophy in the benighted West, the recluses in the Himalayas are gratefully conscious. Of these and many other wonders too numerous here to tell, as well as the story of the strange propaganda which this American Colonel is successfully carrying on in the remote East, we must say nothing at present. Colonel Olcott himself may take an opportunity during his visit of setting forth the latest light – the light of theosophy – in the midst of modern Babylon. At present it is sufficient to repeat for the benefit of our readers the remarkable story which this American apostle of Eastern occultism is prepared to uphold against all the gibes of the sceptical capital of the Western world.

APPENDIX II

[The following note attributed to H. P. B. appeared at the beginning of a pamphlet edition of two articles from 1889 and 1890 on hypnotism by Annie Besant. There was no indication of its source when it was published by the Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, in 1935 and again in 1948. It is not found in the original article. As the extract below contains the only known use in H. P. B.'s writings of the term "etheric double," a term popularized after her death, I have placed it here for the reader to decide its merit.]

Mesmerism and hypnotism differ completely in their method. In hypnotism the nerve-ends of a sense-organ are first fatigued, and then by continuance of the fatigue are temporarily paralysed; and the paralysis spreads inwards to the sense-centre in the brain, and a state of trance results. The fatigue is brought about by the use of some mechanical means, such as a revolving mirror, a disc, an electric light, etc. A frequent repetition of this fatigue predisposes the patient to fall readily into a state of trance, and permanently weakens the sense-organs and the brain. When the Ego has left his dwelling, and the brain is thus rendered passive, it is easy for another person to impress ideas of action upon it, and the ideas will then be carried out by the patient, after coming out of trance, as though they were his own. In all such cases he is the mere passive agent of the hypnotizer.

The method of true mesmerism is entirely different. The mesmerizer throws out his own Auric Fluid, . . . through the etheric double, on his patient; he may thus, in the case of sickness, regularize the irregular vibrations of the sufferer, or share with him his own life-force, thereby increasing his vitality. For nerve-atrophy there is no agent so curative as this, and the shrivelling cell may clairvoyantly be seen to swell up under the flow of the life-current. The pranic current flows most readily from the tips of the fingers, and through the eyes; passes should be made along the nerves from centre to circumference, with a sharp shake of the fingers away from the patient and the operator, at the end of the pass. The hands should be washed before and after the operation, and it should never be undertaken unless the mind is quiet and the health strong. The loss of vitality should be made good by standing in the sun, with as little clothing on as possible, breathing deeply and slowly, and retaining the breath between each inspiration and exhalation as long as is convenient, i.e., not long enough to cause any struggle or gasping. Five minutes of this should restore the pranic balance.

"H. P. B."

APPENDIX III

[This printed list of books recommended for acquisition by branches represents one of the few attempts by the early T. S. to provide such guidance. I include it here for its stress on works on mesmerism that members were supposed to familiarize themselves with. It is copied from H. P. B.'s Scrapbook XIII, Part I (1882), p. 163. In cases where the author's name is not given I have added them in brackets.]

Partial List of Books Recommended for Purchase by Theosophical Society

[The books marked with an asterisk should be ordered
by small libraries first.—H. S. Olcott]

1. **Isis Unveiled* by H. P. Blavatsky. 4th ed.
2. **Mesmerism, with Hints for Beginners* by Captain J. James.
3. *Mechanism of Man: Life, Mind and Soul* by Sergeant Cox.
4. *Buddhism* by [T. W.] Rhys Davids.
5. *Philosophy of Electrical Psychology* by J. B. Dods.
6. **Six Lectures on Mesmerism and Clairvoyance* by [J. B.] Dods.
7. **Report on Spiritualism* by the Committee of the Dialectical Society.
8. **Artificial Somnambulism* by Dr. [W. B.] Fahnestock.
9. *Arcana of Spiritualism* by Hudson Tuttle.
10. *Arcana of Nature* “ “ “
11. *Psychography* by M. A. (Oxon).
12. *Spirit Identity* “ “ “ “

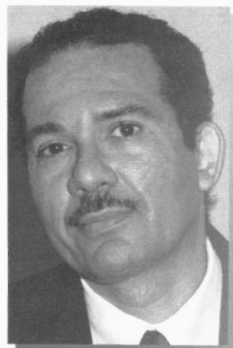
13. *The Modern Bethesda* by A. E. Newton.
14. *Vital Magnetic Cure* by a Magnetic Physician.
15. **Practical Instructions on Animal Magnetism* by J. P. F. Deleuze.
16. *The Rosicrucians* by Hargrave Jennings.
17. *Age of Reason* by Thomas Paine.
18. *Complete Works of Thomas Paine*, 3 vols.
19. *Age of Reason and Examination of Prophecies* by Thomas Paine.
20. *Ancient Symbol Worship* [by H. M. Westropp and C. Staniland Wake].
21. **The Scientific Basis of Spiritualism* by Epes Sargent.
22. *Proof Palpable of Immortality* by Epes Sargent.
23. **History of Conflict between Religion and Science* by J. W. Draper.
24. *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe* by J. W. Draper.
25. *Prof. Zollner's Transcendental Physics*. Translated by C. C. Massey. F.T.S.
26. *Health Manuel* by E. D. Babbit.
27. *Principles of Light and Colour* “ “
28. *Wonders of Light and Colour* “ “
29. *People from the Other World* by Col. H. S. Olcott.
30. *Buddhist Catechism* “ “
31. **Psycho-Physiological Sciences and their Assailants* by A. R. Wallace.
32. *Planchette; or, the Despair of Science* by Epes Sargent.
33. *Bible in India: Hindoo Origin of Christian Revelation* [by Louis Jacolliot].

34. **Self-Contradictions of the Bible* [by William Henry Burr].
35. *The World's Sages, Infidels and Thinkers* by D. M. Bennett.
36. *Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries* by Thomas Taylor.
37. *Ancient Art and Mythology* by R. P. Knight.
38. *Harbinger of Health* by A. J. Davis.
39. *Debatable Land between this World and the Next* [by Robert Dale Owen].
40. *Jesus: Man, Myth or God* [by J. M. Peebles].
41. *Errors of the Bible demonstrated by the Truths of Nature* [by Henry C. Wright].
42. *The Wonderful Story of Ravalette* by P. B. Randolph.
43. *Allegories of Life* by Mrs. [J. S.] Adams.
44. *A Defence of Modern Spiritualism* by A. R. Wallace.
45. *Chapters from the Bible of All Ages.*
46. **Night Side of Nature* [by Catherine Crowe].
47. *The Slade Case* by M. A. (Oxon).
48. **Advancement of Science* by J. Tyndall.
49. **Abstract of Colenso on the Pentateuch.*
50. *Book of Religions* by John Hayward.
51. *Cosmology* by George M. Ramsay.
52. **Some Mistakes of Moses* by Col. [Robert] Ingersoll.
53. *The Gods and other Lectures* “ “ “
54. *What Shall I do to be saved* “ “ “

55. *A discourse on Hell* “ “ “
56. **Light of Asia, Life and Teachings of Gautama*, by Edwin Arnold.
57. **The Soul* by Babu Peary Chand Mittra.
58. **The Occult World* by A. P. Sinnett.
59. **How to Magnetise* by J. V. Wilson.
60. **Soul of Things*, 3 vols by Prof. W. M. Denton.
61. **Footfalls on the Boundary of another World* [by Robert Dale Owen].
62. **[William] Gregory's Animal Magnetism*.
63. **Baron Reichenbach's Book on Odyle Force*.
64. **[William] Crookes' Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism*.
65. *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism* by A. R. Wallace.
66. *The Science and Art of organic Magnetism* by Miss Chandos Leigh Hunt.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Surrounded by ghosts of the past, Michael Gomes has spent the greater part of his life researching the world of H. P. Blavatsky. Over the last forty years his work has taken him through libraries and archives in Canada, England, India, and the U. S. During this time, he has made his own unique contribution to our understanding of the complex character of H. P. B.



Gomes started his career by cataloging the books, papers, and correspondence of the late Theosophical historian, Beatrice Hastings. Mrs. Hastings had accumulated one of the best collections of material relating to the case of H. P. B., and analyzing her papers provided him with a solid background for years to follow.

A decade later he spent a year going through the archives at the International Headquarters of the Theosophical Society at Adyar, Madras, India. The first researcher to have such complete access, he put his findings into his book, *The Dawning of the Theosophical Movement* (1987). Covering the origins of the Theosophical Society in New York in the 1870s, the book was the first thorough examination of the beginnings of the movement. Two years after its publication, Gomes was awarded the Herman Ausubel Memorial Prize for achievement in history by Columbia University in New York.

Another major contribution has been his *Theosophy in the Nineteenth Century* (1994), the first bibliography of the movement. Comprising over 2,000 entries, it is a massive resource for anything to do with the early Theosophical movement, for it contains references to items rarely seen. This project took seven years and was issued as part of Garland Publishing's series on the Social Sciences.

In 2000, commemorating the 125th anniversary of the T. S., Michael Gomes was invited to deliver the prestigious Blavatsky Lecture – *Creating the New Age: Theosophy's Origins in the British Isles* – at the annual Summer School of the Theosophical Society in England, held in Ripon, Yorkshire. Copies of the booklet or an audio recording are available from the Book Department of the T. S. in England.

He has also edited a number of H. P. B.'s works. For her death centenary in 1991, he compiled the first one volume anthology of her vast magazine output, and has given new accessibility to her first book, *Isis*

Unveiled, by providing an intelligent and readable abridgment. His critical edition of the Stanzas of Dzyan, that her *Secret Doctrine* is based on, is forthcoming.

Not content with simply accessing data related to the subject, Gomes believes that on-site research is an important asset to any understanding of this field. He lived for many years in Mme. Blavatsky's old address in New York, known as the Lamasery. Recently, he travelled to Simla, in North India, to discover the home of A. O. Hume, a government official with whom H. P. B. stayed and where she produced some of her phenomena. He has retraced her steps on the border of Tibet, crossing the Ranjit River.

The wealth of background that this research has given him has recently been recognized with his addition to the editorial committee for the *Collected Letters of H. P. Blavatsky*. Aside from this, and his own vast output on Theosophical history, Gomes has found time to begin research on his new project, an intended biography of Blavatsky for her birth bicentenary in 2031. Previous biographies left him unsatisfied, for, he says, "they told you everything about her, except who she was. It is such a necessary undertaking that I don't feel it should be rushed. Hopefully, it will settle some of the controversies still connected with her name."

When he is not doing all these things, he is the Director of the Emily Sellon Memorial Library in New York City.

THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE LONDON

Previous Blavatsky Lectures Still Available

The Science of Spirituality – Ianthe Hoskins 1950 (reprint)
H. P. Blavatsky, the Light Bringer – Geoffrey Barborka 1970
Life, Death & Dreams (reprinted with additional material) –
Geoffrey Farthing 1974
The Soul's Imperative – Harold Tarn 1999
Creating the New Age – Michael Gomes 2000
Theosophy: Its Beneficent Potentialities –
Geoffrey Farthing 2001
The Harvest of Life – Alan Hughes 2002
Joyful Gnosis – Stephan Hoeller 2003
The Living Truth – Radha Burnier 2005
The Virtuous Key – Betty Bland 2006

Recent Publications

Krishnamurti & the Wind – Jean Overton Fuller
The Right Angle: H. P. Blavatsky on Masonry –
compiled by Geoffrey Farthing
Man: A Universe in Miniature – Joy Piper
Theosophy: The Truth Revealed –
compiled by Merseyside Lodge of the TS
Aspects of Divine Law – Geoffrey Farthing

Classic Literature

The Key to Theosophy – H. P. Blavatsky
The Occult World – A. P. Sinnett
The Search Within – Christmas Humphreys

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