

H. P. BLAVATSKY – A SPIRITUAL FLOODLIGHT

A powerful spiritual floodlight will search out a huge darkness of ignorance and in so doing, throw up in sharp relief the creatures of malevolence who choose to inhabit a world of shadows and so become attracted to the light in order to destroy that which seeks out their gloom. Such was the case with those redeemers of mankind whose unswerving mission, born out of their selfless love of humanity, was to lead men out of the mire of his limited existence towards eternal peace and brotherhood; the likes of Zarathushtra, Jesus, Giordano Bruno and Mohammed. Alas! This most certainly applied to Blavatsky as well.

But who was this Russian noblewoman Helena Petrovna Blavatsky fondly referred to as just ‘HPB’ by theosophists all over the world? Sages, prophets and messengers of Light, the world over, from every religion and culture all came to heal and to bless. Not a single one of them ever wasted his life energy preaching a material utopia or inventing new socio-economic schemes to improve the worlds politics and physical poverty. Each one of them realized that it was unregenerate man – spiritually impoverished man – who was the ubiquitous spawner of the ugliness around him and so it was through man himself, his character, that the way must be found towards the way of peace and truth. Such was also the case with HPB who devoted every ounce of her energy to promoting the brotherhood of man by way of making generally available those portions of the perennial wisdom that could legitimately and safely be revealed to the public at large. For this magnanimous self-sacrifice she had to drink her cup of slander and ingratitude to the dregs.



Witness her achievements! Besides being an illimitable occultist, philosopher and scientist (in the true sense of the term), she was also an explorer, prolific writer, linguist, poet and concert pianist.

How did she accomplish all this and why is it that when presenting *The Secret Doctrine* to the Western world she quoted from John, vii, 16 ‘My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me’? Who sent her?

This paper is in two parts. Firstly we explain the reasons for her appearance on the world stage in the nineteenth century and then summarize her message, its formalization as the Theosophical Society, and her output. Concerning the latter, one remains aghast at the liberty with which some of HPB’s detractors continue, even to this day, to slander and vilify a dead woman by repeating statements which have been amply refuted over and over again. For this reason we must be at pains to demonstrate that the charge of fraud and impostor which has ever dogged HPB since the publication of the Hodgson Report in 1885 by the British Society for Psychical Research, has been effectively demolished by their own 1986 report written by a renowned expert in forgery and handwriting analysis. In the second part we describe her life, artistic achievements and financial status.

PART I – THE TASK AND MESSAGE OF H. P. BLAVATSKY

WHY THE NEED FOR MORE LIGHT?

Sûtrâtmâ – The Thread Doctrine

The Esoteric Doctrine is sometimes referred to as the thread doctrine (Sanskrit: *Sûtrâtmâ*) since it passes through and strings together all the philosophical, religious and scientific systems, and reconciles and explains them.¹ We find that this sacred thread of esotericism runs through the events of the history of the world right from its origins in the mists of time to historical times. We discern this in the myths and legends of many cultures; then in the legendary semi-divine figures of Krishna in India, Hermes in Egypt, Mithra in Persia; followed by the great sages such as Gautama the Buddha, Lao-tse and Jesus the Christ. In the west this thread doctrine is to be found in the Greek philosophers like Pythagoras and Plato, and among the Gnostics, Simon Magus and others. Despite ruthless suppression by the Christian Church, it nevertheless emerges among the doctrine of the Rosicrucians, Alchemists and Hermeticists, being made partly explicit in the writings of such as Robert Fludd, Jacob Boehme and Isaac Newton.

Western Thought in the Nineteenth Century and the Raison d'Être for Theosophy

For the first time in recorded history, some parts of this hitherto undisclosed teaching were expounded publicly in the early literature of the theosophical movement. But why during this era in world history? Because this was an age when religion was in sharp conflict with materialistic science. The onslaught of science and technology increasingly gave man mastery over his physical environment but its materialist and rational basis seemed to endanger man's sense of meaning and purpose within creation. At the opposite end of the spectrum, spiritualism was popular with its erroneous theories of the 'spirits' of departed mortals returning to earth to communicate with those they have loved. Probably most insidious was Darwinism which all but succeeded in expunging man's place within a divine order by basing his evolution and existence entirely on mechanical biology involving the notion of genetic mutation and natural selection. Into this sharply polarised state of affairs, theosophy provided dignity and purpose to man's life within a cosmic context. It placed human destiny in an emanationist cosmology and showed that existence is one organic Whole, man as microcosm being the reflection of the macrocosm. Significantly, it expounded the twin doctrine of karma and reincarnation, two central pillars of the esoteric philosophy.

BLAVATSKY'S MESSAGE AND TEACHING

HPB's task was, then, to act as a messenger to bring the knowledge that there is a Divine Wisdom – *Theo-sophia* as the root and basis upon which all philosophies, sciences and religions are founded and which guides the cosmos, nature and human life. This Divine Wisdom is variously known as the Ancient Wisdom, or Wisdom-Religion, or Esoteric Philosophy, or Perennial Philosophy, or Occult Science. All these terms allude to the fact that *Theo-sophia* is not a system of belief formulated by an individual, nor a religion in the ordinary meaning of the word denoting formalized worship and ritual; instead it is the accumulated wisdom of innumerable ages that has been systematically checked by generations of sages the world over (see below).

What then is Occult Science? It is a generic term referring to the Hermetic or Esoteric Sciences, which explore the essential, or hidden secrets of Nature – physical and psychic, mental and spiritual – rather than, but not excluding, Her outward appearance and mechanical behavior which Western science studies to virtual perfection. For example, that Swedenborg came to the Occult teachings in his general conceptions is shown by his essay on the Vortical Theory.²

As to the message that HPB brought: it is based on fundamental axioms formulated into three propositions that cannot be thought of independently from the whole, meaning that no aspect, no principle and no law can be properly considered in isolation: the Universe and all that is in it constitute a WHOLE. Furthermore, it cannot be too strongly emphasized that these propositions are not the invention of HPB or anyone else. They form the basis of the presentation of the doctrines of the Divine Wisdom. Countless generations of sages have checked these doctrines by study as well as practical experience in a manner akin to the inductive method of science whereby a hypothesis put forward is checked by repeatable experiments and only when there is a sufficient corroboration between hypothesis and experimental verification is the former elevated to a theory. In similar vein these sages have found the teachings enunciated to be in consonance with the overriding philosophy formulated by them. But it was HPB who synthesized the diverse and scattered fragments of this doctrine into a coherent system and body of knowledge made available for the first time to, and in a suitable idiom for, the Western world at large. But it is as well to point out here HPB's counsel 'that no human-born doctrine, no creed, however sanctified by custom and antiquity, can compare in sacredness with the religion of Nature. The Key of Wisdom that unlocks the massive gates leading to the arcana of the innermost sanctuaries can be found hidden in her bosom only: and that bosom is in the countries pointed to by the great seer of the past century Emanuel Swedenborg. There lies the heart of nature, that shrine whence issued the early races of primeval Humanity, and which is the cradle of *physical man*'.³

FIRST PROPOSITION: THERE IS ONLY ONE ULTIMATE REALITY

'An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable PRINCIPLE on which all speculation is impossible, since it transcends the power of human conception and could only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude. There is one absolute Reality which antecedes all manifested, conditioned, being. This Infinite and Eternal Cause – is the rootless root of all that was, is, or ever shall be.'⁴

This proposition is, then, an affirmation of the Unity, or ONENESS of origin of all that exists. It avows that there is a single spiritual source from which all proceeds, which sustains everything every moment of time, and into which all will be re-absorbed, bearing the fruits of experience, at the end of each great period of activity or evolutionary cycle. Hence the 'essential unity of all manifested things is due to the originating Reality, the One Principle.'⁵

But in order that the manifest worlds – the worlds of form – may come to be, this One Reality manifests two essential aspects reflected into the duality or polarity that we see running through all of nature, seen and unseen. ‘The Manifested Universe, therefore, is pervaded by duality.’⁶ This is the duality of Spirit and Matter, of Subject and Object, of Positive and Negative, of Life and Form, of Male and Female; plus the dualities which science confirms in its investigation of physical nature where energy (radiation) and matter, or wave and particle are regarded as the two aspects of light. The poles of this duality are to be regarded as the two aspects only of the original ONE from which they derive. They are postulated as the basis of conditioned being, but there can never be one without the other, like, so to say, two faces of one coin.

SECOND PROPOSITION: PERIODICITY AND UNIVERSAL LAW

‘The Eternity of the Universe *in toto* as a boundless plane; periodically the playground of numberless Universes incessantly manifesting and disappearing, called the Manifesting Stars, and the Sparks of Eternity. The Eternity of the Pilgrim is like a wink of the Eye of Self-Existence. The appearance and disappearance of Worlds is like a regular tidal ebb of flux and reflux.’⁷

This asserts the absolute universality of that law of periodicity, of flux and reflux, ebb and flow. The periodic appearance and disappearance of Universes is strictly according to cyclic and karmic law. The appearance or waking state is known as *manvantara*, or the Day of Brahma, being a projection outwards from subjective realms into objectivity – as manifestation, evolution, unfolding, centrifugal action, the movement from within to without; and the disappearance or slumbering state is known as *pralaya*, or the Night of Brahma, being a withdrawal and dissolution of the manifested state back into subjective realms – as involution, enfolding, centripetal action, the movement from without to within. It is stressed that such periodicity is not limited to all departments of physical nature as studied and recorded by Western science, but applies equally on the grandest macrocosmic scale to globes and Universes, for periodicity is one of the universal and fundamental laws of Occult Science.

THIRD PROPOSITION: EVOLUTIONARY PROGRESS

‘The fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul, the latter being itself an aspect of the Unknown Root; and the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul – a spark of the former – through the Cycle of Incarnation, or Necessity, in accordance with Cyclic and Karmic law, during the whole term.’⁸

This proposition states that every soul has of necessity to pass through a complete cycle of incarnation, during which it gains experience as mineral, plant, animal and eventually, man. But this does not mean that man has been a stone, or a plant or an animal, but that it is the evolutionary path of development for the inner, invisible aspect of life and it is by this age long process that individual self-consciousness eventually arises in man.

For any man, then, his evolutionary journey is not accomplished just in one life-time. His immortal spiritual soul projects a ray of itself down into a series of personalities, one after the other, and garners the spiritual experience of living in each of them. Thus man’s spiritual soul grows in this sense.

Obviously then, man enjoys no unaccountable good fortune, or special gifts or privileges save those won by his own spiritual soul through his own effort and merit throughout a long series of metempsychosis and reincarnations. This would explain the phenomenon of genius whether in the arts, sciences, sports or in any other field. Every genius has made himself, so to speak. His body and brain are not merely the accidental upshot of just the right combinations of genetic material, but the deserved instrument of operation for his spiritual soul.

FORMATION OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

At a time when spiritualism was the subject of widespread discussion and responsible journalism in America, a group of serious-minded men and women came together in HPB’s apartment in New York to share a common interest not only in the topic of the day but in a wide variety of intriguing subjects. These, according to the records of the meetings, ranged from mediumship and magical phenomena to contemporary scientific discoveries, curiosities of nature and the beliefs and practices of ancient civilizations.

At one of these meetings, the question was asked: ‘Would it not be a good thing to form a Society for this kind of study?’ The date was 7th September 1875.

In the course of the next few weeks, the formal organization of the society proceeded with the election of officers, recording of minutes, passing of resolutions, and so on, until on the 17th November the President-elect delivered his

Inaugural Address and the Theosophical Society (TS) was thus fully constituted. This date has ever since been celebrated as the date of the Society's formation.

Of the persons present at the preliminary meetings, those who remained to contribute to its firm establishment included Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (President), (succeeded at his death in 1907 by Dr. Annie Besant), Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (Recording Secretary) and William Quan Judge (Counsel).

Over the last hundred years, the modern theosophical movement has divided into several separate organizations, each of which seeks to fulfil the Society's objectives in its own way and with its own emphasis.

The objectives of the TS are the formation of a brotherhood of Humanity, then an understanding of natural law, especially in its occult manifestation, the development of latent powers within the individual, and an appreciation for Oriental scriptures. These were then formalized into the three present objects of the Society:

1. To form the nucleus of a universal brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.
2. To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science.
3. To investigate the unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in Man.

Hence the TS and HPB's works acted as a mirror and a lens to disseminate the esoteric heritage of mankind to new and wider audiences. But the primary goal and thrust of the TS is emphatically its First Object, never a display or teaching of occult phenomena for the sake of it. In the forceful words of a Master 'The Chiefs want a "Brotherhood of Humanity," a real Universal Fraternity started.'⁹ But for this to occur there has to be 'a profound change in human consciousness, which alone can ameliorate world conditions. The Theosophical Society exists in order to awaken human beings in their own higher and real nature, and thus usher in a new age of Universal Brotherhood.'¹⁰

Freedom of thought is at the very heart of the theosophical movement. No teacher, or writer, including HPB, has any authority to impose his or her teachings or opinions on members. Every member has an equal right to follow any school of thought, but has no right to force the choice on any other.

THE WORKS OF H. P. BLAVATSKY

The contents of HPB's works is arguably unparalleled in the literary field, for her works provide a doorway into the secret lore of the Occident and especially the Orient where the Esoteric Philosophy has been preserved since time immemorial by its Custodians. Her magnum opus is undoubtedly *The Secret Doctrine* (see below). This volume is unique. There is no other that sets forth the vast process of cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis, not as a pastiche of doctrine found in one form or another in the scriptures of the world, but as their common source. It shows man a Purpose, a Plan, a Conscious Process, and a Way.

We now cite her principal works as it is quite impossible to mention all her articles, stories and letters written by her in pen and ink for periodicals, amounting to over one thousand. It is incredible that she did not start to write in English until her fortieth year, yet her vocabulary has been said to be the fourth largest in English, putting her in a class with Milton and Shakespeare.

Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett

*The Mahatma Letters*¹¹ is a volume of letters received mainly from H. P. Blavatsky's two Adept Teachers in answer to questions put to them mainly by A. P. Sinnett with some by A. O. Hume. It is the source of the essential principles of the subjects elaborated and disseminated in all Blavatsky's writings. The letters include commentaries on science and provide a wealth of philosophical and metaphysical instruction in the esoteric tradition – such as the unfolding of cosmos, planetary schemes, evolution of man, constitution of man, after-death states, levels of consciousness, electricity and magnetism, and the nature of matter.

Books by H. P. Blavatsky

*Isis Unveiled*¹² was published in 1877 in two volumes: Volume I – Science; Volume II – Theology. Various passages from 1339 different works are quoted and referenced and this does not take into consideration how many times any one volume is quoted. (Think of the labour that would be required for an ordinary writer to search through over a thousand books to find a particular passage.) This enormous iconoclastic work is a mine of information on the science and theology of the day. While some of it is now out of date, there is still a great deal that fulfils its avowed purpose of 'a master-key to the mysteries of ancient and modern science and theology'. There are substantial commentaries on the philosophical basis

of ancient and modern science, reality versus illusion, the mysteries of Nature such as psycho-physical, psychic and cyclical phenomena, force and matter, and on the wisdom of ancient Egypt and India.

*The Secret Doctrine*¹³ was published in 1888. It is a monumental work sub-titled ‘The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy’. The correspondences between cosmos and man demand that the two be studied together. This is the reason why *The Secret Doctrine* reveals both the nature and structure of the cosmos and the occult constitution of man in two volumes (original 1888 edition): Volume I – Cosmogogenesis; Volume II – Anthropogenesis. Volume III (added posthumously) contains essays by HPB. Several extracts from 1147 different works are quoted and referenced to justify and corroborate the occult doctrines propounded and again, this does not take into consideration how many times any one volume is quoted. According to Einstein’s niece, the great scientist always had a copy of it on his desk.¹⁴ Another Nobel physicist who was deeply interested in *The Secret Doctrine* was Robert Millikan, and there is persuasive evidence to show that he and the astrophysicist Gustav Stromberg were instrumental in introducing Einstein to this great work.¹⁵

Of especial value to students of science and the esoteric tradition are the two *Addenda on Science and The Secret Doctrine Contrasted* in Volume I and Volume II. The addenda in Volume I contrasts the dicta of Occult Science with the latest discoveries and theories of physical science on the origin of the universe, the nature of force and matter, elements and atoms. In Volume II the addenda deals with the vast scheme of evolution, anthropology, fossil relics, geological periods, prehistoric civilizations and submerged continents. Again the latest expositions offered by science are set against the backdrop of the archaic wisdom as HPB realized that it was through a scientific idiom that further expositions and explorations into the ageless wisdom should be made. In fact a number of prophetic assertions made in *The Secret Doctrine* on the future course of science have been borne out by events in the twentieth century, such as the interconvertibility of matter and energy, the antiquity of the human race and the primacy of consciousness.

*The Key to Theosophy*¹⁶ appeared in 1889, ‘being a clear exposition, in the form of questions and answers, of the ethics, science, and philosophy, for the study of which The Theosophical Society has been founded’. It expounds the main aspects of the teaching as it affects mankind, such as the wisdom-religion, occultism, spiritualism, god and prayer, the septenary nature of man, after-death states, karma, reincarnation, and the complex nature of mind.

*The Voice of the Silence*¹⁷ also appeared in 1889, ‘being chosen Fragments from the Book of Golden Precepts, for the daily use of Lanoos [Disciples]’. Small in size, but colossal in content, it is in three Fragments entitled: The Voice of the Silence; The Two Paths; The Seven Portals. This is a work meant for those few earnest aspirants seeking true self-knowledge in order to play a significant part in helping mankind along its arduous evolutionary path towards ultimate self-redemption and liberation.

*The Collected Writings of H. P. Blavatsky*¹⁸ is a collection of HPB’s numerous articles and published material written during the period 1875 to 1891, arranged chronologically in 15 large volumes, principally due to the efforts of her grand-nephew, Boris de Zirkoff. These writings contain much teaching which supplements the material in her books. Some of this material gives an insight into how the esoteric teachings could affect the lot of present-day humanity having regard to its traditions, institutions, ignorances, superstitions, etc. They are especially illuminating on matters of spiritualism, the Christian religion, and Occultism generally. As always, HPB presents the essentials and objective facts, which she sees clearly against her encyclopaedic knowledge.

Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge, is in two parts: the first in 1890, the second in 1891, consisting of replies given by HPB to questions asked upon the Stanzas of Dzyan¹⁹ during sessions of the Lodge. It is of particular significance to students of *The Secret Doctrine*.

*The Theosophical Glossary*²⁰ was published in 1892. It is a mine of information and a clarification of esoteric terms, although HPB did not have the opportunity of checking and correcting it.

Miscellaneous Works comprise booklets, pamphlets and commentaries, many of them in Russian and French. Chief among this collection are: *Gems from the East*, a birthday book of precepts and axioms, written in 1890; *Mme Blavatsky on How to Study Theosophy*, being a booklet containing important hints to students written down by Robert Bowen from talks given by HPB to those close to her towards the end of her life; *Five Years of Theosophy*, published

in 1885, being a selection of mystical, philosophical, theosophical, historical and scientific essays from *The Theosophist*, the periodical of which HPB was the editor and often, the author.

PROCESSES INVOLVED IN BLAVATSKY'S WRITINGS

HPB demonstrated the Siddhis (psychic-spiritual faculties) of clairvoyance, clairaudience, and the powers of projection, precipitation and being *en rapport*. These were all used in her writings which may be categorized into seven kinds of processes. We outline them below but it is emphasized that none of the above processes are miracles or supernatural.²¹ All fall within natural law, once the operator has developed the faculties to use them. It is obvious that HPB's writings as just enumerated are proof of this; her literary works with several thousands of references could not have been produced by ordinary means.

Descriptive Writing: This is the conventional method of authorship with the added dimension of one who writes from the standpoint of Occultism.

Writing by Instruction: Here the writing is under instruction and supervision from her Adept Master in fulfillment of her task as the messenger in bringing the teachings of the Perennial Philosophy to the Western world.

Writing by Dictation: Writing by virtue of the capacity to be in perfect mutual psycho-magnetic rapport with an Adept in Occult Sciences, whereupon thought transference and dictation of whole pages becomes possible since space and distance, as such, do not exist for thought.

Writing by Directive Clairvoyance: This is the faculty of being able to select a book on a specific theme although never having physically seen the volume before; then, from any page in the work; then to choose an appropriate passage on a pre-determined subject; then having selected a citation, the ability to copy it verbatim, and give its correct page; moreover to support this citation by quoting another author, an extract from another book would be required in a similar manner. HPB was taught this Siddhi by her Teachers during her exacting training period in Tibet.

The author of this paper has checked large portions of the science sections of *The Secret Doctrine* with regard to their source references. Every one has been found to be correct in every detail with regard to citation, reference and page number. He has also verified each and every one of dozens of references to Sir Isaac Newton and found them all to be correct in minute detail. This is why we can affirm with confidence that HPB wrote truly as a scientist, providing us with full chapter and verse, with verifiable source references.

Writing by Psychometry: This involves the faculty whereby a sensitive person can receive from any object held in the hand or against the forehead impressions of the character or appearance of the individual, or any other object with which it has previously been in contact. Thus a manuscript, painting or item of jewelry, no matter how ancient, will convey to the sensitive a vivid picture of the writer, painter or wearer.

Writing by Precipitation: This signifies the materialization of the message on paper or other substance (the *Mahatma Letters* were received in this way as well).

Writing by a process Analogous to Tulku: Difficult to explain as there is no English word equivalent to the Tibetan, broadly speaking this involves the Siddhi of being able to project one's consciousness by means of an illusory vehicle or body.

CHIEF FIELDS OF RESEARCH SPURRED BY BLAVATSKY'S WRITINGS

The revelation of hitherto guarded facts about the inner workings of nature has spurred major research in a number of areas in science. As HPB tells us, the truths inspired to such as Kepler, Leibnitz, Gassendi and Swedenborg have never found a fair hearing. But now science is beginning to take note. Indeed the Mahatmas have affirmed that 'modern science is [becoming] our best ally'.²²

There are two broad areas where science and Theosophy can supplement one another: natural science, and life science.

Matter and Light

It is interesting how closely the latest experiments and theories in quantum physics on the nature of light and matter appear to mirror the fundamental esoteric tenets, chiefly regarding the role of consciousness.

Cosmology

Big bang theories in cosmology have remained virtually unchallenged for over a decade, but scientists are now beginning to realize the limitations of this model chiefly regarding the exclusion of intelligence from the scheme, and the question about pre-big bang events.

Consciousness

This is currently the most hotly debated topic which divides into two groups: the materialists and the anti-materialists. The former group regard consciousness purely as a function of brain activity and their goal is the ‘easy problem’ of explaining how the brain executes its various data processing tasks. The latter group force the ‘hard problem’ that understanding cerebral mechanisms does not necessarily imply an understanding of consciousness *per se*.

Anthropology, Geology and Evolutionary Theory

Darwinian evolutionary theory is starting to show serious flaws that could swing the scientific picture on evolution into the orbit of Theosophy. A seminal contribution to this breakdown of rigid Darwinism is the work of Michael A. Cremo and Richard L. Thompson in their book *The Hidden History of the Human Race* which is a condensed edition of *Forbidden Archaeology* of 952 pages. This work exposes a major scientific cover-up in that evolutionary prejudices, deeply held by powerful groups of scientists have served to screen out, suppress and ignore facts that contradict the dominant establishment viewpoint of human origins and antiquity. Cremo and Thompson have provided detailed and thorough evidence to demonstrate that people like ourselves existed on earth millions of years before the geological period claimed by Darwinism – and this enormous antiquity of the human race is certainly a key tenet of the occult doctrine on evolution and anthropogenesis.

THE BLAVATSKY LECTURES

The Blavatsky Lecture was inaugurated primarily to commemorate the work done by H. P. Blavatsky in disseminating theosophy through her voluminous writings. This series of lectures by renowned theosophists, many of them authors in their own rights and international speakers for the TS serve to illuminate, expand upon or amplify an aspect of the occult wisdom contained mainly, but not exclusively, in HPB’s writings. The subject matter of these lectures covers the whole range from the relationship between the occult and orthodox sciences, evolution, practical philosophy, freemasonry, and the path of self-development, devotion and service. They are all available in printed form.

THE BLAVATSKY TRUST

The Blavatsky Trust is a public charity founded in 1974 in order to advance education and further research and study into religion, philosophy and science, and to disseminate the results of such work to the public. The Trust helps to finance a Masters course at the University of Exeter in Western Esotericism. Additionally, the Trust assists in the funding of a number of theosophical lectures, seminars and events in England.

THE CHARGE OF FRAUD AND IMPOSTER AGAINST BLAVATSKY

There was growing interest in the TS in sophisticated European circles when a calamity overtook it.

The Hodgson Report by the Society for Psychical Research published in 1885

In 1884 the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) sent Richard Hodgson to investigate the occult transactions associated with HPB in India including the authorship of the *Mahatma Letters*. A Cambridge graduate in his twenties, and distinguished, from all accounts, by excessive self-confidence and hubris he arrived at the headquarters of the Theosophical Society at Adyar in November 1884 during HPB’s absence (she was in England, France and Germany at the time) and Col. Olcott was also abroad. Hodgson’s investigations and conclusions were based almost exclusively on his relying on the testimony of Emma and Alexis Coulomb who were members of the Adyar headquarters staff. This couple had previously been circulating stories that HPB had written letters incriminating herself in the fraudulent production of the *Mahatma Letters* and other occult phenomena. Their accusations were ostensibly motivated by bribes from Christian missionaries antagonistic to Theosophy. It is a little known but amazing fact that there is a document

signed by five Theosophists (HPB and Col. Olcott were *not* among the signers as they were abroad) testifying to the fact that they had positive knowledge of the existence of the Mahatmas. Furthermore, this document was testified by two more people: M. and Mme. Coulomb, on 13 July 1881. It was still further emphasized by both the Coulobms by means of a post-script note stating that ‘The above Postscript is correct’²³ – an astounding declaration in view of the havoc these two individuals caused the Theosophical Society a few years later by committing perjury by making faulty accusations and allegations against HPB, their benefactress. Yet this sworn document was not mentioned by Hodgson who preferred to take the words of the two perjurers rather than the counterbalancing statements of the other members of the staff at Adyar, to whom he assumed friendship, although he later maligned them.

The much-publicized Hodgson Report was published in 1885 and concluded that Madame Blavatsky ‘has achieved a title to permanent remembrance as one of the most accomplished, ingenious, and interesting imposters in history’. This verdict has ever since been circulated in biographies and encyclopaedias, and in the news media whenever her life and works are discussed. The ensuing negative publicity persists even until now.

HPB returned to Adyar in December 1884 but in order to avoid further controversy the TS prevented HPB from clearing her name by legal means which left her demoralized and frustrated. She left India in March 1885 in poor health never to return.

The Recant of Hodgson’s 1885 Report by the Society for Psychical Research in 1986

It is especially noteworthy that in 1986, the centenary year of the Hodgson Report, that the SPR of its own accord issued a three-page press release to the newspapers and leading magazines in Great Britain, Canada and the United States opening with the words –

MADAME BLAVATSKY, CO-FOUNDER OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY WAS UNJUSTLY
CONDEMNED, NEW STUDY CONCLUDES

This ‘new study’ was the re-examining of the case by Dr. Vernon Harrison, past president of The Royal Photographic Society and formerly Research Manager to Thomas De La Rue, an expert on forgery.²⁴

The news release included one of the summarizing paragraphs of Dr. Harrison twenty-five page analysis: ‘As detailed examination of this report [i.e. the Hodgson Report] proceeds, one becomes more and more aware that whereas Hodgson... was prepared to use any evidence, however trivial or questionable, to implicate HPB, he ignored all evidence that could be used in her favour. His report is riddled with slanted statements, conjecture advanced as fact or probable fact, uncorroborated testimony of unnamed witnesses, selection of evidence and downright falsity’.

Hodgson’s evidence on handwriting, Harrison found, was ‘so weak, partisan and confused, that it might just as easily show that Madame Blavatsky wrote *Huckleberry Finn* – or that President Eisenhower wrote the *Mahatma Letters*’²⁵, that ‘there is strong circumstantial evidence that the incriminating Blavatsky-Coulomb letters which have been lost or destroyed, were forgeries made by Alexis and Emma Coulomb’ and that ‘the Hodgson Report is a highly partisan document forfeiting all claims to scientific impartiality.’ He adds ‘I cannot exonerate the SPR committee from blame for publishing this thoroughly bad report’.

Quoting from a statement that HPB herself issued shortly after Hodgson’s report was published, Harrison says: ‘I apologize to her that it has taken us one hundred years to demonstrate that she wrote truly’.

Of course this 1986 SPR report has had far less coverage and generated but little interest compared to the earlier Hodgson Report. But is it not the case that calumny with attendant media hype attract more attention than an item of news that upholds the truth?

The Deeper Implications of the Hodgson Report of 1885

Enough has been said to show that HPB did not write the Mahatma Letters – Harrison’s conclusion independently supported by three other investigations by experts in forgery. Notwithstanding all the above, there are deeper and inner reasons why HPB had to be labelled a fraud in Hodgson’s report.

The reason is that occult secrets are priceless pearls, but immensely dangerous in the hands of the selfish who would use such powers to further their own ends. The charge of fraud against HPB thus acted as a veil to protect deep secrets from unworthy hands.²⁶ The Hodgson report thus effectively shielded the TS and the esoteric doctrines from an unprepared public. The sheer adversity of the Report was part of a larger cosmic necessity, guarding against the premature disclosure of matters that humanity as whole was then, and is yet, unfitted to receive; and that in doing so, it perhaps saved the world from the appalling disasters which result, both to the individual and to the race, from the selfish misuse of occult forces. In HPB’s own words:

‘Occult philosophy divulges few of its most important vital mysteries. It drops them like precious pearls, one by one, far and wide apart...For once out of the safe custody of their legitimate heirs and keepers, those mysteries...fall into the public domain and have to run the risk of becoming in the hands of the selfish...curses more often than blessings’.²⁷

Hodgson’s report effectively ensured that occult pearls would *not* be cast before swine, to take up the famous Biblical saying.

PART II – THE LIFE OF H. P. BLAVATSKY

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831 – 1891) was born at Ekaterinoslav in Ukraine at midnight between 30 and 31 July 1831. Her father, Colonel Peter Hahn, came of a noble family originally of Mecklenburg, but which had settled in Russia for some 300 years. Her mother, Helena Andreyevna was a renowned novelist also of noble lineage. Thus HPB’s heritage combined Russian, French Huguenot, and German stock, while her maternal grandmother, Princess Helena Pavlovna Dolgorukov was descended from one of Russia’s oldest families. In 1848 when she was seventeen, she married Nikifor Blavatsky, an elderly provincial governor, from whom she soon separated.

From earliest childhood and during her life there is evidence of protective guardianship in support of the statement that she was selected to become a direct agent of the Trans-Himalayan Brotherhood of Adepts to usher in a new age by reviving the universal wisdom tradition, as characterized by Theosophy, with its object ‘to reconcile all religions, sects, and nations under a common system of ethics based on eternal verities’.²⁸ This ancient Fraternity of Adepts or ‘Brothers’ exists as a perennial source for the preserving and recording of the events and facts of the history of religions and philosophical evolution in the world.

Her childhood and youth were marked by inexplicable incidents and psychic phenomena to such an extent that her clairvoyant powers were consulted by the nobility about their private affairs and by the police regarding their criminal investigations. Yet she was not interested in such powers for their own sake, but for the principles and laws of nature that govern them. She became a student of metaphysical lore and travelled to many lands, in search of hidden knowledge. During 1848 and 1849, she studied magic in Egypt with an aged Copt and joined ‘The Druses of Lebanon’, a secret society. She was present with Garibaldi at the battle of Mentana in 1849.

When walking with her father in London in 1851, she saw a tall and stately Rajput whom she recognized as a Protector known in her visions from childhood. He spoke to her of a future work she was to do under His direction after preparation in the East. In 1852-54 she attempted to enter Tibet, however she was not successful until 1867-70. During the intervening period, she made contact with spiritualism, learned to bring under her control her marvellous power to produce phenomena at will, and engaged in several commercial enterprises (like a trade in high class woods and head of an artificial flower factory). In Tibet, she learned to manipulate occult forces. In Cairo in 1871 she made an unsuccessful attempt to found a spiritual society upon the basis of phenomena. From Paris she sailed to New York, acting under inner instructions. She landed there on 7th July 1873, without personal funds, having exchanged her first class passage to steerage class (the cheapest) in order to buy steerage class for a poor woman and children who had been swindled. An unsuccessful business venture in a Long Island Farm, used up the 1,000 ruble legacy she had received on the death of her father.

In 1874 she visited the Eddy homestead in Chittenden. This was the scene of various occult phenomena being investigated by Colonel H. S. Olcott. They worked together and founded, together with William Quan Judge, and others, The Theosophical Society as stated above.

On 8th July 1878, HPB became an American citizen; the first Russian woman to do so. Later that year, acting ‘under orders’, she and Olcott sailed for India; they landed in Bombay in February 1879. In 1882 the two founders established the headquarters of the Theosophical Society at Adyar, near Madras (Chennai). This remains the international headquarters for the Society, which is now established in fifty countries of the world.

She made various tours of India between her arrival in 1879 and her visit to Europe in 1884. In Wurzburg she worked at *The Secret Doctrine*. At Ostend, HPB fell very ill but made another strange recovery explaining that she had ‘elected’ to work for a few more years in her suffering body. By invitation, she moved to London which then became the centre of theosophical work in Europe. In this she was assisted by occasional visits of the President-Founder, Colonel Olcott.

HPB died on 8th May 1891 in London. Her ashes were divided between New York, India, and London, and part of it is interred under her statue in Adyar. In her will she requested that each year, on the anniversary of her death, her

friends should assemble and read from *The Light of Asia* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. By Colonel Olcott's wish, this anniversary came to be known as 'White Lotus Day' and this commemoration continues to this day.

BLATVATSKY – THE ARTIST AND MUSICIAN

The phenomenal literary and philanthropic achievements of HPB have understandably obscured her other spectacular accomplishments as an artist and above all, a concert pianist. Although she did not work as an artist with brush and palette or do oil paintings, nevertheless her pen and ink sketches were artistic creations and her cartoons clever and humorous (she did not produce a cartoon of Richard Hodgson!). In addition she could work in a distinctive field because she could produce a picture without pen, pencil or brush, instead by precipitation using *kriyashakti* (literally, the power of creative thought energized by will-power alone that can produce external results – one of the yogic *Siddhis*).²⁹ Her many portraits include a yogi depicted in *samadhi*, produced by *kriyashakti*, and a pen and ink sketch of two opera singers performing Gounod's *Faust* in Tiflis.³⁰

HPB was undoubtedly a magnificent pianist playing with all the touch, deep expression and passion of her nature. She was a pupil of Moscheles and when in London as a young lady with her father, played at a charity concert with Clara Schumann and Arabella Goddard in a work for three pianos by Schumann. HPB also made some concert tours in Italy and Russia under the pseudonym of 'Madame Laura'.

William Kingsland provided this poignant reminiscence³¹:

'I well remember on one occasion, on a visit by her to my house in London in 1889, she sat down at the piano and played Schubert's *Erl-Konig*, to my great surprise and delight...'

The *Erl-Konig* with its fiendishly difficult octave passages still induces panic amongst concert pianists today and the fact that HPB could play this near-impossible piece only two years before she died and in ill health speaks volumes for her sheer will power and exuberance.

HPB was a member of the Philharmonic Society in London.³²

BLAVATSKY'S FINANCIAL STATUS

There is no record of HPB receiving any remuneration for her musical performances. From her literary work she did not derive such income as one might expect and even with her two major works, *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, a great deal of the publishing cost was borne by HPB herself because of her tendency to make alterations on proof-sheets. She sent the first proceeds of *Isis Unveiled* together with money received for her various articles published by Russian newspapers and journals, to the Red Cross in Russia to help her compatriots wounded in the Russo-Turkish war.

The meagerness of HPB's financial status has been attested in documents by Col. Olcott³³ and Countess Wachtmeister.³⁴

Invariably though, there are deeper and inner reasons for the outward hard circumstances of one's life, in HPB's case, why she was often without funds. Let HPB elucidate:

'In occultism, a most solemn vow has to be taken never to use any powers acquired or conferred for the benefit of one's own personal self, for to do so would be to set foot on the steep and treacherous slope that ends in the abyss of Black Magic. I have taken that vow...and I would rather suffer any tortures than be untrue to my pledge.'³⁵

POSTLUDE

The Cards of Destiny have dealt humankind a jewel beyond price in HPB's message of spiritual uplift and universal brotherhood to be attained by a knowledge of the eternal verities of our existence. Have we used this sublime gift with gratitude, understanding and love? Who is to say? All spiritual teachers are but messengers. They proffer no initiations and perform no miracles at our behest. All that they can do is to say, with H. P. Blavatsky: 'I can tell you how to find Those who will show you the secret gateway that leads inward only, and closes fast behind the neophyte for evermore. For those who win onwards, there is reward past all telling: the power to bless and save humanity. For those who fail, there are other lives in which success may come.'

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I deeply indebted first and foremost, of course, to H. P. Blavatsky for the boundless inspiration from her works plus the example of her dauntless courage and moral strength. Then to Professor Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, Sylvia Cranston, Geoffrey Farthing and Geoffrey Barborka from whose various works as referenced in this paper much valuable insight was obtained.

Finally I am most grateful to the Swedenborg Society for inviting me to write this paper.

NOTE: All references to *The Secret Doctrine* pertain to the six volume Adyar edition published by The Theosophical Publishing House, India, reprinted in London, 1950.

¹ See *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 335.

² *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, p.177.

³ *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. IV, p. 365.

⁴ *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, p. 79.

⁵ Geoffrey A. Farthing, *Deity, Cosmos and Man*, Point Loma Publications, 1993, p. 120.

⁶ *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, p. 81.

⁷ *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, p. 82.

⁸ *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, p. 82.

⁹ *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, Third and revised edition, 1972, p. 24.

¹⁰ Presidential address by Radha Burnier, the current International President of the Theosophical Society to the 130th Annual Convention of the TS in 2005.

¹¹ *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, Third and revised edition, The Theosophical Publishing House, India, 1972.

¹² H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, The Theosophical Publishing House, Quest edition, USA, 1994.

¹³ *The Secret Doctrine, Volumes 1 and 2*, A Facsimile of the Original Edition of 1888, The Theosophy Company, USA, 1947.

See also the above reference to the six volume Adyar edition published by The Theosophical Publishing House, India, reprinted in London, 1950.

¹⁴ *The Journal of San Diego History* (San Diego Historical Society), Summer 1974, p. 16. This records that Einstein's niece paid a special visit in the 1960s to the headquarters of The Theosophical Society at Adyar, Madras, explaining that she simply *had* to see the place because her uncle always had a copy of Madame Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* on his desk!

¹⁵ Sylvia Cranston, *H.P.B.*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1993, p. 605.

¹⁶ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, Theosophical Publishing House, London, 1968.

¹⁷ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence*, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, 1992.

¹⁸ H. P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, 1988.

¹⁹ In an article entitled 'The Secret Books of "Lam-Rim" and Dzyan', which was not published during her lifetime, Blavatsky says that the Book of Dzyan, on which *The Secret Doctrine* is based, is one of the volumes of Kiu-te. The Book of Dzyan – from the Sanskrit word 'Dhyāna' (mystic meditation) – is the first volume of the Commentaries upon the seven secret folios of Kiu-te, and a Glossary of the public works of the same name. Thirty-five volumes of Kiu-te for exoteric purposes and the use of the laymen may be found in the possession of the Tibetan Gelugpa Lamas, in the library of any monastery; and also fourteen books of Commentaries and Annotations on the same by the initiated Teachers.

²⁰ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Theosophical Glossary*, The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1892.

²¹ For more details refer to Geoffrey A. Barborka, *H. P. Blavatsky – the light-bringer*, pp. 17-33.

²² *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, Third and revised edition, Letter No. 11.

²³ Sven Eek, *Damodar and the Pioneers of The Theosophical Movement*, 169-71.

²⁴ Vernon Harrison, "J'Accuse: An Examination of the Hodgson Report of 1885", *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, London, England, April 1986.

²⁵ Incredibly, two handwriting experts, F. G. Netherclift and Richard Sims, were used by Hodgson in comparing the writing of HPB with the purported letters of the Master KH. Harrison writes that those experts 'reached the conclusion that these documents were NOT written by Madame Blavatsky...[But] Hodgson would have none of this...'

²⁶ Esoteric and occult truths are ever guarded for this reason. Concerning his alchemical knowledge, Sir Isaac Newton advised Henry Oldenburg, Secretary of The Royal Society, in 1676 that the secret could 'not be communicated wthout immense damage to y^e world if there should be any verity in y^e Hermetick writers ... therefore high silence till he shall be resolved of what consequences y^e thing may be ...'

²⁷ *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, p. 558.

²⁸ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, p. 3.

²⁹ Col. Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. I, pp. 367-8.

³⁰ Geoffrey A. Barborka, *H. P. Blavatsky – the light-bringer*, pp. 37-8.

³¹ William Kingsland, *The Real H. P. Blavatsky*, p. 38.

³² A. P. Sinnett, *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky*, p. 51.

³³ H. P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, Vol. I, p. 95.

³⁴ Countess Constance Wachtmeister, *Reminiscences of H. P. Blavatsky and 'The Secret Doctrine'*, p. 77.

³⁵ Quoted in Geoffrey A. Barborka, *H. P. Blavatsky – the light-bringer*, p. 41.