



Theosophical  
History

A Quarterly Journal of Research

Volume V, No. 7 July 1995  
ISSN 0951-497X

# THEOSOPHICAL HISTORY

A Quarterly Journal of Research

Founded by Leslie Price, 1985

Volume V, No. 7

July 1995

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*Theosophical History* (ISSN 0951-497X) is published quarterly in January, April, July, and October by James A. Santucci (Department of Religious Studies, California State University, Fullerton, CA 92634-9480 U.S.A.) The journal consists of eight issues *per* volume: one volume covering a period of two years. The journal's purpose is to publish contributions specifically related to the modern Theosophical Movement, from the time of Madame Helena Blavatsky and others who were responsible in establishing the original Theosophical Society (1875), to all groups that derive their teachings—directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly—from her or her immediate followers. In addition, the journal is also receptive to related movements (including pre-Blavatskyite Theosophy, Spiritualism, Rosicrucianism, and the philosophy

of Emanuel Swedenborg to give but a few examples) that have had an influence on or displayed an affinity to modern Theosophy.

The subscription rate for residents in the U.S., Mexico, and Canada is \$14.00 (one year) or \$26.00 (two years). California residents, please add \$1.08 (7.75%) sales tax onto the \$14 rate or \$2.01 onto the \$26 rate. For residents outside North America, the subscription rate is \$16.00 (one year) or \$30.00 (two years). Air mail is \$24.00 (one year) or \$45.00 (two years). Single issues are \$4.00. Subscriptions may also be paid in British sterling. All inquiries should be sent to **James Santucci**, Department of Religious Studies, California State University, Fullerton, CA 92634-9480 (U.S.A.). Second class postage paid at Fullerton, California 92634. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Theosophical History (c/o James Santucci), Department of Religious Studies, California State University, Fullerton, CA 92634-9480

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\* \* \* \* \*

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Brief communications, review articles, and book reviews are welcome. They should be submitted double-spaced.

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Layout and composition by Robert L. Hütrwohl, Santa Fe, NM, using Adobe type 1 typefaces: ITC Garamond 1, Linotype Univers and Linotext, with an adapted Sanskrit-Tibetan diacritical Garamond typeface designed by Mr. Hütrwohl.

## Contents

July 1995  
Volume V, Number 7

### Editor's Comments

James Santucci .....	217
----------------------	-----

### Scholarly Research

Jesper Sørensen .....	220
-----------------------	-----

Robert Hütwohl .....	220
----------------------	-----

### From the Archives

The Letters of H.P. Blavatsky to W.Q. Judge: Part VII: Undated Letter [1887], and Part VIII: Undated Letter [1888] With Notes by Michael Gomes .....	221
---	-----

<i>To Spy or Not to Spy: "The Letter" of Mme. Blavatsky to the Third Section</i> Maria Carlson .....	225
---	-----

### Review Essay

<i>K. Paul Johnson's The Masters Revealed</i> John Algeo .....	232
---	-----

### Book Reviews

<i>The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement</i> Robert S. Ellwood .....	248
--	-----

<i>A Confusion of Prophets: Victorian and Edwardian Astrology</i> Robert S. Ellwood .....	252
--	-----

<i>Insights of a Himalayan Pilgrim</i> Robert Boyd .....	253
---	-----

# Editor's Comments

## In This Issue

In the January 1991 issue of *TH*, I remarked that Paul Johnson's 1990 book, *In Search of the Masters*, was "bound to generate considerable discussion" among Theosophists. That it did over the ensuing years. Now, with the publication of what amounts to be a second, revised edition of the book in 1994, retitled *The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge*, the issue of just who the Masters were is again brought to the fore. In the review of the earlier work, Gregory Tillett explains Mr. Johnson's thesis as the following:

. . . The Mahatmas to whom Blavatsky referred were historical human beings, men of flesh and blood rather than the ascended spirit being of later neo-Theosophy, and they, and Blavatsky, were involved in what amounted to a network of political-cum-religious conspiracies. For example, Johnson identifies the Master KH with Sirdar Thakar Singh Sandhanwalla. The Masters were not Tibetan, but rather Indian or Persian.

But what does Mr. Johnson mean by 'identity'? This is the question that is taken up by John Algeo, the President of The Theosophical Society in America, in his review essay of *The Masters Revealed*. Does it refer to the equation of historical personage and Master, or does it refer to fictional Master based on historical prototype? This and the validity of Mr. Johnson's logic and methodology are discussed in great detail by Dr. Algeo. Dr. Tillett was of the opinion that *In Search of the*

*Masters* was a "difficult book" for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that it challenges accepted views of "doctrinaire Theosophists" — to use Joscelyn Godwin's expression in his Foreword to the book—and challenges accepted methodologies of historians. No matter how one views the book, the significance of the topic demands that it be read, but with one's critical faculties fine-tuned and in tact.

If Mr. Johnson's book has caused considerable conversation and controversy, then what is one to make of the 'Russian Spy Letter' supposedly written by Madame Blavatsky on 26 December 1872? I say "supposedly" because the translation is based on the text found in *Literaturneo obozrenie* (*Literary Revue*), with no verification of the handwritten text by either the scholar who found the letter, B.L. Bessonov, or the writer of the introduction, V.I. Mil'don. Dr. Maria Carlson, who translated portions of the letter in her ground-breaking book, *No Religion Higher Than Truth: A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia: 1875–1922* (fn 6 on p. 214), suggests that it could have been written by the "secret police (or some other agency) long after 1872 to discredit Mme. Blavatsky...." This is indeed possible when we know with a fair degree of certainty that the "Protocols of Zion," long thought by some to be a genuine document, was in fact a forgery of the Okhranka, the secret police of Czar Nicholas, instigated around 1903. It is therefore not impossible that this letter is also a product of a similar agency. But logic would demand a reason for

such a forgery, especially at a time when she was not a significant threat to the Russian government. Even if the letter were produced some years after the formation of the Theosophical Society, what threat was the Society to Russian security to warrant such a detailed letter? A far better assessment of the letter can be made if it is read in its entirety. We are grateful to Dr. Carlson for translating the complete text of the letter, together with selected revisions of that portion previously translated in her book. I believe that the full text provides more powerful evidence of its being authentic.

Also appearing in the "From the Archives" section is Michael Gomes' presentation of the Blavatsky-Judge letters taken from the Andover-Harvard Library. The two letters appearing herein, although undated, probably were written in 1887 and 1888. The first letter assures W.Q. Judge that H.P.B.'s new periodical, *Lucifer*, will in no way threaten Judge's *Path*. Elliott Coues is again mentioned, this time as "Theosophy militant & the General in chief thereon in the U.S." Alfred Cooper-Oakley is again brought up, along with Subba Row (see V/5:165), as intriguers against H.P.B.'s returning to Adyar. The second letter mentions the resignation of Subba Row, Cooper-Oakley, and N. Cook from the T.S. and H.P.B.'s request to Judge not to include any announcement in the *Path*. The bad blood between Subba Row and H.P.B. is exacerbated by Row's claiming to have received a letter from H.P.B.'s Master with the claim that he "had to reform the Society" since she "had been given up by the Masters!!"

\* \* \*

## Passing of Two Theosophists

It is with sadness to report the death of two prominent Theosophists: Walter Carrithers and William Laudahn. The only record of Mr. Carrithers' passing as far as I know appeared in the January 1995 issue of *The High Country Theosophist*. Therein, John Cooper notes that he died on or about 21 August 1994. Mr. Carrithers was best known for his book, *Obituary the "Hodgson Report" on Madame Blavatsky 1885-1960* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1963), written under his *nom de plume*, Adlai E. Waterman, and for his Blavatsky Foundation. Mr. Carrithers also served as the Honorary President of the Theosophical History Centre in London in 1987. While in that capacity, he read a paper at the Second International Conference on Theosophical History, subsequently published in *TH* II/4: 126-132 and II/5: 165-182, entitled "Jiddu Krishnamurti and "The Return of Madame Blavatsky." He died at age 70.

The passing of William Laudahn came on 27 February 1995. Mr. Laudahn is known for a number of articles for various Theosophical journals, including two articles recently published: "In and Out of the Real World," in the Fall 1994 issue of *The Eclectic Theosophist* (26-27), and "Pansophy as an Alternative to Theosophy: A Short Informal History" in the January 1995 issue of *TH*. I did not know Mr. Laudahn very well, but the few times that I conversed with him, usually in the company of Associate Editor Robert Boyd, I found him to have an alert and inquiring mind. Despite his physical ailments, he pursued his studies and built up a splendid library of Theosophical, Gnostic, Kabbalistic, and philosophical literature. Mr. Laudahn died at the age of 79.

*Requiescant in pace.*

## Don Franklin Shepherd

Congratulations to Don Franklin Shepherd, who has successfully defended his M.A. history thesis, *Education, Culture and the Performing Arts in the Point Loma Theosophical Society: From Helena Blavatsky to Katherine Tingley*, at California State University, Fullerton. Chapters from this exceptional thesis include: "William Q. Judge: Propagandizing Theosophy," "The Central League Experiment," "Introducing Katherine Tingley," "Aspects of Katherine Tingley's Education System," and "Drama and *The Eumenides*," Especially valuable is the listing of select musical and dramatic performances that took place in San Diego and elsewhere.

\* \* \*

## Subscription Rates

Because of rising prices in paper, printing, and postage, it will be necessary to increase subscription rates, beginning in 1 January 1996. An increase of the price of back issues will take effect immediately. This is the first time there has been a rate increase since the July-October 1991 (III/7-8) issue, when the present rates went into effect. Inflation and a no-advertising policy necessitates such an action primarily to keep pace with the costs of printing and postage. The new rates are as follows:

### ONEYEAR(FOURISSUES)

U.S., Canada, Mexico	\$21 (California residents, add \$1.62)
Elsewhere (surface mail)	\$25 (£16)

Air mail (outside the U.S. and Canada)	\$35 (£22)
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### TWOYEARS(EIGHTISSUES)

U.S., Canada, Mexico	\$38 (California residents, add \$2.94)
Elsewhere (surface mail)	\$45 (£28)
Air mail (outside the U.S. and Canada)	\$65 (£40)
BACK ISSUES	\$6 (£4.50)

\* \* \* \* \*

# Scholarly Research

From *Jesper Sørensen* (Århus, Denmark)

. . . I am preparing my master thesis in The History of Religions on the use of metaphor in theosophical writings and lectures. . . .

. . . I have in vain looked for figures showing how many copies have been sold of the chief works of The Theosophical Society like *The Secret Doctrine*, *Isis Unveiled*, *The Voice of the Silence*, *Ancient Wisdom*, etc. If anybody has that information and/or can refer [me] to reliable sources I would be very grateful.

I find it very positive that there is a growing scholarly interest in The Theosophical Society and related groups, as I believe them to be amongst the main religious innovators in modern times, laying the terminological and ideological foundation of what today is named “New Age.”

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*In the May 1995 issue of the Smithsonian (pp. 111–127), the author, Edward Hower, mentions that Isis Unveiled has sold more than 500,000 copies. What source he bases this on, however, is not given. The Theosophical presses that publish these works (Theosophy Company, T.P.H., and Theosophical University Press) could provide information on at least the number of copies they each have printed. Works such as the Secret Doctrine have been translated into numerous languages, so it would be nearly impossible to get a*

*precise number of copies for each. We often hear of the popularity of Blavatsky’s works, but how does that popularity translate into numbers?*

\* \* \*

From *Robert Hütwohl* (USA)

I am in the final stages of completing a Franz Hartmann bibliography, which is preparatory to my announcement of an extensive array of his German writings, several of which I am translating into English. Journals yet to be searched thoroughly are William Q. Judge’s *The Path* as well as the subsequent *Theosophy* and *Universal Brotherhood*; *The Path*, published by the Blavatsky Institute, Hale, Cheshire, England; *The Theosophic Isis*; *The Occult Review*; and *Theosophical Review*. Although my preference is to see the actual journal in hand as hardcopy, digital, microfilm or microfiche, in order to see the contents and denote duplicate articles (for instance, Hartmann wrote more than one article titled “Capital Punishment”), the second-best alternative is a copy of the table of contents. I need to view journals up to 1925, although Hartmann died in 1912.

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\* \* \* \* \*

# From the Archives

## The Letters of H.P. Blavatsky to W.Q. Judge: Part VII: Undated Letter [1887], and Part VIII: Undated Letter [1888]

With Notes by Michael Gomes

The next two letters are undated but can be placed by internal evidence. The first mentions Mme. Blavatsky's new magazine from London, *Lucifer*, which was scheduled for publication September 15, 1887. Notice of its intended appearance was also mentioned in the September 1887 *Path*. So we can definitely fix the date in 1887, before the end of September. The second letter carries the news of T. Subba Row's resignation from the Theosophical Society; this was revealed to the membership in the Supplement to *The Theosophist* for June 1888. The letter is accompanied by an envelope postmarked from London June 5, 1888, and canceled in New York June 15. Written on the envelope in blue pencil is "June 14, 1888." I have therefore assigned it the date of June 5, 1888, as a fair approximation of when it was written.

All that is readily available on Tallapragada Subba Row has been collected in a small booklet by N.C. Ramanujachary titled *A Lonely Disciple: A Monograph on T. Subba Row, 1856–90* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1993). He was highly esteemed in the early Theosophical movement for his writings on Advaita philosophy. Of the early life of this Telugu Brahmin little is known. He was born on July 6, 1856, at Cocanada (Kakinada), in what is now Andhra Pradesh,

where he received his education. In 1876 he obtained his B.A. from Madras University and went on to study law, becoming an advocate at the High Court of Madras.

He came to the attention of Theosophists with the publication of his article on "The Twelve Signs of the Zodiac" in the November 1881 *Theosophist*. After meeting Col. Olcott and Mme. Blavatsky on their visit to Madras in 1882, he joined the Theosophical Society on April 25 of that year. Col. Olcott acknowledges Subba Row's presence in Madras as one of the reasons for their moving the headquarters from Bombay. By 1884 he was being named as Mme. Blavatsky's editorial assistant for the forthcoming *Secret Doctrine*. But after her departure from India in 1885, they drifted apart, Subba Row becoming critical of the seven-fold classification used by Theosophists. (An examination of their differences in this matter is given in Peter Bandtlow's "T. Subba Row and the Four-fold Classification of Principles," *The Theosophist* 92 [October 1970]: 46–56.)

According to Blavatsky's reference printed in this installment, it was a long letter from Judge in the February 1888 *Path* urging her not to delay publication of *The Secret Doctrine*, "that broke the last straw." In his letter Judge assured her that "it makes but small difference—if any whatever—

here in the vast and populous West what any one or many pundits in India say or threaten to say about the *Secret Doctrine*, since we believe that although a great inheritance has been placed before the East Indians by their ancestors they have not seized it, nor have they in these later days given it out to their fellow men living beyond the bounds of India, and since this apathy of theirs, combined with their avowed belief that all Western people, being low-caste men, cannot receive the Sacred Knowledge, has removed these pundits from the field of influence upon Western thought.” There may have been a direct influence as Blavatsky suggests, for by April, after this issue of *The Path* would have been received in India, Subba Row had resigned his position as President of the Madras Branch of the Society. He died in Madras on June 24, 1890, two weeks before his 34th birthday.

\* \* \*

[1887]

My dearest W.Q.J.

“If I thought for one moment that “Lucifer” will “rub out” Path I would never consent to be its editor. Now listen to me my good old friend: Once that the Masters have proclaimed your “Path” the best the most theosophical of all theosophical publications—surely it is not to allow it to be rubbed out!! I know what I am saying & doing, my “commanding genius” notwithstanding. To prove

<sup>1</sup> The next three sentences were printed in *The Irish Theosophist*, June 15, 1895: 156.

this—(which will be proven to you by the first number of Lucifer when you see its polemical contents) I will write every month regularly for “Path” occult, transcendental & theosophical articles.<sup>2</sup> I give you my word of honor of HPB. I [2] will force people to subscribe for Path & this will never hurt “Lucifer.” One is the fighting combative Manas—the other (Path) is pure Buddhi.<sup>3</sup> Can’t both be united in one [rupa ?] or Sthula Sarira—theosophy? <sup>4</sup>Lucifer will be Theosophy militant—“Path” the shining light, the Star of Peace. If your intuition does not whisper to you—it is so: then that intuition must be wool-gathering. No Sir, the “Path” is too well, too theosophically edited for me to interfere. I am not born for meek & conciliating literature!

Now for C.<sup>5</sup> What I thought of him I say so still. But he will hence forward have an iron hand upon him unconsciously [3] to himself. He too, is Theosophy militant & the General in chief thereon in the U.S. I thought reflected, pondered, till I nearly became mad. I never thought he would give up the Society in giving up that d—d Board of Control. But Judge, if you love theosophy & the Cause, if you would save the unfortunate building, trembling & splitting on all its seams put that strong indomitable character over the movement. Work with him be the palliative. But unless we place that Atilla as the “Angel of the Sword” no one, not even Olcott is up to that task in America.

<sup>2</sup> No article bearing H.P.B.’s signature ever appeared in *The Path* after December 1886.

<sup>3</sup> This sentence is in the June 15, 1895 *Irish Theosophist*.

<sup>4</sup> The next three sentences are in *The Irish Theosophist*, June 15, 1895: 156.

<sup>5</sup> Coues.

[1888]

See, Adyar is collapsing. I just received another letter from O.<sup>6</sup> He sends me a letter to him from Cooper-Oakley who brought [the?] Council to vote for my not returning [4] this year to Adyar. I will send you this specimen of foul plot & intrigue & you will judge. Beware of C.O.! He is determined to make away with me & has enrolled Subba Row with him by lies, slanders & insinuations. Believe me my Son, Hystaspes,<sup>7</sup> Lucifer & the Path, are barely sufficient as an army to hold in check dark intrigues & plot. They all want to get into my shoes. May they never hurt their favorite corns!

Be quick, hurry on, whatever you do. Be ready, if you would go to the end & force by conquering it the kingdom of Heaven.<sup>8</sup> [ ] to be [ ] chela [ ] has to regard [ ] as [ ] guru. Such are the orders.

Yours in haste  
HPB

\* \* \*

My dear Judge,

A few words but most serious. Subba Row, Cooper Oakley N. Cook have resigned from the T.S. & left Adyar. Olcott with his usual tact having, on S.R.'s request, to announce this in the Theosophist<sup>9</sup>, wrote to say in a brief para "non committal as possible" as he expresses it, that the reason for it is "the strained relations between him (S.R.) & yourself" (me!). Well, that's probably done. All I know is, that at the [2] first word about S.R. or C.O. or any of them S.R. will come down heavily upon myself, Olcott & the S. Doctrine. It will be a new scandal worse than that of Coulomb. It is your address to me in "Path"<sup>10</sup> that broke the last straw. Well I ask you in the name of the Masters, for my sake & that of the Cause not to [3] mention their resignations by one single word in "Path." Let it pass unnoticed. He is ready to pounce on us, supported by C.O. & N.C. & others. I will not say one word in Lucifer, just as if he had never existed.<sup>11</sup> You know that S.R. claimed for the two past years to be in communication with my Master; actually with M ∴ !!! That he showed Sanskrit letters from Him (no handwriting no indiscrete calligraphy—in Sanskrit!) to himself &

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<sup>9</sup> The Supplement to *The Theosophist* for June 1888, p. xli, carried a brief three line note to the effect that T. Subba Row and J.N. Cook had resigned their membership in the Theosophical Society.

<sup>10</sup> February 1888. See the reply by Indian members in the July *Path*, 97–98.

<sup>11</sup> But H.P.B. did publish a notice of his death in the August 1890 issue of *Lucifer*, 509.

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<sup>6</sup> Olcott.

<sup>7</sup> Coues' name for himself, a reference to the Persian conqueror Darius Hystaspes.

<sup>8</sup> The empty brackets indicate where parts of the sentence have been scratched out in ink.

translated them to C.O. The letters were to the effect that he, S.R. had [4] to reform the Society & hinted that I, HPB, had been given up by the Masters!! C.O. who has chosen S.R. for his guru, who worships him as does N. Cook, believes in him explicitly. What are the “muslin & bladder Mahatmas” of the Coulombs compared to such doings!!

Bus, bus<sup>12</sup>—I must say nothing, however much I may be disgusted. But, as the ranks thin around us, & one after the other our best intellectual Forces depart to turn bitter enemies—I say—Blessed are the pure hearted who have only intuition for intuition is better than intellect. I will copy your paper [&] send it to you this week.

Yours ever

HPB

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<sup>12</sup> A Hindi exclamation meaning “enough”; “that’ll do.”

# To Spy or Not to Spy: “The Letter” of Mme. Blavatsky to the Third Section<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Maria Carlson<sup>2</sup>

In 1988, in the archival section of the respected Moscow journal *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (Literary Revue), two Russian scholars published a highly provocative letter purporting to be from Helena Blavatsky to the Chief of the Russian secret police, written at the very end of 1872.<sup>3</sup> B.L. Bessonov, a literary scholar, claimed in this article that he had located the letter in Moscow’s Central State Archives of the October Revolution while working on a new

literary encyclopedia.<sup>4</sup> In an unfriendly introduction, V.I. Mil’don observes that “a direct link exists between the pages on which she [HPB] offers her services as an international spy to the police organ famous for its persecution of all free thinking, and the activities of Blavatsky herself, who used calculated deceit.” “This document,” he continues, “confirms an old idea: any attempt to turn spiritual qualities into a means of achieving material goals, whether possessions, power, or glory, always turns against the individual. It also confirms a second, no less old, idea: there is nothing secret that does not at some time become manifest.”<sup>5</sup>

In this commentary, V.I. Mil’don is still expressing the official Soviet attitude toward sensational and dramatic Russian historical figures of Mme. Blavatsky’s sort. The few short years since the publication of this article, however, have witnessed a renewed Russian interest in Theosophy and a virtual explosion of publication of Theosophical materials, which soon find their way onto the Russian book market. It is virtually

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<sup>1</sup>From 1826 to 1880 the Third Section was the Russian Tsar’s personal secret police. After 1880 its functions were taken over by the Ministry of Internal Affairs; it survived into the 20th century as the OGPU, NKVD, and the KGB.

<sup>2</sup>Dr. Maria Carlson is Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures and the Director of the Center for Russian and East European Studies at the University of Kansas-Lawrence. She is the author of *No Religion Higher Than Truth: A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia: 1875–1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). Her most recent contribution on Theosophy appears in the *Dictionary of Russian Women Writers*, edited by Marina Ledkovsky, Charlotte Rosenthal, and Mary Zirin (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994), where she contributed an article on Mme. Blavatsky [“Eléna Petrónna Blavátskaia”] (84–87).

<sup>3</sup>“Pis’mo Blavatskoi [Mme. Blavatsky’s Letter],” publication of B.L. Bessonov and V.I. Mil’don, with introduction and notes by V.I. Mil’don. *Literaturnoe obozrenie* [Literary Revue, Moscow], No. 6 (1988): 110–112. The Blavatsky affair was allegedly resolved between 9 and 27 January 1873. Mil’don claims that the original correspondence is in the Central State Archives of the October Revolution in Moscow (Fond 109, dispatch III:1873, matter 22).

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<sup>4</sup>This new work is the first (since the pre-revolutionary period) to give H.P. Blavatsky her rightful place in the annals of Russian literature. The entry, “Blavatskaia, Elena Petrovna” (27 column inches) is written by V.I. Mil’don. It briefly surveys her peripatetic life, mentions her occult works, and discusses her travelogues. The article refers to the letter under discussion here. In *Russkie pisateli 1800-1917: biograficheskii slovar’* (Russian Writers 1800–1917: A Biographical Dictionary), vol. I (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsyklopediia, 1989), 272–273.

<sup>5</sup>*Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 110–111.

impossible to walk five blocks in downtown Moscow without encountering some Theosophical volumes for sale at the book kiosks. At least two separate editions of *The Secret Doctrine* have been published, and everything from *The Nightmare Tales* and *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan* to *The Voice of the Silence* and Mary Neff's *Personal Memoirs of H.P. Blavatsky* have appeared in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and the Russian provinces. The Russian Theosophical Society has also been reconstituted in Moscow, its representatives have visited the Headquarters in Adyar, and the Society awaits its rechartering sometime soon in the future.

Despite its appearance during the politically ambiguous year 1988, the publication of this sensational letter plays its own role in the mythology that has grown up around Mme. Blavatsky; it makes its own contribution to the contradictory and conflicting documentation of Mme. Blavatsky's extraordinary life. There has been considerable speculation over the years about the possible role of espionage in Mme. Blavatsky's life (was she or wasn't she a Russian spy?), but nothing has ever been proved. This letter is the first indication that there may in fact be some basis for the speculation, although the offer of her services was apparently not accepted by the Russian secret police. Unfortunately, nothing is said in Mil'don's and Bessonov's publication about the verification of handwriting, the provenance of the letter (how did it end up in an archive devoted to events following 1917?), or any other attempts at authentication. This observation is not intended to cast aspersions on the letter's authenticity, but merely to remind the reader that both Mme. Blavatsky and the people around her (well-wishers and not so well-wishers) are known to have manipulated the historical record for their own advantage.

This letter may have been written by Mme.

Blavatsky; it may as easily have been written by the secret police (or some other agency) long after 1872 to discredit Mme. Blavatsky (although Theosophy in Russia was not seriously regarded as politically volatile and Blavatsky was never considered a threat to Russian national security). Her subsequent activities in India were actually more likely to be of interest to the Russian secret police than her time in Cairo in 1871-72. The letter itself can certainly be read as cynical and hypocritical, as opportunistic, self-aggrandizing, and manipulative, but it can also be read as patriotic, and even as desperate: Mme. Blavatsky was financially in very dire straits at the time. The letter is, in the final evaluation, as enigmatic as Mme. Blavatsky herself; it is sensational, but at the moment unverifiable; it raises as many questions than it might answer. We will probably never know the complete and accurate details of this woman's life, but we are certain to be tantalized by more such provocative publications as Russian archives, long hidden from view, gradually become accessible.

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## The Letter of H.P. Blavatsky to the III Section<sup>6</sup>

Odessa, December 26, 1872<sup>7</sup>

Your Excellency!

I am the wife of State Councillor [Nikifor Vasil'evich] Blavatskii; I married at 16 and by mutual consent separated from my husband several weeks after the marriage. Since that time I have lived mostly abroad. During these 20 years I became well-acquainted with all of Western Europe; I avidly followed contemporary politics, not because I had a particular aim, but because I have an innate passion for entering into the minutiae of any affair, in order to better follow events and anticipate them; toward this end I have formed acquaintances with all of the prominent political personages of various nations, both establishment and left-wing. A whole series of events, intrigues, and coups have passed before my eyes . . . Many times I have had the opportunity to be of use to Russia with my information, but in the past, because of the stupidity of youth, I kept silent out of fear. Later, family misfortunes diverted me from this task.

I am the niece of General [Rostislav Andreevich] Fadeev, known to Your Excellency

as a military writer.<sup>8</sup>

Being involved in spiritism, I have developed a reputation in many places as a strong medium. There is no doubt that hundreds of people have believed in and continue to believe in spirits. But I, writing this letter with the goal of offering my services to Your Excellency and to my native land, am obliged to tell you the whole truth frankly. Therefore, I confess that three-quarters of the time the spirits spoke and answered—for the success of my plans—using my own words and considerations. Rarely, very rarely, was I unsuccessful in discovering, by means of this little trap, the hopes, plans, and secrets of the most reserved and serious individuals. Enticed little by little, they finally reached the point where, thinking to learn the future and the secrets of others from the spirits, they revealed to me their own. But I acted carefully and very rarely used my knowledge for personal gain.

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<sup>8</sup>Fadeev, Rostislav Andreevich (1824–1884); Mme. Blavatsky's uncle, Fadeev was a General of Artillery who did become known as a minor writer of military tales during the 1870s and 1880s; he was also known for his erudition and great personal charm. Primarily, however, he was known for his role in the Russian Pan-Slavic movement. The Russian historian Michael Florinsky identifies R.A. Fadeev as “an army officer who had seen service in the Caucasus, in Egypt (where he was in charge of the khedive's army), and later in the Balkans; Florinsky describes him as one of “the less mystically inclined Russian panslavs” who had discarded “the slavophile claim to Russia's religious and cultural dominance, and emphasized instead the ‘historic’ struggle between the Slavs and western . . . Europe” (Michael Florinsky, *Russia: A History and an Interpretation*, 2 vols. [New York: Macmillan, 1953], vol. II, 988). The intellectual historian Andrzej Walicki identifies him as “the eminent Pan Slavist and conservative political leader General R. Fadeev, author of a book entitled *Russian Society: Present and Future*, which contained a program for strengthening and providing legal guarantees for the class privileges of the nobility” (A. Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975], 487–488).

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<sup>6</sup>The letter as published in the *Literary Revue* is not divided into paragraphs. I have chosen to portion the letter into logical units for ease of reference [M.C.].

<sup>7</sup>This date is according to the old calendar; in Western Europe the date would be 12 days later, 6 January, 1873.

I spent all of last winter in Egypt, in Cairo, and knew everything that happened at the khedive's<sup>9</sup>, his plans, the development of intrigues, etc., through our own late Vice-consul Lavizon.<sup>10</sup> The latter became so taken with the spirits that, regardless of all his cunning, he constantly let out secrets. That is how I knew about [the khedive's] secret acquisition of a huge number of weapons, which was nevertheless halted by the Turkish government; and about the many intrigues of Nubar Pasha and his negotiations with the German consul-gen[eral].<sup>11</sup> I discovered all the details of the exploitation of the legacy, worth millions, of Raphael Abet by our agents and consuls, and many other things besides.

I started a Spiritist Society [*Société Spirite*<sup>12</sup>] and the entire country came, excited. Some 400, 500 people came each day; all of polite society, the pashas, and others rushed to me. Lavizon was a regular; he sent for me daily, secretly, and at his place I saw the khedive, who imagined that I

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<sup>9</sup>*Khedive* (Persian); Viceroy; title of the Turkish viceroys of Egypt, 1867–1914. The khedive at the time of Mme. Blavatsky's stay in Cairo was Ismail Pasha (ruled 1863-1879).

<sup>10</sup>Eduard Lavizon (?–1872), Russian vice-consul in Cairo from 1856 to 1872. Note that Mme. Blavatsky establishes her credentials through a government official recently deceased and unable to corroborate her intentions and abilities; she is not particularly kind to him in her description of his alleged indiscretions.

<sup>11</sup>Nubar Pasha Nubarian was then prime-minister in the government of Khedive Ismail.

<sup>12</sup>Other documents also refer to this “*Spiritskoe obsbchestvo*,” or “*Société Spirite*”; Mme. Blavatsky structured the Society according to the principles of Alan Kardec. Kardec's “*Spiritisme*” was more mystical than the pseudo-scientific Anglo-American Spiritualism and contained elements of Buddhist thought, with which Mme. Blavatsky would certainly have been more comfortable. It must be pointed out that she wildly exaggerates the popularity of the Society in Cairo.

would not recognize him dressed in cognito, inquiring about the secret intentions of Russia. He never learned of any intentions, but taught me a great deal.

On several occasions I hoped to enter into relations with Mr. de Leks, our consul-gen[eral]<sup>13</sup>; I wished to propose a plan by which a very great deal could have been known in Petersburg long ago. All the consuls came to visit me, but (probably because I was a friend of Mr. and Mrs. Pashkovskii<sup>14</sup> and Mme. de Leks did not like them) all my efforts were in vain. Leks would not permit the consular staff to belong to the Spiritist Society and even insisted that the whole thing was all nonsense and charlatanism—a politically bad move on his part. In a word the Society, deprived of official support, was defunct in three months.

Then Father Gregoire, the Pope's emissary in Cairo, who visited me every day, insisted that I enter into relations with the papal government. In the name of Cardinal Barnabò, he offered me 20-30,000 francs annually to work through the spirits and my own assessments for the sake of Catholic propaganda, etc.<sup>15</sup> I listened and was silent, although I harbor an innate hatred of all Catholic

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<sup>13</sup>Ivan Mikhailovich Leks (1834–1883), the Russian consul-general in Cairo from 1868–1883.

<sup>14</sup>Possibly this is the woman Marion Meade (and other biographers) names as “Lydia Paschkoff, the Russian explorer and traveler who would one day make explorations in the regions of the Upper Nile and become St. Petersburg correspondent for *Le Figaro*,” whom Mme. Blavatsky met in Cairo sometime after October 1871 (Meade, *Madame Blavatsky: The Woman Behind the Myth* [New York: Putnam, 1980], 94).

<sup>15</sup>Alessandro Barnabò (1801–1878), of Italian heritage (Foligno), Cardinal Sainte-Suzanne from 1856; Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith; liaison of the Vatican with foreign missions. Barnabò's interest in Mme. Blavatsky may have arisen during the years he spent presiding over the Commission for Missions and Churches of the Eastern Rites.

clergy. Father Gregoire brought me a letter from the Cardinal, in which the latter once again offered me all rewards in the future and said, "*Il est temps que l'ange des ténèbres devienne [l'] ange de [la] lumière,*" promised me a splendid position in Catholic Rome, and urged me to turn my back on heretical Russia. The upshot was that I took 5,000 francs from the papal emissary for the time I wasted on him, promised much in the future, turned my back not on heretical Russia, but on him, and left. I reported this to the consulate, but they only laughed at me and told me that I was acting foolishly in not accepting such a lucrative deal, that patriotism and religion are a matter of taste, it was stupid, and so on.

Now I have decided to turn to Your Excellency in the complete conviction that I can be more than useful to my country, which I love more than anything on earth, and to our sovereign, whom my family has always adored. I speak French, English, and Italian as well as I speak Russian; I also freely understand German and Hungarian, as well as a bit of Turkish. By birth, if not by current situation, I belong to the best aristocratic families of Russia and subsequently can move in the highest circles, as well as among the lowest strata of society. I have spent my entire life in these leaps from up to down. I have played all roles and am capable of becoming any person. This self-portrait may not be very flattering, but I am obliged to reveal the whole truth to Your Excellency, and to exhibit myself as people and circumstances and the eternal struggle of my entire life have made me, and which have perfected cunning in me as in a red-skinned Indian.

Rarely have I failed to bring some preconceived aim to its desired result: I passed through all temptations; I played, I repeat, roles at all levels of society. By means of the spirits and other devices I can discover anything, can worm the

truth out of the most recalcitrant individual. Up until now this ability was wasted, and the most significant results, in the governmental and political sense, which, had they been applied to the practical benefit of a nation could have been of tremendous advantage, were limited to the very narrow use of myself alone.

I am not motivated by greed, but, more properly, by *moral* rather than *material* protection and assistance. Although I have limited personal means and live primarily by translations and commercial correspondence, I have until now consistently rejected all proposals that could have positioned me even indirectly against Russia's interests. In 1867 Bates's<sup>16</sup> agent proposed various rewards because I am Russian and the niece of General Fadeev, whom he hated. This was in Pest;<sup>17</sup> I rejected his proposal and suffered the greatest unpleasantness. That year in Bucharest, General Tyur<sup>18</sup>, in the Italian service although a Hungarian, also tried to convince me, just before the Austro-Hungarian compromise, to serve him. I said no.

Last year in Constantinople, Mustafa Pasha,<sup>19</sup> brother of the Egyptian khedive, offered me a large sum of money through his secretary, Wilkinson, and personally as well, having formed an acquaintance with me through his French governess, to return to Egypt and to send him any information about the escapades and intentions of his brother,

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<sup>16</sup>Unable to identify.

<sup>17</sup>The city of Pest, since 1872 part of Budapest (Buda-Pest), the capital of Hungary.

<sup>18</sup>Unable to identify; spelling might also be Tiur, Thur, or some variant of these.

<sup>19</sup>Mustafa Pasha was the military governor of Egypt under Khedive Ismail.

the Viceroy. Not knowing how Russia would look upon this affair, and fearing to inform General Ignat'ev<sup>20</sup> of it, I declined the assignment, although I could have completed it easily.

In 1853 in Baden-Baden, having lost at roulette, I acquiesced to the request of an unknown gentleman, a Russian who had already shown interest in my activities. He offered me 2,000 francs if I could find a way to obtain two German letters (the contents of which were unknown to me), which had been very cleverly hidden by the Polish Count Kailecki, then in the service of the Prussian king.<sup>21</sup> The gentleman was a military man. I was penniless, any Russian had my sympathy, I was unable to return to Russia at that time, and that was horribly bitter to me. I agreed, and in three days I obtained those letters, with great difficulty and considerable danger. Then the gentleman informed me that it would be better for me to return to Russia, that I had sufficient *talent* to be of use to my country, and that should I at some point choose to change my life style and embark upon serious work, I had but to approach the Third Section and leave my name and address. Unfortunately, I did not take up his suggestion at the time.

All of this, taken together, gives me the right to think that I can be useful to Russia. I am alone in the world, although I have my share of relations. No one knows that I am writing this letter. I am entirely independent, and it is no simple boast, or illusion, if I say that I am not afraid of the most difficult and dangerous assignments. My life

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<sup>20</sup>Count Nikolai Pavlovich Ignat'ev (1832–1908), the Russian ambassador to Turkey, 1867–1877.

<sup>21</sup>Simon Konarski, *Armorial de la noblesse polonaise titrée* (Paris: 1958), has no entry for Count Kailecki; the assumption of titles for purposes of espionage, however, was popular at the time.

does not bring me either joy or pleasure. Perhaps my character loves challenge, conflict, and intrigue. I am stubborn and will go through fire and water to reach my goal. I have not been very useful to me; perhaps I can be useful to my country's government. I am a woman without prejudices and if I see advantage in some matter, then I look upon its bright side. It is possible that, knowing of this letter, those dear to me would curse me in blind pride. But they will not know of it, and, anyway, I really don't care. Never have they ever done anything for me. I am forced to be a tame *medium* to them, as well as to society.

Forgive me, Your Excellency, if I have dragged irrelevant domestic squabbles into this business letter. But this letter is my confession. I do not fear a confidential investigation of my life. Whatever I did that was stupid, in whatever situation I found myself, I was always loyal to Russia, loyal to her interests. At sixteen I committed an illegal act. I crossed the border at Poti<sup>22</sup> without a passport and dressed as a man. But I was running away from a jealous old man, forced on me by Princess Vorontsova,<sup>23</sup> and not from Russia. In 1860 I was

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<sup>22</sup>A Georgian port on the Black Sea, north of Batumi.

<sup>23</sup>Probably the wife of Prince Mikhail Vorontsov, Viceroy of the Caucasus, who had given Mme. Blavatsky's grandfather, Andrei Fadeev (1789–1867), the administrative appointment that had resulted in the family moving to Tiflis (Tbilisi). Most biographies attribute Mme. Blavatsky's unexpected and unequal marriage to the newly-named Vice-Governor of Erevan, Nikifor Blavatskii, as a result of her desire to escape the restrictions of Fadeev family life, but life as the wife of the Vice-Governor would have been as, if not even more, socially restrictive. In one of her biographical essays, Mme. Blavatsky's devoted admirer, Elena Fedorovna Pisareva (d. 1940s?), refers to comments made by Maria Grigor'evna Ermolova, a long-time friend of the family and wife of Blavatskii's superior, the Governor of Erevan (during the 1840s). Ermolova suggests that the young Elena Petrovna had in fact thoughtlessly gone off with the occultist Prince Golitsyn, a regular visitor to the Fadeev home, with the intention of meeting oriental sages. A

forgiven, and Baron Bruno, the envoy to London, issued me a passport.<sup>24</sup>

I have done many things abroad in honor of Russia: during the Crimean War I was involved in numerous altercations; I don't know why I was not killed or put in jail. I repeat, I love Russia and am ready to devote the rest of my life to her interests. Having revealed the entire truth to Your Excellency, I most humbly beg you to take all of this into consideration and, if necessary, to put me to the test.

I am currently living in Odessa with my aunt, Mme. General Witte, on Politseiskaia Street, the Gaaz House, No. 36.<sup>25</sup> My name is Elena Petrovna Blavatskaia. If I do not receive a communication from you in the course of a month, I will leave for France, since I am seeking a place for myself as a correspondent in some sort of commercial office. Be assured, Your Excellency, of my infinite respect and my complete readiness to be at Your service,

Elena Blavatskaia

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marriage was quickly arranged with N.V. Blavatskii in order to "save her reputation," and he in turn received his promotion to Vice-Governor in reward. If this is the case and Ermolova is correct, as wife of the Viceroy of the Caucasus, Princess Vorontsova would have certainly played a central role in the "arrangement." Mme. Blavatsky's mention of her here strongly implies that this might indeed be the case. See E.F. Pisareva, "Elena Petrovna Blavatskaia: Biograficheskii ocherk," typescript copy from the 2nd edition of *Vestnik* (Geneva) 1937 (Boston: Alba, 1966), 28-29.

<sup>24</sup>Baron Bruno, or (in Russian transcription) Baron Filipp Ivanovich Brunov (1796–1875), the Russian ambassador to Great Britain from 1860-1874.

<sup>25</sup>Ekaterina Andreevna Witte, *née* Fadeeva, the mother of Count Sergei Iulevich Witte (1849-1915), Minister of Finance under the last Tsar, Nicholas II, and H.P.B.'s first cousin.

Bessonov and Mil'don end their text with the following information: "To an inquiry made by the Head of the Odessa police, the Office of the Third Section answered: "No action was taken concerning Mme. Blavatskaia's request." The response was dated 27 January 1873.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>*Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 112.

# Review Essay

## K. Paul Johnson's THE MASTERS REVEALED

**The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge.** By K. Paul Johnson. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994. Pp. xxii + 288. \$16.95. ISBN 0-7914-2064-7 (pbk.)

This book, published in the SUNY Press's Series in Western Esoteric Traditions, is notable for several reasons. First, it is readable and has a fresh approach. Second, it illustrates the growing academic interest in esoteric traditions generally and in modern Theosophy particularly. Third, it approaches H. P. Blavatsky in a way that is basically friendly and appreciative of her role in and influence on modern thought, without being adulatory. Fourth, it brings to light some interesting aspects of Theosophical history not previously known. And fifth, it surveys some currents of nineteenth century thought and sociopolitical activity that form part of the background of the Theosophical Society.

The book has, however, two aspects that have been unevenly combined and are of unequal merit. The first of these aspects is that which especially accounts for the fifth reason for the book's notability mentioned above: a study of movements and persons, mainly in the late nineteenth century, that had some connection with or function as intellectual or social background for the work of H. P. Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society during its early days. This aspect treats the context in which the Theosophical Society came

into existence and functioned during the first decade or so of its existence.

The second of the aspects is the presentation of a thesis, for which the first aspect is offered as evidence, namely that H. P. Blavatsky's Masters can be identified with historically attested persons for whose interests she worked or whose help she hoped to enlist to promote the Theosophical Society. What "identified" means in this thesis is not entirely clear, and indeed Johnson seems to mean more than one thing by it. Both aspects, however, deserve a reader's careful attention. Although they are interwoven in the text of the book, they will be examined separately below.

The book itself is organized into three parts: (1) "Adepts," treating generally Western (or at least non-Indic) persons who can be seen in relationship to Blavatsky and the Society; (2) "Mahatmas," treating generally Eastern (and mostly Indic) persons of the same type; and (3) "Secret Messages," with four short chapters treating matters that do not fit easily into either of the major parts. "Adepts" and "Mahatmas," as titles of the first two parts, are merely catchphrases; if they are misinterpreted in a traditional Theosophical sense, the terms will be quite misleading. People are considered in the first two parts according to whether they are part of the pre-Indian or the Indian (post-American) context of Blavatsky's life.

## **“Adepts” In The Pre-Indian Context**

Among the Western “Adepts” dealt with by Paul Johnson are some not particularly Western and a number who are certainly not adepts in any usual sense of that term. However, they all relate, directly or indirectly, to Blavatsky before she and Henry Olcott went to India. Moreover, many of these persons cluster into certain groups and are representatives of a few themes important for Blavatsky’s life and thus also for the history of the Theosophical Society.

The first and an extremely important influence on HPB was her mother’s grandfather, Prince Pavel Dolgorukii, mainly through his extensive library, which HPB said included “hundreds of books on alchemy, magic and other occult sciences,” which she read during her early teens (19). This reading doubtless reinforced her early impressions of Tibetan Buddhism among the Kalmucks, for whose affairs her grandfather was the Russian administrator. Blavatsky’s great grandfather also introduces a major theme into the “context”: Freemasonry. He was a member of the Rite of Strict Observance, which incorporated Rosicrucian Masonry, had traditions of Secret Chiefs spread over the world, and looked to Tibet as a source of knowledge and initiation.

The Masonic theme continues through several of the other persons Johnson introduces. Aleksandr Golitsyn was a prominent Russian Freemason and mystic whose grandson and namesake, also known as a “Freemason, magician, and seer” (23), HPB is reputed to have known about the time of her marriage to Nikifor Blavatsky.

Although the degree of HPB’s acquaintance with the young Golitsyn is uncertain, the next Freemasonic figure treated by Johnson was closely

connected with her. Albert Rawson — artist, traveler, esotericist, Freemason, founder of the Guardians of the Mystic Shrine, Arabist, free-thinker, and Theosophical Society member — was a close friend of HPB’s and an important figure in her life and in the early history of the Society. They were acquainted during their twenties and may have been traveling companions. According to Johnson, Rawson asserted that “even in youth, HPB was able to amaze a highly advanced Freemason in Paris with her knowledge of Masonic secrets” (28). Rawson is also important in linking the theme of Freemasonry to a second theme in the “context,” that of Islam and Egyptology.

A shadowy Egyptian figure, also linked to Albert Rawson, is Paolos Metamon, a “Coptic magician” who may or may not have been involved in HPB’s abortive effort to found a “Spirit Society” in Cairo in the early 1870s, sometimes seen as an unsuccessful forerunner of the Theosophical Society.

Considerably more solid is Agardi Metrovitch, famed (or defamed) as a “Carbonaro” and “Mazzinist,” that is, a political activist and republican revolutionary. Blavatsky’s cousin, Sergei de Witte, wrote a scandalous memoir recounting otherwise unsubstantiated gossip about Metrovitch and HPB, which has been given more distribution than it deserves by being accepted uncritically by some of her biographers.

Giuseppe Mazzini, whom Metrovitch was popularly associated with, was a member of the Carbonari, an Italian movement dedicated to republican government and social reform. The movement, which is the third major theme in the “context,” also had Masonic associations. Giuseppe Garibaldi was another famous Carbonaro, with whom HPB was linked by her participation in the battle of Mentana, at which he was defeated by

the Papal forces. Mazzini was an idealist who promoted self-reliance, humanism, progress, and universal brotherhood. His compatibility with HPB on that score is obvious. It is not unlikely that, as a young woman, she moved in romantically revolutionary circles associated with Mazzini.

The list of others in the “context” stretches on. Louis-Maximilien Bimstein, a.k.a. Max Theon, master of the Cosmic Philosophy, included in his circle Mirra Richards, who later became The Mother, disciple and successor of Sri Aurobindo. Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani, a Persian Sufi and later Freemason, circulated widely in Europe and the Middle East. Another Islamic Freemason was James Sanua, a Jew who passed as an Arab and was associated with Italian Carbonarism, thus uniting the three themes of Masonry, Islam, and Italian republican fervor. He was also associated with Lydia Pashkov, a travel companion of HPB’s and a contributor to the French literary scene.

A Cypriot given the name of “Ooton Liatto” in a letter from Olcott to C. C. Massey and S. Moses is incongruously introduced. There is no record of such a person outside the marvelous tale about him recounted by the Colonel, so he appears to be a sort of *entr’acte* in the historical drama Johnson is staging. Olcott describes a visit from two swarthy gentlemen, of whom the younger was named Ooton Liatto. As they sat in his room smoking cigars, it began to pour rain inside the room, except upon the two visitors, who remained dry and told Olcott not to worry as nothing would be damaged. They gave Olcott a crystal in which he saw his mother as she had been twenty years before, after which he went into a trance. When he returned to consciousness, they asked him to introduce them to Madame Blavatsky. He rushed downstairs to do so, only to find the two visitors already in her parlor, chatting. Running back upstairs, he found his apart-

ment empty, and on returning to Blavatsky’s, discovered the visitors had left but through the window could see them turning a corner. HPB said they had been with her for more than an hour and refused any other comment.

The mysterious Ooton Liatto’s brief appearance is followed by two substantial stars: Marie, Countess of Caithness, an important figure in the French Theosophical Society; and Sir Richard Burton, another Islamic connection who was also a member of the Theosophical Society.

A number of lesser known players next enter the stage: Abdelkader, another Sufi Freemason; Raphael Borg, an English diplomat who served mainly in Egypt and a Freemason; and James Peebles, an American Spiritualist and Freemason who put Olcott in touch with the Arya Samaj in India and with the High Priest Sumangala in Sri Lanka and thus played a pivotal role in opening the contacts that brought Blavatsky and Olcott to India and Olcott to his great work among Sri Lankan Buddhists.

The last two pre-Indian figures are better known to Theosophists. Charles Sotheran was one of the original founders of the Theosophical Society who has been credited with proposing the name of the organization. A social activist of the Mazzini persuasion, he was also an active Freemason who procured for HPB the rank of Crowned Princess 12° in Adoptive Masonry. He was also one of the moving forces for making the Theosophical Society into a Masonic body with ritual and degrees, a scheme abandoned only after Blavatsky and Olcott moved to India.

Mikhail Katkov, editor of the Moscow Chronicle, in which HPB’s *Caves and Jungles of Hindostan* was published serially, was an important literary figure in Russia, with extensive international contacts. He was also politically active in promoting Pan-Slavic interests. Although HPB’s

contacts with him were after she went to India, her initial quest for a Russian journalist publisher for whom she might write was made while she was still in New York.

## **“Mahatmas” In The Indian Context**

The eighteen non-Indian “Adepts” are balanced by fourteen Indian “Mahatmas” (including one Tibetan) who appear in HPB’s “context” after her departure from America. Of the latter, two are treated extensively and the others much more cursorily, in one case, with less than a page.

The first of the Indian “Mahatmas” is distinctly a non-Mahatma from the Theosophical viewpoint. He is Swami Dayananda Sarasvati, head of the Arya Samaj, with which Olcott and Blavatsky thought at one time to merge the infant Theosophical Society. The Founders were impressed with the social concerns and anti-missionary spirit of the Arya Samaj, but its narrow emphasis on the Vedas as interpreted by Dayananda and the Founders’ determination to follow their own course led to a parting of the ways.

Shyamaji Krishnavarma was an influential member of the Arya Samaj, a member of the Theosophical Society, and a student of the English Sanskritist Monier-Williams at Oxford. He eventually converted intellectually to the “realistic rationalism” of Herbert Spencer.

Ranbir Singh, Maharajah of Kashmir, receives a lion’s share of attention. Dedicated to social reform, education, and public works, he has been regarded as a philosopher-king in the tradition of Ashoka and Akbar. The Founders had some contact with the Maharajah and speak well of him.

Thakar Singh Sandhanwalia is the other recipient of major attention in this part of the book. He was a member of the Sikh gentry devoted to religious reform and to strengthening Sikhism against missionary incursions. The end of his life was devoted to futile efforts to restore his cousin, Dalip Singh, to the throne of the Punjab. Dalip had converted to Christianity when he thought it would do him some good with the British government and unconverted when he discovered it did not. The center and ineffective agent of a series of diplomatic maneuvers and abortive conspiracies to regain his kingdom, Dalip does not seem worth the efforts expended on his behalf by Thakar Singh, who appears to have been motivated by family loyalty rather than clear principle in the matter.

Holkar, Maharajah of Indore, was one of the Indians Blavatsky and Olcott unsuccessfully tried to get continuing support from. His role in the Society’s history is commensurate with the two-thirds of a page devoted to him by Johnson.

Bhai Gurmukh Singh was an associate of Thakar Singh with long although not particularly significant connections with the Theosophical Society. He did not, moreover, share Thakar Singh’s devotion to the cause of the deposed Maharajah Dalip Singh.

Baba Khem Singh Bedi was an aristocratic, highly conservative and authoritarian Sikh, a descendant of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. He was a strong supporter of Dalip and therefore is an important figure in the political machinations of northwest India in the 1880s. His connection with the Theosophical Society seems to be non-existent, except for a scathing description of him by HPB in an article serialized in the Theosophist.

Surendranath Banerjea, having been educated in England, was inspired by Mazzini’s ambition to create a united Italy to attempt the same for India.

## “Secret Messages”

He is thus an ideological link between HPB's young days in Europe and her later time in India, but his connections with the Theosophical Society appear to be strongest during Annie Besant's administration in connection with the Indian National Congress.

Dayal Singh Majithia was another liberal Sikh concerned with social reform and Indian unity. He and Banerjea were at the 1884 annual meeting of the Theosophical Society, when they and fifteen others were inspired by Olcott to form the Indian National Union, which developed during the following year into the Indian National Congress. Given this prehistory of the Congress, there is an argument for calling Olcott, rather than Hume, its Father as Johnson (188) cites Howard Murphet quoting Kewal Motwani as having pointed out.

Sumangala, High Priest of the Buddhists of Sri Lanka, supported Olcott in both his Buddhist and his Theosophical activities on the island.

Sarat Chandra Das, founder of the Buddhist Text Society, made two trips to Tibet in the company of Ugyen Gyatso, a lama from Sikkim, and subsequently made his observations public through a travel narrative and apparently also privately to British Intelligence. The publication of that information had unfortunate consequences for their Tibetan host, Sengchen Tulku, a high ranking lama with an enthusiasm for Western technology, who was, despite his station, punished for his indiscretion by being arrested, imprisoned, flogged, and then thrown bound into a river to drown.

The last of the “Mahatmas,” who seems genuinely to have deserved the epithet in the eyes of the Founders, is Swami Sankaracharya of Mysore, whom HPB called “the Pope of India.” He was to head an Advaita Society conceived by Subba Row, but it never functioned.

The third part of *The Masters Revealed* deals with the suspicions and the reality of HPB as a “spy,” with A. O. Hume's belief that he was in touch with non-Theosophical Masters — Indian and non-Indian — and with the ideas that Johnson conservatively calls “far-fetched” about HPB and her “occult imprisonment” from an imaginative work, *The Transcendental Universe* (1894), by an otherwise unknown author, C. J. Harrison. The repetition of Harrison's fantasies by Rudolf Steiner has done nothing to lend them credibility.

Johnson begins this part of his book by quoting from HPB's 1872 letter to the Czarist espionage agency, offering her services as an informer, which was first published in Maria Carlson's history of Theosophy in Russia, *No Religion Higher Than Truth*. Johnson believes Theosophists would see the letter “as a bombshell exploding the hagiographical interpretation of the founder's early life” (213). That belief reflects a lack of understanding of the lives of saints, the greatest of whom had notoriously unsaintly beginnings. (One remembers St. Augustine's confessional plea: “Oh Lord, make me chaste, but not yet.”)

Whether or not HPB could ever qualify as a subject for hagiography, this “bombshell” is hardly more than a firecracker. HPB was in constant need of financial support, picking up a kopek here and a sou there, as she could. She was also intensely loyal to Mother Russia, sentimental about the family of the Czar and nostalgically moved by memories of Orthodox Church services, even her dislike of ecclesiastics being overcome by her devotion to things Russian. Picking up information and passing it on is no

crime, and if doing so could combine patriotism and a little entrepreneurship, so much the better. As it happened, nothing came of her naive offer. HPB was no Mata Hari, and the Russian government was no fool.

Of particular interest is the account Johnson gives of Anthony Hern's research in the India Office Library and archives in London, made available through the assistance of Leslie Price. The British government responded to a suggestion by the Ottoman ambassador in Washington that they should keep an eye on HPB as a potential Russian spy when she went to India in 1879. After an extensive investigation, the British government concluded that HPB was not a Russian spy, but merely a "fanatic."

## The Thesis

What does all the material Johnson has assembled add up to? It is no secret that the context of Blavatsky's thought and work is an amalgam of traditions. Johnson summarizes the early ones (145):

From Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry she acquired belief in secret transmission of ancient wisdom by adept brotherhoods. An idealistic belief in the possibility of human liberation from political and religious oppression was also part of her heritage from Western secret societies. Her contacts with Kabbalah and Sufism persuaded her that ancient wisdom was preserved outside Christendom in forms purer and more reliable than she had previously encountered. From personal experience with Spiritualism she became familiar with a wide range of psychic phenomena. And from her early travels in the subcontinent, she developed a love of the

Indian people and a deep respect for their varied religious traditions.

What Johnson has done is to give us accounts of participants in these various traditions, some of whom HPB knew and others of whom she might have known, from all of whom she derived or could have derived inspiration and information. That is the first aspect of this book, and it stands as a valuable contribution to the history of Theosophy and of the alternative traditions of the last two centuries.

Although solid, that aspect of the book lacks "sex appeal." It is missing a "hook" to catch attention. The lack is supplied by the other aspect of the work, the thesis Johnson puts forth in some places guardedly as a hypothesis and in other places boldly, indeed recklessly, as a substantiated conclusion. His thesis is that he has succeeded in identifying some of HPB's Masters with historical persons whom she knew and about whom Johnson has written. Such identifications are the following:

Serapis	=	Paolos Metamon
Tuitit Bey	=	Max Theon (L. M. Bimstein)
Hilarion	=	"Ooton Liatto"
Djual Kul	=	Dayal Singh
The Chohan	=	Khem Singh Bedi
Kuthumi	=	Thakar Singh
Morya	=	Ranbir Singh

However, we must ask more particularly what "identification" means for these seven Masters. The Masters as Blavatsky and Olcott write of them, and even more as they appear in the Mahatma Letters, are clearly human beings who have a certain kind of knowledge and hence abilities beyond those of the run of humanity. In Theosophical terms, they are indi-

viduals who have progressed in spiritual evolution well beyond the stage of most of us and whose incarnated personalities are consequently integrated with the reincarnating individuality. However, such integration is not constant in function. As they indicate in the Mahatma Letters, they are “Masters” only when consciously functioning as such, which implies that part, perhaps much, of the time, their consciousness is focused in the bodily personality, rather than the spiritual individuality.

Such a view of the Masters is quite different in tone and feeling from a number of later views, particularly some of the more recent popularizations of the concept, in which the Masters are spoken of as “ascended” and have become disembodied, etherial, god-like consciousnesses who communicate through channeling and the like. Blavatsky’s Masters, those of the Mahatma Letters, are solid personalities, well anchored to the physical world. There is no reason in theory why it should not be possible to identify them historically. Indeed, certain earlier incarnations of them (such as that of the Count de St. Germain) are identified in Theosophical literature.

Consequently Johnson’s aim in this thesis to “identify” the Masters is reasonable and of considerable interest. When, however, we consider what is meant by “identifying” the Masters, we find a lack of clarity in Johnson’s thesis. There are two extreme versions of “identification.” One extreme is that Blavatsky’s Masters are basically what they seem to be, and it is possible to discover historical records of them, perhaps under other names, but recognizably the same persons. Although Johnson sometimes writes as though he believes the Master Kuthumi (for example) really to “be” Thakar Singh in disguise, that does not seem generally to be his thesis. He does not

propose that the names of the Masters are merely aliases for the historical persons he has identified with them. Indeed, such a thesis is probably easily falsified and is thus untenable.

The other extreme version of “identification” is that Blavatsky borrowed the concept of secret masters from some of the traditions she was familiar with. She then invented particular masters, such as Serapis, Hilarion, Kuthumi, and Morya, and created for them characters based on persons she knew or knew of. The historical “identities” of Blavatsky’s Masters are, in this version, the real prototypes on which her fictional Masters were modeled.

There are three general problems with the thesis in its second version. The first is that it is too neat. When a writer invents a character, that character is not usually based on a single real prototype, but combines characteristics of several prototypes. Blavatsky’s Masters may be similar to their proposed prototypes in some ways, although those similarities are not particularly convincing, but they are certainly very unlike them in other ways. Why has Johnson pointedly identified a single, unique real prototype for each Master rather than looking for a combination of prototypical characteristics?

The second general problem is that the thesis is a hypothesis that can be neither proved nor disproved. The similarities Johnson finds between HPB’s Masters and his proposed prototypes are entirely coincidental and circumstantial. The hypothesis cannot be proved because there is no single bit of clear, unambiguous evidence demonstrating that Master X is modeled on historical person Y. There is no smoking gun. And in the nature of the subject, it is hard to see how there could be unless a statement of Blavatsky’s turns up to the effect that she created the figure of Master X on the model of person Y.

On the other hand, the hypothesis cannot be disproved because any differences between Master X and real person Y can be dismissed as characteristics HPB chose not to imitate. In most forms of scholarship, a thesis that can be neither proved nor disproved is termed “uninteresting.” That is, it is a metaphysical proposition, not a scientific hypothesis.

The unstated metaphysical basis of the second version of Johnson’s thesis is that beings like the Masters of the Theosophical tradition do not exist, and therefore Blavatsky’s assertion that they do must be a fiction. But since all fictions rest upon real prototypes, there must be real prototypes for Blavatsky’s fictional Masters and it should be possible to identify them from among the persons she knew. Consequently, we look at persons Blavatsky knew and match them as closely as we can with her fictional Masters and thus we have identified the latter. Presto, the Masters revealed! On the other hand, if we begin with the metaphysical assumption that beings like the Theosophical Masters do or could exist, rather different conclusions follow.

The third general problem is that Johnson’s whole book rests upon an argument by homophony. He points out, quite correctly, that a scholarly approach to the Masters has to be based on “objective, measurable factors,” because “their ‘spiritual status’ and psychic powers are inaccessible to historical research” (14). That is a responsible and unarguable position. However, Johnson then proceeds to define Master for his purposes as an authority in a spiritual tradition, or an accomplished writer, or one who helped to prepare HPB for her work, or one who sponsored the Theosophical Society from behind the scenes.

Johnson’s definition of *Master* is not what the term means Theosophically. Instead, the Theosophical definition is in terms of “spiritual status”

— precisely the quality Johnson correctly says is “inaccessible to historical research.” Johnson is consequently here playing the role of Humpty Dumpty: “When I use a word,” said Humpty Dumpty, “it means exactly what I want it to mean, neither more nor less.”

The Theosophical Masters are persons defined by their spiritual status. Johnson in effect says, “I cannot study such persons, so instead I will choose some others I can study but call them by the same name.” Johnson has not studied the Theosophical Masters; he has studied the Johnsonian Masters. The Masters he has identified are consequently the Masters he has defined as objects of his study. In Johnson’s end is his beginning.

This homophonous substitution of one sort of “Master” for another makes sense only if we have decided that Theosophical Masters cannot exist and therefore reports of their existence must really be of some other sort of Master. That is to say, as already observed, there is an unacknowledged metaphysical bias underlying Johnson’s work.

Johnson, in fact, never defines his thesis clearly and seems to fluctuate between the two versions of it. Sometimes he writes as though Ranbir Singh really were a teacher Blavatsky followed, for whom she used the pseudonym “Morya.” At other times he writes as though “Morya” were a fiction modeled on Ranbir Singh. Johnson’s thesis is a shape-shifter: impossible to pin down and therefore difficult to evaluate.

In addition to the general problems of the simplistic one-to-one associations, the unprovability of the thesis, its unacknowledged metaphysical assumption, and its lack of clarity, there are particular problems with Johnson’s identifications, whatever “identification” may mean. It is consequently worth looking at the evidence Johnson cites for those identifications.

## Serapis/Metamon

Concerning the Serapis/Metamon identification (31–32), Johnson quotes Albert Rawson’s account of his and Blavatsky’s acquaintance in 1851 with “Paulos Metamon, a celebrated Coptic magician.” Then he quotes A. P. Sinnett’s report of Blavatsky’s reencounter in 1871 with doubtless the same person:

Then [after the closing of an unsuccessful “Spirit Society”], it seems, she came again into contact with her old friend the Copt of Mysterious fame, of whom mention has been made in connection with her earliest visit to Egypt, at the outset of her travels. For several weeks he was her only visitor. He had a strange reputation in Egypt, and the masses regarded him as a magician. [*Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky*]

Of this report, Johnson comments, “HPB’s admission to Sinnett, which includes neither the name of Metamon nor that of Serapis, suggests their identity.” The logic of that comment is obscure. To take the omission of names as suggesting the identity of the unnamed persons is a new form of evidence, not likely to be widely accepted.

Johnson also cites René Guénon’s unsupported opinion that Metamon was involved in HPB’s attempt to found the “Spirit Society” in Cairo in 1871, but if Sinnett’s report is correct, Blavatsky’s reencounter with the old Copt occurred after the attempt had been abandoned. (Johnson’s quotation from Sinnett omits “Then, it seems” and “again” from the first sentence, both of which expressions contradict points he is trying to make.) However, whether Metamon was or was not involved with the Cairo society has no bearing on his putative identification with Serapis.

Without offering further evidence, Johnson concludes his treatment of Metamon:

What is undeniable on the basis of Rawson’s account and HPB’s own admission, is that Paolos Metamon was her first occult teacher in Egypt, who continued to be in contact with her into the 1870s. This makes him the most likely original for the Master Serapis.

Johnson often uses terms like “undeniable” and “admission” whose effect is to suggest the revelation of something secret and the establishment of a point to be proved. It is a rhetorical device that disguises a lack of evidence. What is fairly clear is that HPB knew Metamon in 1851, when she got a look at his “curious books full of diagrams, astrological formulas, magical incantations and horoscopes,” and probably met him again in 1871. There is no evidence that her contact with him was “continued” in the interval; and there is no evidence of any sort to link him with the Master Serapis. Johnson’s assertion that he is “the most likely original for the Master Serapis” is simply without foundation.

## Tuitit Bey / Max Theon

Johnson (32) quotes René Guénon as reporting “unverified rumors” that Metamon was the father of “another personage who was for some time at the head of the outer circle of the HBL [Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor],” who was presumably Max Theon. Later, however, Johnson (44) suggests that the rumors of familial relationship may be a distortion of a student-master relationship.

Johnson identifies Max Theon (Louis Maximilien Bimstein), the alleged son or student of Paolos Metamon, with the Master Tuitit Bey.

Although Johnson does not clearly state his reason for this identification, it appears to rest upon the membership of Theon and Tuitit Bey in organizations with similar names.

Tuitit Bey is said to be part of the “Brotherhood of Luxor,” mentions of which appear in early Theosophical writings (45). The Brotherhood of Luxor is said to be the Egyptian Branch of the *Fratres Lucis*, the Brotherhood of Light (clearly with a pun on *Luxor* and Latin *lux* ‘light’). The latter is said to be a Masonic or Rosicrucian organization traced to Italy in 1498 or to Germany in 1781 and revived in England in 1873. In fact, there appear to have been several groups going by similar names (treated by Joscelyn Godwin in *The Theosophical Enlightenment* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994], *passim*).

Max Theon is credited with founding or reorganizing one such group called the “Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor” in 1884. It appears to have adopted Paschal Beverly Randolph’s sexual teachings (Godwin 348), which may explain HPB’s reaction:

HPB reacted with hostility the moment she heard about this new Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor. She did not recognize in the “new” order and its Grand Master, Max Theon, any connection with the “old” Brotherhood of Luxor. [45]

The two organizations are clearly distinct; no evidence connecting them is advanced by Johnson. And there is no evidence associating Theon with Tuitit Bey.

### **Hilarion / Ooton Liatto**

The identification of Ooton Liatto with the Master Hilarion rests upon a coincidence of time

and place. In May 1875, Blavatsky noted in her scrapbook that Hilarion, who was Greek, and a traveling companion passed through New York (59). In a letter dated late 1875 or early 1876, Olcott describes his encounter in New York with Ooton Liatto, who was Cypriot, and a companion (60–61). This coincidence is not particularly strong evidence, but regardless of its strength, it is irrelevant to Johnson’s thesis. As Johnson himself concludes (62):

The names Ooton Liatto and Hilarion Smerdis have been equally impossible to find in biographical and historical reference books. While both may be pseudonyms, there is little doubt that two real adepts visited Olcott in New York. But the nature of their mission and their connection with HPB are as mystifying to us today as they were to Olcott at the time.

Thus to identify Hilarion as Ooton Liatto is to explain *ignotum per ignoto*—the unknown by the unknown.

### **Morya / Ranbir Singh**

The identification of the philosopher-king Ranbir Singh with the Master Morya seems to be based mainly on the excellence of character attributed to the Maharajah. There is no hard evidence, but one paragraph (136) attempting to make the connection includes the following qualifiers: “it is not unlikely . . . may have . . . it seems possible that . . . perhaps . . . would have made . . . could have found . . . may have made . . . might have been . . .” Later in the chapter, Johnson writes of “the men identified herein as the Mahatmas” (144). Thus it is that tentative possibility is transmuted magically into certainty.

The case is complicated by the fact that in

*Caves and Jungles of Hindostan*, HPB writes of an adeptic figure named Gulab Singh or Gulab Lal Singh, who was a thakar or chieftain and who accompanied her and Olcott in their fictional adventures. There are interesting parallels between Gulab Singh and Morya. Gulab Singh is a Rajput noble who is a wonder-worker (121). He befriends and protects the Westerners. Radda-Bai (the fictional persona of HPB in *Caves and Jungles*) says she met him in England “more than twenty-seven years” earlier, which would have been before 1853 (123); elsewhere HPB says she first met Morya in London in 1851.

In another parallel (125), Gulab Singh refuses a request made through “the editor of a chief government newspaper” to teach an English earl who was also a member of the Royal Society because he was too immersed in the affairs of the world. A similar request from a similar person was made through A. P. Sinnett and was refused by Kuthumi for similar reasons. This parallel is between Gulab Singh and Kuthumi, however, rather than Morya.

It is important to remember that *The Caves and Jungles of Hindostan* may be based on facts, but it is fiction. Olcott was quite clear about this in his review of the English translation of the book (120). He says he recognizes the “substantial basis” of most of the stories, but that the tale of a journey through India “in the company of an Adept whose wisdom instructed and psychical powers astounded us” was added for “spicing and immensely increasing the interest of her narrative.”

The fictional Gulab Singh is a composite character created by HPB, based on Morya, Kuthumi, and doubtless others, as his very name was borrowed from that of another Master. Olcott says that the fictional adept was personified “under the sobriquet of Gulab-Lal-Singh — a real

name of a real Adept, by the way, with whom I have had to do” (120).

There was also a Hindu rajah by the name of Gulab Singh, who died in 1857 and was succeeded by his son, Ranbir Singh. It is the latter whom Johnson wishes to identify as Morya, partly on the coincidence of his father’s name being that of the fictional adept in *Caves and Jungles* and of Olcott’s “real adept.”

Johnson finds further similarities between Ranbir Singh and Kuthumi (129). Ranbir Singh is said to have favored “an attempt to boycott Muslim butchers in favor of Sikh, and the continuation of gruesome punishments for cow-killers.” With this is compared Kuthumi’s reference to those who “saturate themselves with animal blood, and the millions of infusoria of the fermented fluids.” The parallel is only very approximate and ignores some important differences (economic motives and ethnic chauvinism versus a reaction against physical or occult contamination from flesh and alcohol), and in any case the parallel is between Ranbir Singh and Kuthumi, rather than Morya. Johnson is actually undermining his case for an exclusive Morya identification. Or rather he would be doing so if the parallel were close enough to warrant serious consideration. As it is, Johnson’s evidence for identifying the Masters is so weak that he seems to make whatever connections he can, however remote and inappropriate.

Blavatsky had met Ranbir Singh and writes about him in “The Durbar in Lahore,” particularly recounting a comic story of diplomatic gossip which attributed to the Maharajah the intent of deliberately insulting the English viceroy by unceremoniously leaving the durbar at which he was to be honored. It turns out that Ranbir had been prescribed a dose of laxative and was moved urgently to depart (137–38). That is hardly the sort of story HPB was used to

telling about the Master Morya.

Ranbir also appears in the Mahatma Letters as a potential financial supporter for Sinnett's aborted independent newspaper, *The Phoenix*. Kuthumi is annoyed that the Maharajah's support has not been solicited. Again, the way Kuthumi talks about Ranbir Singh is quite different from the way he talks about his Brother Morya.

Ranbir Singh is mentioned in the *Theosophist* (139–40), by Olcott (140–42), and by Damodar (143), but none of those references treat him as though he were a Mahatma. When Ranbir Singh is mentioned by name, he is treated like a Maharajah, not like a Mahatma. Consequently, those references cited by Johnson do not support Ranbir's identification with Morya.

Johnson thinks a remark by HPB to the effect that “the main object of K.H. and M.” in sponsoring the TS was for “the real practical good the Society is doing — every *Brother put aside* — for the Natives” shows too nationalistic a concern for the traditional Masters but one corresponding well to Ranbir Singh's interests (144). However, the Mahatma Letters include various passages showing a patriotic concern of the Adepts for Mother India. To be concerned for all humanity does not preclude a concern for one's native land.

The parallels between Ranbir Singh and Morya are exceedingly tenuous. Johnson says:

That Ranbir Singh was the Master of HPB in any sense recognized by religious tradition is extremely unlikely. Nor did he give telepathic orders or exert strange powers, according to the historical record. But he was the maharaja of the land where HPB met her heart's desire, and he became the apparent model for all the virtues of the Master M.

The first two sentences are correct: Ranbir Singh was not HPB's Master, and he possessed

none of the fundamental characteristics which HPB attributed to her Master. The third sentence is partly a statement of coincidence and partly an unsupported conclusion. There is no evidence that Ranbir was in fact the model for Morya's virtues or anything else in connection with him.

### **Kuthumi / Thakar Singh**

The identification of Thakar Singh with the Master Kuthumi depends in part on some coincidences of timing. For example, the Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett began shortly after an October 1880 visit to the Sikh Golden Temple described by Olcott. Johnson comments (154):

What seems clear from the timing of the events of October 1880 is that HPB finalized an agreement with an akali [guardian] from the Golden Temple, a sirdar [chief], which led to the production of the voluminous K.H. letters. Koot Hoomi [i.e., Kuthumi] had been introduced to the Sinnetts as a correspondent just before HPB's trip to Amritsar and Lahore, and his only recorded fleshly appearances were in the same vicinity several years later.

That comment makes sense only if we suppose that Thakar Singh (the sirdar in question) *was* the writer of the Mahatma letters to A. P. Sinnett and therefore in effect *was* Kuthumi. But that is not the thesis Johnson seems to be advancing elsewhere in his book. And it is not the interpretation others have placed upon his work. For example, Joscelyn Godwin (who provided the foreword to Johnson's book and therefore may be presumed to be intimately familiar with its argument) says in *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (329):

Mr. Johnson has tentatively identified him [Kuthumi] as Thakar Singh, a prominent Sikh, but nowhere suggests that Thakar wrote what are known as the “Mahatma Letters” to A. P. Sinnett and A. O. Hume.

But in fact, Johnson is suggesting just that, or at least his identification of Thakar Singh with Kuthumi makes sense only if we accept the suggestion that Thakar Singh wrote the letters or was somehow crucially involved in their production. This appears to be another case of Johnson’s variable or perhaps just varying thesis.

The weakness of the “evidence” connecting Thakar Singh to Kuthumi is illustrated by the following comment (160) on a description in the *Theosophist* of a trip by Olcott to Lahore:

“His Highness Raja Harbans Singh *and other Sirdars* [my (i.e., Johnson’s) emphasis] sent their conveyances to bring the party to their quarters” . . . Most intriguing in all this are the references to “other Sirdars” . . . The lack of any mention of Thakar Singh’s name seems inevitable if he was indeed the Master K.H.”

By that sort of logic every text that lacks mention of Thakar Singh becomes evidence of his identity with Kuthumi. As *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* puts it:

“Please, your Majesty,” said the Knave, “I didn’t write it, and they can’t prove that I did: there’s no name signed at the end.”

“If you didn’t sign it,” said the King, “that only makes the matter worse. You must have meant some mischief, or else you’d have signed your name like an honest man.”

There was a general clapping of hands at this: it was the first really clever thing the King had said that day.

It is exactly the same sort of Wonderland logic which concludes, “The lack of any mention of Thakar Singh’s name seems inevitable if he was indeed the Master K.H.” Lack of evidence thus becomes evidence. By Wonderland logic, anything can be proved.

Johnson’s observation (173) that “much of the evidence that Thakar Singh was the basis for K.H. is circumstantial” is a vast understatement. There is no real evidence, but only a few circumstantial coincidences and a good deal of Wonderland logic.

### **Chohan / Baba Khem Singh Bedi**

Perhaps the most unlikely of all the “identifications” is that of Baba Khem Singh Bedi with the Chohan. The Chohan appears in the Mahatma Letters as a stern, but immensely respected and beloved elder who provided what has been called the “charter” for the Theosophical Society. On the other hand, HPB heartily despised the rich and reactionary Sikh aristocrat Khem Singh. Johnson (181) acknowledges her dislike:

HPB describes Khem Singh scathingly . . . as a “disgusting Baba” who “leads a parasitical existence in Rawalpindi, surrounded by the veneration of thousands who bring him, as voluntary offerings, over 2 lakhs of rupees” annually, spent “in the company of English functionaries, residents and collectors, in crazy festivities, hunting and drunken orgies.” She also condemns him for maintaining a harem in violation of Sikh law and tradition.

Johnson continues:

The initial reaction to this may be to conclude that Khem Singh’s identification as the Chohan

has just gone up in smoke. But on closer examination, this may not be a safe assumption. The Chohan was apparently never seen even by HPB, and his character is very sketchily portrayed in the Mahatma letters. But he does in some references appear as an authoritarian with whom K.H. has his differences, so Khem Singh may after all be the basis for him.

None of Johnson's comments here make sense unless we suppose that HPB's Mahatmas were simply pseudonyms for persons she knew, rather than creations of her mind incorporating features of persons she knew. But even then, the identification of Khem Singh with the Chohan is wildly inappropriate. However sketchy the Chohan's portrait in the Mahatma Letters, it is nothing remotely like HPB's graphic view reported above.

It is clear from the Letters that the Chohan was Kuthumi and Morya's "boss," to whom they were responsible and to whom they had to justify certain actions of theirs. Nothing remotely of the sort was true of the relationship between Khem Singh on the one hand and Thakar Singh and Maharajah Ranbir Singh on the other. The "closer examination" Johnson calls for does nothing to promote an identification of Khem Singh with the Chohan, but on the contrary makes such an identification all the more bizarre.

### **Djual Kul / Dayal Singh**

The final identification, of Dayal Singh with Djual Kul, rests on the same sort of coincidence as that of Thakar Singh with Kuthumi. Johnson (187) says, "Dayal's presence in the crucial days in Lahore when Olcott, Brown, and Damodar met K.H. there suggests that he was the basis of Djual Kul." That is the best of the "evidence" for this "identification."

## **CONCLUSION**

Johnson's thesis is a revisionist view of the Theosophical Masters, making them neither what Blavatsky and others said them to be nor sheer inventions, but rather elaborations of historically attested prototypes. That is a reasonable thesis to consider. Because the thesis is not clearly developed, however, either in general or in specific applications, the reader is left without knowing how much of the Masters or any particular one of them Johnson thinks real and how much elaboration.

An organization whose motto is "There is no religion higher than truth" must be prepared to accept demonstrated truth, whatever it may be and however much it may vary from received tradition. The keyword, however, is "demonstrated." Johnson has presented no evidence to prove or even to suggest plausibly that Blavatsky's Masters are identical with any historically attested persons or are even modeled on them. Johnson's "evidence" consists of a few general similarities, some coincidences of place and time, and a strong desire to prove a thesis.

The identifications Johnson proposes are at best unsupported speculation. Most are not incompatible with the known facts, but neither is there much reason to accept them. The book assumes a conspiracy view of history by trying to link Blavatsky, social and political revolution, Freemasonry, and the esoteric tradition of the nineteenth century. That there were some connections between some of those is clear. But the book does not succeed in establishing the full range of specific interconnections it hints at. The evidence is simply not strong enough to bear the weight of the conclusions erected upon it. The result is itself a myth—the myth of the Great Esoteric Conspiracy.

There is history in this book: the detailed information about movements swirling around Blavatsky. But the book's thesis is not history. It is an imaginative reconstruction of the past on the basis of an assemblage of miscellaneous facts that have no demonstrated connection with each other. It is like a jigsaw picture composed from pieces of half a dozen different puzzles that make a marvelous pattern, even if they don't fit.

*The Masters Revealed*, in addition to the weakness of the support for its thesis, has other scholarly flaws. In spite of 21 pages of endnotes, Johnson often fails to provide the sort of documentation that a study of this kind should have. He sometimes does not cite his sources. For example, he refers at some length to Sergei de Witte's memoirs of HPB, but they do not appear in his bibliography, which omission suggests that he did not himself consult them. The source of his information about them is not specified.

Johnson in general has a tendency to depend on secondary, rather than primary, sources, and is not overly nice about the accuracy of those citations. For example, he quotes a critically important comment by HPB about communications from the Master Kuthumi (175), but cites as his source "William E." and "Harold L." (listed in the bibliography as "Harold E." and "William L.") Hare's *Who Wrote the Mahatma Letters?* (1936). For such an important citation, Johnson should either have located the original, or acknowledged that he was depending on a study markedly hostile to Blavatsky. And he might have gotten its authors' names right.

Finally, the book has more than a reasonable number of typographical errors, most merely annoying, but some garbling the text beyond coherence. These are trivial matters in themselves, and all the works of human hands are subject to error (as all who have written or edited

printed material know to their grief and embarrassment). However, a pattern of carelessness in such trivial matters does not inspire confidence in more substantive ones.

With respect to the substantive truth of Blavatsky's Masters, there are a number of possibilities. One is that they are in fact "men beyond mankind," as Fritz Kunz termed them, human beings of advanced spiritual development, with knowledge and abilities that seem marvelous to other human beings. Another is that they were figments of HPB's rich imagination, derived from the esoteric traditions she was familiar with and reflecting characteristics of some actual but ordinary people she knew. Other intermediate and alternative possibilities also exist.

From the standpoint of historical scholarship, no convincing evidence exists to decide the issue, which must therefore remain undecided. The view one takes of Blavatsky's Masters consequently reflects one's metaphysical assumptions about reality and one's experience of the reality they represent, rather than a conclusion based upon documented fact and reason.

The flaw in Johnson's book is not that it is revisionist, but that it is reductionist. In reducing Blavatsky's Masters to political agents of one sort or another and treating everything else about them as "blinds" or delusion, Johnson fails to explain their effect. What is really important about Blavatsky's Masters is not who they were, but what they have been in the experience of Theosophists. As Joscelyn Godwin (*The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 224–25) observed about the founding of another organization:

The real origins of the Golden Dawn [are] beyond the reach of the historian. What is most essential, and most precious, derives not from books, manuscripts, or earthly meet-

ings, but from contacts with other levels of reality. When these are present, as in the cases of the Golden Dawn, the Theosophical Society, and a certain number of other orders, the scholarly investigator is doomed to frustration.

*The Masters Revealed* is a record of historical research with a flawed thesis that dooms it to frustration. Johnson has performed a valuable service in bringing together information about the context of Blavatsky's life. He has raised an interesting, though probably objectively unanswerable, question about who Blavatsky's teachers were. But he has not revealed HPB's Masters. He has not touched the mystery.

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# Book Reviews

**THE JUNG CULT: ORIGINS OF A CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT.** By Richard Noll. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994. Pp. xv + 387. ISBN 0-691-03724-8. \$27.95.

This controversial and important new book is likely to be of concern to persons with intellectual interests in the Theosophical movement for two reasons. First, Carl Gustav Jung and his thought have been an important influence on a number of Theosophists. Second, Richard Noll, in this study, presents Theosophy as a significant influence on Jung himself.

Noll's basic theses are that the great analytic psychologist's defining experiences of the archetypes, the collective unconscious, and his own identification with the god Aion were essentially mystical and religious, if not quasi-psychotic, in nature; that the formulation of this esotericism was deeply influenced by the Nietzscheanism and German "völkisch" thought, with its racialism and "neopaganism," of the era; and that Jung deliberately intended that his movement become a religion, a "secret church" as he called it, of the initiated. Noll further contends that the Jungians, in the course of becoming for all intents and purposes that church, have modified or suppressed the more extreme of those tenets, much of which arcana have been unearthed for publication or republication here. Hovering in the background of these rather sensational claims, of course, lies the disconcerting fact that, whatever

they meant in their own time, the strands of German thought Noll now associates with Jung have been forever blemished by subsequent association with the Third Reich. Indeed, one finds disturbing strands of anti-semiticism and gross mythologizing of nationalities in the vast Jungian corpus as published, though as Noll rightly points out they do not add up to the same thing as Nazism.

However, these social and political ramifications of the Jungian mystique and its critique of the modern world have not been entirely unknown to students of Jung. I myself recently wrote a paper, "Why Are Mythologists Political Reactionaries?" (in press), dealing with the social and political thought of C.G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, and Joseph Campbell, in which I alluded to some of the same issues. Certainly Jung stood in that mystical reactionary or, as Eliade was once called, "radical traditionalist," wing of twentieth century European thought which saw enlightenment rationalism and all its works as shallow and impotent beside the vast sea of irrational forces just beneath the surface of human consciousness. Before them only spiritual transformation was adequate, though one hastens to add that despite some initial waffling Jung soon saw the Nazism which outburst just across the border from his native Switzerland as far more an overflow of those irrational and destructive drives than a corrective to them.

But what of Noll's interpretation of all this in

*The Jung Cult?* Though he rightly, unlike some writers, does not make Jung out to be a crypto-Nazi, he does make some extraordinary assertions about Jung's mysticism, his völkism, and even his sanity. Perhaps few judicious readers will accept all of Noll at face value; there is at times the feel of exaggeration and a *tour de force*. Reviewers, though acknowledging the solid scholarship evident in much of Noll's book, have already pointed out some of the overreaches. John Kerr, in the *London Review of Books* (23 March 1995), has suggested that to regard the Psychology Club which Jung founded in 1916 as a "cult," despite the staunchly religious language Jung used in his inaugural address, is something of a stretch. Leonard George, in *Gnosis* (Spring 1995), has indicated that, in his depictions of "institutionalized Jungianism," Noll chooses terminologies "which, while perhaps not inaccurate, seem deliberately provocative," such as the word "cult" itself, and reference to the movement's "manufactured pseudocharisma."

In the same vein, I would go on to raise questions about the tone of the next to last section in the book, "The Jungian Movement and Contemporary Neopaganism," in which Noll writes with obvious distaste about "the role of Jungian ideas" in the current American Pagan movement, above all those groups of "Germanic" inspiration. These rather superheated pages are obviously the culmination of Noll's immersion in the völkisch world of *fin-de-siècle* and Weimar neopaganism, "sun-worship," "nature-worship," and concomitant quests for the mythological roots of nationalities. Despite disavowals of bias, one cannot avoid a sense throughout the book that Noll brings to anything "pagan" deep mistrust and visceral dislike. One here more than ever suspects an ideological if not theological agenda in the book.

In fact, any familiarity with the contemporary

American pagan movement reassures one that, first, it is hardly large or powerful enough—unlike, say, the Christian right—to justify alarmism, and second that, again unlike the Christian right, its adherents, however "Jungian" in their love of myth and ritual, are among the most liberal and uncultish of Americans on most social and political issues. Here, as in many if not most matters, religion works quite differently in Europe and America.

Even in Europe, however, one needs to deal carefully with the German völkisch ideology, as difficult as that is after the Third Reich's inflammatory corruption of much of it.

Certainly, völkischness contained much nonsense and much that was potentially dangerous. But on the other hand it must be realized that this Wagnerian plunge back into the misty pagan roots of Germanness and exaltation of that people's mystical corporate unity was not all that different—except that it was in Germanic countries where nationalism and racism were subsequently to take virulent forms—from parallel turn-of-the-century movements toward idealized and mythologized patriotisms around the world: slavophilism in Russia; the "Celtic twilight" mysticism of W.B. Yeats and Irish nationalism; the British combined cult of King Arthur, chivalry, the British gentleman and the British Empire so well portrayed in Mark Girouard's *The Return to Camelot*; the "Hindu Renaissance" in India. In the United States the same period brought pervasive schoolbook idealizations of Columbus, Washington, the pioneers and the frontier—and little more regard for the rights of indigenes behind that frontier than in any Germanic quest for *lebensraum*. Some of these mystical patriotisms have remained in good odor and others have not, but all had in common important features: a belief that a nation is a spiritual as well as a practical unity with a distinctive character and

destiny; a quest for symbols and mythological archetypes that embody it, from Siegfried to Arthur to Rāma; and, on the more extreme fringes of this consciousness, the establishment of rituals and orders to enact the patriotic faith, these ranging from veterans' groups to secret societies. Jung may have brought into this kind of spiritual patriotism, but he was far from alone.

Among others who did in the (roughly) 1890 to 1945 period were many Theosophists, whose writings and lecture titles from the era reveal countless disquisitions on the unique spiritual qualities embodied in various nations and races. These were usually idealized and present in a way that intended mystical nationalism to fuel the social idealism of the Progressive era.

Returning to *The Jung Cult*, Noll claims that both Spiritualism and Theosophy were important influences on Jung. Unfortunately, his account of Blavatsky and early Theosophy is far from under control and shows evidence of further exaggeration. Sometimes he seems to take too seriously Blavatsky's own tendency to exaggeration for the sake of a good story: "Blavatsky was well aware of the ancient Hellenistic mystery cult of Isis, and with the help of one of her spiritual gurus, she was initiated into these mysteries through a trance that allows Isis to merge with her and inspire her automatic writing." (66) There is conflation of first and second generation teachings; the assertion that Theosophy "developed into a densely hierarchical secret society that required initiations into mysteries that at each level provided the 'keys' for understanding more and more of the essence of life," together with training in "clairvoyance, telepathy, teleportation, mediumship, and other psychic powers." Moreover this movement rapidly grew to remarkable proportions, especially in India, "where large ashrams housed thousands of Theosophists engaged in spiritual practices," and

that worldwide, "at its height, during the period of Annie Besant's leadership following the death of Blavatsky in 1891, the Theosophical movement directly involved hundreds of thousands, if not peripherally millions, of individuals." (65)

After this, Noll emphasizes the importance of Theosophy, and especially the German-language Theosophical publishing houses, in disseminating occult ideas around the turn of the century. Here, we are told, is how Jung undoubtedly came in contact with astrology, mystical views of mythology, the ancient mysteries, and the like; Noll points out, for example, that Jung regularly cited G.R.S. Mead, and finally established a personal friendship with that Theosophical scholar.<sup>1</sup> Other possible literary links between Jung, *völkisch* thought, and Theosophy are suggested.

A careful reading of these pages, however, indicates that all Noll can really claim is that Jung may have read books and magazines published by Theosophical presses. There is no hint that he ever attended a Theosophical meeting, or knew more than a very few Theosophists personally. Theosophists never were very numerous in the German-speaking world, not more than a few hundred members by T.S. statistics, particularly after Rudolf Steiner led most of them into Anthroposophy. However, much influence has been claimed for Theosophy, and this is certainly implied by Noll, on German *völkisch* thought. Particularly marked down are Theosophical concepts of the Root Races—above all the Aryan!—

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<sup>1</sup>*Editor's note.* On Jung's friendship with Mead, see *THV*/6 (April 1995): 202. The Church historian Gilles Quispel writes that

Mrs. Froege of Eranos told me that she accompanied Jung to England sometime about 1930 (?) and that they visited Mead, who was in poor health and isolated, because Jung had a great appreciation for the author of *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten*.]

an alleged conflation of the mahatmas with the Nietzschean superman, and the movement's alleged nature-oriented pantheism. Noll, for example, writes of Friedrich Eckstein, who not only participated in a "Wagnerian *Bund*" but "was the founder of the prominent Vienna Theosophical Society in 1886," for which is postulated a certain unsavory influence (77). Yet the *Theosophical Year Book* (1937) tells us that "The Vienna Theosophical Society was organized in 1887 with Friedrich Eckstein as President. Little came of the movement until 1912 when John Cordes was sent from Adyar to organize the Section." (60)

Clearly further research is indicated. Much has been attributed here and elsewhere to German Theosophy; in some overwrought sources, almost the whole of *völkisch* and even Nazi ideology. Yet, on the face of it, the German T.S. was tiny and lacking any obvious access to cultural power. Some credit no doubt goes to those German presses calling themselves Theosophical; but then as now Theosophical publishing houses issued books which sold well but had only a peripheral relation to strict Theosophical teachings, and moreover in Germany the term refers not only to the Blavatskaiian movement, but to the noble lineage of such figures as Eckhart and Boehme. We clearly need more information on ownerships, editorships, sales, titles, and readerships regarding the Germanic "Theosophical" presses.

In the English-speaking world Theosophy, though certainly linked to the aforementioned mystical patriotism in its most benign and idealistic aspects, is also affiliated politically with the democratic reformism of the Progressive era. One could not think of such Theosophical stalwarts as Annie Besant, Katherine Tingley, or the Blavatsky of *The Key to Theosophy* in any other terms, and the same spirit is certainly manifested in the

moderate socialism and pacifist idealism of Theosophists in politics like George Lansbury in England or Henry Wallace in the United States. Carlson presents a recognizably similar picture of liberal idealism Theosophy even in czarist Russia.

Yet, move to the German-speaking world and, despite the somewhat comparable idealism of a Steiner, Theosophy immediately takes on a very different hue in the eyes of such historians as Richard Noll and many others. It is not my purpose to dispute this remarkable disparity in cultural role. I am not enough of a Germanist to be able to do so with any credibility, though I must admit to some puzzlement and some reservations. But clearly what is desperately called for is a good carefully-researched and independent history of Theosophy in the German-speaking world, comparable to what we have recently received in Jill Roe's work on Australia, *Beyond Belief*, and in Maria Carlson's on Russia, "*No Religion Higher Than Truth*." Then perhaps the vexing and recurring question of whether Theosophy (with a capital T) really had much influence on *völkisch* thought or National Socialism might finally be resolved.<sup>2</sup>

So also might the issue of Theosophical influence on Carl Jung be more fully resolved by a full study of Theosophy in the German-speaking world. The value of Noll's book, *The Jung Cult*, has presumably been shown in the important and far-reaching questions it has raised, and I hope even more in the call for further research in Germanic Theosophy it has inspired. Sometimes

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<sup>2</sup>Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke's *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, by far the sanest and best work on a usually shamelessly sensationalized topic, and a source for Noll, should be mentioned here, but even it in my view is not the last word on Theosophy's place in this picture.

hasty, sometimes exaggerated, sometimes too tendentious and ideological, the book is far from satisfactory in regard to Theosophy. Yet it is likely to become one of those books which, precisely because they are irritants in the intellectual world, provoke response, argument, finally further good research. That is, in the end, a role which must be appreciated.

Robert S. Ellwood

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**A CONFUSION OF PROPHETS: VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN ASTROLOGY.** By Patrick Curry. London: Collins & Brown, 1992. Pp. 192. ISBN 1 85585 136 9. £18.00.

This readable volume represents, to the best of my knowledge, the only monograph to date about an interesting and ultimately significant facet of nineteenth and early twentieth century popular culture in Britain, astrology. Patrick Curry approaches the subject primarily through biographical studies of its leading practitioners, from William Blake's friend John Varley, through "Raphael" (Robert Cross Smith), "Zadkiel" (R.J. Morrison), A.J. Pearce, Richard Garnett, "Sepharial" (W. Gorn Old), and "Alan Leo" (William Frederick Allen). The last two names in particular will be known to Theosophical historians, and suggest the important overlaps between the astrological and Theosophical countercultures.

It was not an easy time to be an astrologer. Despite the fact that their horoscopes, books, and newspaper columns sometimes (not always) sold well, and that they were otherwise relatively

respectable personages, the Victorian/Edwardian astrologers had to suffer vehement vilification from the editorial and political custodians of official opinion. From time to time, certain of them—Zadkiel and Alan Leo most notable—were defendants in sensational trials based on England's notorious and capriciously-enforced anti-vagrancy and fortune-telling laws, typically as the victims of blatant police entrapment.

Yet, as Curry makes clear, the public fascination with these figures, whether in outrage or support, suggests, like Spiritualism and Theosophy itself, an underside of the Victorian mind emerging into view. Merlins in an age of supposed reason and scientific progress, the astrologers drew lightning because of their stubborn refusal to conform to the dictates of modernity; they intrigued because they hinted that there might, after all, be another way of looking at the universe than those proclaimed in the best schools and churches.

Theosophy also, as Henry Steel Olcott asserted in his inaugural presidential address to the T.S., sought to find a third way beside the oft-warring dogmatisms of Victorian laboratory and pulpit, one which drew from the same wells of ancient wisdom of the astrologers. Not surprisingly, the two heterodoxies found common ground. Two of the latest of Curry's astrologers were members of the Theosophical Society. W. Gorn Old—Sepharial—was a part of Helena Blavatsky's inner circle on Lansdowne Road, though he left the T.S. some five years after her death. But Alan Leo remained faithful, developing an esoteric, Theosophical astrology which became immensely influential as the twentieth century advanced. His approach, combined with Jungian perspectives as well, is reflected in the writings of such recent masters of the craft as Dane Rudhyar.

Theosophical readers may find Curry's repre-

sensation of Blavatsky and the T.S. a bit terse and unsympathetic. But his treatment of astrologers with a relation to Theosophy, especially the high-principled Alan Leo, offers important insights into the values and social milieu of London Theosophy in the 1890s and the first two decades of the twentieth century. Leo and his wife, Bessie, entered into an intentionally celibate marriage for Theosophical reasons, wishing to channel all their psychic energies to the cause, a level of dedication Curry tells us was not uncommon. We find both Theosophists and anti-theosophists among the socially prominent, a split which became a chasm in Leo's 1917 trial for "pretending and professing to tell fortunes."

This is a fascinating and valuable book which ought to be on the shelves of all historians of Theosophy.

Robert S. Ellwood

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**Insights of a Himalayan Pilgrim.** By Lama Govinda. Berkeley, Ca.: Dharma Publishing, 1991. Pp. xiii + 196; black-and-white illustrations. Paper, \$11.95.

At last a useful primer to explain some of the finer points of Buddhist philosophy and its practical teachings without any of the silly posturing and pretension that frequently accompany it. Like a number of Westerners converted to Buddhism, Lama Govinda (1898-1985), German-born and later an Indian national, spent the last years of his spiritual life in Mill Valley, California, a properly materialistic venue rather at variance with the

discomforts of monastic settlements in India or elsewhere in Southeast Asia. And then, too, all the applause of the younger set to whom he lectured at U.C. Berkeley must have seemed more inviting than either freezing or sweating it out in Asia. After all, helping Westerners to see the error of their accustomed spiritual traditions indeed had something of a missionary quality.

Thus the reader of this book is provided with previously untranslated essays in German from earlier works in order to consider further the merits of Buddhist versus Western thinking. Actually this collection's content reveals it to be concerned with the dynamics of Buddhist psychology. Perceptive insights and ruminations serve as an enlightened introduction to the subject, especially for the casual reader with a short attention span. But neither does it proselytize nor seek to sensationalize the subjects under consideration. It is pointed out that Buddha and his followers were essentially good psychologists dealing with simple folk and did not disturb or destroy their basic beliefs, but rather encouraged them to realize their ideals.[32-34] To begin with, Lama Govinda establishes basic differences between Buddhism and Hinduism, which he does not define as a religion per se but rather a group of cults in tenuous relationship, whereas he finds Buddhism a unique if not altogether unified system either in view of the various schools, e.g. Mahāyāna, Theravāda, Zen and others which flourish throughout the East. "They [i.e., the Ch'an Buddhists and *siddhas* in India] preferred the paradox to logical formulations and laid more stress on the spirit of inquiry than on the solutions." [45] They also stressed that "[w]hen religion grows in age, faith turns into dogma (Christianity?), . . . virtue by adherence to rules, devotion by ritual, meditation by metaphysical speculation." [44] One must note that the Buddhist hells mentioned

[48] didn't become a part of that tradition until many centuries had passed. There were as many accretions to it eventually, as to any Western system. Curiously uninformed Westerners tend to believe on occasion that Europeans and Americans turn to Asian philosophy just so as to escape the sense of sin. And aren't there rituals and ceremonies in Tibetan, Thai or Japanese versions of Buddhism just as there are in Western religions? This reviewer looked for them and finally found descriptions. [158]

Echoing a comment of Michael Billington's in a recent issue of the Manchester *Guardian* that 'in an age of scepticism about politicians and priests, there is a strong belief in the shamanistic power of the investigative healer', one is likely to expect that there may be varied interpretations of his statement that 'one should act in accordance with his belief system but not become dependent on a belief system of a particular deity'. [19] Obviously those who look for deeper meaning in any belief system are going to have to spend more time in looking for it than accepting whatever may be on offer generally. That is usually where the problem lies because innumerable people look for a quick fix to settle uneasiness over personal actions, in not knowing what are or are not right actions, although Lama Govinda is necessarily cagey about specifying any one thing. Then again some people can rationalise anything with little self-persuasion. So how is a confirmed egoist to be rehabilitated? Clearly there are few easy answers to be had in that regard just possibly because the East *suggests* while the West *explains* . . . and formulates! Although Lama Govinda believes that Westerners are 'knowledgeable only in the realms of technology and thinking' [119] it is necessary to take into consideration the fact that Western thinking and technological innovation have been based largely on the result of experience, which

in Buddhist terms equates with 'reason' [113]; thus in some areas it appears that East and West may not be that far apart. One of the Universal Laws of Buddhism states that "Everything" is nothing but a beautiful but empty idea when we do not really have control over the material realm'. (Was the original German work in this translated phrase 'wann' or 'wenn', i.e. did it mean when or if?) [120]

Years ago at an Adyar lecture, this reviewer remembers still a comment by the late beloved Seetha Neelakantan that, to summarise, nobody's god fails everybody all of the time, just some people some of the time because they haven't taken enough time to figure things out. To which might be added a statement of Lama Govinda that conscious self-liberation by one's own efforts may be attained when 'actions . . . are . . . in right relationship to inner knowledge and to what is already understood'. [119]

In late 1992 there appeared an unusual book in P.R. China entitled *A Philosophical History of Tibetan Buddhism* by Banban Dorje, a lecturer at the Central Institute of Nationalities in Beijing. Already in its second edition but only available in Chinese, the work deals with the evolution of Tibet's primitive religion, Bön, and its eventual replacement by Buddhism. Banban Dorje points out that the original Bön religion became more sophisticated by the 2nd century B.C. By placing an emphasis on the premise that everything originated from nothingness, Tibetans were psychologically prepared to accept the introduction of Buddhism. By the 7th century A.D. Buddhism was highly valued in Tibet as a tool capable of unifying the warring tribes. When King Song-tsen Gam-Po (617-650 A.D.) married two princesses, one from the Chinese Song Dynasty and the other from Nepal, both were allowed to build Buddhist temples in Lhasa, and thus Buddhism gained a stronghold. In the end, Buddhism, the more

advanced, sophisticated and persuasive philosophy prevailed, but only following many adjustments. There are indeed two sides to every story and we can appreciate them the more if facts are weighed in the balance.

Let's add yet further observations. 'Contemplation laid the foundation for the consecration of nature, which in turn resulted in the birth of the gods' says Banban Dorje. Actually the Buddha was against all metaphysical speculations and conceptualizations, 'for whatever a human being knows should have an equivalent in nature or within ourselves'. [123] And more, 'What we perceive as reality is mostly illusory; impermanence does not destroy without something else taking its place'. [133] In basic terms, so does nature. Most ancient Europeans, northerners especially, were found to be nature worshipers, or so the Roman historians tell us. Apparently, these primitive conditions entered in the evolving modern psyche at both an individual and national level, most determinedly by adherents of western Aryanism, and transferred to Eastern thought processes in sublimated fashion. But, 'the danger of the West is to overemphasize the pole of individuality, and therefore ego-activity and willpower. The East, however, is always tempted to overemphasize the pole of universality, and therefore to deny the value of individuality, which can lead to passive disintegration and self-dissolution in an amorphous unity'. [151] It seems that either duality or plurality can be equally grave errors, but again it depends on what a person is looking for.

How then did the West come to increasingly know Buddhism in the 19th century? Lama Govinda suggests that 'it was a time intoxicated by major scientific discoveries, when the ideas of many scholars were under the sway of positivism and scientific materialism. People were looking for a "substitute" religion and thought to have discov-

ered it in the form of an ethical and philosophical Buddhism. They neglected Buddha's words, to be found everywhere in the Pali canon, which go beyond and transcend the realm of the intellect and rationality'. [157] 'But this does not mean that (Buddhism) denies a spiritual reality, which is "inaccessible to the realm of logical and discursive thinking'. [158] Escape from tradition is usually done by a selective process! Eastern philosophies are inviting because they demand concentration on a causal chain of becoming, quite appealing to the logical scientific mind, although they sometimes seem short on reasoning. Remember that in algebra two and two do not always make four.

There are other points in these essays concerning plastic art representation of Buddhism under the influence of Greek colonial art, and finding the spiritual entry and exit to mandalas, all of which occasionally seem a bit oversimplified. For the casual reader of Buddhist traditions, perhaps nothing can be oversimplified enough, and it may not be wise to jump from Lama Govinda straight into the work of, say Herbert Guenther. It will depend on how willing an erstwhile student may be to come to learn the subtleties of them, how much one may already know, and avoiding confusion may be a greater problem still.

Robert Boyd

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