

## HELENA BLAVATSKY AND THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

*-(a reconstruction and deconstruction)  
Dorian Borsella* I have always had a fear that I might not be able to find something that's wrapped up under my very nose, because I am confused about the shape of the package. Every once in a great while, the package can be a person who has much wisdom, but you immediately get turned off and never get to drink from that fountain. How about a short, fat woman with thick arms, hair that can't be tamed, who is also loud, forceful, creative with the truth, wearing a tent of a dress, wearing a handful of rings, who cusses and smokes and manipulates and has a rotten temper? How about the same lady in a proper Victorian setting! But yet—there is that great wisdom! So let's unwrap the package.



### BAPTISM BY FIRE

In Russia, a man named Peter von Hahn was serving in the Russian army. He had taken as his wife an aristocratic, artsy novelist named Helena Andreyevna, well-known in bohemian literary circles. On August 12, 1831 a little girl was born of this union. Even at the little girl's baptism, someone dropped a candle. The priest's robe caught fire. Several people suffered burns! This child was destined to become one of the more unusual, original and fantastic personages in the occult movement. She would later be known as **Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky**.

Very soon, the parents would know that here was no ordinary child. Here was a child with a will of steel. Here was a child that one would not like to cross. Here was a child who started telling tall tales almost from the cradle, a habit that she did not outgrow. Here was a child with a Capital T temper. Here was a child who would not genuflect to social norms. To add to the fire, Helena Blavatsky was

raised against the backdrop of a society which believed in all manner of ghosts, goblins, and things that go bump in the night, horror-story critters who, if crossed, could control human life. A formula for combustion, surely.

Helena's mother, who had her own coterie of literary friends, died when Helena was eleven. It's best to leave the psychiatrists to debate why, throughout her life, Helena insisted that her mother had died during her infancy. HPB probably felt neglected because her mother had a life. Not all women did in those days.

### MARRIAGE, LOVERS AND SEANCES:

When Helena was 17 she married **General Nicephore Blavatsky**, presumably more for the sense of



Peter von Hahn

adventure than for love. The general was around 40. The marriage barely lasted as long as the honeymoon—literally! Helena ran off to her grandfather. The grandfather contacted Helena's father. Peter von Hahn immediately started out on a trip of a couple thousand miles to retrieve his daughter. He was too late. Helena had already flown the coop.

Much of what is known between then and 1873, when Helena Blavatsky appeared on the shores of New York, is known only by what Helena told people. The problem was, Helena supplied various people with a wide selection of biographies. In fact, she told so many different stories, covering so many years, that all the events could scarcely have happened to one person in one lifetime. (Maybe she was including a few past lives!)

A few facts are known. Helena did eventually return to her husband, on the condition that she wouldn't be required to see him too much. In later years, relating the tale of her marriage, she kept making herself younger and her husband older. By the time she got through, she had portrayed him as a lecher of around 80, foisting his attentions on a little girl, herself!

### SEANCES:



Seances were big at this time on both sides of the Atlantic. Helena held them. She became close friends with a certain **Baron Nicholas Meyendorff** of Estonia. He shared her interests in séances and was a close friend of one of the renowned spiritualists of the day, **Dunglas D. Home**. Much later, in her wisdom, HPB concluded that one didn't get a lot of enlightenment by hanging on the words of the dissatisfied dead who were still trying to come back and get their two cents worth in. It was far better seeking things from "The Masters."

At this time, Helena was living with 1.) her husband; 2.) her lover, Meyendorff and 3.) a man named Metrovich, and all of this in her grandfather's home. Although no one knows exactly what the sexual dynamics were among this group, it is usually accepted that Helena did have a child called Yuri. Some of her biographers and followers, who write her life as a hagiography, omit mention of the child. It does seem that this child was loved by Blavatsky, was not healthy, and did not live long.

### MASTERS!



Around this time, Helena began receiving communications from two Masters, **Morya** and **Koot Hoomi**. No one could confirm the ontological status of Morya and Koot Hoomi. In other words, did they exist? They certainly were not quite P.L.U. (people like us!) who walk around with bodies.

I don't know just how many of these letters from the Masters there were; perhaps hundreds. They materialized in odd but significant places. Some dropped out of the sky, or at least from the ceiling. They oozed out of walls. The precipitated! Sometimes, the letters seemed self-serving, trying to influence personal and political events. Sometimes they gave great insights.

Like various religions, (though Theosophy isn't a religion), there are hard-liners and liberals. The hard-liners believe that the letters came from the two disembodied spirits. (a contemporary scholar, K. Paul Johnson, wrote a sensible book called *The Masters Revealed: Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge*.)

Myself, I don't much know, don't much



Aleister Crowley



MacGregor Mathers

care. In those days viewed from these days, you read about long queues of esoteric writers who claim assistance from other-worldly adepts, who have come up with great works and don't admit to sitting down with paper and pen. The famous magician and co-founder of the Golden Dawn (1888), **MacGregor Mathers**, practically lived in the British Museum Reading Room for years, and held that there were "The Secret Chiefs" who spoke only to him! **Aleister Crowley's** Book of the Law was dictated by Aiwass, his "Holy Guardian Angel," over the space of three days, 8, 9 and 10 April, 1904, in Cairo.

Yeats' A Vision originated in the afternoon of 24 October, 1917, when Yeats and his wife of four days, experimented with automatic writing. Joseph Smith produced the Book of Mormon in a similar fashion.

An occultist during Blavatsky's time in America, Emma H. Britten, proclaimed her book, Art Magic, to be produced by the Astral Light. More recently we have **channeling**. The medium is not the message! Madame Blavatsky's Mahatma Letters (the Masters) go to the front of the line for sheer dramatic effect. What would Masters be like if one allowed, for the sake of argument, their existence? It seems that they would be very powerful beings that had a lot of behind-the-scenes power over our poor troubled lives and this troubled globe. MacGregor Mathers had his "Secret Chiefs." Others had "Illuminati.". Perhaps these beings had reached some kind of perfection in their many lifetimes, gotten an understanding of their true self with a small 's' and no longer were troubled by raging hormones and fleshly desires. Chesed, on the Kaballistic Tree of Life, is usually reckoned as the jumping-off place, from which one can evolve no higher. Here, the Illumined One can either jump across the abyss and become one with the All. Another choice would be to linger at the threshold as Magicians of the Light who could still reach out to influence—and hopefully help—poor, struggling humanity. Any decent "mystery school," even today, claims to be "contacted." The downside is that if "things go bad," the "contacts" might desert you. (Don't take my brief assessment as the final word on the subject: Google the terms.)

I have read where Blavatsky devoured the writings of Bulwer-Lytton, especially "Zanoni." Bulwer-Lytton was great friends with Eliphas Levi, the defrocked French priest and magician. Crowley thought so highly of Eliphas that he sometimes claimed to have been Eliphas in his past life. Levi died 31 May 1875; Aleister was born 12 October 1875 so there would have been a rather quick re-ensoulment. Some claim that Blavatski got the idea of the Masters from the writings of Bulwer-Lytton. I remain agnostic on that controversy.

In 1871 Helena (states that she) found herself on the SS Eumonia, bound for Alexandria, Egypt. She traveled with her present lover, Agardi Metrovich.

There are two distinct and conflicting versions of how Metrovich died: One: he died 19 April 1870 in his bed, having been taken ill with a fever and delirium. Two: He lost his life as he and Helena were sailing to Egypt, in an explosion of gunpowder and fireworks which the ship was carrying. Helena claimed to have been one of the few survivors; nearly 400 perished. (I have googled persistently and the only hit I get for Eumonia is pneumonia.)

At any rate, Helena went to **Egypt** and while there formed "The Societe Spirite for



Bulwer-Lytton



occult phenomena.”

A woman named Emma Cutting became Helena’s friend at this time. However, some years later, she was to reincarnate as **Emma Coulomb** and create for HPB a scandal that would prove an “8” or “9” on the richtor scale, easily topping such minor scandals of fraud, bigamy and plagiarism. For the present, Emma desired only contact with a recently deceased brother. She was a bit disappointed with Helena’s seance. No voices ensued, only a few meager raps. Emma accepted Helena’s explanation that the séance room had been inadequately purified beforehand.

**NEW YORK CITY!** The word was out that **spiritualism** was alive and well in America. In July, 1873. Helena reached New York, getting off a ship with many other immigrants. In those days it was easy to be an immigrant. All you had to do was have money for the boat. Nowadays US of A has a type of iron curtain to keep people from getting in. Borders are hermetically sealed!

HPB had an explanation for her arrival from the ship in “steerage” rather than first class. As Madame tells it, German family, with several children, were in tears because they had been sold fraudulent tickets and could not get on the boat at all; she therefore cashed in her first-class ticket and bought fares so that everyone could travel. True? False? I don’t know. Throughout her life, great instances of her generosity have been documented. Yet, in a time that was much more class conscious than our own, a woman set on embarking on a career as a medium and spiritual leader might have preferred to make an excuse for arriving with the “great unwashed hordes.” A few years later, when she was to travel to India, she again traveled cheaply, barely had the \$\$\$.

Blavatsky tried to work, had trouble earning money, was soon virtually penniless. She told herself (and others) that she expected some money to be sent from the Russian consulate. None was forthcoming. She lived in a large boarding house. She managed to divide the home into two groups, those who liked her and those who didn’t. She entertained the former group with stories of her life. On Sunday nights she held séances. This seemed to work until a newspaper took a dislike to her and accused her of using hashish and opium.

Then her father died and she did get some money, \$5000, a modest inheritance. That went fast. HPB worked whenever she could. One job was in a sweatshop making artificial flowers .

An important event in her life occurred ten days after **Henry Steele Olcott**'s first article on the Eddy seances appeared. Helena knew that she had to get introduced to Henry. How hard was that?

Olcott was agricultural editor of the New York Tribune (1858–60.) He had served in the Civil War and afterward was admitted to the bar in New York City. With the rank of Colonel, he was special commissioner in the U.S. War and Navy departments (1863–66). He was a VIP, a “very important person.” He was also the most naïve person one would ever stumble across, though that only became obvious through the years. Helena could get him to “see” semi-transparent Hindus, or believe that letters (written by her but alleged to be by Koot Hoomi) materialized on his desktop. Henry, like



Henry Steele Olcott

Helena, was very interested in Eastern thought.

While living in New York City, Helena founded the **Theosophical Society** in September 1875, with Henry Steel Olcott, **William Quan Judge** and others. The Society was a type of modern day Gnostic movement of the late nineteenth century. It took its inspiration from Hinduism and Buddhism.

Madame Blavatsky claimed that all religions were both true in their inner teachings and false or imperfect in their external conventional manifestations. Imperfect men attempting to translate the divine knowledge had corrupted it in the translation. Her claim that esoteric spiritual knowledge is consistent with new science may be considered to be the first instance of what is now called New Age thinking. In fact, many researchers feel that much of **New Age** thought started with Blavatsky. I myself think that something in current New Age thought is very different, however.

Theosophists didn't "manifest" for wealth or fault the owner for his poor health or believe you had to beam out a positive attitude. (I know I'm being unfair. Mea culpa.) After all, we live in post Y2K.

Helena still, as always, needed financial support. (Throughout her life, she contributed small articles to Russian magazines, at least earning spending change to support her (rolled) cigarette habit). Henry Olcott, wasn't much of a help there. He was a man in the situation that I like to call, not very kindly, a "squeezed out lemon." His money was already committed to his estranged wife and two children. His law practice had been neglected during his Spiritualism investigations.

So Helena married once again! True, her original husband was out there somewhere. Currently, **Michael Betanelly** was available and wanted to marry her. Helena clarified that Betanelly could expect none of the usual privileges of matrimony. Olcott considered this total madness. Betanelly was a Russian-American businessman, also recently arrived in America and 10 years younger than Helena.



William Quan Judge

Helena's main interest was Olcott. He was the one that was needed for the spiritualist movement. HPB dictated Olcott's writings and told him where to send them. Somehow Helena's new husband and Olcott's wife seemed to have evaporated—not literally! In Sept. 1875 in New York City, Blavatsky and Olcott founded the **Theosophical Society**.

It was co-founded by Olcott along with William Q. Judge. Its name was furnished by Charles Sotheran, a man of independent means, a high Mason, a Rosicrucian, and a student of the kabbalah. The word **Theosophy**—Sophia, goddess of Wisdom and Knowledge. Theo – God, the Divine. Thus – Knowledge of the Divine.



Theosophical Society

After its establishment, the Theosophical Society formulated 3 objectives:

1. to form a universal brotherhood of man regardless of race, class—(and since it was so closely connected to India later,) CASTE..
2. studying and making known the ancient religions, philosophies and sciences
3. investigating the laws of nature and divine powers latent in humanity..

**ISIS UNVEILED** - AND A FEW FIRES TO BE PUT OUT: Helena, in close connection to Henry Olcott, wrote Isis Unveiled in the



summer of 1876 in New York. She claimed the help of the secret masters. Sometimes 50 or more newly written pages would appear overnight. At any rate, the book somehow got written. The production of the book gave HPB a huge advantage over several other occultists and spiritualists who might otherwise have been the ones to later become famous or infamous.

The cry of plagiarism immediately followed. HPB was not a trained scholar. She had quoted sources without attribution and was not on good terms with quotation marks. To the reviewers who complained of lack of documentation, Helena explained that some sources had to be kept secret!

The plagiarism storm subsided only to be followed by another storm. The recently married Michael Betanelly was acting up. His threat was not inconsiderable because a budding spiritual leader does not want a bigamy charge. Acrimonious letters went back and forth. Finally Helena got the letter she wanted, the one in which Betanelly said he would not contest a divorce.

Still another fire cried to be extinguished! The prominent medium **Daniel Dunglas Home** had published his autobiography, Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism. In this book, he dedicated an entire chapter to trashing Olcott and maligning Helena. It seems that Home and HPB had history some years back, when Home questioned whether Helena had actually materialized a belt buckle on a Russian corpse.

#### **INDIA BECKONS:**

Helena was determined to go to India. Olcott gave verbal assent but became passive-aggressive. After all, Henry had a life, a wife (ex) and two children, all of whom he supported. He advised Helena that she had best get American citizenship because there was currently a period of British-Russian antagonism. It would be better to carry an American passport when arriving in India. Helena did get American citizenship. She also knocked off about 90 pounds.

Helena, sensing Olcott's procrastination, set about sending him supernatural Master-messages, ordering him to travel no later than December. Her designs were foiled by a second-class fortune teller whom Henry consulted. The fortune teller intimated death by water passage. Helena sold her and Henry's possessions. She also picked up a couple of fellow-travelers, **Edward Wimbridge** and **Rosa Bates**. Typically, they were broke so Henry had to pony up their fares. The entourage of four actually did sail on 18 December 1877, a total of 10 miserable passengers on a steamer. Nine of the 10 were seasick; you can guess who was not!

The pattern of crisis management was not much changed when Helena and Henry arrived in Bombay. Helena was immediately disappointed with the reception committee, or lack of same. In a letter to her sister Vera, Helena complained about being met by a group of half-naked dancing girls which provided, as transport, an elephant! The person who was to officially meet them, Chintamon, was late. Next day they were given a great feast attended by hundreds. HBP and Olcott thought that their fortunes were



Daniel Dunglas Home

looking up –until later, they were handed the bill!

### **TROUBLE IN PARADISE:**

While in Bombay, some time later, Emma Cutting, ne Coulomb, reappeared in Helena's life. She and her husband were penniless. HPB invited the couple to stay with them at their headquarters until Mr. Alexis Coulomb could find work. Later, the invitation got extended indefinitely. Blavatsky and Emma were allies, with Helena winding Emma up to play trick after trick on the gullible Henry Olcott. Emma had sworn that she saw a spirit in the garden. Henry's own spirits were perked up.



**Adyar, India**

Helena's rationale: Whereas Emma was married and presumably had household skills, Rosa was a single woman - 'better make that spinster! (Nasty old Victorian term that is, almost rhymes with "sinister"! Or having nothing better to do than spinning? At least, definitely not one of the power players!) By the time HPB returned from Ceylon, Rosa and Emma could hardly exist in the same household.

Wimbridge, also dismissed, took to vilifying Helena in the Indian press. Blavatsky fought back with letters to the editor. All of this was unhelpful to the T.S.' reputation.

It was in India that HPB and the society gained much support. Newly acquired supporters included Sinnett, the statesman Allen O. Hume, and various high-caste Indians and English officials. The headquarters of TS is in Adyar, India, which is located near Madras.



**Alfred Sinnett**

Rosa Bates, one off the two original travelers from New York, was positioned as the chief housekeeper. Helena and Henry planned an extended trip to Ceylon. (During this trip, HPB and Olcott inexplicably became Buddhists—odd because the Theosophical Society headquarters was to be at **Adyar, India** and they had ever been inspired by Indian Hindu masters! Rosa became furious when HPB appointed Emma as head of household while HPB and Olcott traveled.

**Alfred Sinnett** quickly wormed his way into the inner circle. He was a type of miracle junkie, prevailing upon Helena to produce supernatural manifestations. She satisfied him by performing the esoteric equivalent to some "pull rabbits out of hats" tricks. Then there was the "astral bell." A bell is a powerful magical symbol. It beckons, it warns, it calls you to high tea! It is a feminine symbol associated with the Goddess. Even in Christian symbolism, it jingles on the altar of churches of "high" persuasion when the priest is about to transubstantiate the bread and wine. Some of Blavatsky's followers believed that the small bell that they heard was a manifestation from the astral plane. Skeptics believed that HPB had the bell pinned somewhere in her clothing. Sinnett was delighted to be barraged by letters from Koot Hoomi. At least

one of these letters informed him that it was his duty to publish Helena's work in the Pioneer. Helena and Henry, the two great soulmates while in New York, began to squabble seriously. Henry, who enjoyed lecturing responded to an invitation by the Ceylon Buddhists to visit. HPB did not want him to go. This dispute resulted in a Mahatma letter! Emma delivered the letter. The note threatened that the Mahatmas would cut themselves off from Olcott if he traveled. He would no longer be "connected." Settled in a new house in India, HBP had a favor to ask of Alexis Coulomb. Above Sinnett's room,

Alexis was to cut out a trap door. Later, scores of Mahatma letters fell from this “astral post office” onto Sinnett’s desk.

By late 1882, Helena was clearly a public figure. Prominent people visited her, perhaps none more potentially useful than Jacob Sassoon, a wealthy businessman who had established a Jewish community in Bombay.

William Tournay Brown, a well educated and not so well mentally balanced Scot entered the Theosophists’ lives. Olcott made him his secretary. Brown caused trouble down the road because he had not a doubt in the world that he had visits from Koot Hoomi in his actual flesh! What irony! Later, when Helena found it prudent to tone down the Mahatmas, Brown raised a stink because he was certain that he knew Hoot Hoomi as a man of flesh and blood.

#### **THE DEFECTION OF EMMA COULOMB:**

Meanwhile, following Helena’s scolding of Emma over some lesser matter (not a good idea if you think the person has the goods on you!), the Coulombs began to turn treacherous. Emma’s tongue began to wag to anyone who would listen. Madame was termed a fraud; Henry, merely a fool. While Helena was making the Paris scene, Emma was blowing the minds of the Adyar people. Yes, Blavatsky had ordered Mr. Coulomb to cut a secret hole in the ceiling for receipt of Mahatma Letters. Moreover, the shrine in the Occult Room was fitted with a secret back door. In fact, the whole Occult Room was rigged with all manner of tricks. Franz Hartman and Lane-Fox tried to kick the Coulombs out, offering 2,000 Indian rupees as hush money. Emma only entrenched herself deeper. She was the one who knew all Helena Blavatsky’s secrets: the Metrovitch affair; owed debts; the invention of the Mahatmas. Just for good measure, Emma threw in that HPB saw as the purpose of the TS, the freeing of India from British rule! Now that was serious stuff! Poor Olcott was ready to consider the hypothesis that he really might be a fool. Eventually the Coulombs left Adyar. They did not leave their legal action that they had started against Blavatsky.

#### **MADAME BLAVATSKY VISITS LONDON:**

Helena was dissatisfied with Mrs. Kingsford, the leader of the London Theosophical Society. That society had become too Christianized. Helena went over to London, She had also met with her sister Vera. Vera was no fan of the Mahatmas. Helena was suffering excruciating pain from swollen feet and a probably flare-up of gout.

People formerly confused gout with high-living and rich diet. Helena Blavatsky was a big eater, but I never like to blame the victim for the disease. Gout is a systemic disease (i.e., condition that occurs throughout the body) caused by the buildup of uric acid in the joints. An elevated blood level of uric acid occurs when the liver produces more uric acid than the body can excrete in the urine. Some foods do cause more uric acid than others, notably red meat and red wine. Over time, uric acid in the blood crystallizes and settles in the joint spaces, causing swelling, inflammation, stiffness, and pain. Gout usually affects the first metatarsal joint of the big toe, or the ankle joints. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), gout affects approximately 2.1 million people in the United States today, and is more common in men between the ages of 40 and 50. In women, incidence increases after menopause.

Anyhow, our story is that Helena’s sister, Vera, questioned how these Mahatmas, if they existed, could look on Helena, their greatest proponent, and see her in so much pain. Blavatsky almost immediately said that she felt a hand on her shoulder, declared herself pain free and began to walk without a limp (probably until she was out of sight of Vera).

In London, Blavatsky found an organization that she felt was very much like her own:

**The Society for Psychical Research**, or SPR. An updated group still exists at 49 Marloes Road, Kensington, London.

THE INVESTIGATION On 2 May, 1884, the





Blavatsky and Mahatmas

SPR decided to investigate the Theosophical Society itself. The objects of their investigation were:

1. Astral appearances of living men
2. Physical substances being moved about by occult means.
3. "Precipitation" of letters
4. Various unexplained sounds and voices.

Olcott was the first one interviewed by the group. He had nothing but benign feelings toward them. Mohini Chatterje was interviewed. Olcott thought that he had done very well, passed his "exam" until HPB began grilling him on exactly what he had said. When Helena was through with him, poor Olcott felt deflated. It was left to Frederic Myers of the SPR to interview Blavatsky herself. Helena felt that her own interview was positive. She had also gotten her "astral bell" to tinkle. Some people presume that this was a small bell which Helena hid amidst her petticoats, perhaps a type of bell that might be worn on the collar of a cat. Other people believe that this bell is an otherworldly astral bell.

Emma Coulomb, still in India, persuaded a Rev. George Patterson to publish some articles in his Christian magazine. One article was to be entitled "[The Collapse of Koot Hoomi.](#)"

Back at Adyar, the key to the Shrine Room was being held by Damodar. After the appearance of the "collapse" article, Judge and Hartman demanded entrée. There they observed the hidden hole in back of the shrine from whence all manner of spirit manifestations could be manipulated. William Quan Judge packed up his clothes and caught the first boat out, ultimate destination New York City, where he had left his wife and his life.

During December 1884, **Richard Hodgson** (young, self-confident, pleasant in demeanor, Australian) of the Psychological Research Society (PRS) in London went to Adyar itself. He pursued his investigation of the T.S. Helena still looked upon Hodgson with favorable eyes, saw him as a friend. (Oh, HPB! Where was your psychic sense with this one?!) She invited Hodgson to stay for 2 weeks! He got to paw through the tampered-with shrine room. He studied handwritings of the Mahatma Letters, interviewed everyone at Adyar. Then he visited Emma Coulomb!



Richard Hodgson

In the following spring he released a scathing report alleging fraud and trickery by HPB and her associates. To HPB and the Theosophical Society the report was controversial for over one hundred years. It put a tarnish upon the name of HPB and the Society. Many members left. ( In 1986 the PRS published an article in its Journal calling the report prejudiced, saying that Hodgson had ignored all evidence favorable to HPB, and, that an apology was due.)

With murder suspects today, prosecutors feel uneasy unless they can go into court armed with a motive. It was the lack of motive that still bothered Hodgson. This shows his being out of touch with the esoteric world of his day, where adherents demanded "showings" and otherworldly phenomena, and were prepared to believe almost anything. And "almost anything" is exactly what they got from their

Gurus and mediums: disembodied voices; transparent specters; chill winds; smells; bells; otherworldly flashes of light—and a string of occult writers who didn't want to take credit for their own writing, preferring to claim direct dictation from some manner of "Holy Guardian Angel." Thus Hodgson concluded that Madame might be either a Russian spy. Olcott got off lightly with Hodgson. He was found to be a fool albeit an honest one. (Some of us out there might think it better to be labeled a Russian spy than a fool?)

### THE BIRTH OF THE SECRET DOCTRINE:



After understandably going through a period of anxiety, depression and general cussedness to any friend who offered her house and home, Helena pulled herself together and set out to produce **The Secret Doctrine**. This, her most famous "baby," emerged from a prolonged and difficult "pregnancy." She no longer had Olcott to help her. Countess Wachtmeister had packed Helena off on a badly needed holiday to Ostend, Belgium (ritzy in those days). HPB's luggage apparently contained a number of reference books. Eventually, Constance herself came to Ostend to help Helena organize her writing. Later, back in London, Helena had other helpers: proofreaders; editors; assemblers. Helena herself worked hard, setting the whole morning and part of the afternoon aside for her task. Of course, the charges of plagiarism came:

plagiarism of The Stanzas of Dzyan; drawing from the Kabbala Denudata; etc. But the bottom line was that Helena and her helpers "got it all together," and The Secret Doctrine was then, and continues to be recognized now, as a crucial occult tome.

Helena owned a tongue that could lacerate friend and foe alike. One example (From M. Meade, Madame Blavatsky, p. 321, footnoted from LMW Vol1 p.102): Isabel and Alfred Oakley extended their home to Helena. She did not like the looks of the couple. Of Alfred, an insomniac who eventually overdosed on sleep medicines, Helena sees "...a man whose soul is filled with the scum falling from other people's wicked souls, with the puss exuding from other people's wounds."



CW Leadbeater

In October 1884 a crucial and infamous player in the subsequent life of the Theosophical Society entered HPB's life: **The Reverend Charles W. Leadbeater**, Anglican priest at St Mary's, Bramshott, Hampshire. HPB had pretty much shot her wad of helpful men by this time, so an Anglican priest, soon to be converted to Theosophy, was a welcome addition. Leadbeater's story, however, is most closely connected with that of having as his charge the beautiful young Indian boy, Krishnamurti, raised to be a real-life Theosophical Mahatma. Leadbeater, who like HPB herself, created a fanciful life background for himself, studied for the priesthood when his family's fortunes collapsed. His favorite parishioners were the young boys. (The

Krishnamurti experiment was an abysmal failure. He did become an outstanding spiritual leader but never identified himself with a group.)

DR. OPPENHEIM A curious incident occurred when Helena Blavatsky was traveling in Germany in 1885. Helen apparently harbored a fear that an enemy from her distant past (possibly working with Emma Coulomb) would reveal her sexual foibles; the having two husbands at once; the child, Yuri. HPB's health was not good at this time. She visited a Dr. Oppenheim. This doctor came out with a condition called "Anteflexio Uteri." (Apparently this only means that the uterus was tipped slightly forward, the condition is not unusual, the condition would not prevent childbirth!) Oppenheim is said to have claimed that Helena could not have borne a child. No one is sure how all this came down. In Helena's day it would have been very rare for a woman to undergo a pelvic, and no one knows if the doctor performed one. However, Helena got a certificate (either from the doctor or forged) of sterility. (Subsequently, a few people would later fantasize that HPB was some kind of androgyne, hermaphrodite, or even a man in women's clothes!



The actual physical appearance of HPB: she is described as a short, stout, forceful woman, with strong arms, unruly hair, and large, liquid and slightly bulging eyes. Toward the end of her life she was quite obese. Some of this appearance in her later life might have been due to her failing health. She suffered from Bright's disease. She actually wrote to Mrs. Sinnott in 1882 that she had Bright's disease of the kidneys, and the whole blood turning into water with ulcers breaking out in the most unexpected and least explored spots of her body. She said that she maybe hang around a couple of years, or else, her words, kick the bucket at any time.

Bright's disease is defined as :any of several diseases of the kidney marked especially by edema (swelling) and the presence of albumin in the urine. It can cause elevated blood pressure. It is an inflammation in the filtering system of the kidneys.

### **LONDON ONCE MORE:**

After travels in Europe, Blavatsky finally settled in London, spring 1887, supported by some wealthy friends including Countess Wachtmeister. Helena continued to earn a small income writing occasional articles for Russian magazines. Adyar, through Olcott (the two once-great friends in New York had fallen out) did send her a small allowance (TS money) until that ran dry. But Helena had disciples who were more than willing to take her into their homes (where she immediately took the role of top-dog or dominatrix!) She lived with Mabel Collins at Norwood."Maycot." describing the place as "a hole". Miss Arundale offered hospitality but Helena said that they would find her disagreeable after 7 1/4 minutes of her living with them. Bertram Keightly who was the secretary of the London lodge (he lived with an uncle) moved HPB into their house at 17 Lansdowne Rd. Holland Park. There, she received visitors like William Butler Yeats. Just curiously, HPB herself seldom if ever was the actual speaker at formal meetings of the TS. The Secret Doctrine was selling well despite the slams of publishers who put it down as a mishmash of Buddhism and occultism. With her friends' help, Helena set up her journal Lucifer, which means LIGHT. She found the Blavatsky lodge, which then met on Lansdowne Rd. where she was staying. This lodge still meets at T. S. National Headquarters in London on Gloucester Place, on Thursdays at 6:15. By this time, HPB was a bit of a celebrity. She held Saturday "at homes."

By this time, she was quarreling with Olcott (at Adyar) because she wanted to have control of Theosophy in the West. She persuaded Olcott to agree to establishment of the Esoteric Section in 1889. This would be an exclusive group of students, under direct control of HPB herself.

During 1889 HPB finished two more books: The Key to Theosophy an introduction to theosophical thought and philosophy; and, The Voice of the Silence, a mystical and poetic work on the path of enlightenment.



Annie Besant

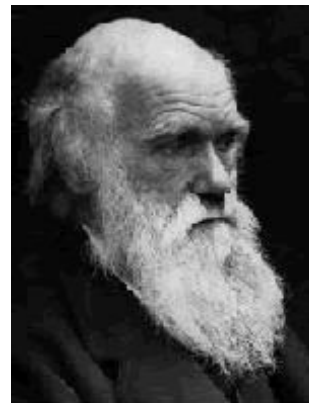
The work of the Theosophical Society was continued by activist **Annie Wood Besant**, a reviewer of *The Secret Doctrine* and a convert to Theosophy. Besant's home in London, at 19 Avenue Road, now became the headquarters of the Society. It contained a special meeting room for the Esoteric Section as well as an occult room. Besant, a converted atheist, actively supported progressive causes, bringing another generation of liberal intellectuals into the society, and became president following Olcott's death in 1907.

HPB died in her home on May 8, 1891. She became unable to walk and suffered from various diseases. She was cremated with a third of her ashes remaining in Europe, and a third going to America and India each. Theosophists commemorate her death on May 8, called White Lotus Day.

What can one say? Madame Blavatsky actively pursued life. One never could say she allowed life to pass her by. If anything, she compelled life, helped by her huge personality. Although she had some defections, many friends as well as strangers freely offered their time, their talent, their homes, and their whole ways of life.

It was true that she didn't tolerate fools well. She had little patience with those followers who were only interested in her producing occult "phenomena" without first wanting to put in the hard work and training which no true occultist can dodge. She had little patience, period. In the last few years of her life, when she finally attained recognition, she was usually in pain and often ill. She was one of the early leaders of the revival of the **magickal** movement in the West. However, her writings make it very clear that she disdained "black magick" which is an attempt to influence the free will of another person by use of magickal techniques.

One has to also place her in historical context. The writings of Darwin, the lectures of Huxley, the new ways that theologians were beginning to look at the Bible (critically rather than literally), and the hardships, disease and death that people witnessed all around them, had shaken people's faith. This was an age where the certainty of a personal God with the omni-attributes was beginning to crack. Findings in astronomy and geology were beginning to pull the plug on the theory that the world was created 4000 years B.C. Amidst this kind of ambiguity, people are often ready to believe anything. They yearned for proof of other worlds, for miracles, or for some kind of spirituality. Mediumship thrived, but Helena Blavatsky wanted something more than that. What she did not necessarily want was hopes of a heaven shock-full of singing angelic creatures. She was too earthy for that. Her life was with people. Her



Charles Darwin

saints were the

Mahatmas or Masters of Wisdom, modeled on Buddhist and Christian monks, who resided in the inaccessible portion of the earth. They were the "old souls" who had completed their rounds of incarnations on earth, but frequently returned to help members of humankind who needed and requested their assistance.

Ref. Sylvia Cranston, HPB: The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky  
K. Paul Johnson: The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Great White Lodge  
Marian Meade: Madam Blavatsky: The Woman Behind the Myth.  
Peter Washington: Madame Blavatsky's Baboon: A History of the Mystics, Mediums, and Misfits Who Brought Spiritualism to America.

#### Links:

[Blavatsky Net Theosophy](#)

[Crystalinks: Blavatsky](#)

[Wikipedia: Blavatsky](#)

[The Society for Psychical Research](#)

[Blavatsky Study Center](#)

[The Theosophical Society in America](#)

[The Theosophical Society-Pasadena, California](#)

[The Theosophical Society-Adyar, India](#)

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#### What happened to them:

[Colonel Henry Steel Olcott](#) (1832-1907), founder and first president of the Theosophical Society, is well-known as the first prominent person of Western descent to make a formal conversion to Buddhism. His subsequent actions as president of the Theosophical Society helped Buddhism into a new renaissance. He is still honoured in Sri Lanka for these efforts. Henry stayed in India and pursued the work of the society there. The Theosophical society built several Buddhist schools in Sri Lanka, most notably Ananda College, Nalanda College, Dharmaraja College and Visakha Vidyalaya. After his death, the leadership of the society devolved onto the shoulders of Blavatsky's protegee Annie Besant.

[Wikipedia: Henry Steel Olcott](#)

[William Quan Judge](#) (1851-March 22, 1896 New York) was a mystic, esotericist, and occultist, and one of the founders of the original Theosophical Society. He was born in Dublin, Ireland. When he was 13 years old, his family emigrated to the United States. He became a naturalized citizen at 21 and passed the New York state bar exam, specializing in commercial law.

Although merely a young man, he was among the seventeen who first put the Theosophical Society together. Like H.P. Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott, he stayed in the organization when others left. When Olcott and Blavatsky left the United States for India, Judge stayed behind to keep the Society's work alive, all the while working as a lawyer [Wikipedia: William Quan Judge](#)

[Mabel Collins](#) (\* 9th September 1851 St Peters Port Guernsey, died 31st March 1927) was a theosophist and author of over 46 books [Wikipedia Mabel Collins](#), She became a great friend of Vittoria Cremers and Roslyn D'Onston, one of many Jack the Ripper suspects. She got into anti-vivisection. She was deeply distressed by World War I. During the war years Mabel visited soldiers and took an interest in military displays. Throughout 1913/4 she spent more and more time with Catherine Metcalfe. In 1915 she went to stay with Catherine Metcalfe and wrote [Our Glorious Future at Metcalfe's Home](#). Catherine Metcalfe had contacted Mabel after returning to England from Vancouver. They were to spend the last twelve years of Mabel's life together. Mabel never talked of her early life and experiences. She was approached write a history of the rise of The TS but refused. She warned Catherine that if she ever attempted a biography she would appear in wrath.

Mabel died of angina on 31st March 1927 at the age of 76. In her will she left a little over £100. Subba Row had initial problems with instructing non-Hindus. It was his distinct belief at the time that Hindu knowledge should remain with India, and not be extended to foreigners. In fact, even after passing over this hurdle, he was still especially private regarding his spiritual life, even to his mother

and close friends. Unless the person he was speaking to had a deep understanding of mysticism, it was a fairly mute topic for him.

For many years then, Subba Row was instrumental in establishing Theosophy in India, and continued to work hard until the first draft of the Secret Doctrine was given to him. It was his initial compulsion to edit the piece when it had been proposed, but upon reading it, he utterly and completely refused to have anything to do with it. It was his opinion that the piece contained so many mistakes that he might as well be writing a completely new book were he to edit it.

In 1888, T. **Subba Row** resigned from the Theosophical Society along with J.N. Cook. Tensions between himself and many of the members, as well as with HPB, had grown too stressful to maintain. It was only slightly thereafter that he contracted a cutaneous disease, a sickness which manifested itself in an outbreak of boils in 1890 during his last visit to the Theosophical Society's headquarters in Madras. Eventually he would succumb to the disease that year, and died on June 24, 1890, saying that his guru had called him, and that it was time for his departure. He was cremated the morning after as per Hindu tradition. [Wikipedia: Subba Row](#)

**A.P. Sinnett** (\* 18 January 1840; † 26 June 1921) was an author and Theosophist.

By 1879, Sinnett had moved to India where he was "... the Editor of The Pioneer, the leading English Daily of India..."[2] He relates in his book, *The Occult World* that: "...on the first occasion of my making Madame Blavatsky's acquaintance she became a guest at my home at Allahabad and remained there for six weeks..." [3]

In 1880 Helena Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott visited the Sinnetts at their summer-home in Simla. The Mahatma letters, which generated the controversy that later helped lead to the split of the Theosophical Society, were mostly written to Sinnett or his wife, Patience.

By 1889, Sinnett was back in England, and asked Leadbeater to come back to England to tutor his son Percy and George Arundale. Leadbeater agreed and brought with him one of his pupils Jinarajadasa.

Sinnett was later President of the London Lodge of the Society. (ibid, A. P. Sinnett)

C. Leadbeater His interest in occultism was stimulated by A.P. Sinnett's *Occult World*, and he joined the Theosophical Society in 1883. The next year he met Helena Petrovna Blavatsky when she came to London. "When she accepted him [as a pupil], he gave up the church, became a vegetarian, severed all ties with England, and followed her to India." [5]

He lived first at Adyar, and then for several years in Ceylon, where he "...taught in a school for poor boys, founded by Colonel Olcott." (Lutyens, p 13). Around 1889, Sinnett asked him to return to England to tutor his son and also George Arundale. He agreed and brought with him, one of his pupils Jinarajadasa.

He became one of the most known speakers in the Theosophical Society for quite a number of years [7] and was also Secretary of the London Lodge. [8]

Leadbeater was accused of pederasty, the first accusation coming in 1906.

A commission was appointed by the American Section, but before the meeting, Leadbetter resigned the TS, as he told Olcott, "to save the Society from embarrassment." (Mary Lutyens, p 16).

Another such accusation came later from Hubert van Hook of Chicago, who as an 11-year-old was proclaimed by Leadbeater as future World Teacher. [11] On the denunciation, Mary Lutyens states: "Hubert later swore to Mrs Besant that Leadbetter had 'misused' him, but as he was extremely vindictive by that time, his testimony, though unshaken, was perhaps not altogether reliable." (Mary Lutyens, p 45n)

Leadbetter was never charged or brought to court, though there is a body of evidence that suggests he had sexual relations with students in the United States, India and Australia. Peter Michel, in his biography of Charles W. Leadbeater, writes that these accusations are suspect as they came from those who could be considered his enemies

After Olcott died in Feb 1907, Annie Besant after a political struggle became President of the Society.

By the end of 1908, the International Sections voted for Leadbeater's

His most well-known activity was the discovery, in April, 1909, of **Jiddu Krishnamurti**, on the private beach that formed part of the Theosophical headquarters in Adyar, India. Krishnamurti and his family had been living in the headquarters for a few months before this discovery. Krishnamurti was to be the

vessel for the indwelling of the coming "World Teacher" that many Theosophists were expecting. This new teacher would, in the pattern of Moses, Buddha, Zarathustra (Zoroaster), Christ, and Muhammad divulge a new dispensation, a new religious teaching. Theosophists believed that the teacher was a spiritual being who would dwell in the body vessel.

**Charles Leadbeater** believed he could read past lives, and did so on Krishnamurti who he claimed was really named Alcyone, publishing 30 such past lives in *The Theosophist* beginning April 1910 as *Lives of Alcyone*. "They ranged from 20,000 BC to 624 AD... Alycone was a female in eleven of them." (Lutyens, p 25)

Charles Leadbeater stayed in India for some time overseeing the raising of Krishnamurti, but eventually felt that he was being called to go to Australia for the cause. [Wikipedia: C.W. Leadbeater](#)