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100 YEARS OF MODERN OCCULTISM

A Review of the Parent Theosophical Society

BY

L. H. LESLIE-SMITH

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100 YEARS OF MODERN OCCULTISM

A Review of the Parent Theosophical Society

FOREWORD

It is a privilege and a great pleasure to have been asked to write a foreword to this booklet which was written by my husband in 1974 at the request of the General Council of the Theosophical Society and its then President Mr. N. Sri Ram. It was intended for publication during the Centenary celebrations of the Society in 1975, along with the Centenary Book "The Universal Flame" which was also edited by my husband. For various reasons the History was never produced. I feel sure that it would have given much pleasure to Leslie to know that the Theosophical History Centre has now decided to publish it, and that the time and trouble he spent over it has not been entirely wasted.

A few biographical notes may be of interest. Leslie served in France during the 1914-18 war, held a commission in the Machine Gun Corps, and was awarded the Military Cross. After the war he took a degree in history at Pembroke College, Oxford, and also studied Theology, intending at one time to take Orders in the Church of England. After leaving Oxford he joined the editorial staff of The Times newspaper and spent all his working life there. His first contact with Theosophy was in the early 1930s when he met Dr. Cyril Pink who became a close family friend and inoculated all the family with the "Theosophical bug". After some years of reading and study, we both joined the Society in 1936.

Almost at once he was drawn into the work at 50 Gloucester Place where his journalistic and literary experience proved most helpful. As his wife I came in for a certain amount of reflected glory and still remember with glee being introduced to somebody with the words:- "You must get to know Mrs. Leslie Smith: she has such a clever husband."

Working at The Times Leslie became Night Editor and during the "Blitz" his family, living in "Bomb Alley" in Kent, had many anxious nights wondering when he would get home. He was much

loved by the men with whom he worked, largely, I think because, as he himself told me, he rarely gave a direct order which made people feel that they had helped to make the decisions. This was brought home to me when one of the machine staff took me aside and told me how important it was that I should look after Leslie's health properly.

Leslie served the Theosophical Society in England as a member of the Executive Committee, as General Secretary and as Chairman of the Theosophical Publishing House (London). He was one of the Directors of the Board of Tekels Park Estate, Ltd. and for many years its Chairman. He also lectured and produced several pamphlets, became a member of the General Council, visited Adyar several times, and was a devoted friend of Mr. Sri Ram.

His was a deep and yet in a way a light-hearted approach to Theosophy, convinced that it offers opportunities for richer life styles to all, whether student, artist, worker or philosopher. It would be his hope that this booklet might encourage enquirers to set out on the path which he trod so steadfastly for so many years.

Madeleine Leslie-Smith

Acknowledgements

The Theosophical History Centre is very grateful to Mrs Leslie-Smith for her sympathetic interest in this project, and to the Theosophical Publishing House (Adyar) for giving their blessing to a T. H. C. edition. Students who would like to pursue the questions raised in Mr Leslie-Smith's review, are invited to subscribe to "Theosophical History" as described inside the back cover.

Leslie Price

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Preface	v
What and Where and When and Why and Who and How .	1
Move to India	9
Coulomb Conspiracy and S. P. R. Report	15
“ The Secret Doctrine ”	21
The Controversy Concerning W. Q. Judge	26
Calm, Then Storm Again	33
Under the Second President	38
Together, Differently	48
Reconstruction after War	52
The Fifth President	57
The Shape of Things to Come	66

PREFACE

ALTHOUGH this brief sketch, undertaken at the request of the General Council of the Theosophical Society, covers most of the important events in the first century of the Society, it is in no wise a history, not even a condensed history. For that, several years of research would have been required, instead of a few weeks. The booklet is a personal appraisal of the period. For any misstatements of fact apologies are here tendered in advance. As regards the comments that link the facts, care has been taken to try to be realistic yet at the same time sympathetic and fair, with what success readers, from their own points of view, will variously judge.

Moreover, this publication is concerned only with the Parent Theosophical Society, as it used to be called, not with the Theosophical Movement as a whole except for the early years when it was all contained within the Society. To have followed the fortunes of all the theosophical branches would have been a major task and for the present writer an impossible one. Neither have we concerned ourselves with matters affecting the Esoteric School, which is an organization separate from the Theosophical Society, though composed of members of it. It is hoped that this slim volume will meet a need in this centenary year and fill a gap on theosophical and other bookshelves.

The author acknowledges his debt to numerous theosophical writings, and especially to *A Short History of the Theosophical Society*, Josephine Ransom; *The Theosophical Movement*,

an anonymous revision of a work by E. P. Dutton; *The Real Madame Blavatsky*, William Kingsland; *The Golden Book of the Theosophical Society*, compiled by C. Jinarājadāsa; as well as to the books mentioned in the footnote on page 20. Also to Corona Trew, V. Wallace Slater and Madeleine Leslie-Smith for kindly reading the manuscript and giving valuable advice.

Camberley, June 1975

LESLIE H. LESLIE-SMITH

WHAT AND WHERE AND WHEN AND WHY AND WHO AND HOW

THE scene is the Mott Memorial Hall in New York. The date is November 17, 1875. The occasion is the inaugural address of the recently elected first President of The Theosophical Society, which constituted its founding. This is therefore the official birthday of the Society, though it was really the date of the assumption of office by the President. The procedure followed that in the political field in the United States where, though elected, the President is not inaugurated till later.

The Society had in fact been organized on October 30 at the house of a well-known Spiritualist, when by-laws were approved and officers elected. Col. H. S. Olcott was elected President, Mme. H. P. Blavatsky Corresponding Secretary and William Q. Judge, a young lawyer, Counsel to the Society. Ten other officers were also chosen, but of the seventeen founding members only the three named here became dedicated workers, though a few remained members until they died. At this meeting the objects of the new body were defined: "To collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws governing the universe."

Whence came the idea of such a society and to what was its origin due at this particular time?

In the eighteenth century there was an effervescence of political and social thought which precipitated and culminated in the philosophy that sparked off the French Revolution. The brutal turn of events smothered all outward

expression of idealism, which however went on bubbling below the surface of life. About the middle of the nineteenth century there was again much revolutionary ferment, characterized by a surge of nationalism and liberalism. In spite of sharp reaction and repression by the old order, these notions began to leaven thought in the west. One must note, too, that at this time Karl Marx published his *Communist Manifesto*.

But this was by no means all. At the mid-point of the century also arose the modern spiritualistic movement, with the sudden eruption of mediumistic phenomena, starting and mushrooming in the United States and spreading in a lesser degree to Europe and India particularly. The manifestations helped to break up dogmatic beliefs, which were less ingrained in America, and seemed to provide information of value that the churches could not give. In spite of the pleas of a few enlightened scientists, science in general refused to make the slightest attempt to investigate the claims of Spiritualism, but merely rejected them without any hearing, as is always the way of an established order that finds itself threatened. It was unfortunately strengthened in this attitude by the fraudulent practices of some mediums. Theology naturally attributed any supersensory powers to possession by devils.

There was still a further far-reaching factor to add to the maelstrom of ideas that was violently disturbing orthodox thinking. Darwin and Wallace were writing down, at the same time and in different parts of the world, quite independently, their theories of natural selection. This gave rise to the notion of evolution, a word that was anathema to the churches and aroused their bitter hostility.

The mental turmoil and confusion in the western world caused by the convergence of these various explosive forces

provided the setting for a new and different society in the world's annals—a body that was to bring the concept of spiritual evolution to complement and correct that of physical evolution. Moreover, amid the ferment of ideas and the questioning of current beliefs of all kinds it would offer a philosophy postulating a reasonable relationship of man and the universe that would render life intelligible and death negligible. What better environment could there be for the introduction of doctrines that were at the same time iconoclastic and spiritually satisfying?

How came the Society to be launched at such a propitious time? Who were responsible for starting it and why did they do it?

The founding and maintenance of the T.S. during its first years are bound up with the lives and work of its two chief founders—Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott. It has been said that she gave the world Theosophy and he gave it the Theosophical Society. It is useful to recall the former's question, some time later, in reply to certain criticisms, "Where would Theosophy be now but for its Society?" The organization was as necessary as the philosophy.

H. P. Blavatsky was a Russian woman of aristocratic birth and culture who was to a high degree what would now be called a sensitive. She was a psychic genius. She defied convention and at times seemed to take a mischievous delight in shocking people. "Helena" wrote Josephine Ransom "was a wilful child, born of a long line of powerful and imperious men and women." In her dreams she was conscious of an eastern sage who protected her. Him she met in the flesh in London in 1851. From that time she dedicated herself to his direction as teacher as well as protector in her

travels through and sojourns in many lands, including Tibet, which was his home. She was possessed of that true purity which is utter singleness of purpose untinged by personal desire. She became so attuned to his influence that at any time she was able to receive what she called her "orders" from him psychically or intuitively. In 1873, when she was living in Paris, she got such orders to go to America.

H. S. Olcott was an agricultural expert who served with distinction with the Federal Forces in the American Civil War, and then he became a lawyer also. He was interested in any kind of occult phenomena and hence in Spiritualism. In 1874 he went, on behalf of a New York daily paper, to investigate the happenings at the home of the Eddys, which were then causing a stir. An account of these appeared in his book *People from the Other World*, published in January, 1875.

Spiritualism in America

To the Eddy household at Chittenden, Vermont, also went H. P. B. as she became known, because she was interested in Spiritualism as a means of breaching the prevalent materialistic dogmatism. Thus were the two brought together.

No sooner had Madame Blavatsky arrived than there was a remarkable change in the type of manifestation that came through the mediumship of William Eddy, and it became apparent that she had extraordinary powers, for she could produce phenomena without going into trance. At that time there was no philosophy to explain what happened. Spiritualists saw in the phenomena proof of survival after death, but it was a personal matter and different mediums had varying ideas of that other world. H. P. B. began to supply the philosophy, but in doing so she inevitably trod on many toes and challenged the interpretation of many mediums. She did

however fully convince Olcott that there was a philosophy of occultism, a word which was regarded as distinct from Spiritualism.

In spite of the general attitude among scientists, there were scientific minds "anxious to discover the meaning of the strange phenomena, who found it difficult to make their way through the mass of fraud and deception to the truth. In two ways H. P. B. tried to indicate the explanation to them: (1) By the practical demonstration of her own powers; (2) By declaring that there was an age-old knowledge of the deeper laws of life, studied and guarded by those who could use it safely and beneficently." (J. Ransom)

Her experiences then led her to write: "The world is not yet prepared to understand the philosophy of Occult Sciences. Let them assure themselves first of all that there are beings in an invisible world, whether 'Spirits' of the dead or *Elementals*: and that there are hidden powers in man which are capable of making a *God* of him on earth."

It seems appropriate here to give the other side of the "orders" H. P. B. received. The Mahatma who was her teacher and protector sent a letter to A. P. Sinnett to put him wise on certain matters. This, like many other letters he received, mostly from the second of the two Adepts who sponsored the Theosophical Society, were not originally intended to be made public. For various reasons, however, they were published in 1923 as *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*. In number 44, which was received in 1882, it says: "One or two of us hoped that the world had so far advanced intellectually, if not intuitionally, that the Occult Doctrine might gain an intellectual acceptance, and the impulse given for a new cycle of occult research . . . So casting about we found in America the man to stand as leader—a man of great

moral courage, unselfish, and having other good qualities. He was far from the best, but he was the best one available. With him we associated a woman of most exceptional and wonderful endowments. Combined with them she had strong personal defects, but just as she was there was no second to her living fit for this work. We sent her to America, brought them together—and the trial began. From the first both she and he were given to clearly understand that the issue lay entirely with themselves.”

In July, 1875, H. P. B. recorded: “*Orders* received from India direct to establish a philosophico-religious Society and choose a name for it—also to choose Olcott.”

During that year many persons interested in occultism had regularly met in Madame Blavatsky’s rooms. At one of these informal gatherings in September Olcott mooted the idea of forming a society. Whether he did this intuitively (apparently he did not know of the “orders” H. P. B. had got) or at her instigation is not clear. At any rate, that autumn the Society came into being.

A circular elaborating the objects of the Society “for the information of correspondents” stated that “man should aim to solve the mystery of his being. . . study to develop his latent powers, and inform himself regarding the laws of magnetism, electricity and all other forms of force, whether of the seen or unseen universes. The Society teaches and expects its fellows to personally exemplify the highest morality and religious aspiration; to oppose the materialism of science and every form of dogmatic theology, especially the Christian, which the Chiefs of the Society regard as particularly pernicious; to make known among Western nations the long-suppressed *facts* about Oriental religious philosophies. . . to disseminate a knowledge of the sublime teachings of that pure esoteric

system of the archaic period, which are mirrored in the oldest Vedas, and in the philosophy of Gautama Buddha, Zoroaster and Confucius; finally, and chiefly, to aid in the institution of a Brotherhood of Humanity, wherein all good and pure men, of every race, shall recognize each other as the equal effects (upon this planet) of one Uncreate, Universal, Infinite and Everlasting Cause."

It is interesting to see that the seal of the Society had already been fixed; it was printed on the front page of the circular. It is well to note also that, although put last, Universal Brotherhood was the chief item. The objects themselves were revised several times, the last occasion being in 1896 when they were formulated as we have them today:

1. To form a nucleus of the 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 unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man.

"Isis Unveiled"

Madame Blavatsky now began writing what was to become her first major work, *Isis Unveiled*. She worked long hours at it for weeks on end. In the evenings, after his professional duties were done, Olcott helped her with the English and with the shaping of ideas, which "came streaming" he said "through her mind like a perennial spring which is ever overflowing its brim". The fascinating story of the extraordinary manner of its writing is told in the first volume of the Colonel's *Old Diary Leaves*. His collaboration brought him as well as H. P. B. in frequent touch with the

Mahatmas, who often dictated to her and also at times wrote pages for her while she was sleeping.

Volume I of *Isis* challenged "The 'Infallibility' of Modern Science," Volume II "The Infallibility of Religion." Its publication in 1877 caused a big stir. Three editions were called for within a few months. The book put forward startling and unexpected ways of approaching the problem of the origin and destiny of man. However, its fierce attacks on current theology served to deepen the bitter enmity of the churches, which had been aroused a year or two before by the publication of the circular already referred to. Although events have fully justified H. P. B.'s strictures on science and religion, the hostility of orthodox Christianity is, alas, even now by no means dispelled.

MOVE TO INDIA

THE two chief founders had formed a desire to go to India, to link up with others who revered the Mahatmas and had some knowledge of eastern philosophy. This wish may have led the Society to flirt with the recently formed Arya Samaj, an Indian organization that seemed to have ideas and ideals similar to those of the Theosophical Society. The two bodies worked together for a while, but it became increasingly apparent that their ideas were not really compatible, and they went their separate ways. All the same, one may wonder whether the Arya Samaj was not one of the bodies referred to in 1882 in a letter A. P. Sinnett received from the Mahatma M. This said: "There is more of this movement than you have yet had an inkling of, and the work of the T.S. is linked with similar work that is secretly going on in all parts of the world." (Letter 47)

The hope of going east was realized when in 1878 Olcott and H. P. B. decided, apparently on instructions, to go to India. From the point of view of the T. S. this was made the easier because during the previous year official arrangements had been made, should it become necessary, to transfer the headquarters of the Society to where the two principal founders might be.

Leaving Judge in charge of the work in America, they sailed from New York a week before Christmas, reaching London for a fortnight's stay early in the New Year. Here they were welcomed by many friends, the British Theosophical

Society having been started the year before. Then they left for Bombay, where also they were warmly welcomed. The Indian press had announced their impending arrival, and government officials, editors and other professional people "poured in upon them"—British, Hindu and Parsi. H. P. B. wrote, concerning their coming: "Our Society was founded at the direct suggestion of Indian and Tibetan adepts, and in coming to this country we but obeyed their wishes."

A few days later a letter was received from A. P. Sinnett, the English editor of the important newspaper *The Pioneer*. He was interested in mediumistic phenomena and wished to know more. He was prepared to give fair reports in his paper of the Society's mission. Thus began a friendship that was to have far-reaching results.

Olcott gave a number of lectures and also wrote for various papers. H. P. B. made no attempt to attract Europeans, but occupied herself with philosophical discourse with Hindu scholars. This unconventional behaviour of not cultivating British officials made the authorities suspect that the Society was a cover for political activities, and for a time she was shadowed as a possible Russian spy, although she had obtained United States citizenship when resident there.

An important event in 1879 was the publication of the first number of *The Theosophist*. Both founders had a huge correspondence, H. P. B. especially. It was hoped that a magazine would be a means of answering many letters at once. As the Society had no funds, subscriptions were required in advance. In a prospectus the Colonel stated that a journal was necessary because of the rapid growth of the Society. The first issue, setting the pattern for subsequent ones, had an astonishing variety of articles, among them: What is Theosophy?, Drift of Western Spiritualism, Antiquity of the

Vedas, The Inner God, a Review of *The Light of Asia*, Aryan Trigonometry, Technical Education and A World Without Women.

On the invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Sinnett the founders paid them a six-week visit at Allahabad, where many English people called on them. They met Hindus in the city and the President gave a public lecture on "Theosophy and its Relation to India". They were also the guests of the Maharajah of Vizianagram at Benares (Varanasi), and they had many talks at Benares College with the Principal, a learned Sanskrit scholar. At one evening party psychic powers were discussed and some pandits declared that these were no longer cultivated. "This was too much for H. P. B.; she caused a shower of red roses to fall from the ceiling in their midst." (J. Ransom) Various phenomena she produced during this stay showed her host and hostess that she had unusual powers and deepened their interest in occult matters.

During the early years in India Olcott and H. P. B. between them travelled all over that vast country, often in most uncomfortable and inconvenient conditions. They also spent some weeks in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), where they went on "orders," and were enthusiastically received. They "took *pansil*," formally declaring themselves Buddhists; but Olcott noted: "Our Buddhism was that of the Master Adept Gautama Buddha, which was identically the Wisdom-Religion of the Aryan Upanishads and the soul of all the ancient world faiths. Our Buddhism was, in a word, a philosophy, not a creed." On a further visit to Ceylon he summarized the teachings of Buddhism in English in a *Buddhist Catechism*, which was approved by the high priest and was translated into Sinhalese and, later, Burmese. He also organized Buddhist schools, to the great displeasure of the Christian missionaries, in whose hands

rested the greater part of education on the island. He made it clear, however, that he did this as a private member of the T. S. and not in his official capacity as President. These schools still flourish in Sri Lanka.

“The Occult World”

In the summer of 1880 the founders went to stay with the Sinnetts at Simla, in the heart of the British community. Here H. P. B. produced startling phenomena, including the duplication of a cup and also supplying water for tea. She would, however, never do such things in public but only among friends and their friends. An admirable first-hand account is given in Sinnett's first book *The Occult World*, published in 1881. This visit led to Sinnett, and then A. O. Hume, a high British official, being put into correspondence with H. P. B.'s teachers. Both Englishmen wished to be taken on by the Mahatmas as chelas (disciples) and to receive special instruction in occult philosophy. But they wanted to dictate conditions and to be free of Madame Blavatsky and Olcott. They felt they knew best how to deal with all these matters for western people.

The Mahatmas were patient but also firm and outspoken. Again and again it was emphasized that brotherhood was all-important and that the T. S. was no school of magic. “You are trying to penetrate the things of the spirit with the eyes of the flesh”; and “My poor blind friend, you are entirely unfit for practical occultism . . . Rather perish the T. S. with both its hapless founders than that we should permit it to become no better than an academy of magic, a hall of occultism,” or even “a simple school of psychology”. Hume's haughty self-conceit effectively precluded him from any continuance of the letters, and later he left the Society. The

contact, however, had given him a more favourable view of Indians, for after he retired he did much to further Indian aspirations and he became the "Father" of the Indian Congress.

Sinnett also lacked humility; he had pride of race and outlook too. Although more amenable to reason than Hume, he would not change his ways. A blow came in 1882 when the proprietors of *The Pioneer* told him his contract as editor would not be renewed. They disliked his theosophical activities and his growing sympathy with the Indians. This move, in the view of the Mahatma K. H., gave an opportunity to start a paper financed by Indians with Sinnett as editor. But partly due to Hume and partly to apathy among those who could have supported the venture, the project failed. The effort is discussed in several of the Mahatma Letters.

After this, Sinnett returned to England and published his second book *Esoteric Buddhism*. This covered a wide range of theosophical doctrines as he had grasped them in the course of his continued correspondence with the Mahatmas, in particular K. H., who gave him authority to quote from the letters as he found necessary. This book was the means of spreading the esoteric philosophy much more widely.

H. Q. at Adyar

In 1882 the founders were able, with the help of two members, to purchase a small estate as a permanent headquarters for the Society. This was at Adyar, near Madras, where the Adyar river runs into the Bay of Bengal. Their choice was influenced by the fact that T. Subba Row, a learned Brahmin with much occult knowledge, lived in Madras. He helped for a time with the preparation of H. P. B.'s *magnum opus*, *The Secret Doctrine*, and his name was to have been

coupled with hers as co-author. But he withdrew his support because of the arrangement of the book and of some differences of interpretation and, sad to say, later left the Society. He had written many articles for *The Theosophist* and had given some brilliant lectures, which remain of great value in occult study.

The President continued to travel the country, attracting large audiences to his lectures. He had discovered in Ceylon that he had the gift of mesmeric healing, and the story of his cures attended him wherever he went. Remarkable cases were recorded. But he knew the limitations of such powers, and his sane outlook is clear from *Old Diary Leaves*. Ultimately he was instructed to discontinue healing practices so as not to endanger his health. H. P. B. wrote later that psychic healing should not be continued by anyone beyond the prime of life, after which it was less effective and it also drained the energy of the healer.

COULOMB CONSPIRACY AND S. P. R. REPORT

THE year 1884 was a doubly testing time for the Society. Olcott had promised the Sinhalese Buddhists to go to England to ask the British Government to deal with some severe grievances. In this he was completely successful and secured full redress. He was possibly helped in his efforts by a signed letter from the President of the United States, which was given him when he left that country, commending him to American diplomats wherever he went. H. P. B. was to accompany him for the sake of her health. In addition, the London Lodge of the T. S. (which the British branch had been renamed the previous year) was having serious internal problems.

Sinnett was "dismayed" when he heard of the impending visit. He was worried about the impression the two visitors would make on the "upper social strata of society" to whom he had introduced Theosophy. Besides, he regarded himself and his wife as the real "importers of Theosophy" into England and the two founders could embarrass him. Sinnett regarded the London Lodge as his instrument. He sought his own contact with the Masters, without H. P. B.'s help, by mediumistic means.

Olcott and H. P. B. went first to Nice, where they were hospitably welcomed by an eminent member to whose home flocked "the cream of the nobility" who were then on the fashionable Riviera. On to Paris, where they were met by the third founder, W. Q. Judge, who was at last achieving an

ambition to accept an invitation from H. P. B. to go to India and share in the work there. He had kept the U. S. branch going since the other active founders left. The three had long talks about future work.

The President and Madame Blavatsky went on to London. Here also they met people of note, among them distinguished scientists who were members of the recently established Society for Psychical Research (S.P.R.). With Sinnett and an Indian member, Mohini M. Chatterji, they met the committee of the S. P. R. and answered questions concerning the theosophical phenomena. Before the committee could report, there came news of a conspiracy by Emma Coulomb and her husband at Adyar to discredit H. P. B., and seeds of doubt seem to have been sown. A preliminary S. P. R. report was non-committal; residence in India for a period by a trusted observer was thought necessary for a definite decision. There was a *prima facie* case for at least some of the claims. The committee also stated that either "some of the phenomena recorded are genuine or that persons of good standing in the Society, and with characters to lose, have taken part in deliberate imposture." A little later a young Australian, Richard Hodgson, was asked to investigate the charges of fraud against H. P. B. and to inquire further into the phenomena by interviewing numerous witnesses. He stayed three months at Adyar as a welcome guest.

The story of the unsavoury Coulomb episode goes back to 1872 when Madame Blavatsky had been shipwrecked and was temporarily without money or possessions. An English woman on the staff of a small hotel in Cairo, who apparently had some psychic faculty, befriended her. Seven years later this woman, now Mme. Coulomb, having married a Frenchman, wrote from Ceylon appealing for help. It transpired

much later that the pair had to leave Egypt as bankrupts. H. P. B. took them in at Adyar, the woman as housekeeper; the man, who had carpentering and mechanical skills, as handyman, but he was given the title of librarian of Olcott's incipient library.

After a time Emma Coulomb began to be sorry for herself and to resent her position, seeming to have illusions of past luxury. She was difficult with other residents, and she tried to get "loans" from wealthy persons visiting Headquarters. This came to a head when H. P. B. heard of it. Mme. Coulomb was furious, said Dr. Hartmann who was present, and "her passionate outbursts of anger and jealousy were in no way soothed by Madame Blavatsky reproaching her for her unjust attempt at extortion."

Before the founders left India they appointed a Board of Control to administer the estate and the Society during their absence. But soon the Board and the Coulombs got at such loggerheads over many things, including the Coulombs "wasting" the Society's funds, that both sides appealed to H. P. B. by letter. Eventually she authorized the Board to get rid of them. Mme. Coulomb had locked H. P. B.'s rooms and had refused to let anyone into them. The Board now found uncompleted carpentry work and a hole in the wall behind the "shrine," all of which had been done since the founders left. Later, Coulomb admitted doing this, but said that it was done on H. P. B.'s instructions.

This "shrine" was a cupboard about three feet square that hung on the wall. Coulomb had made it for her so that it could be taken to pieces and packed when she went to the hills. She placed in it mementoes of Tibet and pictures of the Masters who had sponsored the Society. It provided a

focus for occult forces to produce various phenomena. It was in use for a very short time.

The Coulombs went to the Christian missionaries in Madras with a story of trickery and they also sold them letters purporting to have been written by H. P. B. showing that the phenomena were fraudulent. The missionaries had long felt their work threatened by the spread of Theosophy and the revitalizing of the older religions by the founders, and were delighted to have an opportunity of discrediting and perhaps destroying the Theosophical Society. As regards Mme. Coulomb, one must remember that she was an unbalanced person, a superstitious Christian, who attributed H. P. B.'s works to the devil.

Forged Letters

The forged letters were published as genuine. On this news breaking, the President returned to Adyar and H. P. B. followed soon after. Both were given enthusiastic welcomes everywhere they went. At Madras an address with 500 signatures was read by a student of the Christian college on behalf of his own and other colleges. H. P. B. told them "that of the letters published not one, as it stood, had been written by her." She wanted to take legal proceedings to be cleared of the charges of fraud, but at the Convention of the Society it was resolved, on the President's proposal, to endorse a committee's findings that the letters published were "only a pretext to injure the cause of Theosophy; and as these letters necessarily appear absurd to those who are acquainted with our philosophy and facts, and as those who are not acquainted with those facts would not have their opinion changed even by a judicial verdict in favour of Madame Blavatsky, therefore it is the unanimous opinion of this

committee that Madame Blavatsky should not prosecute her defamers in a Court of Law." If only the committee, or the Convention, could have had an inkling of what was to follow, their decision might have been different.

The vicious attacks on H. P. B. and the consequent strain aggravated what was already a serious condition of her heart and kidneys. She seemed to be at death's door, but made a remarkable recovery. "Her Master had come and laid his hands upon her and brought her back from death." Medical advice, however, was that she would not regain strength in the Indian climate. So she left for Europe, accompanied by a few friends.

Hodgson reported to the committee of the S. P. R. and after a long delay its findings were published in the Society's *Proceedings* in December 1885. Rumours that it was unfavourable had leaked out, but the report itself was shattering. The charges of fraud and deception were accepted and Madame Blavatsky was labelled as "one of the most accomplished, ingenious and interesting imposters in history." As motive, Hodgson raked up the old accusation, long disproved, of her being a Russian spy.

It became obvious that, instead of an inquiry into evidence for phenomena, Hodgson had made it into something like a criminal prosecution without due process of law, in which "a verdict of *Guilty* was pronounced without a hearing and without appeal." It rested on *ex parte* statements by the accusers, and no proper evidence was called. This was no impartial inquiry, such as the S. P. R. should have conducted. How its committee swallowed it is a mystery, particularly in view of its preliminary report. H. P. B. wrote: "Strange to say, from the time the investigation was begun. . . I was never permitted to see those incriminating letters," Charles Johnston,

a retired Indian Civil Servant, who was present when the committee accepted the report, called it "scandalously unfair". The Master M. wrote of H. P. B. : "There never was a woman so unjustly abused."

Sinnett issued a pamphlet in reply to the report, and numerous refutations have since been published, effectively disposing of the charges,¹ so that no doubt should now be possible for an impartial inquirer as to H.P.B.'s innocence. Yet false allegations of every kind are still repeated regarding Madame Blavatsky by persons who take no notice of the rebuttals and who cannot have read her writings. Some of this is no doubt due to the old dodge, too often successful; if you can't refute the message, throw mud at the messenger, vilify him or her. However, the International Convention of 1885 passed a resolution that "as the charges against her had not been proven, their affection and respect for her continued unabated."

That same Convention also sanctioned the President's scheme for the Adyar Library, which is now famous throughout the world among scholars. This valuable collection of both western and eastern volumes, many of the latter in manuscript form, was rehoused a few years ago in a new air-conditioned building on the estate.

Also in 1885 were published some notable works, including *Light on the Path* and *Idyll of the White Lotus* by Mabel Collins, a well known psychic; a book of lectures by the Colonel, *Theosophy, Religion and Occult Science*; and *The Purpose of Theosophy*, by Patience Sinnett, a manual that was badly needed.

¹ A few are: Beatrice Hastings, *Defence of H. P. Blavatsky*, Vol. II; Annie Besant, *H. P. Blavatsky and the Masters of the Wisdom*; C. Jinarājadāsa, *Did Madame Blavatsky forge the Mahatma Letters?*; V. A. Endersby, *The Hall of Magic Mirrors*; A. E. Waterman, *Obituary: The Hodgson Report on Madame Blavatsky*, a devastating exposure of the falsity of the report; H. Murphet, *Hammer on the Mountain*.

“THE SECRET DOCTRINE”

WHILE she was at Adyar H. P. B. had started writing *The Secret Doctrine*, which was at first intended to be an improved version of *Isis Unveiled* but was soon changed to something quite different and of immense value as revealing more of the principles of the esoteric philosophy. She continued this work at Wurzburg, near Munich, and then at Ostend, which was a better place for her health. One day in the spring of 1887 she said that her Master had come and given her the choice “that I might die and be free if I would, or might live and finish *The Secret Doctrine*.” She chose to finish the job.

Soon afterwards she accepted an invitation to live in London. Here the group round her formed a second lodge and called itself the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society. A new magazine was started in the autumn. *Lucifer*, with H. P. B. as editor, carried many learned articles, notably those on “The Esoteric Character of the Gospels.” She also wrote an “Open Letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury” concerning Theosophy and the Theosophical Society.

In 1888 *The Secret Doctrine* was published simultaneously in London and New York. The English edition was sold out on the day of publication and a second printing was done. How, many people asked, did H. P. Blavatsky manage to compose this vast erudite work, with its numerous references, when she had only a tiny library available and but few reference books? Explaining how she wrote it, she said: “I make

what I can only describe as a sort of vacuum in the air before me, and fix my sight and my will upon it; and soon scene after scene passes before me like the successive pictures of a diorama. . . . If I need a reference or information from some book, I fix my mind intently, and the astral counterpart of the book appears, and from it I take what I need."

In 1888 also the President authorized H. P. B. to form the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society, but not without previous difficulties. He had never quite understood her and her utterly impersonal aims. When the two were working closely together all was well. But being widely separated, with no possibility of quickly putting right any misunderstanding, differences arose and were magnified and seriously impeded their unique collaboration. To prevent an open split, the Mahatmas on occasion had recourse to precipitated letters to Olcott. One of these materialized before him on his way to Europe to try to sort out various problems with H. P. B. He was flatly told to confine himself to administration and not to bother her with it; "but this you must tell all: *with occult matters she has everything to do.*" As a result, he sanctioned instead of opposing the formation of the Esoteric Section.

Whenever they could meet the old harmony was restored. But distance and interference by other people tended to cause rifts. On one occasion Olcott wrote: "Had we been together the mistake would not have been made."

In the *Preliminary Memorandum* of the Esoteric Section (or School, as it was soon renamed) H. P. B. wrote: "The Masters can give but little assistance to a Body not thoroughly united in purpose and feeling, and which breaks its fundamental rule—universal brotherly love without distinction of race, creed or colour; nor to a Society many of whose members

pass their lives in judging, condemning and often reviling other members in a most untheosophical, not to say disgraceful, manner. . . . The object of this Section then is to help the future growth of the Theosophical Society as a whole in the true direction, by promoting brotherly union at least among the few. All know that this was the end in view when the Society was established.” She had previously suggested to Olcott the need for him to establish such a body in India, but he did not heed her advice.

Why the judging, condemning, reviling? Why was the Society, and particularly H. P. Blavatsky, plagued right from the start with people who seemed attracted to Theosophy and promised to be useful workers, but who left after a while and often turned against her? The annals of the Society are full of such happenings. Judge suffered from it severely in America. Many no doubt were interested only in phenomena and not in the teachings, nor in brotherhood, and were annoyed when H. P. B. refused to produce phenomena to order.

But there were more serious members, sincerely seeking, who also went out. By no means all of these caused trouble, but a fair number did. One reason for the difficulties and defections must surely be the strange but well-known spiritual law: when a man or woman begins a genuine study of occultism and aspires to chelaship, this causes the “ throwing outward of everything latent in the nature of the man.” All his qualities, good and bad, are forced to the surface. His secret faults will out, and his hidden virtues also. This is the experience of everyone who wishes to follow the Path that opens out to all who gain conscious realization of their divine nature. This is why earnest aspirants are among the most difficult people to live with, until they have successively and successfully

dealt with their imperfections as they are brought to light. One can only surmise that those who went out of the Society only to become antagonistic found that their conditioning, as Krishnamurti puts it, proved too much for them and that the throwing outward of the flaws in their nature provoked inner stresses with which they could not cope.

“The Key” and “The Voice”

Having completed her last big task in 1888, H.P.B. still worked on unceasingly during the remaining year or two of her life and gave us two invaluable volumes. First, *The Key to Theosophy*, which put many facts about Theosophy and also about the Theosophical Society in simple language and packed much theosophical knowledge in small compass. Secondly, *The Voice of the Silence*, “that incomparable gem of occult teaching,” which she translated from an ancient eastern manuscript, the *Book of the Golden Precepts*, and which has had a profound influence on the lives of many students. Then, having told her doctor that she was dying, she died peacefully on May 8, 1891, sitting in the chair where she had done a prodigious amount of work during her years in England.

So passed the great occultist H.P.B. whose incomparable labours were achieved in spite of her being, as the Mahatmas said, “a psychological cripple”. From her writings all modern occultism stems. The several branches of the Theosophical Movement, and also the hundreds of occult or semi-occult bodies throughout the world, derive their existence from her, however strangely some of them may interpret what she said. It is never easy to get at the inner meaning of an author, the essence of the message, through the words in which it is wrapped. This is specially so in spiritual matters. Moreover, it is deceptively easy to mistake a symbol for the truth

it is intended to portray. William Kingsland wrote of her: “ She taught us Theosophy not as a religion, or a philosophy, or a creed, but as a *living force in our lives.*”

The magnitude of Madame Blavatsky’s work is not yet recognized except by a few. In centuries to come it may well be seen that it marked the turning point in the whole history of man, for the principles of the Ageless Wisdom go to the root of all human problems, both individual and collective. She said that the doctrines she promulgated were to “ be found scattered throughout thousands of volumes, hidden under glyph and symbol.” The knowledge she was taught and instructed to make public in terms easily understood “ has been in the possession of the elect from time immemorial.”

As is said in *The Golden Book of the Theosophical Society*, H.P.B. gathered together “the various departments of truth in which men have laboured throughout the ages. . . Since the decadence of Greek civilization there has been in Europe no religious and intellectual synthesis which a man of culture could profess. . . H. P. B. in her writings stated to the modern world this great synthesis which underlies everything. For the first time in the modern world, both in the east and in the west, a man of culture and understanding who in addition to his intellectual development has a deeply religious nature can find in the theosophical philosophy a full satisfaction of all his aspirations.”

In the Introduction to *The Secret Doctrine* H.P.B. quoted Montaigne to describe her own labours: “ I have here made only a nosegay of culled flowers, and have brought nothing of my own but the string that ties them.” It is the “string” that is the all-important contribution to the theosophical nosegay, for it gives it coherence and intelligible pattern and meaning. Well has H. P. Blavatsky been called the Light-bringer.

THE CONTROVERSY CONCERNING W. Q. JUDGE

IN the United States there had been a period of theosophical quiescence after the departure of the President and the Corresponding Secretary for India. Judge, who was keenly interested in mysticism and psychic phenomena, had however kept in close touch with the other founders by correspondence. He had also, as already noted, gone to India in 1884, unfortunately while Olcott and H.P.B. were in Europe. This was a pity, because if the three had worked together at Adyar for a while, later discord and dissension might possibly have been avoided; without so much misunderstanding, the subsequent story of the Theosophical Society could have been very different. Judge took charge at Adyar at the time of the Coulomb ruction, but he was ill in body and not happy in mind and after a short stay he returned home.

In 1886 the United States Section was constituted, a more democratic body than the authoritative Board of Control which it superseded. Judge then started a theosophical journal, *The Path*. He set the keynote in the first number: "The very first step in true mysticism and occultism is to try to apprehend the meaning of universal brotherhood, without which the very highest progress in the practice of magic turns to ashes in the mouth." He felt that theosophically the west had been neglected. Over the next few years he inspired many workers and gathered together a group of efficient helpers. The Society in America grew rapidly under his dynamic enthusiasm. It was this success that led the

President to reorganize the entire Society on the basis of sectional autonomy, which had been adopted in Britain and in Ceylon as well as in America.

Then, in 1887 Judge wrote to H.P.B.: "So many people are beginning to ask me to be chelas that I must do something." After she got the agreement for an esoteric group, he joined her in London and drew up plans and rules for its working. The following year the office of Vice-President, which had fallen into abeyance, was revived and W. Q. Judge was appointed to that office.

Two years before H.P.B.'s death Mrs. Besant joined the Society. She was well known as a gifted speaker and writer, a social reformer who had rejected dogmatic theology and who championed the oppressed. W. T. Stead, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, had got her to review *The Secret Doctrine* when it was published. The ideas put forward in these two large volumes acted as a sort of psychological catalyst on her. She got an interview with Madame Blavatsky and said that she would like to join the Society. H.P.B. told her to read the S.P.R. Report and then see what she thought. Annie Besant found the whole story incredible, and joined the T.S. She became part of the Blavatsky household and was soon the chief support of theosophical work in England. After H. P. B.'s death in 1891 Annie Besant and W. Q. Judge were in charge of the Esoteric School and letters were issued signed by both of them as joint heads. H. P. B.'s precise intention is not clear, but the governing body of the E.S. agreed that this was the right arrangement.

In January 1892 a member arrived at Adyar with a communication signed by W.Q. Judge which was thought too important to be trusted to the post. It apparently accused the President of some moral obliquity during his visit to London

the previous year, and asked for his resignation. Olcott firmly rejected the charge, but as he was beyond his prime and his health was not good, he thought it might perhaps be as well to retire and hand over to Judge, who was widely considered to be the greatest mystic in the Society. So he sent his resignation to Judge as Vice-President and made plans to go and live in the Nilgiris. He found, however, that because of legal complications his resignation could not take effect immediately. Time would be needed.

Moreover, and more important, he received clairaudiently a message from his Master telling him to continue at his post until he told him it was time to give it up. He at once wrote to Judge informing him of these instructions, but without actually withdrawing his resignation. Soon afterwards the American Convention passed a resolution asking the President to rescind his resignation, but stating that Judge was its choice in due course to succeed him and to hold office for life. The European and Indian Sections were invited to support this resolution.

There was some confusion, however, about the facts. The European branches meeting in Convention in London voted for a new President, unanimously choosing Judge, with hearty votes of confidence in the retiring President-Founder and "declaration of gratitude for his untiring services and appreciation of his unselfish life-work". It transpired that neither at the Chicago Convention nor at the London one had the President's message to Judge been communicated to the members. So, on getting news of the London resolution, Olcott revoked his resignation and said that his restoration to health enabled him "to obey his Guru's wishes by resuming active service". And he renewed his travels to lodges in India.

The President appointed Judge to represent him at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. Mrs. Besant was there on behalf of the British Theosophists. This gathering gave a big boost to Theosophy in America. In this year also Judge published his useful book *The Ocean of Theosophy*, which is still a small classic.

Mahatma Letters?

For some time rumour had been spreading that Judge was issuing letters purporting to be from a Mahatma. Objections were also taken to certain articles in *The Path* on the ground that they were setting up a creed. It was alleged, too, that he was serving his personal aims. Eventually Olcott wrote that he did not believe in Judge's "pretended intimacy with the Mahatmas".

At the end of 1892 W.R. Old, a distinguished English member, who had been at H.P.B.'s side when she died, brought to Adyar various documents and messages emanating from Judge and in the script of the Master M., some with the Mahatma's seal. By reason of their style and content Old thought them spurious. After much discussion the President wrote to Judge asking him if he would prefer to resign his vice-presidency or to have the case tried. Judge denied all allegations and refused to have the case tried.

Since the continued and widespread suspicions were harming the Society, the President at length asked Mrs. Besant, who was on a lecture tour throughout India, to formulate the charges against Judge "with reference to certain letters in the alleged writing of the Mahatmas." She herself had received through Judge messages said to be from the Masters, which she had believed authentic. Later, she had doubts, particularly after meeting people in India who had

similar scripts and were not convinced that they were genuine. Perhaps Judge would explain it all and clear things up. But he refused any explanation. In spite of Olcott's disapproval, Annie Besant sent Judge copies of all the papers on which her formulation was based, feeling it was but fair that he should have all the facts.

A judicial committee was appointed and met in London in July. After protracted argument the committee decided that, as the charges related to the accused as a private member and not as Vice-President, constitutionally it had no jurisdiction.

It was stated at the European Convention that followed that tales about Judge had been bruited about "ranging from simple untruthfulness to deliberate and systematic forgery of the handwriting of those who to some of us are most sacred." Judge denied forgery. He affirmed that he had received genuine letters, and that he had reported correctly and faithfully such messages as he thought he had received for transmission, and he never tried to deceive anyone. It was hoped the trouble would end there, but many members were not satisfied.

W.R. Old was furious and resigned his offices of Recording Secretary and Treasurer. He then sent copies of all the documents, including private papers, to a London Newspaper, the *Westminster Gazette*. Thus the whole unfortunate controversy was sordidly dragged into world publicity, with every effort to discredit and harm the Society.

After all the turmoil, Judge's secession was almost inevitable. In 1895 he took with him the greater part of the United States lodges, with their records, property and funds, as the Theosophical Society in America. The fourteen lodges that remained loyal to Adyar were chartered as the American

Section, with Alexander Fullerton, who had been assistant to Judge, as General Secretary. Sinnett was appointed Vice-President.

Meanwhile Judge had accused Mrs. Besant of being under the influence of "dark powers" and unilaterally announced that he was "sole head of the E.S.T. under Master's direction. I declare Mrs. Besant's headship of the E.S. at an end."

Looking back from the vantage point of eighty and more years on, one is astonished that dedicated leaders of a Society devoted to brotherhood should have acted in a high handed and arbitrary manner. First the President is asked to resign simply because some person or persons chose to make accusations against him, and before he had an opportunity of either refuting them or of defending himself. Then the Vice-President is similarly attacked and asked to resign or stand trial without having a chance to deny or explain. It seems that people immediately jumped to an assumption of guilt instead of presuming innocence until there is convincing evidence pointing to guilt. There was also bitter controversy better suited to hostile political parties than to the Theosophical Society. Also, the various matters should have been kept private within the ranks of the Society. No doubt there would have been some leakage, but that would have done less harm than the washing of the dirty linen in public. The truth of it all cannot be known. Where there are acute differences or difficulties, the fault is seldom all on one side. It is wise not to try to apportion blame but to learn the lesson of events and forget them, rather than harp on them and perhaps cherishing them. Our eyes should be on the future.

Judge survived the split by only a year and died at the early age of forty-five. His place was taken by

Mrs. Katherine A. Tingley. Under her and her successors the Point Loma Society did much valuable work as part of the Theosophical Movement. This brief sketch of a century, however, can only follow the fortunes of the original Society.

CALM; THEN STORM AGAIN

How could any society survive such happenings? Yet the T.S. not only survived but for the next ten years made steady peaceful growth. The President continued his travels and lectures, throughout India and also in the United States, South America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Other lecturers, foremost among them being Mrs. Besant, with C.W. Leadbeater as a runner-up, toured countries all over the world where there were branches and started the work in lands where as yet there were none. Many new lodges were formed, and these studied and discussed a spate of theosophical literature that was appearing. Notable publications were the first volume of Olcott's *Old Diary Leaves*; a number of books by Annie Besant, including *In the Outer Court* and *The Path of Discipleship*; a translation of some of the Upanishads; *The Growth of the Soul*, by A.P. Sinnett, and also lectures of his embodied in *Transactions of the London Lodge*; and *Esoteric Writings* of T. Subba Row.

In 1897 appeared a volume edited by Mrs. Besant of manuscripts left by H.P.B., including some of the teaching given to her pupils. This was issued as a third volume of *The Secret Doctrine*, which must have seemed appropriate at the time but with hindsight it is clear that some other title for this valuable book would have been more suitable.

In 1906 the theosophical calm was rudely shattered by serious complaints about Charles W. Leadbeater. Before 1884 he had been an Anglican cleric in a country parish in

England. He was much interested in Spiritualism. He had also read A.P. Sinnett's two books. As a result he had a great desire to go to India and to get into "communication with the Masters". He eventually met Madame Blavatsky at the Sinnetts' house in London, and the next day received a precipitated letter in blue script signed "K.H." This letter clearly stated some of the prerequisites for discipleship and ended with the advice: "So now choose and grasp your own destiny."

He chose, and set out for India, joining *en route* the boat in which H.P.B. had just sailed. The whole fascinating and indeed moving, story is well told by C. Jinarājadāsa in *The "K.H." Letters to C. W. Leadbeater*.

During 1884 and 1885 Leadbeater was given strenuous psychic training at Adyar, which developed a clairvoyant faculty to a high degree. For the next year or two he spent long periods in Ceylon, helping with the educational work that Olcott had started there. But he also travelled a good deal and did much lecturing. Then in 1889 he went to England on the invitation of the Sinnetts to tutor their son. He took with him a Sinhalese boy, C. Jinarājadāsa, then thirteen years old. After that he went travelling again and was on a lecture tour in India when out of the blue arrived at Adyar a letter signed by several eminent American members, including the General Secretary, Fullerton, accusing him of teaching demoralising practices to boys entrusted to his care and demanding an inquiry. Leadbeater frankly agreed that he had given certain advice to a few boys, individually and privately; and this shocked and horrified the puritanical, yet often prurient, minds of the time. The advice was such as would be given today by the average doctor. Leadbeater lived fifty or sixty years before his time. Even

the ardent reformer Annie Besant disapproved, though she was confident of his good intentions.

Under a pledge of privacy Leadbeater explained his attitude, born of long experience in training the young, to Fullerton, and defended his action. Nevertheless the Executive Committee of the American Section sent a member to see the President, the General Secretary of the British Section and other officials. It was suggested that if the "defendant" would sever all connection with the Society and its work, a prosecution would not be pressed; if not, he should be expelled. Extra charges of immoral conduct were added.

Olcott called a meeting in London to advise him. Leadbeater said that he had already informed Fullerton fully of his attitude, under a promise of confidence; yet the matter was now made public to the membership. He considered that his solution of a serious difficulty at puberty was far better than the common one of illicit sexual intercourse. However, as the Society wished to have nothing to do with that view, he had placed his resignation in the hands of the President-Founder. He confessed to no evil intent, but he wished to relieve the Society of any supposed complicity. Finally, his resignation was accepted. He went to live quietly on the Continent of Europe and pursued clairvoyant investigations.

Misgivings

Many members, however, were disturbed, holding that every member has a perfect right to his own views. Jinarājādāsa was on tour in the United States, and on hearing of the charges asserted that for many years he had lived in close intimacy with Mr. Leadbeater and had never had the slightest reason to suspect him of any immoral practice. Fullerton quite wrongly took this statement to

mean that Jinarājādāsa endorsed Leadbeater's views, and as a result of his continued attitude Jinarājādāsa resigned from the Society. This further divided the members.

The First International Congress of the Theosophical Society was held in Paris in June, 1906, the President-Founder presiding. Though he was unwell, he lectured there and afterwards in Belgium and the Netherlands. He then went on to New York to the American Convention. There was violent disputation about Mr. Leadbeater, but an open break was averted. However at the next Convention Dr. Weller Van Hook was elected General Secretary of the American Section in place of Alexander Fullerton. In January, 1907 the President wrote that "unintentional injustice had been done to Mr. Jinarājādāsa" and he was reinstated. There was also a feeling in many quarters that Leadbeater had been wronged. Finally, the next year, the General Council voted by a big majority for his reinstatement. Yet periodically he was attacked and the old charges revived in various parts of the world. As late as 1922 they were renewed in Sydney, Australia, together with accusations against Mrs. Besant, who was President. The campaign of slander persisted there until two prominent members of the section asked the Minister of Justice to inquire into the charges. After full hearings the verdict of the Crown Solicitor was that there was "not enough evidence to obtain conviction on any charge."

We know a lot more about the psychological vagaries of the human mind, especially of the adolescent, than was available in the early part of the century, and we require sexual allegations in particular to be indisputably substantiated. Some years ago the present writer read all the documents in the Leadbeater case and also talked with a number of persons who knew Leadbeater well. The result was a firm conclusion

that there was no substance in the charges. Moreover, two simple facts are most telling. First, the door of his room was usually open and people could wander in to see him at any time, and did. Such is not the practice of someone who intends misbehaving. Secondly, men who as boys were under his care have testified to the value of his spiritual teachings and have had a high regard, affection and admiration for him.

Returning to 1906—Olcott's health worsened after his return from New York to Adyar, and in the following February he died in the presence of Mrs. Besant and Marie Russack (later Hotchener). Though sometimes mistaken, and mistaking others, to the end he remained completely dedicated to the work with which he had been entrusted by the Mahatmas, always fearlessly serving the Society of which he was President-Founder to the best of his ability and according to its needs as he saw them. In the *Mahatma Letters* it is stated: "Him we can trust under all circumstances. Where can we find an equal devotion?" He had two special interests: the library he founded at Adyar and the education of the unprivileged. The schools for Sinhalese Buddhist children that he established in Ceylon soon after his arrival in the east were but a beginning. All over India he started Hindu boys' societies and, wherever possible, schools. No wonder that H. P. B. recorded that he was "adored by the Hindus". The Olcott Free School for "untouchables" that he founded at Adyar in 1894 has done magnificent work ever since, and has recently been upgraded to a high school. One may recall words in his inaugural address in New York in 1875: "If I understand the spirit of this Society, it consecrates itself to the intrepid and conscientious study of truth and binds itself, individually and collectively, to suffer nothing to stand in its way."

UNDER THE SECOND PRESIDENT

FOR some time before Olcott's death his health had been deteriorating and there had been some anxiety as to his successor. However, he sent out an unofficial and preliminary notice that he had "appointed" (later corrected to "nominated", which was all he could constitutionally do) Mrs. Besant as his successor. Even though there was only one nomination, election of a president depended on the approval of a two-thirds majority vote of the entire Society. In due course Annie Besant was elected by 9,572 votes to 1,089 out of a membership of about 13,000.

Mrs. Besant had felt a great affinity for India in 1893 on her first visit—as many others have done since. She soon made her permanent home at Adyar and based her world work there. She set herself to revitalize Hinduism as Olcott had revived and purified Buddhism. She continued her predecessor's keen interest in education. Already in 1898 she had started the Central Hindu College at Benares (Varanasi), to which in 1901 George Arundale went to help at her request. He soon became headmaster of the schools department and later principal. The college was afterwards incorporated in the Hindu University, now one of the leading universities of India.

The new President also added extensively to the Adyar property. With the aid of gifts from many members the compound was expanded from the original 27 acres to 266, to cope with the growing work of the Society all over the world.

Annie Besant was always attracted by any organization that had as its aim the welfare of mankind. True to her earlier traits, she remained an inveterate social reformer. Being partly of Irish parentage, she exhibited the Celtic fervent advocacy of any appealing ideal. A fact of supreme importance in her theosophical life was her absolute certainty that she got "marching orders" from her Guru, who was the same as H. P. B.'s teacher and protector. She based all her big decisions on this occult relationship and, no matter what the difficulties or cost, she would carry out any instructions she felt she had been given. In 1900 she had received a letter from the Mahatma K. H. giving advice and warning against possible developments. It contained some pregnant sentences; "The T. S. and its members are slowly manufacturing a creed. . . The crest wave of intellectual advancement must be taken hold of and guided into spirituality. It cannot be forced into beliefs and emotional worship. . . The cant about 'Masters' must be silently but firmly put down. Let the devotion and service be to that Supreme Spirit alone of which each one is a part."

Mrs. Besant was in the prime of life when she joined the Society, and when she became President at the age of 60 her energy was still undiminished. Her earlier life had shown that she was the stuff of which martyrs are made. Her temperament and her utter conviction of being guided by the Mahatmas explain all her later life. She felt that she *knew*, and the inspiration and enthusiasm that her charisma and superb oratory generated convinced many members that whatever line she took should be followed. It was, after all, an age of leaders and docile followers in most human activities. Those who were content to be unthinkingly led by persons wiser than themselves were merely conforming to the general

custom and pattern of the day. Moreover, psychic faculty, especially clairvoyance, now termed extrasensory perception, was little understood, and any such powers tended to be credited with a totally unwarranted authority. At times it seemed that admiration for great workers, not only in the Society but also in the Movement generally, had degenerated into adulation, and they were regarded as almost infallible.

A further point of controversy is the right of Theosophists to engage personally in all kinds of work which, though useful, is beyond the function of the Theosophical Society itself. Such work, especially when undertaken by prominent members, always tends to confuse people. Thus the T. S. becomes identified with the actions of some of its members. This is bound to happen to some extent, but it becomes serious when it causes the individual and perhaps peculiar interests of Theosophists to be identified with and mistaken for Theosophy. None the less many members have started social or educational groups that were later continued successfully by others, and this is likely to be repeated so long as members are inspired, as they surely ought to be, to do something to ameliorate the condition of human beings by filling a gap and supplying a need that others have not seen or tackled. One can see, then, that though a biography of a member would require all activities of the subject to be chronicled, a review of the Society is concerned only with any member's activities insofar as they impinge on it in such a way as to affect its history.

Already in 1902 Annie Besant had joined what came shortly afterwards to be known as International Co-Freemasonry. The growth of this body, and its esoteric interpretation of ritual and ceremony, was mainly due to her and C. W. Leadbeater.

The Star in the East

Then in 1910-11 the Order of the Star in the East was started to herald the coming of a World Teacher. Mrs. Besant had shown the way her mind was working in 1908 when she publicly announced this imminent event. Many members disliked the Order of the Star because, by reason of the eminence of its founders, it seemed to involve the Society in matters that were not its concern. It was also said that pressure was put on some Theosophists to accept the notion of a World Teacher. (Years later, in 1949, the General Council formally dissociated the T. S. from all other societies: "The Society, while cooperating with all other bodies whose aims and activities make such cooperation possible, is and must remain an organization entirely independent of them.")

A year or two later there was trouble in the German Section. Its General Secretary, Rudolph Steiner, a philosophical mystic, had built up a strong membership. But it was decided that anyone who was a member of the Order of the Star could not be a member of the Society in Germany. This, once again, affected the right of every member to his own opinion and belief. The General Council cancelled the charter. Steiner took fifty-five lodges with him to his Anthroposophical Society, which has today a fine record of splendid work for education and agriculture. A number of lodges stayed with the T.S. and were chartered as the new German Section.

In answer to criticisms, the President stated: "The T. S. is a permanent organization, whereas the Order of the Star in the East is a temporary one." She also quoted the fact that the Society has power to do anything conducive to any of the objects of the Society, and claimed that this meant

the right to do *collectively* all things incidental or conducive to the formation of a nucleus of Universal Brotherhood.

The whole extraordinary story of the Order of the Star, of J. Krishnamurti (who had been picked out some years before by Leadbeater as a boy of high spiritual potentiality), and of the Liberal Catholic Church did affect the Society very much, largely because the general public, as well as a majority of members, associated it all with the T. S. From the start its doings had been "news". All the disturbances and conflicts had been grist to the mill for the press of the world. The newspapers, not understanding the real meaning of Mrs. Besant's words, labelled Krishnamurti as the Messiah, and later had banner headlines about "Mrs. Besant's Theosophical Church," which it most definitely was not. Yet these were actually activities of members and not, as such, of the Society.

It is obvious from writings of the period how great was the confusion in people's minds. One gains the impression, too, that many members, let alone anyone outside the Society, had not heard of the esoteric philosophy which H. P. Blavatsky had named Theosophy. In fact, one result of all the excitement was that it channelled much energy and devoted work into other activities and so deprived the Theosophical Society of them. It was an amazing psychological phase, the story of which can be followed in the numerous theosophical, Star, and Liberal Catholic magazines of the time. Now it is best viewed objectively as an historical episode. When, at the end of the third decade of the century, Krishnamurti rejected the role of "vehicle" for the World Teacher which others had cast for him, he was able in freedom to come to self-realization, which is the message he has given ever since.

Krishnamurti's withdrawal and his refusal to have "followers" threw many members into mental turmoil.

Many still followed him. Many left the Society, the purpose of which they had never grasped. The theme of self-realization is unquestionably an important aspect of the Ancient Wisdom, and its revival in the ranks of the T. S. has had a salutary effect.

But now we must return to 1913. Annie Besant entered the political arena and began to campaign strenuously for Home Rule and Dominion status for India. Again, this could not be the concern of the T. S., but a personal one. "The Society has no politics" she stated. She had, she said, been instructed to take up this work, and she put her whole effort behind it. She was interned for a short time in 1917, not wisely perhaps, but understandably. Widespread and vehement protests secured her release, and she was elected President of the Indian National Congress. Soon afterwards she started the excellent Indian Boy Scout movement. All this only indirectly concerns the T. S. A considerable number of Theosophists held that spiritual affairs should be kept clear of political ones, as H. P. B. had been meticulously careful to do. On the other hand, Olcott made a very successful incursion into politics with the case of the Sinhalese Buddhists. Who can judge another? Annie Besant did a wonderful work for India, which is everywhere gratefully remembered there even today. Whether in the long run a less pushing pace might have proved more beneficial and perhaps have avoided division and bloodshed, can be merely one of the "if's" of history. History does, however, show that excesses mostly follow political agitation.

In Paris in 1921 was held the "First World Congress of the Theosophical Society," which presumably should have been labelled the second world congress. There were twenty-two general secretaries present at the meetings of the General

Council. The chief subject of discussion was "The Mission of the Theosophical Society in the World," which inevitably must be periodically a matter of high concern for Theosophists.

"T. S. Loyalty League"

That same year about a quarter of the 800 membership of Sydney Lodge, Australia, formed "The T. S. Loyalty League," and started a magazine called *Dawn*, which strongly criticized the leaders of the Society and also the Liberal Catholic Church.

C. W. Leadbeater had settled in Adyar in 1909 and had been a great support to the President. In 1910 he went on one of his lecture tours to Australia, when ill-health forced him to stay there. Under his influence the Section gathered many new members. In 1916 the Liberal Catholic Church had been established as an offshoot of the Old Catholic Church, with James I. Wedgwood as bishop. Then he consecrated Leadbeater also as bishop. This caused fears that workers for the T. S. would be side-tracked into church activities. Leadbeater said that there was no official relation between the two organizations; yet it was claimed that the same two Masters were behind both movements. Much uneasiness was felt through the theosophical world, and repercussions went on for some years. In Sydney the attacks of the Loyalty League caused the charter of the lodge and the diplomas of a number of members to be cancelled.

In 1922 B. P. Wadia, a keen and capable worker and helper of the President, left the Society because he felt that it had strayed from its true path. He joined the United Lodge of Theosophists, which had been organized by Robert Crosbie, who had been closely linked with W. Q. Judge. There were "Back to Blavatsky" groups in various major

sections to restore the balance of theosophical teaching as they understood it. Unfortunately one or two of these groups were so vehement that it seemed as if they too were "manufacturing a creed".

About this time the line that large number of members were taking and the rigid attitude of those in authority in the Society in America deprived the T. S. of the valuable services of Alice Bailey and her husband, who formed the Arcane School.

In England in 1924 there was a Special Convention to discuss these matters, with E. L. Gardner presiding. Under the influence of the International President various motions submitted by minority groups were heavily defeated. Soon afterwards the Buddhist Lodge of the English Section seceded and became the Buddhist Society.

Pronouncements of the "coming of the Lord" continued to bedevil the Society; yet it went steadily on, with increasing membership. Wherever she went, the President's force of character, power of speech and compelling sincerity attracted large numbers to her lectures, on whatever subject she chose. Another generation of lecturers of international note sprang up; among them being G. S. Arundale, C. Jinarājadāsa, Clara Codd, J. H. Cousins, L. W. Rogers, Ernest Wood and Sidney and Josephine Ransom.

So the T. S. reached its half-century. The Jubilee International Convention at Adyar in 1925 was packed, with more than 500 visitors from overseas and about 2,500 Indian members.

There were sporadic protests in some sections against Mrs. Besant's policy, as being outside the scope of the objects of the Society, but her eloquence and her certainty of inner guidance nearly always carried the day.

A memorable event in 1929 was another World Congress of the Society in Chicago.

By 1928 it was obvious that Krishnamurti was taking his own definite line and refusing to be pressed into a mould that others had prepared for him. His book *Life in Freedom* marked the change. Then he dissolved the Order of the Star. The effect on the T. S. is shown by membership statistics. The world total in 1928 was over 45,000. By 1934 it had dropped to about 30,000. Annie Besant became seriously ill during a European tour in 1928 and her recovery seemed doubtful. But she rallied and was able to return home to Adyar. Her activities, however, had to be drastically curtailed. She died in 1933 a few days before what would have been her 86th birthday.

So passed the "warrior" as she has been called. It was of her nature that much that she did was controversial. Looking back, it is easy to think that she made serious mistakes. Many of those who criticized her policies thought that she was over-influenced by people who had, to a greater or a lesser degree, developed extrasensory perception—notably an Indian member, G. N. Chakravarti, in earlier years, then C. W. Leadbeater, and later still G. S. Arundale. She had a great sense of loyalty to her helpers and possibly placed too much confidence in their powers, their intuition and their judgment.

It is the fate of those in high places to be expected to be perfect. But none is infallible, and great people make big mistakes. In the entire Theosophical Movement all prominent members inevitably erred in some respects. What is great and true in their lives will endure. Whatever is false or petty will in due course fall away. We can appreciate the greatness and be charitable to everything else. It is useful

also for members of the T. S. to remember what Jinarājadāsa later emphasized, that a distinction must be made between statements of the President, or other officer, in a private capacity and pronouncements of the General Council. "Only the General Council can speak on behalf of the Society."

Certain it is that Annie Besant gave the whole of the second half of her long life in courageous, unselfish and fully dedicated service to the cause of Theosophy as she at different periods saw it. She will be remembered not for her faults but for the tremendous work she did for the uplifting of her fellows. She attracted loyalty, admiration and affection from thousands with whom she came in contact and, by her books, thousands also who never saw her. Her voluminous publications include not only such works as *A Study in Consciousness*, *The Ancient Wisdom* and *Esoteric Christianity*, but also lectures given over the years on a wide variety of subjects. Her writings continue to give inspiration and spiritual help, as many can testify.

TOGETHER, DIFFERENTLY

FOR the four terms of Annie Besant's presidency there had been no election, as she was the sole nominee; and each time she was approved by an overwhelming majority of the voting members. Now, two nominations were made: George Arundale and Ernest Wood. The former was elected, gaining more than seventy per cent of the votes cast. Arundale had long been a close supporter of his predecessor both in India and in other parts of the world. He and B. P. Wadia had been interned with her for three months during the first world war, and he loyally stood by her in all her various ventures. In India he was well known for his educational work, which had had an attraction for him ever since he graduated at Cambridge University. Moreover, in 1920 he had married Rukmini, the beautiful and gifted daughter of a distinguished Brahmin member of the Theosophical Society, whose son, N. Sri Ram, later became President. Arundale's book *Nirvana* had appeared in 1926 and *Mount Everest: Its Spiritual Significance* in 1933.

The new President and his wife did a quick tour to the west, visiting the United States and Europe. He called for "straight Theosophy" based on the classic literature. In London he dedicated the new headquarters of the English Section. Srimati Rukmini, being young herself, had a special appeal for the newly formed Young Theosophists organization.

In New York they elected her president of the group, and at the Adyar Convention at the end of 1934 she was chosen President of the World Federation of Young Theosophists. In this year C. W. Leadbeater died in Australia, aged 86.

A further work of the President was to try to reorganize the Theosophical World University, one of the activities projected in 1925, on more limited and practical lines than its somewhat pretentious title indicated. It had never carried out the functions of a university. The Theosophical Research Centre in England, a group owing much of its inspiration to E. L. Gardner, was authorized to take over the work of the abortive foundation. The T.R.C. was well established; its members included doctors, psychiatrists and scientists who had worked together since the early 1920's investigating current scientific, educational, philosophical, psychological and religious thought in relation to Theosophy and publishing their findings. The T.W.U. was, however, kept in being as a statutory body under Gardner's chairmanship, with the help of Laurence Bendit and Wallace Slater. The stray ends were finally tied up in 1964 under the direction of Sri Ram, when the functions the university would have exercised were embodied in the Theosophical World Trust for Education and Research. This organization is an international body with headquarters in England, where it is registered as a charity. After Gardner's death in 1969 Wallace Slater was elected chairman.

In 1934-35 also a Foundation for Integrated Education was set up in New York, the prime mover being Fritz Kunz. Some years later this became the Centre for Integrative Education. The object was "to promote the free association of those working towards the integration of knowledge through

study of the whole of things, Nature, Man and Society, assuming the universe to be One, Intelligible, Harmonious." For many years it has issued a journal, *Main Currents in Modern Thought*, which exerts a wide influence on thinking in English-speaking countries. In these two movements the somewhat vague idealistic ideas of 1925 have been given a continuing practical form.

During 1935 Arundale ran a campaign the chief of whose objects was "to expound the Theosophy expressed in our literature by H. P. Blavatsky and her greater pupils." At the International Convention at the end of the year Rukmini presented an exquisitely costumed mime and dance, *The Light of Asia*, and also gave a dance recital. The Adyar Players then founded an Academy of Arts, with her as head, with the aim of sponsoring international art. This organization was soon renamed Kalakshetra—Field of the Arts. Through its agency Rukmini elevated the traditional symbolic dances of Southern India and restored their spiritual interpretation. Under her guidance Kalakshetra has become a highly successful venture and is known throughout the world for its invaluable contribution in the cultural field. On the strictly theosophical line she was soon lecturing with ease and eloquence on such subjects as "Indian Art" and "The Place of Women", a subject of the utmost value; the Mahatma K. H. once declared: "On the elevation of woman the world's redemption and salvation hinge."

In the summer of 1936 a World Congress was held in Geneva, and the Arundales also travelled through the continental countries of Europe, lecturing and drawing large and appreciative audiences. In the next year or two they gave impetus to the renewed growth of the Society in many lands, in particular enlisting the support of young people.

Then fell the shadow of Hitler with Munich in 1938 and a year later the second world war was launched. This effectively stopped much theosophical activity. In Europe many of the lodges were submerged and their members persecuted. The President remained in India and poured out a spate of stimulating articles which circulated in the countries that were still free. Overwork and strain, however, took their toll, and he died in 1945, soon after the war in Europe ended, just as he was preparing to travel west again.

George Arundale was a tremendously vital person, open-hearted and generous, always ready to give help where it was needed, yet with a jovial sense of humour. Children loved him and would attend his lectures to enjoy the jokes interwoven with his serious subject matter. He produced a constant stream of fresh ideas. He had a straight and simple way of telling really committed members how they could progress: "You must mean business." N. Sri Ram, Vice-President in charge at the 1945 International Convention, said of him: "He struck his own distinctive note in the presentation of the many-sided Wisdom, and possessed a spirit of dynamic leadership and warm-hearted friendship for each and all, which awakened the enthusiasm of others and attracted the young and the young-hearted irresistibly. . . . He was in truth a keystone of our theosophical arch, bridging many differences." Perhaps the tenor of his whole work may be expressed in his own phrase—"Together, differently". For the thirty years since 1945 Srimati Rukmini Devi has maintained her special contribution to the work of the Theosophical Society, lecturing in many parts of the world and everywhere bringing with mellifluous artistry a unique and gracious influence.

RECONSTRUCTION AFTER WAR

THE only nomination as Arundale's successor was Curupumullage Jinarājadāsa, a mystic with a strong scientific bent. After the necessary voting he was accepted as the universal choice. Brother Raja, as he was generally called throughout the membership, was well known, having done long lecture tours in nearly every country, for after taking his degree at Cambridge University he lost no time in throwing himself wholly and whole-heartedly into theosophical work. In 1900 he went first to his native land, Ceylon. Then, at the request of the President (Mrs. Besant) he was in Italy for two years. In 1905 he did the first of many extensive tours in the United States.

From then onward to 1938 he was an inveterate traveller, covering vast distances and visiting most countries several times: nearly all the European states, North and Central and South America, Australia, New Zealand, Java, Burma, Japan, Viet Nam, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai and of course India. He also gave a good number of Convention lectures. Everywhere he found eager crowds. His charm and simplicity of address endeared him to all his hearers, and especially to those whose language was Spanish, Portuguese, French or Italian, for he lectured in all of these as well as in English. In predominantly Roman Catholic lands he encountered official opposition, but the people were hungry for his message. He constantly advocated more beauty in

the Society's work, and became known as "the apostle of Art and Beauty".

For the larger part of the second world war Brother Raja was in England, to the great benefit and good fortune of members there, courageously playing his part as a volunteer in the Air Raid Precautions service. By dint of a prodigious correspondence he gave comfort and encouragement to members in all countries where a mail service was possible.

Thus the new President came to his task with an unrivalled experience of Theosophists of all nations and races. The immediate concern was the great labour of reconstruction. There had been much disruption in most countries, but particularly where there had been actual fighting—above all in battered Europe. Jaap Van Dissel, head of the European Federation, happened to be in England when the German armies invaded his country, the Netherlands. He was therefore unable to return home until after the war ended, and he had scant news of his family. So London became the headquarters of the Society in Europe, as it was also for the governments of many continental nations.

As early as 1941 the English Section appointed a committee to consider "the spiritual principles that should underlie post-war reconstruction." Later, study groups were set up by the European Federation to discuss from a theosophical point of view the problems that were likely to arise once the war was over. Among other activities, these groups produced a series of booklets covering a wide range of social, economic and scientific subjects. As a result of all the work done, preparatory plans for helping to reconstitute lodges were ready to be put into operation as soon as conditions permitted.

In these preparations a quarterly paper *Theosophy in Action* played a considerable part. When the war clouds

were looming up in 1937 Mlle. Serge Brisy, General Secretary of the Belgian Section, started *L'Action Théosophique*, with articles in French, German and English, but after the war broke out it was impossible to continue it. So in 1940 *Theosophy in Action* was launched in England, in English. After the war ended, this official organ of the European Federation was the one link between the sections, keeping members informed, until sectional magazines in the several languages could be resumed. Mrs. Adelaide Gardner conducted this valuable publication up to the time of her death in 1951. It was continued until 1973, when it was felt that it had fully served its purpose.

Over the Continent of Europe and also in the far east small groups of Theosophists in the occupied countries had devotedly met to talk in their homes, ostensibly at "tea parties" or some such social occasion, which had an innocent appearance if there was a sudden invasion of suspicious secret police. There were no books, of course, and no member dared possess any of a theosophical nature. These courageous groups became nuclei for the re-establishment of various sections. However, the first need was clothes and food, then books; but perhaps above all the renewal of warm friendships with fellow Theosophists.

This slow but steady rehabilitation went on in east and west for all the years of Jinarajādāsa's presidency. This period also saw the independence of India, with the tragic partition and subsequent violence and bloodshed, particularly distressing to the President. The reorganization of members into Indian and Pakistani Sections of the T.S. in place of the former single body was unfortunately an inevitable outcome of the political division.

In spite of poor health the President resumed his travels as soon as circumstances allowed, often in conditions of

difficulty and discomfort. He first visited most of the stricken lands of Europe, to which his presence after so long a gap gave much comfort and encouragement. A special conference was held in Geneva, at which nineteen sections were represented, to consider ways and means of resuscitating the lodges. Then followed a tour throughout India, and many new lodges were started. In 1949 he went to the United States and Canada again.

In that year also the School of the Wisdom was inaugurated at Adyar, with C. R. Groves (England) as first Director of Studies. There were students of nine nationalities and five religions taking the course. The object of the school was to give members a clearer concept of the esoteric philosophy and to train them to be workers for the Society in their respective regions.

In 1951 there was a notable conference of the European Federation at Baden, the President attending. From Europe he went on to Australia and New Zealand. The next year he was in Europe again, for the twenty-first European Congress at Montecatini, in his beloved Italy; members from twenty-two nations attended.

Jinarājādāsa's term of office ended in 1953, and he did not wish to stand for re-election. There were two candidates, Nilakanta Sri Ram and Rukmini Devi. Sri Ram was elected by 13,495 votes to 6,316 for his sister.

Brother Raja's final journey came in 1953. Though his health caused much anxiety, he insisted on keeping his promise to visit the New World once more. A few days after his arrival in the United States he ended that particular life's pilgrimage.

The thousands of miles Jinarājādāsa covered in his travels were all done by sea and land, never by air. He went

round the globe by boat and train, taking numerous cases and crates all carefully docketed and addressed. These included a considerable library and a battery of medicines.

He was a prolific writer on theosophical matters in relation to modern thought, to art and to history. He issued two collections of *Letters of the Masters of the Wisdom*, *The 'K.H.' Letters to C. W. Leadbeater*, and also a large number of books including *First Principles of Theosophy* and *The New Humanity of Intuition* and many booklets, many of which have been translated into several languages. He had a prodigious correspondence. He would often work at his desk until four o'clock in the morning, and his secretary would later find a pile of letters on the floor to be stamped and posted to almost any part of the world.

Raja was of small stature, and neat. He was uncomplicated—simple, direct, childlike, considerate of others. Though gentle and unassuming, he was yet capable of great firmness when necessary. People who met him regularly in daily life found him deeply understanding of difficult situations. Being highly intuitive, he would frequently give answers to questions in someone's mind before they could be formulated. He had a fondness for western classical music and for cats. It was said: "To know him is to love him. He seemed to dwell on higher planes, yet he was most practical." He showed forth the best traits of both east and west.

THE FIFTH PRESIDENT

It is a peculiarity of our age that unpleasant or disturbing events, all the things that show the worst side of human nature, are "news"; whereas expressions of the happier and finer human traits are usually unchronicled because they are not exciting enough. Thus, in the first fifty odd years of its existence the Theosophical Society periodically made news, in fact big news, with streaming headlines. Then in the 1930's there was a lull, followed first by war and after that by the long hard labour of reconstruction, which was well on the way when the fifth president came to office in 1953. It must surely be a matter for congratulation to the Society that it did not hit the newspaper headlines either during the tenure of office of Arundale and Jinarājadāsa or during Sri Ram's three terms.

This is not to say that nothing happened. A great deal happened, but more in the spiritual than the mundane sphere. Nor does it imply that there were no difficulties. They always abound. Problems arose within various sections, but they did not affect the whole Society. They were minor compared with what had gone before, and most of them were resolved after a time.

N. Sri Ram had not been outside of India until a few years before his election. But at Adyar he had been a close and careful observer of theosophical events and personalities ever since he joined the Society in 1908, a year before graduating from Madras University. In 1908 also he married

Srimati Bhagirathi, who was a beloved helpmate until her death sixty years later. They had two sons and a daughter, Radha, now Mrs. Burnier, who has for some years been General Secretary of the Indian Section.

Sri Ram's entire adult life was devoted to the theosophical cause. At different times he was Treasurer, Recording Secretary and Vice-President of the Theosophical Society. For ten years he was assistant editor of Mrs. Besant's paper *New India*, and later was co-editor with G. S. Arundale of the latter's weekly paper *Conscience*. He also did a considerable amount of teaching in theosophical schools. During the last few years of Annie Besant's life he was her private secretary.

Though a late starter as a theosophical traveller, Sri Ram did his full share from 1947 onward. In that year he first went to the west at Brother Raja's request. In most of the next twenty years he was abroad for long periods, visiting the Americas, the European sections, East and South Africa, Australia and New Zealand and East Asia. By 1952 he had several books to his credit, notably *The Human Interest*, *A Theosophist looks at the World*, *An Approach to Reality* and *Man, his Origins and Evolution*.

From the first the new President sounded a note that continued to resound all through the twenty years of his presidency, which may perhaps be described as self-direction by a return to one's original purity of consciousness. This concerns both the life and the form sides of life. On the occult side "he led the Society to a deeper understanding of *The Secret Doctrine* in relation to modern scholarship, especially in science and sociology", as one close worker put it. Then he "re-established the relevance of man's inner quest for meaning to his outer pursuits in science, social welfare and political struggles".

Combining deep spiritual insight with a shrewd appraisal of world events, Sri Ram urged that "Theosophy is a matter of life more than of mere form". It must be made practical. Like his predecessors, he kept up to date with developments in every field, but he penetrated to the core of the matter. Thus, regarding technology, the important question is, what are "the ends to which we shall harness our resources and energies?" He found modern education "defective as a preparation for the more serious aims and aspects of life". Therefore young people "are left inwardly rootless." The problem, whether of individual or group, is always a spiritual one. "Unless an individual has the right spirit. . . no organization, communist, capitalist, socialist or any other -ist will work satisfactorily." Again, "However far a man may go in space, he will be carrying himself as he is, with all his problems. . . The happiness that every human being seeks. . . can come only from within his own being."

The policy stemming from these ideas was not put forward with fanfares, nor with executive directives, but was introduced quietly with persuasive eloquence and unflinching serenity wherever he went and in whatever publications his writings appeared. He advocated "a direct and uncomplicated approach to persons and things, so that we see them and meet them as they are", together with true humility which is the "eradication of all self-conceit".

The Quiet Revolution

Sri Ram's line on the form side brought about what may be called a democratic revolution in the Society, matching a similar movement in human affairs generally, except in the dictator countries. This was a progression, the beginnings of which were seen under Brother Raja's presidency, from

personal loyalty and authority to individual responsibility and self-reliance, from something that smacked of blind faith to a critical examination of every doctrine and statement to try to test its truth. Both within the Society and without there has been a healthy questioning of opinions and systems. Neither men and women, nor groups of them, will any longer be content to be shaped according to what others decree. As inventions and discoveries have altered the whole pattern of life for most of the world, so now there is this further move towards self-direction.

Sri Ram was the ideal president to achieve this within the T.S. Thus, his attitude to study, especially theosophical study, was that the essence of a book needs to be understood, beyond the mere words with which the writer's thought is clothed. And, as regards "belief and acceptance, there cannot be better advice for us than that given by the Buddha. . . . Not to accept anything because of hearsay, because it has been handed down from antiquity, because it is said in some book which people call sacred, because of the authority of any teacher, but only when it is corroborated by one's own reason and consciousness."

During these recent decades when Theosophy has not been news there has been a quiet consolidation within the Society and, more important, theosophical ideas have penetrated deeply into the mental atmosphere of mankind. Moreover, numerous writers in the fields of science, psychology, philosophy and even theology have come by their own routes and disciplines to corroborate much of the theosophical doctrine. All this unobtrusive work has, however, been punctuated by some events of note. Within the Society lecturers of international repute developed, among them Helen Zahara and James Perkins; also some useful authors,

Edward Gardner, Clara Codd, Geoffrey Barboroka, Laurence Bendit, Geoffrey Hodson, Josephine Ransom, I. K. Taimni, Rohit Mehta and others.

Van Dissel (Netherlands), who had carried the European Federation through many difficult years, retired in 1959 and in his stead John Coats (England) was elected chairman. For the next nine years he travelled to all the countries of Europe to which it was possible to go, linking the lodges, giving the sections a sense of unity and inspiring the members. (Frau) Claire Wyss (Switzerland) then carried on the work with devotion and charm until 1971, when she was succeeded by (Mrs.) Madeleine Leslie-Smith (England).

In 1960 Mrs. Ransom was elected Vice-President to succeed Sidney Cook, who wished to retire after some years in that office. But before she could take up her duties she was knocked down by a car in London and, although she remained alive for some months she never regained consciousness. The following year James Perkins was elected to fill that post. There was a particularly valuable congress of the European Federation in 1962 at Swanwick, in England, where the fact of all members being under one roof produced a happy, harmonious and profitable relationship.

The biggest single event of the decade was a World Congress again after a gap of thirty years. This memorable gathering in 1966 at Salzburg, Austria, comprised over 1,200 members representing forty-seven countries. The theme was "A World in Transition." But the event most far-reaching and beneficial in its consequences was the establishment of the Kern Foundation in the United States. This was set up under the will of an American member who left a huge sum to be used in that country "to expose as many people as possible" to theosophical teachings. The trust is not under

the control of the American Section, but the section works in close cooperation with it. The result has been the world famous Quest Books. Many new works have been published and old ones reprinted in paperback edition. This has benefited all English-speaking or English-reading countries. In America itself Quest Books have given a great interest in Theosophy; they have played a considerable part in publicity in that country, which has had the effect of bringing in new members. Three Quest Book films have also been made, thus enlisting modern techniques for theosophical work.

A further matter of importance is the close understanding between the three major theosophical publishing houses. These are at Adyar, Wheaton (U.S.A.) and London. Several fruitful conferences were held in India, England and America, the most definitive being that held at Adyar in 1972 with Sri Ram in the chair. These periodical conferences are a continuing feature of this aspect of theosophical work. The Vasanta Press at Adyar has been printing books for many years. In recent times it has acquired the most up-to-date machinery and other equipment and this is now housed in a splendid new building. Here, all is well set to cope with the future. By reason of the work it does in Europe, T.P.H. London seems well on the way to becoming T.P.H. for the Continent.

An important move was the setting up of a Non-English Publications Loan Fund in 1967 for making grants to sections where English is not spoken or read, so that translations of theosophical books may be available there. This has already proved most valuable for the work in those countries.

The Inter-American Theosophical Federation was formed in 1972 on the same principle as the European, with Luis Spairani (Argentina) as President. It has already done excellent work in linking the various sections and coordinating

theosophical effort. We may hope for another federation to do the same service for south-east Asia and Australasia.

A tour in the United States was planned for the President and Radha Burnier in 1973, but he fell ill in the spring and died as he had lived, thinking of others rather than of himself. Years before, Jinarājadāsa wrote of him: "He is specially characterized by possessing the attribute which I call wise." This judgment is patently justified in Sri Ram's later publications such as *Seeking Wisdom*, *Life's Deeper Aspects* and *The Nature of our Seeking*. One basic aspect of his message, constantly repeated over the years, may be summarized in his own words. "If the present consciousness lets go its attachments, which are really to its own memories, then immediately there is a change of vast consequence. The memories will not cease to exist, but will recede and leave the present in a state of freedom and natural wholeness. The past will turn into a mere landscape."

One who knew him from boyhood said that in a crisis he showed "indomitable courage and nerves of steel which one would not associate with this man who was a personification of gentleness." A quiet sense of humour flavoured his deeply serious nature and saved him from falling into the trap, which ensnares too many spiritually minded persons, of taking himself seriously. A co-worker wrote: "Sri Ram was an artist in the experience of living." He had the vision, and the confidence in its eventual fulfilment, that "it is to a world order that we are inevitably tending, though we may be in the midst of chaos".

End of a Cult

Sri Ram's twenty years tenure of the presidency should have effectively ended any personality cult in the T.S. This

cult had earlier flourished everywhere. It was characteristic of the affairs of the world in general and was therefore naturally prevalent throughout the Theosophical Movement. It is in fact only in this century, with a big advance in general intelligence and education, that any other attitude could become acceptable.

In the 1880's Sinnett was told concerning the Mahatmas: "We are not infallible all-foreseeing Mahatmas at every hour of the day." The distinction is between functioning in their spiritual quality as Mahatmas and at other times using ordinary human judgment in mundane matters. Such discrimination avoids "psychic inflation", a term used by Jung for the common practice of identifying a person with the office he holds. The head of a vast organization wields great power as such. But when he is off duty, as it were, he is a human being like any other. If, however, he carries over into private life the authority of his official position, he becomes self-important; he is stealing from his office something to which he has no right except in that office. One may wonder whether this sort of mistake did not sometimes vitiate judgment during the stormy days of the Theosophical Movement. Any such errors would obscure the fact that the Ancient Wisdom is greater than any of its exponents.

In *The Secret Doctrine* H.P. Blavatsky asks: "Who of us can presume to have the *whole* truth at his fingers' ends, even upon one minor teaching of Occultism?" It might seem that not all who followed H.P.B. heeded this fact. Unfortunately in all spheres of life the reformer, the prophet, the devotee, the leader who is convinced that he has the truth, becomes so utterly and sincerely sure that he is right that he is overpoweringly positive. "Thus saith the Lord" thundered the Hebrew prophets, and more modern prophets have felt

that they too were in the complete confidence of Deity. Lesser persons became swept up by the infectious emotion and enthusiasm. Moreover, the glory of a hero is reflected on those who follow him. A further point in the theosophical context is that until recently it was not realized that psychic powers are mere extensions of our senses, and that being unfamiliar they lend themselves more readily to incorrect interpretations.

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

OWING to a change in the rules, there was the record number of five candidates for the office of President in 1972. John Coats was elected with 3,819 votes, his nearest rival being Rukmini Devi with 3,761. The other candidates were Radha Burnier, 3,191, Joy Mills, 2,023 and James Perkins, 1,789.

Like his predecessors, John Coats has travelled all over the globe. After spending a considerable time at Adyar and then serving for several years as General Secretary of the Society in England, he went in 1946 to the United States, Mexico and Cuba with his wife Betsan, and then in 1949-50 to Australia and New Zealand. For the nine years of his chairmanship of the European Federation he was an assiduous visitor to the countries of Europe. After that he spent a number of years touring in North, Central and South America, the Philippines, Malaysia, Australasia, Africa and India.

The new President's imposing figure stands out among any group of Theosophists the world over, and his outgoing friendliness and gift of languages ensures his popularity everywhere. He could justifiably borrow Thomas Paine's maxim "I am a citizen of the world", for he comes to his office with an unrivalled international knowledge of theosophical lodges and members; and, born of this knowledge, plans that could perhaps benefit the Theosophical Society as it enters its second

century. Each president has taken his distinct line, appropriate for his generation. That of the sixth president will guide the Society as mankind passes into the decisive last quarter of this amazing and unprecedented twentieth century.

No doubt much thought will go into devising means for better two-way information between International Headquarters and members in nearly fifty lands, and for forging stronger links between the centre and the periphery as well as between all the groups on the periphery. A big problem here, of course, is language.

Another strong claim for special effort concerns young people throughout the nations. These are mostly in revolt against the materialistic values of the great majority of their elders. Negatively, they know what they do not want. But by and large they have not yet found their positive line for the future. They desperately need the vision and inspiration of one Being, one world, one human race, to give purpose and meaning to life. Only a few of them are so far finding these and other theosophical verities.

At Adyar an important change is the closing of the School of the Wisdom, which operated for only a few months each year. In its place, in 1976 it is hoped, will be the Institute of Theosophical Studies, which will be a memorial to Sri Ram. Meanwhile, Joy Mills, Vice-President, has been running a Seminar, which will presently be incorporated in the Institute.

So, in 1975, are completed 100 years of modern Occultism and a century of the Theosophical Society. Outwardly there is little to show for it but a small organization of negligible influence. But what of the intangibles? H. P. Blavatsky's challenge to the science and theology of her day has proved almost too successful. Her attack on ignorance and bigotry

started a process of critical examination that was taken up by forward-looking men within those fields. Then came wars and political and social upheavals on an unprecedented scale to accelerate the large scale abandonment of established creeds, customs, habits and loyalties. Alas, the doctrines of the Ancient Wisdom, which H.P.B. propounded to fill the void left by all these discards, is only now beginning to come into its own. The lagging of this constructive part of her work behind the destructive side led to the new materialism in which men worship wealth and status symbols.

Nevertheless, during the decades of quiet consolidation when neither Theosophy nor the Theosophical Society has been news, theosophical ideas have penetrated deeply into the mental atmosphere of the globe. Even a superficial comparison of educated thought a century ago and now makes that obvious. It would be foolish to attribute all the change to the Theosophical Movement; but history could well show that it has played a major part in the process.

As long ago as 1951 Jinarājadāsa wrote: "The real value of the work of the Theosophical Society must be judged from quite a different plane from that of counting the number of members. . . It is when we evaluate the changes produced in the world of thought that we can appreciate better what has been done by the attempts of Theosophists from the beginning." The quarter century since then confirms that view. There is a much bigger balance on the credit side of the Theosophical Movement than can be deduced from statistics.

What next? Theosophists have been eagerly looking for renewal in the final twenty-five years of the century. What is likely to happen? What will happen is already settled, at any rate in general outline. As Sri Ram said, "The future is made in the present." The present grew out of the past,

and inevitably the future springs from the present. The seeds for the blossoming of the last quarter were sown in the previous twenty-five or thirty years. If we had enough insight and were not too much involved in the busyness of our time we should be able to tell in what direction and towards what end events *must* move.

Certainly there is a convergence of many factors and forces as never before in human experience. Modern communications, almost annihilating time and space, are throwing the peoples of the world together so that, however reluctantly, they are being compelled to learn the need and the art of living together. Men of the twenty-first century may be able to look back and see that the present time is "the great divide in human history", and that the Theosophical Society was founded precisely when it was to assist in the transition out of darkness towards the light.

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