



Theosophical History



A Quarterly Journal of Research

Volume VI, No. 7 July 1997
ISSN 0951-497X

THEOSOPHICAL HISTORY

A Quarterly Journal of Research

Founded by Leslie Price, 1985

Volume VI, No. 6

April 1997

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Theosophical History (ISSN 0951-497X) is published quarterly in January, April, July, and October by James A. Santucci (Department of Religious Studies, California State University, P.O. Box 6868, Fullerton, CA 92834-6868 U.S.A.) The journal consists of eight issues *per* volume: one volume covering a period of two years. The journal's purpose is to publish contributions specifically related to the modern Theosophical Movement, from the time of Madame Helena Blavatsky and others who were responsible in establishing the original Theosophical Society (1875), to all groups that derive their teachings—directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly—from her or her immediate follow-

ers. In addition, the journal is also receptive to related movements (including pre-Blavatskyite Theosophy, Spiritualism, Rosicrucianism, and the philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg to give but a few examples) that have had an influence on or displayed an affinity to modern Theosophy.

The subscription rate for residents in the U.S., Mexico, and Canada is \$21.00 (one year) or \$38.00 (two years). California residents, please add \$1.62 (7.75%) sales tax onto the \$21 rate or \$2.94 onto the \$38 rate. For residents outside North America, the subscription rate is \$25.00 (one year) or \$45.00 (two years). Air mail is \$35.00 (one year) or \$65.00 (two years). Single issues are \$6.00. Subscriptions may also be paid in British sterling. All inquiries should be sent to **James Santucci**, Department of Religious Studies, California State University, P.O. Box 6868, Fullerton, CA 92834-6868 (U.S.A.). Periodicals postage paid at Fullerton, California 92631-9998. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Theosophical History (c/o James Santucci), Department of Religious Studies, California State University, P.O. Box 6868, Fullerton, CA 92834-6868.

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

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Printed on acid-free paper

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On the Cover: George Henry Felt (c. 1862). Picture from H.P.Blavatsky's *Scrapbook* (volume VII, p. 55). Archives of the Theosophical Society. Courtesy of the Theosophical Society, Adyar, Madras (India).

Editor's Comments

In This Issue

Since 1997 is the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Theosophical Society's headquarters at Point Loma, two offerings are presented herein: Richard Robb's recounting of his effort in replacing, or replicating, the glass sphere on Spalding House, one of the original structures built there around the turn of the century and the only one of three with glass domes still standing (the other two being the Academy and the Temple). Mr. Robb is the founder of Wizards Bookshelf (Box 6600, San Diego CA 92106) and has done fine work in publishing a number of books significant in Theosophical thought.

The second offering on Point Loma is a review of *In the Temple*, a series of symposiums presented by the successor to Katherine Tingley, Gottfried de Purucker, on the thought of four ancient lands—India, China, the Celtic lands, and Egypt. John Drais, the reviewer, is Abbot of The Paracelsian Order in Dulzura, California.

We are happy to have Leslie Price, the former editor of *Theosophical History*, once again contributing to the journal. He sends a communication commenting on Pier Franco Beatrice's "Pagan Wisdom and Christian Theology according to the 'Tübingen Theosophy'" and a review of David Shaw's *Gerald Massey*.

Other contributors include John Oliphant and James Biggs. The author of that fine

biography on Brother XII, John Oliphant, reviews for the journal *Many Lives, Many Masters* by Brian Weiss. The topic of the book, past-life memories and reincarnation, is of current interest to Mr. Oliphant, who is researching these phenomena. James Biggs, the author of a very informative article on Bellamy and the Nationalist Movement ("Theosophy and Nationalism: A Dialogue," IV/4-5 [Oct. 1992]), reviews William Leach's *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. Included in the discussion of consumer culture and corporate business is the role of religion and "positive thinkers" such as New Thought, Unity, Christian Science, and Theosophy. Also included is mention of the Theosophical connection with the Wizard of Oz and its author, Frank Baum.

Finally, the article "George Henry Felt: The Life Unknown" is an attempt to shed some light on one of the most mysterious and problematic formers of the Theosophical Society. Felt's contribution to the Society has been recognized by Col. Olcott, but it is only within the past few years that any serious effort has been attempted to unveil his life and to understand his contribution to the founding of the T.S. This article does not answer all the questions, but it dispels some of the shadowy imagery of this unusual man.

International Theosophical History Conference

Planning for the Theosophical History Conference, first announced in the April 1996 issue, is nearly finalized as of this writing. It will be held on July 11, 12, and 13, 1997 at the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in England (50 Gloucester Place, London). The order of presenters include the following:

1. James Santucci, "Charles Sotheran's Description of Theosophy: the 1876 Article in the *Spiritual Scientist*"
2. John Patrick Deveney, "Astral Projection and the Early Theosophical Society"
3. Daniel Caracostea, "Jacolliot"
4. Vernon Harrison, "New Discoveries in *The Mahatma Letters*"
5. Michael Gomes, "Unveiling Isis"
6. Nicholas Champion, "Creativity and Conflict: The Astrological Lodge"
7. Tore Ahlbäck, "Theosophy and Socialism"
8. John Hamill, "Stainton Moses, Masonry and Theosophy"
9. Kim Farnell, "Walter Old: The Man who held Madame Blavatsky's Hand"

10. Jean Overton Fuller, "Cyril Scott and a Hidden School"
11. Joy Dixon, "Sex is Not a Freehold Possession"
12. Judy Salzman, "The True Service of Humanity: Robert Crosbie and the United Lodge of Theosophists"
13. Paul Johnson, "Theosophy in the Edgar Cayce Readings"
14. Robert Gilbert, "The Disappointed Magus: John Thomas and his Celestial Brotherhood"
15. James Santucci, "The Point Loma Theosophical Society: 1897"

* * *

Magic, Millennium and New Religious Movements

The Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR or Centro Studi sulle Nuove Religioni) will hold its 11th International Conference at Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam from 7-9 August 1997. Sessions include "The New Cult Wars," "Traditional Witchcraft and Modern Satanism," "Swedenborg," "Gurdjieff," "Gnoses Anciennes et Modernes," and "The Great European Cult Scare." Speakers include Wouter Hanegraaff ("New Age and the Secularisation of Western Esotericism"), James Moore ("The Politics of Consciousness: Gurdjieff's Recourse to Four Historical Paradigms"), Michael

Homer (“Magic in Contemporary Occult Movements: Problems in Methodology”), Carlos Gilly (“La magie au Moyen Age”) Jean-Pierre Laurant (“L’occultisme du XIXe siècle, religion nouvelle pour la fin des temps”), Massimo Introvigne (“Beelzebub’s Tales to European Governments: A Crash Course on How to Reduce Religious Liberty to an Empty Shell” and “Lectorium Rosicrucianum: A Dutch Movement Becomes International”), Herman A.O. de Tollenaere (“An Old New Religion and Authorities: The Theosophical Society in the Netherlands and in the Dutch Colonial Empire [1880-1996]”), and J. Gordon Melton (“Ramtha’s School of Enlightenment”).

The registration fee is F.60 (Dutch guilders). For students it is F.30. One can pay by mail (deadline is July 20) or at the conference on August 7 between 8:00 and 10:00 am. The contact person and address of the registration site is:

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* * *

Prague Alchemy & The Hermetic Tradition

In 1600, Prague was the greatest center in Europe for the study of alchemy and hermetic philosophy. To celebrate this period, a summer-long festival of art, music and cultural events will be held in the capital of the Czech Republic. As a parallel event,

a conference, “Prague Alchemy & The Hermetic Tradition,” sponsored by the New York Open Center among other associations, will be held in the capital from August 29 to September 2, 1997. Speakers include Joscelyn Godwin (“Alchemy & the Pagan Imagination”), Adam McLean (“Alchemy in the Age of Rudolf”), Christopher McIntosh (“Royal Outsiders: Rudolf II & Ludwig II”), Robert Powell (“Tycho Brahe, Kepler, Rudolf II & the Prague Hermetic Renaissance”), Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (“John Dee & Renaissance Magic”), Christopher Bamford (“Rudolfine Prague: Sunset of the Renaissance”), Zdenek Neubauer (“Cartesian Mysteries”), and Cherry Gilchrist (“Of Angels & Dragons: The Visionary Tradition in Alchemy”). Workshops will also be held on various topics, such Joscelyn Godwin’s “Prague’s Hermetic Regent: Archduke Ferdinand” and Adam McLean’s “The Inner Theatre of Khunrath’s Alchemy.” Further information will be available from the New York Open Center at (212) 219-2527 (tel.), (212) 226-4056 (fax), or e-mail: nyocreg@aol.com. Some information is available in Prague 420 2 432 816 (tel.), 420 2 961 41122 (vm), and on e-mail: michal@terminal.cz.

* * *

Theosophical History: Occasional Papers Vol. VI: Astral Projection or Liberation of the Double and the Work of the Early Theosophical Society

An information sheet on the Theosophical Society published around 1897 describes the T.S. as “an International Body . . . which was founded at

New York, U.S., on the 17th day of November, 1875, with three well-defined objects. . . .” Although somewhat ambiguous, the impression given the casual reader is that the T.S. at its inception had three objects, the first of which is “to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity. . . .” This is the impression that still exists today among many Theosophists and historians with passing knowledge of Theosophical history. A careful reading of the events that led to the formation of the Theosophical Society and its activities during the New York years (1875-1878) leaves no doubt that this is an erroneous view. Although a number of studies have revealed the original goals and activities of the Society, no study has exhibited such an extensive investigation of this topic as John Patrick Deveney’s *Astral Projection or Liberation of the Double and the Work of the Early Theosophical Society*. Mr. Deveney culls his information from a host of primary sources that leave the reader with little doubt that magic, occultism, or Theosophy refer more to the manipulation of the secret laws of nature rather than the speculation thereof, at least in this early period of Theosophical history. Madame Blavatsky’s famous lamasery is mentioned as a training school for magic, especially the separation of the astral body from the physical body. *Isis Unveiled* also is largely based on the separability of the astral and physical bodies. Madame Blavatsky herself possessed this ability or at least claimed this ability well into the 1880s. Other members, such as Damodar and Stainton Moses supposedly possessed this ability. In addition, the role of George Henry Felt in the founding of the Society, what it means to be a “chela” and achieve “Chelaship,” and the possible implications of the

early objects upon the later T.S. are all discussed. In short, this study serves as a corrective to the misconceptions and general ignorance about the early T.S. that seem to be widespread to the present day.

Mr. Deveney is very well-qualified to write on this topic. The author of the newly-published *Paschal Beverly Randolph* (Albany: SUNY, 1997) and co-author of *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1995), he has a grasp of the literature of the period that is unsurpassed.

Astral Projection or Liberation of the Double and the Work of the Early Theosophical Society, will be released on November 25, 1997. Those interested in ordering this volume should send a check or international money order in U.S. dollars to James Santucci (Department of Religious Studies, California State University, P.O. Box 6868, Fullerton, CA 92834-6868) payable to Theosophical History. Checks or money orders in British sterling should be made out to Dr. Joscelyn Godwin and sent to Dr. Godwin c/o the Department of Music, Colgate University, Hamilton, NY 13346-1398. The **pre-publication price** (postmarked prior to October 1) is \$18.00 (£13.00); the full **publication price** of \$22.00 (£16.00) will take effect on October 2, 1997. For air mail, please add \$4.00 (£3). There is no extra shipping and handling charge except for air mail. California residents, please add 7.75% sales tax (\$19.40 pre-publication price; \$23.71 publication price). Wholesale discounts available with the purchase of ten or more copies.

* * * * *



**Spalding House:
Without the Glass Dome (c. 1981)**



Spalding House: With the Glass Dome (c. 1984)

COMMUNICATIONS

Getting on the Ball: Replicating the Glass Sphere on Spalding House

Richard Robb

Notes by James Santucci

In 1980 Emmett Small told me that Paul Alexander¹, who had flown Spads in France, and was active in the antivivisection movement, had died at his small house on the grounds of the former Point Loma Theosophical Society.² The house was actually two cottages put together with a kitchen space between, and was the last remaining example of many similar ones formerly spread about the old T.S. grounds. Now, the adjacent property was occupied by the Nazarene Church as Point Loma Nazarene College, and Dwayne Little³, professor of history there, had taken an interest in the original occupants, the Theosophical Society. I moved into the cottage, began improvements, and was surprised at the knowledgeable and fair treatment afforded by Dr. Little in his talks about the Point Loma T.S. He asked if I would help in replicating the six foot glass sphere⁴ that formerly resided atop the Spalding House, which now housed the College Administration Offices.⁵ In Katherine Tingley's era, it was one of

three buildings with glass spheres, the other two adorning the domes of the Temple and the large main building or Academy.

Dwayne Little discovered some old photographs at the San Diego Historical Society, and from these we developed a plan view and side elevation⁶, determining that there were twelve 2 inch x 4 inch meridians⁷ with many segments of purple glass composing its surface. So while Professor Little searched for purple glass, I began laying out a clamping jig with a three foot radius with which to glue 2 inch x $\frac{1}{4}$ inch strips of fir, which the college wood shop supplied. Each meridian was comprised of 16 of these strips 8 feet long, bent in an arc, so the total was 192. We would epoxy several strips each day, but it took many weeks before we had our 12 curved 2 X 4s. They were then run through a planer and epoxy primed. The mounting base needed to withstand the ravages of time and not adversely affect the redwood dome on which it rested, so we

This
is an
Invitation

to witness the restoration of an architectural ornament of unique design and extraordinary beauty to the dome of the historic Spalding home.

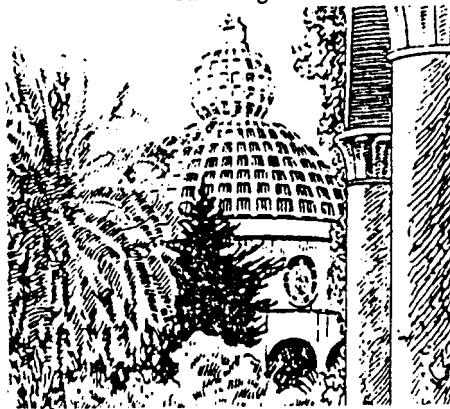
10:30 A.M. Wednesday, Oct. 21, 1981

on

POINT LOMA COLLEGE CAMPUS

3900 Lomaland Drive

San Diego



decided to fabricate an aluminum circle of 6061-T3 3 inch angle, with 12 pairs of ears. This was cut, welded, drilled, and finally anodized, and being aluminum was easier to handle. The surplus store supplied the collector rings that tied together the 12 meridians at the apex, and threaded rods at the equator allowed the segments to be spaced precisely 30° apart. Of course, all this was attended by endless discussions, speculations, and options. The purple glass arrived and we made templates for the 72 pieces, allowing slight overlapping to promote water drainage. But before affixing the glass, we sought an extra long life paint that would guarantee extended protection. Professor Little showed up with a quart can of aluminum pigment, which we mixed with 2 quarts of acrylic base, and surprisingly, this coating of nearly pure aluminum flowed on nicely. The glass was placed with silicone rubber, except where we made a door so one could have access for mounting and cleaning. Dwayne spent some time experimenting with various types of interior illumination which eventually proved satisfactory for evening display. The last item was the “eternal flame,” a carved shape that was mounted at the “north pole.”

A group of enthusiastic students was enlisted to move the sphere from its location alongside my garage to a waiting trailer, which carried it to the Spalding House. There, a large crowd was assembled to witness the placing of the orb at the top of the building by an enormous crane, all attended by music, testimonials, speeches, and a good many elderly people who had not seen each other since the 1940s, commiserating about the old days. There was even a two minute spot on Channel 8 at 6:00. All in all, it was a very

enjoyable project. It was not expensive, and all who pass by are entertained by its appearance, an echo of an extraordinary flowering in the early years of the twentieth century of the Theosophical spirit as envisioned by its leaders, Katherine Tingley and Gottfried de Purucker.

Notes

¹ Paul Alexander was a close friend of Rose Volmer (née Wood), who inherited 11 acres of the Theosophical Society property from her realtor father, Col. George Wood. Wood bought the entire property for \$85,000 in 1942. According to Mr. and Mrs. Emmett Small, the property was sold in three parcels: (1) the south and north ends to realtors, (2) the top part of the T.S. property to Balboa University, a law school, and (3) the eleven acres in the western part to Mr. and Mrs. Volmer.

Mr. Robb states in a letter of April 11, 1997:

Her [Mrs. Volmer's] father bought all property from the existing south line adjoining the Navy, to Hill street on the north, and from Catalina on the east to the ocean. Somewhere near 400 acres. He then developed about half, with streets and houses on the east, and at the northwest corner. The remainder of perhaps 200 acres was the site of the T.S. proper, which however had a parcel of 11 acres in it at the west of the large buildings, which Wood retained and bequeathed to his daughter Rose Volmer (née Wood). She built her residence there and rented out the cottage.

Alexander had no connection with the T.S., but his World War I experience made him a pacifist.

² In a letter to the Editor of *Theosophical History*, dated April 2, 1997, Mr. Small writes that Mrs. Volmer “was I think co-owner with her late father of a good deal of the property in the 1950s. Paul was a strict anti-vivisectionist. I had quite a number of talks with him when I walked over to that area. After Paul died a stone with inscription on it was planted on the grounds there under some shrubbery and is still there.”



From left: The Academy, Temple, Spalding House (c. 1920)



Spalding House (c. 1915)

³ Professor Little is currently the Director of Planning at Point Loma Nazarene College. He still retains his professorship in history, however.

⁴ Emmett Small remarks that George Davenport's frequent repairs to the sphere on the Spalding house during the 1920s resulted in its removal about 1931 due to recurrent leakage. (Letter to the Editor, April 2, 1997.)

The restoration occurred in 1981 and took a period of about 3 months.

⁵ [Editor's note: Spalding House is named after Albert Goodwill Spalding (1850–1915), the founder of the sporting goods firm, known at the time as A.G. Spalding and Brothers. He was also professional baseball's first pitcher to win 200 games, one of the formers of baseball's National League, the captain/manager, president and principal owner of the Chicago White Stockings during the 1880s, and the editor of *Spalding's Official Baseball Guide*. It was in the *Baseball Guide* of 1908 that the Spalding Commission reported for the first time the popular myth that baseball was invented in Cooperstown, New York by the Civil War general and hero of the Battle of Gettysburg, Abner Doubleday, himself a prominent Theosophist who was appointed President *ad interim* of the Theosophical Society by Colonel Olcott in 1879.

In 1901 or 1902 A.G. Spalding became a member of the Point Loma Universal Brotherhood and retired to Point Loma that year, primarily due to the influence of his new wife Elizabeth Mayer Churchill, a devoted supporter of Mrs. Tingley. She became a member of Mrs. Tingley's cabinet and general superintendent of a worldwide network of children's Sunday schools in 1898.

Mr. Small remembers the day of Mr. Spalding's funeral: "I remember the occasion as I was a boy in the school then and we were playing in recess time not far from his house—and told to quiet down!" (letter dated April 2, 1997).

Mrs. Spalding continued to live in Spalding House until her death in 1926. Following her death, Spalding House became the T.S. library, which was run first by Mrs. MacAlpin and then by Helen Todd (née Savage). The side rooms served as offices of Joseph Fussell, Helen Harris, Grace Knoche, and Boris de Zirkoff (Richard Robb, letter dated April 4, 1997). Mr. Fussell was Secretary General then, and Emmett Small, as his aid, "also had a desk there helping him." (letter dated April 2).

In 1950, 100 acres of the Point Loma property was sold to

Balboa University, renamed California Western University in 1952, and still later to United States International University. Then, in 1973, the current owners took possession of the property, the Nazarene Church (Point Loma Nazarene College), then called Pasadena College. Information on the structures is given in Bruce Coughran, "White City on the Hill: The Building of the Theosophical Society Community on Point Loma, California: 1897-1942" (M.A. thesis, California State University Dominguez Hills, 1994), 55.

Further information on A.G. Spalding appears in the biography by Peter Levine, *A.G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). For more details on the persons mentioned above, see Emmett A. Greenwalt, *California Utopia: Point Loma: 1897-1942*, second and revised edition (San Diego, CA: Point Loma Publications, 1978).]

⁶ "Plan view" is a bird's eye view; "side elevation" is a horizontal view from the ground level.

⁷ A "meridian" is a line on the surface of a sphere passing through both poles.

* * *

Byzantine Theosophy

Leslie Price

In the early development of the “Theosophy,” the Tübingen Theosophy of about 500 C.E. is an important text.¹ We know it mainly through an 8th century Byzantine summary, though an original fragment was published in 1906. Its authorship is obscure—Dr. Siémons suggests Aristokritos—but Pier Franco Beatrice, Professor of Early Christian Literature at the University of Padua (Italy) has now proposed Severus, the Monophysite patriarch of Antioch, who is known to have had expert knowledge of paganism and occultism.² Beatrice intends to study further the Monophysite content; meanwhile, he notes the wide knowledge it displays not only of Greek Christian literature, Hermetica, and Neoplatonism but even of Latin literature. He speculates that the treatise “On True Belief,” to which it was once an appendix, may have been lost because it was Monophysite.

Beatrice argues that the appendix is part of a traditional Christian genre in which it is claimed that pagan wisdom receives its consummation in the Christian revelation, and quotations (not always accurate) are deployed that supposedly show, for example, how ancient sages looked to Christ. Against the consensus, he believes that Aristokritos (a Manichaeon) wrote a quite different manuscript on Theosophy, and not this one.

In the background of the Tübingen “Theosophy,” he perceives as opponent the pagan

Porphyry. In 1992, Beatrice had suggested the latter’s anti-Christian treatise in 15 books was the same as his treatise on Oracles. Be that as it may, the Tübingen author was following in the steps of Eusebius in counteracting the pagan Theosophy of Porphyry, and his text “had a great success in the Byzantine tradition, as is demonstrated by the widespread diffusion in various collections of pagan oracles and prophecies of Christianity, all more or less originating from, or inspired by, our ‘Theosophy’.”

Notes

¹ Dr. Jean-Louis Siémons *Theosophia in Neo-Platonic and Christian Literature (2nd to 6th century A.D.)* (London: Theosophical History Centre, 1988).

² Pier Franco Beatrice “Pagan Wisdom and Christian Theology according to the ‘Tübingen Theosophy,’” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3/4 (1995): 403-18. It is gratifying to note that Beatrice cites on page 414 “the very useful collection of texts published by J.-L. Siémons *Theosophia: aux Sources neoplatoniciennes et chrétiennes (2^e - 6^e siècles)* (Paris: Cariscript, 1988) and rejects a statement by R. Lane Fox in *Pagans and Christians* (1988) that the term “Theosophy” appeared to be a Christian coinage.

* * * * *

George Henry Felt: The Life Unknown¹

James A. Santucci

Introduction

The origin of the Theosophical Society is well-known to any person familiar with Henry Steel Olcott's *Old Diary Leaves* or with those accounts given in secondary sources. Certainly, the most reliable record, brief as it may be, must remain the statement contained in the Minute Book of the impending society, dated 8 September 1875:

In consequence of a proposal of Col. Henry S. Olcott, that a society be formed for the study and elucidation of Occultism, the Cabala &c, the ladies and gentlemen then and there present resolved themselves into a meeting, and, upon motion. . . (signed H.S. Olcott and Mr. W.Q. Judge)²

The proposal by Col Olcott, to form what was soon to be called the Theosophical Society, was inspired from a lecture given the previous day by George Henry Felt in H.P. Blavatsky's home at 46 Irving Place (New York City), variously entitled "The Lost Canon of Proportion of the Egyptians" (by Olcott, most likely from the title of the book Felt intended to publish) or, if we follow the Rev. James Henry

Wiggin's account in *The Liberal Christian* (25 September 1875)³, "The Cabala." According to an early report appearing on pages 21 and 22 in the September 16, 1875 issue of the *Spiritual Scientist* of Boston, probably a reprint from a newspaper account⁴:

One movement of great importance has just been inaugurated in New York, under the lead of Colonel Henry S. Olcott, in the organization of a society to be know[n] as "The Theosophical Society."⁵ The suggestion was entirely unpremeditated, and was made on the evening of the 7th inst., in the parlors of Madame Blavatsky, where a company of seventeen ladies and gentlemen had assembled to meet Mr. George Henry Felt, whose discovery of the geometrical figures of the Egyptian Cabbala may be regarded as among the most surprising feats of the human intellect. The company included several persons of great learning and some of wide personal influence. The managing editor of two religious papers; the co-editors of two literary magazines; and Oxford LLD.; a venerable Jewish scholar and traveler of repute; an editorial writer of one of the New York morning dailies; the President of the New York Society of Spiritualists; Mr. C.C. Massey, an English

visitor; Mrs. Emma Hardinge Britten and Dr. Britten; two New York lawyers, besides Col. Olcott; a partner in a Philadelphia publishing-house; a well-known physician; and, most notable of all, Madame Blavatsky herself, comprised Mr. Felt's audience.

After his extempore discourse, an animated discussion ensued. After a convenient pause in the conversation Colonel Olcott rose, and after briefly sketching the present condition of the Spiritualistic movement, the attitude of its antagonists, the materialists; the irrepressible conflict between Science and the religious sectaries; the philosophical character of the ancient theosophies, and their sufficiency to reconcile all existing antagonisms, and the apparently sublime achievement of Mr. Felt in extracting the key to the architecture of Nature from the scanty fragments of ancient lore left us by the devastating hands of the Moslem and Christian fanatics of the early centuries, he proposed to form a nucleus around which might gather all the enlightened and brave souls who were willing to work together for the collection and diffusion of knowledge. His plan was to organize a society of occultists and begin at once to collect a library, and diffuse information concerning those secret laws of nature which were so familiar to the Chaldeans and Egyptians, but are totally unknown by our modern World of Science.

Mr. Felt said, in reply to questions, that communion of mortals with the dead, and the reciprocal intervention of each in the affairs of the other, was not a mere conjecture among the ancient Egyptians, but reduced to a positive science, and he, himself, had been able to cause the materializat[i]on of human forms in full daylight, by magical appliance.

It was unanimously voted to organize the proposed society forthwith; Col. Olcott was elected temporary president, and a committee was appointed to draft a Constitution and By-laws.

We hail the movement with great satisfaction, as likely to aid in bringing order out of our present chaos, furnish us a true Philosophy of spirit-intercourse, and afford a neutral ground upon which the tired wrestlers of the Church and College may rest from their cruel and illogical strife.⁶

There are some important lessons from this narrative. As Olcott remarked many years later⁷, the idea of a society "sprang spontaneously out of the present topic of discussion," that is, Felt's lecture.⁸ There is one more telling piece of evidence. Mrs. Hardinge Britten, one of the individuals present and a prominent Spiritualist herself, wrote that "as long as the [Theosophical] Society existed in that city [New York, before the departure of Olcott and Blavatsky at the end of 1878] *on its original lines*, the author's [Hardinge Britten's] name was retained as a member of the first council.⁹ The "*original lines*" mentioned herein must refer to all the relevant statements given in the last lines of the second paragraph ("a society of occultists¹⁰ ...to collect a library, and diffuse information concerning those secret laws of nature...") and in the final paragraph ("furnish us a true Philosophy of spirit-intercourse"). Regarding the earlier quotes, there is general agreement with the original objects of the Society: "to collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe."¹¹ Furthermore, the By-Laws include the duties of the Librarian (Chapter XII) and the organization and rules regarding the functioning of the Library (Chapter XV). Regarding the latter quote, the most telling evidence providing the connection of Theosophy with "Spiritology" or "Spiritism" is furnished by a serialized article that appeared in the *Spiritual*

Scientist by a “former” of the Society, Charles Sotheran.¹² There, “Theosophy” refers to the “sublime mysteries of the hidden secrets of Nature, including a perfect knowledge of the various degrees of spirits in the ‘Unseen Universe’.”¹³ The association of the term Theosophy with the secret or hidden laws of nature, a good part of which involved a knowledge of the many types of spirits, no doubt persuaded Sotheran¹⁴ to propose the name “Theosophical,” which was accepted at the meeting of the budding society on 13 September 1875 despite other, equally acceptable, names apparently bandied about by the participants therein—among which were “Egyptological” (no doubt Felt’s preference), “Hermetic,” and “Rosicrucian”¹⁵—which only add to the evidence given above. In fact, the use of the term “Theosophical” was employed “since it both expressed the esoteric truth we wished to reach and covered the ground of Felt’s methods of occult scientific research.”¹⁶

George Henry Felt: Background

The man who served as the catalyst and inspiration of the Theosophical Society and who became its first Vice-President has remained an enigma down to the present time. Aside from his active participation from September to November 1875 and only occasional mention thereafter in the Minute Book of the Theosophical Society and scattered accounts and reminiscences, we might safely assume that Felt either lost interest in the Society or was incapable of fulfilling his promise of demonstrating the existence of Elementals and Elementary (spirits),¹⁷

which would have raised occultism to an exact science. In any event, he completely removed himself from the Society in the latter part of 1876, and abandoned those who joined on the promise that he was on the verge of a great discovery. Indeed, a chapter in the Society was closed with his departure.¹⁸ The seeming mysteriousness of his appearance and departure led René Guénon¹⁹ to suggest that he fulfilled his mission, perhaps as a member of a secret society known as the H. B. of L. (Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor).²⁰ Guénon comes to his conclusion *via* a classic case of mixing a powerful combination of ingredients that lead to the establishment of a myth: lack of information, the love of mystery, and the search for meaning. There can be no doubt that much mystery surrounds the man, but the mystery is due more to a lack of documentation on his life rather than to any mythological aura surrounding him. By happenstance, Felt’s investigations were in just the area that was of greatest interest to Olcott and the others in Madame Blavatsky’s circle. To quote Olcott²¹:

Mr. Felt told us in his lecture that, while making his Egyptological studies, he had discovered that the old Egyptian priests were adepts in magical science, had the power to evoke and employ the spirits of the elements, and had left the formularies on record; he had deciphered and put them to the test, and had succeeded in evoking the elementals.

It is just in this area of “Spiritology” and “spirit-intercourse,” as part of the hidden laws of nature, that moved Olcott to propose a society for this sort of study. Here was also a man of great accomplishment, who was on the verge of

gaining lasting recognition through his book recording occult discoveries, and who had the confidence of Blavatsky and his publisher, J.W. Bouton. Yet, he failed to follow up on his promise of proving “the existence of the Elemental races.”²² Who was this man who caused so much excitement, and then embarrassment, for the Theosophical Society? An investigation of the available public records reveal a less mysterious, more mundane New Yorker who nonetheless did make a positive and more public contribution to society, albeit in ways that were quite unanticipated by those familiar with his Theosophical connections.

Family and Military Record

Considering the importance of George Felt’s role in the founding of the Theosophical Society, it is rather surprising that no Theosophical historian ever attempted to investigate his background beyond the statements given by Olcott and Hardinge Britten. Since the information given herein is based almost exclusively upon public documents, we find it difficult at this stage of knowledge to extract a three-dimensional portrait of Felt the individual. It is obvious that this study sheds some light on his life, but much still remains to be done. Any summing up of Felt the man must therefore remain suspended until more information comes to the fore.

The man who gave the lecture at the 7 September gathering was at the time a married²³, forty-three year Civil War veteran and mechanical engineer.²⁴ Born on 21 September 1831 in Boston, Massachusetts, George Henry

Felt was the son of Willard and Elizabeth Lemmon (alternately spelled Lemon) Glover Felt. Both parents came from old and established families as is evident from the genealogical records of both the Felt and Glover families.²⁵ George was the third of four sons of Willard and Elizabeth: Willard Lemmon²⁶ (b. 10 December 1825), David Wells (b. 20 May 1828), and Edwin Mead (b. 17 October 1835). A stationer by profession, Willard Senior moved his family from Boston to New York around 1836²⁷, living most likely at West Farms in Westchester County.²⁸ According to an observation contained in a transcript printed in 1863, George himself was “engaged in the manufacture of paper.”²⁹ The family itself must have been moderately well off as a result of the Willard’s business, for George is also said to have been educated in “select schools of New York city.”³⁰ Since his two brothers were educated at the University of the City of New York, it seemed reasonable that George was educated there as well, but a letter from the Archives Assistant of New York University indicates that he was not a registered student there.³¹ Unlike his brothers³², George became an engineer, probably a mechanical engineer at first³³ and later a civil engineer.³⁴

It was this training that allowed him to serve most of his time in the Union Army during the Civil War as acting-Signal Officer. As it turns out, more is known about Felt during the period 1861-63 than at any other time of his life, including the period 1875-76. Shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War following the Confederates’ attack on Fort Sumter in April of 1861, Felt enrolled for duty at Staten Island (New York) on 31 July of that year for a period of three years. He

was mustered in, at age 30, on 28 August as First Lieutenant³⁵, Company I, 55th Regiment, New York Infantry. On 1 January 1862³⁶, Felt was transferred to Company K³⁷ and from March of that year served in the Signal Corps³⁸ as Acting Signal Officer following a brief course of study completed on 5 February 1862. On 8 June Lieut. Felt was “placed in charge of a signal party in Gen. Halleck’s dept.”; after an illness in August and early September he was “[o]rdered to report for duty to Capt. L.F. Hepburn, at Washington, D.C.” on 24 September, and on 20 January 1863 was “[o]rdered to make an accurate report of the duties upon which he has been engaged since Sept. 24, 1862.”³⁹

Up to this point all seemed routine for the young signal officer, but an unexpected turn of events took place a few months after. On 1 May 1863, Felt received instructions to appear before the Examining Board for the Signal Corps due to a number of statements regarding his “character as a gentleman, . . . efficiency as an officer, and [his] moral character, that, until [he] could prove these statements to be untrue, they [the Board] did not think it worth while to examine [him] as an applicant for admission into the signal corps.”⁴⁰ The statements appeared in correspondence between the Signal Officer—a Major, later Col., Albert J. Myer—and Lieut. Felt that was provided by the Board by Myer. The president of the Examining Board, Col. George Thom, an aide-de-camp of the corps of engineers, later testified at the Court of Inquiry on 26 May that the charges centered around Lieut. Felt’s “receiving commutation for fuel and quarters in Washington city . . . while . . . Felt was on duty in the signal camp, near Georgetown”⁴¹ Col. Myer, in his testimony on 20 May 1863, stated that Felt was

not entitled to the quarters and fuel after the issuance of Special Order No. 7.⁴² Col. Myer demanded an explanation and claimed that he never received a satisfactory answer.⁴³

Another issue brought before the Board, involved the patenting of a signal rocket⁴⁴ and “a rocket code especially adapted to the use of the Signal Corps, Army of the Potomac.”⁴⁵ The issue centered around Lieut. Felt’s intention to profit from the improvements made on both. Myer testified that any improvement “should be for the benefit of the United States”⁴⁶ so long as the improvements were made “while in discharge of his [Felt’s] duty”⁴⁷ as a signal officer.

It was determined by Col. Thom, the President of the Board of Examination⁴⁸, that the whole matter would be better adjudicated by a Court of Inquiry. Consequently, a Board of Inquiry consisting of four officers was established on 16 May by Special Order No. 85.⁴⁹ The Order called for the Board to meet on 18 May in order “to inquire into and report upon the moral character of Lieut. George H. Felt, Acting Signal Officer.”

On 26 May, Felt gave his final statement before the Court of Inquiry defending himself against charges made.⁵⁰ On 11 June 1863, Col. Thom was informed by Major L. Hunt (A.A.A.G.) from Headquarters of the War Department that “all the imputations against Lieutenant Felt’s moral character were fully refuted.”⁵¹ We know that Felt later brought countercharges against Col. Myer on 14 August 1863 for having impugned Felt’s character and reputation and for calling into question Felt’s intentions with the signal rocket that he invented. At the time of the publication of the *Proceedings*, which most likely occurred in the latter part of November

or in December⁵², no action was as yet taken on his charges. On 24 July, Special Order No. 329 was issued by the War Department allowing Felt to be “mustered out of service to date August 15th 1863 to which time he has leave of absence to close his accounts. No payments will be made him till he has satisfied the Pay Department that he is not indebted to the Government.”⁵³ So ended Felt’s military career. More than likely, an injury shortened his career judging from the presence of an Officers’ Casualty Sheet, dated 2 July 1863, included in his record.

Inventor

The most interesting information to come out of the Court of Inquiry was that Felt was an inventor. The testimony about his work with a signal code and rocket⁵⁴ led to an examination of the records of the U.S. Patent Office and the discovery that he submitted, to the best of my knowledge, eleven patents between the years 1863 and 1901. Of these, however, the signal rocket and signal code are the most interesting.

The testimony of Lieutenants Frank N. Wicker and Peter H. Niles on 26 May both attest that the signal rockets were perfected⁵⁵, as did Col. Myer himself⁵⁶, despite what he related on another occasion to Major W. R. Hartshorn, a defense witness. Major Hartshorn also testified that Col. Myer was of the opinion that Felt never succeeded in perfecting any of the inventions he worked on, including the rocket.⁵⁷ The testimony of Col. Charles S. Merchant, First Lieut. C.R. Deming, and Lieut. Niles (Exhibits O, P, Q), however, contradicted Col. Myer’s.

They all claimed that the rocket was a success. Niles writes:

In pursuance of instructions received from Lieut. Geo. H. Felt, I fired seven (7) rockets at this camp on the night of March 20, 1863. . . . Notwithstanding the very unfavorable night, the weather being very thick, and, as we supposed, impossible to distinguish any lights at that distance—eighteen (18) miles—even with the aid of a glass, the rockets were very distinctly visible with the naked eye, and messages sent by them could have been seen at a much greater distance. It would have been impossible to have seen a torch that night at a distance of four (4) miles, with our most powerful glasses. I consider these rockets a very valuable acquisition to our present means of signalling, as it becomes available when every other means of communication fails.⁵⁸

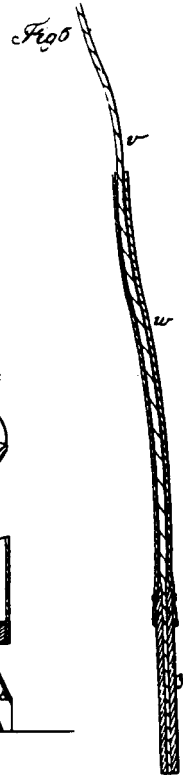
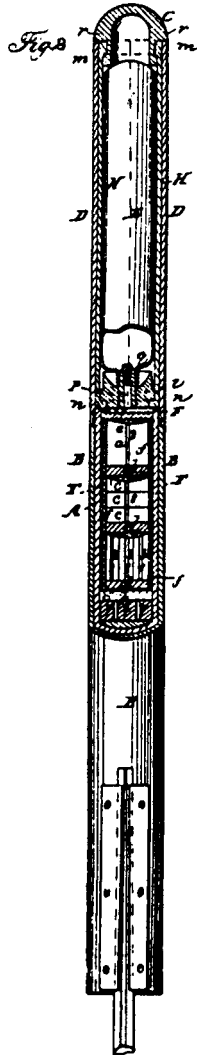
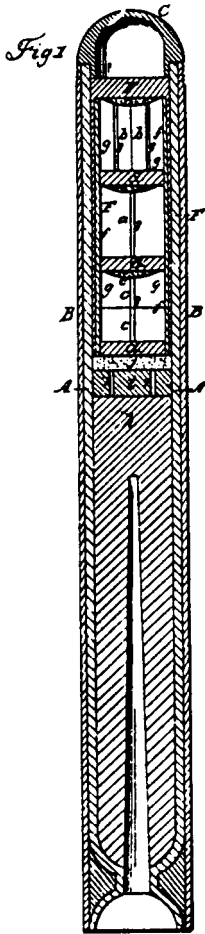
As early as 7 November 1862, Felt wrote that he intended to patent the rocket “out of its regular turn”⁵⁹, with the permission of Myer and with the understanding that it was “intended for the use of the government.”⁶⁰ Because of charges made by Myer against Felt, however, it was only shortly after Felt left the military that he was able to file Patent Number 39,636: on 25 August 1863.⁶¹ The rocket consisted of the following:

. . . a Roman candle for the purpose of discharging stars of the same or different colors . . .
. . . in making the stars of the Roman candle with cavities in the upper ends containing charges of gunpowder . . .
. . . combining a balloon with a rocket as to make it keep suspended for a time or retard the descent of a Roman candle . . .
. . . novel construction and arrangement of a series of divergent spiral passages in the bottom

G. H. FELT.
Signal Rocket.

No. 39,636.

Patented Aug. 25, 1863



Witnesses:
M. S. Postage
Daniel B. Baker

Inventor:
G. H. Felt

of the rocket, for the purpose of obtaining its rotary motion by of the gases eliminated in the combustion of the charge. . . .⁶²

Another innovation mentioned in the *Proceedings* was the signal code for the rockets. Felt asserted that the early system of signaling devised by then Maj. Myer “was practically of little use” and that all messages sent by the signal rockets could “be readily interpreted by his [Felt’s] code.”⁶³ The code, being new and original, was also used in the cypher code, the implication being that the signal code was the basis for the latter.⁶⁴ According to Felt, it was his “idea to make [his] code public and let all nations have it, so that vessels at sea could communicate at great distances, and this could be done very easily without injury to ourselves [the military] as there was an arrangement for changing the code, so that it would be impossible for an enemy to use it against us. . . .”⁶⁵

The importance of Felt’s work with the signal rocket and signal code was that this

was the first time that any system of signaling by rockets, except preconcerted signals, had ever been accomplished, and . . . messages could be sent by rockets faster than by his [Myer’s] system of flagging and torching. In wooded countries, they could be seen above the tops of trees; hazy weather did not stop it; they could be seen great distances through fog, required no stations to be built, and took but very few rockets, and these were arranged so as to be more portable than the old style of rockets, and able to stand any amount of transportation.⁶⁶

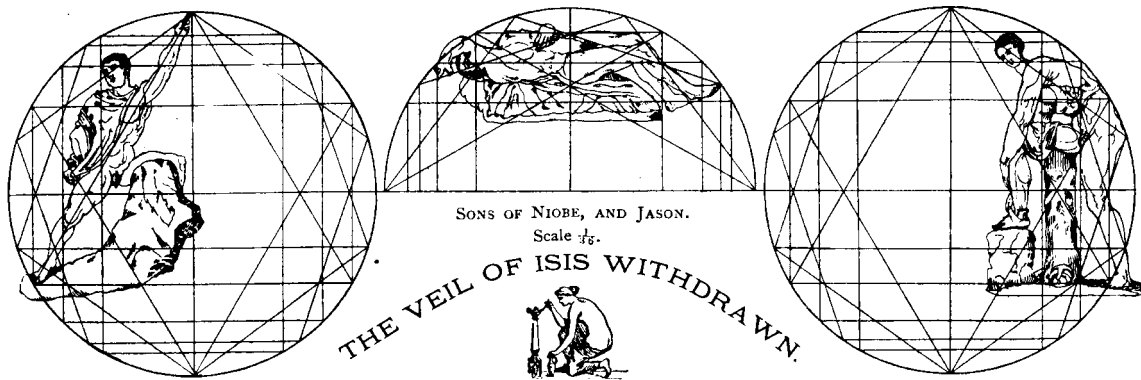
The signal code was later patented on 1 December 1863 (Patent Number 40,744). The

code worked in conjunction with Roman candles, cold lights, flags, lanterns and rockets wherein three colors were employed: red (= 1), white (= 2), and green (= 3). The numbers would be combined to generate the message. A notation system was also devised for taking down the numbers.

Besides these two inventions, other patents were registered in the the ensuing years. One invention, a blasting plug registered by the Patent Office on 27 February 1866 (No. 52,836), may have been the very same fuse that he worked on while in the Signal Corp but apparently failed to perfect at the time.⁶⁷ Other inventions included improvements in reefing and furling sails (No. 44,620: 11 Oct. 1864), a development of a pump used “for obtaining a vacuum or for compression purposes” (No. 224,668: 17 Feb. 1880), a galvanic battery (No. 429,895: 10 June 1890), an electrode for galvanic batteries (429,896: 10 June 1890), a porous cell for galvanic batteries (429,897: 10 June 1890), solution for galvanic batteries (429,998: 10 June 1890), and a metallic beam (681,304: 27 August 1901).⁶⁸

Fifteen months prior to the time that he gave his famous lecture on “The Lost Canon of Proportion of the Egyptians” in Madame Blavatsky’s apartment, Felt filed an application (dated 26 June 1874)⁶⁹ to patent a breech-loading ordnance, which improved on the “Breech or Muzzle Loading Cannon.”

In reviewing the patent applications, we note that there were actually *two* individuals named George Henry Felt listed in the list of patentees during this period. The second G.H. Felt resided in Brooklyn, Michigan. According to the genealogical record⁷⁰, the Michigan Felt, a pattern-maker, was born in Granby, New York on 19



THE KABALLAH OF THE EGYPTIANS

AND THE

GREEK CANON OF PROPORTION:

THE NORMAL LAW OF BEING AND OF BEAUTY,

APPLIED TO

ART, SCULPTURE, ARCHITECTURE, SYMBOLISM, LANGUAGE, NATURAL LAW AND SCIENCE,

AND THE DECIPHERING OF THE HIDDEN MEANING OF THE

SCULPTURED AND WRITTEN, EGYPTIAN AND HEBRAIC RELIGIOUS RECORDS,

By GEO. HENRY FELT.

October 1827, and lived in Brooklyn, Michigan at the time that he submitted his patent in 1878. His first wife, Reuette Clarissa Markham, died there on 5 May 1878. Shortly thereafter, he moved to Jackson, Michigan, where he married a second time. One of his four children by his first wife confirms that he is not the George H. Felt of New York. Charles Benjamin Felt (born on 30 December 1854), was a witness for a patent submitted by Seth H. Smith: an improvement in windmills (submitted 10 August 1877 and patented 8 January 1878: No. 199,114).⁷¹ Smith assigned two-thirds of his right to G.H. Felt (C.B. Felt's father) and to one George W. Green. Shortly after this patent, the same George H. Felt filed an application for a patent (No. 213,557) on 25 March 1878 (approved on 12 August 1878) for an improvement in a rowing apparatus. Both he and Charles B. Felt were listed as assignors.

One last observation. The series of patents dated 1890 (the galvanic battery and various products related to it) indicated that Felt was the assignor to the Felt Electrical Company, indicating that George Felt had his own business at this time.

The Occultist

One of the earliest references to Felt's occult work appeared in the 26 May 1872 issue of the New York *Dispatch*. On the page assigned to "Masonic Matters," edited by M.W. John W. Simons, there appears the familiar title, "The Kaballah of the Egyptians and Canon of Proportions [*sic*] of the Greeks." Columns five and six contain the article in question, from which are quoted the following excerpts:

In the last issue of the DISPATCH we briefly noticed this most interesting subject as presented by Brother George Henry Felt. Since then we have been present at several conversations of distinguished brethren and scientists with Bro. Felt, and we can only repeat our original opinion that it is the most wonderful and startling discovery of the age.

Bro. F. has been advised to give the result of his discoveries to the public in a permanent form, and we avail ourselves of the agreeable privilege of assisting this laudable endeavor so far as our province as journalists may permit. From his prospectus issued in this connection we make the following extract:

"Kaballah," according to the Hebraic style, had a very distinct signification from that in which we understand it, the word being an abstract, and meaning reception, a doctrine received by oral transmission. It existed in the earliest traditional ages and in it the secrets of nature and the mysteries of religion, and the meaning of the divine revelations were expressed by occult figures, signs or words, or by common words, signs or figures having a mystical or hidden meaning.

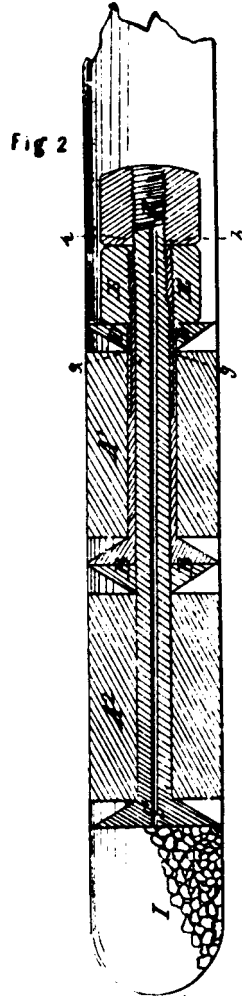
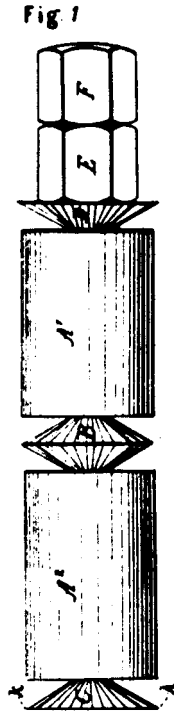
According to tradition, this Kaballah of the Egyptians was a geometrically and mystically arranged figure, intimately connected with all the works of nature, both animate and inanimate, which had been revealed to man in the very earliest ages; but what the Kaballah originally consisted of, or was composed, or anything relating to it, seemed to have been lost.

All traditions agreed, however, in this, that the Kaballah would not only be a perfect system of proportion and a complete key to all the works not only of art in the early ages, but of nature itself; that it would also elucidate the origin of language, not only printed or written, and hieroglyphical or figurative, but even spoken language, thus showing the hidden and true meaning of the Old Testament, and also the true meaning of the New Testament.

G. H. FELT.
Blasting Plug.

No. 52,836.

Patented Feb. 27, 1866



Witnesses
Henry G. Pearson
William A. Lambert

Inventor:
G. H. Felt

Being a complete key to works of Nature, it explains the origins of species and their different relations, in giving a system of proportion that exists in all her works and operations, and their different ramifications or parts.

The Grecian Canon was a system of proportion brought from Egypt by Grecian sculptors and architects about B.C. 360, and in which they fashioned their statues of the human figure and their architectural works.

The proof of its correctness is shown through all Nature and Art, and it is Positive; the work is written without using technical terms and plainly, so that any child of twelve years can understand it; the geometrical problems are reduced to the simplest elements, so that all can understand them without a previous knowledge of that science, as being a work of vital interest to every person; the writer thought it should be adapted to the comprehension of all.

The Kaballah being a geometrical figure, the actual measurements of which are even established through all Nature and Art, the proof be positive, and cannot be for a moment gainsaid.

The article concludes by citing the praises of J.Q.A. Ward, Vice-President of the National Academy of Design (N.Y.), E. Wood Perry, the corresponding secretary of the same Academy, and David S. Mulford, a businessman. Mr. Ward is quoted as saying:

There seems not the least doubt but that Mr. Felt has discovered the Canon of Proportion of the Greeks and the Kaballah of the Egyptians, and, as far we can judge, he establishes the subject matter of the first tables of stone, in establishing a law of proportion that exists in all the works of nature and their ramifications or parts.

His geometrical problems are new and

startling, and are confirmed by nature and art. Altogether it is a work of vital interest to every person, and on a subject that cannot help being appreciated by the general reader, and no doubt will excite as much interest as any other matter that you could put before the readers of your widely extended paper.

The importance of the *Dispatch* article is fourfold. First, Felt is identified as a Mason, the first solid evidence that he was associated with Freemasonry.⁷² Very little evidence exists associating him with Freemasonry⁷³ but for the obituary notice that he was a thirty-second degree Mason.⁷⁴ This connection to Freemasonry is also indirectly hinted at in the Bouton Prospectus⁷⁵, from which I quote in part:

The early Saracenic artists, who had reproduced from the ashes of the Alexandrian civilization which they had destroyed, the Greek Canon as applied to Architecture, together with Egyptian Science and their knowledge of Natural law, and applied these to their wonderful architectural works, were hindered in their comprehension and use of the same by the prohibition in their religion, of the study and practice of sculpture. . . . If it were possible for us accurately to define the parts played respectively by Greek and Saracenic Art and Science in the culture of those great Mediæval artists who built the glorious cathedrals, rudely called "Gothic," of Italy, Spain, France, England and Germany, through which mystic fraternity the Freemasons of our own time trace back the origin of the order to Egyptian Art and Science, we should be enabled to understand more fully and correctly than hitherto the history of that great Renaissance both of Art and Science in Italy, which was the dawn and day-spring of all that is best and most valuable in our existing civilization.

The passage may help us to understand Felt's place in 19th-century occultism. To a certain degree, it appears that he derives understanding from a Masonic point of view.

Second, the article contains for the first time an extended and perhaps the clearest explanation of Felt's discovery. The *Dispatch* article, in conjunction with the Bouton Prospectus, probably come very close to the lecture he gave in the apartment of H.P.B. in 1875.⁷⁶ Indeed, the excitement that he generated there is also echoed not only in the *Dispatch* article but also other accounts as well, specifically the *The Jewish Times* (20 September 1872, *The Churchman* (26 April 1873 and 14 March 1874)⁷⁷ and numerous private accounts as listed in the Bouton Prospectus.

Third, we know beyond doubt that Felt had made his discoveries years prior to 1875. In fact, *The Jewish Times* as early as 1872 wrote that it fully expected to see the publication of the book on the subject, presumably in the near future since all the newspaper accounts and private observations of Felt's demonstrations give the impression that no more work needed to be done. According to the Bouton Prospectus (which may be dated around 1874 or early 1875), the book would contain over 1000 illustrations and issued in ten parts of 64 pages. Why this was not ever published is anybody's guess. The rupture between Felt and Bouton⁷⁸ would not have prevented another publisher from bringing out the work.⁷⁹

Finally, the mention of the Greek Canon as being brought from Egypt around 360 B.C. might suggest a Canon identical or similar to that of Polykleitos.⁸⁰ Polykleitos was the first

sculptor to write on his subject of expertise, which, coupled with his statue, the Doryphoros (Spear-bearer), became what was referred to as Polykleitos' Canon.⁸¹ What little we know of the Canon seems to have nothing to do with Felt's version of the Canon of Proportion.

The lecture given at the 7 September meeting was not only on the question of proportionality but on the power to "evoke and employ the spirits of the elements" as had the Egyptian magician-priests. Indeed, this ability was even more provoking to Olcott than Felt's initial discussion of the canon of proportion. In his Inaugural Address as President of the newly formed Theosophical Society (17 November 1875), Olcott states:

... how can we expect that *as a society* we can have any very remarkable illustrations of the control of the adept theurgist over the subtle powers of nature?

But here is where Mr. Felt's alleged discoveries will come into play. Without claiming to be a theurgist, a mesmerist, or a spiritualist, our Vice-President promises, by simple chemical appliances, to exhibit to us, as he has to others before, the races of beings which, invisible to our eyes, people the elements. . . . Fancy the consequences of the practical demonstration of its truth, for which Mr. Felt is now preparing the requisite apparatus!

The connection of the Canon of Proportion and elementals has always been somewhat of a puzzle to me, until I recently came across Mr. Mazet's observation that the "kabbalistic speculations received further development in the nineteenth century when the occultist movement aroused a new interest in Kabbalah", but

that “this new kabbalistic trend was much more interested in the magical side of Kabbalah than in the authentically spiritual one.”⁸² This statement fits well with Olcott’s observation that the Kabbalist, Dr. Seth Pancoast, “categorically questioned Mr. Felt as to whether he could practically prove his perfect knowledge of the occult possessed by the true ancient magician; among others, the evocation of spirits from the spatial deep.”⁸³ Magic and theurgy⁸⁴ were indeed uppermost in the minds of the early Theosophists. Space does not allow a detailed examination of the references to these topics, but it should be noted that many of these sources have only recently been uncovered or rediscovered, examples being the series of articles from the *New York World* reprinted in earlier issues of *Theosophical History*⁸⁵ and Charles Sotheran’s article, “Ancient Theosophy,”⁸⁶ mentioned above. His mention or emphasis of Spiritology, knowledge of the spirits, their hierarchy⁸⁷, revelatory knowledge, influence, and the powers of individuals who come under the influence of higher spirits, play a large role in the understanding of early Theosophy. It is in this context that the work of Felt was considered so important.

Unfortunately, however, Felt was not able to prove his ability to call up the spirits. A little more than two years later, *The Spiritualist* of London (8 February 1878) mentioned the failure, which prompted a quick response from the Treasurer of the T.S., John Storer Cobb, emphasizing that the “non-realisation was beyond the control of the president or of the society.”⁸⁸ In what was to be the last known letter from Felt on this subject⁸⁹, Felt gave his side of the events. He remarks how he came upon his discovery of

the spirits while working on the drawings of Egyptian Zodiacs. He writes:

I satisfied myself that the Egyptians had used these appearances in their initiations. . . . My original idea was to introduce into the Masonic fraternity a form of initiations such as prevailed among the ancient Egyptians, and tried to do so, but finding that only men pure in mind and body could control these appearances, I decided that I would have to find others than my whisky-soaked and tobacco-sodden countrymen, living in an atmosphere of fraud and trickery, to act in that direction.

The rest of the letter is most interesting and deserves much more study than space permits here.⁹⁰ The scant evidence that we have suggests that George Felt was one of the more intriguing and brilliant occultists of the 19th-century who, to our misfortune, never realized his full potential. These comments, however, are subject to the existence of his manuscript. This is the most frustrating mystery about the man. All the evidence suggests that a manuscript of his work existed, whether completed or not. If this is so, then what became of it? Did it remain in his family following his death?⁹¹ Or was it deposited in his Masonic Lodge? Perhaps Fortune will smile upon us and reveal its location.

Notes

¹Two earlier versions have been published of this article: the first in “Forgotten Magi: George Henry Felt and Ezekiel Perkins” in *Le Défi Magique*, textes réunis by Jean-Baptiste. Volume I: *Ésotérisme, Occultisme, Spiritisme* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1994), 131-142; the second, “Nouvelle

lumière sur George Henry Felt, l'inspirateur de la Theosophical Society," *Politica Hermetica*, no. 7 (1993): 48-61.

² Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The True Story of The Theosophical Society* (NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1895), 121 [Reprinted in 1974 with the full title *Old Diary Leaves: The History of the Theosophical Society: First Series: America 1874-1878*. Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House]. The original Minute Book, located in the archives of the Theosophical Society (Pasadena), was also consulted.

³Reprinted in Michael Gomes' "Studies in Early American Theosophical History: VI. Rev. Wiggim's Review of George Henry Felt's 1875 Lecture on the Cabala," in *The Canadian Theosophist* 71/3 (July-Aug. 1990): 63-69.

⁴The account is quoted from the *Spiritual Scientist*. Olcott (*Old Diary Leaves*, 118-120) quotes most of the statement based on the reprint in Hardinge Britten (see note 6). It is Olcott who mentions that the account was originally "published in a New York daily" (118).

⁵The name is first mentioned in the meeting of September 13.

⁶*Spiritual Scientist*. Reprinted, with minor changes, in *Nineteenth Century Miracles* by Emma Hardinge Britten (N.Y.: Arno Press, 1976), 296. Hardinge Britten gives the date 1876 for this article.

⁷*Old Diary Leaves*, 120.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Nineteenth Century Miracles*, 302.

¹⁰Mrs. Hardinge Britten (*Ibid.*) defines "Occultist" to mean "a member of a fraternity that attempts by study and practice, to discover and apply the occult forces of the Universe. . . ."

¹¹*Preamble and By-Laws of the Theosophical Society* (October 30, 1875), Chapter II.

¹²"Ancient Theosophy; or Spiritism in the Past," appearing in weekly installments in the *Spiritual Scientist* from April 13, 1876 to June 8, 1876.

¹³*Ibid.*, IV/6 (April 13, 1876): 62.

¹⁴Olcott (*Old Diary Leaves*, I, 130, 132) never mentioned the person who suggested "Theosophical" as part of the name to be given the new society. Mrs. Laura C. Langford-Holloway probably was the first to suggest Sotheran in her article, "Helena Petrovna Blavatsky: A Reminiscence," *Word XXII* (Dec 1915): 136-53. The relevant passage is quoted in *H.P. Blavatsky Collected Writings: 1874-1878*. Compiled by Boris de Zirkoff. Volume I (Wheaton, Ill.: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1966), 526-28.

¹⁵*Old Diary Leaves*, I, 132.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Perhaps the most accessible definition of these terms appears in H.P. Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*, vol. I (Los Angeles: The Theosophy Company, 1982 [photographic facsimile of the 1877 edition], xxix-xxx:

ELEMENTAL SPIRITS.—The creatures evolved in the four kingdoms of earth, air, fire, and water, and called by the kabalists gnomes, sylphs, salamanders, and undines. They may be termed the forces of nature, and will either operate effects as the servile agents of general law, or may be employed by the disembodied spirits—whether pure or impure—and by living adepts of magic and sorcery, to produce desired phenomenal results. Such beings never become men. . . .

Elementals are distinguished from "Elementary Spirits," which are "the disembodied souls of the depraved; these souls having at some time prior to death separated from themselves their divine spirits, and so lost their chance for immortality. . . ." (*Ibid.*, xxx.)

In a letter to the editor of the *Spiritualist* (London), June 19, 1878 (reprinted in *Old Diary Leaves*, I, 126-131), Felt referred to "elementals" as "intermediates" and "elementary" spirits as "original" spirits (I, 127-28).

¹⁸Only one mention of Felt appears thereafter, and that is in Olcott's diary entry of 10 September 1878: "No visitors, except Felt in the morning. H.P.B. did not receive him."

¹⁹*Le Théosophisme: Histoire d'une Pseudo-religion* (Paris: Villain et Bellhomme—Editions Traditionnelles, 1973), 28. This was suggested years before by Swāmī Narad Mani, in

the twelfth part of his series, “Baptême de Lumière: Documents pour servir à l’Histoire de la Société dite Théosophique,” *La France Antimaçonnique*, vol. 26, no. 2 (11 Jan. 1912). Therein he states on page 21 that “Un M. J.-H. Felt, professeur de mathématiques et membre de la “*Brotherhood of Luxor*”, se fit présenter, en 1875, par un journaliste du nom de Stevens, à Mme Blavatsky, qui avait à New-York la réputation de médium et de spiritualiste. . . .” This has also been mentioned by Joscelyn Godwin, Christian Chanel, and John P. Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1995), 428, 439-442 (herein, a translation of Guénon’s 1925 article, “Quelques précisions à propos de la H.B. of L.,” is given. On page 440, he describes Felt as a Professor of Mathematics and Egyptology). Mr. Deveney also gives more extensive information in his *Pascal Beverly Randolph* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 289-295. A further discussion of Felt’s role in the Theosophical Society will appear in Mr. Deveney’s forthcoming *Astral Projection or Liberation of the Double and the Work of the Early Theosophical Society*.

²⁰See Joscelyn Godwin, “The Hidden Hand, Part IV: The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor,” *Theosophical History* III/5 (January 1991): 137-148.

²¹*Old Diary Leaves*, I, 117.

²²*Ibid.*, 138. Olcott adds that “Having so often seen H.P.B. employ the Elementals to do phenomena, Signor B. do the same on several occasions, and my mysterious strangers show me them in my own rooms, what was easier than for me to believe that Felt could do likewise. . . .” (138).

²³To Mary Anne Frain, the daughter of John and Elizabeth (Nesbit) Frain. Their marriage occurred on 23 September 1854 (*The Felt Genealogy*, 319. Glover, *An Account of John Glover of Dorchester* (p. 445) gives her maiden name as Train. They had eight children—four boys and four girls—born between 1857 and 1876.

Bibliographical information on these two genealogical studies is given in note 25.

²⁴Elsewhere, Felt is identified as an architect (Hardinge Britten, *op. cit.*, 296 and reproduced in *H.P. Blavatsky Collected Writings: Volume One: 1874–1878*³, compiled by Boris de Zirkoff [Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Pub-

lishing House, 1988], 122) and a “draughtsman” by Olcott (*O.D.L.*, I, 115. There is no record that he actually was a professional architect. A letter from Mr. Scott J. Osterhage, dated 19 August 1992, states that Felt’s name is not recorded in The American Institute of Architects. This does not prove that he was not an architect, however. He was most certainly a talented draftsman at the very least, judging from the statements made in the *Proceedings* (20). The American Society of Civil Engineers, Research and Records, also has no record of Felt belonging to their Society.

²⁵*The Felt Genealogy. A Record of the Descendants of George Felt of Casco Bay*. Compiled by John E. Morris (Hartford, Conn.: Press of The Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1893); Anna Glover, *An Account of John Glover of Dorchester and his Descendants* (Boston: David Clapp & Son, Printers, 1867).

²⁶One of the original members of the T.S., John Lovell, writes that George Felt “translated ‘Jaccoliot’s Occult Science in India’ which I published for him and in consequence was brought into somewhat close relationship with him.” (“Reminiscences of Early Days of the Theosophical Society,” *The Canadian Theosophist* X/2 [April 15, 1929]: 35). The title page of the book gives Willard L., who was most likely George’s brother.

²⁷This is based on inferential evidence from George Felt’s Death Certificate, which states that Felt lived in New York City for “about 70 years.”

²⁸West Farms is now part of the Bronx, the northern borough of New York City. The Bronx was in fact part of Westchester County, the county north of Manhattan, except for certain western areas which were annexed by Manhattan (New York) in 1874, and eastern areas annexed in 1895. It is only in 1898 that the Bronx became a separate borough.

²⁹*Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry, convened by Special Order No. 85, Headquarters Department of Washington, at the Request of First Lieut. George H. Felt* (New York: Willard Felt & Co., Stationers and Printers, 1863), 57.

³⁰*Ibid.* According to *The Felt Genealogy* (318-19), Edwin Mead and Willard Lemmon Felt both graduated at the University of the City of New York: Willard belonging to

the class of 1844, Edwin Mead to the class of 1856. Both studied law, with Willard being admitted to the bar in 1849, Edwin Mead in 1858. See also *An Account of John Glover of Dorchester and His Descendants*, 444-45. According to the Manhattan City Directory, Edwin Mead practiced law in New York into the 20th century. The entry, "Willard L. Felt, stationer," may refer to the fact that the eldest son inherited the business upon the death of Willard Senior on 2 March 1862. The last mention of the business that I have at my disposal was in 1886.

³¹Letter from Joe Glancey, Jr., dated 20 October 1992. I assume that New York University is the same as the University of the City of New York. I suspect that George Felt never had university training. Furthermore, it is stated in the *Proceedings* (57) that Felt was educated in "select schools of New York city." No mention is made of university training.

³²The second eldest brother, David Wells Felt, apparently died in New York in May, 1882. He married two times, the first wife, Mary C. Farrar, having died in Melbourne, Australia on 22 April 1853. In *The Felt Genealogy* (319), a daughter, Elizabeth Maria, was born at sea on board the barque *Syracuse* on 18 January 1853 and died in Collingwood, Australia on 14 May 1853.

³³*The Felt Genealogy*, 319.

³⁴The Manhattan City Directory of 1895-96 lists Felt as a civil engineer. Prior directories simply list him as an engineer.

³⁵On the Company Muster Role of Felt's military record (available through the National Archives of the U.S., he was "[e]lected 1st Lieut. Aug. 24th, 1861 at New York S.I. [Staten Island] - To receive pay of private from 31st July 1861 to Aug. 24th 1861."

³⁶*New York in the War of the Rebellion: 1861 to 1865*³, compiled by Frederick Phisterer. Volume III (Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, State Printers, 1912): 2468.

³⁷The earliest date on the Muster Roll is 28 February 1861. On page 42 of the *Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry*, which contains the record of Lieut. Felt, he is stated to have "reported for duty at Signal Camp, Georgetown, D.C.

[District of Columbia]" and "Recommended for signal duty by the Board of Examination," both on the same day (29 December 1861).

³⁸In the *Proceedings*, 16 March 1862 is the date given when Felt was "[r]elieved from duty with the army of the Potomac [*i.e.* Company I], and ordered to report for duty as signal officer to Major-General Halleck, headquarters St. Louis, Missouri."

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 34-35.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 32.

⁴²Dated 20 January 1863, the Order, reproduced in the *Proceedings*, page 59) reads as follows:

I. First Lieut. Geo. H. Felt, Acting Signal Officer, having returned from duty in New York City, will report without delay to Capt. Wm. G. McCreary, Commanding Signal Camp of Instruction, Georgetown, D.C.

II. Lieut. Felt's duties, while remaining in that camp, will be the careful preparation of drawings representing the Field Signal Telegraph Train, and of all rockets, etc., he may have perfected while in New York city. He will also devise a rocket code especially adapted to the use of the Signal Corps, Army of the Potomac.

By order of Major A. J. Myer.

(Signed) Leonard F. Hepburn,

Captain and Signal Officer

⁴³*Proceedings*, 11.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁵Special Order No. 7, included in *Proceedings*, 59.

⁴⁶*Proceedings*, 13.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 34-35. This was also the opinion of Felt (62).

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 2. The officers were Major G.F. Merriman, 3rd

Battalion, 5th N.Y. Artillery; Capt. W.M. McClure, 2nd Pennsylvania Artillery, and Capt. R.B. Biddlecome, 10th N.Y. Artillery; and Lieut. F.W. Paul, 2nd Pennsylvania Artillery as Recorder.

⁵⁰Reproduced in *Proceedings*, 34-41.

⁵¹Letter in Felt's military record. Also in *Proceedings*, 55-56. The only action that was considered "unbecoming either an officer or a gentleman" was a visitation to Canterbury Hall, which was perhaps a dance hall but never explained in the testimony of those who mentioned it. (23, 26, 29).

⁵²Judging from a letter dated 13 November sent by Felt to Washington requesting a copy of Special Order No. 85.

⁵³From Felt's military record. Procured from the National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁴The Rev. Wiggin mentions that Felt claimed to have "discovered a lacking ingredient [to manifest "shadowy forms resembling the human"], and so perfected the colors of signal rockets that they became very valuable to our armies in the war time, because visible a hundred miles away." ("Studies in Early American Theosophical History," *The Canadian Theosophist* 71/3: 66.

⁵⁵*Proceedings*, 30-31.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 14. Testimony was given on 25 May. Felt recalled that Myer promised him a promotion for his work on the rocket (40).

⁵⁷*Proceedings*, 24. The testimony was actually more negative than the above. Major Hartshorn recounted that "Lieut. Felt had been trying to make a number of inventions and had never succeeded in any, and he thought that he was a little insane on some subjects."

⁵⁸Letter from Peter H. Niles, dated 23 March 1863 (*Proceedings*, 53).

⁵⁹Letter to Maj. A.J. Myer (*Proceedings*, 61).

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

⁶¹Antedated 29 July 1863.

⁶²Quoted from the Patent.

⁶³Testimony of Lieut. Niles (*Proceedings*, 31)

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 38-39.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 39.

⁶⁷The mention of a fuse appears in the testimony of Major Hartshorn (*Proceedings*, 24).

⁶⁸The dates given above refer to the recording of the patent, not the date of application.

⁶⁹The date of the patent, which is No. 159,170, was 26 January 1875.

⁷⁰*The Felt Genealogy*, 216.

⁷¹As if to make matters even more confusing, there was a third George Henry Felt. He was the youngest son of the Michigan Felt, born on 6 January 1864 in Brooklyn, Michigan. The birthplace further confirms that the father was not our G.H. Felt.

⁷²Edmond Mazet's article, "Freemasonry and Esotericism", is most instructive on this subject. It is contained in *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, edited by Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman in collaboration with Karen Voss (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1992).

⁷³The records of the Grand Lodge Free and Accepted Masons of the State of New York are deficient for this period, so there is no record of Felt's association with a recognized Lodge within its jurisdiction.

⁷⁴*New York Times*, Dec. 6, 1906, 9:4.

⁷⁵This was the announcement of the intention of the publisher, J.W. Bouton, to publish Felt's manuscript, if indeed it ever existed in a complete state.

⁷⁶Olcott (*Old Diary Leaves* I, 115-117) gives a summary of the lecture based on a newspaper clipping that was found in the Scrapbook of H.P.B., now in the Adyar archives.

⁷⁷All were reproduced in the Bouton Prospectus.

⁷⁸Olcott (*ODL*, I, 117) writes: “But having to deal with a genius burdened with a large family and exasperatingly unpunctual, the thing dragged along until he [Bouton] lost patience, and the final result was, I believe, a rupture between them and the grand work was never published.”

⁷⁹This is quite possible, of course, but it is my hope that portions of the manuscript are in the (unknowing) possession of some descendant or library archive.

⁸⁰Martin Robertson, *A History of Greek Art*, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 328.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

⁸²“Freemasonry and Esotericism” (in *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*), 267.

⁸³*Old Diary Leaves*, 116.

⁸⁴The importance of theurgy deserves further study. Gregory Shaw’s *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), reminds us that Iamblichus “provided the philosophic rationale for the performance of these [theurgic] rites” and that it was a *theion ergon* or “work of the gods” capable of transforming man to a divine status” (5). Keeping in mind the activities of Blavatsky’s and her followers in the Lamasery in the New York days, are we actually confronted with a Society that was more a *theourgia* and less a *theosophia*?

⁸⁵A review is given in *Theosophical History* VI/6 (April 1997): 203-207. Previous issues with relevant articles reprinted from the *World* include III/6 (April 1991): 174-79; III/7-8 (July-October 1991): 224-28; and IV/2 (April 1992): 51-55. It is my intention to review and reprint all the articles that appeared in the New York newspapers prior to the publication of *Isis Unveiled*. Three entries from the *New York Sun* will appear in the next issue.

⁸⁶The article will be reprinted in future issues of *Theosophical History*.

⁸⁷In the article, “What is Occultism” by an author identifying

himself (?herself) as Buddha, of California (*Spiritual Scientist* IV/10[May 11, 1876]: 109), three divisions of spiritual progress are given: the elementary, astral, and divine.

⁸⁸23 February 1878.

⁸⁹Dated 19 June 1878, addressed to the *Spiritualist* and appearing in *Old Diary Leaves*, 126-131.

⁹⁰A future article will discuss this topic of Felt’s Theosophical work in more detail.

⁹¹He died on 4 December 1906.

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Book Reviews

LAND OF DESIRE: MERCHANTS, POWER, AND THE RISE OF A NEW AMERICAN CULTURE. By William Leach. New York: Pantheon, 1993. Pp. xvii + 510 pp. ISBN 0 679 754 113. Notes, index, and illustrations. \$16.00 (pb).

Moving away from his optimistic, almost celebratory approach to consumer culture evidenced in earlier articles, William Leach, in *Land of Desire*, examines the power of American corporate business to transform American society into a consumer culture that is hostile to the past and tradition. In a dense description reminiscent of Clifford Geertz, Leach traces the rise of a consumer society during the closing decades of the 19th century through the presidential administration of Herbert Hoover. With the intent of understanding what was lost and what was gained during this transformation, Leach examines the efforts of advertisement agencies and executives as they utilized imagination, enticement, and desire as methods for creating demand.

A major theme in *Land of Desire* is the development of a new commercial order based upon consumer service, which is treated in the first and third sections of the book. In these chapters, the reader will find discussions of a wide variety of topics as Leach documents the entrenchment of the consumer culture within American society, including fashion, customer service, the merger wave, Dorothy Shaver, the

rise of investment bankers, consumer credit, Edward Bellamy, Eleanor Porter's Pollyanna, and the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade. Even the department store Santa Claus finds a place in Leach's book. Central to his analysis is an examination of the rise of department stores as they eclipsed dry goods stores and neighborhood dealers. The author describes important innovations in window displays, interior and exterior architecture, and promotions designed to attract customers. In this context, Leach provides a compelling analysis of the dramatic and dream-like design of department store interiors, particularly the use of glass, color, and light, and the use of air conditioning, elevators, and escalators. What makes his study useful, however, is not just the description, but the thoughtful discussion of the meanings behind the window displays and interior design. American cultural values, argues Leach, were infused with a sense of comfort, pleasure, and happiness without "ugliness or pain" (147).

Leach devotes the middle section of his study to an examination into the ways in which this "benevolent" side of business operated in conjunction with other kinds of institutions in creating the "new commercial order." He begins with the most obvious institution, the business departments at colleges and universities, especially Harvard and Pennsylvania, and the various commercial art schools that churned out ad men by the hundreds. The "great urban museums" also did their part in creating the

consumer culture by lending their research and collections to business, including producing consumer products of their own. Leach then traces a trend of cooperation between business and government, citing the creation of various federal agencies such as the Department of Commerce, the Department of Labor, Federal Reserve Board, and interestingly, an expanded United States Postal Service. Hoover's role as Secretary of Commerce and later as President receive heavy treatment. Religion played a role as well, notes Leach. With the exception of a few dissenters such as Protestant theologian Walter Rauschenbusch, Monsignor John Ryan, and Jewish liberal Felix Adler, Americans moved toward a religious accommodation, "a new ethical compromise" that somehow equated material progress with spiritual and social progress. This uncritical acceptance of the consumer culture occurred increasingly, if at times unevenly, within the ranks of nearly all major Protestant denominations, as well as within mainline Catholicism, and Judaism. Leach also notes the near total embracing of a consumer culture by the mind-cure advocates, religious groups characterized by a sunny, optimistic, and self-confident spiritual mentality. Leach identifies these "positive thinkers" as New Thought, Unity, Christian Science, and Theosophy, and argues that their adherents took the consumer culture for what it was and celebrated it. Each in their very different ways helped to legitimize the mass culture of consumption.

An interesting facet of *Land of Desire* is Leach's use of several recurrent themes: fashion, John Wanamaker, and The Wizard of Oz. Leach uses fashion as the illustrative example of the quest for the new, a key element of the consumer

culture. John Wanamaker, argues Leach, is the prophet and priest of the consumer ethic. Wanamaker was a department store developer, retail merchandising innovator, a spokesman for the religious accommodation of consumerism, and the embodiment of new consumer values. Students of Theosophy may find the symbolism Leach assigns to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, a popular children's tale written by L. Frank Baum, a window designer, populist newspaper editor, traveling salesman, and avowed Theosophist, the most interesting. While arguing that *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was "the product of the rise of a new consumer mentality, . . . a hymn to color as well as to abundance" (252, 259), Leach finds much of the novel as originating out of the "spiritualist elements of theosophy" (252). However, Leach may take the novel more seriously than Baum had intended and he neglects to give a sense of Baum as an ardent supporter of Bryan in the 1896 election. Nevertheless, using the novel as a symbol for the period is quite innovative and illustrative.

In his analysis of the changes in values that mark the rationalization of American culture, Leach is critical of consumer capitalism for two reasons. In a discussion that echoes themes developed by the late Christopher Lasch, Leach argues that consumerism is not democratic nor is it consensual. The consumer culture is not produced by the people; rather, it is dictated from above. He also contends that the consumer culture pushes out all other alternatives, and somehow diminishes human existence. Leach finds it rather ironic that the abundance of goods actually diminishes human existence.

Leach marshals an extensive amount of evidence to support a wide variety of insights

into broad areas of American commercial and cultural life. His chapters average about 32 pages and range from over 70 to as many as 130 citations each. He has nearly 100 pages of endnotes, typically citing primary sources. His documentation is truly impressive. Leach is to be commended for his exhaustive (and probably exhausting) combing through large amounts of primary source material.

However, Leach's description of the rise of the consumer culture is not without some problems. One troublesome area, true of most of the studies in consumer culture, is the lack of an international approach. For example, Leach views the rising interest of Americans in all things Oriental as "symptomatic of changes taking place within society, especially in the cities, . . . symbolizing a feeling of something missing from Western culture itself, a longing for a 'sensual' life more satisfying than traditional Christianity could endorse" (105). Perhaps so, but Orientalism was also a theme in several strands of European literature, occurring even earlier in a culture that was less consumer oriented. Consider, for example, the strong theme and interest in all things Oriental and sensual in Alexander Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*. As well, Leach is not sensitive to changing modes of advertisement, as is T. J. Jackson Lears in *Fables of Abundance* (1995). In a minor but not insignificant criticism, Leach (or his publisher) should have provided examples of the advertisements and window displays by using color plates rather than black and white illustrations, given the emphasis on the manipulation of color advertising and promotions. However, the most troublesome aspect of Leach's work is his rather simplistic understanding of

consumer culture as elitist, defined by a set of top-down power relationships. Perhaps Leach could have provided a more subtle analysis by taking an approach suggested by T.J. Jackson Lears and Richard Wightman Fox in their introduction to *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*. They argue that it is not enough to view a consumer culture as an elite conspiracy in which ad men "defraud" the masses by "drown[ing] them in a sea of glittering goods" (x). People make choices and prefer one product over another, they make other meanings out of the items they buy than those suggested by the ad men, and they seek other activities besides the acquisition of consumer goods.

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MANY LIVES, MANY MASTERS. By Brian L. Weiss. New York, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster (A Fireside Book), 1986. Pp. 219. ISBN 0-671-65786-0 (pbk). \$11.00.

In 1980, Dr. Brian Weiss was a clinical associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Miami School of Medicine and the chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at Mount Sinai Medical Center in Miami Beach, Florida, when an attractive twenty-seven-year-old lab technician named Catherine, who was suffering from anxiety, panic attacks, and phobias dating back to childhood, was

referred to him as a patient. After eighteen months of conventional therapy failed to improve her condition, Weiss tried regressive hypnosis, telling Catherine: "Go back to the time from which your symptoms arise." (27) She spontaneously began describing a lifetime as a young woman named Aronda who lived in Egypt in 1863 B.C., recounting in vivid detail her death by drowning. During twice-weekly sessions with Weiss over a period of three-and-a-half months, Catherine experienced either fragments or major portions of about a dozen lifetimes, including incarnations in ancient Egypt and Greece, and more recently as an 18th-century Spanish prostitute; a sailor named Christian, who was wounded in battle off the coast of Wales; a black slave on a plantation in Virginia; and her life before this one, that of a German pilot killed in World War II. Individuals from her present life appeared repeatedly in these lifetimes, including members of her family and her friends and colleagues. She recognized the Jewish physician with whom she had been conducting a troubled six-year affair as the warrior who slit her throat in a coastal raid in the Netherlands in 1473; and Weiss himself appeared in one of her Greek lifetimes in 1568 BC. as her uncle, a respected teacher named Diogenes.

Weiss was initially skeptical of Catherine's disclosures, yet he was unable to explain her past-life memories in terms of fantasy, multiple personalities, E.S.P. or psychic phenomenon; he also rejected genetic memory as an explanation, as well as the idea of the collective unconscious, since her recollections were far too specific for Jung's concept. He gradually came to accept that Catherine was indeed

describing previous lifetimes, and that reincarnation was a reality.

Weiss discovered that Catherine's claustrophobia and fear of drowning, choking, and suffocating stemmed from traumatic incidents in previous lifetimes (in one past-life, for instance, she was sealed up in a cave), and that remembering and reliving these incidents released her from carrying the energy of the trauma into the present lifetime. Weiss comments that the technique of past-life recall is similar to that of reviewing a patient's childhood in conventional therapy, except that the time frame is one of thousands of years, rather than the usual ten or fifteen. He also believes that the past-life process is therapeutic in itself, particularly the experience of one's death, in which a part of one's consciousness leaves the body, floating above it before being drawn towards an energizing light. Catherine describes one such experience: "I have left my body. I see a wonderful light. The light is so brilliant! Everything comes from the light. Energy comes from the light. Our soul *immediately* goes there. It's almost like a magnetic force that we're attracted to. It's wonderful." (82)

Weiss is astonished when a number of discarnate entities, whom Catherine identifies as "Master Spirits," begin to speak through her while she is in trance. These "Masters" of the book's title prove their omniscience to Weiss by providing him with detailed information about the death of both his father and his infant son, who died of a heart defect twenty-three days after his birth. They also transmit information about the afterlife, and the survival of consciousness after death, telling Weiss that

“lifetimes [are] measured in lessons learned and tasks fulfilled, not in years (87), and “life is endless, so we never die; we were never really born.” (112)

Weiss repeatedly stresses the need for strict scientific evaluation of the evidence for reincarnation and spirit communication, yet he seems willing to take at face value all that the “Masters” tell him. He never subjects them to any kind of interrogation, so the reader learns nothing about their identities or motives, or why they chose to communicate through Catherine.

In marked contrast is Joe Fisher’s account of his contact with discarnates, described in *Hungry Ghosts* (Doubleday Canada, 1990). An investigative journalist, Fisher spent an exhaustive and ultimately disillusioning five-year relationship with his own spirit guides, at the end of which he concluded that they were the equivalent of the *pretas* or “hungry ghosts” of Buddhism, earthbound discarnate entities who took pleasure in deceiving human beings, rather than in uplifting and enlightening them. *Hungry Ghosts* is a useful study in comparison, exploring the “dark side” of channeling as opposed to the uniformly positive and uncritical look at the phenomenon presented in Weiss’ book.

Weiss shows signs of becoming obsessed by the guides (as Fisher did), but after Catherine is cured, the “Masters” terminate their contact with him. He believes that they continue to influence him telepathically, through dreams and intuitions, and he has since written two other books, *Through Time Into Healing* (1993), and *Only Love Is Real* (1996), in which he presents his evidence for reincarnation and

tells people they need not fear death. He has successfully used past-life therapy on hundreds of patients since Catherine, and points out that thousands of cases have been recorded in the scientific literature demonstrating the reality of reincarnation.

This book is a simply-written and unpretentious presentation of Weiss’ findings; it has helped to legitimize the use of past-life recall as a valid therapeutic tool, and has brought the message of reincarnation to a mainstream audience—the book has been an enormous popular success. Weiss is to be respected for his courage in risking his professional reputation by publishing this account of what he regarded as an extraordinary case, and for his attempt to integrate the scientific and the mystical, the physical and the metaphysical in his search for a more complete and extended model of human consciousness.

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IN THE TEMPLE: ESOTERIC TEACHINGS ON THE FOUR SACRED SEASONS. By G. de Purucker. Point Loma: Point Loma Publications (P.O. Box 6507, San Diego, CA, 92106), 1994. Historical forward and preface by W. Emmett Small. Pp. xviii + 126. ISBN 0 913 004-91-X. \$8.95.

The Historical Forward opens in 1929 when Gottfried de Purucker assumed leadership over the “Point Loma Society” and the issuance of his Theosophical Fraternization effort. It is noted that even A. Besant was to attend the inaugural ceremony, but she finally declined when C.W. Leadbeater was refused entrance in his official capacity as head of the Liberal Catholic Church. In all fairness, however, to Dr. de Purucker, he made his position quite clear that only delegates of Theosophical Organizations were to attend. The Liberal Catholic Church was not so deemed.¹

Next follows the minutes of his Cabinet and Literary committee, published for the first time “*in extenso* without deletions or editing” in which Dr. de Purucker (GdeP) authorized and directed Judith Tyberg to create what became the official sacred ceremonies of the Pt. Loma Society. These ceremonies were celebrated religiously, one might say, at the time of the four sacred seasons, even though the society was not a religious corporation. Indeed, the opening words read by the Secretary at each of the two Esoteric meetings referred to the Pt. Loma Society as “our Holy Order.” The holiness of the event was further enhanced by the rubric “Listen in utmost silence and concentration of both mind and heart, and when all has been heard, then leave the Temple in voiceless quiet and in peace.”

On the first night of these two night celebra-

tions there was the symposium, collected by Dr. Tyberg. On the second, new applicants to the Esoteric Section were initiated and the Outer Head (GdeP) gave teachings relevant to the cyclic event. This book keeps to that tradition and presents two sections on each of the four turning points of the year; first the symposium, then the teachings. It all begins with the Winter Solstice and teachings on the Mystic Birth. Next follows the Spring Equinox or the Great Temptation. Then comes the Summer Solstice called the Great Renunciation. Finally, the Autumnal Equinox and the Great Passing closes the year on these ancient remnants of esoteric cosmogony.

The Symposia for each of the sacred seasons emphasized the traditions of a particular culture. This is only by choice, as GdeP clearly states. It could just as well have been done in any one of them only, or selected otherwise for each of the seasons. “Fundamentally it is a selecting and sharing of thought from the ancient world of India, from Celtic lands, from China, and Egypt. We see in it a kind of essence of a religion-philosophy-science inherent in the very nature of the life itself” Thus the Winter Solstice symposium draws from the writings of E. Wilson, *Sacred Books of the East*, especially the chapter “A Life of the Buddha.” The symposium of the Spring Equinox is from the writings of Kenneth Morris, the Welsh poet and historian. The Taoist writings of Giles and Waley provide the material for the Summer Solstice symposium. The symposium for the Autumn Equinox come from the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* and HPB’s “the Dirge for the Dead in Life” from *Lucifer*, Vol. III, no. 16. The Esoteric Teachings are as delivered by GdeP and “are

published here unedited as originally given at Pt. Loma.” In spite of this declaration, this reviewer did not have to search far for those unnoticed ellipses that have become such a mainstay of Theosophical publications. As one example, from the Summer Solstice Symposium (66) one of the paragraphs reads as follows. The omitted phrases are bracketed.

Not only are these four seasons steeped with mystery, but all Nature’s operations hold secrets for those who know. And even behind these outward manifestations are the invisible workings of the god Dhyânis, [the divine causes of existence, the fountains of self consciousness and enlightened will,] the sources of all the bright and beautiful ethical principles which man feels innate in his soul, the guardians of cosmic law and order. The Universe is kept going, is kept alive, and is preserved from destruction, by the self-sacrifice, the self-devotion, of the highest ones among these gods.

Another book, *The Four Sacred Seasons*, also by G. de Purucker, was published in 1979 by Theosophical University Press, Pasadena. It has an historical forward by Grace F. Knoche. Because these two books are publications of the same material, a comparison would seem to be in order. I must say at the outset that both publications are very fine and both have a valued place in my library. Both Mr. Small and Ms. Knoche were personal students of Dr. de Purucker and both have taken pains to publish this material in a forthright and accurate manner. There are, however, some distinctions which I will herein attempt to delineate.

In the Temple, as mentioned above, publishes for the first time the symposia material. It

is, therefore, in a larger format (6-1/8" x 9") making *The Four Sacred Seasons* (4-3/4" x 7") more convenient to carry in a pocket, which I have been doing for years at these four sacred times of the year. In order to retain the flavor of the original, *In the Temple* has retained the original capitalization of significant nouns. Since times and conventions change, *The Four Sacred Seasons* has opted for a more modern approach and has dropped what we today feel as excessive capitalization. Similarly, Pasadena has modernized the Sanskrit spelling.

Whereas, Pt. Loma has published these Esoteric Teachings “verbatim,” Pasadena has somewhat edited them. Thus what we modern readers might take as sexist terms, such as “him” or “his,” etc., have been changed to “individual,” “it,” or “we.” Such salutations as “Brothers,” used by GdeP when addressing members of the Brotherhood have been changed to “we,” although it was not used as a sexist term, for the original name of what Emmett Small calls the “Pt. Loma Society” was the “Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society.”

Also removed in *The Four Sacred Seasons* are exhortations as “Hearken well to this,” or “I would try to make one more thing clear.” Along this line *In the Temple* (124) has included this esoteric caveat concerning the order of planetary visitation by the peregrinating monad of the initiate, which is omitted in *The Four Sacred Seasons* (84): “This point of the teaching is too esoteric to develop even in our own holy gathering, and I call your attention to it merely by way of warning.” Furthermore, GdeP always spoke as an oriental teacher and referred to “your occidental” astronomers or scientists. All such statements have been removed in *The Four Sacred Seasons*.

There are omissions in the Pt. Loma edition (27) as well. For example, this passage has the variants in parentheses for Pt. Loma (27) and in brackets for Pasadena (11):

...; and the nucleus in this sphere or (Egg) [egg], for such it is, is what you (men) [we commonly] call our Earth. [Such also is the sphere of Mercury, such is the sphere of Venus, such is the sphere of Mars, also of Jupiter, also of Saturn; yes] (Yes), and of Uranus too. . . .

Still unresolved, and seemingly contradictory in both issues, is the confusion regarding the Fourth Initiation. This degree is attributed both to the Winter Solstice and to the Autumnal Equinox (*In the Temple*, 23 and 125 and *The Four Sacred Seasons*, 4 and 83, respectively).

For those of us Theosophists, whether members of one of the Theosophical organizations or not, who thirst for religious practice freed from creed, dogma, and sanctified ceremonialism, here is a way we can attune our evolving body-mind-spirit to the natural vibrations of the cosmos. Here, at last, is the missing piece of that synthesis of science-philosophy-religion called Theosophy.

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Note

¹See "Dr. de Purucker on Theosophical Fraternalization" in the *Theosophical Forum*, August 18, 1930.

GERALD MASSEY: CHARTIST, POET, RADICAL AND FREETHINKER. By David Shaw. London: Buckland Publications, 1995. Pp. 264. ISBN 0 7212 0905 X. £9.95.

This is a carefully researched short biography of a minor victorian figure, whose major impact on Madame Blavatsky is known to every student of her work. Nowhere, perhaps, is this so evident as in her essays on "The Esoteric Character of the Gospels" (*Lucifer* 1887-1888), which may now be conveniently consulted in Michael Gomes' *HPB teaches: An Anthology*" (Adyar: TPH, 1992).

Much of Mr. Shaw's book is naturally concerned with the literary and political side of Massey's life, and with the intense family hardship during his first wife's life which makes one suspect a great karmic trial. It is clear that this lady, Rosina, was one of the earliest clairvoyants in England to make the transition from mesmerism to Spiritualism. Massey too became a Spiritualist. The author has been diligent in using Spiritualist journals—I would only add *Light* (1881-) to his list, most conveniently available in London at the College of Psychic Studies, and starting perhaps with the tributes in the obituary issue of November 9, 1907.

Theosophical references in the book are unfortunately limited. Madame Blavatsky is quoted (though not directly from a Theosophical source) writing enthusiastically to him in 1887, but he publicly rejected mystery and ancient wisdom. It seem likely that an exploration of Theosophical sources would enlarge though not materially change this picture. Among later Theosophists, Alvin Boyd Kuhn, who is briefly mentioned, was most influenced by

Massey. Massey's Egyptological work is also in the background of the present fierce argument about the African contribution to classical civilisation.

Mr. Shaw's book should be in every national Theosophical library. This is an inspiring story of triumph in adversity and it is easy to see why H.P.B. so admired him. May we hope that Mr. Shaw will publish more of his research?

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