



# **HOW THEOSOPHY CAME TO ME**

**C. W. LEADBEATER**

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C. W. LEADBEATER**

1930

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## CHAPTER 1

### In Ancient Greece

My first touch with anything that could definitely be called Theosophy was in the year 504 b.c., when I had the wonderful honour and pleasure of visiting the great philosopher Pythagoras. I had taken birth in one of the families of the Eupatridæ at Athens—a family in fairly good circumstances and offering favourable opportunities for progress. This visit was the most important event in my youth, and it came about in this manner. A relation of mine offered to take me, along with a brother a year or two younger, for a voyage in a ship of which he was part owner. It was a trading voyage among the Greek islands and over to the Asiatic shore, and with the leisurely methods of those days it occupied nearly a year, during which we visited many places and saw not only much beautiful scenery but many marvellous temples adorned with exquisite sculpture.

Among other islands we called at Samos, and it was there that we found the great Pythagoras, who was then a man of advanced age and very near his death. Some historians have thought that this sage perished when his school at Krotona was wrecked by popular prejudice; others, recognizing that he survived that catastrophe, believe that he died much later at Metapontum. Neither of these ideas seems to be correct; when very old, he left his schools in Magna Græcia, and returned to his patrimony in Samos to end his days where he had begun them, and so it happened that we had this very great privilege of seeing him in the course of our voyage.

His principal disciple at that time was Kleineas (now the Master Djwal Kul); and Kleineas was exceedingly kind to us, and patiently answered all our eager questions, explaining to us the system of the Pythagorean philosophy. We were at once most strongly attracted towards the teaching expounded to us, and were anxious to join the school. Kleineas told us that a branch of it would presently be opened in Athens; and meantime he gave us much instruction in ethics, in the doctrine of reincarnation and the mystery of numbers. All too soon our vessel was ready for sea (it had fortunately

required refitting) and we had regretfully to take leave of Pythagoras and Kleineas. To our great and awed delight, when we called to bid him adieu, the aged philosopher blessed us and said with marked emphasis: “*πάλιν συναντήσομεθα*—we shall meet again.” Within a year or two we heard of his death, and so we often wondered in what sense he could have meant those words; but when in this present incarnation I had for the first time the privilege of meeting the Master Kuthumi, He recalled to my memory that scene of long ago, and said: “Did I not tell you that we should meet again?”

Soon after the death of Pythagoras, Kleineas fulfilled his promise to come and establish a school of the philosophy in Athens, and naturally my brother and I were among his first pupils. Large numbers were attracted by his teaching, and the philosophy took a very high place in the thought of the time. Except for what was actually necessary for the management of the family estate, I devoted practically the whole of my time to the study and teaching of this philosophy, and indeed succeeded to the position of Kleineas when he passed away.

### **My Early Attitude**

It may have been owing to this exclusive devotion to this higher thought that I had a very unusually long period in the heaven-world—just over 2,300 years. To what extent that fact affected my present life I cannot say; but I arrived in this incarnation without any definite memory of all that I had learnt at the cost of so much time and trouble. In my early life I knew nothing whatever of these matters, but in looking back now upon that period, I can see that I found myself in possession of a set of convictions which I had evidently brought over from that other life.

The middle of last century was a time of widespread materialism, of disbelief or at least uncertainty as to religious matters, and scornful denial of the possibility of any kind of non-physical manifestation. Even as a child I was aware that men were arguing hotly as to the existence of God and the possibility that there might be something in man which survives death; but when I heard such discussions I wondered silently how people could be so foolish, for I myself had an unshakable interior certainty on these points,

though I could not argue in defence of my belief, or indeed bring forth any reason to support it.

But I knew that there was a God, that He was good, and that death was not the end of life. Even at that age I was able to deduce from these certainties that all must somehow be well, although so often things appeared to be going ill. I remember well how horrified I was (and I am afraid very angry as well) when a small playfellow introduced to my notice the theory of hell. I promptly contradicted him, but he insisted that it must be true because his father had said so. I went home in great indignation to consult my own father on this incredible abomination; but he only smiled tolerantly and said: "Well, my boy, I don't for a moment believe it myself, but a great many people think so, and it is no use trying to convince them; you will just have to put up with it." So by degrees I learnt that one's own interior conviction, however strong, was ineffective as an argument against orthodox opinion.

One other curious little fragment of half-recollection I seem to have brought over from that Greek incarnation. As a child I used frequently to dream of a certain house, quite unlike any with which I was at that time familiar on the physical plane, for it was built round a central courtyard (with fountains and statues and shrubs) into which all the rooms looked. I used to dream of this perhaps three times a week, and I knew every room of it and all the people who lived in it; I used constantly to describe it to my mother, and to make ground-plans of it. We called it my dream-house. As I grew older I dreamt of it less and less frequently, until at last it faded from my memory altogether. But one day, much later in life, to illustrate some point my Master showed me a picture of the house in which I had lived in my last incarnation, and I recognized it immediately.

Although, as I have already said, I had the most absolute interior conviction with regard to the life after death, I soon came to recognize that in discussing the matter with others it would be an immense advantage to have something of the nature of physical-plane evidence to produce. It occurred to me that such evidence ought to be discoverable if one were disposed to give a certain amount of time and trouble to searching for it. I remembered when I was quite a boy coming across a copy of Mrs. Crowe's *Night Side of Nature*, which I read with the greatest interest; and it

seemed to me that if I could have the opportunity of investigating at first hand cases similar to those which she described I should surely in process of time be able to arrive at something definite which I could quote in answer to inquiries.

### **Personal Investigations**

Occasionally there would appear in some newspaper an account of the appearance of a ghost, or of curious happenings in a haunted house; and whenever anything of that sort came to my notice, I promptly travelled down to the scene of action, interrogated any witnesses that I could find, and spent a good deal of time and trouble in endeavouring personally to encounter the spectral visitant. Of course in a large number of instances I drew a blank; either there was no evidence worth mentioning, or the ghost declined to appear when he was wanted. Even when there was a witness to be found who had a reasonably credible story to tell, it seemed that the ghost did not stay long enough to say or do anything of special interest; or, perhaps, it was the witness who did not stay long enough!

Still, among the wearisome monotony of many failures there came sometimes a bright oasis of definite success, and I presently collected an amount of direct evidence which would have absolutely convinced me, if I had needed convincing. At the same time I also investigated a number of cases of what is called “second sight”, chiefly in the Highlands; and there again I found that it was easy for any unprejudiced person who was willing to take a little trouble to satisfy himself as to the genuineness of the phenomena.

### **Spiritualism**

Unfortunately I was at that time quite ignorant that there was another line of possible inquiry—that of spiritualism. The first time that, so far as I can recollect, I ever heard of such a thing was in connection with the séances held by Mr. D. D. Home with the Emperor Napoleon III. A series of articles describing them was written by the Rev. Maurice Davies in *The Daily Telegraph*; but the statements which he made seemed to me at that time quite incredible, and when reading one of the articles aloud to my mother



one evening I expressed strong doubts as to whether the description could possibly be accurate.

The article ended, however, with the remark that anyone who felt unable to credit the story might readily convince himself of its possibility by bringing together a few of his friends, and inducing them to sit quietly round a small table, either in darkness or in dim light, with the palms of their hands resting lightly upon the surface of the table. It was stated that a still easier plan was to place an ordinary silk hat upon the table, brim upwards, and let two or three people rest their hands lightly upon the brim. It was asserted that the hat or table would presently begin to turn, and in this way the existence of a force not under the control of anyone present would be demonstrated.

This sounded fairly simple, and my mother suggested that, as it was just growing dusk and the time seemed appropriate, we should make the experiment forthwith. Accordingly I took a small round table with a central leg, the normal vocation of which was to support a flower-pot containing a great arum lily. I brought in my own silk hat from the stand in the hall, and placed it on the table, and we put our hands upon its brim as prescribed. The only person present besides my mother and myself was a small boy of twelve, who, as we afterwards discovered, was a powerful physical medium but I knew nothing about mediums then. I do not think that any of us expected any result whatever, and I know that I was immensely surprised when the hat gave a gentle but decided half-turn on the polished surface of the table.

Each of us thought the other must have moved it unconsciously, but it soon settled that question for us, for it twirled and gyrated so vigorously that it was difficult for us to keep our hands upon it. At my suggestion we raised our hands; the hat came up under them, as though attached to them, and remained suspended a couple of inches from the table for a few moments before falling back upon it. This new development astonished me still more, and I endeavoured to obtain the same result again. For a few minutes the hat declined to respond, but when at last it *did* come up as before, it brought the table with it! Here was my own familiar silk hat, which I had never before suspected of any occult qualities, suspending itself mysteriously in the air from the tips of our fingers, and, not content with

that defiance of the laws of gravity on its own account, attaching a table to its crown and lifting that also! I looked down to the feet of the table; they were about six inches from the carpet, and no human foot was touching them or near them! I passed my own foot underneath, but there was certainly nothing there—nothing physically perceptible, at any rate.

Of course when the hat first moved it had crossed my mind that the small boy must somehow be playing a trick upon us; but in the first place he obviously was *not* doing so, and in the second he could not possibly have produced this result unobserved. After about two minutes the table dropped away from the hat, and almost immediately the latter fell back to its companion, but the experiment was repeated several times at intervals of a few minutes. Then the table began to rock violently, and threw the hat off—a plain hint to us, if any of us had known enough to take it. But none of us had any idea of what to do next, though we were keenly interested in these extraordinary movements. I was not myself thinking of the phenomenon in the least as a manifestation from the dead, but only as the discovery of some strange new force.

This rather frivolous beginning led me to make further inquiries, and I soon found that there was a considerable literature devoted to this subject, and that I might carry my investigations much further by séances with regular mediums. Of course I encountered a certain amount of fraud, and still more stupidity, but I was presently able to satisfy myself beyond all doubt that some at least of the manifestations were due to the action, of those whom we call the dead.

There is practically no phenomenon of which I read in spiritualistic books, or hear in spiritualistic circles, which I have not myself witnessed under definite test conditions. Any reader who wishes for a fuller account of my investigations and their result will find it in my book *The Other Side of Death*, or in that small part of the same book which is published separately under the title of *Spiritualism and Theosophy*.

I have related in considerable detail some of these events of my early life in order to make clear to my readers the attitude of mind in which I was when Theosophy eventually came before me, which I think explains the way in

which I instantaneously reacted to it. I ought perhaps just to mention one other incident of my pre-Theosophy life which, insignificant though it was in itself, predisposed me to the acceptance of much that I might otherwise have doubted.

### **A Story of Madame Blavatsky**

The very first news that I ever heard of our great Founder, Madame Blavatsky, was curious and characteristic, and the hearing of it was a most important event in my life, though I did not know it then. A staunch friend of my school-days took up the sea-life as his profession, and about the year 1879 he was second officer on board one of the coasting vessels of the British India Steam Navigation Co. On her voyage from Bombay to Colombo Madame Blavatsky happened to travel by that steamer, and thus my friend was brought into contact with that marvellous personality.

He told me two very curious stories about her. It seems that one evening he was on the bridge trying vainly to light a pipe in a high wind. Being on duty he could not leave the bridge, so he struck match after match only to see the flame instantly extinguished by the gale. Finally, with an expression of impatience, he abandoned the attempt. As he straightened himself he saw just below him a dark form closely wrapped in a cloak, and Madame Blavatsky's clear voice called to him:

"Cannot you light it, then?"

"No," he replied, "I do not believe that anyone could keep a match alight in such a wind as this."

"Try once more," said Madame Blavatsky.

He laughed, but he struck another match, and he assures me that, in the midst of that gale and quite unprotected from it, that match burnt with a steady flame clear down to the fingers that held it. He was so astounded that he quite forgot to light his pipe after all, but H. P. B. only laughed and turned away.

On another occasion during the voyage the first officer made, in Madame Blavatsky's presence, some casual reference to what he would do on the return voyage from Calcutta. (The steamers used to go round the coast from Bombay to Calcutta and back again.) She interrupted him, saying:

"No, you will not do that, for you will not make the return voyage at all. When you reach Calcutta you will be appointed captain of another steamer, and you will go in quite a different direction."

"Madame," said the first officer, "I wish with all my heart you might be right, but it is impossible. It is true I hold a master's certificate, but there are many before me on the list for promotion. Besides, I have signed an agreement to serve on the coasting run for five years."

"All that does not matter", replied Madame Blavatsky; "you will find it will happen as I tell you."

And it *did*; for when that steamer reached Calcutta it was found that an unexpected vacancy had occurred (I think through the sudden death of a captain), and there was no one at hand who could fill it but that same first officer. So the prophecy which had seemed so impossible was literally fulfilled.

Years afterwards, when I was on my way from Java to India with Mr. van Manen, I travelled on a steamer the captain of which was that very same man who had been the first officer of my friend's story, and he told us the tale from his point of view, exactly corroborating the original version.

These were points of no great importance in themselves, but they implied a good deal, and their influence on me was in an indirect manner considerable. For in less than a year after that conversation Mr. A. P. Sinnett's book *The Occult World* fell into my hands, and as soon as I saw Madame Blavatsky's name mentioned in it I at once recalled the stories related to me by my friend. Naturally the strong first-hand evidence which I had already had of her phenomenal powers predisposed me to admit the possibility of these other strange new things of which Mr. Sinnett wrote, and thus those two little stories played no unimportant part in my life, since

they prepared me for the instant and eager acceptance of Theosophical truths.

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## CHAPTER 2

### “The Occult World”

I have already mentioned that the first Theosophical book which fell into my hands was Mr. A. P. Sinnett’s *The Occult World*. I saw it advertised in a catalogue of second-hand books, and was much attracted by the title, so I sent for it immediately, and was fortunate enough to secure it. Naturally the stories which it contains interested me deeply, but its real fascination lay in the glimpses which it gave of a wonderful system of philosophy and of a kind of inner science which really seemed to explain life rationally and to account for many phenomena which I had observed.

I was of course eager to learn very much more of this, but I was so entirely unused to the ways of the literary world that I did not know in the least how to set about obtaining further information. With the benefit of later experience, I can see now that it would have been simple to write a note to the author and send it to the care of his publishers; but such a solution of the difficulty did not occur to me. At the end of his book Mr. Sinnett remarks:

Some readers who are interested, but slow to perceive what practical action they can take, may ask what they can do to show appreciation of this opportunity. My reply will be modelled on the famous injunction of Sir Robert Peel: “Register, register, register!” Take the first step towards making a response to the offer which emanates from the occult world—register, register, register; in other words, join the Theosophical Society—the one and only association which at present is linked by any recognized bond of union with the Brotherhood of Adepts in Thibet.

I was most anxious to follow this advice, but found it by no means easy to do so. The author mentioned that there was a Theosophical Society in London, but did not give its address, and I sought for it in vain in the Post Office Directory. I made many enquiries among friends, but did not happen to find anyone who could help me in my quest.

Shortly after that, however, I was in Scotland enquiring into the evidence for second-sight in the Highlands, and apparently by the merest chance (but I doubt whether anything ever happens by chance) I found on the table in the reading-room of a hotel a copy of a tiny spiritualistic magazine—hardly more than a leaflet; I think it was called *Rays of Light*, or some name like that. In it was an announcement referring to Dr. Anna Kingsford, President of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society, and stating that she was the wife of the rector or vicar of some West-country village or town—I think the name was Atcham. Naturally I seized upon this clue, and at once wrote to her at that vicarage, asking for further information. It was some time before I received a reply, for, as it transpired afterwards, Dr. Kingsford was away on the Continent for a holiday; and even when it arrived it proved to be only a printed circular—very beautifully printed, however, with much of silver about it. But it gave me the information which I wanted—the address of the Secretary in London, and it further told me that in order to join the Society I must be proposed and seconded by two members.

### **How I Joined**

The Secretary was Mr. Kirby (not the Mr. Kirby so well known in later years in connection with the Society's work in Italy, but the Kirby of Kirby and Spence's *Entomology*, a book which I had studied in my boyhood). I promptly wrote to him, pointing out that I wished to join, but had not the pleasure of the acquaintance of any of the existing members; what was I to do? Again I had to wait a long time for an answer, for Mr. Kirby also was abroad—I think climbing peaks in Switzerland; but at length he replied austere-ly that the rules were inviolable, and that no exception could be made, but suggested as an afterthought that I might call upon either Mr. A. P. Sinnett or Mr. G. B. Finch.

I adopted this suggestion and wrote a note to Mr. Sinnett, hardly daring, however, to hope that he could really be the author of the book which had impressed me so deeply. His reply soon set that point at rest, and invited me to come up to London to see him. He had only recently returned from India, and was then staying temporarily at the house of his mother-in-law, Mrs. Edensor, in Royal Crescent, Notting Hill. He received me with the greatest kindness and cordiality, and of course we talked much of his books (for by

that time I had found *Esoteric Buddhism* also) and the wonderful revelation which they contained. The more I heard of Theosophy the more anxious I became to learn all that could be told to me; but when I spoke of joining the Theosophical Society Mr. Sinnett became very grave and opined that that would hardly do, seeing that I was a clergyman!

I wondered rather why the Society should discriminate against members of the cloth; and at last I ventured timidly to put the question. Mr. Sinnett replied:

“Well, you see, we are in the habit of discussing every subject and every belief from the beginning, without any preconceptions whatever; and I am afraid that at our meetings you would be likely to hear a great deal that would shock you profoundly.”

I had already, years previously, attended some of Mrs. Besant's lectures at the Hall of Science in Old Street, off the City Road, and I thought that, after that, nothing that the members of the Theosophical Society could say would be likely to offend me very seriously; so I smilingly assured Mr. Sinnett that I hoped I was not *that* kind of clergyman and that I should be quite prepared to join in any discussion that might arise, irrespective of the beliefs of the debaters. At this Mr. Sinnett partially thawed, and even said that, if that were really the case, he should have peculiar pleasure in admitting a clergyman; but that before finally taking so decided a step he must consult his Council. So we had to leave it at that, and I returned to my country curacy fifty miles away in Hampshire.

### **Mr. A. P. Sinnett**

Within a week, however, I had a letter from Mr. Sinnett saying that the majority of the Council had agreed to my admission, and that if I would fill up the necessary forms he would be glad to propose me himself; and he further advised me to call upon Mr. G. B. Finch, who would probably second my application if I impressed him favourably. Mr. Finch proved to be just as kindly as Mr. Sinnett, and I was presently notified that I was at last accepted as a member of the Society, and that if I would call at his house on a certain evening I might be initiated. By that time Mr. Sinnett had moved into a



house of his own in Ladbroke Gardens, and thither I duly repaired at the appointed time.

I found that I was to be initiated into the mysteries of the Society along with two other applicants, Professor and Mrs. Crookes. Even then I realized the honour of being admitted along with so distinguished a scientist, for though Professor Crookes was not yet Sir William, I knew of him as the discoverer of thallium, the inventor of the radiometer, and the apostle of radiant matter. To join the Theosophical Society was in those days a somewhat formidable undertaking. We found Mrs. Sinnett's large drawing-room crowded to excess, the assembly in fact overflowing on to the landing and a little way up the staircase. I suppose there may have been some two hundred people present, including some who bore very distinguished names—such as Professor Myers, C. C. Massey, Stainton Moses and others. We three were planted together upon a sofa in the midst of the crowd, and Mr. Sinnett, after delivering a homily upon the objects and work of the Society, duly communicated to us a series of signs and passwords by means of which we were to be able to recognize our fellow-members in any part of the world. These signs and words have since dropped into abeyance in most countries, though I think that our President still gives them to any candidates whom she receives in India.

After this I missed very few of the Lodge meetings, coming up to London nearly every week. In fact, Mr. Sinnett was so hospitable as to give me a standing invitation to dine and spend the night at his house on these occasions, as I lived fifty miles away. At those dinners and at the meetings which followed them I met many well-known people, and heard many most interesting and instructive conversations. It must be remembered that all the teaching was at that time quite new to us, that there were many points on which our information was very imperfect, and that consequently there was much room for discussion. The planetary chains, the different planes of nature and the conditions of consciousness upon each of them—all these things came to us as a fresh revelation, and we had no small difficulty in harmonizing the scattered statements made in the replies which had been received to Mr. Sinnett's multifarious questions. The sun of our present President had not then risen above the Theosophical horizon, so we had no

one to disentangle the knotted skeins or to bring the apparently conflicting statements into harmony.

I remember creating a small sensation at the dinner-table by announcing that it seemed to me the obvious course that each of us should set before himself the definite intention of becoming a pupil of one of the great Adept Masters. The suggestion was apparently somewhat of a shock to those present, for it was received in dead silence; and it was only after an appreciable pause that Mr. Sinnett remarked that he supposed that Europeans could hardly hope for anything of that sort at the present stage of our knowledge—which was true enough, but I thought that we might at least set our faces determinedly in that direction.

These meetings of the London Lodge were almost our only sources of Theosophical information in those days. I think we were an exceptionally keen set of students, but there was really not very much for us to study. In addition to those two books of Mr. Sinnett's we had Madame Blavatsky's monumental work *Isis Unveiled* and also a fine book by Dr. Anna Kingsford called *The Perfect Way or The Finding of Christ*. This latter book contained a great deal of information, but it was given from a point of view entirely different from that of Mr. Sinnett's books and for most of us much more difficult to follow. *Isis Unveiled* is a vast chaos of most interesting matter, but we found it very difficult to deduce from it anything that could be called a coherent or definite system. But we struggled along as best we could, and a little later we had the very great encouragement of hearing that the Master Kuthumi was pleased with the efforts that we had made, and would send over from India one of His own disciples to help us in our work.

### **Mr. M. M. Chatterji**

This pupil was Mr. Mohini Mohun Chatterji, a young lawyer from Calcutta, and he reached London along with Colonel Olcott early in 1884. I must say that he proved exceedingly helpful to us, and it was from his addresses that we first gained a clear idea of the Path of Initiation and its requirements. A statement of these in his wording appears in the first of the celebrated *Transactions of the London Lodge*.

I remember well the occasion of his first appearance at one of Mr. Sinnett's evening receptions. Colonel Olcott and Mohini stood on the hearthrug in front of the grate and some two hundred people were brought and introduced to them one by one. Among these was the notorious Mr. Oscar Wilde, who always gave one the impression of wishing to be distinctive (not to say bizarre) both in manners and in dress. On that occasion, I remember, he was habited in black velvet, with knee breeches and white stockings. He came up to Mohini, was introduced, bowed gracefully and in retiring said in a very audible stage-whisper to Mrs. Sinnett: "I never realized before what a mistake we make in being white!" Mohini, being a Brahman, was quite unversed in Western customs, and I believe that it caused him acute discomfort to allow that crowd of wine-drinking Mlechhas to seize him by the hand. He looked very sick, but he endured it nobly, and of course none of us had the least idea what was the matter. He answered patiently a vast number of what must have seemed to him very foolish and incredibly ignorant questions, and came off with flying colours as the hero of the evening, most of the old ladies regarding him with reverential awe.

### **Mr. Eglinton**

In the course of my inquiries into spiritualism I had come into contact with most of the prominent mediums of that day, and had (as I have said before) seen every ordinary phenomena about which one reads in books upon that subject. One medium with whom I had much to do was Mr. Eglinton; and although I have heard stories told against him, I must bear witness that in all my own dealings with him I found him most straightforward, reasonable and courteous. He had various so-called controls—one a Red Indian girl who called herself Daisy, and chattered volubly on all occasions, appropriate or inappropriate. Another was a tall Arab, named Abdullah, considerably over six feet, who never said anything, but produced remarkable phenomena, and often exhibited feats showing great strength. I have seen him simultaneously lift two heavy men, one in each hand.

A third control who frequently put in an appearance was Ernest; he comparatively rarely materialized, but frequently spoke with direct voice, and wrote a characteristic and well-educated hand. One day in conversation with him something was said in reference to the Masters of the Wisdom;

Ernest spoke of Them with the most profound reverence, and said that he had on various occasions had the privilege of seeing Them. I at once enquired whether he was prepared to take charge of any message or letter for Them, and he said that he would willingly do so, and would deliver it when opportunity offered, but he could not say exactly when that would be.

I may mention here that in connection with this I had later a good example of the unreliability of all such communications. Some considerable time afterwards some spiritualist wrote to *Light* explaining that there could not possibly be such persons as the Masters, because Ernest had positively told him that there were not. I wrote to the same newspaper to say that I had it on precisely the same valueless authority that there were Masters, and that Ernest knew Them well. In each case Ernest had evidently reflected the thought of the questioner, as such entities so often do.

To return to my story, I at once provisionally accepted Ernest's offer. I said that I would write a letter to one of these Great Masters, and would confide it to him if my friend and teacher, Mr. Sinnett, approved. At the mention of this name the "spirits" were much perturbed; Daisy especially was very angry, and declared that she would have nothing to do with Mr. Sinnett under any circumstances; "Why, he calls us spooks!" she said, with great indignation. However, I blandly stuck to my point that all I knew of Theosophy had come to me through Mr. Sinnett, and that I therefore did not feel justified in going behind his back in any way, or trying to find some other means of communication without first consulting him.

Finally, though with a very bad grace, the spirits consented to this, and the séance presently terminated. When Mr. Eglinton came out of his trance, I asked him how I could send a letter to Ernest, and he said at once that if I would let him have the letter he would put it in a certain box which hung against the wall, from which Ernest would take it when he wished. I then posted off to Mr. Sinnett, and asked his opinion of all this. He was at once eagerly interested, and advised me promptly to accept the offer and see what happened.

### **A Letter to the Master**

Thereupon I went home and wrote three letters. The first was to the Master K. H., telling Him with all reverence that ever since I had first heard of Theosophy my one desire had been to place myself under Him as a pupil. I told Him of my circumstances at the time, and asked whether it was necessary that the seven years of probation of which I had heard should be passed in India. I put this letter in a small envelope and sealed it carefully with my own seal. Then I enclosed it in a letter to Ernest in which I reminded him of his promise, and asked him to deliver this letter for me, and to bring back an answer if there should be one.

That second letter I sealed in the same manner as the first, and then I enclosed that in turn with a short note to Eglinton, asking him to put it in his box, and let me know whether any notice was taken of it. I had asked a friend who was staying with me to examine the seals of both the letters with a microscope, so that if we should see them again we might know whether anyone had been tampering with them. By return of post I received a note from Mr. Eglinton, saying that he had duly put the note for Ernest into his box, and that it had already vanished, and further that if any reply should come to him he would at once forward it.

A few days later I received a letter directed in a hand which was unknown to me, and on opening it I discovered my own letter to Ernest apparently unopened, the name "Ernest" on the envelope being crossed out, and my own written underneath it in pencil. My friend and I once more examined the seal with a microscope, and were unable to detect any indication whatever that any one had tampered with the letter, and we both agreed that it was quite impossible that it could have been opened; yet on cutting it open I discovered that the letter which I had written to the Master had disappeared. All that I found inside was my own letter to Ernest, with a few words in the well-known handwriting of the latter written on its blank page, to the effect that my letter had been duly handed to the Great Master, and that if in the future I should ever be thought worthy to receive an answer Ernest would gladly bring it to me.

I waited for some months, but no reply came, and whenever I went to Eglinton's séances and happened to encounter Ernest, I always asked him when I might expect my answer.

He invariably said that my letter had been duly delivered, but that nothing had yet been said about an answer, and that he could do no more. Six months later I did receive a reply, but not through Ernest, and in it the Master said that though He had not received the letter (nor, as He remarked, was it likely that He should, considering the nature of the messenger) He was aware of what I had written and He now proceeded to answer it.

It will be necessary presently to explain what His answer was, and what steps I took in consequence of it; but before I can make that intelligible, I must turn aside to describe some other incidents which had occurred in the meantime while I was waiting in hope of receiving that reply.

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## CHAPTER 3

### Practical Work

Naturally, as soon as I had the main principles of Theosophy, as we knew it then, established in my mind, and had definitely set before myself the idea of aiming, at however great a distance in the future, at drawing nearer to the Feet of the Master, I became anxious to know whether there was not something that I could do to help in the practical work of the Society. I propounded this question to Mr. Sinnett, and in reply he opened a large drawer completely filled with letters, and said:

“All these are inquiries about Theosophy; every day they come pouring in upon me from all parts of the world; I struggle with them in a feeble sort of way, and answer a few each day; but I am entirely unable to cope with the torrent. I am already behindhand to this extent, and I shall obviously never overtake the accumulation, for the pile of arrears is increasing steadily day by day. If you are willing to take charge of this little assortment, and answer them as well as you can, you will really be doing an important service to a large number of people.”

I of course objected that I did not know nearly enough yet to take upon myself the office of expounder of the doctrine; but he replied:

“You have read all the books, you have attended nearly all the meetings; I am sure that you know as much of the teaching as I do myself. And besides, it is clearly a case of that or nothing. With all the other work that I have to do, I shall never be able to deal with them; whereas you may manage, in the seclusion of your country parish, to work through some of them at least; and after all, we can always consult upon any knotty points that arise.”

He was right in saying that I had done all in my power to familiarize myself with this wonderful new teaching. I had read both his books, not once but many times, each time, I think, appreciating their value more and more, and gaining a firmer grip of the ideas promulgated in them. So I filled a suit-case with those letters (there were 437 of them) and took them down into

Hampshire. I tackled the job with enthusiasm—I remember that I allowed myself only four hours' sleep each night—and eventually I actually did work my way through them. It was quite a heavy task, for there were no typewriters in those days, so that every word of those many thousands had to be written laboriously by hand.

Some of the questions were easy, and some were difficult; in many cases long explanations were necessary, because the inquirer seemed to have taken hold of the instruction in quite a wrong way; but I think I did my best with them. Of course I received a host of replies, so that that drawer-full of letters occupied most of my leisure time for many months. I may say that quite a number of new recruits joined the Society in consequence of that correspondence, and I also added largely to my list of friends—likewise to my own stock of Theosophical knowledge, for there is no better way of learning a subject thoroughly than trying to teach it to someone else.

### **Dr. Kingsford**

Let me pass on from these comparative trifles to an incident of real importance—my first meeting with Madame Blavatsky. But even before I can describe that, I must give a few words of preliminary explanation. Although Dr. Anna Kingsford was the President of the London Lodge, she was by no means entirely in accord with the teachings which its members were studying. Mr. Sinnett's information came to him in Oriental form from Oriental Teachers and in answer to a series of more or less haphazard questions which he had formulated; whereas what Dr. Kingsford taught, she knew from her own recollection of what she had learnt in a previous life.

The agreement in essentials was most remarkable, but the form in which the teaching was cast was widely different, and each form had its own set of terms, which were by no means always interchangeable. Usually at our meetings Mr. Sinnett would deliver an address or make a statement; but before we were allowed to discuss it or to ask for further information on doubtful points, Dr. Kingsford would always insist upon restating the whole matter in her terms and from her point of view. To almost all of us the Oriental statement was far more comprehensible than the Hermetic; and to our eager minds this unnecessary complication appeared intolerable, so that



Dr. Kingsford's long disquisitions were received with a certain amount of impatience. Not content with stating her own case, she sometimes came perilously near to casting animadversions upon Mr. Sinnett's presentation, and even upon the Masters from Whom it came. It will be readily understood that that tended to arouse considerable indignation in the minds of the members.

On one occasion the Lodge passed a resolution regretting the attitude adopted in a paper which she wrote; and the whole affair created a most undesirable feeling of tension. We even went so far as the publication of certain pamphlets in which the opposing cases were stated; and even Swami T. Subba Rao, far away in India, took part in the discussion. These conditions were still in evidence when Colonel Olcott and Mr. Mohini Mohun Chatterji arrived from India, and the Lodge practically divided itself into two very unequal parties, for Dr. Kingsford's only supporters were her uncle Mr. Maitland and a few personal friends whom she had brought in when she joined. If Madame Blavatsky herself had been with us she would probably have settled the dispute off-hand; but although she had left India along with Colonel Olcott, she had fallen very seriously ill in Paris, and was even supposed to be in considerable danger.

Presently we came to the end of our financial year, and the question arose of the election of a President for the next twelve months. It was, I think, the almost unanimous desire of the Lodge that Mr. Sinnett himself should be its nominal as well as its actual leader; but he was unwilling to accept the position, because in the pamphleteering he had expressed himself somewhat strongly against Dr. Kingsford, and he did not wish to carry this almost personal animosity into the politics of the Lodge. When the night of election came Mr. Maitland proposed the reappointment of Dr. Kingsford, but found only one or two members to support him, at which Dr. Kingsford showed most undignified annoyance. Mr. Sinnett then rose and proposed Mr. G. B. Finch, a barrister of Lincoln's Inn, who in his time had been Senior Wrangler at Cambridge. Being an able and kindly man, he was very popular with the members, and in fact that very meeting was being held in a long room in his chambers in Lincoln's Inn. He was at once elected by an

overwhelming majority, and we then appointed Mr. Sinnett as Secretary and proceeded to the work of the evening.

Dr. Kingsford, however, was obviously ill pleased with the result of the election, and her continual interruptions were more exasperating than ever. The President-Founder himself was in the Chair, but did not seem quite to know how to deal with the lady, and the meeting was dragging along in a dreary and fruitless manner. The room, as I have said, was long, and the door by which we entered was in one side of it, but near the end remote from the platform. The room was filled with benches which were hired temporarily for the purpose of the meeting. Now, it happened that my friend Mr. Varley and I had been a few minutes late, entering the room just after the proceedings had begun. So we slipped into an empty bench just opposite that door, and there were only two or three members in our immediate neighbourhood, although the upper end of the room was crowded. Colonel Olcott and Mohini were trying their best to extract something sensible and useful from a very wearisome and unprofitable discussion, and I suppose that we at the other end of the room were not paying any very close attention to the proceedings; when suddenly and sharply the door opposite to us opened, and a stout lady in black came quickly in and seated herself at the outer end of our bench.

### **I Meet Our Founder**

She sat listening to the wrangling on the platform for a few minutes, and then began to exhibit distinct signs of impatience. As there seemed to be no improvement in sight, she then jumped up from her seat, shouted in a tone of military command the one word “Mohini!” and then walked straight out of the door into the passage. The stately and dignified Mohini came rushing down that long room at his highest speed, and as soon as he reached the passage threw himself incontinently flat on his face on the floor at the feet of the lady in black. Many people arose in confusion, not knowing what was happening; but a moment later Mr. Sinnett himself also came running to the door, went out and exchanged a few words, and then, re-entering the room, he stood up on the end of our bench and spoke in a ringing voice the fateful words: “Let me introduce to the London Lodge as a whole—Madame Blavatsky!”

The scene was indescribable; the members, wildly delighted and yet half-awed at the same time, clustered round our great Founder, some kissing her hand, several kneeling before her, and two or three weeping hysterically. After a few minutes, however, she shook them off impatiently, and was led up to the platform by Colonel Olcott, and after answering a few questions she demanded from him an explanation of the unsatisfactory character of the meeting upon which she had descended so abruptly. The Colonel and Mr. Sinnett explained as well as they could; but she summarily ordered them to close the meeting, and called upon the officials to meet her at once in conference. The members departed in a condition of wild excitement and the officials waited upon Madame Blavatsky in one of the adjacent living rooms.

Now, as I had been invited to spend the night at Mr. Sinnett's, I, though a new and insignificant member, had to stay behind along with the greater people; and so it happened that I was a witness of the very remarkable scene which followed. Madame Blavatsky demanded a full account of the condition of the Lodge, and of the differences between Mr. Sinnett and Dr. Kingsford; and having received it, she proceeded to rate both of them exactly as if they had been a pair of naughty schoolboys, and finally actually made them both shake hands before us all as a token that their differences were amicably settled! Nevertheless, she ordered that Dr. Kingsford should form a Lodge of her own, in which doctrines could be discussed exclusively from her point of view. This order was carried out in a few days, the new branch taking the title of the Hermetic Lodge. So far as I remember, I do not think that it ever had more than a very small number of members, and I fancy that it soon faded into extinction.

Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott both accompanied our party to Mr. Sinnett's house, and stayed there until a late hour, Madame Blavatsky expressing vigorous condemnation of the inefficiency of the officials in not managing the meeting better. I was of course presented to her, and Mr. Sinnett took occasion to tell her of my letter to the spiritualistic journal *Light* on the subject of the spirit Ernest's disavowal of our Masters. When she heard that little story she looked at me very searchingly and remarked:

“I don’t think much of the clergy, for I find most of them hypocritical, bigoted and stupid; but that was a brave action, and I thank you for it. You have made a good beginning; perhaps you may do something yet.”

You may be very sure that after that I missed no opportunity of attending any meeting at which she was present; and though I was far too shy to push myself forward and ask questions, I nevertheless listened eagerly to every word that fell from her lips, and I think that in that way I learnt a very great deal.

I wish I could convey to my readers some adequate conception of what she was to me and to all of us who were so highly favoured as to come into close touch with her—of the truly tremendous impression that she made upon us, of the deep affection and the intense enthusiasm which she evoked.

Only a few of us who knew her in her physical body are now left, and I think it is at once our duty and our privilege to try to pass on to our younger brethren at least a few ideas round which they can build their mental image of our great Founder, since their karma was not such as to permit them to see her in the flesh.

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## CHAPTER 4

### Madame Blavatsky

Let me try for a moment to look at her as an outsider might have looked, if that be possible for me. Frankly, I do not think I can do that, because I love her with the deepest love, I reverence her more than anyone else, except her great Masters and mine. So perhaps I cannot look at her dispassionately from outside, but at least I am trying to do so. I have seen many strangers approach her. I will try to tell you what I have seen reflected in their faces and their minds. The first thing that strikes them all, the first thing that always struck me, was the tremendous power that she radiated. The moment one came into Madame Blavatsky's presence, one felt that here was some one who counted—some one who could *do* things, emphatically one of the great ones of the world; and I think that none of us ever lost that feeling.

There were assuredly many people who disagreed with various things that she said; there were others of us who followed her enthusiastically. She was so strong a person that I have never seen anyone among the thousands who met her who was indifferent to her. Some of them absolutely hated her, but more were immensely impressed by her. Many were almost awed by her; but those who knew her best loved her with a never-failing emotion, and love her still. I have recently seen some of those who knew her well, and it does seem that in every one of them the memory of her is just as green as it is in my own heart, and we have never ceased to love her. The impression that she made was indescribable. I can well understand that some people were afraid of her. She looked straight *through* one; she obviously saw everything there was in one—and there are men who do not like that. I have heard her make sometimes very disconcerting revelations about those to whom she spoke.

I say that that overwhelming sense of power was the first thing that was borne in upon one; and then it is difficult to say what came next, but there was a sense of dauntless courage about her which was very refreshing,

outspokenness to the verge of—one could not quite say rudeness, but she spoke out exactly what she thought and exactly what she felt; there, again, there are people who do not like that, who find it rather a shock to meet naked truth; but that was what she gave them. Prodigious force was the first impression, and perhaps courage, outspokenness, and straightforwardness were the second.

I suppose most of us have heard that she was often accused of deception by those who disliked or feared her. Enemies thought her guilty of fraud, of forgery, of all kinds of extraordinary things. Those who repeat such slanders in the present day are all people who have never seen her, and I venture to say that if any of those who talk about her now could have been in her presence for an hour they would have realized the futility of their aspersions. I can understand that certain other things might have been said against her—for example, that she rode a little roughshod over people's prejudices sometimes; perhaps it is a good thing for people to have their prejudices exposed occasionally; but to accuse her of forgery or deception was utter folly to any of us who knew her. It was even said that she was a Russian spy. (There was a great scare at the time that Russia had designs on India.) If there ever was on this earth a person who was absolutely unsuited for the work of a spy, that person was Madame Blavatsky. She could not have kept up the necessary deception for ten minutes; she would have given it all away by her almost savage outspokenness. The very idea of deception of any sort in connection with Madame Blavatsky is unthinkable to anyone who knew her, who had lived in the same house with her, and knew how she spoke straight out exactly what she thought and felt. Her absolute genuineness was one of the most prominent features of her marvellously complex character.

I think the next thing which must have impressed the outsider was the brilliance of her intellect. She was without exception the finest conversationalist that I have ever met—and I have seen many. She had the most wonderful gift for repartee; she had it almost to excess, perhaps. She was full, too, of knowledge on all sorts of out-of-the-way subjects; I mean subjects more or less connected with our line of thought—but then it is difficult to realize how very wide is the range of thought which we include

under the head of Theosophy. It involves knowing something at any rate along quite a large number of totally different lines. Madame Blavatsky had that knowledge. Whatever might turn up in the course of conversation, Madame Blavatsky always had something to say about it, and it was always something distinctly out of the common.

Whatever else she may have been, she was never commonplace. She always had something new, striking, interesting, unusual to tell us. She had travelled widely, chiefly in little-known parts of the world, and she remembered everything, apparently, even the slightest incident that ever occurred to her. She was full of all kinds of sparkling anecdotes, a wonderful *raconteuse*, one who could tell her story well and make her point effective. She was a remarkable person in that respect, as in so many others.

Soon, with a little more intimate talk, one encountered the great central pivot of her life—her intense devotion to her Master. She spoke of Him with a reverence that was beautiful—all the more beautiful from the fact that one could not describe Madame Blavatsky as exactly of a reverent nature. On the contrary, she always saw the humorous side of anything and everything. Apart from this one great central fact, she would sometimes make a joke about things that some of us would have considered sacred; but that was because her utter straight-forwardness made her detest anything in the nature of a sham or pretence, and there is a great deal of what passes for reverence which is really only empty-mindedness, though well akin perhaps to respectability.

What she called bourgeois respectability was rather in the nature of a red rag to Madame Blavatsky, because often there is so much hypocrisy in the keeping up of outer appearances while inside there are thoughts and feelings which are not respectable at all. In such cases she tore away the veil and exposed the things underneath, which did not please the unfortunate victim; because of that characteristic one would not have called her a reverential person. But the moment she spoke of her Master her voice fell into a tone of loving awe, and one could see that her feeling towards Him was the very life of her. Her utter trust in Him, and her love and reverence for Him, by contrast with the fact that she was not ordinarily reverent, were very beautiful to see.

I think those were the most prominent facts that a stranger would have seen in her. Our younger members, when they grow up and have read her books and realized a little of what we owe her, may quote her and say what a wonderful person she was; and then, quite possibly, they may meet people who will tell them that she was exposed, and was found to have acted fraudulently. Let them ask such slanderers:

“Did you know her?”

“O no”, they will reply, “of course I did not.”

You who have read this can rejoin:

“I have read an account written by one who *did* know her, who knew her exceedingly well; and he said that all such stories were absolutely and utterly untrue—that it was quite impossible that she could have performed any of those fraudulent actions; she could not have deceived people in the way that was stated.”

I could give you many instances in which she was accused of deception, and I can tell you exactly what it was that really happened, and can assure you that there was no fraud whatever in the matter. That much I do know for myself. You may hear much of a certain report made by a Commissioner of the Society for Psychical Research, who went out to India to investigate her case. If anyone quotes that to you, you can tell them that I, who am still living, was in Adyar when that young man (a very conceited young man he was, I am sorry to say), came out to make his report, and I can tell you certain things about that report which show how unreliable it was, though I am sure that he was honest in his intention. I am told that many years later he acknowledged to our present President that if he had known as much about psychic matters in 1884 as he knew at the time of speaking, his report would have been very different.

He decided against H. P. B. in regard to the letters which came from the Masters, saying that she had written them herself. I have myself received such letters when she was thousands of miles away. I have seen them come in her presence, and I have seen them come when she was far away, and I know by irrefutable evidence that she did not write those letters. I tell you



this because I think it is valuable for you to be able to say that you have seen or known of someone who is willing to bear personal testimony that there was no fraud about such things. The testimony of one eye-witness outweighs the prejudice of many people who, not being present, hear these things only at third or thirteenth hand.

Remember that, humanly speaking, without Madame Blavatsky there would have been no Theosophical Society, there would have been no presentation of all this glorious teaching to the people of the West. Perhaps there I am saying a little more than I should, because the Great Ones who stand behind made simultaneous efforts through two channels, Madame Blavatsky being one, and Dr. Anna Kingsford the other. I knew both of them. I can only say that while Dr. Kingsford's presentation was wonderful and interesting, it has not made much impression, has not taken hold of the world to any appreciable extent; whereas the existence of the Theosophical Society shows what Madame Blavatsky's presentation did.

Even the Theosophical Society shows only a small part of her work; for, for every member of this Society there may well be ten, twelve, or twenty non-members who have read the books and acquired much Theosophical knowledge. So her teaching has spread out of all proportion to the size of her Society. That is what Madame Blavatsky has done for us, and for the world, and for that we owe her our love and our gratitude. She told us always:

"These are the facts; but do not believe them because I say so. Use your own reason and common-sense; give life to the teaching, and prove it for yourselves. Don't carp or grumble or criticize; *work*."

We who accepted her challenge, we who followed her advice, soon found that her statements were justified, that her teachings were true. So to you, her followers of the present day, I would say: "Go you, and do likewise."

See to it, all of you, that we never forget her—that on White Lotus Day every year, as she desired, we commemorate the occasion. She did not ask that anyone should speak of her, though our love and reverence lead us always to do that. She did not even ask that her own books should be read; but she did ask that something should be read from the *Bhagavad-Gita* and

from *The Light of Asia*, and that is always done in every Theosophical Lodge unto this day, and I hope that it always will be, and that we shall never allow the memory of our Founder to pass from our minds. I should like you to realize the fact, and to keep it ever in your minds, that all that we have and all that we have learnt, through whatever form it may now be coming to us, we really owe to Madame Blavatsky.

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## CHAPTER 5

### The Letter Answered

It will be remembered that in a previous chapter I mentioned a letter which I had addressed to the Master Kuthumi, confiding it to a spirit named Ernest for delivery. I received a reply eventually—but not through Ernest and not until the very eve of Madame Blavatsky's departure for India. The text of the Master's letter to me will be found in Mr. Jinarājadāsa's book *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, p. 27. He told me that it was not necessary to be in India during the seven years of probation—that a chela could pass them anywhere. He warned me that as a Priest of the Christian Church I had a certain share in the collective karma of that body, and He distinctly intimated that there was much in that karma which was terribly evil. He suggested that I might go to Adyar for a few months, to see whether I could work with the Headquarters staff, and added the significant remark: "He who would shorten the years of probation has to make sacrifices for Theosophy." His letter concluded with the words:

**You ask me what rules you must observe during this time of probation, and how soon you might venture to hope that it could begin I answer: You have the making of your own future in your own hands, as shown above, and every day you may be weaving its woof. If I were to demand that you should do one thing or the other, instead of simply advising, I should be responsible for every effect that might flow from the step, and you acquire but a secondary merit. Think, and you will see that this is true. So cast the lot yourself into the lap of Justice, never fearing but that its response will be absolutely true. Chelaship is an educational as well as a probationary stage, and the chela alone can determine whether it shall end in adeptship or failure. Chelas, from a mistaken idea of our system, too often watch and wait for orders, wasting precious time which should be taken up with personal effort. Our cause needs missionaries, devotees, agents, even martyrs perhaps. But it cannot demand of any man to make himself either.**

**So now choose and grasp your own destiny—and may our Lord's the Tathagata's memory aid you to decide for the best. <sup>1</sup>**

I wished to say in answer to this that my circumstances were such that it would be impossible for me to come to Adyar for three months, and then return to the work in which I was then engaged; but that I was perfectly ready to throw up that work altogether, and to devote my life absolutely to His service. Ernest having so conspicuously failed me, I knew of no way to send this message to the Master but to take it to Madame Blavatsky, and as she was to leave England on the following day for India, I hastened up to London to see her.

It was with difficulty that I induced her to read the letter, as she said very decidedly that such communications were intended only for the recipient. I was obliged to insist, however, and at last she read it and asked me what I wished to say in reply. I answered to the above effect, and asked her how this information could be conveyed to the Master. She replied that He knew it already, referring of course to the exceedingly close relation in which she stood with Him, so that whatever was within her consciousness was also within His when He wished it.

She then told me to wait by her, and not to leave her on any account. She adhered absolutely to this condition, even making me accompany her into her bedroom when she went to put on her hat and, when a cab was required, declining to allow me to leave the room and go to the door to whistle for it. I could not at all understand the purpose of this at the time, but afterwards I realized that she wished me to be able to say that she had never been out of my sight for a moment between the time when she read my letter from the Master and my receipt of the reply to it. I remember as vividly as if it were yesterday how I rode with her in that hansom cab, and the bashful embarrassment that I felt, caused partly by the honour of doing so, and partly by my fear that I must be inconveniencing her horribly, for I was crushed side ways into a tiny corner of the seat, while her huge bulk

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Jinarājadāsa adds the following note: "Our Lord's the Tathagata's memory," is a most striking phrase, understood only many long years after the receipt of the letter. It refers to incidents in past lives of long ago, when C. W. L. had seen the Great Lord face to face. It is as if the Master tried in this manner to go behind the personality of C. W. L. direct to the Ego, in whose consciousness the great truths existed as matters of direct knowledge.

weighed down her side of the vehicle, so that the springs were grinding all through the journey. Mr. and Mrs. Cooper-Oakley were to accompany her on the voyage to India, and it was to their house that I went with her very late that night—in fact, I believe it was after mid-night, so I really ought to say very early the next morning.

### **My First Phenomenon**

Even at that hour a number of devoted friends were gathered in Mrs. Oakley's drawing-room to say farewell to Madame Blavatsky, who seated herself in an easy-chair by the fireside. She was talking brilliantly to those who were present, and rolling one of her eternal cigarettes, when suddenly her right hand was jerked out towards the fire in a very peculiar fashion, and lay palm upwards. She looked down at it in surprise, as I did myself, for I was standing close to her, leaning with an elbow on the mantel-piece: and several of us saw quite clearly a sort of whitish mist form in the palm of her hand and then condense into a piece of folded paper, which she at once handed to me, saying: "There is your answer." Every one in the room crowded round, of course, but she sent me away outside to read it, saying that I must not let anyone see its contents. It was a very short note and ran as follows:

**Since your intuition led you in the right direction and made you understand that it was *my desire* you should go to Adyar *immediately*, I may say more. The sooner you go the better. Do not lose one day more than you can help. Sail on the 5th, if possible. Join Upasika<sup>2</sup> at Alexandria. Let no one know that you are going, and may the blessing of our Lord and my poor blessing shield you from every evil in your new life.**

**Greeting to you, *my new chela*.**

**K. H.**

### **Marching Orders**

<sup>2</sup> Upasika means a disciple in a female body; our Masters often spoke of Madame Blavatsky by this title.

In occult matters to hear is to obey. Madame Blavatsky left London later on in the same day for Liverpool, where she boarded the s.s. *Clan Drummond*. Meantime I was bustling round to steamer offices trying to obtain a passage for myself. The P. and O. steamer which was to leave on the 5th had absolutely not a single vacant berth in any class, so I was reluctantly compelled to seek elsewhere. After many inquiries the only opportunity that offered itself was to take the Messageries Mari-times s.s. *Erymanthe* from Marseilles to Alexandria, and in order to do that I had to leave London on the night of the 4th. I hurried down to Hampshire to pack my goods and chattels and to make my final arrangements; and I may say that I did not go to bed until after I had left England! Mohini and Miss Francesca Arundale were at Charing Cross Station to see me depart and give me their earnest good wishes for the strange new life which was opening before me.

### **In Quarantine**

I reached Marseilles in the ordinary course, only to find that there was supposed to be cholera in the town. I embarked upon the *Erymanthe*, and I remember that our voyage through the Mediterranean was rather rough. On that voyage I read *Esoteric Buddhism* for the tenth time; we were fairly thorough in our studies in those days. When we reached Alexandria I found, to my immense disgust, that because of that rumour of cholera at Marseilles the Egyptian authorities proposed to put us all in quarantine for five days. You may imagine my impatience, and my fear that the delay might cause me to miss Madame Blavatsky altogether. They would not allow us to stay in the town, but carried us off to some barracks at Ramleh, where they charged us £1 a day for very unsatisfactory accommodation. Of course we were all of us perfectly well, and we were fully persuaded that the whole affair was a farce, played simply in order to extract money from us; and the broad smiles of the Egyptian officials showed that they thoroughly appreciated the situation.

At our only point of communication with the outer world there was a very heavy double fence, the component parts of which were perhaps five yards apart. A sort of little wooden railway ran across from one of these fences to the other, and a box with a rope attached to each end of it was hauled backwards and forwards to bring in supplies from without or to deliver our

letters and any articles which we might wish to buy. A large bowl of water was placed in the box and we were ordered to throw into it any coins with which we wanted to pay for our purchases, while letters which we sent out to be posted were stabbed in two or three places and rigorously fumigated. The proceedings were more than ridiculous, and we kept up an attitude of feebly joking with the attendants, insisting that when any change had to be sent across to us, it also should be thrown into the water!

By means of one of the mutilated letters I communicated with the British Consul and learnt from him that Madame Blavatsky and her party had duly arrived, but had gone on to Port Said, where they were awaiting me. As soon as we were released from ourance vile I posted off to the Hotel Abbat to have a real bath and some decent food, and then proceeded to inquire as to transit to Port Said. There was no railway in those days, and I found that my next opportunity was again to take the steamer *Erymanthe*, which had also been detained in quarantine just as we had. We should certainly have been far more comfortable if they had had the sense to leave us on board her, but as we were passengers for Alexandria they would not do that; besides, in that case, the steamer instead of the Egyptian Government would have had our £1 a day!

### **We Meet Again**

We sailed the same evening, and reached Port Said on the following morning, where Mr. A. J. Cooper-Oakley came off to meet me, and took me ashore to a hotel where I found Madame Blavatsky and Mrs. Oakley sitting on the veranda. Madame Blavatsky's last word to me in London had been: "See that you do not fail me"; and now her greeting was: "Well, Leadbeater, so you have really come in spite of all difficulties." I replied that of course I had come, and that when I made a promise I also made a point of keeping it; to which she answered only: "Good for you!" and then plunged into an animated discussion—all discussions in which Madame Blavatsky took part were invariably animated—which had evidently been interrupted by my arrival. Though she said no more than this, she was clearly pleased that I had come, and seemed to regard my presence in her retinue as a kind of card in the game which she had to play. She was returning to India expressly in order to refute the wicked slanders of the Christian College missionaries,

and she appeared to consider that to bring back with her a clergyman of the Established Church who had abandoned a good position in that Church to become her enthusiastic pupil and follower was somehow an argument in her favour.

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## CHAPTER 6

### **An Abrupt Change**

Our last chapter ended with my meeting with Madame Blavatsky at a hotel at Port Said, where I fondly expected that we might wait in peace until our steamer arrived. I did not know Madame Blavatsky as well then as I came to do later, or I should probably have felt less sanguine. I engaged a bedroom and hunted out a few score mosquitoes from inside the curtains of its bed, and was already looking forward with pleasure to the idea of settling down for the night. Soon after darkness fell, however, Madame Blavatsky had one of those sudden flashes of inspiration which so frequently came to her from the inner side of things. She usually attributed them to one or other of those whom she called the Brothers—a term under which she included not only some of the Masters but also a number of Their disciples. In this case the hint which she received completely upset all our plans, for she was instructed that instead of waiting quietly for our steamer we were to post off immediately to Cairo, where we should obtain some information that would be of great use to her in dealing with her treacherous servants, the Coulombs.

### **The Khedive's Packet-Boat**

In those days there was no railway running from Port Said, and the only way in which we could reach Cairo was by travelling down the Suez Canal as far as Ismailia, whence we could take train to the capital. The journey down the canal was performed in a tiny little steamer somewhat like a tug-boat, which was dignified with the name of the Khedive's packet-boat. Every night it left Port Said at midnight and reached Ismailia in the early morning. In spite of its high-sounding name it was perhaps the dirtiest and least convenient craft which I have encountered; but of course we had to make the best of it. In the stern there was a little hutch about ten feet square which was called the general cabin, and out of that at the back opened a kind of cupboard which was labelled as the ladies' room. It was, however, windowless, so that when

the door was shut it was in perfect darkness. This we resigned to Madame Blavatsky.

Mr. Oakley, who was much fatigued and, I think, somewhat upset by the sudden change in our plans, threw himself down on a hard wooden seat at one side of the general cabin; while Mrs. Oakley and I, having regard to the army of enormous cockroaches which was already in full possession of both cabins, preferred to spend the night in walking up and down the few yards of open deck, which gave us about six steps each way as the limit of our promenade. We paused occasionally to glance in at Mr. Oakley, but he slept on peacefully, although absolutely covered by the loathsome creatures already mentioned—and others. Mrs. Oakley, who was a particularly fastidious person in ordinary life, was somewhat depressed—perhaps not unnaturally; so I did my best to comfort her with glowing pictures of the glory and beauty which I hoped were awaiting us in India.

This went on for some hours until the monotony was suddenly broken by pitiable cries from Madame Blavatsky in her cupboard. Mrs. Oakley at once dashed in bravely, facing the insect plague with only a momentary shudder; but she found Madame Blavatsky very ill. and in great pain, and vehemently demanding conveniences which on that squalid little tug-boat simply did not exist. Fortunately our next stop was at the village of Kantara—the place where the pilgrim-track from Cairo to Jerusalem crosses the canal; and we prevailed on the captain of our funereal craft to wait for us there for a few minutes. There was of course nothing in the nature of a gangway, nor even a wharf; but they produced from somewhere a plank—an ordinary builder's plank, perhaps a foot in width, and Mr. Oakley and I had to carry our unfortunate leader ashore by that means. (Madame Blavatsky at that time weighed 245 pounds; I know because I weighed her myself on the butcher's steel-yard on board the s.s. *Navarino* a few days later.)

You may imagine that it was nervous work, and Madame Blavatsky's language on the occasion was more conspicuous for strength than suavity. But somehow or other the feat was achieved; we conveyed her safely ashore, and back again on board a little later—which was even a more

serious undertaking, because of the pronounced upward slope of the plank. She was restored to her cubby-hole, and the heroic Mrs. Oakley sat beside her until she sank to sleep. I believe Mr. Oakley went to sleep again; but his wife, as soon as she could leave our leader, came and paced the deck with me until in the pale gold of the Egyptian morning we moored beside the wharf at Ismailia.

### **Ismailia**

There was an interval of some hours before our train started, so it seemed reasonable to go to a hotel and have some breakfast. There were at that time two hotels in the town, and their respective touts were vehemently pressing their claims on the wharf. Mr. Oakley, who was supposed to be the business man of the party, made some sort of a bargain with one of them. Madame Blavatsky, though still looking pale, was able to come on shore and to walk slowly up and down the wharf, but she did not seem anxious for companionship, and in fact rather repelled it. We saw her exchange a few words with one or two officials and with the men from the hotels; and when a little later a dilapidated carriage drove up and we wished to start for the hotel, the two porters at once engaged in a savage fight over our luggage.

When we called on the station-master to interfere, it transpired that while Mr. Oakley had made an arrangement with one of these men Madame Blavatsky had meantime engaged the other, and naturally, as she spoke in Arabic, we had no inkling of this proceeding on her part until the time came for our departure. So we had to go to the hotel which she had chosen, and to pacify the other unfortunate man as well as we could. Matters were sorted out eventually, of course by bribing both parties to the quarrel, and at last we were allowed to depart in peace and partake of our breakfast. Poor Madame Blavatsky still suffered somewhat, and was evidently not in the best of humours; but she indignantly scouted the timid suggestion that we should spend a day at Ismailia in order that she might recover her strength. So in due course we took our places in the train.

### **A Message**

As the journey continued Madame Blavatsky gradually recovered her strength, and a little conversation arose; but it was distinctly coloured by the

influence of the previous night, for our leader favoured us with the most gloomy prognostications of our future fate:

“Ah! you Europeans”, she said, “you think you are going to enter upon the path of occultism and pass triumphantly through all its troubles; you little know what is before you; you have not counted the wrecks by the wayside as I have. The Indians know what to expect, and they have already passed through tests and trials such as have never entered into your wildest dreams; but you, poor feeble things, what can you do?”

She continued these Cassandralike prophecies with a maddening monotony, but her audience was far too reverential to try to change the subject. We sat in the four corners of the compartment, Madame Blavatsky facing the engine, and Mr. Oakley sitting opposite to her with the resigned expression of an early Christian martyr; while Mrs. Oakley, weeping profusely, and with a face of ever-increasing horror, sat opposite to me. For myself, I had a sort of feeling like putting up an umbrella against a heavy shower, but I reflected that after all a good many other men had entered upon that path and had reached its goal, and it seemed to me that even if I could not reach it in this life I could at any rate lay a good foundation for the work of the next incarnation. *Che sara, sara!*

In those prehistoric days trains were usually lit by smoky oil lamps, and in the centre of the roof of each compartment there was a large round hole into which porters inserted these lamps as they ran along the roofs of the carriages. This being a day train, however, there was no lamp, and one could see the blue sky through the hole. It happened that Mr. Oakley and I were both leaning back in our respective corners, so that we both saw a repetition of the phenomenon which I have previously described as occurring in England; we saw a kind of ball of whitish mist forming in that hole, and a moment later it had condensed into a piece of folded paper, which fell to the floor of our compartment. I started forward, picked it up, and handed it at once to Madame Blavatsky, taking it for granted that any communication of this nature must be intended for her. She at once unfolded it and read it, and I saw a red flush appear upon her face.

“Umph,” she said, “that’s what I get for trying to warn you people of the troubles that lie before you,” and “she” threw the paper to me.

“May I read it?” I said, and her only reply was: “Why do you think I gave it to you?”

I read it and found it to be a note signed by the Master Kuthumi, suggesting very gently but quite decidedly that it was perhaps a pity, when she had with her some earnest and enthusiastic candidates, to give them so very gloomy a view of a path which, however difficult it might be, was destined eventually to lead them to joy unspeakable. And then the message concluded with a few words of kindly commendation addressed to each of us by name. I am sorry that I cannot be quite certain of the exact wording of that message, though I am sure that I have correctly reproduced its general tenor. The little sentence addressed personally to me was: “Tell Leadbeater that I am satisfied with his zeal and devotion.”

### **A Little Dust**

I need hardly say that we were all much comforted and uplifted and filled with gratitude; but, though no rebuke could possibly have been more gently worded, it was evident that Madame Blavatsky did not altogether appreciate it. Before our conversation began she had been reading some book which she wished to review for *The Theosophist*, and she was still sitting with the book open upon her knee and the paper-knife in her hand. She now resumed her reading, stroking the dust of the desert (which came pouring in at the open window) off the pages of the book with her paper-knife as she read. When an especially vicious puff came in Mr. Oakley started forward and made a motion as if to close the window; but Madame Blavatsky looked up at him balefully, and said with unmeasured scorn: “You don’t mind a little dust, do you?” Poor Mr. Oakley shrank back into his corner like a snail into its shell, and not another word did our leader utter until we steamed into the station at Cairo. The dust certainly was rather trying, but after that one remark we thought it best to suffer it in silence. I remember that poor Mrs. Oakley was wearing one of those curious contrivances which ladies call a feather boa; and before we reached Cairo

the whole thing was just a solid rope of sand, the feathers being indistinguishable.

### **Another Abrupt Change**

At Cairo we engaged a carriage and drove as a matter of course to Shepherd's Hotel, that being the usual resort of English people. It would seem that some thirty or forty other people had the same idea, for we found the great entrance-hall crowded, and everything in dire confusion. Our luggage, of which we had a considerable amount, had been piled upon the floor in the middle of the hall; and Madame Blavatsky sat upon it, while Mr. Oakley was trying to fight his way through the crowd to the clerk's desk in order to engage rooms for us. He had barely succeeded in doing this—in fact, he was still struggling in the crowd on his way back to us—when she jumped up from her seat and called to him excitedly, telling him that we were not to stay at Shepherd's at all, but instead were to make our way to the Hotel d'Orient, which had been kept by the Coulombs during their stay in Egypt—the suggestion being that in that house we could acquire a good deal of information which would be of use to Madame Blavatsky when she came to deal with them later.

Of course this caused the usual confusion; poor Mr. Oakley had to go back and countermand the rooms which he had engaged, and we made our way to the other hotel, which, though certainly less fashionable, proved comfortable enough. It was in the Ezbekieh Square, and we had some pleasant rooms looking out over the garden. We stayed there for several days, and the suggestion which had been made to Madame Blavatsky bore much fruit, as she was able to obtain from the present host and hostess of the hotel, and from some servants who had worked in the house for some years, numerous evidential details of unreliable and discreditable conduct on the part of the previous occupants.

### **An Elder Brother**

It was in Madame Blavatsky's room in that hotel that I first saw one of the members of the Brotherhood. While sitting on the floor at her feet, sorting out some papers for her, I was startled to see standing between us a man who had certainly not entered by the door, which was straight before me

the whole time, and had not opened. I jumped up uttering a sharp exclamation of surprise, which caused Madame to laugh inordinately. She said banteringly:

“You will not go far on the path of occultism if you are so easily startled at a little thing like that.”

Then she presented me to the visitor, who proved to be he who is now the Master Djwal Kul, although he had not then taken the Initiation which made him an Adept.

Our stay in Egypt was in many ways a most remarkable experience, as Madame Blavatsky constantly told us much of the inner side of what we saw there. She had been in Egypt before, and was well acquainted with some of the officials, including the Prime Minister, Nubar Pasha, who very kindly invited us all to dinner. She also seemed to know quite intimately the Russian Consul, Monsieur Hitrovo, who was exceedingly kind and attentive to her, sending her every morning a great bouquet of lovely flowers, and treating her in every way as a lady of the highest distinction, as of course she really was in her own country. Also she introduced us to Monsieur Maspero, the Curator of the Boulak Museum, as it was then. I remember particularly how we went through the Museum with this gentleman and how Madame Blavatsky was able to give him a great mass of most interesting information about the various curiosities that were under his care.

### **A Gruesome Ceremony**

We saw many strange things, and it was of course an enormous advantage to us to have with us one who understood so well the Oriental customs, and could explain the meaning of much that without her we could not have comprehended. I remember one day we were looking out of the window of the hotel, when we saw a number of men, obviously Muhammadans, gather together in a circle in the garden of the Square, all facing inwards. After some preliminary mutterings they all began to go through a sort of exercise of extraordinary violence, raising their hands above their heads as high as they could reach, bending backwards as far as possible, and then swinging forwards until with the tips of their fingers they touched the ground in front

of them; and each time they made that convulsive swing they all shouted in unison the name of God—"Al-lah-ha!"

This remarkable performance went on for about half-an-hour and then quite suddenly they all executed a left turn, so that, although still standing in a ring, they were one behind the other. Then each put his hands on the shoulders of the man in front of him, and they began to run round in that ring, all *barking in unison* exactly like dogs. This continued for perhaps five minutes, and then one of the men fell out of the circle and sank to the ground in a fit, struggling horribly and foaming at the mouth. In a few moments all the rest were in the same condition, and the scene was most hideous. After a little while one by one they seemed to recover, and sat up looking round in a dazed sort of way, and presently they helped one another to their feet and staggered away.

But the extraordinary thing was that all the passers-by in that crowded street took the whole thing as a matter of course, and no one even stopped to watch these men—still less to offer any assistance. Madame Blavatsky told us that they belonged to a certain sect which made a practice of such a performance, and that by means of it they believed themselves to become possessed by certain spirits from whom, while in that condition, they could obtain all sorts of useful information—such as, for example, where a buried treasure might be found—or that they could receive advice as to any difficulty in which they might happen to find themselves. She also described to us in the most gruesome manner the peculiarly ghastly and evil elemental creatures which they gathered round themselves by this abominable ceremony.

### **She Knew Arabic**

Madame Blavatsky understood Arabic, and she used to amuse us greatly by translating for our benefit the private remarks which were being made by the grave and dignified Arab merchants, as they sat talking to one another in the bazaar. After they had for some time been calling us Christian dogs, and speaking disrespectfully of our female relatives for many generations, she blandly asked them in their own language whether they thought that was the way in which a good son of the Prophet should speak of those from



whom he hoped to gain much in the way of business. The men were always covered with confusion, not having expected that any European could possibly understand them.

Arabic, however, seems to have been the only Oriental language with which she was acquainted; she did not know Sanskrit, and many of the difficulties of our Theosophical terminology arise from the fact that in those days she would describe what she saw or knew, and then ask any Indian who happened to be near what was the Sanskrit name for it. Very often the gentleman who provided her with the term had not clearly understood what she meant; and even when he did, we must remember that she asked adherents of different schools of philosophy, and that each answered according to the shade of meaning applied to the term in his teaching.

### **Phenomena**

Many curious phenomena were constantly taking place around her at this period. First, she was herself the most striking of all the phenomena, for her changes were protean. Sometimes the Masters Themselves used her body, and wrote or spoke directly through her. At other times when her ego was elsewhere engaged, one or other of two pupils of lower degree than herself would take the body, and there were even certain occasions when another woman used to be in charge—I think a Tibetan. I have myself frequently seen all these changes take place, and I have seen the new man who entered the body looking round to discover the condition of affairs into which he had come—trying to take up the thread of a conversation, for example. Yet with all this, she was in no sense of the word like an ordinary medium, for the true owner of the body stood more or less within reach all the time in full consciousness, and thoroughly understood what was going on.

These amazing changes led sometimes to the most extraordinary complications. The chela who was suddenly called in to occupy the body was of course ignorant of what had been said a few minutes before, and so was occasionally betrayed into what seemed bare-faced contradictions. I remember a story told to me later by a member of the Avenue Road household, which gives a good illustration of the difficulties we had to

encounter. The narrator was a man of some legal experience, and was consequently usually deputed to act as representative of the household, or of Madame Blavatsky, when there was any business to be done with the lawyers.

### **A Characteristic Experience**

On a certain day some such business arose; I do not know its precise nature, but it involved the signing by Madame Blavatsky of several documents. Our member laid these documents before her, and endeavoured with a true legal sense of responsibility to explain them to her, but she did not seem to comprehend at all clearly, and indeed pushed the papers aside somewhat impatiently. Having, as he supposed, obtained all the necessary signatures, he withdrew and was about to start on his journey to the city; but, finding the weather colder than he expected, he decided to wear an overcoat, and ran upstairs to his room to fetch it.

Changing his papers from one pocket to another, he ran through them mechanically to see that all were there, and fortunately noticed that one of them was unsigned; so on his way downstairs he entered Madame Blavatsky's room once more, saying:

"O, H. P. B., here is one of these papers which I have overlooked; will you please sign it?"

"What papers?" demanded Madame Blavatsky.

"Only one more of those which you signed a few minutes ago."

"What do you mean? I have signed no papers," she returned indignantly.

"But, H. P. B., here they are!" protested the mystified member; and he spread them out before her.

"O, I see!" she said, apparently mollified; "but what is their purport?"

Our friend repeated his explanations; and not only were they fully understood this time, but *this* Madame Blavatsky was a better man of business than he was, and asked him questions which he was unable to answer!

No wonder that strangers did not always quite grasp the situation!

I remember an occasion on which she bought in the scent-bazaar at Cairo a tiny bottle of attar of roses, for use in the shrine-room at Adyar, paying £2 for it. When we were sitting at lunch in the hotel half-an-hour afterwards, at a small table reserved for our party in an alcove, two English sovereigns fell out of space upon the table, and Madame Blavatsky explained that she had been told that she ought not to spend money upon Them in this way, as we should need every shilling that we had before we reached Adyar—a statement which certainly proved true.

At one time and another I have seen a good many of the phenomena which were so closely associated with Madame Blavatsky. I have seen her precipitate drawings and writings, and I have also seen her find a missing object by occult power. On several occasions I have seen letters fall out of the air in her presence; and I must also state that I have seen such a letter fall at the Headquarters at Adyar when she was six thousand miles away in England, and again that I myself have several times had the privilege of being employed by the Master to deliver just such letters after her departure from the physical plane.

In those early days of the Society messages and instructions from the Masters were frequent, and we lived at a level of splendid enthusiasm which those who have joined since Madame Blavatsky's death can hardly imagine. Those of us who have had the inestimable privilege of direct touch with the Masters have naturally retained that enthusiasm, but it is not easy for us, whose powers are so much less than hers, fully to impart it to newer members. I have sometimes wondered, however, how many of our present-day members would have found themselves able to endure the somewhat severe but remarkably effective training through which she put her pupils; I can testify to certain radical changes which her drastic methods produced in me in a very short space of time—also to the fact that they have been permanent!

When I came into her hands I was just an ordinary lawn-tennis-playing curate—well-meaning and conscientious, I believe, but incredibly shy and retiring, with all the average Englishman's horror of making himself

conspicuous in any way or occupying a ridiculous position. After a few weeks of her treatment I had reached a stage in which I was absolutely hardened to ridicule, and did not care in the slightest degree what anybody thought of me. I mean that quite literally; it was not that I had learnt to endure disapproval stoically, in spite of internal anguish, but that I actually did not care what people thought or said of me, and indeed never considered that matter at all. And I have never cared since! I admit that her methods were drastic and distinctly unpleasant at the time, but there was no question as to their effectiveness.

Apart from the great Masters of Wisdom, I have never known any person from whom power so visibly radiated. Clever she certainly was; not a scholar in the ordinary sense of the word, yet, as I have already said, possessed of apparently inexhaustible stores of unusual knowledge on all sorts of out-of-the-way unexpected subjects. She was an indefatigable worker from early in the morning until late at night, and she expected everyone around her to share her enthusiasm and her marvellous endurance. She was always ready to sacrifice herself—and, for the matter of that, others also—for the sake of the cause, of the great work upon which she was engaged. Utter devotion to her Master and to His work was the dominant note of her life, and though now she wears a different body, that note still sounds out unchanged, and if she should ever be directed to come forth from her retirement and to take charge once more of the Society which she founded, we shall find it ringing in our ears as a clarion to call around her old friends and new, so that through all the ages that work shall still go on.

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## CHAPTER 7

### Our Voyage to India

Our interesting stay in Cairo was brought to an end by the news that our steamer, the British India s.s. *Navarino*, was due at Port Said on a certain date. Thither I was despatched as a kind of *avant-courier*, to make arrangements in advance for some special comforts for Madame Blavatsky who, with the rest of our little party, wished to avoid the canal, to have an extra day in Cairo, and to embark at Suez. This small errand I duly accomplished, and I think our Leader was fairly well satisfied with the accommodation provided, though of course it fell far short of the luxury of the larger modern vessels.

We had a full complement of passengers, and I suppose that both they and the officers were about the average crowd that one expects to meet on board an Eastern-bound boat. The Captain was perhaps a trifle unusual, for he was a very religious man, narrow and puritanical, and he not unnaturally regarded Madame with a stern disapproval which seemed strongly tinged with horror. His attitude towards our party was one of icy reserve, and during the whole voyage none of us exchanged more than a very few words with him. His officers, however, were more amenable, and I remember that Mrs. Oakley, who was an indefatigable propagandist, made friends with the third mate, Mr. Wadge, and succeeded in interesting him in Theosophy to some small extent, at any rate sufficiently to induce him to read one or two books, to attend one of our meetings at Adyar, and I think to correspond with her later.

Among the passengers were several missionaries, and they, with one exception, seemed distinctly disposed to regard us as emissaries of the Prince of Darkness. The exception was a young Wesleyan minister named Restorick, with whom I used to play deck-tennis; I found him quite friendly and reasonable, and willing to discuss without acrimony all kinds of religious matters. A very different type was an earnest but quite uneducated missionary from America, named Daniel Smith, who made no secret of the

fact that he had been a bricklayer, but found the hard work and the exposure too severe for his health, and so, as he put it, the Lord had called him to preach the gospel to the heathen.

Perhaps because of his ignorance, he was apt to be aggressive, and used frequently to engage in arguments with Madame Blavatsky which were a source of great amusement to the passengers. I am afraid that our Leader took a kind of impish pleasure in entangling him in his talk and inducing him to commit himself to the most impossible theological statements. She knew the Bible far better than he did, and would constantly quote unexpected and little-known texts which drew from him the indignant protest: "That's not in the Bible! I'm sure that's not in the Bible!"

Then Madame Blavatsky would turn to me with deadly composure:

"Leadbeater, fetch my Bible from my cabin!" and would proceed to confound him with chapter and verse. Once he was so ill-advised as to rejoin: "Well, anyhow, I'm sure it's not in my copy!" But the ripple of amusement which ran round among the audience warned him to avoid such a rash assertion in the future.

As we were crossing the Indian Ocean I remember walking the deck with Madame Blavatsky early one morning in all the glory of a tropical sunrise, when this worthy missionary appeared at the top of the staircase, and she at once hailed him with the words:

"Now, Mr. Smith! Look round you! See the calm shining sea, and the lovely colours! See how good your God is! Surely on such a glorious morning as this you can't tell me that I am going to be burnt in hell for ever and ever!"

I must do the Rev. Daniel the justice to admit that he blushed deeply and looked very uncomfortable, but he stuck manfully to his guns, and replied with an evident effort:

"Well, I'm very sorry, ma'am, but I guess you will!"

Naturally Madame Blavatsky's brilliant and powerful personality impressed itself upon the whole company, officers and passengers alike (always excepting the Captain) and whenever she chose to show herself upon deck

in good weather she speedily gathered round her a kind of court of interested auditors, who asked her questions upon all sorts of subjects, and listened fascinated to her stories of experience and adventure in out-of-the-way corners of the world. At night especially they asked always for tales of the weird and supernatural, which she told so well and with such gruesome realism that her audience shuddered with delightful thrills of horror—but I noticed that they had a distinct tendency to herd together afterwards, and that none would adventure into a dark passage alone!

The *Navarino* was not exactly an ocean greyhound, but at long last we reached Colombo, where Colonel Olcott met us and introduced me to the leading members of the Buddhist Theosophical Society there. It was a previous generation of workers, and I suppose hardly any of the Sinhalese gentlemen who were prominent among us then are still upholding the Society's flag on the physical plane. I remember especially the old Mohandiram (an important city official), Mr. William de Abrew (father of the well-known Mr. Peter de Abrew, who has worked so loyally for us for so many years), Mr. Don Carolis of Mutwal, Mr. J. R. de Silva (whom for some reason the Colonel always nick-named the Doctor, though that was not his profession), Mr. C. P. Gunawardana (then the Secretary of our Colombo Branch), Mr. N. S. Fernando, Mr. Wijasekara, Mr. Hendrik de Silva, and others whose names elude me now, though their faces are still clear in my mind's eye. After all, it is forty-six years ago, more than half of a long lifetime!

### **I Become a Buddhist**

Most important of all, I was presented to the great Buddhist leader and scholar, Hikkaduwe Sumangala Thero, High Priest of The Peak and of Galle, and Principal of the Widyodaya Monks' College at Maradana—the most learned and highly respected of the leaders of the Southern Church of Buddhism.

On an earlier visit to the lovely island of Ceylon, both Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky had made public profession of the Buddhist faith and been formally received into that religion; and now Madame Blavatsky asked me whether I was willing to follow their example in that respect. She

strongly impressed upon me that if I took that step it must be entirely of my own motion and on my own responsibility, and that she had no wish to persuade me in the matter; but she thought that, as I was a Christian Priest, the open acceptance of a great Oriental religion would go far to convince both Hindus and Buddhists of my *bona fides*, and would enable me to be far more useful in working among them for our Masters.

I replied that I felt the very greatest reverence for the Lord Buddha and whole-heartedly accepted His teaching, and that I should feel it a great honour to enrol myself among His followers if I could do so without abjuring the Christian faith into which I had been baptized. She assured me that no such repudiation would be asked of me, and that there was no incompatibility between Buddhism and true Christianity, though no enlightened Buddhist would be likely to credit the crude theological dogmas which were usually preached by the missionaries. Buddhism, she said, was not a question of creed, but of life; I was not asked to accept any article of faith, but to try to live according to the precepts of the Lord.

To this I was of course entirely agreeable, so it was arranged that I should be presented to the High Priest for admission.

That very title of High Priest is something of a misnomer, though it was universally employed among us in speaking of Sumangala. In strict accuracy some such title as Chief Abbot would come nearer to the truth. There is in reality nothing like a Priesthood in Buddhism; there is no sacrifice to be offered, no public service to be led. The Brethren of the Yellow Robe, who are so picturesque a feature in the life of all Buddhist countries, are best described as monks, and the nearest that they come to leading a public service is when they “give pansil”, as it is called, to such of their people as ask for it; that is to say, they recite in Pali the sacred formula of the Three Refuges and the Five Precepts, by which all Buddhists are supposed to govern their lives, and the people obediently repeat the pledges which are dictated to them.

It is the recitation of this very same formula which constitutes the solemn admission to the Buddhist religion; it was this, therefore, that I had to repeat after the High Priest that day in the garden of his College. It is



straightforward and simple, but far-reaching. We may say that it opens with an ascription of praise to the Lord Buddha:

I reverence the Blessed One, the Holy One, the Perfect in Wisdom.

### **The Three Refuges**

This is repeated thrice, and then follows the *Tisarana*—commonly rendered “The Three Refuges”. That expression is however not an exact equivalent of the Pali word, which seems to mean much more nearly “a guide”. The nearest that we can come in English to the true meaning of this declaration is:

I take the Lord Buddha as my guide

I take His Law as my guide.

I take His Order as my guide.

The word *Dhamma* (Sanskrit *Dharma*) which is usually translated “law”, really bears a much wider signification than that English term. It is not in the least a law or series of commandments ordained by the Lord Buddha; it is His statement of the universal laws under which the Universe exists, and consequently of the duties of men as part of that mighty scheme. It is in this sense that the expressions quoted above are employed by the Buddhist. In pronouncing the *Tisarana* he expresses his acceptance of Lord Buddha as his guide and teacher; his adherence to the doctrine which the Buddha taught and his recognition of the great order of Buddhist monks as the practised interpreters of the meaning of that doctrine.

This does not in the least imply the acceptance of the interpretation of any particular monk, but only that of the Order in the most catholic sense; he believes that interpretation to be accurate which is held by the entire Brotherhood in all places and at all times—thus closely approximating to the great Catholic declaration that that only should be believed which has been accepted *semper, ubique et ab omnibus*—always, everywhere and by everyone. But it would seem that in some cases at least a much wider connotation is attached to this idea of the Brotherhood, so that it is taken to include not only the Order as now existing on the physical plane, but the

whole Order from the beginning, corresponding to the Christian theory of the Communion of Saints—perhaps even to the Great White Brotherhood itself.

### **The Five Precepts**

Following immediately upon this declaration the *Pancha Sila*, commonly called “The Five Precepts”, are recited. Again “precepts” is hardly the right word, although it is a possible translation of *sila*; “pledges” comes much nearer the fact, though hardly permissible as a translation. These are often compared to the Ten Commandments of Judaism; but in reality they differ greatly in character and, though fewer in number, are much more comprehensive. They are as follows:

- (1) I observe the precept to refrain from destruction of life.
- (2) I observe the precept to refrain from taking that which is not mine.
- (3) I observe the precept to refrain from unlawful sexual intercourse.
- (4) I observe the precept to refrain from falsehood.
- (5) I observe the precept to refrain from using intoxicating liquors or stupefying drugs.

It can hardly fail to strike the intelligent person that, as Colonel Olcott writes:

One who observes these strictly must escape from every cause productive of human misery, for if we study history we shall find that it has all sprung from one or another of these causes. The far-seeing wisdom of the Lord Buddha is most plainly shown in the first, third, and fifth, for the taking of life, sensuality and the use of intoxicants cause at least ninety-five per cent of the suffering among men.

It is interesting to notice how each of these precepts goes further than the corresponding Jewish commandment. Instead of being told to do no murder, we find ourselves enjoined to take no life whatever; instead of being commanded not to steal, we have the more far-reaching precept not to take that which does not belong to us, which would obviously cover the

acceptance of praise not honestly due to us, and many another case quite outside of what is commonly called stealing. It will be observed also that the third of these precepts includes a great deal more than the seventh of the commandments of Moses, forbidding not only one particular type of unlawful intercourse, but all types. Instead of being forbidden to bear false witness in a court of law, we are enjoined to avoid falsehood altogether. I have often thought what a good thing it would have been for all these European countries which have taken up the teachings of Christ if the legendary Moses had included in his decalogue the fifth of the Buddhist precepts—the instruction to touch no intoxicating liquor nor stupefying drugs. How much simpler would be all our essential problems if that commandment were observed in England and America as it is observed in Buddhist countries!

It is also very characteristic of the Buddhist faith that there is here no commandment “Thou shalt not do this or that”—no order given by a Deity or a teacher, but simply the quiet promise made by each man that he will refrain from certain actions which are obviously undesirable.

### **The Chief Abbot Sumangala**

This, then, as I have said, is the formula which I had to recite after the High Priest Sumangala; and at the same time he gave me a short explanation of it and of what it implied. I remember also that before admitting me he asked me whether I fully understood the religion into which I had been born, pointing out that such birth was not by chance, and that I ought to be sure that I had duly learnt such lessons as it had to teach.

Even on this occasion of my first introduction to him was much impressed by the nobility, the courtesy and the obvious fairness of the High Priest; one felt at once that one was in the presence of a truly great man. I came to know much more of him later, as I was engaged for some years in educational work in Ceylon; and I always found him erudite, able and kindly, and not without a saving sense of humour.

Though it does not belong at this stage of my story, but to a period perhaps two years later, I will include at this point a little incident which seemed somewhat characteristic of him. As the Widyodaya College was not very far

from what was then the principal railway station in Colombo and well within reach of the stream of sightseers who landed from the great mail steamers, the High-Priest had quite a number of European visitors, and more especially those who were interested in Oriental religions made a point of calling upon him.

I remember, for instance, that on one occasion the Professor of Sanskrit from a great European University appeared on the scene, and Sumangala joyously hailed him with a speech of welcome in Sanskrit, but was much surprised to find that the learned professor could not understand a word of it, since he had apparently never regarded Sanskrit as a spoken language at all! On the other hand when Sir Edwin Arnold came to Colombo he received a princely ovation; and in that case there was no disappointment, for he was not only able to understand and appreciate the loving welcome extended to him, but to reply to it in a long and fluent Sanskrit speech!

The special incident to which I have referred was of a slightly different character. In this case the visitor was a French scientist of considerable eminence, who came to see the Chief Abbot perhaps mainly out of curiosity, or perhaps to show courtesy to a learned man of whom he had heard something in Europe. This gentleman spoke with respect of the philosophy of the Lord Buddha, but deplored the fact that He had sometimes made indefensible statements on scientific subjects. The High Priest asked him to give an instance, and the Frenchman quoted an assertion that the earth rested upon water, the water in turn upon air, and the air upon empty space. Sumangala listened most politely, and said that he was of course fully aware of the wonderful discoveries of Western science, and was always very glad to learn anything that he could of them. And then he quite innocently enquired from the scientist what were the latest conclusions on that subject from the European point of view. He said:

“Now, if it were possible for us to bore straight down under our feet as we sit here, clear through to the other side of the earth, what should we find at the other end of that hole?”

The scientist considered for a few moments, and replied:

“Calculating roughly, I think we should come out in the Pacific Ocean.”

“Yes,” said the Chief Abbot with keen interest,

“and if we carried on through the ocean, what should we find next?”

“Well,” said the scientist, “of course we should come out into the atmosphere.”

“And if we pushed on through the atmosphere?”

“Well, then naturally we should arrive in interplanetary space.”

“Then,” said Sumangala meekly, “it seems that the conclusions of modern science do not after all differ greatly from those of the Lord Buddha!”

### **Landing at Madras**

After a day or two in Colombo we resumed our voyage on the *Navarino*, and duly arrived at Madras, to find an uncomfortably heavy swell, which made our landing a distinctly unpleasant and even somewhat hazardous business. A breakwater had been erected some years previously, but had not proved strong enough to resist the seas raised by the monsoon, so that all that was left of it were a few scattered heaps of stone. Consequently we had to be taken off the ship in enormous boats of a very unusual type. The planks of which they were constructed seemed to be not nailed together in the ordinary way, but as it were *stitched* together with rope, so that there was a curious collapsibility about the sides; and we were told that this method of construction enabled them to resist the impact of the tremendous surf better than if they had been more rigid.

The boats were of great depth, and the rowers with their long paddles perched themselves somehow on the sides, the very gunwale of the boat, while the unfortunate passengers were dumped into the central hollow far below the feet of the rowers, in what would have been the hold of the craft if it had been decked. It will perhaps be understood that to descend into such a craft from a steamer which was rolling heavily in the open roads (for of course there was then nothing like a harbour) required great agility, and was indeed a decidedly dangerous feat, as the boat was sometimes level for a moment with the ship’s bulwarks and directly afterwards twenty or thirty feet below, for the seas were positively mountainous.

One had to jump at exactly the right moment, and one by one most of the passengers achieved it, though with a good deal of trepidation, mostly bundling ungracefully and ignominiously into the bottom of the boat. Obviously gymnastics of this sort were impossible for Madame Blavatsky, and the only alternative was to tie her carefully into a chair, and lower her by means of the ordinary cargo winch. I need hardly say that she did not appreciate this operation, and I think that her language on the occasion rather surprised even the hardened officers. She was, however, lowered and received with perfect safety, and though the process may have appeared undignified, I think some of the rest of us rather envied her.

Presently we were all safely in the boat, very wet but otherwise uninjured. We have to remember that Madame Blavatsky was returning to India to meet a mass of most wicked and slanderous charges which had been brought against her by the Madras Christian College missionaries, that these so-called missionaries had confidently predicted that she could never return to face these charges, and that consequently the Indian population regarded her as a hero and a martyr, and came down in their thousands to give her such an ovation as might have been accorded to a victorious general.

### **Our Reception**

The students of Pachiappa's College were taking a very prominent part in the reception, apparently as a demonstration against the rival Madras Christian College; and it may have been they who were responsible for the appearance of a band of performers upon various weird Indian musical instruments, mostly, so far as I can remember, of the flute or flageolet order, though there were also some drums. Whoever was in charge of the proceedings made the fatal mistake of sending this band out to the ship in that terrible *masuli* boat, and as they were tossing about for at least twenty minutes in that boat in a very heavy sea while arrangements were being made to put Madame Blavatsky and other passengers on board, they were absolutely prostrate with sea-sickness, and instead of receiving our Leader with joyous strains as her chair swung down, they were simply lying groaning and helpless in the bottom of the boat.

We were brought alongside a pier on which we landed only with very great difficulty—in fact, some members of the band had to be lifted on shore by their friends. Along that pier ran a tramway-line, and there was a single and rather primitive car, which under ordinary circumstances was drawn by a horse; but about a dozen of the most enthusiastic students had harnessed themselves to this car, and insisted on drawing Madame Blavatsky to the shore in triumph amidst a huge cheering crowd. Quite a number of Europeans had also come down to see the fun, and were seated in their carriages at the end of the pier. I think that the Oakleys felt distinctly conspicuous and uncomfortable, and I must admit that I was a little embarrassed myself, as the whole proceeding was, to say the least of it, unconventional; but Madame Blavatsky accepted all this homage with great dignity as a matter of course, and indeed seemed rather to enjoy it.

A comical touch was added to the scene by the fact that the unhappy bandsmen, still desperately in the throes of *mal-de-mer*, were marshalled in front of the car and instructed to walk *backwards* before it, not only playing hard all the time, but bowing towards the car as they walked. Words fail me to describe that amazing pageant; if the reader's imagination is sufficiently powerful he can perhaps make a mental picture of those heroic bandsmen, still green and staggering from seasickness, walking or rather stumbling backwards, bowing profoundly and constantly, but struggling nobly to bring out a few notes from their various instruments between the spasms of acute discomfort, and this weird procession tunnelling its way through a closely packed and wildly uproarious crowd, all waving flags and yelling at the top of their voices. That pier seemed very, very long, but at last we reached the shoreward end, and found that some sympathetic Maharaja had sent down a carriage to meet Madame, and to carry her off to Pachiappa's Hall, where she was to receive an address of welcome from the students.

### **At Pachiappa's Hall**

We were hustled on to a platform, where Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky were accommodated with two big arm-chairs. The hall was crowded to excess, and the tumultuous cheering made it quite impossible to speak for many minutes. Of course we were all loaded with garlands

according to the kindly and picturesque Indian custom; and an attempt was made to read the address of welcome, though irrepressible outbursts of cheering made it difficult to follow it. Then the Colonel rose to reply on Madame Blavatsky's behalf, and one might have hoped that his speech would be allowed to terminate the proceedings; but there were many other Indian brothers who wished to express their sympathy, and their flaming indignation at the atrocious wickedness of the missionaries.

There was an insistent demand for a speech from Madame Blavatsky herself, and though she did not usually speak in public she at last consented to do so on this especial occasion. Naturally she was received with thunders of applause, which lasted so long that she had to sit down again and wait until it was over. When at last she was allowed to speak, she began very well by saying how touched she was by this enthusiastic reception, and how it showed her what she had always known, that the people of India would not accept tamely these vile, cowardly, loathsome and utterly abominable slanders, circulated by these unspeakable—but here she became so vigorously adjectival that the Colonel hurriedly intervened, and somehow persuaded her to resume her seat, while he called upon an Indian member to offer a few remarks.

I remember especially .an exceedingly brilliant speech made by a young lawyer, Mr. Gyanendranath Chakravarti; I had had previously no idea whatever of the eloquence and faultless diction of the highly-educated Indian speaker. The proceedings at Pachiappa's Hall seemed to me almost interminable, but eventually we were allowed to depart for Adyar, and I had my first glimpse of the Headquarters which I afterwards came to know so well, which even now seems to me more truly home than any other spot in the world. Here of course was yet another reception for Madame Blavatsky, and I think that even her iron determination must by this time have been approaching its limit, for the rest of us were almost too exhausted to be able to appreciate the wonderful scene.

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## CHAPTER 8

### Adyar at Last

The Headquarters at which I arrived in the month of December, 1884, was very different from the palatial suite of buildings which now meets the view of the visitor as he drives in over the Elphinstone Bridge from Madras. Colonel Olcott had bought the property just two years before that, and had not yet begun the series of alterations and extensions which were presently so entirely to transform the buildings. The estate then comprised twenty-seven acres, and the house was of the ordinary Anglo-Indian type—not large, but well built and commodious. It was flanked by two small octagonal garden pavilions of two rooms each, and it had the usual stables and outbuildings—supplemented, however, by a swimming-bath. We have, unfortunately, no good photographs of the house as it was then, though there exists a small print cut out of some old magazine which gives a partial view, and some of the early Convention photographs show little bits of the building.

When I first saw it, it possessed on the ground floor a square central hall, on each side of which were two comfortable rooms. At the back of the hall was a sort of ante-room, and then a large chamber, evidently intended to be the main drawing-room, which ran almost the whole length of the house and opened out on to a broad terrace overlooking the Adyar River. That room was being used as the office for the Recording Secretary of the Society and the Manager of *The Theosophist*, and we also kept there our little store of books for sale, the nucleus out of which has grown the extensive business of The Theosophical Publishing House of the present day.

As is usual in India, the whole of the house was covered by a flat cemented roof. Upon this roof, when the house came into possession of the Society, there was one large room (now divided into two bedrooms), and on the way down the stairs a very small one in which Damodar lived—a sort of eyrie, with a window looking west towards the great bridge. Madame Blavatsky had at first occupied the large room upon the roof, but was not altogether

satisfied with it, so during her absence in Europe in 1884 another room was erected for her at the north-east corner of the roof, and it was in this latter that she took up her residence when we arrived there at the end of 1888. Colonel Olcott was at that time living in one of the garden pavilions—that on the eastern side of the main building; Dr. Franz Hartmann occupied the octagonal room, and Colonel Olcott had established himself in the oblong room just behind it. On our arrival from Europe we found all the available accommodation occupied, and indeed overcrowded; so that for a night or two I was honoured by being allowed to sleep upon a settee in the Colonel's room.

I remember waking in the middle of one night and seeing a tall figure carrying a lantern standing by the Colonel's bedside, which surprised me somewhat, as I knew that the door had been locked. I half raised myself in bed, but as I saw that the visitor had aroused the Colonel, who apparently recognized him, I sank back reassured. After a few moments of earnest conversation the figure suddenly vanished—which was the first intimation to me that he was not an ordinary physical-plane visitant. As the Colonel, who had raised himself in bed, promptly lay down and went to sleep again, it occurred to me that I had better do likewise; but in the morning I ventured respectfully to tell the Colonel what I had seen. He informed me that the messenger was Djwal Kul—now a member of the Great Brotherhood, but then the principal pupil and lieutenant of the Master Kuthumi—the same whom I had already seen in the Hotel d'Orient at Cairo, though in this case the light was not strong enough to enable me to recognize him.

A little later in the year, when Madame Blavatsky left for Europe, Colonel Olcott, by her desire, took possession of the new room which had been built for her at the corner of the roof, and it has ever since been occupied by the President of the Society. The alterations which have since been made in the Headquarters building are of so radical a character that it is practically impossible for the visitor at the present time to reconstruct in his mind the house as it used to be; and even those of us who knew it in those earlier days find it difficult to trace the old landmarks.

### **The Headquarters Hall**

It was in the next year, 1885, that Colonel Olcott made his first great alteration, for the purpose of providing a permanent hall in which the Convention meetings could be held. The Convention of 1884, which was just about to commence when I arrived, was held in what is called a *pandal*—a huge temporary hall with walls and roof of palm-leaves; and it was the many inconveniences attached to this, as well as the expense of it, which had determined the Committee of the Society to sanction the construction of a more durable erection. As is usual in the Theosophical Society, the great difficulty that confronted us was the everlasting financial problem. To build a hall at all adequate for our purposes would even in those days of long ago have cost at least £1000, and nothing like that sum was forthcoming.

But Colonel Olcott's ingenuity was equal to the occasion; he devised a plan by which we obtained a fine and convenient hall, quite sufficient for our needs, for about one-sixth of that estimate. Along the front of the house—in front of the square hall previously described and of the rooms on each side of it—ran the usual wide Indian veranda, perhaps a hundred feet long and about fourteen feet in width. In the centre of that projected a *porte-cochère* under which ran the drive leading up to the house. The floor of this veranda was some feet above the level of the drive, and Colonel Olcott carried out that raised floor to the edge of the portico, and then extended it along in both directions until he had doubled the width of his veranda. He raised the roof about six feet, built a wall on the other side of his extended veranda, and then made a new porch and deflected the carriage-drive to meet it.

In this way he provided us with a hall shaped like the letter T—the double-width veranda forming the cross piece, and the original square hall, with the ante-room thrown into it, forming the central stroke. The platform for speakers was placed in the centre of the long arm, facing into the old square hall, so that the speakers had that hall in front of them and the new extension on each side of them. This hall was for many years used for our public meetings; it is supposed to seat 1500 people comfortably, but on several occasions 2300 have been squeezed into it; and even then so many people had to be turned away that for some years now we have given up the endeavour to accommodate the crowd in-doors and have held our

public meetings under the branches of the big banyan tree at Blavatsky Gardens.

### **My First Convention**

It may be imagined with what enormous enthusiasm I entered upon my first Theosophical Convention—what it was to me to find myself at last upon the sacred soil of India, among the dark-skinned brothers of whom I had heard so much—any one of whom might, for all I knew, be a pupil of one of our holy Masters—*all* of whom, I thought, must at any rate have been from childhood students of the Sacred Lore, knowing far more about it all than we Westerns could know. I was fully prepared to see the best in everybody and to make the best of everything; I met with the most kindly welcome from everyone with whom I came in contact, and consequently enjoyed myself immensely. The number and the variety of the new impressions which I received were so great as to be somewhat overwhelming; indeed, I recollect but vaguely the lectures which were delivered and the then unknown brethren who delivered them. The principal subject of discussion was the unspeakably shameful attack upon Madame Blavatsky which had been made by some people calling themselves Christian missionaries—though nothing could possibly have been more utterly un-Christian than the campaign of falsehood and slander upon which they so eagerly and maliciously entered.

I soon found that there was much difference of opinion as to the best way of meeting these loathsome libels. Madame Blavatsky herself was full of vivid indignation and was most anxious to prosecute her slanderers for libel. Many of her friends and admirers heartily agreed with her in this; but it happened that among our most prominent Indian members we had a large number of judges, of eminent lawyers and of statesmen belonging to the various semi-independent Indian kingdoms; and all these men with one accord advised her strongly against taking any such course. They knew well the extreme bitterness of Anglo-Indian feeling against the Theosophical Society, and they declared that it was absolutely impossible that Madame Blavatsky could obtain justice or that the trial would be conducted with ordinary fairness. I was myself in no position to offer an opinion in this matter, so I need say nothing further about it here, but I should like to refer

my readers to the third volume of Colonel Olcott's *Old Diary Leaves*, pp. 190-195, where they will find full reasons given for the conclusions at which the Committee of Councillors arrived.

Another consideration which I think weighed very heavily in this decision was that it would be quite impossible to prevent the enemy from bringing up in court the whole question of the existence of our holy Masters, so that Their names would be exposed to the coarse ribaldry of utterly unscrupulous slanderers, whose only object would be to cause as much pain as possible to those who loved and followed Them. It was felt that such sacrilegious comment would arouse such widespread horror and indignation among all decent Hindus that it would be better to endure any amount of vilification than to set in motion so terrible a stream of filth. Colonel Olcott (having himself been a lawyer) threw the weight of his influence strongly on the side of this more sagacious party, and finally Madame Blavatsky very reluctantly consented to abide by their decision.

Many of those whose names stand forth most prominently in my memories of that 1884 Convention have now passed away from among us, and to mention them here would be merely to compile a list of names, most of them little known to the present generation of Theosophists. They appear in our President-Founder's *Old Diary Leaves*, and photographs of many of them are to be seen in the series of memoirs of "Theosophical Worthies" which appeared some years ago in *The Theosophist*, and also in Mr. C.

Jinarājādāsa's monumental work *The Golden Book of The Theosophical Society*. Many of them were men of high station and noble reputation, and I esteem it an honour to have known them even slightly. The Recording Secretary at that time was a young Mahratta Brahman, Damodar Keshub Mavalankar, and as far as I remember he and a certain southern Brahman were the only young men who took any prominent part in the work, though many hundreds of students attended the public meetings.

This young southern Brahman was something of a mystery; I understand that his real name was M. Krishnamachari, but at the period of which I am writing he was commonly known as Babaji (or Bawaji) Darbhagiri Nath. Now, that is a northern name and not a southern; and it would seem from a reference in one of Mr. Sinnett's books that there really was a Babaji

Darbhagiri Nath in the north of India who had some part in the earlier history of the Society; but he was certainly not the same person whom I saw at Adyar, for he is described as a large and portly person, whereas this young man was almost a dwarf. He seemed then deeply devoted to Madame Blavatsky, and when she went to Europe a little later he was one of those who accompanied her; but afterwards he turned against her for some unknown reason and attacked her in the grossest manner. I remember that Madame Blavatsky wrote a letter to me in which she complained bitterly of the wickedness and malignity of his action; and the Master Kuthumi annotated that letter in the course of its transmission through the post (as They often used to do in those days), and spoke of the little man as having failed.

For some reason or other both this young man and Damodar wore during that 1884 Convention a very curious costume, consisting chiefly of a sort of long coat of silk, slashed in alternate gores of blue and white. Naturally the rumour went round that this was some kind of uniform prescribed for the chelas of the Masters! But I have never seen anybody wearing it since.

### **A Visit to Burma**

Soon after the Convention was over Colonel Olcott asked me to accompany him on an expedition to introduce Theosophy to Burma. I believe that he had received a message of invitation from King Theebaw, or at any rate an intimation that the King was curious to see a white man who had become a Buddhist, and that a visit from him would be welcome. We therefore engaged a passage on the British India steamer *Asia* to Rangoon. The British India steamers of that period were not what they are to-day, and the *Asia* was a boat of some 1200 or 1300 tons only. In those days they did not run directly to Rangoon, but called on the way at Masulipatam, Cocanada, Vizagapatam and Bimlipatam, turning only at this last place to run straight across the bay.

The Captain of the *Asia* at that time was an old school-fellow of mine, (the same from whom I first heard of Madame Blavatsky), and I was glad to have the opportunity of sailing with him. I remember that he told us that the best

cabin on the ship was No. 11, and he advised us to book that for ourselves, which we did.

### **A Curious Little Fact**

But here came in an instance of a trifling but curious little phenomenon, which seemed to haunt the Colonel. His discussions with Indian pandits had immensely impressed him with the importance of the sacred number seven; and the result was that he was always watching for the occurrence of this number in all sorts of small matters of daily life. One might have smiled at it as a harmless little superstition, but for the fact that the number in question really did haunt him in the most extraordinary way. In *The Theosophist* for March, 1892, he writes about Madame Blavatsky:

I notice in Mr. Sinnett's book the coincidence that she arrived at New York on the 7th July, 1873, that is to say on the seventh day of the seventh month of her forty-second year (6x7), and that our meeting was postponed until I attained my forty-second year. And it must also be remarked that she died in the seventh month of the seventeenth year of our Theosophical relationship. Add to this the further fact that Mrs. Annie Besant came to H. P. B. as an applicant for membership in the seventh month of the seventeenth year after her final withdrawal from Christian communion (and when Mrs. Besant herself was forty-two) and we have here a pretty set of coincidences to bear in mind. My own death when it comes will no doubt occur on a day that will accentuate the fatefulness of the number seven in the history of our Society and of its two founders.

His prophecy was accurately fulfilled, for he died at seventeen minutes past seven on the morning of February 17th, 1907.

But, as I have already said, the number absolutely haunted him in ordinary life in a quite amusing way. I have travelled with him frequently, and it's an actual fact that he could hardly ever take a railway ticket or even a tramway ticket which did not contain the number seven; and if by some strange chance the number itself did not appear, then the digits of the number would add up to seven or to a multiple of seven. In the case to which I have just referred we applied for cabin number 11, and it was duly entered on our tickets; but when we came down to the ship on the day of sailing my friend

the Captain met us with profuse apologies that by some mistake Cabin 11 had been booked twice over, and that consequently we had been transferred to—number seven!

Again I remember that on that same expedition we lost our way one day when out walking in the suburbs of Rangoon, and presently, coming in sight of a policeman standing at a junction where two roads crossed, the Colonel remarked that we would ask for a direction from him. But as we came up to the man the Colonel whispered aside to me “Regardez le numero”; I looked at the number on the man’s cap, and laughed to see that it was 77. I do not in the least know what this curious little phenomenon meant or how it was arranged; but I can certainly testify that it was a fact; and the Colonel, although he laughed at it, yet half believed in it as an indication of good fortune. For when we jumped into a tramcar bearing this mystic number or some repetition of it, he would say: “Ha! now I know we are going to have a good meeting!”

### **Our Life in Burma**

The charm operated in the case of our voyage to Burma, for it was very pleasant, and our stay in the country was interesting and successful. Rangoon was a very different city then from what it is to-day; practically the entire town consisted of wooden houses. We stayed, I remember, with a certain MOUNG HTOON OUNG, who lived at what was then the top of Phayre Street, and I used to go long walks through the jungle to the suburbs of KEMMENDINE and INSEIN, on one of which I had the curious experience of coming face to face with an animal of the leopard tribe, who looked at me with blazing eyes for what seemed many minutes, although it was probably really about thirty seconds, before he decided that I was harmless and went peaceably on his way.

We found that a great deal of interest was aroused by the Colonel’s exposition of Buddhism. Quite a number of Burmese gentlemen gathered each evening at the rooms of our host, and we frequently had useful and entertaining discussions. The interest exhibited, however, was not confined to the natives of the country. There was also a considerable Tamil population; and just as the Colonel could talk fluently and instructively to the



Burmese about Buddhism, so could he speak equally well to the Tamil population about Hinduism; in just the same way I have heard him descant by the hour to a Parsi audience about Zoroastrianism; and as it was quite obvious that he was by no means a scholar, in the ordinary sense of the word, with regard to any of the Oriental Scriptures, I once asked him how it was that, without that detailed knowledge, he was nevertheless so well able to expound the doctrines of these various faiths, and in every case to throw new light upon them, which their own instructors had not given to them.

He replied: "My dear boy, of course I do not know the detail of all these religions; but I do know my Theosophy, and I find that that always fits in and explains everything, They propound their various problems; I listen carefully and then use my commonsense." I can certainly testify that the plan worked.

The Colonel also made the acquaintance of some European and Eurasian gentlemen who were deeply interested in the phenomena of mesmerism; and as the Colonel himself was a powerful mesmerist, he was soon able to form a little group of students along that line. But just as all this work was opening up so well in these various directions, there came a telegram from Damodar to the Colonel begging him to return at once, as Madame Blavatsky was dangerously ill. Of course he took the next steamer back to Madras, leaving me behind in Rangoon to try to hold these various elements together—rather a serious undertaking for a man who was quite new to this particular sort of work. However, I did the best I could, though I am afraid that I entirely lack the Colonel's ready wit and his facility of exposition.

On his arrival at Madras he found Madame Blavatsky in a most serious condition; indeed, I think that for three or four days he was quite uncertain as to her recovery; but at the end of that time her Master paid her one of those visits in which He offered her the choice of resigning her terribly enfeebled body or carrying it on for awhile, to do yet another piece of work before casting it finally aside. This seems to have happened several times in the course of her career, and each time she chose the more arduous path and received from Him strength to carry on yet a little longer. In this case she became quite suddenly so much better that she was willing to consent to the Colonel's return to Burma, so he came back again on the return

voyage of the same steamer which had carried him to India—the s.s. *Oriental*. I need hardly say how glad I was to welcome him, and to hear that Madame Blavatsky had made so wonderful a recovery.

He took up his work again with the utmost enthusiasm and formed no less than three separate Branches of the Society—the Shwe Dagon Branch for the Burmese for the study of Buddhism, the Rangoon Theosophical Society for the Tamil members, and the Irrawaddy Theosophical Society for the European and Eurasian students of mesmerism. The Shwe Dagon is the magnificent golden pagoda which stands on a spur of the hills just outside the town, and is said to contain relics not only of the Lord Gautama Buddha, but also of the three Buddhas who preceded Him in this world—a wonderful bell-shaped dome rising 370 feet above its platform, which is itself 166 feet above the surrounding country. The whole of that great dome is covered with gold leaf, which is constantly being renewed, so it may well be imagined that the effect is splendid and that the dagoba is a landmark visible for many miles around.

The platform measures 900 feet by 700 and contains numerous little temples, shrines and rest-houses in which are hundreds of images of the Lord Buddha, presented by countless devotees since the year 588 b.c., when the erection of this dagoba was begun, although it is stated that the spot had been sacred for centuries before. I remember the wonderfully artistic effect produced when, immediately after sunrise one morning. “Colonel Olcott delivered a lecture on that platform, he himself standing at the top of a small flight of steps, and his audience seated in their peculiar way upon the vast stone platform. The festive dress of the Burmese is more brightly-coloured than any other in the world; and sitting at the feet of the Colonel and looking out over his audience, I can compare it only to a vast field of the most brilliantly-coloured flowers—something like those that one sees from the railway train in Holland at the season when the narcissi and the daffodils or the tulips are in flower. Years later I have myself spoken on that same platform, and have even given the Pansil to a huge crowd there; and always one finds the same wonderful effect.

In the course of many lengthy conversations with our host and other Burmese friends, all of them elders and men of importance in the Buddhist

community of Rangoon, the Colonel had come to doubt very seriously the wisdom and the utility of the proposed visit to King Theebaw at his capital, Mandalay, in Upper Burma. Colonel Olcott tells us in his *Old Diary Leaves* that our advisers gave this monarch an exceedingly bad character, regretfully admitting that he was a debauched tyrant, a monster of vice and cruelty, and that his motive in inviting a visit was merely curiosity to see a white Buddhist, and not enthusiasm for the Buddhist religion, of which the ruler himself was so unworthy an exponent. It was also stated that the King's arrogant and unjust conduct in his dealings with certain English merchants was almost certain to lead speedily to an outbreak of war, which would assuredly render nugatory any attempt to introduce Theosophy into his dominions. So the Colonel, decided to cancel our proposed northern journey, and substitute for it a tour through Lower Burma, Assam, and Bengal. Even this plan, however, was not destined to be realized at that period, for we were hurriedly recalled by the news that Madame Blavatsky had had an alarming relapse.

### **Two Religious Leaders**

Before I refer to our return voyage I must not forget to chronicle two very interesting interviews. The first was with the Tha-tha-na-baing, or Chief Abbot of Mandalay, a sort of Burmese Archbishop of Canterbury, who visited Rangoon during our stay and was good enough to give us an audience. I remember having to sit for three hours in a most uncomfortable and cramped position, out of respect for this ecclesiastical dignitary, while he carried on a keen discussion with Colonel Olcott on various points of Buddhist doctrine. Of course, he spoke no English, so every sentence had to be interpreted, and it was often difficult to arrive at a mutual understanding. I think, however, that the exceedingly able and somewhat sceptical old gentleman was eventually fully satisfied that we really were genuine Buddhists!

The other interview was also with an ecclesiastical dignitary, but a man of very different type—the gentle and saintly Roman Catholic Bishop Bigandet, then Vicar Apostolic of Southern Burma. During his long tenure of that office he had become intensely interested in the religion of the country, and had written a very valuable and sympathetic book. *The Legend of Gaudama*,

which was published in two volumes in Trubner's *Oriental Series*. So we felt sure that when calling on him we should find that we had many points in common, and we were not disappointed. He received us most graciously, complimenting Colonel Olcott on his *Buddhist Catechism*, than which, he said, there was no more useful book on the religion of Sakyamuni. He assured us emphatically that he had no more doubt as to the salvation of his good Buddhist friends and neighbours than he had of his own, and he spoke very highly of their probity, kindness and general good character. The Colonel was deeply impressed in his favour and, being unaccustomed to dealing with those of episcopal rank, would persist in addressing him as "Your Right Reverence" instead of the customary "My Lord"!

### **Our Return Voyage**

We left Rangoon on the British India steamer *Himalaya*, and a most remarkable voyage we had. We must have started under unfavourable astrological auspices, for every day as we crossed the Bay of Bengal in perfect weather, some curious little misfortune occurred to us. We had some missionaries on board and, as is well known, sailors of most countries consider them as birds of ill omen, certain to bring bad luck; so that before we reached Bimlipatam our Lascar crew was in a condition of terror and almost on the verge of mutiny.

On the first day out the engines failed; but in those days many steamers carried sails as well, and we were brig-rigged, so we sailed along like a yacht for several hours at a pace of two knots or so, until repairs were effected. Next day a Hindu deck passenger fell overboard, and the ship had to stop, put out a boat to rescue him, and steam round in a circle to pick him up. A curious point was that the Colonel, told us that five months before in Paris a clairvoyant had described this scene, saying that he saw him (the Colonel) sailing in a steamer on a far-off sea, a man falling overboard, the vessel stopped, a boat put out, and the steamer moving in a circle. As a steamer does not usually move in a circle unless she is swinging her compasses, this struck the Colonel as odd, and he made a note of it, little expecting that the vision would prove to be prophetic of an event which would take place nearly half a year later on the other side of the world.

The passenger was saved; the incident had no serious consequences, but still the crew began to grumble; and their nervousness was pardonably intensified when next an unexplained fire was discovered burning among the cargo. That was soon extinguished, and but little harm was done, but the feeling of unrest continued; and it culminated the day after when a case of smallpox declared itself among the steerage passengers! Perhaps it was just as well that we sighted the Indian coast early on the next day, before there was time for another stroke of misfortune to descend upon us!

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## CHAPTER 9

### Unrest at Adyar

When we arrived at Adyar we found very unsatisfactory conditions prevailing there. The Headquarters was by no means the haven of rest and peace which it should be, but was instead full of mistrust and disquiet. In spite of the decision of the Convention the household was still divided on the question as to whether Madame Blavatsky should prosecute her missionary slanderers for libel. There were many who held that it was only by a successful lawsuit that she could ever rehabilitate herself in the eyes of the world; and she herself was strongly disposed to agree with them, while others held that such a course could end in nothing but disaster.

The European element at Headquarters at that time was much dissatisfied with Colonel Olcott's management of the Society's affairs, and wished him to hand over the control of them to a committee composed, if I remember rightly, of themselves with one Indian gentleman as collaborator. To me personally this seemed a monstrously unfair suggestion, and I refused to take any part in the agitation, and naturally enough Colonel Olcott did not feel that he could hand over his responsibilities as President to the malcontents. During the Colonel's absence these people had won a reluctant half-assent to their plan from Madame Blavatsky when she was too ill fully to understand the scope of their suggestion—they having alarmed her by Cassandra-like prophecies of the imminent disintegration and collapse of the Society if their remedy was not instantly adopted. But as soon as she recovered and Colonel Olcott explained to her the full inwardness of their modest demand, she at once withdrew her grudging consent and vigorously repudiated the cabal.

### Madame Blavatsky's Departure

Under the constant harassment of these various complications Madame Blavatsky seemed quite unable, to recover her health, and the distress which was caused to her by this continuous chain of annoyances was so

great that at last her doctor flatly declared that her illness must very shortly terminate fatally unless she could escape altogether from her present environment. With great difficulty we at last obtained her assent to a temporary residence in Europe, and towards the end of March she actually departed by the *s.s. Tibre*, accompanied by Dr. Franz Hartmann, Miss Mary Flynn and the self-styled Babaji Darbhagiri Nath. Damodar Keshub Mavalankar had already left Adyar on the 23rd February, before our return from Burma, and now that the bid for domination made by the European clique had failed they also speedily left; and the Headquarters and Adyar seemed empty and deserted.

Not long after this Colonel Olcott departed upon one of his frequent tours; but before he left he offered me the choice of two lines of work; either I might go down to Galle and take charge of the Theosophical school recently established there, or remain at the headquarters and hold the position of Recording Secretary of the Society. I chose the latter, principally because it allowed me to stay in the centre of the movement where I knew that our Masters frequently showed Themselves in materialized forms.

Although the Recording Secretary was expected also to perform the functions of the manager of the Theosophist Office and of the book concern, the work was still of the lightest description in those early days. I did my best, but I am afraid that I was not a shining success in any of these capacities, because I was entirely inexperienced in business matters, and had little idea which books would sell well, and which would not. My predecessor in the office had been the aforesaid Damodar, and while I knew little of business I think he must have known even less, for I found everything connected with the office in a state of chaos, with huge piles of unanswered and even unopened letters stacked on the floor in heaps. The fact was, I think, that Damodar lived so entirely on higher planes that he actually had no time for the physical, and I fancy that he even regarded it with a strong distaste. He wrote articles and letters with great power and with tireless assiduity, and mundane considerations such as filling book orders and acknowledging subscriptions simply did not enter into his world of thought at all. Our office at that time was the long central room with a large veranda looking out upon the river, opposite the platform and facing

the statues of the founders. It is now used as a kind of reading-room, an annex to the library.

### **The Masters Materialize**

I spoke just now of the occasional materialization of our Masters in those days. It should be remembered that at that time no one among us except Madame Blavatsky herself (and to a certain extent Damodar) had developed astral sight while still awake in the physical body. Nor could any one else bring through communications from the higher planes with the requisite certainty. So when, our Masters wished to convey anything definitely to us they had either to announce it through Madame Blavatsky, to write it as a letter to be delivered by phenomenal means, or to show Themselves in materialized form and speak by word of mouth.

It was in such a materialized form that I first saw both of the Masters who have been most closely associated with the Theosophical Society. My own Master, whom we now know as the Chohan Kuthumi, I first met (on the physical plane) on the square of roof outside the door of our President's room, then occupied by Madame Blavatsky. The additions since made have so changed the appearance of that roof that it is not now easy to follow exactly the lines of the older building; but there was at that time a sort of balustrade running along the front of the house at the edge of the roof, and I happened to be looking towards that when the Master materialized in the very act of stepping over that balustrade, as though He had previously been floating through the air.

Naturally I rushed forward and prostrated myself before Him; He raised me with a kindly smile, saying that though such demonstrations of reverence were the custom among the Indian peoples, He did not expect them from His European devotees, and He thought that perhaps there would be less possibility of any feeling of embarrassment if each nation confined itself to its own methods of salutation.

The first time that I had the honour of seeing the Master Morya was on one of those occasions to which I have already referred, when He visited Madame Blavatsky and endowed her with renewed strength to support the burden of her arduous work.



Those who are familiar with the configuration of the President's rooms as they were in the year 1885 will understand what I mean when I say that three of us—a European lady, a distinguished Indian brother and myself—were seated in the ante-room from which Madame Blavatsky's bedroom branched off at a right angle. (The square room now occupied by our President had not then been added.) The lady was seated on a cushion just inside the outer door to the right, leaning against the rail which protects the stairway running down to the bathroom below. The Indian brother and I were seated on the floor at the opposite corner of the little ante-room, leaning our backs against the edge of a sofa, which stood just to the right of the door leading into Madame Blavatsky's bedroom.

### **A Marvellous Change**

Our Founder herself lay in bed inside in a condition of extreme weakness, but she had just sunk to sleep, so that the lady who was nursing her had thought it safe to steal a few moments of respite, and had come out to sit with us. She was describing to us tearfully Madame's exceeding weakness when she suddenly checked herself to say: "Who can that be?" for we all heard a firm quick step approaching along what was then the open roof, beyond the bedroom. The footsteps came down from that higher level and passed quickly before the window which faced us as we sat, and then—the Master Morya entered the room; but the lady did not see Him, for as He entered the startled look left her face, and she sank back upon her cushion as though in sleep. The Indian and I sprang to our feet and prostrated ourselves; but the Master Morya walked quickly past us with a bright smile and a benedictory wave of His hand turned in to Madame Blavatsky's bedroom.

We heard an exclamation from her, a few words in His voice and then some reply from her, and in a few minutes He came out again with the same quick step, once more smilingly acknowledged our salutations and passed out again by the way that He came. Only after He had left the room did the lady start up from her corner with the exclamation:

"O, who was that?"

Before we had any time to discuss the matter our attention was distracted by a call for the nurse from Madame Blavatsky, in surprisingly loud and firm tones:

“Where are my clothes? I want to dress.”

The nurse looked at us despairingly (for the doctor had prescribed the most absolute rest); but Madame Blavatsky was very much “She who must be obeyed,” and of course she was dressed accordingly, and came forth looking much more like her old self. Her Master had asked her whether she would pass away then—she was very near to passing away, and she had had terrible suffering—or whether she would keep her physical body for some years longer, in order to write that great book *The Secret Doctrine*. She choose to stay. I do not think I exaggerate when I say that from that time onward she had scarcely an hour free from pain, but she fought it down splendidly. She wrote the book, and there it remains, as a monument which will stand all through the ages. She can never, I think, be forgotten while that and her other books remain to speak of her and for her.

### **A Lonely Life**

I have said that when Colonel Olcott left us on his tour Adyar remained empty; and unfortunately its treasury was in the same condition, so that the very few of us who remained had instructions to observe the strictest economy. Mr. Cooper-Oakley and I were for a long time the only Europeans; and as he lived up on the roof in one of the further rooms (later occupied by Dr. English) and I was in the Eastern octagon room, I saw almost nothing of him, except for a short morning visit of greeting each day. We lived an almost ascetic life, there being practically no servants except two gardeners and Manikam the office-boy. I am not quite sure how Mr. Oakley managed his household arrangements; for myself, every morning as soon as I rose I put a large supply of crushed wheat into a double saucepan, so arranged that it could not burn. Then I swam in the Adyar River (it was cleaner in those days) for half-an-hour or so, and then returned to find my wheat nicely cooked. Then the aforesaid office-boy led a cow round to my veranda and milked her on the spot into my own vessel, bringing me also a bunch of bananas from the estate when there happened to be any. I then consumed

half of the wheat, leaving the other half for a second meal at about four o'clock in the afternoon or when the cow came round, and then I warmed up the wheat for a few minutes and dined sumptuously thereon. The Adyar budget was probably simpler at that period than it has ever been since!

### **Unexpected Development**

It should be understood that in those days I possessed no clairvoyant faculty, nor had I ever regarded myself as at all sensitive. I remember that I had a conviction that a man must be *born* with some psychic powers and with a sensitive body before he could do anything in the way of that kind of development, so that I had never thought of progress of that sort as possible for me in this incarnation, but had some hope that if I worked as well as I knew how in this life I might be born next time with vehicles more suitable to that particular line of advancement.

One day, however, when the Master Kuthumi honoured me with a visit, He asked me whether I had ever attempted a certain kind of meditation connected with the development of the mysterious power called *kundalini*. I had of course heard of that power, but knew very little about it, and at any rate supposed it to be absolutely out of reach for Western people. However, He recommended me to make a few efforts along certain lines, which He pledged me not to divulge to anyone else except with His direct authorization, and told me that He would Himself watch over those efforts to see that no danger should ensue.

Naturally I took the hint, and worked away steadily, and I think I may say intensely, at that particular kind of meditation day after day. I must admit that it was very hard work and sometimes distinctly painful, but of course I persevered, and in due course began to achieve the results that I had been led to expect. Certain channels had to be opened and certain partitions broken down; I was told that forty days was a fair estimate of the average time required if the effort was really energetic and persevering. I worked at it for forty-two days, and seemed to myself to be on the brink of the final victory, when the Master Himself intervened and performed the final act of breaking through which completed the process, and enabled me thereafter to use astral sight while still retaining full consciousness in the physical

body—which is equivalent to saying that the astral consciousness and memory became continuous whether the physical body was awake or asleep. I was given to understand that my own effort would have enabled me to break through in twenty-four hours longer, but that the Master interfered because He wished to employ me at once in a certain piece of work.

### **Psychic Training**

It must not for a moment be supposed, however, that the attainment of this particular power was the end of the occult training. On the contrary, it proved to be only the beginning of a year of the hardest work that I have ever known. It will be understood that I lived there in the octagonal room by the river-side alone for many long hours every day, and practically secure from any interruption except at the meal-times which I have mentioned. Several Masters were so gracious as to visit me during that period and to offer me various hints; but it was the Master Djwal Kul who gave most of the necessary instruction. It may be that He was moved to this act of kindness because of my close association with Him in my last life, when I studied under Him in the Pythagorean school which He established in Athens, and even had the honour of managing it after His death. I know not how to thank Him for the enormous amount of care and trouble which He took in my psychic education; patiently and over and over again He would make a vivid thought-form, and say to me: “What do you see?” And when I described it to the best of my ability, would come again and again the comment: “No, no, you are not seeing true; you are not seeing all; dig deeper into yourself, use your mental vision as well as your astral; press just a little further, a little higher.”

This process often had to be many times repeated before my mentor was satisfied. The pupil has to be tested in all sorts of ways and under all conceivable conditions; indeed, towards the end of the tuition sportive nature-spirits are specially called in and ordered in every way possible to endeavour to confuse or mislead the seer. Unquestionably it is hard work, and the strain which it imposes is, I suppose, about as great as a human being can safely endure; but the result achieved is assuredly far more than worth while, for it leads directly up to the union of the lower and the higher

self and produces an utter certainty of knowledge based upon experience which no future happenings can ever shake.

On the physical plane our great pandit Swami T. Subba Rao often did me the honour of driving over to the Headquarters in order to take part in the instruction and testing, and I feel that I can never be grateful enough for all the help that these two great people gave me at this critical stage of my life. When once the way has thus been opened there is no end to the possibility of unfoldment, and I think I may say without any fear of exaggeration that no day has passed in the forty-five years since then in which I have not learnt some new fact. The yoga of the Initiate consists, as does all other yoga, of a steady upward pressure towards union with the Divine at ever higher and higher levels; one has to work the consciousness steadily onward from sub-plane to sub-plane of the buddhic world and then afterwards through the nirvanic; and even beyond all that, other and uncounted worlds are still to be conquered, for the Power, the Wisdom and the Love of the Infinite are as some great mine of jewels, into which one may probe ever more and more deeply without exhausting its capacity; nay, rather, they constitute a shoreless sea into which our dewdrop slips and yet is not lost therein, but feels rather as though it had absorbed the whole ocean into itself.

Thus would I live—yet now

Not I, but He

In all His Power and Love

Henceforth alive in me.

Here then I must end this fragment of autobiography, for this is “How Theosophy came to me”—first through our great founder Madame Blavatsky on the physical plane, and then more fully and on the higher levels through other members of the Great White Brotherhood to which she introduced me. May all my brethren find in Theosophy the peace and happiness which I have found!

**Peace to all Beings**

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