

Theosophical History



A Quarterly Journal of Research

Volume IV, No. 2 April 1992
ISSN 0951-497X

THEOSOPHICAL HISTORY

A Quarterly Journal of Research

Founded by Leslie Price, 1985

Volume 4, No. 2, April 1992

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Theosophical History (ISSN 0951-497X) is published quarterly in January, April, July, and October by James A. Santucci. The journal's purpose is to publish contributions specifically related to the modern Theosophical Movement, from the time of Madame Helena Blavatsky and others who were responsible in establishing the original Theosophical Society (1875), to all groups that derive their teachings - directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly - from her or her immediate followers. In addition, the journal is also receptive to related movements (including pre-Blavatskyite Theosophy, Spiritualism, Rosicrucianism, and the philosophy of Emanuel

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

The subscription fee for the journal is \$14.00 (U.S., Mexico, Canada), \$16.00 (elsewhere), or \$24.00 (air Mail) for four issues a year. Single issues are \$4.00. All inquiries should be sent to **James Santucci**, *Department of Religious Studies, California State University, Fullerton, CA 92634-9480 (U.S.A.)*.

The Editors assume no responsibility for the views expressed by authors in *Theosophical History*.

* * * * *

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There is no limitation on the length of manuscripts. In general, articles of 30 pages or less will be published in full; articles in excess of 30 pages may be published serially.

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

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Layout and composition by Robert L. Hütwohl, GraphicType Southwest, 924 Alto St., Santa Fe, NM 87501 USA, using Adobe type 1 typefaces: ITC Garamond 1, Linotype Frutiger and Linotext, with an adapted Sanskrit-Tibetan diacritical Garamond typeface designed by Mr. Hütwohl.

Contents

April 1992
Volume IV, Number 2

Editor's Comments

James Santucci 33

Book Notes

James Santucci 37

Articles

The Destiny of Russian Theosophists in the Beginning
A. V. Gnezdilov 39

Marx and Engels on Spiritualism and Theosophy
Herman de Tollenaere 45

Note

Four Madame Blavatskys
Leslie Price 49

News From England

The Mead Symposium
Joscelyn Godwin 50

From the Newspapers

Mme. Blavatsky Again. Further Explication of the Buddhist Faith
and its Miracles.
From the *New York World* 51

Book Review

Brother XII: The Incredible Story of Canada's False Prophet
James Santucci 56

On the Cover: Edward Arthur Wilson (Brother XII), *Circa 1926* (Reproduced courtesy of McClelland & Stewart and of John Oliphant.)

Editor's Comments

Theosophical History: An Independent Journal Of Research

Every so often it is necessary to inform the readers of *Theosophical History* of the mission and goals of the journal. When I first took over the journal, I wrote in the first issue under my editorship (III/1 January 1990) that *TH* would “continue its role as an independent, impartial and scholarly journal conforming to the standards and expectations of the academic community.” It was a declaration that was specifically intended to support Leslie Price’s (the founder-editor of the journal) aspirations. In volume I, number 4 (page 62), he set forth in very explicit terms the degree of independence he considered necessary:

When “Theosophical History” was conceived, our relationship with the Theosophical societies was carefully considered. We decided to be independent, even of the Adyar Society, in which this editor [L.P.] is active....We feared that ownership by one society might lose us the confidence of other societies. We did not want the officers of any Theosophical group to be the target of pressure to stop or censor our publication.

We were worried too, lest any of the fringe groups on the theosophical scene, some of them with limited sympathy for historical enquiry or free discussion, might use their influence to try to control our coverage.

This statement remains in effect. *Theosophical History*, if it intends to maintain its integrity, must continue to be independent and reflect impartial,

academic principles of investigation. In this regard, the journal is first and foremost a **history** journal that considers Theosophical topics from a wholly empirical perspective. This editor does not consider it within his purview to arbitrate what teachings should be considered truly Theosophical or not. What the journal does provide is an inquiry into any and all historical questions within a Theosophical context. Statements of ‘Truth’ or of authenticity within such a context cannot and should not be deliberated; that is best left to Theosophical writers and journals.

As the editor of an historical journal, it is my task to ensure the publication of material that helps to expand our knowledge of Theosophy, to provide a forum for the free and open exchange of ideas, and to encourage the study of this topic within the framework of academic principles. Such principles include intellectual honesty, open-mindedness, and a critical application of research methods. Any violation of such principles, including the attempt to impose any degree of censorship based on some dogmatic, doctrinal, or ideological viewpoint on the one hand, or the exhibition of a lack of or improper utilization of research methods on the other, will not be condoned. The proper application of research methods must at the very least be supported by a sufficient data base; it must be free from any ideological agenda that might distort the data, and the analysis and conclusions must be intellectually rigorous. Readers should only expect from me an unflinching

dedication to intellectual integrity and hard work: nothing more, nothing less.

Theosophical or theosophical?

The above discussion makes it abundantly clear that the more important term in the journal title is “*History*” and not “*Theosophical*.” Some may be disaffected by this assertion unless one maintains that the *method* of study is more important than the *object* of study. I base this on the strongly held belief that any existent *res*, any topic is worthy of study. All too often, we who are investigators or researchers—whether in religion, philosophy, and science—have to defend the study of a religious movement, a philosophical viewpoint, or an object of scientific inquiry against attack or ridicule based on an indubitably uninformed opinion towards the subject in question. Anything that *is*, is worthy of scrutiny. To take one pertinent example, the study of Theosophy and matters Theosophical in academe should, in my opinion, be allowed to proceed unhindered without recriminations from colleagues who consider the subject insignificant or unworthy. After all, the measure of historical inquiry is coeval with the *totality* of human activity and thought.

It is hardly expected that this history journal will inquire into the totality of human experience: obviously the limitations of the journal are given by the term *Theosophical*. How far afield does this field of inquiry take us? When Leslie Price initiated the journal in 1985, it was his intention to focus primarily on “the foundation of the Theosophical Society in 1875, and the history of the Theosophical movement since then....” He went on to write:

The assessment of a variety of bodies and impulses that claimed to be Theosophical, or even used different terms altogether but were

once part of the same family, is part of our task. Names such as Alice Bailey, Annie Besant, William Q. Judge and Rudolf Steiner that are offensive to this or that group of Theosophists even today, will be found in our pages. (1/1:2)

Mr. Price’s statement is very timely in the present discussion. When I took over TH, it was due in part that it was established as an independent journal committed to an open inquiry into any topic that properly comes under the label “theosophical.” Although he defined the range of “Theosophical” inquiry to be 1875 and later, there was the occasional exception to the rule, such as Leslie Shepard’s “The ‘Anacalypsis’ of Godfrey Higgins.” It was my view that the inclusion of pre-Blavatskyite theosophy and related movements and teachings also would be of interest to the readership. Therefore, the journal’s purpose stated on the inside cover page is evidence of this broader interest.

In order to avoid confusion between what I perceive as two separate categories of “Theosophical” and associated terms, the journal will henceforth employ “Theosophical”, “Theosophist”, and “Theosophy”—all with capital ‘T’—to refer to the societies, individuals, and literature that derive their teachings *directly* from the writings of H.P. Blavatsky. Conversely, ‘theosophy’, ‘theosophical’, and ‘theosopher’ or ‘theosophist’—all with lower case ‘t’—include all teachings, organizations and individuals that may either predate those of H.P. Blavatsky or that possess only an indirect or superficial relationship to modern Theosophical teachings. Thus, ‘Theosophical’ would refer to all the various Theosophical societies (Adyar, Pasadena, U.L.T., and other organizations that are direct descendants of the 1875 T.S.), ‘Theosophist’ to members of such organiza-

tions, and 'Theosophy' specifically to the teachings discussed in the writings of H.P.B. and all publications directly derived therefrom. These writings include those of W.Q. Judge, Annie Besant, C.W. Leadbeater, G. de Purucker, B. P. Wadia, Robert Crosbie, and others who belong to the various Theosophical societies. Organizations such as AMORC, the Rosicrucian Fellowship, the Arcane School, the Anthroposophical Society, more recent movements such as Eckankar, the Church Universal and Triumphant, Morningland, the Aetherius Society, and individuals such as Alice Bailey, Rudolf Steiner, Max Heindel, Manly Hall, may all be considered 'theosophical' or 'theosophers' respectively.

Theosophical History Foundation

Because of the difficulty and expense in establishing the Theosophical History Foundation as a non-profit corporation with tax exempt status in California, I have come to the conclusion that it would be more advantageous to edit *Theosophical History* and conduct Theosophical History Conferences on a purely private basis. Therefore, the Theosophical History Foundation is undergoing the process of dissolution. Despite this action, no changes regarding the operation and philosophy of the journal are planned or anticipated. Publication and planning for future conferences still rests with me. For legal purposes, I, as editor and publisher of the journal *Theosophical History*, have chosen to do business as [dba] Theosophical History.

Rather than expending time and effort in the business of operating a corporation, it was my decision to draw upon the considerable talents of THF Board members, April and Jerry Hejka-Ekins,

to participate as Associate Editors, thereby enabling them to serve in a more research-oriented capacity. In addition, Karen Voss and Robert Boyd have been chosen to serve as Associate Editors of the journal.

Karen Voss is currently a Ph.D. candidate specializing in esotericism. By her own admission, she is the only Ph.D. candidate in the U.S. who has chosen this subject as her area of specialization. To this end, she is working on her thesis in France with the advice of Professor Antoine Faivre. She serves as a Member of the Comité de rédaction of the journal published by *ARIES*, and since 1991 has been Co-Director of the Hermetic Academy, an affiliated society of the American Academy of Religion. Karen Voss is presently Adjunct Professor of Religious Studies at San Jose State University, where she lectured for five years, and where she designed and taught courses on esotericism and mysticism, and women and religion. From 1988 to 1990, she organized special sessions on esotericism for the American Academy of Religion, Western Region. It is our hope that Professor Voss will keep us informed of contemporary European scholarship on the subjects that concern this journal.

Robert Boyd served as a volunteer at Adyar for several months of each year between 1982 and 1990 during which time he assisted the Honorary Director of the Adyar Library, Dr. K. Kunjuni Rāja. He originally went to India at the invitation of the late Rukmini Arundale and stayed at Kalakshetra for some time. Having begun Theosophical study with Prof. Ernest Wood in Houston, Texas in the early 1960s, Mr. Boyd has over the years met several of the leading Theosophical figures who have now passed from the scene. He was a student at Krotona Institute and during the summer of 1986 volunteered in the library at Wheaton. His academic study was completed at

the University of Madrid (Spain) after which he taught Spanish and Portuguese at Western Illinois University at Macomb and edited a foreign language bulletin for teachers in Illinois. His work in educational travel has taken him to all parts of the world, and he is widely read in several European languages, including French, German, Italian.

Book Notes

James Santucci

Readers may be interested in one book that was published during the H.P. Blavatsky Centennial (1991) that perhaps has not attracted as much attention or publicity as Daniel Caldwell's two compilations (*The Esoteric She* and *The Occult World of Madame Blavatsky*, both cited in this section, III/7-8): *Blavatsky and the Secret Doctrine* by Max Heindel. A booklet of 89 pages containing a short biography of Heindel (whom many know as the founder of the Rosicrucian Fellowship of Oceanside, California and as the author of *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception*) and an introduction by Manly Hall that assesses Heindel's contributions plus additional notes, its primary importance is that it contains, according to Mr. Hall, the "only remaining unpublished manuscript of Max Heindel," which also happens to be his "first literary effort." The basis of this commentary on *The Secret Doctrine* were two lectures that were presented before an audience on the premises of the Theosophical Society in Los Angeles. The only (small) portion of the book that I would take issue with is a two page note by the publisher that contains an attack on the "churchian" or "Neo-Theosophy" of C.W. Leadbeater and a passing negative reference to the theosophy of Alice Bailey. Although intended to be informative, it is an unnecessary and detracting injection of a controversial topic that does not add to our understanding of Heindel's perspective. Published by Wizards Bookshelf (Box 6600, San Diego, CA 92166); price, \$5.00.

One of the more important reference works that have come along in recent years is the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae Canon of Greek Authors and Works* by Luci Berkowitz and Karl A. Squitier (N.Y./Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. lx + 471). Mention of the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG), which is currently housed at the University of California at Irvine has already appeared in a previous issue (II/3 July 1987) in connection with a discussion of the occurrence of the form *theosoph-*. Also, the TLG provided the data for an article of mine, "*Theosophia*: Origins of a Name," which appeared in *The American Theosophist* (Fall Special Issue, 1987: 336) minus the original Greek citations included therein. To quote from a circular on the TLG:

The Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG) represents twentieth century man's effort to collect, maintain, and preserve those materials which constitute the basis of western civilization. In essence, the TLG is a data bank containing all texts and documents surviving from ancient Greece.

The above-mentioned book is the much-expanded third edition that contains around 9400 individual works by 3200 authors. The total number of words cited in the project is calculated to be 65 million.. The new material included in this edition originates primarily from works after 600 C.E. and up to 1453. The price of the book is \$39.95.

While on the subject of Greek, another reference work from Oxford University Press, *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (3 vols., edited by A.P. Kazhdan et al., 1991, pp. li + 2232, \$275), provides considerable information on the language, literature, culture, *realia* and daily life.

The Modern Encyclopedia of Religions in Russia and the Soviet Union (edited by Paul D. Steeves, Gulf Breeze, Florida: Academic International Press, 1988-1991, \$37.50 per volume) promises to be a major undertaking that will cover a wide range of topics. The publication schedule is projected at three volumes a year with a total of twenty-five volumes comprising the full set. Topics include Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism, including articles such as the "All-Russian Muslim League," "the Ancient Slavic Religion," and "Armenian Animal Sacrifice" (volume 1), "Apocalypticism in Russia," "Antireligious Campaigns in USSR" (volume 2), "Apocrypha" (volume 3), the "Blessed Fools," and the "Black Clergy" (volume 4). As of this writing, four volumes have been published.

Alternative Medicine and American Religious Life by Robert C. Fuller (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1989, \$19.95) draws attention to the fact that all too often the investigation of a religion is incomplete because of the absence of healing techniques engaged therein. Alternative medical theory and practice based on metaphysical principles was and in some instances still is an important ingredient in American religious life. Subjects include hydropathy, homeopathy, the influence of Mesmer and Swedenborg, and New Age healing. The book fills a gap in our quest to understand the total religious experience.

Two books published in 1989 on Buddhism are worthy of mention here: one a general survey (*An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, history and practices* by Peter Harvey [Cambridge: Cam-

bridge University Press] pp. xxii + 374, \$14.95), the other a more advanced text intended as an introduction to Mahāyāna Buddhism (*Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* by Paul Williams [London and N.Y.: Routledge], pp. xii + 317). Harvey divides Buddhism into three traditions: the Southern (for example, Sri Lanka, Burma), Northern (Tibet, Mongolia, Nepal, etc.), and Eastern (China, Japan, North and South Korea among others), with the most emphasis on Southern Buddhist teachings and practice. A chapter, "Buddhism beyond Asia," may be of particular interest to those interested in the spread of Buddhism.

Williams' book demands a more careful reading, especially the chapters "On the bodies of the Buddha," "The path of the Bodhisattva," and "Hua-yen - the Flower Garland tradition." This is an informative book by the Indo-Tibetan Studies Lecturer in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Bristol (U.K.).

The Destiny of Russian Theosophists in the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

A.V. Gnezdilov¹

[(This address) is one in a series of talks given by delegates from the U.S.S.R. to the European Theosophical Federation Congress at Arolsen, in Germany in July 1991. Dr. Gnezdilov, whose grandparents were active members of the Theosophical Society (Adyar) prior to the 1917 revolution and the subsequent closing of the Society in Russia in 1918, is chief of medical and scientific work of the Leningrad (St. Petersburg) Voluntary Charitable Society Hospice. **Joy Mills**]

In these memoirs I would like to honour those little known people who devoted their lives to Theosophy. After the [Russian] Revolution, when the Theosophical Society was dispersed, many of its members shared the destiny of people prosecuted and shut in prisons for their views diverging from the officially imposed way of thinking. Very few of them escaped this misfortune; some, however, survived and returned from captivity. Their names and their destinies are worth being remembered by their successors because in their hearts they kept and nourished the light of the Teaching they served, the light that helped them to go through severe trials with their will and their

Spirit unbroken. They went through the ordeal of fire bravely, and they were still able to share their knowledge, or rather their aspiration for knowledge, that was so characteristic of them. In all its errors and delusions, Russia has been and continues to be the land of Searching Spirit, and this is the guarantee of the eternal life in which, sooner or later, we reach the light of the Truth.

In my life I have met with Theosophists at various times and in different situations; that is why my memories are somewhat incoherent and inconsistent, but so is the outer pattern of life. I say the “outer pattern” because the inner laws - for example, the law of likelihood - govern our lives, and certain interests inevitably attract related circumstances.

I was lucky to be born in a family with Theosophical traditions. My grandmother, Sofia Slobodinskaya, who was born in 1870, lived in Kiev and, by the beginning of the century, led a group that had been studying the works by H.P. Blavatsky, A. Besant, C.W. Leadbeater and others. According to the memoirs of my mother, Nina Slobodinskaya, my grandmother was a very talented and enthusiastic woman who drew all her close friends and relatives to the Theosophical movement. Also, her husband, my grandfather, Konrad Slobodinsky, shared her interests. At first, he was interested in spiritualist seances; later on he was seriously engaged in Theosophy. He studied Sanskrit and helped to translate the *Bhagavad Gītā* and poems of Rabindranath Tagore.

¹ Dr. Andrey Gnezdilov is a graduate from the Leningrad Medical Pediatric Institute, has specialized in psychiatry at the Bekhterev Institute of Psychoneurology, and has been associated with the Institute of Oncology for ten years. He is currently a medical director of the First St. Petersburg Hospice. His interests include art and music therapy, sculpture, and writing fairy tales.

He intended to travel to Adyar but circumstances did not allow him. After the Revolution he was arrested for having inconsistent views and died in Tashkent in prison in the 1930s. His wife, Sofia, died in the Caucasus in 1927. At her request she was buried on a slope of a mountain where a small theosophical colony was situated.

Alexander Usov, Sofia Slobodinskaya's brother, lived from 1872 to 1951. He wrote books for children and made many trips. He wrote stories about animals under the pen name "Cheglok." He travelled around the world twice with his friend, the artist Vasili Vatagin, who shared his theosophical ideas. In 1905 Alexander Usov took part in the revolutionary movement in Sochi, then for a period of time lived abroad. He was well-acquainted with A. Lunacharsky, the Peoples' Commissar of Education in the post-revolutionary government, and influenced his views. In 1914-15 Usov founded, with his friends, a small Theosophical ashram in Lazarevskoye, near Sochi, in the Caucasus. Also, in Guarek, a village, he planned to build a sun temple in the shape of a star, which, through a complicated system of mirrors, sunlight would last all day in every corner of the temple. Only design sketches of the temple were completed, however.

In the evenings the Theosophists used to light campfires by the seashore and read poems, meditate and discuss problems. Among those who visited the ashram was Maksimilian Voloshin, a famous poet who was interested in Anthroposophy. At the end of the 1930s, after Lunacharsky had died, Usov was arrested and banished to Siberia. In 1941 he went out from his home to die in freedom, and so never returned.

Among the Russian Theosophists, I would like to mention a good friend of M. Voloshin, poetess Adelaide Gerzik-Zhukovskaya, who lived in Sudak, a town in the Crimea. I heard a lot about her from

her son. She was a very courageous woman. While in captivity, she wrote her memoirs, which were later distributed in Samizdat: *Basement Sketches*.² They consist of very fine psychological observations of innocent people who ended up in prison because of their noble origin or for their religious or other convictions. About the character of the descriptions, one can judge from the title of a series describing the life in prison: "Sanatorium of Souls." Adelaide Gerzik-Zhukovskaya saw how unbearable conditions changed the psyche of the people. The hate between old enemies disappeared, and the proximity of death gave people a new understanding of life and beauty. People, who in their normal life were inconspicuous or egotistical, suddenly became heroic and showed sensibility, depth, mutual understanding and courage. I hope that some day these descriptions will be published. In them can be felt the heroism of the author, who was able to transform the most difficult trials into a lesson, from which she could learn without turning bitter.

Another bright personality was Adelaide's sister, Evgenia Gerzik. She also shared Theosophical views. She was a fine researcher of Edgar Allan Poe's works and was a good friend of the famous Russian philosophers Nikolai Berdyaev and Nikolay Lossky, the latter at the time researching the teachings of Bergson.

Adelaide Gerzik's husband, Dimitri Zhukovsky, also had relations with the spiritualist movement in Russia at the turn of the century. His uncle, Zhukovsky, was a friend of poet Andrei Belyi, a well-known Anthroposophist. These two men took part in founding an estate in the Crimea, which still now carries their name: Zhukovka. The

² This was a manuscript which was later duplicated and distributed in Samizdat. Two fragments from the *Sketches* were published last year in the journal, *Our Heritage*.

plants and trees of the park on the estate were chosen by them in order to suggest occult symbols. The sculptures in the park were made by a well-known sculptor, Matveyev, and they have been preserved to this day. The park is arranged near the ruins of an ancient temple, and its atmosphere is filled with meditative silence, lofty images and the sound of the sea. One could hardly find a more appropriate place in the Crimea, for both beauty and wisdom seem to be concentrated there. Perhaps only Koktebel, near Voloshin's Park, at the site of an ancient volcano, could be compared to it.

In any event, let me return to other members of the Theosophical Movement. The son of Sofia Slobodinskaya, Leonid, was born in 1900. He took part in the "Children's Lodge" Movement of spiritual knights and "pages." If I am not mistaken, the name of this brotherhood was the "Golden Chain" or Ring of the Golden Chain." Theosophical ideas were always present in Leonid Slobodinsky's life. He was an agronomist who kept a diary about his life. Because the social atmosphere in which he lived did not exclude oppression, his diary was kept in symbolic drawings. Each drawing was set in a frame in the form of a shield that was to symbolize his participation in the spiritual movement of the "pages."

Leonid Slobodinsky avoided punishment in spite of his active membership in the Theosophical centre in Lazarevka organized by Usov ("Cheglok").

Among the members of the centre were the Obnorskys: Aleksei, born in 1898, and his wife, Olga. Aleksei Obnorsky belonged to the old Russian nobility. He was an exceptionally well-educated person who knew six languages and was deeply interested in philosophy and Theosophy. Being a smart and bright person, he was always surrounded by young people, whom he

provided with banned Theosophical literature. He translated works by Krishnamurti, kept contacts with the surviving theosophists in Moscow, Leningrad and other cities. In 1952 he was arrested after having been denounced, and only the death of Stalin and the resulting amnesty following his death kept him out of the camps. Olga Obnorskaya was a woman of exceptional spiritual character. She wrote poems and made drawings, and was an unusually strong medium. She received information through telepathic contact from the Teachers of the East, which was written down in a poetic manuscript, "Garden of the Teacher." She died in 1957. It is interesting to note that she could accurately tell the day of her death a couple of years earlier. Interesting also is her talent of telling the fortune of her close friends with amazing accuracy. The Theosophists of Leningrad used to gather around the Obnorsky family. Among them we have to name Olga Yenko. She had a wonderful, sunny nature: always joyful, cheerful and happy. She helped her husband in translating the *Kalevala* into Russian. She never parted with an ivory cross with roses. With deep honour she spoke of the Rosenkreutz [Rosicrucian] movement. She was a close friend of Unkovskaya, whose work *Colour-Sound-Number* was published by the Theosophical Publishing House in St. Petersburg. Also among the members of the Society were Sofia Lesman and her husband, Joseph Lesman, was a violinist in the Auer's Chamber Orchestra. She was the daughter of a wealthy Greek industrialist. She went out to help those suffering from hunger in Povolzhye, and so saw much pain and grief.

Sofia Lesman was a close and trusted friend of Anna Kamenskaya, the Chairman of the Russian Theosophical Society. After the scattering of the Society, and after Anna Kamenskaya left Russia, Sofia Lesman took her place, kept the literature

safe, gave help to those in need and kept contacts with other theosophists. She was arrested and, with her husband, exiled to Alma-Ata, where her husband organized a musical school. His pupils felt the influence of his Theosophical ideas. Later, Sofia Lesman moved back to Leningrad after her husband and son died, where she lived alone in a small dark room. She spoke very little of herself, fearing another arrest, but her very presence at meetings created the atmosphere of deep seriousness and wisdom. She was a remarkable person, able to win people's affection. She was always calm, simply dressed, and she never parted with amethyst beads given to her by Sofia Gerzik. Sofia Lesman gave special meaning to the lilac colour of the stones and used to say that they helped her to feel the contact with the great Masters who gave life to the Theosophical Movement. In her room she kept well in sight the portraits of Blavatsky, Besant, Jinarājadāsa, Leadbeater, Arundale and Krishnamurti. She took her heavy lot with amazing strength, seeing in it the manifestation of Karma. She died in the 1970s in an old people's home.

In this circle belonged the Timofeyevsky family. The head of the family, Pavel Timofeyevsky, a friend of the famous academician Bekhterev, was an important member of the Theosophical Society in St. Petersburg. His publications on the spiritual freedom of man and immortality, two basic ideas in theosophical thinking, are well-known. After the Revolution he was arrested and sent to captivity. He died in the 1950s. His daughter, Yekaterina Timofeyevskaya, was exiled but not imprisoned. His son, Timofei, fell victim to oppression at work as "the son of the people's enemy."

Yekaterina Timofeyevskaya was an artist and a poetess. Her works were not published because of their religious ideas and images. Fortunately,

her poems were preserved in manuscripts, and may someday be published. The heroic pathos and remarkable sincerity of the poems speak for themselves. The basic idea in them is the conquering of oneself and trust in the leadership of the Higher Powers. If we can apply the term "Knight" to a woman, this would be absolutely true for Yekaterina Timofeyevskaya. Full honesty of her thoughts, words, and deeds drew to her everyone she met. She died in 1989. She was found by her bed kneeling, her head resting on a pile of old copies of the journal "Theosophical Message." On the table before her was a portrait of Master M.

I could still name some other people who belonged to the Theosophical Movement, for example G. Shtal, O. Kazin and others, but unfortunately I cannot tell much about the people themselves.

I shall continue with a group of Theosophists in Moscow whom I was lucky enough to meet.

Ariadna Arendt is a sculptor, descendant of the doctor who treated the great Russian poet Pushkin. Ariadna Arendt is a woman who preserved an amazingly strong will and joy in spite of the fact that early in her youth she lost her legs. She was a friend of Maximilian Voloshin and shared the ideas of the Living Ethics of the Roerichs (husband and wife). Her house has always been open for the young, and her library was available to all who were interested. In her home works of Blavatsky, Roerich, Steiner, translations of Krishnamurti, Ramacharani, occult works, and novels by Krzhizhanovskaya Rochester could be found in spite of harsh times. Her handicap and openness of her life protected her and her husband from depression. Her husband was Anatoli Grigoriev, who married her in spite of her disability, kept close to her and served her to the last day of his life. Ariadna Arendt is still alive.

Among the Moscovite philosophers I met was

a wonderful woman, Yevgenya Dementyeva. A known musician, she preserved well into old age a very bright and clear intellect, wrote translations of Krishnamurti and poems of her own. As an example of her thought I would like to quote one of her poems. At the age of nearly ninety years, sick, with a broken hip, helpless, deaf, almost blind, she writes the following:

Louder and louder is the call of the skies.
Weaker and weaker is the song of life.
I wish that the end of my way will come soon.
Someone is whispering a silent reproach to me: "Understand as long as you live, you may not wish to go..."

Not everything is accomplished, you still have many duties. Not yet is the silent peace of soul reached. Excitement and restlessness still live in your heart,
So do not precipitate the end of earthly life.

Only those may go who have fulfilled their duties, or those who could not or did not wish to continue their way.
Accept with blessing, as a gift, your suffering, so that every new day would be a step on the Path.

The name of Kora Antarova is also well-known in Theosophical circles. She was a talented singer and had remarkable visions, which inspired her to write a work entitled *Two Lives*, wherein she opened the occult side of the Masters' work through literature. Among the characters in the book is Leo Tolstoy. This work contains many occult insights and Theosophical ideas.

Sergei and Maria Antonjuk were amazingly wise and warm people. They were teachers, and their devotion to the Theosophical Movement inspired many of their pupils. When Sergei

Antonjuk spoke about the ideas dear to him, has kindled, inspired, displayed a radiating happiness; other people could not help feeling happy too because of the world being so wise, the stars radiating love, the grass smiling, everything around filled with sense and beauty. His cheerfulness brought into mind Francis of Assisi.

Lucy Hublarova is another person who was devoted to Theosophy. Her husband, Mikhail, died in the camps for his religious convictions. When I think about Lucy Khublarova, I see her dark-brown velvet eyes filled with kindness and sorrow. She typed many translations which helped to popularize Theosophical works. After the death of her father, she was left with a rich collection of butterflies, and she herself was like a beautiful butterfly in the world of harmony silently serving the Truth that was shining before her.

Vasili Yefimov was a professor of physiology. He researched the connections with the astral plane. In his lectures he denied the disability of old age, treating it as youth and the time of ripening of the soul. He spoke about the continuous evolution that cannot be stopped by death. Young people liked his lectures, but "official scientists" denied his ideas. When he came to Leningrad to visit the Obnorskys, their discussions lasted usually late into the night. He was a man of encyclopedic knowledge, most of all appreciated a synthetic approach to life, and regarded Theosophy as the only movement that could solve problems of a united world.

One to remember is Yevgeny Zelenit, a professor of mathematics and a person who loved India and the works of Chekhov; another is Tatyana Bukreyeva, who wrote many books, including *Eight Meetings with the Master*. I had never had the luck to meet her, however.

One could not help loving and admiring every one of these people. They were like sparks of a

whole epoch, of a teaching that came simultaneously from the past and from the future, and like seeds that fall onto the ground, they sprout ideas on the uniting of people, religions and philosophies.

I would like to close my memories with a quotation from the Dementyeva:

Do not weep for me, do not shed helpless tears, hoping to hold me when my last hour strikes. Remember - there is no death. I am spreading my wings, they will carry me to an impetuous flight.

It is birth, not death . . . The spiral leads all the steeper. Dimly I see a continuous row of coils. And ahead, in the mist, unknown precipices. When going up, do not look back.

But I love you, my dear Earth, and I'll return to you when the time comes. Will it be soon or not - I do not know . . . There's no time THERE, only the eternal stream.

Marx and Engels on Spiritualism and Theosophy

Herman de Tollenaere¹

There are several ways to look at relationships—friendly or unfriendly—between occultism and political currents, such as Marxism. In this regard, Bruce Campbell has observed that “[e]soteric and mystical sources have been identified as part of the intellectual background for Hegelian and Marxist thought.”² He did not elaborate on this observation, however, and neither will we. If this statement is indeed true, it must relate to an indirect influence of pre-1800 ideas via Hegel. This concerns, however, an earlier age than the subject of this article. Nor does this article consider subjects later in history, like the reciprocal opinions of twentieth century communists and theosophists in such countries as India and Sri Lanka, though it is part of the wider research in which I am now involved.

This article is specifically about Karl Marx’s (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels’ (1820-1895) views on Spiritualism and Theosophy. Both of them embarked on political careers in the 1840s, in the Communist League, an international organization in which migrant German workers in

England were heavily represented³.

Nineteenth century Spiritualism was a widespread but not well organized movement. As is well-known, it began with the Fox sisters claiming to hear ‘spirit rapping’ sounds at their Hydesville, New York farm in 1848.⁴

Nineteenth century Theosophy also started in the same American state through the aegis of the Theosophical Society (T.S.), this time in New York City in 1875 through the efforts of its founders, Colonel (U.S. Army, retired) H.S. Olcott and Russian aristocrat Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (H.P.B.; 1831-1891). They, and others from a Spiritualist background, wanted a more coherent doctrine and organization. It was only since the 1880s (the decade when Marx died and Engels was in his sixties) that the Theosophical Society became sizable, first in south Asia and later in the U.S. and Europe.

Spiritualism

Marx and Engels, in their voluminous works,

³ It had as its motto the words “All people are brothers.” This was soon changed to the familiar “Workers of all countries, unite.” Some 35 years later, the Theosophical Society, after its founders had gone to India, included Universal Brotherhood in its Objects. See C. Jinarajadasa, *The Golden Book of the Theosophical Society* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1925), 343.

⁴ See Joscelyn Godwin, “The Hidden Hand, Part 1: The Provocation of the Hydesville Phenomena,” *Theosophical History*, III/2 (April 1990): 35-43.

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² *Ancient Wisdom Revived* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 13.

often referred to Spiritualism, although on examination all the references are relatively brief. Some of the references do not mention Spiritualism by name, but the authors sometimes joke (for instance, Marx in *Das Kapital*) about dancing tables⁵, “ghost-rappers, ghost-rapping Shakers....”⁶

Engels in an 1886 letter briefly put the Movement into the perspective of U.S. society:

though the Americans . . . have not taken over from Europe medieval institutions, they did take over lots of medieval tradition, religion, English common (feudal) law, superstition, spiritualism, in short, all nonsense, that wasn't directly harmful to business, and now is very useful to dull the masses.⁷

So he thought modern Spiritualism was unmodern. He tried to explain its recent rise only when he used the word “now,” as he wrote about its usefulness to the rich in their battle against the poor.

Longest was a ten page article by Engels entitled “Die Naturforschung in der Geisterwelt” (“Natural Science in the World of Ghosts”).⁸

⁵ Marx saw the 1850s, after revolutions in Europe had been suppressed, as the times when “China and the tables started dancing, as the rest of the world seemed to stand still.” See *Das Kapital*, volume I, in *Marx Engels Werke (MEW)*, vol. 23 (Berlin: Dietz, 1962), 85: “China” refers to the Tai Ping uprising, which lasted from 1850 to 1864. All translations from German are mine.

⁶ *MEW*, vol. 18 (Berlin: Dietz, 1962), 99 (Engels, “Die Internationale in Amerika”: 97-103). This article originally appeared in the German social democrat paper *Der Volksstaat* (#57, 17 July 1872). The “Shakers” refer to a Christian sect.

⁷ *MEW*, vol. 36 (Berlin: Dietz, 1967), 579: letter to Friedrich Adolph Sorge in Hoboken. London, 29 November 1886 (*MEW*: 578-81).

⁸ *MEW*, vol. 20 (Berlin: Dietz, 1962), 337-47.

Probably written in 1878, it was not printed during his lifetime; it first came out in an 1898 Hamburg social democrat calendar. It was similar to T. Huxley's better known observations on the credibility, or lack of it, of spiritualist mediums. The article in fact ended with a Huxley quote. This connection reflected the observation that English zoologists from the sphere of Darwin and Huxley were were prominent among the adversaries of Spiritualism. When the American medium Slade went to Europe in 1876 with recommendations from H.S. Olcott and H.P. Blavatsky, one of these zoologists, Ray Lankester (1847-1929), had Slade sued in court for fraud.⁹ Later, Lankester was one of the eulogists at Marx' burial.

Engels thought that “modern Spiritualism” was the “emptiest of all superstitions.” As an example of the fraud present in the Movement, he cited the Holmes of Philadelphia, who were responsible for evoking the spirit of ‘Katie King’, an action that H.P. Blavatsky defended in the American press.

Engels' article aimed at a sociological explanation only in that it asked what kind of **scientist** spiritualism was most likely to attract. Paradoxically, it was concluded that empiricists were more likely to be attracted than *a priori* theorists like German nature philosophers; Alfred Wallace and Sir William Crookes¹⁰ were cited as examples of the former.

⁹ See also Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*. Volume I (London: Cassell, 1926), 286f. H.P.B. referred to this Lankester in her “(New) York against Lankester”, which appeared in the *Banner of Light* on 14 October 1876. See *H.P. Blavatsky Collected Writings: 1874-1878*. First edition. Compiled by Boris de Zirkoff. Volume I (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1966), 221-25.

¹⁰ Both would briefly become members of the Theosophical Society. See Josephine Ransom, *A Short History of the Theosophical Society* (Adyar, Theosophical Publishing House, 1938), 19.

Annie Besant Before Theosophy

For four years prior to her joining the Theosophical Society in 1889, Annie Besant (1847-1933) was, like Engels, active in the English socialist labour movement: at first in the Fabian Society, which was too moderate for Engels, later in the Social Democratic Federation (S.D.F.) - officially 'Marxist' but criticized for its sectarianism as well.

Although Annie Besant's biographer Arthur Nethercot¹¹ did not quote from Engels' works, he does mention his name several times. He writes on page 235:

Certainly Mrs. Besant never darkened the doors of Engels' home, though she was the Fabian for whom he had the greatest respect, because of her influential pamphlets.

Engels did not forgive her earlier anti-socialism¹². He saw her as one of "those dummy men and women"¹³ who played a role only while British workers weren't confident enough for leadership from their own midst yet.

Engels in 1891 wrote to German social democrat Karl Kautsky on Annie Besant: "Mother B. always is of the religion of the man, that has *subjected* her."¹⁴ Engels shared that idea with many before and after him. It was first said against her by W.P. Ball, a fellow freethinker who op-

¹¹ *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

¹² *MEW*, vol. 36, 101. Letter to Laura Lafargue (Paris). London, 5 February 1884, 101-103.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 710: letter to Laura Lafargue (Paris), London 11 October 1887 (708-710).

¹⁴ *MEW*, vol. 38 (Berlin: Dietz, 1968), 191. Letter to Karl Kautsky (Stuttgart). London, 25 October 1891 (190-191).

posed her becoming socialist; Nethercot and even her 1980's feminist biographer Rosemary Dinnage¹⁵ tended to agree. I hope to write later on arguments against that view on influence on Besant.

Like Annie's supporters later, during the time she played a major role in India, Engels spoke of "Mother" Besant but not in a complimentary sense. Engels complained that a review copy of the new English translation of his *The Condition of the Working-class in England in 1844* he sent to Besant's *Our Corner* magazine was ignored.¹⁶

Theosophy

The only time Engels mentioned H.P. Blavatsky was in an earlier 1891 letter from London to Kautsky:

Do you know Mother Besant has joined the theosophists of Grandmother Blowatsky (Blamatsky). On her garden gate, 19, Avenue Road, now is in big gold letters: Theosophical Head Quarters. Herbert Burrows has caused this by his love.¹⁷

These three lines in a private letter are all Engels (or Marx) ever wrote on the Theosophical Society. If he would have thought them important, he would have written more. Did he, apart from not really agreeing with them, underestimate them? My few lines are not enough to answer that question.

¹⁵ *Annie Besant* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).

¹⁶ *MEW*, vol. 37 (Berlin: Dietz, 1967), 58. Letter to Florence Kelley-Wischnewetzky (New York) London 2 May 1888 (58-59).

¹⁷ *MEW*, vol. 38, 88. Letter to Karl Kautsky (Stuttgart), 30 April, (continued on next page)

1891 (86-88). The last sentence paraphrases Heinrich Heine's poem *Die Lorelei*. H. Burrows was a S.D.F. member as was Annie Besant; he joined the T.S. shortly before her. He left after the 1907 controversy on C.W. Leadbeater. Compare Engels' view to that of Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement* (London, Longmans, Green, 1931), 91 [on her mother, Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst. Her father's views, like Besant's, had gone from liberal to socialist; unlike Engels, he had worked closely with Mrs. Besant's labour free speech Law and Liberty League]:

It was said that . . . Mme. Blavatsky, had been seen to extend her arm to abnormal length, in order to light a cigarette at the gas jet in the ceiling. Mrs. Pankhurst and her sisters attended some of the séances, but nothing remarkable happened during their presence. Mrs. Pankhurst was completely skeptical and dismissed Blavatsky's occult phenomena as mere imposture.

Four Madame Blavatskys?

Leslie Price

Readers of the Rawson letter in T.H. January 1989 (III/1) may anxiously be wondering what the implications are of the fact there stated, and only occasionally recalled, that there were two Madame Blavatsky's at large in the Levant in the same era. In Jean Overton Fuller's biography of H.P.B. *Blavatsky and her Teachers*, Nathalie is identified, rightly in my view, as the mother of the child adopted by H.P.B. But we should note a paragraph from Col. Olcott's *Old Diary Leaves* (*The Theosophist*, May 1892: 456) omitted from the book version, which appears immediately after the testimony of Dr. Marquette.

A large proportion of the calumnious reports circulated about her in Europe for many years, arose from the fact that other ladies of the same surname—Mesdames Julie, Nathalie, Heloise, etc,etc. Blavatsky—were mixed up in adventures of various kinds, some not very creditable, and the enemies of H.P.B. attributed them to her. Her aunt, Mlle. N.A. Fadeyeff, mentions the circumstances in an explanatory letter quoted by Mr. Sinnett (*Incidents*, etc., p. 73) and I had from H.P.B. herself some of the stories, the foisting of which upon herself naturally aroused her fierce indignation.

Boris de Zirkoff and others have done sterling work trying to clarify the Russian family lines of H.P.B., especially on the Hahn side, but it appears we need much more information about the Blavatskys. Russian visitors to Adyar have ap-

peared in recent years, and it may be that these, and the improving political climate in Russia, may enable these connections to be traced.

The Mead Symposium

Joscelyn Godwin

On 30 May 1992 a one-day symposium was held in London, under the auspices of the Temenos Academy for Integral Studies, to commemorate the centenary of G. R. S. Mead's first book, *Simon Magus*, first published in 1892. Kathleen Raine, for the Academy, introduced the program with a tribute to Mead's blend of scholarship with a spiritual commitment to his material: a combination that has prevented his due recognition by modern scholars.

Four papers followed, which together built up a detailed picture of Mead's work and, to a lesser extent, his life. Leslie Price (Founder of *Theosophical History*) spoke on "G. R. S. Mead and the Quest for Gnosis." In the course of a very detailed and informative account of Mead's career, Price raised the question of whether Mead's great mistake, made at the watershed of his life in 1909, was the refusal to stand as a candidate for leadership of the Theosophical Society. Having spent 25 years of his life in the Society, was Mead wrong to quit as a protest against the direction it was taking? Clare Goodrick-Clarke's paper, "Mead's Gnosis; a theosophical exegesis of an ancient heresy," pinpointed some likely academic connections of the young Mead with the Keightleys and with C. W. King, a Cambridge scholar who derived Gnosticism from Buddhism. A lively discussion was bedevilled by the misidentification of "gnosis" as the Way of Knowledge (the Hindu "*jñāna mārga*")—to which Mead was undoubtedly committed—with "Gnosticism," the term for a

group of dualistic religious movements of which he was the discriminating chronicler.

After lunch, Stephen Ronan spoke on "Mead and the Chaldean Oracles," admiring Mead for his avoidance of "mere textual analysis" on the one hand, and "glib esoteric waffling" on the other. Mead's own approach changed between his exposition of Chaldean theology in *Orpheus* and his edition of the Oracles in *Echoes from the Gnosis*, as he learnt from German scholarship that they were of late-antique origin. Like Ronan himself, Mead recognized in the "Chaldean" movement of second-century Rome a genuine instance of theurgy, and was able (unlike most scholars) to distinguish this science from that of magic. Lastly, R. A. Gilbert gave us "New Light on Mead's Break with Theosophy" from letters in archives as well as printed sources. Explaining why Mead was the "only real scholar in the Society," Gilbert traced his successive disillusionment with Judge, Leadbeater, and Besant, and his loyalty to the truth that came even before his affection and reverence for H.P.B.

The picture of Mead that emerged from the four papers and their discussions was of the most admirable and upright personality, with a lifetime commitment to the quest for "theosophy" in the original sense: that of the way of knowledge of the Divine, which—and this is another place where a discrimination of terms is essential—he no longer found compatible with membership of the "Theosophical" Society.

Mme. Blavatsky Again.

A Further Explication of the Buddhist Faith and its Miracles.

The Marvelous Fakirs—Why a Russian Countess Firmly Believes in Magic.

[From the *New York World*, Monday, 2 April 1877: 1]

Mme. Blavatsky, so well known to the public as Secretary of the Theosophical Society—of which Colonel H.S. Olcott, the lawyer, is President—through the medium of several recent communications in these columns, emphatically forbids her friends to address her as “Countess,” although her title to that rank is undisputed. “I am a democrat, and I hate titles,” she says. She has been a traveller from childhood, and has visited nearly all the countries of the world. She is an accomplished scholar, being both linguist and philosopher, a Buddhist by religion, and an occultist of most firmly fixed convictions.

Her life has been an eventful one. Fascinated in early life by the mystic doctrines of the East, she was baptized by fire after the ceremonial of the Parsee priesthood, but afterwards embraced Buddhism, after studying the mysteries taught in the secret societies of the Orient, within whose guarded circles few Europeans have been admitted, but whose existence is as well attested as that of the Pyramids. Travelling often where no other European has ever been, living with the Orientalists as

one of them, she has become thoroughly imbued with many Eastern habits of thoughts and manner without losing the customs of the Western civilization. A photograph of her in a Russian head-dress which shows little but the face presents a girlish profile with straight nose—a little heavenward—a pouting lip and hair that is fluffed over a full forehead. In *propria personæ* she is a middle-aged woman more than *embonpoint*, with an eye as clear as a child’s, an intelligent brow and a complexion that has been darkened but by no means spoiled by tropic suns. She has lived in New York for several years, and her pleasant home in a French flat at the corner of Eighth avenue and Forty-seventh street is well known to a wide circle of friends, which include the whole of the Theosophical Society as well as many outside of that portentous organization. She quotes with equal readiness from Sanscrit or French, and cites authorities from Pythagoras to Huxley as fluently as a boarding-school miss from Owen Meredith. Careless of society, she sits under the shadow of her blue-glass windows between her desk and her piano, surrounded by her feathered pets and a thousand trophies of travel, and receives those of her friends who care to visit her,

but seldom leaves her own apartments. Defraying her expenses (it is said) from the income of her patrimony in Russia, she devotes her time to philosophical study, which is likely soon to take form in the publication of a book.

“The man who writes the editorials in your paper,” she said abruptly, as the WORLD reporter again entered her parlor on Good Friday, “should know that fakirs do not wear baggy trousers¹ or anything else excepting a dhoti. If the man of whom he speaks had a mechanism under his clothing he was not a fakir. And a swamee is not educated in a lamasery.”

The reporter assured her that if some of these words were interpreted the necessary corrections should be made in THE WORLD.

“A swamee is a fakir,” she resumed, with animation, “or holy man of the sect of Brahmins. A dhoti is the only garment he can wear, and consists of a cloth girt about his loins. A lamasery is a school for lamas or holy men among the Buddhists.”

“Yet you, a Buddhist, have acknowledged the magical power of the fakir,” said the reporter.

“Certainly, for I have seen it. I know what it is. The forms and dogmas of different religions differ, but the original essence of them all is the same. The fakirs are certainly holy men, as are the devotees of all the religions of the East. They are bound by their vows to the utmost purity of life, and they show publicly their terrible self-tortures.”

“And have all these devotees of the different religions magical powers?”

“Yes, those who really live up to their vows. And there are also black magicians as well as the holy men who practiced white magic. In India there are thousands of the sorcerers who are

ignorant men, who can neither read nor write, but who have wonderful powers that they have acquired from their parents. They perform these tricks for money, which the fakirs will not do. I remember once seeing a trial between a fakir and a sorcerer on the banks of a small lake. They had been disputing, the sorcerer affirming that he could do anything that the fakir could do and the fakir denying it. The fakir waded out waist deep in the lake and touched his finger to a large leaf of a water plant that lay on the water, and the sorcerer waded out and touched another leaf and they both came to shore. In a little while the leaves began to tremble, and then we heard strains of music, entrancingly sweet but unearthly in their sound, different from anything else I ever heard. And presently the leaf the sorcerer had touched shrivelled up and turned black, and a loathsome face appeared on it. And on the leaf that the fakir had touched appeared a number of characters of exquisitely beautiful tracery. I broke off the leaf and kept it, and showed it afterwards to a very learned gentleman. I did not know the Sanscrit then, but he told me it was a moral precept in the Sanscrit characters.”

“Fakir,” continued Mme. Blavatsky, “is a very loose word, and means one who is devoted to the service of God. They have many other names, such as gossain or holy mendicant, and guru or teacher. It is as Pythagoras that we know your Pythagoras. There are over a million fakirs in India, many of whom are women. They are born of all castes, but on entering on a life of devotion they relinquish caste. They place themselves under the instruction of the gurus and bind themselves by a great number of vows. Among other duties they are obliged to practice non-resistance; if you beat them they will ask you to beat them more. They are forbidden to cherish resentment for any injury even secretly, and are

¹ *Theosophical History* III/7-8: 227.

compelled to relinquish entirely all worldly concerns. They are not even allowed to own a bit of metal, excepting a needle to mend their dhotis and a knife to mend their pens. These they carry, with their pipe, stuck in their hair, which is long and bushy. They may not eat but once a day, and if no one gives them food during the day they fast, for no matter how much they may have on one day they cannot keep any for the next, but are obliged to give away all that they do not eat at once. Another of their vows is that of chastity even in thought. If the thought of a woman crosses the mind of a fakir he is bound by his vows to fast for several days, and even if he touches a woman by accident in a crowd he must fast for a day to purify himself. So you see that the precepts of Jesus, which Christians consider exaggerated statements of moral obligation, which they are to follow, but are not expected to strictly conform to, are actual precepts to be literally obeyed in the estimation of the fakirs."

"But do they live up to them?" asked the reporter.

"They do. An American or European has no idea of the asceticism they practise. They mortify the flesh in a manner that St. Simon Stylites did not begin to approach. They lie for hours among burning coals that nearly touch their flesh. They sit sometimes for years in one attitude, absorbed in thought and not moving a muscle, until they sometimes become paralyzed. If you put food into the mouth of such a man he will eat it; if you don't he will starve. Sometimes a fakir will tie himself up in a tree, head downward, and hang so for days together. They will pass steel hooks through the flesh of their backs and suffer themselves to be swung around in the air until the flesh gives way and they fall to the ground. They do not care. If they die they are glad. They seek always to keep their physical nature in subjection."

"And you say there are a million such men in India?"

"Yes. They are of several different classes, but are all followers of Krishna or Brahmins. One class is composed of the disciples of Nirnarain who was in the line of succession to Odhow. Odhow was left in charge of the human race by Krishna. Among the most famous of the successors of Odhow were Gopal and Atmanund Swamee and Nirnarain. The school of Nirnarain numbers over one hundred thousand devotees; the most of whom are in Northern India. Their first principle is that all souls of whatever nationality or caste or sect, are equal before God. There is no difference, and any one can gain admission to their ranks. They are bound to abstain from wine and strong liquor, from eating flesh—anything that has animal life—from stealing, and from women.

"Then there are the Jains. They derive their name from the word *jinu*, 'to conquer.' There are hundreds of them, and they are especially careful about the destruction of animal life. They carry little brooms with them to brush away the insects that may get in their path. They are among the most powerful of magicians. An anecdote was told about one of them by Major Seeley, which had a wide circulation at the time and excited a good deal of comment. He said that a mischievous European showed a drop of water under the microscope to a Jain, and that he was so impressed by the sight of the numerous living organisms in the water that he vowed never to drink water again. Major Seeley goes on to say that the Jain kept his vow and perished in consequence. It is a pretty story enough, but the fact is that the Jains never drink water that has not been boiled two or three times, and on a rainy day they keep their mouths covered lest they should admit into their bodies the animalculæ of the water. So

you see, they are not as ignorant as the story would indicate.”

“The Fakirs,” continued Mme. Blavatsky, “have eighty-four ‘holy attitudes,’ as they are called—conditions which they assume for particular purposes or on particular occasions. The *asan dolna*, for instance, is the phrase used to express the state of a holy man, who, perceiving by his spiritual intelligence that someone is in distress is calling on him for aid, leaves his body and goes to the rescue. The *asan mama* is the name of the ‘attitude’ practiced solely by the yogis when at prayer. There are very few Buddhists in India. They are mostly in Thibet, Mongolia, Tartary and those countries, and the lamas are among them what the fakirs are among the Brahmins. I am more familiar with the lamas than with the fakirs, for I have been more with them, but they are alike in many respects. But while in India there are many black magicians or sorcerers who ply their trade openly, there are comparatively few among the Buddhists who persecute the jugglers and prevent them as far as possible from practicing their rites. Among the black magicians are the serpent charmers, who have the same powers as the *paillis* of Egypt. They have as keen a scent as a dog for a snake, and will go straight to his hole and dig it out with their fingers. Many of these jugglers will do the same things as the fakirs do, and by a similar process in incantation. I remember I was once in the bungalow of a rich Indian where a fakir and a juggler both performed the feats. In the room were a tame tiger, chained, a monkey and a parrot. While the fakir was performing they all showed symptoms of great delight, but when the sorcerer began the tiger leaped around in evident terror, roaring in a frightful manner, and at last became so violent that he broke his chain, leaped through the window, ran away and was never seen again. The

monkey fled to his perch, grasped it with his tail and hung in a fainting fit, while the parrot fell to the floor nearly dead.”

“Do you think that all this indicates a spiritual nature to these magical powers?”

“It does to me,” was the reply. “They work with the aid of *pitris*, or the souls of their ancestors. All the Orientalists venerate these *pitris*, and the magicians sometimes become powerful enough to create an atmosphere about them in which these spirits become visible. And on the other hand they often become invisible themselves. I remember the first time this was done in my presence. A fakir was in the room with me, crouched down in prayer, and suddenly the fakir disappeared. I was a great sceptic then, and I pinched myself to be sure I was not in a dream. The door was locked, and I searched the room carefully. At length I stumbled over something which I could not see and suddenly my fakir appeared. I thought even then that I had been deluded in some way, but I saw the same thing many times afterwards.”

“How do they acquire this power?” was the next question.

“By the subjection of the body. You will find that the most of the good spiritual mediums are unhealthy in some way, and the Eastern magicians reduce their physical nature until their astral body becomes the more powerful. Then they can work like disembodied spirits which they really are. But many spirits during this life and after it are evil. Not devils—I don’t believe in devils—but evil disposed. But the seemingly unnatural growth of seeds and voluntary levitation and all such feats are undoubtedly produced by these men. The black sorcerers for some reason always choose a mango seed for their marvels, but a fakir will make any seed grow into a plant bear blossoms and fruit in an hour or two. And they will sit in the

air a yard from the ground for twenty minutes or longer without being in contact with anything. I have seen all such things done hundreds of times, and so have hundreds of other Europeans.”

“How were you converted to the Buddhist faith?” asked the reporter curiously.

“By what was to me absolute proof. I was at a vihara in the northern part of India, and the chief of the gurus of the little village showed me things which I demonstrated to be truth. For instance he made me look at a bright tin plate and fix my thoughts on something I wished to see. I thought of my home and instantly saw a room in my father’s house in Russia. Two of my aunts were sitting there, one of them reading a book, the title of which I could read. And a strange looking hump-backed woman entered the room as I looked. I wrote home about it and learned months afterward, that at that time my aunts were sitting in that room and one of them was reading the book I mentioned. And the hump-backed woman was a Polish governess they had engaged after I left home and without my knowledge.

“Then the guru threw me into a trance, first asking me to think of some place to which I wished to go. Now, some of the most powerful mesmerizers of Europe have tried to throw me into mesmeric sleep, and have been utterly unsuccessful. Prince Dolgourouski tried it, but even he failed. But after this guru had made a few passes over my face and had given me something to smell, and had made me swallow a certain potion the ingredients of which I know but will not tell, I instantly fell into the trance. I had desired to go to the house of my dearest friend in Berlin, from whom I had not heard for a long time. I was there at once, and rang the door-bell. An old woman came to the door and I asked for my friend. ‘Alas,’ said the old woman ‘she was buried

three months ago.’ I asked her where she was buried, and she named the cemetery. Then I had a desire to see the grave and I was instantly beside it, looking through the earth at the corruption below. Suddenly I felt two arms about my neck, and a kiss pressed on my cheek. I looked up and my friends stood before me, a glorified image of what she had been in this life, but transparent. Some months later I heard by letter of her death, and years afterwards I visited her grave and recognized it as the place I had seen in my trance.

“After this guru, who was from Punjaub, had thus proved his powers to me, I was unable to doubt him when he showed me in similar ways the secrets of nature, the mysteries of the future life, and the truths that appertain to metaphysics. I studied them for years, and at last I did not believe, but I knew the truth of these things, for I saw them, felt them, tried them, lived them.”

“But you cannot expect others, who have not had your experience, to follow you in your belief,” said the reporter.

“I do not. What is proof to me is no proof to the public, and if they will not believe eleven millions of Spiritualists, because many of the mediums are humbugs and tricksters, they will not take my word, of course, and I don’t expect them to. But what I know I know. And these marvels that seem incredible to those who have not seen them—these miracles, as they are called by the Christian church, and tricks as they are called by self-styled scientists—are not wonders to me, for I understand them.”

Book Review

BROTHER TWELVE: THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF CANADA'S FALSE PROPHET.

By John Oliphant. Toronto, Ontario: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1991. Pp. xii +371. \$29.95. ISBN 0-7710-6848-4.

Of all the so-called millenarian cult leaders to appear in the twentieth century, the name of Edward Arthur Wilson (1878-?1934) must surely be placed in the first rank as one of the most intriguing, mysterious, and infamously charismatic and prophetic to grace the annals of North American history. Sharing the brilliance of an L. Ron Hubbard, the destructiveness of a Jim Jones or a Tony Alamo, and the hypnotic hold of a Rasputin, E.A. Wilson, a/k/a Brother XII, Amiel de Valdes, Julian Churton Skottowe, certainly serves as a case study of and forerunner to the archetypal cult leader that became popularized in the 1960s. Wilson was a person who attracted a considerable following of earnest but gullible disciples—most of whom were highly educated and intelligent—who accepted the disturbing and exhilarating message of impending doom and subsequent salvation, who received the promise with the utmost fervor and expectation that those who participated in the great Work would be greatly rewarded for their considerable efforts. Furthermore, Wilson's Aquarian Foundation, the organization his disciples had joined, followed the

general pattern of a religious 'cult' in that only the leader was qualified to deliver or discern the Truth, at least until such time—often in the nebulous and distant future—when the disciples themselves achieved such status. As is often the case with cult leaders, when the bubble bursts, the devastation to those who committed their heartfelt loyalty to the Master and his Teaching can never be fully ascertained. At the very least, a sense of betrayal is certainly to be expected, but what other pain is suffered?

The story of the Edward Arthur Wilson is still shrouded in mystery, but his career as Brother XII (a name given Wilson by his Master around 1925) is very well-documented indeed by the author of this thoroughly fascinating book. Prior to its publication, the story of Wilson and his Aquarian Foundation was periodically brought to the attention of readers beginning with the narrative account of the Vancouver reporter for *The Daily Province*, Bruce A. McKelvie.¹ Later, the tale was recounted in Howard O'Hagan's "The Weird and Savage Cult of Brother 12"², in Pierre Burton's *My Country: The Remarkable Past*³, in a fraudulent

¹ See Chapter VI of the book. McKelvie later authored a book entitled *Magic, Murder and Mystery* (published by McKelvie), in which he devotes his first chapter (pp. 1-20), to the story of Wilson and his Aquarian Foundation. The account, entitled "Brother XII's Magic," is based on his numerous newspaper accounts.

² *MacLean's Magazine* (23 April 1960).

biography that appeared in 1967 entitled *Canada's False Prophet: The Notorious Brother Twelve*⁴, and an article by this reviewer entitled "The Aquarian Foundation."⁵ Despite the concentrated research of the author, however, precious little has as yet been uncovered about Wilson prior to his forty-sixth year.

Like magi before him (Gurdjieff and Blavatsky for example), there is a hidden, earlier life filled with travel in search of Truth, often coming into contact with human and supra-human beings who promise to reveal the Truth at such time when the candidate is primed for it. Sometimes too, the magus may possess a biological basis for justifying his worthiness and candidacy for such status. In Wilson's case, he made the claim that his mother was a Kashmiri princess, thus providing a direct link to the Eastern mysteries. This is of course, not unique. In my own research of two older contemporaries of Wilson, Count Albert de Sarāk ("Rama," "Alberto de Das" or "Albert de Sarāk, Count of Das") and the hitherto unknown Ezekiel Perkins, both claimed to have Asian parentage. Sarāk, asserting to have been born in Tibet, "son of a Rajan of Thibet and a French

marchioness," was a medium of sorts and the founder of a center for oriental studies in Paris who claimed to have received the secrets of the cosmos from the Mahatmas in Tibet. In actuality he was an Italian by the name of M. Alberto Santini-Sgaluppi, who was previously expelled from the Theosophical Society by President Olcott in 1892 due to his deceptions and confidence schemes.⁶ Ezekiel Perkins, the self-proclaimed head of an occult order of magicians in New York known as the Lampsakenoi, claimed a mother (named Ayasha Maria Perkinje) who was descended from a long line of Bengali princes learned in Eastern wisdom and a father who was a Thug.⁷

Like Santini-Sgaluppi, the truth was less noble and romantic for Wilson. He was actually born to Thomas Wilson, a deacon in the Catholic Apostolic Church and an "Irvingite" who by profession was "a master-craftsman in the city's thriving metallic and brass bedstead trade" (17); and to Sarah Ellen Pearsall, both of whom presumably hailing from Birmingham, England, where they were married.

There is no doubt, however, that Wilson travelled extensively. He was an accomplished seaman and navigator that took him to all the continents with the possible exception of Australia. During this period, Wilson fulfilled his role as a magus by undergoing what he termed the

³ Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1976.

⁴ Richmond Hill, Ontario: Simon and Schuster of Canada, Ltd., 1967. The book was supposedly written by Wilson's brother Herbert Emmerson (*sic*) Wilson, who was actually a bank robber in the 1930s and an ex-convict who first learned of Brother XII while living on Vancouver Island during the 1960s. He and his wife collected what material that could gather and hired a Toronto writer named Thomas P. Kelley, to write the book.

⁵ *Communal Societies*, vol. IX (1989): 39-61. Another recent publication which I have as yet seen is *The Devil of Decourcy Island: Brother XII* by Ron McIsaac, Don Colark and Charles Lillard (Porcepic Books, 4252 Commerce Circle, Victoria, V.C., V82 4M2, 1989). The book was reviewed in *Canadian Theosophist*, vol. 72/6 (Jan.-Feb. 1992): 139-140.

⁶ The quote is from *The Radiant Truth* ("The Official Organ of the Esoteric Centre of Washington"), No. 1 (24 Nov. 1902): 12. A series of articles in the *Annals of Psychical Science* exposed Sarāk for what he was. See especially Laura I. Finch, "All about "Rama." Vol. vi (Dec. 1907): 426-434. Sarāk is also mentioned in Henry Steel Olcott's *Old Diary Leaves*, vol. IV (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1910), 499-501.

⁷ Information on Ezekiel Perkins is for the moment restricted to two articles in the New York *World*, which will be reprinted in a future issue.

Ceremony of Dedication, which revealed to him the special mission which he was to carry out⁸ (19). For the next twelve years very little is known about Wilson except what little he chooses to reveal. Precious little was discovered by Mr. Oliphant during this period⁹ until the significant year 1924, when Wilson claimed to have had visions in the south of France and to have been chosen by the Masters to carry forth their Work for humanity. Prior to this event, Wilson may have met many illustrious figures in South Africa (Jan Smuts), and England (Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir Arthur Eddington, Sir Herbert Austin, Sir Neville Chamberlain). Perhaps further light can be shed on these interesting contacts by examining the papers and letters of these individuals. Oliphant also claims that Wilson became “a brilliant astrologer, and contributed numerous articles to scholarly magazines.” (20) A pity he did not document the claim.

The outcome of Wilson’s epiphany in France and his resultant expansion of consciousness in the months following, was to take down through automatic writing, so he claimed, a book of spiritual teachings entitled *The Three Truths* (12-13) in the latter part of 1925 and early 1926. It is in this book we discern the debt that Wilson owed to Theosophical teachings, containing as it did the primary teachings of the unity of all life, the immortality of the soul, and the law of karma. (13) No accident this, for Wilson was indeed a member of the Theosophical Society (Adyar) from around 1915 to 1917. Other teachings reveal impending doom for the “civilized’ nations of the world” (13), a Manichean vision of the forces of Evil and

⁸ This appears in “Letter IX: Preparations for the Work” (dated July, 1926). See the *Foundation Letters and Teachings* (Akron, Ohio: Sun Publishing Co., 1927), 43-46.

⁹ And in my article, “The Aquarian Foundation”: 58.

Light engaged in warfare on the inner planes, and Wilson’s plans (and the Masters’ he followed), to bring forth the New Age at the turn of the millennium. The message of doom and disaster is, of course, not limited to Theosophical doctrine, but it did have an especial appeal to many Theosophists because of the Theosophical language and ideas employed.

With the theoretical foundation laid, Wilson set about organizing the Work of the Masters in their preparation for the “new Order” (29), the Aquarian civilization, through his Aquarian Foundation. Though it is not entirely clear in the book when the Foundation was conceived and engendered, it seems that the most likely time period was between February and May, 1926.

The promise and excitement of participating in the “laying the foundations of the new Order” (29) must have been profuse for those who were captivated by Wilson’s pronouncements. Many respondents were Canadian members of the Theosophical Society who heard Wilson at the various Lodges throughout Canada (nearly all in the Ottawa Lodge joined the Foundation to give but one example) although the General-Secretary of the Society and editor of *The Canadian Theosophist*, Albert E.S. Smythe, was hesitant and even sceptical of Wilson’s claims, as was Alice Bailey, the head of the Arcane School, and the young editor of *The All-Seeing Eye*, Manly P. Hall. Other, equally respected individuals - the novelist Will Levington Comfort, the astrologer Alfred H. Barley and his wife Annie, Joseph S. Benner (the owner of The Sun Publishing Company), and Coulson Turnbull, a well-known astrologer and author of such works as *The Divine Language of Celestial Correspondences* as well as the owner of The Gnostic Press - were far more accepting.

As promising a venture the Aquarian Foundation was, the issue of Wilson’s character was

almost immediately called into question. Despite the generally good impression that Brother XII had on perspective recruits¹⁰, what was to follow, from 1927 on, was most disturbing and sometimes frightening to all those aware of the events. Once Mr. Oliphant recounts the improprieties, disapprobations, libertinism, and scandals, the narrative becomes so “bizarre that it out rival[s] in real life the wildest imaginings of an old-fashioned dime novel,”¹¹ for it is the story of “His Doomed Cult of Gold, Sex, and Black Magic” states the dust jacket of the book.

Readers will no doubt find the narrative of Brother’s XII sexual escapades, his political ambitions, his increasingly harsh and irrational treatment of his followers, his insatiable and unscrupulous desire for gold, his attempts to kill his enemies by means of black magic or by psychic means, and finally the strange circumstances surrounding his disappearance and eventual, uncertain death in 1934 fascinating and disquieting reading.

As revealing as Mr. Oliphant is in his narration of the facts of E.A. Wilson’s later life as Brother XII, I still cannot unfathom this tenaciously enigmatic character. Was he totally evil as some might infer from his actions? Was he ever the charlatan whose sole purpose was to bilk his followers out of the thousands of dollars they willingly donated for his Work? Or was he at first a balanced and clear-

sighted prophet on a rightful mission only to be derailed by either some psychological breakdown or psychic assault which transformed him into a spiritual megalomaniac? There is a danger in jumping to conclusions about any person’s motivation for such behavior. Behavior is, after all, observable and therefore subject to evaluation and analysis. It is unlikely, however, that the motive upon which such actions are based can ever be uncovered with certitude. And it is on this basis that I hesitate making any superficial judgments about the man. Who knows what demons possessed him? As Colin Wilson states in his “Preface” (7):

there is, it seems, a certain risk attached to becoming a prophet and spiritual leader. Steiner was better able to cope with it than Crowley, because he seems to have been a genuinely decent and saintly man. Yet all these “avatars” seem to find themselves drawn into the same web of difficulty and compromise . . . “Teachers” who try to exert a direct influence on other people, to become gurus and messiahs, seem prone to “entanglement,” to involvement with fools and time-wasters, which often brings out the worst in them. Even when, like Steiner, they are too decent as human beings to succumb to power-mania or paranoia, they seem to find themselves in a trap that defies all attempts to escape.

It is therefore, unfortunate that the subtitle of the book included the phrase “False Prophet” when this is taken into account. Yes, Wilson betrayed the trust of his disciples and followers, but whether this was due to his being a victimizer or a victim only he himself would know. The mystery that resided in his heart, I fear, will ever be impenetrable.

¹⁰ Jane Comfort, the daughter of Will Levington Comfort, in an interview with Mr. Oliphant, remembered the following:

Everybody loved him . . . He was stimulating and wise, and always spoke carefully and with sensitivity. He wasn’t overbearing - if he’d acted like an authority, he would have been much less appealing. But you felt his presence - he was carrying a lot of voltage!

¹¹ “Finis Written to Long Search for Man of Mystery,” *The Daily Colonist* (Victoria, B.C.), 16 July 1939: 2.