

The Early Days of Theosophy in Europe by A.P. Sinnett

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NOTE

[Page 5] Mr. Sinnett's literary Executor in arranging for the publication this volume is prompted to add a few words of explanation.

There is naturally some diffidence experienced in placing before the public a posthumous MSS of personal reminiscences dealing in various instances with people still living.

It would, however, be impossible to use the editorial blue pencil without destroying the historical value of the MSS.

Mr. Sinnett's position and associations with the Theosophical Society together with his standing as an author in the Theosophical movement alike demand that his last writing should be published, and it is left to each reader to form his own judgment as to the value of the book in the light of his own study of the questions involved.

CHAPTER - 1 -

NO record could truly be called a History of the Theosophical Society if it concerned itself merely with events taking shape on the physical plane of life. From the first such events have been the result of activities on a higher plane; of steps taken by the unseen Powers presiding over human evolution, whose existence was unknown in the outer world when their great undertaking — the Theosophical Movement — was originally set on foot. To those known in the outer world as the Founders of the Theosophical Society — Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott — the existence of these higher powers, *The Brothers* as they were called at first, was more or less imperfectly comprehended. That some purpose the Brothers had in view was to be subserved by steps the *founders* felt impelled to take in the year 1875 was dimly realised. And in the first volume of Colonel Olcott's *Old Diary Leaves* it is possible to trace the growth of this belief and equally possible to see how remote from any true conception of that [Page 8] purpose were the ideas which animated the Founders when they held the meeting, since regarded as the inauguration of the Theosophical Society, in November, 1875. On the outer plane the idea of establishing a Society — its name was agreed on later — was suggested by Colonel Olcott during an informal gathering of persons who had become interested in Madame Blavatsky, at her rooms in New York, in September, 1875, the ostensible motive of the gathering being interest in a lecture to be given by a certain Mr. Felt on Egyptian antiquities and the magical science of the Egyptian priests, but we soon lose sight of Mr. Felt as the formation of the Society proceeded.

The day after this gathering a more formal meeting was held, and those present resolved to form a Society for "the study and elucidation of Occultism, the Cabala, etc..". At an adjourned meeting on September the 18th "it was decided that the name of the Society should be *The Theosophical Society* . "

Early in the last century the drift of cultivated opinion in the western world had been definitely in the direction of pure materialism. The progress of science had encouraged the belief that all consciousness was the result of natural laws working through organized matter, satirised at the time in some verses dictated by a more spiritual faith: "I believe in corn and rice; not in virtue or in vice". But playful criticisms of that order had very little effect. The Masters saw the danger of the predominant tendency, and it was decided that an attempt should be made to ascertain whether the world was ripe for a partial revelation of the natural laws governing human evolution. This attempt took the shape of the Theosophical movement. While the Theosophical movement was still in the experimental stage the [Page 9] teachings, given as an experiment, were not systematically designed. It was enough to indicate some broad truths — the existence of the Masters, the growth of the Ego under the law of Reincarnation, itself subject to Karma, and the stupendous magnitude of a planetary scheme to which we of this Earth belong.

After the publication of *Isis Unveiled* Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott left New York on their way to India. They had already become acquainted by correspondence with the Swami Dyanand Sarasvati, a Hindoo reformer at the head of an organization called the Arya Samaj, and became possessed with a belief, eventually abandoned, that the Theosophical Society would derive advantage by being connected with that organization, and it was described for a time as *The Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj*, and the name was, for a short period adopted by a branch established in London. The formation of the first European branch of the Society was due to the influence and exertions of Mr. Charles Carlton Massey, who, in the same way that Colonel Olcott is described as the Founder of the Society in New York, was certainly the Founder of the Society in Great Britain. He was the son of W. N. Massey, the first

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Finance Minister of India and himself a barrister, though private means enabled him to dispense with the active practice of that profession. He was devoted to earnest philosophical study, and translated Baron Carl Duprel's book (*The Philosophy of Mysticism*). I made his acquaintance during my first holiday visit home from India in 1881 and enjoyed his friendship till his death. He had visited America in 1875, drawn thither by interest in certain remarkable spiritualistic phenomena then attracting public attention. At the *Eddy Homestead*, the scene of these manifestations, he seems to have made acquaintance [Page 10] with Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky. He was present at the inaugural meeting of the Theosophical Society in New York and on his return to London established in co-operation with friends the branch above referred to. In his *Old Diary Leaves* Colonel Olcott tells us that according to the first circular issued in June, 1878, it was called *The British Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj of Aryavart*. Its objects were then defined as follows :

1. The British Theosophical Society is founded for the purpose of discovering the nature and powers of the human soul and spirit by investigation and experiment.
2. The object of the Society is to increase the amount of human health, goodness, knowledge, wisdom and happiness.
3. The fellows pledge themselves to endeavour to the best of their powers, to live a life of temperance, purity and brotherly love. They believe in a great First Intelligent Cause, and in the Divine Sonship of the spirit of man, and hence in the immortality of that spirit and in the universal brotherhood of the human race.
4. The Society is in connection and sympathy with the Arya Samaj of Aryavart, one object of which Society is to elevate, by a true spiritual education, mankind out of degenerate, idolatrous and impure forms of worship, wherever prevalent.[Vide *Old Diary Leaves*, vol i, page 399]

The only interest attaching to this earliest attempt to define the purposes of the Theosophical movement resides in the use of the word *Brotherhood*. Mr. Massey was then the first to make use of that expression. Colonel Olcott adopted it from him.[Page 11]

The circular embodying the British statement of objects was no doubt in Colonel Olcott's hands when he wrote; but the elaborate name for the Society, connecting it with the Eastern organization seems to have been forgotten almost as soon as framed. I have in my possession the original Minute Book of the British Society and this interesting volume gives us the actual facts connected with the very earliest beginning of Theosophy in Europe, due, as I have said above to the efforts of Mr. C. C. Massey.

The first entry in the Minute Book shows that a meeting was held at 38, Great Russell Street, London, on the 27th of June, 1878, when those present, (all the names being recorded) were Mr. J. Storer Cobb, (already with some of the others named — a member of the New York Society), Mr. C. C. Massey, Dr. C. Carter Blake, Dr. George Wyld, Dr. H. J. Billing and Miss E. Kislingbury. Mr. Cobb presided.

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The first resolution passed declared: "That in the opinion of the English Fellows of the Theosophical Society of New York present at this meeting, it is desirable to form a Society in England in connection and sympathy with that body". Mr. C. C. Massey was then, by ballot, elected President of the new Branch Society and Miss Kislingbury was chosen as its Secretary.

The meetings of the new Society were not held frequently. The next, after the inaugural meeting was held on the 1st of October, and then another month elapsed before there was a third. At that time no one seemed to know what to do. Many names are added to the list of members. A suggestion is made that books should be selected and discussed, also that mesmeric experiments should be tried, but this idea does not seem to have been followed up. As we can see now the formation of the Societies in [Page 12] New York and London, regarded from a higher point of view, merely provided a framework to be animated later on. Resignations of early members soon began to appear on the minutes. Mr. Billing, a well-known spiritualist medium of the period goes into trance at one meeting, and gives *information* — not more definitely recorded. Then a sudden stir of excitement ensued when Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott passed through London on their way to India and were present at a meeting of the British Society on the 5th of January, 1879. The proceedings, on that occasion, however, were of a formal character relating to Diplomas, initiation fees, and *obligations* and only enlivened by an assurance, from Madame Blavatsky that "the Society might expect the advent of competent instructors from India with confidence".

The Colonel and Madame Blavatsky seem to have been disillusioned about the Arya Samaj even before leaving New York, and "in resuming the Society's autonomy" — as Colonel Olcott expresses himself — it seemed desirable to draw up a new declaration of principles. In this we get for the first time a foreshadowing of the well-known *objects* of the Society. As first stated they were: —

1. The study of occult science.
2. The formation of a nucleus of universal brotherhood.
3. The revival of Oriental literature and philosophy.

At various periods in the progress of the Society the *objects* were rearranged and revised until they assumed the shape, familiar to all later members, with the Brotherhood idea coming first as follows :

1. To form a nucleus of the universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or color.[Page 13]
2. To encourage the study of Comparative Religions, Philosophy and Science.
3. To investigate the unexplained laws of Nature and the Powers latent in Man.

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I think the motive for the record of the objects in this way may be traced to an anxiety on the part of Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, while they dominated the early growth of the Society in India, to attract as many members as possible without allowing belief in the existence of the Masters to become a necessary qualification for membership. In reality the movement had no meaning if it did not serve to lift, in some measure, the curtain that had previously veiled the actual Divine Hierarchy from the consciousness of the outer world. But Brotherhood was a simple idea within the comprehension of the outer world and as stated in the revised declaration of objects was calculated to attract Indian sympathies — and Indian rupees ! Looking back to the history of the Society for the three or four years following the arrival of Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky in India in the year 1879 we must be careful to avoid the mistake of supposing that their efforts to establish the Society on a firm financial basis had any self regarding motive. As the story proceeds it will be seen that the *Founders* made many mistakes, which sometimes nearly wrecked their own work, but they were both utterly free from any personal avarice in this matter. Colonel Olcott had thrown up occupations in America which had been fairly lucrative in order to devote his life to the task of promoting an enterprise which he but dimly understood, but knew to be designed by the Masters whose claim to his reverent attachment he had learned fully to appreciate. He was not called upon to interpret their teachings. At the period I am now dealing with he had [Page 14] scarcely glimpsed them. But he felt that he had to make the Theosophical Society a big solid fact in the world — especially in India, to which country he was drawn by sympathies which much later knowledge enables some of us to understand. In former lives — though in 1879 we none of us knew anything about former lives — he had been closely connected with India, and at important periods of its history had played important parts. In this life he went out with Madame Blavatsky to India vaguely feeling that for them it was a holy land, and his practical businesslike aptitude guided his efforts when there, towards making the Society a business-like success. He was indefatigable in organising new branches and in collecting the *initiation fees* without which the work could not go on. It is undeniable that he lived in India on the Society's funds, but it is equally true that his personal expenditure was always kept within the lowest possible limits, his motives of action pure and unselfish. And as far as Madame Blavatsky was concerned, when my wife and I first knew her in 1879, she was hard at work earning her living by writing for Russian periodicals.

This explanation will show how it came to pass that *Brotherhood*, in later years, was regarded as the foremost idea animating the Society, — the recognition of universal brotherhood the one condition of membership. Adopted in India to attract natives of that country apt to be sore about the prestige of the European residents, it assumed a new meaning when transplanted to Europe. People whose political sympathies took the colouring of ultra-democracy and socialism imagined that the Society was mainly inspired with sympathies of that order. The preservation of the word *nucleus* in the formulation adopted ought to have averted the mistake, and, as [Page 15] the teaching of the Masters gradually filtered through to the outer world it should have been seen that the *nucleus* of a universal brotherhood consists of the advanced members of the human family in a position to understand the spiritual unity manifest on the Buddhic plane. In the long process of ages that comprehension should be *universal* throughout the human family but we are far as yet from having reached that sublime condition.

Some time ago, in July, 1917, I wrote in the *Vahan*, the magazine published by the British National branch of the Society, a short article on this subject, which will bear reproduction now. After explaining how the word first came to be used, I went on:

From time to time we may usefully review the gradually improving conceptions we have been

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enabled to form concerning the grand purposes underlying the Theosophical Movement. The phrases in which these were ultimately crystallised do not (though this matters little) reflect the ideas present to the minds of those who, in 1875, did actually, in a certain sense, *found* the Society. At that time it was the result of interest excited among a small group of persons frequenting Madame Blavatsky's rooms in New York, by the exhibition of her wonderful occult powers. As Colonel Olcott explains in his *Diary Leaves* a lecture was given in September, 1875, at Madame Blavatsky's rooms by a certain Mr. Felt, of whom we lose sight afterwards, on the Adept Magic of Egyptian priests. Colonel Olcott then suggested the formation of a Society to study this subject. That was done, and though the title *Theosophical* was adopted (doubtless under occult guidance) Colonel Olcott at one time proposed to call it a *Miracle Club*.

The word *Brotherhood* does not creep into its records till some years later. It was first used by Mr. C. C. Massey and his friends in London when [Page 16] they formed a British branch of the New York Society. They described its purpose as being, "to discover the nature and powers of the human soul", and they went on to declare that they believed in a great intelligent First Cause and in the divine son-ship of the spirit of Man, and hence in the immortality of that spirit and in the universal Brotherhood of the human race". Colonel Olcott took this hint and developed the idea in a new statement of subjects as follows: " 1) The study of Occult Science. 2) The formation of a nucleus of universal brotherhood. 3) The revival of oriental literature. The word *brotherhood* was afterwards shifted into the first place, but it was always accompanied by the qualifying term *Nucleus*. It was not used and should never be used by Theosophists with the significance attached to it by those concerned with mundane politics or social reconstruction on the physical plane. The word in its theosophical meaning refers to the Unity of Divine consciousness on lofty planes of Nature, and to the nucleus for the reflection of that Unity on the physical plane that may be formed by theosophical students who appreciate the teaching aright.

The gross democratic meaning attached to the term Brotherhood is an insult to Theosophical teaching. The consciousness which expands into perfect humanity is, no doubt, in a subtle metaphysical sense identical in its nature with the consciousness, not merely of the humbler classes in civilized countries, but with that also of the crocodile, the dog, the Australian savage, and the Master of Wisdom. But this does not mean that all manifested consciousness, in whatever vehicle we find it is therefore invested with equal claims on our respect. It is invested with equal claims on our sympathy and that is how people who do not appreciate subtle distinctions drift into the misuse of the term brotherhood. If the sheep and the guinea pig are included in the universal brotherhood, well and good, but we do not ask the sheep or the guinea pig to contribute their opinions to discussions of the suffrage question [Page 17] for example. And that thought is a clue to the fallacy involved in regarding theosophical brotherhood as leading to political socialism. Theosophical teaching concerning human evolution shows us the human family at present at very different stages of development. It rescues us from the old fashioned blunder — arising from the ignorant delusion that each new child is a new creation — to the effect that all have equal rights. According to a phrase classical in political writings, all are equally entitled to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness", but with varied claims on the privilege of shaping laws providing for the fulfilment of that fundamental idea.

Thus to let the formula, in which the objects of the Theosophical Society are generally expressed, distort the purpose of the movement to suit the purpose of any mundane theory of social reform is a very grievous blunder. From the beginning all qualified exponents of the theosophical movement have warned us to keep clear of all political contamination. The society includes persons of very varied political

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opinions but within the society their only duty is to study, and promote the study, of the super-physical spiritual science gradually unfolded for our benefit and through us for the benefit of all mankind. The fulfilment of that duty should be compatible with perfect harmony of feeling within the society, where it is needless and undesirable to discuss varied beliefs as to how the physical welfare of the community may be best promoted. We should not furnish unsympathetic critics of our real work with an excuse for pretending to regard us as a body of people entangled with questionable schemes for subversive changes on the physical plane.

In reality the main object of the Society — though this was not apparent to the so-called *Founders* in the first instance, — was to set wide open the doors leading to initiation on the Path, and thus to the early attainment of the conditions towards which evolution is tending, — doors which had previously [Page 18] been shut against all but the few struggling with immense difficulty to make their way onwards. But before elucidating that statement more fully let me carry on the external narrative towards the period at which my wife and myself began to co-operate.

With the arrival of the Founders in India the real development of the Society may be regarded as beginning. The situation at the time was briefly as follows: —

Madame Blavatsky is the central figure to be considered. She was the one person who *knew* of her own knowledge, that *The Brothers*, — as she called them in those days — were Beings, human in aspect, of flesh and blood, for she had been for a time in company with two of them in Tibet. She knew they had dazzling powers in dealing with the affairs of the world. She herself had faculties of a super-physical order that kept her in touch with them wherever she might be. She knew she had a mission to fulfil which had for the moment assumed the shape of the Theosophical Society. She must have been conscious of possessing wonderful powers the exercise of which was under restriction, to which she submitted in devotion to the great Brother whom she regarded as her own Master, in a pre-eminent degree. She had written, *Isis Unveiled* which, as a matter of fact, did not do much towards the unveiling of Isis but was full of extraordinarily suggestive hints, as also of evidences showing that when writing it she was quite ignorant even of what we came later to regard as the A.B.C. of Theosophical teaching.

Colonel Olcott had not yet begun even to think of that. He simply knew that the Brothers existed; were sublimely entitled to his devotion; that his immediate business was to run the Theosophical Society, and to endure with all the stoicism he could muster, [Page 19] the crushing tyranny of Madame Blavatsky — of which more anon.

The Theosophical Society was still in an embryonic condition. It lingered, almost extinct, as an inactive nucleus in America. It had just been established in London and was in flickering existence under the influence chiefly of Mr. C. C. Massey and Mr. Henry J. Hood, themselves so far having no defined conception of the task they had undertaken. Certainly nothing was doing on the physical plane at that time to hint at the stupendous developments that were in reserve for the great experiment the Masters had in hand, the preliminary conditions of which had been provided by the course of events.

I must now deal — by the light of information obtained at a much later period — with the super-physical conditions that prevailed at the period under review, quite unsuspected by the persons who had been

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guided to subserve them in the outer world.

As already explained, as far back as the year 1830 *the Brothers* — the Elder Brethren of humanity and those of still loftier spiritual attainment all merged in the Divine Hierarchy and constituting the sublime organization that we have drifted into speaking of as *The White Lodge* — held their momentous conference. They provided for the establishment of Spiritualism, and for the later experiment that eventually took the shape of the Theosophical Society.

The difficulties attending the task go far to explain what seems at the first glance as we look back the tedious roundabout methods employed. Agents had to be found on the physical plane, and the qualifications needed were not easily found in combination. The first person wanted had to serve as a link between the White Lodge and the world at large, one able to speak of the Brothers from personal knowledge and [Page 20] yet attached to the ordinary world. He or she had to be endowed with the superior senses which would enable him or her to remain in conscious touch with the Brothers even while living out in the ordinary world, and beyond this to be trustworthy as regards the one supreme attribute of loyalty to the Master he or she might specially belong to. Other attributes were extremely desirable, but the three just enumerated were essential. And protracted search all over the world failed to provide a better *link* than — Madame Blavatsky!

As deplorable results ensued later on from many characteristics she displayed, innumerable intelligent members of the Society, as it grew, asked with indignation — why did the Masters select such an ill qualified Agent ? The answer simply is: — They could not find a better ! As the story proceeds it will be seen that the embarrassment they had to face through Madame Blavatsky's indiscretions — to use a mild term — would often have been ludicrous if they had not also been so grievous in their consequences. But Masters of the White Lodge are patient and persevering. The Society lived through the dangerous ailments of the cradle, period, has hardly yet as I write in 1918 escaped completely from the diseases of childhood, but has long since developed a constitution that robs them of danger to life, and enables the Society to defy the machinations of invisible foes. But I must now look back at our early troubles, as they were entangled with the important chapter in the Society's history which begins with the year 1879.[Page 21]

CHAPTER - 2 -

EARLY in the year 1879 Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott arrived in Bombay. At that time I was, and had been for about eight years, Editor of the *Pioneer*, the leading Anglo-Indian daily newspaper. Friends in London had told me about Madame Blavatsky's book *Isis Unveiled*, how it opened up new vistas of thought beyond those suggested by spiritualism, of which my wife and I had seen a good deal before coming out to India. It seemed to revive old beliefs concerning Magic, long regarded in the western world as mere superstition. At all events the authoress of that book was a remarkable person, sufficiently so for public notice, and I wrote a note in the *Pioneer* apropos to her arrival in India suggesting that she might be in search of new varieties of mediumship among the people of that country. This prompted Colonel Olcott to write to me, though at the time, little foreseeing all that was destined to grow out of the correspondence, I did not keep the letter in question. The Editor of a daily paper is naturally deluged with correspondence and cannot always tell what is worth preservation.

But intuition, as I see now, came to the rescue, intuition not on my own part, but on that of my wife. I well remember how one evening during our *hawa-khana* (the Hindustani phrase, *eating the air* — *i.e.*, driving in the cool (?) of the evening) we talked of the new comers, as probably connected with the subject of spiritualism in which we had been interested before leaving England. Then my wife suggested as [Page 22] a daring experiment that we should invite them to stay with us when they came up country, as no doubt they would do later on. We both laughed over the notion, feeling that there was an element of risk in the adventure as the guests we proposed for ourselves were perfect strangers, but decided to run the risk. So I duly sent the invitation, and (in view of the influences that were playing upon us at that time) of course it was eagerly accepted. Long afterwards Madame Blavatsky told me how emphatic her *Master* had been in desiring that this should be done.

I feel impelled as I write now (1918) — ten years after my wife passed on from this plane of existence, to a condition of great exaltation in the White Lodge — an expression which includes many below the *Master* rank, as well as many more high above it — to give my readers something like a fair comprehension of the part she played in our joint work. Throughout this, of course, external activities, writing and lecturing, fell to my share, but I cannot exaggerate the extent to which her steadfast loyalty to the task we had in hand contributed to whatever success we achieved. Without possessing psychic faculties, in the ordinary sense of the term, her intuitions were always to be trusted, and her practical influence as hostess while our house in London, after our final return from India, was the center of theosophical expansion in this country, had an all-important effect in attracting sympathy. Amongst those who became our intimate friends her influence was keenly appreciated, and looking back on the exciting years beginning in 1883, and ultimately rendered trying by Madame Blavatsky's presence in London, I realize how I myself was more than *helped* to persevere with our work by her unvarying constancy to the lofty purpose. It will be impossible to [Page 23] reiterate this idea at every step in the narrative I have to carry on, but throughout it the spiritual energy behind my public activities was due in very great measure to the stimulating companionship it was my good fortune to enjoy. We had some terrible trials to bear in the progress of time. The faintest comprehension of the way in which the great powers of Evil were in arms from the beginning against all persons prominent in the theosophical movement, will suggest the simple truth that very heavy attacks were leveled against ourselves. During the worst sufferings they occasioned my wife's constancy never faltered, and though she is now on levels of existence from which all such troubles may be regarded with composure, or a smile, they were ordeals in the severest sense of the term at the time. Through these she has passed now as I say to very beautiful destinies. Of them I

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know a good deal both from herself and from others, for I am in touch with that higher world to which she belongs, but to go into further detail would at all events be premature for the moment. Apropos to the first instance in which her intuition prompted us to do the right thing in reference to Madame Blavatsky, I have gone far ahead of the actual stage I have reached in my story; but as it proceeds the reader will all the better be able to appreciate the extent to which my wife participated in all our joint doings during the early days of the Theosophical movement.

The plans Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky had already made provided for a long tour in the south of India and Ceylon, and it was not till nearly the end of the year, that she and Colonel Olcott actually came to us at Allahabad.

I vividly remember the circumstances around their arrival. They came by a train reaching Allahabad at a very early hour in the morning. I went to the station [Page 24] to meet them and brought them back. It was still so early that our *Chota hazri* or first breakfast was set out in the verandah though my wife had not yet emerged from her room. Madame Blavatsky sat down with me at the table and asked me if we had been trying any experiments in spiritualism. I told her that we had done so sometimes but without any results, "not even so much as a rap", ---- "Oh", she said, "raps are the easiest things to get", and thereupon put her hand upon the table. At once raps of the genuine spiritualistic order were heard all about it. My wife almost immediately appeared and received the visitors cordially. Our first impression of Madame Blavatsky was certainly pleasant and I find in my wife's Diary for that day — the 4th of December, 1879 — the following entry concerning Madame Blavatsky. "A most original old lady who promises great amusement". But though the day passed pleasantly and nothing occurred to disturb first impressions, we did get something like a shock a day or two later. We were sitting round the fire in the evening — for about Christmas time at Allahabad one makes a practice of wanting a fire to look at — and Colonel Olcott had been talking of some among Madame Blavatsky's *jadoo* or magic performances in New York. It came to be suggested that she should create something for us then and there, and I proposed a cigar holder as the object to be produced. Madame Blavatsky went through some preliminaries, rubbing Colonel Olcott's meerschaum pipe in her hands, and then — simply put her hand into her pocket and produced a cigar holder. The performance as an exhibition of magic was so absurd, so grotesquely destitute of any evidential value, that it was difficult to know what to say. I don't remember how we got through the rest of the evening, but I do remember how, when my wife and I were at last alone [Page 25] together, we *looked* at one another! No words were needed. Were we really in the hands of a clumsy impostor? That was the wonder in both our minds as we began to talk. Of course there were the raps, which Madame Blavatsky had produced for us in all sorts of ways; they were certainly evidences of something more than even mere mediumship. They were obviously under her control in a way that is never the case with mediumship, so we resolved to be patient and not jump to any premature conclusions.

As time went on the disagreeable impression faded away and we became cordially attached to *the old Lady* as we called her, that name in turn becoming abbreviated till she was generally known in our intimate circle as *the O.L.* The visit originally designed for a few days' duration was expanded into one lasting about four weeks. The O.L. was a bright talker at small dinner parties at our house and elsewhere; and we gradually heard from her a good deal about *the Brothers* and the Theosophical Society which at last she induced us to join, rather reluctantly at the time, as a great deal connected with its organization jarred upon our own taste, but we were led to believe in the Brothers and their interest in the Society in spite of the fact that the O.L.'s behavior offended good taste in many ways, especially in her treatment of Colonel Olcott, to whom she dealt out very rough language from time to time and

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tyrannized over to an exasperating degree. "Do you think" — I remember he once said to me those words or to that effect — "that I would stand going about with that mad Frenchwoman, if I did not *know* what lies behind her". On one occasion he lectured at a public hall on some aspect of Theosophy, with Mr. A. O. Hume in the chair, and not being favourably impressed by his address the O.L. abused him violently in the course [Page 26] of our drive home. In a book I wrote long afterwards *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky* — I refer to this occasion, saying: — "To hear her talk on this subject at intervals during the evening one might have thought the aspirations of her life compromised". [op.cit. Second Edition, page 178] There was another bad outbreak on the evening she and Colonel Olcott left us — the 30th of December. She had forgotten a shawl and threw the blame on the long suffering Colonel, but I need not go here into further detail of that kind. I myself as we grew intimate found it difficult to bear with her tempers, and I see allusions to this in my wife's Diary — a most valuable record, as it has turned out to be, of the events associated with the growth of our relations with the Society.

In spite of somewhat mixed feelings concerning them we invited our guests to pay us another visit at Simla, where by this time it had become possible for us to spend the hot weather months. They arrived there on the 8th of September, 1880. At this time a good many branches of the Society had been established by Colonel Olcott, but no one had as yet any glimmering notion even of the ultimate destinies awaiting it, or of the purpose it was designed by the Masters to fulfil. This is shown — as indeed in other ways also — by a letter Colonel Olcott wrote while with us at Simla to the Foreign Secretary asking to be relieved from all suspicion of political intrigue. The letter is quoted in his *Diary Leaves* and in it he describes the Society as organised "for the defined purpose of studying the religions, philosophies and sciences of ancient Asia". [Old Diary Leaves, vol ii, p 229]

The events attending the presence of Madame Blavatsky at Simla at the period above-mentioned are [Page 27] described for the most part in my book *The Occult World*, and it will not be necessary to go over the same story again. The manifestations of occult power then freely given had a profound effect on my own mind. I felt that those who exhibited such marvelous power over natural forces unfamiliar to physical science must possess knowledge to correspond. In regard to the management of the Society, Madame Blavatsky showed curious inaptitude for the work, and this led me on one occasion to say that I wished I could get into communication with one of the *Brothers* she talked about. I felt sure they would be more reasonable people to deal with than herself. Conversation showed that she thought this might not be impossible, and I wrote a letter addressed to *A Brother* and gave it to Madame Blavatsky for transmission. In due course I received a reply, and this was the first of a long series of letters from the Masters K. H. and M. which led to the preparation of *The Occult World* and afterwards to *Esoteric Buddhism*.

I may as well at once explain, what I only came to realise myself in the progress of later years, the true character of this correspondence. The letters were not, in the beginning what I imagined them to be — letters actually written by the Master and then forwarded by occult means either to Madame Blavatsky or deposited somewhere about the house where I should find them. They were certainly inspired by K. H. (all in the beginning bore his signature) but for the most part, if not always, were dictations to a competent clairaudient amanuensis and Madame Blavatsky was generally the amanuensis in question. They contained passages of great charm and literary beauty, and making careful selections, I gave some of these in *The Occult World*. But from the first [Page 28] Madame Blavatsky seems to have been possessed with the belief that she could improve on and expand the Masters' communications. This did not matter so much in the beginning, but later on when the letters were devoted to the conveyance of

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teaching in occult science, and became the material I worked with in writing *Esoteric Buddhism* Madame Blavatsky's expansions, additions and "*improvements*" (?) were almost disastrous. Long after she passed away from this life, as my methods of communication with the Masters assumed new and Improved conditions, I have discussed this matter with the Master K. H. and in reference to some passages in the letters of the teaching period he has frankly told me that as they stand, they are a *travesty* of his meaning.

None the less they contained masses of information concerning the natural truths that have since become the fundamental ideas underlying Theosophy which were previously as unknown to Madame Blavatsky as to myself. Reincarnation, Karma, the planetary chains, the succession of the root races, then sub-races and so on, were not tampered with. Madame Blavatsky did not know enough about them at that time to make it possible for her to import confusion into information on those subjects which passed through her hands. But unhappily she had contracted — under conditions I will not attempt to elucidate — a bitter detestation of spiritualism, and sometimes when the letters touched on after-death conditions she wove this feeling into them. The result was dreadfully misleading, and the consequences very deplorable, as this narrative will show later on.

Reverting now to the course of events at the Simla period in 1880, I must explain that Mr. A. O. Hume, the head of one Department of the Government of India, took a deep interest in the wonderful phenomena [Page 29] then in progress through the agency of — or by personal power of — Madame Blavatsky. I showed him the letters I received from the Master K. H., and he in turn wrote to the Master himself and received replies. We worked at this time, and later on again in close co-operation. *The Occult World* will show this more in detail.

In December Madame Blavatsky paid us another visit at Allahabad and in March, 1881, my wife and I went for a second holiday trip to England. I wrote *The Occult World* at sea during the voyage home and it was published soon after our arrival.

Now for the first time I made the acquaintance of Mr. C. C. Massey and Mr. Hood, the leading members of the embryonic Theosophical Society in London where a lively and cordial recollection of Madame Blavatsky's visit was entertained, but where as yet no progress had been made towards even comprehending the ultimate purpose of the Theosophical movement. The experiences recorded in *The Occult World*, however, gave a great stimulus to the infant Society. The meetings in Great Russell Street were tinged with a new interest. Eager expectation prevailed. Nobody knew what to expect, but everybody expected something. Amongst other uncertainties was one which gave rise to some ludicrous incidents occasionally. Were we, or were we not to be a secret society? Colonel Olcott, inclining to be attached to form and ceremony, had invented a ceremony of *initiation* into the Society, that newly joining members were called upon to go through. They were taught a form of words to be used in addressing a stranger, if one desired to ascertain whether he was a member of the Society or not. These had to be answered, if he were a member, by other forms of words and there was a rather clumsy hand grip to be learned. I never liked all [Page 30] this affectation of mystery when we really had nothing to conceal, and contrived a little later on to sweep it all away, but it was still in operation at the period I am dealing with. And I remember how at one of the meetings one of the original members more or less in charge of the arrangements came to me and told me there was a strange lady outside who said she was a theosophist and wanted to come in, but *did not know the signs!* Was she to be admitted? I said yes, and the lady then admitted was no other than Mrs. Gebhard whom I then saw for the first time. She had actually come

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over from Germany for the express purpose of getting into touch with the new movement in London (and with ourselves) and played a very important part in the movement later on. If it had not been that I was already rather contemptuous about the initiation signs she would have been denied admission to our little meeting and might — had she been of a different temper — have been disgusted with the whole undertaking, instead of becoming, as she soon did, one of its most useful allies.

From time to time in later years there has been here and there some recrudescence of a desire to decorate theosophical membership with secret signs and passwords of the Freemasonic order. The love of secrecy for its own sake is a curious human attribute not infrequently encountered, but is rather undignified really when there is nothing to conceal. For those in a position to advance along the Path, in full physical consciousness and to acquire real occult knowledge and power, secrecy of the most inviolable order is a matter of course, but membership in the Theosophical Society does not involve that kind of knowledge. It gives us knowledge of priceless importance; the knowledge that the higher kind of knowledge is obtainable, but we need not go on to enact a falsehood, [Page 31] the pretense that we have already in our possession mysteries that must be shielded from profane eyes.

The absurdity of such pretence is emphasised when we realise that the whole purpose of the Theosophical movement as designed by the White Lodge is to offer the world for public consumption information concerning the laws governing spiritual progress that show how its acceleration may be accomplished. I have sometimes ventured to assert that the real purpose of the Theosophical Movement is to recruit the White Lodge! Not for the sake of the White Lodge but for the sake of the recruits! And when we deal with more familiar formulas, it will be seen on close inspection that they are really imbedded in the simpler one I have suggested. So the notion of putting up fences round the Society to keep off intruders is ridiculous in a way analogous to a contradiction in terms.

That does not mean that every theosophical meeting should be open to all comers. In any lodge where the members are genuine students, they will gradually become familiar with volumes of information concerning unseen worlds to which outsiders even of advanced commonplace culture are total strangers. Meetings of such lodges, where advanced studies are going on, are manifestly suited to *members only* but that does not mean that they are handling mysteries from acquaintance with which non-members must be excluded.

Real initiations are so solemn and serious that they are merely caricatured by such sham solemnities as were at one time adopted as initiations into the Theosophical Society and will never again, I hope, be operative to jar the good taste of those who may be drawn towards it by appreciation of the light it throws on the approach to higher wisdom. [Page 32]

CHAPTER - 3 -

DURING our visit to London in 1881, a little incident occurred which has a retrospective interest. We had become intimate in India with Sir Lewis Pelly, engaged in some important diplomatic work during Lord Lytton's Vice-royalty, and he was already settled at home in England in 1881, at 1, Eaton Square. There, Lady Pelly on one occasion said that she would like me to give a drawing room lecture on the new occult experiences I had been having. At first the idea rather startled me, as I had never at that time been in the habit of addressing audiences by word of mouth, however familiar with the use of the pen. But I duly gave the lecture before a picked and influential gathering of Sir Lewis' and Lady Pelly's friends. I have no record of what I said and my knowledge at that time was in such a crudely elementary stage that I suspect I must have talked a good deal of what I should now think to be nonsense, however, there were none present qualified to criticise my utterances which were at all events earnest and sincere. I well remember Mr. H. R. Haweis, the very broad church clergyman, sitting in the front row and listening attentively. At a much later date after the publication of *Esoteric Buddhism* I lectured more than once at his own house in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, but the lecture at Sir Lewis Pelly's has some historical interest as the very first utterance of the kind, addressed to a general audience in England. I wish I could focus it on the exact date, but for once my wife's Diary does not help me. The Diary has been exceedingly useful to me in the preparation [Page 33] of the current narrative. It was begun shortly after our marriage in 1870, and steadily continued right up to my wife's final illness in 1908. It is not a record of thoughts and feelings, but a plain record of events — of our doings and experiences throughout all those years. But during our visit to England in 1881 my wife was ill a part of the time, and staying at a residential hotel in Norwood. The Diary records her own doings there, but at the time I myself was staying at rooms in London, at Down Street, so my personal doings, except for my constant visits to Norwood, do not get recorded.

One circumstance, I remember, connected with the Pelly lecture had to do with one of my audience, then a young man with a very serious inclination towards mysticism who actually went out to India shortly afterwards in pursuit of further knowledge. His father, Sir Lewis told me, said to him on one occasion: "Do you know you have lost me a son !" alluding to the lecture, as he supposed the determining factor in his son's course of action. That was not really the case, for the son in question was a friend of the little group then the nucleus of the British Theosophical Society, and in touch with their early activities. The *Occult World* as I have already said had given a great stimulus to these activities, but it was after my return to India in June, 1881, that I began to receive letters from the Master containing specific teaching concerning human evolution, the origin and destiny of the human race which eventually, a year or two later, furnished the information which enabled me to write *Esoteric Buddhism*.

Conditions of health had rendered it necessary for my wife to remain in England longer than it was possible for me to do so, and I stayed for a time, during the remaining hot months, at Mr. Hume's house in [Page 34] Simla, during part of which time Madame Blavatsky was a fellow guest. This was a very stormy period, associated, it is true, with some phenomenal occurrences of interest but chiefly with the development of profound discontent on Mr. Hume's part — a discontent which I shared — with Madame Blavatsky as a collaborator in the work we now felt ourselves to be concerned with, the disclosure for the benefit of the world at large, of the knowledge (or some part of it) previously in the exclusive possession of the White Lodge. The situation was curiously embarrassing. Madame Blavatsky in spite of all her shortcomings was our only channel of communication with the occult world. At first, crediting her with more knowledge than she actually possessed we endeavoured to extract specific teaching from her. We

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appointed times each day for these efforts and I still have the M.S. book in which I recorded the results, of a very unsatisfactory character. Some extracts from the volume will show the way we struggled with our difficulties. My notes as they stand are put in the form of question and answer, the questions being rather the outcome of previous conversation than deliberately formulated by ourselves. For example we ask :—

"What are the different kinds of knowledge ? The answer is: — Dgyu, and the unreal — Dgyu-mi."

Much time was spent — or wasted — on endeavours to pronounce these words in a satisfactory manner. Inquiring further we were told: — "Real knowledge deals with eternal verities and primal causes. The unreal only with illusory effects".

The Lhas or Adepts, we were told, alone possess the real knowledge — "The Khas has made the perfect junction of his soul with the universal mind . . . The profane cannot become a Dang-ma (purified soul) [Page 35] for he lacks means of perceiving Chhag, genesis or the beginning of things".

A little further on: — "Everything in the occult universe, which embraces all the primal causes, is based upon the principles — Kosmic energy (Fohat, or breath of wisdom, and Kosmic idealism Thyam-kam (the knowledge of bringing about) giving the impulse to Kosmic energy in the right direction".

At every step we get new words, some I believe of Sanscrit origin, some Tibetan, and our attempts to attach definite meaning to them were not very successful. The word *purush* is introduced. We ask "Are we to understand purush as another name for space, or as a different thing occupying every part of space?" Answer: — "Swayambu occupies every part of space ? which itself is boundless and eternal. Swayambu becomes purush when coming in contact with matter".

All this was very unsatisfactory and did not help us towards investing theosophy with claims to the attention of the cultured Europeans. Some letters which came through from the Master helped us much better; but meanwhile friction between Mr. Hume and Madame Blavatsky became more and more serious. Looking back to private conversations I had with Mr. Hume at this period it seems to me that he was deeply in earnest and genuinely desirous of devoting himself to the great work of illuminating the outer world with the splendid vision our opportunities, imperfect as they were, had enabled us to form of the occult world and its concern with human progress. But no two natures could have been more entirely out of tune with another than his and Madame Blavatsky's. Without losing patience with her to the same extent, I felt with him that she was an impossible person to work with in double harness in the western world. We had heard [Page 36] by this time of a super-master over the Master K. H. whom we knew of as *the Old Chohan*. We determined to try the experiment of addressing a letter to him declaring that if we were to do any good in connection with the spread of theosophy we must be somehow enabled to work quite independently of Madame Blavatsky. Looking back from my present point of view, I know that this was an absurd course to take, but it brought matters to a crisis. Ridiculous as the situation was the only way of sending the letter was, to give it to the person of whom it complained — Madame Blavatsky. I remember going in search of her; finding her at the piano in the ball room of Mr. Hume's house, giving her the letter which she put in her pocket without even looking at it. I went away to the room in which I did my work and in a very few minutes Madame Blavatsky burst in. She was pale to whiteness with

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excitement. "What had I been doing?" she almost screamed. I said the matter could not be talked over by us alone. I must fetch Mr. Hume. He came and a terrible scene ensued. He was scrupulously polite, but freezingly cold. Madame Blavatsky in one of her most flaming tempers.

This incident was one of the many crises or turning points in the early history of — I will not say the Theosophical Society, for at that time nothing worth calling by that name had yet come into existence — but of the early work undertaken with the view of building a Theosophical Society on the ill designed foundation laid down some years previously. What would have happened had the breach with Mr. Hume been averted? He was certainly an important force in any undertaking he was concerned with. Madame Blavatsky used to maintain that he was of too domineering nature to work under even the Master's guidance. I think she was mistaken, and anyhow the mere fact [Page 37] that he was led to separate himself from the theosophical movement was no proof that he was eliminated by the Master's intention. Their plans continually go wrong, through the fallibility of the human agents they have to work with, and probably no one connected with their work has disconcerted more plans than has been done by Madame Blavatsky herself.

Before the final crisis just described a good many letters had been received from the Master K. H., some addressed to myself, some to Mr. Hume, and I had begun to get information leading up to the accumulation which ultimately enabled me to write *Esoteric Buddhism*. Some of this teaching was published in the *Theosophist* under the heading *Fragments of Occult Truth*. Most of these were contributed by myself on the basis of the information obtained at the period I have been describing and a little later on. When Mr. Hume detached himself from Madame Blavatsky my own intimacy with him faded gradually away, but my correspondence with the Masters grew more and more important and the Master Morya wrote to me at length during a period when the Master K. H. was preoccupied in other ways.

My wife got back to India in the beginning of January, 1882. In March that year Madame Blavatsky was with us for a few days at Allahabad, but not during the later months at Simla. She was again with us at Allahabad in November, and during that visit I obtained a profile sketch of the Master K. H. under perfect conditions guaranteeing its occult origin. I had been expressing a wish for a portrait of him: had been directed to leave a piece of blank paper about the drawing room: had done so, putting it in a large book on the table and had looked at it frequently for some days without finding it changed. One morning on going in to our midday breakfast in the dining room, [Page 38] from which the drawing room en suite with it was plainly visible, my wife looked at the paper and it was still blank. During breakfast Madame Blavatsky then with us, became aware that an astral visitor was in the drawing room and directly we had finished breakfast we went to look at the paper, and it bore the portrait still in my possession and with which scores of theosophical friends in later years have become familiar.

Another important incident of the period, on the physical plane entirely, was an intimation from Mr. Rattigan who (by purchase from Mr. Allen) had become the principal proprietor of the *Pioneer*, that he no longer needed my services as Editor. He had been from the first intensely unsympathetic with my interest in the occult development, but as this is not a personal biography — even though the early history of the Society is linked so closely with my wife and myself, so that some personal explanations have been necessary — I need only say a few more words on the subject, but for my connection with Theosophy it would have been unlikely that my connection with the *Pioneer* would have been disturbed at this period. There was some friction between myself and the new proprietors, but my success as writer had become fairly conspicuous and the friction such as it was would not have been enough to break the tie. But again

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both my wife and I had grown tired of the Indian life and wished to be back in England. It seemed just possible that the savings of our time in India, plus journalistic work at home, would enable us to live there in moderate comfort, so that we contemplated my resignation of the *Pioneer* editorship as a step we might be inclined to take. The parting therefore was neither strained nor unfriendly, and for many years after my return to [Page 39] England I continued to write articles of various kinds for the paper in India.

We left Allahabad finally in February, 1883, and on our way home stayed for a few days with Madame Blavatsky at Adyar. Colonel Olcott in his *Diary Leaves* describes how he came into possession of the building at that place which has ever since been the headquarters of the Theosophical Society, already well established in India, though so far merely an embryo in the Western world. The purchase was effected on very easy terms, equivalent to about £600 of English money. This was partly provided for as a gift by a wealthy Indian friend, the rest by a loan guaranteed by the same friend and another and paid off within a year by the proceeds of a subscription. When we arrived in March we found the *Old Lady* very comfortably established there, and with her usual emphatic language she assured us that she meant to stay there for the rest of her life. Europeans, she declared, would never understand Theosophy. Her work lay in India.

I had already begun to write *Esoteric Buddhism* and went on with the work during our stay at Adyar. And though no longer especially in search of occult phenomena some were brought about by circumstances, the most striking in a way I will describe. I was writing in a room available for that purpose, and as I went on I made notes of questions for the Master. My wife one morning came in; I asked her to take up the paper of notes then ready and give them to the *O.L.* for transmission. She did so and told me afterwards what happened. The *O.L.* was at her writing table. On the opposite wall of the room a small cupboard two or three feet long each way, the gift of an Indian admirer, was hanging up. It was an ornamental little bit of furniture. Madame Blavatsky [Page 40] had already made use of it to hold some relics of her stay with the Masters in Tibet and she or others about the house had got into the habit of calling it *The Shrine*.

When my wife offered Madame Blavatsky my paper of notes she simply said — without getting up — "Put it in the Shrine". This my wife did, and sat down on a sofa near Madame Blavatsky's table and went on talking with her, for five or ten minutes. Then Madame Blavatsky said, "I think he has sent you the answer." My wife went over to the Shrine; opened it and found lying on my paper of notes, — the Master's answer. The little incident was not surprising to us at the time. We had by then had large experience of similar phenomena, but much later on *The Shrine* was accused — so to speak — of being a conjuring device used by Madame Blavatsky for the purpose of trickery, so the experience just described, one of many others of a similar kind, will help to dissipate that delusion. [Page 41]

CHAPTER - 4 -

MY wife and I arrived in London in April, 1883, and events began to move rapidly in connection with the young Theosophical Society. I had for some time been in correspondence with Mr. Massey and had sent him the *Fragments* as they appeared and the new outburst of teaching and information was not alone interesting to him, but also to the group of his friends then concerned with the establishment of the Society for Psychical Research. I was at once made acquainted with this group, namely with Mr. Frederic Myers, Mr. Gurney and Professor Sidgewick and was received by them and others with great cordiality. By this time Dr. Anna Kingsford and Mr. E. Maitland had joined the Theosophical Society, and at a meeting held on January 7th, 1883, Mrs. Kingsford was elected President and fresh names were added to the list of members at every meeting.

Miss Francesca Arundale now plays a conspicuous part in the work. She and her mother were residing at 77, Elgin Crescent, Notting Hill, and while my wife and I were still unsettled that house became the scene of continual informal meetings of the most eager members of the young society. Wherever we went, rapidly making new acquaintances in London, interested inquirers gathered round us. By this time the Society had a Council and its meetings are recorded in the minute book. On the 6th of May I appear to have been present at such a meeting, and I presided apparently at a subsequent meeting of the [Page 42] *Fellows* on the same day, giving an address on the origin and prospects of the Society.

Hitherto the custom had been at all meetings for the members present to sign the minute book, but as numbers increase this custom is apparently found too inconvenient and is dropped.

An important meeting was held on the 3rd of June at Mr. Massey's rooms, 1 Albert Mansions, Victoria Street, when among many others Mr. Frederic Myers is duly elected a member. By Mrs. Kingsford's wish it was decided " that this branch of the Society be in future called the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society, and that the secretary be requested to write to the President, Colonel Olcott, intimating this decision and suggesting it as a precedent for the adoption of other branches."

On or about the 11th of June *Esoteric Buddhism* was published and at once became the subject of study at the meetings of the Society.

Introduced by Mr. Myers I was a frequent visitor at Mrs. Tennant's (Richmond Terrace, Whitehall) from which centre interest in the Theosophical development radiated into London society at large to a very remarkable extent.

Mr. Sam Ward — known by his intimate friends, who were very numerous, as *Uncle Sam* — had joined the Society and was a zealous worker in the cause besides being a very kind friend to ourselves.

In August we went abroad for a long continental tour and in the course of it made the acquaintance of the Gebhard family at Elberfeld. They played so important a part in later events that I must explain this development more fully. Mrs. Gebhard — English by birth though married to a German — had long been

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deeply interested in occultism. She had made the acquaintance of Eliphas Levi, whom long before [Page 43] she knew us, she had entertained at Elberfeld. She came over to London on hearing of our arrival in 1883 to make our acquaintance and joined the Society. She urgently invited us to visit her at Elberfeld but we were disinclined to do this not knowing the other members of her large family. But as in any case we were passing through Cologne in the course of the tour I have just referred to we consented to diverge from our route and pay a visit to Elberfeld under conditions which would easily enable us to cut it very short if we so desired. As matters turned out we enjoyed the visit exceedingly, found Mr. Gebhard and his grown up sons courteous and agreeable, soon interested in our theosophical talk, and although before we went there — as we learned afterwards — Mrs. Gebhard's interest in occultism was the subject of good humoured chaff by her husband and sons, under our influence the whole family eventually became ardent Theosophists, and our experimental visit, besides being a good deal protracted, was the forerunner of many others in later years, of some associated with Madame Blavatsky's appearance in Europe I shall have to speak later.

Early in October we returned to London, and soon afterwards trouble began to affect the Society. At a meeting held on the 21st Mr. Maitland read an address from the President, Mrs. Kingsford unable for some reason to be present herself, and the tone of it gave deep offence to most of those who were present. It seems to have been partly an attack on my book *Esoteric Buddhism* and generally an unfavourable review of the Eastern teaching. An animated discussion ensued and finally a resolution "that the meeting hears with regret the terms in which the President refers to the Brothers in her opening address" was carried by 15 to 4. Mrs. Kingsford [Page 44] seems to have sent a more or less apologetic message in reply. This was read at a meeting held on the 4th of November, and the trouble blew over for the time.

On the 15th of December, I see, "the Rev. Charles Webster Leadbeater" was proposed by myself and elected a member amongst others. He had already made our acquaintance, having called on me at the house where we were then staying in Royal Crescent, Notting Hill, before having taken 7, Ladbroke Gardens, whither we moved shortly afterwards. He had read *Esoteric Buddhism* and had at once become inflamed with a desire to become a regular *chela*. Both my wife and I were agreeably impressed by him and he became our frequent guest.

About this time (or sooner; I cannot fix the exact date) I received news from India — to my dismay — that Madame Blavatsky having changed her mind in regard to her intention declared to us when we saw her at Adyar, of staying there for the rest of her life, was coming to England, accompanied by Colonel Olcott. I felt that such an arrangement would be disastrous, though I failed to foresee the exact character of the disaster which ultimately ensued. I knew that the Theosophical movement had now taken root in London on a social level that would be quite out of tune with the personalities of the two *founders*, especially with that of Colonel Olcott. Madame Blavatsky's manners were very rough, but everyone of quick perception would see that her roughness was deliberately assumed — that she was not ignorant of refined ways and customs, even while aggressively flouting them. Moreover she had tact in emergencies and was conscious of influences that would guard her from giving needless offence to English people of the kind now becoming interested in theosophy. Still even so far as she was concerned [Page 45] her coming would be a serious danger. Our experience in introducing her to Anglo-Indian friends had not been encouraging. One had to know her very thoroughly to be able to ignore characteristics that were repellent rather than attractive. Even as regards her powers, which rendered her the object, in consequence of my description of them in *The Occult World* of excited interest among the most earnest members of the growing society,

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I knew how easily their exhibition by some clumsiness on her part, would provoke suspicion rather than trust. It was supremely desirable in the interests of the movement that she should remain away from England. For any persons whose ardour was sufficiently intense to take them to India on a pilgrimage to see her — well and good. By the hypothesis their zeal would stand the strain. But Madame Blavatsky in London amidst the flood of people mostly belonging to the upper strata of society; I knew that trouble must ensue.

As regarded Colonel Olcott anxieties of that order were intensified to a terrible extent. I myself had cause to respect Colonel Olcott's character very sincerely. I knew him to be irrevocably devoted to the cause which was ever assuming more and more commanding importance in my own sight — but — the superficial aspects of his personality were of a kind quite certain to set the teeth on edge with Englishmen of the type of those who were leading the Psychic Research movement, and already in the most intimate and cordial relations with ourselves — the importers of theosophy into this country—and with those who had already allied themselves with us as exponents of the new revelation.

I could only protest. I did so in the letter addressed to the Master K. H. (which of course had to pass through Madame Blavatsky's hands) and I got back [Page 46] an answer which later experience makes me now feel pretty sure was Madame's own composition. She was resolved to come — to take part in or enjoy what Colonel Olcott at the time described as *the boom* of theosophy in Europe.

On the 31st January, 1884, we moved into our new house, 7, Ladbrooke Gardens. For some time past our most interesting theosophical gatherings had taken place at Miss Arundale's in Elgin Crescent, where the most earnest members of the Society constituted a special group, though without any elaborate formalities — *Mabel Collins* (otherwise Mrs. Kenningale Cook) was one of us and very helpful at that time in our studies as she was intensely sensitive and under the direct influence — as I came to know later— of the Master Hilarion. On one occasion — arising out of conversations on Karma and the Path, she received from him a clairaudient dictation on those subjects. We were all so much impressed by this paper that we felt it was not one to be kept merely for our private edification, so we made arrangements to have it printed and it was published under the title originally given to the group paper by its unseen author — *Light on the Path*. Few probably of the multitudes who have come to reverence that little book very profoundly have any idea of the circumstances under which it was produced.

Light on the Path was not the only dictation emanating from the Master Hilarion. About this time, or rather some time previously, *Mabel Collins* had been living in chambers on the Adelphi Terrace overlooking the river and near where Cleopatra's Needle had then recently been set up. Her natural gift of clairvoyance enabled her to see the great stone surrounded frequently with Egyptian *Spirits*, as she would have called them then, and processions [Page 47] of them used sometimes to pass through her room. One in particular attracted her attention as she sat writing, for she was already a novelist and then engaged on some collection of short stories. Hardly aware of the change as she went on writing she found afterwards that she had begun an entirely new story. From time to time the inspiration was renewed and that is the way in which the book now familiar to Theosophical readers, *The Idyll of the White Lotus*, came into existence. Interesting circumstances attended its production. After it was half finished the inspiration suddenly stopped. Mrs. Cook could not recover it, and so eventually, in order that the work done might not be wasted, finished it out of her own head. But when the Theosophical movement was set on foot, and she became attached to the group meeting at Miss Arundale's, the inspiration was renewed and the story completed by the original author in his own way. Anyhow the Idyll as it was completed by the

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Master Hilarion — for it was he who managed the whole matter — is probably based upon some very remote experience of his own in an early Egyptian incarnation.

Settled now in Ladbroke Gardens, with a large drawing room, our house was soon frequented by our friends, and friends of our friends, who were becoming interested in the new development of thought and knowledge. We were at home, always, on Tuesday afternoons and my wife's Diary is filled every week with long lists of our Tuesday visitors. The movement in this way spread at first in what may in a broad sense be called the upper levels of society, and it appeared to me desirable that it should take root that way to begin with, its influence being left to filter downwards with social authority behind it, instead of beginning on lower levels and trusted to filter upwards [Page 48] if it could. Unhappily this programme was defeated by Madame Blavatsky's return to England, as the record of later events will show.

An important event in connection with the earlier progress of the work took place in advance of the period dealt with above when our house in Ladbroke Gardens had become the vortex of the whole movement. A *conversazione* in our honour was organised by the Society and was held at Prince's Hall in Piccadilly on the 17th of July, 1883. About 300 people were present. Mrs. Kingsford and I delivered addresses. The audience was cordial and sympathetic and the evening may fairly be described as having been brilliantly successful.

Dating from this demonstration, the next six or eight months may be regarded as the high water period in the early life of the Society in England. Troubles arose within it, but its relations with the outer world were untinged by these. Of course, playing the conspicuous part in its programme that fell to my share, I was the object of more or less good-humoured comment in the newspapers, and the *Saturday Review*, I remember, then in the zenith of its glory, had an article about me entitled *The Mahdi in Society* (the Mahdi in Egypt being at that time the *false Prophet* of the Soudan) — but all that *badinage* only kept the subject before the public mind, and failed entirely to check the growth of interest in Theosophy, among cultured people. And my own relations with the leaders of the Psychic Research Society, then in its promising infancy, were so cordial that the two movements seemed almost destined to coalesce. Mr. Myers — signing himself *An English F.T.S.* — drew up a series of questions arising out of the contents of *Esoteric Buddhism* and these were published in the *Theosophist* together [Page 49] with very long answers written I believe by Subba Rao — a distinguished Indian theosophist and *chela* of the Masters. He, I may parenthetically remark, had been instructed by his occult chief (or *Guru*) to give me help in the preparation of that book, and I made his acquaintance during our stay in Madras on our way home. But all the Indian occult students of that period were intensely jealous of western inquirers. They resented the idea that the arcane knowledge of the East should overflow into the western world. They were doubly wrong of course, first in supposing that occult wisdom was eastern in its origin. For that origin we have to go back to Atlantean times and further still; secondly in failing to realise that India was honoured and not hurt by becoming a channel, in a certain sense, of the new revelation. But anyhow the Indian chelas were jealous, and much trouble arose later on from this attitude on their part. Subba Rao shared the jealousy, and while pretending to act on the Master's instructions, did not really give me any help whatever. At a later period the Master K. H. in a letter to me, referred to the two *teachers* I had been in touch with at Madras — Subba Rao and Madame Blavatsky — "one of whom would not and the other could not" give me any help. Madame Blavatsky at that time would have been willing enough to help me, but wonderful as were her *powers* she possessed none of the detailed knowledge we now call theosophical teaching. She picked it up as the letters from the Masters addressed to me passed through her hands and was able to expand it a good deal in the light of her general occult knowledge.

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Coming back to Mr. Myers' sympathetic criticism of *Esoteric Buddhism* I must quote one or two passages as showing — what it seems important to [Page 50] establish at this stage of the narrative—that the leaders of the S.P.R. were not alone friendly with the new development, but really cordial. Mr. Myers begins: — "The object of the following paper is to submit certain questions which have occurred to some English readers of *Esoteric Buddhism*. We have had the great advantage of hearing Mr. Sinnett himself explain many points which perplexed us, and it is with his sanction that we now venture to ask that such light as permissible may be thrown upon some difficulties which, so far as we can discover, remain as yet unsolved."

The last paragraph of the paper in question is one that I feel embarrassed in quoting, but it is obviously important, in the interests of a true appreciation of the story I have to tell, that the mental attitude of the S.P.R. leaders at the time I have now reached should be rightly apprehended. Mr. Myers winds up his inquiries as follows: —

"We gratefully recognise the very acceptable choice which the Adepts have made in selecting Mr. Sinnett as the intermediary between us and them. They could hardly have chosen anyone more congenial to our Western minds, whether we consider the clearness of his written style, the urbanity of his verbal exposition or the earnest sincerity of his convictions."

Mr. Myers' paper and the elaborate answers of Subba Rao will be found by any readers who wish to consult them in a volume entitled *Five years of Theosophy*, consisting of various extracts from the monthly *Theosophist* published during that period. [Page 51]

CHAPTER - 5 -

THE troubles within the Society to which I referred above arose from the attitude adopted by Mrs. Kingsford. She had already published her very remarkable volume *The Perfect Way*. It was deeply tinged with occult truth and in co-operation with Mr. Maitland, Mrs. Kingsford had, I believe, organized a society called the Hermetic Society for the study of spiritual mysteries along the lines marked out by her own book. In joining the Theosophical Society shortly before our return from India, it seems to me — looking back at that time in the light of later events — that she aimed rather at absorbing it into the Hermetic Society than at following up the promise of further teaching to be derived from an Eastern source. However that may be she began in the early months of 1884 to make unfavorable comments on *Esoteric Buddhism*.

Already the Society had passed a resolution (on the 3rd of June, 1883), "That this Lodge for the present devotes itself chiefly to the study of occult philosophy as taught by the Adepts of India with whom Mr. Sinnett has been in communication". The minutes do not show, nor does my recollection show precisely what words or action on Mrs. Kingsford's part prompted this declaration, but at a meeting on the 21st of October Mr. Maitland read an address from Mrs. Kingsford, not present herself on that occasion, that began serious disturbances of the Society's previously perfect harmony. The minutes of the meeting do not include the address but merely state that Mr. Maitland read it, and go on as follows: —

"Mr. Sinnett protested against the language of the address, expressing regret and indignation at the terms in which she referred to the Brothers. He saw that it would be necessary for him to bring a resolution on the subject before the Society, but before doing so would wait to hear some expression of opinion on the subject from the members.

"Mr. Finch expressed great regret at the language of the address and in order that the discussion might assume a regular form moved that ' the meeting heard with regret the President's address.' "

A prolonged discussion ensued, Mr. Maitland urging delay, but Mr. Finch's resolution was in the end carried by 15 to 4.

Figures of this kind, I may remark in passing, afford no indication of the numerical strength of the Society at that time. New members in ever increasing number were elected at every meeting but comparatively few seem to have attended the meetings regularly, perhaps from an impression that they were generally concerned rather with the business of the Society than with the progress of our teaching, at that time indeed rather in a stagnant condition. Sometimes when some expectations lent special interest to a meeting the numbers present suddenly expanded, and at a meeting in April, 1884, to be described directly, the minute book records the presence of *about 80* members.

At a meeting of the Society on November 4th an attempt was made by Mr. Maitland (again in Mrs. Kingsford's absence) to calm down the feelings excited by her address. He read a letter from her "disclaiming any intention of unfriendliness or disparagement in regard to the Brothers". The patronizing tone adopted has a grotesquely absurd flavour from the point of view of current knowledge and shows

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how [Page 53] completely Mrs. Kingsford failed to understand the movement in which she was presuming to take a part. However at the time the actual plan of the *Brothers* in the Divine hierarchy was very imperfectly understood, and the trouble started by Mrs. Kingsford's address to the Lodge spread over various pamphlets issued afterwards. One by Mrs. Kingsford was entitled "A letter to the Fellows of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society, by the President and Vice-President of the Lodge". This is an elaborate, and highly unfavourable criticism (in 39 pages) of my book *Esoteric Buddhism*. It is not worth while at this later date to examine these criticisms in detail. They gave rise to much further pamphleteering at the time. I published one answer and the well-known Indian theosophist Mr. T. Subba Rao issued another dealing elaborately with Mrs. Kingsford's attack and she followed this up with another pamphlet, a "Reply to the observation of Mr. T. Subba Rao". Her attitude of mind may be sufficiently understood if I quote one short passage at the beginning of her first letter. She says: — "At the time when the appeal to accept office in the Society was made to me I was not one of the Fellows but an independent worker in and contributor to esoteric religious science. My labours in this direction, in regard especially to the production of *The Perfect Way*, had attracted the attention of the leaders of the Indian Theosophical movement, and it was moreover believed that my special qualifications as a student of physical science added to certain natural gifts of seership would prove helpful to the conduct and control of the British branch". We need not feel surprise that at the time she wrote Mrs. Kingsford honestly believed herself to be the real leader of the spiritual revelation beginning to flow [Page 54] into the world. Considering the beautiful fruits of her seership given out in the book to which she refers, and in other writings, our surprise relates rather to the comparative insignificance of the effect they had on public thought, than to the expectation she had of their ultimate results. If she had been able to comprehend Theosophy as the greater revelation following the forecast of which she had been the channel, she might have played a magnificently important part in its subsequent development. I am glad to say that the sore feelings engendered at the time I have been dealing with were smoothed over eventually, and we were quite good friends towards the close of her life, though she never realised the true character of the Theosophical movement. Deeply impressed, as was quite natural, with the interest of her own touch with higher wisdom, she could not see other developments in their true proportions. At the beginning of the illness which proved her last, I remember she said to me (or in words to that effect) "I cannot be going to die because my work is not yet finished". She failed to realise that the work in question is far greater than can be identified with any transient personality.

In the beginning of April, 1884, Colonel Olcott arrived in London, Madame Blavatsky remaining behind at Nice and Paris. Colonel Olcott was accompanied by a young Indian Theosophist, Mohini by name, who became for a time a very conspicuous person in theosophical activities. He was introduced to us as a chela of the Master K. H. and was made cordially welcome.

The 7th was the occasion of the important meeting of the Society referred to above. It was held at Mr. Finch's Chambers in Lincoln's Inn, and its purpose was the election of a new President. Mrs. Kingsford's attitude as already described had deeply [Page 55] offended most of the members. She seems to have failed to understand the feelings engendered and to have expected her re-election. Many of the members wished me to become President but I had taken an active part in the pamphlet controversy and shrank from allowing this to assume the shape of a personal rivalry between Mrs. Kingsford and myself in regard to the Presidency. So I had arranged to nominate Mr. Finch for the office.

The proceedings at the meeting are imperfectly recorded in the old minute book, but are fairly fresh in my memory. I duly proposed Mr. Finch and I think that Mr. Maitland went through the form of proposing Mrs.

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Kingsford. Anyhow, when the show of hands was taken (Colonel Olcott being in the chair) the vote was practically unanimous in favour of Mr. Finch. Indeed my impression is that Mr. Maitland was the only person present who voted for Mrs. Kingsford, who was present herself and showed no little irritation.

Mr. Finch, I should explain, was a barrister who had been senior wrangler in his time at Cambridge. He was a quiet, earnest student of the occult teaching we had so far received, and one of the group that used to assemble at Miss Arundale's. He it was, I remember, who first moved in the matter and arranged for the publication of *Light on the Path*. That little book went through many editions and was largely expanded with notes and comments by Mabel Collins herself. I suppose copies of the first edition still exist but it is many years since I have seen one.

The excitements of the meeting on the 7th were by no means confined to the circumstances of the election. After this was over I was in the midst of an address to the meeting when a disturbance at the door interrupted me and in a moment the whole room was [Page 56] aware that Madame Blavatsky had arrived. I broke off and went to meet her. A little crowd collected round her and one of the ladies present actually sank on her knees before the illustrious visitor, who was then conducted to the upper end of the room and formally introduced to the meeting.

The minutes relating to this meeting after recording Madame Blavatsky's arrival go on as follows :— She "intimated that if any members would communicate to her any inquiries they might like to make in regard to the meaning of obscure passages in *Isis Unveiled* such inquiries would receive attention and would be made the subject of explanations in the new version of that book which under the title *The Secret Doctrine* she proposed to bring out.

"Mr. Myers inquired whether documentary evidence could be obtained from India for the service of the Psychic Research Society in reference to cases in which the astral apparitions of the Mahatmas had been seen at various times and places.

" Madame Blavatsky called on Mr. Mohini to give some information on the subject and Mr. Mohini described the recent appearance of the astral figure of one of the Mahatmas at the Headquarters of the Society at Madras.

"Colonel Olcott expressed the heartiest sympathy with the labours of the Psychic Research Society."

After the meeting was over Madame Blavatsky returned with us to Ladbrooke Gardens, where she stayed with us for a week. Colonel Olcott and Mohini moving over to Miss Arundale's where they remained her guests for a time. At this time however Madame Blavatsky only stayed for the week and then — as I learn from my wife's Diary — returned to Paris. The week was a busy one, and visitors flocked to our house in greater numbers than ever. Amongst those constantly [Page 57] coming I ought specially to mention the Countess Wachtmeister and the two Keightleys, one of whom especially, Mr. Bertram Keightley continued for many years to play an important part in all theosophical activities. [Page 58]

CHAPTER - 6 -

SOME months passed without noteworthy incidents except that we made the acquaintance of an American lady who was for a time very conspicuous amongst us — Mrs. Holloway — a remarkable clairvoyant and pupil of the Master K. H. Her coming from America had been heralded by impressive stories concerning her psychic gifts and relationship with the Higher world and we found her an extremely attractive personality. She was a guest of Miss Arundale's in the first instance and in June came over to stay with us. Eventually she became, quite unintentionally, the cause of some temporary misunderstandings between Miss Arundale and ourselves, but that developed and passed away much later. At first while staying with us she was to some extent a link between ourselves and the Master K. H.. Madame Blavatsky returned to London (and to the Arundale's house) at the end of June and by degrees some troublesome friction ensued between her and ourselves, but in advance of this something much more than friction disturbed the course of theosophical work in this country, and completely changed the character of our relations with the Psychic Research Society.

The 30th of June was the day of the disaster and Colonel Olcott its unfortunate author. My wife's Diary for that date enables me to fix the date and does more than this for it shows by how narrow a chance she — my wife — was prevented from doing something which might, for the time at least, have averted the disaster. Colonel Olcott had become possessed of an [Page 59] absurd little Indian toy consisting of a figure of Buddha, and made of tin if I remember rightly, mounted on little wheels. By moving it about it was supposed to represent some idea connected with the Buddhist faith, but at best it was a very childish symbol. When the toy attained a ghastly celebrity it was referred to by Madame Blavatsky as Olcott's "Buddha on wheels." Evidently my wife intended to warn her about it that she might stop Olcott from showing it to people who would be alive to the bad taste of it. In her Diary, I read: — "I went in the afternoon to Arundale's to try and speak to the O.L., (short for Old Lady, the long familiar nick-name of Madame Blavatsky) about Colonel Olcott and his image of Buddha, but could not get a chance. Mr. Finch, Mother Mary and Dido (another nick-name). In the afternoon Mrs. H. (Mrs. Holloway) told my mother's fortune out of a tea cup". So my wife came away without giving the warning. Had she been able to do that the O.L. would have forbidden Olcott, whom she domineered over absolutely, to play any more with his toy, and the trouble I am about to describe would have been avoided, though probably only put off for a while. As I have said already neither Madame Blavatsky nor Olcott were in tune with people of the kind who were now taking interest in the theosophical movement. Colonel Olcott especially, was out of tune with them to a deplorable extent, and sooner or later this must have given rise to trouble. However, as events turned out we all went that evening to a meeting of the Psychic Research Society where in the course of the proceedings Colonel Olcott got up, uninvited, and made a speech in his worst style, exhibiting and making much of his grotesque "Buddha on wheels".

Of course he set everybody's teeth on edge. Madame Blavatsky with her quick psychic perceptions [Page 60] felt that something dreadful had happened. As a matter of fact the chill suffered by the Psychic Research leaders owing to Colonel Olcott's clumsiness on this occasion led up step by step to the famous Hodgson report which denounced Madame Blavatsky as an impostor. I must trace the course of events more fully as I go on, but the feeling which engendered among the S.P.R. leaders dislike, however unreasonably, for theosophy actually took root in the irritation they felt at Olcott's behaviour on the melancholy evening just described.

To say that Madame Blavatsky was furious, is to give a mere faint suggestion of her condition. Though

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neither she nor Colonel Olcott were staying with us at this time she insisted on coming back with us after the meeting with Olcott, of course to give free play to her wrath. We four went into the library. Madame Blavatsky was bleached white from the intensity of her feelings. In tones rising even higher as she went on she denounced her unhappy colleague in language so violent that I was really afraid it would penetrate the next house, and had to use strong language myself in the attempt to make her slacken off in her fury, with which none the less I could not but sympathise. I do not think Olcott ever understood the essence and nature of his offence. He moved about the room making futile remarks from time to time. "What do you want me to do? " he asked, "Do you want me to commit suicide? "

The biggest conflagrations die out eventually. At last our unhappy visitors went away.

Some deadly poisons, even, may be slow in taking effect. For a time after this sensation just dealt with events took their usual course. I gave lectures at various places, and we had large evening receptions at our own house with addresses from Mohini and [Page 61] others. Mr. Leadbeater was a frequent visitor at this time. He had made, our acquaintance long before and joined the Society in 1883. He was at that time in clerical costume, being a curate at some parish in Hampshire. I warned him that if he came amongst us he would be liable to hear discussions at which a clergyman might be startled, but he put that difficulty aside, and became at once a frequent visitor.

By a pathetic coincidence just about the time of Olcott's unfortunate performance at the S.P.R. meeting the Society was planning a new *conversazione* in honour of himself and Madame Blavatsky.

On the evening of the 6th July we had an interview with the Master K.H. through Mrs. Holloway. On this occasion he actually took possession of her and spoke to us in the first person. Previously she had merely a consciousness and repeated whatever he said. I well remember the conversation, through finding its date in the Diary. I think the idea was to console us and keep up our spirits in the difficulties then seen to be impending. And the situation became entangled by a new development of *fury*, according to the Diary, on the part of the O.L. Outbreaks of the kind became so frequent as time went on that my recollections of each are confused, but evidently she had become angrily jealous of the way in which Mrs. Holloway was becoming a link between ourselves and the Master independently of her. She insisted on Mrs. Holloway leaving us and coming back to the Arundales. And I was disinclined to take an active part in the coming *conversazione*, which gave rise to what pretended to be letters to me from the Master warning me in almost threatening terms (utterly unlike his usual attitude) not to fail in supporting Madame Blavatsky. I distrusted the *bona fides* of the letter at the time and soon became quite [Page 62] convinced that it was a fabrication by the O.L. She got her way for the time being however. Mrs. Holloway was frightened into obedience and returned to the Arundales. She had received a (spurious) letter apparently from K. H. ordering her to remain there, and declaring that we were deceived, that she was merely a medium and saw falsely.

As days went on the situation became worse instead of better. Letters passed to and fro between ourselves and the Arundales, now pretty completely under Madame Blavatsky's influence. The name and handwriting of the Master were taken in vain more than once and I find in my wife's Diary for the 16th that we felt "our theosophical career was approaching its end". Certainly at this period Madame Blavatsky very nearly wrecked it.

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The following morning Mrs. Holloway called on us and said "she meant to give up the whole business in disgust", but nevertheless allowed events to drift and the O.L. had succeeded for the time in dominating the situation. The *conversazione* duly took place on the 21st and the gathering was very large and socially brilliant. Much against my inclination I had been driven to take part in it, and am not surprised to read in my wife's Diary that "Percy did not speak up to his usual level". This celebration was the climax of Madame Blavatsky's success, the result of deplorable behaviour on her part at the time, but looking back upon it in these later years with the knowledge that her great catastrophe was rapidly approaching, one is chiefly impressed by the sadness of it all. Had she only been content to remain quietly at Adyar, satisfied to know that the great work she had played such an important part in starting was going on well, the plot which brought about her downfall would never have been set on foot. To the [Page 63] end she would have been crowned with the halo of her fame as a great occultist and magician and enthusiasts making pilgrimages to visit her in India would never have been disillusioned. But she came to Europe to bathe in a flood of adulation and the awful karma of that mistake has left her memory for the world at large stained with undeserved disgrace. New generations of theosophists it is true have arisen in the thirty years and more that have elapsed since her downfall, and by the vast majority of these her memory has been so entirely re-gilded that the investigation and conclusion of the Psychic Research Society respecting her, are simply forgotten or ignored, as in the main they deserve to be, but it now becomes my task in recording the actual facts connected with the early history of the Theosophical Society in this country, to trace the course of the S.P.R. proceedings, when the leaders of that society after Colonel Olcott's *faux pas* seem to have grown anxious to shake themselves free from theosophical associates liable to bring social discredit upon their undertaking. Already, while still friendly, the S.P.R. leaders had in May — a month before the meeting of June 20th — appointed a committee "to investigate the evidence of marvelous phenomena offered by certain members of the Theosophical Society". The sittings of this committee are not recorded in the published journal of the S.P.R. but were circulated privately. At first the Committee must have been learning a belief in the *bona fides* of the phenomena, as the witnesses examined were Colonel Olcott, myself, Mohini and one or two others, all deeply impressed with belief themselves. But before long the records reflect a changed feeling on the part of the Committee. In the review of its report published at a later date in the Proceedings of the Society we read :—" On the whole [Page 64] (though with some serious reserves) it seems undeniable that there is a *prima facie* case for some part at least of the claim made which, at the point which the investigations of the Society for Psychical Research have now reached cannot with consistency be ignored. And it seems plain that an actual residence for some months in India by some trusted observer is an almost necessary pre-requisite of any more definite judgment". As a result of this decision Mr. Richard Hodgson proceeded to India in November, 1884, and returned in April, 1885.

The results of this visit are mentioned in the *Journal* for April, 1885. A note in that issue says:—" . . . He is now we believe on his way back. He has already sent home a considerable mass of documents. . . . The additional evidence for the most part unfavourable to the genuineness of the phenomena, and Mr. Hodgson inclines we believe to the conclusion that the alleged marvels are altogether to be attributed to fraud".

As Mr. Hodgson's stay in India covered several months it is evident that the original appointment of the committee to which he belongs must have been designed soon after the meeting at which Colonel Olcott spoke, but he seems to have been quite unsuspecting of the feeling which gave rise to it. In the Third Volume of his *Old Diary Leaves* he makes no mention of the stormy scene with Madame Blavatsky, though his narrative covers the period, but shows an almost pathetic unconsciousness of the change of feeling on the part of the S.P.R. leaders which led to the important change in their attitude. He writes: —

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"There had been the making of acquaintance between us and the S.P.R., entire cordiality and unsuspecting friendship on our part: an equally apparent sympathy on theirs, agreeable [Page 65] social meetings at the houses of their leaders and finally a consent on my part to be examined by a committee of the S.P.R. The sky was purely blue without the tiniest cloud to indicate the hurricane in preparation for us".

A general meeting of the S.P.R. (of which I, and many of my Theosophical friends had already become members), was held on the 29th of May, 1885, and Mr. Hodgson was present on that occasion. His full report on the results of his mission to India was not yet published, but he gave the meeting a summary of his conclusions, which were broadly to the effect "that the theosophical phenomena formed part of a system of fraud worked by Madame Blavatsky with the assistance of the Coulombs and several other confederates and that none of the phenomena were genuine".

I was myself abroad at the time but an animated discussion followed, and soon after the famous Report made its appearance. This voluminous document is concerned with lines of inquiry and especially with certain letters ostensibly addressed by Madame Blavatsky to Madame Coulomb (some of them to M. Coulomb) who gave them (or sold them) to the *Madras Christian College Magazine*. They were published in the issue of that periodical for September, 1884. If they were really written by Madame Blavatsky they proved beyond question that she was guilty of arranging with M. and Madame Coulomb for the production of sham phenomena. The handwriting was declared by experts to be that of Madame Blavatsky. She declared that they were forgeries as far as their incriminating passages were concerned. Mr. Hodgson's report also goes at length into the history of, and allegations concerning, the so-called *Shrine* to which I made some reference [Page 66] when dealing with the visit my wife and I paid to Adyar on our way home from India. The report also discusses statements by myself in the evidence I gave to the S.P.R. Committee and in my book *The Occult World*, and goes on to deal with statements made by other writers with reference to their experiences of occult phenomena.

To criticise the report in detail would burden this narrative with a separate volume devoted to that task. At the time of its publication it gave rise to floods of controversy. I answered those parts of it which related to my own writings and statements in a pamphlet still available for reference. This was entitled *The Occult World Phenomena and the Society for Psychical Research*. It provoked counter replies from Mr. Hodgson and the final result was to leave opinion on the whole subject sharply divided. Theosophists in general accepted Madame Blavatsky's assurance that the letters were partly forgeries, and laughed at the conclusions of Mr. Hodgson based on hypotheses to the effect that unlimited skill in organising conjuring devices and in *legerdemain* might account for some of the phenomena. The leaders of the S.P.R. on the other hand accepted Mr. Hodgson's view of these as final, and the original committee of May, 1884, commenting on his report, conclude by saying: — "For our own part we regard her (Madame Blavatsky) neither as the mouthpiece of hidden seers nor as a mere vulgar adventuress; we think that she has achieved a title to permanent remembrance as one of the most accomplished, ingenious and interesting impostors in history".

Writing now in 1918, more than thirty years after the stormy controversy that raged round the Hodgson report, I realise how profound was the misunderstanding which distinguished that controversy on both [Page 67] sides at the time. No true pen portrait of that marvelously diversified personality we called Madame Blavatsky has ever yet been published, I cannot even claim that what I am about to say is an exhaustively complete portrait. To frame anything approximately resembling such a portrait would involve

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the acceptance as plain matters of fact, of mysterious possibilities in human life that none but those deeply engaged in super-physical study would be able to comprehend. I am engaged in writing a history of the external events connected with the origin and progress of the Theosophical Society, and not at this moment, with the occult science of life, of incarnate and supercarnate consciousness, of obsession, psychic faculty, and the complexities of the struggle about belief in the spiritual representation of good and evil, or in other words between Divine and Satanic agencies. But leaving that whole range of thought entirely out of account and contemplating Madame Blavatsky's doings on the ordinary plane of physical life, we who knew her best were most bewildered by the extraordinary contrasts of her behaviour at different periods. In connection with occult phenomena the experiences I have partly recorded in *The Occult World* made me absolutely sure that she possessed powers over matter entirely eclipsing those possessed by ordinary mankind, no matter how deeply versed in science. But in process of time I became equally certain that she sometimes stooped to simple cheating in such matters. That is how Mr. Hodgson came to be so grievously misled. That she sometimes employed the Coulombs, husband and wife, as confederates in trickery is the painful though hardly intelligible state of the facts. Even with me she has done this. For example on my return to India after having published *The Occult World*, — after she [Page 68] knew that I was rooted in a personal conviction not only that she possessed magic powers, but that I was in touch with the Masters and devoted to the theosophical cause, she employed M. Coulomb to drop a letter from the Master intended for me through a crack in the rafters above, trying to make me believe that it had been dropped by the Master himself — materialised then and there after transmission by occult means from Tibet. M. Coulomb told Mr. Hodgson that he had been so employed on this occasion, and his statement fits in with the minor circumstances of the incident. I have no doubt in the matter.

For the benefit of those among my readers who may be able partially to understand the intricacies of super-physical life, I may here give what I have reason to believe is Madame Blavatsky's interpretation of this ridiculous incident. She herself — the real Ego — was away out of the body at the time, and she had neglected to take measures which lay within her power, to prevent the intrusion of alien personalities. In this way her body was actually being run at the time by an evil entity, who designed the sham phenomenon to bring discredit on her and possibly to disgust myself. At the first blush this may seem an explanation of what occurred but no excuse. Her neglect to take proper precautions against such intrusion seems unpardonable. On the other hand she was at this time and very often, conscious, *via* her psychic faculties, of the storm of force raging around her; black attacks being incessant, and the White Lodge resisting them. In this whirlwind of contending forces she was in a measure to be excused for sometimes losing her head — to use a familiar and fairly appropriate phrase.

In the course of the Hodgson controversy one of [Page 69] the S.P.R. writers remarks that no one who really possessed the wonderful powers imputed to Madame Blavatsky could ever stoop to commonplace fraud. Madame Blavatsky certainly had done this sometimes, therefore she could not have been a real magician. Hence all her doings must have been fraudulent. Q.E.D. The psychology of the argument is at fault. Madame Blavatsky behaved as though at one time she were one person; at another, another! One cannot explain her by any commonplace process of reasoning.

If Mr. Hodgson had not conclusively ascertained that she sometimes cheated, he could never have satisfied his own mind with the extravagantly improbable hypotheses, involving conjuring apparatus and sleight of hand, which he invoked to discredit what were really genuine phenomena. Nobody could arrive at sound conclusions about her by collecting evidence about her. Only by the extreme intimacy with her

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that my wife and I acquired during, her frequent and protracted visits to us at Allahabad and Simla, and afterwards by painful experiences of her behaviour in London, in 1884 and 5 could we have reached that understanding of her complex nature which made us remain her champions through the S.P.R. attack and ultimately disgusted us to that extent that her blind devotees grew cold to us in turn.

In further elucidation of the painful truth that Madame Blavatsky would sometimes stoop to trickery even when circumstances did not involve any real temptation to do so, I must here record an incident antedating by a few months the publication of the Hodgson report and not provoked in any way by that report. From the Society's minute book I find that at a meeting held in July, 1884, the President (then Mr. Finch) announced with regret, that [Page 70] Mr C C Massey had resigned his membership of the Theosophical Society. He explained his reasons to me at the time, and I find a record of them in the *Proceedings* of the S.P.R. (page 397, Vol. III.). In 1879 when Madame Blavatsky passed through London on her way to India he urgently represented to her the desire he felt for proof of the existence of the Adepts. Later on, after Madame Blavatsky had reached India he found in the Minute book of the Society a letter addressed to him and purporting to come from one of the Adept Brothers. At the time he fully believed that the letter had been deposited where he found it by the writer and by occult means. Later on again he was shown a letter that had been addressed by Madame Blavatsky from India to a member of the Society — well known to be a medium. This letter and others relating to the same subject, are given in full in the *Proceedings*, but are too long for entire quotation here. In the first Madame Blavatsky encloses the letter from the Brother and begs her friend the medium to convey it somehow in a mysterious manner to Mr. Massey. "Put it into M's pocket or in some other still more mysterious place". Warnings follow to the effect that the lady addressed must be careful that Massey should not suspect either her or her husband (referred to by an initial in the published letter, but Massey told me who was meant) of complicity in the disposal of the letter. Massey was deeply disgusted but brooded over the incident for some time without speaking of it. Ultimately he wrote to Madame Blavatsky on the subject, and received a long letter from her in reply (printed in the *Proceedings*). She admits that she planned the arrangement described, but asserts that the letter from the Master was genuine, so what did the rest matter! [Page 71] "That I saw nothing in it then as I do not see now of so dreadful is only a proof that I have not received my education in London and that our notions of the honourable and dishonourable differ".

That Mr. Massey should have allowed his disillusionment concerning Madame Blavatsky to drive him into his resignation from the Society is greatly to be deplored. Madame Blavatsky's shortcomings or defects of character did not alter the fact that through her intermediation the Veil had been lifted (more or less) from the Occult World previously so totally concealed from view — so far as the world at large was concerned. My wife and I had long been alive to her strangely diversified nature but had attained to a condition of mind and knowledge that enabled us to look behind her at those who for want of a better agent had accepted her with all her disqualifications, as the intermediary who should make their existence known to us. Later on, as far as we were concerned intermediaries of a more satisfactory order took on the work but none of them would have been able to do what Madame Blavatsky did in the beginning.

As the great movement spread, a great many people have continually asked — why did the Masters select such an unsatisfactory representative as Madame Blavatsky ? It is only fair in the same breath to recognise that a great many also, impressed by the fine elements in her character, look upon her still with a feeling resembling worship, but the answer to the question put by those who were not thus impressed, is simply that — no better intermediary could be found. Certain qualifications were essential. The person

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needed to be personally acquainted with some of the Masters in order to be a link between them and the outer world. He or she had to be possessed [Page 72] of psychic faculties that would keep him or her in touch with the Masters wherever he or she might be in the outer world. And absolute loyalty to the Divine Hierarchy was a *sine qua non*. Furthermore the person required must have powers, as well as faculty that would meet the emergencies foreseen. To find all these qualifications united was no easy task. I have learned in later years that a search all over the world failed to find them combined in any Ego willing to undertake the work — except in the case of the Ego known to us as Madame Blavatsky. In her case they were unhappily combined with characteristics sadly out of tune with those of the loftier order, so that — as I often used to tell her — she would go about doing good, and undoing 90 per cent, of it by some deplorable blundering. I have sometimes looked back at my own theosophical career, wondering how, in view of *our* intimacy with Madame Blavatsky, my wife and I were not thrown off the rails at an early stage altogether, as this grievously happened in the case of C. C. Massey.

We were sorely tried by an incident that preceded the exposure of the Hodgson report by a few months. Our intimacy with the Gebhard family at Elberfeld had ripened very pleasantly. Some of them had visited London making the acquaintance of Madame Blavatsky, the Arundales, Mrs. Holloway, and others of the central theosophical group, and quite a large party, including Madame Blavatsky and Mrs. Holloway, were invited to stay at Elberfeld for the August holiday time of 1884. It had become almost a matter of course that we, my wife and I, should visit Elberfeld during the continental tour with which at this period we indulged ourselves each year. Much to our surprise and deeply to her own distress, Mrs. Gebhard had on this occasion to [Page 73] inform us that Madame Blavatsky had given orders that we were not to be invited that year. At this period Madame Blavatsky was staying with the Arundales, who were among those whom her powerful personality had most completely conquered. I need not attempt to analyse the motives that made Madame Blavatsky desirous of keeping us away from the Gebhards during her visit. They may easily be guessed. We were somewhat annoyed but not to any extent that prevented us from enjoying a tour in Switzerland. Towards the close of this we got a telegram from Mrs. Holloway at Elberfeld begging us to come on there after all. We did not feel at all disposed to do so under the circumstances and replied accordingly. Telegrams poured in upon us both from Mrs. Holloway and Mrs. Gebhard. We were assured they were acting by the Master's wish in begging us to come. Ultimately we gave way and did so. A curious situation had developed, though I never could understand it fully. Madame Blavatsky I gathered had been in one of her very worst moods, and must have somehow got into disgrace with the higher powers, for the Masters sent communications over her head, without her knowledge, through Mrs. Holloway, whose psychic condition enabled them to deal with her in this way. A letter for me quite without Madame Blavatsky's knowledge had come this way, and it showed that I was definitely wanted, though it failed to clear up the situation fully. I imagine that Madame Blavatsky had somehow come under the bad influences that sometimes prevailed with her (through her own careless neglect of precautions that would have guarded against them) and that my presence might obviate some risks, but, as I have said, the entanglement remained obscure.

Anyhow Madame Blavatsky had certainly overstayed [Page 74] her welcome, and when, a day or two after our arrival she, accompanied by Mrs. Holloway and escorted by Rudolph, one of the Gebhard sons, left us on her way to Flushing, an atmosphere of great relief pervaded the house, and was associated with one amusing incident. Accompanying Mrs. Gebhard we went over the deserted guest rooms after the O.L.'s departure. To our surprise we found in her room (left in rather a terrible state of disorder) a good sized despatch box belonging to her that had been forgotten. We then were convulsed with laughter in thinking of the storm the O.L. would make when she discovered what had been forgotten. Mrs. Gebhard exercised heroic self-control in refraining from an examination of the contents of that despatch box. By

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this time she was gravely suspicious of the O.L.'s bona fides. She took a reasonable view of the situation. For many reasons she, like ourselves, knew that the mighty fraternity we now call *The White Lodge* was really behind the Theosophical Society, and that Madame Blavatsky was their agent. But her shortcomings as their agent had become painfully apparent. She certainly was to be suspected of playing tricks, of using Tibetan envelopes, of which she was suspected of keeping a store, to cover letters *from the Master* really written by herself. Anyhow I am glad to say, the despatch box was left untouched.

The morning wore away, and we with Mrs. Gebhard were sitting at lunch when the door opened and Rudolph entered with a solemn smile full of meaning that we appreciated. "If you think", he said, with a keen sense of the humorous aspect of the situation, "that we are going on any further without that box, you are quite mistaken". It seemed that the box had been missed in the train. Measures [Page 75] had to be taken instantly or sooner. At the first available station Madame Blavatsky insisted on their all getting out. She and Mrs. Holloway would wait there at the station. Rudolph must return to Elberfeld and retrieve the missing box. He and Mrs. Holloway submitted. Olcott, luckily for him, was not on the scene. If he had been he would certainly have had a rough time, but he, Mohini, and Bertram Keightley, who had all been of the Elberfeld party (distributed among the houses of the Gebhard family) had gone away — for London and Paris — two days previously. I do not remember to have heard how long the journey to Flushing actually took.

By this time a German Lodge of the T.S. had been set on foot, under Gebhard auspices, and Dr. Hübbschleiden was its President, and remained so I believe for many years; but it would be hopeless for me to attempt to trace the course of the Society's evolution beyond the limits of this country in which I have been personally cognisant of its progress. [Page 76]

CHAPTER - 7 -

NOW I must revert to the period antedating the appearance of the Hodgson report. On our return to London we found Madame Blavatsky re-established at the Arundales, but she was preparing for a return to India. We gave an evening reception in her honour as a farewell compliment. News of the attack made upon her at Madras by the *Christian College Magazine* was already floating about London and was beginning to take effect with the S.P.R. people, but was looked upon as a nefarious plot by the Theosophical group — many of whom assembled at Euston Square on the 1st of November to see H. P. B. off on her way to Liverpool en route to India. She was accompanied, amongst others, by Mr. Leadbeater, who had come to the conclusion that he would get on along the Path by going to India and putting his further services at the disposal of H. P. B. and Colonel Olcott.

The next few months, so far as we in England were concerned, gave no indication, on the surface of events, of the approaching storm. The meetings of our inner study group went off pleasantly, and on two occasions, in December and January, we held open meetings to include the friends of the members, in a large room or hall at Queen Anne's Mansions. These were crowded and brilliant gatherings. The growing antagonism of the S.P.R. had not yet permeated society at large, and the wave of interest in the Theosophical development, seemed increasing in amplitude. The storm centre had accompanied Madame Blavatsky to India and I must turn to Colonel Olcott's *Diary Leaves* to trace its further course there. [Page 77]

Madame Blavatsky on her return to India in December came fully resolved to prosecute the Coulombs and the Missionaries in reference to the articles in the *Christian College Magazine*. On her way back she had picked up information at Cairo, (where the Coulombs had formerly kept an hotel), much to their discredit, and imagined that this would ensure her a victory in the law courts. Colonel Olcott appears to have thought differently: insisted on waiting till the approaching Convention should meet when a special committee could consider the matter and decide on a course of action. He writes: — "She fretted and stormed and insisted, but I would not stir from my position, and when she threatened to go by herself and 'wipe the stain off her character' I said that I should in that case resign my office and let the Convention decide between us. ... She then yielded". Soon afterwards the proposed Committee was duly formed and decided against legal proceedings as the publication of the letters was "only a pretext to injure the cause of Theosophy". It was held that the letters would "necessarily appear absurd to those who are acquainted with our philosophy and facts, and those who are not acquainted with those facts could not have their opinion changed even by a judicial verdict given in favour of Madame Blavatsky". [Old *Diary Leaves*, vol iii, page 192] The argument is not very convincing but no doubt it was wise to abstain from the course Madame Blavatsky proposed to take. It could only have led to an unfavourable result. Madame Blavatsky certainly always maintained that the letters were forgeries, as regards their incriminating passages, but she had no means of proving this, and the letters seemed to be obviously in her handwriting. To this day the mystery remains unsolved — except for those [Page 78] who rely on clairvoyant testimony which is in Madame Blavatsky's favor.

Her friends soon began to be seriously alarmed for *her* safety. She might abstain from legal proceedings herself but might be the object of legal attack by others. The Coulomb party — those who represented the *Christian College Magazine* — were eager to be prosecuted, feeling sure with good reason no doubt, that they would secure a sensational victory. At the Convention *one fact*, writes Colonel Olcott, "reported confidentially by a very respected colleague of ours made a deep impression on the minds of the

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Committee. He had overheard a conversation between two influential Madras civilians about Madame Blavatsky and the charges against her. In reply to a question by one of them as to what would be likely to happen, the other said, ' I hope she *will* bring an action for ----- who must try it, is determined to give the greatest latitude for cross-examination so that this damned fraud may be shown up, and it is not at all impossible that she may be sent to the Andaman Islands". [*Old Diary Leaves*, vol iii, pages 194-5]

Disappointed in their hopes that Madame Blavatsky would bring an action, the hostile party endeavoured to get the case before the Courts in another way. They caused Madame Coulomb to begin an action for libel against General Morgan — one of Madame Blavatsky's European friends — intending to call Madame Blavatsky as a witness and so get her under the desired cross-examination. The situation was undoubtedly serious. Her health was made the ostensible motive for arranging her return to Europe. The lady doctor who attended her gave a certificate to the effect that the excitement and worry to which she was exposed in [Page 79] Madras rendered her departure necessary and she was hustled off at very short notice, accompanied by a maid and her doctor, and put on board a *Messengeries* steamer bound for Naples. In her absence the action against General Morgan lost its motive and was dropped.

She arrived in Naples some time in April, 1885, and went to a hotel at Torre del Greco, near by. From there she wrote my wife a long letter in a very gloomy vein. This period may be regarded as the climax of her trouble in connection with the Hodgson report. Of course, as I have said, the report was grossly unfair in many ways, and actually stupid in much of its reasoning, but the world at large took it at its face value, and at first Madame Blavatsky failed to realise how strong a body of adherents she retained in spite of the conclusions reached by the S.P.R.

The long letter is still in my possession together with a large number of others written most of them from Wurzburg, whither she went on from Torre Del Greco. Her industry with the pen, whether writing for the press or for private correspondence, was marvelous. Without reproducing it *in extenso* I will quote from it enough to show the characteristic attitude of mind in which she confronted the Hodgson attack and its reception by the S.P.R.

"Do not fight for me, my kind dear Mrs. Sinnett, do not defend me. You will lose your time and only be called a confederate if not worse. You would hurt yourself, perhaps the *Cause* and do *me* no good. The iron has entered too deeply into the hapless individual known as H.P.B. The chemicals used for the Dye of slander were, or rather are too strong and death herself, I am afraid, shall never wash away in the eyes of those who do not know me, the dirt that has been thrown at and has stuck on the personality of [Page 80] the *dear Old Lady*. Ah yes! the Old Lady is a clean thing to look at now, an honour to her friends, an ornament to the Society, if anything. Alone the *Occult World* has the key to the situation and the truth. But the Occult World is at a discount now even at the Headquarters. The poor Colonel has it securely locked up for the present under a triple key at the very bottom of his poor weak heart, and does not for the time being have it on his tongue. A reaction and an exaggeration with him as usual. He has stuffed the S.P.R. with what could not but appear to the majority *cock and bull stories* and had fights with me for asking him not to take them as arbitrators, not to have anything to do with the *Dons*, and now when their arbitration had such a glorious end for us he got frightened out of his wits".

A good deal more follows to the same effect together with a reference to the occasion I have fully dealt with when Colonel Olcott thrust the Lord Buddha on his wheels before the *intuitional* gathering at the

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Psychic Research meeting". The letter then reverts to the public attitude of mind about herself.

"Of course you all who believe and respect the Masters cannot without losing every belief in them think me guilty. Those who feel no discrepancy in the idea of filthy lying and fraud — even for the good of the cause — being associated with work done for the Masters are congenital idiots. One capable of believing that such pure and holy hands can touch and handle with no sense of squeamishness such a filthy instrument as I am now represented to be — are natural born fools or capable themselves of working on the principle that 'the end justifies the means' Had I written *even one* of those idiotic and at bottom infamous interpolations now made to appear in the said letter; had I been guilty once only of a deliberate [Page 81] purposely concocted fraud, especially when those deceived were my best, my truest friends — no love for such a one as I. At best but pity or eternal contempt. . . . Many are the things I have been obliged *to conceal* by holding my tongue — many although fewer those I have allowed to go uncorrected before the world and the belief of my friends, but these were no phenomena of ours but only the mistakes and hallucinations, the exaggerations of other people quite sincere too. And if I did so it was only because I was ever afraid of injuring the cause."

These quotations do not amount to more than a fourth part of the whole letter, but the rest is mainly an amplification of the parts quoted. The bitter language directed against Olcott was, of course, the expression of a transient feeling, and must not be regarded as representing her final opinion. Dealing with the period in his *Diary Leaves*, Olcott describes her as "chafing like a caged lioness" and *upbraiding* him in letter after letter "for what she called our cowardice, and our haste to sacrifice her as our scape-goat. She was utterly wrong of course, but argumentation was useless — I was called all the harsh names conceivable."

She was especially exasperated by some changes in the form of the magazine *The Theosophist*, the idea of which she had misapprehended at first. When the new issue reached her, Olcott writes: — "She then wrote — ' Well, I *knew* that the accusation of your taking off my name from the Theosophist was all bosh. . . . Let us forgive each other, be indulgent to each other's failings and cease fighting and backbiting like Christian sectarians' ". Considering how one-sided the *backbiting* had been, the lofty tone adopted is sufficiently amusing. [Old *Diary Leaves*. vol ii, page 312 *et seq.*]. [Page 82]

Before the actual publication of the Hodgson report the activities of the London Lodge were hardly checked. Open meetings were several times held at Queen Anne's Mansions and that of March 4th, 1885, is referred to in my wife's Diary as having been very fully attended, but although the Minute book continues to record the names of new members joining the Society it also began to include ominous hints in the shape of resignations. These became more numerous as time goes on, but are balanced by the election of many new members. The proceedings of the Lodge at its closed meetings (distinguished from the open meetings held at Queen Anne's Mansions) were largely concerned with discussion arising from the Hodgson Report — when that at last was published — and with some trouble that ensued from charges against Mr. Mohini. Clouds were settling down on the London Society and its meetings became less frequent than previously. Nevertheless we took a room on the first floor of No. 15, York Street, Covent Garden, to be permanently available for the use of members and collected a few books there. The ground floor was occupied by the shop and office of Mr. Redway, a publisher in a small way of business whom I — at that time in possession of means — subsidised with a view of stimulating his attention to publications of a theosophical character. But nothing could effectually check the disintegration of the Society when the Hodgson report gave the general public the impression that the

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whole theosophical movement was somehow a fraudulent enterprise on the part of Madame Blavatsky. A small group around ourselves remained untouched by the unpleasant influence of the Report, but for a time we had to abandon all hope of progress and could only mark time. [Page 83]

CHAPTER - 8 -

MADAME Blavatsky only stayed a few months at Torre Del Greco and then went on to Wurzburg. She was never left alone, and her principal reliance during the period that followed, was on the Countess Wachtmeister, whose devoted care of her never slackened. My wife and I went to see her at Wurzburg in the course of our autumn tour in 1885. She was staying at 6, Ludwigstrasse. We, of course, went to a hotel though after a day or two my wife went to stay with the O.L. at Ludwigstrasse while I engaged a single room for myself somewhere else. Madame Fadeef (Madame Blavatsky's aunt) was staying with her at the time and also *the Solovioffs* — as I find from the Diary. The O.L. then regarded Solovioff as a friend, though he turned into an enemy later on. Considering what her psychic faculties were in some ways, Madame Blavatsky in a great many cases showed herself a deplorably bad judge of character — both ways.

During our visit to Wurzburg I had to get from her, as well as I could, explanations that would clear up inconsistencies in various stories of her adventurous life that she had told us from time to time in the interests of the book, then in preparation, which ultimately appeared under the title *Incidents in the Life of Mme. Blavatsky*. [Second Edition - Theosophical Publishing House] Much correspondence on this project had already preceded our visit. She was eager that I should do something in her defence when the Hodgson report appeared. The only practical course I could take seemed the publication of her Memoirs. We had long been vaguely assuming that after her [Page 84] death, whenever that might take place, I should write her Memoirs and I had suggested that by doing this. in advance I might effectually dispose of the absurd idea that she was an adventuress concocting the whole theosophical enterprise for her own personal advantage. I could easily obtain from her Russian relations guarantees concerning her birth and social position. In consultation we decided that *Memoirs* would be too comprehensive a title for the book and agreed on the word *Incidents* instead. But the trouble was that in our long intimacy she had told us innumerable tales of adventure which I now had to try and fit in with one another in a connected series, with some attention to time and place. They would not fit. Directly I began to handle dates the difficulties became desperate. She had originally told us, when she first made our acquaintance at Allahabad, that she had spent three years with the Masters in Tibet; other episodes taken into account, no three years could anyhow be identified as those so spent. I had good reason to feel sure that she really had been — at some period — with the Masters in Tibet, but eventually the three years became condensed into about eleven months. So on with other dates, and my wife's Diary makes mention of days spent with Mme. Blavatsky during our Wurzburg visit in trying to clear up the confusion.

I find in a box full of her letters from Wurzburg one which relates to the *Incidents* and exhibits her attitude of mind towards ourselves, which was perfectly sincere, I feel sure, at the moment, though later events put a totally different complexion upon it. She wrote: —

MY DEAREST MR. SINNETT,

May *They* bless and reward you — I can only feel as deeply as it is in my nature to feel that you are [Page 85] the best friends I have left in the world and that you may dispose of me to the hour of my death.

Do whatever you like. Publish the Memoirs, write what you think best and proper. I subscribe

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to it beforehand and hereby give you carte blanche and full authority to act and do in my name whatever you will. I am sure you will defend the cause and myself better than I ever can.

[After going on at some length with indignant protests against being taken for a Russian spy, she winds up by saying she is making her will.]

" I want you to take care of my papers and of a box on which I will write your name. It contains all the Mahatma papers and many letters I have received from Mahatma K. H., orders from Master, *blowing up*, and so on. I hope they will fall in no one's hands but yours. Publish, write, tell me what to do and I will do so. I am a paralysed body — dead heart and body. I have lost the faculty of suffering even.

Yours to the last,

H. P. BLAVATSKY."

I never heard any more of the box in question or of the will and, though at the time she was always hinting at the probability of an early death, six more years of life lay before her during which her Wurzburg attitude of mind underwent considerable changes. Even as regards the *Incidents* she grew more than dissatisfied. As its purpose in accordance with her wish had been to dissipate the suspicion that she was a Russian spy I had emphasized the loyal tone she really had always adopted in speaking to Indian natives about the British rule. She warned them of the folly of wishing to exchange this for Russian rule, which she plainly told them would be a dismal change for the worse. When the book was published [Page 86] her Russian relations were deeply offended with her for taking this tone. Her sister, Mme. Jelihovsky, was staying with her at Ostend, and no doubt took her to task on the subject to her great annoyance. Anyhow she generally afterwards referred to my book as *those damned Memoirs*. As I had only written it at her earnest desire this was a somewhat ludicrous result, but it will be unnecessary for me to refer to the matter again.

All through the spring of 1886 my wife and I continued to keep the Society alive and our house at Ladbroke Gardens continued the centre of a great deal of social activity — though the prestige of the movement had been severely shaken. The Minutes of the Society at this period refer to attacks on the Society in the *Sunday Times* and the *World* directed especially against Mr. Mohini, whose relations with a certain lady gave rise to some legal proceedings that gave us great annoyance at the time but proved abortive in the end. None the less we were enabled to hold another open meeting at Queen Anne's Mansions on the 30th June which, I see from my wife's Diary, was largely attended. The ordinary meetings meanwhile were almost suspended during the following few years. The last entry in the Minute Book records a meeting held in January, 1893, but by that time the movement in this country had attained an entirely new aspect, as I must now endeavour to explain.

Early in 1886 Mme. Blavatsky migrated from Wurzburg to Ostende under the guidance and with the help of the Gebhard family. Mrs. Gebhard had long before this, got over her distrust of the *O.L.* as engendered by the visit to Elberfeld which I have described. I visited her at Ostende in August, 1886, and found her very busy writing the *Secret Doctrine* on which work she had been engaged during the [Page 87] greater part of her stay at Wurzburg. I have no recollections of special interest in connection with this visit, except that I met Mme. Jelihovsky, Mme. Blavatsky's sister, who afterwards I think had a good deal to do with

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the widening of the breach between Mme. Blavatsky and myself. But the visit, looking back on it from a later period, may be regarded as the last stage of Mme. Blavatsky's close attachment to and reliance on ourselves. Soon afterwards she was brought over to London and a new era dawned for the Theosophical Movement in England.

A group of the London Lodge members, of which the two Keightleys and Mr. Harbottle were especially active in the matter, had conceived the idea of inviting Mme. Blavatsky to return to London. Although the ultimate results as regards the progress of the movement were important and beneficial I did not welcome the idea at the time. Deeply impressed by the disasters that had ensued from her return in 1884, I shrank from the possibility that her presence might give rise, in some way, to further trouble. The Keightleys consulted me on the subject, but were not turned from their purpose by my disapproval. We had a special conference on the proposed invitation — taking the respectful form of a *petition* to Mme. Blavatsky — at the house where Mr. Archibald Keightley was then living in Elgin Crescent, and my reluctance to join in with it began to create an estrangement between myself and its promoters. Thus I have no personal knowledge of the arrangements made for carrying out the plan. I believe that some of the group concerned went over to Ostende to see Mme. Blavatsky and obviously they financed the whole undertaking. The scheme seems to have hung fire for a little owing to some temporary illness, but Mme. Blavatsky actually came over under careful escort in May, 1887, and was [Page 88] established at first in a house at Norwood, Maycot by name, lent to the group in charge of her. The first reference to the new situation that I find in my wife's Diary shows that we had news on the 2nd May that H.P.B. would arrive at Norwood in the afternoon. The following morning I went to see her and my wife went the following day and had "nearly three hours with her". We both went again, two or three times during the month, and on the 23rd my wife records a visit in the course of which she found the *O.L.* "very full of the new notion of turning the English Theosophists into groups each under its own President". The Keightley group had apparently by this time determined to create a new Lodge to be independent of the London Lodge, till then the only recognised Theosophical organisation in Great Britain — the only one in Europe except for the German branch established at Elberfeld. The plan was quickly carried out and *The Blavatsky Lodge* as it was called came into existence. I cannot describe the course of events more minutely as I was not consulted in the matter, but Colonel Olcott's diary records the receipt of a letter from Mme. Blavatsky dated 25th May, 1887 (from Maycot), in which she writes:— "We have fourteen of the best of the members who have now formed a new Lodge, and, my protests notwithstanding, have called it the Blavatsky Lodge of the T.S.". [Old Diary Leaves, vol iv, page 25]

The protests can hardly have been very determined for the founders of the new Lodge were too completely devoted to her to have resisted any real wish on her part. In one sense the *Early Days* of the Society, those in which its history was identified with that of the London Lodge, had come to an end. A new Theosophical era had ben inaugurated, in which [Page 89] great progress was made, and in which storms raged from time to time in a way that was not unusual in connection with activities revolving round H.P.B.. One such storm — this time in a tea-cup — had to do with some trouble that had arisen in Paris in connection with a branch of the Society established there by a certain M. Louis Dramard who died soon afterwards. His survivors seem to have disagreed as to the management of the branch. Madame Blavatsky took the part of one combatant and wrote such excited letters to India on the subject that the Executive Council — Colonel Olcott tells us — "was alarmed for the stability of the movement in the West". [Old Diary Leaves vol iv, page 56] So he thought it necessary to come himself to Europe, to restore order.

This he seems to have accomplished by issuing a *charter* for a new lodge to be independent of that in

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which the tea-cup storm had arisen. In doing this he displeased the disputant whom Madame Blavatsky had been disposed to patronise and this "led to a pitched battle between H.P.B. and myself on my return to London". The mutual relations of *the Founders* were by no means always so harmonious as later generations of Theosophists have generally imagined. *Quarreling* would hardly be the word to use in reference to these disagreements, as the anger involved was always shown by Madame Blavatsky. Olcott's tone in writing about such troubles was always good tempered and restrained, as for example, in reference to the formation of the *Esoteric Section* which Madame Blavatsky designed, as she practically admitted in conversation at the time, to neutralise Colonel Olcott's autocratic supremacy in the Society.

Colonel Olcott gives a picturesque account in his [Page 90] *Diary Leaves* of the ferocious attitude she took up in her correspondence with him in reference to the *Esoteric Section* set on foot soon after her establishment in comfort at the house in the Lansdowne Road taken for her accommodation by the Keightley group. The stay at Norwood had never been regarded as more than a provisional arrangement. The *Diary Leaves* will always be available for reference by any of my readers who wish to realize the extent to which the *Founders* were sometimes at variance, so I need only quote a few significant passages. Colonel Olcott writes. —

"She had hatched out a new section, with herself elected as President. . . . She writes ' Now look here, Olcott. It is very painful, most painful, for me to have to put to you what the French call *Marché en main*, and to have you choose. You will say again that you hate threats and these will only make you more stubborn. But this is no threat at all, but a *fait accompli*. It remains with you to either ratify it or go against it, and declare war to me and my Esotericists. If, recognising the utmost necessity of the step you submit to the inexorable evolution of things nothing will be changed. Adyar and Europe will remain allies and, *to all appearances*, the latter will seem to be subject to the former. If you do not ratify it — well, then there will be two Theosophical Societies, the old Indian and the new European, *entirely independent of each other* ". [*Old Diary Leaves* vol iv, page 55]

The formation of the Esoteric Section as I have said was arranged for soon after Madame Blavatsky's establishment at Lansdowne Road. The net was thrown out very widely, and members joined it, attracted by the promise of some mysterious teaching not given to the rank and file of the Theosophical [Page 91] Society. As persons quite unknown to Madame Blavatsky were taken into it by correspondence, my wife once asked her if she really meant to give *esoteric* teaching to persons whom she did not even personally know. "Oh no". she replied, or in words to that effect, "I shall only give teaching to the few immediately around me". She did not seem to feel that the others were then beguiled into the organisation on false pretences. They were required all the same to give pledges; I find among my papers a draft of these pledges in a form that appears to have been used in the beginning, and the most important one binds the applicant, or *probationer* "to support before the world the Theosophical movement, its leaders and its members, and in particular to obey without cavil or delay the orders of the Head of the Esoteric Section in all that concerns my relation with the Theosophical movement". The probationer was also required to pledge himself "never to listen without protest to any evil thing spoken of a brother theosophist and to abstain from condemning others", and again "to give what support I can to the Theosophical movement in time, money, and work".

I declined participation in the undertaking — though offered personal exemption from all the pledges, if only I *seemed* to accept things — as it sinned, in my opinion, against fundamental principles of

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Theosophy as I understood it. The breach between Madame Blavatsky and myself then gradually widened.

Colonel Olcott — as the result of his *pitched battle* apparently — consented to issue an *Order in Council* — (he was always fond of investing his doings as President with the dignity of such phrases), "forming an Esoteric Section with Madame Blavatsky as its responsible head". [Page 92]

CHAPTER - 9 -

THIS same year, 1888, the *Secret Doctrine* was published. To our surprise we found in its earlier pages an attack on *Esoteric Buddhism*. I was represented as having misunderstood the Master's letter in reference to the association of the planets Mars and Mercury with our Earth in the planetary chain to which we belong. I had clearly explained that they did belong to our chain, Mars behind us in evolution, Mercury in advance. But now Madame Blavatsky declared that this was a *great mistake*.

I refrain from a minute analysis of the elaborate attempt to justify her position that Madame Blavatsky makes in the protracted explanation that follows. It affords one of the most, or the most, painful examples of the terribly evil influences under which she sometimes fell as a consequence of the confusing war of hostile and protective powers continually raging around her. The letter from the Master from which she professed to give extract was not what she represents it, an answer to enquiries of her own, but a garbled version of a letter originally addressed to me, a copy of which came into her possession under circumstances deeply to be deplored.

Though printed in the earlier chapters of the *Secret Doctrine* the whole passage was of course added during the Lansdowne Road period when she was surrounded by impassioned devotees, some of whom no doubt resented my reluctance to be one of them. On them she threw the whole blame when my wife indignantly addressed her (I forget whether by [Page 93] letter or word of mouth) in reference to the attack on me, so comically at variance with her former attitude of mind when we were almost her only champions during the Wurzburg period. *They* had made her write as she did !

Our equanimity as regards the accuracy of the statements made in *Esoteric Buddhism* relating to Mars and Mercury was not in the least disturbed by Madame Blavatsky's attempted refutation. At this period and for many later years we were enjoying opportunities of frequent conversation with the Master K. H. in a way carefully concealed from Madame Blavatsky's knowledge, as well on the higher plane by the Master's arrangements as on the lower by our own scrupulous secrecy on the subject. We had been told that if she came to know of our private privilege her occult powers would enable her to interfere in a way which would imperil its continuance. Her jealousy of anyone else acting as an intermediary between the Masters and people on the physical plane was so intense (it had been productive of trouble in the case of Mrs. Holloway as I have shown) that she would hesitate at nothing if her displeasure in this way was roused. Privately the Master assured us that I had not made any *mistake* in the matter dealt with, and although the attack directed against me was annoying we must be content with knowing we were really in the right. Thus while sorely tempted to create an open scandal by disclosing the true facts about the alleged letter as given in the *Secret Doctrine* I did not do so, and even now am passing lightly over the details of the episode. The annoyance it gave us increased rather than diminishing as time went on, and as I began to receive letters from all over the world asking me how I came to be so stupid as to misunderstand the Master's teaching, [Page 94]

it was not easy to remain silent. Eventually when Madame Blavatsky had passed away and Mrs. Besant, by the expansion of her own knowledge had ascertained definitely that Mars and Mercury did belong to our chain with functions in evolution as I had originally described them, she did publish a statement to that effect in *Lucifer* — the magazine started by Madame Blavatsky and which she, Mrs. Besant, continued to edit under that name for a time. [See *Lucifer* vol xvii, page 271]

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This note may have had the effect of reconciling some theosophical students with the true teaching in reference to the planetary chain, but it is not easy to kill falsehood outright when it once gets a good start. Up to the time at which I am writing (1919) the echoes of Madame Blavatsky's attack on my book are still reverberating. In an American magazine called *Azoth* a review of a pamphlet I recently published deplores the fact that I am "still guilty of the heresy which H. P. B. condemned of believing that this humanity came from Mars and is going to Mercury".

The year 1889 was associated with many events of importance in connection with the growth of the Society, and at its extreme close with one that led to very important consequences — the return to Europe of Mr. Leadbeater, accompanied by a Singalese boy, who in later years became a very prominent figure in the Theosophical world, as C. Jinarajadasa. The story of his introduction to this country is, at the time I write, unknown to his admirers at large, but is worth record here.

When Mr. Leadbeater went to India with Madame Blavatsky he was sent by Colonel Olcott to Ceylon to take charge of certain Buddhist Schools that he, Colonel Olcott, had established there. Mr. Leadbeater kept up a correspondence with me and many of [Page 95] his letters showed plainly that he was very miserable in this uncongenial employment, although, as I learned afterwards, the period was associated with great development of his psychic faculties and with consciousness in the physical brain of his relations on higher planes with the Master K. H.

Our son was, in 1889, a boy of 12 years old. The period was one in which we seemed to be very well off, in worldly possessions (our total ruin planned by the black powers came on later). It occurred to us that it would be better for our son to be educated by a Theosophical tutor instead of being sent to a commonplace school, especially as he was thought to be of delicate constitution. Mr. Leadbeater seemed to be exactly qualified to fit the part. We knew and liked him personally. We wrote to him offering him the appointment with us as resident tutor. The grateful letters he wrote back were touching in their exuberant delight at the prospect of emancipation from the wretched life he was leading in Ceylon, but there was a great difficulty in the way! The Master had specially directed him to take care of a certain native boy in whom he — the Master — for reasons of his own, was interested. Leadbeater could not leave Ceylon and come to England *without bringing that boy with him* !

Of course this was a most unattractive proposal, but we came to the conclusion that by falling in with it we should be helping to realise some plans the Master had in view, and after much consideration agreed. My wife and I had gone to South sea to spend Christmas that year, but a telegram announced Leadbeater's arrival in England, and I went back to town a few days sooner than I intended to meet him. I found him and the Ceylon boy already established at our house in Ladbroke Gardens. I may as well deal [Page 96] at once with later developments in reference to the boy. From the beginning he behaved nicely in all ways, during the year or two he stayed in our house. The arrangement was only broken up when our total ruin, to which I must refer again later, rendered its continuance impracticable. I contrived eventually to secure employment for Leadbeater in the London office of the *Pioneer*, the paper I formerly edited in India, and "*Raja*", as we called him, grew up in his care. In my belief he failed to carry out the astral plan the Master had in view. This was to let the boy have the benefit of a Western education, but to let him return to Ceylon and by joining the Buddhist priesthood do something to reform that very decadent body. But Leadbeater grew too much attached to the boy to carry out this plan. By degrees he became well known to many of our friends, some of them willing and in a position to give the pecuniary help he needed to keep Raja in England and even at a University. By the time his education was complete and

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he had emerged from boyhood he had almost forgotten his native language and regarded the notion of going back to live the ordinary native life in Ceylon with unconquerable reluctance. So he drifted into the career that has made him well known in many parts of the world as a theosophical lecturer and writer.

In compiling a narrative of this kind it is almost impossible to maintain a chronological sequence in dealing with events that have to be recorded. So many separate threads are interwoven with each other that in following out each in turn it is necessary to go back to pick up others. The development of the Society from 1889 onwards was assuming a new character which left that of its early days in the background. Colonel Olcott paid another visit to Europe in that year, traveled about England, Scotland and [Page 97] Ireland and founded many lodges. The *British Section* was now definitely constituted, and the London Lodge denuded of many members drawn off into Madame Blavatsky's entourage shrank to relatively small proportions. We made a present to the British Section of the furniture and books we had accumulated at the York Street room, and the really important work we did was carried out at our private meetings first at Ladbroke Gardens, and afterwards at Leinster Gardens, whither we moved in the beginning of 1890. Our financial crisis was approaching, but we continued to hold meetings in the evenings of the most faithful members of the London Lodge in which the teaching I — or rather we (my wife and I) — were then getting from the Master *via* the private channel of communication that had been available for the previous five years was talked over and assimilated. Thus I had been enabled in 1885 to issue a *Transaction* of the London Lodge on *The Higher Self*, an expression which together with the important ideas clinging round it, was then introduced into Theosophical literature for the first time. The whole subject has so long now been a familiar commonplace of theosophical thinking that it seems strange, looking back, that it should have been received with grudging distaste by the large circle of devotees round Madame Blavatsky. But she could never tolerate the notion of fresh teaching coming through any channel independent of herself. So she endeavoured to pick holes in the new theory of the Higher Self, resting her objections on the use of the word *Self* in some Eastern writing as identical with the Divine principle in all consciousness.

At this date it seems hardly worth while to follow in detail the controversy that ensued. Obedient to the hint that my view of the matter was distasteful to [Page 98] Madame Blavatsky, the American publication *The Path*, conducted by Mr. Judge, attacked my pamphlet and, outside the narrow circle of London Lodge students, it was for a time regarded as deplorably heterodox, though by degrees the teaching it passed on came to be regarded as among the familiar and rudimentary commonplaces of theosophical knowledge, and theosophical students are now so used to the idea that they will hardly realise that it dawned upon us first on the occasion I refer to. But in spite of its truth and simplicity it did not, as I have said, meet with a cordial reception from Madame Blavatsky, who as I have shown in other cases did not readily welcome occult information coming through other channels. Later on, when I endeavoured in a book called *The Rationale of Mesmerism* to interpret some of the higher phenomena of mesmerism, I had to make use of the information I had acquired in reference to the Higher Self, and criticism of the book emanating from devout followers of Madame Blavatsky denounced the theory as at variance with her teaching. I only refer to the matter now because it gives me an opportunity of showing how beautifully my wife and I were in collaboration in all that concerned our work in the interests of Theosophy. As I have said before my wife's help and sympathy in connection with my more conspicuous share in the work was of supreme value throughout the whole undertaking, but it did not often assume a public manifestation. On the occasion I am dealing with however, it did. Reviews of my Mesmerism book appeared in Madame Blavatsky's magazine *Lucifer* and in Mr. Judge's magazine published in America *The Path*; my interpretation of some among the subtle phenomena of Mesmerism involved reference to the Higher Self and was scornfully dealt with [Page 99] accordingly. My wife took up the defence of my position and wrote

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an article for *Lucifer* of August, 1892, so well reasoned and representing such careful preparation that I reprint it here in order that the reader may realise in some measure her mental grasp of the teaching it was our task to pass on.

After a few introductory words relating to the reviews of my book she goes on: —

"For some years past there has been a considerable amount of misapprehension on the subject of the *Higher Self*, as originally elucidated by Mr. Sinnett in a *Transaction of the London Lodge*, published in 1885. He was the first of the modern writers on Theosophy to make use of that expression; and to that extent coined the word which has since then been so much used and misused, to convey his meaning in regard to that particular aspect of the human soul.

The words, the *Self*, the *Highest Self*, and the *Supreme*, are to be found in many of the English translations of the Sanskrit writings, more particularly in the *Upanishads*, but the expression *Higher Self*, as a definition of the individualised Ego, had never, until the publication of the *Transaction* referred to, been used in recent Occult teaching. At the time of writing the above-mentioned paper the term "*Higher Self*" appeared to Mr. Sinnett to be the best description available of the re-incarnating principles in their relation to the lower quaternary, and the reasons for thus using the term prevail as strongly now as they did then. Therefore in criticizing his present book it would perhaps be more instructive to the reader, as it would undoubtedly be fairer to the author, if the reviewer accepted his meaning, even though objecting to his terminology. It is moreover difficult to understand how the *Higher Self*, as spoken of in the *Rationale of Mesmerism*, [Page 100] could be considered as the equivalent of *Atmâ*, or the Universal Spirit, especially when taken in conjunction with the two previous *Transactions* on the subject which are referred to, and consequently may be supposed to have been read, by the writer of the notice in *The Path*.

Madame Blavatsky, in dealing with these two papers in the *Key to Theosophy*, does not fall into this error, but fully appreciates that in speaking of the *Higher Self* Mr. Sinnett is referring to the Spiritual or re-incarnating Ego, and not to either *Atmâ*, or Parabrahman, the Divine and Universal Spirit.

Language and words in themselves are of no value unless they can be utilised to convey ideas, and in support of the use of the expression *Higher Self* as a suitable definition of the human Spiritual Ego, many quotations taken from writings, ancient and modern, may be brought forward.

In the English translations of Sanskrit works mentioned above, *Atmâ*, *ParamĀtma*, *Brahma*, or the Universal Spirit, are almost invariably spoken of as the *Self*, the *Highest Self* or the *Supreme*, but never as the *Higher Self*.

In Telang's rendering of the *Bhagavad Gitâ* we find these words: —

There are two beings in the world, the destructible and the indestructible. The destructible (includes) all things. The unconcerned one is (what is) called the indestructible. But the being Supreme is yet another called the Highest Self, who as the inexhaustible lord pervading the

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three worlds supports (them) . . .

Davies, in his translation of the same verses, gives the idea in very similar terms.

In this world there are two existences, the Perishable and Imperishable. The Perishable consists of [Page 101] all living things, the Imperishable is called the Lord on high. But there is another, the highest existence, called the Supreme Spirit. . . .

Turning to the *Upanishads*, in the last section of the *Mundaka* we read: " —

He that knows that Highest Self, becomes that Highest Self only. There is none in his family ignorant of the Self. He passes beyond misery, he passes beyond the taint of good and evil works, he is released from his heart's ties and becomes immortal.

Again: —

. . . And we also know the undecaying Highest Self, the farther shore beyond all fear for those that will to cross the sea of metempsychosis.

Mr. Gough further says: —

[*Philosophy of the Upanishads*]

This Self, this Highest Self, Atman, Brahman, Paramâtman, is being, thought, and bliss undifferentenced.

Professor M. Muller, in describing the Self, says: —

[*What Can India Teach Us*]

Atman, the Self far more abstract than our Ego— the Self of all things, the Self of the old mythological gods . . . the Self in which each individual self must find rest, must come to himself, must find his own true self.

Further on page 251: —

But that Self, that Highest Self, the Paramâtman, could be discerned after a severe moral and intellectual discipline only, and those who knew the other gods to be but names or persons . . . knew also that those who worshipped these names or persons, worshipped in truth the Highest Self, though ignorantly.

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Again page 253: —

The Self within (Pratyagâtman) was drawn towards the Highest Self (the Paramâtman); it found its true Self in the Highest Self, and the oneness of the subjective with the objective Self was recognised as underlying all reality.....[Page 102]

These extracts are not given for any intrinsic value in themselves, although they contain much of the essence of the Vedantin philosophy. For the purpose of illustration, however, they show that Mr. Sinnett had some authority to go upon, outside of the reasonableness of the wording, in speaking of the individual Ego as *Higher Self* in contra-distinction to the Highest. In its capacity as a re-incarnating force it cannot be considered the Highest, although in development it becomes more and more glorified and illuminated by its spiritual aspiration towards that Highest, and may finally blossom into liberation and unity. Atmâ as representing pure Spirit should not be confounded with the divine human Ego, as the latter, while in a state of differentiation and liable to re-incarnation, must contain the higher fifth principle, of Manas. It is this very individual Self in humanity which contains the potential elements of future unity with the Supreme and Universal Self; and which — sometimes retarded in its upward path of evolution, and sometimes helped onward by the experience gained through its alliance with its series of personal selves — was appropriately termed by Mr. Sinnett *The Higher Self*.

Madame Blavatsky, in much that she has written, appears to support the idea, and in some cases uses even the same nomenclature. In her comments on Stanza V. she says: —

This fire is the Higher Self, the Spiritual Ego, or that which is eternally re-incarnating under the influence of its lower personal Selves.

[*Secret Doctrines*, Vol. II. Stanza V.]

Further on in the same chapter: —

Unless the Higher Self or Ego gravitates towards its sun[Page 103]

The reader will find all through this commentary that the writer uses the term Higher Self as the equivalent of the re-incarnating Ego.

Again in her remarks on Stanza X., page 230: —

. . . This is the human terrestrial form of Initiates, and also because the Logos is Christos, that principle of our inner nature which develops in us into the Spiritual Ego — the Higher Self — being formed of the indissoluble union of Buddhi, the sixth, and the spiritual efflorescence of Manas, the fifth principle.

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To this is added a footnote: —

It is not correct to refer to Christ, as some Theosophists do — as the sixth principle in man, Buddhi. The latter *per se* is a passive and latent principle, the spiritual vehicle of Atman, inseparable from the manifested universal soul. It is only in union in conjunction with *self-consciousness* that Buddhi becomes the Higher Self and the divine discriminating soul.

Further on in the same volume (ch. XXIII. p. 563):

Now when the Rabbi Jesus is requested (in *Pistis Sophia* by his disciples to reveal to them the mysteries of the Light of thy (*his*) Father (*i.e* of the Higher Self enlightened by Initiation and Divine Knowledge), Jesus answers, . . . etc.

Obviously pure Atman cannot be *initiated* either in Divine or any other kind of knowledge, therefore the Higher Self here, as in the other quotations, can only refer to the re-incarnating Ego.

One more extract from the same author may be taken out of that most beautiful little book, *The Voice of the Silence* (page 38): —

Restrain by thy Divine thy Lower Self.

Restrain by the Eternal the Divine.

Aye, great is he who is the slayer of desire.

Still greater he in whom the Self Divine has slain the very knowledge of desire.

Guard thou the Lower lest it soil the Higher.

[Page 104] Clearly nothing can soil or pollute pure spirit, or Atmâ, and the Higher and Lower alluded to can refer only to the Higher and Lower Selves.

The word *higher* predicates an intermediate condition between that which is above and that which is below. If pure spirit, Atmâ, or the Supreme, is to be called the Higher Self, where are we to look for what must be, if language has any meaning, the Highest ?

A few words may now be said about some other points raised in the afore-mentioned notices. The most important is that which touches upon the question as to which of the principles of the sensitive in trance come under the control of the mesmerist. There would certainly be no difference of opinion between Mr. Sinnett and his critics in regard to one point, and that is, that pure Atmâ, or pure Spirit, alone does not fall under the power of the operator. If, however, the human Ego is to be described as being either the one or the other, then the experience of Mr. Sinnett, or any other Occult student who has had any practical knowledge concerning the higher aspects of Mesmerism, will not be in accord with that view. A long and close study of this branch of Occultism goes to prove most decisively that it is the enormously varying

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character of the Manas principle in the human race, due to greater or less spiritual development and the ever-changing Karmic necessities, which over and over again find expression in the psychical forms of incarnation. These variations in the Higher Self are never more clearly illustrated than when it is set free under the mesmeric trance, whether such be functioning on the astral or spiritual plane. Each Ego under such conditions differs in some striking way from another under like circumstances, quite as much as do their physical bodies in ordinary life. [Page 105] Moreover, it would be impossible for an operator of this pure and more spiritual form of mesmerism to be deceived as to the state of consciousness of any special sensitive when in the trance condition. Such a one might at one moment be functioning on one plane and the next on another, but there would be no confusion as to the fact in the mind of the trained observer, for the sensitive has not the same comprehensive power of acquiring real knowledge on the astral as when upon the spiritual plane. When the true Ego, by the effort or assistance of the mesmerist, is really cleared of close connection with the lower principles, it is still of course in close magnetic touch with the operator, though it can no longer be accurately spoken of as under his control, for it has then passed into a condition or state of consciousness which renders it absolutely free from all influence from this plane.

In the mesmerism of the stage, or in the ordinary drawing-room experiments, it is undoubtedly true that only the astral principles are brought into operation. The physical senses are rendered inoperative and the astral ones take their place. To drink noxious liquids, suck tallow candles, or to have the flesh pierced with pins and needles does not require the intervention of the victim's Higher Self, and for such performances the stronger physically and the more material the operator probably the greater the anaesthetic results. But where it is a question of the higher regions of the Art, something quite outside of a merely strong physique is necessary.

The practice of this more spiritual kind of mesmerism as here discussed, is hardly open to the ordinary run of people. It requires one who is an Occult student, one who knows something of the conditions and influences that connect humanity with the unseen universe, continued patience, great [Page 106] self-denial, and certain other facilities that need not be here mentioned.

Almost the first thing the Occult student of mesmerism, who is also in search of spiritual truth, sets himself to do, is to try and separate the higher triad of the sensitive's principles from the lower quaternary. This he may succeed in doing more or less quickly or slowly according to the possibilities of the subject. Let this result once be effected and what happens is, that the Ego or Higher Self immediately touches that state of consciousness to which its freedom from the lower quaternary entitles it, viz., that of the spiritual plane. Just as in case of death, whether the complete separation of the three higher principles from the lower ones takes a longer or shorter period, when the liberation has taken place then the Ego's consciousness enters upon its Devachanic bliss. But while that separation is not complete, whether the body is dead or only entranced, while the Higher Manas is too much held back by the claims of the lower, the Ego is unable to touch the state of consciousness beyond that of the Astral plane, but even in that condition it is the true Ego that is communicating with the magnetizer, and there is no question of a skilled and experienced student mistaking the independent intelligence of the Higher Self for the utterances of the lower astral principles more or less reflecting his own thoughts.

There are undoubtedly certain centres of vital and magnetic force in the human body. These are of the greatest importance as connecting the physical body with the astral. The potentialities of these in their full significance are known only to those who have passed certain initiations and cannot be explained. It is

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much better therefore that they should not be mentioned at all in books intended for the public at large, and for [Page 107] the reason that there are already sufficient dangers in the widespread use of mesmerism and hypnotism among curious and unscrupulous experimenters, without starting these on new lines of research, the further possibilities of which, if only partially discovered, would render mesmerism a hundred times more insidious and dangerous to the sensitives than is at present the case". [Page 108]

PATIENCE SINNETT

CHAPTER - 20 -

IN Mrs. Besant's Autobiography the last few pages deal with her approach to Theosophy and her relations with Madame Blavatsky. She never knew our *O.L.* during any of the stormy periods of her life, only making her acquaintance in 1889 when she was comfortably established in Lansdowne Road and surrounded with devotees. Under these calm conditions and naturally eager to enlist Mrs. Besant in the great Theosophical cause, which she was always ready to serve, according to her lights even by means that *western morality* which she openly despised would condemn, she evidently took care to keep her loftiest characteristics well in evidence. To Mrs. Besant, for the brief remainder of her life, she was always entitled to "the reverence due from a pupil to a teacher who never failed her" and to "the passionate gratitude which, in our school, is the natural meed of the one who opens the gateway and points out the path". [*Annie Besant: An Autobiography*, page 344] No doubt Madame Blavatsky realised the importance of Mrs. Besant as a recruit for the Theosophical Society and did all she could to confirm her attachment to it. Though for many years at this period *phenomena* were scornfully denounced by the *O.L.* herself and her later followers, as unworthy of association with the dignified ethics of pure Theosophy, their potent agency seems to have been invoked to rivet Mrs. Besant's devotion to her revered teacher. She writes: "I had asked her as to the agency at work in producing the taps so constantly heard at Spiritualistic [Page 109] sΓ©ances. 'You don't use spirits to produce taps' she said: 'See here!' She put her hand over my head, not touching it, and I heard and felt slight taps on the bone of my skull, each sending a little electric thrill down the spine. She then carefully explained how such taps were produced at any point desired by the operator and how interplay of the currents to which they were due, might be caused otherwise than by conscious human volition. It was in this fashion that she would illustrate her verbal teachings, proving by experiments the statements made as to the existence of subtle forces controllable by the trained mind". [*ibid* page 353]

Mrs. Besant takes care to add: "The proof of the reality of her mission from those whom she spoke of as Masters lay not in these comparatively trivial physical and mental phenomena, but in the splendour of her heroic endurance, the depths of her knowledge, the selflessness of her character, the lofty spirituality of her teaching, the untiring passion of her devotion, the incessant ardour of her work for the enlightening of men". [*ibid* page 354]

The view of her that some of us derive from experience of the *Early Days* renders some part of this glowing eulogy almost more amusing than impressive, but though my plain narrative of actual happenings may sometimes cast light on the less alluring aspects of Madame Blavatsky's very varied character, I can easily understand how, with them entirely in suppression, and a strong motive in operation, she gave rise to the impressions in Mrs. Besant's mind set forth in the glowing language above quoted. Her character would not have been *varied* as I have described it, if it had not included some very fine aspects — as well as the others. [Page 110]

During the period of Mrs. Besant's residence with her — the last two years of her life — neither my wife nor I saw anything of her. We were in close touch with the Master K. H. himself by our own private arrangements and, as I have already explained, were emphatically warned by him to guard them from any possible interference by Madame Blavatsky. So the result of it was a complete extinction of our former intimate relations. I have never known exactly what strange tales she invented in order to keep Mrs. Besant from making acquaintance with us, as she might naturally have wished to do when

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becoming attached to the theosophical movement. In her autobiography she describes how long before becoming acquainted with Madame Blavatsky and when investigating occult ideas of all kinds — "Into the darkness shot a ray of light — A. P. Sinnett's *Occult World* with its wonderfully suggestive letters". When the illumination had expanded and Occultism in its loftiest aspects became the main purpose of Mrs. Besant's life it must have required some inventive ingenuity on Madame Blavatsky's part to restrain her from coming into touch with us. But the ingenuity was effective, and it was only after Madame Blavatsky's death, only after Mrs. Besant had gone to India, had been in touch with the Master Morya on her own account and had come back to London that the mysterious barrier set up between us was broken down. In a manner as touching to me as it was simple and straightforward Mrs. Besant told me that she had misjudged me altogether at first and was sorry for it. We became good friends at once and I have never striven to penetrate the mystery which lay in the background.

In 1890 Madame Blavatsky moved from the Lansdowne Road to 19, Avenue Road, St. John's Wood, [Page 111] a house over which Mrs. Besant had control, and there she died in May, 1891. A little later on Mrs. Besant paid her first visit to India, and on her return established friendly relations with ourselves in the manner I have already described. We were then in the middle of the period during which our private methods of communicating with the Master K. H. were in full progress, and it was no longer necessary to maintain the secrecy that had at first been used to shield them from Madame Blavatsky's jealousy. Mrs. Besant quickly appreciated their importance, and applied for admission to the London Lodge, which we cordially welcomed. Of course she at once began to take part in the work of the inner group which without any formal organization as such, or affectation of masonic ceremonial, became the real vortex of the theosophic teaching of the period. The long series of London Lodge Transactions which were due to that teaching constitute, as we look back upon them, so many mile-stones on the road leading gradually to the later developments of theosophical knowledge.

When Mrs. Besant joined our group she became intimately acquainted for the first time with Mr. Leadbeater, whose wonderful clairvoyant faculties were of immense assistance to us in our studies. Up to that time he had been exclusively devoted to co-operation with us. I had, as I have already mentioned, procured him remunerative employment in the London Office of the *Pioneer*, but eventually, as Mrs. Besant came to appreciate his value she became desirous of enlisting him on the theosophical staff at Avenue Road. She was surrounded there with a group of young men identified with the Blavatsky Lodge, some of whom were well off, in possession of plentiful means. An offer was [Page 112] made to Mr. Leadbeater to the effect that if he would give up his *Pioneer* work, come and live at the Avenue Road house, and devote himself to assisting the group there in their studies, he should be provided with an adequate income — I forget what was the precise amount to be guaranteed to him. To do him only justice I should say that his answer at first was that he would leave the decision to me, and if I had refused to sanction the arrangement I believe he would loyally have accepted that decision. But I felt that I could only give one answer. I was sure that he would prefer the Avenue Road plan beyond all comparison with the other course of life, and I agreed. I knew that the change would mean a great loss to us of the London Lodge but that had to be borne. The first idea was that Mr. Leadbeater would still be able to attend our group meetings, but naturally that interest for him slackened as time went on. I cannot find the exact date of the change but it occurred somewhere in the 1890's.

During those years our activities at Leinster Gardens were very energetic. I find their records in my wife's Diary very interesting. We continually held meetings of the London Lodge to which friends of the members came in large numbers, the attendance mounting up sometimes to as many as sixty, and the

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weekly group meetings were going on all the time. These sometimes seemed to have been kept up till very late hours. At some evening meetings Mrs. Besant lectured, more often that duty fell to me. The diffusion of interest in Theosophy as a consequence of these proceedings must have been very important, and this is partly evidenced by the record of our regular weekly afternoon receptions. The Diary generally records the names of Tuesday visitors, or many of them, and the lists are significant of the [Page 112] wide-spread interest in our work felt in various strata of London society.

This was all going on in spite of the fact that financial ruin had overwhelmed us. This is not an autobiography so I need not go into detail, but our ruin owing to the failure of certain companies in which during the previous nine or ten years of their great prosperity I had become deeply involved was very complete, obliging me to work harder than ever and to accept help from some sympathetic friends. The whole course of events as I have since learned lay outside the normal Karma of our lives. All was arranged by the black powers with the idea that we should be so angry with our own Masters for not warding off the catastrophe that we should throw up all theosophical work in disgust. Though we suffered very severely we remained faithful to the theosophical cause, thus what was intended to be spiritual disaster for us proved an ordeal successfully passed, and productive of great spiritual advancement.

In spite of financial embarrassment we continued to keep on living at Leinster Gardens for some years and the lodge meetings and group meetings were held there, but eventually in 1905 were obliged to move into a smaller and cheaper house, in a less desirable neighbourhood, 14 Westbourne Terrace Road. None the less our theosophical friends found their way there, and we continued our Tuesday afternoon receptions.

Serious troubles began soon afterwards to affect the Society. They cannot be regarded as belonging to the *Early Days*, so it will be only necessary for me to sketch their course very lightly. For some years Mr. Leadbeater had been traveling and lecturing in America and Australia. From America painful stories reached this country to the effect that he [Page 114] had been guilty of serious misconduct with boys entrusted to him as pupils. The accusations pointed especially to instruction he gave them more or less secretly in practice designed to quench their desire for sexual intercourse of the ordinary kind. Those inclined to take the worst view of their significance imagined that they pointed to still more shocking offences. Colonel Olcott, then in Paris, came over to London to investigate the charges and called a meeting of representative theosophists to advise him as to the course to be pursued. Mr. Leadbeater himself was present, not denying that he had given the instruction above referred to to the boys in question, but treating the other insinuation with scornful contempt. The proceedings were of a painful character and some of the members present contended eagerly that Mr. Leadbeater should be expelled from the Society. He had already offered his resignation to Colonel Olcott and I moved that it should be accepted. On a division the advocates of expulsion were defeated and my advice carried. Mr. Leadbeater retired after this into obscurity and only a few of his personal friends knew of his address; so the storm, for the moment, quieted down.

Its most serious consequences, as far as the Society was concerned, developed later. Colonel Olcott died at Adyar, Madras, in the year 1907. The clairvoyant testimony of one lady staying at Adyar at the time indicated that some of the Masters had been present in astral body when the fatal result of Colonel Olcott's illness approached. The details of the story which got afloat were believed or discredited in the Society according to the various attitudes of mind which they encountered. It was alleged that the Masters had plainly declared that Mrs. Besant should be the next President. Some rather embarrassing

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functions in [Page 115] the meanwhile devolved upon myself. By the rules of the Society where a President should die or resign, the authority of the Presidency pending the election of a new President, was to be exercised by the Vice-President. I was holding that office at the time of Colonel Olcott's death, but I was living in London, and all the machinery of the Society's administration was focused on Adyar. Current expenditure even required Presidential authority. It was obvious that I had to delegate my suddenly acquired power to someone at Adyar. Various cable messages were sent back and forward and it seemed that either Mrs. Besant or Mr. Bertram Keightley, then on the spot, might be selected. They, however, I understood to be very much at variance and I had no means of forming an independent opinion as to the merits of the situation, so I appointed the Treasurer of the Society, a man who appeared to be neutral between the more or less antagonistic groups and generally respected, as my Deputy. In the course of time Mrs. Besant was duly elected, and the excitements of the period I have been dealing with were soon forgotten, though the Leadbeater scandal was destined to a formidable revival before long.

In November, 1908, I was subject to a terrible misfortune, the loss of my wife who died on the 9th of that month after a long and fearfully painful illness due to cancer. For the benefit of theosophical readers who may not unnaturally regard such an end to such a life with surprise approaching bewilderment I think it well to explain what I have learned since, that her severe sufferings were not Karmic in any way, nor, in this case, the result of any attack by Satanic enemies. By her own decision on the higher plane, though not conscious of this in the incarnate self, she *chose* the frightfully distressing conditions of her departure [Page 116] from this life — for which the natural period had arrived — in order to accomplish a great spiritual purpose. To explain this more fully would necessitate an elaborate survey of occult mysteries with which it is not the purpose of this book to deal. Nor is it necessary for me to dwell on the effect the loss had on myself for a time, till in the later progress of my own development I came to understand the whole situation aright, to comprehend the sublime conditions in the Occult World to which my wife attained partly in consequence of her great sacrifice, to enjoy opportunities of communication with her and to realise the wisdom underlying the course she had pursued.

Mrs. Besant soon after her election as President saw reason to modify her first impression concerning Mr. Leadbeater and arranged for his return to Adyar and his resumption of his work as a leading member of the Society. This gave rise to much excited feeling in the Society and especially in the London Lodge. At a meeting of the Lodge held in February, 1909, the Lodge by a practically unanimous vote detached itself from the Society altogether. I was not myself entirely in sympathy with the course, but in view of the strong feeling of the Lodge generally, it was useless to attempt any opposition to the separation proposal. It seemed absurd that I should disconnect myself from the Society which I had been mainly instrumental in establishing — so far as the western world was concerned — but at all events, by agreement to the separation it seemed possible to keep the London Lodge together and make a new departure in touch with Theosophy if not with the Theosophical Society. So a Committee was appointed to carry out the idea and the members of the former London Lodge became, almost all, members of a new body to which we gave a new name — *The Eleusinian Society*. [Page 117]

Under this designation we used to meet, for about two years, at the rooms of the Royal Asiatic Society in Albemarle Street. I remained all the time in touch with the Masters, through a very efficient channel of communication, and a time came when I was enabled to see that the anomalous arrangement prevailing might as well come to an end. I determined to resume my connection with the regular Theosophical Society. I was re-established in my former position as Vice-President and I endeavoured to persuade the

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Eleusinian Society to resume its old character as the London Lodge of the T.S. Some agreed and others refused. The London Lodge was re-constituted under a special Charter issued by the governing body at Adyar and by degrees the whole Eleusinian episode has been almost forgotten, except as regards some broken friendships of the earlier period that are a sad memento for me of the great crisis of 1906.

So, writing now in the course of the eightieth year of my life on this physical plane, I feel that it is needless to attempt to carry the record any further. The object I have had in view has been to leave behind me for the benefit of future theosophical generations a plain, truthful narrative of the circumstances under which the great movement was inaugurated in the Western world, in order to correct, as far as need be, mythological conceptions of those Early Days which are apt to arise in later days among new adherents of the movement who have no personal knowledge of the human agency employed in the beginning by the real Founders of the theosophical movement who work on super-physical planes of activity. The blundering of human agency has over and over again threatened to wreck the whole undertaking. Few of us concerned with its beginning have avoided mistakes altogether, but in bringing to a close this sketchy [Page 118] review of mistakes and successes, the story will introduce the reader to one person at all events quite unknown to the theosophical world at large whose important share in the early work seems to me, looking back, unblemished by mistake — my Wife. The story I have had to tell will show how we together — my wife and I — had the privilege of launching the theosophical movement in Europe, for nothing done before 1883 bore any promise of permanent vitality. I — and perhaps hardly anyone else still living — can appreciate the value of her influence while our house was the centre around which all theosophical activities of the period revolved. And that influence was so effective, as I seem to see now, because it was untainted by the faintest desire for recognition. There was no self-regarding germ in my wife's nature on which evil influences could play to bring about misdirected action, while if there were germs of the right kind in people with whom she might be dealing, these were nourished or brought out by her influence in a remarkable manner, as I have learned to understand in these later years since she has passed on. As an underlying attribute which conduced to the results I refer to, she was the most absolutely truthful person I have ever known, incapable of deception in any form, and that is an attribute which is impressive to others in a greater degree than perhaps they always understand.