

MADAME BLAVATSKY



Photo :

Yulesha Kicin, Madras

HELENA PETROVNA BLAVATSKY

MADAME BLAVATSKY

BY

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TO
THE LITTLE COMMUNITY

PREFACE

THE personality of Madame Blavatsky has been the subject of so much contention—bitter denunciation and as fervent praise—during the past thirty years or so, that a book which gives a complete and, as far as possible impartial, review of all sides of the argument seems likely to be serviceable. In the present volume an attempt is made to summarize and review not only everything of importance that has been said about this extraordinary woman, but also the teachings given to the world through her instrumentality. Undoubtedly the time is fully ripe for a résumé of Madame Blavatsky's life, work and influence. Few things can be more important than that Theosophists should be familiar with the truth about their first teacher, the Founder of the Theosophical Society. They should be able to rebut the charges which, from time to time, are still made against Madame Blavatsky by the sceptical and misinformed. It is therefore the hope of the writer that this book may become a weapon in the armoury of earnest Theosophists.

A list of the principal books quoted will be found at the end of this volume, but in particular the author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky*, by A. P. Sinnett, *Old Diary Leaves*, by Colonel Henry S. Olcott, and other publications of the Theosophical Publishing House, also to the *Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett* and to Mrs. Alice Leighton Cleather for

permission to quote from her three books, particularly *H. P. Blavatsky, her Life and Work for Humanity*. He also wishes to thank the Blavatsky Association for valuable assistance in placing books, articles and manuscripts at his disposal.

G. B. B.

Hampstead,

December, 1925.

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MADAME BLAVATSKY

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD

PROCLAIMED by some as a heaven-treading seer, learned Occultist and selfless servant of the Masters ; by others denounced as a shameless impostor, immoral adventuress, charlatan and thief of souls, Madame Blavatsky is likely to remain, for many days to come, one of the most arresting figures in the history of Occultism. When more is known about the nature of psychical phenomena, and when the strange happenings of the séance room become recognised by orthodox science as being, in many instances, genuine, H. P. Blavatsky's claims as a worker of "miracles" may in time be fully vindicated ; the phenomena said to have happened in her presence will at least be recognised as neither impossible nor unparalleled. That, however, is scarcely likely to happen for many years to come, and in the meantime, individuals who have not known her personally find it difficult to decide what manner of woman Madame Blavatsky really was. To write her down as an impostor is the easiest course ; it is the assumption which appeals most to the intellectually indolent. But however greatly certain of her phenomena, her more indiscreet utterances and most plausible "exposures" may lend countenance to this supposition, it is impossible to make the theory of fraud cover all the facts. Moreover, if Madame Blavatsky were a fraud, if all her claims were

mere pretence, then, it also must be admitted, she was one of the most cruel and conscienceless women who have ever lived. Leaving far behind her the grosser crimes of adultery, robbery and murder, she adopted the rôle (if this supposition be correct) of deceiver in the sphere of religion, and this to an unrivalled degree. She must have played with men's religious convictions. She raised their devotion to the point of self-sacrifice, urged them to immolate themselves for the sake of a religious ideal. She allowed Colonel Olcott to renounce everything—profession, income, comfort and reputation—in order to follow the Masters. She urged him, and others also, to ever greater labours in behalf of the world-religion. She herself simulated intense conviction, profound devotion. She even fell on her knees before the Masters in the streets of India. And others who followed her became (what she herself claimed to be) seers and visionaries, as a result of being guided by her through the labyrinths of Occultism. If all this were deception and hypocrisy, there are no words too harsh to be used in her condemnation. Until this question can be finally cleared up, if indeed it can ever be, her personality presents an intensely interesting problem in psychology. Madame Blavatsky was either incredibly wicked, or else was one of the most deeply wronged women known to history.

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Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, or, to call her by her maiden name, Mdlle. Hahn, was born at Ekaterinoslaw, in the south of Russia, "on the night between July 30 and 31," in the year 1831. She was of aristocratic parentage, for her father, Colonel Peter Hahn, traced his descent from the Von Hahns, noblemen of Mechlenburg, Germany, her grandfather being General Alexis Hahn von Rottenstern Hahn. Helena Petrovna was the only daughter of Helene Fadeef (second wife of Colonel Peter Hahn) and granddaughter, on her mother's side, of Privy Councillor Andrew

Fadeef and the Princess Helene Dolgorouky. "Thus," says the account written by representatives of her family and published by A. P. Sinnett in *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky*, "her maternal ancestors belong to the oldest families of the empire, since they are the direct descendants of the Prince or Grand Duke Rurik, the first ruler called to govern Russia. Several ladies of that family belonged to the Imperial house, becoming Czarinas (Czaritiza) by marriage. For a Princess Dolgorouky (Maria Nikitishna) had been married to the grandfather of Peter the Great, the Czar Michael Fedorovitch, the first reigning Romanoff; another, the Princess Catherine Alexéevna, was on the eve of her marriage with Czar Peter the II when he died suddenly before the ceremony."

Pre-natal influences may possibly have affected the character of the future Occultist, for Helena Petrovna Hahn was born prematurely owing to deaths from cholera which occurred in her mother's house, the years 1830 to 1832 being memorable for the terrible outbreak of this plague which decimated almost every town of the Continent at that time. Not only was she "ushered into the world in the midst of coffins and desolation," but was herself so sickly and apparently so likely to require one of the coffins by which she was surrounded, that, in order to save the helpless infant from the flames of hell, she was hurriedly baptized by a priest of the Greek Church. In the narrative published by A. P. Sinnett,¹ the ceremony of baptism in "orthodox" Russia is described as "attended with all the paraphernalia of lighted tapers, and 'pairs' of godmothers and godfathers, every one of the spectators and actors being furnished with consecrated wax candles during the whole proceedings. Moreover, everyone has to stand during the baptismal rite, no one being allowed to sit in the Greek religion—as they do in Roman Catholic and Protestant churches—during the church and religious service. The room selected for the ceremony in the family mansion was

¹ *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky.*

large, but the crowd of devotees eager to witness it was still larger. Behind the priest officiating in the centre of the room, with his assistants, in their golden robes and long hair, stood the three pairs of sponsors and the whole household of vassals and serfs. The child-aunt of the baby—only a few years older than the niece aged twenty-four hours—placed as ‘ proxy ’ for an absent relative, was in the first row immediately behind the venerable *protopope*. Feeling nervous and tired of standing still for nearly an hour, the child settled on the floor, unperceived by the elders, and became probably drowsy in the overcrowded room on that hot July day. The ceremony was nearing its close. The sponsors were just in the act of renouncing the Evil One and his deeds—a renunciation emphasised in the Greek Church by thrice spitting upon the invisible enemy—when the little lady, toying with her lighted taper at the feet of the crowd, inadvertently set fire to the long flowing robes of the priest, no one remarking the accident until it was too late. The result was an immediate conflagration, during which several persons—chiefly the old priest—were severely burnt. That was another bad omen, according to the superstitious beliefs of orthodox Russia; and the innocent cause of it—the future Madame Blavatsky—was doomed from that day in the eyes of all the town to an eventful life, full of vicissitude and trouble.” This story is chiefly of interest because it partly accounts for the fear with which the young child was regarded by her attendants, the result being that no one had the courage to control her. For, although she was not at first expected to live, the baby seems quickly to have developed into a robust madcap whose exploits of reckless physical daring alternated with morbid moods when she would sit brooding and communing with herself in some forsaken corner of the house. From her earliest years she was self-willed and independent; and these tendencies were encouraged by the extent to which she was pampered by her grandparents and aunts and by the superstitious fear with which

the servants of the household regarded her. The result was that, a few years later, nursery mistresses and tutors were unable to exercise any authority over her whatever.

From her earliest years she was brought up in an atmosphere of legend and phantasy. Goblins and fairies were her familiars from the cradle; and, in particular, the domovoy, or house goblin, played an important part in her infantile career. This serviceable domestic sprite is widely believed in by the peasantry of Russia. He is said to watch over the household while they sleep and to perform various domestic offices, such as "cleaning the horses every night, brushing and plaiting their tails and manes, protecting the cows and cattle from the witch." But on the night of March 30th he changes from a good and helpful sprite to an extremely mischievous one, teasing the horses, thrashing the cows and causing the whole household to be dropping and breaking everything, stumbling and falling, during all the day. Only an individual born on the night between July 30th and 31st, as was Helena Petrovna, is believed to be exempt from his freaks, and from the interference of other spirits also, for people born on that night are believed to exercise a mysterious power over the unseen. This belief had an important effect on the character of the child. While very young she was imbued with a belief in superhuman and sub-human spirits; and the belief of the household in her own supernatural powers had the effect of giving free play to the self-willed and masterful disposition of the child. Owing to the date and circumstances of her birth, and the fire that had broken out at her baptism, she was actually regarded with superstitious reverence. The servants dared not offend her because they believed that she could call upon goblins and gnomes to torment them. She was called by the serfs the *Sedmitchka*: "an untranslatable term, meaning one connected with the number Seven; in this particular case referring to the child having been born on the *seventh* month of the year, on the night between the 30th and 31st of July—days so

conspicuous in Russia in the annals of popular beliefs with regard to witches and their doings." It was for this reason that, for many years, she was conducted round the house, stables and cow-pen on the 30th of July and was made to sprinkle the four corners of each room with water, to an accompaniment of mystic sentences repeated by the nurse. The child is said to have taken part in this ceremony from a very early age, the whole affair being conducted by the servants in profound secrecy.

An interesting story which illustrates the way in which the child was regarded by the servants is told about the "roussalkas," or green-haired nymphs popularly believed to inhabit the shores of the Dnieper, which encircles Ekaterinoslaw. Whenever the perambulations of nurse and child took them in the direction of the river, Mdlle. Hahn is said to have demanded implicit obedience from her nurse on pain of being tickled to death by a roussalka. The fear with which she was regarded was increased by an incident which occurred on one of these occasions and which A. P. Sinnett¹ has recorded :

"In one of her walks by the river-side a boy about fourteen who was dragging the child's carriage incurred her displeasure by some slight disobedience. 'I will have you tickled to death by a roussalka!' she screamed. 'There's one coming down from that tree . . . here she comes . . . See, see!' Whether the boy saw the dreaded nymph or not, he took to his heels, and, notwithstanding the angry commands of the nurse, disappeared along the sandy banks leading homeward. After much grumbling the old nurse was constrained to return home alone with her charge, determined to have 'Pavlik' punished. But the poor lad was never seen alive again. He ran away to his village, and his body was found several weeks later by fishermen, who caught him in their nets. The verdict of the police was 'drowning by accident.' It was thought that the lad, having sought to cross some shallow pools left from the

¹ *Ibid.*

spring inundations, had got into one of the many sandpits so easily transformed by the rapid Dnieper into whirlpools. But the verdict of the horrified household—of the nurses and servants—pointed to no *accidental* death, but to the one that had occurred in consequence of the child having withdrawn from the boy her mighty protection, thus delivering the victim to some roussalka on the watch.”

As may be readily imagined, the child's parents, when this story reached their ears, were exceedingly displeased, the more so as their daughter gravely corroborated the charges made by the servants, and the impression made on her mind by the beliefs of the peasantry in an unseen world were already too profound to be eradicated. The incident led, however, to the engagement of an English governess, Miss Augusta Sophia Jeffries; but this lady, though free from the superstitious beliefs of the Russians, found her ward entirely unmanageable, and after some time she relinquished her task in despair. Until about six years old, the child was therefore given over to the care of her Russian nurses, and at that age she and her younger sister went to live with their father in his army quarters. For the next two or three years, says A. P. Sinnett, the little girls were cared for chiefly by their father's orderlies, and Helena Petrovna, for one, greatly preferred their supervision to that of female attendants. The process of petting and spoiling was continued, for the children were taken about everywhere with the troops and were pampered by the whole regiment. Mdlle. Hahn was still a child when her mother died, and when about eleven years of age she was taken charge of altogether by her grandmother at Saratow, where the five subsequent years were passed.

The life at Saratow is wonderfully described in the writings of Madame Blavatsky's sister, Madame Jelihowsky, quoted by A. P. Sinnett in his *Incidents*. The house in which they lived was old and vast, “full of subterranean galleries, long abandoned passages, turrets and most weird nooks and corners.” Dark underground passages and

dungeons where serfs were said to have been imprisoned and tortured by a cruel overseer who had taken charge of the estate for one or other of the past proprietors were explored by the children, and here Helena Petrovna used often to hide in order to avoid her lessons. In one of these vaults she erected for herself "a tower out of old broken chairs and tables in a corner under an iron-barred window, high up in the ceiling . . . , and there she would hide for hours, reading a book known as *Solomon's Wisdom*, in which every kind of popular legend was taught." Sometimes, in her efforts to escape detection, she lost her way in the subterranean corridors, yet even this failed to frighten her. She assured the others that she was never there alone, but had companions and playmates whom she called her "hunchbacks."

Another of her hiding-places was a dark loft underneath the roof, where she would sometimes be discovered seated amid pigeons' nests and surrounded by hundreds of pigeons. She would amuse herself here by putting the birds into mesmeric slumber by stroking them according to the rules explained in *Solomon's Wisdom*, and her sister records the fact that at such times "pigeons were found, if not asleep, still unable to move, and as though stunned, in her lap."

Madame Jelihowsky also records the fact that attached to the house was a large abandoned garden or park, full of ruined kiosks, pagodas and outbuildings, "which, running up hillward, ended in a virgin forest, whose hardly visible paths were covered knee-deep with moss and with thickets in it which perhaps no human foot had disturbed for centuries." Although this forest was said to be a hiding-place for criminals and deserters, Mdlle. Hahn used to hide there, when the underground vaults no longer assured her privacy. Expeditions into the woods were arranged by the family both during daytime and at night. The latter were for the purpose of adding to their grandmother's entomological collection, and as these nocturnal excursions

necessitated lanterns and butterfly nets, to say nothing of a bodyguard of servants, Cossacks and perhaps a gendarme or two, they were greatly enjoyed by the children.

From the age of ten, Helena Petrovna was accustomed to ride the Cossack horses astride a man's saddle, and she persisted in this practice at the age of fifteen, by which time the sense of propriety of her relatives was severely shocked by her mannish behaviour. A story which illustrates the mediumistic gifts which she undoubtedly possessed at a very early age records how on a certain occasion a horse which she was riding suddenly bolted, the result being that the girl fell from the saddle. Her foot became entangled in the stirrup, and "before the horse was stopped she ought, she thinks, to have been killed outright but for a strange sustaining power she distinctly felt around her, which seemed to hold her up in defiance of gravitation."¹

It has been suggested that this incident and one or two other occurrences of a similar nature show that even in her childhood Madame Blavatsky was under the special protection of certain higher Powers, and she herself has stated that amidst the strange double life which she seems to have led since her earliest years "she would sometimes have visions of a mature protector, whose imposing appearance dominated her imagination from a very early period. This protector was always the same, his features never changed; in after life she met him as a living man, and knew him as though she had been brought up in his presence."²

Madame Jelihowsky records that during childhood her sister showed frequent evidence of somnambulism, "speaking aloud, and often walking in her sleep." Often she was found in the deserted parts of the house during the night, either fast asleep or in a semi-conscious condition. And, although daring and fearless in physical adventure, she was sometimes scared into fits through hallucinations. One frequent source of distress was what she called "the

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

terrible glaring eyes " which, though invisible to everyone else, stared at her from inanimate objects or from phantasmal forms. " She would shut her eyes tight during such visions," wrote Madame Jelihowsky, " and run away to hide from the ghostly glances thrown on her by pieces of furniture or articles of dress, screaming desperately and frightening the whole household." At other times, however, she would be seized with fits of laughter, which she said were provoked by the humorous behaviour of her invisible companions.

According to one of Madame Blavatsky's aunts, other of her characteristics at this period were her " attraction to, and at the same time fear of, the dead ; her passionate love and curiosity for everything unknown and mysterious, weird and fantastical ; and, foremost of all, her craving for independence and freedom of action—a craving that nothing and nobody could control ; all this, combined with an exuberance of imagination and a wonderful sensitiveness." The slightest contradiction is said to have brought on an outburst of passion, and not infrequently a fit of convulsions.

During her childhood Madame Blavatsky had a wonderful power of story-telling which seems greatly to have impressed her playmates. Madame Jelihowsky remarks that " she had a strong power of carrying away her audiences with her, of making them see actually, if even vaguely, that which she herself saw. . . . Once she frightened all of us youngsters very nearly into fits. We had just been transported into a fairy world, when suddenly she changed her narrative from the past to the present tense, and began to ask us to imagine that all that which she had told us of the cool, blue waves with their dense populations was around us, only invisible and intangible, so far. . . . ' Just fancy ! A miracle ! ' she said ; ' the earth suddenly opening, the air condensing around us and re-becoming sea waves. . . . Look, look . . . there, they begin already appearing and moving. We are surrounded with water,

we are right amid the mysteries and the wonders of a submarine world ! . . .'

" She had started from the sand, and was speaking with such conviction, her voice had such a ring of real amazement, horror, and her childish face wore such a look of a wild joy and terror at the same time, that when, suddenly covering her eyes with both hands, as she used to do in her excited moments, she fell down on the sand screaming at the top of her voice, ' There's the wave . . . it has come ! . . . The sea, the sea, we are drowning ! ' . . . every one of us fell down on our faces, as desperately screaming and as fully convinced that the sea had engulfed us, and that we were no more ! . . ."¹

Others of her stories were told to parties of younger children, the place and time preferred for her narrations being the family museum at nightfall. Here, with the dim, twilight forms of stuffed animals around them, the children would listen spellbound while the future occultist invented weird and incredible phantasies :

" Each of the stuffed animals in the museum had taken her in turn into its confidence, had divulged to her the history of its life in previous incarnations or existences. Where had she heard of reincarnation, or who could have taught her anything of the superstitious mysteries of metempsychosis, in a Christian family ? Yet she would stretch herself on her favourite animal, a gigantic stuffed seal, and caressing its silvery, soft white skin, she would repeat to us his adventures, as told to her by *himself*, in such glowing colours and eloquent style, that even grown-up persons found themselves interested involuntarily in her narratives. They all listened to, and were carried away by the charm of, her recitals, the younger audience believing every word she uttered. Never can I forget the life and adventures of a tall white flamingo, who stood in unbroken contemplation behind the glass panes of a large cupboard, with his two scarlet-lined wings widely opened as though ready to take flight, yet chained to his prison cell. He had been ages ago, she told us, no bird, but a real man. He had committed fearful crimes and a murder, for which a great genius

¹ *Ibid.*

had changed him into a flamingo, a brainless bird, sprinkling his two wings with the blood of his victims, and thus condemning him to wander for ever in deserts and marshes. . . .

“ I dreaded that flamingo fearfully. At dusk, whenever I chanced to pass through the museum to say good night to our grandmother, who rarely left her study, an adjoining room, I tried to avoid seeing the blood-covered murderer by shutting my eyes and running quickly by.”¹

Certainly the child possessed a remarkable imaginative power, almost amounting to genius. And Madame Jelihowsky is possibly in error when she adds that “ she never spoke in later years as she used to speak in her childhood and early girlhood. The stream of her eloquence has dried up, and the very source of her inspiration is now seemingly lost ! ” In view of *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan* and the *Nightmare Tales*, it must be recognised that Madame Blavatsky’s power of romantic imagination, when she cared to exercise it, was fully as vivid and exotic in later years as it was in her childhood.

Residence at Saratow was broken in 1844 by Mdlle. Hahn’s first journey abroad, when her father, Colonel Hahn, took her to Paris and London. She was then fourteen years of age, and one of their objects in visiting London was the furtherance of her knowledge of music. As a pianist she possessed great natural talents, and she now had several lessons from Moscheles. She is also said to have played in a pianoforte duet at a private concert with a famous professional musician, and, some years later, to have made an extensive Continental tour as professional pianist. Later still she spent many years at a stretch without once touching the instrument. Yet her powers as a musician continued with her to the end of her life ; occasionally a sudden whim would take possession of her and her friends would be delighted by her playing, which seemed all the more entrancing because so infrequent.

¹ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER II

MARRIAGE AND EARLY WANDERINGS

RESIDENCE at Saratow came finally to an end when Mdlle. Hahn was between sixteen and seventeen years of age. In the following year (1848), when still only seventeen, she was married to General Blavatsky. At the time of her marriage she was staying with her grandmother and some other relatives at Djellallogly, a mountain village to which the inhabitants of Tiflis were accustomed to repair in the summer months. General Blavatsky was much older than his bride. Madame Blavatsky declared in later years that he was nearer to seventy than sixty, but, according to the General himself, he was at least ten years younger than the lower of these estimates. He was, at any rate, older than she, and from the outset they were an ill-matched and uncongenial couple. She is said to have married him in a fit of bravado. Her governess, in a moment of exasperation, had defied her to find any man who, in view of her temper and disposition, would be her husband. Being determined to retain the freedom of a single life, she had already rejected, it is said, several eligible suitors, greeting them, in each instance, with extreme ill-behaviour ; but when her governess flung at her the taunt that even ugly old General Blavatsky would not marry her, her pride and youthful folly were so worked upon that in three days she made him propose to her. Then, when too late, she sought to escape from the engagement which she had accepted as a joke. Her sole intention had been to defy and humiliate her governess in the manner of a naughty child ; but she found that her defiance had

led her into a trap from which there was no escape. Her family and friends, to say nothing of the General himself, insisted on her holding to the engagement, and the marriage was therefore celebrated on the 7th of July, 1848. It is said that when, at the altar, she heard the priest saying to her, "Thou shalt honour and obey thy husband," the hated word "shalt" caused her face to flush angrily and then become deadly pale. Her aunt has made the statement that she muttered in response, through her set teeth, "Surely I *shall not*." Nor did she, for their married life was short, amounting, in all, to only three months.

On the day after the wedding the General conducted her to a summer retreat called Daretchichag, but already there had been "unforeseen revelations, furious indignation, dismay, and belated repentance" on the part of Helena Petrovna, who, like her future disciple Mrs. Besant, seems to have entered the marriage relationship in complete ignorance of its real meaning. Already there had been violent conflict, and while on the journey to Daretchichag she attempted flight towards the Persian frontier. Her attempt failed, however, owing to the fact that the Cossack whom she sought to persuade to act as her guide betrayed her to the General. She was brought to the scene of their honeymoon carefully guarded. After three months of unhappiness Madame Blavatsky found her existence unendurable and forsook her husband by taking horse and riding back to Tiflis, where her family were then residing. Her relatives decided that she should be sent to her father at Odessa, and, in the care of an old servant, she therefore set out for Poti to travel thence by steamer. But she so prolonged the journey through Georgia that she missed the steamer at Poti, and went instead on board an English sailing vessel, believed to have been named the *Commodore*. The destinations of the *Commodore* were first Kertch, then Taganrog in the Sea of Azof, and finally, Constantinople; and by a liberal presentation of roubles Madame Blavatsky persuaded the skipper to accept herself and

servants as passengers to Kertch. On arriving at Kertch she sent the servants ashore to obtain apartments, and then, in the night, sailed away in the *Commodore* for Taganrog. At Taganrog, when the harbour police visited the vessel, she concealed her identity by retiring to a bunk and posing as a sick cabin boy, the cabin boy himself being hidden among the coals. Thus, in due course, she arrived at Constantinople; and here, with the assistance of the steward, she had to fly ashore post-haste in order to escape the persecutions of the skipper, who by this time, it seems, had fallen in love with her. Fortunately for herself, she encountered at Constantinople a Russian lady of her acquaintance, the Countess K——, with whom she “formed a safe intimacy, and travelled for a time in Egypt, Greece, and other parts of Eastern Europe.”

In Egypt, with the Countess K——, she visited Cairo for the first time and made the acquaintance of an old Copt, who enjoyed great reputation as a magician and whom she met again in later years at Boulak. It is said that it was from this old Copt, during her first visit to Egypt, that she gained the earliest rudiments of her occult knowledge. From the time that she deserted her servants at Kertch, her relatives at Tiflis had lost all trace of her. She communicated privately, however, with her father. She secured his consent to her programme of foreign travel, which extended over a period of ten years before she again saw her relatives. Her father supplied her, from time to time, with the sums of money that she needed, and it may be supposed that on the whole he was not sorry to have his turbulent and unruly daughter out of the way. Presumably, the feelings of General Blavatsky were similar to those of Colonel Hahn, for at any rate the former endeavoured to obtain a divorce on the ground that “his marriage had never been more than a form.” His attempt failed, however, owing to the fact that Russian law at that time regarded divorce with disfavour.

Meanwhile Madame Blavatsky continued her travels,

sometimes with an English titled lady whom she had met, sometimes with an old Russian lady, the Countess B——, and, more frequently, in solitary independence. With the Countess B——, she stayed for a time at Mivart's Hotel, London, after fleeing hurriedly from Paris in order to escape from a famous mesmerist who had discovered her marvellous psychic gifts and was anxious to keep her under his control as a sensitive. After touring about Europe with the Countess B—— in 1850, January 1st, 1851, saw her once more in Paris, where she continued until the following July. In July she set sail for Canada. Having formed in her imagination a romantic and idealised picture of the Red Indians, whom at this time she regarded as heroes, she determined to go and see them. At Quebec she made the acquaintance of a party of Indians and their squaws, with whom she discussed the ways and wisdom of the medicine men. But when the Indians departed they took with them various articles of Madame Blavatsky's personal property—in particular, a pair of boots which Madame Blavatsky greatly prized and which could not be replaced in Quebec. Her ideals of the Indians being shattered, she turned her thoughts to the Mormons, but as their original city, Nauvoo in Missouri, had just been destroyed and many Mormons massacred by the American mob, and as the survivors were at that time in the desert, searching for their new home, Madame Blavatsky ultimately decided to make Mexico her objective. In journeying thither she stayed at New Orleans, where her interest centred in a negro sect of black magicians known as Voodoos. They were addicted, says Mr. Sinnett, "to a form of magic practices that no highly trained occult student would have anything to do with," and Madame Blavatsky was warned in a vision of the risk she was running, a guardian (doubtless her Master) appearing to her whom later on she met as a living man.

Continuing her journey, she passed through Texas into Mexico, where she must surely have experienced an

arduous life and many perilous adventures. In commenting on the dangers through which she passed at this time, young, friendless and alone in a wild and lawless country, A. P. Sinnett remarks that "it seems miraculous in the retrospect that she should have been able—young woman at that time as she was—to lead the wild life on which she was embarked without actually incurring disasters. . . . She passed through rough communities of all kinds, savage as well as civilised, and seems to have been guarded from harm, as assuredly she was guarded, by the sheer force of her own fearlessness, and her fierce scorn for all considerations however remotely associated with the 'magnetism of sex.'"

Possibly some light is thrown upon her habits of life at this time by the following excerpt from a letter written by the Countess Wachtmeister to A. P. Sinnett when he was preparing to publish his *Incidents*. This passage is quoted from the volume entitled *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett* :

"Now about her Memoirs, three things should certainly be omitted in them, first the adopted child, as there are many who can bring unpleasant family secrets to light on that point—again Madame's travelling about so much in men's clothes. Is there not a law in England to punish women who do such things? At any rate, it would shock English prudery—lastly, no mention of Mahatmas."

In the light of this letter it seems not improbable that much of Madame's early wandering may have been accomplished by masquerading as a man. It can be readily understood that at that time the Countess Wachtmeister would have been anxious to conceal as much of Madame Blavatsky's unconventionality as possible. Less than thirty years ago the fact of a woman being in the habit of smoking cigarettes would alone have been sufficient to condemn her in the eyes of most people of ordinary outlook.

During her wanderings in America, a legacy of 80,000 roubles, which she ran through in an incredibly short space

of time, was bequeathed her by one of her godmothers. Although she has shown more than once that she could endure poverty with fortitude, her impulse whenever she found herself in possession of money was "to throw it away with both hands." Mr. Sinnett¹ records the fact that with the legacy she received she bought land in America, the situation of which she afterwards totally forgot, besides losing all the papers referring to the transaction. Possibly, however, this refers to the land purchased with her patrimony in 1874, which will be mentioned in its due place.

While in Mexico she resolved to visit India, her ultimate objective being Tibet, where she hoped to gain acquaintanceship with the great teachers of occult science. She arrived at Bombay at the end of 1852, or possibly early in 1853, in company with an Englishman she had met in Germany two years before and to whom she had written inviting him to join her. Her second companion was a Hindu whose acquaintance she had made at Copau, Mexico, and whom she believed to be a chela (pupil) of the Adepts or Masters of occult science. On arriving at Bombay the party soon dispersed, Madame Blavatsky being bent on entering Tibet through Nepal. For the time being, however, she failed to get through Nepal and therefore went down to Southern India, thence to Java and Singapore, sailing from the latter to England.

Many years afterwards, when travelling in India, Colonel Olcott, Co-Founder with Madame Blavatsky of the Theosophical Society, received confirmation of her statement about attempting to enter Tibet from a chance encounter with Major-General Murray, who, in 1854, when he held the rank of Captain, had been military commandant on the frontier between Nepal and Tibet. The Major-General told Colonel Olcott that he had prevented Madame Blavatsky crossing the frontier and had kept her in his house, in his wife's company (possibly meaning, under his wife's

¹ *Ibid.*

surveillance), for a month. Colonel Olcott, in *Old Diary Leaves*, comments on the fact that when Madame Blavatsky told the story of her first attempt to enter Tibet she omitted to mention the name of Major-General Murray, which, of course, would have been a point of considerable evidential importance. It was only as the result of coincidence that Major-General Murray's testimony was made known to Colonel Olcott. Probably in this instance, as on so many other occasions in relating her early adventures, Madame Blavatsky had forgotten the facts. For as regards the concrete details of everyday matter-of-fact existence her mind appears to have been chaotic and her memory extremely unretentive, though for knowledge which really interested her it was quite the opposite.

London in 1853 was scarcely the most congenial place in which a Russian subject might settle, for preparations for the Crimean War were then in progress. At the end of the year Madame Blavatsky again visited America. She landed, this time, in New York. Continuing her journey westward, she visited Chicago and crossed the Rocky Mountains to San Francisco. Her stay in America on this occasion occupied altogether about two years, and at the end of that time she again set out for India, *via* Japan and the Straits, reaching Calcutta some time during 1855. After travelling for some months in India, she made in 1856 her second attempt to enter Tibet and succeeded this time in penetrating a considerable distance into that inaccessible country. Her guide on this occasion was a Tartar Shaman, or "holy man," by whom, as described in *Isis Unveiled*, several occult wonders were performed during the journey. Finally, Madame Blavatsky and her Shaman lost their way or otherwise became stranded in the desert and help was obtained from an Adept and his followers; a party of twenty-five horsemen came from their lamasery in response to a summons from the Shaman, who visited them in the astral body.¹ For the time being,

¹ *Isis Unveiled*, Vol. II, Chap. XII.

this incident concluded Madame Blavatsky's Tibetan wanderings, and her rescuer had her conducted back to the frontier "by roads and passes of which she had no previous knowledge." Her Indian travels were then renewed, but shortly before the Mutiny which broke out in 1857 she was directed by her unseen protectors to leave the country. From Madras to Java she sailed in a Dutch vessel, returning thence to Europe. This time Russia was her destination, and in 1858, after an absence of ten years, she rejoined her relatives, who were then residing at the town of Pskoff. Thus closed the first important chapter in Madame Blavatsky's life, the first educational and preparatory experiences whereby she became in later years a fitting instrument for revelation of occult truths to the world.

CHAPTER III

THE RETURN TO RUSSIA—MADAME BLAVATSKY'S PSYCHIC DEVELOPMENT

WHEN Madame Blavatsky returned to her relatives at Pskoff she appears to have been in an intermediate stage in her development from medium to occultist. With mediums, phenomena occur spontaneously ; but with a fully trained occultist they should occur solely in obedience to the will. With Madame Blavatsky at this time physical phenomena such as raps sometimes showed themselves affected by her will power while also occurring spontaneously and continuously wherever she went. Knocks and raps occurred not only in her presence, but in every room of the house, on walls, floor, windows and furniture ; whisperings and other mysterious sounds were heard ; furniture moved without contact ; and, in obedience to her will, there occurred increase and decrease in the weight of objects. Madame Blavatsky was also an astral clairvoyant ; she frequently saw in the astral light objects that were invisible to others, spectral images of dead persons who had once inhabited the various houses she visited, or astral pictures of persons still living but removed to other parts of the country who had once lived wherever she might be at the time of her vision. This intermediate stage of development seems to have been of short duration ; she could already sometimes cause phenomena at will. Thus, when provoked by the scepticism of her brother Leonide, she made a small table become so heavy that, despite his utmost exertions and his excellent muscular development, he was

unable to move it from the floor though the wood cracked under his efforts. Yet a moment later he nearly dislocated his arm when, on returning to the struggle, he put forth all his strength for a great pull and found, much to his astonishment, that the table had now become light as a feather. This extraordinary event is said to have taken place at Pskoff in the presence of a number of visitors.

She also convinced her father, Colonel Hahn, of the reality of her powers by discerning clairvoyantly a word which he had written in the privacy of another room. By means of raps Madame Blavatsky caused the word "Zaïtchik" to be spelt out; and this was correct, for the sentence written down by her father in the other room had been: "What was the name of my favourite war-horse which I rode during my first Turkish campaign?" and then in parenthesis "(Zaïtchik)." His astonishment when his daughter gave the word correctly was such that he turned deadly pale. When he had recovered from his astonishment he expressed himself as being entirely convinced, and from that time became an enthusiastic believer in his daughter's powers. Hitherto he had been a staunch follower of Voltaire, a sceptic, or at most a deist. He now devoted himself with great enthusiasm to obtaining by means of the raps an entire history of the family, to nothing less, in fact, than "the difficult task of restoring the family chronology." From the first crusades down to his own time the family tree was given him with dates of years and months and "hundreds of names by connection and side marriages," also "a mass of contemporary events . . . were given *rapidly* and unhesitatingly." Unfortunately the documents embodying this information were afterwards lost, being stolen among other papers after the death of Colonel Hahn. The rapidity of delivery, however, is in accordance with the manner of similar psychic communications giving facts which have proved capable of verification.

Examples of the playfulness, even mischievousness, which

was one of the characteristics of her later years, also occur at this period. Thus, to convince the young Professor M——, she caused the raps to occur inside his spectacles with such force that they were sent flying from his nose. In reply to a somewhat frivolous woman who enquired ironically what was the best conductor for the raps, the reply "Gold" was spelt out, followed by the words, "We will prove it to you immediately." In another moment the lady suddenly turned pale, sprang from her chair, clapped her hand to her mouth and rushed from the room, for she had felt the raps in the gold of her artificial teeth.

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Less agreeable is the story of Madame Blavatsky having successfully employed her clairvoyant powers at this time in discovering the whereabouts of a murderer for the police. The result was that she herself narrowly escaped being charged as an accomplice, a misfortune which would almost have been merited. The use of psychic powers in the detection of crime, or for the tracking of criminals in order that they may be put to prison or hanged, is one of the most detestable abuses to which the spiritual faculties may be subjected.

Instances of telekinesis occurred at this time, including more than once the arrival through the air, without visible means of conveyance, of Madame Blavatsky's tobacco pouch, box of matches, pocket-handkerchief, "or anything she asked, or was made to ask for." Sometimes a powerful wind would sweep through the apartments, extinguishing lamps and candles; and then, when a match was struck a moment later, all the heavy furniture, including sofas, arm-chairs, tables, cupboards and a large sideboard, were seen to be standing upside down, "as though turned over noiselessly by some invisible hands, and not an ornament of the fragile carved work nor even a plate broken."

A phenomenon which anticipates the much discussed power to materialise objects which was claimed by Madame Blavatsky in later years is also recorded by Madame

Jelihowsky¹ as having occurred at this period. Colonel Hahn is conversing by means of raps with what purports to be the spirit of a deceased orderly. The following is the incident, exactly as recorded :

“ ‘ Who is it, then ? ’

“ ‘ It is me ; your old orderly, your honour : Voronof.’

“ ‘ Ah, Voronof ! very glad to meet you again, my good fellow. . . . Now, try to remember old times : bring me my pipe.’

“ ‘ I would be very happy to do so, your honour, but I am not able ; *Somebody* holds me fast. But you can take it yourself, your honour. See, there it is *swinging over your head on the lamp.*’

“ We all raised our heads. Verily, where a minute before there was nothing at all, there was now the huge Turkish pipe, placed horizontally on the alabaster shade, and balancing over it with its two ends sticking out at both sides of the lamp which hung over the dining-table.”

Early in 1859 Madame Blavatsky went with her father and sister to the village of Rougodevo, where they dwelt about a year. Rougodevo is in the district of Novorgeff, in the Government of Pskoff, about 200 versts from Leningrad, at that time known as St. Petersburg. The village of Rougodevo had been bought by Madame Jelihowsky, Madame Blavatsky's sister. It was a picturesque place among hills and mountains, pine forests and lakes ; and with an old mansion in which the family themselves dwelt in the midst of a park. Here remarkable demonstrations of clairvoyance occurred, for Madame Blavatsky saw in the rooms of the old house figures which she described and which were identified by the peasants who had dwelt there many years and been familiar with past owners. For instance, she saw the phantom of an old lady—“ a fat old thing ”—with a white frilled cap, white kerchief across the shoulders, a short grey narrow dress and a checked apron, rather like a Flemish painting, afterwards identified as

¹ *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky.*

Mina Ivanovna, a German who had been housekeeper there for twenty years. The vision of a German student in black velvet blouse with wide leather sash and long hair hanging in heavy waves down his back and shoulders was recognised as a student from Gottingen named Statkowsky who had died in Rougodevo of consumption three years before the arrival of Madame Blavatsky and her family. But most remarkable of all was the apparition of "an old man, very strange to look at, with a high black head-gear, terribly long nails, wearing habitually a long grey overcoat," who was identified by two old peasants as being an identical description of their late master Nikolay Mihaylovitch Shousherin. His long nails, they explained, were the result of a disease caught while in Lithuania and called the Koltoun. One of the effects of this malady is that the nails of fingers and toes cannot be cut without the sufferer bleeding to death. Madame Blavatsky's description of his appearance was therefore a remarkable piece of evidence proving the reality of her powers of clairvoyance.

Early in 1860 the life at Rougodevo was brought to an end by a severe illness experienced by Madame Blavatsky. Years before, she had received a wound just below the heart which, from time to time, and for no accountable reason, was liable to open again. Whenever this happened, Madame Blavatsky suffered intense agony which was often followed by convulsions and profound trance. The local physician proved of little use, and it is said that he had scarcely examined the wound when "suddenly he saw a large, dark hand between his own and the wound he was going to anoint . . . the hand kept slowly moving at several intervals from the neck down to the waist." The physician's terror was further increased by a tumult of noises from the ceiling, floor, window-panes and furniture which now suddenly broke out; and he begged not to be left alone in the room with his insensible patient.¹ Colonel Olcott also refers to this wound in *Old Diary Leaves*. It opened at

¹ *Ibid.*

Chittenden in 1874, during the first few weeks of his acquaintance with Madame Blavatsky, and it was partly in order to consult him about this wound that Madame Blavatsky first made his acquaintance. Speculating as to the way in which the injury may have been received, Mr. Sinnett suggested that it may have been "during her solitary travels in the steppes of Asia," and Colonel Olcott seems to imply that it may have been the result of experiments in occultism.

This wound is also mentioned in the *Posthumous Memoirs* published by Mr. Jos. M. Wade, which, of course, is an entirely unreliable book. The reference, however, is not without interest, though worthless as evidence. On page 42 the spirit of Madame Blavatsky asserts that "I had received a wound, made during some incantations by the sword of the ecclesiast, and it had the way of opening at unexpected times, when I suffered intense agony, convulsions and the trance state succeeding lasted far into the moon, when it would suddenly heal and no trace of illness remain."

Having recovered from her illness at Rougodevo, Madame Blavatsky and her sister set forth in the spring of 1860 for Tiflis, in the Caucasus. The object of this journey was a visit to their grandparents, whom they had not seen for many years. Several interesting events occurred on the journey, including an interview with Isadore, Metropolitan of Kiev, head of the Orthodox Greek Church, and an adventure in clairvoyance with a surly station-master at a station where they changed horses. The interview with the Metropolitan Isidore took place at Zadousk and seems chiefly to have been confined to an investigation of the raps produced by Madame Blavatsky. His holiness was so interested in this phenomenon and in the intelligence and knowledge shown that he pursued his interrogations of the unseen for over three hours, even forgetting his dinner. In bidding good-bye to Madame Blavatsky and her sister, the venerable ecclesiastic is said to have addressed these parting words to the former :

“ As for you, let not your heart be troubled by the gift you are possessed of, nor let it become a source of misery to you hereafter, for it was surely given to you for some purpose, and you could not be held responsible for it. Quite the reverse ! for if you but use it with discrimination, you will be enabled to do much good to your fellow-creatures.”

The adventure with the station-master was of a rather different kind. It was necessary to change horses, and the station-master, who was intoxicated, roughly stated that there were no fresh horses available and they would therefore have to wait. To lose time unnecessarily was, to say the least, annoying, for the weather was good for travelling, the sun had not yet set and there was a full moon. Moreover, the waiting-room, which should have been open for the use of travellers, was locked and bolted. The whole place seemed deserted, and Madame Blavatsky, not unnaturally, “ flattened her face against the window-pane ” in order to see into the waiting-room. Suddenly she uttered a mysterious exclamation. “ That’s what it is ! ” she cried. “ Very well, then, and now I can force the drunken brute to give us horses in five minutes.”

She at once left her sister and started off in search of the station-master. Left alone, Madame Jelihowsky, in her turn, also peered through the window, but was able to discern nothing beyond the ordinary furniture of the room. Nevertheless, to her great surprise, “ three excellent and strong post-horses ” were brought out within ten minutes by the station-master himself, “ who, pale and confused, had become as though by magic, polite and full of obsequiousness.” When Madame Jelihowsky asked her sister how she had effected such a change in the station-master, Madame Blavatsky only laughed. But on the following day she condescended to confess the secret. Madame Jelihowsky’s *Narrative*¹ continues as follows :

“ It appears that upon finding him in a back-yard, she

¹ *Ibid.*

had shouted to him that the person whose body had been just standing in a coffin in the 'travellers' room' was there again, and asked him not to detain us, for we would otherwise insist upon our right to enter the room, and would disturb her spirit thereby. And when the man upon hearing this opened his eyes, without appearing to understand what she was referring to, Mme. Blavatsky hastened then to tell him that she was speaking of his deceased wife, whom he had just buried, and who *was there*, and would be *there*, in that room until we had gone away. She then proceeded to describe the ghost in such a minute way that the unfortunate widower became as pale as death itself, and hurried away to order fresh horses ! ”

At Tiflis, with her grandparents, the Fadeefs, Madame Blavatsky resided nearly two years, a third year being passed in roaming through Imeretia, Georgia and Mingrelia. At the military settlement of Ozoorgetty in Mingrelia she bought a house, and while living here she developed a mysterious illness which the army doctor, who was the only physician in the place, found himself unable either to diagnose or to cure. According to Madame Blavatsky herself, she “began to lead a double life”; when undisturbed she used to lie in a dreamy stupor, she “became somebody else” with her consciousness, for the most part, on another plane of being. Her principal physical symptom took the form of a mild fever which caused her at first slowly and then “visibly and rapidly” to decline. As no way of curing her could be discovered she was sent back to her grandmother at Tiflis. Being unfit to travel by either horseback or cart, she was conveyed up the river in a large native boat, the journey taking four days to complete. Her immediate destination was a town called Kutais. Such was her weakness that she lay throughout the journey as though dead; and the servants, greatly to their horror, several times during three consecutive nights, saw what was apparently the form of Madame Blavatsky gliding from the boat and over the

water towards the forest while her body was lying prostrate on the bed. So great was their alarm that, but for the presence of a faithful old butler, the other servants would have abandoned both vessel and patient in mid-journey. On arriving at Kutais they immediately forsook her. She was transported to Tiflis by carriage with great difficulty and reached her family apparently dying.

Yet in due course she recovered, and it is said that from the time of this illness the nature of her psychic powers entirely changed; physical phenomena, such as raps, no longer occurred spontaneously and were henceforth rigidly subordinate to her will. In a letter to a relative written shortly after this illness, she attributes the change to the influence of "THOSE whom I now bless at every hour of my life"—the Masters to Whose service the remaining years of her life were devoted.

In 1863, being entirely recovered, she left the Caucasus and went to Italy. The next two or three years were spent in apparently aimless European travel, about which little is known, and it is said that in 1867, masquerading as a man, she entered the Italian Army under Garibaldi and fought with the troops in the battle of Mentana on November the 4th of that year. She was so severely wounded that she was mistaken for dead and was flung into a ditch among the slain. Her wounds amounted to five, and but for the fact that Madame Jelihowsky has recorded its existence at an earlier date, one would be disposed to assume that the wound over her heart which used to reopen was one of these.

From 1867 to 1870 she travelled in the East, increasing still further her already considerable store of occult knowledge. She returned from the East in 1870 *via* the Suez Canal, which at that time had just been opened. After staying a short period in Piræus, she sailed for Spezzia on a Greek vessel which was blown up during the voyage by the explosion of a quantity of gunpowder and fireworks forming part of the cargo. In this catastrophe most of

the passengers perished, Madame Blavatsky, fortunately, being among the few who were saved. Like the other survivors, she was rendered temporarily destitute by this disaster and was assisted by the Greek Government, who sent her to Alexandria and Cairo, where she was obliged to manage as best she could until money from Russia reached her.

While at Cairo at this time she endeavoured to launch a scheme for founding a *Société Spirite*, which was actually opened in Cairo during 1871 and ran for about a fortnight. Her aims, as explained by herself to friends of later years, were, first, to demonstrate the reality of psychical phenomena and, secondly, to show that the spiritualistic interpretation was insufficient to account for the facts ; that, in short, the occult hypothesis of shells, elementaries, mayavic illusions, and so forth, was necessary if one would really understand the meaning. Having failed to obtain a medium from England or France, she was forced to staff the *Société* with psychic amateurs—"French female spiritists, mostly beggarly tramps, when not adventuresses in the rear of M. de Lesseps' army of engineers and workmen on the canal of Suez." These "mediums" were speedily detected in cheating. Madame Blavatsky also complained that they stole the Society's money and drank "like sponges." Stormy scenes with dissatisfied investigators soon brought the project to a termination ; and the whole affair undoubtedly did much to diminish what little reputation Madame Blavatsky possessed at that time. In later years Dr. Hodgson expressed the opinion that the *Société Spirite* was simply a device for making money, that Madame Blavatsky herself was responsible for the fraud practised (her accusations against the mediums being simply a clever strategy in order to extricate herself from a tight corner), and that where the *Société Spirite* failed, the Theosophical Society succeeded. This, of course, was Dr. Hodgson's personal opinion, and the only authority in his support is the entirely unreliable statement of Madame Coulomb

that one day, on entering the *Société Spirite*, she found Madame Blavatsky surrounded by an indignant crowd of sitters who had detected her in fraudulent practices.

Madame Blavatsky's own version of the affair is rather different. According to her published letters and the account given in A. P. Sinnett's *Incidents*, she had no intention or hope whatever of making money out of the scheme and, as a matter of actual fact, lost a considerable sum. She had paid her mediums, and had made other initial disbursements. Moreover, the fact of her "mediums" having imposed upon her would only be in accord with the numerous other well-attested occasions on which her own honesty and simple trustfulness were exploited by unprincipled tricksters. Yet the story of the *Société Spirite*, as it has circulated among the sceptical, tells that Madame Blavatsky sought to profit from the tricks of jugglers palmed off as genuine phenomena.

Incidentally, the whole question of her attitude to Spiritualism is complicated and, at first sight, puzzling. A further discussion of this problem will be found in the chapter on Solovyoff's *A Modern Priestess of Isis*.

After closing the *Société Spirite*, Madame Blavatsky went to live in Boulak, near the Museum, where she renewed her acquaintance with the aged Copt from whom she had obtained some of her earliest lessons in Occultism. She is said to have received psychic intimations at this time of the death of two old servants of her family, Pietro and Maxim Koutcherof. During a visit to the Pyramid of Cheops with some friends who were Spiritualists, a lady of the party felt impelled to write automatically. The script which resulted was in Russian characters, though the medium was ignorant of the language, and Madame Blavatsky found that it contained an evident apostrophe to herself :

"Barishuya (little or 'young miss'), dear barishuya, help, oh help me, miserable sinner! . . . I suffer : drink, drink, give me a drink! . . . I suffer, I suffer!"

Madame Blavatsky, in a letter to her sister, Madame

Jelihowsky, then describes the result of a clairvoyant investigation which she herself made :

“ I found the name Pietro Koutcherof echoed in my mind quite distinctly, and I saw before me an indistinguishable mass of grey smoke—a formless pillar—and thought I heard it repeat the same words. Furthermore, I saw that he had died in Dr. Gorolevitch’s hospital attached to the City Refuge, the Tiflis workhouse where you had placed them both. Moreover, as I made out, it is you who placed him there in company with his brother, our old Maxim, who had died a few days before him.”

Madame Jelihowsky adds that all these details, discerned by clairvoyance in Egypt, were strictly in accordance with the actual facts as they occurred in Russia, and as Madame Jelihowsky ascertained them by telegraphing to Dr. Gorolevitch for corroboration of the death of the servants. The most remarkable feature of the incident was the fact that Madame Blavatsky’s letter to her sister was dated the very day on which Pietro died at Tiflis, the death of his brother having occurred two days previous.

After staying at Boulak for a few weeks, Madame Blavatsky left Egypt and made her way back to Russia by travelling through Palestine. On her return journey she visited Palmyra and other ruins with some Russian friends, reaching her family in Odessa at the end of 1872. Her arrival in their midst was as unexpected and as wholly without warning as on the previous occasion when she returned from her wanderings.

CHAPTER IV

AMERICA—INAUGURATION OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

IN 1873, Madame Blavatsky again left Russia and stayed with her cousin, Nicolas Hahn, in the Rue de l'Université, Paris, for about two months. It is claimed that her occult relations with the Masters were by this time fully established, and that while she was staying in Paris she was ordered by Them to go to America. She obeyed Their command immediately, booking her passage with so little delay that her departure had the appearance of flight. On the quay-side, when about to embark, she was distressed to notice a weeping woman who had come far across France with her children in order to rejoin her husband in America. During their journey an unscrupulous sharper had sold them bogus mailboat tickets. The officials were therefore unable to admit the poor woman and her children on to the boat, although she had parted with her money and was unable to pay for the tickets a second time. Madame Blavatsky afterwards told Colonel Olcott that the plight of this poor woman so affected her that she sold her own first-class ticket and purchased steerage tickets for herself, the woman and the children with the proceeds.

Madame Blavatsky arrived in New York on July 7th, 1873, without money, work or plans for the future. To support herself until instructions were received from the Masters, she obtained work as a dressmaker, living for several months in extreme poverty in a New York slum. Her deliverance from this position was decidedly romantic. It was accomplished through the agency of a man whom

she had befriended during her earlier travels on the American continent. This man sent her a sum of money at the order of the Masters, on Whose behalf (her period of probationary trial being at last over) her serious labours now commenced.

The history of her life in America, and, subsequently, in India and London, has been recounted in detail by Colonel Olcott in *Old Diary Leaves*, and an account of Colonel Olcott's first meeting with Madame Blavatsky is also to be found in his book, *People from the Other World*, published in 1875. In 1874, Colonel Olcott paid a visit to Chittenden, Vermont, which extended over a considerable period, in order to investigate the mediumship of the famous Eddy brothers. While at Chittenden he wrote accounts of his experiences with the Eddys which were published in the form of articles in the *New York Sun* and the *New York Daily Graphic*. The articles which appeared in the *Graphic* had the effect of drawing Madame Blavatsky to Chittenden, where almost inevitably she made the acquaintance of their author. Colonel Olcott has recorded that he encountered her at the midday dinner-hour, she having arrived in the company of a French-Canadian lady shortly before noon. His eye "was first attracted by a scarlet Garibaldian shirt the former wore, as in vivid contrast with the dull colours around. Her hair was then a thick blonde mop, worn shorter than the shoulders, and it stood out from her head, silken-soft and crinkled to the roots."

The acquaintance begun in the farm-house at Chittenden developed into the lifelong comradeship through which the Theosophical Society was founded and placed on a permanent, successful footing. But before this occurred the remainder of their period of work in the spiritualistic movement was still ahead of them. Colonel Olcott wrote his *People from the Other World* and Madame Blavatsky wrote many newspaper articles on the same subject for American magazines, besides translating some of Olcott's articles into Russian.

William Q. Judge first met Madame Blavatsky in the early days, shortly after her removal from Philadelphia to New York. He appears to have been brought into the Theosophical circle either through having known Colonel Olcott in a professional connection or else through his keen interest in Occultism. And certainly, whatever else may be said against William Q. Judge, he certainly had keen interest in the movement, great fidelity and tenacity. For at one time the Theosophical Society in America seems almost to have consisted of himself alone.

Another event which occurred shortly after the first meetings of Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, and which certainly cannot be said to have exactly helped forward the cause of Theosophy, was Madame Blavatsky's second marriage, which proved as ill-starred and as short-lived as her first. As a result of Colonel Olcott's Chittenden letters to the *Daily Graphic*, a Russian named Mr. B—— conceived a strong desire to meet Madame Blavatsky and talk over Spiritualism with her. Mr. B—— therefore wrote to Colonel Olcott, who by this time was on intimate terms with Madame Blavatsky, and in due course arrangements were made for Mr. B—— to come to New York from Philadelphia. On meeting Madame Blavatsky, he was filled with the most profound admiration for her and besought her hand in marriage. She persistently rebuffed him, but a crisis was reached when he threatened to take his life unless she would consent to marry him. Meanwhile, she had been so indiscreet as to go to Philadelphia, staying at the same hotel with him and receiving his daily visits. Mr. B—— declared that he would "ask nothing but the privilege of watching over her" in "unselfish adoration for her intellectual grandeur," making no claim for the usual privileges of married life. He so besieged her that she at last consented to be nominally his wife, and they were married by a Unitarian clergyman of Philadelphia. But no sooner were they legally united than Mr. B—— forgot his vows of unselfishness and, to Madame

Blavatsky's "ineffable disgust," he became "an importunate lover." In the month of June she fell dangerously ill from the effects of an accident during the previous winter. Falling on a stone pavement in New York, she had bruised her knee, and this now resulted in "violent inflammation of the periosteum and partial mortification of the leg." She recovered in one night in a semi-miraculous manner, and forthwith she forsook her husband, never to return to him. Like General Blavatsky, he became an episode of the past, so unfortunate and unhappy as to necessitate his obliteration from her memory. After many months of separation, his illusions about her being now dispelled, Mr. B—sued for a divorce. The divorce was granted on the 25th May, 1878, William Q. Judge acting as counsel for Madame Blavatsky. At the time of this marriage, Colonel Olcott had privately remonstrated with her for tying herself to a man so much younger than herself and so indubitably her intellectual inferior, and had expressed his amazement at the apparent folly of the course she was pursuing. She had replied that "her fate and his were temporarily linked by an inexorable Karma," the union being to her "in the nature of a punishment for her awful pride and combativeness, which impeded her spiritual evolution, while no lasting harm would result to the young man."¹

The next great event in her life was the inauguration of the Theosophical Society. During the autumn of 1875 a group of friends, chief among whom were Madame Blavatsky herself and Colonel Olcott, were in the habit of holding weekly meetings for the discussion of magic, occultism and similar subjects. At one of these meetings held in October of that year a lecture on "The Lost Canon of Proportion of the Egyptians" was delivered by a Mr. J. H. Felt. In the course of his lecture Mr. Felt remarked that the Egyptian priests had been adepts in magical science, with the power to evoke and control elemental spirits. He added that he had deciphered many of their formularies.

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. I.

He had put these to practical tests and had found them successful in evoking elementals. This suggested to Colonel Olcott that it would be a good idea to form a Society for the purpose of occult research, and he therefore wrote on a scrap of paper :

“ Would it not be a good thing to form a Society for this kind of study ? ”

He handed this communication to William Q. Judge, who passed it on to Madame Blavatsky ; and, as she nodded her approval of the idea, Colonel Olcott rose and broached the subject. Mr. Felt intimated his willingness to teach the Society how to evoke elementals, and thereupon it was unanimously agreed that the Society should be formed. It should be noted, therefore, that Colonel Olcott, and not Madame Blavatsky, was the originator of the Theosophical Society. On the motion of William Q. Judge, the Colonel was selected Chairman, and Mr. Judge, on the reciprocal motion of Colonel Olcott, was elected Secretary. The administrative work of the Society, from its earliest beginnings till his death in 1907, was carried on not by Madame Blavatsky, but by Colonel Olcott ; and it was Olcott's courageous enthusiasm and tireless energy, fully as much as Madame Blavatsky's writings and phenomena, that first established the Society on a prosperous footing. In subsequent years the Colonel toured India, Ceylon, Japan, Burma and Australia, making converts and establishing branches of the Society wherever he went, and almost equalling the missionary labours of St. Paul. In fact, Colonel Olcott did the active pioneer propaganda while Madame Blavatsky remained, for the most part, at headquarters, working hard at literary tasks. In Volume IV of *Old Diary Leaves*, Olcott has described their relationship :

“ She was the Teacher, I the pupil ; she the misunderstood and insulted messenger of the Great Ones, I the practical brain to plan, the right hand to work out the practical details. Under the Hindu classification, she would be the teaching Brahmin, I the

fighting Kshatriya ; under the Buddhist one, she would be the Bhikshu, I the working Dyaka or laic."¹

Even at the inception of the Society its founders were imposed upon, for it was arranged that Mr. Felt should deliver a series of lectures on Egyptian magic with practical demonstrations of the manner in which it was possible to obtain power over elementals. In order to defray the costs of his projected lectures, the Treasurer of the Society, Mr. Henry J. Newton, paid Mr. Felt \$100 ; but his demonstration of the existence of the elemental races " proved a complete and mortifying disappointment." He delivered only two lectures, and finally, after much pressure to fulfil his promises, he " went out of the Society."

The next adventurer to victimise the Society was the Baron de Palm, " a Voltairean with a gloss of Spiritualism " who claimed to be a member of " an ancient baronial family of Bavaria." After joining the Society on the 29th March, 1876, he complained of feeble health, and as he had no one to look after him in New York, Colonel Olcott invited him to share the latter's apartments. Here the Baron fell ill, and after making a will in which, after minor bequests, Olcott was made " residuary legatee," was removed to the Roosevelt Hospital on Friday evening, May 19th, 1876. He died there the following morning. A magnificent pagan funeral² was then devised by the Theosophists as an expression of gratitude, for they believed that, under the Baron's will, they would benefit by the receipt of a considerable sum of money. Incidentally this pagan funeral caused Colonel Olcott the loss of a bigoted Christian client whose business was worth £2000 a year.

Olcott records that his first disillusionment came when he opened the dead Baron's trunk at the hospital. He found that it contained two of the Colonel's own shirts " from which the stitched name-mark had been picked

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. IV.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 149 *et seq.*

out." Subsequent enquiries revealed the fact that the Baron de Palm was a penniless adventurer who had fled to America in order to avoid his creditors.

One of the accusations brought against Madame Blavatsky in later years was that *Isis Unveiled* was written up from manuscripts left by the Baron de Palm. But it is, of course, impossible to give this suggestion serious consideration. It was first put forward in a letter from Dr. Elliott Coues printed in the *New York Sun* for July 20th, 1890; and the editor afterwards retracted and expressed his regret for having published an accusation which was quite unsupported by evidence and which "ought never to have been printed."

The Baron de Palm had expressed a wish that his body might be cremated. Colonel Olcott was such an enthusiastic believer in this form of burial that he determined to carry out the Baron's wish. At that time there was no crematorium in America, and Olcott had to preserve the Baron's body for more than six months, "packed in carbolised dried clay," until a crematorium which Dr. F. Julius Le Moyne was building for the burning of his own body was completed. With the exception of two individuals whose bodies had been cremated on funeral pyres in Eastern fashion in the open air, the incineration of the corpse of Baron de Palm at Washington, Pennsylvania, on December 6th, 1876, was the first cremation to take place in America.¹

Shortly after the formation of the Theosophical Society, Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott took two suites of rooms at 433, West 34th Street, New York. Madame Blavatsky dwelt on the first and the Colonel on the second floor. Prior to this, Madame Blavatsky had cursorily commenced work on *Isis Unveiled*, and she now applied herself to writing this book with unremitting industry. "From morning to night," wrote Colonel Olcott, "she would be at her desk, and it was seldom that either of us got to bed before 2 o'clock A.M." *Isis Unveiled* was completed in 1877,

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 166 *et seq.*

approximately two years from the time of its commencement, and as much of it was rewritten and all of it revised during that period, one can readily believe the Colonel when he declared that he "never knew a managing daily journalist who could be compared with her for dogged endurance or tireless working capacity." Colonel Olcott has described¹ the manner in which *Isis Unveiled* was written, and we shall have occasion to refer to this later in discussing the nature of Madame Blavatsky's psychic powers (see Conclusion). Before the book was actually published they removed to 302, West 47th Street, where their quarters were known as the "Lamasery." *Isis Unveiled* appeared at the end of September, 1877. It was immediately successful, and, for the most part, was favourably reviewed. The first edition was exhausted within ten days.

Thenceforward, until their departure for India at the end of 1878, the Lamasery was more than ever thronged with literary, spiritualistic and other distinguished visitors. But they had few real supporters, and the Theosophical Society as a body was comparatively inactive. The meetings started when Mr. Felt was to have delivered his lectures on Egyptian magic, though continued for a time with other speakers, had long since been abandoned. The hire of a meeting room in the Mott Memorial Hall, Madison Avenue, New York, had been discontinued. And influential Spiritualists who had joined at first, left the Society after the publication of *Isis Unveiled*. But the signs of the Society's growing influence were seen in an increase in home and foreign correspondence, in controversial articles in the Press, the establishment of branch societies at London and Corfu, and the opening up of relations with sympathisers in India and Ceylon.²

On the 8th of July, 1878, Madame Blavatsky took out her naturalisation papers as a citizen of the United States. At the end of that year, obedient to the wishes of the

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 208 *et seq.*

² *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 330.

Masters expressed through Madame Blavatsky, a Theosophical party, consisting of four individuals, left America for India, sailing from New York on December 18th, 1878. Madame Blavatsky's excitement as the time for departure drew near is amusingly described by Colonel Olcott :¹

“ The nearer we approached the time for our change of base, the more vehement became H. P. B.'s praise of India, the Hindus, the entire Orient and Orientals as a whole, and her disparagement of Western people as a whole, their social customs, religious tyranny, and ideals.”

But the glowing picture of perfection thus painted by her imagination was destined to cruel destruction by experience immediately on reaching the land of her heart's desire. For here, as with so many other things and places, serious discrepancy was found to exist between the ideal and the real.

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 470-1.

CHAPTER V

LIFE IN INDIA

AFTER breaking their journey in London, where several phenomena occurred and one of the Masters was seen by Madame Blavatsky, Colonel Olcott and some friends with whom they were staying, they set forth anew from Liverpool in the *Speke Hall* on January 18th, 1879. They arrived at Bombay on February 16th, 1879, and were welcomed by three Indian members of the Theosophical Society—Mr. Mooljee Thackersey, Pandit Shyamji Krishnavarma and Mr. Balajee Sitaram. In addition to Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, the party from New York included a school teacher named Miss Bates and Mr. Wimbridge, a designer and architect. Both of these, it seems, had been induced to throw in their lot with the Theosophists in the hope of following their respective professions with more success in India than they had achieved in America. Miss Bates afterwards quarrelled seriously with Madame Coulomb and Madame Blavatsky, and was expelled from the Society by Colonel Olcott. And Mr. Wimbridge opened an art-furniture and art-decoration business in Bombay in which, according to the Colonel, he is believed to have made a fortune.

From the day when the theosophical party landed in Bombay the history of Madame Blavatsky becomes, to an increasing degree, inseparable from the history of the Theosophical Society; and the first noteworthy event experienced was a severe disillusionment in regard to the romantic notion of the Indian character cherished so dearly

by Madame Blavatsky and largely shared by her colleague, Colonel Olcott. Their first betrayal was at the hands of one Hurrychund, at that time president of a society known as the Arya Samaj, with whom they had had considerable correspondence from New York, the Theosophical Society being at that time affiliated with the Samaj in friendly alliance. Before leaving New York, Colonel Olcott had written to Hurrychund asking him to engage for the party "a small, clean house in the Hindu quarter, with only such servants as were indispensable, as we did not wish to waste a penny on luxuries."¹ Hurrychund now conducted them to a house of his own on the Girgaum Back Road, which, says Olcott, "was certainly small enough." Here they entertained many native visitors daily as well as giving a big reception. The disillusionment came when, by means of "strenuous pressure," Mr. Hurrychund was persuaded to render his accounts, for his charges were found to comprise "an enormous bill for rent, food, attendance, repairs to the house, even the hire of the three hundred chairs used at our reception, and the cost of a cablegram" in which Hurrychund had urged the party to hasten their arrival. The Theosophists had been given to understand that they would be entertained as guests; and with expenses at such an unexpectedly high rate, they would soon have been reduced to insolvency. They promptly evacuated Mr. Hurrychund's cottage and removed to 108, Girgaum Back Road, Bombay, where they resided for the next two years. Further enquiries elicited the fact that a sum of over Rs.600, which had been sent through Hurrychund to the Arya Samaj before the departure of Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott from New York, had been embezzled by the recipient. "I shall never forget," writes Olcott, "the scene when H. P. B., at a meeting of the Arya Samaj, let loose at him the bolts of her scorn, and forced him to promise restitution."

The aggressive sympathy which the Theosophists

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. II, p. 16.

showed for the Hindu population and the contempt for Europeans which Madame Blavatsky did not attempt to hide (on the contrary, she went out of her way to flaunt it) was so extraordinary, and the general eccentricity of the party seemed so remarkable, that, not unnaturally, they were at first suspected of being political spies. They were placed under police surveillance by the Government. This caused them considerable righteous indignation and not a little inconvenience, for a police officer followed them wherever they went, making no attempt to conceal himself. And on at least one occasion Madame Blavatsky poured out the vials of her wrath upon his head, calling him to task for the folly and injustice of the Government in the vigorous and piquant language so readily at her command, till the man is said to have turned crimson with confusion in the midst of a rapidly growing crowd. This inconvenience was not discontinued until September or October of the following year (1880), when Colonel Olcott appealed to the Government and obtained their official protection so long as the Society infringed no law and abstained from meddling in things outside their declared field of activity.

Existence during the two years in which they resided in the Girgaum Back Road was varied by frequent travels through India, including a visit to Karli Caves and a tour through Northern India, and these wanderings provided much of the material for Madame Blavatsky's romance, *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan*. On these journeys many occult phenomena are said to have occurred, and several times Masters and Adepts were encountered. The Indian nucleus of the Theosophical Society rapidly increased in importance. Friends and enemies were made in steadily growing numbers. Disagreement arose with the Arya Samaj, owing to the catholicity of the Theosophical Society and the sectarian narrowness of the Samaj, and the first hostility from missionaries was experienced; the latter, indeed, occurred

so early as March, 1879, when the editor of the *Dnyanodaya*, the organ of the Presbyterian Marathi Mission, published a gross libel, for which Colonel Olcott exacted an apology by threatening legal proceedings.

The decision to found the Society's magazine, *The Theosophist*, was made on the 4th July, 1879, which, as Colonel Olcott, ever a true American, points out, is Independence Day; and the first number of the magazine, consisting of an issue of four hundred copies, was published on the last day of September in the same year. The magazine was first rendered necessary by the enormous volume of correspondence and enquiries which the founders of the Theosophical Society were receiving as a result of their propaganda. Many of the letters received could only be dealt with adequately by replying at great length. Colonel Olcott records that, although he frequently answered letters from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., and night after night until 2 and 3 a.m., he was unable to cope with the contents of the mail. *The Theosophist*, of course, afforded a platform for meeting enquirers and thus lessening correspondence. Colonel Olcott adds, with transparent pride, that the magazine has never caused its proprietors to incur a shilling of debt and has shown a profit since the fourth month. This, doubtless, is due to its strikingly original character and the amount of first-hand observation, knowledge and exceptional local colour discernible in almost all its articles. Through its pages, too, Asiatic philosophy was introduced to a popular European and American public for the first time in the history of civilisation by writers who believed in the ideas they expounded, and who advocated the Hindu and Buddhist systems of religion with all earnestness, not merely exhibiting them as curiosities or holding them to ridicule. Moreover, many of the articles were contributed at first hand by Hindu pandits and occultists, and were therefore authoritative. Later on, the same qualities contributed to the success of Colonel Olcott's writings on Buddhism. His *Buddhist Catechism*

was published with the official approval or "imprimatur" of the High Priest of Ceylon Buddhism, Sumangala Thero, after full discussion and thorough revision with Sumangala and his Assistant Principal, Hiyayentadûme. Thus it is scarcely remarkable that the magazine paid its way and contributed to the expenses of the Theosophical Society. Madame Blavatsky, too, is said to have toiled at her desk from morning till night, writing articles and stories for Russian magazines in order to meet expenses in the early days of the Society. *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan* is a famous example of her work in this class.

One of the most important acquisitions of the Society in the early days in India was the friendship of A. P. Sinnett. Their acquaintanceship began with a letter from Sinnett dated 25th February, 1879 (nine days after they landed at Bombay), in which he expressed his interest in Spiritualism and Occultism and offered them publicity through the columns of the newspaper of which he was then editor—*The Pioneer*. Colonel Olcott received Mr. and Mrs. Sinnett into membership of the Theosophical Society on the 26th December, 1879. The Colonel has recorded¹ that the ceremony was "made unusually interesting by a voice replying, 'Yes, we do,' to my question whether the Masters heard the pledges of the candidates and approved of their admission into the Society." In December, 1879, Mr. and Mrs. Sinnett invited the Co-Founders to visit their residence at Simla, a delightful hill station on the Himalayas and the story of Mr. Sinnett's connection with Theosophy has since become famous. In response to enquiries which he addressed to the Masters through the mediation of Madame Blavatsky, he received numerous phenomenal letters many of which were published or summarised in Sinnett's books, *The Occult World* and *Esoteric Buddhism*.

The Occult World appeared in 1881 and immediately attracted great attention. It brought the tidings of the

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 138.

ancient wisdom to thousands. In this it did an incalculable amount of good and advertised the Theosophical Society most effectively. Perhaps its chief weakness lies in the matter-of-fact and rather pettifogging style in which it is written and in the fact that many of the phenomena performed by Madame Blavatsky at Simla (description of which occupies the major portion of the book) unfortunately were carried out under anything but strict scientific test conditions. At the same time *The Occult World* contains record of some excellent phenomena of an extremely convincing nature.

Probably the chief fault of *The Occult World* is that it is so written as to seem to imply that the Masters or Adepts were an exclusive fraternity, jealous of their occult knowledge and reluctant to reveal truth to the world. Sinnett wrote as though the Brothers were aware of an infinite condescension in making public, through the instrumentality of Madame Blavatsky and himself, even a very small fraction of occult wisdom. The Masters seem to have flung their phenomena to the world much as one might fling a bone to a dog. For instance, Sinnett tells us in *The Occult World* that "If the Brothers were to employ themselves on the large, rough business of hacking away at the incredulity of a stolid multitude, at the acrimonious incredulity of the materialistic phalanx, at the terrified and indignant incredulity of the orthodox religious world, it is conceivable that they might—*propter vitam vivendi perdere causas*—suffer the occult science itself to decay for the sake of persuading mankind that it did really exist."

The task of proclaiming the gospel of salvation to the peoples sitting in darkness is regarded by the exoteric religions as one of the noblest and praiseworthy acts of mercy; but Sinnett was of the opinion that it is impossible to depute one of the Brothers to missionary service while the others "keep the occult science itself from decay," because "an aspirant for occult honours does not go through the tremendous and prolonged effort required to

win him success, in order at the end of all things to embrace a life in the midst of the ordinary world, which on the hypothesis of his success in Occultism must necessarily be repugnant to him in the extreme."

Farther on he tells us that "the Brothers, as already described, have an unconquerable objection to showing off. . . . They do not want to attract candidates for initiation by an exhibition of wonders."

This attitude is so noticeable in *The Occult World* that it was commented upon not only by sceptics, but even by the Theosophist, Dr. Franz Hartmann, who pillories it in the following passage from his satire on the exoteric side of the Theosophical Society entitled *The Talking Image of Urur* :

"Our reporter asked Mr. Puffer how it came that there were occasionally famines in Africa if the Adepts had the power to do such things. Mr. Puffer replied that he had presented this matter to their consideration, but that the Adepts had no time to attend to such trifling matters, as their number was small and it was all they could do to keep the world going. They had something more important to do than to satisfy the greed of the paupers."¹

That this sort of impression should have been given was no doubt due to limitations of outlook on the part of A. P. Sinnett rather than to *hauteur* of the Masters. It must be remembered that when he wrote *The Occult World* Sinnett was only on the threshold of occult knowledge or mystical experience. And there are very valid reasons why the vital secrets of Occultism should not be made indiscriminately public—particularly the frightful possibilities of abuse known as Black Magic. The best, when corrupted, produces the worst. A black magician is a lost soul indeed ; the blackness of his transgressions are such as to make the ordinary sins of ordinary people seem almost to have the

¹ Quoted by Arthur Lillie in *Madame Blavatsky and her "Theosophy."* Mr. Lillie omitted to mention that *The Talking Image* was originally published in Madame Blavatsky's magazine *Lucifer*, Vols. IV and V.

whiteness of virtue by comparison. He stands on the threshold of annihilation. It were therefore more than well worth while to save souls from this abyss of perdition by keeping the occult knowledge secret ; indeed, " occult " and " secret " are synonymous terms.

Nevertheless, the impression given by *The Occult World* is unfortunate, for it is in sharp and unfavourable contrast with the attitude of the great world-religions. According to these, no sacrifice and labour are considered too great if they avail to save even one soul :

" There were ninety and nine that safely lay
 In the shelter of the fold,
 But one was out on the hills away,
 Far off from the gates of gold ;
 Away on the mountains wild and bare,
 Away from the tender Shepherd's care.

Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety-and-nine—
 Are they not enough for Thee ?
 But the Shepherd made answer : This of Mine
 Has wandered away from Me ;
 And although the road be rough and steep,
 I go to the desert to find My sheep."

The truth is that the Masters have a burning eagerness to reveal their knowledge to the world, but they dare not do so till humanity as a whole is sufficiently trustworthy to bear the great responsibility entailed.

Sinnett's attitude at the end of his life, as revealed by his posthumous work, *The Early Days of Theosophy in Europe*, seems to have undergone but little change in this respect. In this book he even implies that the manners of Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott were liable to cause offence in polite society and suggests that the beginning of the unfriendly attitude of the Society for Psychical Research is to be traced to a meeting of that body at which Colonel Olcott, uninvited, made a speech " in his worst style," exhibiting and making much of an image of the Buddha,

on wheels,¹ characterised by Sinnett as "absurd" and "grotesque" (p. 61).

Moreover, Sinnett remarks that, owing to the numbers of people who attended his wife's Tuesday afternoon receptions at their house in Ladbroke Gardens, "the movement spread . . . at first in what may in a broad sense be called the upper levels of society, and it appeared to me desirable that it should take root that way to begin with, its influence being left to filter downwards with social authority behind it,"² instead of beginning on lower levels and trusted to filter upwards if it could" (p. 47). He deplores the fact that this programme was defeated by Madame Blavatsky's return to England in 1884, forgetting that truth needs no "social authority," that it is for all men of all classes, and that one of the signs of a genuine religious revelation is always the fact that "the poor have good tidings preached to them."

The letters received by Sinnett from the Masters before publishing *The Occult World* and *Esoteric Buddhism* have been published in full since Mr. Sinnett's death in the volume entitled *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*. Madame Blavatsky has, of course, been accused of having written these letters herself, and even their recipient came ultimately to the conclusion (see *The Early Days of Theosophy in Europe*) that they were either written automatically or were heard clairaudiently and written down by Madame Blavatsky, the apparently phenomenal manner of their delivery being a mere conjurer's device. It must be observed that if Madame Blavatsky practised deception in this matter she gained little thereby save notoriety and abuse. It is true that the Theosophical Society had the benefit of the publicity launched by A. P. Sinnett, but this led ultimately to the S.P.R. enquiry, and Theosophy had, in addition, much publicity of an undesirable kind. It was Sinnett, not Madame Blavatsky, who benefited by the

¹ This is also referred to by Madame Blavatsky in *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*.

² The italics are ours.—G. B. B.

enormous sale of the Mahatma letters embodied in his books, and yet he has never been regarded by enemies of the Theosophical Society as anything more contemptible than a credulous dupe. His honesty has never been questioned. He was able to relinquish his editorship of *The Pioneer* after publishing *The Occult World*.

Sinnett's first impressions of Madame Blavatsky are described rather quaintly in his *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky*, where he remarks that she was turbulent, irritable and unconventional in the extreme, almost her first injunction to him being "not to mind me, a hippopotamus of an old woman." She made both friends and enemies during her visits to the Sinnetts at Allahabad and Simla, but the latter seem to have preponderated over the former.

During their first stay with the Sinnetts at Allahabad, Colonel Olcott delivered a lecture on "What is Theosophy?" And this, remarks Sinnett, appeared to displease Madame Blavatsky, for on the way homeward in the carriage she abused the Colonel with such violence that "one would have thought the whole fate and future of Theosophy had depended on the lecture," and she appeared to wholly overestimate its importance. Olcott himself in *Old Diary Leaves* records that the lecture in question was a poor one and that he was not up to his usual form because he had been subjected all day to a nagging from Madame Blavatsky and had had no opportunity for collecting his thoughts. On the whole, therefore, Sinnett's mild remark in the *Incidents* shows great kindness and forbearance :

"Her rough manners, of which we had been told so much, did not prove very alarming, though I remember going into fits of laughter at the time when Colonel Olcott, after the visit had lasted a week or two, gravely informed us that Madame was under great self-restraint so far."

In 1880, Madame Blavatsky paid a second visit to Simla, and on this occasion she performed several of her most

famous phenomena. These included the discovery of a lost brooch in a flower-bed of Mrs. Hume's garden and the materialisation of a cup and saucer for Mrs. Sinnett during a picnic which was joined at the last moment by an unexpected guest. In connection with the latter phenomenon a certain Major H—— who was a member of the party accused Madame Blavatsky of fraud, which, not unnaturally, distressed her for days.

In 1880, too, Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott paid their first visit to Ceylon, sailing from India on May 7th and arriving in Colombo harbour on the morning of May 16th. Their reception among the Sinhalese Buddhists was extraordinarily favourable ; large crowds attended them continually and many branches of the Theosophical Society were founded. On May 25th, at a temple of the Râmânya Nikâya, the Colonel and Madame Blavatsky “ took *pansil* ” from the High Priest Bulatgama—in other words, they acknowledged the Five Precepts and Three Refuges announced by the Lord Buddha for His lay followers, and they were thus formally received into the Buddhist religion. The story of Colonel Olcott's labours in Ceylon, restoring Buddhism to dignity and influence, and opening Buddhist schools for the children, is one of the most wonderful in the whole history of religious philanthropy. If anything can rival the severity of Colonel Olcott's labours in Ceylon, it is the Colonel's missionary journeys in India. The Colonel's self-sacrifice in establishing the Theosophical Society among the Eastern peoples make an epic of heroism and practical faith. Unfortunately, it is impossible to relate Colonel Olcott's story here, although in many respects it is fully as interesting as Madame Blavatsky's.

On returning to Bombay they found trouble awaiting them in that Miss Bates and Madame Coulomb, whom they had left behind to take charge of the headquarters, were quarrelling bitterly. According to Colonel Olcott, the root cause of disagreement was personal jealousy. Miss Bates, who had been entrusted with the sub-editorship of *The*

Theosophist, was dissatisfied with the extent of her responsibilities, which she conceived to be inadequate, and had objected to the fact that Madame Coulomb had charge of the housekeeping. Colonel Olcott decided that on this occasion Madame Coulomb was in the right. The disagreement, however, led to a serious domestic feud. Mr. Wimbridge supported Miss Bates; and on the third day relations had become so strained that they dined separately—Mr. Wimbridge and Miss Bates in the dining-room, and Olcott, Damodar, Madame Coulomb and Madame Blavatsky in the latter's small bungalow. "Day by day things grew worse," wrote Colonel Olcott; "we ceased speaking to each other at last; H. P. B. fretted herself into a fever: there was an *impasse* by the 9th, and on the 10th a complete separation between the two parties . . . this whole pother grew out of some contemptible feminine rivalries and jealousies." It led, ultimately, to the secession of Miss Bates and Mr. Wimbridge from the Society.

The Coulombs had joined the Theosophists in Bombay on the 28th June, 1880. Colonel Olcott records that his first intimation of their existence was a letter to Madame Blavatsky received on the 11th of August, 1879. Madame Coulomb wrote from Galle, in Ceylon, having noticed the report in the Ceylon newspapers of the arrival of the Theosophists at Bombay. The Coulombs at that time were almost penniless; Madame Coulomb expressed a wish to come to India, hoping that her husband would there be able to find work. Madame Blavatsky offered to give them shelter until suitable employment for M. Coulomb should be forthcoming. The French Consul at Galle and "other charitable persons" subscribed for their passage, and it has been suggested that the Ceylon officials were glad to see the last of them. Their sole possessions on arrival consisted of a box of carpenter's tools and "a few rags of clothing." After a short time, Colonel Olcott found M. Coulomb a machinist's berth in a cotton mill, but "he fell out with the owner and threw up the situation." "I

found him (M. Coulomb) a man very quick-tempered and hard to please in the matter of employers," wrote Colonel Olcott in *Old Diary Leaves*, "and, as no other opening occurred, he and his wife just drifted along with us, without any definite plans as to the future. He was a clever mechanic and she a practical, hard-working woman, and as both tried to make themselves useful, and I could get on with them by treating them kindly, they were taken into the family. From neither of them did I hear a bad word about H. P. B.'s behaviour at Cairo; quite the contrary, they seemed to have the greatest respect and affection for her."

During the next two years both Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott (more particularly the latter) made many propagandist journeys through India. The Colonel tells us that during his wanderings he "had been observing places, peoples, and climates, with a view to selecting the best place for a permanent headquarters for the Society." Offers of houses free of rent had been made to them in Ceylon, but, notwithstanding the loveliness of the island, Ceylon was too isolated and too intellectually backward, and above all, the cost of postage was too high, for this country to become the headquarters of the Theosophical Society. On the 31st May, 1882, however, the Colonel and Madame Blavatsky were invited by the sons of Judge Muttusawmy to look at some property that was being sold at a low price. They were driven to Adyar, and at once decided that here was their future home. The property then consisted of a "palatial building," two riverside smaller bungalows, brick-and-mortar stables, coach-house, store-rooms and swimming-bath; while "its avenue of ancient mango and banyan trees, and its large plantation of casuarinas (one of the cone-bearing trees) made up an enchanting country residence." The price demanded was Rs.9000 odd, or about £600, a figure so low as to be merely nominal. With the assistance of P. Iyaloo Naidu, who advanced part of the money, and Judge Muttusawmy

Chetty, who secured a loan of the rest on very easy terms, the property was purchased. An appeal for subscriptions was issued at once, and within a year the whole amount was paid off and the title-deeds delivered into Colonel Olcott's hands. The low price asked was due to the fact that the railway to the foot of the Nilgiri Hills had recently been opened and had brought the lovely holiday resort of Ootacamund within a day's ride of Madras, the result being to throw the grand Madras bungalows on to a market without bidders.

CHAPTER VI

THE COULOMB CONSPIRACY AND THE S.P.R. REPORT

FOR rather more than a year after moving from Bombay to Adyar, the affairs of the Theosophical Society prospered steadily. The movement became widely known throughout India and Ceylon ; the circulation of *The Theosophist* continued to increase ; and more and more of the native Sanskrit scholars of India and the Buddhist priests of Ceylon became interested in Theosophical ideals. Particularly among Hindus and Buddhists, Theosophy was regarded almost everywhere with favour.

But, though as yet unsuspected, heavy clouds of trouble were collecting beneath the horizon and would shortly make their appearance. In February, 1884, Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott left Adyar for a visit to Europe, and while they were away occurred the first stages of the Coulomb conspiracy, whereby everlasting doubt has been cast upon Madame Blavatsky's honesty. The trouble with the Coulombs came to a head owing to the fact that Madame Coulomb had for months continually dropped hints to the effect that Madame Blavatsky was guilty of fraudulent practices, that she (Coulomb) " could say a thing or two if she cared," and that the Society was under the patronage of the devil. M. Coulomb had been commissioned to make some structural alterations, while the Founders were in Europe, to Madame Blavatsky's bedroom and the adjoining " Occult Room," in which was hanging the famous Shrine wherein Mahatma letters were phenomenally received. As a result of their misbehaviour, the Coulombs were

expelled by the Board of Control at Adyar, but they refused to leave until an order from Madame Blavatsky endorsing their expulsion was received by telegraph. On investigating Madame Blavatsky's bedroom and the Occult Room, which M. Coulomb had kept locked since Madame Blavatsky's departure, it was found that he had been fitting sliding panels to the back of the Shrine in the Occult Room and the back of a wardrobe in Madame Blavatsky's bedroom, and had also made a hole in the wall between them. At the time of the expulsion of the Coulombs this work was left in a half-finished state, with the panels rough, unpainted at the edges and obviously newly made; but the consternation of the Theosophists can scarcely be imagined. Unfortunately, their alarm was such that they took the Shrine from its place on the wall and destroyed it, thus preventing subsequent investigation by non-Theosophical witnesses which might have had the effect of exonerating Madame Blavatsky from the charges made against her.

The discharge of the Coulombs from the employment of the Society was followed by the publication in the *Madras Christian College Magazine* for September and October, 1884, of portions of certain letters purporting to have been written by Madame Blavatsky to the Coulombs. These letters gave instructions for the fraudulent production of phenomena. This "exposure" was followed a month later by the visit of Dr. Richard Hodgson (then Mr. Hodgson) to Adyar for the purpose of investigating in the name of the Society for Psychical Research, the phenomena alleged to take place in connection with Theosophy. Mr. Hodgson's investigation extended over a period of three months, and its results are to be found in the famous "Report on Phenomena connected with Theosophy," published in December, 1885, in Part IX of the *Proceedings* of the S.P.R.

Although Dr. Hodgson states in the opening paragraphs of his Report that "whatever prepossessions I may have had were distinctly in favour of Occultism and Madame

Blavatsky," the result of his investigations was so unfavourable that the Committee of the S.P.R. concluded their "Statement and Conclusions" with the following valuation of Madame Blavatsky :

" For our own part, we regard her neither as the mouthpiece of hidden seers, nor as a mere vulgar adventuress ; we think that she has achieved a title to permanent remembrance as one of the most accomplished, ingenious, and interesting impostors in history."

In a word, Dr. Hodgson decided that the letters published by the Coulombs purporting to emanate from Madame Blavatsky were genuine and not forgeries ; that the Mahatma letters received by various Theosophists were written by Madame Blavatsky in disguised handwriting ; that, in collaboration with M. and Mme. Coulomb and other confederates, the apparent materialisation of these letters had been effected fraudulently ; that the sliding panel in the back of the Shrine at the Adyar headquarters and the communication between Madame Blavatsky's bedroom and the Occult Room had been used for the production of the Shrine phenomena ; and that the Mahatmas said to have appeared from time to time were impersonations by M. Coulomb, who used a dummy head and shoulders for the purpose. Letter No. 7 in the S.P.R. Report is supposed to refer to this dummy, which Madame Coulomb destroyed in a fit of disgust, afterwards making another to replace it. Cigarettes were also said to have been left about by Madame Coulomb, according to prearrangement, so that Madame Blavatsky could effect their astral transportation by "occult" means.

Dr. Hodgson's Report should be read in order to be appreciated ; but it seems much more convincing at first reading than after careful study, and, above all, it should be compared with the defence put forward by Dr. Annie Besant and with the account of Madame Blavatsky published by the Countess Wachtmeister. In order to maintain

his case, Dr. Hodgson brought forward a number of occasions on which, it must be admitted, it would certainly have been possible for Madame Blavatsky to arrange for bogus Mahatma letters by telegraphing for them; he maintained that the back of the Shrine and the wall dividing the Occult Room from Madame Blavatsky's bedroom had never been thoroughly examined by disinterested individuals, and claimed to have seen cracks and crevices in ceilings through which spurious Mahatma letters could have been projected by means of the contrivance of springs said by the Coulombs to have been employed for this purpose. Damodar K. Mavalankar, Babajee D. Nath and Madame Blavatsky's native servant, Babula, were accused by Dr. Hodgson of being accomplices; and the evidence of Theosophist after Theosophist who claimed experience of phenomena was shown to be contradictory or unreliable. In support of his contention that Madame Blavatsky forged the Mahatma letters, Dr. Hodgson published the testimony of Messrs. Netherclift and Sims, handwriting experts, who gave the opinion that unquestionably the Mahatma letters were written by Madame Blavatsky. Dr. Hodgson also claimed that, particularly in the Koot Hoomi letters, there are clear signs of development, "various strong resemblances to Madame Blavatsky's ordinary handwriting having been gradually eliminated." Prominence is given in the Report to the fact that a certain letter in the K. H. handwriting, apparently addressed from Thibet to A. P. Sinnett in 1880, "was proved by Mr. H. Kiddle, of New York, to contain a long passage apparently plagiarised from a speech which he delivered at Lake Pleasant, August 15th, 1880, and was reported in the *Banner of Light* some two months or more previous to the date of Mahatma K. H.'s letter." In a subsequent letter K. H. explained that this was due to the letter having been imperfectly transmitted; and in precipitation the quotation marks had been omitted by his chela. He then gave what he claimed to have been the true version of the letter, which included quotation

marks. But, as was shown by Mr. Massey in *Light*, in the second version of the letter the sentences quoted were "ingeniously twisted into a polemical sense, precisely opposite to that in which they were written." Moreover, Mr. Kiddle pointed out that the passages acknowledged in the revised letter did not comprise the whole of the plagiarised quotations, many of which were antecedent to those admitted by the Mahatma. "The proof of a deliberate plagiarism aggravated by a fictitious defence," says the S.P.R., "is therefore irresistible."

The Report also includes elaborate analyses of Madame Blavatsky's handwriting and phraseology, and that of the Mahatma letters; plans and diagrams of the Adyar headquarters, with hypothetical fraudulent devices; an exhaustive list of phenomena, with discussion of the various means whereby they *might* have been performed fraudulently; long statements and cross-examinations of various witnesses, and speculations as to who may have been Madame Blavatsky's accomplices. To deal with the Report adequately and in detail would itself fill a book of considerable size.

CHAPTER VII

THE CASE FOR THE DEFENCE

THE case against Madame Blavatsky as presented by the Society for Psychical Research certainly seems to carry positive conviction ; but in reality this is not so, as everyone will realise who takes the trouble to read Dr. Besant's defence,¹ *H. P. B. and the Masters of Wisdom*. In the first place, there is the obvious newness of the panels made by M. Coulomb and the fact that they were too stiff to use ; there is also the fact that innumerable phenomena similar to those which the Coulombs claim to have produced fraudulently occurred long before the arrival of the Coulombs in Bombay ; and these include not only phenomenal letters, but the appearance of Mahatmas in person at the house in the Girgaum Back Road and elsewhere. In order to support his case, Dr. Hodgson had to assume that Madame Blavatsky had other accomplices in addition to the Coulombs, though the Coulombs themselves accuse no one but Madame Blavatsky. Hodgson made the Theosophists into a sort of mutual deception Society in which half the principal members were hoodwinking the others. And in the case of Damodar, in particular, the accusation is absurd, since, in order to join the Theosophical Society, he offended his parents, thereby losing his prospect of inheriting a considerable fortune : he broke the rules of the high Brahmin caste to which he belonged by birth. Damodar's father was willing to restore him to favour and fortune if he would abandon

¹ Originally published in *Time*, March, 1891, under the title of "The Great Mare's Nest of The Psychical Research Society."

the Theosophical Society, but Damodar continued loyal. He was clairvoyant from boyhood ; and among his earliest memories were visions of a guiding and protecting Being whom he afterwards identified as Mahatma K. H. He believed in the Mahatmas so completely that he afterwards set forth across the Himalayas to find their Thibetan retreat, passing thus beyond the circle of his fellow-Theosophists. The story of his life, whether one of delusion or enlightenment, is a magnificent saga of belief.

The illiteracy of the letters published by the Coulombs also supported Madame Blavatsky's contention that they were forgeries ; and there were also numerous instances (to be referred to later) of phenomena which cannot be attributed to fraud and which must certainly have been genuine.

Of course, the Blavatsky letters were sold to *The Christian College Magazine* by the Coulombs for money. But accounts differ as to the amount actually paid them. In dealing with this point, Dr. Besant wrote :¹

“ Prof. Patterson of the Christian College, Madras, said in answer to a question of Dr. Hartmann, that they had agreed to pay Madame Coulomb Rs.1000, but had only so far given her Rs.75 ; this statement was made in the presence of Mr. Judge, who published it in the *Madras Mail* the following day ; General Morgan says that they paid Rs.150.”

Madame Coulomb and her husband were expelled from the Theosophical Society by a General Council held on May 14th, 1884, the charges against the former being that she had stated “ that the object of the Society was to overthrow British Rule in India ; that its objects were inimical to true religion ; that the phenomena were frauds, and the works of the devil ; that she had attempted to extort money from members ; that she had wasted the Society's funds ; that she had been guilty of lying and back-biting ; that she had grossly slandered H. P. B. ; that her presence at Head-

¹ *H. P. Blavatsky*, by Dr. Annie Besant.

quarters was mischievous to the Society." M. Coulomb was charged with aiding and abetting his wife. Only the first three charges were tried, and the evidence being overwhelming, M. and Mme. Coulomb were expelled.

The immediate cause, both of the expulsion and of the revenge which Madame Coulomb took by selling the forged letters to *The Christian College Magazine*, is said to have been the following incident: When Prince Harisinghi, of Kathiawar, was at the Convention held at Adyar in December, 1883, Madame Coulomb sought to obtain from him the loan of Rs.2000. The Prince evaded her request; but in February, 1884, when Madame Blavatsky left Adyar for Bombay *en route* for Europe, Madame Coulomb asked permission to accompany her. Her reason for this lay in the fact that Madame Blavatsky intended visiting Prince Harisinghi in the course of her journey. Madame Coulomb availed herself of this opportunity to renew her request for a loan, whereupon the Prince complained to Madame Blavatsky, who "promptly crushed the proceedings." The fury of Madame Coulomb at this interference is said to have known no bounds, and, according to Babula (whose honesty, of course, has also been questioned), she muttered as she stepped on to her boat after saying good-bye to Madame Blavatsky at Bombay, "I shall be revenged on your mistress for preventing me from getting my two thousand rupees!" Madame Coulomb's nature, as innumerable witnesses have testified, was warped and vindictive; she was the sort of person who could not be happy unless hatching plots and fomenting trouble. She is even said to have maintained a pack of mangy dogs at Adyar in order to keep the high-caste Brahmins from the premises; and after her departure the housekeeping expenses, of which she had had control, were considerably reduced. There is little doubt that it was the affair of Prince Harisinghi and his Rs.2000 which supplied the immediate incentive for her betrayal of Madame Blavatsky, though there is reason to suppose that she contemplated some such course since the

earliest days of her connection with the Theosophical Society, when she joined the Society in Bombay. Madame Blavatsky herself makes this assertion in one of her letters to Sinnett¹ :

“ She began building her plan of treachery in 1880, from the the first day she landed at Bombay with her husband, both shoeless, penniless and starving. She offered to sell *my secrets* to the Rev. Bowen of the *Bombay Guardian*, in July, 1880, and she sold them actually to the Rev. Patterson in May, 1885. But those secrets were ‘ open letters ’ for years. Why should I complain ? Has not Master left it to my choice, to follow either the dictates of Lord Buddha, who enjoins us not to fail to feed *even a starving serpent*, scorning all fear lest it should turn round and bite the hand that feeds it—or to face *Karma* which is sure to punish him who turns away from the sight of sin and misery, or fails to relieve the sinner and the sufferer ? I knew her and tried my best not to hate her, and since I always failed in the latter, I tried to make it up by sheltering and feeding the vile snake.”

The Society for Psychical Research at least endeavoured to be impartial, even though their efforts in this direction cannot be said to have been crowned with great success. The astounding nature of the phenomena, the extreme plausibility of the theory of deception and the fact that trap-doors and sliding panels were in existence when Dr. Hodgson visited Adyar, are important factors tending to exonerate the S.P.R. But even the inadequate hearing accorded Madame Blavatsky by Dr. Hodgson was denied her by other of her enemies, who did not hesitate to malign her and to employ every weapon of outrage, insult and vituperation. The Christian Literature Society of Madras, in pamphlets such as *Madame Blavatsky : Her Tricks and Her Dupes*, was wholly biassed against her and did not scruple to present the evidence in the worst possible light and to ignore anything that might seem in favour of their hated enemy. The tone of their publications, to say the least, is anything but Christian or charitable. Doubtless

¹ *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett.* Letter No. XLVI, p. 116.

the Christian Literature Society pamphlets have been effective in advertising Theosophy and even in winning converts for the movement so outrageously abused. The blood of the martyrs, it might be said, has been the seed of the Theosophical Society.

Madame Coulomb's booklet, *Some Account of My Intercourse with Madame Blavatsky* (published by Mr. Elliot Stock in 1885), would be a terrible exposure if it were the truth. It includes copious quotations from the incriminating letters alleged to have been written by Madame Blavatsky. If they are forgeries, some of them are extremely clever imitations of Madame Blavatsky's manner of writing; and if genuine, they prove Madame Blavatsky to have been a fraud and charlatan of the most audacious and shameless kind. In this book Madame Coulomb claims, moreover, to have detected Madame Blavatsky in the practice of fraud in connection with the *Société Spirite* in Cairo, and to have lent Madame Blavatsky money, during their acquaintance in that city, which was never paid back. Madame Coulomb adds that unfortunately she left behind her at Cairo when she came away the written receipts which Madame Blavatsky gave her for this money; but such negligence is not at all consistent with the care with which she seems to have preserved Madame Blavatsky's other writings.

Referring to Madame Coulomb's accusation of having borrowed money from her in Cairo which was never paid back, Madame Blavatsky states in a letter to Solovyoff¹ that she has a letter from Madame Coulomb, written from Ceylon eight years after the period in Egypt, begging for a loan of money.

Moreover, by claiming to have discovered Madame Blavatsky in the practice of fraud at Cairo (in 1871), Madame Coulomb proves herself to have been both a liar and a hypocrite, for shortly after the arrival in Bombay of the Theosophists from America, Madame Coulomb wrote an extremely interesting letter to the *Ceylon Times*. The

¹ *A Modern Priestess of Isis*, p. 131.

news of the arrival of Madame Blavatsky in India had reached Ceylon and had evoked a certain amount of discussion there, or, more probably, gossip ; and Madame Coulomb, who was at that time in Ceylon, made the following statement, which was published in the *Ceylon Times* on the 5th June, 1879 :

“ I am not acquainted with any of the members of the said Society, except with Madame Blavatsky. I have known this lady for these last eight years, and I must say the truth, that there is nothing against her character. We lived in the same town, and, on the contrary, she was considered one of the cleverest ladies of the age. Madame Blavatsky is a musician, a painter, a linguist, an author, and I may say that very few ladies, and indeed few gentlemen, have a knowledge of things in general as Madame Blavatsky.”

So it is safe to assert that, if the Coulombs had been pleading on behalf of Madame Blavatsky's phenomena, instead of asserting them to be tricks, it would have been pointed out by the Society for Psychical Research that the Coulombs were people of such doubtful honesty that no value whatever could be attached to their testimony.

The Coulombs, however, are not the only witnesses whose accusations against Madame Blavatsky may be regarded as worthless. In the exposure by the Society for Psychical Research great stress is laid upon the alleged fact that a resemblance existed between the normal handwriting of Madame Blavatsky and the script in the Mahatma letters ; and the opinion of two handwriting experts, Messrs. Netherclift and Sims, was cited to the effect that certain of the Mahatma letters were written by Madame Blavatsky and were therefore forgeries. Colonel Olcott points out¹ that Mr. Montague Williams, Q.C., on page 263 of his *Leaves of a Life* says that in a case in which he appeared, Netherclift and Chabot swore positively to a writing as that of a certain man, and it was proved to be by someone else. He adds that their evidence from handwriting is worthless and, in

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. III, p. 188.

the opinion of Mr. Williams, "utterly unreliable." Mrs. Besant adds¹ that Netherclift and Sims first expressed the belief that the Mahatma writing was not the work of Madame Blavatsky, and it was only when the letters were *re-submitted* to them with some others that they complaisantly changed their opinion and declared that the writing was Madame Blavatsky's "without doubt." Dr. Besant also mentions a case in which *The Times* newspaper was duped by a clever forger whose productions were declared genuine by experts of the Netherclift type. "Their evidence was proved to be worthless, and the forger, convicted of fraud, made the public apology of suicide."

But in any event the question of handwriting can scarcely be said to have much point. For although Madame Blavatsky denied that she was in any sense a spiritualistic medium, there can be no doubt that her powers were similar to those possessed by good physical mediums. And if Madame Blavatsky had been in any sense a medium for the production of the Mahatma letters, some similarity between her normal handwriting and the handwriting of the letters is only to be expected, and in no way incriminates her. This principle is well known to all investigators of psychic phenomena. Communicating entities borrow from the brainstuff and vital forces of the medium, with the result that something of the medium's personality is almost always discernible in their communications or manifestations. This applies to "precipitated" writing and to "direct" writing almost as much as to automatic script. And the possibility of some of the Mahatma letters having been automatically produced, although nowhere claimed by Madame Blavatsky, does not appear to have been so much as considered by the S.P.R. Clearly it is a possibility which should have been taken into account.

Incidentally, if Madame Blavatsky were really the charlatan which some people would have us believe, it is remarkable that she never pretended that occasionally the

¹ *H. P. Blavatsky*, p. 47.

Mahatma letters were written by means of her own hand. Had she done so, she would have been covered in regard to similarities in handwriting. Any letter of which the script resembled her normal caligraphy could then have been attributed to automatism. She never made this suggestion, though she occasionally wrote letters in obedience to "impressions" from the Masters and embodying information impressionally received.

Obviously, the entire value of the phenomena which occurred in the Shrine depends upon whether the back of the Shrine and the wall behind it were intact when Madame Blavatsky left India. The whole case brought against Madame Blavatsky by the Coulombs really stands or falls by this point. The following is the description of the Shrine given by Dr. Hodgson in the Report published in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*¹ :

"The Shrine, as I gather from comparing the accounts of different Theosophists, was a wooden cupboard between 3 ft. and 4 ft. in width and height, and 1 ft. or 15 in. in depth, with a drawer below the cupboard portion, and with corner brackets. The Shrine was made with three sliding panels at the back. It was placed against the portion of the wall in the Occult Room where the north window of Madame Blavatsky's room had previously existed, covering most of that portion, a most unfortunate position to choose for it if there was no fraudulent intention. It rested below on a plank or shelf, but its chief support consisted of two thick iron wires which were attached to two hooks near the ceiling. A certain space round the Shrine was enclosed by muslin curtains, which were drawn aside from the front when anyone wished to approach the Shrine. These curtains were about 7 ft. high on the sides, but on the wall behind the Shrine extended nearly to the ceiling. The wall immediately behind the Shrine was covered by white glazed calico, tacked to the wall. Two widths of the calico met in a vertical line passing behind the centre of the

¹ *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Vol. III, Part IX.

Shrine. The remaining part of the walls of the Occult Room was covered with red and white striped calico tacked to the wall. The upper part of the Shrine was as close to the wall itself as the muslin and calico behind it would allow. The lower part of the Shrine was near to the wall, at a distance from it differently estimated by different witnesses, but which must have been somewhere between $\frac{1}{4}$ in. and $1\frac{1}{2}$ in., and was probably very little, if at all, more than $\frac{1}{2}$ in. The Shrine and its appurtenances were fixed in February or March, 1883. Shortly afterwards a four-panelled wooden boarding was placed in Madame Blavatsky's room, at the back of the recess. For some time an almirah (cupboard) stood in front of this recess. . . .

“ M. Coulomb states that he removed the Shrine just after it was originally placed against the wall, sawed the middle panel in two, and attached a piece of leather behind to serve as a handle, so that the top portion could be easily pulled up. The junction between the two halves of the panel was, he says, hidden from those looking at the inside of the Shrine by a mirror which just covered it. Behind this sliding panel a hole was made in the wall. A sliding panel was also made in the wardrobe which stood in front of the recess in Madame Blavatsky's bedroom, and one of the panels of the teak-wood boarding was also made to slide about 10 inches, so that easy communication existed between Madame Blavatsky's bedroom and the Shrine.”

The Shrine was hanging in the Occult Room at Adyar from 1883 to September, 1884, and much of the force of the indictment by the Society for Psychical Research depends upon whether the back of the Shrine was investigated by Theosophists prior to the departure of Madame Blavatsky to Europe in February, 1884. To establish the fact that the Shrine and wall dividing the Occult Room from Madame Blavatsky's bedroom had been tampered with after her departure, the Theosophical Board of Control issued a circular enquiry in August, 1884, to various Theosophists who had visited Adyar asking them to state

in writing what they knew of the condition of the Shrine, adjoining walls, etc., prior to and after the expulsion of the Coulobms. Dr. Hodgson was allowed to read through the packet of replies that had been received in response to this enquiry, and reached the conclusion that "except for Madame Blavatsky and the Coulobms, Madame Blavatsky's native servant Babula and Colonel Olcott . . . , there is no evidence to show that any person ever removed the Shrine from the wall or saw it removed from the wall after it was first placed there, until the expulsion of the Coulobms; that, therefore, no careful examination could ever have been made of the back of the Shrine or of the wall in immediate juxtaposition."

Dr. Annie Besant is in emphatic disagreement with Dr. Hodgson on this point. In the defence of Madame Blavatsky which she published in reply to the S.P.R. Report, she makes the declaration that "the testimony as to the nature of the Shrine, and of the wall behind it, is overwhelming."

The following witnesses are cited by Dr. Besant in support of this assertion :

Judge Sir S. Subramania Aiyer, of the High Court, Madras, who, after witnessing phenomena on the 26th and 28th December, 1883, stated that "It (the Shrine) was not fixed to the wall, but only touches it. I have carefully examined the Shrine inside and outside, and also the wall against which it is put. I found nothing to suspect the existence of any contrivances which could account for what I saw."

Mr. R. Casava Pillai, an Inspector of Police, who stated that "The Shrine was found attached to a solid wall behind, and there were no wires or other contrivances which could escape the trained eye of a police officer like myself."

Professor J. N. Unwalla, a Parsi gentleman, who stated that in May, 1883, when a guest at Adyar, he had many opportunities of being in the Occult Room and of examining it

and the Shrine : “ I can safely say, without any equivocation or reservation, that in the Occult Room or anywhere within the precincts of the Headquarters, I never could find any apparatus or appliances of any kind suggestive of frauds or tricks.”

Lastly, Mr. P. Ruthnavelu, Editor of the *Philosophic Inquirer*. Mr. Ruthnavelu's evidence is particularly important because he examined the Shrine and the rooms both before and after the attack by the *Christian College Magazine*. On the 1st of April, 1883, he witnessed some phenomena which were described in the issue of his magazine dated April 8th, 1883. After describing the phenomena, Mr. Ruthnavelu continued as follows :

“ I went up to the Shrine with two sceptical friends of mine, and the doors were opened for me to inspect closely. I carefully examined everything, touching the several parts with my hand. There was no opening or hole on this side of the cupboard. I was then led into the adjoining room to see the other side of the wall to which the Shrine is attached. There was a large almirah standing against this wall, but it was removed at my request, that I might see the wall from that side. I tapped it and otherwise examined it, to see if there was no deception, but I was thoroughly satisfied that no deception was possible.”

On September 14th, after the Coulomb scandal, Mr. Ruthnavelu again went to see the room, and reported as follows :

“ On the other side of the wall, at the back of the Shrine, I saw close to the wall an ingenious furniture-like apparatus, to which was fastened a sliding door which, when opened, showed a small aperture in the wall. Inside of this, there was a hollow space, large enough for a lean lad to stand in, if he could creep into it through the aperture and hold his breath for a few seconds. I attempted in vain to creep in through the opening, and afterwards stretched out my hand with difficulty into the small hollow, to see the internal structure. *There was no communication* with the back-board of the Shrine. I could see that the machinery

had not been finished, and the sliding panels all bore the stamp of the freshness of unfinished work."

In *The Early Days of Theosophy in Europe* (pp. 39-40) A. P. Sinnett has expressed his belief in the genuineness of some of the Shrine phenomena. He describes an occasion, during the time when he was writing *Esoteric Buddhism*, when he had a bundle of questions for Madame Blavatsky to transmit to the Master. Mr. Sinnett and his wife were staying at Adyar at the time. He gave the questions to his wife, who then handed them to Madame Blavatsky in her room. She told her husband afterwards that "the O. L." was at her writing-table, and without getting up when Mrs. Sinnett entered, Madame Blavatsky simply told her visitor to "Put it in the Shrine," which at that time was hanging on the wall. Mrs. Sinnett did as she was bid, and then, sitting down on a sofa, engaged in conversation with Madame Blavatsky for five or ten minutes. The latter then said, "I think he has sent you the answer." Mrs. Sinnett then "went over to the Shrine; opened it and found lying on my paper of notes,—the Master's answer. The little incident was not surprising to us at the time. We had by then had large experience of similar phenomena, but much later on 'The Shrine' was accused—so to speak—of being a conjuring device used by Madame Blavatsky for the purpose of trickery, so the experience just described, one of many others of a similar kind, will help to dissipate that delusion."

Unfortunately, when Dr. Hodgson arrived at Adyar at the end of 1884, the Theosophists, not unnaturally but perhaps unwisely, had so far as possible removed all traces of the treacherous work executed by the Coulombs. Dr. Hodgson admitted this fact in his Report¹ in the following words :

"Moreover, the Occult Room, when I first received permission to inspect it, had been considerably altered; its walls were

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. III, Part IX, p. 220.

covered with fresh plaster, and I was informed by Mr. Damodar that all traces of the alleged 'machinations' of the Coulombs in connection with the Shrine had been obliterated. This was not true, for the bricked frame and the aperture into the recess still existed. However, under the circumstances it was impossible for me to test the accuracy of much of the description given by Theosophists of the Occult Room and the Shrine at the time of the 'exposure' by the Coulombs"—

a fact which robs Dr. Hodgson's opinions of much of their weight.

One other mistake was made by the Theosophists at Adyar. On examining the Shrine after the expulsion of the Coulombs the panels in its back were discovered, and the Theosophists were so alarmed at the thought of this discovery possibly being made public, and perhaps being emphasised by the *Christian College Magazine* in proof of their allegations, that they resolved to destroy the Shrine. "To do this," says Dr. Hodgson in his Report, "they considered that the Shrine must be surreptitiously removed, but such removal was inconvenient from the Occult Room. The Shrine was therefore first removed openly to Mr. Damodar's room, and, on the following night, was thence removed secretly by three Theosophists, concealed in the compound, afterwards broken up, and the fragments burned piecemeal during the following week."¹

Another point to remember is the fact that the Coulombs themselves were spiritualistic mediums; and this, coupled with the fact that their characters can scarcely be said to have been so lofty as might be desired, almost certainly led them to become instruments of expression for evil spirits. Whatever benefits may result from mediumship when the instrument is a person of lofty character and sincere and unselfish motive (and such benefits are, of course, immense), they disappear entirely when the medium is given over to malice, avarice, untruthfulness or similar vices; for the fact of addiction to evil passions conjoins him with evil

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

spirits in the invisible world, and thus his mediumship becomes a means of communication with hell. Now, it was known that the Coulombs were mediums, and they were tolerated at Adyar with greater patience than is usually shown even by Theosophists because they were believed to be obsessed by devils. If there are beings in the spirit world who hate progress and enlightenment and desire nothing more than the corruption and enslavement of humanity—and most certainly such individuals exist, both in the physical body and in the hells—their evil influence would naturally concentrate round such a centre of religious and spiritual progress as the Theosophical Society. They would endeavour to counteract the influence and undo the labours of the Mahatmas. And for this purpose the Coulombs were ready and willing instruments of which the Dark Forces were not slow to avail themselves, clouding the minds of their mediums with passions of envy, malice and uncharitableness, influencing them to think out schemes of exposure, stimulating their greed by pictures presented before the imagination or inward eye, and guiding the thought and hand of the forgers of letters. Thus the Dark Forces sought to discredit the Theosophical Society and annul the benignant work of the Masters. That this is no exaggeration of the malice and wicked arts of which infernal spirits are capable may be realised by studying the revelations of Swedenborg, who has described evil spirits as continually uttering scandals against the Lord Himself. And good men have always been rewarded with the hatred of the wicked, even while still in the world. The crucifixion of the Founder of Christianity is a similar instance and has provoked such statements from doctors of the Christian Church as that “The guilt of our sin has been the attempted murder of God.”¹ And this animosity towards goodness persists in the spirit-world. Swedenborg records² the intense hatred of evil spirits towards man :

¹ *Foundations of Faith*, by W. E. Orchard, D.D. ² *Arcana Cælestia*.

“ Unless the Lord defended man every moment, yea, even the smallest part of every moment, he would instantly perish, in consequence of the indescribably intense and mortal hatred which prevails in the world of spirits against the things relating to love and faith.”

In another part of the same work he describes how certain evil spirits impersonated him in the world of spirits and thus spread scandal and calumny, the angels afterwards complaining that Swedenborg had infested them. Elsewhere he says that the Satans in hell burn with perpetual raging lust to usurp the throne of God. It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that scandals and slanders are the invariable reward of those who strive to tread the path of perfection.

Moreover, apart from the negative arguments tending to disprove the charges of fraud levelled against Madame Blavatsky, there are the positive arguments which may be based on the many phenomena produced by Madame Blavatsky and described by many witnesses and which cannot possibly be attributed to fraud. There is also the evidence (its importance can scarcely be overestimated) provided by other clairvoyants such as Dr. Besant and the Countess Wachtmeister. The earliest well-authenticated evidence which proves the reality of Madame Blavatsky's occult powers has been recorded by Colonel Olcott in his *People from the Other World* and *Old Diary Leaves*. Some of the occurrences he describes date from the earliest period of his acquaintance with his colleague. The phenomena mentioned by the Colonel which it is impossible to attribute to fraud are described in Chapters XI, XII, XIII and XIV of this book.

The fact that Madame Blavatsky was accused so effectively of fraudulent practices has undoubtedly had its effect upon the Theosophical Society. At the actual time of the exposure by the Society for Psychical Research, the ensuing scandal drove most of the best brains, most of the eminent and gifted men who had joined the Society or expressed

their interest in the movement, to sever every connection with Theosophy. Thus F. W. H. Myers and Professor Richet regarded Madame Blavatsky as a charlatan exposed, and many members of the Theosophical Society resigned. And in 1883, when Mr. Kiddle taxed her with having plagiarised his address on Spiritualism delivered at Lake Pleasant in August, 1880, the Society lost Anna Kingsford, Edward Maitland, Stainton Moses and C. C. Massey.

And the effect of these exposures is still felt to-day in that Theosophy is doubly hard to accept by the clearest concrete intellects. Dr. Besant by her marvellous eloquence has to a great extent saved the situation and turned defeat into victory; yet one sometimes wonders whether the whole affair may not have resulted in quantity of members rather than quality. For it cannot be denied that many of the finest minds, whose loyalty would be of literally incalculable value to the movement, remain outside, and one wonders whether this would still have been the case if the genuineness of Madame Blavatsky's phenomena had never been questioned. To a large extent one has to join the Theosophical Society, if one joins it at all, on sheer faith. One has to make an adventure which, in the eyes of the world, is nothing but foolishness. A Theosophist must expect to be accused of credulity or simplicity, and will rarely be regarded by men of the world as possessing sound judgment.

Sometimes one almost wishes that the phenomena had never happened. Yet it cannot be denied that in the early days they formed the chief advertisement of Theosophy. Without them the Theosophical Society might never have developed into anything more than a diminutive New York club or a group of fanatical students in India. It was the phenomena which brought, not only notoriety, but converts. Again and again Madame Blavatsky secured the membership of distinguished individuals by the performance of some striking phenomenon the *bona fides* of which seemed above suspicion. Thus she convinced not only Mr. Sinnett,

Herr Gebhard and Dr. Hubbe Schleiden, but even Colonel Olcott himself ; and the Colonel's successor, Dr. Annie Besant, was also not uninfluenced by Madame Blavatsky's occult powers. The phenomena, therefore, were essential if the Society was to flourish and become influential, but they brought with them their inevitable karma of suspicion. They could not possibly be accepted by a world which was materialistic in thought and life, and altogether ignorant not only of occult science, but even of so much as the *existence* of that science. Inevitably Madame Blavatsky was accused of fraud, and with almost equal inevitability, the circumstantial evidence seemed to be against her. This disgrace was the penalty of her fame.

CHAPTER VIII

CONTINENTAL WANDERINGS AND LIFE IN LONDON

THE indignation and dismay with which the news of her exposure by the Coulombs was received by Madame Blavatsky were also in her favour as implying her innocence, though some have cited her distress as a proof of guilt. A capacity for moral indignation has been said to be an unfailing index to character, and the violence of her feelings were an additional proof that she had the cause of Theosophy genuinely at heart. It was with the utmost difficulty that Colonel Olcott and other friends restrained her from taking legal action, a course which, in view of all the circumstances, would only have led to additional sufferings and more complete disgrace. It is by no means impossible that, just as trap-doors had been produced for the exposure, false witnesses claiming to have been Madame Blavatsky's accomplices might have been forthcoming in the event of legal action. At any rate, there is evidence to suggest that the missionaries and M. and Mme. Coulomb definitely laid themselves open to legal attack in the hope of provoking Madame Blavatsky to prosecute—a trap into which she would certainly have fallen were it not for wise counsellors round her, for in her furies she was like a blinded Titan. Legal action would probably have resulted in her extradition, or possibly have led to confinement in a lunatic asylum. Olcott saved her from this, because, as he records in *Old Diary Leaves*, he overheard a conversation between two influential Madras civilians in which, in reply to a question regarding what was likely to happen, one said, "I hope

she *will* bring an action, for — who must try it, is determined to give the greatest latitude for cross-examination so that this damned fraud may be shown up, and it is not at all impossible that she may be sent to the Andaman Islands.”¹ When it became apparent that Madame Blavatsky would not prosecute, Madame Coulomb was caused to bring an action for libel against General Morgan in order to call Madame Blavatsky as a witness and in that way get her under the desired cross-examination. This action was dropped when Madame Blavatsky was ordered to Europe by her medical adviser and it became impossible for her to appear as a witness.

On her way back to India at the end of 1884, after hearing of the letters in the *Madras Christian College Magazine*, Madame Blavatsky broke her journey at Cairo to collect information about the Coulombs, imagining that if she could prove that they were bad characters, the action she desired to bring against them would be assured of success. In this, of course, she again shows her childlike simplicity, for the fact that the Coulombs were shady characters would scarcely have told in her favour as their associate and could certainly throw little light on the problem of her own integrity. Yet with obvious jubilation and sense of triumph she telegraphed from Cairo to Colonel Olcott at Adyar at the end of 1884 :

“ Success complete. Outlaws. Legal proofs. Sail Colombo, *Navarino*.”²

And in a letter to Solovyoff, dated January 3rd, 1885, written after her return to Madras, she again refers to this visit to Cairo. She says that “ the Coulombs are fraudulent bankrupts who had decamped on the sly by night, and had several times been in prison for slander. She is a well-known charlatan and ‘ sorceress,’ who revealed buried treasure for money, and was caught red-handed—i.e. with the ancient coins which she used to bury beforehand, and

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. III, pp. 194-5.

² *Ibid.*, p. 189.

so on. The French Consul gave me official authority to hang them (!), and entrusted me with a power of attorney to get 22,000 francs from them."¹

In the same letter she describes the reception accorded her at Bombay on her return to India :

" Well, we arrived ; the missionaries were drawn up on shore to enjoy my disgrace. But before the anchor had been cast, a whole crowd of our Theosophists was swarming over the deck. They threw themselves down and kissed my feet, and at last hurried us on shore. Here there was a dense mass of people ; some thirty vans with bands, flags, gilded cars and garlands of flowers. I had no sooner appeared on the wharf than they began to hurrah. I was almost deafened by the furious cries of triumph and delight. We were drawn, not by horses, but by Theosophists, in a chariot preceded by a band walking backwards. The Brahmins blessed us, and all welcomed and cheered us. After an hour's procession, during which all the missionaries disappeared as if they had rushed off to hell, we were taken to the town-hall, where we found 5000 people to complete my deafness. Lord, if you had only been there ; how proud you would have been of your countrywoman ! Imagine 307 students of that very Christian College, whose missionary professors had hatched all this plot, signing an address which they publicly presented to me and read aloud amid the loud applause of the public (Hindu, of course). . . . Then I was obliged to get up and make a speech. Imagine my position ! After me Olcott spoke, Mrs. Oakley and Leadbeater. Then they took us home, where I spent the first night in fever and delirium."²

That there were many friends to welcome them on their return to India is also the statement of Colonel Olcott, who³ remarks that almost their entire native following stood by them in this crisis, the only important secessions being on the part of European members. He regards this loyalty as being due to the fact that they had never accepted money for their phenomena :

" H. P. B.'s unchallengeable phenomena and my healings caught hold of the popular imagination in such fashion that magnates

¹ *A Modern Priestess of Isis*, p. 107.

² *Ibid.*, p. 109.

³ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. III.

literally laid their treasure-bags at our feet, and fabulous sums were offered us to show our various powers. That we rejected all their offers with evident sincerity is the secret of much of the loyal friendship shown us throughout India, from the beginning until now. If we had ever taken a present for ourselves, the whole Indian public would have abandoned us in the Coulomb crisis, and we should have been looked upon as religious humbugs; whereas, as it is, all the Missionaries combined, of all the societies of the world, cannot rob us of our place in the hearts of India's children."

But, in spite of the loyalty of the Indians, Madame Blavatsky suffered agonies under the taunts and gibes of her enemies. Such was her burning sense of injustice that she used to pace up and down her room at Adyar for hours at a stretch. "It was awful to see her, with her face empurpled by blood that rushed to her head, her eyes almost standing out from their orbits and dead-looking, as she tramped up and down the floor, denouncing everybody and saying wild things. Her physicians said this could not last; she must have rest and quiet, or she would drop down dead some day without giving us a moment's warning."¹ Dr. Mary Scharlieb, her medical adviser, pronounced a cool climate and a secluded life as absolutely essential to her existence, at the same time issuing the following certificate²:

"I hereby certify that Madame Blavatsky is quite unfit for the constant excitement and worry to which she is exposed in Madras. The condition of her heart renders perfect quiet and a suitable climate essential. I therefore recommend that she should at once proceed to Europe, and remain in a temperate climate—in some quiet spot."

At the end of March, 1885, Madame Blavatsky left India, an outcast and an invalid. She was so ill that "Dr. Mary Scharlieb's husband, one of the Presidency Magistrates, procured the use of a hospital chair, and she sitting in it, was lifted from the boat on board by means of a hoisting

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 222-3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 223; *In Memory of H. P. B.*, p. 86.

tackle."¹ Her immediate destination was Italy, and for the next three months she resided at Torre del Greco, on the north side of Vesuvius. Her letters at this time complain bitterly of discomfort and poverty. Her room, she said, was damp and draughty. She had only a rickety old table to write on, and was compelled to sit with her feet on uncarpeted stone flags. She wrote to Olcott imploring him to send carpets, as the cold floor was causing a recurrence of rheumatic gout.

Olcott remarks² that for some time after she left Adyar he sent her £20 monthly until the reserve fund of the *Theosophist* was exhausted. He then notified her that unless she came back and "shared his crusts" she would have to find some other means of support. We are not told what other means she found.

The tumult of her feelings had not by any means abated by the time she arrived in Italy, as many of her letters show. In a letter dated July 23rd (1885) she writes with considerable poignancy to Mrs. Sinnett:³

"Do not fight for me, my kind, dear Mrs. Sinnett, do not defend me; you will lose your time and only be called a confederate, if not worse. You would hurt yourself, perhaps the *cause*, and do *me* no good. The mud has entered too deeply into the hapless individual known as H. P. B.; the chemicals used for the dye of slander were, or rather are, too strong, and death herself, I am afraid, shall never wash away in the eyes of those who do not know me, the dirt that has been thrown at and has stuck on the personality of the 'dear old lady.' Ah, yes; the 'old lady' is a *clean* thing to look at now; an honour to her friends, and an ornament to the Society. . . .

"Of course, you all who believe in, and respect the Masters cannot without losing every belief in Them, think me *guilty*. Those who feel no discrepancy in the idea (Hume was one of such) of filthy lying and fraud even *for the good of the cause*—

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. III, p. 222.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 22.

³ *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*, pp. 101 *et seq.* Letter No. XLV.

being associated with work done for the Masters—are congenital *Jesuits*. One capable of believing that such pure and holy hands can touch and handle with no sense of squeamishness such a *filthy* instrument as I am now represented to be are natural born fools, or capable themselves of working on the principle that ‘the end justifies the means.’ Therefore, while thanking you, and appreciating fully the great kindness of your heart that dictated you such words as—‘Were I convinced to-morrow that you had written those wretched letters *I should still love you*’—I answer—*I hope you would not*, and thus for your own sake. Had I written *even one* of those idiotic and at bottom *infamous* interpolations now made to appear in the said letters ; had I been guilty *once only*—of a deliberate, purposely concocted fraud, especially when those deceived were my best, my *truest* friends—no ‘love’ for such one as I ! At best—*pity* or eternal contempt. Pity, if proved that I was an irresponsible lunatic, an hallucinated *medium*, made to trick by his ‘guides’ whom I was representing as Mahatmas ; contempt, *if* a conscious fraud—but then where would be *the Masters?* ”

And to Mr. Sinnett himself she wrote :¹

“ You can never wash away the dirt I am covered with.”

Occasionally she attempts to view her disgrace in a humorous light, but her laughter, one feels, is always very near to tears² :

“ O lovely, peaceful old age ! To have to play at the wandering Jew, to hide like a culprit, a felon, because—well, because I have done my duty.”

After spending three months on the slopes of Vesuvius, she is next heard of in Paris, where she stayed for a time at the house of Madame Adam. In the autumn of 1885 she removed to Wurzburg, where she took lodgings and applied herself to writing her second great book, *The Secret Doctrine*, the Bible, so to speak, of the Theosophical Society. At about this time she writes to A. P. Sinnett :

“ I am very busy on *Secret D*. The thing at New York (meaning the circumstances under which *Isis Unveiled* was written) is

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 136. Letter No. LVII.

² *Ibid.*, p. 201. Letter No. LXXXV.

repeated—only far clearer and better. I begin to think it shall vindicate us. Such pictures, panoramas, scenes, antediluvian dramas, with all that! Never saw or heard better.”

Madame Blavatsky was joined at Wurzburg by the Countess Constance Wachtmeister, who looked after her, and whose book, *Reminiscences of H. P. B. and "The Secret Doctrine,"* contains important evidence in corroboration of Madame Blavatsky's occult powers. As a result of personal observation extended over a period of several months, the Countess was convinced of the reality of Madame Blavatsky's contact with her Masters, of Their power to precipitate writing, to materialise letters and of Madame Blavatsky's power to cause raps.

Several of the letters of Countess Wachtmeister published in *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett* provide a valuable supplement to the testimony given in the Countess's little book, for they contain references to phenomena observed when living with Madame Blavatsky at Wurzburg, and to astral visions and clairaudient messages experienced by the Countess in regard to current events, both far and near, connected with the Theosophical Society.

It was while she was living at Wurzburg that the Report of the Society for Psychical Research was published. A copy of the Report was sent to Madame Blavatsky without any previous warning, by some thoughtless or evilly disposed person, the result being that for nearly a fortnight she again stormed and raved continuously. *The Secret Doctrine* remained quite untouched during this terrible period, and after the publication of the Report the progress of Madame Blavatsky's book was constantly retarded through news of the disaffection of Theosophists or new attacks on the Society. A terrible glimpse of this period of suffering is given by the Countess Wachtmeister in a letter written at this time to A. P. Sinnett¹ :

¹ *Ibid.* Letter No. CXXVII.

“ She is terribly upset to-day, has received a *brutal* letter from Selin telling her he resigns because he looks upon her and the whole Society as a fraud, that he does not believe in the Masters and that he thinks that ‘ Isis ’ has been plagiarised from other books.

“ We are having a horrible time of it here. I thought Madame would have an apoplectic fit—but fortunately a violent attack of diarrhœa saved her, but I do weary of it all so much. I think sometimes my own strength will fail me, *physical* not moral. It is a mystery to me how all this dirt and filth seems to surround and oppress us.”

In the spring of 1886 Madame Blavatsky parted from Countess Wachtmeister for a time, the latter returning to her home in Sweden for the summer. Madame Blavatsky, who was accompanied as far as Ostend by a London Theosophist, Miss Kislingbury, went to Elberfeld, where she stayed as a guest of Mrs. Gebhard. After staying with the Gebhards, Madame Blavatsky returned to Ostend with her sister, Madame Jelihowsky, and her niece, and here she was rejoined shortly afterwards by the Countess Wachtmeister, who henceforward became her devoted companion until the death of Madame Blavatsky. During all these months she had suffered greatly in health. Her limbs were badly swollen, so that she could only move from one room to another with difficulty, and while at Elberfeld with the Gebhards she had fallen and hurt her leg. She spent all day and every day at her desk, writing *The Secret Doctrine*. She took no exercise, and it was exceedingly difficult to persuade her to sacrifice the time necessary for taking fresh air in a carriage or bath-chair. When the Countess Wachtmeister rejoined her at Ostend she was alarmed to see that her health seemed very much worse. She used to become drowsy and heavy in the middle of the day, and was often unable to work for an hour together. She grew rapidly worse. The doctors, one of whom was a Belgian and the other a London Theosophist, Dr. Ashton Ellis, who was specially telegraphed for, pronounced her illness to be an affection

of the kidneys. The former said that " he had never known a case of a person with the kidneys attacked as H. P. B.'s were, living as long as she had done, and that he was convinced that nothing could save her." According to Dr. Ellis, " it was exceedingly rare for anyone to survive so long in such a state." Medicine and massage prescribed by a specialist produced no effect ; she grew steadily worse, and arrangements were made for a lawyer, the two doctors and the American consul, to be present on the following morning in order that Madame Blavatsky might make her will. During the night, adds Countess Wachtmeister, " to my horror I began to detect that peculiar faint odour of death which sometimes precedes dissolution." Yet after a night of unconsciousness, Madame Blavatsky awoke in the morning with what almost seemed to be her normal health. She was able to dress and smoke and bandy witticisms with the lawyer who came to make her will and the doctor who had more than half expected to sign her death certificate. " Master has been here," she explained. " He gave me my choice, that I might die and be free if I would, or I might live and finish *The Secret Doctrine*. He told me how great would be my sufferings and what a terrible time I would have before me in England (for I am to go there) ; but when I thought of those students to whom I shall be permitted to teach a few things, and of the Theosophical Society in general, to which I have already given my heart's blood, I accepted the sacrifice, and now, to make it complete, fetch me some coffee and something to eat, and give me my tobacco box."¹

From Ostend, as she had predicted, Madame Blavatsky came to England. She stayed for a time with Mabel Collins, afterwards famous as the author of *Light on the Path*, at the house in Norwood known as " Maycot." The most important event while Madame Blavatsky was at " Maycot " was the formation of the Blavatsky Lodge, which was started in May, 1887. In many ways Madame

¹ *Reminiscences of H. P. B. and the " Secret Doctrine,"* p. 75.

Blavatsky was not entirely comfortable at Norwood. She had frequent altercations, more or less friendly, with Mabel Collins, and complained chiefly that the house was too small and the neighbourhood too suburban. Whenever she raised her voice in argument, it almost seemed that the structure must collapse. In September of the same year she removed to more congenial quarters at No. 17, Lansdowne Road, London, W., where, in October, 1888, the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society was established and her magazine *Lucifer* was started. It was at Lansdowne Road that *The Secret Doctrine*, which had by this time become "a huge pile of manuscript more than three feet high," was at last finished and published. Mr. Bertram Keightley has recorded that Madame Blavatsky "read and corrected two sets of galley proofs, then a page proof, and finally a revise in sheet, correcting, adding and altering up to the very last moment," the result being a printers' bill for corrections alone amounting to over £300.¹

Dr. Annie Besant joined the Theosophical Society in 1889. W. T. Stead had given her *The Secret Doctrine* for review, and it was the perusal of this work that caused her conversion :

"As I turned over page after page the interest became absorbing ; but how familiar it seemed ; how my mind leapt forward to presage the conclusions, how natural it was, how coherent, how subtle, and yet how intelligible. I was dazzled, blinded by the light in which disjointed facts were seen as parts of a mighty whole, and all my puzzles, riddles, problems, seemed to disappear. The effect was partially illusory in one sense, in that they all had to be slowly unravelled later, the brain gradually assimilating that which the swift intuition had grasped as truth. But the light had been seen, and in that flash of illumination I knew that the weary search was over and the very Truth was found."²

Shortly after Mrs. Besant joined the Society, Madame Blavatsky removed to Mrs. Besant's house, No. 19, Avenue Road, St. John's Wood, which henceforward became the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

² *Autobiography of Annie Besant*, p. 340.

London headquarters of the Society. Madame Blavatsky's health was still steadily failing. An article in *Piccadilly* for November 2nd, 1888, states that at that time she was unable even to perform the raps or the astral bell at will, because, owing to the weakness of her heart, the attempt would probably prove fatal. Yet she continued her literary labours with unremitting ardour. The third volume of *The Secret Doctrine*, which she did not live to complete, *The Voice of the Silence*, *The Key to Theosophy* and innumerable articles for *Lucifer* kept her constantly at her writing-desk from early in the morning until the evening. She frequently amused herself in the evenings by playing picquet in the great arm-chair which seems to have accompanied her on all her latter-day wanderings. The evening, too, was commonly the time for receiving every variety of visitor, for many enquirers, friends and many newspaper reporters sought her out in the latter days of her fame.

One of Madame Blavatsky's last actions was the formation of an Inner Group of the Esoteric Section. This Inner Group consisted of twelve members, of whom six were men and six women: Dr. Annie Besant, the Countess Wachtmeister, Mrs. I. Cooper-Oakley, Mrs. A. L. Cleather, Miss L. Cooper, Miss E. Kislingbury; Messrs. G. R. S. Mead, Walter R. Old, Dr. Archibald Keightley, Herbert Coryn, Claude Wright and — Sturdy.

In the spring of 1891 Madame Blavatsky contracted a severe attack of influenza. She failed to shake this off and gradually became worse, and to the heartfelt grief of all her friends, her malady ultimately proved fatal. Her last hours are described with great tenderness by Miss Laura Cooper in the memorial volume issued by the Theosophical Society:

“ During the day H. P. B. rallied and about three in the afternoon dressed, and with very little assistance walked into the sitting-room; when there she asked for her large arm-chair to be brought her, and while it was being placed in its old position near her writing-table, she stood merely leaning slightly against the table. The chair was turned facing into the room, and when

H. P. B. was sitting in it she had her card table with the cards drawn in front of her, and she tried to 'make a patience'; notwithstanding all these brave efforts it was quite apparent that she was suffering intensely, and that nothing but her powerful will could have sustained her in the struggle; the intense difficulty in breathing had brought a strained pathetic expression into H. P. B.'s dear face most pitiful to see, and it seemed to show even more when she attempted any return to her old habits. Dr. Mennell came shortly after 5 o'clock and was much surprised to find her sitting up, and he congratulated her and praised her courage; she said, 'I do my best, Doctor'; her voice was hardly above a whisper and the effort to speak was exhausting her, as her breath was very short, but she was less deaf and liked to hear conversation. She handed Dr. Mennell a cigarette she had managed with difficulty to prepare for him; it was the last she ever made. After a little time Dr. Mennell asked H. P. B. if she would mind seeing his partner Dr. Miller, and allowing him to listen to her chest; she consented, he came in at once, and the examination took place; a consultation was held, and then Dr. Mennell called Mrs. Oakley and myself to hear Dr. Miller's opinion. He considered H. P. B.'s condition very serious, owing to the bronchitis from which she was suffering and her extreme weakness; he advised a teaspoonful of brandy every two hours, the quantity to be increased if necessary. This change in the treatment was at once made, and it seemed to produce a good effect. Shortly after Dr. Mennell left H. P. B. returned to her bedroom and her chair was once again placed beside her bed; she was very tired, but asked as usual after the other invalids, particularly wishing to know if there was a good Lodge Meeting. The night that followed, her last with us, was a very suffering one; owing to the increased difficulty in breathing H. P. B. could not rest in any position; every remedy was tried without avail, and finally she was obliged to remain seated in her chair propped with pillows. The cough almost ceased, owing to her great exhaustion, though she had taken both medicine and stimulant with regularity. About 4 a.m. H. P. B. seemed easier, and her pulse was fairly strong, and from that time until I left her at 7 o'clock all went quietly and well. My sister then took my place, while I went for a few hours' rest, leaving word for Dr. Mennell to give me his opinion of H. P. B. when he called. This he did shortly after nine, and his report was satisfactory; the stimulant was having a good effect and the pulse stronger; he saw no cause

for immediate anxiety, advised me to rest a few hours, and told my sister she could go to her business. About 11.30 I was aroused by Mr. Wright, who told me to come at once as H. P. B. had changed for the worse, and the nurse did not think she could live many hours ; directly I entered the room I realised the critical condition she was in. She was sitting in her chair, and I knelt in front of her and asked her to try and take the stimulant ; though too weak to take the glass herself she allowed me to hold it to her lips, and she managed to swallow the contents ; but after that we could only give a little nourishment in a spoon. The nurse said H. P. B. might linger some hours, but suddenly there was a further change, and when I tried to moisten her lips I saw the dear eyes were already becoming dim, though she retained full consciousness to the last. In life H. P. B. had a habit of moving one foot when she was thinking intently, and she continued that movement almost to the moment she ceased to breathe. When all hope was over the nurse left the room, leaving C. F. Wright, W. R. Old and myself with our beloved H. P. B. ; the two former knelt in front, each holding one of her hands, and I at her side with one arm round her supported her head ; thus we remained motionless for many minutes, and so quietly did H. P. B. pass away that we hardly knew the second she ceased to breathe ; a great sense of peace filled the room, and we knelt quietly there until, first my sister, then the Countess arrived."

In accordance with the request made in her will, the mortal remains of Madame Blavatsky were cremated. Cremation took place at Woking cemetery on Monday, May the 11th, 1891, a day of beautiful spring sunshine. A funeral oration was delivered by Mr. G. R. S. Mead, and her ashes were divided into two portions and enshrined in two urns, one of which was designed for the purpose by the Swedish sculptor, Sven Bengtsson. Half of Madame Blavatsky's ashes are now preserved at Adyar ; the other was handed to W. Q. Judge for the American branch of the Society, before his exposure and consequent secession.

Although the last years of Madame Blavatsky's life were marked by unparalleled self-sacrifice and devotion to the

cause of Theosophy, and although she expended the last fraction of her strength for the movement she had at heart, working to the very day of her death, it cannot be said that this portion of her career was free from many serious mistakes and indiscretions similar to those which marred her earlier life. Madame Blavatsky was in continual danger of destroying with her left hand what she built up with her right ; and whenever anything went wrong she was always liable to make matters worse in her frantic efforts to put them in order. Thus she would have rushed into a lawsuit against the Coulombs had not Colonel Olcott and his colleagues restrained her. And when she was in Italy, in 1885, she wrote accusing him of having banished her, of sending her away in disgrace in order to save the Society, when the truth was that she had been ordered away by her physician. Yet there are still people who, ignoring the fact that Colonel Olcott expressed keen desire that she might return to India, blame him for acting as he did and accuse him of having harshly sent her into exile. She quarrelled seriously at this time with T. Subba Roa as to whether the principles of which the human entity consists are five or seven in number. Her breach with Subba Roa was so complete that he refused to read the manuscript of *The Secret Doctrine* for her, though he had originally promised to do so, and she had had it re-typed at a cost of £80. For no adequate reason she also accused Mr. Cooper-Oakley, the Managing Editor of *The Theosophist*, whom she herself had appointed to the position, of treachery, demanding his dismissal. The fact that Olcott refused to obey her was one of the reasons for starting *Lucifer* in September, 1887, one of her objects being, as she told Colonel Olcott, to have a personal organ in which she could say what she pleased. Sinnett interprets this in *The Early Days of Theosophy in Europe* as practically an admission that she wished to be independent of the Adyar headquarters. But this suggestion has to be weighed with Countess Wachtmeister's account of Madame Blavatsky's miraculous recovery at Ostend and her apparent

pre-knowledge of the students to whom she would be permitted "to teach a few things" (see also page 86).

Then, she allowed personal likes and dislikes to sway her unduly, and thus she sometimes changed friends into enemies. Particularly was this the case with Anna Kingsford, of whom she wrote in her letters in terms of unmitigated dislike. The result was that Mrs. Kingsford resigned her membership of the Society. No doubt Anna Kingsford had always been unsympathetic towards Eastern mysticism, and she now became for a time a powerful enemy of Madame Blavatsky.

On the whole, although the Theosophical Society was gaining in numbers and in notoriety, it cannot be said that its condition at the time of Madame Blavatsky's death was really healthy, and it was not until after the Judge and Leadbeater scandals had been cleared up that the Society entered comparatively smooth waters under the able leadership of Mrs. Besant. In 1891 it was near to disruption owing to the egotism and conflicting desires of its members. In America, William Q. Judge and Dr. Coues were in open and unfriendly rivalry, and ambitious individuals were tearing the Paris and London branches in pieces. In London, Sinnett, who had hitherto been head of the London Lodge, resented the arrival of Madame Blavatsky upon the scene, and this led to the London Lodge and the Blavatsky Lodge entering into unfriendly relations. Deterioration was partly due to Madame Blavatsky's egotism, but it was also the result of meanness, jealousy, ambition and suspicion on the part of Theosophical Society members, as may well be realised by reading the three books on Madame Blavatsky by Alice Leighton Cleather.¹

The last years in London had the result of provoking much newspaper publicity, and Countess Wachtmeister's *Reminiscences* includes reprints of articles published at this time in *The Path*, *Piccadilly*, *The New York Times*, *The Star*,

¹ *H. P. Blavatsky, her Life and Work for Humanity* ; *H. P. Blavatsky, a Great Betrayal* ; *H. P. Blavatsky as I knew Her*.

The Sunday Tribune and *The Commercial Gazette, Cincinnati*. But the most famous of all these was the attack by F. E. Garrett, entitled *Isis Very Much Unveiled*, first published in the *Westminster Gazette*. It is, however, nothing more than clever journalistic writing, and entirely worthless to either side as a serious contribution to the subject. It is satire masquerading as history.

Three books about Madame Blavatsky—two unfriendly and one absurd—were published shortly after her death. These were *A Modern Priestess of Isis*, by Solovyoff; *Madame Blavatsky and her "Theosophy,"* by Arthur H. Lillie; and *Blavatsky's Posthumous Memoirs*. The first of these is so important that a separate chapter is devoted to an examination of its contents, and brief reviews of the two latter may well be appended here. The chief claim to distinction of *Madame Blavatsky and her "Theosophy"* is that it includes within one set of covers summaries of practically all the accusations brought against her, all the principal exposures and satires under which she writhed, with the exception of Solovyoff's *A Modern Priestess of Isis*. The profundity of Mr. Lillie's book may be gauged from the fact that he accused Theosophy of being atheistic and Theosophical leaders of temporising, and of adapting their doctrine to popular demand. The gradual unfoldment of truth as revealed to the early Theosophists he construes into "a change of front," and gravely asserts that "'Theosophy' proclaims that at death the individual becomes practically two individuals, one of which takes off all the good qualities to the 'rosy slumber' of Devachan or Paradise. The second, with all the bad qualities, remains on the earth plane for a time, attends séances, deceives Spiritualists, and is by and by annihilated." He quotes as his authority for this grossly inadequate caricature of Theosophical doctrine an article which appeared in *The Theosophist* for October, 1881.

Mr. Lillie also criticises Madame Blavatsky for claiming

to have had seven years' probation before being accepted as an Initiate. Apparently ignorant of the fact that a Mahatma can leave the physical body at will and, travelling in the astral, perceive by clairvoyance events which take place at distant parts of the earth, Mr. Lillie quotes a statement by A. P. Sinnett: "'Never, I believe, in less than seven years from the time at which a candidate for initiation is accepted as a probationer, is he ever admitted to the very first of the ordeals.'" Commenting on the fact that these ordeals are reputed to be very severe and Madame Blavatsky was travelling in various parts of the globe when she claimed to have been undergoing them, Mr. Lillie asks: "But if no Brothers are by to inspect, how could these ordeals be quite satisfactory? A 'probationer' might take a bath at Ostend and announce a 'trial by water.'" "

Duty compels us to notice *Blavatsky's Posthumous Memoirs*. This book was published by Jos. M. Wade, of Boston, Mass., in 1896. Mr. Wade claimed that these memoirs were dictated by the spirit of Madame Blavatsky to a materialised form which operated a Yōst typewriter under the supervision of the spirit of Mr. G. W. N. Yōst, inventor of the machine operated. This extraordinary book, therefore, took Madame Blavatsky's name in vain and provided an unique advertisement for the Yōst typewriter in one breath.

The book itself was a fairly full account of the life of Madame Blavatsky, but it contains numerous absurdities as well as enough correct statement and character delineation to render it plausible and enough shrewdness to render it interesting. Of the latter nature are the reflections on A. P. Sinnett that purport to emanate from "H. P. B.":

"I take occasion to say here that he (Sinnett) was given his own prominence and notoriety upon my bruised and bleeding body . . . his lurid glow was the temporary reflection from my own personality."

She complains also that Sinnett made a fortune out of the sales of *The Occult World* and *Esoteric Buddhism*, while she herself "was practically without a penny."

Among the inaccuracies and absurdities must be mentioned Madame Blavatsky's *post-mortem* account of the Shrine at Adyar :

"I had M. Coulomb make me a shrine of well-seasoned wood and which I had sanctified and smoked in sandal-wood oils and other incantations, and which was made so that I could have access to it from my room, and also another opening for the use of the Colonel and the household.

"There was nothing suspicious about this shrine, and besides the chelas had to depend upon the substance of the messages received and not upon my integrity or goodwill. It was perfectly understood by those among us who received and maintained communications with the Brothers that the substance of the message was everything, and not the manner of its phenomenal delivery.

"In some cases I had to write the message out with my physical hand, and in others there was a show of independent delivery, but of such a subtle flavour that it could not be said other than that I handed it to the chela myself with my own physical hand, so that the fact of the shrine having two openings was well known among us of the household and it was not thought anything of."

Madame Coulomb, too, according to this astral "H.P.B.", was a Roman Catholic "of small mentality." Yet "Madame Blavatsky" makes the admission that "I had been so unfortunate as to have required some money of Madame Coulomb in Cairo."

Colonel Olcott's remarks on this book, published shortly after the *Posthumous Memoirs* first appeared, are in themselves sufficient refutation of its assertions.¹ He refers to an article printed in *The Theosophist* for March, 1883, in which occurs the following passage :

"While it is yet time, both the Founders of the Theosophical Society place upon record their solemn promise that they will let trance-mediums severely alone after they get to the 'other side.' If, after this, any of the talking fraternity take their names in vain,

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. IV, pp. 441 *et seq.*

they hope that at least their theosophical *confrères* will unearth this paragraph and warn the trespassers off their astral premises."

But if further argument is needed, that argument is provided by the fact that, with a person so highly developed psychically as was Madame Blavatsky, the lower principles, the astral and mental bodies, would be likely to disintegrate very shortly after death—a fact which is shown by the account given to the Countess Wachtmeister by a clairvoyant of her acquaintance. This clairvoyant had been favoured with astral visits from Madame Blavatsky while the latter was still in physical life, and a vision experienced shortly after death seems to show that Madame Blavatsky passed very rapidly to a lofty plane where physical sex is transcended :

" A few days after Madame Blavatsky died, H. P. B. awoke me at night. I raised myself, feeling no surprise, but only the sweet accustomed pleasure. She held my eyes with her leonine gaze. Then she grew finer, taller, her shape more masculine ; slowly then her features changed, until a man of height and rugged appearance stood before me, the last vestige of her features melting into his, until the leonine gaze, the progressed radiance of her glance alone remained. The man lifted his head and said : ' Bear Witness ! ' He then walked from the room, laying his hand on the portrait of H. P. B. as he passed. Since then he has come to me several times, with instructions, in broad daylight while I was busily working, and once he stepped out from a large portrait of H. P. B."

Nevertheless, although the style of the *Posthumous Memoirs* is on the whole inferior to that of the real Madame Blavatsky and almost always lacks force and crispness, there are certain respects in which it really resembles what it strives to imitate. Even some of its inaccuracies almost suggest the possibility of genuineness, for Madame Blavatsky herself was notoriously careless about the minor details and (in her opinion) more trivial facts of her existence. It is also like Madame Blavatsky to express warm friendship for Mr. Wade and to wish that she had known him during

earth-life, as her work would have benefited. He is another "only true friend and accepted chela."

Yet even Madame Blavatsky—though in private life she frequently dubbed her friends with playful and fantastic nicknames the originality of which was itself an expression of genius—would never have alluded in print (as she is made to do in the *Posthumous Memoirs*) to Mr. Keightley as "Bert," and to Dr. Besant as "Besant" and "poor Annie," apparently rejoicing in the fact that, after being imposed upon by W. Q. Judge, "she can never regain the confidence of the public in this work; and no matter what desire the Masters might have to give something to the world as to their intentions, they could not possibly do it through the organism of Mrs. Annie Besant, for it would only bring her into greater ridicule, and the public would not believe her credulity or even her honesty after her fall" (p. 148).

There is also a book by Mr. J. N. Maskelyne—*The Fraud of Modern "Theosophy" Exposed*—in which the usual charges against Madame Blavatsky and Mrs. Besant are recounted. But Mr. Maskelyne's book seems chiefly designed as an advertisement for his own conjuring tricks.

CHAPTER IX

SOLOVYOFF'S "A MODERN PRIESTESS OF ISIS"

THE Coulomb scandal and the Report of the Society for Psychical Research were not the only "exposures" by which the reputation of Madame Blavatsky has been assailed. Many of the phenomena which she produced were of such a nature as to arouse suspicion almost inevitably, especially among people who had had no experience of spiritualistic marvels or the power over the forces of nature said to be exercised by Occultists. In 1892, only a year after the death of Madame Blavatsky, yet another attack was made upon the Theosophical Society, and again the most lively discussion raged round the personality of Madame Blavatsky and her phenomena. The cloud which gathered against the Society in 1892 took the form of a now almost forgotten book, *A Modern Priestess of Isis*, by Vsevolod Solovyoff, which was first published during that year in the form of articles in eight of the monthly numbers of the *Russky Vyestnik* (Russian Messenger). To this magazine, when Mr. Katkoff was editor, Madame Blavatsky herself had been a contributor. The articles in the *Vyestnik* were soon republished as a book, and in 1895 there appeared an English abridged translation by Mr. Walter Leaf, with a commendatory preface by the Society for Psychical Research.

In *A Modern Priestess of Isis*, Solovyoff claimed not only to have detected Madame Blavatsky in the practice of fraud, but actually to have obtained her confessions, both verbal and written, of trickery and deceit. Solovyoff relates how he visited Madame Blavatsky in 1884, when she was staying

at Paris in the Rue Notre-Dame des Champs ; how he found her there, dwelling in “ poverty and obscurity ” ; how she accepted him as a member of the Theosophical Society and how he forthwith endeavoured to fathom the secret of her phenomena. Solovyoff implied that Madame Blavatsky went to extravagant and most humiliating lengths in the hope of winning him for the Theosophical Society. He was actually a member of the Society for a short time, but claims to have resigned after detecting Madame Blavatsky in the practice of deception. In writing his book he cleverly concealed the fact that at one time his attitude, whether sincere or assumed, was strongly favourable to Theosophy ; but this fact is proved by his early communications with the Society for Psychical Research.

A different version of this story is told by Colonel Olcott. According to the Colonel, it was not Madame Blavatsky who sought Solovyoff’s allegiance, but Solovyoff who begged from Madame Blavatsky initiation into the mysteries of Occultism. Madame Blavatsky, ever loyal to the Masters, refused his request because she discerned his moral unworthiness. Solovyoff revenged himself by writing *A Modern Priestess of Isis*.

His book is damaging on account of its plausibility, but at the same time its importance has been greatly overrated. On several important points it is unquestionably inaccurate. For instance, after saying that Madame Blavatsky had an extraordinary cynicism and contempt for mankind which, though usually concealed, broke out occasionally, he adds, “ But the time for these confessions was still far distant,” though his whole acquaintance with her only covered six weeks at Paris, six weeks at Wurzburg and a few days at Elberfeld. Madame Jelihowsky says that Solovyoff knew Madame Blavatsky so little that he was entirely unqualified to write about her. His testimony certainly has to be weighed against that of many other people who knew her far more intimately.

Among its other defects are cynical scepticism, unnatural

dialogue and a dramatic quality which one usually associates only with fiction. If the S.P.R. Report may be called a spiritual tragedy, then Solovyoff's *A Modern Priestess of Isis* is psychical melodrama. It is unconvincing in the extreme, and it seems incredible that the Society for Psychical Research should ever have honoured the work with the seal of their approbation. The explanation lies in the fact that, as Prof. Sidgwick remarked in a prefatory note to the volume, Madame Blavatsky's charlatanism was, in the opinion of the Society for Psychical Research, "a question already judged and decided." Probably, also, the S.P.R. may have felt that there is strength in numbers and therefore welcomed corroboration of their views from anyone.

Solovyoff claimed that Madame Blavatsky promised him phenomena and that he then detected her in fraud. The first phenomenon which she attempted in Solovyoff's presence was the reading by clairvoyance of a letter in a sealed envelope apparently just delivered by the postman. The letter, says Solovyoff, "was not only gummed in a stout, opaque envelope, but the postage stamp was affixed in the place of the seal." Placing this letter against her forehead, Madame Blavatsky "began to speak aloud with a visible effort, at the same time writing down her words upon a sheet of paper." When the clairvoyant reading of the letter was finished, Madame Blavatsky's sister, "Madame Y——," expressed doubt as to the success of the experiment. Thereupon Madame Blavatsky, apparently irritated, declared that she could do better even than this, and wrote at the bottom of the copy of the letter she had just made a theosophical sign in red pencil and also underlined one word in the letter. Then, "with a tense expression on her face, and obviously with a great effort of will, she announced: 'This sign must be at the end of the letter, and this word must be underlined in it.'" The letter was then handed to Miss X—— (a sister of Madame Blavatsky), who opened the envelope and found its contents approximated very closely to what Madame Blavatsky had just

read out and written. The theosophical sign and the red underlining also appeared as Madame Blavatsky had predicted. Solovyoff was dissatisfied with this phenomenon on the ground that its success was too great to be convincing : Miss X—— might have substituted a prepared letter for the one delivered by the postman, or, if no substitution was made during the experiment, the letter might have been prepared by Babula beforehand.

Similarly, a day or so later, Solovyoff was dissatisfied with the portrait of a Mahatma which Madame Blavatsky caused to appear inside a locket hanging round her neck. Solovyoff suspected that one locket was substituted for another, and asked that the portrait should be transferred to his cigar-case, inside his pocket. This, however, was not done ; but when he rose to depart, Madame Blavatsky insisted on his remaining another half an hour. Taking his hat from his hand, she placed it upon the marble chimney-piece. Solovyoff adds that he did not see any action to arouse his suspicions, but an inner voice said to him : “ The portrait is in the hat.” And sure enough, on taking up his hat in half an hour’s time, he found the portrait exactly as he had anticipated. He implies, of course, that Madame Blavatsky placed it there when she took the hat from her guest.

He then prints a vague, semi-compromising statement which he claims was made to him by Madame Blavatsky’s sister, Madame Y—— (Madame Jelihowsky). Madame Jelihowsky, of course, subsequently maintained that in this statement Solovyoff distorted and misrepresented what she said to him.

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Although Solovyoff is so entirely sceptical, one or two remarkable experiences recorded in *A Modern Priestess of Isis* call for reference. In August, 1884, he set out from Paris to visit Madame Blavatsky at Elberfeld ; and at Brussels, where he broke his journey and

stayed at the Grand Hotel, he encountered Miss A——, who was also on her way to Madame Blavatsky. On the morning fixed for continuing the journey, the keys of Miss A——'s portmanteau unaccountably disappeared, though they had been present the night before. It became necessary to send for a locksmith. The first portmanteau opened by the locksmith was found to contain a bunch of keys, and on the bunch the key of the portmanteau itself. Solovyoff seems to infer from this that Miss A—— must have been deceiving him, presumably by using a duplicate key. But the most curious part of the story is what follows. As they had now missed the nine o'clock train they agreed to take a walk in the city, and to start at one o'clock. But Solovyoff, who had been unable to sleep all night, suddenly experienced unusual weakness and a powerful desire to sleep. "I begged Miss A—— to excuse me," he writes, "went to my room, and threw myself on the bed. However, I did not fall asleep, but lay with my eyes closed,—and there before me, one after the other, passed, quite clear and distinct, various landscapes which I did not know. This was so new to me and so beautiful, that I lay without stirring, for fear of interrupting and spoiling the vision. At last all became misty, little by little, then grew confused, and I saw no more." He afterwards could not refrain from telling Miss A—— of what had happened to him, and described in detail the landscapes which he had seen. When they were in the train for Elberfeld, Miss A—— suddenly looked out of a window and exclaimed, "See, here is one of your landscapes!"

Solovyoff continues :

"The effect was almost painful. There could be no doubt about it, just as I could not doubt that this was the first time I had ever travelled by this line or been in this region. Until it grew dark, I continued to gaze in reality upon all I had seen in the morning, as I lay on my bed with my eyes closed."

On arriving at Elberfeld, Solovyoff found Madame

Blavatsky and her companions admiring Schmiechen's portraits of Mahatmas M. and K. H. The portraits were specially draped and “ illuminated by a brilliant, bluish light, concentrated and strengthened by mirrors.” The effect of this lighting, says Solovyoff, was surprising. When he looked at the portrait of Mahatma M., he had to force himself to remember that he was not gazing at a living man. He could not turn his eyes away ; and he complains that Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott kept him before this portrait for more than an hour. At last his head began to ache owing to the excessively bright light, and he “ felt all the symptoms of severe fatigue.” In company with Miss A—— he made his departure, but all the way back to the hotel they could talk of nothing but the wonderful portrait of the Master, and Solovyoff seemed to see Him standing before him in the darkness. When he shut his eyes he could still see the figure clearly in every detail. On reaching his room, he locked the door, undressed and went to sleep. The remainder of the story is related in Solovyoff's own words :

“ Suddenly I woke up, or, what is more probable, I dreamt, I imagined, that I was awakened by a warm breath. I found myself in the same room, and before me, in the half-darkness, there stood a tall human figure in white. I *felt* a voice, without knowing how or in what language, bidding me light the candle. I was not in the least alarmed, and was not surprised. I lighted the candle, and it appeared to me that it was two o'clock by the watch. The vision did not vanish. There was a living man before me, and this man was clearly none other than the original of the wonderful portrait, an *exact repetition* of it. He placed himself on a chair beside me, and told me in ‘ an unknown but intelligible language ’ various matters of interest to myself. Among other things he told me that in order to see him in his astral body I had had to go through much preparation, and that the last lesson had been given me that morning, when I saw with closed eyes the landscapes

through which I was to pass on the way to Elberfeld ; and that I possessed a great and growing magnetic force. I asked how I was to employ it ; but he vanished in silence. I thought that I sprang after him ; but the door was closed. The idea came upon me that it was an hallucination, and that I was going out of my mind. But there was Mahatma M. back again in his place, without movement, with his gaze fixed upon me, the same, exactly the same, as he was imprinted on my brain. He began to shake his head, smiled, and said, still in the voiceless, imaginary language of dreams : ‘ Be assured that I am not an hallucination and that your reason is not deserting you. Madame Blavatsky will show you to-morrow in the presence of all that my visit was real.’ He vanished ; I looked at my watch, and saw that it was about three o’clock ; I put out the candle, and went to sleep at once.”¹

An account of this experience was also published by the Society for Psychical Research in *Proceedings* for December, 1885. Solovyoff afterwards decided that the apparition of the Mahatma was an exceptionally vivid dream induced by the prolonged contemplation of the portrait by Schmiechen on the previous afternoon. The fact that Madame Blavatsky knew on the following morning that “ the ‘ Master ’ has been to see you with one of his chelas ” before Solovyoff had mentioned his vision, was attributed by him to a fortunate coincidence or a lucky shot, for Madame Blavatsky had more than once assured him, both by word of mouth and by letter, that the Master visited him.

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Gradually becoming more intimate with Madame Blavatsky, Solovyoff detected her—or, at least, claimed to have detected her—in fraud after fraud. Finally, he asserts that he obtained from her a definite admission of guilt. At Wurzburg, while in conversation with Madame Blavatsky, he detected Bavaji (Bowajee), who was at that time her

¹ *A Modern Priestess of Isis*, pp. 79, 80.

companion, “ keeping his eyes wide open, with a sort of contortion of his whole body, while his hand, armed with a great pencil, was carefully tracing some letters on a sheet of paper.

“ ‘ Look ; what is the matter with him ? ’ exclaimed Madame Blavatsky.

“ ‘ Nothing particular,’ I answered ; ‘ he is writing in Russian.’

“ I saw her whole face grow purple. She began to stir in her chair, with an obvious desire to get up and take the paper from him. But with her swollen and almost inflexible limbs she could not do so with any speed. I made haste to seize the paper and saw on it a beautifully *drawn* Russian phrase.

“ Bavaji was to have written, in the Russian language with which he was not acquainted : ‘ Blessed are they that believe, as said the Great Adept.’ He had learnt his task well, and remembered correctly the form of all the letters, but he had omitted two in the word ‘ believe.’ (The effect was precisely the same as if in English he had omitted the first two and last two letters of the word.)

“ ‘ Blessed are they that *lie*,’ I read aloud, unable to control the laughter which shook me. ‘ That is the best thing I ever saw. Oh, Bavaji ! you should have got your lesson up better for examination ! ’

“ The tiny Hindu hid his face in his hands and rushed out of the room ; I heard his hysterical sobs in the distance. Madame Blavatsky sat with distorted features.”¹

Similarly, Solovyoff frequently heard what Colonel Olcott called Madame Blavatsky’s “ occult bells,” or, as Solovyoff describes it, her “ silver bell.” But one day, when the sound of the bell had just been heard, “ suddenly something fell beside her on the ground. I hurried to pick it up—and found in my hands a pretty little piece of silver, delicately worked and strangely shaped. Helena Petrovna changed countenance, and snatched the object from me,

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

I coughed significantly, smiled, and turned the conversation to different matters.”¹ It is singular that Solovyoff apparently never heard this bell emit more than one note, presumably always the same note. Olcott and Sinnett both repeatedly remark that the bells were able to play a considerable musical scale and frequently imitated notes struck on musical instruments, or sometimes glasses, in the room. Presumably the “pretty little piece of silver” would hardly have been sufficiently complex for such feats of music.

Being bidden by Madame Blavatsky to open a drawer and look for a photograph of Subba Rao, Solovyoff “found the photograph . . . together with a packet of Chinese envelopes such as I well knew; they were the same in which the ‘elect’ used to receive the letters of the Mahatmas M. and K. H. by ‘astral post.’

“‘Look at that, Helena Petrovna! I should advise you to hide this packet of the ‘Master’s’ envelopes farther off. You are so terribly absent-minded and careless.’

“It is easy to imagine what this was to her. I looked at her, and was positively frightened; her face grew perfectly black. She tried in vain to speak; she could only writhe helplessly in her great arm-chair.”²

As a result of these discoveries Solovyoff claimed to have extracted her verbal admission of trickery, after pretending that he was willing to become an accomplice:

“ . . . ‘when I was caught I wriggled out, and it always ended in those who had found me out being left with empty hands.’

“‘Are you alone the author of Koot Hoomi’s letters, philosophical and otherwise?’

“‘No, the chelas used sometimes to help me, Damodar and Subba Rao and Mohini.’

“‘And Sinnett?’

“‘Sinnett won’t invent gunpowder; but he has a beautiful style, he is splendid at editing.’

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 149-50.

² *Ibid.*, p. 152.

“ ‘ And Olcott ? ’

“ ‘ Olcott is not bad at editing either, when he understands what he is talking about. But one has to chew everything for him till one is sick. . . . He has very often helped me in phenomena, both over there and here. But he can never think of anything for himself.’ ”¹

Another point against her. Solovyoff quotes her statement to the effect that owing to naturalisation as a citizen of the United States she lost every right to her pension of 5000 roubles yearly as the widow of a high Russian official. Solovyoff’s comment on this is as follows :²

“ What will the modest and honourable N. V. Blavatsky (who though old is still alive) say, when he hears that he is a ‘ high official in Russia,’ and that his widow was to receive, during his lifetime, a pension of 5000 roubles a year ? What an irony of fate ! Helena Petrovna, while still almost a child, married a middle-aged official in spite of her relations ; after a stormy and almost incredible career, she died at sixty years of age, and he, though she had long given herself out as a widow, survives her.”

Solovyoff evidently mentioned this point to Madame Blavatsky, for in a postscript to one of her letters to Sinnett she wrote :³

“ Maybe what Solovyoff tells me of old Blavatsky ‘ whom you (I) have prematurely buried ’—is a wicked fib of his, thinking the news would overwhelm me, and perhaps it is not. I never had an official intimation of his death, only what I learned through my Aunt at New York, and again here. ‘ His country seat ruined, he ‘ himself had left years ago ’ and news had come ‘ he was dead.’ I never bothered my brains about the old man : he never was anything to me, not even a *legitimate*, though hated *husband*. Yet if it turned out to be truth—(his father died when 108 and my own grandmother at nearly 112) and we talking all the while of him as though he were in Devachan or Avitchi—it would bring no end of trouble.”

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

² *Ibid.*, p. 116.

³ *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*. Letter No, LXXVI, pp. 180-1.

It must be noticed that all Solovyoff's really damaging evidence consists of statements which he alleges that Madame Blavatsky made to him verbally. And as he withheld them from publication during her lifetime, but hastened to publish them within a year after her death (using the fact that Madame Jelihowsky had published an article about her in a Russian magazine as his very excellent excuse), positively no weight whatever can be attached to them as evidence. The whole story is so melodramatic that it must assuredly have been adapted. It reads like a work of fiction. And even if Madame Blavatsky were the shameless impostor which Solovyoff would have us believe, it seems incredible that she should ever have made the admissions of which Solovyoff accuses her. Even if they were true, it is unbelievable that she would have confessed so shamelessly to Solovyoff, even though he feigned friendship and won her confidence. It is far more probable that Solovyoff, in the ice-cold cruelty and treachery of his heart, and in lust for notoriety and monetary gain, invented the whole story. At any rate, he is amply discredited by his own pen, for on October 8th, 1885, he wrote to Madame Blavatsky from Paris a letter from which the following is an extract. Madame Blavatsky was then resident at Wurzburg, and the letter must therefore have been written after the interviews he claims to have had with her at Paris and Elberfeld, and at a time proximate to that when, according to the statements made in *A Modern Priestess of Isis*, Madame Blavatsky confessed to him that she resorted to trickery and that, in fact, she was nothing other than a criminal :

“ I have made friends with Madam Adam, and talked to her a great deal about you ; I have greatly interested her, and she has told me that her *Revue* is open not only to theosophy but to a defence of yourself personally if necessary. . . . To-day I passed the morning with Richet, and again talked a great deal about you, in connection with Myers and the Psychical Society. I can say positively

that I convinced Richet of the reality of your personal power and of the phenomena which proceed from you.”¹

After such shameless hypocrisy and treachery, anything Solovyoff might say against Madame Blavatsky must be written down as worthless. Plainly he was a liar. And it is more than a little surprising that the Society for Psychical Research, who are usually so strict in the standard of accuracy and veracity they demand from witnesses, should have attributed such unjustifiable importance to his book. It is safe to say that if any medium had been detected in the treachery and untruthfulness of which Solovyoff stands convicted, no evidential value whatever would be admitted by the Society as attaching to his phenomena, and probably it would be gravely asserted in a lengthy official report “no genuine phenomenon whatever has ever occurred in connection with him, and his pretended mediumship is entirely fraudulent.” But because Solovyoff was on the side of prejudice and orthodoxy no such adverse opinion was expressed against his testimony.

And yet the Society for Psychical Research at least endeavoured to be impartial, even if it cannot be said to have achieved distinguished success. Solovyoff, making no attempt to conceal his hatred, is her avowed enemy. Moreover, by asserting that Colonel Olcott was an accomplice he passes beyond the limits to which even the Society for Psychical Research and Madame Coulomb dared go, for both these accusers referred to Olcott as a perfectly honest simpleton. “He has been called a dupe,” wrote Dr. Annie Besant, “but never an accomplice.” According to Dr. Hodgson, Colonel Olcott’s statements were unreliable owing either to “peculiar lapses of memory or to extreme deficiency in the faculty of observation.” Dr. Hodgson found it “impossible . . . to place the slightest value upon the evidence” offered by the Colonel.²

¹ Quoted by Madame Jelihowsky in her reply to Solovyoff; see Appendix to *A Modern Priestess of Isis*.

² S.P.R. Report, Vol. III, Part IX, p. 239.

Again, on pages 310 and 311 of the same Report, it is stated that: "Some readers may be inclined to think that Colonel Olcott must himself have taken an active and deliberate part in the fraud, and been a partner with Madame Blavatsky in the conspiracy. Such, I must emphatically state, is not my own opinion." Dr. Hodgson thought, however, that the Colonel had no capacity for estimating evidence and that he probably believed he remembered circumstances that never happened.

Madame Blavatsky's so-called written "confession" to Solovyoff is no confession at all. It consists of a letter obviously written in an hysterical condition and expresses the extravagant fury which has been described by all her friends again and again. As a statement of fact it is worthless. As a confession of deception it is worthless. Indeed, it may be construed, on the other hand, as a protestation of martyred honesty. It simply indicates that for the time being Madame Blavatsky had lost her self-control. The passage in which she is said by Solovyoff to have made her confession is as follows:

"I will even take to lies, to the greatest of lies, which for that reason is the most likely of all to be believed. I will say and publish it in *The Times* and in all the papers, that the 'master' and 'Mahatma K. H.' are only the product of my own imagination: that I *invented* them, that the phenomena were all more or less *spiritualistic* apparitions. . . . I will say in certain instances I *fooled* people; I will expose dozens of *fools, des hallucinés*; I will say that I was making trial for my own satisfaction, for the sake of experiment. And to this I have been brought by *you*."

Certainly this letter sounds as though the scepticism of Solovyoff had goaded her into a frenzy. It cannot be called a "confession." She says herself that it would be "the greatest of lies."¹

¹ (See *Letters* XCIII and XCIV, pp. 213-14). She writes to Mr. Sinnett at the same time and tells him *why* she said this to Solovyoff. She would be driven to this "gigantic lie" as a last resource to

Probably the most damaging chapters in Solovyoff's book are not those in which he purports to recount his own personal experiences, but those near its close in which he discusses the inception of the Theosophical Society in America and quotes from letters written by Madame Blavatsky to Prof. Aksakoff. In one of these letters, dated November 14th, 1874, Madame Blavatsky indirectly seems to confess that during her youth she had been guilty of immoral conduct :

“ Whoever it was told you about me, they told you the truth, in essence, if not in detail. . . . Morality and good deeds I regarded as a social garment, for the sake of propriety. . . . I hated ‘ society ’ and the so-called world as I hated hypocrisy in whatever form it showed itself ; *ergo*, I ran amuck against society and the established proprieties. Result : three lines in your letter, which have awakened all the past within me and torn open all the old wounds. . . . Do not deprive me of the good opinion of Andrew J. Davis. Do not reveal to him that which, if he knew it and were convinced, would force me to escape to the ends of the earth. I have only one refuge left in the world, and that is the respect of the spiritualists of America, who despise nothing so much as ‘ free love. ’ ”

Here, again, it must be recognised that the actual confession—if such it must be called—is of an exceedingly vague nature. It hints vaguely at sexual immorality. And while the question of personal purity is of paramount importance in a religious teacher, it must not be forgotten that, rightly or wrongly, public opinion on these questions has changed enormously in the last decades. Divorce and even worse entanglements no longer cause the ruin of public characters in the way they used to do during the Victorian era. And however mistaken the present age may be, large numbers of people to-day would probably sympathise with Madame Blavatsky rather than condemn her for daring to “ run amuck against society and the established proprieties ”

dissociate the Masters whom she so revered from all the scandal which had gathered round herself in her endeavour to present to the world some of their transcendental teachings.

Madame Blavatsky's own explanation of this matter was that in her early womanhood she had saved the honour of a friend by adopting this friend's child as her own. She had educated this child herself and openly called him her son. He had since died.

Although this story sounds, on the surface, highly improbable, it is supported by evidence which Colonel Olcott was able to publish in Vol. III, p. 319, of *Old Diary Leaves*. When at Wurzburg in 1885, Madame Blavatsky fell ill and was obliged to be under medical attendance, and her friends among the German Theosophists obtained from the medical practitioner the following certificate :

"The undersigned testifies, as requested, that Madame Blavatsky, of Bombay—New York Corresponding Secretary of the Theosophical Society—is at present under the medical treatment of the undersigned. She suffers from *Anteflexio Uteri*, most probably from the day of her birth ; because as proven by a minute examination, she has never borne a child, nor has she had any gynæcological illness.

(Signed) DR. LEON OPPENHEIM.

Wurzburg, 3rd November, 1885.

"The signature of Dr. Leon Oppenheim is hereby officially attested.

Wurzburg, 3rd November, 1885.

The Royal Medical Officer of the District.

(Signed) DR. MED. ROEDER.

"We, the undersigned, hereby certify that the above is a correct translation of the German original before us.

Wurzburg, November 4th, 1885.

(Signed) HUBBE SCHLEIDEN.

(„) FRANZ GEBHARD."

So this very black accusation against her is flatly contradicted by an official document the force and authority of which cannot be denied.¹ Yet, in spite of this certificate,

¹ See also *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. III, p. 246. Testimony of Tamil nurse to H. P. B.'s virginity. Colonel Olcott also had a number of letters in his possession proving her innocence.

Madame Blavatsky refused to publish the truth about this adopted child.¹

Solovyoff also takes up Dr. Hodgson's suggestion that Madame Blavatsky was a Russian spy and declares that she made the following admission, or, to be more exact, assertion :

“ I wish to propose myself as a secret agent of the Russian Government in India. . . . I can easily organise a gigantic rebellion. . . . Only they must give me the pecuniary means. . . . I proposed the same thing before, some years ago, when Timasheff was still minister ; but I did not receive any answer.”

It should be noted, however, that the foregoing, even if true, is not an admission of espionage, but only an admission that she would like to play the part of a spy if an opportunity arose. And therefore Dr. Hodgson was incorrect in suspecting that she had secret political motives in going to India. The fact that she was ceaselessly shadowed for a whole year after her arrival in India and then allowed to go without further surveillance should be sufficient proof of the baselessness of the speculation ; and the above statement, if really uttered by Madame Blavatsky, would place the whole matter beyond dispute. She was *not* a spy. But it is impossible to believe that she ever made such an admission to Solovyoff as that “ I proposed the same thing before, some years ago.” Such prattle would be worse than insanity and would be far more incredible than her much debated and much doubted phenomena. Reading between the lines, it seems likely that in the “ spy ” incident, if it really occurred, Madame Blavatsky was endeavouring to probe Solvoyoff and discern his motives. He adds that she looked at him in a peculiar manner, and made no reply when he invited her to give him her written statement to the effect that she was willing to become a spy, the suggestion being that Solovyoff would lodge her document with the proper official. No doubt

¹ See *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*. Letter No. LXI, pp. 151 and 154.

this document, had she written it, would have made a great sensation in a special chapter of *A Modern Priestess of Isis*.

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A considerably more serious accusation has been made against Madame Blavatsky by Mr. Emmette Coleman.¹ Mr. Coleman has asserted that *Isis Unveiled* contains about two thousand unacknowledged quotations, and that *The Secret Doctrine* is largely plagiarised from Wilson's translation of the *Vishnu Purana* and Prof. Winchell's *World Life*. The two last-named works, says Mr. Coleman, form the basis of *The Secret Doctrine*, but numerous other books are also quoted without acknowledgment. The *Stanzas of Dzyan*, claimed by Madame Blavatsky to be a translation from the oldest scripture in the world, contains, according to Mr. Coleman, "statements copied from nineteenth-century books." And *The Voice of the Silence*, supposed to be translated from a Thibetan manuscript, contains "intermingled Sanskrit, Pali, Thibetan, Chinese and Sinhalese terms—a manifest absurdity in a Thibetan work." The language, however, of *The Voice of the Silence*, and also of *The Stanzas of Dzyan*, is Madame Blavatsky's own. In other words, she was an unique poetic genius. For Mr. Coleman gravely remarks that *The Voice of the Silence* "is a compilation of ideas and terminology from various nineteenth-century books, the diction and phraseology being those of Madame Blavatsky." Similar plagiarisms, says Mr. Coleman, are traceable in the Mahatma letters.

But even with this evidence against her it is by no means certain that, in writing her books, Madame Blavatsky was guilty of conscious dishonesty. Colonel Olcott suggests that ignorance of the literary code of honour, her carelessness and the chaos in which she used to work may have accounted for some of her omissions to acknowledge quotations. In *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, in particular, her deliberate purpose was to quote from as

¹ See Appendix to Solovyoff's *A Modern Priestess of Isis*.

many sources as possible in order to show the underlying unity of religions and philosophies. Moreover, many witnesses, including the Countess Wachtmeister and Dr. Besant, have testified to the fact that many of Madame Blavatsky's quotations were copied not from actual books but from astral visions of them. Mr. Bertram Keightley makes a similar statement, and adds that in verifying extracts copied out by this means, his work of reference at the British Museum was complicated by the fact that Madame Blavatsky used to get the page numbers of her quotations reversed (for instance, 321 instead of 123), showing that she had copied her quotations from reversed reflections in the astral light. It was by this means that *The Voice of the Silence* was written. Dr. Besant, who was in the same room with Madame Blavatsky at Fontainebleau while the latter was at work, says that *The Voice of the Silence*, which is a prose-poem of extraordinary beauty, was not a work of original composition. A large portion of it was produced each day, and between the writing down of each phrase Madame Blavatsky paused and gazed at a point in space before her, apparently reading (as, indeed, she claimed to be) from a book or manuscript which she discerned by astral vision.

Madame Blavatsky's writings, then, were either inspired through the channel of her unusual psychic senses, or else, at the very least, they result from

- (a) The appearance in the form of phantoms or visions of books which she had read, whereby she obtained access to the hidden stores of her memory in the belief that she was guided by the Mahatmas ; or
- (b) Visions of printed matter or manuscript in which the subconscious mind and memory had intermingled, combined and adapted, matter which she had read and which she copied from the “ astral light ” in the belief that it was original work of the Mahatmas passed on to her by means of her vision.

Neither of these alternatives is impossible and neither is synonymous with fraud. Moreover, similar cases are provided in the persons of Andrew Jackson Davis and Stainton Moses, both of whom, on several occasions, showed that they possessed super-normal means of access to books and printed matter. And an occasion when Jackson's powers of clairvoyance of printed matter led him quite innocently into a compromising situation is described in the conclusion to this book (see page 257). There is a good deal of evidence, then, to show that there is at least a *possibility* that Madame Blavatsky may have been an unintentional offender in the matter of plagiarism and unacknowledged quotation; and the evidence is further strengthened by the undeniable fact that she toiled night and day at *The Secret Doctrine* in the hope that its publication would establish theosophical doctrines on a firm philosophical basis, independent of discredited phenomena. She even hoped that, far from adding to her shame, the book would become her vindication in the eyes of the world.¹

Equally puzzling is the apparent inconsistency to be detected in her attitude towards Spiritualism. Solovyoff, as is only to be expected, makes much of this. The letters to Aksakoff published in *A Modern Priestess of Isis* include statements such as these:

“ I am a ‘ spiritist ’ and ‘ spiritualist ’ in the full significance of the two titles. . . . I have now been a spiritist for more than ten years, and now all my life is devoted to the doctrine. I am struggling for it and trying to consecrate to it every moment of my life. Were I rich, I would spend all my money to the last farthing *pour la propagande de cette divine vérité.* ”

It was in connection with Spiritualism that Madame Blavatsky first made the acquaintance of Colonel Olcott. They met at the Eddy homestead, where the Eddy brothers were holding their much-discussed séances. Moreover, for some months Madame Blavatsky was extremely active with her

¹ See page 257 of this book.

pen in the cause of Spiritualism, writing, it is said, scores of articles in the American papers. When the exposure of the mediums, Mr. and Mrs. Holmes, occurred, she at first defended them. Subsequently she seems to have admitted to Olcott that they were guilty of deception. These facts are certainly hard to reconcile with her bitter hostility to Spiritualism in later years, and Solovyoff suggested that she abandoned Spiritualism in favour of Theosophy solely from mercenary motives. The Holmes exposure made Spiritualism extremely unpopular for a time in America, and by her own admission to Aksakoff (letter dated May 24th, 1875) the writers on Spiritualism found it difficult to make a living :

“ Look at poor A. J. Davis ; he can barely keep body and soul together, his books are not selling at all. The *Banner* has fallen from 25,000 subscribers to 12,000. Olcott is sitting on heaps of his *People from the Other World*, like Marius on the ruins of Carthage, and thinking bitter things. Not a thousand copies of his book have been sold in five months. Epes Sargent, the favourite and most learned of the American authors, the only spiritist whom everyone respects and who has hitherto been regarded as an authority, is lighting his stove with his *Proof Palpable of Immortality*, his last work. Robert Dale Owen has hidden himself, and vanished from the face of the earth.”

It is scarcely fair, and certainly not logical, to infer from this that Madame Blavatsky therefore caused the Theosophical Society to be started, simply in order to obtain a livelihood. There is no evidence in support of such an assertion, and the letter of Madame Blavatsky to Aksakoff on which Solovyoff bases his accusation is in itself a striking testimonial to her frankness and simplicity. It provides strong support, too, for the statement frequently made by people who knew her intimately that she was frank and honest to a fault and temperamentally incapable of deceit.

Even the Society for Psychical Research acquitted the Founders of the Theosophical Society of any mercenary motive, adding that had there been the least reason to

suspect money-making motives on the part of Madame Blavatsky or Colonel Olcott, the famous S.P.R. enquiry would never have been made. It is certain that both the Founders contributed to the funds of the Society to the utmost limit of their resources, besides devoting all their time and energies to theosophical labour. The suggestion that Madame Blavatsky may have been endeavouring to make money by means of Theosophy is disproved by the fact that after writing "From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan" for the *Russky Vyestnik*, Madame Blavatsky received an invitation from the editor of that journal to contribute regularly to its pages on very favourable terms of remuneration; in fact, on the same terms as those accorded Turgeniev. Madame Blavatsky rejected this offer in obedience to her Masters, who intended that *The Secret Doctrine* should be produced through her agency. She had the choice of romantic fiction, honour and a good income on the one hand, or the writing of an occult treatise at the dictation of the Adepts, with consequent abuse and poverty on the other; and she deliberately chose the latter alternative. Moreover, the general truth of this statement is admitted even by Solovyoff, for in what purports to be the last interview between Madame Blavatsky and himself he reports himself as having said:

"Have pity on yourself; throw away all this horrible tinsel, resign the Theosophical Society, as you yourself wished to do not long ago, nurse your health in quiet, and write. You have a real literary talent; this can supply you with a livelihood and with satisfaction for your self-love."

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Madame Blavatsky's hostility to Spiritualism certainly seems to have been an unfortunate and mistaken policy inasmuch as it was an injustice to a movement which she had once supported. Her attitude was certain to lead to misunderstandings. In one of the earliest issues of *The Theosophist* she stated that one of the objects of the Society

was “ to put down Spiritualism,” and this hostile attitude she maintained consistently throughout her theosophical career, *The Key to Theosophy*, one of her latest works, containing several extraordinarily bitter invectives against this much despised and unfortunate movement.

This attitude, as we have said, is hard to understand. Madame Blavatsky’s own explanation was that she was at first told by the Masters to associate herself with Spiritualism in order to demonstrate that the spiritualistic interpretation of the phenomena was not in every respect the right one and to lead Spiritualists by degrees to the theosophical position. Afterwards this attitude was changed to active hostility. It is to be presumed that the bitterness towards Spiritualism which Madame Blavatsky afterwards displayed was aggravated by the misunderstandings and “ exposures ” to which she was subjected.¹ D. D. Home accused her of fraud ; Madame Coulomb herself was a spiritualistic medium, and there were other Spiritualists, such as Mr. Kiddle, who accused her of plagiarism and other forms of dishonesty. Thus Madame Blavatsky’s legitimate objections to the dangers which accompany the practice of Spiritualism, and her warnings that departed friends or relatives are sometimes impersonated by deceitful spirits on the lower regions of the astral plane, as well as by deceitful mediums, were intensified by personal bitterness. Her theory of the “ astral shell,” which she said was all that communicates at séances and is a mere spirit-automaton or corpse from which the consciousness has departed, seems incredible. Probably it is a part-truth, and there is little doubt that Madame Blavatsky exaggerated its importance. It is rarely put forward by her followers without modification.

Nothing is more certain than that Theosophy was originally a development from Spiritualism, and that the

¹ According to Sinnett’s *Incidents*, p. 157 (old edition), p. 123 (later edition), that as early as 1858 Helena Petrovna Blavatsky repudiated the theory of psychic phenomena as held by Spiritualists.

two movements have a great deal in common. The estrangement between them is therefore the more to be deplored. Western Spiritualism, it should be remembered, is an extremely new thing, and the goal to which it will finally lead is still uncertain. But in the East, Spiritualism has been understood for thousands of years, and Theosophy is based upon the Eastern religions which conform to, and in some respects may even be said to be derived from, Spiritualism—Spiritualism vastly older, far more complete, infinitely subtler, profounder and more highly developed than that with which, as yet, the West is familiar. This is Madame Blavatsky's vindication in dissociating herself from Western Spiritualism and allying herself with Eastern Occultism.

As for Solovyoff's suggestion that Madame Blavatsky's spirit-control, "John King," was transformed into Mahatma M. or K. H. by simply dressing him in Eastern garb, the mere idea is ludicrous. The references to John King during Madame Blavatsky's spiritualistic period all point to his objective reality as a spiritual being. Even John King's unreliability, and the tendency to lying and deceiving which Madame Blavatsky admitted having found in him, all point to his genuineness as a denizen of the astral plane and not to an origin in Madame Blavatsky's imagination. Why may not Madame Blavatsky have been in contact with John King at that time as well as with the Mahatmas?

It almost seems unnecessary to point out the numerous respects in which Solovyoff's work shows an unreasonable and unreasoning bias against Madame Blavatsky and Theosophy; but as we believe that *A Modern Priestess of Isis* is still the means of keeping many people from the Theosophical Society, it is plainly a duty to indicate these points in detail. In the first place, the book shows that Solovyoff himself was cruel and cynical, unlovable and unloving. If it is true that he detected Bavaji in the act of forging a Mahatmic communication, it must be true

also that when Bavaji wrote “ Blessed are they that lie,” Solovyoff laughed—whereas a nobler spirit would have wept. Again Solovyoff reveals his nature when he remarks in the second chapter of his book that when he called for the first time on Madame Blavatsky he “ expected to see something which in many ways would be magnificent ” and had prepared himself “ for the solemn audience.” He was convinced that he would find “ a row of carriages at her door ” and that he should present himself “ in the midst of a great and varied company of her visitors.” But instead of this, he is shocked to find himself “ in a long mean street on the left bank of the Seine. The house,” he adds, “ was unsightly enough to look at, and at the door there was not a single carriage.” Other indications of poverty and obscurity seem to disgust him or arouse his contempt. Later on, he accompanies Madame Blavatsky and Bavaji on a journey, but at Lucerne decides not to continue the journey with them : “ she and Bavaji attracted general attention, and were the centre of the excessively amused glances of the public.” Such snobbishness, perhaps, is only to be expected from a Russian author holding the post of Page of Honour to the Czar, especially bearing in mind the entire corruption of the Russian autocracy, the scoundrels which that system, now happily destroyed for ever, produced in such enormous numbers, and the fact that almost all Russian authors who, in addition to “ high repute,” were possessed of insight and moral courage, were socialists. There are abundant passages in *A Modern Priestess of Isis* which show that the dark ages of mediæval tyranny and superstition still lingering in Russia had cast their shadow upon the mind of Solovyoff. The fear of everlasting perdition drives him from Madame Blavatsky in frenzies of fanatical fear. He calls her a “ thief of souls.” He shows hostility to Buddhism and gives the impression of being a Russian orthodox Christian. He accuses Madame Blavatsky of having fallen into the hands of some secret politico-religious Indian brotherhood, and of having

adopted Buddhism and undertaken the mission of spreading it in "regions where Christianity had fallen and there was felt the yearning for some faith." He puts into the mouth of Madame Blavatsky the most improbable confession that, "I would gladly be Russian, Christian, orthodox." On uttering a few words of consolation to Madame Blavatsky's sister, Miss X——, who had recently lost a near relative, Solovyoff is shocked because she replied in a peculiar tone of voice: "Thank you, thank you. . . . No one has ever spoken to me like that. You have convinced me, now I understand it all. I am at peace. Thank you." And he answers: "Pardon me; but what I have said is only what any orthodox priest to whom you applied might have said to you."¹ And the success of the Theosophical Society he attributes to decadence among its members: "Such a success for such a cause can only flourish on a soil watered by morbid exhalations, among people truly degenerate and at the same time unconsciously exhausted by profound and torturing unbelief. When faith vanishes from among men, its place is inevitably taken by superstitions of every sort. The weariness of unbelief, working on the degenerate organism, leads on fatally to the fanaticism of superstition."²

Nor is he any kinder to Madame Blavatsky's friends and associates. He accuses her sister, Madame Jelihowsky, of having practically admitted Madame Blavatsky's dishonesty. He cannot trust Babula because he knows that "he was a most consummate rascal"; and is amply convinced of his rascality by "a glance at his face."³ Mohini, he says, was only prevented from being "perfectly beautiful" by "thick dark blue lips, projecting through a not overabundant growth of moustache and beard"; and he asserts that "several female hearts in Asia and Europe could tell tales of the beauty of this young apostle of the newest theosophy." But he does not explain precisely what he means by this undeniably spiteful innuendo, nor

¹ p. 41.² p. 284.³ p. 65.

on what evidence, if any, it is based. Possibly it is an inference from the fact that Mohini had “ thick blue lips.”¹ Bavaji, whom Solovyoff claimed to have detected in shameless treachery, is described as having “ a tiny piteous figure ” and he indulges in “ apish movements,”² whereas anyone who cares to consult the photograph of the group of delegates to the 1884 Convention at Adyar, published in *Old Diary Leaves* (Vol. III, pp. 192-3), in which Bavaji appears, will see that his countenance was broad, open and sensitive—strongly suggestive of spiritual power and honesty. Even Colonel Olcott, who was almost without an enemy and universally admired and respected, is called by Solovyoff “ a liar and a knave, in spite of his stupidity.”³ In Chapter V⁴ Solovyoff gives the following highly charitable and Christian-spirited description of the Colonel’s personal appearance :

“ He was a man of fully fifty years of age, of medium height, robust and broad, but not fat ; from his energy and vivacity of movement he looked anything but an old man, and showed every sign of great strength and sound health. His face was handsome and pleasant, and suited his bald head, and was framed in a full and perfectly silver beard. He wore spectacles, somewhat concealing thereby the one defect of his appearance, which none the less was a real ‘ spoonful of tar in a barrel of honey.’ The fact is that one of his eyes was extremely disobedient, and from time to time used to turn in all directions, sometimes with startling and most disagreeable rapidity. As long as the disobedient eye remained still, you had before you a handsome, agreeable and kindly, but not particularly clever man, who won you by his appearance and inspired you with confidence. Then suddenly something twitched, the eye got loose and began to stray suspiciously and knavishly, and confidence vanished in a moment.”

¹ p. 18. See also *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*. Letter No. L. ² p. 161. ³ p. 115. ⁴ pp. 36-37.

As no other writer has remarked this peculiarity in Colonel Olcott, it is not unreasonable to believe those who knew him and who say that, although the Colonel had "a slight cast in one eye," he had no such affliction as Solovyoff attributes to him.

It is undeniable, therefore, that at the time when Solovyoff wrote *A Modern Priestess of Isis* he was bitterly inimical not only towards Madame Blavatsky and Theosophy, but to all her intimate friends and relatives. Possibly this attitude was deliberately adopted in order to draw attention from the fact that he had not only once been a member of the Theosophical Society, but, by his own written admission, had been favourably disposed towards Occultism.

Solovyoff makes another criticism of the Theosophical Society on pages 281 and 282, which, in view of subsequent theosophical developments, can scarcely be said to correspond to facts, however much it may have seemed to do so at the time when his work was published. "When in 1884 Madame Blavatsky, Olcott and Mohini came, or were sent, to Europe," says Solovyoff, "they appeared with cunning, and declared that their Society was purely scientific, and occupied only with the investigation of 'Oriental learning'; that it not only did not wound, but profoundly respected the beliefs of its members, to whatever religion they belonged." But in declarations of this sort, according to Solovyoff, the Theosophical Society "shockingly deceived" its members, for it soon became clear that "it was no universal scientific brotherhood, to which the followers of all religions might with a clear conscience belong, but a group of persons who had begun to preach in their organ, *The Theosophist*, and in their other publications, a mixed religious doctrine. Finally, in the last years of Madame Blavatsky's life, even this doctrine gave place to a direct and open propaganda of the most orthodox exoteric Buddhism, under the motto of 'Our Lord Buddha,' combined with incessant attacks on Christianity."

This is one of Mr. Solovyoff's statements which the mere action of time has shown to be untruthful. The Theosophical Society stands to-day, as it has always done, for world-unity in religion, believing that brotherhood and international peace can never be realised until there is first peace and reconciliation in religion. The Society includes among its members individuals of almost every religious faith. Many of its most important publications during the last twenty-five years, far from being furtive recommendations of Buddhism, have been expositions of Hinduism. The President of the Theosophical Society, Dr. Annie Besant, is not a Buddhist, but an avowed Hindu.

Finally, the Madame Blavatsky of Solovyoff is not the Madame Blavatsky described by scores of other people, many of whom knew her intimately and, even while convinced of her many and serious defects, were yet able to admire her profoundly. Madame Blavatsky was never sanctimonious, yet Solovyoff's "modern priestess" is frequently sanctimonious in the extreme. The real Madame Blavatsky never made lugubrious and obviously deceitful speeches such as abound in Solovyoff's pages. In fact, *A Modern Priestess of Isis* depicts not one Madame Blavatsky but two. There is the pious impostor of Solovyoff's imagination, and, now and then, in glimpses, there is the real Madame Blavatsky as she has been described by others and as we know, from the testimony of her personal correspondence, she really existed. This real Madame Blavatsky is piquant, vivacious, profane, sometimes turbulent and abusive, but always transparently sincere, frank and disingenuous sometimes to a painful degree, and incapable of prolonged deception. Sometimes the real Madame Blavatsky peeps out from Solovyoff's pages almost, it seems, without Solovyoff himself realising that she does so. Here and there an authentic transcript of her conversation, a faithful echo of her wit, or a record of her tantrums. But the Madame Blavatsky who is sanctimonious and lugubrious

in the manner of another Madame Coulomb, the Madame Blavatsky who was wily and foolish, cunning and ignorant, is not the seer and Occultist with whom we are acquainted, but the charlatan whom Solovyoff created from the saturnine luxuriance of his imagination.

CHAPTER X

SUMMARY OF PHENOMENA—CASES APPARENTLY LENDING SUPPORT TO THEORIES OF FRAUD

THERE are, it is true, accounts of certain phenomena, chiefly among those related by Colonel Olcott in *Old Diary Leaves*, which, on the surface, have a highly suspicious appearance. This is due to a variety of causes, one being the incredible nature of the phenomena, which almost makes one feel that they *must* have been tricks; they seem too absurd to have been anything else. Yet this is scarcely a logical argument.

Another source of doubt is the fact that Madame Blavatsky never troubled herself to eliminate circumstances which might look suspicious nor to arrange for test conditions. The reflection that people might suspect her of fraud seems never to have occurred to her. Psychic phenomena, apparently, were so familiar to her, such an everyday occurrence, that she herself would have as soon thought of questioning the genuineness of the moon as of doubting her "miracles." When people unfamiliar with Occultism or magic made the obvious suggestion that perhaps this or that phenomenon may have been a cleverly executed trick, Madame Blavatsky was at first astonished and then indignant. She was slow to learn that the exercise of certain of her powers before sceptical audiences would inevitably result in accusations of fraud.

Most of the following stories are selected from *Old Diary Leaves* and are included here because of the suspicious nature of the incidents described. But in judging them it

is necessary to remember that it is only owing to the entire honesty of Colonel Olcott that any record of them was preserved. Colonel Olcott believed in Madame Blavatsky implicitly ; and he must have had very strong evidence in support of his convictions before he could publish these doubtful cases so fearlessly.

Firstly, then, Madame Blavatsky told Colonel Olcott that after her arrival in New York from Paris in 1873 she lived, for a time, in such stark poverty that she was forced to do needlework for a maker of cravats. Yet during this period she had a large sum of money (about 23,000 francs) lying in her trunk. This money had been confided to her by the Masters to "await orders," and in fulfilment of probationary discipline she was not allowed to touch it though she was penniless. After some time she was ordered by the Masters to take the money to Buffalo and there deliver it to an individual whom They named as residing at a certain specified address. She obeyed the order of the Masters without question, and found the person whom they had mentioned in such dire straits that if help had not come to him when it did he would have committed suicide within the next twenty-four hours. The most suspicious point in this very improbable story is the fact that when Madame Blavatsky narrated the occurrence to Colonel Olcott she had forgotten not only the address in Buffalo to which she had been sent, but even the name of the man to whom, at the order of the Masters, she had given the money.

Similarly, she told stories of having owned land in America, but had lost all documents relating to it. She also said that she received a considerable legacy during one of her earlier sojourns in America, but had no idea of how she managed to spend the money. If statements such as these were truthful, she must have been extravagant with money and careless of worldly affairs ; indeed, many independent witnesses have remarked these elements in her character. Her forgetfulness, too, is only explicable on the assumption of intense preoccupation. There is abundant

evidence pointing to the fact that Madame Blavatsky's real existence was spent not in the physical world, but in subtler and (to us) invisible planes. She herself said once, in one of her jocular moods, "My nights are my manvantaras and my days my pralayas." She had no memory for details of her outer life.

The accounts related by Colonel Olcott of the occasions on which he believed himself to have projected the astral double during sleep¹ might be so interpreted as to suggest trickery on the part of Madame Blavatsky and self-deception on the part of Colonel Olcott. He believed that on one occasion he went in the astral body from his bedroom into the dining-room of his New York flat in order to wind the clock. In the course of his journey he knocked his eye against the shelf of a small hanging bookcase, and in the morning he found that a bruise had appeared by repercussion on the spot which he had dreamed of knocking. On another occasion he desired to make an alteration to the manuscript of *Isis Unveiled*, and before falling asleep willed that he should do so in the astral body. In the morning he found the alteration scrawled in his own handwriting on the correct page, which lay at the bottom of the great pile of manuscript. It is only necessary to suppose that in these instances Colonel Olcott had been sleep-walking; but on the latter occasion, when he wrote in the manuscript of *Isis*, Madame Blavatsky told him in the morning that while she lay in bed she "saw my Olcott's astral body oozing through the wall. And stupid and sleepy enough you seemed, too! I spoke to you, but you did not reply. You went to the writing-room and I heard you fumbling with the papers."

One day in Philadelphia Madame Blavatsky remarked to Colonel Olcott that her dress was being pulled by a little elemental who wanted something to do. Olcott suggested that the elemental should be allowed to hem some towels which he had just bought. In compliance

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. I, pp. 383 *et seq.*

with Madame Blavatsky's instructions, the Colonel then locked the towels, with needle and thread, in a bookcase with glass doors lined with thick green silk. After a quarter of an hour the elemental made "a little squeaky sound, like a mouse's pipe," which signified that the task was completed. On going to the bookcase, Colonel Olcott found that the towels had indeed been hemmed, "though after a clumsy fashion that would disgrace the youngest child in an infant-school sewing-class."

On another occasion Colonel Olcott met a friend in the lower part of New York who reviled Madame Blavatsky in such an offensive manner that the Colonel made no reply and abruptly left him. On returning home he went to his bedroom and washed. Then, on turning round to the shaving stand, he saw in a mirror the reflection of a sheet of green paper pinned to the wall exactly facing where he had been washing a moment ago yet had seen nothing. The paper was attached to the plastering by pins at the four corners and contained a number of Oriental texts from Dhammapada and Sutras, "written in a peculiar style and signed at the lower corner by one of the Masters." The communication was a reproach for having allowed Madame Blavatsky to be abused without defending her and referred unmistakably to his recent encounter in New York. The only ground on which the *bona fides* of this phenomenon could be suspected would be the assumption that the invective to which Colonel Olcott had had to listen had been arranged beforehand between Madame Blavatsky and her reviler—an hypothesis, however, which appears improbable.

One day in New York Madame Blavatsky produced by magic some water-colours for W. Q. Judge, who was making an Egyptian drawing. Stepping over to the cottage piano behind Judge's chair, and facing the corner made by the end of the piano and the wall, she held her dress as an apron to receive something, returning in a few moments with thirteen bottles of Winsor and Newton's dry colours. Shortly afterwards, Judge asked for some gold paint, and

she produced this by rubbing a brass key upon the bottom of a saucer, holding both key and saucer beneath the table edge, and therefore out of sight, while she did so. On bringing the saucer into view again, it was found to be covered with a layer of gold paint of the purest quality. In view of the fact that, in later years, Judge was detected in dishonest practices, it is possible that this incident was a hoax in which Judge played the part of an accomplice.

Some phenomena strongly suggestive of conjuring tricks occurred one evening in New York. Colonel Olcott was smoking, and Madame Blavatsky produced from beside the arm-chair in which she was seated a Turkish pipe in red clay, its flaring bowl set in filigree gilt, the stem covered with purple velvet and ornamented with a slight gilt chain with imitation coins attached. Colonel Olcott expressed a wish that the velvet had been blue instead of purple, and forthwith Madame Blavatsky produced a pipe similar to the former one but with blue velvet, from the same place beside her chair. Later on she said, "Here's a baby pipe," and handed him a miniature reproduction of the larger ones. After this she produced successively a Turkish cigarette mouth-piece in gilt and amber, a Turkish coffee pot and sugar bowl, and finally a gilt tray in repoussé with imitation enamel ornamentation. These articles were afterwards seen in the rooms of Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott by many individuals; and when the time came for setting sail for India, all of them were given away to friends except the gilt tray and sugar basin, which were taken out to India by Colonel Olcott.

Shortly before leaving New York for India, Madame Blavatsky read the contents of a sealed letter so successfully one evening that the very success had the effect of arousing suspicions. Colonel Olcott, Mr. Wimbridge, Mr. O'Donovan and Madame Blavatsky were at dinner when the servant brought a letter from Mr. C. C. Massey, which had been left at that moment by the postman. Before the arrival of the letter Madame Blavatsky announced its

coming and nature, and before the seal was broken she said it contained a letter from Dr. Wyld. While the letter lay unopened on the table she read clairvoyantly the contents of Mr. Massey's letter and also the enclosure from Dr. Wyld, in spite of the fact that a large earthenware pitcher was between her and the envelope. On opening the envelope, Mr. Massey's letter was found to have Mahatmic writing on one of the pages. The suspicion is, of course, that Madame Blavatsky had already seen these letters, and written the Mahatmic communication and then had reposted the letter. But it is highly improbable that the extra postmark thus produced would have passed unnoticed by the three men present while the envelope was lying on the table before them. Possibly she may have bribed the servant to substitute this letter for the one really delivered by the postman.

Another suspicious story is related in *Old Diary Leaves* (Vol. II, pp. 59-62). Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott had received verbal instructions from an Adept that they were to proceed to Rajputana. While they were in the train Madame Blavatsky expressed regret that their instructions had not been given in writing, as Miss Bates and Mr. Wimbridge, who had been left at Bombay, might regard the whole thing as a mere excuse for a pleasant journey. She therefore wrote the following note and, after adding to it certain symbolical signs which she said dominated the elementals, flung the note through the window of the railway carriage :

“ Ask Goolab Singh to telegraph to Olcott the orders given him through me at the cave yesterday ; let it be a test to others as well as to himself.”

Sure enough, Colonel Olcott received an answer when he returned to Bombay :

“ Letter received. Answer Rajputana. Start immediately.”

Everyone in London and New York to whom the telegram and an account of the phenomenon were afterwards

forwarded agreed that it seemed to provide conclusive proof of Madame Blavatsky's occult relationships. But Colonel Olcott adds that he afterwards discovered a weak point in the evidence inasmuch as a native named Baburao had been engaged to look after the theosophical party at the three principal halting-places in their tour where the Adept had been encountered. It is possible that Baburao might have been bribed by Madame Blavatsky to be an accomplice in her trickery. Moreover, Mr. John Judge, brother of William Q. Judge, wrote to Colonel Olcott and stated that when the telegram from Goolab Singh reached him (it had been posted to him for inspection) the name of Goolab Singh had completely faded out. Yet when Colonel Olcott received it back again the name had once more become perfectly visible and looked exactly as it had done when the Colonel posted it to America.

The quarrel which arose between Miss Bates and Mr. Wimbridge on the one hand and Madame Blavatsky on the other, and which led ultimately to the expulsion of Miss Bates and the secession of Mr. Wimbridge from the Society, had no more definite cause, according to Colonel Olcott, than temperamental incompatibility. He rather implies that Mr. Wimbridge and Miss Bates had been led to go to India from self-interest and not because of enthusiasm for the ideals of the Theosophical Society. It is possible, though perhaps not probable, that their disaffection was due to having detected Madame Blavatsky in trickery. This, however, is purely supposititious, and there is nothing known which confirms the speculation. After all, temperamental incompatibility has shown itself, again and again, to be an amply potent cause in effecting most serious feuds.

Shortly after arrival in Bombay, at the request of Mr. Ross Scott, Madame Blavatsky removed her name, "Heliona," which was embroidered across a corner of her handkerchief, and substituted the name of Hurrychund. The request was made on the spur of the moment,

and Madame Blavatsky performed the phenomenon in the presence of Mr. Scott, Hurrychund and Colonel Olcott merely by holding a corner of the handkerchief in her hand for a few minutes while Mr. Scott held an opposite one. The suggestion to perform this phenomenon emanated from Mr. Ross Scott, not from Madame Blavatsky.¹

During May, 1880, in the course of the first voyage of Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott to Ceylon, the former caused the name of the chief engineer, Mr. Elliott, to appear in embroidery on her handkerchief in place of her own name. The phenomenon was effected during a few moments while Mr. Elliott held the handkerchief screwed up in his hand. His name, however, was incorrectly spelt with one "l" and one "t." Mr. Elliott requested Madame Blavatsky to perform this phenomenon on several occasions before she consented to do so.

Both these phenomena must be regarded with suspicion in view of Madame Coulomb's assertion that Madame Blavatsky employed her to embroider people's names on her handkerchiefs in order to use them for spurious "phenomena." If, on producing Mr. Elliott's name wrongly spelt, Madame Blavatsky had corrected this by occult means, the incident would have been entirely convincing. It would have established beyond possibility of question the reality of her power to alter names embroidered in material. But as no attempt of this kind seems to have been made, the incident bears a highly suspicious appearance.

At Benares, in December, 1879, Madame Blavatsky caused several extraordinary phenomena for the benefit of a German sceptic, Professor G. Thibaut, Ph.D., Principal of Benares College. By waving her hand in the air with an imperious gesture she caused a shower of approximately a dozen roses to fall in a room in which were several guests. In the scramble which ensued Professor Thibaut was unable to secure one of the flowers. Later in the evening he

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. II.

asked Madame Blavatsky to repeat the phenomenon, thinking, no doubt, that if a trick had been performed, repetition would be impossible. But at a sweep of her arm, down fell another shower of roses. One of these struck the Professor on the top of the head and bounded into his lap. Professor Thibaut is then said to have remarked with great solemnity: "De veight mooltiplied py te felosity, proves dat it moost haf come from a great distance."

When the Professor departed, he was shown out of the house by Colonel Olcott, Madame Blavatsky and Damodar. The last-named carried a lamp, and as the Professor was about to take his farewell, Madame Blavatsky "took the lamp from Damodar's hand, held it by her left forefinger, looked fixedly at it, pointed at it with her right forefinger and in an imperious tone said, 'Go up!' The flame rose and rose until it came to the top of the chimney. 'Go down!' said she: it slowly descended until it burnt bluish at the wick. 'Go up!' she exclaimed, 'up: I command you!' The obedient flame once more mounted to the top of the chimney. 'Down!' she cried; and once more it sank to the point almost of extinction."¹

Madame Blavatsky was frequently inexact and apparently consciously fantastical in her statements, particularly when called upon to explain the *modus operandi* of her occult phenomena. In answer to Colonel Olcott's enquiries, she gave two different and contradictory explanations of the means by which the foregoing phenomenon was produced. The first of these explanations was that invisible to all but herself, a Mahatma had been present and had turned the lamp up and down while she spoke. At another time she said the effect was due to the fact that she had power over the elementals of Fire, and they obeyed her commands.

Passing over the extreme improbability that one of the Masters of the Wisdom would be standing at her side in readiness to adjust the flame of a lamp in obedience to her whim, this explanation nevertheless receives support from

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. II.

an incident recorded by the Countess Wachtmeister in her book on Madame Blavatsky. The Countess, who for several months shared Madame Blavatsky's bedroom at Wurzburg, when *The Secret Doctrine* was being written, was on one occasion prevented from sleeping by the light of a lamp which was burning by Madame Blavatsky's bedside. H. P. B. herself was asleep, and the Countess therefore decided to extinguish the light. Three times she turned down the wick, and each time, much to her astonishment, the flame rose again to its former size. On the third occasion the Countess Wachtmeister distinctly saw a dusky brown hand turning the wick.

When Colonel Olcott was about to embark on his second voyage to Ceylon, Madame Blavatsky, at the last moment, rather capriciously objected to his going. The ground of her objection was that he would be away some time and she desired his help on *The Theosophist*. On February 11th, 1881, she fell into a "white rage" with him, and although the Mahatmas had previously signified their approval of the project, she said that the Lodge would have nothing more to do with the Society or with Colonel Olcott if he persisted in going to Ceylon. He did persist. His work in Ceylon was rewarded with success nothing short of marvellous. When he returned to Bombay, which he reached on December 19th, Madame Blavatsky, much to his astonishment, conveyed to him "a most kind message from the Masters about my success in Ceylon, seeming to have completely forgotten the angry threats and even written declaration that the Society would be abandoned by them if I went there, and that neither with them nor with her would I have any further relations." Thenceforward, adds the Colonel, he did not prize her less as a friend and teacher, but the idea of her infallibility, if he had ever entertained it even approximately, was gone for ever.¹

"I think I could name a number of women who hold

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 326-7.

her letters saying that they are to be her successors in the T.S., and twice as many men whom she declared her 'only *real* friends and accepted chelas.'"¹ Olcott himself had a number of such certificates and used to value them greatly, until he found that other people had been similarly encouraged. He adds that he could not say that she was either loyal or staunch. She had repeated to him the secrets of people of both sexes—sometimes of a highly compromising nature—and Olcott believed that Madame Blavatsky treated his own confidences in the same manner.

Many of the phenomena produced by Madame Blavatsky during her stay with the Sinnetts at Simla in 1880 have since become famous, owing to the controversies they provoked. The first of these was the finding of an extra cup and saucer at a picnic on October 3rd, 1880. Owing to the unexpected arrival of an additional guest, the party found themselves short of one cup and saucer. Madame Blavatsky was jokingly asked to produce the required articles by occult means, whereupon, after carefully examining the ground, she requested a gentleman of the party to dig down at a certain spot. To the amazement of everyone a cup and saucer were unearthed from beneath the grass and "a net-work of fine roots of adjacent trees." The cup and saucer were found to match the others in Mrs. Sinnett's set, though representing an addition thereto, as she ascertained by counting all the pieces of the set when she returned home.²

Mr. Sinnett is positive in asserting that the necessity of this extra cup and saucer could not possibly have been foreseen, that the suggestion to produce them by occult means in no way emanated from Madame Blavatsky and that the site chosen for the picnic was selected fortuitously. Nevertheless the Society for Psychical Research was of the

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 463.

² See *The Occult World*, by A. P. Sinnett, and *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. II.

opinion that the cup and saucer might have been buried beforehand by Babula, in spite of the fact that, according to Mrs. Sinnett's servant, only nine cups and saucers of this set were left unbroken at the time, whereas the cup and saucer excavated during the picnic represented a tenth. The gentleman who did the digging at Madame Blavatsky's instructions afterwards took the view that the phenomenon was spurious and that, by tunnelling in from the side of the hill, the cup and saucer could have been placed by normal means where they were found. The picnic had been held on the summit of a hill, and the cup and saucer were unearthed from near the edge of a sudden sharp descent.

Another of the Simla phenomena which, though at first sight inexplicable, was cited by Madame Blavatsky's enemies as a piece of clever deception, was the discovery of a lost brooch belonging to Mrs. Hume. The occasion was a dinner in Mrs. Hume's house at which a number of guests were present. The brooch had been lost for a considerable time, and, on being asked by Mrs. Hume if she could find it, Madame Blavatsky, after "communing with herself," said that she had "seen it drop like a point of light" into a star-shaped flower-bed in the garden. It being night-time and dark, several of the guests then went out into the garden with lanterns, and the brooch was found by Mrs. Sinnett and Captain M—— in a small white-paper package which was revealed "by pulling up a tangled network of nasturtium and other vines that made a perfect mat of verdure."¹

This phenomenon, though entirely convincing to those present when it occurred, has been criticised by the Society for Psychical Research on the ground that "the brooch formed one of several articles of jewellery which Mrs. Hume had given to a person who had again parted with them to another who had 'allowed them to pass out of their possession.' It is an admitted fact that many of these articles,

¹ *The Occult World.*

parted with at the same time as the brooch, did actually pass through Colonel Olcott's hands shortly afterwards. Colonel Olcott does not remember seeing the brooch ; but that Madame Blavatsky may at that time have had an opportunity, which she seized, of obtaining possession of it, is obviously highly probable, though there is no absolute proof of this. It is at any rate certain that she entrusted a brooch which needed some slight repair to Mr. Hormusji S. Seervai, of Bombay, who shortly afterwards returned it to Madame Blavatsky. When the 'brooch incident' occurred later, and the account of it was published containing a description of the brooch, Mr. Hormusji found that the description exactly fitted the brooch which had been entrusted to him for repair by Madame Blavatsky. For these facts I rely chiefly on statements made to me personally by Mr. Hume and Mr. Hormusji."¹

The following interesting detail was mentioned by Mr. Sinnett in *The Occult World*. When Madame Blavatsky was asked if she could discover the brooch, she requested Mrs. Hume to give her a detailed description and a rough sketch of the brooch in order to visualise it clearly. She then wrapped a coin attached to her watch-chain in two cigarette papers, and put it in her dress with the remark that she hoped the brooch would be obtained during the evening. It was not until the close of the dinner that she said that the paper with the coin had gone ; and it was when they were in the drawing-room that she claimed to see the brooch falling into the flower-bed. The paper wrapping in which the brooch was found lying proved to be two cigarette papers, "and these, when examined in a full light in the house, were found still to bear the mark of the coin attached to Madame Blavatsky's watch-chain, which had been wrapped up in them before they departed on their mysterious errand. They were thus identified, for people who had got over the first stupendous difficulty of believing in the possibility of transporting material

¹ The S.P.R. Report. *Proceedings*, Vol. III, Part IX, p. 267.

objects by occult agency, as the same papers that had been seen by us at the dining-table."¹

The Occult World includes three cases of the alleged transportation of cigarettes by occult means, the following being quoted from a statement written and signed by Mrs. Alice Gordon :

" On Thursday last, at about half-past ten o'clock, I was sitting in Madame Blavatsky's room conversing with her, and in a casual way asked her if she would be able to send me anything by occult means when I returned to my home. She said ' No ' ; and explained to me some of the laws under which she acts, one being that she must know the place and have been there—the more recently the better—in order to establish a magnetic current. She then recollected that she had been somewhere that morning, and after a moment's reflection remembered whose house it was she had visited (Mr. O'Meara's house). She said she could send a cigarette there, if I would go *at once* to verify the fact. I, of course, consented. I must here mention that I had seen her do this kind of thing once before ; and the reason she gives for sending *cigarettes* is, that the paper and tobacco being always about her person, are highly magnetized, and therefore more amenable to her power, which she most emphatically declares is not supernatural, but merely the manifestation of laws unknown to us. To continue my story. She took out a cigarette paper and slowly tore off a corner as zigzag as possible, I never taking my eyes off her hands. She gave me the corner, which I at once put into an envelope, and it never left my possession I can declare. She made the cigarette with the remainder of the paper. She then said she would try an experiment which might not succeed, but the failure would be of no consequence with me. She then most certainly put that cigarette into the fire, and I saw it burn, and I started at once to the gentleman's house, scarcely able to believe that I should find in the place indicated by her the counterpart of the cigarette paper I had with me ; but sure enough there it was, and, in the presence of the gentleman and his wife, I opened out the cigarette and found my corner-piece fitted exactly. It would be useless to try and explain any theory in connection with these phenomena, and it would be unreasonable to expect anyone to believe in them, unless their own experience had proved the possibility of such wonders."

¹ *The Occult World*.

Similarly, Captain P. J. Maitland describes an occasion on which Madame Blavatsky "took two cigarette papers from her pocket and marked on each of them a number of parallel lines in pencil." She then tore a piece off the end of each paper across the lines and gave the pieces to Captain Maitland. "She declined to let me mark or tear the papers, alleging that if handled by others they would become imbued with their personal magnetism, which would counteract her own." The torn pieces, however, were handed directly to Captain Maitland, who adds that, although he watched Madame Blavatsky intently, his eyes being not more than two feet from her hands, he observed no opportunity for the substitution of other papers by sleight of hand. With the large pieces of paper Madame Blavatsky made two cigarettes. Captain Maitland held the first one while the second was being made up, and he scrutinised this cigarette very attentively in order to be able to recognise it afterwards. His narrative continues as follows :

"The cigarettes being finished, Madame Blavatsky stood up, and took them between her hands, which she rubbed together. After about twenty or thirty seconds, the grating noise of the paper, at first distinctly audible, ceased. She then said 'the current is passing round this end of the room, and I can only send them somewhere near here.' A moment afterwards she said one had fallen on the piano, the other near the bracket. As I sat on a sofa with my back to the wall, the piano was opposite, and the bracket, supporting a few pieces of china, was to the right, between it and the door. Both were in full view across the rather narrow room. The top of the piano was covered with piles of music books, and it was among these Madame Blavatsky thought a cigarette would be found. The books were removed, one by one, by myself, but without seeing anything. I then opened the piano, and found a cigarette on a narrow shelf inside it. This cigarette I took out and recognised as the one I had held in my hand. The other was found on a covered cup on the bracket. Both cigarettes were still damp where they had been moistened at the edges in the process of manufacture. I took the cigarettes to a table, without permitting them to be touched or even seen by Madame

Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott. On being unrolled and smoothed out, the torn, jagged edges were found to fit exactly to the pieces that I had all this time retained in my hand. The pencil marks also corresponded. It would therefore appear that the papers were actually the same as those I had seen torn. Both the papers are still in my possession. It may be added that Colonel Olcott sat near me with his back to Madame Blavatsky during the experiment, and did not move till it was concluded."¹

Somewhat similar is the experiment recorded by Mr. C. F. Massey.² Madame Blavatsky prepared a cigarette in his presence, having first torn off a corner of the cigarette paper and given the corner to Mr. Massey to hold. She then caused the cigarette to disappear from her hands. On Mr. Massey enquiring whether they would be likely to find this cigarette again, Madame Blavatsky asked him to accompany her into the dining-room, where she said the cigarette would be found on the top of one of the window curtains. "By means of a table, and a chair placed thereon," adds Mr. Massey, "I was enabled with some difficulty to reach and take down a cigarette from the place indicated. This cigarette I opened, and found the paper to correspond exactly with that I had seen a few minutes before in the drawing-room. That is to say, the corner-piece, which I had retained in my possession, fitted exactly into the jagged edges of the torn paper in which the tobacco had been rolled. To the best of my belief, the test was as complete and satisfactory as any test can be."

In recalling his first impressions of Madame Blavatsky, A. P. Sinnett, in *The Early Days of Theosophy in Europe* (written in 1919 and published 1922), relates how after making her acquaintance when she paid her first visit to the Sinnetts at Allahabad in December, 1879, he formed the impression that his guest was "A most original old lady who promises great amusement." Although the first few days passed pleasantly, the Sinnetts "did get something like a shock a day or two later." They were sitting

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

round the fire in the evening, and Colonel Olcott had been describing Madame Blavatsky's "jadoo" or magic performances in New York. "It came to be suggested that she should create something for us then and there, and I proposed a cigar-holder as the object to be produced. Madame Blavatsky went through some preliminaries, rubbing Colonel Olcott's meerschaum pipe in her hands, and then—simply put her hand into her pocket and produced a cigar-holder. The performance as an exhibition of magic was so absurd, so grotesquely destitute of any evidential value, that it was difficult to know what to say. I don't remember how we got through the rest of the evening, but I do remember how, when my wife and I were at last alone together, we *looked* at one another! No words were needed. Were we really in the hands of a clumsy impostor?"¹

The fact that Madame Blavatsky told all sorts of stories about her age has been instanced by her enemies as a proof of her untruthfulness. Colonel Olcott remarks² that he has known her pretend to be twenty, forty and even sixty and seventy years older than she really was. One can well imagine that this reversal of the usual feminine procedure must have been greatly congenial to her nature and have afforded her infinite amusement. An article in the *Phrenological Journal* for March, 1878, repeats a statement made by Madame Blavatsky to a reporter in the presence of Colonel Olcott to the effect that she was then upwards of eighty years old, and an interviewer's report in the *Hartford Daily Times* for December 2nd, 1878, contains the following passage:³

"Very, very old? Impossible. And yet she declares it is so; sometimes indignantly, sometimes with a certain pride, sometimes with indifference or impatience. 'I came of a very long-lived race. All my people grew to be very old. . . . You doubt my age? I can show you my

¹ *The Early Days of Theosophy in Europe*, pp. 24 and 25.

² *Old Diary Leaves*. ³ Also quoted by Olcott in *Old Diary Leaves*.

passports, my documents, my letters for years back. I can prove it by a thousand things.' ” To Colonel Olcott she excused herself for this sort of deceitfulness by saying that “ the somebodies inside her bodies at these various times were of these various ages, and hence no real falsehood was told.” Such behaviour was certainly indiscreet, though at the same time it probably indicates nothing worse than playfulness or a love of mischief. One sometimes wonders how far this love of mischief might lead her, and suspects that she would have obtained great amusement from playing tricks on her friends. It is not unreasonable, however, to give her the benefit of the doubt and to suppose that she would have stopped short of deception on important matters involving serious religious or moral principles. Yet some of her phenomena, even when regarded as being genuine, were nothing more nor less than mischievous tricks played upon her friends.

Solovyoff states in *A Modern Priestess of Isis* that at St. Cergues in 1885 Madame Blavatsky was accompanied by a young Anglo-Indian Theosophist, Mary F——, whose frivolous habits caused the “ old lady ” much annoyance. At length she became so irritated that she sent her away to her uncle in England. Solovyoff relates that at the prospect of departure “ tears and sobs began. But ‘ Madame ’ had a nice little phenomenon ready by way of a sweet sedative. While at Torre del Greco, Mashka (Mary) had lost a beautiful jewelled ring. And lo ! at the moment of her departure the ‘ Master ’ appeared to ‘ Madame ’ and left with her a ring ‘ the same at every point,’ which was solemnly placed on Mashka’s finger in his name. This calmed her to a great extent and she went off without making a heart-breaking scene.”

One of the most serious facts of all is the incident which occurred at Amritsar in October, 1880.¹ Madame Blavatsky invited Mr. Rattan Chand Bary, a member of the Arya Samaj, to visit Mr. Sinnett at Simla as a spokesman of

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. II, pp. 252 et seq.

Mahatma K. H., and to play the part of the Master's messenger at a time when the future author of *The Occult World* was almost entirely convinced of the truth of Theosophy. Mr. Bary was not to give Mr. Sinnett any facts about himself, his name, condition, or place of residence, and was to answer fully all questions on religious and philosophical subjects. Madame Blavatsky guaranteed that the Master would watch over his messenger and would inspire him with every necessary idea and argument at the appropriate moment. Mr. Rattan Chand Bary, however, after asking for a day or two in which to consider the suggestion, wrote to say that he regarded the proposition as nothing other than deception. He therefore refused to take part in it. This refusal, adds Olcott gravely, must have reacted seriously to the detriment of Mr. Bary's karma, and Madame Blavatsky was exceedingly indignant. The incident is certainly suspicious. It makes one wonder whether anyone was persuaded to act the part of Masters on other occasions when They were encountered by members of the Theosophical Society. Possibly this incident had something to do with the estrangement which occurred between the Theosophical Society and the Arya Samaj, whose leader, Swami Dyánand Saraswati, though at first friendly, afterwards became one of the Society's bitter and active opponents. Madame Blavatsky, it is true, explained the quarrel with the Arya Samaj as being due to the narrowness and ambition of the Swami : he wanted the entire allegiance of Theosophists.

One of the greatest difficulties in regard to many of Madame Blavatsky's phenomena is that they seem to have been produced almost solely for purposes of display, and this is probably one of the reasons why they have provoked so much argument and brought upon their author so much abuse. A. P. Sinnett, in *The Occult World*, states definitely that "As a general rule, indeed, the display of any occult phenomenon for the purposes of exciting the wonder and admiration of beholders is strictly forbidden." And yet

Madame Blavatsky, either with or without the permission of her Masters, seems to have broken this rule again and again. As Colonel Olcott aptly says, she wasted on trivialities an incalculable amount of precious psychic force. But it has to be remembered, as an extenuating circumstance, that frequently her visitors were most importunate in begging her to perform phenomena, even forgetting the rules of good breeding in their eagerness to witness an example of her miraculous powers. And sometimes the very people who thus compelled her to produce phenomena against her will were the first to ascribe to fraud the manifestations with which they were favoured, and were the loudest and most emphatic in denouncing their benefactress, or, to be more exact, their victim. In such instances, Madame Blavatsky's invincible good-nature and generosity were a serious weakness, laying her dangerously open to attack from any unprincipled or bigoted individual who might cajole her into displaying her powers.

CHAPTER XI

SUMMARY OF PHENOMENA (*continued*)—APPEARANCES OF MAHATMAS

A FACT always to remember is that Madame Blavatsky's central occult claim was, that she held communication with Mahatmas or Masters—a brotherhood of Adepts or superhuman men who had evolved beyond the ordinary level of mankind. These Mahatmas are known as the Great White Lodge and are said to reside in Thibet, their mission being to watch over and guide Humanity in its upward evolution. Of these high Beings, Madame Blavatsky was an accepted *chela* or disciple. This is the central fact of Madame Blavatsky's occult life. Her claim is supported by the fact that Colonel Olcott, Damodar, Bavaji, W. T. Brown and other members of the Theosophical Society actually saw the Masters in the flesh ; while others, again, have seen them in dreams and astral visions. Moreover, some among the Theosophists, including the Countess Wachtmeister, Dr. Besant and Colonel Olcott, received communications from Them clairaudiently under circumstances which preclude the possibility of their clairaudience being illusions produced by hypnotic devices of Madame Blavatsky. Colonel Olcott saw the Mahatmas face to face in the physical body on numerous occasions in America, India and England. The following are some of these encounters recorded by the Colonel in his various writings.

In the early days of his acquaintance with Madame Blavatsky in New York, Olcott was visited by a Mahatma or a *chela* on at least two occasions. In the first volume of

Old Diary Leaves he records that a stranger whom he met in New York came to his room by appointment and "by a wonderful process of Maya" caused the bedroom to be converted "into a cube of empty space wherein there appeared alternately vivid scenes of water, cloudy atmosphere, subterranean caves and an active volcano, in the midst of which appeared a succession of phantasmal shapes and forms, some . . . lovely, some malignant and fierce, some terrible."

The Colonel was also visited by a Master in his rooms in New York,¹ who after talking for a considerable time and giving much spiritual advice and philosophical counsel, was believed by Olcott to have vanished phenomenally. The Master left behind, however, his head-cloth or turban as "a tangible and enduring proof" of his visit. This turban was preserved by Olcott for years and exhibited to enquirers with transparent pride. Solovyoff describes an occasion of this sort in *A Modern Priestess of Isis*.

One summer evening in New York, in the early twilight after dinner, Madame Blavatsky was seated by the south front window and Colonel Olcott standing on the rug before the mantelpiece in deep thought. Suddenly he heard her say, "Look and learn." Thereupon he saw rising from her shoulders a mist which presently formed itself into the likeness of one of the Mahatmas. Having formed the upper half of the torso, the shape faded away again and was gone. Madame Blavatsky "sat statue-like for two or three minutes, after which she sighed, came to herself and asked me (Colonel Olcott) if I had seen anything."

The following passage from the pen of Colonel Olcott is to be found in *Hints on Esoteric Theosophy*, p. 112 :

"You will find in an old number of the *N. Y. World* a long account of a reporter's experiences at our headquarters in 47th Street. Among the marvels witnessed, by the eight or ten persons present, was the apparition of

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. I, pp. 379-80.

a Brother who passed by the window and returned. The room was on the second story of the house, and there was no balcony to walk on.”

During the New York period, Madame Blavatsky once asked Colonel Olcott to go to a certain city to undertake some work for the Mahatmas. The Colonel at first demurred to this because of the expense and the diminution in his income which would result from the journey. Madame Blavatsky asked him how much he expected the trip would cause him to lose, and he replied about \$500 each month. She replied that he might do as he pleased, as the Brothers had no right to take him away from his business. Nevertheless he ultimately decided to undertake the journey because he could not bear, he says, to refuse the least request of the Teachers. When he returned, after nearly two months, he found that there was just \$1000 more than there should have been to the credit of his banking account. On making enquiry, he was told by the bank cashier that the money had been paid in by a very tall man with long black hair rolling on his shoulders, piercing black eyes and brown complexion.¹

Colonel Olcott was also convinced that on several occasions he saw Mahatmas in India *in the physical body*. One such occasion occurred at Pondichery in 1883. On returning, after a lecture, to the house where they were staying, Colonel Olcott found Madame Blavatsky with a number of visitors in the sitting-room ; and seated a little distance beyond the others was one of the Masters whom Olcott had known in New York during the writing of *Isis Unveiled*. When the company left, this personage saluted Madame Blavatsky in Indian fashion with folded palms as the others had done. After speaking a few words with Madame Blavatsky apart, he followed the other guests out.

On the 19th November, 1883, Colonel Olcott and W. T. Brown were visited by Mahatma K. H. while asleep in

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 437.

their tent at Lahore. The Master awoke Colonel Olcott first, and the Colonel seized him by the upper arms, fearing the presence of a religious fanatical assassin. Thereupon he was answered by the sweet and gentle voice of the Master, saying, "Do you not know me? Do you not remember me?" The Master talked with the Colonel some time and then passed to W. T. Brown's side of the tent and awoke him also. During conversation with Mahatma K. H. a letter (according to Olcott's own statement) materialised in the Colonel's hand, and on opening the envelope he found that it contained a letter of private counsel and prophecies of the death of two undesignated, then active, opponents of the Theosophical Society in India. These prophecies were realised in the passing away of the Swami Dyánand Saraswati and Babu Keshab Chandra Sen shortly afterwards. A phenomenal letter was also received on this occasion by W. T. Brown.¹

An account of the occasions on which he saw appearances of Mahatmas is contributed by Mr. Babaji Nagnath to *Hints on Esoteric Theosophy* :

"In the month of April, 1881, on one dark night, while talking in company with other theosophists with Madame Blavatsky about 10 p.m. in the open verandah of the upper bungalow, a man, six feet in height, clad in a white robe, with a white *rumal* or *phetta* on the head, made his appearance on a sudden, walking towards us through the garden adjacent to the bungalow from a point—a precipice—where there is no path for anyone to tread. Madame then rose up and told us to go inside the bungalow. So we went in, but we heard Madame and he talking for a minute with each other in an Eastern language unknown to us. Immediately after, we again went on to the verandah, as we were called, but the Brother had disappeared.

"On the next occasion, when we were chatting in the above verandah as usual, another Brother, clothed in a white dress, was suddenly seen as if standing on a branch of a tree. We saw him then descending as though through the air, and standing on a corner edge of a thin wall. Madame then rose up from her seat

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 36.

and stood looking at him for about two minutes, and, as it seemed—talking inaudibly with him. Immediately after, in our presence, the figure of the man disappeared, but was afterwards seen again walking in the air through space, then right through the tree, and again disappeared.

“ Similarly, in a strong moonlight on another night . . . about eight or ten yards distant from the open verandah in which we were sitting, we saw a Brother known to us as K. H. He . . . was gradually forming, as it were, in front of a shrub, or number of shrubs, some twenty or thirty yards away from us, until he stood to a full height. . . . He . . . showed his full figure for about two or three minutes, then gradually disappeared, melting away into the shrub. . . .

“ On another night a Brother came in his own physical body, walking through the lower garden (attached to Colonel Olcott's bungalow) and stood quiet. Madame Blavatsky then went down the wooden staircase leading into the garden. He shook hands with her and gave her a packet. After a short time, the Brother *disappeared on the spot*, and Madame coming up the stairs opened the packet and found in it a letter from Allahabad. We saw the envelope was quite blank, i.e. unaddressed, but it bore a triangular stamp of Allahabad Post Office of December the 3rd, 1881, and also a circular postal stamp of the Bombay Post Office of *the same date*, viz. 3rd December. The two cities are 860 miles apart.”

On returning from a carriage drive with Madame Blavatsky on December 28th, 1881, Damodar and Colonel Olcott “ saw, as the carriage approached the house, a man upon the balcony over the *porte-cochère*, leaning against the balustrade, and with the moonlight shining fully upon him. He was dressed in white and wore a white *Fehta* upon his head. His beard was black, and his long black hair hung to his breast. Olcott and Damodar at once recognised him as the ‘ Illustrious.’ He raised his hand and dropped a letter. . . . Olcott jumped from the carriage and recovered it. It was written in Thibetan characters, and signed with his familiar cypher. It was a message to Ramaswamier, to reply to a letter (in a closed envelope) which he had written to the Brother a short time before we went out for the ride. M. Coulomb, who was reading inside the house, and a

short distance from the balcony, neither saw nor heard anyone pass through the apartment, and no one else was in the bungalow, except Madame Coulomb, who was asleep in her bedroom." Upon descending from the carriage and going upstairs, it was found that the Brother had disappeared.¹

An occasion on which a Master was seen unexpectedly occurred in March, 1880, and is described in the second volume of *Old Diary Leaves*, pp. 145-6. The incident is so picturesque that we quote it in full as an example of the encounters with the Masters experienced by various members of the Theosophical Society in the early days :

" We three had driven out in the open phaeton that Damodar had presented to H. P. B. to the further end of the causeway known as Warli Bridge, to enjoy the cool sea-breeze. A magnificent electric storm was raging, unaccompanied with rain, the flashes being so vivid as to light up the neighbourhood almost like day. H. P. B. and I smoked and we all chatted about this and that, when we heard the sound of many voices coming from the sea-shore to our right, from a bungalow situate on a traverse road not far from the corner where we sat. Presently a party of well-dressed Hindus, laughing and talking together, came in sight, passed us and entered their carriages, which were driven up in line on the Warli Road, and drove off to town. To see them, Damodar, who was sitting with his back to the driver, stood up and looked over the box. As the last party of convivial friends were coming abreast of our carriage, he silently touched my shoulder and motioned with his head that I was to look at something in that direction. I stood up and saw behind the last group a single human figure approaching. He, like the others, was dressed in white, but the whiteness of his costume positively made theirs look grey, as the electric light makes the brightest gaslight appear dull and yellow. The figure was a head taller than the group which preceded him, and his walk was the very ideal of graceful dignity. As he came about as far as our horse's head, he deflected from the road in our direction, and we two, to say nothing of H. P. B., saw that it was a Mahatma. His white turban,

¹ *Hints on Esoteric Theosophy*, p. 101.

and dress, mass of dark hair dropping to his shoulders, and full beard, made us think it was 'the Sahib'; but when he came to the carriage side and stood not more than a yard from our faces, and laid his hand on H. P. B.'s left arm as it lay on the carriage body, and looked us in the eyes and responded to our reverential salutations, we then saw that it was not he, but another, whose portrait H. P. B. wore, later, in a large gold locket, and which many have seen. He spoke no word, but quietly moved towards the causeway, taking no notice of, nor, seemingly, exciting any from the Hindu guests as they rolled away in their carriages towards the town. The recurrent blazes of electric light lit him up as he stood by us; and as his tall form showed against the horizon and the dark earth of the causeway, I noticed, too, that a lamp of the last of the carriages threw him up in high relief when he was some fifty feet away from us and on the causeway. There was no tree or bush to screen him from us, and, it may be believed, we watched him with intense concentration. One instant we saw him, the next he was gone; disappeared, like one of the lightning flashes. Under the strain of excitement I jumped out of the carriage, ran to the spot where he was last seen, but no one was there. I saw nothing but the empty road and the back of the carriage that had just passed."

An experience related by the Countess Wachtmeister¹ cannot be explained save on the assumption that the Masters really exist and were able to communicate with her. In the autumn of 1885, before she had met Madame Blavatsky, and before she knew that she was likely to meet her, the Countess was making preparations to leave her home in Sweden in order to spend the winter with some friends in Italy, intending to visit Madame Gebhard at Elberfeld *en route*. While she was laying aside the articles she intended to take with her, the Countess, who was clairvoyant and clairaudient, heard a voice saying, "Take that book, it will be useful to you on your journey." The book referred to was a manuscript collection of notes on

¹ *H. P. Blavatsky and the "Secret Doctrine,"* by the Countess Constance Wachtmeister.

the Tarot and passages in the Kabbalah compiled by a friend. Countess Wachtmeister could conceive of no purpose for which this book might be required, but, obedient to her clairaudient injunction, she laid it in the bottom of one of her travelling trunks. At Elberfeld, Madame Gebhard persuaded the Countess to go to Wurzburg and spend the winter with Madame Blavatsky there instead of going to Italy. When the Countess arrived at Wurzburg, and was going into the dining-room to take some tea, Madame Blavatsky said abruptly, as if the matter had been dwelling on her mind :

“ ‘ Master says you have a book for me of which I am much in need.’ ”

The Countess Wachtmeister denied that any books were with her, but Madame Blavatsky bade her think again, as Master said that her visitor had been told in Sweden to bring a book on the Tarot and the Kabbalah. “ Then,” adds the Countess, “ I recollected the circumstances I have related above. From the time I had placed the volume in the bottom of my box it had been out of my sight and out of my mind. Now, when I hurried to the bedroom, unlocked the trunk, and dived to the bottom, I found it in the same corner I had left it when packing the box in Sweden, undisturbed from that moment to this. But this was not all. When I returned to the dining-room with it in my hand, Madame Blavatsky made a gesture and cried, ‘ Stay, do not open it yet. Now turn to page ten, and on the sixth line you will find the words . . .’ And she quoted a passage.

“ I opened the book which, let it be remembered, was no printed volume of which there might be a copy in H. P. B.’s possession, but a manuscript album in which, as I have said, had been written notes and excerpts by a friend of mine for my own use, yet on the page and at the line she had indicated I found the very words she had uttered,

“ When I handed her the book I ventured to ask her why she wanted it.

“ ‘ Oh,’ she replied, ‘ for *The Secret Doctrine.*’ ”

Surely this incident establishes at one and the same time the existence of the Masters and the reality of Madame Blavatsky’s power of clairvoyance.

CHAPTER XII

SUMMARY OF PHENOMENA (*continued*)—MAHATMA LETTERS

SO much dispute has raged round the letters claimed to have been received phenomenally that a summary of the principal occasions when such letters appeared is of particular importance. It should be noted, firstly, that the abnormal production of "Mahatma letters" is paralleled by other phenomena of a similar nature in connection with Madame Blavatsky. Colonel Olcott records¹ that "direct" or "precipitated" writing was produced through her agency before the Theosophical Society was thought of and when she was still avowedly a Spiritualist. The author of these early communications claimed to be the spirit-control, John King; and there are other occasions when Madame Blavatsky made copies by occult means of letters received through the post in the ordinary way.

The first letter phenomenon recorded by Colonel Olcott occurred in 1875, when the Colonel went to stay with Madame Blavatsky in Philadelphia. This was only a few months after making her acquaintance. Olcott says that on the evening of the same day on which he gave his Philadelphia address to the Philadelphia General Post Office, he received letters from widely different places, addressed to him in New York, but showing no New York postmark or other indication of having passed through the New York Post Office. These letters, he says, were delivered by the postman into his own hand. On opening them, he found writing from the Masters inside each of

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. I.

them, on margins or other blank spaces left by the writers of the letters. The script of the Mahatmic communications was similar to communications he had previously received phenomenally in New York.

At about this time Olcott records an interesting instance of precipitation purporting to have been effected by "John King." This also occurred in Philadelphia. The Colonel had bought a new reporter's notebook, and on showing it to Madame Blavatsky was told by her to place it in his bosom. He did so, and after a moment's pause was told to bring it out again and look within. He found that inside the first cover, written and drawn on the white lining paper in lead pencil, was the following :

" JOHN KING

HENRY DE MORGAN, his book

4th of the Fourth month in A.D. 1875."

Beneath this was the drawing of a Rosicrucian jewel ; over the arch of the jewelled crown, the word FATE, beneath which was the name "Helen," a monogram and other hieroglyphics. Colonel Olcott adds in *Old Diary Leaves* that this psychograph was still legible after seventeen years.

On one or two occasions letters were copied phenomenally by Madame Blavatsky under circumstances which, if accurately recorded by Colonel Olcott, seem to preclude all possibility of fraud. One day in New York Olcott received a letter which he read aloud to Madame Blavatsky from a person who had done him a serious wrong. Madame Blavatsky remarked that they must have a copy of the letter. Taking the sheet of notepaper in her hand, she held it daintily by one corner and peeled off a duplicate as though she had split the sheet between its two surfaces.

A five-paged letter dated December 22nd, 1887, received from the Rev. Stainton Moses, she caused to be copied by telling Colonel Olcott to place it in a drawer with five plain

sheets of paper. After an interval of conversation, he found that a duplicate had appeared on the blank paper in writing similar to but not identical with that of Stainton Moses. The inks, too, were different, and that used by Stainton Moses was not copying ink. Yet the time occupied by this phenomenon was only about five or ten minutes.

One evening at New York, Colonel Olcott wrote out a series of questions addressed to an Adept in Asia, and by Madame Blavatsky's instructions placed them in a sealed envelope behind the clock on the mantelpiece, leaving enough of the envelope visible for him to watch it while conversing. After about an hour Madame Blavatsky told him to open the letter he had written. The seal was still unbroken, and inside the envelope was his own epistle and an answer "in the Adept's familiar manuscript, written on a sheet of green paper of peculiar make" the like of which Colonel Olcott believed was not in the house.

The great majority of phenomenal letters, however, and those around which dispute has mostly raged, were received in India or Europe. From among them the following are quoted.

At Rajputana in 1879 Colonel Olcott received a reply to a letter he had sent to the Adept Goolab Singh. The answer was delivered by an old Hindu, robed in white, who came round the corner of the house when Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott were sitting alone in the rear verandah. The letter was "beautifully worded" and pointed out that the surest way to seek the Masters was through the channel of faithful work in the Theosophical Society. "That way I have persistently travelled," adds the Colonel, "and even though the letter had been a false one, it has proved a blessing and a perpetual comfort in times of trouble."¹

During the famous visit of Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott to Mr. and Mrs. Sinnett at Simla in September and October, 1880, several phenomenal communications

¹ *Ibid.*

were received. On Prospect Hill, Simla, on September 29th, 1880, Mrs. Sinnett obtained a Mahatma letter by climbing into the heart of a tree, where the communication was transpierced by a twig. A weak point in this incident, however, was that the note was not received in the manner desired. Mrs. Sinnett had asked for it to fall into her lap.¹

A day or two later, during the picnic when the cup and saucer were unearthed, a gentleman said that he would join the Theosophical Society if Madame Blavatsky could give him his certificate duly filled in, then and there. Madame Blavatsky made a sweep of her hand, pointing to a bush at a little distance, and told him to see if he could not find the certificate there. To his amazement, he drew forth from the bush a diploma of membership filled in with his name and that day's date, together with an official letter from Colonel Olcott in the Colonel's handwriting, though Olcott himself was quite sure that he had not written it.²

Another phenomenal letter was received by A. P. Sinnett on October 20th and was referred to by him as the "cushion incident." A picnic was held one afternoon on Prospect Hill, and, as Sinnett was expecting a Mahatma letter, the suggestion was made that Madame Blavatsky should cause it to appear inside a back cushion or pillow against which Mrs. Sinnett was leaning in her *jampan*. Sinnett then ripped open the pillow with his pocket-knife. "The outside cover," says Colonel Olcott, "was embroidered on the face, backed with leather or some strong fabric, sewn with very stout thread, and the seam covered with a silken cord closely sewn to it. It was an old pillow, and the sewing had become so hard with time as to make it a difficult job to rip it apart. This was done at last, however, and inside was a second pillow cover holding the feathers and also strongly sewn down the seams. When this was ripped, Mr. Sinnett thrust in his hand, felt among the feathers, and soon brought forth a letter and a brooch. The letter

¹ *The Occult World and Old Diary Leaves.*

² *Ibid.*

was from 'K. H.,' and referred to a conversation between Mr. Sinnett and H. P. B.; the brooch was Mrs. Sinnett's, and just before leaving the house she had seen it lying on her dressing-table."¹

In the description of this phenomenon published by Sinnett himself in *The Occult World* he adds that the note which he found inside the pillow referred unmistakably to a conversation he believed himself to have had with Mahatma K. H. subjectively on the previous evening, and also to a conversation which had taken place at the dinner-table on the same evening. Sinnett was positive that the suggestion that the letter should appear inside a cushion was an entirely spontaneous choice of his own, and was in no way suggested by Madame Blavatsky or any other member of the party: "I said, after a little reflection, 'inside that cushion,' pointing to one against which one of the ladies present was leaning. I had no sooner uttered the words than my wife cried out, 'Oh, no, let it be inside mine,' or words to that effect. I said, 'Very well, inside my wife's cushion'; Madame Blavatsky asked K. H. by her own methods if that would do, and received an affirmative reply. My liberty of choice as regards the place where the object should be found was thus absolute and unfettered by conditions."

In view of the fact that the letter found inside the cushion referred to incidents which occurred on the previous evening, Madame Blavatsky could not possibly have inserted the letter in the cushion fraudulently unless she had done so during the morning of the day on which the picnic took place. "But," says Mr. Sinnett, "from the time of getting up that morning, Madame Blavatsky had hardly been out of our sight, and had been sitting with my wife in the drawing-room. She had been doing this, by the by, against the grain, for she had writing which she wanted to do in her own room, but she had been told by her Voices to go and sit in the drawing-room with my wife that morning,

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. II, pp. 244-5.

and had done so, grumbling at the interruption of her work, and wholly unable to discern any motive for the order."

An unusual instance of the phenomenal precipitation of a letter occurred during 1880 in the presence of Judge Gadgil and Mr. Kirtane. By holding a sheet of paper horizontally between her palms for a few moments (the paper having previously been marked by Gadgil and Kirtane for purposes of identification), Madame Blavatsky caused a letter to appear on it in the handwriting of the then British Resident at the Court of Baroda, bearing also the signature of that official. It was a faithful reproduction of his handwriting (which Madame Blavatsky had never seen)—“a most peculiar, small caligraphy, and the signature more like a tiny tangle of twine than a man's name.” Madame Blavatsky explained that, although she had never seen the British Resident's handwriting and had produced the phenomenon upon the instant in response to the requests of her two guests, it was done by means of the access she possessed to the Astral Light in which the record of all things is stored. The British Resident at Baroda had been particularly hostile to the Theosophical Society, and the most humorous and evidential point about the letter was that it was addressed to “My dear Col. Olcott,” begging pardon for the malicious things he had said against the Society, asking to be entered as a subscriber to *The Theosophist* and expressing a wish to join the Society. Finally, it was signed “Yours sincerely.”

Playfulness of this kind was characteristic of Madame Blavatsky in certain moods. Colonel Olcott adds that the phenomenon was performed “as she stood in the middle of the room, in broad daylight, with us three witnesses looking on.”¹

On returning to India from a visit to England in 1881, A. P. Sinnett stayed a few days at the headquarters of the Theosophical Society, which were at that time in Bombay.

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 366-8.

Sinnett had written to Mahatma K. H. through Madame Blavatsky shortly before leaving London and expected to find a reply awaiting him on his arrival. He reached the Theosophical Society headquarters late at night and found that no Mahatmic letter addressed to himself had as yet been received. Sinnett goes on to relate¹ that after breakfast he was talking to Madame Blavatsky in the room that had been allotted to him. They were sitting on different sides of a large square table in the middle of the room, in full daylight, and no one save Sinnett and Madame Blavatsky was present. "Suddenly, down upon the table before me, but to my right hand, Madame Blavatsky being to my left, there fell a thick letter. It fell 'out of nothing,' so to speak; it was materialised, or re-integrated in the air before my eyes. It was K. H.'s expected reply—a deeply interesting letter, partly concerned with private matters and replies to questions of mine, and partly with some large, though as yet shadowy, revelations of occult philosophy, the first sketch of this that I had received."

A phenomenal letter to Judge Sreenevas Row was received in the Shrine at Adyar on December 28th, 1883, during the annual Convention of the Theosophical Society. The letter was found by Damodar, who had been instructed to look for it by Madame Blavatsky. The envelope contained a letter from the Mahatma K. H. thanking Judge Sreenevas Row for his zealous services and enclosing Rs.500 in Government Promissory Notes towards the expenses of the Convention. On the back of each note the initials "K. H." were written in blue pencil. The letter was found immediately after Colonel Olcott had mentioned to Madame Blavatsky that it was a pity Judge Row had been allowed to spend so much as Rs.500 towards the Convention out of his own pocket. Madame Blavatsky, says Colonel Olcott, thought deeply for a few moments and then instructed Damodar to look in the Shrine—the result being that he found the letter and the notes for Rs.500.

¹ *The Occult World.*

Several instances of the receipt of Mahatma letters under circumstances which preclude the possibility of fraud by Madame Blavatsky are instanced by Dr. Annie Besant in her defence of Madame Blavatsky. Unless these letters were genuine occult phenomena, many of them must have been produced fraudulently by other members of the Society, an assumption which is scarcely less than absurd. For instance :

On February 10th, 1882, a letter was seen to fall to the ground perpendicularly, in the open air, ten paces from Madame Blavatsky's chair, and seven from the little group who saw it fall.

Another fell in a railway carriage in which were Madame Blavatsky, Mr. and Mrs. Oakley and Mr. Leadbeater. The communication blamed Madame Blavatsky for what she was doing at the moment. This letter, therefore, must have been genuine unless Mr. Leadbeater was an accomplice and both the conversation and the appearance of the letter had been prearranged—a fantastically improbable supposition.

Dr. Franz Hartmann, too, went on one occasion to a drawer of his writing-desk to obtain a pair of pincers. The drawer contained "the pincers and a few other things, but no vestige of any letter," but as Dr. Hartmann took the pincers and was about to close the drawer he suddenly saw lying in the drawer a great envelope addressed to him in the handwriting of the Master. On opening the envelope, he found that it contained a letter dealing with problems he had just been discussing with Madame Blavatsky, "besides giving a detailed and very satisfactory answer to the very question which had so perplexed my mind, and a satisfactory explanation of certain matters, which for some time had been foremost in my mind, but of which I had said nothing at all."

On the 17th March, 1884, Madame Blavatsky being then in Europe, Mr. Navatram Ootaram wrote out some questions on a sheet of foolscap to which he wanted Damodar to

obtain answers. This occurred at the Adyar headquarters. Damodar, however, took no notice of the questions. But while Mr. Ootaram and he were talking, the paper disappeared, and in a short while an envelope was found lying upon the floor. It was addressed to Mr. Ootaram, and on opening it he found his sheet of questions written over in blue pencil with answers in the handwriting of Mahatma K. H.

Mr. R. Casava Pillai testifies that in 1882, while traveling by railway between Allahabad and Mogal Serai a letter from Mahatma K. H., giving him instructions about a matter which was at that moment in his thoughts, fell in the railway carriage. He was alone in the compartment and the train was in motion. Madame Blavatsky was at that time in Bombay.

Pandit Bhavani Shankar claims to have seen Mahatma K. H. astrally when staying at the house of A. P. Sinnett in Allahabad in March, 1882. The Master took from him a letter which had been handed to the pandit by Sinnett. Bhavani Shankar found the answer, addressed to Sinnett, under his pillow next morning.

On November 8th, 1883, while talking with a European friend at Bareilly, Pandit Bhavani received a letter from the Master inside a courier bag which was hanging across his (Bhavani's) shoulders. The letter was contained in a Chinese envelope.

Damodar K. Mavalankar also received many Mahatma letters when trickery on the part of Madame Blavatsky was out of the question.

At Bombay, at the end of 1880, he received a letter from his Master in Hindi. This letter he found in a drawer in which, the day previous, he had first placed a letter to the Master about family troubles, and then, altering his mind, had destroyed it.

In August, 1881, Damodar was in Bombay, at the Theosophical headquarters, and was sitting one evening near his bed, feeling very low-spirited owing to family

troubles, when he saw a letter, which proved to be from his Master, forming on the table in front of him. At that time Madame Blavatsky was in Simla, and Colonel Olcott in Ceylon.

In 1882, when Madame Blavatsky was in Darjeeling, Damodar was sitting in an open balcony with M. Coulomb, when suddenly, just as the latter was lighting his cigarette, Damodar felt a slight electric shock and saw a letter lying at his feet. It was found to contain a reply to his thought and also information to be sent to a brother Theosophist.

“During Madame Blavatsky’s absence in Ootacamund, in July, 1883,” adds Dr. Besant, “various letters were received in the Shrine at Adyar, Damodar placing them within it and taking out the replies. He also received letters in the well-known writing before and after the coming of the Coulombs, away from headquarters as well as in them, and notes written on letters from others, delivered into his own hands by the postman. In all these cases, Madame Blavatsky was away, but the writing was identical with that of the letters so often received through her instrumentality.”

In Volume III of *Old Diary Leaves* a number of phenomena are described in connection with Damodar, particularly his power of travelling in the astral body. By means of this power he is alleged to have conveyed messages and information between Colonel Olcott on his propagandist tour and Madame Blavatsky at the Adyar headquarters. The incidents, though interesting and in all probability genuine, are unfortunately valueless as strict scientific evidence, for the Society for Psychical Research has suggested that Damodar may have been an accomplice of Madame Blavatsky and that they secretly communicated with one another by telegraph. The suggestion receives support from Madame Blavatsky’s own assertion that Damodar was completely under her influence and that her slightest wish was law to him. But except for this boast of Madame Blavatsky’s, which may

be accepted for what it may be worth, Damodar's record as a Theosophist makes it impossible to believe that he was insincere. His story, and the phenomena connected with him, are related in Volumes II and III of *Old Diary Leaves*, where they may be read by all who are sufficiently interested to make the reference.

Another instance of a Mahatma letter which materialised during a train journey occurred on August 1st, 1884. Dr. Hubbe Schleiden and Colonel Olcott were travelling from Elberfeld to Dresden, and the incident is described by the latter in Volume III of *Old Diary Leaves*, pp. 167 and 168, in the following words :

“ He (Dr. H. S.) had begun a conversation about certain painful experiences of his early years, which he was then relating for the first time, and about which he had not spoken to Madame Blavatsky. While we were thus occupied, the railway guard came to the right-hand window of the carriage for our tickets. I sat to the Doctor's left. He took both his and my ticket and leaned to the right to hand them to the guard, across the knees of the person who sat to his right. As he was resuming his seat, he saw between his body and the next passenger a letter : it was addressed to him in K. H. handwriting, was in a Thibetan, or, rather, Chinese envelope, and its contents not only explained the cause of the misfortunes he had just been complaining of, but also answered certain questions he had addressed to H. P. B. (then in London) in a posted letter, to which, in the natural course of mail, there had not been time to receive her reply . . . poor Dr. Hubbe was much cheered up and encouraged by the contents of the letter. . . . I too rejoiced in his joy.”

A few months earlier a similar instance of a letter materialising during a railway journey befell Colonel Olcott and Mohini M. Chatterji. On April 5th, 1884, they were travelling from Paris to London when a letter from Mahatma K. H. addressed to Colonel Olcott fell from the roof of the

railway carriage. At the moment when the letter appeared the Colonel was reading a communication from Mr. Bertram Keightley about the dispute that had arisen in the London Lodge between Mrs. Anna Kingsford and her followers on the one hand and Mr. Sinnett and his circle on the other. The Mahatmic letter contained advice for the treatment of the difficulty and was a marked response to Mr. Keightley's expression of loyalty to the Masters which Colonel Olcott was reading at the moment.

On February 1st, 1882, when Professor Smith, of Sydney University, was staying for a few days at the Theosophical headquarters, Colonel Olcott happened to remark that if the Professor were to receive many letters during his stay there might be a chance of his finding Mahatmic writing in some of them. The Professor replied that there would be no chance of that, as no one would write to him. Madame Blavatsky then said that one of the Brothers was present in astral body and that He asked if the Professor would like some such token as Colonel Olcott referred to. The Professor replied that he would be much gratified. Thereupon, relates the Professor, in his Statement published in *Hints on Esoteric Theosophy*, Madame Blavatsky "rose from the table and told us to follow her. Taking my hand, she led me along the verandah, stopping and looking about at some points till we reached the door of my bedroom. She then desired me to enter alone and look round the room to see if there was anything unusual, and to close the other doors. I did so, and was satisfied the room was in its usual condition. She then desired us to sit down, and in doing so took my hands in both of hers. In a few seconds a letter fell at my feet. It seemed to me to appear first a little above the level of my head. On opening the envelope I found a sheet of notepaper, headed with a Government stamp of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, and the following words written in red pencil, in exactly the same writing as that in the letters of the previous evening" (received in the post by Madame Blavatsky, see p. 199):

“ ‘ No chance of writing you inside your letters, but I can write direct. Work for us in Australia and we will not prove ungrateful, but will prove to you our actual existence, and thank you.’ A fair review of circumstances excludes, in my opinion, any theory of fraud. Bombay, 2nd February, 1882. (Sd. J. Smith).”

It was this same Professor Smith whose letter addressed to a Master and sewn in a silk envelope was returned to him apparently intact but with Mahatmic writing added to his epistle. This phenomenon completely convinced the Professor of the genuineness of Madame Blavatsky's powers, until Madame Coulomb claimed that she had opened the envelope by withdrawing a thread of the silk and had resewn it by looping the silk with a hair.

On the 25th August, 1884, Madame Blavatsky caused a letter to materialise in Mr. G. Gebhard's drawing-room. The phenomenon was performed in response to a request from Mr. Gebhard's son, Rudolf, who asked that a letter might be addressed to his father “ treating on a subject that he should mentally wish for.” Mr. Rudolf Gebhard stated, in an account written for the Society for Psychical Research and published in Part IX of the *Proceedings* of the Society (December, 1885), that Madame Blavatsky did not influence the choice of the phenomenon, as she made no suggestion. But she said that she saw something going on with a large oil painting hanging over the piano. Both Madame Blavatsky and an American clairvoyant, Mrs. H——, had already seen a ray of light go towards this picture, and Mrs. Gebhard had seen something like a faint flash of lightning in the looking-glass. Madame Blavatsky told Rudolf Gebhard to examine the picture, as he would probably find something there. He therefore examined it carefully, before and behind, even passing his hand along the top of the frame. He then turned round to Madame Blavatsky, saying that he could find nothing, when she exclaimed, “ There it is ! ” He again turned round sharply, and a letter fell on to the piano as he did so. It was

addressed to his father and, as desired, it discussed the subject which Mr. G. Gebhard had been thinking of at the time. Rudolf Gebhard was an amateur conjurer who had had lessons from a professional; but both he and his father were so convinced of the genuineness of the phenomenon, that the former in his statement to the S.P.R. offered to pay £100 to see this phenomenon performed by a professional conjurer under the same conditions. Colonel Olcott gives the sum offered for this as Rs.1000.

Mohini has recorded an occasion on which a Mahatma letter fell from the ceiling in the presence of Colonel Olcott, the editor of the *Indian Mirror*, Mr. Norendra Nath and himself. In this letter a remark just uttered by Mr. Norendra Nath was quoted. This communication was published in the *Indian Mirror*, and as it referred to a remark which had only just been uttered by a visitor it is particularly important.

On another occasion, when staying in Paris at 46 Rue Notre Dame des Champs, Mr. Mohini received a Mahatma letter when Mr. Keightley and Mr. Oakley were paying him a call. The three Theosophists had been discussing whether to go into the country to visit Madame Blavatsky, and the letter recommended Mohini to do so and to take his two friends. The interesting point is that the letter obviously referred to conversation that had just taken place yet Mr. Keightley and Mr. Oakley had only called on Mr. Mohini that morning by accident.

An unusual instance of the transportation, or precipitation, of a letter by occult means in order to impress the Spiritualists is to be found in A. P. Sinnett's *The Occult World*. The incident referred to occurred in connection with the famous medium Eglinton, who visited Calcutta in 1882 and there made the acquaintance of Madame Blavatsky. Both Eglinton himself and his spirit-controls were at first sceptical as to the existence of the Mahatmas, but shortly before the time for Eglinton's departure from India, his spirit-controls "declared their full knowledge

of the Brotherhood, naming the 'Illustrious' by that designation, and declaring that they had been appointed to work in concert with the Brothers thenceforth." Eglinton sailed on the s.s. *Vega* on or about the 16th March, and during the voyage he received an astral visit from Mahatma K. H. A letter written by Eglinton describing this visit was transported instantaneously from the s.s. *Vega* to Bombay, where it suddenly fell in the centre of a room where Madame Blavatsky and several visitors were in conversation. This letter was addressed to Mrs. Gordon, a member of the Theosophical Society, and after it had been identified by the several witnesses present, it was tied up with a further note written by Madame Blavatsky on several of her visiting cards. Both communications were then removed by occult means, and a few moments later they were received by Mrs. Gordon at Calcutta, Colonel Gordon and Colonel Olcott also being present when the letter appeared. The incident is described by Mrs. Gordon in the following words in a declaration which bears her signature. The first intimation received by Mrs. Gordon that a phenomenon was impending was a letter from Madame Blavatsky

"dated Bombay the 19th, telling us that something was going to be done, and expressing the earnest hope that she would not be required to assist as she had had enough abuse about phenomena. Before this letter was brought by the post peon, Colonel Olcott had told me that he had had an intimation in the night from his *Chohan* (teacher) that K. H. had been to the *Vega* and seen Eglinton. This was at about eight o'clock on Thursday morning the 23rd. A few hours later a telegram, dated at Bombay 22nd day, 21 hour 9 minutes, that is, say 9 minutes past 9 p.m., on Wednesday evening, came to me from Madame Blavatsky, to this effect: 'K. H. just gone to *Vega*.' This telegram came as a 'delayed' message, and was *posted* to me from Calcutta, which accounts for its not reaching me until midday on Thursday. It corroborated, as will be seen, the message of the previous night to Colonel Olcott. We then felt hopeful of getting the letter by occult means from Mr. Eglinton. A telegram later on Thursday

asked us to fix a time for a sitting, so we named 9 o'clock Madras time, on Friday 24th. At this hour we three—Colonel Olcott, Colonel Gordon, and myself—sat in the room which had been occupied by Mr. Eglinton. We had a good light, and sat with our chairs placed to form a triangle of which the apex was to the north. In a few minutes Colonel Olcott saw outside the open window the two 'Brothers' whose names are best known to us, and told us so; he saw them pass to another window, the glass doors of which were closed. He saw one of them point his hand towards the air over my head, and I felt something at the same moment fall straight down from above on to my shoulder and saw it fall at my feet in the direction *towards* the two gentlemen. I knew it would be the letter, but for the moment I was so anxious to see the 'Brothers' that I did not pick up what had fallen. Colonel Gordon and Colonel Olcott both saw and heard the letter fall. Colonel Olcott had turned his head from the window for a moment to see what the 'Brother' was pointing at and so noticed the letter falling from a point about two feet from the ceiling. When he looked again the two 'Brothers' had vanished.

"There is no verandah outside, and the window is several feet from the ground.

"I now turned and picked up what had fallen on me, and found a letter in Mr. Eglinton's handwriting dated on the *Vega* the 24th; a message from Madame Blavatsky, dated at Bombay the 24th, written on the backs of three of her visiting cards; also a larger card such as Mr. Eglinton had a packet of, and used at his *séances*. On this latter card was the, to us, well-known handwriting of K. H. and a few words in the handwriting of the other 'Brother,' who was with him outside our windows, and who is Colonel Olcott's Chief. All these cards and the letter were threaded together with a piece of blue sewing-silk. We opened the letter carefully by slitting up one side, and we saw that some one had made on the flap in pencil three Latin crosses, and so we kept them intact for identification. The letter is as follows:—

" "s.s. *Vega*,

" "Friday, 24th March, 1882.

" "MY DEAR MRS. GORDON,—At last your hour of triumph has come! After the many battles we have had at the breakfast-table regarding K. H.'s existence, and my stubborn scepticism as to the wonderful powers possessed by the "Brothers," I have been

forced to a *complete belief* in their being living distinct persons, and just in proportion to my scepticism will be my *firm unalterable* opinion respecting them. I am not allowed to tell you all I know, but K. H. *appeared* to me in person two days ago, and what he told me dumbfounded me. Perhaps Madame B—— will have already communicated the fact of K. H.'s appearance to you. The "Illustrious" is uncertain whether this can be taken to Madame or not, but he will try, notwithstanding the many difficulties in the way. If he does not, I shall post it when we arrive at port. I shall read this to Mrs. B—— and ask her to mark the envelope ; but *whatever happens*, you are requested by K. H. to keep this letter a profound secret until you hear from him through Madame. A storm of opposition is certain to be raised, and she has had so much to bear that it is hard she should have more.' Then follow some remarks about his health and the trouble which is taking him home, and the letter ends.

"In her note on the three visiting cards, Madame Blavatsky says :—' Head-quarters, March 24th. These cards and contents to certify to my doubters that the attached letter addressed to Mrs. Gordon by Mr. Eglinton was just brought to me from the *Vega*, with another letter from himself to me which I keep. K. H. tells me, he saw Eglinton and had a talk with him, long and convincing enough to make him a believer in the "Brothers" as actual living beings, for the rest of his natural life. Mr. Eglinton writes to me : "The letter which I enclose is going to be taken to Mrs. G—— through your influence. You will receive it wherever you are, and will forward it to her in ordinary course. You will learn with satisfaction of my complete conversion to a belief in the 'Brothers,' and I have no doubt K. H. has already told you how he appeared to me two nights ago," etc. etc. K. H. *told me all*. He does not, however, want me to forward the letter in "ordinary course" as it would defeat the object, but commands me to write this and send it off without delay so that it would reach you all at Howrah to-night, the 24th. I do so. . . . H. P. Blavatsky.'

"The handwriting on these cards and signature are perfectly well-known to us. That on the larger card (from Mr. Eglinton's packet) attached was easily recognised as coming from Koot Hoomi. Colonel Gordon and I know his writing as well as our own ; it is so distinctly different from any other I have seen that among thousands I could select it. He says, 'William Eglinton thought the manifestation could only be produced through H. P. B. as a

medium ' and that the power would become exhausted at Bombay. We decided otherwise. Let this be a proof to all that the spirit of *living man* has as much potentiality in it (and often more) as a disembodied *soul*. He was anxious to test her, he often doubted ; two nights ago he had the required proof and will doubt no more. But he is a good young man, bright, honest, and true as gold when once convinced.

“ ‘ This card was taken from his stock to-day. Let it be an additional proof of his wonderful mediumship. K. H.’

“ This is written in blue ink, and across it is written in red ink a few words from the other ‘ Brother ’ (Colonel Olcott’s Chohan or Chief). This interesting and wonderful phenomenon is not published with the idea that anyone who is unacquainted with the phenomena of Spiritualism will accept it. But I write for the millions of Spiritualists, and also that a record may be made of such an interesting experiment. Who knows but that it may pass on to a generation which will be enlightened enough to accept such wonders ? ”

If the foregoing were a fraudulent device arranged between Madame Blavatsky and Mr. Eglinton, it seems to have been remarkably well planned and carried out with really wonderful success. The part played by Colonel Olcott is particularly important, because his unswerving and entire honesty has been attested by almost everyone who knew him—even by the Society for Psychical Research. Moreover, seven witnesses signed a written statement to the effect that they were present when the letter from Eglinton appeared phenomenally at Bombay

The only apparently weak point in the incident concerns the transmission of Mr. Eglinton’s letter from the *Vega* to Bombay. Mr. Eglinton was asked by Mr. J. E. O’Conor, a Theosophist who happened to be on board the *Vega* at the time of the experiment, to enclose a letter to Madame Blavatsky from himself as an additional test. Mr. Eglinton agreed to this suggestion, and in order to comply with it he opened the envelope which he previously had marked and sealed by a lady friend. Being unable to find this lady again, he marked the flap of a new envelope with

three crosses, which unfortunately was not the mark they had agreed upon beforehand. Mr. O'Connor's letter was duly received by Madame Blavatsky at Bombay, but for some unknown reason it reached her nearly one hour after Mr. Eglinton's. As Mr. O'Connor's letter was private, and Madame Blavatsky did not know whether the writer wished his name to be brought before the public, no word of Mr. O'Connor's letter was mentioned in the published accounts of the case. Mr. O'Connor was therefore not convinced by the experiment, and it is matter for regret that, by not publishing an acknowledgment of Mr. O'Connor's letter at the time of its receipt, an important piece of additional evidence in support of occult phenomena was allowed to become worthless. The transmission of the letter and the visiting cards from Bombay to Calcutta, however, is a flawless piece of evidence. Fuller particulars of Mr. O'Connor's part in the *Vega* experiment are to be found in *Hints on Esoteric Theosophy*.

The Countess Wachtmeister has recorded in her *Reminiscences*¹ that when she was staying with Madame Blavatsky at Wurzburg and the latter was writing *The Secret Doctrine*, the Countess often found on Madame Blavatsky's writing table in the early morning pieces of paper with unfamiliar characters traced upon them in red ink. These notes were precipitated messages and indicated Madame Blavatsky's work for the day. The Countess records other instances of communications and letters from the Mahatmas² :

"I was walking in one of the most frequented parts of the town (Wurzburg) and, as I passed a perfumer's shop, I saw some soap in a glass bowl in the window. Remembering that I required some, I walked into the shop and chose a piece from the bowl. I saw the shopman wrap paper round it, took the parcel from his hand, put it in my pocket, and continued my walk. When I returned to my apartment I went straight to my room, without first

¹ *Reminiscences of H. P. B. and the "Secret Doctrine,"* p. 38.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 50 et seq.

going to see H. P. B., and took off my hat and cloak. Taking the parcel out of my pocket, I began to unfasten the string and pull off the wrappings, and, as I did so, I perceived a small sheet of folded paper inside. I could not help thinking, how fond people are of advertisements, they even stick them on a cake of soap! but then I suddenly remembered that I had seen the man fasten up the parcel, and that he assuredly had not inserted any. This struck me as strange, and, as the paper had fallen to the ground, I stooped down and picked it up, opened it, and there found a few remarks addressed to me from H. P. B.'s Master in His handwriting, which I had often seen before. They were an explanation of events which had been puzzling me for some days past, and gave me some directions as to my future course of action. This phenomenon was peculiarly interesting to me as having taken place without H. P. B.'s knowledge, and independently of her, for she was writing quite unconcernedly at her table in her writing-room at the time, as I ascertained later on. . . .

“ I recall another incident where a phenomenon of a similar nature occurred. Dr. Hartmann had written me a letter requesting me to ascertain something from the Master relative to himself. I showed the letter to H. P. B. and asked her if she would communicate. She replied, ‘ No, see what you can do with it yourself. Put it on Master's portrait, and if Master wishes to reply to Hartmann, the letter will be taken.’ I closed H. P. B.'s door and went to my writing-table, where a portrait in oils of the Master was standing, placed the letter in the frame, took up a book, and read for about half an hour, nobody coming into the room during that time. When I looked up the letter was gone. A few days passed, during which I heard nothing. But one evening, on receiving the letters from the postman, I saw one from Dr. Hartmann, and thought to myself how bulky it was, and how strange that more postage should not have been charged on it. When I opened the envelope I took out first the Doctor's letter

which I had placed on the portrait, then a letter from the Master answering Hartmann's questions, and lastly, the fresh letter from the Doctor, on the margin of which were annotations in Master's handwriting relative to the matter contained in the letter. On the outside of Hartmann's letter was a seal with Master's signature precipitated on the envelope."

Phenomena of this kind, says the Countess, were of common occurrence, and frequently letters received contained marginal annotations in the Master's handwriting. One morning a letter received from Sweden about private affairs caused the Countess some perplexity. Thinking over its contents, she placed it on the table beside her and went on eating her breakfast. By and by, wishing to refer to it again, she found to her astonishment that it had disappeared. "I searched under my plate, on the ground, in my pocket, but could find it nowhere. H. P. B. glanced up from the Russian letter she was reading and said, 'What are you looking for?' I replied, 'For a letter I received this morning.' She said quietly, 'It is useless to look for it. Master was by your side just now and I saw him take up an envelope.' Three days passed without any news of this letter, when one morning as I was busy writing in the dining-room I suddenly saw the envelope on the blotting-pad before me, and on the margin of the letter were comments with intimations as to how I should act, and later experience proved to me how wise the advice was."

CHAPTER XIII

SUMMARY OF PHENOMENA (*continued*)—RAPS AND THE ASTRAL BELLS

BY no means unimportant is the power which Madame Blavatsky undoubtedly possessed of producing raps at will similar to those which frequently occur spontaneously in the presence of physical mediums. Dr. Hodgson in the S.P.R. Report (p. 262) treats this phenomenon lightly. He describes an occasion on which Madame Blavatsky placed her hands upon the back of his head, but the so-called "shocks," he says, impressed him simply as being movements of impatience. "My attention being drawn to them as 'phenomena,' they were repeated; but I found them not at all like the 'shocks' experienced when taking off sparks from the conductor of an electrical machine." Yet even Solovyoff admits in *A Modern Priestess of Isis* (pp. 209, 210) that "there is, it is true, one thing which I cannot explain: how she produced and stopped at will the various raps which were heard at a great distance all round her." He also describes occasions on which, by flicking her hands, as though shaking drops of water off them, she caused raps to come on the surface of a mirror and on various articles of furniture. And M. Solovyoff is under no doubt whatever that these raps sometimes came from points several feet distant from Madame Blavatsky.

Both Colonel Olcott and A. P. Sinnett describe incidents through which the unquestionable reality of these raps was demonstrated. The former has described in *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. II, the experiments conducted at Simla, and

he mentions the luncheon at which she caused the visitors present to pile their hands on top of one another's ; and then, laying her own hand on top of them all, she caused raps to come " with sharp metallic clicks under the lowest hand of the pile " (p. 228). This phenomenon, adds Colonel Olcott, was repeated on several occasions, and once a certain well-known High Court Judge was present whose hands, when placed in the pile, had the effect of inhibiting the phenomena—owing, according to Olcott, to the Judge's nervous system being not a conductor for Madame Blavatsky's nerve aura. On page 118 of the second volume of *Old Diary Leaves* Olcott tells us that Madame Blavatsky produced raps at Simla under circumstances which made trickery impossible. They sounded from various parts of the room—the walls, the glass of the hanging pictures, on a newspaper which was held out to her and on the hand of a Professor who was among the guests. She also placed the tips of her fingers against a glass door, and Colonel Olcott and a sceptical professor watched from the other side while she produced the raps. " The fingers did not change place a hair's breadth nor her muscles contract, but we could see the nerves quivering before each rap, as though some fine current of nerve-force were thrilling through them." Olcott adds that nevertheless the Professor subsequently declared Madame Blavatsky to be a trickster.

Sinnett is referring to some of these same experiments when, in *The Occult World*, he describes the raps produced by Madame Blavatsky in his presence :

" I soon found out not only that raps would always come at a table at which Madame Blavatsky sat with a view of obtaining such results, but that all conceivable hypotheses of fraud in the matter were rapidly disposed of by a comparison of the various experiments we were able to make. To begin with, there was no necessity for other people to sit at the table at all. We could work with any table under any circumstances, or without a table at all. A window-pane would do equally well, or the wall, or any door,

or anything whatever which could give out a sound if hit. A half-glass door put ajar was at once seen to be a very good instrument to choose, because it was easy to stand opposite Madame Blavatsky in this case, to see her bare hands or hand (without any rings) resting motionless on the pane, and to hear the little ticks come plainly, as if made with the point of a pencil or with the sound of electric sparks passing from one knob of an electrical apparatus to another. Another very satisfactory way of obtaining the raps—one frequently employed in the evening—was to set down a large glass clock-shade on the hearthrug, and get Madame Blavatsky, after removing all rings from her hands, and sitting well clear of the shade so that no part of her dress touched it, to lay her hands on it. Putting a lamp on the ground opposite, and sitting down on the hearthrug, one could see the under surfaces of the hands resting on the glass, and still under these perfectly satisfactory conditions the raps would come, clear and distinct, on the sonorous surface of the shade. . . .

“ Madame Blavatsky would sometimes put her hands, or one only, on someone else’s head, and make the raps come, audibly to an attentive listener and perceptibly to the person touched, who would feel each little shock exactly as if he were taking sparks off the conductor of an electrical machine. . . .

“ At a later stage of my enquiries I obtained raps under better circumstances again than these—namely, without contact between the object on which they were produced and Madame Blavatsky’s hands at all. This was at Simla in the summer of last year (1880), but I may as well anticipate a little as far as the raps are concerned. At Simla, Madame Blavatsky used to produce the raps on a little table set in the midst of an attentive group, with no one touching it at all. After starting it, or charging it with some influence by resting her hands on it for a few moments, she would hold one about a foot above it and make mesmeric passes at it, at each of which the table would yield the familiar sound. Nor was this done only at our own house with our own tables. The same thing would be done at friends’ houses, to which Madame Blavatsky accompanied us. And a further development of the head experiment was this : It was found to be possible for several persons to feel the same rap simultaneously. Four or five persons used sometimes to put their hands in a pile, one on another on a table ; then Madame Blavatsky would put hers on the top of the pile and cause a current, or whatever it is which produces the sound, to pass through the whole series of hands, felt by each

simultaneously, and record itself in a rap on the table beneath. Anyone who has ever taken part in forming such a pile of hands must feel as to some of the hypotheses concerning the raps that have been put forward in the Indian papers by determined sceptics—hard-headed persons not to be taken in—to the effect that the raps are produced by Madame Blavatsky's thumb-nails or by the cracking of some joint—that such hypotheses are rather idiotic.”

Dr. Annie Besant, too, experienced these raps on the occasion of one of her early visits to Madame Blavatsky at the house in Lansdowne Road. Dr. Besant in her *Autobiography* describes the phenomenon and her sensations :

“ She (Madame Blavatsky) put her hand over my head, not touching it, and I heard and felt slight taps on the bone of my skull, each sending a little electric thrill down the spine. She then explained carefully how such taps were producible at any point desired by the operator, and how interplay of the currents to which they were due might be caused otherwise than by conscious human volition.”¹

Several references to the “ raps ” occur in Countess Wachtmeister's *Reminiscences*. While Madame Blavatsky was at Wurzburg, shortly after the publication of the S.P.R. Report, she received a visit from a certain Professor who desired to investigate the phenomena for himself. Although “ very disinclined to gratify him,” she at last consented “ to produce some trifling experiments in psycho-electric force—raps—the simplest, easiest, and most familiar of these ‘ phenomena.’ ” When the Professor had drawn the table away from her, so that he could easily inspect it on all sides, she produced “ sharp, distinct raps ” in accordance with his wish that she should knock three, five and seven times, and so on.

“ The Professor seemed delighted. He skipped round the table with wonderful agility, he peeped under it, he examined it on all sides, and when H. P. B. was too exhausted to gratify his curiosity in this direction any longer, he sat down and plied her with

¹ *Autobiography of Annie Besant*, p. 353.

questions, to all of which she replied with her usual vivacity and charm of manner.

“ At length our visitor took his departure—unconvinced, as we afterwards learned. He was a disciple of Huxley, and preferred to adopt my explanation, however absurd, provided it did not clash with his own theories.

“ Poor H. P. B. ! Her swollen and painful limbs, that could hardly bear her from couch to chair, were little fitted for the gymnastics the Professor credited them with.”¹

Countess Wachtmeister also records the following :²

“ There was one occurrence, continually repeated over a long period, which impressed me very strongly with the conviction that she was watched and cared for by unseen guardians. From the first night that I passed in her room, until the last that preceded our departure from Wurzburg, I heard a regularly intermittent series of raps on the table by her bedside. They would begin at ten o'clock each evening, and would continue, at intervals of ten minutes, until six o'clock in the morning. They were sharp, clear raps, such as I never heard at any other time. Sometimes I held my watch in my hand for an hour at a stretch, and always as the ten-minute interval ticked itself out the rap would come with the utmost regularity. Whether H. P. B. was awake or asleep mattered nothing to the occurrence of the phenomenon, nor to its uniformity.

“ When I asked for an explanation of these raps I was told that it was an effect of what might be called a sort of psychic telegraph, which placed her in communication with her Teachers, and that the chelas might watch her body while her astral left it.”

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Regarding the sound of the silvery bell which so many people have described as occurring in the presence of Madame Blavatsky, Sinnett recorded that he first heard this phenomenon in September, 1880, when Madame Blavatsky

¹ *Reminiscences of H. P. Blavatsky and the "Secret Doctrine,"* p. 34.

² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

visited him at Simla. Sometimes, he says, there was a chime and sometimes a little run of three or four bells on different notes: "They were produced for us the first time one evening after dinner while we were still sitting round the table, several times in succession in the air over our heads, and in one instance instead of the single bell-sound there came one of the chimes." Later on Mr. Sinnett heard these bells "on scores of occasions and in all sorts of different places"—at different houses which Madame Blavatsky visited, in the open air, "up in the sky in the stillness of the evening" and "sometimes down on the ground amongst the feet of a group of persons listening for it." On one occasion, when a gentleman went back to the dining-room, two rooms off, to get a finger-glass with which to make a sound for the occult bells to imitate, he "heard one of the bell-sounds produced near him, though Madame Blavatsky had remained in the drawing-room."

A statement by Martandrao Babaji Nagnath published in *Hints on Esoteric Theosophy* records the fact that in 1879, after spending an evening with the Founders of the Theosophical Society, when Babaji and his friends were leaving the premises and were in the open compound, Madame Blavatsky suddenly held her visitor back with one of her hands on his shoulder, near a tree in the compound, and "to our great surprise, a sound of sweet music was heard coming from the tree."

Apparently the same, or a very similar experience is recorded in the same book by Mr. Nilagi Pitali:

"Madame Blavatsky came out on to the verandah into the open air and stayed still, and while steadily gazing towards the sky, we heard music similar to the tunes of a musical-box. She then approached a tree, and laying her hand upon it, we heard music as if within the tree."

The fact is pointed out by A. P. Sinnett in *The Occult World* that the astral bell was far from being a purposeless phenomenon, since it was used as a sort of "telegraphic call-bell" by the Masters. On many occasions Sinnett has

heard a little "ting" in the room, whereupon Madame Blavatsky "would get up and go to her room to attend to whatever occult business may have been the motive of her summons." And he relates a picturesque incident showing how the sound could sometimes be produced by a brother-initiate at a distance :

"A lady, a guest at another house in Simla, had been dining with us, when about eleven o'clock I received a note from her host, enclosing a letter which he asked me to get Madame Blavatsky to send on by occult means to a certain member of the great fraternity to whom he and I had been writing. . . . We were all anxious to know at once—before the lady with us that evening returned up the hill, so that she could take back word to her host—whether the letter could be sent ; but Madame Blavatsky declared that her own powers would not enable her to perform the feat. The question was whether a certain person, a half-developed brother then in the neighbourhood of Simla, would give the necessary help. Madame Blavatsky said she would see if she could 'find him,' and taking the letter in her hands, she went out into the verandah, where we all followed her. Leaning on the balustrade, and looking over the wide sweep of the Simla valley, she remained for a few minutes perfectly motionless and silent, as we all were ; and the night was far enough advanced for all commonplace sounds to have settled down, so that the stillness was perfect. Suddenly, in the air before us, there sounded the clear note of an occult-bell. 'All right,' cried Madame, 'he will take it.' And duly taken the letter was shortly afterwards."¹

¹ *The Occult World.*

CHAPTER XIV

SUMMARY OF PHENOMENA (*concluded*)—PRECIPITATION OF
WRITING AND PICTURES—PHENOMENA OF DUPLICATION
—MATERIALISATION OF VARIOUS OBJECTS, ETC.

ONE or two cases of precipitated writing, as, for instance, the communication from John King, which appeared in Colonel Olcott's notebook, have already been described in order to lead up to the Mahatmic letter phenomena. There are several other cases of this kind on record, as well as instances of precipitated pictures. In addition to their intrinsic interest, they support the stories of the materialisation of various objects which is said to have occurred. Precipitated writing, and even precipitated pictures, although rare, are not by any means unknown among Spiritualists. The Glasgow medium, David Duguid, for example, produced some remarkable pictures, which were painted in darkness and in very short spaces of time, when the medium was in trance.

But to return to Madame Blavatsky. Colonel Olcott records¹ that a note "from E. W. to Mr. Owen" was copied on to the fly-leaf of a dictionary which had been in Olcott's pocket until half an hour before the experiment, when he had placed it on a mantelpiece where it had been in full view.

On the following evening a second and even better copy of the note from E. W. was made upon the inside surface of a piece of Bristol-board drawing-paper. And a Mr. B—who was present on this occasion assured Colonel Olcott,

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. I, pp. 52-3.

upon his honour, that he had received phenomenally a letter from "John King" in reference to a personal matter, the letter having come into his carpet-bag while in a train and miles distant from Philadelphia or Madame Blavatsky.

Colonel Olcott mentions¹ that some verses claiming to emanate from John King were precipitated on to the three blank leaves preceding the title-page of his copy of Esquemeling's *Buccaniers*. This, of course, was done in the very early days, before *Isis* was written or the Theosophical Society inaugurated.

A story related by William Q. Judge was published by Sinnett in his *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky* and referred to by Colonel Olcott in *Old Diary Leaves*. One evening Mr. Judge, Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky were writing a letter to Mr. M. D. Evans, an insurance broker of Philadelphia. They were unable to remember Mr. Evans's address, though both Madame Blavatsky and Olcott recollected that in Philadelphia the former had a slip of blotting-paper with Mr. Evans's address printed on it. Finally, Madame Blavatsky took from the table a japanned tin paper-cutter, stroked it gently, laid a piece of blotting-paper over it, passed her hand across the surface, lifted the paper, and there, on the black japanned side of the paper-cutter, was printed in bronze ink the facsimile of the inscription on the Philadelphia blotting slip. Colonel Olcott called this an example of precipitation whereby a subliminal was converted into a supraliminal consciousness.

One day at Philadelphia Madame Blavatsky caused the drawing of a man's head and some writing to appear on the ceiling, beyond the reach of her arm, where the Colonel was confident that nothing was to be seen a few moments before.

Colonel Olcott mentions some large Thibetan writings in letters of gold that suddenly came upon the flat part of the cornice and the frames of two glass doors of a book-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

case. The writing appeared in the time between putting a box within the bookcase cornice and taking a stuffed bird from the writing-table behind him to lift it to its place on the box.¹

One day in New York Colonel Olcott witnessed the direct slate writings of a private medium named Cozine, which, he said, were far more wonderful than Dr. Slade's, because no pencil or crayon was used and communications come upon the slate in bright blue and red colours while Olcott was holding one end of the slate. When he related this to Madame Blavatsky, she expressed a desire to see if she could obtain this phenomenon herself. The Colonel purchased a slate, and Madame Blavatsky took it, without crayons or pencil, into a small, pitch-dark closet bedroom and lay down, Olcott waiting the while outside. After a few minutes she reappeared with the slate in her hand. On the slate was writing in red and blue crayon in a handwriting which was not her own. Her forehead was damp with perspiration ; she looked very tired, and said that the effort had " taken it out of her."

One evening during the period in New York Madame Blavatsky caused the portrait of an Indian yogi to be precipitated on to a piece of Lotos Club note-paper which Colonel Olcott had brought home with him before dinner. The only suspicious fact about the occurrence is that the experiment was suggested to Madame Blavatsky by W. Q. Judge. The picture was made in the presence of Olcott and Judge. Madame Blavatsky scraped perhaps a grain of the plumbago of a Faber lead pencil on to the paper and then " rubbed the surface for a minute or so with a circular motion of the palm of her right hand." She then handed them the result. The picture of a yogi, probably Tiruvalluvar, had appeared on the paper, and the picture was afterwards pronounced by Le Clear, an American portrait painter, to be so unique that no living artist could have produced it. The effect was so soft and delicate that

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 445.

it was impossible to see how the pigment had been applied, and there was no sign of the paper having been touched with a hard lead-pencil point. The picture is still to be seen in the Picture Annexe to the library at Adyar.

In the presence of Colonel Olcott, also at New York, Madame Blavatsky caused a picture illustrative of Stainton Moses in the astral body, and showing the degree of development he had attained at that time, to be precipitated on to a piece of satin which Madame Blavatsky cut to the required shape. Colonel Olcott was looking on while she did so. Madame Blavatsky then placed the material underneath a piece of blotting-paper, brought down her clenched fist upon it and then, raising the paper and turning over the satin, she tossed it to the Colonel. "On the sheeny side," he says, "I found a picture in colours, of a most extraordinary character. There was an excellent portrait, of the head only, of Stainton Moses as he looked at that age, the almost duplicate of one of his photographs that hung 'above the line' on the wall of the room, over the mantelshelf. From the crown of the head shot out spokes of golden flame; at the place of the heart and the solar plexus were red and golden fires, as it might be bursting forth from little craters; the head and the place of the thorax were involved in rolling clouds of pure blue aura, bespeckled throughout with flecks of gold; and the lower half of the space where the body should be was enwrapped in similarly rolling clouds of pinkish and greyish vapour, that is, of auras of a meaner quality than the superior cumuli."¹

During the early days in India, A. P. Sinnett desired to have a precipitated picture of Mahatma K. H., and on the occasion of one of Madame Blavatsky's visits to Allahabad she asked him to give her a piece of thick white paper and to mark it. This paper she placed in her scrap-book, there being reason to hope that "a certain highly advanced chela, or pupil, of Koot Hoomi's . . . would do what was neces-

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 364-5.

sary to produce the portrait." The scrap-book was then left on the table in the drawing-room and was occasionally inspected by Mr. or Mrs. Sinnett. Nothing happened to it that day or night, and on the following morning the paper inside the scrap-book was still blank. But during breakfast, which was held at half-past eleven, Madame Blavatsky, by astral sight, discerned the presence of the expected chela. After breakfast, on looking into the scrap-book, a precipitated profile portrait was found on Mr. Sinnett's sheet of marked paper. "The face itself was left white, with only a few touches within the limits of the space it occupied; but the rest of the paper all round it was covered with cloudy blue shading."

The weak point about this incident is the fact that the picture was apparently precipitated during breakfast, and the obvious suggestion is that Madame Blavatsky might have hastily drawn it herself immediately before sitting down to the meal, especially as the face itself had "only a few touches" and the rest consisted of "cloudy blue shading." Sinnett himself, however, was entirely satisfied with this phenomenon. Yet, in order to obtain a second and more detailed portrait, Madame Blavatsky took Mr. Sinnett's marked paper to her room because, as Mr. Sinnett remarks, there was no need for test conditions in obtaining the second portrait, and in Madame Blavatsky's room the magnetic atmosphere was more suitable and more time could be devoted to the work.

PHENOMENA OF DUPLICATION

These were frequent, particularly in the early days in America. They were a form of materialisation. Madame Blavatsky used to say that materialisation was much easier when a copy of the object to be produced was already in existence and before her. It made the task of visualising, which preceded the actual appearance of the phenomenon, so much easier; and in some cases the physical material

of the object already in existence was drawn upon for the creation of its duplicate.¹

An instance of duplication which leads on naturally from the phenomenal production of pictures occurred in New York in 1875 in the presence of Mdlle. Liebert. Madame Blavatsky produced a duplicated portrait of the Chevalier Louis, but with the head in a reverse direction from the original and with two grinning elementals in the background. Madame Blavatsky precipitated the portrait on to the underneath side of a card by passing her hand three or four times over its surface. It was reproduced by Olcott in the first volume of *Old Diary Leaves*.²

An account of an interview with Madame Blavatsky which was published in the *Hartford Daily Times* for December 2nd, 1878, and quoted by Colonel Olcott in *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. I, includes a striking instance of duplication. The reporter happened to call when Madame Blavatsky was making a new scrap-book for newspaper cuttings having reference to Theosophy. She had bought a paper alphabet which she was pasting on to the title-page to form an inscription, and being short of A's, P's and S's, she duplicated several under the gaze of the reporter, simply by looking at the letter with intensity. At his request she then made two A's joined together, and they appeared "as if stamped from the same piece of paper. There were no seams or (artificial) joinings of any kind."

In New York the Hon. J. L. O'Sullivan, formerly United States Minister to Portugal, called on Madame Blavatsky one day and the conversation turned on phenomena of duplication. Colonel Olcott had brought home that afternoon a bank-note for \$1000, which Madame Blavatsky now told Mr. O'Sullivan to hold screwed up in his hand. He did so, and on opening his hand a moment later he found an exact duplicate of the bank-note, even to the serial number and face and back printing. The two notes were

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 364-5.

² *Ibid.*, p. 197.

then laid away in a drawer, and after O'Sullivan had gone, Madame Blavatsky showed Colonel Olcott that only the original one remained; the duplicate had dissolved.¹

One evening in New York, when one of the Masters was in the body of Madame Blavatsky writing *Isis Unveiled*, the Master borrowed a pencil from Colonel Olcott. Knowing that Madame Blavatsky would probably forget to return it, and as it was the only pencil he possessed at the moment, the Colonel was momentarily reluctant to comply with the request and possibly may have showed slight hesitation. At any rate, the pencil which the Adept borrowed immediately became a dozen pencils of identical make and pattern as He held it in His hand, or rather, as He held it in Madame Blavatsky's hand.²

Mr. Babaji Nagnath relates in *Hints on Esoteric Theosophy* that in September, 1880, when in conversation with the Naib Dewan of Cochin States, Mr. Shankeraya, at the headquarters in Girgaum, Madame Blavatsky was asked by her visitor for one of her visiting cards. She gave him one, and was then asked for another, whereupon she said, "There it is coming," and a card came fluttering down through the air to the ground.

On the 8th September, 1879, at the request of Shishir Babu, editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Madame Blavatsky pulled some black Asiatic hair from her head, rang the astral bells and duplicated a magic mirror with a black frame and handle which she had received that day from a Master. The phenomenon was performed, in response to the Babu's reiterated request, by turning away from him for a few moments, after which she turned round with two identical glasses and sank exhausted on to a seat.³

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 435.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 245.

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 92, 93.

MATERIALISATIONS, ETC.

One evening, when several friends were present in Madame Blavatsky's New York apartments, she made a fine *crépe* handkerchief "out of nothing" while in conversation with M. Herrisse, of the Haytian Legation. M. Herrisse had referred to some fine Chinese handkerchiefs which a friend had brought back with him from that country and expressed a doubt whether their like could be found, whereupon Madame Blavatsky produced a handkerchief by magic which closely resembled those of which he had been speaking. When the handkerchief appeared, Colonel Olcott promptly took possession of it. Madame Blavatsky, however, wished to give it to Mr. O'Sullivan, who was also present. Colonel Olcott therefore asked her to make a duplicate; and this she did by holding it in her hands and turning her back to the company for a few moments. She then placed the second handkerchief round her neck, but finding that it was not long enough, she jerked it impulsively away and flung it to Colonel Olcott. Immediately it was found that a third and exactly similar handkerchief was round her neck; and O'Sullivan declared that he saw it formed under his eyes.¹

In the house of Mr. Houghton, a lawyer of Boston, living in the suburb of Roxbury, Madame Blavatsky caused a gold ring to materialise in the heart of a rose. The increasing weight of the flower was remarked by Mr. Houghton and Colonel Olcott, and a moment later the ring seemed to be extruded from its heart. The rose at once grew noticeably lighter in weight and more erect on the stalk. On examination, it was found that there was no sign whatever of the petals having been tampered with or forced open.²

The ring now worn by Dr. Annie Besant, with a seal tablet of dark green bloodstone, was materialised by Madame Blavatsky in New York by holding a ring belong-

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 337 *et seq.*

² *Ibid.*, p. 94.

ing to Colonel Olcott. Olcott's ring, however, was of a different pattern and was set with a red carnelian. The original bloodstone, too, materialised by Madame Blavatsky, has since been lost, and that now worn by Dr. Besant was set by a jeweller.

Madame Blavatsky made a large iron whistle from three keys by clasping them in her hand. The whistle was found to be on the key-ring, from which the keys had disappeared in the few brief moments during which she clasped them in her hand.¹

When Colonel Olcott sent away his family silver from their New York flat, Madame Blavatsky materialised a pair of sugar-tongs for their use. But she visualised the tongs incorrectly, the result being that the article produced had abnormally long legs and claws at each end slit like the prongs of a pickle fork. This curiosity, with a number of other relics of phenomena, is preserved at Adyar.

Colonel Olcott's splendid beard must be familiar to all who have read the early history of the Theosophical Society and seen photographs or portraits of the President-Founder, but the way in which this patriarchal feature was first acquired is probably not so widely known. It is described in *Old Diary Leaves* in these words :

“ After having shaved my chin for many years I began to grow a full beard, under medical advice, as a protection to a naturally delicate throat, and at the time I speak of it was about four inches long. One morning, when making my toilet after my bath, I discovered a tangle of long hair under my chin next the throat. Not knowing what to make of it, I very carefully undid the mass at the expense of almost an hour's trouble, and found, to my great amazement, that I had a lock of beard, fourteen inches long, coming down as far as the pit of the stomach ! Upon my showing it to H. P. B., she said it had been purposely done by our Guru while I slept, and advised me to take care of

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 337 *et seq.*

it as it would serve as a reservoir of his helpful aura. . . . So I used to tuck it away inside my collar to hide it, and did so for years, until the rest of the beard had grown to match it. This accounts for the 'Rishi beard,' so often mentioned in friendly allusions to my personal appearance, and explains why I have not yielded to my long-felt wish to clip it into a more convenient and less conspicuous shape."

One evening in New York, when Madame Blavatsky received a visit from a Chinese lecturer, Mr. Wong Chin Fu, Colonel Olcott saw her produce two finely executed paintings from a drawer that had previously contained only her writing-paper. Wong Chin Fu suggested that the first of these pictures was Japanese. Madame Blavatsky returned it to the drawer, and a moment later drew forth the second picture. It was strikingly similar to the first one in design but differently coloured. It had Chinese lettering in the left-hand lower corner.

During the winter of 1874-5, Madame Blavatsky materialised some "ripe black Hamburg grapes" for Colonel Olcott at about 1 a.m. after they had been working on *Isis Unveiled* all the evening. Having eaten some salt food for dinner, Colonel Olcott had grown very thirsty. Madame Blavatsky asked him to turn down the gaslight while the materialisation occurred, and he accidentally turned it right out. He lit it again immediately, and was amazed to find that two large bunches of grapes were attached to the two ends of a hanging bookshelf.

During the first visit of Madame Blavatsky to the Sinnetts the party went to stay for a few days at Benares, and were lodged in a house which was lent to them by the Maharajah of Vizianagram. One evening after dinner, when they were sitting in the central hall of this building, three or four cut roses suddenly fell in the midst of the party. Several lamps and candles were burning at the time and the phenomenon was wholly unexpected, even by Madame Blavatsky, who

was sitting in an arm-chair reading. The ceiling of the hall consisted of solid, bare, painted rafters and boards supporting the flat cement roof of the building.¹

At Simla, too, Sinnett records her having materialised water in a bottle when on a picnic during which the supply of water ran out. A coolie was sent to a brewery, about a mile off, which was the nearest building, with a note asking for water, but he returned without any because, being Sunday, no European was on the premises to whom he could deliver the note. After a few moments "Madame Blavatsky suddenly got up, went over to the baskets, a dozen or twenty yards off, picked out a bottle—one of those, I believe, which had been brought back by the coolie empty—and came back to us holding it under the fold of her dress. Laughingly producing it, it was found to be full of water." Mr. Sinnett asserts that this cannot have been trickery, because the accident whereby the brewery was deserted by the Europeans, and the fact that a coolie was chosen for the job so abnormally stupid as to come back without any water, were both impossible to foresee. But the Society for Psychical Research has suggested that the coolie had been bribed by Madame Blavatsky and had brought back the one bottle filled with water which she picked out from the baskets. This supposition ignores Mr. Sinnett's positive declaration that "I tasted the water in the bottle Madame Blavatsky produced, and it was not water of the same kind as that which came from our own filters. It was an earthy-tasting water, unlike that of the modern Simla supply, but equally unlike, I may add, though in a different way, the offensive and discoloured water of the only stream flowing through those woods."

One evening on returning to dinner in his house in Allahabad, Sinnett found several telegrams awaiting him. In one of the telegraph envelopes was a little folded note from Mahatma M. bidding him search in his writing-room for a fragment of a plaster bas-relief which the Mahatma

¹ *The Occult World.*

had caused to be transported from Bombay, a distance of eight hundred miles. Mr. Sinnett found in his writing-table, in a drawer devoted exclusively to occult correspondence, a "broken corner from a plaster slab, with M.'s signature marked upon it."¹ He immediately telegraphed to Bombay asking if anything had happened. He was informed in reply that at about seven that evening, when Madame Blavatsky and four Theosophists were seated at tea in the verandah they were startled, first, by Madame Blavatsky seeing an Adept by astral sight, and, a few minutes later, by the sound of something falling and breaking behind the door of Madame Blavatsky's writing-room. On going in to see what had happened, they found that a Paris plaster mould representing a portrait had fallen to the ground and was broken into several pieces. Madame Blavatsky was greatly annoyed, and, thinking that the mould might be repaired by glueing it, they tried to piece the fragments together on the table. They found that one piece, nearly square, and of about two inches, in the right corner of the mould, was missing. Nor could this corner be found by searching.

"Shortly afterwards Madame Blavatsky suddenly arose and went into her room, shutting the door after her. In a minute she called Mr. — in, and showed to him a small piece of paper. We all saw and read it afterwards. It was in the same handwriting in which some of us had received previous communications, and the same familiar initials. It told us that the missing piece was taken by the Brother whom Mr. Sinnett calls 'the Illustrious,' to Allahabad, and that she should collect and carefully preserve the remaining pieces." (From a statement attested by the signatures of seven persons in all who were present when the plaster bas-relief was broken—quoted by A. P. Sinnett in *The Occult World*.)

As there is nearly half an hour's difference of longitude between Bombay and Allahabad, the fragment seems to

¹ *Ibid.*

have appeared in Mr. Sinnett's drawer almost immediately after the breakage at Bombay. In fact, Mr. Sinnett was of the opinion that it "was really brought from Bombay to Allahabad, to all intents and purposes, instantaneously." A few days later Mr. Sinnett ascertained that the fragment found in his drawer was veritably the missing piece from the broken mould. The broken pieces were posted to him from Bombay, and he found that the fractured edges of his fragment fitted exactly into those of the defective corner, so that he was "enabled to arrange the pieces all together again and complete the cast."

The foregoing phenomena occurred while Colonel Olcott and a Hindu named Bhavani Rao, or, as he is more frequently called, Bhavani Shankar, were staying with Mr. Sinnett in Allahabad. Dr. Hodgson in his Report suggested that the phenomenon was fraudulent and that the corner had been broken off the plaster mould before Colonel Olcott and Bhavani left Bombay. On arriving in Allahabad, Bhavani Shankar may then have inserted the fragment in Mr. Sinnett's desk. Meanwhile no one in Bombay had noticed that a piece from the plaque was missing, and at the correct moment for the phenomenon the mould may have been jerked from the wall by one of Madame Blavatsky's confederates, possibly Babula, by a string pulled from outside the room.

This may or may not have been the case ; but the latter phenomenon which occurred two days later also depends for its impressiveness upon the honesty of Bhavani Shankar (see p. 164).

"MAYAS," OR HYPNOTIC ILLUSIONS

Perhaps one might almost be excused for believing that, at any rate in the phenomenon affecting Colonel Olcott's beard, the Colonel must have been the victim of an illusion. He includes numerous instances in *Old Diary Leaves* to demonstrate the fact that Madame Blavatsky had sometimes the power of casting "hypnotic glammers," "mayavic

illusions," or, as Colonel Olcott calls them, "mayas," upon people with whom she came in contact.

For instance, in New York, in the early days before the Theosophical Society was founded, Madame Blavatsky and Signor B——, in the presence of Colonel Olcott, each caused a white butterfly to enter the room through an open window. For some time the butterflies chased one another round the room and then flew into a corner and disappeared.

At Philadelphia, in one of her playful moods, she vanished from a room from which there was no means of exit without being seen by Colonel Olcott.¹ After a short time she appeared again as though from nowhere. Colonel Olcott was of the opinion that this illusion was performed by means of a silent hypnotic suggestion that she was invisible. He believed that while he was searching for her, she was probably standing within a few feet of him. The feasibility of this theory has been conclusively shown by innumerable hypnotic experiments in which, as a result of suggestion, the hypnotised subject has been made unable to see a person who was present and even to be terrified at the sound of the "invisible" person's voice, apparently coming from nowhere.

On several occasions Madame Blavatsky was known to cut tresses of her hair, which was auburn, but when the lock of hair was handed to the person for whom it had been cut, the recipient found it to have turned dark and wiry, as though it had been taken from the head of an Asiatic. At Philadelphia, too, Madame Blavatsky once caused her hair to seem longer than in reality it was.²

Shortly before leaving New York for India, Madame Blavatsky entertained Colonel Olcott one evening by shuffling a pack of cards in which the astral duplicates of visiting cards of persons known to them continually appeared and disappeared. Colonel Olcott refers to this as a marvellous and unique phenomenon, and laments that

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. I.

² *Ibid.*

“precious psychic force—so hard to generate, so easy to lose—should have been wasted to objectify, for a brief moment in each case, these astral phantoms of common visiting cards.”¹

Colonel Olcott's sister, Mrs. Mitchell, who with her husband and children occupied a flat in the same house with Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, remarked to her brother one day that Madame Blavatsky had shown her a collection of gems and jewellery which must have been worth at least £10,000. It was with difficulty that Colonel Olcott convinced his sister that Madame Blavatsky owned no such property and that the jewellery Mrs. Mitchell had seen was entirely illusory.²

CLAIRVOYANCE

On several occasions Madame Blavatsky showed that she possessed the power to read the contents of sealed letters clairvoyantly, and at least one incident recorded by Colonel Olcott in *Old Diary Leaves* proves that she had the ability to “psychometrise”—to describe persons and their physical and spiritual condition when handling objects which have been in their possession. At Simla in 1880 she was asked to psychometrise a letter in a plain envelope.³ On placing the envelope to her forehead, she said, “This is queer, I see just the top of somebody's head with hair standing up like spikes all over it. I can't see the face. Ah! now it begins to rise slowly. Why, it is Dr. Thibaut, of course!” In this, her vision was correct; the letter contained in the envelope was from Dr. Thibaut.

Hints on Esoteric Theosophy contains an interesting statement by the Hon. J. Smith, Member of the Legislative Council, N.S.W., Professor in Sydney University, President of the Royal Society, N.S.W., etc. The Professor records

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. II.

that while stopping for a few days at the Theosophical headquarters on his way home from Australia, "on the evening of the 31st January (1882), when the daily batch of letters was being opened, one was found to contain some red writing different from the body of the letter. Colonel Olcott then took two unopened letters and asked Madame Blavatsky if she could perceive similar writing in them. Putting them to her forehead, she said one contained the word 'carelessly' and the other something about Colonel Olcott and a branch at Cawnpore. I then examined these letters and found the envelopes sound. I opened them and saw the words mentioned. One letter was from Meerut, one from Cawnpore, and one from Hyderabad."

A similar, if not the same, occurrence is described in Volume II of *Old Diary Leaves*¹ :

"Damodar received four letters by one post which contained Mahatmic writing, as we found on opening them. They were from four widely separated places and all post-marked. I handed the whole mail to Prof. Smith, with the remark that we often found such writings inside our mail correspondence, and asked him to kindly examine each cover to see whether there were any signs of its having been tampered with. On his returning them to me with the statement that all were perfectly satisfactory so far as could be seen, I asked H. P. B. to lay them against her forehead and see if she could find any Mahatmic message in either of them. She did so with the first few that came to hand and said that in two there was such writing. She then read the messages clairvoyantly, and I requested Prof. Smith to open them himself. After again closely scrutinizing them, he cut open the covers, and we all saw and read the messages exactly as H. P. B. had deciphered them by clairvoyant sight."

A similar instance to the foregoing, which took place in New York, is described in an earlier chapter (see pp. 131, 132).

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 333.

It was admitted that this incident might possibly, though improbably, have been fraudulent on the ground that Madame Blavatsky by some means might have obtained previous access to the letter and have read its contents. A similar occurrence, when Madame Blavatsky read the contents of a sealed envelope, just delivered by the postman, is described by Solovyoff in *A Modern Priestess of Isis* and is there attributed by him to fraud of this nature. The fact that Madame Blavatsky knew what the envelopes contained is at first sight a fact which seems to tell against her ; but it must be remembered that it is now recognised by scientists that the clairvoyant perception of the contents of sealed packages certainly occurs. Dr. Tischner, for example, in his book, *Telepathy and Clairvoyance* (1924), gives a number of cases of the kind so well authenticated that it is impossible to disbelieve them. So here, at least, science supports Madame Blavatsky. As a matter of fact, none of the phenomena attributed to her are definitely known to be impossible ; but doubt is raised through their extreme improbability. But even this improbability grows less and less as one advances in knowledge of occult psychology.

Madame Blavatsky undoubtedly possessed the unusual power of clairvoyance of printed matter ; that is, she used to see before her the astral visions of printed books from which she was able to read. Many of the quotations in *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* were obtained in this way, and many witnesses have recorded that when making quotations she gazed at a point in space immediately before her and then wrote down what she saw. Thus Olcott remarks this phenomenon in describing the manner in which *Isis* was written, and Dr. Besant says that she saw *The Voice of The Silence* being copied from its astral original in this way. Similar statements are made by Mr. B. Keightley and the Countess Wachtmeister in regard to *The Secret Doctrine*. The latter wrote as follows in her *Reminiscences* (p. 35) ;

“ Shortly after my arrival in Wurzburg she took occasion to ask me if I knew anyone who could go for her to the Bodleian Library. It happened that I did know someone I could ask, so my friend verified a passage that H. P. B. had seen in the Astral Light, with the title of the book, the chapter, page and figures all correctly noted.

“ Such visions often present the image of the original reversed, as it might be seen in a looking-glass, and though words can, with a little practice, be read easily, and the general sense and context prevent serious error, it is much more difficult to avoid mistakes in figures, and it was figures that were in question on this occasion.

“ Once a very difficult task was assigned to me, namely, to verify a passage taken from a manuscript in the Vatican. Having made the acquaintance of a gentleman who had a relative in the Vatican, I with some difficulty succeeded in verifying the passage. Two words were wrong, but all the remainder correct, and, strangely enough, I was told that these words, being considerably blurred, were difficult to decipher.”

The Countess adds that the foregoing are but a few instances out of many, and that whenever Madame Blavatsky needed information on any particular subject, that information would be sure to reach her, either from a friend writing from a distance, or it would be found in newspapers or magazines, or discovered in the course of casual reading. “ And this happened with a frequency and appositeness that took it quite out of the region of mere coincidence. She would, however, use normal means in preference to the abnormal when possible, so as not to exhaust her power unnecessarily.”

In *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett* (Letter No. LXXX) there occurs the following allusion to this extraordinary faculty :

“ There’s a new development and scenery. Every morning, *I live two lives again*. Master finds that it is too

difficult for me to be looking consciously into the astral light for my S. D., and so, it is now about a fortnight, I am made to see all I have to as though in my dream. I see large and long rolls of paper on which things are written and I recollect them."

CHAPTER XV

MADAME BLAVATSKY'S WRITINGS

TURNING from phenomena to the study of Madame Blavatsky's writings, one receives the impression of violent contrast, for the difference is equivalent to a transition from the sensational to the sublime. *Isis Unveiled*, Madame Blavatsky's first book, was written in New York during the incredibly short period of approximately two years, and was published in that city in 1877. Its success was immediate, the first edition being exhausted in ten days from the date of publication; and it has sold steadily ever since. *Isis Unveiled* is in two volumes, the first dealing with science and the second with religion, the aim of the work being to show that all science and all religion, when rightly interpreted, point to the existence of a secret knowledge or occult tradition concerning the origin, spiritual nature and ultimate destiny of Man and indeed of all living spirits, human and sub-human, incarnate and discarnate. Thus, in the volume on science, the reader is brought again and again to problems such as the gulf between mind and matter, the nature of the universal ether, the nature of the atom, the reality of powers resident in man which orthodox science has not yet fathomed, and, ultimately, the spiritual origin of all things created. And in the volume on religion insistence is laid again and again on the fact of secret traditions in all religions, particularly in their early states, of initiations into Mysteries which entailed real experience and the unfoldment of vital spiritual powers; and Madame Blavatsky shows how, as the materialistic

cycle now reaching its completion was unfolded stage by stage, the secret traditions, the inner meanings of the Mysteries were gradually lost and, in some cases, deliberately suppressed. Madame Blavatsky is absolutely fearless and entirely without mercy in her exposure of the exoteric and corrupt orthodox religions which have forgotten the meanings of their Initiations and lost the spiritual tradition, showing, for example, in great detail, how the mysticism of the Neo-Platonists was suppressed by the early Catholic Church, seers and initiates being exterminated. She also quotes page after page from the Jesuits' own writings showing the depths of corruption to which the Society of Jesus sank during the Middle Ages. No one who reads *Isis Unveiled* can wonder that its author should have drawn upon herself torrents of the most bitter and violent abuse, or that those whom she so ferociously attacked should have been willing to go to every length in order to discredit her in the eyes of the world.

Two criticisms are frequently levelled against *Isis Unveiled*: one, that it is a very inadequate and vague presentation of Theosophical doctrine; and, secondly, that it is loosely constructed, without any sense of literary form, and rambles from topic to topic in an entirely capricious manner. Regarding the first objection, it has to be remembered that *Isis Unveiled* is primarily a work on Occultism rather than Theosophy, its object being to show the existence of a secret tradition which is the key to spiritual knowledge, and in the light of which all sciences and all religions are seen to be fragments of a unity. Colonel Olcott, in the first volume of *Old Diary Leaves*, confesses at some length that he is at a loss to explain the fact that no exposition of reincarnation is to be found in *Isis*, and that in one passage reincarnation is explicitly denied. But in this Colonel Olcott is almost too punctilious, for although the word reincarnation is not mentioned, the theory which it stands for is referred to under the term metempsychosis, and Sinnett, in the exposition of *Isis Unveiled* contained in

the third part of *The Occult World*, quotes several passages in which metempsychosis is referred to. In the "Glossary of Terms," too, in the introductory section entitled "Before the Veil" we find the following :

"*Metempsychosis*—the progress of the soul from one stage of existence to another. Symbolised and vulgarly believed to be re-births in animal bodies. A term generally misunderstood by every class of American and European society, including many scientists. The Kabalistic axiom, 'A stone becomes a plant, a plant an animal, an animal a man, a man a spirit, and a spirit a God,' receives an explanation in Manu's *Manava-Dharma-Shastra*, and other Brahmanical books."

The fact that greater details about reincarnation were not given in *Isis* may have been due to the fact that at that time the Western public was not in a fit mental state to comprehend or to receive the doctrine ; and it would therefore have been folly to have destroyed the influence of *Isis Unveiled* and to have turned a success into a failure, by emphasising a doctrine which were better withheld until a later date. This principle is followed in all religious and spiritual revelation. The divine verities are shown to man strictly in proportion to willingness and capacity to receive. It would be madness to suppose that the last word of divine truth has been spoken even now ; no doubt much more awaits us when our development is such that we may assimilate it.

Place of highest honour is also given in *Isis Unveiled* to the ancient Hindu philosophers, and the fact that some of the Hindu names were spelt incorrectly seems rather to indicate that Madame Blavatsky wrote from inspiration or copied down what she saw imperfectly in the astral records, rather than that she deliberately plagiarised or drew her information from ordinary printed books :

"It is the Platonic philosophy, the most elaborate compend of the abstruse systems of old India, that can alone afford us this middle ground. Although twenty-two and a quarter centuries

have elapsed since the death of Plato, the great minds of the world are still occupied with his writings. He was, in the fullest sense of the word, the world's interpreter. And the greatest philosopher of the pre-Christian era mirrored faithfully in his works the spiritualism of the Vedic philosophers who lived thousands of years before himself, and its metaphysical expression. Vyasa, Djiminy, Kapila, Vrihaspati, Sumati, and so many others, will be found to have transmitted their indelible imprint through the intervening centuries upon Plato and his school. Thus is warranted the inference that to Plato and the ancient Hindu sages was alike revealed the same wisdom. So surviving the shock of time, what can this wisdom be but divine and eternal? "

The formlessness of *Isis Unveiled* is more apparent than real, for the book is modelled as a gigantic *rondo*. Although the author seems to wander into innumerable side issues and to touch upon an infinitude of subjects, she returns again and again to the principal theme: the reality of occult knowledge. And *Isis Unveiled*, imperfect though it often seems, even in its greatness, was the first book ever published on modern Theosophy promulgated by the Theosophical Society. It therefore marked the appearance of a new literature and was the forerunner of a vast army of books, many of which are works of spiritual genius.

The years which followed the writing of *Isis Unveiled* were busy ones for the Founders of the Theosophical Society. As Corresponding Secretary, Madame Blavatsky put in long hours at her writing-desk at the headquarters in the Girgaum Back Road, Bombay, and at Adyar later on. In addition to her voluminous correspondence and articles for *The Theosophist*, she wrote much for American and Russian newspapers—slaving night and day, Colonel Olcott tells us, in order to provide the necessary income with which to carry on the work of the Theosophical Society. *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan*, the series of descriptive essays which won recognition for her in Russian literary circles, was written at this time for the *Russky Vystnik*; and there are records of her having translated articles and stories from the

Russian for Sinnett's newspaper, *The Pioneer*, and also for the Indian Government. It was not until the scandal brought upon her by the Coulombs and her subsequent exile in Europe that she definitely commenced the composition of her greatest work, *The Secret Doctrine*, though she had been contemplating this work for a considerable time. The earliest chapters of *The Secret Doctrine* were written at Wurzburg and Cologne, which Madame Blavatsky visited during her Continental wanderings of 1886. Much of *The Secret Doctrine* was produced in poverty and wretchedness, and she cherished the idea that the publication of this work would re-establish her good name and vindicate her tarnished honour.

Her methods of writing and the conditions under which she laboured are described by the Countess Wachtmeister in *Reminiscences of H. P. Blavatsky and "The Secret Doctrine."* She wrote in continual torture from disease, and was sometimes so ill that she could scarcely drag herself from one room to another. Her life was in continual danger, owing to the state of her heart, and she was in such an advanced stage of kidney disease that with any ordinary person her malady would have proved fatal long before she made her final sojourn in Avenue Road, Regent's Park. She was in continual torture, too, owing to calumnies which were still appearing, and she declared that she could sometimes feel the malevolent thoughts of thousands of individuals impinging on her astral body and stinging her into frenzies. The Report of the Society for Psychical Research on her phenomena was published and sent to her while she was at Wurzburg, and this again caused her to lose her balance completely, and for weeks any sort of work at *The Secret Doctrine* was impossible. Yet, in spite of every obstacle, "this great and grand work" proceeded.

The Secret Doctrine is justly regarded by Theosophists as being, with the possible exception of *The Voice of the Silence*, Madame Blavatsky's greatest work. According to

the Countess Wachtmeister, *The Secret Doctrine* was originally to have consisted of four volumes, each comprising three parts—The Stanzas and Commentaries; Symbolism; Science. But Madame Blavatsky was only able to complete two volumes before death claimed her, and these form the most magnificent and complex essay in cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis that has ever been written. To give an idea in few words of the wide range and splendour of its conceptions would be quite impossible. Fundamental to all its doctrine is the principle of the Days and Nights of Brahmâ, the alternating periods of Manvantara and Pralaya, of manifestation on the planes of material being and of reabsorption in the unmanifested divine One Existence.¹ A Day or a Night of Brahmâ is said, according to the most abstruse and careful occult calculations, to endure for 311,040,000,000,000 years.

The framework, or skeleton, of the book consists of a prose-poem called the "Stanzas of Dzyan," which Madame Blavatsky claimed to have copied from the astral records of the oldest manuscript in the world. The language of these stanzas is not only highly poetical and picturesque, but absolutely unique as literature. At the same time the theme which they describe is one of the most sublime and

¹ The theory of Days and Nights of Brahmâ is referred to very poetically in *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan* (p. 36) in the course of a description of the Hindu miracle-play, *Harischandra* :

"The Hindu's divide the periodical appearances and vanishings (of the universe) into days and nights of Brahmâ. The nights, or withdrawals of the objective universe, are called Pralayas, and the days, or epochs of new awakening into life and light, are called Manvantaras, Yugas, or 'centuries of the gods.' These periods are also called, respectively, the inbreathings and outbreathings of Brahmâ. When Pralaya comes to an end Brahmâ awakens, and, with this awakening, the universe that rested in deity, in other words, that was reabsorbed in its subjective essence, emanates again from the divine principle and becomes visible. The gods, who died at the same time as the universe, begin slowly to return to life. The 'Invisible' alone, the 'Infinite,' the 'Lifeless,' the One who is the unconditioned original 'Life' itself, soars, surrounded by shoreless chaos. Its holy presence is not visible. It shows itself only in the periodical pulsation of chaos."

loftiest which the human mind can conceive. In the first stanzas the earliest stirrings of the divine towards manifestation after the long sleep of Pralaya are described :

“ The last vibration of the Seventh Eternity thrills through infinitude. The mother swells, expanding from within without, like the bud of the lotus.

“ The vibration sweeps along, touching with its swift wing the whole universe and the germ that dwelleth in darkness : the darkness that breathes over the slumbering waters of life . . . ”

and the first quiverings of manifested life on the higher spiritual planes, the awakening of the Sons of Light and the Lipika, who, guided by the Primordial Seven, prepare the gross matrix for the forms to be evolved during the ensuing manvantara. The formation of material and spiritual worlds is described :

“ He makes balls of fire, runs through them, and round them, infusing life thereinto, then sets them into motion ; some one way, some the other way. They are cold, he makes them hot. They are dry, he makes them moist. They shine, he fans and cools them. Thus acts Fohat from one twilight to the other, during Seven Eternities.”

The details of this process are, to the ordinary mind, most abstruse, for they relate to activities which take place on the higher spiritual planes. Unless one is a developed clairvoyant of a lofty order, they describe events entirely beyond one's experience. As well explain the difference between Sheraton and Hepplewhite furniture to a savage whose whole experience was confined to a cave, with stones, sticks and animal skins for its sole equipment, as describe the ultimate spiritual processes to the concrete, physical mind.

Every Day of Brahmâ is divided into seven “ Eternities ” (æons or periods) during which seven Root Races of humanity rise, reign and pass away, each root race being divided into seven sub-races. The Aryan peoples, of which we ourselves are members, is the fifth of these root races,

and up to the present five sub-races—the Hindu, Arabian, Iranian, Celtic and Teutonic—have appeared. The four preceding races were : The Sons of the Gods, the Hyperboreans, the Lemurians and the Atlanteans. The Sons of the Gods existed before the surface of the earth had cooled ; they had astral bodies. The second race, the Hyperboreans, which was a densification of the first, had etheric bodies ; but it was not until the emergence of the Lemurians that human beings, as we understand the term, appeared on the earth. All this, and much more, is described in detail in *The Secret Doctrine*, in the Stanzas of Dzyan and the Commentaries on them by Madame Blavatsky.

More complex even than this is the system of cosmic evolution according to which worlds are born and die and undergo reincarnation, almost in the manner of human beings, but magnified to a colossal scale. *The Secret Doctrine* posits two parallel streams of evolution—the evolution of Form, which is continuous from parent to offspring, and the evolution of individualised Spirit, which passes from form to form and from world to world, unfolding its latent divinity through vital material contact, converting potentialities into powers, rising from soul of mineral, plant and animal, through man to divinity. To provide for the evolution not of forms but of life itself many worlds are needed ; and every earth in the universe is therefore part of a “ chain,” which is a series of seven globes of various densities. These globes are really the “ spheres ” of Spiritualism and are linked together by the fact that entities pass from globe to globe in the course of their evolution and at the crises called “ death.” Every chain passes through seven stages, or lives. A series of seven chains is called a Scheme of Evolution, and is watched over by a great spiritual Being called a “ Ruler of Seven Chains.” Briefly and crudely, this is the substance of *The Secret Doctrine*, but it gives no idea of the profound learning and abundant reflection contained in this work. The book undertakes the gigantic task of portraying

man in the successive stages of his vast evolutionary pilgrimage.

Popular statements of this doctrine are also to be found in Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*, in *Theosophical Gleanings* and in many of the books and published lectures of Dr. Annie Besant, notably in *The Ancient Wisdom and Man ; Whence, How and Whither*, the last-named written in collaboration with Mr. C. W. Leadbeater. Another excellent expression of *The Secret Doctrine* is embodied in the *Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, published in 1923.

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A library devoted exclusively to the subject could scarcely do full justice to Madame Blavatsky's writings, and the present sketch is therefore necessarily most inadequate. Whole volumes have been published in exposition of the doctrines of reincarnation and karma alone ; and, after cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis, these play a most important part in the Theosophical view of life. Inseparable from reincarnation and karma is Madame Blavatsky's famous doctrine of the Seven Principles, or the sevenfold nature of man. According to the doctrine of the Seven Principles, the consciousness of man, when fully developed, is capable of functioning on seven planes which together make a great Cosmic Plane. For each of these planes man has a special vehicle of manifestation, sometimes called a Body or Spiritual Body. These bodies or sheaths are the instruments through which the ego expresses himself and manifests his individuality ; they are composed of spirit-matter, resultant of centuries of pre-existent thought, will and action on the part of the ego. They limit the eternal Spirit, reveal the unmanifested, express that which otherwise could never be uttered ; they differentiate the individual from the great Divine Source, they are the mould for individual consciousness. The seven planes of life, for each of which man possesses or is evolving a vehicle of consciousness, are the Physical (divided functionally into the

Etheric and the Dense Physical); the Astral, vehicle of desires and emotions; Manas, the concrete, lower mind; Buddhi, the plane of spiritual wisdom; Atma, the plane of spiritual consciousness, all-embracing love, profound bliss; the Anupadaka, or monadic plane on which the entity manifests as abstract will, wisdom and activity; and, lastly, the Divine Plane; the two latter being both as yet unmanifested. It is the three highest principles—the Divine, the Monadic and the Atmic—which contain the abiding consciousness of the real man. After death, the lower principles are worked out one by one, the lower bodies are cast off like the physical at the death of the physical, and the experience undergone in the lower vehicles is registered in the higher as innate disposition and natural ability or disability. It is in the higher vehicles that the memory of past lives lies concealed; it is these that persist from incarnation to incarnation, attaching to themselves a new set of lower principles every time the individual is born into the physical world. The purpose of rebirth is the acquirement of experience, the evolution of character and the development of powers. The man who makes a failure of life—and almost all of us fail when judged from the higher standpoint—is not condemned to everlasting torment, nor is he blotted from the book of life for ever; but he is born again, he has another chance of progress, he goes through the discipline of incarnation again and again until he at last awakes in the divine likeness.

The chain of causation by which the many lives of man are hung together on a single thread is known as karma. It is the doctrine of cause and effect extending from one life to another. By means of karma past conduct builds present conditions, present conduct builds future conditions; past thought builds present intellect, present thought makes future intellectual powers; past will and desire make present character; the aspirations of to-day determine what we shall become to-morrow. The man who robbed and plundered yesterday is born to-day a slave.

He who toiled in past ages producing wealth that others batted on is born to-day with riches. The conqueror who spared his foe and wrought no harm to lower creation is to-day mild and beneficent, saint-like, he is the almost-Buddhâ. On the other hand, he who wrought evil, who enslaved his fellows, or who drenched the earth in human blood, despising the sacred truths that other men held dear, is born again to misery, disease, deformity ; and long and anxiously he seeks before the crumbs of truth be found. This is the principle of karma, whereby perfect justice is everywhere in operation. No wrong is suffered, no pang is borne, no privation is undergone that is unmerited, that fails to redeem a debt incurred, or that does not bring healing and redemption in its train. To those who err, who set their faces in the direction of evil, karma is a relentless machine that crushes and destroys. To those who seek the Right Hand Path leading to divinity, it is a powerful weapon of self-progress, the key that unlocks the prison-house of material existence, the pathway that leads the spirit away from earth, among the stars of heaven and beyond.

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Ill-health prevented Madame Blavatsky from finishing *The Secret Doctrine*, but when she died she left a considerable quantity of manuscript in the care of Dr. Annie Besant. This manuscript duly appeared as the third volume, and consists, not of the lives of great Occultists which Madame Blavatsky had at one time thought of writing for this volume, but of essays and discursions on various aspects of Religion, Occultism and Science, much in the manner of the latter parts of the first two volumes. There are no "Stanzas of Dzyan" in the third volume of *The Secret Doctrine*, so it lacks a good deal of the wonderfully picturesque quality of the earlier volumes.

The third volume of *The Secret Doctrine* has been a subject of much contention among Theosophists. On the

one hand is a small group who insist in following Madame Blavatsky to the exact letter and will accept no one else as leader ; while on the other is the great majority of broad Theosophists who recognise that Madame Blavatsky must be succeeded by other seers. The former class resent the fact that *The Secret Doctrine* and other of Madame Blavatsky's writings have been edited by her literary trustees. By some of her followers she is still regarded with such extreme veneration that the thought of no other philosopher, the vision of no other seer, seems worthy of either credence or consideration. An illustration of this attitude is provided by the fact that some of the American Theosophists have brought out an exact reproduction of the first edition of *The Secret Doctrine* without a word, comma or minutest typographical divergence from the original edition. This has been achieved by photographing each page of the original first edition and then printing from blocks instead of type. The method must have involved great expense, but its underlying motive was love, not profit ; and the result is an exact reproduction of the original book.

Although in steadily declining health, Madame Blavatsky's labours by no means ended with the publication of *The Secret Doctrine*. The great work was followed, during the closing years of her life, by a considerable series of books and articles.

“ The monuments to her literary industry between 1885 and 1891,” wrote Colonel Olcott in *Old Diary Leaves*, “ are *The Secret Doctrine*, *The Key to Theosophy*, *The Voice of the Silence*, *Gems from the East*, the several volumes of her new magazine, *Lucifer*, her contributions in Russian and French to Continental magazines, a great bulk of unpublished MSS. for Volume III of *The Secret Doctrine* and her Esoteric Section, or private school of instruction in occult philosophy and science, which, at her death, numbered between one and two thousand pledged and enthusiastic pupils.”

The Voice of the Silence, in particular, is one of her most beautiful pieces of writing, and might almost have been suitable to use as stanzas for the fourth volume of *The Secret Doctrine*, had she lived to write it. *The Voice of the Silence* shows the path of progress along which man evolves to divinity. It completes the cycle of Theosophical thought, for from the first word of *The Secret Doctrine* to the last of *The Voice of the Silence* one is led from primeval cosmogenesis to the ultimate destiny of the individual. *The Voice of the Silence* was said to be a transcript from *The Book of the Golden Precepts*, some of which are pre-Buddhistic and others later, the originals being engraved on thin oblongs and containing "about ninety distinct little treatises."

The Voice of the Silence describes the awakening of the soul; its psychic and spiritual development, and the path of initiation traversed by the disciple in his progress to Buddha-hood. In conclusion, it places before the aspirant the ideal of the perfected Nirmânakâya, who, with divine powers at his command, renounces his right to Nirvana in order to remain in touch with his brethren of earth, assisting them on their upward march. The last words of the last book published by Madame Blavatsky during her lifetime describes the loftiest idealism, the sublimest self-renunciation which it is possible for mind of man to conceive—no less, indeed, than the sacrifices of the great Avatars, the Holy Incarnations of God.

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No review of Madame Blavatsky's writings would be complete without reference to her imaginative gifts as a teller of stories. *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan* which, it has been said, "reveals a literary brilliance, a fascination of style, and a gorgeousness of imagination equal to almost anything that exists in literature,"¹ is unquestionably a work of genius. It is a charming piece of description, imagination and learning blended together and

¹ *Old Diary Leaves.*

cleverly contrasted in a succession of sketches. Among its most delightful pen-pictures are those entitled "On the Way to Karli," "A City of the Dead," and "An Isle of Literature." Humour, poetry and vividness are among the finest qualities of the book. It won for its author wide recognition in Russia, where it was first published.

The *Nightmare Tales* (published by the Theosophical Society in 1892) form a much less ambitious work than *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan*. But they show the same fertile imagination and wealth of descriptive power, as well as complex occult knowledge and great psychical experience. No one but a true seer could have written such stories of visions, apparitions, voices heard clairaudiently and psychic flights across the earth. The *Nightmare Tales* were written or revised in the closing months of Madame Blavatsky's life when their author "was tired with the drudgery of the Theosophical Glossary" and shortly after she produced that most wonderful of all her writings, her veritable swan-song, *The Voice of the Silence*.

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In reviewing her writings as a whole, the first thing to notice is what Colonel Olcott called "the phenomenal changes in her literary styles." These changes were said by her enemies to be due to plagiarism, but in reality they were due to psychic influences and to the versatility of genius. For most undeniably Madame Blavatsky was a genius. And if she were a fraud, her genius then seems greater than ever. For if Madame Blavatsky was an impostor, she must have written *The Stanzas of Dzyan* and *The Voice of the Silence*, like *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan* and the *Nightmare Tales*, entirely from the riches of her own imagination. And can anyone imagine a greater contrast in literary style than that which exists between *The Stanzas of Dzyan* and the Commentaries upon them in *The Secret Doctrine*? If these, and her other writings, were all produced by Madame Blavatsky's un-

aided talent, she must have possessed the intellectual resources of at least three ordinary geniuses.

Secondly, it has to be recognised that in *Isis Unveiled*, and to a greater extent in *The Secret Doctrine* and *The Voice of the Silence*, this amazing woman has handled with the authentic tones of Authority the profoundest, most vital and most abstruse subjects known to mankind. If Madame Blavatsky were, as we believe, a genuine Messenger, there seems to be nothing more to be said about existence. Madame Blavatsky in her writings has shown us the Whence, How, Why and Whither of life. She has shown us whence this universe has sprung, how our individual spirits were differentiated from the Unmanifested God Which is our Eternal Father, why we are incarnate at this moment and the eternal goal whither we are bound. She has shown us the mighty alternations of Night and Day, the rhythmic pulse of worlds, the irresistible waves of life which course round the cosmic chains and the Wisdom that presides over all. What more can be said of the writings of this woman? If it be true that a tree is known by its fruits, that men gather not figs off thistles, neither doth a good tree bring forth evil fruit, then is Madame Blavatsky justified for ever in the works which follow her.

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More recently two important additions to the Blavatsky writings have been given to the world by Mr. A. Trevor Barker in *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* (1923) and *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett* (1924). These letters are important for many reasons. They throw a wonderful light on Madame Blavatsky's life and character, and they go a long way towards establishing the reality of her occult powers. Moreover, these two volumes provide an instructive contrast in literary style. Although there is similarity in some points between the style and phraseology of the Mahatma letters and the style of Madame Blavatsky's own personal letters, there is also remarkable

divergence. The former, on the whole, are fluent, whereas the latter are staccato. Letter No. CXL in *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* may be studied in regard to this particular point. In this letter Madame Blavatsky claimed that she actually learned much of her English from Mahatma K. H. On reading these letters one feels more than ever that the theory of fraud is not only inadequate, but incredible. No finer vindication of Madame Blavatsky can be imagined than these two volumes of letters.

CHAPTER XVI

HER PERSONAL CHARACTER

CONCERNING Madame Blavatsky's personal character there is an abundance of testimony. She was a person of changeable and very vivid moods, or, as many people would no doubt say, she had the "artistic temperament." At times she would give way to the most ungovernable rage, would abuse her servants and companions and utter torrents of profane language, quite regardless of who might be present and whether the onlookers might be scandalised or not. Mahatma K. H. in one of the early letters to A. P. Sinnett remarks that a human cyclone was raging in the body of "Upasika" (Madame Blavatsky) most of the time; and Mr. Sinnett himself remarks¹ that "She certainly had none of the superficial attributes one might have expected in a spiritual teacher; and how she could at the same time be philosopher enough to have given up the world for the sake of spiritual advancement, and yet be capable of going into frenzies of passion about trivial annoyances, was a profound mystery to us for a long while"; while the occasions of which Colonel Olcott recorded that "H. P. B. was in one of her bad moods," nagging him and abusing him, are only too numerous. Yet, in contrast with these moods of violence, she was sometimes so winsome and fascinating that no one who saw her could resist liking her. Even Solovyoff pays tribute to the childlike simplicity and ingenuousness she sometimes displayed; and Madame Coulomb, her other arch-enemy, admits that "she could make herself agreeable if she was stroked on the right

¹ *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky.*

side," and that "at times she used to have a good fit for two or three days, at which times she was more tractable, which made up for the past."

The childlike element in her nature was very considerably preponderant, and there is no doubt that this is the master-key without which it is impossible to understand her behaviour. Whether her various phenomena were genuine or fraudulent, many of them are in either event incomprehensible until it is realised that the mind that conceived them was the mind of a child. Her phenomena, many of them, were the sort of wonders which every child would love to do if only he could. Her carelessness about test conditions in which these wonders were performed, her impatience with sceptics and her indignation and astonishment when accused of trickery were all childlike. She expected from her audiences the simplicity of saints and philosophers; the critical suspicions of modern men of the world never seem to have entered into her calculations, and, in consequence, she placed herself in every manner of compromising situation. All of this is childlike.

The same characteristic explains the ease with which she was imposed upon. The early history of the Theosophical Society is a continuous story, not of frauds perpetrated by Madame Blavatsky, but of unscrupulous tricksters and charlatans who, one after another, imposed upon her simplicity and exploited her generosity. The first adventurer to deceive Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott was Mr. J. H. Felt, who was followed by the Baron de Palm and Hurrychund Chintamon.

Colonel Olcott also mentions a New York reporter named Mr. Curtis who was numbered among their friends when *Isis Unveiled* was being written. Mr. Curtis seems to have made a great deal of excellent "copy" out of the Theosophists, and on one occasion persuaded Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott to spend a night on a pile of lumber by the river-side in order to see the ghost of a night-watchman which was supposed to haunt the wharves.

The whole thing was a hoax, but the Theosophists, with a small crowd of reporters, bravely saw their vigil out. The next day's papers made great fun of the event and paraded the Founders of the Theosophical Society as "a couple of crack-brained persons who had expected the impossible." Their arrival in India was similarly accompanied by disillusionment. Mr. Hurrychund, with whom they had corresponded from New York, abused their confidence, not only by charging exorbitant rent after giving them the impression that they were to be his guests, but by embezzling money which had been sent to him from New York for the benefit of the Arya Samaj, the Indian religious organisation of which he was secretary. The treachery of the Coulombs was a similar story. When Madame Blavatsky befriended them they were penniless and homeless, and, no doubt, in the trustfulness of her nature, Madame Blavatsky often said indiscreet things to them which they afterwards distorted and misinterpreted to her undoing. When Dr. Hodgson came to Adyar he was welcomed in a spirit of friendliness and trustfulness and was given every opportunity to investigate both premises and documents and to cross-question everyone. Even the crafty viper Solovyoff won her confidence to an astonishing degree, as is clear to everyone who cares to read between the lines of his book. And before the Theosophical Society was so much as thought of there were the Red Indians who stole her top-boots, and the fraudulent mediums of the Société Spirite, Cairo.

Her reckless generosity is well attested. Mr. Sinnett aptly said that whenever she found herself possessed of money she seemed to regard it as "something to be got rid of soon. . . . Her impulse was to throw it away with both hands."¹ Colonel Olcott says that at New York she pawned her long gold chain in order to assist a penniless medium when herself without money to spare, and she told Olcott that when she went from Paris to New York she

¹ *Old Diary Leaves.*

travelled steerage in order to assist a poor woman who had been defrauded of the money she had saved for her fare, and who otherwise would not have been able to make the journey. As the only authority for the genuineness of this story is Madame Blavatsky herself, it may be accepted with reservation and for what it is worth, but it is similar to other stories related by eye-witnesses. And if her phenomena were fraudulent, her generosity must be admitted to have been even more remarkable, for many of the "phenomena" resulted in handsome presents—shawls, handkerchiefs, jewellery, flowers and other expensive articles—which her friends took away with them. For instance, Madame Blavatsky doubled a valuable diamond or yellow topaz for Mrs. Sinnett at Simla, and for a lady friend at Ootacamund she duplicated a sapphire—phenomena which, if fraudulent, must have been both expensive and extravagant, particularly as the Society was by no means too prosperous at the time. Colonel Olcott adds that the lady at Ootacamund afterwards fell away from them, but she kept the sapphire, which had been valued by a jeweller at Rs.200. And if the Mahatma letters to Sinnett were written fraudulently by Madame Blavatsky, even these must be reckoned among her acts of generosity, for they made A. P. Sinnett into a famous author.

The playful tricks and harmless deceptions which she sometimes practised—the joke about her age, for instance (see pp. 143-4)—also resulted from the fact that, fundamentally and ultimately, Madame Blavatsky was a child. Her irritability, vanity and peremptory tendencies owe something to the same fact. Even her reprehensible habit of calling all sorts and conditions of people her "only true friends and accepted chelas," and promising that after her death they should succeed her in the Theosophical Society, show a child's scale of values and a child's irresponsibility. Perhaps the worst of all her faults was that she ate too much and took too little exercise. Friends who were with her when she wrote *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* remark that

she wrote for extraordinarily long hours, and it was only with the utmost difficulty that she could be persuaded to go out. When writing *Isis Unveiled* she was sometimes at her desk for fifteen hours a day, and when the Countess Wachtmeister was with her, during the writing of *The Secret Doctrine*, she sometimes wrote during both morning and afternoon, resting her mind in the evening by playing *picquet*. If the Countess Wachtmeister persuaded Madame Blavatsky to go out for exercise, "H. P. B." was usually irritable and impatient, complaining at the waste of time and plainly anxious to get back to her work. And yet, as Colonel Olcott admitted, "If H. P. B. wrote mighty books, she also ate her fried eggs swimming in grease every morning." The fact that she ate unwisely and took so little exercise affected her heart and increased her irritability. Yet even in her anger she was magnificent, because always utterly fearless and frequently in the right. An incident is recorded which illustrates this very well.¹ In June, 1879, Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott paid a visit to a Dekkanee Sirdar who introduced them to a charming child of ten years whom they supposed might be his granddaughter, for the Sirdar was a grey-bearded, white-haired old nobleman. Madame Blavatsky's face, says the Colonel, relaxed into a sweet smile as the child approached, but upon the Sirdar saying, "'Madame, allow me to present to you my little wife,' the smile gave place to a frown, and in tones of inexpressible disgust she shouted, 'Your WIFE? You old beast! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!'" Colonel Olcott adds that they left the nobleman "trying to smile."

Madame Blavatsky's language was always piquant and sometimes, in Colonel Olcott's phrase, ironclad. She had a playful wit and keen sense of humour. One of her inveterate habits was that of dubbing her acquaintances with quaint and fantastic nicknames. Thus A. P. Sinnett was "Sir Percy," and Sinnett and his wife are addressed

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 91, 92.

in some of her letters as "Dear Boss and Bossess." Nicknames were also used in the forged Coulomb letters, Madame Coulomb having taken advantage of her victim's playful habit to accuse her of fraud in respect of persons whose identity must always remain a matter of doubt. The Coulombs themselves she named "Marquis" and "Marquise."

One of Madame Blavatsky's most characteristic words was "flapdoodle," which she is said to have invented and which she used as an expression of good-natured contempt. Whenever she was angered she did not hesitate to swear and to use profane language—a custom which Olcott suggests may have been deliberately adopted in order to shock the prudish, but which it seems far more likely she may first have acquired when, as a little girl, she associated with the soldiers of her father's regiment. Later, no doubt, the habit would have been cultivated and her vocabulary extended, in the course of her knock-about travels in various parts of the world.

Mrs. Cleather, in *H. P. Blavatsky as I Knew Her*, describes her first encounter with Madame Blavatsky and how the "old lady" was in such an ill-humour that she refused to see her visitor:

"I well remember Mr. Keightley telling me on our way out to Norwood that, in their frequent 'arguments,' she (Mabel Collins) and H. P. B. could be 'heard half-way down the road'—when the windows were open. We walked from West Norwood station and, sure enough, when we got within about a hundred yards of Maycot, I heard loud and apparently angry voices floating—or rather ricochetting—towards us down the road. I was rather aghast, and Mr. Keightley's murmured remark that he was afraid 'the Old Lady' was in 'one of her tempers' was not reassuring, particularly as he added that she would probably refuse to see me! *She did*: Nothing would induce her to, I could hear her saying so when Mr. Keightley went in (leaving me outside on the doorstep), and rating him soundly for bringing a total stranger to call at such an inopportune moment. In vain he reminded her that she herself had made the appointment, and that I had come up

from the country on purpose to keep it. No, she was adamant ; also angry."

This description by Mrs. Cleather is confirmed by Mr. E. J. Dunn, who has recorded the fact that he was guided to her house in Lansdowne Road, whither Madame Blavatsky removed after leaving Norwood, by the sound of her voice, in fierce debate, issuing from an upper window¹ :

" Well do I remember walking up Lansdowne Road, wondering which house it was, when—hark ! What was that I heard ? Through an open window of an upper room, I could hear a voice talking in stentorian tones at express speed, and I knew that only Madame Blavatsky could possess a voice like it. There was no need to look for the number of the house. That was Madame Blavatsky, and no other ! "

Incidentally, Mr. Dunn's impressions on seeing Madame Blavatsky face to face are worth repeating :

" No one could speak like H. P. B. without being true to the core. She had the courage to face, practically single-handed, the obloquy of the world, and this dauntless courage came out in the treatment of every subject which was discussed. Eyes that could look one through and through, steady as a rock, penetrating as the ether, intelligence incarnate, portrayed a reliable and heroic soul behind them. The contrast between this giant soul and the deceptions and pusillanimity attributed to her was not worth a moment's hesitation."

In *Old Diary Leaves*, Colonel Olcott gives several wonderful descriptions of her characteristics and appearance. She was a gifted pianist, Olcott remarks, and sometimes played magnificently, apparently under psychic influence. On first settling in her rooms in New York she bought a piano, which she played fairly frequently for the first few weeks, after which it was used for piling books upon, and Olcott adds, rather regretfully, that many months went by without her playing a note. Although she is

¹ E. J. Dunn in *The Vahan*, quoted by Sax Rohmer in *The Romance of Sorcery*.

usually credited with exceptional artistic ability, and is known to have executed a number of clever caricatures, and also, of course, is accused of having painted various pictures which she claimed were precipitated by super-normal means, Colonel Olcott says¹ that :

“ She had a bad eye for colours and proportions in her normal state, and very little of that fine æsthetic taste which makes a woman dress herself becomingly. I have gone to the theatre with her when I expected the house to rise at us. She, a stout and remarkable-looking woman, wearing a perky hat with plumes, a *grand toilette* satin dress with much trimming, a long heavy gold chain about her neck, attached to a blue-enamelled watch, with a monogram on the back in cheap diamonds, and on her lovely hands a dozen or fifteen rings, large and small. People might laugh at her aside, but if they caught her stern eye and looked into her massive Calmuck face, their laugh soon died away and a sense of awe and wonder possessed them.”

Again, the description of their manner of life in New York² throws a flood of light on Madame Blavatsky's personality :

“ The routine of our life at the ‘ Lamasery ’ was the following : We breakfasted at about 8, dined at 6, and retired at some small hour in the morning, according to our work and its interruption by visitors. H. P. B. lunched at home and I in town, somewhere near my law-office. When we first met, I was a very active member of the Lotos Club, but the writing of *Isis* put an end, once for all, to my connection with clubs and worldly entanglements in general. After breakfast I left for my office and H. P. B. set herself for work at the desk. At dinner, more often than not, we had guests, and we had few evenings alone ; for even if no visitors dropped in, we usually had somebody stopping with us in our apartment. Our housekeeping was of the simplest ; we drank no wine or spirits, and ate but plain food. We had one maid-of-all-work, or rather a procession of them coming and going, for we did not keep one very long. The girl went to her home after clearing away the dinner-things, and thenceforward we

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. I, p. 459.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 409 *et seq.*

had to answer the door ourselves. That was not much ; but a more serious affair was to supply tea, with milk and sugar, for a roomful of guests at, say, 1 A.M., when H. P. B., with lofty disregard of domestic possibilities, would invite herself to take a cup, and in a large way exclaim : ' Let's all have some : what do you say ? ' It was useless for me to make gestures of dissent, she would pay no attention. So after sundry fruitless midnight searches for milk or sugar in the neighbourhood, the worm turned, and I put up a notice to this effect :

“ ‘ TEA

“ ‘ *Guests will find boiling water and tea in the kitchen, perhaps milk and sugar, and will kindly help themselves.* ’

“ This was so akin to the Bohemian tone of the whole establishment that nothing was thought of it, and it was most amusing later on to see the habitués getting up quietly and going off to the kitchen to brew tea for themselves. Fine ladies, learned professors, famous artists and journalists, all jocosely became members of our ' Kitchen Cabinet,' as we called it.

“ H. P. B. had not even a rudimentary notion of housekeeping. Once, wishing boiled eggs, she laid the raw eggs on the live coals ! Sometimes our maid would walk off on a Saturday evening and leave us to shift as we might for the day's meals. Then was it H. P. B. who catered and cooked ? Nay, verily, but her poor colleague. She would either sit and write and smoke cigarettes or come into the kitchen and bother. In my diary for 1878, I find this in the entry for April 12 : ' The servant " vamoosed the ranch " without preparing dinner : so the Countess L. P. turned in and helped me by making an excellent salad. Besides her, we had O'Donovan to dinner.' He was a rare chap, that Irishman ; a sculptor of marked talent, an excellent companion, with a dry humour that was irresistible. H. P. B. was very fond of him and he of her. He modelled her portrait from life in a medallion which was cast in bronze, and which is in my possession. . . . He was a Roman Catholic by birth, though nothing in particular, it appeared, in actual belief. But, seeing how hot and angry H. P. B. would always get when Roman Catholicism was mentioned, he used to pretend that he believed that that creed would eventually sweep Buddhism, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism from the face of the earth. Although he played this trick on her twenty times, H. P. B. was invariably caught again in the trap whenever

O'Donovan set it for her. She would fume and swear, and call him an incurable idiot, and other pet names, but to no purpose : he would sit and smoke in dignified silence, without changing face, as if he were listening to a dramatic recitation in which the speaker's own feelings had no share. When she had talked and shouted herself out of breath, he would slowly turn his head toward some neighbour and say : ' She speaks well, doesn't she ? But she don't believe that : it is only her repartee. She will be a good Catholic some day.' And then, when H. P. B. exploded at this crowning audacity, and made as if to throw something at him, he would slip away to the kitchen and make himself a cup of tea. I have known him bring friends there just to enjoy this species of bear-baiting ; but H. P. B. never nourished malice, and after relieving herself of a certain number of objurgations, would be as friendly as ever with her inveterate teaser."

In Volume II of the same work¹ Colonel Olcott refers to Madame Blavatsky in the following :

" A self-satisfied ignoramus in society, giving out infantile explanations of psychical phenomena, and trying to show off his cleverness at her expense, was her detestation, and she used to collar and crush him, metaphorically speaking, with fierce wrath. And how she hated the smug matron who, while absolutely unqualified to pronounce an opinion on these high subjects, and unblessed with Christian charitableness (!), would regard her as a horror not to be mentioned in respectable circles ! It was better than a play to hear her go on about them. She used to say that the Russian, Austrian and French women might be very bad in their conduct, but were far more honest than the British and American women of like social standing, since they did their wicked things in the eyes of the whole world, while the others did their equally bad things behind doors and in hiding-places of all sorts. Undoubtedly her rough ways, her daring eccentricities, her profanity, and other peculiarities, were simply her passionate protest against the shams and hypocrisies of society. A pretty woman, with her brains, would never have dreamt of making herself so talked about : being the reverse of pretty, both in face and form, she instinctively let herself make a splash all around her, as one having no admirers to lose, hence no reason to put

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. II.

her feelings under restraint. I am now talking, of course, about the woman, not about the sage."

According to another pen-portrait to be found in *Hints on Esoteric Theosophy*, she had a sort of humorous combativeness which "leads her at times, especially when she is in high spirits and entirely free from higher influences, to propound absolute fictions of malice prepense. She has only to discover that those talking to her are chaffing her, suspecting her of fraud, or disbelieving some true statement of hers, to at once assume the attitude of the sailor lad, who, on discovering that his granny considered him a liar in the matter of flying fishes, at once reeled off to her Pharaoh's chariot wheels and similar marvels. This habit is, in her position, much to be regretted, the more so as even those who know her best can never be sure at times whether she is in fun or in earnest, whether she is telling a truth or simply bamboozling an adversary; but it exists, and had led to more 'occasion to the enemy to blaspheme' than perhaps any other of the earthly frailties, that still slightly disfigure a life otherwise most beautiful for its purity and utter selflessness."

It is interesting to compare the foregoing with Mr. Sinnett's first impressions of her.¹ He says:

"She had evidently been apprehensive, to judge from her latest letters, lest we might have formed some ideal conception of her that the reality would shatter, and had recklessly painted herself as a rough, old 'hippopotamus' of a woman, unfit for civilised society: but she did this with so lively a humour that the betrayal of her bright intelligence this involved undid the effect of her warnings. Her rough manners, of which we had been told so much, did not prove very alarming, though I remember going into fits of laughter at the time when Colonel Olcott, after the visit had lasted a week or two, gravely informed us that Madame was under 'great self-restraint' so far."

Sinnett also refers to his "very varied assortment of memory portraits of Madame, taken during different con-

¹ *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky.*

ditions of her nerves and temper. Some recall her flushed and voluble, too loudly declaiming against some person or other who had misjudged her or her Society ; some show her quiet and companionable, pouring out a flood of interesting talk about Mexican antiquities, or Egypt, or Peru, showing a knowledge of the most varied and far-reaching kind, and a memory for names and places and archeological theories she would be dealing with, that was fairly fascinating to her hearers. Then, again, I remember her telling anecdotes of her own earlier life, mysterious bits of adventure, or stories of Russian society, with so much point, vivacity, and finish, that she would simply be the delight for the time being of everyone present."¹

In studying the character of Madame Blavatsky one sometimes misses the quality of pity for humanity, concern for the social welfare of the race, which one always expects in an exalted religious character. But this was because her nature was so virile and masculine that anything in the nature of maudlin commiseration was entirely foreign to her temperament. She undertook her work for humanity with a sort of careless hilarity which almost seemed to imply that the sufferings of others did not disturb her ; she seemed far more anxious to publish truth to the world, by her writings and phenomena, than, for instance, to relieve the sufferings of the poor. But this impression is unquestionably erroneous. Those who knew her best are unanimous in declaring not only that she was incapable of avenging herself on an enemy, but that she was also extremely kind-hearted. The story has been told of an occasion on which Madame Blavatsky was being wheeled through Regent's Park in her Bath chair when a child accidentally fell against one of the wheels. Instantly Madame Blavatsky threw herself forward to save the child from harm, nearly falling out of her chair in her anxiety.

Similarly, Colonel Olcott has recorded at least two occasions on which she performed phenomena solely for

¹ *Ibid.*

the sake of children. One day when an English Spiritualist called on her in New York, bringing with him his son aged ten or twelve years, Madame Blavatsky, in order to entertain the boy, "rose from her chair, reached her hand round one of the sliding doors just behind her, and pulled out a large toy sheep mounted on wheels," which Olcott was positive had not been there the moment before.

On the occasion of a visit to Albany, Madame Blavatsky materialised a harmonicon, or glass piano, of about 15 in. by 4 in. in size with its cork mallet beside it, in a bag which Colonel Olcott himself had packed before starting and to which no one but himself had had access during the journey.¹ This phenomenon was performed in order to provide a present for the little daughter of their friends, Dr. and Mrs. Ditson.

Solovyoff records a somewhat similar incident in *A Modern Priestess of Isis* (see p. 144 of this book).

In *H. P. Blavatsky as I Knew Her*, Mrs. Cleather mentions an incident which illustrates the statement in *Isis Unveiled* that "We elbow soulless men and women at every step in life,"² or, in other words, men and women in whom the higher principles are not yet developed :

"Almost the last—in fact, it was the very last—incident I recollect of the Lansdowne Road days is, to me, the most touching and tragic of all my memories of H. P. B. It was the day before she left for 19, Avenue Road, Regent's Park, N.W., and as it was a lovely warm afternoon the Countess had taken her for a drive in Hyde Park, in the fashionable hour. Never shall I forget her return from that drive ; Mrs. Cooper-Oakley and I were in the double drawing-room when she entered, followed by the Countess, in what seemed to be almost a passion ; but it was a passion of *grief*. She walked up and down the room, the tears streaming down her face, ejaculating from time to time : ' Not a Soul among them—not *one* ! ' It was a heart-cry of grief, a poignant illustration—and *my* first sight—of ' helpless pity for the men of Karmic sorrow.' "³

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. I, pp. 348-9.

² *Isis Unveiled*, Vol. II, p. 369.

³ *H. P. Blavatsky as I Knew Her*, p. 19,

There are other records of occasions on which Madame Blavatsky wept, and at least one of these was of a more trivial and homely nature than the foregoing. When at New York she kept a pet canary which was found one day lying on its back at the bottom of its cage "at its last gasp." Madame Blavatsky kissed her dying pet, stroked its plumage and tried to restore its vitality by magnetic breathing. But nothing availed to save the dying bird: "there came a last gasp, a last flutter of the birdie's heart, and then? Then, sharp and sweet and clear in the Ákasha near us, rang out a fairy bell, the requiem of the passing life; and H. P. B. wept for her dead bird."¹

Lastly, Madame Blavatsky had two other characteristics: one, an unique kind of other-worldliness, and the other, whole-hearted devotion to the Masters and the Cause. Her other-worldliness was that of the developed clairvoyant whose life, for the most part, is spent on interior planes. It is shown by her frequent unconsciousness of the passing of time, the trustful innocence which led her to perform phenomena which aroused men's suspicions, and occasionally by her ignorance of the common procedures of life. Thus, Colonel Olcott never quite recovered from his amazement on seeing her attempt to boil an egg by placing it straight on the fire without a saucepan or water; and her absurd idea that dinner could be ready and waiting for her at any hour of the day and yet always be perfectly cooked shows similar unawareness of processes essential to one's well-being on the physical plane. All this was due to her intense psychic activity.

Strangely enough, the existence of this quality in Madame Blavatsky is confirmed by the *Posthumous Memoirs* (published by Jos. M. Wade, p. 44), in which the spirit of Madame Blavatsky is reported as remarking that "When I was alone, my interior life began and I would wander off in the yogi state, when hours and days even passed as a minute of time, and in this supernal reverie I learned to

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. I, p. 431.

hide myself and live with the beings upon a plane of existence whom I found there in the inner consciousness.”

Although it is certain that the ego known as Madame Blavatsky cannot have been responsible for the *Posthumous Memoirs*, it is quite conceivable that echoes of her life caught from the astral records may be contained in the book and that the foregoing quotation may be one of them.

Her absolute loyalty to the Masters and the Cause has been attested by innumerable witnesses and is shown unconsciously by many of her words and actions. Several of her letters to Sinnett show how great was her dread of further scandals, lest Theosophy should again suffer through calumnies ; and, on the other hand, by many of her threats to accuse herself of fraud she meant that she was willing to accept any disgrace or ostracism if only it would be possible to benefit Theosophy by doing so. If it would help the movement, she was willing to be classed with charlatans and criminals, and she never hesitated to say so to people whom she found disposed to place the good opinions of others before loyalty to truth. Her “confession” to Solovyoff was nothing more than a declaration to that conservative and snobbish individual that she was ready, for the sake of truth, to fling every conventional virtue to the winds. The same attitude is seen in the letter which she wrote to M. and Mme. Coulomb from Paris on the 1st April, 1884, when the conspiracy at Adyar was approaching a crisis :

“ If by accusing myself publicly, and proclaiming myself a *fraud* in all the papers, I can thus do good to the Society and make the veneration for the Mahatmas still greater—I shall do it without a moment’s hesitation. . . . Absorbed *altogether* in the cause as I was, and still am, I think of nobody. May I perish, but may the cause flourish ! ”

According to Letter LIV (from Mahatma K. H. to A. P. Sinnett), Madame Blavatsky continually produced phenomena herself which, in her zeal for the Brothers, she

untruthfully attributed to Them, denying that she herself had had anything to do with the phenomenon. "Her impulsive nature," adds Mahatma K. H., "as you have correctly inferred in your reply—is always ready to carry her beyond the boundaries of truth, into the regions of exaggeration ; nevertheless without a shadow of suspicion that she is thereby deceiving her friends or abusing of their great trust in her."

In Dr. Franz Hartmann's short autobiography¹ some valuable references to Madame Blavatsky are to be found. Dr. Hartmann was convinced of the reality of Madame's powers by the unquestionably genuine phenomena performed in his presence, sometimes in response to his silent thoughts. He frequently found letters in "direct" writing in his desk. "To me," he says, "she always appeared as a great spirit, a sage and initiate, inhabiting the body of a grown-up, capricious child, very amiable on the whole but also at times very irascible, ambitious, and of impetuous temper, but easily led and caring nothing for conventionalities of any kind.

"In her higher aspect she seemed to be in possession of the highest occult wisdom and of a knowledge obtained not by reading of books or by ratiocination, but by interior illumination and direct perception of truth. She seemed to know everything without having ever read anything, and as if the whole universe were to her like an open book. She seemed to be at home on the astral plane as much as on the physical."

In addition to describing in detail some of the phenomena he witnessed in her presence, Dr. Hartmann mentions that many ambitious and worldly people asked her for most unspiritual favours. He had known her to be asked to pray to the holy saints of the Himalayas that a man's wife might give birth to a son, to procure for another a paying appointment at a Government office, to find for another a buyer for his house and for another a good location for

¹ Published in *The Occult Review* for January, 1908.

opening a shop for selling cheese. And when Madame Blavatsky refused these requests, the people who made them, all too readily became her enemies.

Finally, there is the testimony of her friends ; and although there were doubtless many among her followers who lacked critical discernment, to whom her most glaring faults were unapparent, and who idolised her irrationally, there were others who valued her because they had power to pierce beneath the surface. Beneath her eccentricities of manner and superficial deficiencies they perceived the sterling value of her innermost character. Colonel Olcott, who lived in close association with her for years, not only believed in her, but entertained a lively affection for her, as all readers of *Old Diary Leaves* must realise. The people who knew Madame Blavatsky most thoroughly believed in her most completely ; and many who have practised her teachings have found them lead to the promised goal ; they have developed clairvoyant and occult powers. Thus it was with the Countess Wachtmeister and Dr. Annie Besant, both trance clairvoyants, and with Colonel Olcott, who became clairaudient, and all of these are individuals whose honesty and nobility of character cannot possibly be questioned. Dr. Besant, for instance, has repeatedly declared that Madame Blavatsky's occult teachings stand the test of practical application, that by following her instructions people of psychic temperament can develop their latent powers and thereby verify for themselves the truth of many assertions insusceptible of proof by the concrete knowledge available through physical experience. Again and again Dr. Besant has paid Madame Blavatsky high tributes, as in the following from her Autobiography :

“ When, in future days, a world rejoicing in a Universal Religion shall count over the great souls who laid thereof the foundations, not the least of those Master-Builders will be revered as H. P. Blavatsky.”

It is interesting to compare this with what other of her

acquaintances and followers have said of her. Colonel Olcott says, in *Old Diary Leaves*, that :

“ When I look through my papers of those days of stress and storm, and read the letters written me from exile by Mme. Blavatsky, the solemn feeling comes over me that the binding mortar of its blocks was stiffened by the blood of her heart, and in her anguish were they laid.”

And the Countess Wachtmeister, in her *Reminiscences of H. P. Blavatsky and the “ Secret Doctrine ”* :

“ She was, as it were, a sacrificial victim accepting a long martyrdom, and upon her agony, and the shame which she bore so undeservedly and bravely, was built up the prosperity of the Theosophical Society.”

The following tributes are taken from the book entitled *In Memory of H. P. Blavatsky. By Some of her Pupils*, published by the Theosophical Society. Some of them show good judgment, and some show more enthusiasm than discrimination, but all of them indicate loyalty and respect for her character :

“ While she lived, every mistake and wrong-doing of those who surrounded her were set down to H. P. B. and she had to bear the blame of all.” (G. R. S. Mead.)

“ The first and earliest impression I received from Madame Blavatsky was the feeling of the power and largeness of her individuality ; as though I were in the presence of one of the primal forces of Nature. . . . It was rather the sense of a profound deep-seated reality, and exhaustless power of resistance, a spirit built on the very depths of Nature, and reaching down to the primeval eternities of Truth.” (Charles Johnston.)

“ Nothing in her was more remarkable, nothing more truly stamped her as one of the elect, than the great humility of her character, ready to deny and ignore all its own splendid endowments, in order to bring into light the qualities of others. This humility was no mere affectation, no mere trick to call up admiration and wonder, but the profoundly sincere expression of her own nature.” (Charles Johnston.)

“ Her powers of endurance were equal in every respect to her great sense of devotion. She was an incessant worker.” (Walter R. Old.)

“ With the power and the knowledge that belong to lions and sages. It is only through blindness they failed to see the lion’s glance, the diamond heart of H. P. B. . . . H. P. B. had a lion heart, and on the work traced out for her she had a lion’s grasp.” (William Q. Judge.)

“ She sacrificed fortune, fame, health, and at last life itself, for an *idea*. . . . If it be just to judge a tree by its fruit, a character by its service to humanity, and a personality by its self-forgetfulness, then will H. P. Blavatsky soon be recognised in her true character, and placed among the benefactors of humanity.” (J. D. Buck.)

“ Mabel Collins tells the truth when she says that Madame Blavatsky had a contempt for mankind ; but forgets to say that it was an affectionate contempt. She was neither pessimist nor misanthrope. She was simply an upright and romantically honest giantess, who measured herself with the men and women with whom she came in contact, and felt the contrast, and was not hypocrite enough to pretend she did not feel it. But she did not call even those who reviled and wronged her by a more bitter epithet than ‘ flapdoodles.’ . . . She was almost the only mortal I have ever met who was not an impostor. . . . She wore her heart upon her sleeve.” (“ Saladin ” in the *Agnostic Journal*, quoted in *In Memory of H. P. B.*)

“ What H. P. B. wanted, she thought, and what she thought she said, and what she said she acted, regardless of any consequences. In her, as in an innocent child, thoughts, words and acts were one and in harmony.” (Franz Hartmann, M.D.)

“ She had neither the cunning nor the self-control needful for plotting and concealment.” (Alice Gordon.)

“ Although in the flesh she remained unknown to me, she alone of all the world’s Leaders gave me Truth, taught me how to find it, and to hold it ‘ against the world.’ The soul that can work such a miracle at a distance is no minor ray ; it is one of the great Solar Centres that die not.” (J. Campbell Ver Planck.)

“ She was not of this nation or that. The wide earth was her home. . . . We say confidently that before many years have gone

by, she will be regarded as an Avatar, a holy incarnation, and divine honours will be paid to her memory." (*The Indian Mirror*.)

"H. P. B.'s enthusiasm was a quenchless flame at which all our Theosophists lit their torches, an example which stirred the sluggish blood like the sound of a war trumpet." (H. S. Olcott.)

"She would take the clothes off her back, the bread from her mouth, to help her worst, her most malicious foe in distress or suffering." (Bertram Keightley.)

"She gave me hope for the future; she inspired me with her own noble and devoted principles, and transformed everyday existence by holding up a high ideal of life for attainment." (José Xifre.)

Lastly, there are the similar testimonies embodied in *Helena Petrovna Blavatsky: a Refutation of Recently Published Slanders*, by Iverson L. Harris (published by the Theosophists of Point Loma, California), from which the following are a selection:

"She will take her place as one of the great spiritual Teachers of Humanity." (Herbert Coryn.)

"Her devotion to the cause was absolute, and entirely disinterested." (Reginald W. Machell.)

"One of those Great Souls who, from century to century, again and again, appear among men as benefactors of the human race." (C. Thurston.)

"She sowed the fields of thought with poetry, aspiration, faith in the divine order of things. She made spiritual thinking possible. Her fiery energies, her dynamic strength of will, heart, intellect, allowed none to remain indifferent: here was one out of the Heroic Age, who challenged all souls. The ethics of the Christs and Buddhas, grown faint with time, she wrote anew in letters of fire."

Although the Society for Psychical Research would probably assert that no evidential value whatever can be attached to the foregoing opinions, it has to be remembered that many of them were expressed by individuals who enjoyed far more extended acquaintance with Madame

Blavatsky than did either Dr. Hodgson or Solovyoff. But on this point it is possible to say no more.

We have now reviewed the outward events and surface characteristics of Madame Blavatsky's life and personality. Yet outward and surface happenings were the least real portion of her existence. Her real life was hidden or betrayed only by the "phenomena" with which she amazed, bewildered, startled, converted, or called forth the suspicion and contempt of men. Of course, the nature of her inner life is inextricably bound up with the nature, genuine or otherwise, of the phenomena she produced, and to the uninitiated enquirer her character seems an insoluble riddle. Who can decide what she was, or estimate her at her true worth, most evil or most admirable of women?

CONCLUSION

HAVING reviewed Madame Blavatsky's career and examined her writings and, as faithfully as possible, described her personal character, there remains nothing but to give final consideration to various theories put forward to explain this extraordinary woman. Reflection is also called for on the various issues involved.

I

Apart from Madame Blavatsky's own claim to occult communication with the Masters, the possible explanatory theories may be said to amount to five : (1) Fraud, (2) Occasional fraud mingled with genuine super-normal phenomena, (3) Dissociated personality, (4) Riotous imagination, (5) Mediumship.

II

Let us consider the fraud theory first. Apart from the concrete arguments adduced by both sides, to which full consideration has already been given, there are one or two considerations of a general nature that are not without importance. And these, like many of the phenomena, are divisible into two classes : (*a*) those which point towards her guilt, and (*b*) those which tend to establish her innocence.

Firstly, are people ever abused as was Madame Blavatsky unless they have done something to bring such trouble on themselves ? How was it that Madame Blavatsky continually got herself into difficulties ? Did she make enemies simply through her tempestuous nature and her thoughtlessness ? Did she arouse suspicions through foolish dis-

plays of occult power, or was she, in reality, a conjurer? That is the most difficult point to decide. At least it is clear that Madame Blavatsky was frequently unwise in the choice of phenomena she elected to produce, and unfortunate in the circumstances in which she operated. She was unfortunate, too, in her choice of companions, for there seems no doubt whatever that Madame Coulomb, for one, was an entirely wicked woman. Her character is shown, we think, by the unctiousness and servility of her literary style, as well as by the testimony of Theosophists and the known facts of her career. The problem is, did Madame Blavatsky give shelter to Madame Coulomb in pity for her wretchedness and because the disciple is bidden by the Lord Buddha to feed even the venomous snake that stings its preserver? Or was Madame Coulomb's corrupt character her chief recommendation? Did Madame Blavatsky take Madame Coulomb into the household in order to make of her an accomplice, not foreseeing that the day would come when this human tiger would turn and rend her?

The former suggestion is the more probable for many reasons, not the least of which is the fact that Madame Blavatsky was frequently deceived and imposed upon by other unscrupulous persons besides Madame Coulomb. And if this is the truth, the founding of the Theosophical Society presents a remarkable parallel with a betrayal even more dastardly and known to everyone. Madame Coulomb betrayed her benefactress. According to Dante, to betray a benefactor is the worst possible of all crimes. People with this form of gratitude were described by the Florentine poet as being in the very lowest depths of hell. There they were wholly embedded in ice, for before it is possible to betray a benefactor it is necessary to have heart and soul of ice. And in the midst of these traitors Dante set Lucifer, triple-headed Satan, ghastly parody of the Blessed Trinity, champing in each of his mouths, one of the three arch-traitors—Judas Iscariot, Brutus and Cassius.

III

And yet, if one may be pardoned for saying so, even when regarded as a charlatan Madame Blavatsky is not undeserving of admiration. If Madame Blavatsky were a fraud, there is no one who more truly deserves to rank with Napoleon Bonaparte. For the fearless daring of her enterprise, for the strategic genius with which she must have planned her "phenomena" and the compelling personal magnetism with which she secured her followers, Madame Blavatsky the charlatan is the only worthy counterpart of the Man of Destiny. She resembled Napoleon even in her failures. Like the Emperor, she suffered disastrous defeat; like the Emperor, she was banished. In spite of all reverses she retained the loyalty of many of her followers and lived to wield power again after her disgrace. Yet if personal aggrandisement were her object (and most certainly it was not), her life-work must be regarded as a magnificent and baneful failure. She achieved scanty success and little glory; and, like Napoleon, she died in obscurity.

Madame Blavatsky the charlatan sometimes seems almost more attractive than Madame Blavatsky the genuine Occultist. If she were a fraud, her impudence is almost unrivalled. It is impossible to overestimate the brilliance with which she thought out her campaigns of deceit and the courage with which she put them into execution. But Madame Blavatsky the genuine Occultist seems to have been a fool. She was a fool to perform the most astounding phenomena and then expect them to be accepted as genuine without question or demur. Above all, she was a fool to display her powers when requested to do so by sceptics. Her actions at times were almost tantamount to putting the hilt of a two-edged sword into the hands of her enemies and then throwing herself upon its point—"two-edged" because if a way could be seen by which phenomena *might* have been produced fraudulently, it was at once assumed that they were produced in that way; and, on the other

hand, if the phenomenon was so perfect as to admit of no rational explanation, it was simply said that the trick was too clever to detect.

IV

Yet though in some ways one may almost admire Madame Blavatsky even in the rôle of trickster, no pardon for such dishonesty, even if fraudulent phenomena were only occasionally intermingled amidst the genuine ones, would be possible for one moment. Madame Blavatsky the charlatan was a "thief of souls," a trifler with religious loyalties, a contemner of humanity, a heartless rebel against God and Existence. When one adds to this what we know of what Colonel Olcott calls "Helena Petrovna in her physical self," the result is an individual wholly beneath contempt. In some respects she was pampered, self-indulged and, worst of all, would sometimes spin romances and allow them to pass for truth. She was liable to ungovernable rage and capable of petty spitefulness, as well as treachery to her most devoted friends—a creature of impulse and caprice, not of reason and principle. All this, as an interpretation of Madame Blavatsky's character, follows inevitably when once it is assumed that in the greater matters of Occultism she was guilty of fraud.

V

The foregoing are the principal general arguments in favour of fraud. The following are the general arguments in favour of her honesty.

Firstly, it should be noted that the accusations made by the Coulombs implicate no one in fraud except Madame Blavatsky herself. Yet the Society for Psychical Research, in the endeavour to establish their accusations, was forced to provide her theoretically with a whole army of accomplices. Not only was it suggested that she bribed Hindus to masquerade as Masters and to assist her in the various letter phenomena, but, according to the Society for Psychical

Research, the actual Theosophical Society itself was little more, in the early days, than a club for mutual deception. Even the honesty of Colonel Olcott had to be questioned if the *Vega* phenomenon and the fall of Mr. Eglinton's letter at Calcutta were not genuine. Similarly, the letter received by Dr. Hubbe Schleiden when travelling in the train with Colonel Olcott must have been a genuine phenomenon unless the letter was thrown by the Colonel. At any rate, it is not possible to imagine any other means by which fraud could have been effected in these and similar instances.

VI

Another indication of Madame Blavatsky's honesty was the violent indignation and astonishment which any suggestion or accusation of fraud always evoked from her, and it is undeniable that her life must have been considerably shortened through the various scandals of which she was the subject from time to time. The weak condition of her heart—aggravated by her manner of life, her habit of taking insufficient exercise and wrong diet—must also have made deceit impossible. The strain and apprehension would probably have been too severe for her physical organism. Her violent attacks on Christianity and Spiritualism, too, though grievous mistakes of policy, are more compatible with burning sincerity than with charlatanism.

Even the fact that many of her phenomena are so obviously open to the suggestion of fraud, if considered carefully, will be seen to be in Madame Blavatsky's favour. A real trickster would have taken care to lay her plans more skilfully than was sometimes the case with Madame Blavatsky. The fact was that occult phenomena were such an everyday experience in her life that she was unable to realise how startling and incredible they appeared to others; she could not imagine for one moment that their genuineness would be questioned. When the inevitable doubt arises, she is astonished, hurt, indignant. Here,

again, the simplicity of the child is discernible. It was the honesty of her nature that made her easily imposed upon and unsuspecting of others' suspicions. All too thoughtlessly, she performed phenomena before unbelievers, or in circumstances where fraud might have been possible ; and thus she allowed misleading circumstantial evidence to accumulate against her.

VII

Moreover, if Theosophists were deceived by Madame Blavatsky, the deception was confirmed in many instances by their own subjective impressions—dreams, visions, clairvoyance and clairaudience. Fully as many of the leading early Theosophists were convinced by subjective visions and voices as by phenomena produced through Madame Blavatsky. This is doubtless one reason why many of her most earnest followers were unwilling to admit even the possibility of Madame Blavatsky having been a charlatan. It accounts, for instance, for the intense conviction of Dr. Annie Besant. The latter claims to have intercourse with the Masters through clairvoyance and clairaudience, and to have received communications and instructions from Them embodying concrete knowledge during trance and sleep :

“ ‘ Yes ; the learned Brahmins would come to me with obscure passages and allegories from the sacred writings, asking for interpretation. My answers were based upon the teachings which I have myself received from my Master, one of the great Eastern teachers, to whom I was led by Madame Blavatsky. It is this teaching which enabled me to deal with the learned and spiritual questioners who came to me with their problems.’ ”¹

If Madame Blavatsky were a charlatan, one would be forced to conclude that there is no evidence for the existence of Mahatmas, and that therefore Dr. Besant's mystical

¹ From a report of an interview published in *The Daily Chronicle* for April 7th, 1894, and quoted by Arthur Lillie in *Madame Blavatsky and her "Theosophy."*

experiences are probably a form of self-deception. And if Dr. Besant's subjective experiences are illusions, why should not this be equally true of all mystics of all religions? Clairvoyance and clairaudience are phenomena to be found in all religions, including Christianity. What is there to prove that Christianity, and the experiences of Christian mystics, are not similarly a snare and a delusion—a phantasy based upon an unreal valuation, or a false definition, of the personality of that religion's Founder? The implication is that if Theosophists are deceived, all religious experience, and the convictions based upon them, or from which they spring, are also unreliable and probably false.

It is possible to suppose, even if difficult to prove, that movements such as the Theosophical Society are started by fraudulent phenomena, or phenomena due to dissociated personality. These impress weak-minded and imaginative persons and result in auto-hallucinations, visions, voices and dreams bordering on insanity. These deceptive activities of the subconscious mind have the effect of confirming the subject in his belief in spurious phenomena and usually make him an ardent and firm believer in the movement. That is the theory, but if it were true it would imply that the human intellect is incapable of sound or reliable judgment.

VIII

The second theory is, that some of the phenomena were fraudulent and others genuinely super-normal. It is suggested that Madame Blavatsky really possessed occult or mediumistic powers, but occasionally these failed her, or she could not afford the necessary expenditure of vital force. At such times, it is suggested, she may have resorted to trickery in order to meet the demands for phenomena to which she was constantly subjected by innumerable inquirers and "phenomenon-hunters." Some such view as this is probably current among quite a number of Theosophists who have not taken the trouble to think the problem

out to its ultimate conclusion ; and it is supported by the fact that during the closing years of her life failing health made the production of phenomena more and more difficult. For this reason Madame Blavatsky must certainly have experienced the temptation to adopt trickery, even though she may never have succumbed to it.

W. T. Brown, at one time a Theosophist, in his autobiography, *My Life*, supported the theory that Madame Blavatsky possessed genuine occult powers but stooped to trickery in order to supplement them. Mr. Brown was a member of the Theosophical Society until after the Coulombs were expelled. He mentions in *My Life* phenomenal letters received at Adyar after the Coulombs had gone, while Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott were still away, and which could not, in his opinion, be reasonably attributed to fraud on the part of Damodar. "Of the existence of the Adept K. H.," he adds, "I obtained all the proof desirable, and was convinced of the soundness, in the main, of the Theosophical teaching."¹ As, however, he afterwards abandoned Theosophy in favour of Rosicrucianism, and finally was received into the Roman Catholic Church, his conviction cannot be said to have excessive value.

The same theory was supported by A. P. Sinnett in the closing years of his life, though it is doubtful whether his conclusion can be justified :

"I may as well at once explain, what I only came to realise myself in the progress of later years, the true character of this correspondence. The letters were not in the beginning what I imagined them to be—letters actually written by the Master and then forwarded by occult means either to Madame Blavatsky or deposited somewhere about the house where I should find them. They were certainly inspired by K. H. (all in the beginning bore his signature), but for the most part, if not always, were dictations to a competent clairaudient amanuensis, and Madame Blavatsky was generally the amanuensis in question."²

¹ *My Life*, p. 27.

² *The Early Days of Theosophy in Europe*, p. 27.

This and other passages in the last book written by A. P. Sinnett show that he came ultimately to the conclusion that while Madame Blavatsky possessed genuine occult powers she also frequently resorted to trickery: a plausible, specious theory leading ultimately to the conclusion that all Madame Blavatsky's phenomena were spurious. If the Mahatma letters were only "dictations to a competent clairaudient amanuensis," then not only is an unique block of evidence for the power of the Masters lost, but Madame Blavatsky's honour is completely compromised. Nothing could be more deceitful, or more reprehensible, than the way in which, on this hypothesis, she must have engineered the "phenomenal" manner of their delivery. Moreover, such a supposition implicates the Masters as accomplices in deceit. They must have known the course pursued by Madame Blavatsky. Yet They made no protest, nor did They disillusion A. P. Sinnett or other recipients of Their letters on this important point.

Yet hear Mr. Sinnett once again on the principles by which he believed Madame Blavatsky to have been actuated:

"That she sometimes employed the Coulombs, husband and wife, as confederates in trickery is the painful though hardly intelligible state of the facts. Even with me she has done this. For example, on my return to India after having published *The Occult World*,—after she knew that I was rooted in a personal conviction not only that she possessed magic powers, but that I was in touch with the Masters and devoted to the theosophical cause,—she employed M. Coulomb to drop a letter from the Master intended for me through a crack in the rafters above, trying to make me believe that it had been dropped by the Master himself—materialised then and there after transmission by occult means from Tibet. M. Coulomb told Mr. Hodgson that he had been so employed on this occasion, and his statement fits in with the minor circumstances of the incident."¹

In support of this astounding suggestion Sinnett added what he believes to be Madame Blavatsky's interpretation

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 68.

of this incident, namely, that at the time the trick was done her real Ego was out of her body and she had neglected to take measures to prevent the intrusion of a foreign entity. The result was that her organism fell under the control of an evil being, presumably a black magician, "who designed the sham phenomenon to bring discredit on her and possibly to disgust myself." Madame Blavatsky's neglect to take proper precautions against an intrusion of this nature was, in Mr. Sinnett's view, inexcusable; but, he continues, "she was at this time and very often, conscious, *viâ* her psychic faculties, of the storm of force raging around her; black attacks being incessant, and the White Lodge resisting them. In this whirlwind of contending forces she was in a measure to be excused for sometimes losing her head—to use a familiar and fairly appropriate phrase."¹

If it could be conclusively proved that one single phenomenon produced by Madame Blavatsky were fraudulent, it would be reasonable to infer that all her other phenomena may have been fraudulent too. She would lose the confidence of every critical individual. Moreover, she would forfeit every right to be a spiritual and religious teacher of humanity which is hers as "the mouthpiece of hidden seers."

The most that is known for certain is that Madame Blavatsky had a habit of sometimes poking fun at frivolous and inquisitive people by telling them ridiculous stories, such as the famous one about her being more than a hundred years old. No doubt this sort of playfulness was very unwise, as it seemed to lend feasibility to the more serious charges brought against her. At the same time it is humour of a kind frequently found in people of imaginative and vivacious temperament. It is quite a different thing from systematic deceit in matters of doctrine or principle.

IX

According to Frank Podmore, systematic trickery (the only motive being gratification of diseased vanity) is fre-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

quently practised by psychics having genuine powers. In support of this theory, which is to be found in his *History of Modern Spiritualism*, he instanced the Seeress of Prevorst and Andrew Jackson Davis. Podmore was convinced of the bad faith of Frederica Hauffé because some of the proofs of spirit return provided through her mediumship were so conclusive, and some of the physical phenomena so incredible that to a mind like Podmore's they simply *must* have been fraudulent ; no other alternative seemed to him to be possible. Similarly with A. J. Davis. That an unlettered youth of nineteen should have dictated *The Principles of Nature* was clearly an absurdity. Davis must have had access to books and concealed the fact. In other words, Davis, in Frank Podmore's view, was a liar. Madame Blavatsky, therefore, can scarcely be said to have received a hearing, at any rate, from Podmore ; she was condemned beforehand.

Yet this theory asks us to believe the incredible suggestion that a great religious movement like Modern Spiritualism is founded on trickery and fraud, a supposition which, while one is willing to admit the personal imperfection of many psychics and even many religious leaders, is clearly an absurdity. It assumes that the divine gift of reason is the exclusive possession of Frank Podmore and others of his type.

X

The third theory, that of dissociated personality, may seem at first sight, especially to those who are familiar with the problems of abnormal psychology, the most plausible suggestion of all. Cases of dissociated personality investigated during the last century by Professor Pierre Janet, of Paris, and more recently by the American, Dr. Morton Prince, have established beyond possibility of question the fact that occasionally (mostly as a result of shock) the human personality may be split into two, three or even more separate centres of consciousness, so that it seems just as though more than one person were inhabiting

the same physical body. Sometimes it seems that these personalities are intermittent, and, of course, they alternate in "waking up" and in being aware of the subject's life. At other times a dissociated personal centre may co-exist with the main consciousness as an independent sub-consciousness, and may occasionally oust, or put to sleep, the real personality and obtain possession of the organism. A person suffering from dissociated personality is only partially awake. He is permanently somnambulent, and only a fraction, an abnormally small fraction, of his ego is conscious in the physical world at one time and at one centre. The alternating personalities are the different phases of a trance; they resemble the different facets of a jewel. Dissociated personalities are sometimes at war with one another, but the important point for our present purpose is the fact that when personality is really dissociated, the different sub-personalities are frequently ignorant of one another and of one another's actions. It was this fact that was noticed by Frank Podmore and seized upon by him as a possible explanation of the physical phenomena that occurred in connection with the mediumship of Stainton Moses, and it is not impossible that the same theory might account for the phenomena connected with Madame Blavatsky. Thus, if Madame Blavatsky's personality were dissociated, one would assume the existence of Blavatsky I (the real Madame Blavatsky) and Blavatsky II (a secondary personality, unknown to Blavatsky I, but with the power of throwing Blavatsky I into a trance and acting in her stead). Thus, one would assume that the Mahatma letters were written by normal means by Blavatsky II, and the various other phenomena engineered fraudulently by this same sub-personality. The first person to be duped by this psychic misfortune would be Madame Blavatsky I herself, who, being ignorant of Blavatsky II and her tricks, would not unnaturally suppose that phenomena and letters occurred through super-normal agency.

The theory is undeniably ingenious and certain facts

seem to support it. For instance, Madame Blavatsky was a woman of changeable and violently contrasting mood ; her conduct sometimes seemed extraordinarily erratic, and at times she appeared to act without rational motive. Moreover, Colonel Olcott has distinctly recorded in *Old Diary Leaves* that there were not one Madame Blavatsky, but many. *Isis Unveiled*, he says, was written, for the most part, not by Madame Blavatsky, but by a number of higher Beings who occupied her physical frame in rotation ; and after some weeks he could tell which of these Beings was present by the different personal mannerisms she exhibited :

“ There were times when H. P. B.’s personality had melted away and she was ‘ Somebody else,’ when I would sit and watch her hand as if pulling at and twisting a moustache that certainly was not growing visibly on H. P. B.’s upper lip, and the far-away look would be in the eyes, until presently resuming attention of passing things, the moustached Somebody would look up, catch me watching him, hastily remove the hand from the face, and go on with the work of writing. Then there was another Somebody, who disliked English so much that he never willingly talked with me in anything but French : he had a fine artistic talent and a passionate fondness for mechanical invention. Another one would now and then sit there, scrawling something with a pencil and reeling off for me dozens of poetical stanzas that embodied, now sublime, now humorous ideas. So each of the several Somebodies had his peculiarities distinctly marked, as recognisable as those of any other of our ordinary acquaintances or friends. One was jovial, fond of good stories and witty to a degree ; another, all dignity, reserve and erudition. One would be calm, patient and benevolently helpful ; another testy and sometimes exasperating. One Somebody would always be willing to emphasise his philosophical or scientific explanations of the subjects I was to write upon, by doing phenomena for my edification ; while to another Somebody I dared not even mention them.”¹

Colonel Olcott also recorded that these changes in personality were accompanied by changes in the handwriting of her manuscript, one variant of her script being “ very

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. I, pp. 244-5.

small, but plain ; one bold and free ; another plain, of medium size and very legible ; and one scratchy and hard to read, with its queer, foreign-shaped a's and x's and e's."¹ There was also great difference in the English of these scripts, some of the personalities being more grammatical than the others.

There are several other points mentioned by Colonel Olcott which seem to suggest the theory of dissociation. For instance, in the Introduction to Volume II of *Old Diary Leaves* he refers to a passage in his Diary for 6th December, 1878, written by Madame Blavatsky "in a variant of her proper handwriting" : " We got cold again, I think. Oh, unfortunate, empty, rotten old body ! " Colonel Olcott goes on to ask whether the " body " was empty of its proper tenant, or, if not, what could be the explanation of this peculiar script ? It may have been a genuine instance of Madame Blavatsky's mediumship, or it may have been an example of the mischievous playfulness in which she sometimes indulged and which we have already noticed ; or it may have been the work of a secondary personality.

Again, on page 331 of the second volume of *Old Diary Leaves*, Olcott refers to the fact that he hesitated to admit Mr. D. M. Bennett, the Freethinker, as a member of the Theosophical Society owing to the abuse likely to be forthcoming from the missionaries. When Colonel Olcott expressed his doubts to Madame Blavatsky " she was overshadowed by a Master " who reproached him for faulty judgment and delivered a lecture on Pharisaism. This, again, might really have been a Mahatma, or it might have been dissociated personality.

Colonel Olcott himself devotes considerable space in the first volume of *Old Diary Leaves* to a discussion of this possibility, and comes ultimately to the conclusion that the theory of dissociation cannot be made to account for all the facts in connection with Madame Blavatsky and her phenomena. And we think that anyone who studies all

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

the available testimony impartially and thoroughly will reach the same conclusion. The raps alone, which she was able to produce at will and which have been described by innumerable witnesses, are sufficient to demonstrate that the theory of dissociation of personality can never be put forward as more than a partial explanation of her claims or powers. And as it is only a partial explanation it is most probably a false one.

XI

Fourthly, had Madame Blavatsky the kind of mind which cannot distinguish between dreams and imaginings and actual facts? Had she an imagination which was so vivid that it completely ran away with her? This suggestion is by no means so impossible as at first sight might appear. Madame Blavatsky herself admitted that her nights were "her manvantaras," meaning that when she fell asleep she entered a world of manifestation and activity far more vivid and real to her than physical waking existence. That this should be so is a recognised consequence of occult development; but the sceptic and the materialist are perfectly free to place an entirely different construction on such an admission. Many materialists would probably maintain, and honestly believe, that Madame Blavatsky was mad. That her imagination was extraordinarily vivid is proved by her wonderful narrative *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan*, in which the bare facts of her Indian experiences are completely transfigured and glorified by the luxuriance of her phantasy. In this book she blended fact and fiction with amazing skill, as may be realised by comparing *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan* with the cold description of the actual facts of identical experiences to be found in Olcott's *Old Diary Leaves*. *The Nightmare Tales*, too, show a wonderful gift of story-telling and power of sustained make-believe. This power of make-believe may have dominated the whole of Madame Blavatsky's life. She may have written out the Mahatma letters with her own

hand, playing an illusion like a child, herself firmly believing that Mahatmas put ideas into her head as the ink flowed from her pen.

The faculty of make-believe is frequently to be found in young children, and Madame Blavatsky had undoubtedly many childlike characteristics. Her indignation, her touchiness, her trustfulness and simplicity, her extravagance, even her efforts to impress people and to strike a magnificent figure, were all indicative of a childlike nature, with a child's scale of values, a child's outlook, a child's ignorance of mundane affairs and even a child's inexperience. Undoubtedly Madame Blavatsky was a great and magnificent child, but whether one can go so far as to suppose seriously that she played at make-believe and deceived both her followers and herself is another matter. It is hardly probable that, if this were the true explanation of her life, her "make-believe" would have attracted the attention, the devoted followers and the furious abuse which shaped the destiny of Madame Blavatsky and her Society.

XII

Lastly, there is the theory of mediumship. There is no doubt that in early life Madame Blavatsky was a powerful physical medium, and although after the strange illness experienced at Ozoorgetty in Mingrelia, physical manifestations no longer occurred spontaneously, but were apparently under the control of her will, it seems undeniable that Madame Blavatsky's powers were at least akin to mediumship. It is true that phenomena did frequently occur in obedience to her will, which they never do for an ordinary medium; but it is equally true that many of the most important occurrences—such as the delivery of Mahatma letters to various Theosophists and friends of the Society—occurred independently of her will and frequently even without her knowledge. No doubt Madame Blavatsky dissociated herself from ordinary

mediums because of the erratic and purposeless nature of many of their physical phenomena and their frequent susceptibility to lower and even evil influences. Yet Madame Blavatsky is reputed to have admitted that once or twice she had fallen victim to the influence of a black magician.

Similarity in style between the Mahatma letters and Madame Blavatsky's own literary composition would be no evidence of forgery if Madame Blavatsky were in some sense a medium. The style of Imperator is the style of Stainton Moses released, sublimated, charged with high emotion, but still the same style. The spiritual dialogues to which Swedenborg listened, and which he wrote down in his books, are in the style and phraseology of the seer who transcribed them. Even the style of the Vale Owen script is such as the medium might have written from his own self-conscious centre had he but the eyes to see or the imagination to conceive celestial spheres. And this is because the spiritual communicant usually borrows the literary equipment of the medium.

For the same reason similarities of spelling or of handwriting are no evidence of fraud ; for even with " direct " writing the materialised spirit-hand has affinity of cell, molecule and nerve with the hand of the medium from whom ectoplasm is drawn off.

Nor are Madame Blavatsky's frequent plagiarisms a convincing proof of conscious fraud. Abundant evidence exists which proves that the clairvoyant consciousness of certain psychics has super-normal means of access to printed matter. Sometimes information from books seems to be conveyed to the medium by discarnate entities, and sometimes the clairvoyant himself, when in abnormal states of consciousness, is able to peruse the astral duplicates of printed matter. These facts have been demonstrated by innumerable " book tests," of which those of Stainton Moses are so well known as to be almost classical ; indeed, the theory of clairvoyance of printed matter has even been

suggested as sufficient to account for the whole of the supernatural knowledge to be found in Stainton Moses' automatic writings.

Andrew Jackson Davis had the power of clairvoyant access to books in a high degree, for it was by this means that he wrote his *Principles of Nature* when an entirely unread youth, and his *Great Harmonia* when still scarcely literate. The great difference between the literary clairvoyance of Davis and Madame Blavatsky was that the abnormal consciousness of the former always quoted, whereas the latter assimilated and reproduced, sometimes without knowing the source from which her knowledge was derived. The following quotation from *Modern Mysteries Explained and Exposed* (1855), by the Rev. A. Mahan, is an illustration of the way in which a clairvoyant may sometimes become the victim of his own powers :

“ The past fall and winter, nearly one year ago, our seer (A. J. Davis) performed a mission in some of the Western States. When in the city of Cleveland (we were there at the time), and while delivering a public lecture, he suddenly stopped, and for some minutes seemed to be in one of his favourite states of abstraction, or spiritual reverie. On coming to himself, he remarked that he was deeply, painfully impressed with woman's rights. ‘ Will Horace Mann,’ he exclaimed, ‘ lecture in this city this winter ? He will. Will his subject be Woman ? It will.’ Our seer then requested that portion of the audience who should hear Mr. Mann to compare what he should now utter with what Mr. Mann should utter on his arrival, and carefully mark the correspondence between them. He then delivered a very spirit-stirring paragraph, in which the audience was intensely interested. He professed to the audience that, during the reverie referred to, he had had a vision of Mr. Mann's manuscript, and thus obtained the extract delivered. When our seer was through, a gentleman in the audience arose, and remarked that he also *was impressed* to say, that what the speaker had just uttered as obtained through a vision of an unprinted manuscript could be found word for word in a certain number of the *New York Tribune* ; and that, if desired, he would produce the paper and read the paragraph to the audience. Our seer, of course, was taken all aback by such

an announcement, and, remarking that he did not read the newspapers, went on with his lecture."

As a result of this incident, the impression was confirmed, among people hostile to Spiritualism, that Davis was a "deliberate impostor"; for, adds Mr. Mahan, no "single sentence in Davis's extract was contained in the manuscript, the former being a condensed report of a lecture he (Mr. Mahan) had previously delivered in New York." It is incredible, however, that Davis, even if he had not been a man of high principles, would have risked his reputation by such a puerile trick, one, moreover, which was almost certain to be discovered.

Precisely the same argument applies to Madame Blavatsky. She did really see the astral duplicates of books suspended in the air before her eyes. There is nothing incredible or unparalleled in the suggestion that by this means she obtained quotations incorporated in *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, and that other quotations may not have poured into her brain from the etheric records. Thus she plagiarised without being aware that she was doing so.

Even the oft-cited letter plagiarising Mr. Little's lecture may have been produced by these means: that is to say, by unconscious mingling of the effects of clairvoyance of printed matter with communications from the Mahatma. Whether Mahatma K. H. was an Adept still dwelling in the physical body or whether he were a discarnate spirit, Madame Blavatsky must have been very much in the position of a medium in respect to his communications. Two minds must at times have been employing the same brain material in giving messages to the world. No one can deny that this is abnormal. K. H. was thinking and writing through someone else's brain—that of Madame Blavatsky. It was K. H.'s mind and Madame Blavatsky's etheric brain that must have been employed even in direct writings and precipitations. And there is no reason why it should not be impossible for the intellectual activities of the two individuals sometimes to become mixed together;

and indeed such an occurrence, from what we know of Spiritualism, is even probable. Over and over again thoughts for which the medium is responsible appear in the script of automatists or in trance-utterance. And yet there may be genuine communication from another entity at the same time. When a medium is not entirely withdrawn from the physical brain two intelligences are using it, playing upon it, and, unless the medium is absolutely passive, the thoughts of medium and control are liable to blend, sometimes in the form of contradictions and absurdities and sometimes (if medium and control are in sympathy and agreement, as was Madame Blavatsky and her Masters) in a manner so harmonious that it is difficult to distinguish the two strands of thought.

XIII

The credibility of many of the phenomena connected with Madame Blavatsky will be greatly increased when it is established beyond question that phenomena of a similar nature occasionally occur in connection with Spiritualism. Many similar phenomena, of course, have been reported as occurring from time to time, but they have not, as yet, been investigated by scientists under test conditions. Ectoplasmic materialisations of the human form have been pronounced by Baron von Schrenck-Notzing, Professor Richet, Sir Oliver Lodge and other scientists to be genuine phenomena; but a verdict has not yet been given in regard to the materialisation of miscellaneous objects and the production of "apports" by super-normal means. The materialisation of flowers said to have taken place in the presence of such mediums as Madame D'Espérance and Mrs. Thayer (the last-named described by Colonel Olcott in *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. I) bear similarity to the articles, pictures and flowers which sometimes appeared from "nowhere" in the presence of Madame Blavatsky. Similarly there are stories of direct writing and of the materialisation of letters. "Apports" have been known

not only in Spiritualism, but in other religions, particularly Roman Catholicism, a statue of the Infant Jesus, which is said to have fallen miraculously from the sky at Prague, being a famous instance. Spiritualistic "apports" appear suddenly, "out of the air" or "out of nothing." They are said to be sometimes accompanied by a flash of light, and sometimes they fall from ceiling or roof with extraordinary velocity. Sometimes, too, they are unaccountably warm if picked up immediately they appear.

There are also stories of direct writing and of the materialisation of letters. Phenomena similar to those experienced in the early days of the Theosophical Society are said to have occurred some years ago in connection with a secret society with headquarters at Leghorn and various branches. The phenomena in the Leghorn Society are believed to have included instantaneous inter-communication at a distance, phantasmal appearances, conveyance and precipitation of letters, and disintegration and reintegration of objects.

Podmore's *History of Modern Spiritualism* contains several other examples.

In 1856 the Baron L. de Guldenstubbé obtained direct writing by putting paper and pencil in a small locked box, of which he carried the key on his person. He also obtained writing on pieces of paper left on tombs and pedestals of statues.¹

Mr. Morrell Theobald had a mediumistic cook through whose agency direct writing in English, German, old French, Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Raratongan appeared on walls and ceilings, in locked receptacles, or on marked paper at séances. This case, however, was apparently one of clairvoyance of printed matter and possibly of somnambulism.

Scraps of paper inscribed with doggerel rhymes are said to have fluttered down from the ceiling during at least one of the séances at which Miss Showers was the medium.

¹ *Modern Spiritualism*, Vol. II, p. 189.

In March, 1872, Mr. St. George Fox attended a séance at which a choir-boy, or a number of choir-boys, acted the rôle of medium. His impression was that there was no trickery, and a few days later he held a second séance with eight of the boys :

“ We took tea together as before. Whilst the boys were still seated round the table I rose and walked to the mantelpiece, turning over in my mind how I should broach to the boys my intention of examining their pockets. There were four candles burning on the mantelpiece, by the side of which I took my stand. The boys, as I have said, were still seated round the table, which was at a considerable distance, and were chatting together about some game of cricket. Such was the position of affairs in the room, when a shower of folded papers descended upon me, floating gradually down as if dropped very gently. One of them alighted on my hand and so called my attention to the rest. . . . They did not seem to come from or through the ceiling, but rather to start into sudden existence in the air above me. It was physically impossible for these papers to have been thrown at me by the boys at the table, and I thought it perfectly ludicrous after this to propose the examination I had intended, a test having been given me far more satisfactory than any I could have devised.”¹

A young medical student of New York, named Mr. Fowler, claimed in a statement written on March 26th, 1852, and published in *Shekinah*, to have received communications in Hebrew by direct writing. It is not impossible that this case may really have been one of somnambulism. But an interesting point is the fact that Mr. Fowler saw, or dreamed that he saw, the direct writing actually being done by means of electric emanations, “ luminous currents ” which, centring round the pen, had the power of taking it up, dipping it in the ink and writing with it. It is curious to notice that a similar occasion is described independently by Stainton Moses (published recently in *The Controls of Stainton Moses*, by A. W. Trethewy). During one of his trances Stainton Moses dreamed that he stood looking on at his own body when

¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 247.

automatic writing was being done through his physical organism. He was surprised to notice that his hand was moved, not by the hand of a spirit, but by a beam of light which was directed upon it. Statements such as these seem to support Madame Blavatsky's doctrine of the etheric currents and their potency in the production of phenomena.

If it could be proved scientifically that direct writing and precipitation of letters really occurs with physical mediums (and we believe that sometimes it does) it would not, it is true, establish with logical certainty the genuineness of the phenomena produced through Madame Blavatsky. But it would at least make them seem credible, more easy to regard as probable, or at least possible.

XIV

But apart from all questions of Madame Blavatsky's honesty, or the nature of her powers, it must be remembered, after all, that the Russian occultist, great bringer of light though she was, was not the originator of Theosophy. Theosophy was an ancient and, for the most part, secret tradition of mysticism. It has come down to the modern world in two separate and distinct streams—the Hindu and the Christian—and these two streams have united in the Theosophical Society. But the greatest service which Madame Blavatsky contributed to the movement was the provision of a new and, if genuine, undeniable proof of the existence of the Masters. This she did through her connection with Them and the phenomena she produced in Their name. Similarly, all Theosophical teachings, re-incarnation, karma and so forth, were corroborated and indirectly supported through the implications behind her phenomena. If Madame Blavatsky were a charlatan, this evidence is absent, the subjective and mystical experiences of her followers may probably be illusions, and Theosophy becomes little more than a series of attractive speculations.

The whole question is becoming one of vital importance in days when a new *avatara* is proclaimed as imminent,

when the Master and Teacher who spoke to the world through H. P. B. is about to express himself through a human form, walking the streets and cities of the world in a new revelation of God to "those who want sympathy, who want happiness, who are longing to be released, who are longing for happiness in all things."

XV

Yet even if Madame Blavatsky were a charlatan, Theosophy is not without a certain amount of concrete evidence in its support, namely, the general drift of Spiritualistic philosophy. Over and over again the theory of reincarnation is to be found in Spiritualism. Its earliest advocate in recent times was the French Spiritist, Allan Kardec. His first important writing on this subject was published in 1857,¹ long before the Theosophical Society and its ideals were thought of, yet his luminous arguments in favour of the plurality of lives have never been refuted or surpassed. Reincarnation is also taught or implied in much automatic writing.

In the experience of Mr. Frederick Bligh Bond, whose scripts about Glastonbury have created widespread interest, the truth of reincarnation has been encountered in a highly dramatic form. In a recent series of scripts (quoted and referred to by Mr. Bligh Bond in his book, *The Company of Avalon*) the automatist, Miss X—, is referred to by the old monks who purport to communicate as though the medium were a member of their fraternity. Miss X— is addressed in her automatic script as "Brother Simon," and it is clearly suggested that she is one of these early Glastonbury monks who has undergone reincarnation. When she asks questions about the ancient condition of the abbey, the answer is sometimes followed by the remark, "But you ought to *know* this, Brother Simon, for you were there."

The script also implies that in her former existence "Brother Simon" loved the meditations of the cloister

¹ *The Spirits' Book*, revised edition, 1857.

more than the active life of good works and charity. Moreover, Brother Simon hated women. He is now reborn in a female body, presumably in order to learn that women are not so sub-human as he had imagined. Miss X—— is a member of the Church of England and a tireless social worker among the poor. So, clearly, Brother Simon, now Miss X——, is making atonement for his former negligence and selfish love of solitude.

Cases of this kind provide striking examples of the way in which Theosophical doctrines continually make their appearance in spiritualistic communications—a fact which, if it does not actually demonstrate their truth, at least increases their probability through independent and additional testimony. For assertions of the truth of reincarnation are by no means solely vouchsafed to automatists who already believe in the doctrine. Neither Miss X—— nor Mr. Bligh Bond were convinced of reincarnation before the receipt of this script, and the former, at any rate, as a member of the Church of England, was probably definitely opposed to any such idea.

When to these considerations is added the fact that mystics, whether in the Spiritualistic movement or in more orthodox religious bodies, are unanimous in declaring that there is no such thing as chance, that the hairs of our head are all numbered, that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father seeing it, and that the providence and guardianship of God extend to the most insignificant minutiae of life as well as operating in the greatest, then you have a theory of divine order very much akin to the Theosophical doctrine of karma. In fact, providence becomes karma the moment that reincarnation is added to one's conception of nature, and the divine guidance is seen to extend over chains and sequences of lives.

XVI

If Madame Blavatsky could be proved to have been a fraud, it is true that a most important testimony to the

existence of the Masters would be lost. But at the same time it would not necessarily follow from this with absolute certainty either that Theosophy is false or that Mahatmas such as those with whom Madame Blavatsky claimed to be in contact do not really exist. Colonel Olcott was honest ; Dr. Besant believes sincerely, and many other members of the Theosophical Society are of earnest conviction and no little scholarship. And Theosophy in its early days owed at least as much to the efforts of Colonel Olcott as to Madame Blavatsky. Indeed, it may almost be said that in some respects the latter, quite apart from any question of good faith, did as much harm as good to the Society. This does not mean that she was not a tireless worker, that she did not wield far-reaching and profound influence, or that she did not make the greatest sacrifices for the Cause she had at heart. But, in spite of all these virtues, it cannot be denied that Madame Blavatsky frequently had a way of alienating people and of making enemies. She lacked diplomacy and patience, and her good influence was sometimes restricted owing to her personal egotism. But, as we have said, there was also Colonel Olcott ; and to-day the greatest worker and leading spirit of the movement is Dr. Annie Besant. And the doctrines of Theosophy are nothing other than the ancient Aryan Wisdom. It was Colonel Olcott, primarily, who incorporated in modern Theosophy the doctrines of Buddhism, and Dr. Besant who has expounded in a marvellous manner the principal elements of Hinduism. Both these Theosophical achievements are independent of Madame Blavatsky and her phenomena. Theosophy, therefore, cannot be said to stand or fall inevitably with the honesty or dishonesty, sanity or insanity, success or failure, of any single individual in the movement.

Why should it be difficult to suppose that it may be the karma of the Ancient Wisdom, or, rather, the karma of Europeans in relation to that Wisdom, that the great truths of early Aryan revelation should seem to be obscured by charlatanism ? Because we have so long been sceptical and

materialistic, when faith would have been easy if we had but willed to believe ; because for so long we have loved darkness rather than light, and for so long have fought on the wrong side ; it is now our karma that the truth be fenced from us by barriers of apparent dishonesty. This mountainous obstacle of seeming deceit must be surmounted by every Westerner and concrete thinker who would win his way to the Theosophic truths. Belief, for us, is made doubly hard because, in years and ages past, we have consciously devoted our intellects to the obscuration of truth instead of labouring to make truth plain.

But it would be foolish to suppose that because of this, Madame Blavatsky was really guilty of the fraud attributed to her. The reality is entirely different. For when every barrier is surmounted by the mind, when the veil of illusion is at last penetrated, and when, through patient study and research, we succeed in visualising Madame Blavatsky as she really was, we see before us, not a charlatan, but a noble, an heroic soul, a supremely honest, clear-seeing woman, distinguished from most other modern benefactors of humanity by her superior glory.

XVII

Had Madame Blavatsky a logical mind ? The answer, we fear, must be in the negative. By natural temperament she was imaginative, impulsive, disorderly. She thought in pictures more readily than in abstract ideas. She rarely showed herself capable of close, clear-cut reasoning, accurate and long-sustained. This explains the apparent incoherence of her great books. It needed a fine logical mind, like Dr. Besant's, to reduce those sublime ideas to scientific order and small compass.

Yet in the preponderance of imagination over analytical reason lies Madame Blavatsky's strength as well as her chief weakness. For Madame Blavatsky was a seer, and a seer of extraordinary genius. A great, an unrivalled psychic ; the messenger of a marvellous religious and philosophical

revelation ; a lovable personality ; a stalwart fighter ; a great sufferer ; a woman of far-reaching and enduring influence—such was Madame Blavatsky.

It is still much too early to estimate the full effect her influence is likely to achieve. We see the Theosophical Society she helped to found growing greater and more powerful year by year ; the section of the Society which seceded under William Q. Judge is also doing work in its sphere ; and in recent times there has appeared the origins of a " Back to Blavatsky " movement which, although on a small scale, is not without its interest. The existence of the Blavatsky Society (for which no members of the Theosophical Society are eligible as members) shows the great and lasting impression Madame Blavatsky made. It seems that, like all great clairvoyants, from Swedenborg to Rudolf Steiner, Madame Blavatsky is to have her own special and exclusive followers—a tendency to be deprecated chiefly because narrowness of outlook may lead to error. It was precisely in order to foster a more Catholic spirit that the Theosophical Society was founded. At no time has it been suggested that the writings of Madame Blavatsky represent truth whole and entire, or that new seers and prophets would not follow after her ; and it is by listening wisely to the voice of more than one and by giving all ideas their true setting within the temple of truth, like jewels of thought set in the fine gold of spiritual wisdom, that the true sanity and deep religious life are to be found and experienced.

XVIII

Undoubtedly the most precious work made possible through the labours and powers of Madame Blavatsky was the inauguration of the Theosophical Society. For the Society is an unique combination of theory and practice, mysticism and politics, faith and works. It stands for the grand ideal of World Unity, of reconciliation between peoples, understanding between East and West.

Above all things, the Theosophical Society stands for

unity in religion—religion, which hitherto has been a source of strife and bloodshed. The Theosophical doctrine that the religious faiths of the world have a common origin and an underlying unity may lead in future years to the union in one Brotherhood not only of Christendom—now divided into warring sects—but of all those who, throughout the world, worship the unseen Father. This movement may mean the death of religious bigotry and intolerance. It may at last mean peace in the world of religion. And when there is peace in religion, hope may dawn of peace between nations and between classes ; peace in politics, commerce and the family. For then indeed will individuals be rooted and grounded in love. This present age of darkness, the Kali Yuga, will be over and past, and the Golden Age, the first age, will dawn upon the earth once again. Then may the prophet's dream become a practical reality. There shall be no more swords, but ploughshares ; no more tears, but laughter. Life, and love, and happy children shall increase throughout the earth in the cycle wherein all things are made new. In the realisation of this vision the Theosophical Society which Madame Blavatsky helped to found is one of the practical instruments.

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