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# THEOSOPHICAL HISTORY

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

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

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## GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION OF MANUSCRIPTS

The final copy of all manuscripts must be submitted on 8 ½ 11 inch paper, double-spaced, and with margins of at least 1 ¼ inches on all sides. Words and phrases intended for *italics* output should be underlined in the manuscript. The submitter is also encouraged to submit a floppy disk of the work in ASCII or WordPerfect 5 or 5.1, in an I.B.M. or compatible format. If possible, Macintosh 3 ½ inch disk files should also be submitted, saved in ASCII ("text only with line breaks" format if in ASCII), Microsoft Word 4.0C or earlier version, WriteNow 2.0 or WordPerfect 2.01 or earlier version. We ask, however, that details of the format codes be included so that we do not have difficulties in using the disk. Should there be any undue difficulty in fulfilling the above, we encourage you to submit the manuscript regardless.

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

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

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# Editor's Notes

## In This Issue

*Theosophical History* finally enters 1991 with this issue. The present issue continues and completes Professor Godwin's "The Hidden Hand", the first three parts of which previously appearing in III/2-4. This final study investigates the somewhat mysterious Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor.

One of the interests of this journal is the exploration of theosophical societies and movements in countries not usually associated with such organizations. Professor Bernardino del Boca, a former Italian Consul in Singapore, was kind enough to send information on what he calls in the title of his essay, "The First Practical Expression of Theosophy in Italy: The Villagio Verde."

Reviews are also included of two rather significant historical publications. The first book, *In Search of the Masters* by Paul Johnson, is bound to generate considerable discussion. Just who the Mahatmas in the Theosophical Society are has been argued since the inception of the Society. The last significant discussion on these mysterious personages came with the Hare brothers' denial of their very existence in their book *Who Wrote the Mahatma Letters?* (by Harold Edward Hare and William Loftus Hare [London: Williams and Norgate Ltd., 1936]). Mr. Johnson has taken a more middle-of-the road approach, indicating that they were neither superhuman nor figments of Madame Blavatsky's imagination. The review is contributed by Dr. Gregory Tillett of Macquarie University (Australia). The second review examines Joseph Ross's publication on the origins of the Krotona Institute of Hollywood (California). Mr. Ross has provided us with much valuable

information not only of the Institute but also of the American Section of the Theosophical Society during the early portion of the twentieth century. We eagerly await future volumes of this study.

Please note the cover photograph for the July 1990 journal is of Annie Besant wearing the Cagliostro Jewel. See the page 79 drawing of that jewel. The picture was donated by Mr. Joseph E. Ross.

## International Theosophical History Conference Call For Papers

It is with great pleasure that we announce plans to hold an International Theosophical History Conference at Point Loma, California from 12-14 June 1992. As many of our readers are already aware, four previous conferences took place at the headquarters of the English T.S. in London from 1986 to 1989 under the auspices of the Theosophical History Centre. With this in mind, the Theosophical History Foundation wishes to continue the valuable work of the Centre and the founder of this journal, Leslie Price.

The location of the conference will be on the grounds of the old Point Loma theosophical community (Lomaland), now the Point Loma Nazarene College, from Friday, 12 June 1992, to Sunday, 14 June 1992. The conference activities will be in Boney Lecture Hall. For those who wish to remain on the campus of P.L.N.C., Finch Hall has been reserved at a cost of \$15 a person or \$30

for a double room. This residence hall is a short walking distance to Boney Hall and provides a lovely view of the Pacific Ocean. A quote in the standard work on the Point Loma community, Emmett A. Greenwalt's *California Utopia: Point Loma: 1897-1942* [second and revised edition (San Diego, CA: Point Loma Publications, Inc., 1978), 33], aptly describes the locale:

Point Loma is the northern and westernmost land-arm protecting San Diego Bay. Its elevation of nearly four hundred feet commands a view which Charles Dudley Warner in *Our Italy* described as one of the world's three finest, with San Diego and the mountains to the east, and the broad Pacific to the west. The site [Lomaland] is itself three miles short of the lighthouse standing at the tip of the point.

No particular theme is intended to dominate the Conference proceedings. Papers on any aspect of the Theosophical Movement as defined on the inside cover of the journal will be welcomed. We suggest that the paper title and a short precis (50 to 100 words) be sent to the editor at your earliest convenience. We do intend to publish the summaries and abstracts of the papers and presentations in *Theosophical History*. It is our hope that the Conference and the publication of the proceedings will establish and strengthen a network of scholars in theosophical studies. Since the papers will be considered for publication in *Theosophical History*, it is important that the full length paper be sent no later than two weeks in advance of the Conference. Scheduling constraints may require that papers be summarized, but the full paper will definitely be made available either through the journal or through some alternative publication.

### **Registration and Accommodations,**

*Theosophical History*

**Meals, and Information** forms were included in the last issue (III/4). Should you require additional forms or information, please write to the editor (James A. Santucci, Department of Religious Studies, California State University, Fullerton, California 92634-9480).

## **Book Notes**

Although *Theosophical History* customarily includes reviews of books addressing historical topics on the Theosophical Movement, we will include occasional notices of publications that might be of more general interest. Readers are welcome to send in titles and comments on such works they wish to see mentioned herein.

*The Human and Divine Universe: Platonic, Neo-Platonic and Theosophic Insight into the Nature of Reality* (San Diego, California: Point Loma Publications, 1989, 116 pages, \$6.75) consists of essays by "mystic scholars" William Laudahn and Kathleen Raine as well as short selections from late nineteenth and early twentieth century writers in the theosophical movement: G.R.S. Mead, Alexander Wilder, Fritz Darrow, Henry T. Edge, and Thomas Taylor.

Point Loma Publications has also announced the publication of Dr. H.J. Spierenburg's *The Buddhism of H.P. Blavatsky*. The book "is a compilation in one volume of her perspective, both controversial and stimulating [in] value, for all interested in the Buddhist and Theosophic world view." The address of Point Loma Publications is P.O. Box 6507, San Diego, California 92166 (U.S.).

*Expanding Horizons* by a former Leader of the Theosophical Society (Pasadena), James A.

Long, is a 1990 reprint of the 1965 edition published by the Theosophical University Press (P.O. Bin C, Pasadena, California) as a Sunrise Library Book. It is available in cloth (\$12), softcover (\$7), and three audiocassettes (\$15). The question and comment format in this 248 page book includes topics on karma, 'theosophia', psychic vs. spiritual development, good and evil, the Lord's Prayer, the Golden Rule, and much more.

*H.P. Blavatsky Collected Writings: Cumulative Index*, volume XV, compiled by Boris de Zirkoff and assisted by Dara Eklund (Wheaton, Illinois: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1991, xiii + 633 pages, \$27.95) has just been published and was given a favorable review in *The Canadian Theosophist* (May-June, 1991) by Ted G. Davy. In the same issue is mention of a limited Centenary Edition of H.P. Blavatsky's *Voice of the Silence*, now available at a cost of \$20 (U.S.) through the Edmonton Theosophical Society, P.O. Box 4804, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, T6E 5G6.

## Adjustment of Subscription Rates

The publication of the past four issues of *Theosophical History* require that the subscription rates be brought more in line with the costs of its publication. An increase in the postal rates and the high cost of printing in California require increases in actual subscription rates for both the U.S. and overseas. These adjustments take effect with number **seven** of volume III (July 1991). The new rates are as follows:

U.S. and Canada	\$14
Elsewhere (surface)	\$16
Air mail (outside the U.S. and Canada)	\$24
Price per issue	\$4

# Correspondence

*The following letter is from Professor Robert Ellwood, Professor of Religion at the University of Southern California and Associate Editor of Theosophical History.*

I appreciated the suggestion by Joseph Ross in the Letters column of the July 1990 *Theosophical History* that we think in terms of “perspectives” in history. Whether or not a change in the title of TH is needed, the reminder that no historical work can entail all possible angles of vision is important. Historical insight or “truth” is always partial and selective. The finite human mind can never know all the virtually infinite number of factors that go into any contemporary event, much less comprehend all those that make up a happening back in the past. Furthermore, the selection by historians of the data that seems significant out of all the rest often tells us more about the historians themselves, and the age in which they write, than it totally unlocks the past, even though it is surely possible to undertake *some* significant reconstructions of former ages.

I would, however, not go so far as Mr. Ross in stating that “the only valid reason for studying history lies in its lessons for the present.” Certainly there are lessons—though often ambiguous and hard to decipher aright—to be gleaned from the study of history. But for myself I find that the perusal of history can be no less important as what in the sixties was called an “expansion of consciousness,” and as finally a kind of spiritual experience—stemming like all

such from the rapture of exploring new dimensions of awareness. History helps us to get out of the one-dimensionality of the present, and grow in wisdom and compassion by sensing what it would be like to be a person of a very different time and place. To me, this is a most profound and rich experience, entirely worthwhile in its own right.

I believe this is what Mr. Ross means when he finally says, “The real importance of history viewed as the experience of that unity called Mankind, is Mankind knowing Himself.” I would, though, have preferred the term Humanity or Humankind, and I hope TH would also. If it is thought necessary to use a single-gender term generically to cover the entire human race, it would be more rational—especially in the context of Theosophical history!—to employ the feminine, e.g., “Womankind knowing Herself,” since there are more women in the world than men.”

Best wishes, and thanks for the excellent job you are doing with this interesting and important journal.

# The Hidden Hand, Part IV: The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor

Joscelyn Godwin

The Brotherhood of Luxor, or “of Light,” lost its most famous members when Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott left for India in 1878. Now it disappears from view for several years, so that when a “Hermetic” Brotherhood of Luxor emerges in the mid-1880’s, there is some question as to whether this was still the same group, under a modified name. For Olcott, it was definitely not: he said that the title Brotherhood of Luxor “was pilfered by the schemers who started, several years later, the gudgeon-trap called ‘The H.B. of L.’”<sup>1</sup> Olcott was determined to dissociate the Brotherhood of Luxor, whose Masters Tuitit and Serapis had enrolled him in 1875, from the H.B. of L. as represented by Peter Davidson in the mid-1880’s. The H.B. of L. was equally keen to emphasize its pedigree, and this is obviously what prompted the remark in the later, official history of the order: that the Brotherhood was founded in 1870, “and not, as the January number of *The Theosophist* says, in 1884...”<sup>2</sup>

In “The Brotherhood of Light” (Part II of this article) I concluded that, while there was no

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The History of the Theosophical Society. First Series: America 1874-1878*. Second edition (Adyar, Madras: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1941), 76. The order in question has always been known by its initials alone, which leaves it ambiguous whether the L. stands for Luxor or Light (though they may mean the same thing).

<sup>2</sup>Peter Davidson, “Origine et objet de l’H. B. of L.” in *H. B. of L. Textes et documents secrets de la Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor* (Milan: Archè, 1988), 4.

solid evidence for the foundation of such an order in 1870, the succeeding years saw a lot of activity of the sort that might be expected to follow on the launching of an occult movement. One character had no place in the description of those events, because his association with them is purely on hearsay; but now it is time to introduce Max Théon (1847-1927), born in Warsaw as Louis-Maximilien Bimstein, the son of a rabbi. If we can believe the story told, years later, by his sometime pupil in occultism, Mirra Alfassa-Richard<sup>3</sup> (later the “Mother” of Sri Aurobindo’s ashram), Théon was very young when he became involved in occultism, and mastered many languages and crafts.<sup>4</sup> He had “worked with Madame Blavatsky,” and had “founded an occult society in Egypt.”<sup>5</sup> Until reading Nahar’s book on Mirra, I could make no sense of the rumor, published by René Guénon,<sup>6</sup> that Théon was the son of Paulos Metamon, the

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<sup>3</sup>For Théon’s biography, see Sujata Nahar, *Mother’s Chronicles*, Book 3: *Mirra the Occultist* (Paris: Institut des Recherches Evolutives, 1989). This contains the findings of Patrice Marot and Christian Chanel; the latter cautions, in private communication (8 June 1991) against attributing too much importance to Nahar’s account. I am grateful to Paul Johnson for access to this book.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 51f.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>6</sup>René Guénon, *Le Théosophisme: Histoire d’une Pseudo-religion* (rev. & augmented ed., Paris: Ed. Traditionnelles, 1982), 313.

Coptic magician whom Mme Blavatsky met in paternity in question was that of master to pupil, several dissociated facts fall into place.

To continue with Mirra's sketchy biography of Théon,<sup>7</sup> we find him appointed Grand Master of the Outer Circle of the H. B. of L. in 1873, at the age of only 26, while the Scotsman Peter Davidson was its frontal Chief. Olcott and Blavatsky were both members until 1877, the same year in which Théon, then in Egypt, severed his relationship with the Brotherhood. Théon came to London at some time after that and was a great social success, with his long hair and a reputation akin to that of the Comte de Saint-Germain. In 1885 he married a mediumistic Englishwoman, Mary (or "Alma") Ware, and held séances with her in England and France. In 1887 he moved to Algeria, restoring a large villa at Tlemcen where he lived until his death, heading (as "Aia Aziz") a movement for the propagation of the "Cosmic Philosophy" for which his wife acted as the writing medium.

It is odd that one has never before heard of such a social lion in the London of the early 1880's. Leaving that aside, however, I turn again to the H. B. of L.'s official account of its own origins. This mentions an adept who resolved in 1870 to seek a neophyte in Great Britain who would establish an Exterior or Outer Circle. "After having performed an important and secret (private) mission on the European Continent, he arrived in Great Britain in 1873 and discovered by chance a neophyte who satisfied his plans."<sup>8</sup> This language makes it sound as if the adept came from outside Europe, and allows for the possibility of Théon,

<sup>7</sup>This paragraph is based on Nahar, 50-56.

<sup>8</sup>*H. B. L. Textes*, 4. Another version in René Guénon, "F.—Ch. Barlet et les sociétés initiatiques," *Le Voile d' Isis*, Yr.30, No.64 (April 1925), 216f.

sent from Egypt by Metamon, passing through Paris to England, and making contact with the neophyte Peter Davidson. In any case, this document of 1887 makes frequent allusion to Théon, showing that he cannot have left the H. B. of L. in 1877, as Mirra understood him to have done. He was publicly acknowledged in Peter Davidson's *Occult Magazine* as "the eminent Occultist" and "an exalted Adept" behind the scenes. This magazine was produced in Glasgow from the beginning of 1885 through 1886, by Davidson and the Order's secretary, Thomas H. Burgoyne.

With the activities of Davidson and Burgoyne, we come to the ascertainable beginnings of the H. B. of L. and its public appearance under that name. Probably its first advertisement was in a note inserted in the 1884 edition of *The Divine Pymander*, published by Robert Fryar in Bath with an Introduction by Hargrave Jennings.<sup>9</sup> Against the skepticism of the Theosophists, Davidson writes in a letter to *The Theosophist*<sup>10</sup> that he has himself known the adepts of the H. B. of L. in the flesh for fourteen years (thus from 1871). So we must take a glance into the past of this interesting character.<sup>11</sup>

Peter Davidson first came to public notice in 1871 with a book not on occultism but on *The Violin*<sup>12</sup>, which was widely reviewed and

<sup>9</sup>Information from Christian Chanel, Lyon. The note is not to be found in the reprint of this work (Minneapolis: Wizards Bookshelf, 1973).

<sup>10</sup>*The Theosophist*, December 1884.

<sup>11</sup>The Library of Congress Catalogue gives Davidson's dates as 1842-1916. R. Swinburne Clymer, *The Book of Rosicruciae* (Quakertown: Philosophical Publishing Co., 1946-9), which contains a brief idealized account of Davidson's life and extracts from his works, gives (III, 215) the dates 1837-1915.

<sup>12</sup>Glasgow: Porteous Bros., 1871.

eventually ran to five editions. We learn from this that he lived in Forres, near Findhorn, Scotland, and worked as a violin dealer and repairer.<sup>13</sup> He had a wide knowledge of violin collections in Scotland and England, and had traveled to Paris in 1859.<sup>14</sup>

When his violin book went into its third edition (1881), Davidson enlivened it with remarks on the symbolism of color and of number and on the marvelous powers of music, referring to Hargrave Jennings's *The Rosicrucians, Their Rites and Mysteries* (first published 1870).<sup>15</sup> He suggests that the claims of the Rosicrucians concerning music may not be so far-fetched as they seem, [p.37] and speaks of the Astral Body that is set free in sleep, and the imperishable tablets of the Astral Light on which all things are recorded. [p.193] An appendix of musical anecdotes brings in trance and Spiritualistic phenomena, and also prints the entire story "The Ensouled Violin," taken from *The Theosophist*. (Mme Blavatsky attributed it to Hilarion Smerdis, one of her Masters.) Praising India as the cradle of music, as of all arts and sciences, Davidson cites the *Surya Siddantha*, a Hindu astronomical work much used by Mme Blavatsky, and the *Agroushada Parikshai*, one of Jaccoliot's sources. At the end of the book he takes the opportunity to mention the

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<sup>13</sup>Elsewhere he is called a cabinet-maker, which is what violin-makers sometimes have to do to earn a living; also a teacher. After immigrating to the USA, he tried to establish a model farm. He appears to have had a family. I do not think that he ever had an easy life.

<sup>14</sup>In the third edition of *The Violin* (London: Pitman, 1881), p. 90, Davidson says that he saw a certain instrument in Paris twenty-two years ago. This may incline one to favor the earlier birthdate, which would make him twenty-two and not seventeen at the time.

<sup>15</sup>P. Davidson, *The Violin* (1881), 19, 190.

ghastly crimes of Constantine, the first Christian emperor, and the greed of the Church.

If one mentions such things in a book that is supposed to be about the violin, it must be for a reason. These digressions alone would place Peter Davidson unambiguously in the camp of the Brotherhood of Light, as I have outlined its doctrines in Part II of this article, for he has managed to mention astral travel, occult phenomena, the superior science of the ancients, the primacy of Indian wisdom, and the shortcomings of official Christianity. Moreover, in printing his own address, he was not only soliciting trade for his violin business, but inviting communications from those who were intrigued by these hints of another sort. It may be that the first members of the H. B. of L. were enrolled in this surreptitious way, at the beginning of the 1880s.

The third person active in the propagation of the H. B. of L. was Thomas H. Burgoyne (1855-94), the son of a Scottish physician.<sup>16</sup> Apparently he was making enquiries among occult students in 1882, contacting among others Hurrychund Chintamon and the Rev. William Ayton, the "Alchemist of the Golden Dawn." Burgoyne did not get along well with Ayton, as we will see below, but he and Chintamon were birds of a feather. As we may remember from Part III of this article, the erstwhile President of the

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<sup>16</sup>None of the sources on Burgoyne is entirely trustworthy, with the exception of Ellic Howe's notes in his edition of Ayton's letters, *The Alchemist of the Golden Dawn* (Wellingborough: Aquarian, 1985). I have consulted Waite's *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* (reprinted New York: Weathervane, 1970), I, 349-50 (based on an article Waite wrote for *The Occult Review*, May 1925); its correction by René Guénon in "Quelques précisions à propos de la H. B. of L.," *Le Voile d'Isis*, Yr. 30, No. 70 (Oct. 1925), 592-95; and the expurgated versions in "The Church of Light," P.O. Box 76862, Los Angeles, Ca. 90076), and in the Introduction to Burgoyne's *The Light of Egypt*, I (see note 39 below).

Bombay Arya Samaj had fled to England after relieving his master Dayananda of 4000 rupees, and was now spreading calumnies about Mme Blavatsky to the members of the London Theosophical Society. In January 1883, Burgoyne, under what must have been his true name of Thomas Dalton, and described as a grocer, was sentenced at Leeds to seven months' imprisonment for swindling.<sup>17</sup>

After his release, Dalton/Burgoyne contacted Peter Davidson and forthwith became the Secretary of the H.B. of L. Davidson and Burgoyne ran the H.B. of L. from Scotland, soliciting membership from likely people such as Ayton. *The Occult Magazine* is the best source for their ideas and activities. Most of the magazine was written pseudonymously by "Mejnour" (presumably Davidson himself), with help from "Zanoni" (Burgoyne), later joined by "Glyndon," a French occultist (probably F.-Ch. Barlet). Taking their names from Bulwer Lytton's *Zanoni* perhaps had no more significance than any other attempt made in the later 19th century to enroll the enigmatic novelist to one's cause. Among other hints of filiation, *The Occult Magazine* praises Lieut. Morrison (the astrologer "Zadkiel") and Sampson Arnold Mackey, the author of *The Mythological Astronomy of the Ancients Demonstrated* (1822-3), the latter being called "the Neophyte of an Initiate of the H. B. of L., whence he got his information."<sup>18</sup> Among the few books recommended in the magazine that are not by Davidson himself are *The Temple of the Rosy Cross* by F. B.

Dowd,<sup>19</sup> and *Palingenesia, or The Earth's New Birth*, by "Theosopho" and "Ellora."<sup>20</sup> *Ghostland* and *Isis Unveiled* are quoted, but virtually no other modern authorities are acknowledged.

Some of the language in this magazine is not without its resonances. At pains to make itself agreeable to the Theosophists, it says: "The H.B. of L. is purely and simply the Western Division of the UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD OF ADEPTS."<sup>21</sup> And again: "The Adepts who guide the Interior Circle of the H. B. of L. are however not Mahatmas, though members of the same Sacred Band of the Himalayas."<sup>22</sup> In a note to a correspondent we read: "*there is a Section of our Order*, who have certain Lodges in the United States, who are under the control of a Committee of Seven. But there are *other Orders* in the States, entirely distinct from ours, whose Lodges also consist of a Committee of Seven."<sup>23</sup> (Remember the mysterious document sent to Olcott in 1875 by "The Committee of Seven, Brotherhood of Luxor.") It speaks of the "unseen races of elementals, made visible by our MASTERS," recalling George Felt's promises made to the early Theosophists in the same year. I consider these coincidences as strong pointers

<sup>19</sup>Freeman Benjamin Dowd was one of the successors of P.B. Randolph's "Rosicrucian" order. *The Temple of the Rosy Cross* was first published in 1882.

<sup>20</sup>Ellora again! (See Part II of this article.) This very strange utopian book is by G. J. R. Ouseley (1835-1906), published Glasgow: Hay & Nisbet, 1884. The Revd. Ouseley was a close friend of Edward Maitland, the collaborator with Anna Kingsford in her revelations.

<sup>21</sup>*The Occult Magazine*, I/7 (Aug. 1885), 56. Compare the words of Blavatsky, cited in Part III of this article: "The Brotherhood of Luxor is one of the sections of the Grand Lodge of which *I am a member.*"

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, II/12 (Jan. 1886), 7.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, I/8 (Sept. 1885), 63.

<sup>17</sup>Poor Burgoyne's swindle was the most timid and pathetic kind of mail fraud, getting people to send him stamps and then keeping them! I am grateful to John Patrick Deveney for this information.

<sup>18</sup>*The Occult Magazine*, II/15 (April 1886), 31.

towards a connection of this new H. B. of L. with the Brotherhood of Light of the 1870's.

As far as doctrine is concerned, the magazine is rather vague. It has a strongly anti-ecclesiastical tone, tending towards the christology of Dupuis and his English disciple Robert Taylor: that Jesus is just another solar symbol, his Cross solely that of the vernal point in the celestial zodiac. Someone - probably "Glyndon," the French occultist - seems to have read Jean Sylvain Bailly (the historian of astronomy), Fabre d'Olivet, and Louis Figuier. A new translation of the Hermetic treatises *Asclepius* and *The Virgin of the World* is published in parts. But above all, the H. B. of L. stands not for theoretical research and scholarship, but for precisely that practical instruction in occultism that the Theosophical Society was failing to provide for its members: hence its idea that the two movements were not competitive but complementary.

Mme Blavatsky felt otherwise. To judge by her letters written from Germany to A. P. Sinnett, she was taken unawares when in late 1885 an American Theosophist enquired about the H. B. of L. Her first reaction was that "It is evident there's some new treachery emanating from the fair Anna,"<sup>24</sup> i.e., Anna Kingsford, who had recently founded the "Hermetic Society" upon her resignation from the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society. A friend of Countess Wachtmeister later investigated the H. B. of L., and identified Burgoyne as a convicted felon. Mme Blavatsky commented that "It is the work of the Jesuits I spoke to you of. Now the Kingsford is mixed up in it and many others...Warn all the theosophists..."<sup>25</sup> This sounds like paranoia, but perhaps that is understandable, at the height of

<sup>24</sup> This paragraph is based on Nahar, 50-56.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., Letter CXIII, 240; see also CLXXXII, 348.

the Hodgson Report and attendant scandals.

What did the H.B. of L. do? Besides the material published by Davidson and Burgoyne, a sizable collection of manuscripts has survived, including essays that were given out as instruction,<sup>26</sup> and a correspondence between Peter Davidson and some French members. I base the following account on these materials.

People joined the H.B. of L. by contacting Peter Davidson and sending him their photograph, the details of their birth, and a five-shilling fee. He then drew up and interpreted the horoscope of the postulant. If accepted, one filled out a pledge of secrecy and sent Davidson the admission fee of one guinea. One was then permitted to borrow and copy a series of manuscript essays and instructions, for an annual fee of five shillings. (These sums make Ayton's remarks on Davidson's profiteering—see below—seem a little unfair.) The idea was that members should work as far as possible by themselves. Davidson provided personal guidance and answered queries by letter when these could not be handled by the "Provincial Grand Masters." But there was no initiation ceremony or other rituals; the whole thing could

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<sup>26</sup>Most of these have been published in the Archè volume (see note 2 above), with an anonymous preface based uncritically on Guénon. See Christian Chanel's review in *Politica Hermetica*, 3 (1989), 146-152. The manuscripts owned by Barlet, with related correspondence, are now in the Fonds Papus of the Bibliothèque Municipale de Lyon. A guide to them has been prepared by Robert Amadou. An additional letter of early 1890, presumably from Barlet to Chaboseau, is published in Jean-Claude Frère, *Vie et mystères des Rose+Croix* (Paris: Marne, 1973), 197-207, outlining the H.B. of L.'s policies and the means of joining it. Frère is otherwise quite inaccurate (see his uninformed treatment of Randolph, 199f.) Further useful information is in Paschal Thémanlys, *Max Théon et la Philosophie Cosmique* (Jerusalem: Bibliothèque Cosmique, 1955). I am grateful to Gérard Galtier for knowledge of these works, and to Christian Chanel for sharing with me the researches for his dissertation on Théon and other matters. No one but myself is responsible for any errors here.

be done, as it were, by mail-order.

The H.B. of L. allowed its members complete liberty of thought; they might belong to anything else they liked, and several of them belonged to the Theosophical Society.<sup>27</sup> Its specialty was the teaching of practical occultism. Here follows a summary of its basic manuscript instructions.

1. *Eulis*, extracted from P.B. Randolph's book of that name (1874) with notes by Burgoyne.

2. *Brief Key to the Eulian Mysteries*, otherwise called *Eros*, partly arranged (from an unpublished work of Randolph) by Burgoyne; on the development of the will and its magical use; also on sexual mysteries.

3. *Symbolic Notes for the First Degree*, largely adapted from Hargrave Jennings' *The Rosicrucians* (1870) and Thomas Inman's *Ancient Faiths Embodied in Ancient Names* (1868) also on sexuality and love.

4. The Abbot Trithemius *On Secondary Causes* (Nuremberg, 1522), a treatise on the cycles of history and their angelic rulerships; almost certainly translated by the Rev. William Ayton.<sup>28</sup>

5. *The Key*, a short explanation of Trithemius.<sup>29</sup>

6. *The Hermetic Key*, a system of histori-

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<sup>27</sup>Peter Davidson himself had originally been on the Council of the Theosophical Society, and other members of both included William Ayton, Barlet, Arthur Arnould, Louis Dramard, and Papus.

<sup>28</sup>See H.P. Blavatsky, *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings: 1874-1878*. Compiled by Boris de Zirkoff. Volume I (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1966), 421. Olcott records in his diary, dated 20 November 1878, the arrival of Ayton's translation of Trithemius' prophecies. William Hockley was also a student of the Abbot of Spanheim; see John Hamill, *The Rosicrucian Seer* (Wellingborough: Aquarian, 1986), 80.

<sup>29</sup>Reprinted in Burgoyne's *The Light of Egypt*, I, 109-117.

cal cycles, developed from Mackey's *The Mythological Astronomy of the Ancients* and from Trithemius, and compared with Hindu chronology.<sup>30</sup>

7. *Psychic Culture*, by Peter Davidson, on moral and physical hygiene, dated 1887. This urges total abstinence from alcohol, drugs, and meat.

8. *Magic Mirrors*, partly arranged by Davidson from P.B. Randolph's *Seership* (1870); on the types, construction, consecration and practice of magic mirrors, and on the invocation of planetary angels at the appropriate times.

Davidson's teachings are strongly moral, and have a reverent, devotional air, as do his letters. While he makes ample use of Randolph's work, in *Psychic Culture* he warns the aspirant against the sexual doctrines which misled Randolph and ruined many others, namely the idea that through concentration during sexual intercourse, one can obtain anything one wants. Davidson's adaptation of these doctrines and mental techniques is always with the intention to raise and refine the brute instincts, especially of the male. He says categorically that the sexual magic of the H.B. of L. has only two purposes: the spiritual elevation of the partners, and the benefit that this confers on any child conceived.

Here is an extract from a letter of Davidson's to Barlet, circa October 1889, containing a long message for Arthur Arnould who was mourning the recent death of his wife and hoping to get in touch with her.

Tell Mr Arnould then that after a certain stage of occult development is reached there is no longer "mine" or "thine" as commonly understood, there is a new degree in fact of preferential Love. An Arch-Vril is formed and

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<sup>30</sup>Reprinted in *ibid.*, 86-108.

condensed in which the living forms of the affections are enabled to become embodied as was impossible formerly. If a man loved his wife before, he now loves her with a love of singularity enhanced more than a hundred fold, and she is enabled to demonstrate to him according to the measure of this abundance. Oriental Buddhist initiates assert that in the states arising beyond, and superior to Devachan personal affection is *less and less*—but this is a gross and mighty misnomer—a cold, heartless, *untrue* philosophy, for, in reality and in truth, affection and love become *intensely more concentrated*. They also assert that in order to renew the physical frame, man must die out of the affections that unite him to his kind. This I again repeat is an outrageous delusion, for in the Adeptship of the Divine Science progress is first made by cleansing loves from the *taint of self-desire*, then, by loving till we hold a creation of loves, living loves, fashioned in the heaven of our body, as the spirits of the glittering stars in the blue immensity of heaven.

The Barlet-Davidson-Arnould correspondence emphasizes one point that places the H.B. of L.'s teaching on this matter poles apart from that of common Spiritualism. This is that efforts to contact the dead are justified only if they involve raising the living person to the higher, spiritual level which their loved ones now inhabit, and never trying to drag the dead down to earth. This can be done, perhaps, but only at dreadful cost to those who have been released from matter; whereas the opposite ideal involves not merely an emotional indulgence but a notable step forward in the living person's progress. The correspondence makes moving reading, one's intrusion into Arnould's private grief being justified, perhaps, by what one learns from his example as an earnest follower of this path.

At the very time of this correspondence, Arthur Arnould was President of the newly-founded Hermès Branch of the French Theosophical Society, and a member of the Esoteric Section.<sup>31</sup> It was natural for him to wonder whether the two were compatible. Barlet, for his part, was beginning to find the Theosophical teaching deficient in precisely this element of love, significantly enough the central teaching of the Christianity that Mme Blavatsky seemed to reject.<sup>32</sup> He had come to believe that:

above this [Buddhist] Theosophy, and also above Christian esotericism, there is Esotericism unqualified (whose Masters are also in India), which is far above all our heads. You have no need to share my conviction. But I think that Christianity, and especially Catholic Christianity, approaches more closely to this transcendent degree than Orientalism, and that Egypt (from which India probably derives) possessed it more than India, and that it is from this that Christianity came.

All this implies, as you can see, the conviction that the Mahatmas of the Theosophical Society are not of a superior order. More than that: since Sinnett (and *Esoteric Buddhism*), these Mahatmas are said no longer to involve themselves with the Theosophical Society. Mme Blavatsky may still be in communication with Koot Hoomi, but not with him personally—and he declares himself a gifted beginner. I add in confidence that such was also the opinion of our friend

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<sup>31</sup>See J. Godwin, *The Beginnings of Theosophy in France* (London: Theosophical History Centre, 1989).

<sup>32</sup>On Barlet's esoteric career, see Guénon, "F.-Ch. Barlet et les sociétés initiatiques" and "Quelques précisions à propos de la H. B. of L.," cited above, notes 8, 16.

Dramard [...] If only we can ever arrive at this “inferior” degree, for all this is relative!<sup>33</sup>

Barlet’s qualms resemble those felt on the other side of the English Channel by certain people who were at that very moment making up their minds between the Theosophical Society and the “Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn” - or both. The parallel is complete if one realizes that Barlet is alluding, between the lines, to certain “Secret Chiefs” of whom he has heard rumors, though in his case they are those of the “Brahmatmic” center with which Saint-Yves d’Alveydre believed himself to be in touch.<sup>34</sup>

*The Occult Magazine*, for the two years it appeared, is full of news of Davidson and Burgoyne’s plans to emigrate to America and found an agricultural community there. According to René Guénon, who must have learnt this, too, from Barlet, Mme Blavatsky got wind of their plans and drew the attention of the immigration authorities to Burgoyne’s criminal record, supposedly in revenge for her own expulsion in 1878 from the Brotherhood of Light.<sup>35</sup>

Another who learnt of Burgoyne’s record was the Rev. William Ayton. He was appalled to discover in 1886 that the man whom he had known as Secretary of the H.B. of L. was identical with “T.H. D’Alton, or Dalton, alias Seymour, a convicted felon.”<sup>36</sup> Ayton adds: “I do not think

P.D. knew that T.H.B. was a convicted felon, but when he did know it, he still embarked with his family and this felon for America. He has not been over scrupulous and has been making use of Occultism for mere secular gain. I could tell you much of it if I were to see you personally.” On 29 December 1890, Ayton went into more detail about Burgoyne: “It came to my knowledge that Burgoyne, the Secretary, of whom I had always been suspicious, was no other than a man I had known previously under the name of D’Alton who made such a confession of Black Magic that I rejected him altogether as being impossible.” [p.58] Evidently Ayton was one of the occultists whom Burgoyne had contacted earlier in the hope of joining some order, before his imprisonment and change of name.

However, both men eventually succeeded in emigrating, Davidson to the remote village of Loudsville, Georgia, and Burgoyne to Carmel, California. Here Burgoyne met Norman Astley, a retired British Army officer who had studied occultism in India, and received from Astley and some other members a commission to write a series of lessons for the H.B. of L.’s teachings.<sup>37</sup> These lessons were at first privately circulated to members, but in 1889 were published as *The Light of Egypt*, of which a second volume followed in 1900; both have been reprinted recently.<sup>38</sup> Burgoyne signed his own name to them followed by “Zanoni” and a swastika, the traditional signature of the Fratres Lucis, which, according to

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<sup>33</sup>Undated letter in Bibliothèque Municipale de Lyon (Fonds Papus), circa May 1889.

<sup>34</sup>See J. Godwin, “Saint-Yves d’Alveydre and the Agarthian Connection,” in *Hermetic Journal*, 32 (1986), 24-34; 33 (1986), 31-8.

<sup>35</sup>Guénon, *Le Théosophisme*, ed. cit., 314.

<sup>36</sup>Ellic Howe, *The Alchemist of the Golden Dawn* (Wellingborough: Aquarian, 1985), 20.

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<sup>37</sup>See “The Church of Light,” note 16 above.

<sup>38</sup>Thomas H. Burgoyne, Zanoni, [swastika symbol], *The Light of Egypt, or The Science of the Soul and the Stars*. Two volumes (Albuquerque: Sun Books, 1980).

Kenneth Mackenzie, was otherwise known as the Order of the Swastika.<sup>39</sup>

*The Light of Egypt* may not be the loftiest of teachings, but it certainly does not read as the work of a grocer turned felon—nor, one might say, of the rather slick customer pictured in the frontispiece photograph. It also seems exceedingly doubtful that if, as is stated, *The Hermetic Key* dates from 1880, it was from the pen of the 25-year-old Dalton whom Ayton had spurned on first sight. Possibly Burgoyne was simply turning his secret H.B. of L. manuscripts to profit; but it is only fair to hear his own statement about their publication:

The chief reason urging this step was the strenuous efforts being systematically put forth to poison the budding spirituality of the western mind, and to fasten upon its mediumistic mentality, the subtle, delusive dogmas of Karma and Reincarnation, as taught by the sacerdotalisms of the decaying Orient.<sup>40</sup>

Already in *The Occult Magazine*, Burgoyne had been much more anti-Theosophical than Davidson, on occasion making remarks that Davidson later had to apologize for and retract. Hostile remarks about Oriental Theosophy are scattered throughout *The Light of Egypt*, while even the Western branch, represented by Anna Kingsford and Lady Caithness, is not spared. Yet when one tries to pinpoint the motives for this

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<sup>39</sup>It might be fruitful to investigate other authors of the period—Rudyard Kipling, of course, the chief among them—who decorated their books with this symbol, with the idea that it might imply membership of this or a cognate order. I return to this subject, and to much else tangential on the present topic, in *Arktos: Myths and Mysteries of the Pole* (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1992).

<sup>40</sup>*The Light of Egypt*, I, v.

polemic, Burgoyne's disagreements with Theosophical teachings come down to only three: (1) The fifth of the Seven Principles in Man is the Spiritual Body, not, as Theosophy has it, the Higher Manas; (2) It is impossible for mediums to contact the "shells" of the dead; (3) There is no reincarnation.

The title of the book of course puts it in the Egyptian, rather than the Indian current, yet though it gives historical precedence to Egyptian wisdom over Indian, it is not anti-Oriental. The author praises the true Hindu and Buddhist religions, which apparently do not teach these "poisonous doctrines," and, surprisingly enough, speaks favorably of A.P. Sinnett's outline in *Esooteric Buddhism* of the system of rounds and chains. More predictable is Burgoyne's friendliness to the author of *Art Magic*, and even to *Isis Unveiled* as a work from before the time of Mme Blavatsky's defection to the East. Emma Hardinge Britten would return the compliment by calling *The Light of Egypt* "a noble, philosophical and instructive work."<sup>41</sup> But by that time Burgoyne was dead.

The syllabus of the H. B. of L., as described above, was evidently a creation of Davidson and Burgoyne, including sources that were not even published at the supposed time of its foundation in 1870. It seems as if Théon was content to remain in the background as *éminence grise*, leaving his colleagues to design and run the practical work on the basis of whatever they themselves found helpful. Thus, for example, Davidson was obviously much taken with Hargrave Jennings' *The Rosicrucians, Their Rites and Mysteries*—as was Mme Blavatsky, in her New York period—and therefore made extracts from it re-

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<sup>41</sup>Publisher's advertisement at the back of *Ghost Land*, 1897 edition.

quired reading for neophytes. The same probably applies to the books of P. B. Randolph. One is left with the intriguing question of whether Jennings and Randolph themselves acquired their ideas, in some degree, from earlier initiatic orders of the H. B. of L. type.<sup>42</sup>

After his marriage in 1885, Théon seems to have been totally taken up with the “cosmic” teachings given through his wife. Peter Davidson kept in touch for a few years with the French occultists whom he had initiated, of whom Papus, with his new Martinist Order, was the most prominent. In 1892 Davidson started a new journal, *The Morning Star*, which resembled his *Occult Magazine*, but with a more Christian outlook. A French Martinist, Edouard Blitz, went to the USA and contacted Davidson in 1894, reporting back to Papus that Davidson had “not yet given a single grade,”<sup>43</sup> presumably referring to the H.B. of L. rather than to the Martinism which Davidson was still hesitating to join, not being a Freemason.<sup>44</sup> Blitz founded a Martinist group in Pentwater, Michigan, and *The Morning Star* served for a while as voice for that order, too. But by 1896 Blitz had broken with Davidson and was slandering him to Papus as a plagiarist, for having printed the *Golden Verses of Pythagoras* without acknowledging their modern translator, Fabre d’Olivet.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>See my article “Hargrave Jennings,” in *The Hermetic Journal*, 1991. A parallel study of Paschal Beverly Randolph is in preparation.

<sup>43</sup>The correspondence with Blitz, and other essential materials for any history of Martinism, are in the Fonds Papus of the Bibliothèque Municipale de Lyon.

<sup>44</sup>Neither was Papus, but he had obtained certain high grades such as those of the Order of Memphis and Misraïm.

<sup>45</sup>This was a calumny. Fabre d’Olivet is credited on the cover of *The Morning Star*, I,1.

Davidson, doubtless disillusioned by the ceaseless squabbles of the Paris occultists, now renewed his contact with Max Théon, and henceforth devoted his magazine, until its cessation in 1910, to Théon’s “Cosmic Philosophy.” Since the revelations of Alma Théon were made in her native English, they could be taken over directly by *The Morning Star*. Mirra Richard translated many of them for publication in France, in the two-volume *La Tradition Cosmique* (1900-01) and the journal *La Revue Cosmique* (1900-08). Barlet also threw in his lot with Théon and helped with these publications; he is credited as co-author of the anonymous *La Tradition Cosmique*. The subsequent history of Mirra is well documented, but it is worth mentioning that although she moved into a very different sphere as soon as she settled with Aurobindo Ghose in Pondicherry, to this day the publications of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram carry the symbol that Théon devised for his own: the lotus within the six-pointed star. Perhaps in the last-ditch efforts of the nonagenarian “Mother” to attain physical immortality, one can detect an echo of Théon’s “transcendental materialism.”

In the German-speaking world, the most notable member of the H. B. of L. was the Austrian industrialist Karl Kellner (1850-1905). In 1895, Kellner met Theodor Reuss, and the two of them conceived the idea of a “masonic academy” which was later to materialize as the OTO (Ordo Templi Orientis).<sup>46</sup> Based on the Rite of Memphis and Misraïm, which had been obtained from John Yarker, the OTO was supposedly the more exoteric part of Kellner and Reuss’s enterprise, while, in the latter’s own words, “the teachings of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light were reserved for

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<sup>46</sup>See the biography of Reuss by Ellic Howe and Helmut Möller, *Merlin Peregrinus. Vom Untergrund des Abendlandes* (Würzburg: Königshoven & Neumann, 1986), 87.

the few initiates of the occult inner circle.”<sup>47</sup> One does not have to look further than the H. B. of L.’s secret documents for the source of the sexual practices developed by Kellner and taught to Reuss, and later elaborated by Aleister Crowley.

It is hard to believe that Rudolf Steiner did not also penetrate to these inner teachings upon joining the OTO in 1906 and being immediately delegated Grand Master to found a Berlin Lodge. How seriously they were pursued in the OTO itself is another matter. Peter Davidson put the Outer Circle of the H.B. of L. “to sleep” in 1913, which may simply mean that being old, tired, and very far away, he ceased to have anything to do with it. The H. B. of L. under his administration had never had a fraternal system with group work and ceremonial initiations, having been in effect a correspondence course for solitary aspirants. Oaths were taken not to pass on the manuscripts, but without a strong organization there was little to prevent leaks from occurring, or to stop other orders from adopting the teachings that, after all, were not original except in their combination. By 1917 the distinction in the OTO of inner and outer circles appears to have broken down, for in that year a manifesto published from Monte Verità, Ascona, openly named “the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light, known as the O.T.O.” as the pioneering organization for world-reform.<sup>48</sup> From what is known of Reuss, it seems unlikely that he would have long withheld his order’s most precious assets from the eager initiate. One such, H. Spencer Lewis,<sup>49</sup> founder of the AMORC, was

surely not ignorant of the H. B. of L.’s teachings, though it cannot be sufficiently stressed that such knowledge, or for that matter membership of the OTO, did not necessarily imply depraved sexual practices masquerading as “yoga.” (This was an issue in the “War of the Roses” of the 1930s between Lewis and R. Swinburne Clymer.)

At least two groups today claim to carry on the tradition of the H. B. of L. The Church of Light in Carmel, California descends from the Astleys who had patronized T.H. Burgoyne, and propagates the *Light of Egypt* teachings. I have not made a special study of this branch, but I have noticed the Brotherhood of Light credited on publications by John H. Dequer and Coulson Turnbull.<sup>50</sup> In less direct line, Clymer’s Rosicrucian Fraternity, based in Quakertown, Pennsylvania, traces its descent from P.B. Randolph and his successor F.B. Dowd, while recognizing Peter Davidson as a “great initiate.” Théon’s Cosmic Philosophy still has a small following, mainly in France and Israel.

But these obscure groups do not exhaust the influence of the H. B. of L., which was out of all proportion to its scale. As I have shown, its teachings of practical occultism reached many of the key figures of modern esotericism. These include the most important German-speaking occultist of the century, Rudolf Steiner; the most influential French one, Papus; the most notorious English one, Crowley; and the most successful American, Spencer Lewis. To these one should add René Guénon, who never condemned the H. B. of L. as he did most modern “esoteric” move-

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 136, citing Reuss in *Oriflamme*, Jubilee No. (1912), 15.

<sup>48</sup>Howe & Möller, 214.

<sup>49</sup>Lewis received an OTO diploma from Reuss in 1921, but does not seem to have had a closer relationship. See Howe & Möller, 247.

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<sup>50</sup>J.H. Dequer, *Arrows of Light from the Egyptian Tarot. A practical application of the Hermetic System of Names and Numbers, based upon the teachings of the Brotherhood of Light* (New York: Author, 1930); C. Turnbull, *The Divine Language of Celestial Correspondences* (San Diego: Gnostic Press/Los Angeles: Brotherhood of Light, 4th ed., [1913]).

ments; and, through Mirra, Sri Aurobindo.

This article has presented hints and suggestions—nothing more is possible—that there was a hidden hand at work behind the launching of Modern Spiritualism in 1848; the foundation of the Theosophical Society in 1875; and the H. B. of L. in the 1880s. I believe that Paul Johnson's researches into Egyptian Freemasonry<sup>51</sup> are highly relevant to this operation, with its agents in Cairo, Paris, and New York. However, Blavatsky and Olcott set themselves apart from it when they settled in India under the influence of Himalayan Masters (whom I am not quite ready to identify with Johnson's Sikhs and Sufis). Western esotericists were thereupon faced with the challenge of assimilating Eastern wisdom, or of rejecting it.

From the point of view of the H. B. of L., the Theosophical episode would have been seen in terms of Mme. Blavatsky's meteoric appearance in Cairo and her equally meteoric fall fourteen years later, leaving the Brotherhood shaken but not overwhelmed, and faced with the imperative need to disavow her brand of esotericism. For a moment, she and Colonel Olcott, with their formidable occult and organizing powers, must have seemed the Brotherhood's greatest hopes for a broader activity and a deeper influence on the course of human thought. But this promising pair was lured away by the wiles of the Orient into preaching phony Mahatmas, working fraudulent phenomena, and teaching misleading doctrines.

That, as I said, is one view of the matter. Blavatskian Theosophists, in turn, might regard the Brotherhood of Light as an order with worthy ideals, but not of the highest inspiration, and the H.B. of L. as a rather pathetic hotch-potch. Why

read *The Light of Egypt* when one can read *The Secret Doctrine*? Why stare into magic mirrors and cultivate mediumship if one has understood *The Voice of the Silence*?

The parting of the Eastern and Western streams goes far deeper than the backbiting and criticism of their respective leaders. It hinges on two contrary philosophic views of the ultimate destiny of the human being and the purpose of life on earth. The H. B. of L. and its higher Spiritualist allies imagine the soul, single or with its beloved partner, leaving this earth after a single lifetime to travel ever finer, grander spheres, leading ever more marvelous angelic and cosmic existences in universes beyond universes, finally being reabsorbed into God. Mahayana Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta, on the contrary, see the ultimate goal as being attainable here on earth, in a human body that is the fruit of many incarnations. The Bodhisattva or Jivan-mukti who achieves this goal is simultaneously in the world of existence and in that of Non-Being or Nirvana which is the support of all universes, no matter how spectacular or how sordid. In Buddhist language, the H. B. of L. can only lead to the realm of the "Long-Lived Gods"; while in Hindu terms, its practical occultism, taken as an end in itself, can only reinforce the bondage of the Mayavic illusion.

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<sup>51</sup>See P. Johnson, *In Search of the Masters: Beyond the Occult Myth* (South Boston, Va: Author, 1990), Pt. I.

# The First Practical Expression of Theosophy in Italy: The “Villaggio Verde” (Green Village)

Bernardino del Boca

From 1947 to 1951 I was the Italian Consul in Singapore and, being a member of the Theosophical Society and former president of the “Besant-Arundale” Lodge in Novara, Italy I would often visit the Singapore Lodge located on 8 Cairnhill Road. At a meeting of the Malayan Vegetarian Society, I met a Chinese nun, Pitt Tze Hui, who asked me to help her establish a Buddhist society in Singapore. I did my best to help her, as did other theosophists, such as Rie and S.H. Ph. von Krusenstierna (now Bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church in Australia), Mrs. H.B. Moorhead, Mr. V. Rajagopal, and Mr. Chan Chim Lee.

Together with Pitt Tze Hui, we published *A bilingual graduated course on the Fundamental Teachings of the Lord Buddha (Jen Chien Fu Chion - Buddhism for this Sansara World)*. We also established a model for a community in Italy where it was possible to live “to be and not to have.” We had many dreams and we hoped to be able to make people understand the invisible reality of the “Continuous Infinite Present.”

At that time I was very young, but this dream of a community or village with individuals living in harmony, not just intellectual harmony but a harmony with the invisible reality of the Spiritual Realm, has persisted to be somewhat of an obsession to me. To this end, I began to collect books and magazines on alternative and spiritual

literature. At the present time, the Villaggio Verde possesses a library of 13,000 books and magazines.

In 1970 I founded, together with the theosophist Edoardo Bresci, the Publishing House, “L’Età dell’ Acquario” (The Age of Aquarius), and the magazine *L’Età dell’ Acquario*, now in its seventy-first issue.

In 1981 we bought some wooded land near the place of origin of my family, Boca, not far from Lake Maggiore and Arona, and we started the Villaggio Verde, a community conforming to the principles of Theosophy, trying to escape from both the illusion of Time and Space and especially from the negative influence of the mind and of the sensory illusion of materialism. Our goal is to build fifty-one “moduli” (apartments) around a small artificial lake, the already completed lake being the symbol of the Aquarian Age. At the time of this writing, sixteen have been constructed (see photo). In front, at the entrance of the Village, is a shrine of the *phi* [spirit beings who usually inhabit rivers, mountains, wild places and trees. In front of many Thai homes is the *Sam-Phra-Phum*, the ‘home of the earth spirit,’ to which this most certainly is - *ed.*] originating from Bangkok, Thailand. It is a symbol of our greater belief and confidence in the invisible world and its spiritual energies. Our agricultural endeavors give us food enough for the inhabitants.

We are now in the process of establishing a Museum of Animism. To that end, we have collected many statues of the *nats* [spirit-beings] of Burma, the *phis* of Thailand, the *kami* of Japan, and fetishes.

For many years I have been a friend of John Coats [the late President of the Theosophical Society, Adyar], who often visited us in Singapore and Italy, and who discussed the Villaggio Verde with us on numerous occasions. It is a pity that John did not see the realization of the project.



A visitor (left) and Bernardino del Boca (right) standing in front of the entrance to the Villaggio Verde, on either side of the shrine to the phi.

# Book Reviews

**IN SEARCH OF THE MASTERS: BEHIND THE OCCULT MYTH.** By Paul Johnson. South Boston, VA: author, 1990. Pp. 305. \$11.95 + \$2.00 handling. May be ordered through the T.S. bookshops in Paris, Sydney, and London, and directly from the author.

This is a difficult book, both to read and to review. Different readers, and reviewers will find it difficult for different reasons. The typical, historically ill-informed Theosophist will be unlikely to read it, but, if he or she does, will doubtless reject it outright as an unjustified attack on Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, which it is not. Scholars of Theosophical history may likewise be deterred by the methodology and the speculation, both of which are an inevitable consequence of the subject matter. Neither Blavatsky nor those who have followed her in Theosophical organizations have had any great enthusiasm for history; they preferred mythology, though usually under the guise of history, but history edited, adjusted and laundered (in the tradition of religious and political movements generally) to adjust the often inconvenient fact to suit ideology.

The trail that Paul Johnson has sought to follow has therefore been far from straight, or well sign-posted. Blavatsky, no less than her disciples, sought to obscure rather than to reveal her, and indeed their, history. In addition, the circles into which Johnson's explorations took him were often preoccupied with secrecy and obscurity, and were not usually of sufficient significance socially or culturally to have been documented independently.

Speculation about Blavatsky, the origins of her teachings, and the nature of her Masters, has produced some of the worst pseudo-scholarship and most vividly mindless hagiographies or exposes in the writing of religious history. This book, as the author notes, falls neither into the "true believer" nor the "all lies" camps. For that reason, Johnson may succeed in pleasing no-one. But that will not be his fault.

He takes on the difficult, and probably impossible, task of seeking to answer the question: who were Blavatsky's masters? To which can be added: and what were they trying to do? Johnson provides quite clear answers to both questions, and his conclusions are extraordinarily original and interesting.

Previous Theosophical authors, as Johnson notes, have tended to argue that the Masters were supernatural, or at least superhuman, beings (or Beings), remote from the ordinary world; this was not what Blavatsky taught, but it became the general Theosophical tradition after her death when the Masters became oriental variants on the Inner Plane Adepts of the tradition of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn or, less flatteringly, the Guides of Spiritualism. Questions about the Masters and their earthly activities have tended to be avoided by Theosophical commentators, apart from those such as Leadbeater who (in works like *The Masters and the Path*) offered extraordinary guides to their physical appearance, characters and personal tastes.

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

The myth, or "masks", of the Mahatmas was, Johnson argues, established to conceal the real identities and purposes of the men. Blavatsky was prepared to allow herself to be declared a fraud and a charlatan rather than disclose the real identities of her Masters.

However, the problem Johnson faces, given the elaborate concealment and mythologizing in which (if his hypothesis is correct) Blavatsky and her Masters engaged, is to establish coherent and historically convincing evidence for his thesis. Like all who enter the shadowy realms of conspiracy theory, he is caught in something of a trap: if there was a secret conspiracy, there is unlikely to be any direct evidence of it. He is therefore reduced to circumstantial evidence, suggestions, implications, coincidences, and associations. This is the major, and inevitable, criticism of his book.

And this, to a large extent, explains the difficulty of the book, no less than of the research on which it is based. The research is virtually beyond criticism; Johnson has explored, uncovered and documented both major pathways and obscure byways and dead-ends of Theosophical and occult history with a zeal and enthusiasm for detail which is otherwise almost unknown in

writers of Theosophical history, and conspicuously lacking in previous writers on Blavatsky. His research took him on a world-wide journey in an attempt to trace the outlines of the conspiracy and the conspirators. Although assisted by a wide range of scholars and Theosophical organizations he joined the distinguished ranks of those against whom the Adyar Society kept its secret archive door closed. Although one suspects that there may have been little there to assist him.

It is easy to find minor flaws in the book; they have nothing to do with the major thesis or the substance of his research. In large part they are the result of the author publishing his own book. Mainstream Theosophical publishers presumably found the subject matter too challenging and controversial. Playing a game of trivial pursuit to find fault with the book does not detract from the central arguments, and the overwhelming (and, for some readers, probably almost unendurable) mass of detail and documentation.

Does the author satisfactorily establish his thesis? Inevitably, not, but through no fault of his own. The case he makes out is coherent and well-documented; it depends, however, on substantial conjecture, rather than on soundly documented history. This is hardly unorthodox in the area of Theosophical history, or the history of occultism generally. Two relatively recent studies of Blavatsky - Meade's *Madame Blavatsky: The Woman behind the Myth* (1980) and Fuller's *Blavatsky and her Teachers* (1988) - make no less use of speculation and conjecture, from diametrically opposed positions, and without the degree of supporting evidence which Johnson employs.

The book lacks an index which, particularly in works arguing complex historical con-

spiracies, makes serious study difficult. The extensive endnotes and bibliography are, however, extremely helpful.

*In Search of the Masters* is difficult reading, but it is also fascinating and challenging reading. Whether or not the reader accepts Johnson's central thesis, the mass detail, the curious byways of Theosophical, occult and political history, and the vivid impression of it all the author creates, makes it compelling, if exhausting, reading. This book ought to be read, and carefully, by anyone interested in Blavatsky and the origins of the Theosophical Society or, indeed, in the occult revival of the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

**Dr. Gregory Tillett**

**KROTONA OF OLD HOLLYWOOD: VOLUME I, 1866-1913.** By Joseph E. Ross. Montecito, CA: El Montecito Oaks Press, 1989. Pp. xiv + 298. \$22.95. [A free supplement of the Krotona letters will be included with the book.]

In her informative book, *100 Years of Theosophy: A History of the Theosophical Society in America*, Joy Mills has observed that the "full history of the Hollywood Krotona is still to be written." (51) I am happy to report that this deficiency is now being remedied by a former resident of Krotona (Ojai) and the present Director of the International Lalita Kalas Foundation, Inc., Joseph Ross. Mr. Ross is in a unique position to conduct this study because of his foreknowledge in collecting and preserving a treasure trove of letters from the founders of Krotona, including

such notables as Mrs. Annie Besant, C.W. Leadbeater, and A.P. Warrington, that would otherwise have never seen the light of day. This material serves as the basis of a detailed and fascinating account of the conception, origin, and first year of operation in this first volume on the history of the Krotona Institute. From its very inception it was characterized as "a community of members of the Esoteric Section [now known as the Esoteric School of Theosophy] of the Theosophical Society" (iv) by the then head of the Esoteric Section and, later, General Secretary of the American Section, Albert Powell Warrington.

The author divides the book in six chapters, beginning with the early life of Mr. Warrington from his birth in 1866 to his admission to the E.S. in 1906 [Chapter 1]; his dream of "establishing a community on Pythagorean lines" (letter from C.W. Leadbeater to A.P. Warrington on p. 12) consisting of a community "dedicated to the ideals of discipleship and brotherhood" (11) [Chapter 2]; the search for the ideal location of the community [Chapter 3]; the establishment of the Krotona Institute in 1912 as an "educational nucleus" (132) as well as becoming the center of the Esoteric Section (the owner of the Krotona Institute), the American headquarters of the Order of the Star in the East and of the American Section of the Theosophical Society, and to house for a time the Temple of the Rosy Cross [Chapter 4]; the expansion and growth of Krotona during the remainder of 1912 [Chapter 5]; and its first full year of operation in 1913 [Chapter 6].

Because of the wealth of detail and the copious reproduction of letters by the principals containing much extraneous information, readers might well be advised to read Mr. Warrington's address, "Krotona— Past and Present," delivered

on 2 February 1913 during the opening day ceremonies of the Winter Session (216-221). In its principal role as a center of learning, he states that the Krotona Institute provides the

adult an opportunity for a measure of instruction which he cannot get in other institutions of learning.... We discover Theosophy, feel its grandeur, and then yearn to spread its message. To such the opportunity will here be given to learn of that light of truth and love which is so filling the world today.... Men and women who, for lack of training, have no capacity to express the things that fill their souls, who have had no opportunity to study and to qualify themselves to express something of the soul's fullness—it is for such that the Krotona Institute is brought into existence. (218-9)

Although Mr. Ross does not provide a complete list of the courses that were provided by the Institute during 1913 Winter Session, that list does appear in the journal, the *O.E. Library Critic* (II/5, 23 Oct. 1912). In a most sympathetic article by the future scourge of the T.S. (Adyar), the editor, H.N. Stokes, considered Krotona at its inauguration to be not merely a school of Theosophy but “the beginning of a university in which every subject so far as it admits of it will be treated from the theosophical standpoint, just as the universities treat everything from the standpoint of evolution.” (4) The courses that were offered were:

The Aryan Sub-Races  
Applied Theosophy  
The Astral World  
Elementary Philosophy  
Science and Theosophy Correlated  
Abnormal Psychology

Child Life—in the Light of Theosophy  
Anthropology and Folklore and Development of Religion  
Everyday Law  
Government  
Untried Theories, Social and Political  
Esoteric Interpretation of the Drama  
Esoteric Interpretation of the Poets  
Music Theosophically Interpreted  
Care of the Body

Turning to the style of the book, the reader should be forewarned that this is not an easy book, the main reason being that the narrative is broken up repeatedly by often lengthy letters that, on numerous occasions, contain references to topics and events that have little or nothing to do with Krotona, and this usually without the benefit of the author's annotation. This may cause some frustration on the part of those attentive readers having little or no knowledge of the Theosophical Society and its leaders in the earlier part of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, a full understanding of some of the contents of the letters cannot always be complemented by secondary reading material. For this reason, the book would have been of even greater value had Mr. Ross pursued these nooks and crannies of theosophical history. Examples include mention of Douglas Pettit (56, 69, 103, 125, 185, 193, 203-4, 206-7), the unusual role of Marie Russak in the American Section and her supposed psychic powers (23, 160, 253-5, 260-1), the presence of rival 'occult' societies such as the Universal Brotherhood (171, 185) or the Mahacakra Society (179), the role of that supposed nemesis of the T.S., the Jesuits (171-2, 186). One last regret is the failure to give a more rounded, three-dimensional portrait of General Secretary Mr. Warrington's immediate predecessor, Dr. Weller Van Hook. He is a most

shadowy figure who appears only as the opponent to Warrington's dream of establishing the Krotona Institute. Also, Mr. Ross has purposely chosen to follow a purely narrative style rather than to attempt to analyze and define events and personalities in the book. This will be welcomed by some readers, but the author's perspective, after examining this subject so meticulously, would be appreciated.

On the other hand, it is unfair to fault the author for omitting what was admittedly beyond the purview of the book. Admittedly, our knowledge of theosophical history has been greatly expanded. Indeed, the original source material reproduced therein is enough to make the book required reading for all historians of theosophical, communal, and Californian history. Mr. Ross is to be especially commended in shedding light where only lacunae previously existed. It is my fervent hope that succeeding volumes will offer as much insightful material as this first initial effort.

**James A. Santucci**