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"Thesis' includes 'treatise', dissertation' and other similar productions.
Abstract

H. P. Blavatsky (1831-1891) and C. W. Leadbeater (1854-1934) were successive ideologues for the Theosophical Society. The revelation they articulated was premised on the existence and benevolence of a Brotherhood of Masters with whom they alleged contact. The Masters are presented as perfected men, possessed of supranormal physical and spiritual endowments, whose task it is to guide humanity along an inclined trajectory toward ultimate divinisation.

The objective of the present work is to examine the Masters phenomenologically, and to ascertain their rôle within Theosophical discourse. No attempt is made to discern the ontic reality of the Masters as such an enquiry lies beyond the scholar's methodological apparatus. Rather, the Master is examined as a function of Theosophical esotericism, and as a pivotal personification of Theosophy's occultistic engagement with such prevailing paradigms as progressivism, evolutionism, and perfectibilism.

The work is divided into five parts: the first is concerned with methodologies and heuristic definitions; the second examines the ideational structures of the Blavatskian conceptual domain; the third explores Leadbeater's redaction of the Blavatskian template; the fourth proposes several typological categories under which the Masters may be viewed (the Mercurian, the Monastic, the Pædagogical, the Oriental, the Perfected, the Angelic, the Rosicrucian); and the fifth is devoted to appendices (portraits, geographical location, fictional literature, 'Malign Masters', and contemporary recensions of the motif).
Acknowledgements

Any scholar who has studied esotericism will appreciate that such research is often akin to a treasure hunt, with all of the attendant excitements, but also the various frustrations. Among the latter is the availability of resources, both textual and personal; indeed, the search for obscure and rare documents is only matched by the equally challenging quest for academic peers who share the same interests, and who are able to discuss the matters contained herein with genuine enthusiasm and insight. In both cases - the materials and the minds - I have been particularly blessed by much valued support.

For assistance in the location of necessary documents I am indebted to the Librarian and staff of the following institutions: the American University in Cairo, the Australian Archives (Canberra), the Bibliotheque Nationale (Paris), the British Library (Reference, Manuscript, and Newspaper Divisions: London), the Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris), the Campbell Theosophical Research Library (Sydney), the Clergy Library of the Liberal Catholic Church (Sydney), the Fisher Library of the University of Sydney, the Library and Archives of Lambeth Palace (London), the Library and Archives of the British Orthodox Church (London), the Library and Archives of the India Office (London), the Library of Columbia University (New York), the Library of The Manor (Sydney), the Library of the Theosophical Society (Sydney), the Library of the University of New South Wales (Sydney), the Library of the University of London, the Library of the Warburg Institute (London), the Library of the Wellcome Institute (London), the Mitchell Library (Sydney), the National Library of Australia (Canberra), the New York Public Library, the Société d'Archéologie Copte (Cairo), the State Archives of New South Wales (Sydney), and the State Reference Library (Sydney). Special note must be made of the valiant efforts of Sabine Lusch, Kathryn Vandine, Tam Dao, and Rod Dyson of the Inter-Library Loans/Document Supply section of Fisher Library (University of Sydney) for their stoic determination to secure several scarce items. In fact, I suspect that their persistence - which more often than not paid dividends - was matched only by their puzzlement at the titles requested.
Several individuals from the Australian Section of the Theosophical Society (Adyar) supported my efforts. My thanks go to the late Norman Hankin of The Manor, to Zora Marresh of the Sydney Adyar Library, to Beverley J. Champion (the National President), and, particularly, to Cai and Naomi Blumensaadt whose eleventh hour bibliographic assistance proved invaluable. Special mention is due to the past International Vice-President, Joy Mills, of Krotona in Ojai, California, whose encouragement of scholarship, and openness to historians, would surely have pleased Blavatsky enormously.

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The great bibliophile and Theosophical scholar, the late John Cooper, provided friendship and an inspirational example from the very first. Sadly for me, he passed away before reading any of the present work. I can only wonder what additions (or subtractions!) might have been made with the assistance of his celebrated eye for detail. My thanks are due also to Shirley Cooper for her friendship.

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I wish to dedicate this work to two women who wove their own special kind of enchantment: my grandmothers, Eva Kathleen Vane French Adamson (d. 31 August, 1992) and Tui Olga Lewis Gilchrist Leadbitter (d. 19 February, 1997).
Introductory Notes

A Note on Sources

In order to obtain materials for the present research the author consulted both public and private collections. Among the former were included the following:

- The American University in Cairo,
- The Australian Archives (Canberra),
- The Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris),
- The British Library (Reference, Manuscript, and Newspaper Divisions: London),
- The Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris),
- The Library and Archives of the India Office (London),
- The Library and Archives of Lambeth Palace (London),
- The Library of Columbia University (New York),
- The Library of the University of Sydney,
- The Library of the University of New South Wales (Sydney),
- The Library of the University of London,
- The Library of the Warburg Institute (London),
- The Library of the Wellcome Institute (London),
- The Mitchell Library (Sydney),
- The National Library of Australia (Canberra),
- The New York Public Library,
- The State Archives of New South Wales (Sydney),
- The State Reference Library (Sydney).

The privately-funded and administered institutions and collections consulted by the author include the following:

- The Campbell Theosophical Research Library (Sydney),
- The Clergy Library of the Liberal Catholic Church (Sydney),
- The Library and Archives of the British Orthodox Church (London),
The Library and Archives of Dr. John Cooper (Bega, New South Wales),
The Library and Archives of Dr. Gregory Tillett (Sydney),
The Library and Archives of Revd. Laurence Langley (Wyongah, New South Wales),
The Library of The Manor (Sydney),
The Library of the Theosophical Society (Sydney),
The Société d'Archéologie Copte (Cairo).

Throughout the present work, all references to H. P. Blavatsky’s books are taken from first editions, or facsimiles thereof. Where the title of an article by Blavatsky is important for the purposes of argument, it has been cited in full; otherwise, the reader is directed to page entries in the fifteen volume Theosophical Publishing House edition of Blavatsky’s Collected Writings (comp. Boris de Zirkoff, inter alia). For Blavatsky’s correspondence, all references are from published sources or from John Cooper’s two volume doctoral thesis, ‘The Letters of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky: 1862-1882’ (The School of Studies in Religion, University of Sydney), Sydney, 1998. For biographical materials on Blavatsky, the author has consulted Boris de Zirkoff’s ‘Chronological Index’ and ‘Historical Index’ (in the Cooper Archives), as well as all of the published works available.

For C. W. Leadbeater, the author has examined all of the published writings, as well as Gregory Tillett’s three volume doctoral thesis, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater, 1854-1934: A Biographical Study’ (Department of Religious Studies, University of Sydney), Sydney, 1986. Unpublished archival materials were also consulted in the State Archives of New South Wales (Sydney), the Special Collections Department of Columbia University (New York), the Library and Archives of the India Office (London), the Library and Archives of Lambeth Palace (London), and the ‘[Gerald] Yorke Collection’ of the Warburg Institute (London).
A Note on Citation

As the Theosophical Society - and late modern esotericism generally - remains a much under researched domain of study, it has been decided to provide substantial referencing throughout the present work. It is hoped that such detail will facilitate future scholarship and help to avoid a common tendency among writers in this field to damage their materials through poor research methodology and scant or misleading citations. To this end, all works have been cited in full initially, and then in reduced form thereafter. A bibliography of works cited has also been appended.

It might be noted that unlike most works which deal with Theosophy, no abbreviated forms or honorifics have been employed to describe the Theosophical Society’s leaders. Thus it is that Helena Petrovna Blavatsky is rendered throughout as ‘Blavatsky’, and not as ‘HPB’ or ‘Madame Blavatsky’, titles which imply familiarity or deference.

A Note on Style

Throughout the first decades of the Theosophical Society’s existence it was common for members to Anglicise Oriental terms, phrases, and names. Nevertheless, it is now not unusual for editors retrospectively to alter these texts such that they accord more completely with contemporary usage. So it is that standardised diacritics and phonetic markers, for instance, have been employed in several recent reissues of Victorian-era Theosophical texts.

The present work has attempted to maintain the earlier forms for the reasons of clarity and fidelity to the data. Where several variants of the one text or name appear in Theosophical works, the simplest has been employed. Thus, for instance, Leadbeater’s protégé, Curuppumullage Jinarājadāsa, is rendered throughout as ‘Jinarajadasa’, for the reason that the latter was the more common form in the literature of the period. So, too, certain terms which have a specific Theosophical usage - which differs markedly from their Oriental origins - are left unitalicised; thus Bodhisattva, Maitreya, Mahatma, akasha, etc.
A Note on Terminology

As a nascent discipline, the academic study of esotericism is still much preoccupied with nomenclature and definitions. Although the present work is not devoted to such concerns sensu stricto, it is necessary nevertheless to begin with a few simple heuristic definitions. Each of the following appears to accord with the scholarly consensus.

Esotericism: In the limited historical sense employed throughout the present work, esotericism is a constellation of ideas, notions, and attitudes of an anagogic nature which have come into creative proximity with one another in the wake of Renaissance syncretistic Hermeticism. Thus understood, esotericism as an historical corpus is a Western development, initially from within a Christian crucible (which is not to suggest that there are no other esotericisms exterior to the West, but simply that it seems highly unlikely that a sufficiently comprehensive metahistorical essentialist ‘esotericism’ could be posited). Forms of thought and praxis which inhere in esotericism include Christian and post-Christian Kabbalah, alchemy, Paracelsianism, theosophy (sensu lato), Illuminism, Rosicrucianism, and occultism, inter alia. Current scholarly consensus would suggest that the epistemological comparabilities shared by these trends indicate several constitutive elements, the first four intrinsic:

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A) a system of correspondences which are deemed to connect invisibly all parts of manifest life with other worlds of experience - whether they be supercelestial, transhistorical, or textual/hermeneutic;

B) a living nature in which bonds of sympathy unite all forms in an ordered cosmos;

C) a belief in the faculty of creative imagination wherewith access to other worlds of experience - presumed by A) and B) supra - can be achieved by means of such mediations as ritual, imagery, angelic or spirit invocation, inter alia;

D) a belief in, and a desire for, transmutation. The experiences of A), B), and C) supra, operate as a trigger for a soteriological gnosis, whereby the esotericist is changed utterly, and assumes a new condition (physical, spiritual, or other);

E) a praxis of concordance in which the esotericist finds a superior wisdom by synthetising a variety of preexisting traditions;

F) a dynamic of transmission by which means teachings are passed from one person to another, and traditions thereby established.

Gnosticism/gnosticism: A distinction is drawn in the present work between historical Gnosticism(s) as a temporally-specific nebula of religions and religionisms, and gnosticism as a diachronic phenomenon of religious soteriological epistemology. Historical Gnosticism (capitalised to differentiate it from atemporal gnosticism, with which it nevertheless shares significant conceptual affinities) of the first centuries of the Common Era is only peripherally of concern for the present work, given that the Theosophical Society is a late modern phenomenon. Of ‘gnosticism’, Wouter Hanegraaff has noted the following:

According to [gnosis], truth can only be found by personal, inner revelation, insight or ‘enlightenment’. Truth can only be personally experienced: in contrast with the knowledge of reason or faith, it is in principle not generally accessible. This ‘inner knowing’ cannot
be transmitted by discursive language (this would reduce it to rational knowledge). Nor can it be the subject of faith ... because there is in the last resort no other authority than personal, inner experience.¹

Hermeticism/Hermetism: As perhaps indicated supra (see ‘Gnosticism/gnosticism’), definitions are inevitably arbitrary, and are more often than not hallowed by use. Since the work of Frances Yates (d.1981), a distinction has been drawn between ‘Hermetism’ and ‘Hermeticism’. Under the former rubric are designated the myriad antique works which are known as the Hermetica, and which share conceptual affinities as well as a putated author, Hermes (Trismegistus). Included as well are those texts which were directly inspired by the Hermetica; thus it is that ‘Hermetism’ as a category can include works covering the entirety of the Common Era. ‘Hermeticism’ is a more paradoxical category in that it is (technically) more inclusive and thus able to subsume ‘Hermetism’, but also more discriminating in so far as it describes various Renaissance and post-Renaissance developments of a distinct esoteric character. For the present work, then, ‘Hermetism’ is employed to refer to those texts which take the Hermetica as their particular purview, and ‘Hermeticism’ to imply those traditions or currents which, inspired by the Hermetica (particularly the Corpus Hermeticum), inculcated new synthetic esotericisms, such as alchemy, Christian Kabbalah, theosophy, and philosophia magia.

Occultism: Fewer words in English have endured more baroque applications with such minimal lexical content as has ‘occultism’. For the present work, occultism is considered to be a specific current within esotericism which espouses a religio-political agenda. This agenda came to the fore in the esotericism of the nineteenth century - though intimations of earlier manifestations can be found - and it is during this time that the term ‘occultism’ came into parlance. The occultists of the nineteenth century self-consciously sought to usurp the rhetoric and vocabulary of the scientific rationalist paradigms of their era, and then wed them to traditionalist esoteric

discourses, in an attempt to redeem the world from the errancy of (Positivist) materialism. Yet the reconsecrated cosmos desired by the occultists was not one which emphasised or even necessitated a personal God or Redeemer, but one in which the \textit{anthropos} could be apotheosised. Thus it is that occultism can be couched in the language of Enlightenment progressivism, Darwinian naturalism, and Cartesian dualism, but have as its ideological purpose the humanistic reenchantment of a world presumed to be denuded of the numinous. Such a paradoxical \textit{rapprochement} is described by Wouter Hanegraaff thus:

\begin{quote}
Occultism, I suggest, can be defined as a category in the study of religions, which comprises \textit{all attempts by esotericists to come to terms with a disenchanted world or, alternatively, by people in general to make sense of esotericism from the perspective of a disenchanted secular world.}^{3}
\end{quote}

\textit{Theosophy:} For the present work, theosophy incorporates (but is obviously not exhausted by) two historical currents. The first, exemplified by Jacob Boehme (1575-1624) and his continuators, has recently been characterised by Antoine Faivre as inspired speculation and visionary hermeneutics.\textsuperscript{4} Faivre has suggested that there are three constitutive elements to the theosophical current of the sixteenth and, particularly, seventeenth centuries:

A) \textit{The God/Human/Nature Triangle} in which speculation on each element, and on the \textit{perichoresis} operating between the three, leads to an inspired understanding of the cosmic \textit{processus};

B) \textit{The Primacy of the Mythic} is such that mythemes are emphasised and the active fostering of the image/‘imaginary’ encouraged: ‘Theosophy is a kind of theology of the image’;

C) \textit{Direct Access to Superior Worlds} can be gained through the faculty of applied \textit{imaginatio} (see equivalent component in ‘esotericism’ \textit{supra}).

\textsuperscript{3} Hanegraaff, \textit{New Age}, 422.\textsuperscript{4} The following discussion is informed by Faivre, \textit{Theosophy}, 7-8.

\textit{XII}
Although Faivre’s definition appears to proceed synchronically from his study of the works of Boehme and others, it is not unlikely to be also applicable to a transhistorical phenomenon of theosophical religiosity (as with ‘gnosticism’ supra). Thus it is that throughout the present work such engaged religious reflection is figured as ‘theosophy’ - with a lower case ‘t’ - and its proponents, ‘thesophers’.

‘Theosophy’ - with an upper case ‘T’ - is here employed specifically to refer to the Theosophical Society, founded in New York in 1875, and which survives to the present day. ‘Theosophists’ are members of the Theosophical Society. That some Theosophists were also theosophers is evident, but not presupposed.

It is important to note from the outset that the Oriental iconography and idioms favoured by Theosophical discourse have prompted some commentators to artificially divorce the Society from the broader theosophical current of thought as it has manifested in the West over the past several centuries. One objective of the present work is to provide a corrective to this view by focussing upon the Occidental ideational constructs which permeated the Theosophical Society from its inception, and thereby illustrate the degree to which the Theosophical Weltanschauung was a deliberately-constructed renaissance of a specifically Western esotericism.
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INTRODUCTION

One of the ironies of modernity has been that in reaching for a share of God's mastery, humanity may well have inadvertently fallen from its own pedestal. In traditionalist Biblically-generated theological reflection, human Promethean aspirations were necessarily limited for the reason that God's sphere was deemed to be inviolable. There was ample compensation for such delimitations, however, for humans were vouchsafed uniqueness in the created order. Adam, as priest of creation and 'name-giver', was the summit of manifest life - and his descendants shared in his rarefied ontology.

As humanist and secularist ideologies began to assert themselves in the discourse of recent centuries, certain divine prerogatives started to be usurped, not least the telling of (pre)history. Revelation - hitherto unassailable - was diminished, and rearticulated as mythology. In its place, human stories began to be elevated, and were granted an authority and distinction previously accorded to divine dictates alone. Indeed, it is not unfair to suggest that God was being coaxed out of his heaven, and his lodgings prepared for the next tenant: the self-sustaining human.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the confidence of such post-Enlightenment aspirations was to be tested, but not in expected ways. No great cataclysm issued from the firmament to sweep away the new science and the new philosophy. Instead, the danger proved to be intrinsic; the new epistemologies contained their own surprises to upset the idealistic ambitions of their inventors. Rather than dispelling mystagogy as had been their intention, such novelties as biological evolutionism and palæoanthropology ultimately undermined less of the divine esse, than of the human. Indeed, the teleological priority of the human was in danger of being negated by the application of the very 'gift' (reason) that had traditionally been employed to support it.

It is not exaggerating the situation to suggest that these circumstances amounted to modernity's existential crisis. By the late nineteenth century, in fact, there was a veritable mêlée of competing scientific, philosophical, and religious paradigms - few of which offered much comfort. Orthodox wisdom suggested that in such times a
person should take respite in the ark of Biblical sureties - but what if there was no ‘ark’ extant? It certainly appeared to many that what had once been the indomitable ark of faith had come aground on the shoals of secularism - and had latterly seemed rather leaky as a consequence. But the new modalities seemed no more satisfying; having denuded the cosmos of its protective divinities, modern scientific thinking had made the universe a lonely place indeed. Materialism, Positivism, and naturalism (and the various permutations in between) all seemed to suggest that the very idea of God was to be dispensed with as an outmoded nostrum that had run its course. Less extreme, though not really any more heartening, was the deistic maxim that if God existed at all, he had become deaf to all entreaty. Indeed, it seemed to many that there was now no Creator, no Creation, just creatures - with homo only one development among a multitude. It is hardly surprising, then, that some theorists would attempt to rescue humanity from this ontological drift and seek to establish new conceptual orbits in which meaning and purpose could be reintroduced as part of a teleological dynamic.

The present work is devoted to two such conceptualisers. The first, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), achieved fame in her lifetime as the founder and prime ideologue of the Theosophical Society; the second, Charles Webster Leadbeater (1854-1934), came to prominence in the Society in the years following Blavatsky’s death, and redacted Theosophy to accord with his own idiosyncratic vision of an energised cosmos. Blavatsky and Leadbeater have been selected not only for the fact they have been the two most celebrated theorists in the history of the Theosophical movement, but also because they might be considered to embody the contrapuntal propensities of the Theosophical Weltanschauung.

Blavatsky has tended to be ignored by scholars, no doubt because of the taint of occultism which adheres to her voluminous writings. Yet when the works are examined a solo they reflect a remarkable depth of engagement with the central epistemological dilemmas of her era. Blavatsky was convinced that the Spirit had fled from Christianity, and that the Churches comprised little other than mausoleums for dead religiosity, stripped by modern scholarship of their foundational mythos. She was no more enamoured of the secularist philosophies of her day, believing them to
offer little solace against the uncertainties of the coolly mechanistic universe they had crafted. Clearly, what she required was a tertium quid.

Blavatsky turned for inspiration to the referential corpus of Western esotericism, and there found the motifs and idiom which enabled her to fashion a vision of a reconsecrated cosmos. But she articulated her conceptual domain in rigorously modern rhetoric, thus electing to engage with the secularist paradigms of her era, rather than parry with them as she had observed the Churches do to their disadvantage. Blavatsky’s occultism, then, was an esotericism refracted through the prism of nineteenth century epistemology.

Blavatsky’s Theosophy (as her system was called) was crafted so as to provide the vital ingredient which she believed was lacking in religious and philosophical discourse: transformative potentiality. To this end, she retrieved the anthropos from the periphery of the cosmic processus, and returned it to its position of preeminence as the teleological spindle around which all universal dynamics were spun. As a consequence, in the Theosophical cosmos all life is considered to be human, whether in esse or in posse. When this anthropocentrist dictum is wedded to an hierarchised schema and energised by a progressivist dynamic (the nineteenth century paradigm par excellence), the result is a cosmos in which humanity as presently constituted is considered to be embarked on an evolutionary journey directed toward ultimate divinisation. Importantly, such a telos could comfortably incorporate the radical scientific and philosophical epistemologies of Blavatsky’s era, but reconstrue them as divinely sanctioned cosmic processes.

Blavatsky buttressed her argument by claiming that hers was not a novel configuration, but simply the Ancient Wisdom expressed in a modern idiom. Indeed, Theosophy was not new at all; rather, she maintained, it was the esoteric heart of all esoteric religious and philosophical structures. But Blavatsky’s warrant was not as a mythographer. Recognising that hers was an age characterised by concerns over facticity, Blavatsky asserted that her teachings were mediated by documents of remarkable (indeed Atlantean!) antiquity, and - crucially - by a Brotherhood of Masters.
whose perennial task it was to oversee human development. Theosophy, thus, was presented as nothing less than an empirically-determined revelation.

The Masters are the core of the Theosophical endeavour, and as such comprise the basis of the present work. Blavatsky depicted the Masters as men who had perfected themselves through conscious effort, and who lived strict ascetical lives in a fraternity situated in remote Tibet. The Masters, it seems, are possessed of an ambiguous ontology; having progressed beyond normative limits, they have achieved supranormal powers and evolutionary endowments. The Great White Brotherhood - a collective title - ordinarily operates in secrecy to advance human perfectibilism, but on rare occasions they will accept pupils ('chelas') for instruction in the Ancient Wisdom. Blavatsky was one such chela, to whom was granted the warrant to publish their arcane lore. Interestingly, Blavatsky was further aided in her mission by an extensive correspondence which the Masters undertook with several Theosophists. It should be noted at the outset, therefore, that the Masters (unlike the God of the deists) did not stand apart from their creation; theirs is a constant - if elusive - presence.

Leadbeater inherited Blavatsky's mantle as chief Theosophical ideologue, ultimately extending the parameters of her idiom to include overt ceremonialism and an idiosyncratic Masters-oriented adventism. His Theosophy was a baroque, but not unpredictable, development of the Blavatskian template, in which the attempt to forge a rapprochement between rationalist and religious rhetoric is amplified to an unprecedented degree. In fact, Leadbeater's insistence that all supramundane processes were explicable by physical laws constitutes one of the most extreme occultisms on record. He, too, alleged a commission from the Masters (with whom he claimed to remain in perpetual psychic contact) and on the basis of this unassailable authority many thousands of Theosophists accepted his pronouncements as nothing less than scientific certainties.

As with all claims to meta-empirical insight, the scholarly tools do not exist to prove or to disprove Blavatsky's or Leadbeater's assertions of contact with Masters. Nevertheless, what little attention the Masters have received from scholars has been
devolved upon this very question: did/do they exist as verifiable historical entities? The focus of the present work concentrates, rather, on the function of the Masters in Theosophical discourse, and on what aspects of esotericism (and modernism) they might incarnate for the faithful. What is it about the aspirational model of the Masters that so comprehensively embodied the dreams of nineteenth and twentieth century esotericists? To what degree can the Masters be said to have broadened the aperture of religious discourse in an age characterised by secularism?

The following work is divided into several parts. The first details the methodological stance of the author and proposes a heuristic definition of the Master. The second examines the career and ideational constructs of Blavatsky, with a special concentration on the conceptual component of Theosophy as it affected her presentation of the Masters. The third explores Leadbeater’s redaction of Blavatskian Theosophy and focusses on his theurgic ‘Masters-making’. The fourth proposes preliminary typologies for the Master, and suggests that the Master is presented as an embodiment of the occult Hermes, of esoteric monasticism, of antique pædeutics, of Orientalism, of Enlightenment perfectibilism, of Kabbalistic angelology, and of Rosicrucianism (inter alia). The fifth is comprised of appendices devoted to the portraits of the Masters, their geographical location, their relationship to fictional literature, their corruption into ‘Race theory’ (i.e., ‘Malign Masters’), and their presence in Theosophical and esoteric discourse in the years subsequent to Leadbeater’s death in 1934.

What follows is a detailed study of the Masters in the context of Theosophical theorising. Throughout, the author has kept in mind the words of the Master Morya:

In our doctrine you will find necessary the synthetic method; you will have to embrace the whole - that is to say to blend the macrocosm and microcosm together - before you are enabled to study the parts separately or analyze them with profit to your understanding.¹

PART ONE

METHODOLOGY AND OVERVIEW
CHAPTER 1

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES FOR THE STUDY OF THE THEOSOPHICAL MASTERS

At the risk of preempting a preliminary definition of a ‘Master’, it can be safely assumed that such a figure is a mainstay phenomenon, indeed a favourite *topos*, of Western esotericism. It is partially with a view to discerning the degree of ubiquity of the Master, and the concordant possibility of locating the Master-type within the increasingly more exacting scholarly definition of esotericism, that this study has been undertaken. This objective requires *ab initio* a review of previous researches in this field, with particular regard to the metaphysical stance and methodological standpoint of the authors.

Religionism and Reductionism

As Hanegraaff has noted in a not-dissimilar context, the dominant note in the study of the ‘New Age’ has been of an unabashedly religionistic tone; so too in the case of

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1 For a heuristic definition of a Master see *infra* ch. 3. For the *topos* of the ‘Hidden Master’ see Antoine Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism*, State University of New York, Albany, 2000, 171-172, 185-186. The remarkable ubiquity of the Master *topos* within esoteric sodalities can be determined by a brief survey of one of the more extensive encyclopaedic works within the field: J. Gordon Melton (*Encyclopaedia of American Religions*, 3rd ed., Gale Research Inc., Detroit, 1989, 643-806) has collated data on adherents to esoteric philosophies which he has subsequently published under the chapter headings, ‘Spiritualist, Psychic, and New Age Family’, ‘Ancient Wisdom Family’, and ‘Magick [sic] Family’. Though an uncritical work, Melton’s *Encyclopaedia* indicates that 86 of the 339 entries are Masters-groups, thus a little over 25% of the total. Indeed, this figure can be regarded as conservative given that Melton has included such religious activity as Neopagan witchcraft, goddess worship and Satanism within his rubric ‘Magick’; such pursuits are not normally considered classifiable as esotericisms. See Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1994, 17.

2 Recent researches into esotericism have begun to propose definitions and typologies which pertain to this very fluid domain. See Antoine Faivre, ‘Introduction I’ in Antoine Faivre & Jacob Needleman, eds., *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, Crossroad, New York, 1992, xiv-xx; id., *Access*, 10-15; Antoine Faivre & Karen-Claire Voss, ‘Western Esotericism and the Science of Religions’ in *Numen*, 42:1, 1995, 60-64. Cf. also Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, Brill, Leiden, 1996, 396-405, esp. 403. Unfortunately, to date the Masters have not been assessed in terms of these proposed definitions; it is to be hoped that the present work may venture observations regarding the aetiology and taxonomy of the Masters, and open other pertinent avenues of academic enquiry in related fields, such as the iconography of the Masters or their representation in fiction, etc. For these latter, see *infra* Part Four, Part Five.
Masters groups. That the first wave of publication regarding a particular esoteric formulation is predicated on an undisguised faith position is hardly surprising. Unfortunately, what little response there has been to such ‘believers’ literature’ has tended not to engage the material in a spirit of genuine phenomenological enquiry, but to indulge one or other modes of reductionism, thus rarely managing to break the surface of the vast complex of challenging and fertile ideas being presented. To paraphrase Paul Johnson, ‘When hagiography and “pathography” compete, biography may well suffer’; so too, when the Masters are analysed solely with a view to their historicity, for instance, their phylogenesis and function within the discourse of esotericism may well remain insufficiently examined.

It would not be unfair to suggest that both of the dominant methodologies, the religionist and the reductionist, exist as polarised opposites, serving only as foils for one another’s entrenched epistemological positions. Theosophical literature may well contain a range of opinions, but in most cases there is a neat division between apologetics and unengaged derision. What can be certain is that the underlying motivation for expressing such opinions is founded in personal, axiomatically-held convictions regarding the nature and existence of what has been termed a ‘multiple-tier

1 Ibid., 3; see also id., ‘Empirical method in the study of esotericism’ in Method and Theory in the Study of Religion, 7:2, 1995, 109-111.
2 Examples of the polarised nature of the literature are plentiful. For the present purposes, it is sufficient to note that the two most widely circulated biographies of Blavatsky reflect this divide abundantly. Marion Meade’s Madame Blavatsky: The Woman Behind the Myth (Putnam’s, New York, 1980), though a detailed study, suffers from an overt reductionism in so far as the author has assumed a priori that the vast majority of Blavatsky’s assertions were false, and thus has tailored her argument accordingly. In effect, then, Meade’s work is an ex post facto attempt to discern a psychological portrait of a colourful fraud. Sylvia Cranston’s [Anita Atkins’], H. P. B.: The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky, Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement (G. P. Putnam’s Sons, New York, 1993) is, again, a very detailed study, but suffers from a religionist stance akin to a mild hagiography. Thus it is that Cranston simply ignores certain problematic issues (such as the existence of Yuri, Blavatsky’s ward and - possibly - natural child, for whom see infra p. 65) and assumes a priori that all of Blavatsky’s self-referential claims were necessarily true. Such methodologies as those adopted by Meade and Cranston cannot but veil their subject.

3 Paul Johnson, The Masters: Behind the Occult Myth, privately printed, South Boston, 1990, 3. Johnson defines ‘pathography’ as ‘the writing of biographies which focus overwhelmingly on the personality defects of the subjects’. He adopts the term from an unsourced work of the novelist Joyce Carol Oates.

4 It should be noted from the outset that although notions of the nature, appearance, location, and tasks of the Masters vary dramatically in the Theosophical literature, there still tends to be a sharp religionist-reductionist divide depending on the faith position of the author. Thus the significance of the concept of the Master is relegated to a minor concern behind questions of his existence in space and time.
cosmology'. Thus, for many, the existence of a meta-empirical realm, inhabited by Masters (and perhaps other entities as well) is an *a priori* assumption; for others the belief appears delusional at best, fraudulent at worst. Yet in the field of esotericism generally, the ever-growing academic treatment of the materials is indicating that between these extremes - the religionist and the reductionist - there exists an emerging small, yet significant, literature which suggests the possibility of more fruitful, variegated standpoints. This agnostic stance promises to contribute tremendously to a field of enquiry previously made barren by stubbornness and *hauteur*.

By far the dominant focus of enquiry into the Masters has fixed upon questions of the existence in real space and time of individuals identified, or identifiable, as such. As a result, the impetus which has driven the debate, for such has been the nature of the discourse, has invariably centred upon the question of plausibility; can reasonable men and women be expected *to believe* such a proposition? That this motivation for examining the Masters is predicated upon a personal metaphysical credo is undeniable. Nevertheless this admission has rarely been made. Consequently, investigations into the conceptual foundations of this phenomenon of esotericism, and its concomitant implications for the study of the history of religious ideas, have been overlooked in favour of often facile, and mostly futile, attempts to prove or disprove that which is *a priori* empirically unassailable.

In this context it is interesting to survey the reaction to K. Paul Johnson’s recent investigations into the sources of the Theosophical Masters-complex of the nineteenth

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8 To indicate the lack of any serious engagement with the notion of the Masters as a religious phenomenon (and an axiomatic tenet) of Theosophy, it is informative to survey anti-Theosophy polemics. Walter Martin (*The Kingdom of the Cults: An Analysis of the Major Cult Systems in the Present Christian Era*, Bethany House, Minneapolis, 1982), who promises to provide an 'historical analysis of the salient facts ... [and a] theological evaluation of the major teachings' (p.12), dismisses the Masters as a 'highly imaginative picture' (p.225). Further, he admonishes his readers to 'not be deceived by the veneer of the intellectual and metaphysical jargon the Theosophist has mastered' (p.233). It must be noted that Martin is at least forthcoming about his own religious affiliations and philosophical standpoint; such is not commonly the case.
century. Johnson has examined in some detail the claims made by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) to have been 'a chela of one of them' and to have been 'their humble representative'. For Johnson, as for the present study, Blavatsky's is the pivotal Masters-construct, as there can be little doubt that her esoteric formulations, based as they are upon claims of supramundane insights gained at the hands of pedagogical Masters, have been the *fons et origo* of the classic modern Masters mytheme.

Johnson's project has been to 'prove to the satisfaction of many scholars that Mme. Blavatsky fictionalised her Masters, and that the personae of Morya and Koot Hoomi are covers for other people'. An examination of Johnson's work, much of which he admits to be highly speculative, indicates that his concern is primarily to detect in the *personae* of Blavatsky's Masters evidence of direct prototypes within her social acquaintance. It follows, then, that his researches are less about Masters *qua* ontologically superior 'meta-humans' than about the men whom he believes inspired the myth within Blavatsky's fertile imagination.


11 Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. XII, 162.

12 This claim can be substantiated not solely by reference to the degree to which Blavatsky's apologetics for the Masters have been adopted by later esotericists, but by the fact that many such individuals and groups claim to be in contact with the self-same Masters whose existence (in one fashion or another) were first brought to public attention by her: for several such cases see infra Appendix E. Modern esotericists, by and large, are very concerned with matters of pedigree and apostolicity. To this end many have claimed Blavatsky as a 'familial matriarch' whose premier achievement was to have coaxed the Masters from their Himalayan retreats and onto the public stage. As with many such cases of retrospective adoption, it is unlikely that Blavatsky would even recognise, let alone respect, those who claim her as a spiritual ancestor.


14 Johnson has stated that '[m]uch remains unclear, and some of the identifications of adepts I have proposed are quite speculative': in Johnson, *The Masters Revealed*, 4.
Johnson's position is historical and synchronic. He considered his task was not to disavow 'the existence of spiritually advanced humans with paranormal abilities' (in which, indeed, he believes fervently),¹⁵ as some have suggested,¹⁶ but to unmask what he argued are Blavatsky’s deliberate obfuscations of her Masters’ mundane identities.

In so doing, he exposed the real nature, and inherent limitations, of his thesis; for in the final analysis Johnson’s investigations amount to interesting - and occasionally compelling - conjectures, founded upon the oft times tenuous identifications which his detective work has revealed. Johnson’s researches are thus only peripherally concerned with the metaphysics of ‘Master-ship’; their real objective is to discern from Blavatsky’s mostly cryptic allusions the real identities of historically-attested individuals who may or may not have been Masters, Theosophically-defined.¹⁷

Throughout his investigations Johnson has repeatedly emphasised that his is not a systematic diachronical analysis of the Master topos.¹⁸ Indeed, his work is synoptic only in its treatment of the persons he identifies as models for Blavatsky’s Masters, not in the ‘metanthropology’ of the Masters themselves.¹⁹ The latter pursuit, he acknowledged, remains unsurveyed: ‘A thorough study of the relationship between

¹⁵ Paul Johnson, ‘Response to John Algeo’s Review of The Masters Revealed’ in Theosophical History 5:8, 1995, 266: see also id., In Search, 280.
¹⁶ John Algeo, in an otherwise mostly balanced review, mistakenly interprets Johnson’s thesis as having been premised on a reductionist programme designed to remove the metaphysical dimension of Theosophy. Algeo interprets Johnson’s speculations regarding Blavatsky’s sources as indication of his inherent lack of belief in the Masters: ‘The unstated metaphysical basis of the second version of Johnson’s thesis is that beings like the Masters of the Theosophical tradition do not exist, and therefore Blavatsky’s assertion that they do must be a fiction’ (John Algeo, ‘K. Paul Johnson’s The Masters Revealed’ [rev. art.], in Theosophical History, 5:7, 1995, 239, 245-247). Algeo’s misapprehension of Johnson’s metaphysical stance is, to a certain degree, the latter’s fault; Johnson nowhere adequately defines whether the human prototypes he hypothesises for Blavatsky’s Masters are themselves the spiritually-advanced adepts known to Theosophists as ‘Masters’, or simply the mundane models for Blavatsky’s mythopoeia. In a response to Algeo’s comments, Johnson has much more astutely demarcated his field of enquiry so as to avoid criticisms of reductionism, for which see Johnson, ‘Response’, 266-268.
¹⁷ For a heuristic definition of the (Theosophical) Master see infra p. 54.
¹⁹ ‘Metanthropology’ has here been coined to refer to the study of the Masters as a class of humans, albeit a class with obvious inherent challenges for study. Other terms (xenology, etc.) are of little value.
historical reality and HPB’s portrayal of the Masters is yet to be written.” Yet even after his self-acknowledged delimiting of his research field and objectives, the general reaction to his thesis has been to interpret his source-analysis of Blavatsky as an attempt forcibly to demythologise Theosophy. It appears clear that many of Johnson’s critics have hopelessly confused his motives and, as a consequence, have retreated to time-honoured religionist or various reductionist platforms.

Emblematic of the religionist, and avowedly Theosophical, perspective is Richard P. Taylor’s response to Johnson:

Mr. Johnson believes this great secrecy is due to political ramifications, or to HPB’s fear of losing face with Theosophists if the very human identity of her teachers were to be made public. This is purely an insulting speculation. True adepts work on the principle of impersonality, craving no recognition or public honors. They work best when they work freely behind the scenes, with whatever assistants they are able to find, in order to instruct humanity and promote selflessness and brotherhood. Were the identity of the adepts to become publicly known, they would be worshipped fanatically by some and hunted as devils by others because of their remarkable abilities. Either way, their work would be hindered and so they must remain anonymous … They are neither gods nor frauds: They are human, divinely human.

20 Johnson, ‘Response’, 265. Johnson observed the following:
[T]he primary focus is on historical persons and their connections to HPB [Helena Petrovna Blavatsky] and the TS [The Theosophical Society]; only about 5% of the book is devoted to linking them to the personae of Morya, Koot Hoomi, Serapis, Tuitit, Hilarion, Djual Kul and the Chohan [Blavatsky’s Masters].

‘HPB’ is an acronym of Blavatsky’s name, an epithet in use during her lifetime and hallowed by Theosophical usage ever since.

11 Joscelyn Godwin was quite prescient in 1991 to have suggested that Johnson’s efforts would open up a ‘Pandora’s box’: Joscelyn Godwin, ‘The Men behind the Masters (In Search of the Masters: Behind the Occult Myth by Paul Johnson)’ [rev. art.], in Gnosis 20, 1991, 60. As a caveat for those who pursue such researches, Hanegraaff has noted:
Although historians should avoid the ‘genetic fallacy’ of assuming that to point out the (in this case historical) origin of a certain conviction proves that the conviction cannot be true, the net effect of a genetic approach nevertheless may be to ‘demythologize’ certain convictions and render them highly, even intolerably improbable (Hanegraaff, ‘Empirical Method’, 105).

The implication that Johnson’s researches were motivated by an intent to expose Blavatsky’s Masters as ‘frauds’ is informed by a lamentable ‘confusion between mythography and historiography’; a confusion, moreover, born of a fear that empirical methods of research have a capacity to annihilate metaphysical faith positions - a power they clearly do not possess.

In contradistinction, the insinuation that Johnson has somehow demonstrated the impossibility of the Masters possessing a meta-empirical ontology (which conveniently was then extrapolated to the implication that he has denied the existence of a meta-empirical realm in toto) has been the position taken by reductionist critics. In a review printed on the rear of Johnson’s The Masters Revealed, James Burnell Robinson has opined:

He [Johnson] has marshalled an impressive body of evidence to show that the Theosophical masters are neither disembodied spirits nor are they fictions but are specific historical personages whose identities were disguised for various reasons.

Robinson’s comments suggest, perhaps inadvertently, that Johnson’s identifications of

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24 Interesting in this context are the researches of Festinger, Riecken and Schachter into the IFO-Sananda religion. Their investigations led to the postulation of the ‘consonance-dissonance theory’ (otherwise called the ‘theory of cognitive dissonance’) which attempts to map the various efforts made by adherents of a specific faith position to reduce or to eliminate the dissonance between conflicting notions. One dynamic whereby the ‘remaining dissonance can be reduced [is if] more and more people can be persuaded that the system of belief is correct, then clearly it must, after all, be correct’: Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken & Stanley Schachter, When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that predicted the Destruction of the World, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1956, 28. Jan Platvoet - while not commenting upon the theory of ‘cognitive dissonance’ itself - reserves harsh words for the ‘tactics of deception which they [Festinger, et al.] chose to use. These were objectionable, if not ethically inadmissible’: J. G. Platvoet, Comparing Religions: A Limitative Approach. An Analysis of Akan, Para-Creole, and IFO-Sananda Rites and Prayers, Mouton, The Hague, 1982, 82. Nevertheless, the aforementioned dynamic furnishes a degree of insight into the reaction of many Theosophists to the works of Johnson. A remarkably similar response greeted the publication of Tillett’s biography of the Theosophist, Charles Webster Leadbeater, ten years prior (Gregory Tillett, The Elder Brother: A biography of Charles Webster Leadbeater, Routledge, London, 1982). From such previous examples, it appears that the fears of religionist critics that Johnson’s claims will immediately explode the metaphysics of Theosophy seem likely to be unfounded; such researches may undermine literalist belief in the Masters, and even render some notions untenable, but in all likelihood present-day Theosophists will rally to the cause of the Masters, just as they did to Leadbeater. For Theosophists’ attempts to explain the many discrepancies between Leadbeater’s various assertions and the empirical evidence to the contrary, cf., eg., [Various], ‘Correspondence Received’ in The Liberal Catholic, 64:5, 1997, 21-28.

the Masters as men within Blavatsky’s social milieu have somehow divested them of both the meta-empirical ontology and the paranormal capacities which she claimed for them, a position which Johnson wisely disavows.\footnote{Johnson, ‘Response’, 266. Johnson remarks astutely that even were his identifications to be proved, the larger question of the supramundane abilities of the Masters prototypes would still remain unanswered, and, in all probability, unanswerable. Such has not been the universal reaction to his researches by scholars; Daniel van Egmond has gone so far as to state: Although [Johnson’s] conclusions could be contested on some points, his study proves once and for all that Blavatsky’s masters were real human beings. Consequently, accusations that they were mere figments of her fantasy, and also all the claims of many of her would-be successors of being the new messenger of these same masters, no longer deserve serious attention. (Daniel van Egmond, ‘Western Esoteric Schools in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’ in Roelof van den Broek & Wouter J. Hanegraaff, eds., Gnosis and Hermeticism: From Antiquity to Modern Times, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1998, 313).}

This brief foray into the only serious study previously attempted of the Theosophical Masters-complex has been undertaken so as to indicate the real lack of methodological engagement within the field. Yet Johnson’s critics are not alone in espousing a religionist metaphysic, for the author himself seems prey to occasional unscholarly observations and florid language of a distinctly theosophical sort.\footnote{Exactly how commentary of the nature of, ‘[p]assing through the watery initiation, they were reborn into a new identification with humanity, the earth and the cosmos’ (Johnson, Initiates, 205) is intended to support a ‘free and fearless search for truth’ (Johnson, ‘Response’, 269), premised upon ‘objective enquiry’ (ibid.), is difficult to ascertain.} In fact, the main criticism of Johnson’s work is not his sometimes tenuous identifications of Blavatsky’s sources, but his earnest efforts to dismiss the implication that she contrived to invent her Masters \textit{in toto}, and that she protected her fraud by recourse to
a time-honoured occult disclaimer: the ‘vow of secrecy’.28 By interpreting her motive for constructing an elaborate mythical identity and conveniently remote Himalayan hideaway to ‘mask’ her Masters as a martyr’s cross, Johnson deftly rescues her deceit - for so it would otherwise be - from culpability.29 The fact remains that, at least with the evidence currently at hand, no motive can so categorically be imputed or ascribed to Blavatsky without damaging either the data or the scholar’s methodological agnosticism.

Most studies of Blavatsky founder on an often uncritical acceptance of the veracity of

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28 It is a commonplace of the literature of esotericism that an author will claim access to privileged information or informants which he or she is unable to divulge due to some form of pledge of secrecy. The scholar must be careful to distinguish notions of secrecy from esotericism sensu stricto, however, for the very fact of information being concealed does not make it esoteric. Indeed, for esoteric bodies such as the Theosophical Society, secrecy is most often observable as a factor within the dynamic of transmission of esoteric knowledge. Thus by far the greater part of Blavatsky’s œuvre is infused with tantalising hints of secret teachings and dire penalties, which either intentionally or coincidentally (depending upon one’s faith position) whet the reader’s appetite and ensure his or her attention. Now do not ask me anything more, for if I had to be hung, publicly whipped, tortured I would not, never would dare tell you anything more. You speak of ‘deceptions,’ mysteries, and concealments in which I ought ‘never to be involved’. Very easily said by one, who is not under obligation of any pledge or vow ... I know one thing, that if it came to the worst and Master’s truthfulness and notions of honour were to be impeached - then I would go to a desperate expedient. I would proclaim publicly that I alone was a liar, a forger ... that I had indeed INVENTED the Masters and thus would by that ‘myth’ of Master K. H. and M. screen the real K. H. and M. from opprobrium (H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett, 1886, in A. T. Barker, comp., The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1925, 170-171).

29 It should be stressed that Blavatsky’s culpability, were it ever to be proved, would be immense. In this context it is worth remembering that Dâmódar K. Mávalankar (1857-1885?), a young and ardent Theosophist desperate to be accepted as a student of one of the Masters, undertook the arduous journey to Tibet where Blavatsky had indicated they lived. Soon afterwards news reached the Adyar headquarters of the Theosophical Society that his frozen body had been found naked in the snow near Chumboi, Sikkim. For years thereafter, however, the Society taught that Dâmódar had been accepted by the Masters, was undergoing training, and that the corpse may in fact have been mâyā, an illusion to deceive the faithful. Indeed Blavatsky claimed to have received a letter from him, and the Master Koot Hoomi mentions him as a neophyte in one of the ‘Mahatma Letters’. Yet Blavatsky wrote in a personal correspondence to the Theosophist Franz Hartmann that if the body were discovered to be that of Dâmódar, ‘I think I would commit suicide; for it is out of pure devotion for me that he went. I would never forgive myself for this, for letting him go. That’s the truth and only the truth’: H. P. Blavatsky, ‘Letters of H. P. B. to Dr. Hartmann, 1885-1886, III’ in The Path X:11, February, 1896, 333. For Theosophical perspectives on Dâmódar’s demise see Sven Eek, comp., Dâmódar and the Pioneers of the Theosophical Movement, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1965, 10-22; cf. also Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 342. See also infra Appendix B et passim.
her own statements.\textsuperscript{30} Where Johnson's occasionally disappoint is in the dogmatic presentation of the author's thesis, which cannot but be highly provisory, and, more significantly, in his lack of engagement with the myriad sources of inspiration, esoteric and otherwise, which in all likelihood contributed to such mythogenesis. It is certainly possible that human prototypes played some part in 'fleshing out' Blavatsky's Masters, and for his forays into this unchartered territory Johnson must be congratulated; nevertheless, the manifold epistemological paradigms which percolated in Blavatsky mind, and which likely coalesced in the figure of the Master, remain frustratingly unexplored. Consequently, it could be argued that Johnson has not so much 'revealed' as re-veiled the Masters behind their mistress' voluminous skirts.\textsuperscript{31}

It would seem, then, that Johnson's investigations may well have claimed new territory for analysis by historians of Theosophy, but have availed little insight into the aetiology of the Theosophical Masters or provided a typology which adequately addresses the myriad forms in a systematic diachronic fashion.\textsuperscript{32} To do so would require a rigorous application of appropriate method and an understanding of the demands and limitations which inhere within such an approach.

\textsuperscript{30}'If the stories strike us as preposterous taken together, each narrative is just credible enough on its own, allowing for legitimate hyperbole': Peter Washington, \textit{Madame Blavatsky's Baboon: Theosophy and the Emergence of the Western Guru}, Secker & Warburg, London, 1993, 32. Peter Washington is one of the few who have attempted to analyse Blavatsky's macrohistorical paradigms; unfortunately there are significant faults in his scholarship which undermine his conclusions to a certain degree. See W. T. S. Thackara, 'Notes on Madame Blavatsky's Baboon', [rev. art.] in \textit{Theosophical History} VI:8, 1997, 309-316; see also id., 'Notes on Madame Blavatsky's Baboon' [rev. art.], in <http://www.greenheart.com/amsec/theo2b.html>; cf. Robert Boyd, 'Madame Blavatsky's Baboon', [rev. art.] in \textit{Theosophical History}, VI:6, 1997, 224-228.

\textsuperscript{31} Perhaps Johnson is following Blavatsky's own esoteric etymology:

\begin{quote}
Of course, at present there is no longer classical authority to satisfy the orthodox philologist, but the occult authority which maintains that originally the word \textit{revelare} meant to 'veil once more', and hence that revelation means the throwing a veil over a subject, a \textit{blind} - is positively overwhelming (H. P. Blavatsky, \textit{Collected Writings}, vol. XIII: 1890-1891, comp. Boris de Zirkoff, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Ill., 1982, 99n).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{32} It should be noted that these were not Johnson's objectives: 'No claim to exhaustiveness is intended ... Despite the advances in research reported here, the mystery of the Masters remains elusive': Johnson, \textit{The Masters Revealed}, 15. It is entirely possible that Johnson's researches will ultimately prove most fertile in the fields of Indian political and cultural history, which should in no way demean their importance for nineteenth century esotericism. His contribution to Theosophical historiography is uniquely fascinating, in an otherwise often impoverished terrain.
The Sociological Method

As Platvoet has maintained, the ‘distinctive group spirit of the academic study of religions’ has come to be premised upon an ‘ideology of objectivity’.\(^{33}\) This methodological standpoint has particular resonance for a study of the Masters. In the first instance, esotericism has tended to be regarded as marginal with respect to broad religious *theoria* and *praxis*,\(^{34}\) and is, as a consequence, regularly reduced by commentators to the status of a haven for the credulous or the ‘anti-social’, or for those somehow unable or unwilling to adapt to, or engage with, modernity.\(^{35}\) (It is hardly surprising that this highly reductionist characterisation is prevalent emphatically where the creed of a particular esotericism requires the mandatory acceptance of the existence, authority, and intervention of supramundane entities such as the Masters). Implicit within this reductionist perspective is a preordained analytical framework which would make of Masters-esotericism a ‘flight from reason’ predicated upon irrationalism, social anomie, alienation or any other species of the sociology of deviance.\(^{36}\)

\(^{33}\) Jan Platvoet, 'The Definers Defined', 183.


\(^{35}\) For the ‘flight from reason’ sociological analysis of esotericism see Webb, *Flight*, esp. 148-149; see also *supra*. A number of sociologists have noted in both abstract and concrete terms that esotericism, though an ideational constituent of social change, is nevertheless classifiable as pertaining to deviance. Edward Tiryakian has opined that ‘much of the parlance of esoteric culture is necessarily obscure, that is, designed to put off members of the larger society; this is in some ways similar to the argot of the underworld or even to the language of some psychotics used as a shield from public deciphering’: Edward A. Tiryakian, ‘Toward the Sociology of Esoteric Culture’ in Edward Tiryakian, ed., *On the Margin of the Visible*, John Wiley, New York, 1974, 267-268, emphasis added. One of the more vexing problems with the sociological approach to esotericism is its lack of historical rigour and regular failure to articulate necessary definitions and categories. Stephen Pfohl, in attempting to analyse critically the construction of the ‘Demonic Perspective’ in the sociology of deviance, almost entirely undermines his thesis by assuming a continuity of enlightened philosophical paganism between the ‘witches’ of the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries and the ‘Goddess-directed “feminist spirituality”’ witches of the contemporary Neopagan revival: Stephen Pfohl, *Images of Deviance and Social Control: A Sociological History*, 2nd ed., McGraw-Hill, New York, 1994, 28-55, esp. 37,55. The sociological determinism of Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) has left a profound legacy upon the sociology of deviance: see Colin Sumner, *The Sociology of Deviance: An Obituary*, Open University, Buckingham, 1994, 22ff. As early as 1890, Gabriel Tarde had noted: ‘The sociology of deviance was born [of] ... a reluctance to accept oppositional forms of life as anything other than “moral aberration”’ (Gabriel Tarde, *Penal Philosophy*, trans. Rapelje Howell, William Heinemann, London, 1912).
This 'sociology of the occult' programme is problematic as a methodological means for preserving the ideology of objectivity for a number of reasons. In the first place, it is often, and sometimes wilfully, unhistorical. Galbreath has clearly demonstrated that such claims as are made by Webb, Truzzi, and Tiryakian - that the occult erupts in times of social dislocation and as an idiosyncratic, deviant response to scientific rationalism - are based upon uncritical premises:

[The claims] often rest on unexamined or ambiguous assumptions, they are vulnerable to counter examples, and they ordinarily fail to take note of significant variations in historical development, cultural stratification, and types of occult belief systems and practices.

The value of the applicability of Galbreath’s comments to the present work are immediately apparent. It should be noted, for instance, that much of the revelation from the Theosophical Masters is couched in scientific terms; indeed, far from retreating from modernity, many Theosophists engaged in highly dialectical, if eccentric, scientific enquiry, often with a view to ‘resacralising’ science. Interestingly, for many a nineteenth century occultist, Darwin’s model of biological determinism - if not perhaps his comprehensive naturalism - sounded a welcome and a necessary death knell for religious structures believed to be outdated and dogmatic, and


Charles Webster Leadbeater (1854-1934), a leading Theosophist of his era and the evangelist of one of the most fabulous Masters-complexes since Blavatsky, published an entire book (co-authored with Annie Besant) on clairvoyant investigations into the atomic elements: Annie Besant & Charles W. Leadbeater, Occult Chemistry: Clairvoyant Observations on the Chemical Elements, 2nd ed., ed. A. P. Sinnett, Theosophical Publishing House, London, 1919. In another of Leadbeater’s books he claims to have discovered through occult means the technology by which Christian prayer and sacrament vouchsafe divine grace to the faithful; the techniques are highly, if idiosyncratically, scientific in their documentation: C. W. Leadbeater, The Science of the Sacraments, 2nd ed., Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1929. For awkward attempts to ‘verify’ Leadbeater’s claims (e.g., E. Lester Smith, Occult Chemistry Re-Evaluated, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Illinois, 1982) see infra ch. 17. Leadbeater’s contribution to the conceptual development of Theosophy is examined in Part Three of the present work.
was considered to be pivotal in ushering in an era of ‘Real Science’ (that is, a science informed and engaged by esoteric insight). Thus for several groups, particularly the Theosophists, a retreat from a sound scientific paradigm into the irrational would amount to a retrogressive, anti-spiritual and, ironically, devolutionary step - a certain anathema.

The sociological programme to reduce esoteric speculation to an antagonistic anti-science also fails comprehensively to address the very real sense in which both science and esotericism are engaged in what may be termed a fraternal enterprise; that is, they mutually address concerns of an existential and epistemological character. Further, the sociologists of the occult, as noted by Hanegraaff, regularly fail to account for the cross-fertilisation which has characterised the relationship between the two, or indeed of the contribution of certain esoteric philosophies and technologies, notably Naturphilosophie, astrology, and alchemy, to the construction of the prevailing scientific paradigm.

40 Thus, for Blavatsky, ‘materialistic science’, though a poor cousin of the ‘Occult sciences’, can advantage the esotericist in so far as it is able to demonstrate in physical terms the truths of the esotericist’s meta-empirical insights. Indeed, she observed that ‘[e]very new discovery made by modern science vindicates the truths of the archaic philosophy’: H. P. Blavatsky, ‘Occult or Exact Science’ in id., Collected Writings, vol. VII:1886-1887, 2nd ed., comp. Boris de Zirkoff, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Ill., 1987, 55-90, esp. 55. Similarly, it follows that when science is wrested from the ‘cold, heartless, materialistic, and crassly ignorant’, it has the propensity to become ‘[o]ne of the keys of Occultism’: id., ‘The Signs of the Times’ in id., Collected Writings, vol. VIII: 1887, comp. Boris de Zirkoff, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Ill., 1960, 103. It is not insignificant that Blavatsky’s New York apartments sported a stuffed baboon, in gentleman’s regalia, clutching a manuscript of a lecture on The Origin of Species: see Washington, Madame Blavatsky’s Baboon, 44,45. Even Blavatsky’s Masters were not above an occasional humorous barb at Darwin and his fellow theoreticians of evolution theory:

It is not among the Herbert Spencers and Darwins or the John Stuart Mills that the millions of Spiritualists now going intellectually to the dogs are to be found, but it is they who form the majority of the ‘second class minds’. (Koot Hoomi to A. P. Sinnett, (Letter No. 74: Received August 1882) in The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett from the Mahatmas M. & K. H.: Transcribed and Compiled by A. T. Barker. In Chronological Sequence, arr. & ed. Vincente Hao Chin, Jr., Theosophical Publishing House, Quezon City, Manila, 1993, 229. Unless otherwise noted, the 1993 ‘chronological’ edition will be employed throughout the present work).

41 The inherent irony of this position is best summed up by Blavatsky’s Master Koot Hoomi: ‘Perhaps now you will be prepared to better understand the difficulty with which we will have to contend. Modern science is our best ally’: Koot Hoomi to A. O. Hume in The Mahatma Letters, 1993 ed., (Letter No. 65: Rec. 30 June, 1882) 168.

42 The observations in this and the following paragraph owe much to Hanegraaff, ‘Empirical Method’, 119,120. For the indebtedness of modern scientific thinking to the influence of such disciplines as astrology, alchemy and ‘natural magic’, see Allen G. Debus, Man and Nature in the Renaissance, Cambridge University Press, 1996. See also Faivre, Access, 61-66, 82-84.
Apart from the evident lack of attention which the sociology of the occult has afforded to the facts of history, it is proved an inappropriate methodological apparatus for the present study due to an inherent prejudice which immediately renders it reductionist in its treatment of the data. By classifying esotericism as deviant behaviour, the scholar has immediately subjugated the study of the materials in and of themselves to a project to determine the psychological or social factors which combined negatively to produce the deviant response. Naturally this suggests that an examination of esotericism can have value only where it can aid in the diagnosis of a preexisting underlying social dysfunction. It follows that esotericism cannot ever be the primary subject of study by means of such an approach as it must always be considered contingent upon the non-conformist disposition of the ‘deviant’. Further, the suggestion that esotericisms are the jetsam of scientific enquiry (another standard assumption of the ‘sociology of the occult’) leads often to unacceptable and amateurish theorising about the psychological states and personal proclivities of those who profess an interest in such. Indeed, the view that the occult (the ‘irrational’) exists solely in opposition to the scientific (the ‘rational’) is to impose upon the materials untenable dichotomies from which relevant data often must be rejected, or used all-too-selectively, in order to sustain the original errant hypothesis.43

What can be noted unequivocally about the secondary literature of esotericism, religionist or reductionist, is that for the most part it has failed to illuminate its subject in any of its genuinely fascinating intrinsic detail. The sociological analyses of esotericism - conducted in the main under the oft times pejorative rubric of ‘the occult’ - although couched in academic terms, fail to fulfil their promise. It is simply the case that the ‘sociology of the occult’ programme undermines any proper analysis of the data because it cannot but be prey to preexisting personal bias.

43 Galbreath, ‘Explaining’, 14. In this context the comments of Keith Thomas are apposite: There is a tautological character about Malinowski’s argument that magic occupies the vacuum left by science, for what is not recognised by any particular observer as a true ‘science’ is deemed ‘magic’ and vice versa (Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in popular beliefs in sixteenth and seventeenth century England, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1971, 667).
An Empirical Approach

Recently, a number of scholars, who have understood the transdisciplinary nature of esotericism and its tendency to maintain a fluid domain, have begun to assess the data with a greater sensitivity to their phenomenological aspect. Due to these efforts, headway is being made in positing and testing such staples of serious academic discourse as appropriate terminology, the boundaries of the discipline, useful and appropriate methodologies, systematic mapping of histories, and preliminary heuristic definitions and typologies. As yet the Masters, though certainly a subset of the esoteric, have not been granted more than a brief mention in this growing literature. Nevertheless, the observations made by some of these scholars regarding methodology are pertinent for an investigation into the Masters.

Hanegraaff has suggested that the most fruitful method in the study of esotericism, one which avoids the barrenness of religionism and the violence of reductionism, is that which remains empirical with respect to the data. As the scholar has no tools with which to verify or falsify the claims made by esotericists regarding the existence and nature of a meta-empirical realm, he must remain a fortiori, methodologically- speaking, agnostic. As a result the empiricist is limited to a 'one-tier cosmology' for the simple reason that it alone is quantifiable in terms of research. Indeed, the reductionist tendency to dismiss claims made by esotericists regarding the meta-empirical is rightly deemed by Hanegraaff to be unscientific as it presupposes that that which is by definition beyond empirical enquiry is somehow falsifiable by the same means. Such reductionism is predicated upon an axiomatically-held assumption that there is a 'one-tier cosmology' precisely because there can be no other. Such a faith

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44 Faivre, Access, 15-19.
45 It is a little surprising that the Master has been so underrepresented in the new generation of scholarly treatments of esotericism given the catholicity of the concept. It is possible that Joscelyn Godwin's observation regarding the Theosophical Society's lack of the 'patina of age that makes Ramon Lull or Paracelsus respectable subjects of study' (Joscelyn Godwin, 'Foreword' in Johnson, The Masters Revealed, xvii) is equally applicable to the Masters. Perhaps more significant is the fact that a synoptic study of the Masters must be located somewhere within the 'history of idea's which is itself a relatively novel discipline; a 'history of esoteric ideas' is thus a grossly underexplored terrain, and prey to being subsumed within the more generalist tendencies sometimes apparent within Religionswissenschaft as a whole.
46 Wouter Hanegraaff's observations regarding relevant methodological apparatus are elaborated in Hanegraaff, New Age, 3-7, and id., 'Empirical Method', 99-129.
47 See supra 9n7.
position (for such it must be) is quite simply untenable for the scholar who recognises that there exists no apparatus capable of verifying such a claim.  

The new generation of scholars who are investigating esoteric isms in a spirit of informed empiricism will be required to eschew ideology as well as personally-held metaphysical maxims. For the present work there are yet further conditions and limitations which attend to an empirical methodology. It must be acknowledged at the outset that there is no hope, nor any desire, on the part of the author to prove or to disprove the existence in history of beings identified by Theosophists as Masters. This statement should not be taken as an early capitulation or as courteous even-handedness; the simple truth is that there are no sure means by which an empiricist can garner such knowledge. The questions which attend upon the latter statement are obvious: if one is precluded from determining the historical existence of

It should be noted that there is an equally untenable philosophy at work in what may be termed the 'dominant religionisms versus the minor or novel religionisms discourse'. Competing notions of both the nature and inhabitants of meta-empirical space will not make for incisive scholarship:

To Catholics the new Theosophical experiment will appear in no other light than as an outrage - a sacrilegious profanation, or, at best, a blasphemous parody, of all that the Church holds most sacred (Herbert Thurston, S. J., 'Preface' in Stanley Morison, Some Fruits of Theosophy: The origins and purpose of the so-called Old Catholic Church disclosed by Stanley Morison, Harding & More, London, 1919, 5).

The circuitous logic that would have it that the lack of significant material evidence for the Masters' existence somehow proves their existence (and consummate skill at subtle arts!), or indeed that 'only those with eyes will see', need not be entertained as they are species of argumentum e silentio. Of the latter type the following is representative:

As for the declaration that 'the existence of the Masters and the inspiration of Theosophical writings by them are among the weakest of the Theosophists' claims', Mr. Cambell is apparently unaware that this is as it should be. The idea of 'proving' with objective evidence that the Masters exist is ridiculous. The evidence that the Masters exist is of the sort presented in Isis Unveiled and The Secret Doctrine - no evidence at all for readers unable to recognise the profound wisdom in both these works. In speaking of the reality of perfected beings - the climactic flower of evolution - H.P.B. took a calculated risk, a risk that she understood quite well, as shown by her Preface to Isis Unveiled. She expected books of this sort to be written (Anonymous, 'Blavatsky Very Much Veiled' [rev. art.], in Theosophy, 69:3, January, 1981, 81).

Interestingly, Cambell's assertion that '[c]laims about [the Masters'] existence are open to objective examination and refutation' (Bruce F. Campbell, Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1980, 199) is really not much more helpful. Certainly, where material evidence exists by which metaphysical claims can be disputed, Campbell's observation is pertinent. However it is crucial to note that although the Masters are depicted as human beings, they nevertheless have recourse to meta-empirical agency for such abilities as bilocation, transportation, invisibility, and so on. From this it can be extrapolated that their talent for subtlety and subterfuge exceeds normative human investigative strategies. Consequently, standard investigative methodologies cannot be said to apply.
an object of study, should one begin at all? If empiricism is so encumbered by its limitations, then is it in reality any more successful or applicable as a methodological modus operandi than religionism or reductionism?

The answers, at least for the present analysis, are a resounding 'yea'. For the study of esotericism to be worth anything at all, particularly in its nascent stage, researchers must be prepared to accept that good scholarship is less often about knowledge (sub specie 'episteme') than demonstration. The temptation may validly exist to extrapolate from the latter to the former, but never the other way around - at least not honestly. The Masters may or may not exist, but for any author to present a thesis as an attempt to demonstrate 'scientifically' a personal metaphysic (an approach which entirely belies any scholarly capacity) would be to pan knowingly for fool's gold.

Nevertheless, empiricism, in spite of its avowed inability to provide absolutes, does not stultify interpretative research as may at first be thought. As Platvoet has maintained, '[t]he first aim of the empirical study of religion is to study them descriptively'. Such phenomenological description is made possible in the present circumstance primarily because the Masters topos has remained central to Theosophical discourse since the Society's inception. Having limned the Masters within historical time, the scholar may then, if the material warrants the analysis, pose questions germane to a broader diachronic study. Thus it is that empirical methodology does not disavow analysis, interpretation, and any resulting hypotheses, but it does eschew any

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52 Platvoet, 'The Definers Defined', 187.
metahistorical presuppositions. For such heuristic mappings to have any currency, they must result from the application of accepted scholarly methods and be expressed within equally scholarly terms. Faivre and Voss have noted:

[S]uch interpretations should have an 'etic' character, and not an 'emic' character; i.e., they should draw on methods of interpretation which are not intrinsically those of the esotericists themselves but which are historical, sociological, psychological, etc.

This distinction between the believers' modes and categories of thought and explanation (the 'emic') and those of the scholarly community (the 'etic') is a crucial one. For the purposes of the present work, the ability of the empiricist to collect and present data which represents as faithfully as possible the esotericists' beliefs, knowledge of, and interaction with, meta-empirical beings not only serves to maintain the integrity of his source materials, but also safeguards his claim to an unimpinged

53 The author is aware of the problematic definitions of both 'macrohistory' and 'metahistory'. In the present context the term 'macrohistory' will be used regularly, particularly with reference to the broad vision of Blavatsky. It is engaged to refer to the process of 'doing history' by means of incorporating more and more information, persons and places into an ever-expanding panorama of 'geographical breadth and (linear-) temporal depth': Garry Trompf, 'Macrohistory in Blavatsky, Steiner and Guenon' in Antoine Faivre & Wouter J. Hanegraaff, eds., Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion: Selected Papers presented at the 17th Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Mexico City, 1995, (Gnostica Texts & Interpretations, 4), Peeters, Leuven, Belgium, 1998, 269-270. Macrohistory thus becomes a perpetual recontextualising of relationships and the histories which underpin them: such was foundational aspiration of the Blavatskian œuvre. The term 'metahistory', conversely, has come to signify the idiosyncratic historiographies of various generalists, often of a highly refined nature: see in ibid. In simple terms, then, (for the present work) 'macrohistory' is the 'gathering' of histories into an all-inclusive testament, 'metahistory' is the 'sifting' of them to discern transhistorical commonalities. Clearly, the division remains arbitrary.

55 Faivre & Voss, 'Western Esotericism', 66.

56 The emic/etic categories (coined from the terms 'phonemic' and 'phonetic') were originally formulated by the anthropological linguist, Kenneth Pike:

The etic viewpoint studies behavior from outside of a particular system, and as an essential initial approach to an alien system. The emic viewpoint results from studying behavior from inside the system (Kenneth L. Pike, Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behaviour, 2nd ed., Mouton and Co., The Hague, 1971, 37).

Wouter Hanegraaff has suggested that Pike’s classifications may be appropriate as methodological categories for the study of esotericism, though with the caveat that further clarification will be required: Hanegraaff, New Age, 6; id., 'Empirical method', 108; see also Faivre & Voss, 'Western Esotericism', 66-67. In this context Marvin Harris' comments may prove instructive:

In the cultural materialist research strategy, etic analysis is not a stepping stone to the discovery of emic structures, but to the discovery of etic structures. The intent is neither to convert etics to emics nor emics to etics, but rather to describe both and if possible to explain one in terms of the other (Marvin Harris, Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture, Random House, New York, 1979, 36).
Without an emphatic reliance upon a reasoned and comprehensive presentation of the believers’ material, the scholar is endangered by his own normative judgments and may well be subject to an unacknowledged personal hermeneutical bias.

Nevertheless, the documentation of the emic perspective is only one part of the task of the present study. No religious formulation - even a Theosophical trans-Himalayan Brotherhood of Masters - operates within a culturo-historical vacuum; whether acknowledged by adherents or not, religious thought and praxis exist in a covalent relationship to their surrounds. The domain of esotericism, perhaps more than most, is heavily conditioned by exterior factors; cultural, political, social, psychological, historical, and even economic concerns all contribute to its myriad forms and iconography. It follows that part of the task of the present work is to examine the Masters contextually; that is, to view these meta-empirical beings, perhaps paradoxically, as creatures manifest in discrete time and space, and to assess the depth of the engagement between the esotericists who promulgated the notion of the Masters and the circumstances which influenced, or even engendered, their views.

This latter analysis, presented as far as possible in etic terms, is informed by Hanegraaff’s injunction that all such hypotheses garnered by empirical means remain provisory. To date there have been no published works which attempt to analyse the Masters either as a phenomenon of esotericism or indeed as a function of the period in which they were deemed active. This lacuna has encouraged the present author to be doubly cautious.

\textsuperscript{56} ‘Epoché’ is here used to denote the scholar’s willing suspension of (dis-)belief whereby a bracketing of normative interpretation allows for concentration upon the intrinsic qualities of the research subject.

\textsuperscript{57} Hanegraaff, ‘Empirical method’, 108.
CHAPTER 2

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PURVIEW OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Delimitations with regard to Source Materials

Although the literature of Theosophy and its related domains is vast, it would be understating the case to suggest that the quality is uneven. Indeed, much is hyperbolic, obscurantist, and self-contradictory; few contemporary Theosophical bodies are (publicly) enamoured of the work of others, and claims of fraud and deceit levelled at rivals have been a commonplace throughout the Society's history. Given this situation, the selection of materials for the purposes of research can be a hazardous undertaking.

It is necessary from the outset to explain why textual sources have been examined as the sole materials for research. Those well acquainted with the field of Theosophical studies will be aware how fascinating and occasionally enlightening oral histories and interviews can be. Unfortunately, their value as personal testimony is undercut by an inherent arbitrariness, inexactitude, and personal bias. For the present circumstances, though, interviews were discounted as primary data due to the time period selected for survey.1 Naturally enough, there are no surviving members of the nineteenth-century Theosophical milieu, and only a small number remain of those who were involved with Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater. Wherever possible the author has spoken at length with the latter, but only so as to furnish a more synoptic view of esoteric speculation and pursuits in the first part of this century, not for the purposes of including such data in the body of the present work.

A further complication arising from the use of oral testimony (and, for that matter, participatory techniques) is the stern emphasis in some quarters placed upon secrecy and the concealment of personal identity. While many Masters-groups were and are open in their activities, even to the degree of proselytising, others have been entirely covert. Of the latter (including a number of the various Theosophically-inspired

1 See 'Delimitations with regard to time period' infra 31.
Rosicrucian and ‘fringe’ Freemasonic fraternities, among others) it should be noted
that members were regularly required to take oaths of secrecy which bound them to
silence. In practice, however, esotericists of whichever stripe, then and now, tend to
garrulousness, and such admonitions of secrecy were heeded strictly only with regard
to the publication of names, rituals, and certain teachings. As a result, the author
discovered many persons willing to be interviewed; few of whom were later prepared
to be identified. Such a circumstance is problematic for this enquiry for entirely self-
evident reasons.

Further, printed sources prove to be more reliable as, for the most part, they were
published with a view to disseminating the writers’ beliefs regarding experience with,
or knowledge of, a Master or Masters. Both Blavatsky and Leadbeater wrote

\[\text{2 The use of the term ‘fringe’ in this context is not intended to be derogatory, but rather to infer that there exists at the margin of institutionalised Freemasonry a cluster of lodges or less well structured groupings, some of a distinctly Theosophical character. The term has been much employed following the researches of Ellic Howe: see Ellic Howe, ‘Fringe Masonry in England, 1870-85’ in Ars Quatuor Coronatorum, 85, 1972, 242-295. Other terms, particularly ‘Illuminist’ and ‘Speculative’, have garnered academic approval (cf. Marsha Keith Schuchard, ‘Yeats and the “Unknown Superiors”: Swedenborg, Falk and Cagliostro’ in Marie Mulvey Roberts & Hugh Ormsby-Lennon, eds., Secret Texts: The Literature of Secret Societies, AMS Press, New York, 1995, 114-168), but are not cognates for the term ‘fringe’ and have tended to be employed in a more specifically historical usage. The present author has employed the term ‘fringe’ primarily because it is employed in much of the secondary literature which deals with the period of the genesis of Theosophy.}

\[\text{3 The obligation to observe secrecy is a commonplace of those organisations which are either encompassed within, or deem themselves in some way related to, Freemasonry. Such oaths vary enormously in object and penalty. Emblematic of a Masters-based Freemasonic theurgic rite, with a membership comprised in the main of Theosophists and those sympathetic to the Society, is the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Initiants of the Adeptus Minor grade of the second, highly secretive order of the Golden Dawn (the Rosae Rubeae et Aureae Crucis, inaugurated in 1891) were made to profess the following:}

I, Christian Rosenkreutz, a Member of the Body of Christ, do this Day Spiritually bind myself, even as I am now bound Physically unto the Cross of Suffering [the aspirant was at this point bound upon a cross] ... That I will keep secret all things connected with this Order, and its secret knowledge, from the whole world ... I also undertake to work unassisted at the subjects prescribed for study in the various Grades from Zelator Adeptus Minor to Adept Adeptus Minor, on pain of being degraded in rank to a Lord of the Paths in the Portal of the Tomb only ... Such are the words of this my Obligation as an Adeptus Minor, whereunto I pledge myself in the presence of the Divine One, and of the Great Avenging Angel HUA, and if I fail herein, may my Rose be disintegrated and destroyed, and my power in Magic cease (R. A. Gilbert, ed., The Golden Dawn Companion: A Guide to the History, Structure, and Workings of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Aquarian, Wellingborough, 1986, 103-105).

voluminously on the subject and while the means and method of transmission of such supramundane pedagogy are markedly different in the two cases, their appeal to the agency of a Master make their claims, and the written materials which attend upon such 'authorised' revelation, germane to this enquiry.

In certain circumstances written materials were produced solely for teaching purposes and distributed among a selected circle; wherever possible such data have been included in the present study. These materials are of importance as it was not uncommon for the leader or leaders of a group to profess publicly a history or philosophy which stood in stark contradiction to private claims. An example of such a disparity is the claim to Rosicrucian initiation made by Harvey Spencer Lewis (1883-1939), the founder of the Theosophically-inspired Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis ('AMORC'). In his early autobiographical accounts, H. Spencer Lewis alleged that he had been physically initiated into an authoritative 'apostolic' European Rosicrucian fraternity in 1909:

There [in Toulouse] I eventually found that my plans and desires had been anticipated and known for some time, and I was permitted to meet not just one of the officers of the French Rosicrucian Order, but a number, as well as some who were members of the international Council of the Rosicrucian bodies of various European nations. At a regular Council meeting, and at several special sessions of the Order in other cities held in the months following, I was duly initiated and given preliminary papers of instruction to present to others whose names had been given to me.

The son of the founder, and second Imperator of the Order, Ralph M. Lewis, continued to express the official story of the genesis of AMORC’s orders in his biography of his father:

Later that night I [Harvey Spencer Lewis] was initiated into the Order Rosae Crucis. I Crossed the Threshold in the Old Lodge in

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4 Rosicrucianism will be a recurring mythic axis of the present work. AMORC is but one of a great many bodies who proudly boast to being heirs of Christian Rosenkreutz, the Masters prototype par excellence. Indeed, AMORC claims contact with the Theosophical Masters themselves: see infra Appendix A. For a detailed history and analysis of Rosicrucianism sensu lato, see infra, ch. 29.

5 Harvey Spencer Lewis, Rosicrucian Questions and Answers: With Complete History of the Rosicrucian Order, Rosicrucian Press, San Jose, California, 1929, 149.
that very old building. I met the many Officers, I took the solemn pledges, I received the great blessing and was made a Brother of the Order as the witching hour of midnight was struck by the old chimes in the tower of the building.6

Yet these public utterances are contradicted by privately-circulated accounts of the initiation written by H. Spencer Lewis in 1918, and later printed privately by Ralph M. Lewis. These short pamphlets, issued as a ‘new Confessio R. C. Fraternitatis’,7 speak of a ‘mystic, psychic Initiation’.8

As I rose to my feet, a sudden conscious realisation passed over my being and at once I knew. While I ‘slept,’ the Master - the one who had appeared to me in the first Chamber, had taken me through the First Degree Initiation ... I shall never forget that Initiation, and those who have been with me during the past three years, have often heard me recall the many points of equipment or fittings I saw then and there - though they never knew how I saw - and, after all, that matters little to them or to me.9

This rather more arbitrary account is justified by H. Spencer Lewis on the grounds that, ‘so many of the appurtenances of the original Lodge had been removed that it would be impossible for me to go through the regular form of ceremony there’.10

More telling, perhaps, is Ralph Lewis’ account:

[All] of the facts concerning the Order’s reestablishment in this jurisdiction could not be too quickly and frankly divulged. Prudence had to be exercised, so though the present histories are basically true in fact, still they conceal much ... But a time came when the

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9 Ibid.: second emphasis added.
curtain had to be raised higher, for in the recesses of the stage of truth were scenes the audience was now prepared to witness with a full understanding ... it [the 'new Confessio'] should acquaint certain of the brethren with the inner Cosmic experiences of their Imperator.\textsuperscript{11}

Examples of this sort abound in the literature of esotericism, occultism, and Theosophy, although the degree of fabrication or conscious manipulation of known facts varies tremendously. For the purposes of the present work, it is necessary to err in favour of inclusion of such data, for only thus can a truly catholic picture of the Masters be assembled. Nevertheless, strict attention must be accorded to questions of the historicity of truth claims wherever the materials allow, so as both to safeguard an unimpeded methodological empiricism, and to examine the faith-dynamic which develops among believers when a particular Master, or his\textsuperscript{12} earthly agent, is exposed as fraudulent. As a result, the textual materials employed cannot simply be assessed in vacuo, but require a sympathetic study of the actual and implied reader for the fullest possible picture of the Masters-dynamic to emerge from the believers' literature.

Sources for the present enquiry fall into four broad categories. First, there are the statements, writings, and general correspondence of leading Theosophists that exist wholly within the public domain. These materials comprise the basic structural components of research as they were, for the most part, granted the particular author's imprimatur as official teachings, and, as such, are representative of their author's opinion regarding the Masters. Second, there exists the corpus of statements, writings, and personal correspondence which was deemed private or for limited circulation. Into this category should be placed those teachings restricted to a circle of close trusted acquaintances, fellow initiates or students. For the most part these materials have been published subsequent to their author's demise by associates, disaffected or otherwise, or by latter-day researchers. Such materials are of value in

\textsuperscript{11} Ralph M. Lewis, 'Prolegomenon', 13, 14: emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{12} The masculine pronoun is not used generically. It is empirically provable that all Masters surveyed for the major part of the present work (that is, from 1875 to Leadbeater's death in 1934) were portrayed as being male. See infra 40n41.
that they were directed to a sympathetic audience and often contain information regarded as too sensitive or problematic for general distribution. Third, perhaps more properly a subset of the second, there are those textual materials which were deemed by their authors or recipients to be highly personal or controversial, and which remain unpublished. Such data, where available, have been included as indicators of the veracity of claims made by the Theosophists concerned. Although this enquiry does not have as its object the desire, let alone the capacity, to test claims made by Theosophists regarding their experiences of Masters, nevertheless contradictions within the œuvre of any given writer will be noted where appropriate, as outlined supra. Fourth, there now exists a growing body of scholarly work which attempts to wear neither the religionist nor the reductionist mantle. These secondary works furnish a more synoptic picture of certain periods and movements, and contain valuable insights into what is now being recognised as the mythogenic compulsion of esotericism.

Delimitations with regard to Time Period

As the present study unfolds, it will become clear that the gestalt of the Master is a common phenomenon of esoteric conceptualising. Although primarily concerned with the formulations of H. P. Blavatsky and C. W. Leadbeater, this work can hardly ignore the salient fact that a significant part of Theosophy's success devolved upon the abilities of such theorists to capitalise upon preexisting mythemes and topoi. Indeed, the Theosophical presentation of the Masters benefited enormously from an esoteric terrain which had been thoroughly prepared and fertilised in the centuries prior. In determining a time period for the present study, then, it is important to maintain diachronic historical breadth while at the same time isolating the Theosophical Masters synchronically.

Until comparatively recently, even those scholars favourably inclined toward the identification of esotericism as a domain worthy of study concluded that it was in all likelihood an eccentric by-product (or, indeed, the sinister issue) of the humanistic preoccupations of the Renaissance or, as a secondary possibility, the deism which
characterised the Enlightenment. The genesis for such a notion is surely rooted in a desire to characterise esotericism as a constellation of dissident quasi-religious speculations that necessarily lead to forms of praxis rigorously antithetical to the pursuits of orthodox religion, and which betray their paucity of pedigree by these very acts and attitudes. Needless to say, this perceived tendency to oppositional behaviour is deemed to share similar characteristics with Renaissance humanism and Enlightenment deism, which themselves are regularly interpreted as having been at core antagonistic to inherited paradigms. Yet external similarities rarely indicate shared origins or purpose, and such is the case here. It is true that esotericism has often enjoyed a problematic relationship with institutionalised religion, notably Christianity, it is also true that some esotericists, particularly those of the cinquecento, were renowned humanists.

Such notions exhibit a tendency to conflate esotericism, popular superstition, and the employment of theurgy (rites designed to expiate personal misfortune or attract beneficence) into one entity, 'magic'. The 'magical world view' is then interpreted along modalist semi-positivist lines: thus 'primitive magic' suffices for an ignorant age, and highly complicated theurgical rites for an 'advanced' time - yet both remain expressions of the same impulse. Accordingly, esotericism, then, is magic's answer to the age of humanism. An example of this approach is offered by Professor Jerome-Antoine Rony (Jerome-Antoine Rony, A History of Magic, trans. Bernard Denvir, Walker, New York, 1962), who observed that '[t]he magic of primitive peoples is relatively simple' (p.20), that magic achieved its 'Golden Age' in the civilisations of Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome (pp.46-64), and that, rather than be discarded in a later scientific age, 'a subtle alliance was formed between magic and the Enlightenment' (p.85) which produced the composite esotericisms of that period. Clearly this magico-Sabellianism is too simplistic a model to be of great advantage.

Keith Thomas has noted that esotericism is a much more elusive creature than has customarily been thought, and that the causes of its genesis and ever-changing popularity are not reducible to the standard sociological cabal:

It is therefore possible to connect the decline of the old magical beliefs with the growth of urban living, the rise of science, and the spread of an ideology of self-help. But the connection is only approximate and a more precise sociological genealogy cannot at present be constructed. Too many of the participants in the story remain hidden from view and the representative status of those who are visible is too uncertain (Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, 665-666).

This observation encourages the scholar to recognise that though esotericism may well have engaged Renaissance humanism, it is not, however, reducible to it.

Renaissance esotericism is an indicator of the semantic impoverishment of the term 'humanism'. It is of prime importance to demarcate effectively between an utterly naturalistic humanism (and its later cognate, scientific rationalism) and a religious humanism, which accommodated, though was not predicated upon, the possibility of divine penetration into the sensible world. Esotericists of the period were, unsurprisingly, more regularly found in the latter camp. Those esotericists of the Italian Renaissance most renowned as humanists, though of a particularly Platonic and Neoplatonic stripe, would include Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494). See Ingrid Merkel and Alien G. Debus, eds., Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe, Folger, Washington, 1988, and Stephen A. McKnight, The Modern Age and the Recovery of Ancient Wisdom: A Reconsideration of Historical Consciousness, 1450-1650, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1991; cf. also Wouter Hanegraaff, New Age, 389ff.
that components of the *prisca theologia* (the ‘Ancient Wisdom tradition’ which comprised the historiographical infrastructure of Renaissance esoteric speculation) share common philosophical progenitors with orthodox Christianity,\(^\text{17}\) that some of the most dominant streams of esoteric speculation actually antedate Christianity,\(^\text{18}\) and that a significant number of esotericists spurned both humanism and deism as dangerous diversions, believing themselves to have been perhaps unconventional, but nevertheless thoroughly orthodox Christians.\(^\text{19}\)

It can now be stated with some certainty that esotericism is not the direct progeny of either the naturalistic or religious humanisms of the Italian Renaissance, but rather operates as a *tertium quid*. This said, it can hardly be ignored that the publication in 1471 of a Latin translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* by Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) inaugurated a period of intense inquiry into the esoteric heritage bequeathed by the ancient world. In fact, the Renaissance, though unable to assert paternity for esotericism *qua* esotericism, can rightly be deemed to have provided the impulse to harmonise these varied strains of speculation into some form of coherent unity, and to claim for the resulting hybridised esotericisms an illustrious pedigree and a vaunting philosophical profundity. This more or less overt project to create a synthesis of such varied streams as neo-Alexandrian Hermetism, Jewish Kabbalah, and German

\(^{17}\) The *prisca theologia* is, according to Stephen A. McKnight, a function of the renewed interest in Platonic and Neoplatonic speculation in the Renaissance:

> [The *prisca theologia* is] an exceptionally elastic framework that includes a variety of pseudoscientific and esoteric religious traditions that were accumulated, incorporated, and refined between the establishment of the Neoplatonic School in Alexandria in late antiquity and its transmission into Italy during the Renaissance (McKnight, *The Modern Age*, 22).


\(^{18}\) One of the most influential of such arterial esotericisms is alchemy. For a diachronic treatment of the means by which one antique mythic motif, the golden fleece, has been continually reworked by centuries of esoteric reflection see Antoine Faivre, *The Golden Fleece and Alchemy*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1993.

\(^{19}\) Into this category must be placed those theosophers in the tradition of Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), for whom pagan antiquity in itself held little or no fascination, and who instead undertook a form of esoteric hermeneutical exegesis of Scripture, underscored by natural observation and metaphor. See Antoine Faivre, ‘Renaissance Hermeticism and the Concept of Western Esotericism’ in van den Broek & Haneegraff, eds., *Gnosis and Hermeticism*, 116-117. See also Andrew Weeks, *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1991, 48-51, esp. Weeks’ discussion of Boehme’s designs for a “‘Pansophic” Synthesis”.

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**Naturphilosophie** - to devise, in short, a kind of *Diatessaron* of esotericism - is one of the enduring contributions of the Renaissance to the formulation of the modern character of esotericism.\(^{20}\) For the study of the reception and recasting of esoteric ideas, then, it is entirely appropriate that the year 1471, in which the immensely influential *Hermetica* first appeared in the Latin West in Ficino’s translation, operates as a useful ancestral spindle around which the modern syncretising esotericisms can be wound.

Historiographers of esotericism have noted that at various times over the last several centuries one individual has attempted to replicate the feat of the Renaissance Hermeticists by uniting the various traditions under one banner. Such a person was Blavatsky, and her banner was the Theosophical Master. Yet even she never claimed that there were no intimations of the Masters’ existence before her own writings; they had appeared under numerous guises throughout history, and been pivotal in the establishment of several esoteric sodalities. The question for the scholar, then, is deceptively simple: where to begin?

The Rosicrucian manifestoes, the first of which was published in 1614, have as their core component a secret philanthropic fraternity of adepts dedicated to the furtherance of human spiritual development.\(^{21}\) Could these mysterious men be the prototypes of the Theosophical Masters? It may indeed seem so, and there can be little doubt that various Masters of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries claimed just such a pedigree, or at the least that the fabled Christian Rosenkreutz was a member of a lodge of

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\(^{20}\) There is now an ever-expanding number of scholarly treatments of Renaissance Hermeticism and its allied fields. Notable are Merkel and Debus, eds., *Hermeticism and the Renaissance*; Faivre, *Access*; van den Broek and Hanegraaff, eds., *Gnosis and Hermeticism.*

\(^{21}\) Rosicrucianism will prove a recurring mythic axis for the present inquiry. Though the Rosicrucian canon can really be said only to contain the three works (the *Fama Fraternitatis*, the *Confessio Fraternitatis* and the *Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosenkreutz Anno 1459*), published in Cassel, Germany between 1614 and 1616, the pamphlets have sponsored an enormous literature. For an analysis of the large contribution made by the genre of the ‘Rosicrucian novel’ to the development of the idea of the Theosophical Master see *infra* ch. 29.
Throughout the eighteenth century institutionalised Freemasonry was to provide a fertile and secure environment for men inclined toward esoteric speculation; here, too, antecedents of the modern Master can be found. In this context the name of Samuel Hayim Falk ([1710?]-1782) is of particular interest; indeed, Falk's reputation as a theurgic Kabbalist was such that later commentators have ascribed to him the desire to develop 'a new mystical religion ... [a] courageous international project, which involved a small but powerful network of Masons'.

Falk is but one of a handful of enigmatic Freemasonic entrepreneurs of the eighteenth century who began to introduce into 'Illuminist' Freemasonry the notion of a (usually aristocratic) meta-class of initiates whose arcane knowledge was of a supremely high order, and whose identities were to be shrouded from those of lesser rank. The introduction into Freemasonry of these 'Unknown Superiors' appears in the first instance to have been a mechanism which guaranteed the anonymity of certain figures of dubious or dangerous affiliation, though its success is more likely attributable to its providential accommodation of the innate tendency for esotericists to suspect an ever-spiralling series of 'inner circles' of more highly erudite, and thus more secretive, esoteric

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21 One such claimant to the same pedigree as the Rosicrucians is the Theosophical Master Koot Hoomi. In one of his letters to the Theosophist A. P. Sinnett, Koot Hoomi writes that 'Rosencent [sic] ... upon his return from Asia dressed them [the eastern doctrines of the Masters] up in a semi-Christian garb intended as a shield for his pupils, against clerical revenge': Koot Hoomi to A. P. Sinnett in The Mahatma Letters, 1993 ed., (Letter No.20: Rec. 5 August, 1881) 71.

This, perhaps, provides one key to understanding the apparently inexhaustible value of the Rosicrucian mythos for over three hundred years of esotericists: the amorphous and eminently modifiable attributes of the Rosicrucian fraternity allow for ready application to any number of purposes and projects.

24 With Falk must be included his contemporary Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). For a concise synopsis of the construction and dissemination of the concept of the 'Unknown Superiors' in continental lodges see Schuchard, 'Yeats and the "Unknown Superiors"', 114-168, esp. 140-156; see also Faivre, Access, 78-80.
knowledge.\textsuperscript{25} This veiling of the origins of orders and authority became fully institutionalised in the German \textit{Écossais}\textsuperscript{26} Rite of Strict Observance developed by Karl Gotthelf, Baron von Hund (1722-1776) in the 1750s following his initiation into Templar Freemasonry in 1743.\textsuperscript{27} Under Hund, \textit{Écossais} Freemasons were required to pledge obedience to the 'Unknown Superiors', an obligation observed to this day in lodges claiming a Master's oversight.\textsuperscript{28}

With the advent of the 'Unknown Superiors' onto the esoteric world stage, another prototype for the modern Masters can be discerned. As with the Rosicrucians, however, it is difficult to select arbitrarily a date which is both pivotal to the development of the 'Unknown Superiors' and in which can be seen the chrysalis of the Theosophical Master-type of later years.\textsuperscript{29} Further, the development of this sort of theosophically-directed Freemasonry sounds a note of caution for the historian of ideas who attempts to isolate synchronically one such movement, let alone he who intuits the existence of a phenomenon of esotericism such as the \textit{topos} of the Hidden Master and

\textsuperscript{25} One of those claimed as an 'Unknown Superior' was the Young Pretender, Charles Edward Stuart. That Stuart was assisted in his abortive rebellion by Freemasons of Jacobite sympathies is undisputed; it remains unclear the degree to which he fostered such support through direct participation in Freemasonic activities, or whether he was either aware of, or supportive of, his exalted position as an 'Unknown Superior': see Schuchard, 'Yeats and the "Unknown Superiors"', 134-135, 142-143; cf. John Hamill \& R. A. Gilbert, \textit{World Freemasonry: An Illustrated History}, Aquarian, London, 1991, 70. For background see Bruce Lenman, \textit{The Jacobite Risings in Britain 1689-1746}, Methuen, London, 1984.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Écossais} Freemasonry has been characterised historically by an elaborate hierarchy of degrees ('Haute Grades') based on chivalric mythology. The reference to Scotland is founded in a highly imaginative claim to Templar involvement in Scottish lodges, a claim which enjoyed great currency among continental Jacobites: see Hamill \& Gilbert, \textit{World Freemasonry}, 58-65. \textit{Écossais} Freemasonry, having evolved tremendously over its long history, exists now in the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, perhaps the most popular of all Freemasonic systems exclusive of the formative three degrees of British Craft Freemasonry.

\textsuperscript{27} Hund claimed his organisation was a filiation of Philip the Good's Order of the Temple (Faivre, \textit{Access}, 78) and was led to understand by his initiators that the Stuart Pretender was a Secret Chief of the Order and the Young Pretender was the Grand Master: see Schuchard, 'Yeats and the "Unknown Superiors"', 134-135. Terms such as 'Secret Chief' later become synonymous with that of Master, as was common in the nineteenth century theurgic body, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (for which see \textit{infra} Appendix E).

\textsuperscript{28} Lodges with such pledges include those descended from, or affiliated with, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (see \textit{infra} 27n3) and those lodges closely associated with the Theosophical Society (for which see \textit{infra} chs. 19, 22). It should be added that these rites are often considered heterodox by normative Craft Freemasonry.

\textsuperscript{29} Although Hund's Rite of Strict Observance is no doubt crucial in the historiography of the \textit{topos} of the Hidden Master, there is really no indication that his conception of the 'Unknown Superiors' would have allowed for the claims of a meta-empirical ontology for the Masters made by later esotericists. Though certainly ambiguous, and conceived of as politically and 'esoterically' exalted, Hund's 'Unknown Superiors' can only be considered at best \textit{proto}-Masters, not \textit{crypto}-Masters.
desires to trace it diachronically. Marsha K. Schuchard's acute analyses of the byways of 'Illuminist' Freemasonry of the eighteenth century have suggested that any reasoned analysis of a development such as the 'Unknown Superiors' requires investigation into fields as diverse as Sabbatian antinomian theosophy, Jacobite royal pretension, and the philo-Semitic millenarianism of Zinzendorf's Moravian Brotherhood.30

Further names and dates from the Freemasonic and Kabbalistic constellations of Europe present themselves as important for the present purposes. Joseph Balsamo, alias Count Cagliostro (1743-1795), a Masonic entrepreneur of dubious probity and a favourite of contemporary Theosophists, became renowned for his presumed magical abilities, longevity, and knowledge of esoteric arcana.31 Martinès de Pasqually ([1727?] -1774) founded a rite entitled the Order of the Elect Cohens (‘Elus Coëns’), the theurgical techniques of which he claimed to have encountered by supramundane agency.32 Two disciples of Pasqually deserve mention in this context: Jean-Baptiste Willermoz (1730-1824), founder of the Chevaliers Bienfaisants de la Cité Sainte, also known as the Rite Écossois Rectifié (the Rectified Scottish Rite),33 and Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin (1743-1803), termed Le Philosophe Inconnu, whose

30 Nicolaus Ludwig Zinzendorf, Count of Zinzendorf and Pottendorf (1700-1760), became the patron of expatriate Bohemians whom he later reconstituted into the Moravian Brotherhood, a church still extant. His attempt at infusing strains of Pietism into the Lutheran Church via 'Moravianism' was given an eccentric impetus by the inclusion of a secretive inner circle of the Brotherhood - Der Pilger - devoted to an idiosyncratic and esoteric Judenmission premised upon a sexual antinomianism somewhat akin to radical Sabbatianism. See Schuchard, 'Yeats and the "Unknown Superiors"', 118, 138-139.

31 Though Cagliostro's death in an Inquisition prison in 1795 is well attested, nevertheless various tales have since abounded that claim he lived for many years, indeed centuries, thereafter:

Strange stories, however, continued to be circulated, according to which he escaped from confinement; and, thanks to the Elixir of Life he claimed to possess, he still lives on like the Mejnour of Lord Lytton's 'Zanoni,' under some other name (Kenneth Mackenzie, The Royal Masonic Cyclopedia, 1877, Kessinger Publishing Co. Reprint, Kila, Montana, n.d., 97-98).

32 Little is known of Pasqually before the 1750s. Faiivre identifies his birth date at 1727 (Faiivre, Access, 73); Versluis prefers the date of 1710 (Arthur Versluis, 'Christian Theosophic Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries' in van den Broek & Hanegraaff, eds., Gnosis and Hermeticism, 229). For an account of Pasqually's theurgic practices see Christopher McIntosh, Eliphas Levi and the French Occult Revival, Rider, London, 1972, 20-25; cf. Hanegraaff, New Age, 436.

Christian theosophy is to French literature what Jacob Boehme's is to German. These two men, representing the Illuminist Freemasonic and theosophic streams of esoteric enquiry, respectively, can be said to have provided the germ of the Master avant-la-lettre.

Important contributions to the generation and proliferation of the concept of the Masters were also made by fictional literature, particularly those authors who published within the genre of the Rosicrucian novel. Of such works, perhaps the most influential has proved to be Bulwer-Lytton's *Zanoni*, an 1842 *bildungsroman* that hints at an even more secret fraternity of adepts than the Rosicrucians. Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873) was able to synthesise the concerns of his literary and esoteric forebears into a cohesive pattern and create the paradigmatic Rosicrucian hero in the character of Zanoni. While it is tempting to establish the publication of *Zanoni* as the modern *locus classicus* of the mature Master figure, it is really not until a generation later that the seeds sown by its author, and by the Illuminists, theosophers, self-styled Rosicrucians, and *Hauts Grades* Freemasons who preceded him, would come to fruition in the thoroughly articulated Master figure of Theosophy. From their refuge in the trans-Himalayan peaks, Blavatsky's Brotherhood of Masters has overshadowed the occult domain ever since.


37 The discrete category of the Rosicrucian novel was first identified by Edith Birkhead in 1922. See Edith Birkhead, *The Tale of Terror*, Russell & Russell, New York, 1963, 100-127. See also *infra* ch. 29.


the same year saw the demise of one of the pivotal figures of the late nineteenth-century French occult revival, Alphonse-Louis Constant (1810-1875), alias Eliphas Lévi. A tinge of irony is offered against these deaths by the birth of perhaps the most notorious and self-promoting occultist of the twentieth century, Edward Alexander ‘Aleister’ Crowley (1875-1947). 1875 also witnessed the births of various organisations which, in one fashion or another, contributed to a late nineteenth century renaissance of interest in matters esoteric. In that year Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) published her seminal text, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, and began meetings of ‘The Christian Scientists’ which led ultimately to the chartering of The Church of Christ (Scientist) in 1879. In the same year Dayānanda Sarasvatī (1824-1883) founded in Bombay the Ārya Samāj, a reformist Vedic party which stipulated a monotheistic anti-Brahmanical Hinduism. The Ārya Samāj, following closely upon the footsteps of its forebear the Brahmo Samāj, fostered a religious philosophy which ensured Oriental religions a more sympathetic appreciation from the West, if only because Dayānanda’s reforms made Hinduism more palatable to the

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38 There exists no satisfying scholarly biography of Constant/Lévi in the English language. A readable account is offered by McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi*. See also Thomas A. Williams, *Eliphas Lévi: Master of Occultism*, University of Alabama Press, Alabama, 1975. An exploration of Constant’s literary output, positing its Swedenborgian echoes, is Lynn R. Wilkinson, *The Dream of an Absolute Language: Emanuel Swedenborg & French Literary Culture*, State University of New York Press, 1996. This latter work is marred by a small number of errors; n.b the different years given for Constant’s death; pp. 2, 23.


The Ārya Samāj would rate as little more than a footnote for this study were it not for the fact that its allure proved to be so great for a number of Western esotericists that they packed up and moved to India. Of these, the most significant for the present purposes is Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. It is in the person and writings of Blavatsky, and in the Theosophical Society which she was instrumental in establishing, that the Master truly came into his (not her!) own. Blavatsky's Theosophy is a highly syncretistic system but at its core stand the 'Masters of the Wisdom', men who can truly be said to enflesh every available thread of arcane lore. In the hands of the polymath Blavatsky, such 'threads' were woven into a sophisticated occultism unrivalled in recent times for complexity (some would say inscrutability) and influence. It is with Blavatsky's Masters of the Theosophical Society that this study must start, and - perhaps unsurprisingly - the Society was inaugurated in 1875.

The selection of an end-date for Masters research is inherently more arbitrary given that Masters-groups proliferate more readily now than perhaps at any time in their history. Masters-based esotericism has multiplied since the late nineteenth century to such a degree that a very large percentage of today's ever-ballooning occult and self-designated 'New Age' movements defer to Masters (whether of the Theosophical pantheon, or other) as sources of revelation and authority. Indeed, the Masters have become a significant presence in fields which have not heretofore been considered to

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43 The male pronoun is employed here purposely. It will be observed that all of the Masters depicted by Blavatsky or Leadbeater were/are men. The reasons for this are never specifically articulated, though socio-cultural factors may be presumed to be prominent. One awaits a satisfying feminist analysis of occultism, though Diana Basham's *The Trial of Woman: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society* (New York University Press, New York, 1992) is a very good start. Unfortunately, in an extensive treatment of Blavatsky as the 'Occult Mother' (pp. 178-214), Basham never mentions the monogender of the Masters. See also Mary Farrell Bednarowski, 'Outside the Mainstream: Women’s Religion and Women Religious Leaders in Nineteenth-Century America' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, XLVIII:2, June, 1980, 207-231; id., 'Women in Occult America' in Kerr & Crow, eds., *The Occult in America*, 177-195.

44 See supra 7n1.
sit comfortably under the rubric of esotericism. To research all of the Masters-groups in the contemporary panorama of esoteric pursuits and related domains would be a task of great enormity, and could hardly be completed successfully in fewer than many volumes. Further, it is entirely likely that a distance of some decades at least will be required in order to gain a synoptic picture of these groups and philosophies, and to assess properly their sources, impact, and depth of engagement with the religious Zeitgeist.

With the latter observation in mind, the main body of research will concern itself with the period from 1875 to the death of Theosophy’s second great ideologue, Charles Webster Leadbeater, in 1934. It has been suggested by more than one commentator that the last two millennia have been but footnotes to Plato; in the sphere of Masters-occultism, it could cogently be argued that the last seventy years have been but footnotes to Blavatsky and Leadbeater. Indeed, the two might well be considered polar figures of Theosophical history, with most subsequent formulations finding a home somewhere in between.

As this study progresses it will become clear that Blavatsky borrowed from innumerable sources in her quest to create a synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy. Central to her endeavour was the need to harvest from the history of esotericism those mythistorical attributes which she could employ to describe her Masters. Hermeticism, Kabbalah, the mythotypes of Illuminist Freemasonry, and the Rosicrucian novel are only a few of the esoteric quarries at which she worked diligently to fashion both a synthetic occultism and a conceptual paradigm which would become the necessary point of departure for subsequent theoreticians. The present study, then, will attempt to limn the development of Blavatsky’s thought, and the subsequent changes made to her Theosophical template by Leadbeater. Only then will it be possible to look backward from 1875 to discern the true ‘genealogical lineaments’ of the Theosophical Master, and forward so as to appreciate properly the

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43 For instance, the Masters have become central to ‘Ufology’: see infra Appendix B, E.
44 H. P. Blavatsky, Theosophy’s motivating genius and primary apologist, died in 1891. Her successor as President was Annie Besant (1847-1933) whose tenure was marked by her active collaboration with Charles Webster Leadbeater (1854-1934). Though a number of Theosophical ‘Sections’ rejected Leadbeater’s influence and publications, the Leadbeater/Besant partnership can nevertheless be characterised as the second generation of the parent (Adyar) Society.
semi-ubiquitous phenomenon of the Master in the contemporary esoteric/occult milieu.

Delimitations with regard to Geography and Language
By the time of Leadbeater’s death, the Theosophical Society had an active membership in many dozens of countries, East and West. Thus it is that the breadth of distribution of Theosophical publications was immense. For all of its international flavour and Oriental iconography, however, the lingua franca for Theosophy has always been English. Though multilingual herself, Blavatsky understood that the English idiom was the most efficient vehicle for her purposes, encompassing, as it did, North America, the United Kingdom and, crucially, the British dominions in the Orient.

It is a singular fact that all of the seminal texts of the Theosophical corpus were written and published in English, and only thereafter translated into other languages for dissemination. It might also be noted that most of those countries which provided the stage upon which the Theosophical drama unfolded were also English-speaking: the United States of America, England, (the British Raj in) India, and Australia. It follows, then, that the present study has concentrated on English-language texts as the primary materials for research. Nevertheless, the author has consulted those non-English works of primary or secondary materials which have been deemed relevant. So, too, where individuals or groups have assumed pivotal importance in the institution or development of Theosophical Masters-based esotericism, and yet have not been located in English-speaking countries or remain unpublished in English, references to such have been included to ensure depth of analysis.

Preliminary observations with regard to Terminology
Although the Master may well be represented under various guises in many strains of esotericism, it is the thesis of the present work that the Theosophical Master is a discrete gestalt with attributes and characteristics idiosyncratic to himself. In order to isolate the Theosophical Master from his fellows in the esoteric ensemble it is first necessary to bracket any a priori assumptions about what is connoted by the term ‘Master’ either in the common vernacular or in esoteric parlance generally, and then to examine what is meant by the epithet in Theosophical discourse. Without such clear
taxonomic and terminological boundaries, it is clear that it might be easy to confuse the Master with any number of related mesocosmic entities. It is equally important to establish a clear demarcation between the Master of Theosophical fame and other modes of charismatic authority as exemplified, for instance, by the Eastern guru or the ‘cult-leader’ of New Religious Movements - with both of which the Master has been lamentably confused. All of these figures might share common attributes or functions - as font of revelation, source of authoritative pronouncements, emblem of spiritual attainment, and mediator with unseen forces - yet the Master has certain propensities which mark him off from others as a possessor of a unique ontology. To begin to discern the essential character of the Master, then, requires *ab initio* a preliminary heuristic definition, a definition sufficiently broad so as not to exclude data which otherwise may be useful, and yet exacting enough to allow the individual qualities of the Master to emerge from the dense thicket of mythology and theology which have heretofore obscured him.

Compounding the problem of establishing the *sui generis* character of the Master is the fact that many Theosophists and commentators have proved to be notoriously inaccurate in their use of terminology and, as a consequence, have employed cognate terms indiscriminately - or indeed have used the designation ‘Master’ for figures well outside of the Theosophical template. Indeed, the choice of the term ‘Master’ is in itself rather arbitrary given that a broad range of options avail themselves: Adepts, the Great White Brotherhood, Hidden Chiefs, the Hierarchy, the Inner Circle of Humanity, the Inner-Plane Adepts, the Invisible Brotherhood, *Mahatmas, Rishis,*

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48 Andrew Rawlinson has recently published a work devoted to an analysis of ‘Western Teachers in Eastern traditions’ (Andrew Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters: Western Teachers in Eastern Traditions*, Open Court, Chicago, 1997). Unfortunately, Rawlinson’s work - which includes several figures from the *Theosophical milieu* - contains no etymological or semantic analysis of the term ‘Master’ or of its cognates, and one is left to suspect that he has adopted the term based upon its wide currency. If such is the case, then clearly it is important to assess whether the term gained its currency in contemporary discourse via *Theosophy* or another channel. ‘Master’ is obviously not a term of Eastern derivation, and any study which claims comprehensiveness must pay attention to the fact.
Secret Chiefs, the Third Order, the Elder Brothers, Unknown Superiors, *inter alia.* Each of these terms is employed in the literature (and there are many other synonyms), but for the most part such nomenclature is either borrowed from Indian usage or Freemasonic sources, and is thus of more specific and less generic applicability. The choice of the term 'Master' was deemed the most catholic for the present purpose, and the least given to particular cultural, linguistic or historical associations. It was also the preferred choice of both Blavatsky and Leadbeater.

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There is a seemingly endless stream of cognates: the Enlightened Guardians, the Great White Lodge, the Guiding Helmsmen, the Guild Masters, the *Hyperanthropos,* the Nautioners, the Supermen, and the *Khwajagan,* etc (for the latter, Persian for 'Master', see Ernest Scott, *The People of the Secret*, The Octagon Press, London, 1983, 260-263). Naturally, some of these terms are employed within select groups, others are of more universal application. It should be noted that of all the terms, 'Master' enjoys near ubiquity.

It is important to note that Blavatsky employed several collective nouns for the Masters, notably 'the Great White Lodge'. It appears that Leadbeater coined the term 'Great White Brotherhood' (likely a conflation of such Blavatskian idioms as 'Great White Lodge' and 'Great Brotherhood of the Himālayas'). Leadbeater's usage has become standard coinage in contemporary esoteric and New Age circles, and has also gained prominence in the field of conspiratology.
Allusion has already been made to the provisory nature of any hypothesis garnered from empirical observation of data; such is the nature of the limitations which inhere in such a methodological viewpoint. It is equally true that it may be impossible to discern a synoptic definition of the Theosophical Master from such disparate paradigms as those offered by Blavatsky and Leadbeater - particularly as their works span more than half a century. Given this caveat, however, it is at least possible to limn briefly an initial portrait of the Master-figure of Theosophy from the descriptions of various Theosophists who spanned the years 1875 to 1934. Interestingly, although definitions and terms are often blurred, the degree of agreement on fundamental points remains impressively marked. Naturally, such a heuristic should be diachronic in orientation and very broad so as not to define out of the equation materials that may later prove of lasting significance.

A selection of the definitions and descriptions of the Masters has been assembled from ten popular theorists or commentators on Theosophy.¹ Interestingly, for all of the variations in iconography, chronology, and nomenclature, a distinct type begins to emerge:

George Arundale (1878-1945):
Perhaps you know that the government of the world is in the hands of a graded band of Mighty Brethren whom we call the Great White Lodge - using the word ‘Lodge’ in its Masonic sense of an

¹ The selection of these ten authors is by no means an attempt at comprehensiveness. Further, no extensive effort is made at this time to analyse the passages; rather, the desire is to highlight certain key concepts which recur in the writings of various Theosophists and to employ these observations as the basis of a working model of the Master, and certainly not as a template. It might be noted that some of the authors (such as Alice Bailey) eventually moved out of the ambit of Theosophy and into their own conceptual domains - though all remained within the Theosophical Weltanschauung, and can thus be considered emblematic of the Theosophical paradigm.
organised Fraternity. At Their head stands the Great Ruler of the world, THE KING, and around Him are grouped His Ministers and Servants, some functioning as organisers, rulers, heads of the races of the world, others as teachers of religions, others guiding the various continents and countries, others influencing non-human races such as Angels and Devas, yet others acting as assistants to these Greater Ones and preparing to take Their places when They shall have passed on to still higher work. Now most of you young people belong to one or to another of these departments in the world’s government, and some great Master has His eye upon you, watching for the time when He shall see that you intend from your heart to give yourself to the world’s service, showing unmistakable signs of practical earnestness.¹

Alice A. Bailey (1880-1949):
The work or the radiatory activity of the Hierarchy is today more potent that at any time in human history. The Masters and Their disciples ... were physically present on earth in early Atlantean times, and the radiation emanating from Them was protective, guarding and nurturing. Later, the Hierarchy withdrew into a subjective expression, and humanity was - under the Law of Evolution - left to its own devices, thus to learn the Way and tread the Path of Return through individual experiment and experience.³

These perfected men, therefore, exist; They are more than men because the divine spirit in them registers all stages of consciousness and awareness - subhuman, human and superhuman. This inclusive development enables them to work with men, to contact humanity at need, and to know how to lead us forward to the phases of resurrection.⁴

¹ George S. Arundale, Thoughts on ‘At The Feet Of The Master’, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1919, 11.
This has been an epoch of crisis, and the great moment for which the Hierarchy has been preparing ever since it was founded upon the Earth. Slowly down the ages, men have been trained and prepared for initiation ... they have taken their place within the ranks of the Hierarchy and have - later - passed into the higher centre, Shamballa.

Annie Besant (1847-1933):
We may take, then, as a definition of a Master: a human being who has perfected himself and has nothing more to learn on earth, who lives in a physical body on earth for the helping of man, who takes pupils that desire to evolve more rapidly than their race, in order to serve it, and are willing to forsake all for this purpose.

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891):
Our MASTERS are not 'a jealous god'; they are simply holy mortals, nevertheless, however, higher than any in this world, morally, intellectually and spiritually. However holy and advanced in the science of the Mysteries - they are still men, members of a Brotherhood ... [He who] would become a candidate for either chelaship or favours ... must be aware ... [that it] is a bond of seven years of probation ... [for one to step] on the Path leading to the Ashrum [sic] of the blessed Masters - the last and only custodians of primitive Wisdom and Truth.

\[^{5}\text{Alice A. Bailey, The Rays and the Initiations, Lucis Publishing, New York, 1972, 236.}\]
\[^{7}\text{H. P. Blavatsky, 'The Theosophical Masters' in Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. VII, 242-249. For 'chelaship' see supra p. 10n10. 'Ashrum', more properly Áśrama, is the place of retreat of the Vānaprasthya ('forest-departure'), described in the priestly manuals of orthodox Hinduism as the location of the strict ascetical retreat which the high-caste Hindu is expected to undergo as the third phase of his (four stage) religious life. It is unlikely that this practice was followed in normative Hinduism: see Benjamin Walker, The Hindu World, vol. 1, 84-86. For Blavatsky the 'Ashrum' refers to the dwelling-place of the Masters, a place geographically remote and spiritually idealised: see infra Appendix B.}\]
The Fifth [Race] will not die, but survive for a while: overlapping the new Race [i.e., the Sixth] for many hundred thousands of years to come, it will become transformed with it - slower than its new successor - still getting entirely altered in mentality, general physique, and stature. Mankind will not grow again into giant bodies as in the case of the Lemurians and the Atlanteans; because while the evolution of the Fourth race led the latter down to the very bottom of materiality in its physical development, the present Race is on its ascending arc; and the Sixth will be rapidly growing out of its bonds of matter, and even of flesh ... The Cycles of Matter will be succeeded by Cycles of Spirituality and a fully developed mind. On the law of parallel history and races, the majority of the future of mankind will be composed of glorious Adepts.

Harriette Augusta Curtiss & F. Homer Curtiss:

The Masters of Wisdom are Great Souls who, through repeated experiences and determined effort through many earthly lives, have obtained mastery, firstly, over the passions, appetites and desires of the personal self; and secondly, over the forces of Their bodies and over the life-currents of the Cosmos ... Jesus was such a Master, in fact was and is a Master ... [They are] all banded together in what is known as The Great White Lodge; a lodge in the sense of oneness of aim and motive; for They are all working for the uplifting of humanity. They are divided into certain degrees and subdivided into orders so as to systematically cover all the needs of humanity in its different stages of evolution.

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* It should be noted that Harriette Curtiss and Homer Curtiss established a separate body from the Theosophical Society called The Order of Christian Mystics, with Harriette receiving clairaudient messages from the Masters. Nevertheless, they remained staunchly within the Theosophical cosmo-historical paradigm. The excerpt which follows is a message from 'The Teacher [Master] of The Order of Christian Mystics', transcribed by Harriette...

Curuppumullage Jinarajadasa (1875-1953):

Here on this globe of ours which spins round the sun, Mighty Beings guide every event ... The facts as to an inner Government of the World have been long kept as the most precious secrets in the Ancient Mysteries; but with the opportunities of a swifter evolution now dawning for men, what was once hidden is now revealed ... The work of the world, visible and invisible, is under the direction of the Adepts of the Great White Brotherhood. Into Their hands the LOGOS commits HIS Power, Wisdom and Love, and They distribute the energy of the LOGOS into all the many departments of human activity. Religion and philosophy, science and art, commerce and development, are inspired and guided by Them ... They inspire and guide all, brooding over men's good and evil with infinite love and understanding. The 'Everlasting Arms' of the Great Brothers enfold humanity, and while They labour to complete the Plan, no ultimate failure is possible for mankind. Because They, once weak and sinful as we are to-day, have now achieved Perfection, the vision of Perfection some day for us is not a dream but a reality ... to be accepted by Them as Their assistants and helpers is to enter on the Path that leads to Deification.\(^\text{11}\)

William Quan Judge (1851-1896):

Admitting that the Adepts have great powers, they have disclaimed the power to alter human nature in any other way than through the processes of evolution and always strictly under a rigid law of justice ... The Adepts do not yet appear publicly and proclaim themselves to the world ... because the cycle must run its course, since, if they proclaimed themselves out of time, a wrong result would be produced ... WHAT, THEN, ARE THE ADEPTS DOING? Not possibly could all their work be stated. But, for a part:

(a) Assisting all good movements by acting on men from behind the scenes through mental influence.
(b) Preparing as many men and women who are fit for it so that they may, in their next incarnation, appear in the world as active devotees to the good of the Human Family.
(c) Spreading now, through impulses given in many places which must not be mentioned, a philosophy of life which will gradually affect the race mind, and in particular the active, conquering Western peoples, thus preparing the whole people to change and evolve yet further and further until evils disappear and better days and people reappear.¹²

Charles Webster Leadbeater (1854-1934):
The historical records of every nation are full of the doings of men of genius ... is it not logical to say that we cannot see the bounds of human attainment, and that there may well have been, and even now may be, men far further developed even than they, men great in spirituality as well as in knowledge or artistic power, men complete as regards human perfections - men precisely such as the Adepts or Supermen whom some of us have had the inestimable privilege to encounter? ... Behind the evolving form burgeons out the Life eternal, the Life Divine ... It is because His will is evolution that all life everywhere is pressing onward and upward; and it is therefore that the existence of Perfected Men, at the end of this long line of ever-unfolding power and wisdom and love, is the most natural thing in the world. Even beyond Them - beyond out sight and our comprehension - stretches a vista of still greater glory ... The logical consequence of all this is that there must be Perfected Men, and there are not wanting signs of the existence of such Men in all ages who, instead of leaving the world entirely, to pursue a life of their own in the divine or superhuman kingdoms, have remained in touch with

humanity, through love of it, to assist its evolution in beauty and love and truth, to help, as it were, to cultivate the Perfected Man.\textsuperscript{13}

Cyril Scott (1879-1970):

The Masters are members of the Great White Lodge or Hierarchy of Adept which constitutes the inner Government of our world ... They work to further the Evolutionary Plan ... the Master has acquired that faculty ... of transporting himself in one of his subtler bodies to any place to which he may elect to go ... But telepathic powers are only a few among many others which the Masters exercise; they manipulate occult forces, control magnetic currents ... they have acquired the knowledge how to retain their physical bodies far beyond the usually allotted span.\textsuperscript{14}

It is essential to state unequivocally that any successful attempt to set up a rapport with these Super-men entails a life of self-abnegation and rigorous self-discipline. The indulgence in cocktail drinking and immoderate sexuality, to which many people are addicted at the present time, is entirely hostile to Occult Science: the former poisons the organism, the latter wastes force.\textsuperscript{15}

Alfred Percy Sinnett (1840-1921):

In reality, the Arhats and the Mahatmas are the same men. At that level of spiritual exaltation, supreme knowledge of the esoteric doctrine blends all original sectarian distinctions. By whatever name such \textit{illuminati} may be called, they are the adepts of occult knowledge, sometimes spoken of in India now as the Brothers, and the custodians of the spiritual science which has been handed down

\textsuperscript{13} C. W. Leadbeater, \textit{The Masters and the Path}, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1925, 4-6.


\textsuperscript{15} 'By the Author of \textit{The Initiate in the Dark Cycle, etc. etc.}' [Cyril Scott], 'Introduction' in David Anrias [Brian Ross], \textit{Through the Eyes of the Masters: Meditations and Portraits}, 3rd ed., George Routledge and Sons, London, 1947, 13.
to them by their predecessors.\textsuperscript{14}

The level of elevation which constitutes a man - what the outer world calls a Mahatma or 'Brother' - is only attained after prolonged and weary probation, and anxious ordeals of really terrible severity.\textsuperscript{17}

The development of those spiritual faculties, whose culture has to do with the highest objects of the occult life, gives rise, as it progresses, to a great deal of incidental knowledge, having to do with physical laws of Nature not yet generally understood. This knowledge, and the practical art of manipulating certain obscure forces of Nature, which it brings in its train, invests an adept, and even an adept's pupils, at a comparatively early stage of their education, with very extraordinary powers, the application of which to matters of daily life will sometimes produce results that seem altogether miraculous.\textsuperscript{18}

These passages, for all their singularity, do point to some sort of meta-class of initiates or adepts, accorded special powers and vouchsafed a particular grace. Though in each case the terminology is idiosyncratic to its author, there are fundamental areas of overlap in terms of both the attributes of these figures as well as their function within the Theosophical discourse. Consequently, it is possible to generalise in the following terms.

\textit{Characteristics and Attributes of a Master}

The Masters are men; they are neither disembodied spirits, nor angels. Through means (not stipulated) they became aware of spiritual progress as an ontic necessity. This knowledge, enhanced and illuminated through undisclosed processes, directed the aspiring Master along the path of conscious evolution and perfection. Having undergone an extensive probation and trials (initiations?), the neophyte was eventually

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 13.
elevated to the status of a Master and was inducted into the hierarchised fraternity.

There are secondary consequences of this process. The Master, now aware of the aetiology of the human condition as a result of having transcended it personally, has at his disposal an array of techniques and technologies, otherwise beyond the range of humans, which he can apply to alleviate imperfection and ignorance. His exalted (evolved) ontology also grants to him a range of supramundane powers: telepathy, the capacity to transport himself ‘to any place to which he may elect to go’, the ability to manipulate ‘occult forces’, knowledge of the ‘physical laws of Nature’, inter alia. Central to his abilities, and a function of his ‘Master-ship’, is the capacity for extreme prolongevity.

Given the rigours of attaining to the status of a Master, only a tiny minority will ever succeed. The Masters are ipso facto an elite, and regard themselves in such terms. Consequently, the path to ‘Master-ship’ is a solitary one and the Masters appear to maintain an ascetic and chaste existence. They function most effectively in secrecy. Conscious evolution has a moral component; the Masters reject turpitude and indulgence of all kinds, and work benevolently and philanthropically.

Functions of the Master

The Master’s primary tasks appear to be three-fold: the guidance of humanity, the training of disciples, and mediation between humanity and the divine will.19

The Masters comprise the real and abiding government of the world. It is they who direct the affairs of mankind so as to produce the outcomes most likely to effect general spiritual and physical progress. They supply the inspiration for human creative pursuits and scientific investigation. Their work is most often undertaken indirectly as they do not usurp the human prerogative of free will. All of their activities are directed toward the enablement of a spiritualised human evolution that can occur only in accord

19 It should be noted here that just as the Masters share common characteristics in the passages quoted, so too one could establish commonality on the definition and attributes of divinity. Though the latter quest does not fall strictly within the parameters of the present work, it will nevertheless require attention as the Masters do appear to incarnate qualities of the divine (as perceived Theosophically); see infra, chs. 12, 13.
with the divine will.

In accord with his task of general overseer, the Master also has a particular pædagogical rôle. The Masters are especially interested in the operations of mundane esoteric fraternities; they watch with interest so as to encourage the work of spiritual progress which is the professed preserve of such groups, and they will occasionally select an individual as a personal pupil for more demanding and rarefied tutelage.

The Master stands in a mesocosm between humanity and the divine, a position which enables him to act as mediator. Having aligned his will with that of the divine as a necessary function of his status, he is in a privileged position to transmit divine dictates to humanity and to endow selected men and women with particular revelation and supramundane potentialities. He is further empowered to act as protector of humanity, and in this capacity works to avert cosmic disaster and to vanquish evil forces (however such forces are defined) bent on retrogressive devolutionary endeavours.

A Working Heuristic

In short, then, a working heuristic definition could read as follows:

The Master is a man who, through conscious effort, has progressed beyond his contemporaries and has achieved earthly perfection. His advanced ontology has opened to him powers and knowledge far in excess of the normal human range. He works to further this process of personal and collective evolution on a macro level by subtle manipulation of human affairs and on a micro level by direct instruction of a pupil or pupils.

Initial Observations

Even at this preliminary stage it is possible to isolate a few other remarks about the Masters which will serve to underscore their value as a phenomenon worthy of observation and analysis by the historian of ideas.
A Masters-based esotericism is also a cosmosophy. Not only does it presuppose a ‘multiple-tier cosmology’, but it also posits a highly sophisticated hierarchical scheme with a fluid and dynamic interchange between strata - premised, it would seem, upon a highly idiosyncratic evolutionism. That this conceptual framework surfaced in a period characterised by a profusion of progressivist ideologies indicates a likely engagement on the part of Theosophical theorists with the prevailing winds of evolutionary theory (inter alia), and may well serve to support Hanegraaff’s contention that esotericism - occultism in particular - rather than being a quixotic escape from modernity, is in fact a ‘mirror of secular thought’. Could the Masters, then, be an eccentric - even valorous - attempt on the part of such theorists to reknit the divine fiat and contemporary science in such a way as to maintain the centrality of the anthropos while consigning Bibliophilic Judaeo-Christian cosmology (with its all-too-distant transcendent God) to the same bin as ultra-naturalist biological determinism?

An intriguing feature of the Masters literature, alluded to in the excerpts supra, is the consistent reference to a system of epochal civilisations erupting in an unusually closely-articulated cyclic time scale. It seems that the Masters have existed for millennia, alternatively assisting humanity in its upward evolutionary struggle, and then retreating into silence during periods of decadence and self-imposed spiritual regression. (Of great significance is the notion that this tendency toward human self-arrest leads not only to a diminishing of spiritual progress, but also to a halt or even a degeneration in physical development. For Blavatsky, then, a highly evolved ‘Race’, in physical, intellectual, and spiritual terms, may well be found side by side with a less well endowed peoples; one waxing, the other waning). Thus by employing the Masters as perennial agents of the cosmic evolutionary impetus, unable and unwilling to interfere with human free will even in such dire circumstances as the antediluvian Fall of Atlantis, such macrohistories have comfortably accommodated the central epistemological challenge of their era - the existence of a vastly elongated pre-Biblical history. Such expansive temporalities seem thereby to have enabled Theosophists to

20 See supra p. 8.
21 Hanegraaff, New Age Religion, passim. The strength of Hanegraaff’s conviction is echoed in his choice of subtitle: ‘Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought’. It is hoped that the present work - devoted, as it is, to two of the most influential occultists of recent times - might contribute to the support for his thesis.
absorb the radical propositions of evolutionist thought which so confounded their more religiously orthodox nineteenth century contemporaries. In other words, cyclic 'Age theory', complemented by an evolutionism which vouchsafed spiritual and physical progression to a secret elite, seems to have allowed Theosophists to reconcile the new scientific epistemologies with a need to ensure an historical *locus* for the Master and his 'primitive wisdom' in a far distant Golden Age: the *Sitz im Leben* of his philosophy.

This cyclicism accounts for the presumed absence of the Masters at vital points in human history and prehistory, and further explains how it is possible that a world which undergoes obvious periodic devastation could nonetheless be marching forward in an ever inclining spiritual progressivism towards 'Deification', 'resurrection', and 'exaltation'. The Master, it seems, operates as an extra-historical 'spiritualising' trigger, capable of initiating and then accelerating eras devoted to human perfectibilism, and later silently lamenting the devolutionary tendencies which retard further development. It appears likely, at least from the excerpts quoted *supra*, that the cyclic periodicity of Age theory and the *motif* of conscious human perfectibilism are two of the hallmarks of Masters-based esotericism.

As has previously been noted, the domain of esotericism is highly fluid. It is not unlikely that one of the characteristics which has both ensured its posterity and maintained its contemporary relevance is its highly syncretistic nature. Indeed, the consistent mythologising and re-mythologising which takes place within the discourse of esotericism has produced a matrix of *storia* which allows esotericisms to be consistently reinvented and re-presented. It is no coincidence that at their core many of the myths of esotericism have to do with shape-shifting and Hermesian ambiguity. It seems the Masters, too, are capable of this same tendency towards mythic malleability. In the passage from Harriette and Homer Curtiss quoted *supra*, Jesus is identified as a Master, which suggests that the motif of the Brotherhood allows for historical figures to be coopted into an all-embracing Theosophical testament. This is interesting for the

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historian of ideas in so far as this all encompassing comprehensiveness posits a *philosophia perennis*, and, importantly, suggests that the Masters are its keepers. The nineteenth century Masters thus become, for Blavatsky, 'the last and only custodians of primitive Wisdom and Truth' - the last in a series of such supramundane guardians whose task it is to safeguard the *prisca theologia* from one generation to the next. It seems that the Masters have employed this primordial tradition as the core of all later theologies; in other words, the arcane esoteric philosophy, protected by the college of Masters, is the *fons et origo* of all later theology, wisdom, and religion. It is not so much that all religions are one, as that all religions - acknowledged or not - are founded in one. The interest for the scholar is surely the ways in which the Masters operate within the dynamic of such a monadic philosophy.

In the passages quoted supra there are instances wherein the author attempts to explain how it was that the Masters were now seeking public attention. After all, the reader would have been justified in asking why, after centuries or even millennia in secret, the Masters had now chosen to publish their presence and activities. The answer, in all such cases, is that '[t]his has been an epoch of crisis, and the great moment for which the Hierarchy has been preparing ever since it was founded upon the Earth'. The Masters were acting either as heralds of a new dawn in human consciousness and evolution, or as prophets of an imminent collapse - and their message was urgent. In this way a degree of messianism enters Theosophy; indeed, such an identification of Master as messiah is never far below the surface. It awaits to be seen how the eschatology of Masters-based esotericism may be characterised: can an essentially

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23 The term *philosophia perennis* was coined, according to Faiivre, by Agostino Steuco in 1540: Faiivre, *Access*, 35. It postulates a veiled tradition of philosophers in an unbroken chain originating in some primordial revelation. Although the lineaments of the various chains may vary, such luminaries as Zoroaster, Orpheus, Moses, and Hermes Trismegistus are commonly implicated. It is significant for a study of the Masters that the chain includes historical personages and those now considered mythical: see id., *The Eternal Hermes*, 39; id., *Access*, 7. See also infra ch. 23.

24 For the *prisca theologia* see supra p. 33.


optimist progressivist philosophy, premised upon an evolutionary imperative toward perfectibility, really accommodate a premillennial 'epoch of crisis' or catastrophe on the scale of Atlantis? If not, how then is the latter, a perennial component of esoteric historiography, to be accommodated within a postmillennial eschatology?

If a brief analysis of certain obvious features contained within ten short passages can suggest such broad and diverse concerns as millennialism, messianism, Age theory, and evolutionary perfectibilism, and also offer insights into the shared engagement between Masters-groups and secularism, Enlightenment philosophy, and modern science, then an investigation into the Masters is amply justified.

27 The demarcation between pre- and postmillennial discourse is not always as clear as may at first be thought. Premillennialist expectation is generally conceived of as an anticipation of a radical discontinuity in the transition from the old world to the new. Postmillennialism, then, emphasises a smooth, and perhaps hardly perceptible transition. See W. H. Oliver, Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1978, 20-22; Wessinger, Annie Besant, 19-39.
PART TWO

HELENA PETROVNA BLAVATSKY
CHAPTER 4

THE EARLY YEARS

An examination of the Masters of the Theosophical Society is an exercise coterminous with an analysis of the career and philosophies of Theosophy's originator and most ardent apologist, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. It matters little if Blavatsky was in fact the creator of the Masters, as her critics have alleged, or their humble amanuensis as she claimed, for questioning the ontic reality of the Masters will avail little insight into their function within the discourse of esotericism. In any event, it is with Madame Blavatsky that the Masters gained fame and currency, and became a pivotal force in the formulation of esotericisms for the subsequent century.


Blavatsky’s could rightly be called an enigmatic history. There can be little doubt that she engineered the construction of an enthusiastically romantic past for herself, yet there are sufficient notes of truthfulness and even candour to suggest that ascriptions to her of imposture and outright deceit are over-stepping the mark. What can be stated categorically is that she was born into circumstances which availed themselves of many of the classical hallmarks of esoteric mythologising: an aristocratic lineage, a multilingual environment, a difficult birth, early omens of a peculiar destiny, serious illness, and an youthful acquaintance with esoteric literature. Such circumstances of early life, coupled with a highly individualistic temperament and a propensity for ‘wonderful psychic gifts’, created the perfect combination of grist to supply the esoteric mill of mythopoeia.

It is typical of her detractors that a certain grudging respect is evinced for Blavatsky for at least having lived a colourful, rich, and mysterious life. Thus even Blavatsky’s cousin, the tsarist statesman Count Sergei Iulevich Witte (1849-1915), who was quite antipathetic to her, and dismissive of her putative psychism, was struck by the ‘extraordinary facility with which she learned’ and considered her a ‘remarkable and, to a degree, demoniacal person’: Sergei Iulevich Witte, The Memoirs of Count Witte, trans. & ed. Sidney Harcave, M. E. Sharpe Inc., Armonk, New York, 1990, 10. Witte suggested that, among other occupations, his cousin had been a circus equestrienne, a florist, and the owner of an ink factory. Witte posed a question which has long captivated her biographers: If one accepts the view that life hereafter is divided among heaven, hell, and purgatory, then the question arises: from which of these did this soul, which inhabited Blavatskaia during her earthly sojourn, come? (Ibid., 11).

Unsurprisingly, Blavatsky’s biographers have tended to divide on the question of the veracity of her claims regarding her early life. The illogical assumption is widely held that if she can be proved a liar in these, all of her subsequent claims can be dismissed.

One such episode, compiled by A. P. Sinnett from ‘family records’, details the conflagration caused during Blavatsky’s baptism when a child’s candle ignited the robes of the officiating Orthodox priest. See Sinnett, Incidents, 13-14. See also Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 21.

Blavatsky claimed to have been ‘sick and ever dying till seven or eight’ (Barker, The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky, 150), though the nature of the illness and its severity are unrecorded. Typically for Blavatsky, she later contradicted herself: ‘Before writing Isis [Unveiled] I was ill only once – when I was fifteen years old’ (Blavatsky to D. A. Counnes, 17 April 1883: reprinted in Michael Games, The Dawning of the Theosophical Movement, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Illinois, 1987, 120).

Childhood and Youth

Elena Petrovna von Hahn was born in Ekaterinoslav in the Ukraine on 12 August, 1831. Her parents were both descended from noble families, particularly her mother, Elena Andreevna de Fadeyev (1814-1842), who could trace several centuries of aristocratic pedigree. Elena Petrovna’s father, Peter Alekseevich von Hahn (1798-1873), was an army colonel, absent from home to such a degree that his direct influence on the young child could only have been slight. Although it is also difficult to determine the influence of the elder Elena upon the younger, it might be noted that she exhibited significant literary skills and had published a dozen novels under the nom de plume ‘Zenaida R-va’ prior to her early death from tuberculosis at the age of 28. Indeed, Elena Andreevna was granted the appellation ‘the Russian George Sand’ due to her views on the emancipation of women from the various social tyrannies of nineteenth-century Russia, a theme not unknown in Blavatsky. One of Blavatsky’s biographers, Gertrude Williams, has noted:

Zenaida’s stories sketched a world where the men were cads and cowards, women invariably the victims, sometimes of man’s lust, sometimes of the cruelty of provincial gossip.

Whatever influence her mother exerted over Blavatsky waned when the eight year old Elena was sent to live with her maternal grandparents, the Fadeyevs. (Her mother was to die two years later). Privy Counsellor Andrei Mihailovich de Fadeyev (1790⁴ - 1867) was at the time provincial governor of Saratov and his wife, Princess Elena Pavlovna Dolgoroukaia (1789-1860), had earned a significant reputation as a student

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⁹This date is reckoned according to the Gregorian calendar. The Julian calendar, then in use in Russia, placed the occasion at 31 July. This is important in that the latter date apparently has an esoteric significance in Russia to do with control over spirits: see Sinnett, *Incidents*, 15; Cranston, *H. P. B.*, 9. Further, it should be noted that Ekaterinoslav has, since 1926, been redesignated by the Ukrainian name Dnepropetrovsk, though a post-Communist return to its original designation seems likely.


¹¹Marion Meade has deduced that Helena Petrovna lived with her father for only twelve months in her first ten years: see Meade, *Madame Blavatsky*, 35.


¹⁴Andrei de Fadeyev was born on 31 December 1789 according to the reckoning of the Julian calendar. Transposed into the Gregorian calendar, this would give the birth year of 1790.
of geology and botany, linguist, artist, and scientific author of some repute.\textsuperscript{15}

According to Blavatsky, the main feature of her life in her grandparents' home was her introduction to the literature of esotericism in the library of her maternal great
grandfather, Prince Pavel Vasilyevitch Dolgoroukii (1755-1837).\textsuperscript{16} Dolgoroukii, an assiduous collector of alchemical and theurgic texts, was a latter-day member of the group of Rosicrucian speculative Freemasons called the Moscow Mystic Masons or
Novikov group, after its leader and apologist, Nikolai Novikov (1744-1818).\textsuperscript{17} Russian Freemasonry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as elsewhere, was
divided along rationalist and illuminist lines. Of the latter, the Rite of Strict
Observance with its doctrine of Unknown Superiors, under the reformist system of the
Prussian Zinnendorf (1731-[1782?]), assumed prominence from the 1780s. It was
into Novikov's Rosicrucian version of this rite that Blavatsky's great grandfather had
likely been initiated.\textsuperscript{18}

Whatever Prince Pavel's exact Freemasonic affiliations may have been, there can be
little doubt that his library of *esoterica* exerted a great fascination upon the young
Elena. Blavatsky claimed to 'have read them with the keenest interest before the age of

\textsuperscript{15} It is noteworthy that Lady Hester Lucy Stanhope (1776-1839) remarked of Helena Pavlovna:

In that barbarian land I met an outstanding woman-scientist, who would have
been famous in Europe, but who is completely underestimated due to her
misfortune of being born on the shores of the Volga River, where there was none
to recognize her scientific value (H. P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. I:

\textsuperscript{16} Paul Johnson places the date of Prince Pavel's death at 1838: see Johnson, *The Masters Revealed*,
19.

\textsuperscript{17} For Novikov and the Moscow Mystic Masons see Lauren G. Leighton, *The Esoteric Tradition in
Russian Romantic Literature: Decembrism and Freemasonry*, Pennsylvania State University Press,
University Park, 1994 *passim*, esp. 197-203; see also Maria Carlson, 'Fashionable Occultism:
Spiritualism, Theosophy, Freemasonry, and Hermeticism in Fin-de-Siècle Russia' in Bernice Glatzer
1997,143-149. For an analysis of Novikov's Rosicrucian Freemasonry see Arthur Edward Waite, *The
Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross: Being Records of the House of the Holy Spirit in its Inward and
Outward History*, University Books, Secaucus, New Jersey, 1973 [1924], 531ff (with care).

\textsuperscript{18} Paul Johnson hints that Prince Pavel may have been an initiate of Novikov's 'Brothers of the Inner
Order', a group devoted to theurgy, alchemy, and the study of Kabbalah. This must remain
conjectural. See Johnson, *The Masters Revealed*, 20. Certainly, the Freemasonic historian Arthur
Edward Waite (1857-1942) claimed that a 'Grand Prince of Dolgourouki' was an 'important member of
the STRICT OBSERVANCE [sic]', though Waite's assertions should be viewed cautiously: see
Arthur Edward Waite, *A New Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry (Ars Magna Latomorum) And of
(1923), 19.
15' Even if a degree of hyperbole can be expected in such reminiscences, it is certainly true that Blavatsky was *au fait* in the language and grammar of esotericism early in her life. The attractions of the library were not sufficiently strong, however, to inhibit the young Elena from marrying Nikifor Vasil'evich Blavatskii (1809-?), the vice governor of the province of Erevan (Yerivan), immediately before her eighteenth birthday in 1849. Within months, however, her innate *Wanderlust* asserted itself and she parted from her husband.

**The Blavatskian Odyssey**

Following her separation from Blavatskii, Mme. Elena Blavatskaia (which she transliterated into English as 'Helena Blavatsky') initiated a period of travel. With all candour it must be acknowledged that the years 1849 to 1871 (that is, from Blavatsky's eighteenth year to her fortieth) are a dim period for the historian, with little objectively attested material, but much confusing conjecture on the part of Blavatsky apologists. Few things are certain. It is known that she was resident in Cairo in the early 1850s, desirous of investigating the 'ways of the serpent charmers' with the American artist, author, and Orientalist Freemasonic entrepreneur Albert Rawson (1828-1902) as her companion. She was in London in 1851, New York in 1853, and Paris in 1858 where she seems likely to have encountered the famous Spiritualist medium Daniel Douglas Home (1833-1886). Before the end of the 1850s it can also be confidently attested that Blavatsky had visited India. During the winter of 1863/1864 to have been 'most likely' the period of Blavatskii's death, though one suspects he was trying to avoid the implication that Blavatsky's second marriage (to Betanelly) was bigamous: see in ibid., vol. VIII, 304n.

Rawson's testimony of his travels with Blavatsky was included in an article from the February 1892 edition of *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* entitled 'Mme. Blavatsky: A Theosophical Occult Apology' (reprinted in Theosophical History, 2.6, April 1988, 209-220). Rawson was occasionally given to self-aggrandisement and romanticising (note Johnson's investigations of Rawson's academic laurels: Johnson, *The Masters Revealed*, 26), so his recollections of his travels with Blavatsky cannot be considered inviolable. It is interesting that in his defence of Blavatsky, Rawson dismisses the Masters as 'so much Hindoo mysticism': Rawson, 'Mme. Blavatsky', 219.

1859/60 Blavatsky was once more in Russia, this time in the house of her recently-widowed sister Vera Petrovna Zhelikhovskaia (then Iakhontova) in Pskov. How many of the following years Blavatsky remained in Russia is uncertain; what can be stated relatively confidently is that she became the adoptive mother of a child, Yuri (possibly her own illegitimate son), in 1862, later travelled within Italy and Austro-Hungary with the child and its adoptive father, the opera singer Agardii Metrovitch (d. 1871?), during 1865 and returned to bury the child in its homeland in 1867.

The apocryphal tales of Blavatsky's fabled expeditions during these 22 years are legion. Some are certainly spurious, such as Geoffrey Barborka's itinerary of Blavatsky's visits to Peru, Mexico, the West Indies, and the United States of America (in order to investigate 'Red Indians', 'Voodooism' and Mormonism), at the same time as Rawson places her in Cairo. Others are rather more intriguing if only because of the possibility that there may be germs of truth in Blavatsky's assertions. One of the more remarkable adventures which Blavatsky claimed for herself was a period of seven years - though not served consecutively - in 'Lamaistic convents' in Tibet, under the tutelage of her Masters:

I will tell him [Mr. Lillie] also that I have lived at different periods in Little Tibet [Balistan] as in Great Tibet, and that these periods form more than seven years ... What I have said, and repeat now, is, that I have stopped in Lamaistic convents; that I have visited Tzi-gadze,

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25 It seems likely that Blavatsky remained in Russia until at least the summer of 1865, and was reunited with her husband for a period of a year: Alfred John Cooper, 'The Letters of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky: 1862-1882', vol. I, Ph. D thesis, School of Studies in Religion, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1998, 3-6. Unfortunately, the earliest known Blavatsky letters post-date 1862, so many of the claims made for her youthful travels remain conjectural.
26 The story of Yuri is a vexed one, both for Theosophists, who regularly maintain Blavatsky's perpetual virginity, and for scholars. Yuri, always an unhealthy child, was likely the son of the spiritualist Nicholas Meyendorff. Marion Meade has assembled impressive evidence to suggest that the child's mother was in fact Blavatsky: Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 76-93. Other Theosophists and biographers avoid the issue altogether, a somewhat disingenuous silence: cf., e.g., Cranston, H. P. B., in which the child does not rate a mention. Yet others rely on contemporary doctors' reports of Anteflexio Uteri and Blavatsky's own claims that she was incapable of birth, and perhaps even intercourse: see Jean Overton Fuller, 'H. P. B.: The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky, Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement by Sylvia Cranston' [rev. art.] in Theosophical History, 4:6-7 (Double Issue), 1993, 220-221.
27 Geoffrey A. Barborka, H. P. Blavatsky, Tibet and Tulku, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1966, 24-25. In Barborka's defence it must be said that such are the contradictions within Blavatsky's own recollections of these years.
the Tashi-Lhünpo territory and its neighbourhood, and that I have been further in, and in such places of Tibet as have never been visited by any other European, and that he can ever hope to visit.\textsuperscript{28}

Theosophical biographers have generally accepted Blavatsky at her word on this point, and have substantiated the claim by reference to other highly anecdotal contemporary accounts of a white woman travelling in Tibet.\textsuperscript{29} Given that Tibet was sealed from foreigners as a matter of official policy, that the journey was rigorous to say the least, and that Blavatsky implied she completed her pilgrimage without prepared provisions and bearers, her Tibetan sojourn appears at best highly unlikely.\textsuperscript{30}

Whatever the veracity of the claims made by, and on behalf of Blavatsky, it is certainly true that by the time she entered her forties she had succeeded in cultivating around herself an air of exotic sophistication. By this time she was representing herself as a Spiritualist medium and psychic,\textsuperscript{31} and was regarded by her associates as ‘Bohemian’ - an impression heightened by her tobacco and ‘hasheesh’ smoking, and compounded by her notoriously uncouth language.\textsuperscript{32} If these were not enough, the next major episode in Blavatsky’s occult career came as the result of a shipwreck off the island of Spetsai \textit{en route} to Egypt. One of only seventeen passengers to have survived (from a manifest of four hundred), Blavatsky was granted free passage to Egypt, where she


\textsuperscript{29} Meade, \textit{Madame Blavatsky}, 472n29. It is not unlikely, however, that she may have reached the border regions of the country.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 70.


\textsuperscript{32} Campbell, \textit{Ancient Wisdom Revived}, 5, 6. The fact of Blavatsky’s tobacco smoking has posed some problems for latter-day Theosophists who mostly decry the practice. It is still a common occurrence for images of Blavatsky smoking to be truncated or airbrushed. A number of Theosophists hold that Blavatsky was required to smoke because her spiritual/etheric body was of such a pure consistency that it would otherwise have dissolved without the ‘grounding’ offered by cigarettes: Gregory John Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater, 1854-1934: A Biographical Study’, vol.3, Ph. D. thesis, Department of Religious Studies, University of Sydney, 1986, 71n16.
arrived, penniless, in late 1871.33

In Cairo, Blavatsky set about establishing her first occult organisation. Entitled the Société Spirite, the new group was devoted to the practical investigation of the reincarnationist theories of Spiritualism espoused by Allen Kardec (Léon-Dénizarth-Hippolyte Rivail, 1804-1869).34 In the light of her later excoriating comments regarding Spiritualism and all forms of necromancy, Blavatsky’s biographers have occasionally stumbled over the Société; Sinnett felt obliged to interpret Blavatsky’s motives as inherently munificent:

[T]here was no other way to give people a chance to see for themselves how mistaken they were ... she was ready to go to any amount of trouble - even to allowing herself to be regarded for a time as a helpless medium.35

Though there is really no reason to suspect that Blavatsky’s disenchantment with Spiritualism was complete by 1871, there are indications that she was searching for alternatives to satisfy her intellectual hunger for an enlightened esotericism. It appears that at least part of this quest was founded in a desire to institute some sort of novel occult fellowship with Blavatsky as its incarnated and presiding genius. Sadly, however, her Société proved not to be the vehicle of promise. Within two weeks it was a ‘heap of ruins’, with Blavatsky furious over the mediums’ embezzlement, drunkenness, and fraudulence, and having narrowly, she claimed, avoided being shot ‘by a madman ... [who] got possessed I suppose by some vile spook’.36 It is evident that although the Société survived, at least until 1874 when James Peebles (1822-67)
1922) was invited to a séance held at the summit of the Great Pyramid, it had failed to engage the interest of its authoress. It is at this time that Blavatsky renewed her acquaintance with the Coptic magician Paulos Metamon. About this man history records little except his mendacity, and the fear and dread in which he was held by his countrymen. Nevertheless, he apparently held a position of honour in Blavatsky’s eyes and it is possible, as Joscelyn Godwin has opined, that ‘Blavatsky and Metamon were involved in practical occultism that had nothing to do with the putative spirits of the dead’. Blavatsky returned to Russia in July, 1872, having tired of her Société Spirite. It was during the nine months spent with family in Odessa that she offered her services to the Director of the Third Section, the feared Russian secret police, as an espionage agent. This episode, hotly contested by Theosophists, is of interest here only in so far as it indicates a certain propensity on Blavatsky’s part for enterprise and picaresque

38 Blavatsky and Rawson had encountered the Egyptian during their investigations of Cairo in the early 1850s, when both had dressed as *fellahin* in order to travel around Cairo unmolested: see Rawson, ‘Mme. Blavatsky’, 210.
39 For the former see in ibid., 210; for the latter see Sinnett, *Incidents*, 126. René Guénon (1886-1951), the ‘Descartes of esotericism’ according to Faiivre (Faiivre, *Access*, 101) and the inspiration for the modern Perennialist school (which advocates a metaphysics predicated upon the existence of a primordial tradition), has claimed that Paulos Metamon was actually the father of the elusive Max Théon (Louis Maximilien Bimstein, [1850?]-1927), the founder of the *Mouvement Cosmique*. This almost certainly fanciful claim is of interest primarily in that it furnishes two of Paul Johnson’s identifications of Blavatsky’s Masters: Metamon as Serapis Bey and Bimstein as Tuitt Bey. In fact, it is unlikely that Blavatsky encountered the ever-fascinating Théon in Cairo in 1871: see Joscelyn Godwin, Christian Chaneel & John P. Deveney, eds., *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Light: Initiatic and Historical Documents of an Order of Practical Occultism*, Samuel Weiser, York Beach, Maine, 1995, 8-9, 438-442. It might be noted that the marked tendency to include Guénon among the Perennialists has more to do with their subsequent publishing of his books, than with any overt historical causality. (Until the late 1970s, the Perennialists were known as the Traditionalists. The change seems to have occurred in response to a desire for academic recognition, and has been concretised by Faiivre’s and Hanegraaff’s consistent usage). For all of his protestations to the contrary, Guénon had more in common with Blavatsky than with such Traditionalists as Schuon, Comaraswamy, and Nasr.
adventurings: she was nothing if not inventive.\textsuperscript{42}

Following her unsuccessful application to the Third Section, Blavatsky journeyed on to Paris and, shortly thereafter, to New York, arriving on 7 July, 1873. It has been a common assumption in Theosophical literature that by the time she disembarked in the United States of America, Blavatsky had disavowed any interest in Spiritualism and was directing her energies into the establishment of the Theosophical Society.\textsuperscript{43} Her letters of the period belie such an easy modalism; in fact Blavatsky described herself as 'a “spiritist” and “spiritualist” in the full significance of these two terms’ as late as November, 1874.\textsuperscript{44} An ‘Important Note’, found after Blavatsky’s death in 1891, contains the following account of her motives:

I was sent from Paris on purpose to America to ... show the fallacy of the Spiritualistic theories of ‘Spirits.’ But how could I do it best? ... I had received ORDERS ... I had to keep alive the reality, the genuineness and possibility of such phenomena in the hearts of those who from Materialists had turned Spiritualists and now, owing to the exposure of several mediums fell back again, returning to their skepticism.\textsuperscript{45}

Blavatsky’s allusion to the exposure of fraudulent mediums may indeed have proved a definitive factor in her rejection of Spiritualism. Certainly, with a more than slightly disingenuous retrospectivity, she was later to claim that Spiritualism had been but a blind for her true occult purposes. Nevertheless, it seems evident that Blavatsky had tired of the practice, recognising that it would not for long remain in the ascendant; indeed, one of Blavatsky’s great personal assets, as will become clear, was her

\textsuperscript{42} There is no indication that her services were accepted.
\textsuperscript{43} Most biographers place too much emphasis on the veracity of Blavatsky’s later claims that Spiritualism was an exoteric means to an esoteric end: cf., eg., Murphet, \textit{When Daylight Comes}, 72, 83; Charles J. Ryan, \textit{H. P. Blavatsky and the Theosophical Movement: A Brief Historical Sketch}, 2nd ed., Point Loma Publications, San Diego, 1975, 44ff.
\textsuperscript{44} Helena Blavatsky to A. N. Aksakov, 14 November, 1874 in Cooper, ‘The Letters’, vol. I, xxxvi. It should be noted that this comment may reflect Blavatsky’s self-image as one of a reformer of Spiritualism.
\textsuperscript{45} Blavatsky, \textit{Collected Writings}, vol. I, 72-73. De Zirkoff’s dating of the document is highly questionable. Another version of the same note is to be found in Henry Steel Olcott’s history of the Theosophical Society, though it differs slightly. (It was he who had found the letter within Blavatsky’s scrapbooks, as the latter possibly intended). See Henry Steel Olcott, \textit{Old Diary Leaves: The True Story of the Theosophical Society}, G. P. Putnam’s Sons, New York, 1895, 13-14. No doubt ‘ORDERS’ refer to Blavatsky’s alleged Masters.
capacity to ride the wave of the Zeitgeist to personal advantage. It is clear that she had come to the opinion that Spiritualism lacked the essential underpinnings of a systematic and comprehensive esotericism, and so she determined to formulate a 'macro-esotericism' which would adequately encompass the phenomenal data of Spiritualism, but which would also address the new epistemologies sponsored by the scientific humanism of the late nineteenth century.

Fraternities and Friendships

In order that her occult synthesis would be received by those whose opinions she valued, and that there would be a receptive sympathetic readership awaiting her pronouncements, Blavatsky turned again to the possibility of instituting a public organisation as a means of disseminating her theories to a wide audience. For such a venture she required associates.

Blavatsky's early associations reveal much about her preoccupations. To a man (throughout her life Blavatsky's closest friends and partners were male), their interests represented every major constellation of the esoteric firmament - from Spiritualism to Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, and beyond. It is not overstating the situation to suggest that Blavatsky's early coterie of acquaintances were a natural pedagogical progression from the obscure esoteric texts in her great grandfather's library. Blavatsky was an omnivorous reader, primarily of the esoteric corpus and related fictional works, but she also supplemented her literary diet with a range of somewhat eccentric philosophical, philological, and historical conjecturings,

46 Robert Ellwood has characterised the relationship between Spiritualism and Theosophy thus: The frontiers of this ['inner plane'] realm are probed by Spiritualism, but, according to Theosophy, though one may be brought toward it by that faith, its entities are only wretched lorelei compared to the true splendors of the Masters' occult world (Robert S. Ellwood, Jr., *Alternative Altars: Unconventional and Eastern Spirituality in America*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1979, 110).

47 'Macro-esotericism' might be considered a similar phenomenon to macrohistory in so far as both gather all available data into an over-arching synthesis. For the definition of macrohistory applied in the present work see supra 24n53.

48 There are one or two exceptions to this rule, such as that of Annie Besant. Nonetheless, the conclusion seems warranted.
occasionally of a rather outré nature. These she integrated within her ever-expanding reservoir of mythistorical musings and hypotheses, garnering small treasures along the way for later incorporation into her own mature macrohistorical programmes. Blavatsky was no ingénue in the field of such literature, nor was her mind akin to a pristine tabula rasa, passively receiving the imprint of her voracious reading. Rather, Blavatsky was a collector, receiving and classifying information in an order idiosyncratic to herself, and, until her publications of the late 1870s at the earliest, it is often unclear exactly what policy governed her acquisitions.

As with her voracious reading, so, too, the interests and experiences of Blavatsky’s earliest acquaintances became grist to her esoteric mill. The first occult friendship of her maturity was Albert Rawson (1828-1902), who had accompanied her on her explorations of Cairo in the early 1850s. Rawson has become known to posterity as an artist and prolific author of books detailing Oriental geography, linguistics, and ‘comparative religion’. It should be noted that Rawson’s ‘exoteric’ output was matched only by his esoteric pursuits and publications. His quest for first-hand evidence of Oriental initiatic societies (being himself an ‘adopted’ brother of the Moabite Bedouin and the recipient of Druze initiation in Lebanon) was not motivated purely by academic concerns; indeed, Rawson incorporated much of what he learned during his sojourns in the Middle East into a series of idiosyncratic and unorthodox Freemasonic rites. His ‘Orientalising’ Freemasonry promulgated an arabicized Islamic ethos within various rites, most notably his Guardians of the Mystic Shrine. As with many of his esoterically-inclined associates, Rawson’s Freemasonic affiliations were

49 Much attention has been focused upon the literary sources of Blavatsky’s books, and the claim of plagiarism has regularly been levelled at her reliance on (often unacknowledged) sources. This issue will be addressed infra ch. 8. Unfortunately this debate has tended to focus upon Blavatsky’s literary borrowings, and has preempted any valuable analysis of the exact nature of her personal preferences in literature. A detailed study of Blavatsky’s favourite authors, particularly of fiction works, would likely prove highly informative.

50 See supra p. 64-66.


not restricted to the observances of normative Freemasonry, but also extended to encompass the abundance of paramasonic orders and rites then becoming available. These fringe Freemasonic phenomena were both a product of the nineteenth century fascination with things occult, and a strong magnet for those inclined to such pursuits - providing, of course, that they were men.53

Another of Blavatsky's close associates of the early 1870s was Charles Sotheran (1847-1902), a man not unlike Rawson in his fascination with the ever-expanding panoply of heterodox rites available to the contemporary aspiring esotericist. Like Rawson, Sotheran was something of a Masonic entrepreneur: aside from his membership of the normative Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, in which he held the honour of Assistant Grand Secretary General of the Supreme Council, he had also been initiated into such speculative rites as the Rite of Memphis, the Swedenborgian Rite, the Antient and Primitive Rite, as well as Rawson's Guardians of the Mystic Shrine.54 Sotheran's rather eclectic Freemasonic enthusiasms were wedded to a profound rejection of Christianity and a Mazzinist revolutionary fervour, a blend not so conspicuously mismatched as may at first be thought.55 Sotheran's hero, the redoubtable Cagliostro, had himself proved to be a martyr to each of these causes:

In May 1789, boldly planting himself in the very patrimony of St. Peter, [Cagliostro] defies the papal chair, and the hierarch or pantarch of religious and political despotism, as did in later days the intrepid Mazzini. His martyrdom - his crucifixion is about to commence!56

53 For a discussion of the proliferation of such rites cf., eg., Howe, 'Fringe Masonry in England, 1870-85', 242-316; J. M. Hamill [et. al.], 'John Yarker: Masonic Charlatan?' in Ars Quatuor Coronatorum 109, 1997, 191-214. 54 A documentation of Sotheran's Freemasonic affiliations is available in Johnson, The Masters Revealed, 82-86. Much credit is due to Johnson for rehabilitating Rawson and Sotheran as probable ideational influences upon Blavatsky. See also Who Was Who In America, vol. I, 1157. 55 For Mazzini, see supra 67n33. 56 Charles Sotheran, Alessandro di Cagliostro: Impostor or Martyr: quoted in Johnson, The Masters Revealed, 88. Blavatsky eventually parted company with Sotheran over the latter's radical socialism. A newspaper cutting from The New York Herald (6 September, 1878, pAl, which details a rather strident speech given by Sotheran to strikers and which Blavatsky pasted into vol. VII of her Scrapbook, has a notandum in Blavatsky's script: A Theosophist becoming a rioter, encouraging revolution & MURDER, a friend of communards - is no fit member for our Society. HE HAS TO GO (Gomes, The Dawning, 156. Gomes also notes that de Zirkoff has transcribed 'communards' for 'Communists': cf. Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. I, 404).
For the esoteric Freemasons of the late nineteenth century, Cagliostro's 'martyrdom' at the hands of the Inquisition cannot be understood solely in political, or even in anti-ecclesiastical terms.\(^57\) For them, Cagliostro incarnated the native defiance of esotericism in the face of the rationalist challenge. He was deemed to be a champion of moral, political, spiritual, and \textit{physical} regeneration - and, as such, an ideal template for the perfected Freemason.\(^58\)

Blavatsky's knowledge of Freemasonic arcana had exhibited itself early in her international wanderings. As Rawson himself had stated:

> Madame visited Paris on her way to New York, and compared notes with Thevenot, Grand Secretary of the Grand Orient of France, and astonished that very learned and highly advanced Freemason by her knowledge of all the secrets of the degrees in one branch to the Thirty-third, and in another to the Ninety-fifth.\(^59\)

There can be little doubt that Blavatsky mined the experience of such men as Rawson in her quest for an occult synthesis.\(^60\) In this latter, she would subsequently prove to be something of a savant, gifted with remarkable recall and able to synthesise any number of seemingly disparate streams of information into her overarching systematising of esoteric lore. In the early 1870s, though, it appears that Blavatsky was intent upon immersing herself in the myriad esotericisms of her era, with the objective, perhaps, of eventually establishing her own occult organisation. If an

\(^{57}\) For Cagliostro see \textit{supra} ch. 5.


\(^{59}\) Rawson, 'Mme. Blavatsky', 211.

\(^{60}\) Rawson and Sotheran have been selected for survey because they seem to have been seminal influences and representative of the men with whom Blavatsky was associated. Certainly, it seems that Freemasonry was a common denominator of many of these friendships. In this context it is worth mentioning John Yarker (1833-1913), who, in August, 1877, (in his capacity as Arch Registrar of the Royal Oriental Order of the Sikha and the Sat B’hai) conferred upon Blavatsky \textit{honoris causa} the degree of Arch Auditor. He later awarded her the rank of 'crowned Princess of Rite of Adoption' in his own Antient and Primitive Rite: for details see Hamill [et. al.], 'John Yarker: Masonic Charlatan?', 208-209; H. P. Blavatsky, 'H. P. Blavatsky's Masonic Patent' in id., \textit{A Modern Panarion: a Collection of Fugitive Fragments from the pen of H. P. Blavatsky}, [ed. G. R. S. Mead], The Theosophical Publishing Society, London, 1895, 128-131. Yarker's fringe Masonic rites, especially the Sat B’hai (established \textit{circa} 1870 by James Henry Lawrence Archer, but ostensibly Yarker's creature), espoused an Orientalist (crucially, Hindu) ethos and a philosophical template of Western progressivist perfectibilism. That such fusions were very much \textit{en vogue} in the 1870s is clear - and indicative of the type of esoteric crucible from which Theosophy was later formed.
idealised speculative Freemasonry, mediated to Blavatsky by mythopœic Masonic entrepreneurs, provided the model for her musings regarding a society of esotericists, then the ground had been more than amply fertilised by her experiences of Spiritualism. She intuited that adherents of both Freemasonry and Spiritualism were earnestly seeking a satisfying occult Weltanschauung - and that it would be from these that she could form the nucleus of her new collegium.

In the interim, though, Blavatsky proved not unlike many purveyors of a new or reformed spiritual dispensation; as well as teachers, acknowledged or not, her ego and missionary zeal required disciples. The former category, represented by Rawson and Sotheran inter alia, appears within the formative years of Blavatsky's spiritual apprenticeship; the latter category naturally appears later, and is best represented by the figure of Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907).

Where Blavatsky's first 40 years have been characterised by all commentators, religionist and reductionist, as demonstrably unconventional, Olcott's were perhaps more normative. He had enjoyed dual careers in agriculture and journalism, and then commissioned military service during the American Civil War. Olcott's outward appearance of benign middle-class respectability, however, concealed the inner man

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61 Henry Steel Olcott, the President-Founder of Theosophy, has been the subject of several highly religionist biographies: cf., eg., Howard Murphet, Yankee Beacon of Buddhist Light: Life of Col. Henry S. Olcott, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Illinois, 1988 (originally published in 1972 as Hammer on the Mountain. The Life of Henry Steel Olcott); Hridaya N. Agarwal, comp., Reminiscences of Colonel H.S. Olcott, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1932. By far the most scholarly biography is Stephen Prothero, The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1996. While Prothero's work is highly competent, there remain some factual errors (e.g., Blavatsky did not divorce her first husband: cf. p. 43), and certain unresolved issues of interpretation. Prothero concludes that Theosophy's 'only discernible dogma was the paradoxical liberal shibboleth of nondogmatism' (p. 49), and suspects that the resultant 'religious liberalism' (surely better termed relativism) encouraged Blavatskian Theosophy to function 'as a sacred canopy that stretched across all the world's faiths, Buddhism included' (p. 121). Prothero, who introduces his biography with an excursis about the unacknowledged ontic elitisms of the 'religious liberalism' of his own Harvard Divinity School, states that his 'book is informed, therefore, by a fundamental mistrust of schemes, however well-intentioned, that begin by judging all religious traditions to be true' (p. x). Unfortunately for Prothero, this axiomatic stance discolours his understanding of Theosophy which, in its Blavatskian formulation, is not, properly speaking, relativistic at all. A close reading of Blavatsky makes it abundantly clear that all religions are not true, but are likely to contain a trace of the [one] truth. Thus it is that she presented Theosophy not as a religiously-agglomerate meta-narrative, but as an undying priscia theologia. It must be noted, however, that Prothero's contention that Olcott was a subject of the 'creolization' of liberal American Protestantism and Theravada Buddhism is entirely probable; there is significant evidence that Olcott's knowledge of the (Blavatskian) Theosophical enterprise was slight.
who, upon entering his forties, had initiated a personal religious quest that had begun like Blavatsky's with forays into Spiritualism. That Blavatsky and Olcott were to meet at a renowned site of Spiritualist pilgrimage, the house of William and Horatio Eddy in Chittenden, Vermont, possesses a certain symmetry. Spiritualism, like the omnipresent Freemasonry, was still in the 1870s a beacon for budding esotericists and a catchall for those possessed of a desire for arcane or supramundane insights. The irony exists in the fact that the society which Blavatsky and Olcott would institute a year after their meeting, and over which the two would preside for the remainder of their lives, would wrest the mantle of occult overlordship from Spiritualism and become itself the magnet and haven for the next generation of esotericists.

[42] For the meeting see Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, ch. I. For the Eddys and the Chittenden phenomena see Frank Podmore, *Mediums of the 19th Century*, vol. 2, University Books, New York, 1963, 115ff. (Podmore's work, one of the earliest extensive investigations into Spiritualism was originally published as *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism* in 1902).
CHAPTER 5

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

It has become a commonplace for commentators to conjure an entirely fanciful revisionist history for the establishment of the Theosophical Society. Many such writers envision an extraordinary epistemological leap occurring on the night of 7 September, 1875, in Blavatsky’s New York apartments, when sixteen or seventeen enthusiasts decided to inaugurate a body for the study of arcane lore. Indeed, the evening is often considered to have occasioned a revolutionary break with outmoded and moribund vehicles of esoteric speculation such as Spiritualism and Freemasonry, and the instituting of an association capable of ushering in a period of scientific esotericism for the modern world.

Unsurprisingly, this romantic historiography does not accommodate known facts. The Theosophical Society most certainly did not appear ex nihilo, but had been a prospect in Blavatsky’s mind at least since her abortive attempt to found the Société Spirite in Cairo some three years prior. So, too, Olcott had attempted a similar feat (with, it must be said, similar results) with his Miracle Club in May of 1875 during Blavatsky’s temporary residence in Philadelphia. In fact, a thorough examination of Blavatsky’s early career will indicate that the institution of some species of society was an inevitable result of her zealous temperament and unflinching belief in her pædagogical powers and prophetic vocation.

Just as many authors have unduly eulogised the founding of the Theosophical Society, so, too, later reductionist critics have either openly claimed or tacitly inferred that the society reneged on its early promises. Peter Washington has written that the aims of the Society were a ‘muddle’ and ‘puzzling’:

1 For details of the founding of the Theosophical Society see, e.g., Josephine Ransom, A Short History of the Theosophical Society, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1938, 76ff.
2 Blavatsky later claimed that the suggestion to initiate the Miracle Club came in a letter from Tuitit Bey, Olcott’s first Master: see C. Jinarajadasa, comp., Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom: Second Series, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1925, 12; cf. also Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. I, 89-90. For Tuitit Bey see infra ch. 6.
[The Theosophical Society] started from the premise that fundamental truths and values are universal and that all religions are essentially the same religion. Furthermore, the Society confused the issue by proclaiming humanitarian social ideals: studying spiritual science went with promoting the Brotherhood of Man.\(^3\)

Washington’s comments exemplify the impoverished historiography which has until recently characterised the study of the Theosophical Society, and which make a rigorous empirical methodology all the more crucial for an exacting analysis.\(^4\) The Theosophical Society has changed direction and emphasis many times throughout its history and never more so than in its pupal stage; indeed, the decades subsequent to its establishment witnessed a dramatic revisioning of its nature, self-characterisation, and objectives.\(^5\) The objectives to which Washington refers, however obliquely, were not adopted until 1879 and not enshrined as the ‘Three Objects’ of the Society until as late as 1886:

1) To form the nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed or colour.

2) To promote the study of Áryan and other Eastern literatures, religions and sciences.

3) A third object, pursued by a portion of the members of the Society, is to investigate unexplained laws of nature and the psychical powers of man.\(^6\)

The original aims of the Society, though perhaps less fraternal, were no less idealistic:

The title of the Theosophical Society explains the objects and the desires of the founders: they seek to obtain knowledge of the nature and the attributes of the supreme power and of the most elevated spirits by means of physical procedures. In other words, they hope

\(^3\) Washington, *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon*, 55.

\(^4\) Olcott explicitly stated that:

The idea of Universal Brotherhood was not there [and only] later on, however, when our sphere of influence extended so as to bring us into relations with the Asiatics and their religions and social systems, it became a necessity, and, in fact, the corner-stone of our edifice. The Theosophical Society was an evolution, not - on the visible plane, - a planned creation (Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, 120-121).

\(^5\) For a detailed comparison of the changes in the Theosophical Society’s objects, structure, and rules see Ransom, *A Short History*, 545-553.

\(^6\) Ibid., 548-549.
that in going more deeply than modern science into the philosophies
of ancient times, they can become capable of acquiring for
themselves and for other investigators, the proof of the existence of
an invisible world, of the nature of its inhabitants, if there are any,
of the laws which govern them and of the their relations with the
human race.\textsuperscript{7}

The practical, even theurgic, aims of the Society are further emphasised by Blavatsky:

\begin{quote}
We want to make an experimental comparison between spiritualism
and the magic of the ancients by following literally the instructions
of the old Cabbalas, both Jewish and Egyptian.\textsuperscript{8}
\end{quote}

It seems, then, that in its infancy the Theosophical Society pursued practical evocatory
objectives, not unlike a number of other Illuminist Freemasonic and allied bodies.\textsuperscript{9}

That the rupture with Freemasonry had not been as decisive as subsequent apologists
may have wished is further highlighted by the 1876 resolution that the Society be
reorganised to adopt an obligation of secrecy and its concomitant paraphernalia of
signs and passwords.\textsuperscript{10} Such iconography of Freemasonry were not accidental:
throughout its New York gestation, and even after its removal to India, the Society
was intent not simply to model itself on Freemasonry, but even to consider itself as an

\textsuperscript{7} Emma Hardinge Britten, ‘The Late Baron de Palm and the New York Theosophical Society’,
(originally published in \textit{Banner of Light} 29:12, June 17, 1876): quoted in John Patrick Devaney,
\textit{Astral Projection or Liberation of the Double and the Work of the Early Theosophical Society}
(Theosophical History Occasional Papers vol. VI), Theosophical History, Fullerton, California, 1997,
45.

\textsuperscript{8} Solovyoff, \textit{A Modern Priestess}, 256-257. Vsevolod Solovyoff (Solov'ev) was the elder brother of
the Russian theosopher and sophiologist Vladimir Solov'ev (1853-1900) whose relationship with the
Theosophical Society was itself somewhat fraught: see Carlson, \textit{No Religion}, 46-50. \textit{A Modern Priestess of Isis}
was originally serialised in the journal \textit{Russkii Vestnik} under the title of
‘Sovremennaiia zhitsa Izidy (Moe znakomstvo E. P. Blavatskoi)’. Cf. also Devaney, \textit{Astral Projection}, 44-45.

\textsuperscript{9} In response to the documentary evidence suggesting an evocatory motivation underpinning the
founders’ objectives, James Santucci has wondered ‘are we actually confronted with a Society that was
more a theourgia and less a theosophia?’: James A. Santucci, ‘George Henry Felt: The Life
Unknown’ in \textit{Theosophical History}, vol. VI:7, 1997, 261. For a partial answer one need only
remember that an experiment undertaken at Blavatsky’s behest, designed to demonstrate how she had
discovered the means of human flight, involved the ‘magnetising’ of a cat by means of a charge from
an electrical battery: the cat died. For details see the letter from Blavatsky to A N. Aksakov, \textit{circa}
September 1876, in Solovyoff, \textit{A Modern Priestess}, 275. (It is significant that John Cooper, having
made an assiduous study of Blavatsky’s letters, concluded that the Aksakov correspondence was

\textsuperscript{10} Olcott, \textit{Old Diary Leaves}, 468-469.
incipient Rite. Olcott's reminiscences make it clear that this decision was founded on the pragmatic assumption that Theosophy would be best served by being disseminated through preexisting channels. In reality, Blavatsky and Olcott were simply the most recent in a long line of esotericists who had desired to awaken Freemasonry from what they considered to be its collective slumber and to quicken the esoteric pulse which they believed lay in its heart. The means to rekindle the flagging esoteric evangelical purpose of Freemasonry would be found, significantly, in an injection of 'Eastern occult thought'.

On the 17th April [1878] we began to talk with Sotheran, General T., and one or two other high Masons about constituting our Society into a Masonic body with a Ritual and Degrees; the idea being that it would form a natural complement to the higher degrees of the craft, restoring to it the vital element of Oriental mysticism which it lacked or had lost.

Given the 1878 removal of the Society's headquarters to India, the putative conversion of its founders to Buddhism, and the speedy Indicising of its outlook and membership during the 1880s, most commentators, writing with the global perspective of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, have incorrectly assumed that the 'Oriental mysticism' of the early Theosophical Society was Indian, or at the least Asian, in orientation. This was not the case.

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11 Sinnett's recollections of the early years of Theosophy are illustrative of the Society's interest in Freemasonic iconography. In 1881, six years after its inception, the Society still occasionally entertained notions of itself as a secret group:

Were we, or were we not to be a secret society? Colonel Olcott, inclining to be attached to form and ceremony, had invented a ceremony of 'initiation' into the Society, that newly joining members were called upon to go through. They were taught a form of words to be used in addressing a stranger, if one desired to ascertain whether he was a member of the Society or not. These had to be answered, if he were a member, by other forms of words and there was a rather clumsy hand grip to be learned (A. P. Sinnett, *The Early Days of Theosophy in Europe*, Theosophical Publishing House Ltd., London, 1922, 29).

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.
Ex Oriente Lux?

The eastward gaze of the Christian West has been afforded probing analysis by critics from virtually all of the discrete social scientific disciplines. Unfortunately, specifically esoteric Orientalism has not yet undergone independent study. Thus it is that such entities as the Theosophical Society have tended to be subsumed into much greater meta-discourses; in fact, Theosophy has more often than not been characterised as a symptom of Victorian Indophile enthusiasm. Yet such an analysis is over-hasty.

For Blavatsky and her fellow esotericists of the early 1870s, the mystic east was situated, for the main, in and around Egypt. Certainly, this idealised Egypt was mediated to Blavatsky by a spurious and romantic historicism wedded to a quixotic determinism (founded upon the stubborn notion - *ex oriente lux* - that all that is good and pure must have originated outside of Christian orthodoxy, and remain extra-mural to it). Such an ahistorical construct is indicative not so much of the paucity of the nineteenth century scholarly treatment of the Egyptian-European cultural interface, as much as it is of Blavatsky's wilful suppression of divergent opinion under the weight of her own macrohistorical programme. For Blavatsky, Egypt, as the crucible of Hermeticism, was the *fons et origo* of arcane lore; in this she was following an esoteric precedent established by such other luminaries as Giordano Bruno - a man for whom she professed great respect. For Blavatsky, then, antique Egypt represented a primordial religious idyll, a spirituality *sub specie aeternitatis*, unconfounded by
later accretions and concretised orthodoxies. That this view did not hold with accepted scholarly consensus was incidental to her programme for, as will become increasingly clear, Blavatsky’s appropriation of Egyptian, and later Indian, motifs should be seen as a synthetic universalist superstructure wedded to a preexisting, thoroughly Western infrastructure.

Late modern scholarship has maintained a lively interest in the Egyptian cultural and spiritual matrix, particularly with regard to Alexandrian Hermeticism and Gnosticism(s), even to the degree of occasionally (re)positing an Egyptian prisca theologia. What must be recalled to mind is that at the time of the institution of the Theosophical Society in 1875, Egypt was deemed by most esotericists to have been the esoteric wellspring par excellence. Indeed, the immediate inspiration for the establishment of the Society had been a lecture delivered on the night of 7 September by George Henry Felt (1831-1906) entitled ‘The Lost Canon of Proportion of the Egyptians’20 which, despite its unprepossessing title, claimed for its author the rediscovery of the technology whereby Egyptian magician-priests had evoked ‘elementals’ to visible manifestation.21

That Egypt had become the locus for a pre-Christian esoteric Golden Age is made explicit in the importation into Freemasonry of the iconography of Egypt, albeit in a highly idiosyncratic form. Such a process began in earnest with Allesandro Cagliostro, whose ‘Egyptian Rite of Freemasonry’, propagated throughout Europe during the 1780s, became notorious for its claims of contact with angelic entities.22 Needless to say, Cagliostro’s Egyptophilia was highly idealised and relied heavily on exotic accoutrements, yet remained peopled by the standard Freemasonic pantheon of Greek virtues and Old Testament prophets and kings.23 The confluence of interest by the early Theosophs in Egypt, Freemasonry, and the visible evocation of semi-

19 Romantic views of ancient Egypt were hugely popular in Blavatsky’s day: see Mursi Saad el Din & John Cromer, Under Egypt’s Spell: The Influence of Egypt on Writers in English from the 18th Century, Bellow Publishing, London, 1991.
20 An alternative title may have been ‘The Cabala’: see Santucci, ‘George Henry Felt’, 243.
21 Unfortunately for Felt’s reputation it seems his promise of repeating his feat for the public was left unfulfilled: in ibid., 255-256.
22 For Cagliostro see infra ch. 6.
divine forces is emphasised by Olcott:

Now that I come to look back at it, we were in reality but planning to
repeat the work of Cagliostro, whose Egyptian Lodge was in his
days so powerful a centre for the propagation of Eastern occult
thought.\textsuperscript{24}

This excursis into the Egyptian esoteric wellspring from which Theosophy drew
inspiration may initially appear to bear little relationship to an investigation into the
Theosophical Masters. Indeed, it has been the contention of many that the Masters of
the Theosophical Society were simply Occidental masks drawn over the faces of Hindu
devas and Buddhist Bodhisattvas and, as such, they necessarily stood at a remove
from Western spiritual traditions.\textsuperscript{25} That Egypt and its widely-attested esoteric heritage
may have served as an early focus for Theosophical conceptual mapping, and that the
avowed objective of early members was evocatory and theurgical, is indicative that
such assumptions of origins and purpose may be premature, or even unfounded.

It is true that the Theosophical Society absorbed Indian motifs and certain theological
tenets in an ever-increasing trajectory after 1878, but the question remains as to
whether such Indophilia comprises the root stock of the Theosophical enterprise or
rather had been grafted upon a structure with a preexisting metaphysical framework.
In responding to this question it is informative to examine the early manifestations of
Blavatsky’s Masters, and to trace the development of Theosophical Masters-
esotericism from its embryonic form in the early 1870s to its fulfilment in a full-
fledged, if novel, teleology only a decade later.

\textsuperscript{24} Olcott, \textit{Old Diary Leaves}, 468.

\textsuperscript{25} Cf., eg., Washington, \textit{Madame Blavatsky’s Baboon}, 36-40 \textit{et passim}.
It is often the tendency when faced with a creative imagination so well developed as Blavatsky’s that scholars will assume the philosophical or cosmological formulations of later life were present in germinal form in early years. Going one step further, Blavatsky apologists have assumed that the sophistication of Blavatsky’s esoteric œuvre is due to an early encounter with her Master or Masters, an encounter which made her subsequent two decades of international wanderings appear more as a preordained spiritual apprenticeship than as arbitrary meanderings. Religionist writers have been assisted in this enterprise by certain of her self-referential claims.

It has been customary to fix the date of Blavatsky’s ‘chelaship’ (that is, her apprenticeship to a Master) to her twentieth birthday. Her sketchbook contains a rather intriguing entry:

_Nuit mémorable! Certaine nuit, par un clair de lune qui se couchait à Ramsgate 12 Août, 1851, *lorsque je recontrais [then follows a symbol which looks rather like ‘M.B.’] le Maître de mes rêves!!*

*Le 12 août - c’est juillet 31 style russe jour de ma naissance - Vingt ans!*

The sketchbook, presumably in storage in Russia during Blavatsky’s travels, was only returned to its owner by her aunt, Madame N. A. de Fadeyev, in the mid-1880s. Blavatsky delighted in the reappearance of the book and immediately cited the 1851
entry: ‘the day I saw my blessed Master’. Countess Constance Wachtmeister (1838-1910), one of Blavatsky’s companions from 1885, noted an apparent contradiction; Blavatsky had regularly claimed that her first meeting with her Master had taken place in London, not in Ramsgate as the sketchbook suggested. In response to Wachtmeister’s questioning, Blavatsky explained that the entry was deliberately obscurantist and that Ramsgate had been a blind to deflect the interest of any who may have discovered the book: the real encounter had taken place in Hyde Park, London.

Indeed, the London meeting between the young Russian and her Master is central to the Blavatsky myth:

When she was in London, in 1851, with her father, Colonel Hahn, she was one day out walking when, to her astonishment, she saw a tall Hindu in the street with some Indian princes … The next day … she saw the same form approaching her, and then her Master told her that he had come to London with the Indian princes on an important mission, and he was desirous of meeting her personally, as he required her co-operation in a work which he was about to undertake. He then told her how the Theosophical Society was to be formed, and that he wished her to be the founder.

Certainly no mention is made in the sketchbook of the ethnicity of her Master, nor of the mooted Theosophical Society (which did not appear for another quarter of a century).

This small notandum has assumed tremendous significance for those who desire to revise Blavatsky’s entire mature life as a premeditated service to the Masters. Unfortunately, the data are too diffuse and arbitrary to allow for any meaningful analysis of the 1851 encounter, and any attempt to identify ‘le Maître de mes rêves’ is not so much provisory as wishful. Notwithstanding the lack of objectifiable

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1 Ibid., 57.
2 Ibid., 58n. Ramsgate is a Kentish seaside town (current population 37,895) about 25 kilometres north of Dover. It was a popular Victorian resort destination.
3 Exactly why Blavatsky would have wished to promote such a deception remains unclear, especially given that she was so patently delighted at the evidence of such an early encounter. Indeed, there are other discrepancies which arouse certain suspicion: the page upon which her reminiscences were made is also decorated with sketches of boats resting in the quay of a seaside town, an image much more likely derived from Ramsgate than London (though such an observational must remain provisional).
4 Ibid., 56-57.
evidence which could undergird any claim to identify the 1851 'Master', there has been a range of suggestions, mostly without any supporting data. One interesting, though highly theoretical, proposition is that the man in question was Edward George Earle Bulwer-Lytton, an accomplished novelist and putated Rosicrucian, then at the height of his popularity, and a great favourite of the young Blavatsky. Sten Liljegren has suggested that the influence of Bulwer-Lytton on Blavatsky's esotericism, and particularly on her conception of the Masters as an occult brotherhood, may in fact have extended beyond abstract borrowings to the person of the author himself. Quoting personal correspondence with Lord Nevil Lytton, Liljegren has indicated that Bulwer-Lytton was in Ramsgate and London in the summer of 1851, due to the draw of the Great Exhibition, and may well have encountered the young Russian there. Though Liljegren's theory has a certain pleasant symmetry, it and the sketchbook which inspired it cannot contribute much to any scholarly treatment of the Theosophical Masters.

**Spiritualism and John King**

The first real instantiation of a Blavatskian Master figure can be traced to her early association with Spiritualism. As a modern form of necromancy, Spiritualism is customarily spoken of as having begun on 31 March, 1848. On that day, two sisters - Margaretta and Katherine Fox of Hydesville, New York - determined that the strange rappings which had plagued their home for months could be decoded, and that the results were not the outpourings of a devilish spirit but the communications of a

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7 Bulwer-Lytton is only now becoming acknowledged as a seminal influence on nineteenth-century esotericism, particularly of the Rosicrucian variety. It is not impossible that the cipher 'M.B.' could be a shorthand form of 'Master Bulwer', for his influence on Blavatsky was immense. See infra ch. 29.


9 Ibid., esp. 28. Jean Overton Fuller disagreed with Liljegren's hypothesis which she termed, 'one of the zaniest monographs ever to issue from an academic press': Fuller, *Blavatsky and her Teachers,* 10. Fuller consulted Sybilla Jane Flower, an authority on Bulwer-Lytton, who has discovered letters dated 7, 10, and 14 August, 1851, each sent from Knebworth (Bulwer-Lytton's Baronial seat), not Ramsgate. An examination of the archives at Knebworth would possibly assist in the resolution of this inconsistency, though likely Liljegren's claims will remain conjectural. It must be added that Fuller's biography borders on hagiography and is written from the perspective of an ardent Theosophist. Paul Johnson has suggested that the mysterious 'M.' may in fact be Giuseppe Mazzini, exiled to London during the 1850s: Johnson, *The Masters Revealed,* 121.
Thus begun, Spiritualism spread with remarkable rapidity throughout America and, within a few years, had become an international phenomenon. 11

Spiritualism has been closely studied. 12 Indeed, the swift agglomeration of diverse Spiritualist phenomena into a discrete metaphysics, paralleled by the founding of various Spiritualist churches, has become a foundational concern of the study of New Religious Movements. No less important, though often less well emphasised, is the significant analytical study of psychical phenomena which began in earnest during the period as a predictable response to the claims of adherents of Spiritualism. 13 Such research may well have grown out of Spiritualism, but eventually it came to be considered its nemesis - as was later to be the case with Theosophy.

Central to the doctrines of Spiritualism was the existence of the ‘spirit guide’, the Hermesian entity responsible for transmitting post mortem communications. As Spiritualist séances proliferated, so too did the search for the most reliable and assiduous spirit guides. Of these, a number rose to prominence, even in some cases assuming dynastic proportions. Perhaps the most famous and ubiquitous of the early guides was the spirit known as John King. Having first appeared to the Davenport

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10 It is important to note that the assignation of such a specific genesis for modern Spiritualism is inherently arbitrary. Similar claims had been made for years. The Hydesville incident is significant primarily in that it gained intense and diffuse publicity: see Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment, 187-188. A further factor that is often overlooked is that the sisters (later joined in their enterprise by their married elder sister, Leah) were then 13 and 11 years old respectively. Margaretta subsequently confessed that the rappings were created by means of the cracking of body joints: see Webb, Flight, 3-4.

11 It has been estimated that within three years there were 100 Spiritualist mediums in New York City; Podmore, 83. The significance of the movement is accentuated by its popular support: it has been estimated that between one and two million Americans participated in Spiritualist activities during the movement's apogee in 1855 - a not insignificant percentage of the country's population of 25 million persons. For details see Campbell, Ancient Wisdom, 16.


brothers in 1850 and the Koons soon thereafter. John King became a staple in the Spiritualist world, as did his 'daughter' Katie King; indeed, they were the most popular male and female spirit guides on either side of the Atlantic for many years. It is not insignificant that from reasonably humble (post-mortem) beginnings, John King was eventually to be represented in rather exalted fashion; in one instance he was shown to be the spirit of the buccaneer Henry Morgan (c.1635-1688), at another time he claimed to be the chief of a band of prelapsarian spirits.

The Kings, father and daughter, gained much notoriety from an 1874 incident involving two Philadelphia mediums, Jennie and Nelson Holmes. It appeared that the Holmes' had employed Katie King as more than just a spirit guide: the elderly Robert Dale Owen (1801-1877) claimed publicly that the jewellery he had been giving Katie King, via the Holmes, had turned up in the possession of a woman by the name of Eliza White, who acknowledged that she had been employed by the Holmes' to impersonate the spirit. This incident is significant for the present study primarily because Blavatsky, then resident in Philadelphia, rushed to the defence of the Holmes', insisting that Katie King was a genuine spirit and that the incident had been fabricated by 'the Protestant Jesuitical society called the “Young Men's Christian Association” [the Y. M. C. A.]. Blavatsky, it seemed, had her own relationship

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14 The Brothers Davenport are of interest here in that they were early expositors of the practice of Spiritualist manifestations. Their real innovation was the incorporation of a cabinet into their performances, an item of Spiritualist accoutrements which became a staple in the years to come. The brothers encouraged those in attendance to tie the two of them with ropes so as to assure observers that the musical instruments and flailing arms which presented themselves from the inside of the blackened cabinet were genuine manifestations of spirit entities. Their illusions were unmasked in Liverpool in 1868 when it was discovered that they had developed the ability to slip free from the ropes which held them. (Prior to his death, Ira Davenport passed his skills to Houdini who later perfected the art). It is interesting to note that just as the figure of John King unites the Davenports and Blavatsky, so too does the presence of a controversial cabinet, for which see infra ch. 11. For the Davenports see Brandon, The Spiritualists, 102, 168, 283-284; see also Podmore, Mediums, vol. 2, 55-62.

15 See Cooper, 'The Letters', vol. I, lxxxii; Olcott, Old Diary Leaves, 10-11.

16 Brandon, The Spiritualists, 103.

17 Olcott, Old Diary Leaves, 10-11 et passim.

18 Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 134. Robert Dale Owen was the son of Robert Owen (1771-1858), the devoted idealist, reformer and - like his son - devoted Spiritualist. The post-millennial philosophies of Robert Owen were later mediated to the young Annie Besant (1847-1933) by the system of cooperatives and communities established in England by Owen’s disciples. Besant was later to become the second President of the Theosophical Society and the sponsor of the Theosophical 'messiah', Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986). For Besant's Theosophical 'postmillennialism' (and esoteric adventism) see Wessinger, Annie Besant and Progressive Messiahism, passim, but cf. infra chs. 21, 22.

19 Quoted in Solovyoff, A Modern Priestess, 239. 87
with the King family and did not appreciate the negative publicity surrounding the allegations of the Holmes’ fraudulence.

Writing in 1875, Blavatsky explained her association with the mysterious John King in glowing terms:

[T]he spirit John King is very fond of me, and I am fonder of him than of anything on earth. He is my only friend, and if I am indebted to anyone for the radical change in my ideas of life, my efforts and so on, it is to him alone... John King and I are acquainted from old times, long before he began to materialise in London.20

Never one to broach rivals, Blavatsky took care to separate her guide (‘my John King’) from any others.21 It is apparent, even at this early stage, that Blavatsky’s relationship of priority with her spirits (as would later be the case with her Masters) was jealously guarded.

Olcott, too, had encountered John King at a séance during a London visit in 1870.23 He only became convinced of the value and veracity of King, though, when the spirit assisted in a series of séances held during the early months of 1875 which had had as their express purpose Blavatsky’s design to rehabilitate the reputation of Philadelphian Spiritualism - or at least so she had said at the time.24 It is during this period, however, that a subtle readjustment in explaining Spiritualist phenomena can be discerned in Olcott:

20 Quoted in ibid., 247. It is somewhat surprising that John King is afforded only a passing reference in Johnson’s The Masters Revealed. Given that Johnson’s efforts have been directed at discerning the identities of the men in Blavatsky’s social milieu who may have provided models for her Masters, it would not be improbable that her ‘John King’ may also have been fashioned on such an acquaintance.

21 Quoted in Solovyoff, A Modern Priestess, 243.

22 Blavatsky later wrote:
I have known and conversed with many a ‘John King’ in my life - a generic name for more than one spook - but thank heaven, I was never yet ‘controlled’ by one! (Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. VI, 271).


24 H. P. Blavatsky, “The Philadelphia “Fiasco,” or Who is Who?” in Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. I, 56-72. Later Blavatsky would claim that the experiments with the Holmes’ were engineered by the Masters, for which see infra p. 99ff.
Try to get private talk with ‘John King’ - he is an initiate, and his
frivolities of speech and action are meant to cover serious business.25

There can be little doubt that Olcott’s references to King’s standing as an ‘initiate’ and
to his technique of subterfuge were mediated to Olcott by Blavatsky. This shift from
imaging the spirit entities as discarnate humans26 of no specific religious hue or status,
and with no particular theological or dogmatic programme, to conceiving of them as in
some sense spiritually adept is evidence of early Blavatskian revisionism. From the
middle of 1875, and with an ever-broadening application thereafter, Blavatsky would
assign the impetus for the inception of Spiritualism, and indeed the governance and
direction of esoteric orders as a whole, to a band of living adepts she called Masters:

An attempt in consequence of orders received from T*** B***
[Tuitit Bey?] through P*** [an elemental?]27 personating J. K.
[John King?]. Ordered to begin telling the public the truth about the
phenomena & their mediums. And now my martyrdom will begin!
I will have all the Spiritualists against me in addition to the
Christians & the Skeptics! Thy Will, oh M:. [Master? Morya?]28 be
done!29

A note in Oleott’s 1875 publication People from the Other World, while reduced in
emotional tone, speaks no less clearly with Blavatsky’s voice:

After knowing this remarkable lady, and seeing the wonders that
occur in her presence ... I am almost tempted to believe that the
stories of Eastern fables are but simple narratives of fact; and that

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26 It is important to recognise that Spiritualism was (and is) a very broad rubric and incorporated many
varieties of phenomena, not least the ‘materialising’ guides. These latter have an especial resonance
with the Theosophical Masters as they share a certain ambiguous ontology. The means by which
such guides were brought to manifestation was explained as the exudation of ectoplasm (a term coined
by the Nobel laureate Charles Richet) - or ‘psychical structure’ - by the medium: see Brandon, The
Spiritualists, 131, 279-281 et passim.
27 Such was Olcott’s conclusion; see Olcott, Old Diary Leaves, 25.
28 Godwin has suggested that the initial could even refer to the elusive Copt, Metamon: see Godwin,
The Theosophical Enlightenment, 289. Most Theosophical authors have assumed this cipher to be an
early reference to the Master Morya.
29 Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. I, 89-90. This notandum was written on the bottom of a
newspaper cutting from 27 May, 1875 (which mentioned Olcott’s Miracle Club), and then attached to
the Scrapbook. There are thus no reliable means of establishing a firm date for the sentiment; de
Zirkoff’s assumptions of a date contemporaneous with the cutting are uncertain.
this very American outbreak of spiritualistic phenomena is under the control of an Order, which while depending for its results upon unseen agents, has its existence upon Earth among men.\textsuperscript{30}

Ultimately, Blavatsky’s championing of the Holmes’ in the Katie King incident would also be revised to insinuate that the Masters had provided the manifestation of John and Katie King for the edification of Olcott and the assembled enthusiasts. Writing years after the event, Olcott felt sufficiently confident that although he had once believed categorically in ‘a veritable John King’, he was now ‘persuaded that “John King” was a humbugging elemental, worked by [Blavatsky] like a marionette and used as a help towards my education’.\textsuperscript{31} A further note in Blavatsky’s Scrapbook leaves no doubt as to how she recast her role in the séances:

\begin{quote}
I went to the Holmeses and helped by M:. and his power, brought out the face of John King and Katie King in the astral light, produced the phenomena of materialization and - allowed the Spiritualists at large to believe it was done thro’ the mediumship of Mrs. Holmes. She was terribly frightened herself, for she knew that this once the apparition was real.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

The notion that Blavatsky may have precipitated the phenomena in Philadelphia, and, more broadly, that the entire enterprise of Spiritualism had not been a spontaneous eruption, but a carefully engineered project by living Masters, has been analysed in an illuminating series of articles by Joscelyn Godwin.\textsuperscript{33} It is Godwin’s contention that a variety of occultists contrived the phenomena of Spiritualism - or so they claimed -

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} Henry S. Olcott, \textit{People from the Other World}, American Publishing Company, Hartford, Conn., 1875, 453-454.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Olcott, \textit{Old Diary Leaves}, 11.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Blavatsky, \textit{Collected Writings}, vol. I, 73. Again, this insert into the first volume of Blavatsky’s Scrapbook is an addition appended to the book at a later date. It is not possible at this time to establish even an approximate date, though de Zirkoff’s arguments for mid-1875 are not especially convincing. It is a wry note that Jennie Holmes later claimed that Blavatsky had contrived the phenomena of the séances for Olcott’s sake. According to Holmes, Blavatsky had so ‘psychologized him that he did not know his head from his heels’: see Meade, \textit{Madame Blavatsky}, 135. Conventional Theosophical wisdom has it that the ‘M:.’ to whom Blavatsky refers is the Master Morya.
\end{itemize}
with no lesser purpose than to overturn the orthodoxies of Christianity and materialist science, and to establish in their place a novel metaphysics with profoundly altered ontological and epistemological paradigms. That these vaunted claims can have been sufficiently well justified by the parties concerned as to be widely believed by their followers is testament to the degree of dissatisfaction felt by Blavatsky's generation of esotericists for the prevailing religious, scientific, and social standards of the era. Yet the question of the Masters' motive in such an undertaking has been insufficiently addressed: what purpose could living Masters have had in provoking the mass irruption of modern necromancy into the nineteenth-century Western cultural matrix? What was the gain?

Blavatsky, writing in 1890, sought to establish the Masters' motive in the propagation of Spiritualism. Unsurprisingly, Spiritualism is the Baptist to Theosophy's Messiah:

For several years [Spiritualism] reigned undivided. Yet in truth, its phenomena, its psychic and mesmeric manifestations, were but the cyclic pioneers of the revival of prehistoric Theosophy, and the occult Gnosticism of the antediluvian mysteries. These are facts which no intelligent Spiritualist will deny; as, in truth, modern Spiritualism is but an earlier revival of crude Theosophy, and modern Theosophy a renaissance of ancient Spiritualism.

It seems, then, that for Blavatsky the Masters operated in a sense extra-historically. They reinitiate on a cyclical basis the invigorating injection of spiritual sustenance required to disarm the ascendancy of materialism and dogmatism. Spiritualism was an undeniable and not to be misunderstood answer of the inner nature of man to the then revelling, gloating Materialism of the age, as an escape from which there was but another form of evil - adherence to the dogmatic, ecclesiastical conventionalism of State religions (in ibid., 124).
thus the prodromus for Theosophy which alone could re-enchant a dispiritedly rationalist cosmos. Ultimately, then, Spiritualism had been initiated in order that the ground could be prepared for the Masters-inspired revival of esotericism which would come in the form of Theosophy; Olcott had worded it thus: ‘Must not babes be fed with milk?’

*In Correspondence with the Masters*

Having been so furtive in their Spiritualist strategies in the years preceding 1875, the Masters now became a conspicuous fixture in the lives of Blavatsky and Olcott from this point and on, selecting as their preferred mode of contact the simple franked letter. Probably around the middle of May, 1875, Olcott received the first of what became a long stream of correspondence from individuals he believed to be Masters of the Universal Mystic Brotherhood. Written in an elaborate, if imperfect, copperplate script in gold ink on green paper, and replete with sigils of a mystico-Masonic nature, the letter is in effect an invitation to an occult apprenticeship:

> From the Brotherhood of Luxor, Section the Vth to Henry Olcott.
> Brother Neophyte, we greet thee.
> He who seeks us finds us. Try. Rest thy mind - banish all foul doubt. We keep watch over our faithful soldiers. Sister Helen is a valiant, trustworthy servant. Open thy Spirit to conviction, have faith and she will lead thee to the Golden Gate of truth ... Brother ‘John’ [John King] hath brought three of our Masters to look at

37 Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, 321. In this context Ann Braude’s comments are apposite: American Spiritualism had never associated itself with the occult. On the contrary, Spiritualists believed that there was nothing mysterious about spirit communication, that it required no special knowledge, and that it was equally accessible to everybody. These tenets were central to the egalitarian thrust of the movement and conflicted with the emphasis on elite secret wisdom in Theosophy (Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 179).

38 There is some confusion about the date when the letter was sent and received. Campbell incorrectly assumes the 9th of March (Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom*, 23). Internal textual references to Olcott’s ‘club’ [surely his ‘Miracle Club’] date the letter to the month of May: see Geoffrey A. Barborka, *The Mahatmas and their Letters*, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1973, 231-233.

39 This phrase is another of the synonyms for the fraternity of Masters which ‘adopted’ the Theosophical Society and which professed governance over human affairs. Such titles, often amounting to doxologies, had been staples of Western esotericism, particularly in its Rosicrucian Freemasonic manifestation, for many years.

40 There are, for instance, Hebraic characters, Rosicrucian sigils, astrological/chemical symbols, and even the twin pillars of Solomon’s temple, Jachin and Boaz (cf. 1 Ki. vii:21; 2 Ch. iii:15-17).
thee after the seance. Thy noble exertions on behalf of our cause now give us the right of letting thee know who they were:

*Serapis Bey* (Ellora Section)

*Polydorus Isurenus* (Section of Solomon)

*Robert More* (Section of Zoroaster)... Activity and Silence as to the present.

By Order of the Grand:

*Tuitit Bey*

Observatory of Luxor.

Tuesday Morning.

Day of Mars.

This letter was delivered to Olcott not by some species of occult precipitation, but in the same mail as a note from Blavatsky, who stated that she had been directed by the Masters to forward the letter to its recipient. Olcott’s attentions were further aroused when he discovered that a circular that he himself had recently published in the *Spiritual Scientist* had prefigured his introduction to his proto-Master: an acrostic of the first letters of each paragraph read ‘TUITIT’. This interesting confluence, first noted by Blavatsky, further convinced the Colonel that he had been accepted as a pupil.

41 A facsimile of the letter is provided in Jinarajadasa, *Letters from the Masters: Second Series*, facing page 12. The original is kept in the archives of the Theosophical Society in Adyar.

42 Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom*, 24

43 Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, 74-76.

Indeed the article in question, penned entirely by Olcott, had been published at Blavatsky’s suggestion under the authorship of ‘*the Committee of Seven*, Brotherhood of Luxor’. There can be no suspicion that Olcott held any doubt that his apprenticeship had begun or that the Masters enjoyed an independent human existence. The best analysis of the early Masters literature is offered by Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 289ff.
Olcott’s occult tutelage passed from Tuitit Bey to Serapis Bey at a very early stage. From the middle of 1875 (and thus antedating the establishment of the Theosophical Society) until the latter part of 1879, Olcott received many ‘Masters’ letters’ from Serapis, sometimes in concentrated volleys, at other times only intermittently. Arriving by regular mail (postmarked from Philadelphia and Albany), the first several letters are in the main unremarkable and concern themselves with relatively mundane details of Blavatsky’s and Olcott’s domestic life. The central topics appear to be Blavatsky’s financial woes and her by now failed second - and bigamist - marriage to the Georgian Michael Betanelly. The language is replete with deliberate archaisms and self-conscious allusions to some form of arcane Order. Indeed, Serapis’ main interest, it would seem, was to secure Olcott’s unwavering allegiance to the Lodge of the Masters and to their representative, Helena Blavatsky, by means that might sometimes appear those of a ‘Machiavellian schemer’ rather than an altruistic Master of the Wisdom. At one time Serapis exhorted Olcott to approach relatives of his divorced wife for money ‘for the sake of the Cause’; at another he attempted to involve Olcott in highly questionable business deals with Betanelly, Blavatsky’s erstwhile husband. Serapis’ worldliness is accompanied by a disappointing want of oracular ability: he assured Olcott that his ‘distant future is at Boston’ and that ‘there are

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45 It should be noted that Olcott’s contact with the Masters is not restricted to his correspondence. The Colonel claimed confidently that he met more than one Master in the flesh from (at least) August, 1875. One, a dark middle-aged man, offered Olcott a vision in a crystal. Another, identified as ‘Ooton Liatto’, a Cypriot by birth, together with an unnamed confreere produced flowers from the air and a phenomenal indoor rain. It is possible that Liatto is to be identified with the Master Hilarion: see infra p. 119n22. Such corporeal visits (the latter deemed so remarkable by Olcott that he never included it in his published works) certainly complicate matters for those historians who believe Olcott to have been duped by the mendacious Blavatsky. See Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment, 297-298; Joscelyn Godwin, ‘Communications. Colonel Olcott meets the Brothers: An Unpublished Letter’ in Theosophical History V:1, 5-9.


47 There are few details about the marriage other than that it lasted only a few months. Olcott believed that Blavatsky had married Betanelly out of pity for the man’s hopeless ardour. Betanelly ultimately sued for divorce (on the ground of desertion) and was successful: see Cranston, H. P. B., 133-134.

48 That the Masters would employ Freemasonic vocabulary (‘Lodge’) is hardly surprising given the widespread view among occultists that late nineteenth century normative Freemasonry was the ossified shell of (otherwise, the exoteric camouflage for) the true and undying esoteric brotherhood. Such terms regularly grace Serapis Bey’s letters; cf., eg., Jinarajadasa, Letters from the Masters: Second Series, 23.


50 Ibid.

51 Jinarajadasa, Letters from the Masters: Second Series, 32. After leaving for New York, Olcott had little or no contact with Boston thereafter.
It is an interesting feature of religionist Theosophical scholarship that the Masters’ letters are deemed to have begun not with the correspondence of Tuitit Bey and Serapis Bey, but with the later missives sent to Sinnett and others from the Oriental ‘Mahatmas’ (Masters): Koot Hoomi and, later, Morya.\(^{53}\) Certainly, part of the reason for this selective emphasis is the post-1878 Orientalising of the Theosophical Society: in fact, Garry Trompf has noted that Blavatsky came to ‘look more Indophile than Schopenhauer’\(^{54}\). Unsurprisingly, this dramatic focus on the Asian Masters has had the effect of suppressing the pre-Indic history of the Theosophical Society, and of accentuating the novelty of the Oriental models at the expense of similar currents in the esoteric milieu of Europe and America. Allied to this revisionist undertaking to shift the genesis and inspiration for Blavatskian Theosophy ever farther eastward is the concern to elevate the Masters to the status of a rarefied spiritual elite, unique in the esoteric firmament. Even a cursory examination of the first generation of Masters’ letters (those which feature Serapis Bey) indicates that this Master was in reality not far removed from the spirit guides of Spiritualism in terms of either dogmatic pronouncements or Mercurial activities.\(^{55}\) In fact, there is little about Serapis’ self-revelation which would justify Theosophical claims that with the emergence of Blavatsky’s Masters a new spiritual dispensation had begun.

\(^{52}\) Betanelly remained financially pressed for the remainder of his life. In a letter of 1877 he informed Blavatsky that ‘I cannot pay [for a divorce]; I have not money enough even to live’: see Meade, *Madame Blavatsky*, 177.

\(^{53}\) It might be noted that William Quan Judge later claimed that Serapis was a pseudonym for Koot Hoomi. The evidence for such an opinion is underwhelming: see John Cooper, ‘The Story of the Mahatma Letters’ in *Theosophical History* VII:4, October, 1998, 152.

\(^{54}\) Garry Trompf, ‘Macrohistory in Blavatsky, Steiner and Génon’, 275.

\(^{55}\) A later Theosophical justification for the lack of a reverent tone or content in Serapis’ communications was that he was but a minor functionary within the hierarchy of the Masters; certainly he played a much reduced part in the formulations of Leadbeater and others of Blavatsky’s continuators.
CHAPTER 7

AN EXTENDED FAMILY: EXTRAMURAL MASTERS

William Stainton Moses and Imperator

At this point it is worthwhile to limn briefly those entities whose existence was claimed by, and whose beneficence was afforded to, esotericists in Blavatsky's and Olcott's acquaintance, and which could be considered either cognates of the Masters or who suggest a certain *air de famille*.¹ The first, previously mentioned, is 'Imperator +' and others of the spirits whose *post mortem* revelations were vouchsafed to the Reverend William Stainton Moses (1839-1892).² In 1872, Moses, an Anglican curate and avid Spiritualist, discovered that in a state of self-induced meditative trance he was able to transmit the teachings of a small cabal of spirit guides through the technique of automatic writing. Of the mass of necromantic revelation which grew in the wake of Spiritualism, the 'Spirit Teachings' of 'M. A., Oxon.' (Moses' preferred *nom de plume*) are quite unusual in so far as they were profoundly dialectical and reasonably internally consistent with regard to cosmology and theology. Imperator³ (together with such associates as Magus and Prudens), espoused a neo-Gnostic cosmology and anthropology with some profound similarities to various of the treatises from the *Corpus Hermeticum*:

> It may well be, good friend, that the noblest destiny of the perfected spirit may be union with the God into whose likeness it has grown, and whose portion of divinity, temporarily segregated during its

¹ Only three esotericists in Blavatsky's *milieu* are here mentioned: Moses, Hockley, and Hardinge Britten. There are certainly others outside of this circle who provided inspiration to Blavatsky, particularly the optimistic progressivism (and graded hierarchies) of Paschal Beverly Randolph and Louis Jacolliot, for whom see infra ch. 26.

² Moses, employing the *nom de plume* 'M. A. (Oxon.)' wrote a number of books and articles based upon his experience with the spirits: *Spirit Identity* (1879); *Psychography* (1882); *Spirit Teachings* (1883); *Higher Aspects of Spiritualism* (1880), *inter alia*.

³ Moses never revealed the (extra-)mundane identities of his 49 spirits. Recent examination of his notebooks indicates that they were of a rather exalted kind with such names as Elijah, St. John the Baptist, Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus all represented. 'Imperator +' was in fact the Old Testament prophet Malachi: see Nandor Fodor, *An Encyclopaedia of Psychic Science*, Citadel Press, Secaucus, New Jersey, 1974, 249. Interestingly, this conclusion contradicts the only biographical reference made by Imperator in the revelations published as 'Spirit Teachings' - that he had been at one time resident in Paris: Moses ('M. A., Oxon.'), *Spirit Teachings*, 182. See also Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 294-5.
pilgrimage, it so renders up to Him who gave it.4

It was Imperator's claim that a new dispensation had begun. The spirits had previously attempted to influence the progressive development of humanity, but the time had not been ripe: 'Efforts have been made from time to time to pour in advanced knowledge; it has been found that the time was not come, and the effort has been withdrawn'.5 Now, however, humanity itself had developed sufficiently well to make it receptive to the presence of the spirits:

In America, the land from which dates this movement in your days, there are many who have been so far developed as to lead a dual life, and to hold face to face intercourse with us. We have even now a band of workers there who are achieving results which we cannot command here through faithlessness of mind, materiality of interests, and even grossness of atmospheric surroundings.6

One of the central tenets of this new revelation was a form of relativism which denied Christianity its customary claim to exclusivity. Jesus, but one of a chain of messianic figures (beginning, importantly, in India),7 had himself undergone 'His preparatory training' in Egypt.8 Furthermore, Jesus' post-resurrection appearances were reconstrued as archetypal figurations of the self-abnegating munificence of the spirits:

His resurrection was symbolic of the change that passes on the risen life of spirit ... He was animated by that most potent law of spirit which you may trace in all the ways of spirit-influence - the law of love ... So the souls who voluntarily linger around your earth are those whose motive-spring is love, or they whose mission is animated by the same master principle.9

The similarities between Moses' Imperator and Olcott's Serapis are immediately apparent. Both claim an exalted spiritual message, and both speak of a small contingent of humanity now sufficiently advanced (though in what way or ways remains at this point unclear) to accept this lofty wisdom. But for all these superficial

Moses ('M. A., Oxon.'), Spirit Teachings, 228.
5 Ibid., 239.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 212 ff.
8 Ibid., 262.
9 Ibid., 267.
similarities there exist very real points of divergence. While both Serapis and Imperator select the written word as their means of contact with their charges, Moses’ communications require him to act as sole amanuensis; whatever their provenance, the Masters’ letters *qua* letters retain a freer dynamic of reception. Indeed, no small part of the Theosophical Society’s attraction for potential converts was the possibility, however remote, that such aspiring *chelas* might receive similar correspondence themselves.10 Another significant difference between the two entities devolves upon the associations which they will have suggested; while Imperator is wholly associated with Spiritualism, and thus subject to such accusations as having been the product of the suggestibility, vanity or outright fraud of his medium, Serapis is cut from new cloth: he is self-determining, invariably - indeed, attractively - abstruse, and hints (in accord with Godwin’s ‘provocation theory’) that he and his confreres are themselves the originators of Spiritualism, a claim which robs Imperator and others like him of any independent ontology.11 Though various Theosophists over the years would be accused of having created counterfeit Masters’ letters, nonetheless the scope, geographical diffusion, variety of script, quantity of both recipients and reputed authors (a range of Masters), and the *sheer volume* of correspondence would, rightly or wrongly, mitigate against claims of single-handed and unmodulated fraud.

By far the most significant, if also the most obvious, difference between Imperator and Serapis is that the former is dead and latter was, at least putatively, alive. This last point signals the ultimate break between Theosophy, as the teachings of live adepts, and necromantic Spiritualism. A foundational dogma of the latter pursuit had always been that the aperture which occasioned spiritual and extra-mundane insight was opened only after the death of the physical body. Theosophy’s radical alternative was to postulate a tremendous paradigmatic shift in the means by which meta-empirical insight was able to penetrate the earthly sphere. No longer did the esotericist await death as the great occult initiation, for, with the Masters, progression to an elevated spiritual elite was not only possible in the human frame, but regarded as an essential, if

10 Over the next five decades, letters (or portions thereof) from the Masters were delivered to over two dozen Society members: see *infra* ch. 10.

not the essential, raison d'être. Significant in this altered esoteric soteriology, though somehow ignored by scholars, is the inference that the wane of Spiritualism (as far as many esotericists were concerned) was occasioned, not so much by its regular exposure as fraudulent, as by the fact that post-mortem spiritual enlightenment was apparently available to all and thus neither required nor really encouraged any ante-mortem individually-driven change in ethical, moral or spiritual attitudes. In fact, it could easily be argued that several of the most celebrated spirit guides, such as Katie King, appeared to be - morally at least - wholly undeserving of such spiritual accolades.\textsuperscript{12} The primary appeal of the Theosophical Masters was that they offered themselves as living exemplars of the heretofore hidden possibilities of rapid human advancement. That Serapis Bey appears less than saintly is not nearly as significant as his consistent inferences of an adept brotherhood peopled by recondite sages who have achieved their exalted status by their own efforts. Such a proposition also conveniently both justifies and entreats Theosophists to a zealous evangelism; Spiritualism had no such direct mission as its credo devolved upon a simple faith position regarding the immortality of the soul and its contact with the living through various necromantic technologies. Theosophists' commitment to the Masters, in contrast, was also a concomitant commitment to their own conscious spiritual advancement through such religiously-normative means as spiritual apprenticeship, obedience, submission to a hierarchy, and abnegation of personal will.

Another, and supremely utilitarian, by-product of the Masters' self-presentation and Blavatsky's later decisive published formulation of Masters-based occultism, was the capacity for this sagacious brotherhood to claim other spiritual teachers and teachings as having emanated from their fraternity. This exercise, which exceeds normal esoteric syncretism (and invariably leads to accusations of outlandish historical revisionism), can be discerned in an early manifestation as the 'provocation theory' wherein Spiritualism was deigned to have been a Masters-generated phenomenon. Such a

\textsuperscript{12} Fodor, An Encyclopaedia of Psychic Science, 191. Katie King, through the mediumship of Florence Cook, likely brought more attention to Spiritualism than any other. King, who claimed to have been the daughter of the ubiquitous John King, had been a terrible criminal in her time, having, among other crimes, murdered her two children with her own hands. She had died in her early twenties and, according to her own testimony, was given the rôle of spirit guide in expiation of her sins. For a discussion of the career of Florence Cook (and other materialising mediums) see Trevor H. Hall, The Spiritualists: The Story of Florence Cook and William Crookes, Helix Press, New York, 1963.

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tendency was also evident in the wholesale absorption of other Masters-cognates into the Theosophical pantheon. Thus Olcott was able to claim that Moses’ guides were Masters, not spirits:

Who ‘Imperator,’ its agent, was, I known not - I do not even know who H. P. B. really was - but I have always been inclined to believe that he was either S. M.’s [Stainton Moses’] own Higher Self or an adept; and that ‘Magus’ and others of S. M.’s band were adepts likewise.13

Indeed, even the Theosophical Master Koot Hoomi later claimed in one of his letters to A. P. Sinnett that Moses’ spirits were in fact adepts like himself.14

Frederick Hockley and the Crowned Angel

Moses was not alone in the Spiritualist milieu for having relayed the teachings of a spirit guide who appears in significant ways to have been similar to the Theosophical Masters. Another of Olcott’s correspondents, and a man more avowedly ceremonial in his occultism than was the mild ‘M. A. (Oxon.)’, was Frederick Hockley (1808-1885), the renowned crystallogomancer and bibliophile whose erudition in matters arcane made him something of a Victorian esoteric paterfamilias.15 Just as Moses’ Spiritualism can be seen as having stood on the cusp of Theosophy, so too Hockley, by seeking to reconcile two independent strains of the esoteric heritage - namely theurgic angelology and Rosicrucianism - was able to establish a synthesis with surprising echoes of the early Theosophical Masters.
Hockley's crystal scrying exemplifies an established pattern of goetic theurgy, particularly as it had developed in England. Where Hockley's methodology and technology may have accorded with that of other crystalomancers, his theoretical presuppositions were of an entirely different order. Hockley's anthropology, as mediated to him by his favoured 'guide', the Crowned Angel of the Seventh Sphere, was profoundly progressivist. His angelic communications, comprising a vast literature, posit a highly optimistic perfectibilism whereby post mortem human souls (if necessary expunged of imperfection on a purgatorial planet) rise through seven spheres of angelic consciousness, ultimately arriving at a 'state of bliss'. As they percolate through the spheres such souls swell the ranks of the angels and regularly return to earth in this guise to minister to the living as Guardian Spirits:

The number of Angels from the Creation of the world down to the birth of Christ was continually increased by many good men who left the Earth ... as the population increased the number of Angels also increased from those who died ... at the present time there are

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17 Many of Hockley's communications with the Crowned Angel are available in Hamill, *The Rosicrucian Seer*, passim.

18 Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 171. Hockley claimed to have filled 'thirty volumes [sic], containing twelve-thousand answers received in this way [i.e., via the crystal and mirror]': see Hamill, *The Rosicrucian Seer*, 26.

19 Ibid., 119, 124.

20 Ibid., 120.
about half the number of Angels as mortals upon Earth.²¹

Hockley sought avidly to demarcate his angelic communications from the phenomenon of popular Spiritualism, a practice he believed to be diabolical.²² For him, as for Moses, the spirit guide (or angel) was commissioned by the divine power to elucidate these mysteries of heavenly cosmology for purely altruistic reasons. Such a motivation begs a further question: if post mortem progressivism is a fixed equation, then what spiritually-educative value do such revelations contain for mundane humanity? The inferred response is that such entities as the Crowned Angel bestow soteriological and eschatological insights to the ‘faithful’ because, armed with such knowledge, those so informed will appreciate that spiritual progression can in fact be initiated before death.

Just as Hockley espoused a celestial progressivism, through his writings and associations he also offered recondite testimony that a similar spiritual evolution existed on the earth in the form and keeping of the Rosicrucian fraternity. Profoundly influenced by the original Rosicrucian manifestoes, and convinced of a continuing continental tradition, Hockley inquired of the Crowned Angel whether Freemasonic initiation would be advisable in order to gain contact with initiates. The response was not heartening:

The Society is in France and unless you went there and were installed a Brother you could not possible become one ... They study the occult sciences after an interview with an invisible power, which they have at stated times. The Elders travel to Jerusalem ... then return to the rest of the Society with the instructions they receive from the invisible agent - upon this they act ... but in the meantime I hope you will not join an English Lodge.²³

Hockley evidently believed that some sort of Rosicrucian pedigree had existed in England but that the majority of contemporary claimants in his country were

²¹ Ibid.
²² Ibid., 168.
²³ Ibid., 16. The Crowned Angel also suggests that Napoleon I was a member of the Fraternity, and that financial means were not a consideration for Jean-Jaques Rousseau ‘was one of its firmest supporters’. Ultimately Hockley did not follow the Angel’s advice for he was initiated into Freemasonry in British Lodge No. 8 on 21 March, 1864, in his mid-fifties. He eschewed the irregular Freemasonry of a number of his correspondents, but was active in a variety of capacities in normative Lodges until his death.
pretenders. Desirous of establishing a fuller picture of native Rosicrucianism he collected the books, certificates and diaries of putative Rosicrucians, and even invoked their spirits by crystallogram. Significantly, his goetic researches indicated to him that he was able to contact the spirits of the living in his crystals as well as those of the dead, and that this may serve to explain certain of the manifestations of Spiritualism:

The most singular feature to me of these recent spiritual manifestations is, that the communicants have almost invariably announced themselves as being the spirits of deceased mortals only, and not as being spiritual intelligences who never had been embodied on earth, whilst the existence of co-existing atmospheric spirits of living mortals has never been alluded to as such, although, I perceive they have in numerous instances developed themselves in the spirit circles.

It is hardly necessary to indicate that the individuals deemed to be most capable of producing such paranormal feats were also assumed to be those possessed of recondite secrets gained through occult processes: in short, Rosicrucians or their ilk.

24 Hockley did, however, join the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia (S.R.I.A.), probably at the behest of his friend F. G. Irwin. The S.R.I.A. purported to be a ‘revived’ Rosicrucian study Lodge, though it seems likely to have been instituted by Robert Wentworth Little (1839-1878) in 1865: for details see infra ch. 29. Hockley’s association with the Bristol and the Metropolitan Colleges was uneventful and there is no real indication of any enthusiasm on his part. There is little doubt that Hockley’s superior erudition and theurgic aspirations would have left him unimpressed with his Rosicrucian brothers of the S.R.I.A.: see in ibid., 18-19. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Hockley was later viewed as having represented a vital link in the chain of Rosicrucian apostolicity in England, which included such occult authorities as Ebenezer Sibley (1752-1799), Francis Barrett (1765-1825), the author of The Magus (1801; described by Joscelyn Godwin as ‘a plagiarism of plagiarisms’: Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment, 20), Sigismund Bacstrom (1740?-?) and Godfrey Higgins (1773-1833). See Hamill, The Rosicrucian Seer, 19-22; see also Francis X. King, The Flying Sorcerer: Being the magical and aeronautical adventures of Francis Barrett, author of ‘The Magus’, Mandrake, Oxford, 1992, passim.


26 One of Hockley’s favourite anecdotes entailed his gift of a consecrated crystal (i.e., with indwelling spirit) to the adventurer Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890). Later, Hockley claimed that his seeress was able to summon an image of Burton via the crystal, and that the latter had appeared ‘as an Arab and sunburnt’. Interestingly Hockley further claimed that Burton, on his return to England, had seen Hockley’s account and had signed his name to it in order to witness to its veracity. Unfortunately, Hockley’s (and thus, presumably, Burton’s) original is lost and exists only in a copy by F. G. Irwin. See Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment, 172-172; Hamill, The Rosicrucian Seer, 100-101.

27 Ibid., 167. Hockley claimed contact via the crystals and mirror with a mortal man, Captain Anderson, who was apparently able to furnish the former with first-hand details of the Crimean War: see Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment, 171. The similarities between Hockley’s suppositions that some of the phenomena of Spiritualism could be ascribed to the influence of mortal men and Blavatsky’s argument for a Masters-generated Spiritualism are immediately obvious. Hockley’s is thus another version, albeit rather idiosyncratic, of the previously noted ‘provocation theory’.

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Hockley's occult cosmosophy is unusual in that there are parallel processes of progressivism operating in the mundane and extra-mundane realms simultaneously. Most of his energies (and questions to the Crowned Angel) were directed at mapping the celestial realm with its septenary system of graduated progress, but there are significant indications within the logic of his system that a similar process of calibrated spiritual awareness was available to the initiated elite upon the earth, and that such an elite existed in the form of the Rosicrucian or some similar fraternity.

Hockley's model of a synchronous initiatic progressivism in the terrestrial as well as the celestial spheres provides an important indication of parallel developments in the esoteric milieu of the late nineteenth-century. That there exist resemblances between Blavatsky's Masters and analogous entities, such as those of Moses and Hockley, is important as a counterbalance against the prevalent view among religionist, and even some avowedly empirical surveys, that the Theosophical Masters were a unique development. Where Blavatsky's Masters-esotericism differed markedly from Hockley's, however, was in the former's insistence upon an explicit and necessary interpenetration between the terrestrial and celestial strata. Though Hockley inferred a covalent, perhaps even symbiotic relationship between earthly adepts and guardian angels - a relationship whereby both parties 'progressed' - Blavatsky formulated an esotericism which predicated all human progress upon the benevolence of the Masters. Consequently, the Theosophical Masters were apotheosised as an a priori precondition of human spiritual and physical development. Clearly it could be argued that Blavatsky had 'trumped' Moses and Hockley; her incipient Masters-cosmology wholly enveloped such entities as the Crowned Angel and Imperator (placing them at her disposal as crypto-Masters), and at the same time promulgated her own Masters of Wisdom as the exclusive agents of esoteric insights and spiritual progress - with herself as the bridge.

*Emma Hardinge Britten and the Chevalier Louis*

It is crucial at this point to recall that Blavatsky was not alone among her contemporaries in claiming a warrant for her writings from an emissary of a secret
fraternity of adepts: she was not, to her obvious annoyance, the only such bridge. Emma Hardinge Britten (1823-1899), an inaugural member of the fledgling Theosophical Society, to some degree preempted Blavatsky’s ‘one and supreme great lodge [of adepts]’ by asserting her own membership of a select secret band of adepts known as the Orphic Society. Harding Britten claimed to have been introduced to the group in her youth, and inducted on account of her ‘somnambulistic faculties’, and to have been trained in its occult technologies by a man she initially identified with the pseudonymous title ‘Austria’, and whom she later proclaimed to have been ‘Chevalier Louis de B-----’. The Chevalier Louis remains an enigmatic figure for historians of nineteenth-century esotericism. The temptation is to dismiss him as a convenient cipher or a romantic literary device conjured by Hardinge Britten in her

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28 To extend the metaphor, one suspects that Blavatsky would claim that hers was the only ‘bridge’ whose traffic was both orthodox and legitimate.


30 In *Ghost Land* (Anonymous [‘Chevalier Louis de B-----’]), *Ghost Land; or Researches into the Mysteries of Occultism, illustrated in a series of autobiographical sketches*, trans. & ed. Emma Hardinge Britten, privately printed, Boston, 1876, ch. XVI), the Chevalier Louis refers to the occult sodality as the ‘Orphic Circle’. Harding Britten employs the term ‘Orphic Society’ in an article published under the pseudonym ‘Sirius’ in her journal, *The Two Worlds* (‘Sirius’ [Emma Hardinge Britten], ‘Occultism Defined’ in *The Two Worlds*, 1:1, 1887, 3-5). She clears up any confusion by stating that the two are synonymous in her autobiography of 1900: Emma Hardinge Britten, *Autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten*, ed. Margaret Wilkinson, John Heywood, Manchester, 1900, 4. This observation was made by Joscelyn Godwin: see Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, 211.

31 ‘Sirius’ [Emma Hardinge Britten], ‘Occultism Defined’, 3. Harding Britten is referring to her clairvoyant capacities, which she claimed to have been profoundly in evidence from early youth.

32 Chevalier Louis himself claimed to have been mentored by ‘my master’ Felix von Marx in the ways of clairvoyant research:

They [the ‘Berlin Brotherhood’ of which von Marx was a member] had discovered, by repeated experiments, that spiritual forms could become visible to the material under certain conditions, the most favorable of which were somnambulism procured through the magnetic sleep. This state, they had found, could be induced sometimes by drugs, vapors, and aural essences; sometimes by spells, as through music, intently staring into crystals, the eyes of snakes, running water, or other glittering substances; occasionally by intoxication caused by dancing, spinning around, or distracting clamors; but the best and most efficacious method of exalting the spirit into the superior world and putting the body to sleep was, as they had proved, through animal magnetism. (Anonymous [‘Chevalier Louis de B-----’], *Ghost Land*, 34).

*Ghost Land* first appeared in a reduced and serialised form in the short-lived Spiritualist magazine, *The Western Star*, published by Emma and her husband, Dr. William Britten. Here the Chevalier Louis is introduced as ‘Austria’. Only in *Ghost Land* is his identity exposed, and there frustratingly incompletely.

33 Joscelyn Godwin calls him ‘one of the major mysteries facing the historian of this subject’: see Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, 206. Louis’ putative membership of the mysterious esoteric group mentioned in Johann Heidrich Jung-Stilling’s *Autobiography* cannot be verified: for details see Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, 47 et passim.
desire to systematise Spiritualism and to endow it with both a sophisticated cosmosophy and a teleology. That Chevalier Louis may have been more than a fictional entity has been a rare opinion among scholars, at least until Professor Godwin’s engaging researches. Yet the precise nature of the Chevalier’s identity is of less significance than the fact that he is a remarkable anticipation of the Theosophical Masters; unlike the disembodied spirits of Moses and Hockley, the Chevalier is presented as a supremely talented living adept. Of equal significance here is the

Emma Hardinge Britten proved to be among the most ardent and articulate apologists for Spiritualism since its inception in 1848. Her trance lectures, beginning in 1856, coupled with her evangelical writings on behalf of Spiritualism, were a sustained attempt to harmonise Spiritualism with world mythography, devotional practice (she advocated prayer), and social ethics: see Godwin, Theosophical Enlightenment, 200-204. For Hardinge Britten’s contribution to female emancipation see Braude, Radical Spirits, passim. See also Logie Barrow, Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910, Routledge, London, 1986, passim.

It is unfortunate that James Webb altered his description of Hardinge Britten’s claim (‘Mrs Britten claimed that the book had been written by a European adept of her acquaintance, the Chevalier Louis Constant’) in the first edition of his The Flight from Reason (Webb, Flight, 278), to the more declaratory, ‘Mrs Britten falsely claimed that the book had been written by a European adept of her acquaintance, the Chevalier Louis Constant’ in the revised edition (James Webb, The Occult Underground, Open Court, La Salle, Illinois, 1990, 294). No reason is provided to justify the change. Indeed Webb has followed Ransom (Ransom, A Short History, 110-111) in a more serious error by supplying the surname ‘Constant’ to Hardinge Britten’s Chevalier. (Alphonse-)Louis Constant was the real name of Eliphas Lévi, the nineteenth-century French occultist, a man whose nationality, career, and chronology indicate that he could never have been the ‘Chevalier Louis de B---’. Godwin has employed a more empirical methodology in his researches: see particularly Godwin, ‘The Hidden Hand, Part I: The Provocation of the Hydesville Phenomena’; ‘The Hidden Hand, Part II: The Brotherhood of Light’; ‘The Hidden Hand, Part III: The Parting of East and West’ and also his Theosophical Enlightenment, passim, esp. 206-212, 300-302. It would be intriguing to apply a similar hypothetical approach to Hardinge Britten’s Chevalier as Paul Johnson has done to Blavatsky’s Masters (Johnson, Masters Revealed) and to enquire which of the men in her acquaintance may have provided either the inspiration or the template for Chevalier Louis. According to Hardinge Britten, she was acquainted with Bulwer-Lytton, the Earl of Stanhope, and Lieutenant Morrison (who wrote under the pseudonym ‘Zadkiel’) in her youth, and may well have been involved in clairvoyant researches with any or all of them as she had alleged (Hardinge Britten, Autobiography, 4). Each of these men was a renowned esotericist and could well have provided her with the model for the persona of Chevalier Louis. That said, there is at present no sure information which allows comment on the Chevalier’s proper ontology.

Eric Dingwall suggested that the Chevalier was but a literary cloak cast over Baron Joseph Henry Louis de Palm (1809-1876): see E. Dingwall, ‘Introduction’ in Hardinge Britten, Autobiography, xvi. Though certain of this adventurer’s life experiences parallel those of the Chevalier Louis, there is little indication that de Palm possessed the intellectual and occult faculties which Hardinge Britten ascribes to the Chevalier. Olcott believed him to be bereft of ‘either literary talent, erudition, or scholastic tastes’: Olcott, Old Diary Leaves, 161. The Baron de Palm is perhaps best remembered as being the recipient of the first modern cremation in the United States of America: see in ibid., 148-161, 166-184. Blavatsky, with customary wit, noted that the Baron was ‘[p]rincipally famous as a corpse’: Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. I, 214. In support of Dingwall’s assertion it must be remembered that Hardinge Britten was a close acquaintance of the Baron, she spoke at his cremation and, in later years, joined Elliot Coues in his assertion that Blavatsky’s Isis Unveiled was nothing more than ‘a compilation from the manuscripts of Baron de Palm, and without acknowledgement’: Olcott, Old Diary Leaves, 162. This last claim was never supported by evidence. See also Gomes, The Dawning, 151.
motif of information transference: permission has been granted by the Chevalier’s associates and superiors for him to divulge to a (female) disciple hitherto undisclosed arcane secrets. In return the disciple has pledged obedience and has vowed not to reveal the adepts’ mundane identities.37

During 1876 the Brittens published two books, both putatively written by Chevalier Louis, and translated and edited for him by Emma. The first, *Art Magic, or, Mundane, Sub-Mundane, and Super-Mundane Spiritism*, though for the most part a belaboured survey of late mediaeval evocatory and theurgical texts,38 does contain certain philosophical and cosmological reflections which to some degree anticipate the themes of Blavatsky’s later work.39 The second work, *Ghost Land; or, Researches into the Mysteries of Occultism*, is an expansion of the rather truncated autobiographical sketches previously included in the six issues of the Brittens’ Spiritualist magazine *The Western Star*.40 The book is a robust tale of occult adventure which documents Louis’ apprenticeship to the ‘Berlin Brotherhood’, his subsequent membership of the English ‘Orphic Circle’, and his ultimate induction as

37 Hardinge Britten wrote:
When modern spiritualism dawned upon the world, for special reasons of my own, the fellows of my society gave me an honorary release from every obligation I had entered into with them except in the matter of secrecy. (Hardinge Britten, *Autobiography*, 4).

38 Charles Sotheran, in a review of *Art Magic for The Spiritual Scientist* (7 December 1876) opined:
It is simply a rehash of books readily available to any student of even limited means, and can readily be found in almost any book store, or on the shelves of any public library. Ennemoser’s *History of Magic*, Howitt’s *Supernatural*, Salverte’s *Philosophy of Magic*, Hargrave Jennings’s *Rosicrucians*, Barrett’s *Magus*, Agrippa’s *Occult Philosophy*, and a few others, are the real sources of this wretched compilation which is full of bad grammar and worse assumptions (reprinted in Gomes, *The Dawning*, 117).


40 See *supra* p. 105n32..
hierophant in a third, more powerful order, the ‘Ellora Brotherhood’.* Taken together, *Ghost Land* and *Art Magic* posit a primordial monotheism which survives at the esoteric heart of the world’s confessional religions, that this true and abiding ‘Cabbala’ was honoured in ancient Egypt as the source of manifest magical power, and that its origins lie far to the east in India. According to this occult scheme, no single divine incarnation is required: Jesus becomes one of a number of advanced souls whose life, interpreted allegorically, provides paradigmatic proof for the evolution of consciousness. The *leitmotif* of evolution from the simple to the ever more complex resides at the core of Hardinge Britten’s cosmosophy; there is a dual emphasis on the horizontal evolution of the *anthropos* (as representative of the human collective) from elemental spirit, to human as presently constituted, and ultimately thence to angel and planetary spirit, and the perpendicular evolution of the individual from an unenlightened to an enlightened state. The former process, that of general human development, operates in aeonic time; the latter, of personal conscious evolution, in single lifetimes.

Significant in this scheme is the intercession, never fully enunciated, that the point of intersection between the horizontal axis (collective evolution) and the vertical (personal evolution) is occupied by the lodge of adepts, in this case the Ellora Brotherhood. The adept, alone aware of the true dimensions of this progressivist dynamic, is able to...

* The appearance here of a specific reference to an occult sodality centred around Ellora (in the vicinity of Aurungabad, Maharashtra State, India) is rather interesting considering that Colonel Olcott’s Master, Serapis Bey, with whom the Colonel was in regular correspondence throughout this period, is attached to the ‘Ellora Section’ of the Brotherhood of Luxor. Godwin has also noted that two of the letters from Serapis Bey (no.12 & no.13: Jinarajadasa, *Letters from the Masters: Second Series*, 33-36) refer to Blavatsky as an ‘Ellorian’: Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, 300. At this time, Blavatsky and Hardinge Britten were still amicably disposed toward one another and it is not unlikely that the *air de famille* which surrounds their literary productions can be attributed to cross-fertilisation. At the time of their acrimonious parting, however, Blavatsky accused Hardinge Britten of having plagiarised from her works:

[Hardinge Britten has begun using my] best phrases in his lectures. And when taken to task by me for it, answered that she remembered nothing of what she said in trance condition (!) She was in a trance then as I am now (H. P. Blavatsky to J. D. Buck, 4 July, 1889, in Gomes, *The Dawning*, 115-116).

It would be an interesting exercise to be able to trace the first appearances of Ellora in Western social scientific discourse, and thence to determine its entry into the ‘geographic imaginal’ of Western esoteric literature. Joselyn Godwin’s researches, though provisional, appear to be the first significant attempts to place Ellora within such a context; see also Joselyn Godwin, *Arkos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism, and Nazi Survival*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1993, 82-3; 96-97. For Ellora itself see P. V. Ranade, *Ellora Paintings*, Parimal Prakashan, Aurangabad, 1980; K. V. Soundara Rajan, *Cave Temples of the Deccan*, Published by the Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 1981.
influence the former by concentration on the latter. The adept’s task is to purify, govern, and exalt his will; the rewards which accrue to his efforts are the meta-empirical powers he is granted. Such powers are neither mere conjurings nor the playthings of a præternatural elite, but are to be used sagaciously for the furtherance of collective human evolution, both spiritual and physical. It is the Ellora Brotherhood’s task to employ their individual and collective gifts to inculcate a progressivist occult current within human society.  

Godwin has suggested that ‘[t]he two books [Art Magic and Ghost Land], taken together, are the first authoritative statement in English on the distinction between spiritualism and occultism’.  

It is certainly true Chevalier Louis asserted that communication with supra-and submundane entities (angels, elementals, and so forth) was equally as possible, and desirable, as the necromantic activities sponsored by Spiritualism, wherein commerce was restricted by and large to the spirits of the ‘unprogressed human dead’.  

It is also the case that occultism, as mediated by Hardinge Britten’s Chevalier Louis, promotes the conscious development of an active will in concert with a technology of human-spirit commerce which emphasises heightened consciousness rather than a passive receptivism, as was customarily the case with Spiritualism. This noted, the tension between the Spiritualist and occultist

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The Chevalier Louis alludes to the collective task of such adepts when he refers to ‘a spiritual, though nameless and almost unknown association of men’ (presumably an even more elevated assembly than the Ellora Brotherhood), whose task it is to ‘spiritualize’ humanity:

[There] is an order that owes nothing to its working or existence to this age or time. Its actual nature is only recognized, spoken, or thought of as a dream, a memory of the past, evoked like a phantom from the realms of tradition or myth...

... Few can attain to the inner light of these spiritually associated brethren, or apprehend the significance of their order; enough that it is, has been, and will be, until all men are spiritualized enough to partake of its exalted dispensations (Anonymous, Ghost Land, 68-69).

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Godwin, Theosophical Enlightenment, 206. It should be noted that Hardinge Britten may well have been influenced by the American occultist, Paschal Beverly Randolph, who had articulated a somewhat similar vision in his own putatively Rosicrucian sphere: cf., eg., Deveney, Paschal Beverly Randolph, 134-135 et passim.

This last phrase is Godwin’s: see his Theosophical Enlightenment, 304.
gnosiologies is never satisfactorily resolved in Hardinge Britten's thought. In her Spiritualist writings, Hardinge Britten is emphatic that physical death provides the crucial launch into the graded hierarchy of the celestial spheres; indeed, angels and the like are deprived of their customary orthodox ontology as a unique created order, and become, rather, the manifestations of post-mortem spiritual evolution. If the aperture to genuine spiritual enlightenment is opened for all at death, how, then, are the efforts of mundane esoteric orders such as the Ellora Brotherhood to be valued or validated? Having comprehensively rejected terrestrial reincarnationism, Hardinge Britten leaves unaddressed the consequent paradox: the underlying purpose of ante-mortem conscious evolution through occult means is comprehensively undermined if death remains the primary catalytic agent for spiritual progress.

Colonel Olcott reaffirmed the Theosophical stance that Spiritualism and occultism were inherently incompatible:

To affirm that mediumship and adeptship are compatible, and that any Adept would permit himself to be guided or commanded by departed spirits, is an absurdity only equal to that of saying that the North and South Poles are in contact (Olcott, Old Diary Leaves, 191). It should be noted that Olcott had no high opinion of Hardinge Britten or her Chevalier. In describing a photograph of a chalk drawing of Chevalier Louis which Hardinge Britten provided for him, Olcott noted that the face was not that of a 'real Adept', but:

of a pretty man with mutton-chop whiskers, the face has the vapid weakness of a 'sick sensitive', of a fashionable lady-killer, or, as many say who have seen it, that of a wax figure such as the Parisian barber sets in his shop window to display his wigs and whiskers upon. One who has ever been face to face with a real Adept, would be forced by this effeminate dawdler's countenance to suspect that either Mrs. Britten had, faute de mieux, shown a bogus portrait of the real author, or that the book was written by no 'Chevalier Louis' at all (ibid., 193-194).

Hardinge Britten wrote:

['the demonstrated facts of Spiritualism'] dispel the phantoms of gloom, horror, and uncertainty to which superstition and ignorance have given birth, and reveal the death angel clothed in garments of celestial light, conducting the shivering souls of humanity, not into inconceivable states of sepulchral sleep, or scarcely less desirable conditions of everlasting torture, or everlasting heavenly psalm-singing, but into the second and higher stage of an eternal series of progressive existences (Emma Hardinge Britten, Modern American Spiritualism: A Twenty Years' Record of the Communion between Earth and the World of the Spirits, privately printed, New York, 1870, 520: n.b., though this work purports to be a second edition, there is no evidence of any previous issue - a not uncommon practice for publishers in this market, designed presumably to exaggerate the popularity of a work. For this tendency see Godwin, Arktos, 83).

See Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment, 375.

Faivre has noted that 'the spiritualist movement does not belong to the history of esotericism properly speaking, but would be closely associated with it because of its wide influence and because of the problems it raised': Faivre, Access, 87. This last point has resonances for Hardinge Britten's attempted synthesis.
The problematical relationship between ante-mortem and post-mortem spiritual progression which to varying degrees flummoxed Moses, Hockley, and Britten is first given comprehensive treatment by Blavatsky in 1877. With the establishment of her cherished dream of an occult fellowship in the form of the Theosophical Society, and with the support and direction granted her by her Masters, Blavatsky felt the time was ripe for the publication of her first major esoteric treatise. Though her early articles exhibited the promise of an inquiring mind (and a combative temperament), few could have failed to have been impressed by the sheer scope and size of her first opus, Isis Unveiled. Published in two volumes, running to in excess of thirteen hundred pages, Isis Unveiled is the first instalment of Blavatsky’s all-embracing mythography and within its pages the Masters gestalt is shown as the fulcrum upon which her cosmohistorical paradigm balances.¹ That said, Blavatsky’s Isis Unveiled is also by all accounts a prolix work, tending to sententiousness and aggressive polemics, particularly with regard to Blavatsky’s personal bugbears: materialist positivism and dogmatic ecclesialism. Its rather strident tone has sometimes led to its author being accused of unreconstructed iconoclasm to the detriment of her higher ambition, which purported to be an attempt to establish an all-inclusive testimony of the failure of materialist science and institutional religion to provide satisfying answers to fundamental questions of ontology and purpose. For Blavatsky, science had reneged on its promise.

¹ Blavatsky’s mature macrohistory of 1888 (H. P. Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy, 2 vols, Theosophical Publishing Company, London, 1888) is rightly considered her seminal work. Unfortunately, many scholars seize upon its Indic emphasis as proof of Blavatsky’s rejection of Western modes of thought. More properly, Isis Unveiled and The Secret Doctrine should be considered pendant volumes, the latter providing Oriental footnotes upon the former.
The latter part of the nineteenth century witnessed a shift in the perceptions of how the social sciences were to be studied and, perhaps more significantly, by whom. A heightened sensitivity toward the taxonomic ordering of materials into discrete social scientific categories, as well as the ever-increasing hoard of data available to Western researchers, combined to ensure the ascendency of the specialist scholar and the passing of the 'gentleman amateur'. By the time Blavatsky penned *Isis Unveiled*, grandiloquent all-inclusive testaments and eccentric universal theories (at least in the study of religion and mythography) were, for the most part, a thing of the past in the academy. For esotericists, though, such trends in academic epistemology meant very little: after all, those granted a special dispensation and in possession of secret truth require no warrant for their generalities. Certainly for Blavatsky, the real authors of

1 Undoubtedly the term 'social science' (*Sozialwissenschaft*) is itself problematic from the standpoint of historiography, let alone the more predictable concerns with methodology which have trailed the science: see G. W. Trompf, 'Social Science in Historical Perspective' in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 7:2, 1977, 113-138, esp. 131-134.

2 For this phrase, as well as a useful discussion of the epistemological shift in early nineteenth century scholarship, see Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 311-312.

3 In this context it would be interesting to pursue a study of the often competing, macro- and metahistorical paradigms which flourished in the nineteenth-century. An introduction to this study is offered by Herman de Tollenaere's 1992 article on socialism and Spiritualism (Herman de Tollenaere, 'Marx and Engels on Spiritualism and Theosophy' in *Theosophical History* 4:2, 45-47). An amplification of this theme, with particular resonance for South East Asia and India, is to be found in id., *The Politics of Divine Wisdom: Theosophy and labour, national, and women's movements in Indonesia and South Asia, 1875-1947*, Uitgeverij Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen, Leiden, 1996, 138-239.

An example of the sort of macrohistorical musing which antedated Blavatsky is to be found in Godfrey Higgins' *Anacalypsis* (Godfrey Higgins, *Anacalypsis, An Attempt to Draw Aside the Veil of the Saitic Isis; or, an Inquiry into the Origin of Languages, Nations and Religions*, 2 vols., Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Longman, London, 1836). Higgins' work is certainly an ancestor of Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* in direct as well as in indirect ways. Though Oclcott does not mention it among those works in their New York library, Blavatsky was certainly cognizant of its contents and regarded its author with great favour (cf., eg., H. P. Blavatsky, 'The Esoteric Character of the Gospels' in Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. VIII, 178). Higgins' interest in aeonic cyclicism and his concentration on a 'secret science' is a remarkable prefiguration of Blavatsky's later conceptions. Little has been made of Higgins' anticipation of Blavatsky, perhaps due to the notorious rarity of his works. The notable exceptions are Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment, passim*, and esp. Leslie Shepard, 'The *Anacalypsis* of Godfrey Higgins - Precursor of *Isis Unveiled* and The Secret Doctrine' in *Theosophical History* 1:3, July, 1985, 46-53.

4 A curious turn of events regarding the title of Blavatsky's book sheds some light upon its universalist pretensions. The work was originally to be entitled 'The Veil of Isis' until it was discovered W. Winwood Reade's curious book of 1861 had preempted the name. J. W. Bouton (Blavatsky's publisher) and Charles Sotheran hastily retitled the book *Isis Unveiled*. Bouton later wrote that the new title 'seems to me in many respects much better than the other title, for in itself it has a distinct meaning which the other has not': J. W. Bouton to Blavatsky, 8 May, 1877, in Michael Gomes, *The Dawning*, 122. Though the change from the first to the second title is contingent, it is nevertheless significant as being emblematic of the claim that Blavatsky had somehow penetrated the veil to expose the mystery to public gaze. Indeed, what she claimed was nothing less than a *universal hermeneutic.*
Isis Unveiled were her Masters; she was but the amanuensis. Thus her cosmohistorical pronouncements were subsequently elevated to the status of divine dictate by her disciples, a position they continue to hold for most ardent Theosophists.\textsuperscript{6}

Though Blavatsky included input from selected acquaintances (Sotheran, Rawson, Olcott, and others), the work is demonstrably her own production.\textsuperscript{7} That said, it should be noted that the erratic nature of its creation, the breadth of its erudition, and even the variety of calligraphic scripts evident in the manuscript, convinced many in her acquaintance that Blavatsky had been 'entered' psychically and physically by her Master or Masters, and that he or they were the true authors.\textsuperscript{8} Such a notion was further emphasised by Blavatsky's claim to a comprehensive ignorance of matters scientific:

\begin{quote}
I had never been at any college, and what I knew I had taught myself; I have never pretended to scholarship in the sense of modern research; I had then barely read any scientific European works, knew little of Western philosophy and science.\textsuperscript{9}
\end{quote}

In fact, Blavatsky’s Master operated not simply as inspiration for her endeavour, but in an entirely active capacity:

Whenever I am \textit{told} to write, I sit down and obey, and then I can write easily upon almost anything - metaphysics, psychology, philosophy, ancient religions, zoology, natural sciences, or what not. I never put myself the question: ‘\textit{Can} I write on this subject?...’ or, ‘Am I equal to the task?’ but I simply sit down and

\textsuperscript{6} The degree to which Blavatsky’s writings have been received as authoritative Writ can be discerned in what purports to be an objective history of the Society:

\begin{quote}
[N]ot in a jot or in tittle is there a contradiction or a disagreement in all she ever wrote; that in ‘Isis’ are the foundational statements of Occultism. All her later writings are but extensions, ramifications, the orderly development and unfolding of what is both explicit and implicit in ‘Isis Unveiled’ (Anonymous [John Garrigues, ed.], \textit{The Theosophical Movement, 1875-1925: A History and a Survey}, E. P. Dutton, New York, 1925, 41).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{7} Olcott, \textit{Old Diary Leaves}, 205-206.

\textsuperscript{8} Blavatsky wrote to her sister, Vera Zhelikhovskaia \textit{circa} 1876:

Do not be afraid that I am off my head. All I can say is that someone positively inspires me - more than this, someone enters me. It is not I who talk and write: it is something within me, my higher and luminous Self, that thinks and writes for me (H. P. Blavatsky, ‘Letters of H. P. Blavatsky’ in \textit{The Path} IX:9, December, 1894, 266).

\textsuperscript{9} Blavatsky, \textit{Collected Writings}, vol. XIII, 197.
write. Why? Because somebody who knows all dictates to me...My MASTER, and occasionally others whom I knew in my travels years ago [...] He allows me to simply copy what I write from manuscripts, and even printed matter that pass before my eyes, in the air..." ^10

Blavatsky was careful to assure her readers, particularly those who were members of the nascent Society, that although *Isis Unveiled* was the product of meta-empirical agency, and contained heretofore unpublished revelation, it was not produced by any species of automatic writing: ^11* 'I have never been unconscious one single instant'. ^12 Such demonstrative declarations from Blavatsky are a concerted attempt to contrast the production of her writings from those of Spiritualists such as Moses, and yet at the same time to retain their intrinsic revelatory character as having been generated with supramundane insight. The reader is left in no doubt of Blavatsky’s first-hand acquaintance with those entrusted with esoteric arcana: the first sentence of the preface emphasises that ‘[t]he work now submitted to public judgment is the fruit of a somewhat intimate acquaintance with Eastern adepts and study of their science.' ^13

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^10 Sinnett, *Incidents*, 157, emphasis and spacings in original. Though Sinnett does not attempt to date the letter, Vera Zhelikhovskaia remembers it to have been ‘during the very time of her writing’ *Isis Unveiled*: see Violet M. Christie, ‘H. P. B.’ in *The Theosophist* XLVII:6, March, 1926, 736.


Few analyses of *Isis Unveiled* have been attempted. Those which exist have tended to divide neatly between scholars who dismiss the work as pompous and uniformed posturing, and those who assert Blavatsky’s purpose to have been nothing more sophisticated than a bombastic frontal assault on entrenched religious and scientific orthodoxies. Certainly, the evidence for such an assault is demonstrably present, yet few have intuited that her desire was neither anarchic nor atheistical, but rather to highlight her conviction that materialist science and institutional Christianity, far from

14 Perhaps the most infamous of the analyses of *Isis Unveiled* has been that of William Emmette Coleman (Wm. Emmette Coleman, ‘The Sources of Madame Blavatsky’s Writings’, included as Appendix C in Solovyoff, *A Modern Priestess*, 353-366). Coleman charged Blavatsky with blatant plagiarism; he claimed to have discovered two thousand passages which Blavatsky had included in *Isis Unveiled* without acknowledgement. Further, he surmised that the work had been more or less cobbled together from around one hundred books and periodicals. In response to the latter there need be little argument given that Olcott himself acknowledged the paucity of the New York ‘Lamasery’s’ library:

One might fancy, upon seeing the numerous quotations in *Isis Unveiled* that she had written it in an alcove of the British Museum or of the Astor Library in New York. The fact is, however, that our whole working library scarcely comprised one hundred books of reference (Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, 207).

The former is the more substantial assertion. Conventional Theosophical wisdom would have it that Blavatsky was the subject of a degree of ‘thought transference’ whereby the Master’s conveyed information to their amanuensis mentally. That such information may well have come originally from a book would thus have been unknown to Blavatsky herself. Further, she was required to engage a number of associates to edit the English text who themselves may not have applied rigorous rules of acknowledgement - certainly Blavatsky later wished to reedit the work. In any case, the interest of *Isis Unveiled* is to be found less in its specific detail than in its conceptual sweep. For Blavatsky’s explanation of the book’s precipitation/production see Blavatsky, ‘My Books’ in Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. XIII, 191-204. It should also be remembered that Coleman’s antipathy towards Blavatsky may well have been influenced by his own espousal of Spiritualism: see Cranston, *H. P. B*, 379-384; Michael Gomes, *Theosophy in the Nineteenth Century: An Annotated Bibliography*, Garland, New York, 1994, 493-495.

15 James Webb, representing the former tendency, dismissed *Isis Unveiled* in the following terms:

It was a BIG book, over thirteen hundred pages long. Considering the appalling style, the magpie-like accumulation of mysticism, tall stories and archaeology, and the vicious anti-Christian bias, it is not surprising that such reviewers as struggled through *Isis Unveiled* were mostly derogatory, or at best puzzled. Equally unsurprising is the popularity which Madame Blavatsky’s compendium of mystification afterwards brought its author, who was offering her contemporaries the sort of spiritual porridge for which they craved (Webb, *Flight*, 46).

Emblematic of the latter tendency is David Morris:

What did nevertheless appear through the ‘spiritual porridge’ was that, whatever else may be said about Theosophy, it set itself firmly against both the whole spirit of contemporary materialist science and also the beleaguered orthodoxy of the Christian faith ... In its assault on both organized religion and progressive science, proclaiming the authority of mediumistic and adept knowledge, the T.S. was possibly unique (David Morris, *The Masks of Lucifer: Technology and the Occult in Twentieth-Century Popular Literature*, B. T. Batsford Ltd., London, 1992, 14).

One wonders how Morris’ limited definition of Theosophy (as mediated by *Isis Unveiled*) would differ from, for instance, the sophisticated Spiritualism of the 1860s and later.
being at enmity, were indeed complementary, if odd, bedfellows. As it happened, both were, in Blavatskian historical mapping, inherently transient and symptomatic of devolutionary tendencies. Blavatsky’s goal was larger than simple nihilism and involved nothing less than the dismantling of the exclusivist presuppositions of Church and science in order to remove the stigma which had occluded humanity from an unimpeded vision of its own origins and destiny. Unsurprisingly, it would be the Masters who would remove the offending scales:

The universe is there, and we know that we exist; but how did it come, and how did we appear in it? Denied an answer by the representatives of physical learning, and excommunicated and anathematized for our blasphemous curiosity by the spiritual usurpers, what can we do, but turn for information to the sages who meditated upon the subject ages before the molecules of our philosophers aggregated in ethereal space?16

To achieve this end Blavatsky was required to paint with a very broad palette indeed.

For all of its Oriental airs, the Weltanschauung of Isis Unveiled remains steadfastly grounded in established Western philosophical and historical reflection. As an example, the first volume, devoted to an indictment of scientific materialism, conjures the Indic Mahayuga as evidence of a cosmo-historical cyclic periodicity in order to counter the linear visioning of time so prevalent in Thomas Huxley (1825-1895) and, above all, Auguste Comte (1798-1857).17 Yet such Indian borrowings are incorporated into Blavatsky’s programme not solely so as to promulgate India as the

17 Kalpa theory, i.e., aeonic periodicity, most notably exhibited in the quaternary systematisation of the Mahayuga, was known to Blavatsky through early renderings of the epic Mahabhara. It is worthy of note that the focus of her interest in the Mahabhara was directed to its much later, post-Christian appendix, the Harivamsa, with its concentration on the degenerate present age, the kali yuga, and its premillennial eschatology: see H. P. Blavatsky, ‘Magic’ in H. P. Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. II:1879-1880, comp. Boris de Zirkoff, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Ill., n.d., 37-38. De Zirkoff has suggested Blavatsky employed the edited version of the Mahabhara produced for the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta between 1834-1839 (in ibid., 536). Blavatsky’s hatred for the Positivists - ‘a mongrel class of pseudo-philosophers’ - is as nothing compared with her contempt for Comte himself: ‘Comte ... presented the world with the greatest monstrosity that ever emanated from a human mind!’: Blavatsky, Isis Unveiled, vol. I, 75, 83. Typical is her suggestion that as ‘[i]rascible psychophobists, no more cutting insult can be offered them than to suggest that they may be endowed with immortal spirits’: ibid., 75. One suspects that the scorn Blavatsky reserved for Comte had as much to do with her aversion to alternative and competing evolutionisms as it did to his ‘sociology’. 116
matrix of human spiritual and cultural history, as too many Blavatsky scholars have repeatedly assumed, but more keenly in order to emphasise the universalist aspirations of her preexisting Occidentally-generated spiritualised processus theory. In reality, the Indic materials at this point add little other than a vocabulary to conceptual figurations whose grammar was already available from classical models of time and history, such as those of Hesiod (c. 750 B.C.E.) and Aristotle (384-355 B.C.E.), or from the expansive visions of such luminaries of esotericism as Boehme and Swedenborg.

In a similar vein there has been a noted tendency in Blavatsky scholarship to dismiss the syncretising elements so evident in Isis Unveiled as but the prelude to what is perceived to be her ultimate wholesale subjugation of Western motifs to Eastern ones. Consequently, commentators have, for the most part, mistakenly conflated her pre-Isis Masters of Wisdom with the ascetic adepts of Buddhist and Hindu devotional praxis who figure prominently in Isis Unveiled. Though it is true that this confusion is only aided by Blavatsky’s tendency to conflate terms at will, the work does, however, insist that the latter comprise a less exalted subset of the former:

Many and varied are the nationalities to which belong the disciples of that mysterious school [the Masters], and many the side-shoots of that one primitive stock. The secresy [sic] preserved by these sub-lodges, as well as by the one and supreme great lodge, has ever been proportionate to the activity of religious persecutions; and now, in the face of the growing materialism, their very existence is becoming a mystery.

Cf., eg., Donald Cook’s comment on Isis Unveiled: ‘despite the title of the book, it is Hinduism and Buddhism that begin to emerge as the old yet timeless sources’ (Donald A. Cook, ‘Madame Blavatsky: The Woman Behind the Myth’ [rev. art.], in Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research, 75:3, 1981, 285).

The influence of these figures and others will be more closely examined in reference to The Secret Doctrine, infra ch. 14.

It is important here to define Blavatskian syncretising in a narrow sense. Her desire was not to accommodate all religious and philosophical thought (particularly Indian themes) in a form of all-embracing pansophic religionism; rather, she strove to harmonise various carefully selected strains of speculation and imagery into a single cosmosophy. Thus her aims were, properly speaking, synthetising in nature.

This last comment has a particular practical resonance for Blavatsky's Theosophical imaging. For her, the Masters were a people apart, transcending the particulars of culture, creed, and nationality. Attendant upon this emphatic universalism, the astute reader can propose a simple observation: if the 'disciples of that mysterious school' exist in all places and times, and are not confined by the cultural, geographical, and linguistic barriers which encircle the general human populace, then why is it that the Theosophical Masters personify ever more Orientalising traits? From the recognisably Western John King of the early 1870s, thence to the Egyptians Serapis and Tuitit Bey
of 1875,

and later to the Kashmiri Brahmin Mahatma Koot Hoomi and Rajput prince Mahatma Morya of the late 1870s, Blavatsky’s Masters appear to steadily - even geographically - remove themselves from any engagement with the Western complex. Intriguingly, this ‘Indicisation’ of the Masters mythologem is exactly emblematic of Blavatsky’s personal philosophical pilgrimage of the later 1870s.

It is true that the late nineteenth century swell of acceptable translations of ancient Eastern religious and mythological texts, as well as the burgeoning interest in

...
Religionswissenschaft (attending upon Friedrich Max Müller’s conviction that in the science of religion, ‘He who knows one, knows none’) had combined to establish the Orient as a promising subject for the Western gaze. Yet it is surely less the attractions of the East than the active hazards of the West which ultimately convinced Blavatsky that, though her conceptual framework would remain that of a Western esotericist, her Theosophical Society, together with the mythos and idiosyncratic historiography which engendered it, were best removed to India. Significantly, the hazards, the ‘persecutions’, which Blavatsky intuited in the West were not to be found most insidiously in ecclesial opposition, nor indeed in either Europe’s entrenched Deism or the incipient historical or dialectical materialism of Engels’ Marxism. What Blavatsky recognised as the prime danger for the West was that the progeny of the bitter union effected between a de-sacralised science and doctrinally reactionary religion was likely to be an illegitimate ‘scientism’; a faith with all of the awe of religion and none of the transformational power. She was particularly concerned that the mythology of scientism would hallow naturalistic determinism and would thus deny the reality of conscious spiritual and physical evolution, the prime tenet of esotericism.

For Blavatsky the only viable alternative to this mongrel ‘scientism’ was a renovated hybridised esotericism whose inventive blending of Eastern iconography and Western Enlightenment progressivism, of Indian kalpa theory and Kabbalistic aeonic configurations, and of lamasery and Rosicrucian vault, would aspire to a cosmo-historical synthetic universalism never before conceptualised by


Blavatsky recognised that her teachings would find little space to grow by maintaining a Western idiom:

[T]he Western world ... refuses to learn anything. For it, any notion of the Divine Ego or the plurality of its births is ‘heathen foolishness’. The Western world rejects these truths, and will recognize no wise men except those of its own making, created in its own image, born within its own Christian era and teachings (Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. XII, 314).

In typically colourful prose, Blavatsky noted the irony in the misplaced soteriological power which she believed was being accorded to science:

[T]he world has become mortally sick of the dogmatism, the arrogance, the self-sufficiency, and the spiritual blindness of modern science - of that same Modern Science which men but yesterday hailed as their deliverer from religious bigotry and Christian superstition [sic], but which, like the Devil of the monkish legends, requires, as the price of its services, the sacrifice of man’s immortal soul (Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. VIII, 278).
esotericism. Indeed, only by a rigorous and systematised policy of appropriating all the world’s cultural and historical grist and feeding it to the esoteric mill could the new esotericism parry with ‘scientism’ which, appropriately enough, was attempting much the same thing in its own gambit for epistemological dominance. Central to Blavatsky’s endeavour was the Master; only he could personify her desire to wrest matter from the Materialists and refashion the anthropos as the centre of a reenchanted world: he was, after all, the ideal, template, and proof of conscious evolution.

Isis Unveiled is concerned primarily with Blavatsky’s attempted resuscitation and revisioning of Western esotericism in the light of Darwinian naturalism and Comtist Positivism, both of which promulgated a radically demythologised world. Yet the epistemological rupture caused by the ascendancy of empirical science over Bibliocentric cosmology and anthropology meant that the radically elongated prehistory and human developmentalism advocated by the evolutionists had somehow to be accommodated in any new esoteric historiography. For Blavatsky the options were clear; she could either favour entrenched reactive positions and retreat to less-confronting conceptualities such as she had known during her career as a Spiritualist, or she could disengage from the Judaeo-Christian historical stream, which until that time had been the harbour of Western esotericism and which was now becoming increasingly harried by the bright glare of scientific rationalism, and search for an entree into new domains by turning her mythistorical locus ever farther eastward.

An esotericism with universalist pretensions would attack the ‘parasitic weeds’ from all angles: Universal Esotericism preserved by certain cosmopolitan fraternities, and the key to which has long since been lost by the Brâhmanas in general, presents a cosmic and human genesis which is logical and based on natural sciences, as well as on a pure transcendental philosophy. Judeo-Christian exotericism gives but an allegory based on the same esoteric truth, but so smothered under the dead letter that it is taken for mere fiction. Jewish Kabbalists understand it to some extent (in ibid., 74-75).


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CHAPTER 9

INDIA

Having already begun something of a philosophical pilgrimage to India, it remained for Blavatsky to undertake her physical relocation. As was typical for her, circumstances which might otherwise appear entirely arbitrary and coincidental were interpreted as omens of her peculiar destiny. Thus it was that she was introduced to the Ārya Samāj of Dayānanda Sarasvati (1824-1883).

Sales of Isis Unveiled had gone well. The Theosophical Society, which by the latter part of 1877 had dwindled to the stage at which meetings often were convened with only the two founders present, underwent something of a small renaissance. Blavatsky had been approached by two English Spiritualists, Charles Carleton Massey (1838-1905) and Stainton Moses (of 'Imperator' fame), and by her adoring disciple Emily Kislingbury, about the formation of a London branch. Plans were afoot for similar developments in Russia and Japan. Blavatsky was receiving applications for membership from prominent figures in the business and scientific worlds, including General Abner Doubleday (1819-1893) and Thomas Edison (1847-1931). Most significant, though, was the friendship of Moolji Thackersey.

The Theosophical Society of the Ārya Samāj of India

Olcott had first encountered Thackersey, the owner of a Bombay mill, during his 1870 passage to England at a time when India had surely not entered his mind. Seven

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1 Even at the high price of $7.50 the first edition of one thousand copies sold out in ten days. Olcott quotes from the American Bookseller (October, 1877): 'The sale ... is unprecedented for a work of its kind' (Olcott, Old Diary Leaves, 294). Isis Unveiled has never been out of print.
3 Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 181.
4 Ibid., 181-182.
5 Cranston, H. P. B., 185-186.
6 It was during this visit that Olcott first encountered the famed spirit guide, John King. See supra ch. 6.
years later Blavatsky and Olcott were visited at their New York Lamasery by the American Spiritualist, James Peebles (1822-1922), who recognised Thackersey as one of the figures in a mounted photograph inside the apartment. Peebles told the delighted pair that he had himself encountered Thackersey on a recent visit to Bombay and was able to furnish Olcott with his address. Olcott wasted no time; the following day he wrote to his erstwhile friend, lauding the achievements of the Theosophical Society in disseminating the pristine wisdoms of India. Thackersey replied almost immediately and the two were soon engaged in a regular correspondence. For Blavatsky this link with India indicated nothing less than that the benevolent regard of Providence - or, in Theosophical parlance, her Masters - oversaw their mission.

Thackersey had become an avid disciple of the Hindu reformist Dayânanda Sarasvatî. Dayânanda’s Ārya Samâj movement, with its emphatic insistence on monotheistic anti-Brahmanical Hinduism, immediately aroused sympathies in Blavatskian anticlericalism, which had come to the fore during the writing of *Isis Unveiled*. Further, Dayânanda’s embracing of the antique Vedas and of modern epistemology and technology seemed to meld well with her occultistic desire to present a ‘modernised’ *prisca theologia*. The philosophical and theological sympathies between the societies were no doubt further (and dishonestly) exaggerated by Hurrychund Chintamon, an Ārya Samâj devotee and semi-official facilitator between the two groups, who seems to have misrepresented Dayânanda’s stance on such

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7 Such was the title a reporter gave to their New York apartments on 8th Avenue and 47th Street. For details and an illustration see Cranston, H. P. B., 168-178.
8 Olcott referred to Dayânanda Sarasvatî as the ‘Hindu Luther’: Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, 396.
9 For details of Dayânanda’s Vedic focus, and his espousal of such items of modernity as the railway and the telegraph, see Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, 101-129, esp. 113-116.
pivotal issues as the existence of a personal deity.\textsuperscript{10} Within six months Olcott’s enthusiasm for the Ārya Samāj had multiplied and his letters had become those of a suppliant:

A number of American and other students who earnestly seek after spiritual knowledge, place themselves at your feet and pray you to enlighten them.\textsuperscript{11}

Blavatsky’s interest was no less evident; characteristically she incorporated Dayānanda into her macrohistorical ensemble:

H. P. B. told me ... that he was an adept of the Himalayan Brotherhood inhabiting the Swami’s body; well known to our own teachers, and in relations with them for the accomplishment of the work he had in hand.\textsuperscript{12}

By 23 May, 1878, Blavatsky and Olcott, with the support of their Council, had agreed that the Theosophical Society should amalgamate with the Ārya Samāj and would now

\textsuperscript{10} Hurrychund Chintamon (he Anglicised his name from Harishchandra Chintamanani) was at the time the President of the Ārya Samāj in Bombay. He was ultimately expelled from the movement: see Har Bilas Sarda, \textit{Life of Dayanand Saraswati: World Teacher}, n.p., Ajmer, 1946, 524. For an analysis of the veracity of the correspondence, and further information about Hurrychund, see Cooper, ‘The Letters’, vol. I, xxxvi-xlili. For Dayānanda Sarasvati see Vishwa Prakash, \textit{Life and Teachings of Swami Dayanand}, Kala Press, Allahabad, 1935; Johnson, \textit{The Masters Revealed}, 107-115...

Blavatsky was not above a certain duplicity herself, and seems to have found something of a willing partner in Hurrychund. On 22 May, 1878, Blavatsky wrote to Hurrychund and asked him to write in turn to C. C. Massey and Emily Kislingbury and hint that the information contained in his letters was derived from an occult source. (For an analysis of the veracity of this and later letters see Cooper, ‘The Letters’, vol. I, lviii-lix, ch.2). Unfortunately for Blavatsky, Hurrychund eventually travelled to England and struck up an association with Massey and informed him of the deception. Hurrychund passed the originals of Blavatsky’s letters to Professor H. Sidgwick who delivered copies of them to Richard Hodgson for inclusion in a damning report of Theosophy commissioned by the Society for Psychical Research (\textit{Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research}, 3, 1885), for which see \textit{infra} ch. 11. For his part, Massey proved to be the subject of a number of acts of Blavatskian engineered legerdemain. With the able assistance of the Spiritualist Mary Hollis-Billing ([1837-?] whose cooperation was guaranteed when Blavatsky assured her that her spirit guide, ‘Skí’, was none other than an Indian Master), Blavatsky was able to insinuate some correspondence into various locations, including Massey’s coat pocket, apparently miraculously. Hollis-Billing later admitted to the fraud (Meade, \textit{Madame Blavatsky}, 193-194, 255), though cf. supra p. 135n43. See also Leslie Price, ‘The British Letter’ in \textit{Theosophical History}, 1.3, 1985, 54-59 for C. C. Massey’s correspondence with Henry Sidgwick regarding the debacle over Blavatsky’s use of Mary Hollis-Billing to engineer phenomena.


\textsuperscript{12} Olcott, \textit{Old Diary Leaves}, 396-397.
be reconstituted as the Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj of India. Little remained to tie Blavatsky to New York and she was eager to depart for India; such was not the case for Olcott who had serious misgivings about financing the expedition and who had the not inconsequential problem of his wife and two sons to support. Significantly, a flurry of letters from his then Master, Serapis, together with Blavatsky’s increased candour regarding the identity of her mysterious Indian associate (‘M:’) as being the Master Morya, appeared to tip the scales in favour of the journey: ‘definite orders from Serapis. Have to go; the latest from 15 to 20th Dec.’ They departed on the 18th.

The joy (and relief) which Blavatsky and Olcott experienced upon arriving in Bombay on the morning of 16 February, 1879, was soon tempered by the realisation that their partnership with the Arya Samaj was not to be a happy one. Hurrychund Chintamon, who had regaled them with great pomp upon their landing, subsequently billed them for the privilege; indeed it was soon discovered that he had embezzled 600

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19 Olcott’s Old Diary Leaves has the title of the new body as ‘The Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj’: in ibid., 397. Even critical biographies of Blavatsky follow suit: cf., eg., Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 182. The suffix ‘of India’ is included in Olcott’s original correspondence with Dayânanda: see Sarda, Life of Dayanand, 528. Another name is sometimes given as a ‘bridge between the two mother countries’, ‘The Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj of Aryavarti’, though the former tended to be maintained in usage: C. Jinarajadasa, The Golden Book of the Theosophical Society, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1925, 37, 220.

10 Olcott’s diary in Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. I, 420. This note was inscribed by Blavatsky in Olcott’s diary (the book, housed in the Adyar library archives, was in reality a communal enterprise for the two during the year 1878). Further notes by Olcott regarding correspondence from ‘the Divine Brother’ (Serapis?) appear in ibid., 415. It is around this time that the mysterious ‘M:’ or ‘Master M.’ to whom Blavatsky had been referring since 1877 is first introduced as Morya (though cf. Blavatsky’s sketch of Morya in Neff, Personal Memoirs of H. P. Blavatsky, 221, and n.b. Caldwell contra Johnson in Caldwell, K. Paul Johnson’s House of Cards, 34-36). Olcott, who claimed to have been visited in his room one evening during the period of the writing of Isis Unveiled by a mysterious Rajput Indian, believed he had encountered ‘one of the Elder Brothers of Humanity, one of the Masters of our dull pupil-race’: Olcott, Old Diary Leaves, 380. It was at this time that Blavatsky had informed him that he had been transferred from the ‘African [Egyptian?]’ section of the Occult Brotherhood ... to the Indian section and a different group of Masters’: in ibid., 17-18. That the Master Morya (a Rajput prince) would at this specific time show an interest in the movement of the Society to India, and in Olcott’s personal activities in particular, would have convinced Olcott his decision to relocate was the correct one. Indeed, so convinced was he of his 'adoption' by an Indian Master that he took to wearing the turban left by his mysterious visitor aboard the ship, much to Blavatsky’s annoyance: see Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 194-195.

11 Blavatsky had found the voyage almost unbearable and had injured herself in high seas. Having survived one shipwreck, she was concerned about the fastness of their vessel, the Speke Hall. Six years later the ship was lost without any survivors: see Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 195.
rupees Blavatsky had raised for Dayânanda’s movement. Energetic as ever, Blavatsky chose not to be daunted by the deception, nor indeed by the rigours of life as a Russian emigré and newly-nationalised American woman under the British Raj. She did not even create her customary fuss when, during their introductory meeting, Dayânanda overlooked her in favour of Olcott. Further indication of her emotional equilibrium is provided by the fact that only once, it seems, did she bother overmuch with the constant police surveillance given to suspect spies. Instead she set about Masters-hunting, inquiring after supramundane phenomena from various of the Sunyâsin the pair encountered in their travels. Often she would wander away and return with flowers or a note from a member of the Brotherhood whom she claimed to have encountered.

Marion Meade has asserted that Blavatsky sought desperately to plunder her encounters with Indian ascetics for phenomena which would prove the existence of the Masters. Such a position is in keeping with Meade’s programme to reduce the Masters to simple instantiations of Blavatsky’s romantic temperament, mendacious

16 Henry Steele Olcott, Old Diary Leaves: The Only Authentic History of The Theosophical Society, Second Series, 1878-83, 3rd ed., Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1954, 20. It also appears that Hurrychund had not bothered to inform more than a couple of people that the pair were to arrive in India.
17 Blavatsky was the first Russian woman to be naturalised in the U. S. A. (8 July, 1878): see Cranston, H. P. B., 113ff; Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 183.
18 Ibid., 203-204.
19 On that occasion Blavatsky had shouted at the police escort and demanded to go to the United States Consulate to complain. Even though Blavatsky had reluctantly agreed to gain a U. S. A. passport in order to counter British interest in her, the pair were still watched at every turn. Only weeks after the Theosophists’ arrival in India, British forces had invaded Afghanistan and were nervous about Russian espionage. Blavatsky, wilfully exhibitionistic and given to violent public outbursts, was doubly suspect. Olcott records that even their notes and telegrams were intercepted: see Olcott, Old Diary Leaves, Second Series, 77. There is a curious irony in the fact that the surveillance undertaken by the Anglo-Indian police was ultimately ended (November, 1879) by the intervention of the Viceroy, Edward Robert Bulwer-Lytton, first Earl Lytton, the son of the nineteenth century paterfamilias of occult literature, Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer-Lytton, first Baron Kneebworth, author of Zanoni. Edward Robert Lord Lytton, who published poetry under the pseudonym ‘Owen Meredith’, was quite sympathetic to the Society and following his tenure as Viceroy, furnished Blavatsky and Olcott with a letter of recommendation: see Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. II, 428; id., Collected Writings, vol. X: 1888-1889, 2nd ed., comp. Boris de Zirkoff, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Ill., 293; cf. incorrect date in vol. XIII, 206.
20 To which one, a blind Sikh Sunyâsi by the name of Babu Surdass, replied chasteningly that the ‘Wise Man never permitted his attention to be drawn aside from the search after spirit by these playthings of the ignorant’: recorded by Olcott, Old Diary Leaves, Second Series, 65.
21 Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 202ff.
22 Ibid., 202-203, 207 et passim.
disposition, and Orientalising fervour. That noted, there are significant episodes which illustrate Blavatsky’s tendency to indulge in a little creative myth-making in regard to the Masters. Some of her tales, most notably her admittedly romanticised accounts of the Founders’ 1879 travels, written under the pseudonym ‘Radda-Bai’ and entitled From the Caves and Jungles of Hindostan, do not really compare favourably with the more prosaic version in Olcott’s Old Diary Leaves. Adeptsbounds in Blavatsky’s account, each performing numerous feats of wonder; Olcott’s seems more concerned with ‘beautifully evoking the tropical atmosphere’. Of more concern, perhaps, are the occasions wherein Blavatsky appears likely to have cajoled or employed individuals to impersonate Masters so as to beguile Olcott and others.

One likely candidate for such fraudulence occurred on a visit to the Karli caves in April, 1879. Throughout the trip Olcott was given notes, flowers, and gifts, each enigmatically delivered to him with messages from the Brotherhood of Masters. A man, identified as Baburao, would await the travellers at various of their train stops and proffer the compliments of his master (interpreted by Olcott as a Master). To cap all of this, and with customary flourish, Blavatsky sent a request to the Masters by means of a scribbled note folded into a triangle and cast unceremoniously out of the window of the train while it steamed across uninhabited terrain at an altitude of three thousand feet. Upon arrival at Bombay, Olcott was greeted with an answering telegram from the mysterious Master Goolab Singh, receipted only 75 minutes after Blavatsky’s petition. Such marvels impressed Olcott deeply at the time; many years later he discovered that Baburao had been hired by Thackersey at Blavatsky’s request.


24 Johnson, The Masters Revealed, 127. Johnson’s chapter on the Maharaja Ranbir Singh of Kashmir (pp. 120-147) is a masterly analysis of the probable prototype of the adept most well recorded in From the Caves and Jungles of Hindostan, Gulab-Singh (or Gulab-Lal-Singh). That Ranbir Singh may also have furnished some of the iconography and traits for the Master Morya is more tentative, but certainly possible.

25 One of the first such occasions occurred in 1876 when it appears Blavatsky orchestrated the appearance of an ‘elemental’ in her New York apartment by the simple means of promising a maid five dollars if she would dress for the part. It seems she never paid the debt. Details in the Religio-Philosophical Journal, September 4, 1889: quoted in Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 175.

26 See infra p. 127n24.
as her personal servant for the trip. It seems not to have occurred to him that their fifteen-year-old domestic servant, Vallah Bulla (reduced to ‘Babula’ by Blavatsky), was also present on the train - though in a third class carriage - and may himself have engineered the gifts and telegram.

The dramatic flair which Blavatsky employed to such effect in casting a glamour over Olcott and their growing band of Indian associates earned her something of a celebrity status in Bombay; their premises on Girgaum Back Road soon became a haven for the exotically-minded who would sit on the verandah and listen to Blavatsky’s inspiring talk of Masters. Dayânanda commented wryly in a missive of 23 November, 1880:

How amazing is it that you came here (India) to become a disciple and a pupil and now want to become Guru and Acharya (preceptor).

Is it proper for any one to do such contradictory things?

Dayânanda’s acuity underscores a significant failing in the traditional analyses of Blavatsky’s attraction to India. Most studies suggest that upon her arrival she absorbed Indian motifs with a remarkable alacrity so as to regurgitate them, with variable success, as a sort of hotchpotch Occidentalised Indicism tailored for a Western

28 Dayânanda Sarasvatî to H. P. Blavatsky, 23 November, 1880, in Sarda, Life of Dayanand, 544-545. Cf. also Johnson, The Masters Revealed, 114. It seems that the failing of the joint Ārya Samaj/Theosophical Society enterprise, complete by the end of 1883, had more to do with mutually contradictory philosophical positions (as well as tensions to do with authority) than with ‘Hindu fanaticism’ (as Johnson would have it): see Johnson, Initiates, 40.
readership. In this way she has been seen as but one in a long stream of cultural appropriators and exporters. The error is not entirely one of substance, rather of emphasis; in reality, Blavatsky imported standard motifs of Western esotericism into India and speedily arrayed them in local forms, thus fashioning an Indicised esotericism. Her notion of Masters, unsurprisingly deemed peculiar by the Veda-literate Ārya Samāj, had been predetermined in the main prior to her departure from New York; certainly it was afforded colour by its Indic overlays, but it remained staunchly a product of Western esotericism(s). Thus Dayānanda was right; Blavatsky did conceive of herself as a teacher: she alone would have been unsurprised that Indians were coming to her for lessons in what others would have perceived superficially as indigenous religion.

Several authors have ascribed to Blavatsky a preeminent position among those of her century who exposed Indian religion and mythology to the West: cf., eg., Zareer Masani, *Indian Tales of the Raj*, BBC Books, London, 1987, 78ff. Aubrey Menen's *The New Mystics* grants to her 'the credit of opening Western minds to Indian thought, in general, of which, till her, it was virtually ignorant': Aubrey Menen, *The New Mystics and the true Indian tradition*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1974, 154. While it is true that Blavatsky was responsible, perhaps even primarily responsible, for first presenting Indian religious and philosophical tenets to a broad popular Western readership, much too little scholarly work has been done to determine the degree to which Blavatskian redactions and patternings upset the integrity of the Indian materials. It could be argued, for instance, that Blavatsky's romanticised Indic prisca theologia is the conceptual forebear for many of the peculiar relativistic 'Indicisms' of the New Age (for which Blavatsky is an acknowledged 'materfamilias'): see infra Appendix E. A few voices were raised against Blavatskian Orientalism in her day - the most authoritative being Max Müller, who found little to admire. Müller's most extensive attack on 'Esoteric Buddhism' (Theosophy) was published soon after Blavatsky's death in the May, 1893, edition of *Nineteenth Century*. Sinnett replied to Müller in the next month's edition in a remarkable piece which suggested that he (rather than Blavatsky) had been responsible for the greater part of the Theosophical idiom. Müller followed up with an amusing rejoinder in the August edition. All three pieces are reproduced in F. Max Müller, *Last Essays, Second Series: Essays on the Science of Religion*, Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1901, 79-170.

For such a voluminous and hyperbolic writer it is interesting that Blavatsky rarely allows a glimpse into her essential Eurocentrism. In a roundabout way she indicated her conceptual roots in a letter to the Theosophist Franz Hartmann, though she was careful to qualify her comments at the end:

Arrived at Bombay, we had to drop Western and take to Eastern Rosicrucianism. It turned a failure for the Europeans, as the Western turned a failure for the Hindus. This is the secret, and the very root of the failure. But, having mixed up the elements in the so-desired Brotherhood - that could not be helped. Please do not misunderstand me. Occultism is one and universal at its roots. Its external modes differ only (H. P. Blavatsky, 'Letters of H. P. B. to Dr. Hartmann, 1885 to 1886' in *The Path* X:12, March, 1896, 366). For a discussion of the Western derivation of Blavatsky's topoi of the Master, see infra chs. 23-29.

Cf. Butler's comment: '[The Theosophical Society] had, of course, little or nothing to teach the East spiritually, since it merely popularised Eastern thought and ... she was a corrupting rather than an ennobling influence in some individual Indian minds' (Butler, *The Myth of the Magus*, 258).
The first months of 1880 proved to be one of the happiest and most productive periods of Blavatsky's life. On the literary front she was occupied with crafting exotic tales of India for Russian journals, for which she was paid handsomely, and with contributing detailed articles to her newly-conceived Society journal, *The Theosophist*. The Theosophical Society was expanding successfully across India, incorporating native Hindus and several prized converts from the British establishment. Blavatsky and Olcott were feted wherever they went: during a visit to Ceylon, Blavatsky rode in procession on an elephant and was secretly pleased to find Sinhalese women...
prostrating before her.\textsuperscript{35} The journey to Ceylon was crowned with a ceremony held at a temple in Galle on 25 May at which time Olcott and Blavatsky formally, and very publicly, converted to Buddhism.\textsuperscript{36} This ‘conversion’ has led some to believe that the pair had renounced their esoteric affiliations and philosophies and finally found a normative, if Oriental, creed.\textsuperscript{37} In fact the Founders’ ‘Buddhism’ was but an arbitrary designation for an Indicised \textit{prisca theologia}:

Our Buddhism was that of the Master-Adept Gautama Buddha, which was identically the Wisdom Religion of the Aryan

\textsuperscript{35} Blavatsky declared such colourful processions to be a journey ‘from triumph to triumph’: H. P. Blavatsky to A. M. Dondoukoff-Korsakoff, 5 December, 1881, in Jinarajadasa, \textit{H. P. B. Speaks}, vol. 2, 29-30. Blavatsky is certainly evoking here the Roman sense of a victorious commander bringing the spoils of foreign war to an adoring people. The messianic pretensions are clear, and it is worthwhile quoting at length:

\begin{quote}
In the eyes of the natives I was a woman prophet sent to them by the Buddha. How did the idea come to them, from whence that strange illusion - I do not know! Nevertheless it is a proved fact, and henceforth the English had to take me into account. I quickly learned Sanskrit and Pali; soon I will give them lectures in these two languages. I was chosen by the Cingalese \textit{sic} as their arbiter in religious matters. At Ceylon, there are two Sects, the Siamese and that of Amarampourea, both Buddhist but always quarrelling. I reconciled them after 700 years of quarrels. I discussed with them religious problems and explained to them this or that metaphysical subject from the Tripitakas and Abhidharma, Buddhist scriptures. How did I know these subjects so metaphysical and abstract? Ah! there lies the great secret. But I feel capable of holding my own in front of the greatest Sanskrit scholars and beating in public discussion either Brahmins or Buddhists, who are accustomed to breaking their teeth on their scriptures (In ibid., 30-31).
\end{quote}

It should be noted that Jean Overton Fuller has denied the authenticity of the Blavatsky - Dondoukoff-Korsakov correspondence on the basis that the letters seem to exhibit ‘overweening self-exaltation’ on the part of Blavatsky: see Fuller, \textit{Blavatsky and her Teachers}, 235-238. John Cooper, on the other hand, sees no reason to consider them spurious: Cooper, \textit{‘The Letters’}, vol. I, lvii. To deny the authenticity of this correspondence on the basis of self-glorification is to have missed a central, and occasionally highly entertaining, facet of Blavatsky’s psychopathology; cf. the same letter where she notes:

\begin{quote}
I am now on the rise and by God I will remain there even though I should be obliged to allow my army of \textit{Theosophists} to crown me Queen-Prophet of Ceylon or Assam - and this under the very nose of the English, of whom half in India adore me and the other half detest me! (H. P. Blavatsky to A. M. Dondoukoff-Korsakoff, 5 December 1881, in Jinarajadasa, \textit{H. P. B. Speaks}, vol. 2, 30-31).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{36} The ceremony involved the taking of ‘Pansil’, i.e., the formal acceptance of the five Precepts of the Buddha. Campbell has called it the equivalent of ‘confirmation’: Campbell, \textit{Ancient Wisdom}, 83.

\textsuperscript{37} Rawlinson has provided a useful tonic to this trend in his analysis of Olcott’s ‘wildly exotic’ Buddhism: Rawlinson, \textit{The Book of Enlightened Masters}, 463-467. That said, Olcott’s subsequent contribution to Buddhist education and emancipation in Ceylon has been deemed highly noteworthy. On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of Olcott’s death (i.e., 1967), Sri Lankan Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake noted that:

Colonel Olcott can be considered one of the heroes in the struggle for our independence and a pioneer of the present religious, national and cultural revival. Colonel Olcott’s visit to this country is a landmark in the history of Buddhism in Ceylon (quoted in Murphet, \textit{Yankee Beacon of Buddhist Light}, 318).
Upanishads, and the soul of all the ancient world-faiths. Our Buddhism was, in a word, a philosophy, not a creed.\textsuperscript{38}

Blavatsky concurred:

[O]ur periodical [\textit{The Theosophist}] is described as a - ‘Buddhist organ’! This is a puzzle indeed ... The Northern Buddhism, or esoteric Arhat doctrine, has little in common with popular, dogmatic Buddhism. It is identical - except in proper names - with the hidden truth or esoteric part of Advaitism, Brahmanism, and every other world faith of antiquity.\textsuperscript{39}

To emphasise the distinction between ‘popular, dogmatic Buddhism’ and her own creed, Blavatsky coined the term ‘Budhism’: “‘Budhism’ has preceded Buddhism by long ages and is pre-Vedic”.\textsuperscript{40} ‘Budhism’, a term arrived at through a rather eccentric etymology, is obviously a Masters-generated esoteric arcanum:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Budhism would mean ‘Wisdom’, from Budha, ‘a sage’, ‘a wise man’, and the imperative verb ‘Budhyadhwam’, ‘Know’; and Budhism is the religious philosophy of Gautama, the Buddha.}\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

Central to every Blavatskian endeavour was the propagation of the Theosophical doctrine of the Masters, and it was the promise of their benevolence to their chelas and the evidence of Blavatsky’s phenomenal powers (which exhibited, it was believed, further proof of the Masters’ munificence),\textsuperscript{42} that stimulated many to join the Society.

\textsuperscript{38} Olcott, \textit{Old Diary Leaves}, Second Series, 168-169.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 282n.
\textsuperscript{42} Blavatsky’s paranormal/psychic capacities lie beyond the realm of empirical research in as far as they are accounted a tenet of Theosophic religious doctrine. To the degree to which they can be investigated on material grounds, a goodly number appear capable of having been engineered, exaggerated or open to at least a degree of skepticism. This said, her psychic talents were widely recognised during her lifetime and even her most hostile critics grudgingly admit some of her phenomena beg rational explanation. Butt’s comments are significant:

\begin{quote}
All too thoughtlessly, she performed phenomena before unbelievers, or in circumstances where fraud might have been possible; and thus she allowed misleading circumstantial evidence to accumulate against her (Butt, \textit{Madame Blavatsky}, 245).
\end{quote}

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Emblematic of this quest for chelship is Alfred Percy Sinnett (1840-1924), editor of the *Pioneer*, the leading English daily in India, who had contacted Blavatsky nine days after her arrival in Bombay, offering to publish an article on the Society. Interested in psychic phenomena, and a convinced Spiritualist, Sinnett invited the Founders to his home in Simla to spend the summer of 1870 and, he hoped, provide some convincing miraculous *divertissement*. Blavatsky did not disappoint.

Blavatsky’s success at Simla precipitated an explosion of interest in the Theosophical Society and its Masters, and provided the impetus for Blavatsky, uncouth and ill-mannered as she often was, to be welcomed into the society of the Anglo-Indian elite. In front of Sinnett and his guests, most notably Allan Octavian Hume (1829-1919), past Secretary to the government of India, Blavatsky excelled herself in the manifestation of rappings, bell chiming, and the seemingly miraculous production of monikered handkerchiefs. Less than content with these not entirely uncommon Spiritualistic phenomena, Blavatsky decided to raise the stakes on her abilities by announcing that her psychic link with the Masters was so strong that they were able to supply her with information that she could not otherwise have known. Thus when a picnic party was increased to seven at the last moment, Blavatsky was able to direct the unexpected guest to the location where he might dig in order to find a teacup and

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For Sinnett’s account of the Simla phenomena see A. P. Sinnett, *The Occult World*, Theosophical Publishing House, London, 1969, 49-134. Emma Coulomb later claimed that this was a standard of sleight-of-hand trickery and was accomplished by means of the voluminous sleeves of Blavatsky’s gown: see Meade, *Madame Blavatsky*, 220-221. Care must be exercised with Meade in all occasions where she enlists the so-called Blavatsky-Coulomb letters, or the Coulomb’s testimony to the ‘Hodgson Report’ (more properly ‘Report of the Committee Appointed to Investigate Phenomena Connected with the Theosophical Society’ [incorporating Hodgson’s own report, ‘Account of Personal Investigations in India, and Discussion of the Authorship of the “Koot Hoomi” letters’] in *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, 3, 1885, 201-380) to discredit Blavatsky’s psychic or paranormal faculties. The correspondence, though not extant in originals (It was reprinted from the September and October [1884] editions of the Madras Christian College Magazine as Emma Coulomb, *Some Account of My Intercourse with Madame Blavatsky from 1872 to 1884*, Higinbotham, Madras, 1884), is now deemed possibly to have been forged: see Vernon Harrison, H. P. Blavatsky and the SPR: An Examination of the Hodgson Report of 1885, Theosophical University Press, Pasadena, 1997, 6-12, 41-43. It is certain that Blavatsky believed that the letters were forgeries, perhaps containing portions of material from originals in her hand, and later redacted in an incriminating light: see Cooper, ‘The Letters’, vol. II, 591-592, 659, 661, 681-683 *et passim*. In any event, Emma Coulomb can be seen as an extremely hostile detractor of Blavatsky and her testimony must be read accordingly. Cf. Michael Gomes, ‘H. P. Blavatsky’s Annotations in Madame Coulomb’s Pamphlet in the Archives of the Society for Psychical Research, London’ in *Theosophical History*, 1:6, 1986, 144-155.
saucer to match the other six;" so, too, she was able to locate a prized heirloom for Mary Anne Hume: a brooch believed to have been irretrievably lost some months earlier." This last achievement, described in rapturous tones in the Pioneer, caused a flurry of interest in Blavatsky, and yet more applications for membership of her Society.

"The teacup and saucer incident is justly famous in Theosophical lore. The objects are maintained at Adyar as quasi-relics; for an illustration see Jinarajadasa, The Golden Book, 56. There is some evidence that Blavatsky may have overheard that a seventh was to be added to their party and had the items buried in anticipation by her servant, Babula: Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 223-224; but cf. Sinnett, The Occult World, 60-61.

"The brooch phenomenon, regarded at the time as the summit of Blavatsky's psychic achievements, is intriguing in that Blavatsky would have been required to plan for some months to engineer the incident. Though such premeditation is certainly possible, Meade too readily dismisses the episode: Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 224-226.
Chapter 10

The Mahatma Letters

Sinnett, 'ripe for chelaship', inquired of Blavatsky whether it would be possible for him to correspond directly with the Masters. Though doubtful whether she could convince any of them to undertake the task, she promised to try. Sinnett penned his first letter - 'to the Unknown Brother' - and passed it on to Blavatsky for delivery. Not content to wait, he wrote a second. Soon thereafter, he discovered a letter of reply on his own writing table from the Master "Koot' Hoomi Lal Singh", and so began a correspondence which would last six years, include about 170 full or partial letters, and be primarily responsible for fostering the notion of the Theosophical Masters in the Western imagination.

1 The phrase is taken from Joyce's Ulysses:

Yogibogeybox in Dawson chambers. Isis Unveiled. Their Pali book we tried to pawn. Crosslegged under an umbrel umbershoot he thrones an Aztec logos, functioning on astral levels, their oversoul, mahamahatma. The faithful hermetists await the light, ripe for chelaship, ringroundabout him (James Joyce, Ulysses, Penguin, Harmondsworth [Middlesex], 1968, 191-1920).

Joyce certainly read Blavatsky’s works and was particularly fascinated with her notion of cycles and aeonic time. The definitive analysis of esoteric motifs in Joyce, particularly Blavatskian themes, remains to be written; otherwise see Cranston, H. P. B., 473-476.


3 The Master's name is variously given with or without the apostrophe following 'Koot'. Although some authors have included this as proof of fraud, it should be remembered that Koot Hoomi, though apparently an alumnus of a Western university and the guardian of a vast occult museum, is nevertheless still presumed to be writing in a foreign tongue.

4 The Mahatma letters under investigation for this part of the present study comprise those sent to Sinnett and Hume. These might be termed the orthodox canon. Further letters and partial letters were received in varying modes for at least the following 45 years, the recipients numbering around 30 persons with seven Masters ascribed authorship: see Claire Walker, 'Member's Forum: The Mahatma Letters Reconsidered' in The American Theosophist, 74:6, June, 1986, 213-215. Few of the non-orthodox letters contain teaching materials and a great many are regarded by various Theosophical factions as having been fraudulently produced. Copies or originals of most of the non-orthodox canon are maintained in the Archives at the Adyar Headquarters.
The Mahatma letters (Blavatsky had begun to adopt the Sanskrit term 'Mahâtma' as a cognate for the more Occidental 'Master') are rightly regarded as the abiding mystery of Theosophical researches: the provenance, generation and transmission of the letters remain as vexingly obscure today as they did a hundred years ago, and equally able to foment heated debate. Entire books have been produced to promulgate one or other opinion, each attempting to provide the 'final word' in analysis. Specious arguments have been forwarded to propose Blavatsky as the sole author of the letters; so too, committed religionists have overstepped their methodological limitations by concluding

Blavatsky wrote in 1889: As for that other assertion, namely, that it is with this 'term' [Mahatma] that Mdm. Blavatsky has succeeded in bewildering John Bull, Brother Jonathan, it is as false as all the rest. The person of that name had never pronounced the term 'Mahatma' (having used quite another and a more telling one) in America. It was first used by Mr. Sinnett in his Esoteric Buddhism, because the Hindu Theosophists used it, applying this adjective to the MASTERS (H. P. Blavatsky, 'Going To and Fro in the Earth' in H. P. Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. XI:1889, comp. Boris de Zirkoff, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Illinois, 1973, 458).

Paul Johnson has stated that the term was introduced into Theosophical parlance by Dâmodar K. Mâvalankar: see Johnson, Initiates, 21.

The extant Mahatma letters were deposited by Sinnett's executrix, Maud Hoffman, in the British Library where they remain. Bound in three large volumes (Department of Manuscripts: Additional Manuscripts MSS 45284, 45285, 45286), they run to in excess of thirteen hundred pages. Several varieties of papers were used, mostly of a common 'rice paper' type; the writing was formed in the main with either black ink or blue crayon. Although the great majority were written to Sinnett, a small number were addressed to A. O. Hume. The Master Koot Hoomi (K. H.) was responsible for all of the letters with a few exceptions, notably a run of letters from the Master Morya (M.), a correspondence the latter undertook during Koot Hoomi's three-month spiritual retreat. They were first published collectively in 1923: The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett from the Mahatmas M. & K. H., transcribed, comp. & intro. A. T. Barker, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1923. As noted supra, unless otherwise stated all subsequent references will be to the chronological edition of 1993: The Mahatma Letters, arr. & ed. Vincente Hao Chia, Jr.

avant-la-lettre that the correspondence was precipitated entirely by occult means.¹

Between these extremes there exists a scholarly consensus espousing the view that the letters attributed to K. H. (Koot Hoomi) and M. (Morya) were penned by two

¹ Meade's assertion that '[p]utting together everything that is known of H. P. B.'s life, it would be illogical to assume she did not write the letters from the various Masters' (emphasis in original), is not acceptable from the scholarly standpoint: see Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 466.
unknown persons," that Blavatsky did not knowingly forge the correspondence,\(^\text{10}\) that

\(^{\text{10}}\) Harrison has concluded that \"[h]aving read the Mahatma Letters in the holographs, I am left with the strong impression that the writers KH and M were real and distinct human beings\": see Harrison, *H. P. Blavatsky and the SPR*, 67.

\(^{\text{10}}\) Though Harrison has concluded from graphological analysis and other methods that Blavatsky was not responsible for the K. H. and M. letters, he does not entirely dismiss the notion that she may have generated the correspondence \"while she was in a state of trance, sleep, or other altered states of consciousness\" or even that K. H. and M. \mbox{\textquoteleft}might be considered sub-personalities of Helena Blavatsky\mbox{\textquoteright}; ibid., 68. It is surely significant that the major recipient of the Mahatma letters, A. P. Sinnett, ultimately concluded that, although the contents of the letters were for the most part genuine correspondence from the Masters, Blavatsky had often been the amanuensis and had occasionally amplified the Masters' meaning. His views, contained in the last of his books printed during his lifetime, are worth quoting at length:

I may as well at once explain, what I only came to realise myself in the progress of later years, the true character of this correspondence. The letters were not, in the beginning what I imagined them to be - letters actually written by the Master and then forwarded by occult means either to Madame Blavatsky or deposited somewhere about the house where I should find them. They were certainly inspired by K. H. (all in the beginning bore his signature) but for the most part, if not always, were dictations to a competent clairaudient amanuensis and Madame Blavatsky was generally the amanuensis in question. They contained passages of great charm and literary beauty, and making careful selections, I gave some of these in \mbox{\textquoteleft}The Occult World\mbox{\textquoteright}. But from the first Madame Blavatsky seems to have been possessed with the belief that she could improve on and expand the Masters' communications. This did not matter so much in the beginning, but later on when the letters were devoted to the conveyance of teaching in occult science, and became the material I worked with in writing \mbox{\textquoteright}Esoteric Buddhism\mbox{\textquoteright} Madame Blavatsky's expansions, additions and 'improvements' (?) were almost disastrous. Long after she passed away from this life, as my methods of communication with the Masters assumed new and improved conditions, I have discussed this matter with the Master K. H. and in reference to some passages in the letters of the teaching period he has frankly told me that as they stand, they are \mbox{\textquoteleft}a travesty\mbox{\textquoteright} of his meaning. None the less they contained masses of information concerning the natural truths that have since become the fundamental ideas underlying Theosophy which were previously as unknown to Madame Blavatsky as to myself. Reincarnation, Karma, the planetary chains, the succession of the root races, then sub-races and so on, were not tampered with (Sinnett, *The Early Days*, 27-28).

The \mbox{\textquoteleft}new and improved conditions\mbox{\textquoteright} to which Sinnett refers are his communications with the Master K. H. via the use of Spiritualist mediums, a practice which Blavatsky would no doubt have abhorred; see Meade, *Madame Blavatsky*, 234. It is not insignificant that Charles Leadbeater was among the mediums: Tillett, \mbox{\textquoteleft}Charles Webster Leadbeater\mbox{\textquoteright}, vol. I, 182; cf. also Daniel H. Caldwell & Michelle B. Graye, \mbox{\textquoteleft}Mary Unveiled\mbox{\textquoteright} in *Theosophical History*, 1:8, 1986, 205-207. It appears that another of the mediums was Robert King, who later became a Liberal Catholic bishop (see *Eirenic*, Summer, 1963, 146): for King's Theosophical career, see *infra* ch. 20. For a detailed Theosophical explanation of the generation of the Mahatma letters see Geoffrey A. Barborka, *H. P. Blavatsky, Tibet and Tulku*, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1966, esp. ch. IX-XIV.
certain details of the generation of the letters remain indeterminable, and that early attempts to prove the letters to be an ingenious fraud were ‘riddled with slanted statements, conjectures advanced as fact or probable fact, uncorroborated testimony of unnamed witnesses, selection of evidence and downright falsity’. It is not the aim of this research to establish the veracity of the letters as testament to the Masters’ oversight of the Theosophical Society, nor indeed to establish that the meta-empirical claims made in behalf of the letters’ generation and diffusion lend weight to religionist notions of a supernatural perichoresis between Master and chela. Rather, an examination of the contents of the letters can reveal much about the Theosophical Masters qua Masters for the simple reason that they were afforded official recognition by Blavatsky as normative, indeed primary, Theosophical teachings.

The first letters are notable for their Occidental emphases and for their summary incorporation of the Western esoteric traditions into a broader Masters-driven Theosophical synthesis. Indeed, the first letter, replete with references to the ‘enormous learning of the Paracelsi, of the Agrippas and the Dee’s [sic]’ (as well as the omnipresent Bulwer-Lytton), contains only one passing mention of Indian civilisation in the redesignation of the goddess Saraswati as ‘our Aryan Isis’. Yet for all the obvious esoteric erudition of the early letters, little that could properly be called instruction in ‘divine wisdom’ emerges. The chief considerations of K. H. appear to be pendant concerns: to itemise the disastrous failings of materialist science

11 Harrison has noted:

I draw attention to curious and unexplained features of the KH letters, namely the clear, regular striations of some of the writing apparently made with blue pencil ... the small amount of ink penetration even when thin ‘rice’ paper was used, the unexplained features of the erasures seemingly made with ink eradicat or yet without staining or roughening of the paper, the variability of some (but not all) of the characters and the (at times) grossly exaggerated t-bars. These features suggest that the documents preserved in the British Library may be copies, made by some unknown process, of originals which we do not possess (Harrison, H. P. Blavatsky and the SPR, 68).

In this context it might be recalled that Count Witte, Blavatsky’s cousin, believed she had at one time ‘opened an ink store and factory’: Witte, The Memoirs, 10.


13 The Mahatma Letters, 1993 ed., (Letter No. 1: 17 October, 1880) 4. It should be added that there is a passing reference to ‘Akas’, presumably a variant of the Sanskrit Ākāsā ([metaphysical] ‘substance’). Barborka has noted that for occultists, Akasha ‘is used with a great deal of latitude’; Barborka, The Mahatmas, 139.
and to emphasise to Sinnett the meanness of his cravings after phenomena. These two themes appear to coalesce in the veiled references to an ancient fraternity of ‘Brothers’ [Masters/Mahatmas] who have overwrought any desire to ‘gratify individual aspirations [so] as to serve our fellow men’ and whose task it is to assist others to appreciate that it is solely by means of the ‘study of the occult mysteries’ that a person’s foot may be placed upon ‘the upper step in the ladder of Knowledge’.14

Guided by his Guru the chela first discovers this world, then its laws, then their centrifugal evolutions into the world of matter. To become a perfect adept takes him long years, but at last he becomes the master. The hidden things have become patent, and mystery and miracle have fled from his sight forever. He sees how to guide force in this direction or that - to produce desirable effects. The secret chemical, electric or odic properties15 of plants, herbs, roots, minerals, animal tissue, are as familiar to him as the feathers of your birds are to you.16 No change in the etheric vibrations can escape him. He applies his knowledge and behold a miracle! And he who started with the repudiation of the very idea that miracle is possible, is straightaway classed as a miracle worker and either worshipped by the fools as a demi-god or repudiated by still greater fools as a charlatan! ... Our laws are as immutable as those of Nature, and they were known to man an eternity before this strutting game-cock, modern science, was hatched.17

K. H. assures Sinnett that few are chosen, and even fewer succeed: patience, loyalty, and obedience (especially to Blavatsky) are the prerequisites.

The first and most important of our objections [to accepting chelas] is to be found in our Rules. True, we have our schools and teachers, our neophytes and shaberons (superior adepts), and the door is always opened to the right man who knocks. And we


15 ‘[O]dic properties’ refers to the notion of an odic fluid or force - a sort of psychic emanation given off by living objects - first posited by the chemist Carl Baron Reichenbach (1788-1869).

16 Hume was a noted amateur ornithologist, having published a number of books on the subject of the game birds of India. Meade notes that his collection included 63000 skins and 19000 eggs: see Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 224.

invariably welcome the new comer; only, instead of going over to him he has to come to us ... Then let him come; but he must not think to return until the seal of the mysteries has locked his lips even against the chances of his own weakness or indiscretion. 

The chastening tone and warnings of dire penalties for failure or infidelity to the Masters served only to whet Sinnett’s appetite; having been informed that the ‘adept is the rare efflorescence of a generation of enquirers’ he wished to be included among their number. 

The keepers of the sacred Light did not safely cross so many ages but to find themselves wrecked on the rocks of modern scepticism. Our pilots are too experienced sailors to allow us [to] fear any such disaster. We will always find volunteers to replace the tired sentries, and the world, bad as it is in its present state of transitory period, can yet furnish us with a few men now and then.

Koot Hoomi’s emphatic insistence that Sinnett abandon any aspirations for supernatural phenomena underscores something of a recurring existential dilemma which has plagued the Society since its inception. Sinnett, emblematic of many Theosophists, had abandoned Spiritualism not so much for its failure to produce much touted, and eagerly sought, irrefutable proofs of a supramundane realm, nor indeed for its paucity of sophisticated esoteric reflection. Rather, he wished to circumvent the apparent autonomy of the vagarious and often irascible spirits and to gain sufficient personal occult power to generate such supernatural effects according to his own will.

In a landmark study, Astral Projection or Liberation of the Double and the Work of

18 Ibid., (Letter No. 2: 19 October, 1880) 8, 9.
19 Ibid., 6.
20 Ibid., (Letter No. 11: December, 1880) 35.
21 It should be noted that Sinnett’s writings often tend to suggest that he sought from Theosophy only a mature explanation for the phenomena of Spiritualism. An examination of the early questions he directed to Koot Hoomi, as well as a careful reading of his own books, suggests that Sinnett was never entirely convinced of the veracity of Spiritualism’s claims to supernatural agency, and that he hoped to find genuine paranormal phenomena in Masters-based Theosophy. In any case, for Sinnett, spirits may be able to generate phenomena through their mediums, but of abiding interest was the ability to perform such feats oneself, alone and unaided:

Broadly speaking, there is scarcely one of the phenomena of spiritualism that adepts in occultism cannot reproduce by the force of their own will, supplemented by a comprehension of the resources of Nature ... I have seen some of the most familiar phenomena of spiritualism produced by purely human agency (Sinnett, The Occult World, 11).
the Early Theosophical Society, John Patrick Deveney has examined the tension which resulted from the often mutually antagonistic desires for gnosis and magia which characterised the ambitions of early Society members. Deveney has comprehensively deconstructed the received history of Theosophy which has traditionally reflected the opinion that the Theosophical Society had not been instituted as a theurgic entity, and had always dissuaded its members from such pursuits. In reality, it appears that the Society was in fact inaugurated for precisely such purposes, and that from its inception a 'hankering after phenomena' has undoubtedly proved to be at least the initial motivation for membership for a large majority of Theosophists.

The reorientation toward a more cerebral esoteric epistemology which de-emphasised theurgy (and thus discouraged 'thaumaturgic sots'), became highly pronounced over

24 Deveney, Astral Projection, 65-84. It should not be forgotten that, though the 'objects' of the Theosophical Society evolved through many permutations (see supra ch. 5), the investigation of occultism has remained a constant, whether as the 'study of occult science' or as '[the investigation of] the unexplained laws of Nature and the Powers latent in Man'. Interestingly, the former object was initially placed first in the list of three, whereas in its latest recension, the latter object is placed third, behind Universal Brotherhood and the Study of Comparative Religion: see Sinnett, The Early Days, 12-13.
the years of the Mahatma/Sinnett correspondence. This disavowal of thaumaturgy has led most critics of Blavatsky to assume that she repositioned her conceptual emphasis only when she could no longer meet the need for satisfying phenomena - that her feats of *legerdemain* were insufficient to provide sustenance for a burgeoning and increasingly skeptical membership. *Ergo* the Masters, located beyond the ken of Society members, were introduced to fill the gap. Such a conclusion is over-hasty and reductionist.

There can be little doubt that the shift of focus away from practical occultism created a crisis of confidence for many Theosophists, ultimately causing a large number of the most vocal and demanding members to abandon the Society for more theurgic

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35 *The Mahatma Letters*, 1993 ed., (Letter No. 42: January, 1882) 115. The Master K. H. tended to regard his often untidy correspondence as further indication that the Masters, though spiritually rarefied, were nevertheless still men, and men who would disavow any supernatural means to achieve a purpose if a mundane solution could be sought:

> The abundance of MSS. from me of late shows that I have found a little leisure; their blotched, patchy and mended appearance also proves that my leisure has come by snatches, with constant interruptions, and that my writing has been done in odd places here and there, with such materials as I could pick up. But for the RULE that forbids our using one minim of power until every ordinary means has been tried and failed, I might, of course, have given you a lovely 'precipitation' as regards chirography and composition ... As your lady [Blavatsky] once kindly remarked, they [the 'blotched' letters] take away most effectually the flavour of miracle, and make us human beings, more thinkable entities, - a wise reflection for which I thank her (Ibid., (Letter No. 68: July, 1882) 115).

K. H.'s comments must be seen as rather disingenuous given that, although the letters may well have been generated by ordinary means, they were often delivered in such a way as to create a deliberate sensation. It should never be forgotten that Blavatsky's and the Masters' injunctions against spectacle must be taken with more than a grain of salt: Masters-based Theosophy necessarily devolves upon axiomatically-attested meta-empirical claims regarding an elite possessed of supramundane powers and wisdom. Although many Theosophists would argue that such abilities are latent in all (or, more likely, some) humans, the fact remains that various presumed supernatural phenomena were employed to entice potential members, as well as to support the veracity of the Masters' teachings as having originated from an occult supernal source.

It is interesting that as early as 1948 E. M. Butler had suggested that the use of written messages as a means of communication between mortals and spirits was a characteristic of the *jajan* and *Kudais* of Central Asia. Intriguingly, the Tatars were said to have received replies to their correspondence from a hole in the ceiling of the *yurt* - in much the same way as the Masters sometimes chose. It is a surprise that Theosophists have not investigated Butler's findings (based upon the investigations of N. K. Chadwick) as they would support the veracity of the Mahatma letters and also lend weight to the truth of Blavatsky's putative Tibetan travels: see Butler, *The Myth of the Magus*, 251-252 (including references to Chadwick).

It is also certain that the device of the Mahatma letter, with its dynamic of transmission from guru (Master) to chela (Sinnett and others), conveniently circumvented Blavatsky as the fons et origo of Theosophy’s claim to meta-empirical insight and oversight. Crucially, such a dynamic also removed some of the pressure on her to ‘perform’ phenomena at will, while also maintaining her centrality as the prime organ and recipient of the Masters’ revelation. These facts acknowledged, the Mahatmas’ insistence on the rejection of the ‘foolish and sinful phenomena-mongers’ served primarily to remove the Society from the confining orbit of related esoteric groups and into a specifically Blavatskian conceptual domain, that of the profoundly gnostic. It is this idiosyncratic and resolutely nineteenth-century-looking gnosticism, first aired comprehensively in the Mahatma letters and presented in its mature form in Blavatsky’s The Secret Doctrine, that would captivate Blavatskian macrohistorical and cosmological conceptualising for the remainder of her life. It would also provide the ideational crucible for the Masters.

Intimations of a Theosophical Universe

Given the sheer number of books and articles devoted to the Mahatma letters it is not unreasonable to expect at least a degree of mature critical analysis. Such has not been the case. Scholarly interest in the letters has focussed in the main on the question of fraudulence in generation, and secondarily on stylistic matters, such as the occasional self-conscious archaisms, or upon the more mundane portions which make reference to events of interest for the historiography of Theosophy (many of which suggest the Masters not to have been averse to occasional, and sometimes vicious, gossip). Where particular Theosophical authors have sought to mine the voluminous letters for Masters’ self-revelation, they have simply isolated those fractions of the material which speak to the Brotherhood’s identity, composition, and activities. Thus the reader learns that the Masters agreed on an experiment in diffusing their wisdom to the world

\[\text{Symptomatic of the trend for some Theosophists to move from Theosophy to theurgy is the occult career of the Reverend William Alexander Ayton (1816-1909). A member of a broad range of esoteric bodies throughout his life, his dissatisfaction with the lack of thaumaturgical workings in the Theosophical Society encouraged his move first to the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light and then later into the specifically evocatory magical confraternity, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. See Deveney, Astral Projection, 79-80; Ellic Howe, ed., The Alchemist of the Golden Dawn: The Letters of the Revd W. A. Ayton to F. L. Gardner and Others, 1886-1905, Aquarian Press, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, 1985, passim, esp. 9-18.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{28} The Mahatma Letters, 1993 ed., (Letter No. 61: June, 1882) 158.}\]
by means of the establishment of the Theosophical Society,\(^{29}\) that they live a life of self-imposed *ascesis*,\(^ {30}\) that they maintain a written record of all aspirants and of humanity generally,\(^ {31}\) that there is a hierarchy of Masters (Koot Hoomi's Master is 'the Chohan'),\(^ {32}\) and that the aspiring *chela* may ultimately join the ranks of the Masters.\(^ {33}\) These and similar observations tend to be characteristic of the extent to which analysis of the correspondence has ignored the broader conceptual cosmo-historical paradigm which the Masters inhabit and, ultimately, *personify*.\(^ {34}\)

A close examination of the Mahatma letters reveals that the occult stage upon which the Masters tread is a cosmos governed by an optimistic evolutionary progressivism which sponsors and demands a recurring cyclic periodicity - but not, as some have assumed, an unending macrodrama bereft of teleology.\(^ {35}\) There is a point and a purpose to life; the Mahatma letters refer disparagingly to the Materialists, who consigned the notion of a Divine Plan to the unenlightened superstitions of the prescientific, as little more than journalistic prestidigitators, formulating their philosophies in the breach of the true and complete knowledge, the *esoteric*, which is the sole province and purvey of the Masters.\(^ {36}\) The Mahatmic wisdoms seek to 'trump' the Materialists (and even those who attempted a quixotic visioning of a Spirit-driven, if deceptively naturalistic-

\(^{29}\) Ibid., (Letter No. 45: February, 1882) 124-125.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., (Letter No. 20: 5 August, 1881) 73.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., (Letter No. 47: February, 1882) 131.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., (Letter No. 65: 30 June, 1882) 168.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., (Letter No. 90: October, 1882) 284.

\(^{34}\) Indeed, the Master Morya noted that the Masters must be understood in the context of a detailed esoteric cosmology:

> In our doctrine you will find necessary the synthetic method; you will have to embrace the whole - that is to say to blend the *macrocosm* and microcosm together - before you are enabled to study the parts separately or analyze them with profit to your understanding (in ibid., (Letter No. 44: January, 1882) 118).

\(^{35}\) What follows here is an introduction into some of the tenets of Theosophical cosmology and macrohistory. A fuller analysis will be undertaken with reference to Blavatsky's *magnum opus*, *The Secret Doctrine*.

\(^{36}\) To extend the metaphor, the Masters imply that the Materialist School is 'dealing with a reduced deck'. In other words, the tenets of Materialism (or 'Physicalism') can only ever provide an impoverished metaphysics as they are not founded in 'truth' which has a substantive esoteric component - and which is mediated primarily by the guardians of that truth, the Masters.


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looking, evolutionism), for the simple reason that the Masters’ teachings claim to instantiate the only true and faithful record of the processus of creation and the cosmos. Indeed, the teachings of the Masters, purporting to reflect eye-witness accounts of human evolution over countless millennia, can properly be called the latter-day survivals of the ‘theosophy’ of an antique human ancestry, closer to its divine origin, and thus nothing if not properly accurate - even documentary - by nature.

The purpose of the Masters’ excursus into the public domain via the Mahatma letters was not, it seems, simply to sponsor yet another self-involved occult fraternity, but to proffer precious knowledge of the cosmo-historical plan which alone could liberate humanity from the rigours of being enslaved to an otherwise oppressive, silent, and autonomous processus. This is not to say that the Theosophical adept would be exempted from the inviolable laws which govern the evolution of matter and consciousness, rather that the knowledge of such laws could both ameliorate the pains of ignorance and, significantly, accelerate his cosmic pilgrimage; it is in this latter sense that the Mahatmic wisdoms are to be interpreted as providing a Theosophical gnostic soteriology. Such knowledge, which further claims to provide a hermeneutical key to all of the world’s aspirational religious texts, is, according to the Mahatmas, the true gold of the initiate and the ultimate motivation for the Masters’ self-disclosure; phenomena will ever remain illusory and a distraction.

Divinity and Materiality

Die Entwicklung, or ‘the development’, of history had been the preoccupation of German philosophy at least since Kant, and reached its fullest treatment in the works

37 A Spirit-driven evolutionism, for all of its quasi-modalist, if not resolutely Joachite resonations, is nevertheless a species of the Gott in der Geschichte axiom which had preoccupied German philosophical and religious discourse at least since Hegel. (The phrase ‘Gott in der Geschichte’ [‘God in History’] can be traced to Christian Carl Josias Freiherr von Bunsen’s three-volume study of the same name dating from 1856-1859). For a study of Blavatsky, Hegel is no distant relative; his developmentalist schematisation of history, no less than his reliance on India as a sort of missing link in the dialectical chain from fetishism to ‘the consciousness of thought as Universal’, prove him to be a conceptual forebear: see G. W. Trompf, Friedrich Max Mueller As a Theorist of Comparative Religion, Shakuntala Publishing House, Bombay, 1978, 8ff; see also Raymond Plant, Hegel: An Introduction, 2nd ed., Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1983.

The distillation of the exact dialectical forces at work in the unfolding of history became the Hegelian preoccupation par excellence and resulted in an often amorphous and evasive Geist at work directing the progress of history toward an undisclosed but ultimately favourable destination. Aside from its avowedly axiomatic Christian pretensions, Hegelian Idealist Universalism can be said to have prefigured the Mahatmas’ visioning of time in that the spiritual Entwicklung of humanity can somehow be distilled from the events of history and examined a solo. Where Hegelian Geistesgeschichte was a purely human affair - which is to say that as an Idealist, Hegel’s developmentalism was concerned with human epistemologies and ontological uniqueness - the Universal Spirit for the Mahatmas (and, thus, Blavatsky) was an all-encompassing cosmic law sub specie aeternitatis. The Theosophy of the Mahatma letters is quite specific: this Universal Law (Entwicklung in time and space) is what otherwise may be termed ‘God’, and to know the Law is to know God, and to know God is to be saved.

The treatment given to theism within the Mahatma letters has achieved a certain notoriety. Many contemporary observers and subsequent commentators have seized upon a superficial strain of atheism in the letters so as to allege the Masters to have been rigidly Buddhistical regarding the existence of a personal God or perhaps iconoclastic in the face of Western ecclesiastical theologies. It has also been suggested, erroneously, that the Masters were simply ‘updating’ the notion of divinity

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40 It should be recalled that the ‘Buddhism’ of the Theosophists was more an Orientalised and highly idealised prisa theologia. The Master K. H., for all of his avowed affiliations to the Gelugpa School of Tibetan Buddhism, is occasionally rather dismissive of traditional Buddhist doctrine:
   A Being however gigantic, occupying space and having length breadth and thickness is most certainly the Mosaic deity; ‘No-being’ and a mere principle lands you directly in the Buddhistic atheism, or the Vedantic primitive Acosmism (The Mahatma Letters, 1993 ed., (Letter No. 90: October, 1882) 280).
41 E. M. Butler believed the letters to be primarily a documentary proof of Blavatsky’s aversion to institutionalised Christianity: ‘the Mahatma letters contain too plentiful an admixture of religious bile to be altogether edifying’ (Butler, The Myth of the Magus, 255). It would appear that Butler chose not to overlook the more irreverent and mundane portions of the Mahatma letters so as to more properly examine their Theosophical teachings phenomenologically.
by placing themselves (as a species of man-God hybrids) within the ambit traditionally reserved for an utterly transmundane deity.\(^{43}\) Such reductionist appraisals of the Masters' theology do not sufficiently address the sense in which the Masters' detailed and self-consciously scientific-sounding cosmology (which pervades the letters) is in fact properly a 'cosmosophy' more redolent of antique Gnosticism, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and the Kabbalah than of Oriental religion, Occidental atheism or nineteenth-century scientific humanism.\(^{44}\)

The Masters stated: 'we believe in MATTER alone'.\(^{45}\) Such a declarative comment would appear unequivocal except that 'MATTER' is to be understood not solely, or even primarily, in atomic terms, but as inclusive of 'spirit': 'spirit and matter are one, being but a differentiation of states not essences'.\(^{46}\) Indeed, K. H. noted that 'our notions of “cosmic matter” are diametrically opposed to those of modern science'.\(^{47}\)

The Master then identifies matter with Nature:

> [W]e recognize but *one* element in Nature (whether spiritual or physical) outside which there can be no Nature since it is *Nature* itself, and which as the *Akasa* pervades our solar system, every atom being part of itself, pervades throughout *space* and *is* space in fact ... and *is* the universal Proteus, the ever active Nature.\(^{48}\)

Thus when the Masters declare themselves to be subject to the laws or powers of Nature - which are effectively synonymous - it becomes easier to understand how some have mistakenly characterised them as proponents of naturalism (as understood in the orthodox philosophical sense). In fact, Theosophical 'naturalism' incorporates a non-conflictual matter-spirit dualism which would surely amount to anathema for philosophical naturalisms. Indeed, for all of their emphatic denials of belief in anything other than matter, and their quixotic determination to find support for their

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\(^{43}\) Gertrude Marvin Williams, in a negative biography, believed that in Blavatsky's closely orchestrated cosmology the Maha Chohan 'correspond[ed] fairly well with the usual religious concept of God': *Williams, Priestess*, 164.

\(^{44}\) For the gnostic, Hermetic, and Kabbalistic sources of the Blavatskian idiom see *infra* ch. 12, 13, 23, 28.


\(^{46}\) Ibid., (Letter No. 65: 30 June, 1882) 168.

\(^{47}\) Ibid.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.
esoteric theses in empirical science, the Masters nevertheless inhabit a profoundly 'spiritualised' universe characterised by distinct mundane and supramundane hierarchies and intelligences;\textsuperscript{49} in short, not a post-Darwinian disenchanted cosmos at all, but one replete with a rich teleology. Such terminological abstruseness can also be extended to the Masters’ definitions of God:

If people are willing to accept and to regard as God our ONE LIFE immutable and unconscious in its eternity they may do so and thus keep to one more gigantic misnomer. But then they will have to say with Spinoza that there is not and that we cannot conceive any other substance than God ... When we speak of our One Life we also say that it penetrates, nay is the essence of every atom of matter, and that therefore it not only has correspondence with matter but has all its properties likewise, etc. - hence \textit{is} material, \textit{is \textit{matter itself}}.\textsuperscript{50}

The Masters’ characterisation of God as an occult principle of nature is a curiously heterodox non-Christian redaction of early German theosophers writing within the tradition of \textit{Naturphilosophie}.\textsuperscript{51} Perhaps more tellingly, the Masters’ ‘living nature’

\textsuperscript{49} For Theosophical cosmology see \textit{infra} ch. 12.


\textsuperscript{51} German \textit{Naturphilosophie} is discussed in Faiivre, \textit{Access, passim}. Perhaps the most significant figure in this context is Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493-1541): Nature ... is not visible, though it operates invisibly; for it is simply a volatile spirit, fulfilling its offices in bodies, and animated by the universal spirit - the divine breath, the central and universal fire, which vivifies all things that exist (Paracelsus, \textit{The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of [Aureolus Philippus Theophrastus Bombast, of Hohenheim, called] Paracelsus [the Great]}, vol. I, ed. Arthur Edward Waite, James Elliott and Co., London, 1894, 289).

is reminiscent of Lévi’s conception of the ‘Astral Light’. Lévi, one of Blavatsky’s heroes and an acknowledged antecedent, posited the existence of a universal all-pervasive medium, the Astral Light, which ‘is the vehicle of all ideas [and] the mother of all forms’. This ‘great magnetic agent’ became a fixture of French, British and American esotericism by the 1860s and, by Blavatsky’s time, had become the catch-all phrase for the unseen quintessence of the alchemists, the occult unitive principle par excellence. It is significant that where Lévi employed the metaphor ‘light’ - certainly Leo's exalted reputation among esotericists is not in proportion with his œuvre. Nevertheless, he is rightly regarded as a canny synthetist (as evidenced by his reasonably unforced correspondence schema for the Kabbalistic tree of the Sefirot and the Tarot trumps), and as the likely coiner of the term ‘occultism’. Faivre has astutely observed that ‘this magus inspired conviction and came along at the right time’: Faivre, Access, 88. Works on the occult tarot are legion; for Lévi’s contribution see Michael Dummett, The Game of Tarot: from Ferrara to Salt Lake City, Duckworth, London, 1980, 113-163; Ronald Decker, Thierry Depaulis & Michael Dummett, A Wicked Pack of Cards: The Origins of the Occult Tarot, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1996, 166-193; Danny L. Jorgensen, The Esoteric Scene. Cultic Milieu, and Occult Tarot, Garland, New York, 1992.


Lévi, Transcendental Magic, 63. Lévi, who arose to prominence in an era of materialist Positivism, appears to have been one of the first self-proclaimed occultists who sought to reconcile his occultistic theories with the insights of nineteenth-century science. His choice of the term ‘magnetic’ refers not solely to the Magnetism of Franz Anton Mesmer (1733-1815) as may at first be thought, but also to the phenomenon of physical magnetism: Williams, Éliphas Lévi, 100-101. In this tendency to find justification for esoteric notions in the physical sciences, Lévi found disciples both in Spiritualism and Theosophy. It is not insignificant that the Masters refer admiringly to Lévi several times in the Mahatma letters; it is also true that the Society published an 1883 translation (by A. O. Hume) of Lévi’s The Paradoxes of the Highest Science, together with comments by the Master K. H. (under the pseudonym 'E. O.', or Eminent Occultist) which the Mahatma had appended to Lévi’s text. See Eliphas Levi (sic), The Paradoxes of the Highest Science: in which the most advanced truths of Occultism are for the first time revealed (in order to reconcile the future developments of Science and Philosophy with the Eternal Religion), 2nd ed., trans. A. O. Hume, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1922. See also Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. VI, 258-260.

The Master K. H. himself sought out a scientific term to encompass his all-pervasive spirit-matter principle: ‘phlogiston’.

Then what do we believe in? Well, we believe in the much laughed at phlogiston ... the incessant though perfectly imperceptible (to the ordinary senses) motion or efforts one body is making on another - the pulsations of inert life - its life ... in matter as visible nature and matter in its invisibility as the invisible omnipresent omnipotent Proteus with its unceasing motion which is its life, and which nature draws from herself since she is the great whole outside of which nothing can exist (The Mahatma Letters, 1993 ed., (Letter No. 88: 28 September, 1882) 273).

The phlogiston theory, popularised by Georg Ernest Stahl (1666-1734), argued that a ‘fire principle’ exists ontologically in all inflammable substances and that this ‘substance’ can be released through combustion. Though stoutly defended by Priestley, the theory was almost universally abandoned by 1800, only to enjoy something of an esoteric renaissance at the hands of Blavatsky and others. For a comprehensive view of the phlogiston debate see John Maxson Stillman, The Story of Alchemy and Early Chemistry, Dover, New York, 1960, 424-460. It is also worth noting that in the Blavatskian idiom Akasha is more or less synonymous with ‘Pohat’, for which see infra ch. 12.
a reference to the effusion of the divine *Fiat* - Blavatsky's Masters encouraged something of a cultural realignment by turning to the Sanskrit term 'Akasa':

The Akasa (Bar-nang) or Kosmic atmosphere, or Astral Light, or celestial ether ... whether in its latent or active condition, surrounds and interpenetrates all matter in motion.55

A brief investigation of the spirit-matter dualism of the Mahatma letters, as well as its implications for Theosophical theology, is important for a study of the Masters for two significant reasons. In the first place, the inference that the Masters themselves are in some fashion subject to a preexisting super-celestial teleology dispels any notion that

they were involved in a process of conscious auto-apotheosis. Second, and of crucial importance, is the realisation that the Masters can be properly understood only within the context of the Theosophical cosmo-historical paradigm; for scholars to have approached the Mahatma letters with an a priori assumption that occult adepthood, as mediated via the Mahatma letters, was ever proffered as an end in itself, or even that the Masters’ cosmological pronouncements were some species of baroque sophistry designed to titillate or bamboozle the reader, is simply to have entirely misread who and what the Masters were intended to signify.

This observation is particularly critical in an era wherein a mainstay preoccupation of Religionswissenschaft is the discernment of the power structures of authoritarianism, particularly as mediated by New Religious Movements (within which gampit Theosophy is often placed). There has been a distinct tendency to dismiss the Masters as nothing other than tools designed to prop up Blavatsky’s authority. Catherine Wessinger has employed examples from the post-Blavatsky Society, wherein highly questionable communications from equally improbable Masters proliferated, to support her hypothesis that there existed from the first an unresolvable tension between democracy and hierarchy within the Theosophical Society: Catherine Wessinger, ‘Democracy vs. Hierarchy: The Evolution of Authority in the Theosophical Society’ in Timothy Miller, ed., When Prophets Die: The Postcharismatic Fate of New Religious Movements, State University of New York Press, New York, 1991, 93-106. Though such tension may well exist de facto, the ontic conflict which Wessinger discerns loses value when Theosophical macrohistory and evolutionary cosmology are considered. The point of Blavatskian conscious evolutionism is that the will of the individual is not subsumed into, or overpowered by, the will of the Masters, but comes into accord with it as a necessary adjunct of personal growth and spiritual progress. Though this is a fine point, and one which did cause serious ruptures in the post-1891 Society, there is little evidence for problematical authoritarianism in Blavatsky or her Masters. Indeed it is a significant point, and so far virtually unaddressed in the literature, that Blavatskian doctrinaire anti-dogmatism extended even so far as to Theosophy itself:

They [the Founders] had to oppose in the strongest manner possible anything approaching dogmatic faith and fanaticism - belief in the infallibility of the Masters, or even in the very existence of our invisible Teachers, having to be checked from the first. On the other hand, as a great respect for the private views and creeds of every member was demanded, any Fellow criticising the faith or belief of another Fellow, hurting his feelings, or showing a reprehensible self-assertion, unasked (mutual friendly advices were a duty unless declined) - such a member incurred expulsion. The greatest spirit of free research untrammelled by anyone or anything, had to be encouraged (H. P. Blavatsky, The Original Programme of the Theosophical Society and Preliminary Memorandum of the Esoteric Section, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1974, 5-6).

Joel Kramer and Diana Alstad have enunciated the apparent paradox between selflessness and self-centredness which they believe lies at the heart of the ‘bodhisattva’s vow’ (which entails the renunciation of personal enlightenment for the altruistic ideal of helping others to achieve enlightenment), a staple of Masters-discourse. Their thesis further explores the problems of assisting others to a ‘place’ one has never been. Though their conclusions are based upon a rather literal and linear modelling of spiritual progressivism, their observations are apposite for Theosophy and may provide a valuable soteriological hermeneutic; to what degree does assisting others to discover Theosophy’s esoteric truths assist cosmic evolution and thus contribute to personal spiritual progress? This seems in part to be the sanctioned view of the Masters, and the natural corollary of their own behaviour, which thus suggests that Theosophical proselytising, for all of Blavatsky’s high-minded defence of religious pluralism and relativism, may in fact be a prerequisite for personal spiritual (and physical - as the two cannot be separated) progress. See Joel Kramer and Diana Alstad, The Guru Papers: Masks of Authoritarian Power, North Atlantic Books/Frog Ltd., Berkely, 1993, 365-367.
Blavatsky’s macrohistory and cosmology would not reach their mature configurations until the publication of her *The Secret Doctrine* in 1888, only a few years prior to her death. Nevertheless, the Mahatma letters afford an insight into a Theosophical cosmohistory governed by cyclicism and notable for its emphatic assurance of a (radically-elongated) prehistory:

We have the weakness to believe in ever recurrent cycles and hope to *quicken* the resurrection of what is past and gone. We *could not* impede it even if we would. The ‘new civilisation’ will be but the child of the old one, and we have but to leave the eternal law to take its own course to have our dead ones come out of their graves; yet, we are certainly anxious to hasten the welcome event.  

There never was a time within or before the so-called historical period when our predecessors [as Masters] were not moulding events and ‘making history’, the facts of which were subsequently and invariably distorted by ‘historians’ to suit contemporary prejudices. Are you quite sure that the visible heroic figures in the successive dramas were not often but their puppets? We never pretended to be able to draw nations in the mass to this or that crisis in spite of the general drift of the world’s cosmic relations. The cycles must run their rounds. Periods of mental and moral light and darkness succeed each other, as day does night. The major and minor yugas must be accomplished according to the established order of things. And we, borne along on the mighty tide, can only modify and direct some of its minor currents.

There has been a marked tendency in the study of the occultistic movements of the past 200 years to disendow them of broad cosmological and macrohistorical components. This lacuna in scholarship has served to render such movements even less liable to

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59 In this context it is necessary to exempt Garry Trompf’s ‘Macrohistory’ which is a pioneering work of its kind and unique in the literature. Trompf notes that even a scholar as seminal for the field of (Jewish) esotericism as Gershom Scholem ‘tended to read out the presence of a macrohistorical dimension altogether’: Trompf, ‘Macrohistory’, 278. For Scholem and his followers, see *infra* ch. 28.
proper academic scrutiny than their esoteric forebears. It is customary for any analysis of the Corpus Hermeticum, for instance, to view closely indications of idiosyncratic notions of time and space, and, indeed, the absence of such treatment would constitute a serious breach of rigour. Such would also necessarily be the case for any examination of Boehme or Swedenborg. Significantly, modern esoteric groups such as the Theosophical Society have engendered research primarily under the banners of sociology and psychology, and have thus been arbitrarily divorced from

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60 This tendency can be seen, for example, in Jean-Pierre Laurant who, following Tiryakian's problematic definition of occultism as applied esotericism, tends to the view that the occult groups of the late nineteenth century were for the most part 'trappings' and 'trivial': one cannot help but sense that for Laurant, such occult groups were unauthentic in that they were divorced from Renaissance models: Jean-Pierre Laurant, 'The Primitive Characteristics of Nineteenth-Century Esotericism', trans. Stephen Voss, in Faivre & Needleman, eds., Modern Esoteric Spirituality, 277-287. Had Laurant examined the cosmology of Theosophy, for instance, he may have noted the continuity of antique esoteric motifs into many groups he would otherwise have dismissed too lightly. His conclusion, which centres on the figure of René Guénon (1886-1951), suggests that Laurant considers him pivotal for a return to traditional esotericism; many other scholars would conclude that, though Guénon is often associated with the Perennialists (but cf. supra p. 68n39), he cannot properly be called an exponent of esotericism: c.f., eg., Hanegraaff, 'Empirical Method', 110. One could further take issue with Laurant's final sentence: 'The final survivors of romanticism disappeared with the onslaught of the general war'.

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their natural antecedents of the more distant past.

One of the serious ramifications of this disappointing trend has been the resultant tendency to view modern esotericism as inherently less sophisticated and more derivative than earlier manifestations. Sadly, this view is in danger of becoming entrenched even among those who are otherwise

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61 In this context it is informative to note the comments of Antoine Faivre regarding Theosophy. In the first instance, he noted:

Through its content and inspiration, it is largely an offshoot of Oriental spiritualities, especially Hindu, reflecting the cultural climate in which it was born (Faivre, **Access**, 92).

It is true that Indian motifs were present in the writings of Blavatsky, and have permeated the Society since her demise. Nevertheless, an examination of Blavatskian macrohistorical mappings and borrowings emphasizes the predominantly Western nature of her synthetic teachings, and the fact that her writings in these fields appear little studied even by acknowledged experts such as Faivre indicates that scholars overlook such particulars to the detriment of their conclusions.

In the same analysis Faivre posits three reasons to explain why Theosophy ‘is now rooted in most Western countries’: the presence of such remarkable personalities as Annie Besant’, the numerous links that the various branches maintained with most of the other esoteric societies’, and ‘the high percentage of artists who are known to have felt the influence of the Theosophical Society’: Faivre, **Access**, 92-93. Interestingly, Faivre’s choices each tend to suggest something of a sociological turn to his analysis. It is not improbable that such an emphasis upon sociological functions tends to operate to the disadvantage of Theosophical researches as it inadvertently diminishes the original esoteric content of Masters’ Theosophy, while perpetuating its lesser valency as something of a club for the like-minded. Faivre’s primary interests appear to be centred in the fields of Renaissance Hermeticism and the theosophy of the later Baroque period; his acuity in attempting to provide a heuristic demarcation between a diachronic ‘theosophic current’ and synchronic eruptions of visible theosophic bodies such as the Theosophical Society is to be lauded. Nevertheless, one tends to notice a bias toward the historical corpus at the expense of depth analysis of Blavatskian Theosophy:

This is not the place to draw up a list of the different uses made of the word ‘theosophy’ since the end of the 19th century until today ... the word is now employed mostly for designating either the current that has been examined here or the teachings of the Theosophical Society. And if either one holds any interest for the historian of ideas and religiosity in the modern West, the fact remains that only the first has four centuries behind it (id., ‘The Theosophical Current: A Periodization’ in *Theosophical History* VII: 5, 1999, 206).

It seems that Faivre’s opinions regarding the Orientalism of the Theosophical Society have changed little. As recently as 1998 he noted that:

Even though both H. P. Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society have some anchorage in [the esoteric current of theosophy], as well as in the current of occultism ... they nonetheless evince a proclivity to draw more on Eastern traditions (id., ‘Questions of Terminology proper to the study of Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe’ in Faivre & Hanegraaff, eds., *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, 6).

In a book published in 2000, Faivre has characterised Theosophy as a ‘vortex that tends to co-opt [the theosophical current], to swallow it up’: id, Theosophy, 28.
considered pioneers of the newly-emergent academic field.\textsuperscript{62}

The consequence of the disinclination to examine the erudite conceptual theses of individuals such as Blavatsky is that a distorted image of esotericism \textit{qua} esotericism begins to emerge; ironically, analysis begins to assume its own temporal paradigm and to posit a 'Golden Age' for esotericism which is both unempirical and illusory.\textsuperscript{63}

Thus, for some, nineteenth century Theosophy can only ever be a poor cousin to

\textsuperscript{62} In this context see Hanegraaff, \textit{New Age}, 380-383 \textit{et passim}. It is an interesting ahistorical correlation that just as Hanegraaff has noted the tendency among some contemporary religionist pros-esoteric critics of New Age spiritualities to condemn what appears to them to be 'the superficial pseudo-esotericism of New Age religion', so too a number of scholars whose interests are fixed primarily in the field of European antique and Renaissance esotericism tend to denigrate groups such as the Theosophists for being inherently \textit{ersatz} or ignorantly derivative. One suspects Hanegraaff has himself noted the similarity: see id., 'On the Construction of "Esoteric Traditions"' in Faivre \& Hanegraaff, eds., \textit{Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion}, 19. Though the tendency to present the esotericists of the last two centuries as being of a lesser significance than their forebears may owe much to the lack of patina of age which at present attends them, a more rigorous analysis would, one suspects, find a corollary between the end of 'classical' esotericism (an etic construct, to be sure) and the birth of the occultist movements in the second half of the eighteenth century; one cannot but suspect a bias in favour of those esotericists whose pre-Enlightenment theorising was not 'sullied' by contact (or even contagion) with materialist science. In this context it is interesting to note Hanegraaff's acute analysis of Pierre Riffard and Gilles Quispel (in ibid., 19-26). Hanegraaff concluded that these 'pro-esoteric universalists' have both rejected certain recent esotericisms as being 'vulgar pseudo-gnosis' (Quispel) and 'exotericism' (Riffard). Hanegraaff further noted that these commentators have mistaken their emic positions as etic constructs and have then superimposed them onto the materials - to the detriment of objective scholarship. If such is the case, and the evidence seems overwhelming, then it could be argued that the reason that certain recent occultisms are excluded from the pantheon of 'true' esotericism is most probably that such scholars have implicitly defined esotericism as being inherently anti-rationalist. Accordingly, \textit{any} emically-defined esotericism which \textit{parleys with a modernity heavily characterised by scientific rationalism (as contemporary esotericisms must) is ipso facto not an esotericism at all}. This may seem a minor observation, but it actually has broad ramifications for universalists such as Riffard and Quispel who see esotericism as a transhistorical phenomenon; if, as they seem to imply, esotericism cannot maintain its integrity in a scientific age, then, with a very few exceptions (notably C. G. Jung in the case of Quispel), this particular cycle of esotericism, begun in Alexandria around the inception of the present era, has come to a close.

\textsuperscript{63} It should be noted here that the attempt to circumscribe an historiography of esotericism by compartmentalising eras according to the combined literary output of noted individuals is often a valuable tool of the historian, if only so as to move from the huge and amorphous emic materials to specific analysis and thence to the etic construct. The dangers are no less real for these advantages. Faivre's periodisation of theosophy is a case in point. The benefits for the reader in Faivre's typically acute analysis are manifold and obvious: schematisation, linearity of argument, applicability for etic analysis, and so on. When, however, Faivre tends to define periods by the use of such loaded terms as 'the First Golden Age' and so forth, the risk grows of grafting a preordained mythic structure onto the materials. As a consequence, when the reader notes that the present age is labelled with such terms as 'Effacement' and 'Dissolution', it is hardly to be unexpected that those individuals and groups which constitute the esotericism of this age tend to be seen as degenerate or derivative - with the result that such persons and groups tend not to generate an appropriate quantity of scholarly curiosity. Thus a false 'Dark Ages/Renaissance' cycle is perpetuated not on the basis of the materials, but on the etic periodisation of the scholar. See Faivre, 'The Theosophical Current', 167-207; id., 'Questions of Terminology', 4-6.
eighteenth century theosophy, just as the ritualistic endeavours of modern ceremonial magicians are but spectres of the great theurgists of the Renaissance. The broad cosmological and temporal sweep of the Mahatma letters indicates that if nothing else the Masters and Blavatsky were closely engaged with nineteenth century philosophical and scientific debates, and were employed in articulating attractive alternatives - just as esotericists had done since antiquity.

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64 One suspects that this view is often further justified, if unconsciously, by the notion that magicians of the prescientific past at least had an excuse to perform such perverse rites as they had not the advantages of scientific rationalism. That such reductionist maxims are unempirical, and further promote an implausible mutual antagonism between 'science' and 'magic', hardly needs noting. Such an acknowledgment, however, will probably do little to dispel this dominant (and, one could argue, axiomatically, if ironically religionist) assumption.
CHAPTER 11

THE ADYAR YEARS

This study is concerned primarily with textual sources, particularly those which could be considered to comprise the Theosophical corpus: *Isis Unveiled*, the Mahatma Letters, and, *The Secret Doctrine*. It is important to recognise that the Mahatma letters, particularly, must be viewed complementarily with the subsequent history of the Society (at least until the time of its Foundress' death) for the reason that their reception helped to make religionist belief in the Masters a central precept of Theosophical teaching.

During the first years of the 1880s the Theosophical Society expanded commensurately with the fame which adhered to the Mahatma letters. Sinnett's publications of *The Occult World* (1881) and *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883), in which he included excerpts of the correspondence as well as a sometimes breathless commentary, became instant best-sellers and garnered many enthusiastic converts. The removal of the Society to a new and spacious headquarters at Adyar, Madras, further contributed to the sense of stabilisation. The pervasive calm of the early 1880s was not to last, however, and the

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1 One example will suffice to illustrate the extraordinary attraction which the Masters posed. One Theosophist, Edward Maitland (1824-1897), then Vice-President of the London Branch (soon afterwards called the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society), and who was later to gain fame with Anna Bonus Kingsford (1846-1888) as the founder of The Hermetic Society, noted the following:

The idea of a group of divinised men, dwelling high up in the fastness of the Himalayas, and endowed with transcendent knowledges and powers, possessed a fascination for all but the strongest heads; and that many succumbed to the glamour of the supposed 'Mahatmas', as the adept masters were called, was evidenced by their readiness to accept implicitly all that was put forward in their name, even to resenting as blasphemous the suggestion of need for caution and deliberation (Edward Maitland, *Anna Kingsford: Her Life, Letters, Diary and Work*, 3rd ed., vol. 2, ed. Samuel Hopgood Hart, John M. Watkins, London, 1913, 139-140).

2 For *The Occult World*, see infra p. 159n4; cf. also A. P. Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, Trübner & Co., London, 1883. The popularity of Sinnett's works can be ascertained from the fact that *The Occult World* went through five British editions in eight years, while *Esoteric Buddhism* achieved five editions in three. These two works continue to enjoy great popularity in Theosophical circles even though Blavatsky found them unimpressive; she and Sinnett parted company on poor terms: see Gomes, *Theosophy*, 369-376.

3 The Founders arrived at Adyar on 19 December, 1882; see Ransom, *A Short History*, 174. Adyar remains the parent Society's headquarters and the centre of its publications arm. It is also the seat of the President and the location of the Society's main archives and library.
Masters proved to be the catalysts for a brewing storm.

**The 'Kiddle Incident'**

A portion of an early Mahatma letter of 10 December, 1880, was included in Sinnett's *The Occult World*, published in June, 1881.⁴ In his letter to Sinnett, the Master Koot Hoomi had stated the following:

Plato was right: ideas rule the world; and, as men's minds will receive new ideas, laying aside the old and effete, the world will advance; mighty revolutions will spring from them; creeds and even powers will crumble before their onward march crushed by the irresistible force. It will be just as impossible to resist their influx, when the time comes, as to stay the progress of the tide.⁵

An American Spiritualist, and one time president of the American Spiritualist Alliance, Henry Kiddle, had found himself somewhat taken aback upon reading the Master's prediction, as he recognised not just the sentiment, but the words themselves.⁶ In a lecture he had given on the fifteenth of August, 1880, to a Spiritualist assembly at Lake Pleasant, Massachusetts, entitled 'The Present Outlook of Spiritualism', he had opined the following:

My friends, ideas rule the world; and as men's minds receive new ideas laying aside the old and effete, the world advances. Society rests upon them; mighty revolutions spring from them; institutions crumble before their onward march. It is just as impossible to resist their influx when the time comes, as to stay the progress of the tide.⁷

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⁴ For the relevant portion of the letter see *The Mahatma Letters*, 1993 ed., (Letter No. 12: 10 December, 1880) 39. Cf. also in ibid., (Letter No. 117: December, 1883) 400-401. For Sinnett's redaction see Alfred Percy Sinnett, *The Occult World*, Trübner & Co., London, 1881, 102. In the fourth edition Sinnett included an appendix on the Kiddle incident, though it is to be regretted that in most subsequent editions (e.g., the ninth) the appendix has been removed and the portion of the Mahatma letter (No.12 in the Chronological edition) has been excised from the text.


⁶ It should be noted that the passage in question occurs in Sinnett's *The Occult World* and not in his *Esoteric Buddhism*, published two years later. The reason for this occasional lapse on the part of scholars (e.g., Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 347), it would seem, is that Kiddle's indignant letter to the editor of *Light* (see infra p. 160n10), which first brought the incident to public attention, was labelled 'Esoteric Buddhism'. It is unclear whether Kiddle or the editor of *Light* placed the title upon Kiddle's letter, though it seems likely to have been the latter in reference to Sinnett's then new book of the same name which had been gaining wide circulation.

Kiddle, having received no reply to his letter to Sinnett (via the latter’s publisher), decided to publish his consternation in the English Spiritualist journal, Light:

I was very greatly surprised to find in one of the letters presented by Mr. Sinnett as having been transmitted to him by Koothoomi ... a passage taken almost verbatim from an address on Spiritualism by me at Lake Pleasant, in August 1880, and published the same month by the Banner of Light. How then did it get into Koothoomi’s mysterious letter?

How indeed! After much comment in The Theosophist, sometimes of a rather fatuous nature, Sinnett decided to enquire of the source how such an apparent plagiarism may have occurred. Koot Hoomi’s reply is rather reminiscent of Blavatsky’s indignant rejoinder regarding accusations levelled at her over passages she was supposed to have mined in the writing of Isis Unveiled: Masters, too, store images,

2 As Gomes has noted. Kiddle’s address was not published in August, but in the 18 September, 1880, issue of the Banner of Light; see Gomes, Theosophy, 402.
3 Henry Kiddle, ‘Esoteric Buddhism’ [Letter to the Editor], Light III: 1 (London), 1 September, 1883, 302.
4 A lot of the Theosophical riposte was centred upon an attempt to ‘turn the tables’, as it were, upon Kiddle by accusing him of plagiarising from Plato. The Master K. H. had prefaced his version of the passage in question with the words, ‘Plato was right: ideas rule [etc.]’. An attempt was made, with little success, to ascribe the words and sentiment to the Platonic Dialogues: see T. Subba Row, ‘Happy Mr. Henrey Kiddle’s Discovery’ in The Theosophist 5:3, [no.51], December, 1883, 86-87; Ellen H. Morgan, ‘A Defence of Madame Blavatsky’s Views and Phenomenal Abilities’ (Letter to the Editor) in The Medium and Daybreak, 4 January, 1884, 5-6 (reprinted in part in Gomes, Theosophy, 408).

Victor Endersby believed that Blavatsky’s intelligence would mitigate against the claim she (as the supposed inventor of the Masters) plagiarised from Kiddle:

Consider the howling logical absurdity of this ‘Kiddle Incident’. Here is H. P. B. using all her cunning to build up these Mahatmas’ characterisations, according to the opposition; and she deliberately copies passages out of an organ of her worst enemies, the spiritualists, to put in a Mahatma letter! If she did that she couldn’t help getting caught - this genius at deception! (Endersby, The Hall of Magic Mirrors, 159).

The process of exonerating K. H. from the charge of plagiarism continues unabated: David Pratt has stated:

[When carefully read, the passage by KH is seen to be directed against what Kiddle was saying. Moreover, the wording indicates that something had gone wrong in the transmission of the letter (David Pratt, The Theosophical Mahatmas: A Critique of Paul Johnson’s New Myth, [rev. art.] internet posting 4.11.1997, <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/dp5/johnson.htm>).

Pratt’s point seems irrelevant: the argument is not how K. H. used Kiddle’s words, but why. It is also surely impossible to assume a problem in transmission, when the means of transmission (‘precipitation’) presuppose meta-empirical agency.
words, and texts, in their minds, having precipitated them from the Astral Light. At the time in question, Koot Hoomi had been overwrought from a 48 hour journey on horseback, and had entrusted the dictation of the letter to a junior chela, and had inadvertently failed to edit the missive prior to its psychic/physical transmission. Thus had whole passages inadvertently been reproduced from the Lake Pleasant Spiritualist camp address, which the Master had been psychically overseeing as a result of his interest in 'the intellectual progress of the Phenomenalists'.

The 'Kiddle incident', as this episode is termed in Theosophical publications, has become notorious as the pivotal moment during which much public sentiment turned against the Masters and their amanuensis, Blavatsky. Certainly, a number of prominent Theosophists resigned from the Society, as much on the basis of insufficient explanation of the event, as from the suspicion of Blavatskian plagiarism. Perhaps the most significant result of the incident was the arousal of interest in the phenomenal aspects of the Mahatma correspondence by the newly-formed Society for Psychical Research; its own subsequent investigation, though hardly a model of methodological impartiality itself, was to provide a damning indictment of Blavatskian Theosophy as nothing less than, and certainly nothing more than, ingenious fraud.

Though it is not the objective of the present work to provide argument for the veracity of Theosophical claims regarding the Masters' corporeal existence (nor indeed can such an aim be attempted on the basis of an agnostic empirical methodology), the

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13 K.H. regularly refers to the process of transmission as 'precipitation'. The process is outlined in all of its peculiar detail in ibid., (Letter No. 117: December, 1883) 396-404. Cf. also H. P. Blavatsky, 'Have we to lower the flag of truce' in Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. VI, 1-5.
15 It is worth quoting from a letter of the prominent English Theosophist and first British Theosophical Society president, C. C. Massey:

> I did not leave the Society on account of the coincidences between Mr. Kiddle's lecture and the letter ... alleged to be from Koot Hoomi, but because an explanation of this coincidence afterwards put forward in the name of Koot Hoomi was, as I considered, manifestly and demonstrably false ... But, strange as it may appear, I nevertheless retained, and still retain, belief in the existence of the 'Adepts' ... Nor do I say that in my belief Madame Blavatsky is worthy of unrestrained confidence (C. C. Massey, 'The Theosophical Society and the "Christian World"' [Letter to the Editor] in *Light IV* (London), 22 November, 1884, 488).

See also Leslie Price, 'Massey's Resignation', 112-114.
16 For the so-called 'Hodgson Report' see *infra* 169ff.
The apparent plagiarism of Kiddle by Koot Hoomi is the point of departure for virtually all scholarship devoted to the dismissal of the Masters as Blavatskian fiction. The natural defence which confronts this often preordained axiomatic position is yet again of a methodological nature: given the Masters' self-revelation via the Mahatma letters, as well as the extraordinary claims made in their behalf by their acknowledged chela, Blavatsky, there is no means by which to justifiably falsify Koot Hoomi's account. He is a keeper of records and the overseer of esoteric orders and, by his own admission, humanly fallible. Certainly those commentators who choose to accept Blavatsky's account of her 'borrowings' for Isis Unveiled are ipso facto required to extend the same scholarly equanimity to her Masters. So too, those who assume that the Kiddle incident is sensu lato proof of the non-existence of Masters must reassess the limitations of their methodological apparatus. The most that can be claimed for this incident is that Koot Hoomi knowingly plagiarised Kiddle; it says nothing about the Master's ontic existence.

The treatment of such occurrences of potential or probable fraudulence as the Kiddle incident by much of the current analytical material reveals the degree to which there is a detectable trend toward the 'psychologising' of the Masters. It has become almost de rigueur for scholars to reduce the Masters to the status of simple instantiations of Blavatsky's over-abundant imagination, or indeed the product of psychological illness. This methodological standpoint has its roots in the ex post facto application of certain modern psychological theories in the assessment of historical persons and movements. While such a methodological standpoint may avail under certain

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17 Renée Haynes has opined:

It is possible to speculate, at this distance of time, as to whether [Koot Hoomi] was a secondary personality of Madame Blavatsky's, an over life-size version of [Stainton Moses'] Imperator ... this would explain a great deal (Haynes, The Society for Psychical Research, 143).

This comment is curious. One wonders how it is possible to speculate (i.e., on what empirical basis), why 'this distance of time' makes such speculation more warranted, and exactly in which ways this would 'explain a great deal'. Such amateur analysis contributes significantly to the demonising of esotericism; to all intents and purposes the dismissal of mediaeval goetic theurgy as devil-inspired differs only in particulars, though not in effect, from the equally reductionist accusation that Blavatsky's Masters were the result of some form of psychological imbalance. Haynes later admonished Blavatsky in the following terms: 'The trouble about pious fraud is that it sows general distrust' (Haynes, The Society for Psychical Research, 144); the same could be said about pious reductionism.
circumstances, its inherent danger for the present study is all too evident. Were Blavatsky, and perhaps Olcott, the only individuals to claim to have met the Masters, then a case could be brought that they undertook an exercise in Masters-mythopoeia either in mendacious self-aggrandisement, entirely mundane self-interest or as a result of some species of subconscious psychological need, perhaps arising from childhood romanticising or trauma. Such a position becomes much more strained, however, when it is acknowledged (as few scholars have done) that two dozen or more individuals claimed personal commerce with the Masters. Aside from recourse to diagnostic notions such as group hysteria, or to entirely unsupportable claims of elaborate transcontinental conspiracy, there are few grounds upon which an exclusively psychological interpretation of the Masters phenomenon can be established. To emphasise this point, it is worthwhile to note briefly a couple of incidents of the Masters appearing in physical form.

The Masters in propriis personis

On one occasion the Master Morya appeared to a group of seven:

We were sitting in the moonlight about 9 o’clock upon the balcony which projects from the front of the bungalow ... The library was in partial darkness, thus rendering objects in the farther room more


\[19\] Of course it is not impossible that the persons appearing as Masters were paid impostors; there is some evidence that Blavatsky employed such means during her early days in India: see supra ch. 9. It is interesting to note, though, that many of those who claimed to have encountered the Masters engaged them in extended dialogue, and ever afterwards asserted that the Masters exhibited great wisdom and erudition: see Barborka, *The Mahatmas*, passim. Nonetheless, it should be noted that there can be little doubt that the greater part of those who claimed such personal commerce with a Master or Masters were predisposed toward Theosophical beliefs, and highly desirous of such meetings.

The *ex post facto* attribution of psychological illness to Blavatsky has become a favoured reductive means to overcome the paradox of the Masters. One example of this tendency is Tim Maroney’s *The Book of Dzyan* (The Book of Dzyan: Being a Manuscript Curiously Received by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky with Diverse and Rare Texts of Related Interest. Selected and Introduced, ed. & intro. Tim Maroney, A Chaosium Book, Oakland, California, 2000). Maroney’s retrospective diagnosis includes the following: Blavatsky was a ‘strong-willed unattractive woman adopting dissociative male personae’ (p. 50); the Masters ‘were reworked unconsciously into dream characters, whom she never met except in her mind’s eye’ (p. 36); Blavatsky’s ‘alter egos were well established and had acquired a largely independent existence’ (p. 35); ‘in her unwell state, fragments of her life and imagination combined with her visionary powers to form an unconsciously *fictionalized* character whom she most likely believed to be real’ (p. 23); ‘Blavatsky manifested all of the four diagnostic criteria for D[issociative] I[dentity] D[isorder] ... [and] could open or close herself at will to other personalities’ (p. 29). An historian makes such claims to his or her peril.
distinct. Mr. Scott suddenly saw the figure of a man step into the space, opposite the door of the library; he was clad in the white dress of a Rajput, and wore a white turban. Mr. Scott at once recognised him from his resemblances to a portrait in Col. Olcott's possession ... He walked towards a table, and afterwards turning his face towards us, walked back out of our sight ... when we reached the room he was gone ... Upon the table, at the spot where he had been standing, lay a letter addressed to one of our number.20

On another occasion, K. H. visited Olcott, Dâmodar, and William T. Brown immediately outside Lahore in November, 1883:

Lahore has a special interest, because there we saw, in his own physical body, Mahatma Koot Hoomi himself. On the afternoon of the 19th November, I saw the Master in broad daylight, and recognized him, and on the morning of the 20th he came to my tent, and said 'Now you see me before you in the flesh; look and assure yourself that it is I,' and left a letter of instructions and silk handkerchief, both of which are now in my possession ... On the evening of the 21st ... we were visited by Djual Khool (the Master's head Chela, and now an Initiate), who informed us that the Master was about to come. The Master then came near to us, gave instructions to Damodar, and walked away.21

Such visitations by Masters in propriis personis were not uncommon in the early years of the 1880s.22 As skepticism about the existence of the Masters mounted, a number of those who claimed to have been the subject of such visits signed

20 A. O. Hume, Hints On Esoteric Theosophy, No. 1, Issued under the Authority of the Theosophical Society, Calcutta, 1882, 75-76.
22 For a quite comprehensive overview of such visitations, and also for signed testimonials, see Barborka, The Mahatmas, 226-355.
testimonials to emphasise the veracity of their accounts. It is interesting to note that a number of highly critical analyses of Blavatsky and Theosophy regularly omit any reference to such encounters: Peter Washington included in his *Madame Blavatsky’s Baboon* only those claims to contact made by Blavatsky and Olcott, thus improperly strengthening his thesis that the Masters were invented by Blavatsky simply to shore up her authoritarian control over the movement, and that Olcott was her unwitting dupe. Marion Meade’s assertion that ‘[i]n all, about nine or ten persons testified to having seen the Mahatmas: Annie Besant, Henry Olcott, Damodar Mavalankar, Isabel Cooper-Oakley, William Brown, Nadyezhda Fadeyev, S. R. Ramaswamier, Justine Glinka and Vsevolod Solovyov’ falls significantly short of the mark. Daniel Caldwell has properly noted the figure to be in the vicinity of twenty five. While the present work does not (and, indeed, cannot) devolve upon the physical existence of the Masters, such testimonials are instructive for those who too rapidly dismiss Theosophical claims as fraud or hysteria. Indeed, were such visitations from Masters to be proved somehow to be a remarkable mass hallucinatory delusion, it would only

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21 Ibid.

24 ‘Blavatsky created a Brotherhood of Himalayan Masters who had supposedly selected her to communicate their message to the world ... She was in short just the woman for Olcott, who had lost all sense of direction in his dreary life’: Washington, *Madame Blavatsky’s Baboon*, 40-41. Washington’s (often simplistic) thesis is marred by gross errors of fact. He notes, for example: 

> According to Blavatsky’s later descriptions of the Brotherhood, this hierarchy is headed by the Lord of the World, who lives at Shamballa in the Gobi desert. The Lord of the World came originally from Venus with several helpers and now inhabits the body of a sixteen-year-old boy (Washington, *Madame Blavatsky’s Baboon*, 34).

It would appear that Washington is confusing Blavatskian Theosophy with its later modifications by Charles Webster Leadbeater, and that the ‘sixteen-year-old boy’ is a reference to Jiddu Krishnamurti who had not been born at the time of Blavatsky’s death.

In contradistinction, no author can be said to have granted a more comprehensive account of the interaction between Masters and chelas than Paul Johnson. He is perhaps alone in having provided a detailed analysis of the claims of the Indian chelas; in this, he is something of a pioneer in having disavowed the racism that has beset much Theosophical historiography: see Johnson, *Initiates*, 17-69 et passim. It is interesting to note that Meade’s biography of Blavatsky, widely regarded as the most critical, treats the Indian chelas as little other than ciphers or support players. It can hardly be insignificant that peripheral European and American personalities rate mention in her index while hugely influential Theosophical mentors and benefactors of Indian origin, among them princes and maharajas (the Sikh Maharājā Bikram Singh of Faridkot; Maharājā Ranbir Singh of Kashmir; Daji Raja Chandra Singhji, Thakur of Wadhwan; the founder of the Singh Sabha, Sirdar Thakar Singh Sandhanwalia, *inter alia*), do not appear: Meade, *Madame Blavatsky*. It should be noted that Prince Harisinghji Rupsinghji (who does appear in Meade’s index, though as ‘Prince Jarisinghji Rupsinghji’) and Daji Raja (who does not appear) both exhibited religionist belief in the Theosophical Masters: Johnson, *Initiates*, 45.


emphasise the significance of this phenomenon of esotericism as a potent symbolic force deserving of critical analysis. The tendency to focus on the possibility of Blavatskian intrigue entirely evades the question of the remarkable reception which the Masters received; the latter remains the far superior enquiry.

**Occident or Orient?**

By the end of 1883, as has been noted, murmurings of discontent over the position of the Masters within the Theosophical Society, and also the ever-Orientalising direction of its gaze, caused the London lodge to fracture.\(^{27}\) Concerned at the level of discontent, Blavatsky journeyed to England\(^{28}\) and oversaw the division between the Sinnett-influenced and Masters-oriented members, and those loyal to the Christian Hermeticism of the lodge president, Anna Bonus Kingsford (1846-1888).\(^{29}\) According to the newly-elected member, Charles Webster Leadbeater, the occasion of Blavatsky’s visit to the London lodge created the sort of uproar to be expected of the prime chela of the Masters:

\(^{27}\) Ransom, *A Short History*, 196-198.

\(^{28}\) In fact Blavatsky, having been unwell for a matter of months, decided upon a short holiday to visit family in France. It is probable, however, that despite her protestations about not visiting London, the conflict in the London lodge was foremost in her mind and provided the motivation for her journey. Ostensibly she simply accompanied Olcott who had been called upon by the Ceylonese to act as their delegate and ambassador in London in order to press the Sinhalese Buddhist cause against the overt institutionalisation of Christianity in a predominantly Buddhist country: see Ransom, *A Short History*, 191-192.

\(^{29}\) Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 333-346, esp. 344. Kingsford remains a fascinating figure of late nineteenth century Hermeticism, and under-researched. No modern biography has been written; the standard work remains Maitland’s *Anna Kingsford* of 1896 (3rd ed.: 1913). An avid anti-vivisectionist and vegetarian, Kingsford’s combination of social activism, allegorical hermeneutical exegesis, and esoteric Christianity make her something of a contrapuntal force to Blavatskian Theosophy. One suspects that Kingsford’s energies were, however, of a more erratic kind: there is evidence that she planned to kill ‘psychically’ a number of vivisectionists, including Louis Pasteur. She certainly believed she was responsible for the deaths of both Paul Bert and Claude Bernard; see in ibid., vol. 2, 268-269; 290-297. Interestingly, she appears to have conscripted one of her devoted Hermetic Society members to train her in ‘practical occultism’ so as to achieve her purpose. The man in question, Samuel Liddell Mathers (1854-1918), soon thereafter came to prominence as the driving force and Imperator of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the most celebrated theurgic Order of modern times (see in ibid., vol. 2, 268-269). Meade provides no documentation to support her assertion that Maitland was Kingsford’s ‘step-uncle by marriage who had agreed to act as her guardian and chaperon’: Meade, *Madame Blavatsky*, 277. It should be noted, however, that Maitland had stated that ‘there was a connection between her husband’s family and my own’; the pair appear to have assumed the familial connection in order to rent a joint apartment in Paris during Kingsford’s studies for her M. D.: Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, vol. 1, 26; 56-57. Kingsford was married to an Anglican vicar (in this she shows one of a number of similarities to her fellow anti-vivisectionist Annie Besant, the second President of the Theosophical Society), and her relationship with Maitland appears to have remained strictly non-sexual.
[A] stout lady in black came quickly in and seated herself at the outer end of our bench. She sat listening to the wrangling on the platform for a few minutes, and then began to exhibit distinct signs of impatience. As there seemed to be no improvement in sight, she then jumped up from her seat ... [Sinnett] spoke in a ringing voice the fateful words: 'Let me introduce to the London Lodge as a whole - Madame Blavatsky!' The scene was indescribable; the members, wildly delighted and yet half-awed at the same time, clustered round our great Founder, some kissing her hand, several kneeling before her, and two or three weeping hysterically. After a few minutes, however, she shook them off impatiently.30

Olcott, as Founder-President of the Society, and certainly with the goodwill of Blavatsky, agreed to allow Kingsford to establish a Hermetic Lodge of the Theosophical Society, to be devoted specifically to the study of Western esoteric themes and motifs. Kingsford, no great respecter of Blavatsky’s claims to supramundane revelation, ultimately led her followers outside of the ambit of

30 C. W. Leadbeater, *How Theosophy Came To Me*, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1930, 43-44. The meeting took place on the evening of 7 April, 1884.
Theosophy by constituting a separate body, the Hermetic Society.\textsuperscript{31}

The schism in the London lodge is rarely granted the importance it deserves in Theosophical histories.\textsuperscript{32} The London fracas is often, and rightly, interpreted as the opposition occasioned by conflicting Occidental and Oriental emphases; less well acknowledged is the implication which such a break had for the concept of the Masters in Theosophy.\textsuperscript{33} Until the schism, belief in the Masters was widely interpreted as an individual's prerogative in accordance with the Society's affirmed belief in the Masters as the embodiment of the divine. The Hermetic Society provided something of the Western ambience which, by this time, had begun to disappear from Theosophy. The Hermetic Society was immediately very popular and attracted many crypto-esotericists to its fold, including W. B. Yeats, S. L. Mathers and A. E. Waite. Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) was present at its inaugural meeting; Edward Carpenter (1844-1929) was a regular participant. The Hermetic Society never recovered from the early death of Kingsford in 1888, and it soon fell for the most part into abeyance with many of its members joining such groups as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn or the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light, both of which maintained its Western ethos.

The influence of The Hermetic Society has been undervalued by historiographers of nineteenth century occultism. P. G. Bowen ([1877/1882]-1940), in writing of his father Robert Bowen, stated the following:

He [Robert Bowen] states definitely that Anna Kingsford, in 1885 (I think) formed an Inner Group in her Hermetic Society, and in it were Wynn Westcott and MacGregor Mathers. There was another member whom my father often mentions as 'X', or 'X-A' and sometimes as 'Druid friend X' or simply 'The Druid', and this person it was who brought the 'Club' material to Anna. Westcott and Mathers were given access to it, and later made it the basis of the Golden Dawn rituals (P. G. Bowen to 'Mac Kinnon', n.p., n.d., typed copy of original in the possession of the present author).

Although P. G. Bowen's assertions cannot be verified, they nevertheless indicate that The Hermetic Society was believed to have been fundamental in the genesis of the Golden Dawn, a view all-too-rarely stated. It might be noted that Robert Bowen was an associate and disciple of Blavatsky; P. G. Bowen later published his father's important account of his studies: Robert Bowen, Madame Blavatsky on How to Study Theosophy, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1970. P. G. Bowen himself became a noted occultist and published several works including: P. G. Bowen, The Sayings of the Ancient One: A unique re-statement of the Ageless Wisdom, 2nd ed., Theosophical Publishing House, London, 1985. P. G. Bowen claimed to head a continuing Hermetic Society in Dublin, established by his friend 'A. E.' (George Russell), and to have been initiated into an African occult brotherhood by an Atlas Berber, 'Mehlo Moya', from whom he learned arcane secrets in the Bantu language of 'Isinzu': in ibid., 'About the Author', unpaginated. He also asserted that he had been trained in an 'occult body' disguised as a Greek Orthodox monastery by a 'Patriarch' 'Agapoulos or 'I'Akupulusa' in 1919. After his death in 1940, a disciple - Mrs. E. A. Ansell - moved to London and perpetuated Bowen's teachings in a body called The Ancient Order of Druid Hermetists: see Colquhoun, Sword of Wisdom, 119-120.

\textsuperscript{31} The Hermetic Society provided something of the Western ambience which, by this time, had begun to disappear from Theosophy. The Hermetic Society was immediately very popular and attracted many crypto-esotericists to its fold, including W. B. Yeats, S. L. Mathers and A. E. Waite. Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) was present at its inaugural meeting; Edward Carpenter (1844-1929) was a regular participant. The Hermetic Society never recovered from the early death of Kingsford in 1888, and it soon fell for the most part into abeyance with many of its members joining such groups as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn or the Hermetic Brotherhood of Light, both of which maintained its Western ethos.


\textsuperscript{33} It is significant that Bruce Campbell's one paragraph summary of the London schism nowhere mentions the Masters - the East/West divide forms the structure and axis of his analysis: Campbell, Ancient Wisdom, 86-87. One suspects that although the orientation of the Society may have precipitated the dispute, the underlying cause had more to do with the Masters and their position of authority with regard to spiritual \textit{pronunciamenti}. 

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stance on anti-dogmatism. Though never enunciated afterwards, the result of the split was that Masters-Theosophy became a \textit{de facto} doctrine of the Society, belief in which amounted in many cases to a \textit{sine qua non} for membership.

\textit{The Coulombs and the 'Hodgson Report'}

Blavatsky's 1884 European travels are significant for two further reasons. Back at the Society's headquarters in Adyar, a simmering disputation, which Blavatsky's presence had hitherto constrained, finally boiled over with the result that Alexis and Emma Coulomb (\textit{née} Cutting) were called upon to quit the compound. Blavatsky had known Emma Cutting in Cairo in the early 1870s and had subsequently offered the penurious Coulombs accommodation and work with the Society, first in Bombay and then at Adyar.\textsuperscript{34} (There are some indications that Blavatsky offered the positions to the Coulombs for fear that Emma may have exposed details of her Cairene adventures to public scrutiny).\textsuperscript{35} Though granted the grandiose appellations of Librarian and Assistant Corresponding Secretary, the tasks amounted to little more than domestic overseer for Emma and general factotum for Alexis, a circumstance much to the displeasure of Madame Coulomb.

During Blavatsky's absence, Emma had been entrusted with the keys to her mistress' private suite and also to the Shrine room, so-called for Blavatsky's installation of a specially-appointed room set apart for the veneration of the Masters.\textsuperscript{36} Arguments arose between Emma and resident Theosophists about access to these apartments, and as the insults volleyed from one party to the other, Emma began to voice extraordinary

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{35} Emma Coulomb wrote in a letter to \textit{Ceylon Times} (5 June 1879):}
\footnotesize{I have known this lady for these last eight years, and I must say the truth that there is nothing against her character. We lived in the same town, and on the contrary she was considered one of the cleverest ladies of the age (Cooper, 'The Letters', vol. II, 494).}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{36} Meade, \textit{Madame Blavatsky}, 205-206.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{34} The Shrine Room (or Occult Room) became the focus for many of the phenomena associated with the Masters, notably the shrine itself which, when opened, regularly contained gifts or letters from one of their number. The exact dimensions of the room and its furnishings, as well as the degree to which Blavatsky was aware of the sliding panels at the back of the shrine itself (which opened onto an old window recess covered on the other side by a wardrobe in Blavatsky bedroom) is an unresolved question. Theosophical wisdom has it that Alexis Coulomb altered the shrine and room after Blavatsky's departure so as to assist his wife in her attempts to disgrace Blavatsky. The research into this one aspect of the SPR (Hodgson) Report is voluminous: cf., eg., Waterman (Walter A. Carrithers, Jr.), \textit{Obituary: The 'Hodgson Report'}; see also Endersby, 'Battle Royal' (for illustrations).}
 accusations about fraud and mendacity on the part of Blavatsky, culminating in her
allegation that the Masters were a fiction - indeed, Emma claimed to possess
documentary evidence in support of her contentions.37 Incensed at Emma's umbrage
and apparent slander, the Board of Control (established by the Founders to represent
their interests during their European sojourn) demanded that the Coulombs be expelled
both from membership and the headquarters; ultimately charges of slander, extortion,
and profligacy were brought by the Executive Committee of the General Council.38
Following a tense impasse, the couple finally departed for Madras on 23 May, 1884.39

Apart from fielding an incessant correspondence from indignant Society members, and
wondering whether Emma would seek her revenge by publishing letters which she
claimed incriminated her mistress,40 Blavatsky was occupied in London by the
fascinated curiosity which the Mahatma letters had aroused in members of the newly­
formed Society for Psychical Research. The SPR, as it is known, had been
constituted in 1882 with the stated aim: 'to examine without prejudice or prepossession
and in a scientific spirit those faculties of man, real or supposed, which appear to be
inexplicable in terms of any generally recognized hypotheses'.41 The SPR has

37 For discussion of the 'Coulomb Conspiracy' see Ransom, A Short History, 209-216; Campbell,
Ancient Wisdom, 87-95. See also Gomes, 'H. P. Blavatsky's Annotations', 144-155.
38 The calumny which many Adyar Theosophists believed Emma Coulomb had heaped upon Blavatsky
was not the only charge. It was considered, rightly it appears, that Emma had embezzled certain
monies for herself from the household accounts: see Fuller, 'The Coulombs', 2. Madame Coulomb
was notoriously grasping in financial terms, regularly eliciting promises of aid from residents; she
even approached Prince Harisinghji Rupsinghji for a loan of two thousand rupees, much to
Blavatsky's horror: see Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 280-281. Franz Hartmann, a member of the
Board of Control, described Madame Coulomb thus:
Imagine a weird witchlike creature, with wrinkled features, a stinging look and an
uncouth form ... She seemed to consider it her special purpose in life to pry into
everybody's private affairs ... if she found a willing ear she would never hesitate
a moment to insinuate that the whole Society was a humbug, the phenomena
produced by fraud, and 'that she could tell many things if she only wanted to do
so' (quoted in Annie Besant, H. P. Blavatsky and The Masters of the Wisdom,
Theosophical Publishing House, Krotona, California, 1918, 45-46).
39 Coulomb's account, together with portions of the 'Coulomb-Blavatsky correspondence' are to be
found in Coulomb, Some Account, passim. It should be remembered that the correspondence is now
deemed to be a probable forgery. See supra p. 133n43.
40 Emma Coulomb had apparently sought vengeance from at least the end of 1883 when she was
confounded in her attempt to secure a loan from Prince Harisinghji, a powerful Indian benefactor of
the Theosophical Society: see supra ch. 9. See also Johnson, Initiates, 44.
41 The Society for Psychical Research continues to this day. The objectives of the SPR are to be
found in Haynes, The Society for Psychical Research, xiii. See also Brian Inglis, Science and
suffered much under the hand of revisionist historians who have tended to interpret it as a rationalist foil to the general ‘flight from reason’ which characterised the latter nineteenth-century.\textsuperscript{42} In reality, the SPR at the time of its origin was less concerned with the measurement of specific extra-sensory potentialities, than with investigating the philosophico-religious questions aroused by the necromantic activities of Spiritualism.\textsuperscript{43} As James Webb has noted, ‘it is difficult to escape the conclusion that in certain cases the SPR fulfilled the function of Spiritualist church for intellectuals.’\textsuperscript{44}

On 2 May, 1884, the SPR convened a committee to investigate the phenomena produced by Blavatsky: the committee comprised the President, Henry Sidgwick, and members E. Gurney, F. W. H. Myers, F. Podmore, and J. H. Stack (soon thereafter completed by Mrs. Eleanor Sidgwick and Richard Hodgson).\textsuperscript{45} The SPR committee interviewed Olcott, Sinnett, and an Indian Theosophist named Mohini Mohun Chatterji (1858-1936); last of all they met with Blavatsky, who was much overcome with a sense of foreboding.\textsuperscript{46} The resultant report, entitled \textit{First Report of the Committee of the Society for Psychical Research, Appointed to Investigate the Evidence for Marvellous Phenomena Offered by Certain Members of the Theosophical Society}, proved to be a rather innocuous document, failing to arrive at substantial conclusions. There is the sense that the committee maintained strong reservations about the extraordinary breadth of claims made in Blavatsky’s half, but were somewhat overcome by the strength of testimonial support.\textsuperscript{47} It was agreed that the phenomena

\textsuperscript{42} See Webb, \textit{Flight}, 18ff.
\textsuperscript{43} James Webb has noted: ‘The SPR was a peculiar hybrid of Spiritualist cult and dedicated rationalism: as such it defies classification’ (see in ibid., 21).
\textsuperscript{44} See in ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{45} Harrison, \textit{H. P. Blavatsky and the SPR}, 5. On the subject of the investigation of the Theosophical Society by the SPR, Haynes (\textit{The Society for Psychical Research}, 141-144) is best avoided. The work is marred by numerous errors of fact, and several unjustifiable omissions.
\textsuperscript{46} Meade, \textit{Madame Blavatsky}, 305-309. These interviews were conducted over the period 11 May to 9 August, 1884.
required further examination.

In an effort to broaden the investigation and, it seems, to create of it an exemplar for the burgeoning industry of psychical research,\textsuperscript{48} the SPR dispatched one of its young recruits, the Australian Richard Hodgson (1855-1905), to India. Hodgson was eager to begin his investigation, surprising staff at Adyar by arriving before their mistress had returned from Europe.\textsuperscript{49} Although he had been granted a broad brief by his superiors, centred primarily around Blavatsky's Spiritualistic phenomena (raps, mysterious music, and so on) and the generation and delivery of the Mahatma letters, Hodgson soon began to focus upon the Masters, having correctly divined their centrality to the Theosophical movement.\textsuperscript{50} Hodgson's investigations lasted three months; by the end of his sojourn he had come to believe that Blavatsky was an inveterate fraud, her Masters were mythical, and the premises upon which the Society rested were illusory. His final report (Report of the Committee Appointed to Investigate Phenomena Connected with the Theosophical Society)\textsuperscript{51} was devastating for the entire membership.

\textsuperscript{48} 'For years Hodgson has been presented as an example of a perfect psychical researcher, and his report a model of what a report on psychical research should be': Harrison, \textit{H. P. Blavatsky and the SPR}, 4.

\textsuperscript{49} In fact, Blavatsky had travelled via Alexandria and Port Said in order to interview old employees and associates of Emma Coulomb, with a view to providing herself with documentary support in her escalating conflict with her former friend. Though she met with a number of disaffected individuals, there was little tangible material for her to carry away. Her arrival in Egypt is of special note because there she was met by Leadbeater, who had hurriedly severed all personal and pastoral ties in England following a letter from K. H. (passed to him by Blavatsky) inviting him to be a chela. He subsequently travelled with his mentor to Adyar.

\textsuperscript{50} Hodgson had arrived at Adyar 18 December, 1884. He returned to the headquarters four days later so as to meet with the newly-arrived Blavatsky.

\textsuperscript{51} It should be noted that Blavatsky appears to have found Hodgson an unpretentious and approachable man, and one who was not necessarily averse to Theosophy. Some commentators (such as Bruce Campbell) have accepted at face value Hodgson's introductory note to his Report: '[W]hatever prepossessions I may have had were distinctly in favour of Occultism and Madame Blavatsky' (Campbell, \textit{Ancient Wisdom}, 92). It is equally likely that this comment was a literary device designed to add further emphasis to his ultimately negative conclusions. Were Hodgson's 'prepossession' so sympathetic it seems likely his report would have been more genuinely impartial and comprehensive. He may have been optimistic of proving psychic phenomena to be genuine in the first days, but by the time of his departure for England he was entirely dismissive of Theosophy and all of its claims. The suspicion remains that he was determined to create a sensational report whichever way it went.

\textsuperscript{51} As noted supra, the Report is most often called the 'Hodgson Report', and with good reason; as Harrison has noted:

\begin{quote}
[T]he rest of the committee did little more that rubber-stamp his conclusions. They made no attempt to correct glaring errors of procedure or to check critically Hodgson's findings (Harrison, \textit{H. P. Blavatsky and the SPR}, 6).
\end{quote}
Hodgson was serendipitously provided with ample material to declare the Masters a fiction by the disaffected Emma Coulomb. Having sought vengeance upon the Adyar Theosophists since the disgrace of her departure, Madame Coulomb had ultimately fulfilled her promise by publishing her correspondence with Blavatsky in the *Madras Christian College Magazine*. Beginning in September, the magazine published the letters in two instalments, entitled, tellingly, ‘The Collapse of Koot Hoomi’.

Taken on face value the letters are highly incriminating; they document several occasions when Blavatsky had solicited the couple’s help in producing fraudulent phenomena or masquerading as Masters. The question of the veracity of these letters is a vexed one. Certainly, Blavatsky claimed that portions of the correspondence were genuine, but that interpolations had corrupted the text and perverted her meaning. It is unlikely that the controversy over these pivotal documents will ever be resolved: the originals of the letters appear subsequently to have been destroyed.

Having arrived at the *a priori* conclusion that the Masters were illusory, Hodgson proceeded to dismantle what he saw as the apparatus of the deception. He concluded that the fabled Mahatma letters had been penned by Blavatsky (with the probable assistance of Dāmodar), and that the shrine was an elaborate artifice specifically designed to obscure common conjuring tricks. Recent investigations, as previously

The first instalment was 11 September 1884, and was edited by the Magazine’s editor, Revd. George Patterson: see Cooper, ‘The Letters’, vol. I, lli. Cooper noted that Patterson was unsure whether the letter had been given to him by the Coulombs in July or August. The two instalments contained portions of nineteen letters. These, and seven others, were later printed as a booklet by Emma Coulomb: *Some Account of My Intercourse with Madame Blavatsky from 1872 to 1884*, Madras, 1884.

Vemon Harrison, a noted expert on forgery, has concluded that ‘[t]he circumstantial evidence that the Blavatsky-Coulomb letters were found after expert examination to be forgeries is strong’: Harrison, *H. P. Blavatsky and the SPR*, 8. Harrison’s investigations provide a sometimes devastating critique of some parts of the Hodgson Report.

Blavatsky’s comments (included in Sinnett’s *The Latest Attack on the Theosophical Society* [1884]) were reprinted in *Collected Writings*, vol. VI, 295-308 (see also pp. 308-313).

It seems that much of the correspondence was purchased by Elliot Coues (1842-1899), a disaffected Theosophist. Coues had published an interview with Blavatsky in the *New York Sun* to which she took exception. Blavatsky sued for libel and, having been found slandered, was to be awarded damages; she died before the suit could be awarded. Coues appears to have purchased the Coulomb-Blavatsky correspondence to assist his defence, though, intriguingly, he never included them in evidence. The letters seem to have been burned by one of his descendants: see Harrison, *H. P. Blavatsky and the SPR*, 7-8.

Dāmodar is regularly accused of having collaborated in various deceptions with Blavatsky. It should be recalled that he appears to have met his death in search of Masters, so he can be presumed to have believed in their existence in some form. See *infra* Appendix B.
noted, have summarily rejected his findings, at least with regard to the authorship of the Mahatma letters. Unfortunately, the shrine itself had been dismantled by Hartmann and William Quan Judge (1851-1896) prior to Hodgson’s arrival in India. It is now impossible to ascertain whether the shrine apparatus was originally intended to facilitate deception, or whether Alexis Coulomb altered it so as to implicate Blavatsky in fraud. Hodgson departed for Europe 26 March, 1885, having informed Blavatsky and Olcott of his general conclusions.

By this time life in India was becoming untenable for Blavatsky. She had become extremely ill, often requiring confinement in bed; her relationship with Olcott had deteriorated markedly on account of his growing suspicion of possible duplicity on her part; the General Council of the Theosophical Society had intervened in the dispute with the Coulombs, preventing her from prosecuting her defamers in court; and now she faced sure ignominy once the final report was tabled. As a consequence, five days after Hodgson’s departure from Adyar, Blavatsky left for Naples aboard the SS Pehio.

Harrison, H. P. Blavatsky and the SPR, passim.

Blavatsky claimed the rear panels of the shrine were designed for easy dismantling for the purposes of travel. Adlai E. Waterman (Walter Carrithers) has analysed the architecture of the Occult Room and the shrine in detail and has concluded that Hodgson’s selective use of evidence puts his conclusions in serious doubt: see Waterman, Obituary, 10-45.

Hodgson was rather stumped for a motive to explain Blavatsky’s remarkable Masters fiction. She had gained neither significant financial advantage, nor social cachet. He had concluded, perhaps in the breach of any alternative, that she was a paid espionage agent for the Russian government: such was a view was reflected in his report. One wonders how the Mahatma letters could possibly have undermined British Imperial interests in India, though Campbell (Ancient Wisdom, 94) seems somehow to suggest the connection.

Virtually all biographies of Blavatsky make mention of her obesity as cause or major contributor to her 1885 illness. Meade, particularly, seems to have something of an idée fixe regarding Blavatsky’s weight: Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 339-341 et passim. It is unwise for biographers to make posthumous diagnoses, particularly as no medical records appear to have survived. No less problematic are amateur psychological assessments:

There is no question that many of her illnesses were psychosomatic; the insomnia, pounding of the heart, and sensations of suffocation were all symptoms of severe anxiety complicated by depression (Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 339).

It hardly needs noting that such symptoms are also present in entirely physiological illnesses, notably heart disease.

never to return to India.  

Hodgson read a synopsis of his report to the SPR on 29 May and tabled his findings before the General Meeting of 26 June, 1885. By December the Report had received the imprimatur of the SPR and was published in their Proceedings. The opinion of Hodgson, one ratified by members of the SPR, is best summed up in the oft-quoted Committee’s conclusion which prefaces the Report:

For our own part, we regard her neither as the mouthpiece of hidden seers, nor as a mere vulgar adventuress; we think that she has achieved a title to permanent remembrance as one of the most accomplished, ingenious, and interesting imposters in history.

The ‘Hodgson Report’ caused major scandal for the Theosophical Society. Not only had Blavatsky been summarily condemned as yet another Spiritualist fraud, but the Masters had been exposed to ridicule as a vast conceit:

I must express my unqualified opinion that no genuine psychical phenomena whatever will be found among the pseudo-mysteries of the Russian lady alias Koot Hoomi Lal Singh alias Mahatma Morya alias Madame Blavatsky.

A more penetrating observation was offered by F. W. H. Myers, a member of the investigating committee. His comment suggests the significance and ramifications of the ‘Hodgson Report’:

Blavatsky later wrote a rather remarkable open letter to Indian Theosophists which documented her feelings of betrayal by Adyar officialdom. She remained determined to work for the Masters, and against those who doubted:

It is useless I should use the little time I have before me to justify myself before those who do not feel sure about the real existence of the Masters, only because, misunderstanding me, it therefore suits them to suspect me (H. P. Blavatsky, ‘Why I do not return to India’ in id., Collected Writings, vol. XII, 165).


Quoted in Gomes, Theosophy, 510. One small irony is that Hodgson was later to convert to the ‘survivalist’ school; i.e., he became a Spiritualist in so far as he accepted the ‘dualist hypothesis’ which advocated the survival of the non-physical component of the human mind after death, and that such discarante mind can at times communicate through a medium. It is often considered a non-religionist view of Spiritualism, though the distinction is far from clear: see Robert Ashby, The Guidebook for the Study of Psychical Research, Rider & Co., London, 1972, 125-126, 148. It is a small consolation to Theosophists that, upon meeting Annie Besant several years after his Report was published, Hodgson stated that ‘he would have given a very different report had he known in 1885 what he learned afterwards’: Annie Besant, The Real and the Unreal, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1923, 9.
Madame Blavatsky (one may say) was within an ace of founding a world-religion, merely to amuse herself & to be admired.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{66} A notandum from F. W. H. Myers to Lord Acton, 28 April, 1892, in Gauld, The Founders, 367.
The combined pressure of the Coulomb charges and the SPR report caused many cracks to develop within the Theosophical edifice: membership numbers fell, Theosophical marvels were recast as *soi-disant* phenomena, and Theosophical publications began to be dismissed as the product of a conspiratorial fraud. Undoubtedly the worst effect as far as the Founders were concerned was the summary dismissal of the Masters: if the Masters were a fiction, *ipso facto* their pronouncements were invalidated.

Blavatsky turned her attention to the writing of *The Secret Doctrine*. In fact, the project to produce a compendium of Theosophical doctrine, incorporating an anthropology and a cosmology, had been in Blavatsky’s mind for some years. Her humiliation at the hands of the Coulombs and the SPR steeled her resolve to broaden the wisdoms of the Mahatma letters into something of a textbook for Theosophists and, in so doing, emphasise the Society’s philosophical and spiritual character and thus minimalise the problematic phenomenalism which had captivated the attention of the psychic researchers and public.

During the years 1885 to 1887 Blavatsky returned to her established peripatetic lifestyle. Her passage from India arrived in Naples on 23 April, 1885, yet her health and desire for more salubrious accommodation encouraged her north to the German city of Würzburg, at which she established herself on 12 August. There she set about preparations for *The Secret Doctrine* which she initially viewed as a mature revisioning of *Isis Unveiled*. Unhappily, circumstances mitigated against much progress for, on New Year’s Eve, she was handed the final word of the SPR, the highly critical ‘Hodgson Report’.1 Matters were complicated further by the activities

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1 Countess Constance Wachtmeister (1838-1910), who acted as secretary and companion to Blavatsky during the late 1880s, was required to give her digitalis to offset the ‘[p]alpitations of the heart’ caused by the stridency of the ‘Hodgson Report’: see correspondence from C. Wachtmeister to A. P. Sinnett, 1 January, 1886 (Letter # CXXV) in Barker, *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky*, 270.
of two Indian Theosophists, one of whom, Babaji Krishnaswami Iyengar, was travelling in Blavatsky's train. Babaji, whom Blavatsky had acknowledged as a chela of the Masters, turned violently apostate and in a fit of rage accused her of extortion, fabrication of phenomena and, worst of all in his view, desecration of the Masters by exposing their arcane mysteries before an unenlightened West. To Blavatsky's relief, the Masters, at least, were spared Babaji's calumny. Unfortunately, Blavatsky's other Indian disciple, Mohini Mohun Chatterjee, whom she had proudly introduced as a prime chela of the Master Koot Hoomi, found himself involved in a rather sordid scandal involving a Miss Leonard. The latter had exposed herself to Mohini, thus provoking Blavatsky, in a temper of prim Victorian hubris, to accuse Miss Leonard of being a 'Messalina' and a 'Potiphar', outraging the young woman, who subsequently employed a solicitor to sue for defamation. As it transpired, the chaste and holy chela had written scores of love letters to Miss Leonard, and had solicited her demonstrative affections in the first place. Blavatsky was forced to retract her comments and apologise.

It seemed that the Fates had conspired against the Foundress; not only had the allegations of fraud and conspiracy followed her to Europe, but the Indian chelas, intended to provide a living testament to the notion of conscious evolution through the example and benefaction of the Masters, had exhibited signs of a distinctly reactionary fallibility. Sensing the possible disintegration of much of her life's work, Blavatsky turned to her primary gift: the writing of Theosophical texts. She determined to produce an esoteric treatise designed to propound a broad and yet comprehensive vision, capable of instantiating an all-inclusive occult response to the swiftly

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1 Babaji (or Bawaji or Bowaji), meaning 'the little man', was the name most commonly employed by the chela, although he was more properly known as M. Krishnamachāri and was granted the 'mystic name' of an elder chela, Dharbagiri Nath, by Koot Hoomi. This latter seems to have come about when the elder chela required the use of Babaji's body in order to attend a meeting at which he couldn't otherwise have been present because his own physical body was in Tibet: see The Mahatma Letters, 1993 ed., (Letter No. 53: March 17, 1882) 144-145. Cf. Fuller, Blavatsky and her Teachers, 160; Johnson, Initiates, 38.

2 A typically amusing account of Blavatsky's relationship with Miss Leonard can be found in W. B. Yeats, Autobiographies, MacMillan, 1989,177-178.
concretising evolutionary paradigm which had so captivated the thought of her era. The resulting document, *The Secret Doctrine*, running to in excess of fifteen hundred pages in two volumes, can rightly be called her *magnum opus*, and constitutes perhaps the most influential esoteric formulation (certainly in the English language) of the last two hundred years.

Blavatsky worked at her text over a period of at least three years, most notably at Ostend in Belgium (whither she had travelled from Würzburg) and then in London from May, 1887. She was aided in her endeavours by the indefatigable Countess Constance Wachtmeister and the editorial assistance of Bertram Keightley (1860-1945) and his nephew, Archibald Keightley (1859-1930). The first volume, subtitled ‘Cosmogenesis’, was published in October, 1888; the second, subtitled ‘Anthropogenesis’ appeared in December of the same year. Predictably, the press had convinced Blavatsky that *The Secret Doctrine* was not to be an updated and amended *Isis Unveiled*. She determined to create a work which would so bedazzle the public that thoughts of the verdict of the ‘Spookical Research Society’ (as she called it) would soon be forgotten: *Secret Doctrine is entirely new. There will not be there 20 pages quoted by bits from Isis ... This will be my vindication I tell you* (H. P. Blavatsky to H. S. Olcott, 6 January, 1886, in Gomes, *Theosophy*, 181).

There can be little doubt that the manuscript was edited and read, in part at least, by a number of those whose knowledge of esotericism (or English!) Blavatsky admired. It is difficult to ascertain the identities of each of these figures in the book’s early (pre-London) gestation, though the English Theosophist Edward Douglass Fawcett (1866-1960) figured prominently among Blavatsky’s assistants for the second volume, though perhaps not to the degree he later claimed (Meade, *Madame Blavatsky*, 406). There is little doubt that the Keightleys were the two most responsible for the book’s publication, having supported its author financially and editorially. For testimonials from the Keightleys and others associated with *The Secret Doctrine*, see Wachtmeister, *Reminiscences*, Appendix I, 87-129.

It is certain that Blavatsky intended *The Secret Doctrine* to appear in four volumes. According to her original plan, the first volume would contain much material on famous occultists of the past. The Keightleys convinced Blavatsky to follow ‘the natural order of exposition’ and to begin with cosmology, then follow with volumes on occult anthropology, eminent occultists in history, and finally a volume on ‘Practical Occultism’: see Wachtmeister, *Reminiscences*, Appendix I, 91-92. Though this arrangement meant that much of the material which Blavatsky had already written or collated for the first volume would have to be reserved for the third, the Keightleys were owed a debt of gratitude for enforcing an order upon what would otherwise have been a work more chaotic than *Isis Unveiled*. As it happened, Blavatsky published only the two volumes in her lifetime. The putative ‘third volume’, which appeared in 1897, has become something of a *cause célèbre* in Theosophical circles with a number of members rejecting it as wholly spurious (cf. ‘Publishers' Preface’ in the facsimile edition of 1888: *The Secret Doctrine. Volumes I and II 1925 Edition: A Facsimile of the Original Edition of 1888*, The Theosophy Company, Los Angeles, 1925): H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, vol. III, Theosophical Publishing Society, London, 1910. A comparison of the text of the third volume with the draft of Blavatsky’s unedited first volume (which survives in the Adyar archive) indicates that the third volume was indeed predominantly Blavatskian: see Gomes, *Theosophy*, 182. For the purposes of the present study, only the officially recognised two-volume edition has been deemed authoritative, though the other materials were consulted.
reviews of the work divided as they had done with *Isis Unveiled*; most of the mainstream reviews noted *The Secret Doctrine*’s prolixity and eccentricity, a few concentrated on examining the text for plagiarisms; among the Theosophical cognoscenti the work was accepted as unparalleled revelation.

The Book of Dzyan

According to Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* was an extended translation of, and commentary upon, certain stanzas from a cosmogonic treatise by the name of the *Book of Dzyan*. This tome, which she claimed to be the most ancient text in the world (with teachings that could be traced to Atlantean times), was originally dictated to humanity’s distant ancestors by ‘Divine Beings’ in Senzar, a ‘secret sacerdotal tongue’, though later versions of the text apparently contain paraphrases and

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7 The reviewer from the American journal *Science* deemed *The Secret Doctrine* to be one of the most successful pieces of recent humorous literature: see Meade, *Madame Blavatsky*, 416. The *New York Times* reviewer found it difficult to understand a page, let alone a chapter, due to the ‘vast quantities of indigestible materials’, and declared the author ‘mad’: in ibid., 416.

8 A true nemesis of Blavatsky, William Emmette Coleman, published a five-part analysis of *The Secret Doctrine* in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, entitled ‘The Secret Doctrine of Madame Blavatsky, in two parts and five papers’ (10, 17, 24, 31 August, 7 September 1889), in which he accused the authoress of plagiarism and contradiction, and rejected the Masters as mythical. Coleman’s criticisms are interesting, though pedantic in the main: he notes her misspellings and mistaken dates for historical events. His criticisms have been answered in much the same way as his similar analysis of *Isis Unveiled*; cf. supra ch. 8.

9 Annie Besant, whose conversion to Theosophy happened immediately upon reading *The Secret Doctrine*, noted:

I was dazzled, blinded by the light in which disjointed facts were seen as parts of a mighty whole, and all my puzzles, riddles, problems, seemed to disappear ... the light had been seen, and in that flash of illumination I knew that the weary search was over and the very Truth was found (Annie Besant, *An Autobiography*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1893, 340).

10 Most critics of Blavatsky have noted that no copy of the *Book of Dzyan* has ever surfaced for exterior scrutiny, though such a view ignores the Theosophical premise that revelation is proffered only upon the initiated: i.e., access to such materials is exclusively in the gift of the Masters of the Wisdom. That said, Gershom Scholem (following L. A. Bosman) has noted that the Book of Dzyan has certain aural and stylistic (‘pompous’) consonances with the Zoharic treatise, *Sifra Di-Tseniuatha* and that ‘[t]he Book Dzyan [sic] is therefore nothing but an occultistic hypostasy of the Zoharic title’: see Scholem, *Major Trends*, 398-399. Scholem could well be right, but surely has not the methodological apparatus to be so demonstrative: cf. Hanegraaff, *New Age*, 453. There have been several religionist attempts to discover the philological origins and provenance of the Book of Dzyan: (for the most comprehensive) see David Reigle & Nancy Reigle, *Blavatsky’s Secret Books: Twenty Years’ Research*, Wizards Bookshelf, San Diego, 1999.

translations in Oriental languages. It would appear that Senzar is for humans the Ur-language by which divine-human communication was facilitated and, further, the proto-tongue for all later language development.

Importantly, *The Secret Doctrine* deals with that portion of the stanzas of the *Book of Dzyan* (coupled with wisdoms gained from the Mahatma letters and Blavatsky’s years as a chela) which the Masters have vouchsafed appropriate for the time. *The Secret Doctrine*, as the great hermeneutical key to the world’s religions and philosophies, lies squarely in the province of the Masters:

The Secret Doctrine was the universally diffused religion of the ancient and prehistoric world. Proofs of its diffusion, authentic records of its history, a complete chain of documents, showing its character and presence in every land, together with the teaching of all its great adepts, exist to this day in the secret crypts of libraries belonging to the Occult Fraternity [of Masters].


13 Algeo is correct in noting that Senzar should not be interpreted in the light of current manifestations of sacred language: Latin, Hebrew, Sanskrit, etc. (Algeo, *Senzar*, 11-12). Some have interpreted Blavatsky’s concentration on Senzar as another example of her typically amateurish crypto-philology through which she appropriated the theories of her famous contemporaries such as Max Müller. This view is simplistic in the extreme and displays an ignorance of the history of esotericism which is replete with examples of languages for which similar, and even more fantastic, claims are made. The notion that there existed a prelapsarian or antediluvian language - the *lingua adamicca* - spoken by God, humanity, and angels is a staple of such contemplation, and indicative of the synthetic and unitive principles of esotericism. Seen in this light, Blavatsky’s Senzar has more to do with an antique revelation untainted by later semantic perversions, than with an idiosyncratic parleying with nineteenth-century philologists. One example of the desire to discern the language spoken in (Biblical) paradise is that of the theurgist John Dee’s transcription of the Enochian tongue gained through crystallomancy in the years following 1581. Donald Laycock, an academic philologist, decided that the language did indeed possess a rudimentary syntax, though it appeared that the paraisonal Enochian was structured suspiciously similarly to English in phonology and grammar: see Donald C. Laycock, *The Complete Enochian Dictionary: A Dictionary of the Angelic Language as Revealed to Dr. John Dee and Edward Kelley*, Samuel Weiser, Inc., York Beach (Maine), 1994, 41ff. For the *lingua adamicca* see Ingrid Merkel, ‘Aurora; or, The Rising Sun of Allegory: Hermetic Imagery in the Work of Jakob Böhme’ in Merkel and Debus, eds., *Hermeticism*, 306; Hugh Ormsby-Lennon, ‘Rosicrucian Linguistics: Twilight of a Renaissance Tradition’ in Merkel and Debus, eds., *Hermeticism*, 311-341.

The significance of the *Book of Dzyan* for Blavatsky’s tome is immediately clear. *The Secret Doctrine* is presented neither as a conglomerate of pretentious or eccentric musings, nor simply a scholarly thesis: it is authentic Masters-derived revelation. Further, as the text is based upon documentary sources of profound antiquity (*The Secret Doctrine* reveals just how far back Blavatskian historical mapping can go), it immediately ‘trumps’ even the most ancient religious texts, notably Biblical *Genesis* (and even, significantly, the *Mahābhārata*), which, by Blavatsky’s time, was faltering as a reliable historical record and being relegated to pious mythology. The implication is clear: just as Senzar is the Ur-language of mankind, *The Secret Doctrine* is the Ur-religion from which all others have their being - if in a diluted or perverted form. *The Secret Doctrine*, then, is nothing less than an ardent appeal for a reinvigorated *prisca theologia* capable of holding its own in an era dominated by the diverse challenges provided by the convincing speculations of such men as Darwin, Huxley, Haeckel, and Spencer.

Certain of the philosophical presuppositions of *The Secret Doctrine* come as no surprise in that they appear to be natural developments from themes evident in *Isis*...
Unveiled, the Mahatma letters, and Blavatsky’s voluminous essays. Thus ‘spirit’, the all-pervasive energised hypostasis of matter and spirit, is presented as the underlying substantive reality of the cosmos, a reality both omnipresent and eternal. So, too, macrohistorical imaging of time as cyclically-determined, a Blavatskian theme apparent from her earliest writings, is present, albeit elevated into an all-encompassing cosmological evolutionary impetus. Humanity’s place within the cosmos, another recurring Blavatskian fixation, is granted a novel soteriology (at least when compared against the modelling within Isis Unveiled) with an elaborate incorporation of modified Oriental theologies of reincarnation and karma theory into her predominantly Occidental schemata.

Equally significant, The Secret Doctrine amplifies Blavatsky’s preoccupation with developmentalism and biological evolutionism. Where her earlier writings had attacked the conceits of Christian creatio ex nihilo dogmatism and the banality of philosophical materialism and naturalistic evolutionism (together with the curiously hybrid ‘scientism’ which these positions engendered), The Secret Doctrine turned progressivism into an ontological principle, rather than just a biological imperative. Indeed, her macrohistorical configurations could rightly be called progressivism

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19 Theosophical studies of The Secret Doctrine are manifold and very uneven. The two most comprehensive analyses are by Wadia and Hanson: B. P. Wadia, Studies in 'The Secret Doctrine', Theosophy Company (India) Private Ltd., Bombay, 1961; Virginia Hanson, ed., H. P. Blavatsky and 'The Secret Doctrine': Commentaries on Her Contributions to World Thought, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1971. The Hanson volume is marred by repeated attempts to correlate Blavatskian Theosophy with the recent discoveries of geology, astronomy, biology, and the like. Such identifications are notoriously forced: cf., e.g., Jean Raymond, 'The Evolutionary Cycles and their Chronology: The Secret Doctrine and Science Compared' in Hanson, ed., H. P. Blavatsky, 97-107. It is surprising that Godwin’s Theosophical Enlightenment, which treats Isis Unveiled extensively, seems to devote little space to an examination of The Secret Doctrine. His Arktos remedies the discrepancy to some degree: Godwin, Arktos, 19-24; 208-212.

20 The hypostatic union of invisible spirit and visible matter is, for the purposes of the following argument, hereafter referred to as ‘spirit’ (i.e., in inverted commas) as Blavatsky had occasion to do herself. In the simplest possible terms: Blavatsky posited an unconditioned Absolute, symbolised by space and motion (change), which bears two aspects for humanity: spirit (consciousness, broadly defined) and matter. Spirit is to be understood as ‘pre-Cosmic Ideation’: matter is ‘pre-Cosmic Substance’. The hypostasis of these is effected by the ‘Foha!’ which proves to be the energising principle which operates as ‘bridge’ between the two, and thus makes manifestation possible. Blavatsky referred to this process as ‘ONE REALITY [in] dual aspects’: Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, vol. I, ‘proem’, 14-16. It is important to note that Blavatsky did not posit ontic conflict between ‘pre-Cosmic Ideation’ and ‘pre-Cosmic Substance’.

apotheosised:

There is a predestination in the geological life of our globe, as in the history, past and future, of races and nations. This is closely connected with what we call *Karma* and Western Pantheists, 'Nemesis.' [sic] and 'Cycles'. The law of evolution is now carrying us along the ascending arc of our cycle, when the effects will be once more re-merged into, and re-become the (now neutralized) causes, and all things affected by the former will have regained their original harmony.22

*Cosmogony and Temporality*

Much comment has been made regarding the intricacies of Blavatsky's mapping of the multiple worlds, eras, continents, and races of the earth's cosmological and anthropological history.23 Although space permits only a brief mention of these Theosophical tenets, any analysis of the Masters would be incomplete without acknowledging some of the most significant of these cosmo-historical structures and metastructures. Unsurprisingly, the Masters figure as the 'keys' which unlock these crucial wisdoms to the Theosophical aspirant.

Blavatsky is at pains to distance Theosophical cosmogony from Christian accounts of origins: there can be no personal God erupting a single, final, and self-contained universe from within himself.24 (Indeed it could be argued that Blavatsky objected less to the specifics of Biblical cosmogony than to the univalency, at least as she interpreted it, of its mythic potentialities). Theosophical emanationist cosmogenesis has no such definitive *fiat*: the universe (or, perhaps more properly, the multiverse) is in a state of constant flux, ebbing and flowing between manifestation in dense matter and sublimation in subtle matter.25 This process is governed by homologous

22 Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. I, 641. Blavatsky dismissed personal deity as an 'extra-cosmic god' (in ibid., 280) thus confirming that her real target was the concept of utter transcendence (which has characterised Western Christian discourse).
25 Ibid., 17.
processes at work within the monadic\textsuperscript{26} structure of the universe (‘spirit’) which itself inexorably shifts from sublimation (when spirit is in the ascendant) to densification (when matter gains the ascendancy) and and so on, in an eternal ephemeral sequence. This process is undergone through time, and is, to a profound degree, governed by it; Blavatsky employs the Indic epochal visioning of \textit{kalpa} theory, whereby the God Brahmā inhales and exhales universes through an unceasing periodicity.\textsuperscript{27} A complete ‘Day (and night) of Brahmā’ is equivalent to 8640 million solar years.\textsuperscript{28} Significantly, Brahmā is himself subject to the vicissitudes of this vast temporal process; after one hundred of his years, he too will experience a great conflagration and be reborn.\textsuperscript{29}

The vast aeonic configuration of \textit{kalpa} theory, mediated to Blavatsky by early translations of the \textit{Mahābhārata} and the Vedas,\textsuperscript{30} certainly assisted in her project of undermining Biblical cosmogenesis. So, too, it afforded Blavatsky a framework of cyclic periodicity which illuminated the human macrodrama, for the ‘Day of Brahmā’, by principles analogous to the repeated universal disintegrations (the \textit{mahā pralaya}) at the celestial level, also incorporated lesser conflagrations (the layas and pralayas) at the mundane, human tier. Thus every ‘Day of Brahmā’ is subdivided into a thousand

\textsuperscript{26} ‘Monadic’ is here used adjectivally to signify the ultimate unit of physical (and non-physical) existence, which is necessarily an hypostatisation of spirit and matter. ‘Pilgrim Monads’ are another thing altogether, for which see infra ch. 13.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.,368-378.

\textsuperscript{28} A \textit{kalpa} (an aeon, otherwise a ‘Day of Brahmā’) is traditionally reckoned as lasting 4320 million years. At the end of the aeon a conflagration occurs during which substantive creation, and even the lesser gods, are consumed by dehydration and fire. A deluge follows which entirely inundates the earth. During the \textit{pralaya} (or ‘Night of Brahmā’, of equal duration to the ‘Day of Brahmā’ and sometimes called an \textit{ardha-kalpa}, or one half of a \textit{kalpa}, thus making a full \textit{kalpa} 8640 million years) Brahmā deglutes all gross elements of the universe and sleeps. He then reawakens and refashions the universe anew. It should be noted that water operates as a cosmic amnion which encloses and hides a universe of finite, but ever reemerging, matter: see Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, ed. and trans., \textit{Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook translated from the Sanskrit}, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976, 185-186. For \textit{kalpa} theory, see especially the \textit{Vishnu Purāṇa} i:3; vi:1. See also W. J. Wilkins, \textit{Hindu Mythology: Vedic and Purānic}, 2nd ed., Rupa & Co., Calcutta, 1979, 353-360.

\textsuperscript{29} For a chart and analysis of the chronologies of Indian cosmological cycles see Walker, \textit{The Hindu World}, vol. I, 6-8. For Blavatsky, the life of Brahmā (i.e., 100 of his years) is equivalent to 311 040 000 000 000 000 solar years: Blavatsky, \textit{The Secret Doctrine}, vol. II, 70.

\textsuperscript{30} De Zirkoff has suggested that Blavatsky employed the edited version of the \textit{Mahābhārata} produced for the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta between 1834-1839; see Blavatsky, \textit{Collected Writings}, vol. II, 536.
maha yugas, each maha yuga is conceived as containing four yugas, and each yuga is accompanied by a period of ‘morning twilight’ (samdhya) and evening twilight (samdhyamsa) which respectively precede and succeed it.

The yugas comprise the most humanly accessible foundational units of Hindu temporality. The four yugas (together with the inclining and declining periods of rest which precede and follow them; the samdhyas and the samdhyamsas) bracket a single devolution from a state of moral and physical purity to that of degeneracy. The first yuga, the krita yuga is to some degree analogous to classical concepts of a prelapsarian Golden Age, characterised by human fraternalism, physical prolongevity, and sexual abstinence. The next yuga, the treta yuga, is reduced in duration by one fourth and exhibits a concomitant reduction in human lifespan, from 4000 to 3000 years. During the treta yuga fraternalism is sundered; so, too, four vedas are required, rather than one, thus indicating a remove from pristine wisdom. The penultimate yuga, the Dvapara yuga, witnesses a further reduction by a fourth in terms of its own length and the length of a human life. Physical calamity begins, with disease appearing; fraternalism dissolves into castes. Human procreation now requires intercourse, though it is always spousal and vaginal. The fourth is the present yuga, the Kali yuga, and of only a quarter of the length of the Krita yuga. This is the lowest

31 In some commentaries the maha yuga is deemed to be of equivalent duration to the manvantara, so-called because it is the period ruled by the semi-divine beings of Hindu scripture, the Manus. This is certainly a less orthodox view. There are divergent accounts about the duration of the reign of each of the fourteen Manus assigned to a kalpa, and whether they rule singly, and thus successively, or at times conjointly: see Walker, *The Hindu World*, vol. II, 29-30. It appears Blavatsky accepted as normative the account that each Manu reigned for a period of 71 maha yugas, and that the resultant 994 maha yugas, together with the samdhis, or periods of rest (which amounted to a period of six yugas), would constitute a kalpa of 4320 million years. See Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. II, 69-70.

32 The yugas are described extensively in the Mahābhārata by the monkey-god Hanumān: see Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology*, 357. The duration of the yugas is mentioned in exact terms in the *Vishnu Purana*: in ibid., 359.

33 For a useful discussion of the ‘Golden Age’ topos see Nicholas Campion, *The Great Year: Astrology, Millenarianism and History in the Western Tradition*, Arkana, London, 1994, 59-75. It is to be regretted that Campion, whose work on the ancient world is comprehensive, treats the modern world so cursorily. Although he briefly outlines Blavatskian thought, he does not examine any of the implications so raised: e.g., though his book is devoted to Western thought, it is probably impossible to treat the ‘New Age’ movement (as he does) without reference to the Indic imaging of the Great Year (the ‘Mahayuga’) which it seems Blavatsky was primarily responsible for having indelibly incorporated into occultist discourse. No reference to any tenet of kalpa theory is to be found in the index; ‘yuga’ and ‘kali yuga’ appear in the text only once (and, significantly, in reference to Blavatsky): in ibid., 491.
ebb for humanity, with sexual profligacy, moral turpitude, and physical degradation the common experience of mankind.34

It has become a commonplace of much adverse scholarship to denigrate Blavatsky’s redaction of this antique periodisation and other Oriental motifs, and to suggest that they were intended merely for curiosity and titillation in Victorian parlours:

Mme. Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine* [sic], a multivolume work, is such a melee of horrendous hogwash and of fertile inventions of inane esoterica, that any Buddhist and Tibetan scholar is justified to avoid mentioning it in any context.35

So, too, a number of contemporary observers eschewed Blavatskian Theosophy as merely a corrupted or ersatz Hinduism, culled from readily available texts and reconstructed in an idiosyncratic, if not dishonest, redaction.36 Certainly, much later scholarship has indicated that many of the precepts which Blavatsky espoused could not have been considered either normative Brahmanical orthodoxy or true to the ancient sources.37 Although this position is to some degree mitigated by the early translations with which she was familiar, the primary reason her writings may not accurately mirror the Indic materials is that she was writing through the prism of Theosophical occultism; its own project owed everything to combating Western paradigms and little to accurately reflecting Hindu ones.

While *kalpa* theory could account for the massively-elongated prehistory which Blavatsky sought, and provided something of a template for a periodicity founded

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36 Max Müller’s comments are instructive:

> Madame Blavatsky ... was most anxious to discover in a large number of books traces of that theosophic intuition which reunited human nature with the Divine. Unfortunately, she was without the tools to dig for those treasures in the ancient literature of the world, and her mistakes in quoting from Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin would be amusing if they did not appeal to our sympathy rather for a woman who thought that she could fly though she had no wings, not even those of Icarus (Müller, *Last Essays, Second Series*, 104).

For all of his erudition, one suspects that Müller’s understandable sense of umbrage at the (mis)use made of Oriental texts clouded his perspective somewhat - after all, Theosophy was made in the Occident for the Occident, and is only incidentally concerned with fidelity to antique Oriental sources.

37 For a discussion of Blavatsky’s Orientalism and her approach to Eastern religious idioms and motifs see infra ch. 26.
upon ahistorical cosmic processes, it lacked (as she saw it) two characteristics which were especially beloved of the Theosophical enterprise. First, for all of its cyclicism there appeared little room within the temporal dynamic for significant collective escape from its apparently fatalistic dictates: Blavatsky required a teleology which supported an optimist progressivism. In other words, she could quite well accept the 'devolution' from krita yuga to kali yuga as long as the process also allowed a return from the darkness of kali yuga to the primordial state of grace, krita yuga. Further, the return to such a prelapsarian 'dispensation' must be experienced in a conscious state - not in the Hindu imaging of the pralaya wherein the detritus of the kali yuga, destroyed by flood and fire, is passively reabsorbed into the mind of Brahmā, negating all human agency. Second, her experiences with Spiritualism had confirmed in her mind the absolute requirement for ante-mortem conscious transformation in any sophisticated esotericism. (It is crucial to recognise that Blavatsky considered 'transformation' to be synonymous with conscious evolution). Her esotericism would avail little if Theosophists were not able somehow, even in small subtle ways, to accelerate, decelerate or alter the process of temporal reticulation:

But these cycles - wheels within wheels, so comprehensively and ingeniously symbolized by the various Manus and Rishis in India ...

*do not affect all mankind at one and the same time ...* mastery can be achieved only through INITIATION.39

In Theosophical discourse, as the aspirant grows in knowledge of the process of conscious evolution, and submits himself to it, he subtly subverts the dictates of an otherwise autonomous universe. Crucially, the proof of this latent power is to be found in the Masters:

There never was a time within or before the so-called historical period when our predecessors [as Masters] were not moulding events and 'making history' ... We never pretended to be able to draw nations in the mass to this or that crisis in spite of the general

38 See *infra* ch. 27. The success of Blavatsky's endeavours to transpose traditional notions of alchemical, ritual, and initiatic transformation for post-Enlightenment concepts of evolution, progressivism, and perfectibilism is perhaps her most important singular contribution to the domain of occultism and supplies further emphatic evidence that the rhetoric of occultism employs the grammar and vocabulary of the Enlightenment.

drift of the world’s cosmic relations. The cycles must run their rounds. Periods of mental and moral light and darkness succeed each other, as day does night. The major and minor yugas must be accomplished according to the established order of things. And we, borne along on the mighty tide, can only modify and direct some of its minor currents ... having to deal with an immutable Law, being ourselves its creatures, we have had to do what we could and rest thankful.\(^{40}\)

In order to accommodate the imperative of human agency for spiritual and physical progression within a universe which would otherwise appear disconcertingly sovereign and uninterested in human affairs, and so as also to assert that such progressivism had as its teleological objective an ultimately optimistic goal and destination, Blavatsky embraced within her macrohistorical imaging a conceptual framework adopted from the core traditions of Western esotericism - traditions with which she was more than familiar.

Blavatsky’s concentration upon Indian *kalpa* theory received, unsurprisingly, the lion’s share of interest upon publication of *The Secret Doctrine*, no doubt because of its novelty and appeal to a vast temporal scale. That Hindu aeonic configurations posed a significant, if adumbrated, threat to traditional Christian cosmogony could hardly be ignored;\(^{41}\) neither, it should be noted, did they of necessity engender the same conflict which had engaged Western discourse following the highly confronting vista of ever-expanding human history which had been afforded by the discoveries of materialist science. What is perhaps less well recognised is that Blavatsky did not simply adopt Hindu epochal visioning and graft it into her synthetistic esoteric *prisca theologia*; rather, she believed strongly that such vast prehistories were already a part of the esoteric heritage bequeathed to the West via such staples of the esoteric firmament as the *Hermetica*, the Kabbalah, and their interpreters. Further, Blavatsky had rightly intuited that the vast temporality which provided the ‘horizontal’ framework of much of Western esotericism was often offset by a ‘vertical’ cosmogony which


emphasised emanationism or an ascent/descent telos.

It has been established that from her early youth Blavatsky proved to be a dedicated student of the historical corpus of Western esotericism. It can hardly be surprising that the sources of her emanationist cosmology can be traced to these pivotal influences:

"The now Secret Wisdom was once the one fountain head, the ever perennial source at which were fed all its streamlets, the later religions of all nations - from the first down to the last. This period beginning with the Buddha and Pythagoras at the one end, and the [Neo-Platonists] [sic] and Gnostics at the other, is the only focus left in history wherein converge for the last time the bright rays of light unobscured by the hand of bigotry and fanaticism, from the aeons of time gone by."  

Any analysis of Blavatsky's indebtedness to antique and early modern sources for her cosmological pronouncements faces two immediate hurdles. In the first place, how can the interrelationships between the Hermetica, the Kabbalah, Merkabah mysticism, Neoplatonism, Chaldean theurgy, and the ever-problematical Gnosticism, be precisely delineated (or parent be divined from progeny)? Further, at the distance of a hundred years, and with few clues as to the exact dimensions of Blavatsky's library, is it possible to reconstruct the exact lineaments of Blavatskian borrowings? It is sufficient to note for the current project that questions of origins, influence, provenance, and nomenclature of these antique philosophies mattered little for Blavatsky, convinced as she was of a primordial tradition of which the former were significant, though later, recensions. Accordingly, Blavatsky mined the antique heritage of esotericism for the three specific motifs which most fascinated her: emanationist or descensus cosmogony, heavenly ascent figurations, and 'Age theory'. These three notions,  

\[190\] H. P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. XIV: Miscellaneous, comp. Boris de Zirkoff, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Ill., 1985, 467-468. This passage is especially interesting as it comprises part of the original unedited text of *The Secret Doctrine*, as preserved in manuscript in the Adyar Library, Adyar, Madras. See also id., *Collected Works*, vol. XI, 438, in which Blavatsky asserts that Alexandrian Neoplatonism was 'in its essence Theosophy'. Blavatsky's debt to various late antique writers of the Neoplatonic schools has been grossly undervalued. Indeed, she believed that her Society was but a renovated Neoplatonism:

The modern movement of our own Theosophical Society was begun on the same principles; for the Neo-Platonic school of Ammonius aimed, as we do, at the reconcilement of all sects and peoples, under the once common faith of the Golden Age (Blavatsky, *Collected Works*, vol. XIV, 305).
formerly *theologoumena* (as Blavatsky saw it) in the hands of Hermeticists, Kabbalists and such, were elevated into the realm of divine dictate by being acknowledged by the Masters as aspects of Universal Law.
In order to better understand the use made by Blavatsky of the antique motifs of emanationism, heavenly ascent, and 'Age theory', it is necessary first to limn the cosmological and anthropological configurations which lie at the core of The Secret Doctrine. Only after examining the Theosophical universe will it be possible to note the homage (and debt) which Blavatsky paid to the wellsprings of Western esotericism. It is an indictment of most modern commentators that few have taken the time to read, let alone understand, Blavatsky’s vision.¹

Cosmology, Anthropogeny, and Ethnography

In accord with the principle of homology, which provides the structural edifice of sympathies without which Theosophy would be bereft of necessary programmatical schemata, the universe operates on a septenary scale of universal correspondences. Planets, continents, races, nations, and tribes each undergo a seven-fold developmentalism; thus it is that the earth (one of seven, each undergoing its own global progression) has developed through three previous global ‘Rounds’, during which time it has concretised, is now at its densest stage (i.e., the Fourth Round), and after three further Rounds will return ‘to its first ethereal form; it is spiritualised, so to say’.²

An analogous process is at work upon the surface of the planet. Blavatsky noted that ‘[w]e believe in the seven “continents”, four of which have already lived their day, the fifth still exists, and two are to appear in the future’.³ Each continent is home to a particular Root Race (of humanity) and to each of the seven sub-races and family-races

³ Ibid., vol. II, 404.
which further divide it: ‘man, in his gradual consolidation, developed pari passu with the earth’. Thus it was that the first continent of the Fourth Round, ‘The Imperishable Sacred Land’, was home to the First Root Race, the Lunar Ancestors, possessed of ‘astral bodies’ impervious to destruction, who had ‘neither type nor colour, and hardly an objective, though colossal form’ and who had begun their evolutionary pilgrimage in the most protean form many Rounds before. Each of the Lunar Ancestors - like all sentient life within the Theosophical paradigm - is the physical form of a Pilgrim Monad, the indivisible unit of human consciousness and individuality, which will reincarnate multiply throughout the Rounds. The second continent, the Hyperborean (‘of the Hyperboreans’), was peopled with human ancestors of a still largely ethereal kind who, throughout the period of their tenure on earth, became increasingly materialised. Concomitant with this devolution into matter was the change in reproductivity: the Hyperboreans were originally oviparous, then hermaphroditic, and ultimately androgynous. The Second Root Race was, for the most part, destroyed during a ‘great cataclysm’ which (as all things serve an evolutionary purpose) ushered in the third continent, Lemuria. By the end of the fifth sub-race of the Third Root Race, humanity had developed to the point wherein the

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4 Ibid., 250, 330. References to Theosophical race theory are legion throughout The Secret Doctrine and, to a lesser extent, the Mahatma letters. A broad picture of the ethnographical schemata can be gained from Blavatsky’s commentaries on Stanzas 1 to 9 in Book 2, Part 1 of The Secret Doctrine (pp. 22-201). (Note that early editions of The Secret Doctrine erred in printing Book 2, Part 2 for Book 2, Part 1 on the table of contents: thus Trompf, ‘Macrohistory’, 282n63). For Blavatsky’s esoteric ethnography see also infra Appendix D.


7 Every human life is the result of the ‘Pilgrim Monad’ incarnating. The Monad is the animating principle which grants intelligence, motility, and consciousness to the form. In Theosophical usage it has come to represent the imprint of divine character: ‘It is divine in its higher and human in its lower condition’ (Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, vol. II, 186). All Monads incarnated by the middle of the Atlantean or Fourth Root Race (id., The Secret Doctrine, vol., II, 303). For Blavatskian reincarnationism see id., The Key, 77-78, 133-152; also infra p. 205ff.

8 Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, vol. II. 7. It should be noted that terms such as ‘Hyperborea’ and ‘Lemuria’ are but designations for continents, adopted by Blavatsky so as to incorporate antique mythologies and modern archaeology into her gestalt. Their ‘real’ names were not recorded in The Secret Doctrine; see in ibid., 171.

9 In the first sub-races of the Third Root Race, reproduction was effected ‘from drops of “sweat”, which, after many a transformation, [grew] into human bodies’: in ibid., 177.

10 Ibid., 109-170, esp. 164-167. Blavatsky went to pains to emphasise that her occult ethnography had been confirmed by scientific observation of similar reproductive developmentalism in the natural world. It appears that she considered human reproduction to be essentially ovoviviparous.

11 Ibid., 138.
Blavatsky suggests that such development was completed circa eighteen million years ago. It is during her analysis of the Third Root Race of the Lemurian Age that Blavatsky introduced some novel features into what had appeared hitherto to be a fairly simple redaction of Indian *kalpa* theory coupled with mythotypes derived from Homer's account of the Hyperboreans and Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus*. During the Lemurian Age, evolution was artificially speeded up through the involvement of the Dhyanis or Planetary Spirits. A number of the senior 'Dhyani-Chohans' ('archangels') through an act of spiritual self-abnegation and philanthropy, deigned to assist protean humanity in its terrific struggle for evolutionary self-realisation. Those proto-humans who had but recently taken form on earth were unready for the Dhyanis' attention and were left to develop unaided; others who were 'half-ready' received a 'spark' of Manas, or Higher Mind; a small number were assumed into a hypostatic
union with the advanced Dhyanis. These last, enervated by total Manas, became 'the “ancestors” (the spiritual forefathers) of all the subsequent and present Arhats, or Mahatmas': the Masters of the Lemurian Age.

The tripartite division of the Lemurians was further complicated by the anthropomammalian miscegenation undertaken by the ‘narrow-brained’ proto-humans (defined as those with no Dhyanic spark or union). Such sexual behaviour naturally presupposes the existence of mammalian animal life on the Lemurian continent. Blavatsky’s contemporaries must have noted the profound significance of the attendant question: do the Masters teach the chronological priority of man or animal? The answer would have served to create a locus for Theosophy in either the Darwinist camp of natural selection or in the creationist camp of traditional Biblical exegesis. Predictably, Blavatsky posited a tertium quid: rejecting evolution as proceeding solely from below, she posited a further devolution from above, thus maintaining a curiously anthropocentric evolutionism: ‘Man is the alpha and the omega of objective creation’.

11 The choice of the term ‘hypostatic union’ in this context is deliberate. It appears that all commentators follow Blavatsky in selecting the terms ‘incarnation’ or ‘incarnate into Monads’ to describe the descent of the Dhyanis into preexisting forms (but q.v. in ibid., 275). Though it may seem odd to adopt terms more commonly held to be germane to Christological debates, it is important to note that Blavatsky, for all of her rejection of her native Orthodoxy, nevertheless is careful to emphasise that the union of Dhyanis and human form is reminiscent neither of Nestorianism nor Monophysitism: ‘The entrance into a dark room through the same aperture of one ray of sunlight following another will not constitute two rays, but one ray intensified’: in ibid., 167. Thus, following the descent, there is but one Monad: ‘It does not mean that Monads entered forms in which other Monads already were’; in ibid. Cf. Trompf, ‘Macrohistory’, 283.

12 Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, vol. II, 173. Meade’s reading of The Secret Doctrine has it that ‘certain Kumaras or “princes” - beings living on spiritual planes who yearned to taste physical experience - made their descent and stepped down (the ‘Fall’) into earthly encasement’: Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 415. Conversely, Trompf suggested that ‘legions of angelic beings ... were chosen to remain in the System to help later-comers out of compassion - like bodhisattvas’: Trompf, ‘Macrohistory’, 283. Though Blavatsky herself occasionally referred to the Dhyanis-human hypostasis as a ‘Fall’, she more regularly considered it a second wave of evolutionary current - the term of derogation, ‘Fall’, she reserved most often for later human-animal miscegenation and occasionally for the sexual differentiation which occurred during the Third Root Race. In this instance one can detect Blavatsky’s negative views regarding human sexual relations. When humankind were oviparous and androgyneus they lived in a prelapsarian state; as soon as they ‘began to beget’, they fell: see Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, vol. II, 267. Blavatsky appears ambivalent about the motives of the Dhyanis, who appear sometimes entirely altruistic and at other times covetous of flesh. It is likely that Meade and Trompf are both correct. As ever, Blavatsky seems to be attempting to fuse numerous motifs and mythologies: see in ibid., 246. The selflessness and selfishness of the ‘bodhisattva vow’ may not be as contradictory as otherwise imagined: cf. supra 152n56.

For the creation of animal life on Lemuria, Blavatsky posited an ingenious Theosophical solution to the joint challenges of Darwinian natural selection and the truncated period of sentient life proposed by Biblical arithmeticians, most famously Archbishop Ussher.\(^{21}\) By reminding her readers of the Theosophical axiom that posits a universe of finite energy and matter, Blavatsky was able to suggest that some animals, most notably marine life, were created from particles of matter and energy which survived from the detritus of the devastation which closed the Third Round, particularly 'the dead bodies of men'.\(^{22}\) The mammalian species of the Fourth Round were generated from excess vital energy left over from the creation of human life ('nature never leaves an atom unused')\(^{24}\) and from cast off dust and sweat from the Third Root Race.\(^{24}\) *The Secret Doctrine* avers that a number of the mammalian species so produced were gross and monstrous.\(^{25}\) Nevertheless, of critical import for Blavatsky, was that all life devolves from human origins:

The animals - the creeping beasts and those in the waters that preceded man in this Fourth Round, as well as those contemporary with the Third Race, and again the mammalia that are posterior to the Third and Fourth Races - all are either directly or indirectly the mutual and correlative product (physically) of man.\(^{26}\)

The 'narrow-brained' proto-humans, bereft of the Dhyanic spark, began to interbreed with various of the monstrous anthropoid mammals and created a number of simian orders more primate than hominid. In accord with her theology of evolutionary progressivism, Blavatsky deemed this miscegenation the Fall of Mankind.\(^{27}\) Some of

\(^{21}\) Ussher (1581-1656), by a tortuous method of dating the Old Testament patriarchs, settled upon 4004 B.C.E. as the year in which God created the universe. His *pronunciamento* was deemed authoritative by many of Blavatsky's contemporaries (and enjoyed continuing respect in many Creationist Christian communities throughout the twentieth century). John Lightfoot, following Ussher, suggested that God likely created the world at 9:30 am, 25 October, 4004 B.C.E. - the commencement date of Cambridge University's first term: see Garry Trompf, *In Search of Origins*, Oriental University Press, London, 1990, 31; id., 'Macrohistory', 281.


\(^{24}\) Ibid., 180-190. Margaret Anderson calls these particles of matter and energy, '[e]theric particles and moist ectoplasmic (or protoploid) exudations': see Anderson, 'Evolutionary Biology', 352.


\(^{26}\) Ibid., 186.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 191-194.
these pithecoids themselves bred back with the ‘narrow-brained’ and produced ‘the inferior Races, of which there are still some analogues left - as the Australians (now fast dying out) and some African and Oceanic tribes’. This intercourse was deemed ‘sinful’ by the higher sub-races of the Third Root Race, inhabited or led by the Dhyani Masters, and was pronounced prohibited, all future couplings being made sterile - thus ‘equilibrizing’ the races and species.

Blavatsky’s formulation of the Third Root Race on the continent Lemuria provided an aetiology of species differentiation as well as a typology for all discrete species and genera, notably the primate family. Crucially, she was able to maintain the anthropos as the ideal and aim of biological evolution as well as its origin, thus trouncing, so she believed, those naturalists who proposed a materialist chain of being which was not so much crowned or completed by humanity as simply finding in it an accidental link. By positing an endless cycle of eras and worlds to facilitate the human journey to perfectibilism, Blavatsky was able to exempt humanity from terrestrial evolution on one earth, and thus, while evenhandedly placing all mundane matter on a spectrum from the simple to the complex, nevertheless suggest for humanity an elite esoteric

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28 Ibid., 162, 193. It is worth quoting Blavatsky on this topic at some length:

Now why has less change taken place in Australia than elsewhere? Where is the raison d’être for such a ‘curse of retardation’? It is simply because the nature of the environment develops pari passu with the race concerned. Correspondences rule in every quarter]. The survivors of those later Lemurians, who escaped the destruction of their fellows when the main continent was submerged, became the ancestors of a portion of the present native tribes. Being a very low sub-race, begotten originally of animals, of monsters, whose very fossils are now resting miles under the sea floors, their stock has since existed in an environment strongly subjected to the law of retardation. Australia is one of the oldest lands now above the waters, and in the senile decrepitude of old age, its ‘virgin soil’ notwithstanding. It can produce no new forms, unless helped by new and fresh races, and artificial cultivation and breeding (ibid., 197).

29 The Master Koot Hoomi referred to the survivors of the seventh sub-race of the Third Root Race in the era of the Fifth Root Race (e.g., Australian aborigines) as ‘fallen, degraded semblances of humanity’: see The Mahatma Letters, 1993 ed., (Letter No. 93b: October, 1882) 308. Contemporary Theosophists have experienced great difficulty in explaining Blavatsky’s ethnicism and incipient racism: typical of such attempts is Ellwood, Theosophy, 93-102 et passim. Ellwood noted: ‘[I]t’s impossible to explain this teaching can be used to establish no doctrine of racial superiority, but rather describes a chain of experiences through which all of us have passed’ (p.98). As human-mammalian miscegenation is considered the parent of many aboriginal peoples, and such unions ran counter to the evolutionary impetus (and were ultimately made biologically infertile), it is hard to understand how all peoples can be expected to ‘have passed’ through such lives.


31 Webb, emblematic of most commentators on Blavatskian anthropogenesis, is entirely incorrect in asserting that ‘[m]an had evolved from apes’: Webb, Flight, 52. For Blavatsky, humanity must always maintain priority.
ontology.

Blavatsky incorporated into her macrohistorical imaging of aeonic time the common eschatological notion that all such eras end cataclysmically and with a final confrontation between the Righteous and the Wicked. Such a telos allowed Blavatsky to underscore the dire penalty for corrupting the wisdom of the Dhyani-Masters into either materialism or theurgic magic:

It is a well-established belief among ... Occultists that toward the end of every race, when mankind reaches its apex of knowledge in that cycle, dividing into two distinct classes, it branches off - one as the 'Sons of Light' and the other as the 'Sons of Darkness', or initiated Adepts and natural-born magicians or - mediums. Toward the very close of the race, as their mixed progeny furnishes the first pioneers of a new and a higher race, there comes the last and supreme struggle during which the 'Sons of Darkness' are usually exterminated by some great cataclysm of nature - either by fire or water.\(^{31}\)

Thus it was that as the greater part of the Lemurians - together with the Fourth Root Race, the Atlanteans, who had been evolving from their Third Race ancestry toward the end of the Lemurian epoch - became ever more ensconced in matter, their attentions drifted to 'self-worship' and 'sexual religion'.\(^{32}\) In response, the 'hierarchy of the "Elect"' retreated to 'Shamballah' in the Gobi desert to await the end.\(^{33}\) Thereafter Lemuria fell, with but a remnant surviving, comprised in the main of the residents of Shamballah: the Dhyanis-human hypostaseis, their followers possessed of the 'spark'

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\(^{31}\) Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. IV, 262. Note that Blavatsky is careful to suggest Spiritualism as a path to 'Darkness'.


\(^{33}\) Ibid. It should be noted that accounts of the Gobi desert do not include references to a domicile of the mysterious Brotherhood: cf., eg., Mildred Cable & Francesca French, *The Gobi Desert*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1946. See also infra Appendix B.
and, significantly, 'a few tribes'.

It should not be forgotten that Blavatsky's Brotherhood of Masters resided in the main in an unnamed valley located in 'Trans-

34 Ibid., 220. The 'few tribes' were the progenitors of many of the world's aboriginal peoples - 'savages' in Blavatskian terms. Their presence is justified by the fact that necessary allowances needed to be made for a selection of such 'primitives' to pass into the next continent so as to explain racial differentiation in the current era: see supra Appendix D. Note that such persons cannot be termed 'primal' in Blavatskian imaging as they are considered corrupt and sinister issue. Blavatskian geological and terrestrial imagining has been analysed by Godwin who differentiated two types of cataclysm: 'exogenic' (outside of the earth) and 'endogenic' (caused from within): Godwin, Arktos, 208-212.

'Shamballah' (alternately 'Shamba-la' or 'Sambala' in Blavatsky's writings-the latter the normative Sanskrit transliteration) first gained currency in the West as an Oriental Arcadia with the journeys of the Portuguese Jesuits João Cabral and Estevão Cacella whose 1627 letters make note of a 'Xembala'. The first English reference seems to be that of Alexander Csoma de Korős in 1833. Donald Lopez (one of the few Tibetologists to have read Blavatsky) has suggested that elements of Blavatsky's esoteric ethnography may have been derived from the texts of the Kālacakra Tantra which provide an historiography of the Himalayan 'kingdom of Shambala': Donald S. Lopez, Jr., Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1998, 180-182, 267-268 et passim. It is certainly likely that Blavatsky appropriated the stories of conflict between Buddhists and Hindus in Shamballah from the Kālacakra Tantra texts and employed them rather ingeniously to explain the apparent inconsistencies in the 'esoterics' of Hinduism and Buddhism: see esp. Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. VII, 347; vol. III, 402, 418-424; vol. XIII, 330; vol. XIV, 399. Lopez appears to be among the first scholars of the Western reception of Tibetan Buddhism to intuit the pivotal place of Blavatskian Theosophical imaging, though he is correct in noting that the history of the Occidental redactions of the idea of Shamballah remains frustratingly unexplored; this lacuna may well be filled by the as yet unpublished researches into Blavatskian 'cult archaeology' by David Pecotic, but see also Godwin, Arktos, ch. 8. The best account of the romanticising undertaken by Western conceptualisers in Tibet (including significant references to Blavatsky!) is: Peter Bishop, The Myth of Shangri-La: Tibet, Travel Writing and the Western Creation of Sacred Landscape, The Athlone Press, London, 1989. There are several books best avoided which treat the theme: Andrew Thomas, Shambala: Oasis of Light, Sphere Books, London, 1977; David Hatcher Childress, Lost Cities of China, Central Asia and India: A Traveler's Guide, Adventures Unlimited Press, Stelle, Illinois, 1985; Alec Maclellan, The Last World of Aghari: The Mystery of Vril Power, Corgi Books, London, 1983. The recension of the occultic tradition of Shamballah, stemming in large part from Blavatsky, is described in Geoffrey Ashe, The Ancient Wisdom, Abacus, London, 1977. For a more extensive treatment of Tibet and Shamballah see infra Appendix B.
Himalayan’ Tibet.35 That an implicit identification of the Masters’ chief residence with Shamballah is intended is obvious; thus, emphatically, the Masters constitute the remnant of the remnants, and Shamballah represents the repository of their accumulated wisdoms).

As the continent of Lemuria reconstituted itself as Atlantis, the new Race developed and flourished.36 The Atlanteans, evolving at a time of tenuous equilibrium between ‘brain intellect and Spiritual perception’ (finding themselves, more or less, at the meridian of the densification of spirit in matter), soon divided into the righteous and the unrighteous; the former characterised as ‘those who worshipped the one unseen Spirit of nature, the ray of which man feels within himself’, the latter indulging in ‘fanatical worship to the Spirits of the Earth’.37 The unrighteous Atlanteans, having been granted knowledge of the ‘Mysteries’ and the ‘secrets of Nature’ by the beneficent continuators (Masters) of the wisdom tradition begun by the Dhyanis-humans, became ‘with every generation more arrogant, owing to the acquisition of superhuman powers’.38 It is significant that this particular gnosis is equated by

35 Although the headquarters of the Brotherhood are located in an inaccessible retreat in Tibet, it appears that the Masters move around as required. Most authorities have stated that during the period of the ‘Mahatma letters’ correspondence the Masters K. H. and Morya were located in a ravine close to the Grand Monastery of the Tashi Lhünpo, seat of the Panchen Lama, near Shigatse (Tzi-gadze): cf., eg., Fuller, *Blavatsky and her Teachers*, 24-27; Godwin, *Arktos*, 98. The present author has been able to find no Blavatskian authority for the proximity to the Tashi Lhünpo - it appears more likely that Blavatsky preferred to keep details of the exact abodes of the Masters unpublished. The most telling references to Shigatse being the (temporary?) domicile of the Theosophical Masters (K. H., M., *inter alia*) is by Koot Hoomi: e.g., “This - to prove that living men can appear ... in London, even tho’ themselves at Tzi-gadze, Tibet’ (*The Mahatma Letters*, 1993 ed., *Letter No. LBS-193A: May, 1882*) 497). Fuller has stated that on one occasion the Master Djual Kul precipitated a picture of the ravine onto silk: *Blavatsky and her Teachers*, 24-25, reproduced between between pp. 136 & 137. It seems likely that her information is based upon a Leadbeaterian account; the positively Arcadian image is reproduced facing the cover page of Leadbeater’s *The Masters and The Path* (C. W. Leadbeater, *The Masters and The Path*, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1925). It is noted that the reason Djual Kul showed only his back was because ‘He considered that His Mongolian features were not worth putting on record’. Djual Kul, at the time of the precipitation, was an advanced chela, but was soon thereafter elevated to ‘Master-ship’: see Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. VI, 29. It is very common for commentators to confuse the Shigatse residence of K. H. and M. with the “Snowy Range” of the Himalayas’, ‘country or “seat of the Brothers”’: Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. XIV, 423.

36 The grandeur of the Atlanteans is confirmed by the statement that ‘[t]he early Atlanteans were from 300 to 400 feet high’: Spierenburg, *The Inner Group Teachings*, 2nd ed., 110.

37 Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. II, 273-275. There is a clear inference that part of the worship of the unrighteous involved sexual rites and ‘phallicism’. The equation between sexual ascessis and perfectibility is overt throughout Blavatsky’s *œuvre*. Further, she goes to pains to assert that ‘the worship of the later Hebrews’, and, by extension, Christians, is founded in phallicism - *ergo* it is unrighteous.

38 Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. XIV, 246, 259.
Blavatsky with esotericism and the 'Wisdom-Religion', for, during the later Third and early Fourth Root Races, such gnosis had been exoteric, only being sequestered to an elite after misuse 'by the Sorcery of the Atlanteans'. It was in Atlantis, then, that the prisca theologia and 'psychism' passed from the preserve of the populace to the elite. The means by which this was effected was through the intervention of the Masters; these were the 'inheritors of the Rishis of the Treta-Yuga' (the successors of the Dhyani-human Masters of the Lemurian Age) who caused such powers to atrophy in the general populace so as to avoid a sinister evolutionary byway. By the end of the Atlantean epoch the Masters had become already something of a secret fraternity; having witnessed the catastrophe caused by endowing the unevolved with powerful wisdoms, they decided to retreat from engagement with the general populace and hold fast in their inaccessible domains. There they awaited the time when some of their human confrères would have evolved sufficiently to again gain access to the plenitude.

Ibid., 68. ‘Gnosis’ is used here deliberately. The knowledge of the ‘secrets of Nature’ and the ‘Mysteries’ is patently not of an epistemological kind, and is shown to have specific applicabilities: For it was the ‘misuse’ only, and not the use, of the divine gift that led the men of the Fourth Race to Black Magic and Sorcery, and finally to become ‘forgetful of Wisdom’ (in ibid.).

It might be wondered why the Treta Yuga, the second in Hindu epochal visioning, is equated with the Lemurian Age, home to the Third Root Race and third continent (cf., e.g., Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, vol. II, 520). Noting that Blavatsky’s macrocyclicism is septenary, Trompf has suggested that as Blavatsky ‘postulated five past and two future Root Races ... she was clearly committed to a modelling independent of the Indic four-staged Mahayuga’; Trompf, ‘Macrohistory’, 282-283 (it might be observed that the fifth has not yet passed). Blavatsky resolved the tension between the present Race (the Fifth) existing in the kali yuga (the fourth) by arguing that the first Race was of such an amorphous nature that it could not properly be deemed human, but ‘Progenitor’ or ‘ancestor’: note that the First Root Race were deathless and the first continent did not suffer catastrophe akin to later continents (Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, vol. II, 138, 309, 249; Godwin, Arktos, 210-211). Thus Blavatsky was able to reconcile the number 4 with two primes, 5 and 7 - a not inconceivable feat - and thus was empowered (contra Trompf) to synthetise Hindu quaternary systematics with Western Hermetic, Kabbalistic, and alchemical (inter alia) synoptic templates (as well as Hesiod’s quinary Age theory).

It is hard to ignore the imputation that here Blavatsky is warning off those who profess an interest in theurgy. Though ‘there must again come a time’ when such powers are available to ‘mankind in general’, the day is not yet. Until that time the only purveyors of the esoteric gnosis are her Masters: Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. XIV, 68 (n.b. her comments are printed in an article entitled ‘the Dangers of Practical Magic’). Such warnings can only ever be entirely equivocal as Blavatsky the chela often impressed with paranormal feats.

So as to avoid confusion, it should be noted that while Greater Atlantis fell about 850 000 years ago, smaller sub-continents and islands survived for millennia thereafter. Thus it is that the ‘Atlantis’ spoken of by Plato in the Timaeus and Critias was inundated only 11 000 years ago. The continents, like the Root Races, necessarily ‘overlap’: see Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, vol. II, 433. For an interesting survey of the possible Egyptian origins of the idea of Atlantis, and for further details of Plato’s usage, see J. Gwyn Griffiths, Atlantis and Egypt: with Other Selected Essays, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1991, 3-30; Christopher Gill, Plato: The Atlantis Story: Timaeus 17-27, Critias, intro., notes & vocab. Christopher Gill, Bristol Classical Press, Bristol, 1980.
of esoteric gnosis first granted to humanity by the great Dhyanis Masters of the
Lemurian era and stewarded by their successors ever since. Away from this
storehouse of esoteric wisdoms, what remained of the *prisca theologia* for the general
populace was refracted through the lens of the Mystery cults and ancient religions,
inevitably but a chimera of its former self.

When Atlantis fell a remnant of the righteous survived, comprised of those Atlanteans
who had remained loyal to the Masters’ teaching, together with the first sub-races of
the Fifth Root Race, the Aryan, only then just evolving. (Humans of the Fifth Root
Race - the present dominant peoples of the planet - have existed as a discrete species
for about one million years, overlapping the last major groupings of the sub-races of
the Atlantean by a period of about 150,000 years). In the Fifth Root Race, human
Monads have reached their deepest inherence in matter - a period of great potential and
equally great danger. During this, the *kali yuga*, the karmic load of previous
incarnations is at its ‘heaviest’ and only the Masters’ teachings will allow for the
ascendance of the Ancient Wisdom over materialism, the progeny of dense matter.
So it is that portions of the accumulated wisdoms of the Atlantean Elect were
transmitted to the priests of dynastic Egypt and to select groups from the civilisations
of the ancient world. (As Blavatsky’s macrohistory moves into the territory of
recorded history, it is not unexpected that major civilisations are accorded status as one
 or another sub- or family-race. It thus comes as no surprise that [white] Americans
will be the ‘germs’ of the sixth sub-race of the Fifth Root Race). Blavatsky is
careful to note that a portion of the Masters’ teachings has occasionally been conveyed
to ‘initiates’ throughout recorded history; thus it is that she is able to propose an
overarching Theosophical synthesis of the esoteric teachings of all ages: a *philosophia*

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chronologies by noting that the *kali yuga* began between the 17th and 18th of February, 3102 B.C.E.

\(^5\) Ibid., 436.

\(^6\) Ibid., 444-445. Cf. Webb, *Flight*, 54. The location of the sixth sub-race in America and
Australasia would later become something of a Theosophical fixation: see infra ch. 19.
perennis stretching back in this Round to the Dhyanis hypostaseis.\textsuperscript{47}

Evolution and Involution

Blavatsky made it clear that the Masters' motive for authorising her to divulge these remarkable esoteric schemata, the details of which have been hidden from the uninitiated for millennia, is to arrest humanity's sharp decline into ossified exoteric religious cultus and materialist 'scientism'. That such temptations exist at this, the mid-point of the Fourth and densest Round, is hardly surprising. Of great profundity for Blavatsky's programmatical, if prolix, paradigm for human cyclic evolution, is that an injection of the esoteric arcana at this point in the Round will assist in accelerating the advance into future Races and Rounds, each of which will begin gradually to become more ephemeral and 'spiritualised'. In order to appreciate Blavatsky's strategy, it is thus crucial to recognise that the evolution of the Pilgrim Monads into ever-denser human forms is accompanied by a subsequent involution to Spirit. Those authors who have suspected Blavatsky of proposing an evolutionary system bereft of soteriological purpose are wrong.\textsuperscript{48} The goal of the entire elaborate cosmic reticulation is to ensure that the wisdom gained through multiple life experiences in each of the family-, sub-, and Root Races will be extracted from the system as Spirit engages in, and then disengages from, matter, and will be carried into the next Round: 'We are returning up the arc, only with self-consciousness added'.\textsuperscript{49} Ultimately it is to be expected that such wisdom will exalt and purify the Monad until a point is reached wherein Spirit, until then hypostatically united with matter, can entirely divorce itself and reintegrate with the Absolute:

\textsuperscript{47} It should not be forgotten that Blavatsky initially planned to include a lengthy study of the 'initiates' and 'occultists' of the past in The Secret Doctrine. A typical example of the luminaries of the philosophia perennis is the place Theosophists accord to Plato:

Plato must have known, as would any other initiated adept, about the history of the Third Race after its 'Fall', though as one pledged to silence and secrecy he never showed his knowledge in so many words (Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, vol. II, 266).

\textsuperscript{48} It is noteworthy that James Webb treats Blavatskian evolutionist Theosophy at some length - with no reference whatsoever to anything but its sociological functionalism. Theosophy 'represents so many of the confused aspirations of those who espoused the cause of the irrational': Webb, Flight, 55. This reductionism in an otherwise intelligent work seems to suggest that Theosophy provided no template for a spiritual life. Webb is typical of most commentators who have noted evolutionism at the heart of Blavatskian anthropology and have ignored the obvious question: evolution into what?

\textsuperscript{49} Spierenburg, The Inner Group Teachings, 2nd ed., 17.
Spirit is slowly re-asserting itself at the expense of the physical, or matter, so that, at the close of the seventh Race of the Seventh Round, the Monad will find itself free from matter and all its qualities as it was in the beginning; having gained in addition the experience and wisdom, the fruition of all its personal lives, without their evil and temptations.\(^{50}\)

It might be assumed from the above that Blavatsky’s Theosophy has a dualistic aversion to matter as a trap in which spirit is caught and must free itself. To the degree to which the drag of matter instantiates devolutionary tendencies, matter can be considered a yoke upon spirit, yet it is only through the incarnational experiences afforded through the hypostasis that necessary self-realisation can be achieved - necessary because such illumination must precede reabsorption into the Universal Spirit:\(^{51}\)

ENQ.-Do not some of you regard this association or ‘fall of spirit into matter’ as evil, and re-birth as a sorrow?

THEO.-Some do, and therefore strive to shorten their period of probation on earth. It is not, however, an unmixed evil, since it ensures the experience upon which we mount to knowledge and wisdom.\(^{52}\)

It could thus also be inferred, since all Monads progress toward Universal Spirit, that Blavatsky is advocating a theology of *apocatastasis*\(^{53}\) - and such is ostensibly the case, though her universal salvation is temporally-differentiated: all will achieve the goal of transformation into pure Spirit, but for the unenlightened the process will be

\(^{51}\) The obvious esoteric macrohistorical underpinnings of this scheme are to be found in Boehme, for whom see *infra* ch. 14. See also Trompf, ‘Macrohistory’, 277.
\(^{52}\) Blavatsky, *The Key*, 152.
\(^{53}\) *Apocatastasis* is the Origenist doctrine of the universal salvation of all free moral creatures. As a doctrine it was expounded first by Clement of Alexandria (c.150-c.215), and then extensively articulated by Origen (c.185-c.254) and, later, Gregory of Nyssa (c.330-c.395). It was condemned by Augustine of Hippo (354-430), and declared anathema by the Council of Constantinople in 543. For details see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed., Adam & Charles Black, London, 1977, 473-486.
tortuous and long.\(^n\) The objective, it seems, is to achieve this divinisation as efficaciously as possible, not by *enduring* lifetimes, but by accruing an elevated gnosis along the way. Not only does this ‘saving knowledge’ provide a palliative for the trials engendered by the ‘fleshing’ of the human Monad, but it also supplies the key to reducing or obviating individual *karma*, and thus accelerates involution into the Absolute.

\(^n\) It is at this point that Blavatsky illustrates how far she has moved away from Hindu *kalpa* temporality. Unlike *kalpa* theory, which posits a comparatively sharp incline from the *kali yuga* (the decadent age) to the *krita yuga* (the ‘Golden Age’) before a renewed degeneration occurs, Blavatsky’s periodicity accords to a cosmicised *schematically-regular* descent into matter and subsequent ascent into spirit. Although this process operates in eternity, for the individual Monad the experience is one of slow descent and slow ascent underscored by an optimistic trajectory.
Karma and Reincarnationism

Indeed, it was Blavatsky’s adoption of Oriental notions of karma which overcame a glaring inconsistency within the teleological dynamics of her macrocyclic vision.55 Blavatsky, aware that she sometimes walked a fine line between advocating a highly structured, autonomous universe with mechanistic, indeed deterministic processes and preordained outcomes, and one in which individual agency is paramount, required a retributive mechanism (so as to justify social and evolutionary disparity), but one which obviated the need for a theology of theodicy which bespoke the existence of a personal God.56 Her means of synthesising these apparently diametrically-opposed positions (determinism and free will) was to posit a law of karma-nemesis which

55 Two studies of Blavatskian karma and reincarnationism deserve note. Robert S. Ellwood’s ‘Obligatory Pilgrimage: Reincarnation in the Theosophical Tradition’ (in Steven J. Kaplan, ed., Concepts of Transmigration: Perspectives on Reincarnation, Studies in Comparative Religion vol. 6, Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, New York, 1996, 189-202) offers an insightful account of Theosophical teachings, noting that ‘we are basically in the world of Gnostic or Kabbalistic myth’ (p.193). Ellwood’s study is somewhat marred by certain methodological issues arising from his attempted correlation of Theosophical post-mortem expectations with descriptions of so-called ‘near death experiences’. Ronald Neufeldt’s ‘In Search of Utopia: Karma and Rebirth in the Theosophical Movement’ (in Ronald W. Neufeldt, ed., Karma and Rebirth: Post Classical Developments, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1986, 253-255) is a detailed, if unsatisfying, account of Blavatskian notions of karma and reincarnation. Neufeldt has suggested that ‘these two ideas could be regarded as the two pillars upon which all of Theosophical teaching rests’ (p.234), an arguable contention, and further states, remarkably, ‘[t]he idea of rebirth is therefore supported by persuasive rhetoric and analogies designed to convince by emotional impact rather than by close reasoned argumentation and detailed scientific data’ (p.241, emphasis added). The most serious concern is Neufeldt’s insistence on the ‘utopian character of these teachings’ (p.250); one suspects he means thereby to signify an optimistic eschatology, because otherwise his conclusions are nonsensical. (One might add that the term ‘Utopianism’ has been grossly misused since its 1516 genesis, nowhere more comprehensively than in the literature of twentieth century esotericism - a fact of which scholars should be aware). In his ‘Critical Response’ to Neufeldt’s study (in ibid., 339-345), Terence Penelhum has characterised Blavatskian formulations as ‘a sort of benign predestinarianism without God’ (p.345), thus suggesting to him a logical question:

Without [a theistic base] the claim of Theosophy to offer us a universally acceptable blend of religious insights faces a difficulty with which my comments began: what ground is there, at least for the skeptical Western mind, to suppose that the workings of the natural order, as distinct from the workings of the mind of a personal God, incorporate any moral attitude at all, whether it be justice or benevolence? (p.345) Penelhum’s question would be entirely apposite were it not for the fact that Theosophy does presuppose a theism, even if it is understood more as an optimistic evolutionist principle. Thus moral retributive logic is reconfigured, through a novel ‘evolutionist’ theodicy, as a mechanism to reward and advance those Monads who contribute to personal and collective development (‘spiritualisation’), and to impede those who exhibit devolutionary ‘materialistic’ tendencies. That the ‘moral’ outcomes are highly mechanistic does not infer that they are non-existent. Penelhum’s misapprehension of Blavatskian Theosophy may be due to Neufeldt, who nowhere adequately addresses the concept of divinity (somewhat surprisingly, given the research is focussed upon Theosophy).

56 But cf. Faivre, ‘The Theosophical Current: A Periodization’, 173n11: ‘Theosophy [sensu lato] is always, one way or the other, a theodicy of some sort’. 206
operated at all levels of evolution and thus supported a teleology that was neither mute nor bereft of human contingency. Interestingly, the Blavatskian recension of *karma* resulted in a curiously naturalistic reformulation of Providence:

> It is not, therefore, *Karma* that rewards or punishes, but it is we, who reward or punish ourselves, according to whether we work with, through and along with nature, abiding by the laws on which that Harmony depends, or break them.  

Importantly, Blavatskian karmic reincarnationism is divested of Oriental doctrinal pessimism (wherein the soteriological purpose of *karma* is such that rebirth may ultimately be avoided) and reconstrued as an optimistic progressivism through ever more purified and exalted lives until reabsorption with the Divine takes place:

> [T]he spirit has to pass through the ordeal of incarnation and life, and be baptised with matter before it can reach experience and knowledge. After which only it receives the baptism of soul, or self-consciousness, and may return to its original condition of a god, *plus* experience, ending with omniscience. In other words, it can return to the original state of homogeneity of primordial essence only through the addition of the fruitage of *Karma*, which alone is able to create an absolute conscious deity, removed but one degree from the

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58 Bruce Campbell is entirely incorrect in asserting that Theosophy propounds a negative creed: By viewing creation as an illusion, Theosophy appears to [suggest a] negative valuation of life in the world ... The teaching devalues life in the world, seeing it not as intrinsically worthwhile but as a stage for the pursuit of salvation (Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom*, 73-74).

Robert Ellwood, conversely, has argued correctly that Theosophy is a life-affirming creed, in support of which he noted a crucial ontological priority: Though inseparable from *karma* in practice, reincarnation, like the soul which enjoys it, appears [in Theosophy] to be ontologically prior ... This is in contrast to standard Vedanta and Buddhist philosophies, in which *karma* itself is the a priori, indivisible from samsara or maya, that predicates the appearance of separate reincarnating souls on the plane of relative truth (Ellwood, 'Obligatory Pilgrimage', 193).
The tension between the dual desires to gain an experiential gnosis as the repeatedly-incarnating human Monad and to achieve a return to absolute Spirit are left purposefully unresolved by Blavatsky. It is certain that the consciously-cultivated accelerated evolution which attends upon the pathway to ‘Master-ship’ would lead to an expedited reintegration with the divine, yet her insistence that such reintegration is predicated upon incarnational gnoseological experience subverts such a lineal eschatology.60 The resulting ambivalence allows her to maintain a structurally elitist creed, which presupposes that only those who pursue the esoteric gnosis will circumvent the extended temporality of the karmically-constrained evolutionary process, while also emphasising an essentially positive attitude towards material creation. This last is of the utmost importance because the inherent ontological ‘goodness’ of the world is a defining characteristic of modern Western esotericism, the fons et origo of Blavatsky’s Weltanschauung.61

The Power behind the Processus

Blavatsky’s extraordinary cosmo-historical synthesis, in its mature configuration as The Secret Doctrine, has rarely been ‘placed’ within the discourse of Western esotericism. Not unexpectedly, her adoption of Oriental motifs and philosophies, notably karma and kalpa theory, has led to repeated charges of eclecticism and appropriation. It is true that Blavatsky possessed a magpie-like talent for incorporating

60 Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol., VIII, 117: see also Wichmann’s observations in Hanegraaff, New Age, 454-455. Blavatsky reiterated her optimistic progressivist interpretation of karma in her popular work, The Key to Theosophy:

[A]s the bee collects its honey from every flower, leaving the rest as food for the earth worms, so does our spiritual individuality ... Collecting from every terrestrial personality, into which Karma forces it to incarnate, the nectar alone of the spiritual qualities and self-consciousness, it unites all these into one whole and emerges from its chrysalis as the glorified Dhyān Chohan (Blavatsky, The Key, 113).

61 See Faivre, Access, 20 et passim.
seemingly disparate themes and images into her programme, and that on a number of occasions her syncretising can seem forced or arbitrary. Yet after careful analysis it becomes apparent that her adoption of Eastern religious formulations, as well as her indefatigable quest to establish the historicity of a *prisca theologia*, were simply the *modus vivendi* for reinvigorating an esoteric gnosis that, by the late nineteenth century, was appearing ever less likely to survive the materialist proselytising of naturalist science and Positivist philosophy.

(It should be remembered that in the popular imagination the dominant forces of Science - to which were appended modernism, individualism, and humanism - and Religion - which incorporated tradition, conservatism, and a significant proportion of Eurocentrism - were caught in a battle for epistemological dominance. Blavatsky feared the battle would prove Pyrrhic, and result in the ascendance of a ‘Scientism’ whose precepts would, ironically, be held in the same awe and deference previously accorded to church doctrine).62

In order to ‘re-enchant’ her world, Blavatsky faced considerable obstacles. In the first instance she was required to reject the not-inconsequential naturalism engendered by Darwinian evolutionary speculation. This task was fraught with hurdles of an epistemological and historical kind. She had first to deny the posited primate origins of humanity, yet also account for the comprehensiveness of the evolutionist’s argument and the ever-increasing anthropological and biological support for it.63 Unlike many of her era she was not prepared to fall back upon Christian orthodoxy as a viable alternative, for, even apart from her notorious antipathy to Christianity in general, and elite ecclesiologies in particular, she sensed that institutionalised Christianity’s power to proscribe dissent and to propound anti-modernist doctrine had

62 Blavatsky noted:

> It is ... when the dogmatism of a priest backed up by law declares that a discovery is opposed to the revealed word of his god, that we may fear. That day is gone for a long time to come, and we need expect no more scenes like that in which Galileo took part. But among the materialistic minds ... there is a good deal of that old spirit left, only that the ‘revealed word of God’ has become the utterances of our scientific leaders (Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. IX, 122).

63 For a discussion of Blavatsky’s novel evolutionism, see infra ch. 27. See also Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. XIII, 95-97; vol. VII, 41ff; vol. VIII, 122-123; vol. XIV, 303-304.
long passed its apogee. In a characteristically ingenious response, Blavatsky intuited that de-mythologised ‘evolutionism’ could be rearticulated as a ‘spiritualised’ cosmological progressivism, and presented as the secret esoteric doctrine of the ages. Such a creative compromise enabled her systematically to undermine all religious exclusivism (particularly Christianity, against which she was able to forge an unlikely alliance with virtually all of those whose disciplines were gnawing away at the edifice of Church claims to ontological uniqueness and dismiss materialist science as but a predictable phase in the evolutionary chain of being. By expanding exponentially the aeons of prehistory, adopting a design dynamic of evolutionary cycles, and by positing a concomitant process of involution into the Divine, she was able to project a richly textured cosmological paradigm which would (more or less) neatly accommodate an endangered anthropocentrism and re-enthrone divinity as the power behind the processus.

Blavatsky’s assessment of the Zeitgeist of her age has proved correct; notions of progressivism and perfectibilism pervaded the philosophical and religious literature of her century, and provided the alembic through which traditionalisms were reconfigured to allow for the epistemological leaps of the Victorian age. In particular, the concept of progressivism occasioned the catalysis by which religious orthodoxies were often reconstituted in a guise previously unrecognisable. Into this climate of dissolution and hybridisation there irrupted a number of idiosyncratic alternatives which attempted to chart a course between the shoals of an atheistical naturalism and an

45 By adopting the forms of progressivist evolutionism and ‘sanctifying’ them, Blavatsky was able to accuse the Christian churches of having stultified science - unlike Theosophy, which embraced it: ‘Christianity ... fixed in dogma, arrested all scientific progress for long centuries’ (Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. II, 63).
46 ‘Materialism’ (employed in a very broad sense by Blavatsky) was an entirely predictable phenomenon in the age of the kali yuga and at the middle of the Fourth Round when matter is in the ascendancy. But, in an ever-reticulating system, the winds of change will come:

[I]n the midst of the deadpest calm of wholesale negations, there arose a breeze from a wholly unexpected quarter. At first the significant afflatus was like a hardly perceptible stir, puffs of wind in the rigging of a proud vessel - the ship called ‘Materialism’, whose crew was merrily leading its passengers toward the Maelstrom of annihilation. But very soon the breeze freshened and finally blew a gale. It fell with every hour more ominously on the ears of the iconoclasts, and ended by raging loud enough to be heard by everyone who had ears to hear, eyes to see, and an intellect to discern (Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. XII, 121).

51 For Blavatskian notions of progress, perfectibilism, and evolution, see infra ch. 27.
oft times hubristic and reactionary ecclesiasticism: of these, Blavatsky’s Theosophy proved one of the most innovative and enduring.

The foregoing extended discourse on Blavatskian macrohistorical and cosmological articulation has been included in the present work because it is pivotal to an appreciation of the place of the Master within Theosophy. The Master instantiates, indeed *incarnates*, the nexus between evolutionism undergone through aeonic time and ultimate reintegration into the Divine; he provides the mesocosmic link between mundane existence and ultimate human destiny, *for he is the closest to both*. His centrality to Theosophy is guaranteed precisely because he provides the inspirational impetus which otherwise is lacking in an evolutionary timescale of such enormity. It should be noted that the vast scale of cosmic time, marked by innumerable incarnations of the human Monad ever evolving toward perfection - necessary though it is in order to counter Darwinism and a literalistic Biblical hermeneutic - may not inspire the individual to adopt positive measures aimed at conscious evolution, the central tenet and *raison d’être* of Theosophy. In fact, the lineaments of the evolution of the human Monad are so long and attenuated that a Theosophy bereft of the Masters-exemplar could certainly be accused of fostering *at least* the same degree of passivity which some commentators have found in certain Oriental religious paradigms.

The Masters, by enfleshing, as it were, evolutionary progress toward perfection, indicate that though enlightenment could not ever be achieved in one lifetime, it is nevertheless possible to make rapid spiritual and physical advances within the human span: ‘The chief object of our struggles and *initiations* is to achieve this union while yet on this earth ... Our beloved K.H. is on his way to the goal’. If reintegration with the divine is the long-term soteriological aim of the Masters’ Theosophy, then emulation of their example and the aspiration to join their number are the proper interim ambitions. The former objective is encapsulated in Blavatskian imaging by her adoption of cyclic models of history characterised by optimistic progressivism, as well as by an emanationist cosmogony; the latter is exhibited by her concern with the notion of heavenly ascent.

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45 For Blavatsky’s use of the dynamism of heavenly ascent see *infra* ch. 15, 28.

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CHAPTER 14

THE BLAVATSKIAN SYNTHESIS

Any reading of Blavatskian historiography will encounter the macrocyclicism and aeonic thinking of the kalpa theory of the Mahayuga, known to her primarily from the Mahabharata and the Puranas. There can be little doubt that the quaternary system of yugas provided the vocabulary for much of the Theosophical cosmo-historical mapping, particularly given Blavatsky's presentation of India as home to a less obfuscated descendant of the prisca theologia than was to be found in the West. Less well acknowledged is the perhaps surprising regularity of such aeonic and cyclic thinking in the Western esoteric traditions. A discussion of such schemes will place the Masters more comprehensively within the historiographical framework of esotericism, and is thus a necessary predicate for the typological analysis presented in Part Four of the present work.

Developmentalist Historiography and Joachimism

Developmentalist historiography has been omnipresent throughout Western discourse and has been ably analysed. Such thinking has been characterised primarily by its concern with models of progress and eschatology; concomitant with its normative optimism (however the 'eschaton' is imagined) has been the desire to discern from the data of history a governing metastructure by which means the inexorable upward march toward perfectibility is ordered and upheld. This intuited dynamic has taken many forms and has often involved complicated arithmosophies: unilinealism, millenary chronological configurations, and tripartite, quaternary, and quinary.

1 It is important to note that the interrelationship between aeonic periodicity and cyclicism is a very close and subtle one. The demarcations between these historiographical methodologies have sometimes proved artificial: note Trompf's comments on the lack of notice paid to the motif of recurrence in the three staiś of Joachim de Fiore: G. W. Trompf, The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought: From Antiquity to the Reformation, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1979, 217. One hopes that Trompf's sequel (forthcoming) will incorporate what might be termed the occult recurrence historiographies of Blavatsky and others.

2 It is an interesting and ironical phenomenon that a particular modelling of history, such as Joachim's, which began with a priori religionist assumptions (and a specific reliance on Providence) could be refashioned so as to be primarily concerned with a secular eschaton. Joachim's 'historicization of eschatology' (Trompf, The Idea of Historical Recurrence, 217) allowed for new dispensations which could be strikingly anti-theistical (such as Comte's Positivism).
Perhaps the most influential proponent of a tripartite Age theory was Joachim de Fiore (c.1132-1202) whose theologisation of history entailed a semi-modalistic association between the three Persons of the Trinity and three post-Abrahamic Ages. John Passmore has noted the lineaments of Joachim’s influence:

Lessing’s three Revelations; Schelling’s Ages of Fate, of Nature, of Providence; Comte’s three stages of history - the religious stage, the metaphysical stage, the positive stage; Hitler’s first, second and third Reich, all echo the Joachist tripartition of history.

It is certain that Joachim’s schematisation of history, with its hints of recurrence and the motif of cyclicism, provided a continuing resource for diverse Age theorists. Nowhere approaching the same systematic analysis of Joachite influence has been afforded to esoteric historiographers, though the survey would appear promising. Marjorie Reeves’ and Warwick Gould’s researches into nineteenth century recensions of Joachim’s notion of a ‘new evangel’ repeatedly bring to the fore a plethora of names of individuals otherwise known primarily from the domain of esotericism: Cornelius

The unilineal view posits a steady progression throughout history; millenary chronological configurations adopt the motif of the thousand-year-rule from the Book of Revelation (often with a chiliast eschatology); Joachim de Fiore is the most influential of the ‘tripartite’ historiographers; the anonymous author of chapter seven of the Book of Daniel is representative of the quaternary modelling; Hesiod employed a five-part schema. Obviously any number of Ages can be selected as providing a template - whether for linear or recurrence models: other popular numbers are seven and twelve, the latter forming the basis for Zoroastrian cosmology. The literature is vast: see G. W. Trompf, The Idea of Historical Recurrence, 116-120, 216-220, 335-337 et passim; Richard Lewinsohn, Prophets and Prediction: The History of Prophecy from Babylon to Wall Street, Secker & Warburg, London, 1958, 143-157; John Passmore, The Perfectibility of Man, Duckworth, London, 1972, 212-238. For Hesiod see (‘Archaeology and Hesiod’s Five Ages’ in) Griffiths, Atlantis and Egypt, 237-248; id., ‘Did Hesiod Invent the “Golden Age”’ in ibid., 248-251.

It should be recalled that Joachim’s Age theory is more detailed and dynamic than is often assumed. Furthermore his three status model is predicated upon an adherence to traditionalist notions of the Great Week; indeed, Joachim sought something of a rapprochement between his tripartite modelling and the Augustinian schemata by inserting his novel configuration within the preordained structure. For Joachim’s extra-historical etatulae metastructures see Trompf, The Idea of Historical Recurrence, 204-220, esp. 217; for Joachim see Marjorie Reeves, The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1969; id., Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future, Harper & Row, New York, 1977.


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Agrippa (1486-1538), Pierre-Michel Vintras (1807-1875), Alphonse-Louis Constant (alias Eliphas Lévi, 1810-1875), Joseph-Antoine Boullan (1824-1893), James Pryse (1859-1942), and Stanislaus de Guaita (1861-1897), inter alia. Unfortunately, Reeves and Gould appear to subscribe to a reductionist sociological explanation for the preponderance of esotericists in their survey:

T]he Joachimism of the modern sects was also not the intellectual tradition we have traced in this study, it was, if anything, the occult tradition, and its prophetic works were an aspect of a loose and vague currency, if not of a lunatic fringe." Reeves and Gould appear somewhat confounded by the preponderance of discussion about Age theory, including Joachimism, in the Theosophical Society:

Strangely, it is in the Theosophical Society that we find the clearest usage of Eternal Evangel terminology in an otherwise eclectic, even jumbled, language of renewal and hope. Not that they were likely to have had any detailed knowledge."

Jacob Boehme

Garry Trompf has indicated that the Joachite schemata were mediated to Blavatsky by the works of Boehme and Lévi. In itself this is not a novel observation, but what makes Trompf's analysis acute is that he has proposed that the motif of Age theory in Reeves and Gould, Joachim of Fiore, 245. One suspects that the space devoted to Yeats and Joyce, and the esteem in which they are held by the authors, indicates that their esotericism (particularly in the case of Yeats) has been ignored in favour of their literary efforts. Yeats' theurgy appears to remain something of an enigma and an occasional embarrassment for many scholars, regardless of the massive literature it has engendered. For Yeats' esotericism see: F. A. C. Wilson, W. B. Yeats and Tradition, Methuen, London, 1968; Harbans Rai Bachchan, W. B. Yeats and Oculism: A study of his works in relation to Indian lore, the Cabala, Swedenborg, Boehme and Theosophy, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1965; Kathleen Raine, Yeats, The Tarot and The Golden Dawn, Dolmen Press, Dublin, 1972; William T. Gorski, Yeats and Alchemy, State University of New York Press, New York, 1996; Ellmann, Yeats: the Man, 1961; George Mills Harper, Yeats's Golden Dawn: The Influence of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn on the Life and Art of W. B. Yeats, Aquarian, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, 1987; R. F. Foster, W. B. Yeats: A Life. I: The Apprentice Mage, 1865-1914, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997.

Trompf, 'Macrohistory', 276-279. Reeves and Gould are of the opinion that Boehme (who never referred to Joachim) was not influenced by Joachimism, rather that there exists an air de famille between the tripartite models: Reeves and Gould, Joachim of Fiore, 23-25. For all of his concentration on triplicities, Boehme's septenary temporal scale would have been of more interest to Blavatsky (a point not made by Trompf): Jacob Boehme, Mysterium Magnum, or An Exposition of the First Book of Moses Called Genesis, vol. 1, trans. John Sparrow, John M. Watkins, London, 1965, ch.30, verses 34-46 (pp.240-243); ch.31, verses 38-45 (pp.255-256).
Boehme and Lévi is accompanied by a circular cosmogonic model of divine descent into matter and a concomitant ascent to 'respiritualization'; in broad terms, he suggests Blavatsky was attracted to those esoteric authorities whose cosmo-historiography combined Age theory and a dynamic of ascent/descent. Thus Boehme, who espoused a progressivist historiography of inclining ages, culminating in a Joachite-sounding Lilienzeit ('time of the lily') at which time 'the Holy Ghost will open any doors in the Wonders which Men now hold for impossible', also writes of a divine descent and an associated Providence-generated human ascent and palingenesis.

The descent of the divine, the 'coagulation', is instantiated that 'the hidden God is made manifest with [in] the visible things, for the delight and play of the divine Power: so that the invisible might play with the visible, and therein introduce itself into the sight and sense of itself'. This dialectical 'play' within and without the divine is pivotal to an understanding of Boehmian cosmo-history; crucially, the gradual differentiation within the divine (that is, from the inchoate precosmic God, 'Ungrund', to Trinitarian Personhood) is a process undergone extra-historically. This differentiation outside of time is continued into phenomenal Creation by a process of creatio ex Deo, as opposed to the more normative creatio ex nihilo. On this premise it is not illogical to conceive of phenomenal Creation as a continuation of the divine theogony and processus, ending only with the reintegration of redeemed

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1 Trompf, 'Macrohistory', 277-279. An earlier and less detailed discussion of the centrality of 'a cyclical world view' in gnostic thought is to be found in Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'A Dynamic Typological approach to the Problem of “Post-Gnostic” Gnosticism' in ARIES, XVI, 1992, 35-36.

11 For Joachite palingenesis see Merkel, 'Aurora', 305.
14 See David Walsh, 'A Mythology of Reason: The Persistence of Pseudo-Science in the Modern World' in McKnight, Science, 152-156. Boehme's programmatical dialecticism was an obvious antecedent of later Hegelian configurations. Only recently has Hegel's debt to the Western esoteric heritage begun to be explored: significantly, Blavatsky noted similarities between Boehme and Hegel, whose fundamental doctrines of speculative philosophy bear a striking resemblance to those of Boehme (Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. III, 34). For Hegel see Walsh, 'A Mythology', 158-164; Hanratty, Studies in Gnosticism, 81-116.
manifest creation into the suprasensible Eternal. Thus the history of humanity can be seen as an analogue for the self-revelation of God.

Aside from the necessity for a detailed theodicy which this cosmogony engenders, one facet of Boehme’s Weltgeschichte becomes clear: even though he may at times appear pessimistic about the human condition, and sometimes seem to posit an ontological alienation, his espousal of a cosmic (thus divine) dialecticism allowed for a rejection of Gnostic ontic dualism and an acceptance of a necessarily temporalised progressivist dynamic. An inherent in Boehme’s philosophy is that evil, particularly the Fall of angels and humanity, is a necessary part of history as, without it, palingenesis cannot ever occur. Evil is thus reconfigured to become a dynamic of self-arrest - a contravention of the process of reintegration and fulfilment. Perhaps most significant for Blavatskian Theosophy, Boehmian objective dialecticism created a systematics of ever-inclining spirals, with each human effort toward achieving the ‘yes in all things’ ensuring incremental progress in the direction of ultimate cosmic transfiguration. Boehme thus crafted a telos of progressivism and an eschaton of

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17 A concise study of the motif of alienation and its ‘gnostic themes’ in Boehme see Hanratty, Studies in Gnosticism, 59ff.
18 Boehme’s dialecticism is everywhere evident in his works: In this consideration are found two qualities, a good one and an evil one, which are in each other as one thing in the world, in all powers, in the stars and the elements, as also in all the creatures; and no creature in the flesh, in the natural life, can subsist, unless it hath the two qualities (Jacob Boehme, The Aurora, trans. John Sparrow, John M. Watkins, London, 1960, ch. 1, verse 3 (pp. 39-40); also ch. 2, verses 3-10 (pp. 50-52)).
19 Boehme explicitly rejected a classical Gnostic dualism: For the God of the holy world, and the God of the dark world, are not two Gods; there is but one only God: he himself is all being, essence or substance; he is evil and good, heaven and hell, light and darkness, eternity and time, beginning and end (Boehme, Mysterium Magnum, vol. 1, ch. 8, verse 24 (pp. 36-37)).
20 For Blavatsky, of course, Boehmian cosmicised ‘evil’ is reconstrued as the expected by-product of the descent into matter, and thus has no moral component. For Blavatsky, ‘personal sin’ (to adopt a theological metaphor) is the desire to battle against the evolutionary impetus toward respiritualisation, and to prioritise ‘matter’ - and is thus a species of self-arrest which will carry a karmic retribution (for which see infra ch. 13).
21 Boehme occasionally employed the model of clockwork (’Uhrwerk’) as a metaphor for progression through harmony; evil thus upsets the temperance (the alchemical term ‘Temperatur’) of the workings. Andrew Weeks rightly distances Boehme’s use of the clock topos from that of the Deists: Weeks, Boehme, 189-190. Weeks has also stated that he would very much like to ‘cleanse Boehme of the odium of occultism’: Weeks, Boehme, 9.
reintegration into the divine.\textsuperscript{22}

It would be difficult to over-estimate the influence of the Boehmian contribution to Western esotericism; indeed, Trompf has noted that the works of the Philosophus der Einfältigen (‘philosopher of the simple folk’) ‘may be considered seminal reflection for the West’.\textsuperscript{23} The influence of Boehme and his continuators over Blavatsky and subsequent generations of Theosophists is great: Franz Hartmann, an intimate of Blavatsky’s, noted in his 1891 book, The Life and Doctrines of Jacob Boehme, the God-Taught Philosopher, that:

I have carefully compared the doctrines of Boehme with those of the Eastern sages [Masters], as laid down in the ‘Secret Doctrine’ and in the religious literature of the East, and I find the most remarkable harmony between them in their esoteric meaning.\textsuperscript{24}

\textit{Eliphas Lévi}

No less of an influence over Blavatsky was the rather more historically accessible figure of Eliphas Lévi.\textsuperscript{25} As Trompf has indicated, Lévi imbibed a variant of the Joachite Age theory during his early years in the seminary of Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet in the 1820s.\textsuperscript{26} The degree to which direct influence can be attributed to Joachim is problematic, nevertheless notions of the tripartition of history and the coming Age of the Paraclete were the common stock of historiographical speculation in

\textsuperscript{22} Blavatsky explained Boehme’s remarkable metaphysics by claiming that he was a reincarnation ‘of one, who, in a previous birth, had attained through extreme purity of life and efforts in the right direction almost to a Yogi state of holiness and saintship’: Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. XII, 371-372. It should be noted that Boehme’s progressivist telos underpins Blavatsky’s intentions only for those on the path to respiritualisation: i.e., for the current Fifth Root Race in the Fourth Round trying to divest itself of the pull of matter. Although the first Rounds are schematically necessary (to explain humanity’s descent into materiality/materialism), it is really only the ascent to the Absolute which constitutes the soteriological core of the system.

\textsuperscript{23} Trompf, ‘Macrohistory’, 277: see also Weeks, Boehme, 3. One suspects that Boehme’s fame is enhanced, rather than degraded, by his rejection of pagan antiquity and surprisingly small debt to the \textit{Hermetica}: cf. Merkel, ‘Aurora’.


\textsuperscript{25} For Lévi see also \textit{infra} ch. 29.

\textsuperscript{26} Trompf, ‘Macrohistory’, 277-278; McIntosh, \textit{Eliphas Lévi}, 75-76. Lévi seemed especially enthralled by his superior, the Abbé Frère-Colonna, who espoused a quatripartite Age theory, though one with obvious Joachite resonances (Alphonse Louis Constant [Lévi], \textit{L’Assomption de la femme}, Le Gallois, Paris, 1841: quoted in ibid; see also Williams, \textit{Eliphas Lévi}, 8-9).
Lévi’s day. Significantly, especially for Blavatsky, Lévi would later revise his vision to encapsulate the septenary periodisation of the Benedictine abbot Trithemius of Sponheim (Johann Heidenberg of Trittenheim, 1462-1516), who proposed that angelic governors (the ‘secondary intelligences’) of the seven planetary spheres would each reign over the earth for a period of 354 solar years and four lunar months. Indeed, in a manuscript unpublished during his lifetime, Lévi extended his reliance upon a seven-fold periodicity:

Darwin’s theory does not contradict the Bible ... the great week of the creation is a series of Geological epochs.

Lévi’s various partitionings of history were coupled with an ascent/descent framework borrowed in the main from his readings among the literature of the Kabbalah, in its various historical configurations. Lévi proposed the Kabbalah to be the *fons et origo* of esoteric philosophy, the secret source behind the conceptions of such

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27 The influence of Swedenborg is another factor in Lévi’s arithmosophy, though Wilkinson has shown that his familiarity with Swedenborg’s works may not have been as intimate as has sometimes been thought. Wilkinson, The Dream, 19-54. Cf. also McIntosh, Eliphas Lévi, 188. Lévi’s notion of ‘three worlds’ (a common Swedenborgian motif) is to be seen regularly in his first major magical text, *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* of 1856: Lévi, Transcendental Magic, 47 et passim.

28 Trithemius’ historiography is set out in his *De septem secundeis* of 1508 (published as *De septem secundeis, id est, intelligentis, sive spiritibus orbes post Deum moventibus Ubellus sive Chronologia mystica*, Apud Ioannem Birckmannum, Cologne, 1518). For the relevant details, and Trithemius’ debt to Pietro d’Abano, see Noel L. Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology: A Chapter in the Controversy over Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1999, 133-135. Lévi’s first references to *De septem secundeis* are to be found in his Le Testament de la liberté (J. Frey, Paris, 1848) and later enlarged in his *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* of 1856: Lévi, Transcendental Magic, 352-355. According to Lévi’s reading of Trithemius, the seventh Age, that of Michael, would begin in November, 1879, issuing in an era of political and religious peace. (The Age of Michael would then give way to another round, the fourth since Creation, beginning again with Oriful). It is highly significant that Blavatsky, who read *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* avidly (cf., eg., Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. I, 283; vol. III, 208ff; vol. IV, 262; vol. V, 60ff), seems not to have referred to the date which would have coincided with the first growths of Theosophy in India. Given Blavatsky’s aptitude for the promotion of her Society, this silence remains something of a mystery. Kingsford and Maitland (the latter obtained Lévi’s own annotated copy of the 1567 printing of *De septem secundeis* from Baron Spedalieri) believed that their own work was a fulfilment of the prophecy: see Maitland, *Life of Anna Kingsford*, vol. I, 431; vol. II, 168-169, 302. Godwin has noted that later commentators have calculated that the date should rather have been 1881, though the 1879 prediction is that with which Maitland would have been familiar: cf. Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 337, 345. See also Harrison, *The Transcendental Universe*, 208n30.

29 Levi (sic), The Paradoxes, 153.

30 It appears that Lévi had read Adolphe Franck’s *La kabbale ou la philosophie des Hébreux*, published by Hachette in Paris in 1843: see Wilkinson, *The Dream*, 40, 43. Other works of which he was fond (mostly, it should be noted, of Renaissance Christian Kabbalah) are listed throughout *Transcendental Magic: Lévi, Transcendental Magic*, esp. 20.
luminaries as Boehme and Swedenborg. There can be little doubt that Lévi’s reputation as a theurgist and Kabbalist is grossly overstated: for all of its breadth, the conceptual component of his Kabbalism is slight and lacks erudition and consistency.

Gershom Scholem has variously referred to his ‘brilliant misunderstandings and misrepresentations’ and ‘supreme charlatanism’. Nevertheless, Lévi can best be summarised as a popularist and synthetist; he discerned the dialecticism at the core of Boehme’s cosmology and was able to reinvigorate the concept of theurgic magic, predicated upon the Kabbalistic Tree of the Sefirot and his notion of the Astral Light, by attempting an idiosyncratic dialectical rapprochement between science and religion: ‘Science and faith can and ought mutually to counterbalance each other and produce equilibrium; they can never amalgamate’. Magic, accordingly, became an empiricised faith, a religion palatable to the enlightened; it is interpreted as the knowledge of God’s processes, figured as the serpent of Genesis. Magic allows the initiate to ‘re-create’ by employing sacred formulae to call the divine down through the Kabbalistic spheres and into manifest form at the command of the magician:

So does doctrine serve in all hieratic religions to veil the secret of those forces of nature which the initiate has at his disposal; religious formulae are the summaries of those words full of mystery and power which make the gods descend from heaven and yield themselves to the will of men.

Lévi was certainly very familiar with Boehme; he often employed distinctly Boehmian terminology such as ‘the yea and nay’: see in ibid., 52. It is worth quoting Lévi’s understanding of the Kabbalah at some length:

All truly dogmatic religions have issued from the kabbalah and return therein; whatsoever is grand or scientific in the religious dreams of all the illuminated, Jacob Boehme, Swedenborg, Saint Martin, &c., is borrowed from the Kabbalah; all masonic associations owe to it their secrets and their symbols. The Kabbalah alone consecrates the alliance of universal reason and the divine Word; it establishes, by the counterpoise of two forces apparently opposed, the eternal balance of being; it only reconciles reason with faith, power with liberty, science with mystery; it has the keys of the present, past and future (in ibid., 20).


Scholem, Major Trends, 2; id., Kabbalah, Meridian, New York, 1974, 203.

For the Astral Light see infra ch. 10. Cf also Lévi (sic), The Paradoxes, 10.

Lévi, Transcendental Magic, (1896) 182.

Ibid.
By grafting Swedenborgian, Hermetic and alchemical figurations of universal correspondences onto the Sefirotic Tree, and then appropriating the trumps (court cards) from the tarot and allocating each to a pathway between the sefirot, Lévi was able to fill the Kabbalistic glyph with a plenitude of esoteric iconography. The aspiring magician, furnished with a host of 'active' correspondences and images, was thereby enabled to ascend through the spheres for himself by engaging his will to impress such imagery upon the Astral Light, Lévi's universal agent. The Astral Light, in response, would deliver reassuring images to the magus, ensuring him of his regulated ascent and thus systematically illuminating his via ascendendi. Lévi's technology of magical ascent was predictably predicated upon the traditional analogue of man as microcosm and the phenomenal universe as macrocosm - the esoteric correspondence par excellence. By such means, theurgic magic was represented as entailing simultaneously the command of nature (and the obviation of 'natural laws') and the contemplation of God. Such experience propelled the adept to complete 'the supreme circle' ('Atziluth') and come fully into identification with the divine.

It should be stressed that Lévi's philosophy of magic was neither novel nor entirely internally consistent. What attracted Blavatsky, aside from Lévi's religious relativism and his modest engagement with the development of an anti-materialist and anti-naturalist occult paradigm, was the quite fluid ascent and descent infrastructure of his Kabbalism and his optimistic progressivism - the latter an uncommon feature in a 'Post-Faustian' era wherein ceremonial magic was more often deemed a romantic

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37 For Lévi's syncretistic occult tarot see infra p. 150n52.
38 A more detailed examination of Lévi's occultism is not germane to the present study, but note that each section of Transcendental Magic ('Doctrine' and 'Ritual') has 22 chapters - one for each tarot trump (and Hebrew letter). Cf. also Levi (sic), The Paradoxes.
40 Lévi, Transcendental Magic, 50; Trompf, 'Macrohistory', 278.
41 Cf., eg., Lévi's various understandings of the traditional four worlds of the Kabbalah: Lévi, Transcendental Magic, 259, 372; McIntosh, Eliphas Lévi, 147.
42 Lévi (sic), The Paradoxes, 153 et passim. Blavatsky is occasionally contemptuous of Lévi's vestigial Roman Catholicism. The cause for much of her attitude is to be found in Lévi himself who, for all of his relativism, retains an equivocal relationship with Catholic dogma, sacramentalism, and ceremonial: see Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. XIV, 239-240; vol. VI, 133.
fallacy or diabolical than a viable means of personal gnosis. Levi's emphatic reassurances that the Kabbalah was not solely a Jewish or Christian mystical scriptural hermeneutic, nor indeed that it was dependent upon Abrahamic religions, opened it up as a universally-applicable magical *modus operandi*.

The result of this appeal to a Kabbalistic *prisca theologia* was that all claims to religious exclusivity would become moot, and that any comparable modality of mystical speculation could become incorporated into a sort of pansophic Kabbalistic gnosticism:

> All other doctrines are made fruitful [by the Kabbalah] ... the true Kabalist [*sic*] is more catholic that M. de Maistre, more protestant that Luther, more Jewish than the chief rabbi, and a prophet more than Mahomet. Is he not above systems and the passions which darken truth? Can he not at will bring together their scattered rays, so variously reflected in all the fragments of that broken mirror which is universal faith - fragments which are taken by men for so many opposite beliefs?

It might also be noted that the Kabbalah, as Levi envisaged it, did not presuppose a dualistic anticosmism: reflecting its origins, the Kabbalah bespeaks an admirable creation.

Further, theodicy in Levi is reminiscent of Boehme:

> Evil then, is the resistance which confirms the effort of good, and so that is why Jesus Christ was not afraid to say: 'It must needs be that

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44 Levy, *The History of Magic*, 3, 20, 101-112, esp. 28. Trompf has noted the relative ease with which Kabbalism could be associated with figurations of descent in Sufism and the Indic Brahmin/Atman 'circle': Trompf, 'Macrohistory', 278. See also infra ch. 28.

scandals should come! 47

Transformation results from eternal motion, which is the essential law of vitality; check this and enforce a stability at any stage of evolution, and you create a real death. 48

Giordano Bruno

It is clear that Blavatsky’s voracious reading among the literature of Western esotericism availed her of many examples of an aeonic periodicity, macrocyclicism, optimistic progressivism, and an ascent/descent motif. In this context, Trompf has illuminated the influence of Boehme and Lévi. Of others who may have influenced Blavatsky, an obvious contender is Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), a man indirectly responsible for the flowering of scholarly studies in esotericism generally. 49

Bruno has suffered at the hands of many reductionists: he was burned at the stake as an atheistical heretic and apostate, was later believed to have been a proto-martyr to the causes of modernity, anticlericalism, and anti-papism, and was subsequently


proclaimed to be the embodiment of a ‘full Egyptian Hermetist’ and ‘Magus’. More pertinent for the present purpose is to acknowledge Blavatsky’s insistence on the identity of Brunian and Theosophical thought:

[T]he martyred philosopher, Giordano Bruno, seems to have come to the same conclusions ... [and] to have taken them bodily from our Occult Doctrines.51

Indeed, Blavatsky published portions of a ‘Life of Bruno’ in her magazine, The Theosophist:

We regret - space forbidding - to be unable to reproduce it not only more fully, but to give in each instance chapter and verse from the Aryan philosophies [Theosophy] of which Giordano Bruno could know nothing, and in which the reader would find a complete identity of thought and conclusion.52

Bruno’s visioning of time incorporated notions of the Great Year during which the heavenly bodies would realign themselves to their original configurations; for him, idiosyncratically, the Great Year assumed both cosmo-historic and theogonic proportions.53 This celestial revolution is reported in La Cena de la ceneri (The Ash Wednesday Supper, 1584/5) as requiring 49000 years; in Spaccio de la bestia

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50 Yates, Giordano Bruno, 286,308, 332, 350, 356, 451 et passim. Yates’ thesis regarding the influence of the Hermetica on Bruno is overstated, at least to the extent that it reduces other significant factors to subsidiary concerns, but cf. the more balanced approach in id., Lull & Bruno: Collected Essays, Volume 1, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1982, 129-272. For comment on the various interpretations of Bruno, see Mendoza, The Acentric Labyrinth, xv-xxiv. Certainly Blavatsky, for all of her protestations to the contrary, encouraged the notion that he was a martyr to ‘the religious intolerance of the Popish Church’: Blavatsky, Isis Unveiled, vol. 1, 94ff. Nevertheless, Blavatsky anticipated Yates’ thesis, in a rarely noted passage in Isis Unveiled:

But for the opportune appearance of Berti’s authoritative work, we would have continued to revere Bruno as a martyr, whose bust was deservedly set high in the Pantheon of Exact Science, crowned with laurel by the hand of Draper. But now we see that their hero of an hour is neither atheist, materialist, nor positivist, but simply a Pythagorean who taught the philosophy of Upper Asia, and claimed to possess the powers of the magicians (in ibid., 97-98).


52 Ibid, 293. Blavatsky states that the ‘Life of Bruno’ was translated by Mr. N. Trübner; de Zirkoff was unable to identify the author. It is likely to have been Domenico Berti: see Blavatsky, Isis Unveiled, vol. 1, 94.

53 For the ‘great year’ see Campion, The Great Year. It is unfortunate that Bruno is absent from Campion’s discussion. See also Trompf, The Idea of Historical Recurrence, 11-12 et passim.
trionfante (Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast, 1584) the period is 36000 years. Interestingly, in the latter work, Bruno equates the ‘revolution of the year of the world’ with the ‘Day of Judgment’, thus implying that the ‘great year’ is equivalent to the lifetime of Jove and that from the ensuing conflagration following the god’s demise, a new firmament may be born. The gods themselves are thus subject to the powers of ‘mutation’. In a later work Eroici Furori (The Heroic Frenzies, 1584/5), Bruno emphasises the cyclical nature of his aeonic thinking:

The revolution or great year of the universe will be in that space of time during which we return to a certain state of things after passing through other infinitely varied and contrasted states ... [as with the] solar year in which the principle of one arrangement of things coincides with the close of a contrary arrangement, and the principle of the latter with the close of the former.

For Blavatskian Theosophy it is of tremendous significance that in a late Latin poem, De Immenso (On the Boundless, 1591), Bruno summarily rejected the notion of the ‘eternal return’ as typical of the ‘fantastic’ dreams of philosophers. For him, all manifest creation, ordered as it is by cycles, is in constant motion: history may well offer echoes of one age in another, but it will never be precisely replicated. One consequence of this historiography is that it brings to the fore questions of teleology and eschatology.

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Bruno, *The Expulsion*, 96. This concept of the death of the god at the end of the age would also have been known to Blavatsky from Hinduism: cf., eg., Mendoza, *The Acentric Labyrinth*, 146-147, 164; see also supra ch. 12.

Michel, *The Cosmology*, 269. Spatial or geometrical modelling of Bruno’s cosmology has proved elusive; so, too, ascription to him of ‘cyclicism’ is problematical, though, one suspects, necessary: see in ibid., 277-283.

One example of a philosophical school which appears to have propounded a theory of ‘exact recurrence’ is that of the Pythagoreans: see Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence*, 66-67. The significance of the rejection of exact recurrence to Theosophists has to do with their progressivism: see infra ch. 27.
Space disallows anything but a discursive observation of a Brunian universe of remarkable philosophical complexity. Bruno’s metaphysics of a transcendent God is rendered in apophatic terminology: God is ultimately ineffable. 60 Disavowing the symbolic and metaphorical semiotics of the mystic, Bruno as cosmologer sought a modelling of the divine which would communicate discursively his belief that the transcendent and immutable Unity of God is nevertheless abundantly present \textit{within} Creation. 61 Further, and somewhat ironically given the manner of his death, he wished to avoid accusations of pantheism. 62 The terminological means which Bruno sought in order to expound his cosmology he ultimately found in Plotinian emanationism. 63

According to Plotinus, cosmogony can be construed as the process of the crystallisation of the infinite One into manifest multiplicity. 64 Concurrent with this necessary \textit{descensus} is the concretised hierarchy of being which results; perfection is to be found in the original and unfragmented unity, with each step down into materialisation instantiating a concomitant falling away from perfection. An inherent of Plotinus’ cosmology is the ontological degradation of matter, removed, as it is, from its divine origin and ever afterwards seeking reunification.

60 Mendoza, \textit{The Acentric Labyrinth}, 137-151.
61 One must here make a sometimes arbitrary distinction between cosmological elucidation in Bruno (usually described in metaphorical terms) and cosmological \textit{pronunciamenti} (normally, though not always, expressed discursively).
62 Mendoza considers Bruno to have occasionally come close to a ‘crude panentheism’. ‘Panentheism’, coined by K. C. F. Krause (1781-1832), suggests that although God is not to be identified with the universe, the latter is a creation \textit{within} his being. The use of the term with regard to Bruno is highly problematical, not least because the latter postdated Bruno by centuries. Indeed, Mendoza makes no mention of Krause at all: see in \textit{ibid.}, 248-249.

One suspects that Panentheism will come to the fore as a self-referent for many practising esotericists and for those from related domains, particularly Neopagan witchcraft and goddess religion. It might well have more intrinsic value as a means of distinguishing \textit{between} various esoteric theologies and cosmologies (not least because of the Freemasonic and Swedenborgian allegiances of its originator): see Hanegraaff, \textit{New Age}, 398n60.

63 For precision of terms, it should be noted that Bruno adopted Plotinian language when discussing emanationist cosmogony, but rejected outright the notion of fixed heavenly spheres as articulated by Neoplatonic-Pythagorean cosmologists (and predicated upon the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic mechanistic model). Blavatsky intuited his reliance on ‘the Alexandrian Platonists, and the later Kabalists’: Blavatsky, \textit{Isis Unveiled}, vol. 1, 94. With Bruno’s avid Egyptophilia in mind, it is worth considering the probable Egyptian influences upon Plotinus’ emanationism; for the latter see Karl W. Luckert, \textit{Egyptian Light and Hebrew Fire: Theological and Philosophical Roots of Christendom in Evolutionary Perspective}, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1991, 241-269.

In the tradition of Plotinus, and such Renaissance Neoplatonists as Marsilio Ficino, Bruno adopted the idiom of emanationism, positing a necessary separation of the ‘primordial principle’ into two:

[I]n nature, it is necessary to recognize two kinds of substance, one which is form and the other which is matter.65

Elsewhere Bruno notes that ‘form’ and ‘matter’ may be rendered as two substances, one able to act, the other to be acted upon. Michel notes that the former is ‘the soul of the universe’, the latter is ‘matter’ (defined normatively).66 Crucially, neither ‘form’ nor matter may be independently present:

One power implicates the other; I mean, having been determined, it necessarily determines the other.67

Bruno diverges from Plotinus, and normative Neoplatonism, in eschewing all notion of hierarchy. Matter, an ontic potentiality of the One - and no less intrinsic to it than ‘form’ (or soul) - cannot be held to exist in dualistic opposition to ‘soul’ as the two proceed from the primary Unity: Michel has deemed God, Soul, and Matter to be the ‘three indivisibles’ in Brunian thought.68 It follows that the manifest cosmos is a ‘reflection’ or a ‘shadow’ of God and takes part in his eternity.69 Matter is thus eternal, though its exterior manifestation will constantly be reconfigured under the influence of ‘form’ or ‘soul’.70 By energising matter, ‘form’ ensures unending cosmic mobility. As ‘form’, the cause of this mobility, is not exterior to the manifest universe, but part of its constituent being, all the movements of matter (which, when temporalised, constitute history) are ‘theodiscised’. It is a natural corollary that the processus of history, however defined or interpreted, is in some way a divine self-disclosure; the incidence of this prime Theosophical tenet in the writings of such a luminary as Bruno was not lost on Blavatsky’s nephew (by marriage), the Theosophist Johnston (1867-1931):

44 Ibid., 79.
45 Ibid., 126.
46 Ibid., 88. Indeed, Bruno could argue that God had need of the world just as much as the world had need of God: see Bruno, Cause, Principle and Unity, xx (editors’ Introduction).
[On the writings of Bruno:] Through the revolution of worlds through space around their suns, from their order, their constancy and their measure, the mind comprehends the progress and conditions of men, and their duties towards each other, the Bible, the sacred book of man, is in the heavens; there does man find written the word of God.71

Bruno’s emanatory descent framework is coupled with what Frances Yates has termed, ‘the Hermetic spring upwards’ or ascent.72 Depending on ‘the ladders of occult sympathies running through all nature’,73 the magus possessed of the furor divinus can bring his intellect, the seat of his soul, to bear upon nature and ascend to contemplation of the universal soul:

You can henceforth rise to the concept, I do not say of the supreme and most excellent principle, which has been excluded from our inquiry, but to the concept of the world soul, insofar as it is the act of everything and the potency of everything, and insofar as it is present in its entirety in everything.74

Yates has attributed the dynamism of the descent/ascent motif in Bruno to his innovative appropriation of classical and Renaissance mnemonics, Lullism, and Hermetism.75 For the present work it suffices to note that Bruno’s own words on the matter presage Blavatsky:

I would like you to note that nature descends to the production of things, and intellect ascends to the knowledge of them, by one and the same ladder. Both ways proceed from unity to unity, passing

72 Yates, Giordano Bruno, 246.
73 Ibid., 248-249.
74 Bruno, Cause, Principle and Unity, fourth dialogue, 81; cf. Greenburg, The Infinite, 144-159. See also Michel, The Cosmology, 118-121.
75 Frances A. Yates, The Art of Memory, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1969, 197-309. Ramon Lull (c.1235-1316), attempted throughout his life to create an art transcending cultural and historical specificities, thus with universalist aspirations: the most well-known version of which is the Ars Magna of 1305-1308. The Neoplatonic, and likely Kabbalistic, component of his works is obvious: Faivre has noted that ‘it is an ars ascendedi as well as descendendi’ (Antoine Faivre, ‘Ancient and Medieval Sources of Modern Esoteric Movements’ in Faivre & Needleman, eds., Modern Esoteric Spirituality, 57-58).
Indeed, the similarities between Bruno's vast cosmo-historical philosophy and Blavatskian Theosophy are rather interesting, and more than deserving of individual analysis. Each shares such notions as the issue of countervailing and co-dependent matter and spirit (or 'form') from the unconditioned Absolute; the rejection of any ab nihilo cosmogony; the acceptance of Pythagorean or Hermetic metempsychosis; and the perception of cosmic motility as indicative of a universal soul and mens.

Johnston noted the 'harmony' between Bruno and Theosophy:

In the works of this noble philosopher and hero we find all that is vital in the Secret Doctrine of the ages, and more, we find a divine harmony with the one truth, for ever eternal in the heavens.

No further proof of Bruno's influence over (and, indeed, possible oversight of!) the Theosophical Society is required than to note that the second President, Annie Besant, deemed herself to be his reincarnation, and that the Sydney radio station named in her honour was allocated the call sign 2GB.

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76 Bruno, Cause, Principle and Unity, fifth dialogue, 93.
77 This similarity is somewhat less surprising if, as Mendoza believes, Bruno's theology is reminiscent of the Hinduism of the earlier Upanishads: Mendoza, The Acentric Labyrinth, 146-147, 164.
78 For Bruno's metempsychosis see Bruno, The Expulsion, 34-35, 94; for the occurrences of transmigration in the Corpus Hermeticum see Brian P. Copenhaver, Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English translation, with notes and introduction, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, 74, 226 (Asclepius 12). In analyses of Blavatskian theories of karma and reincarnation too little emphasis is placed upon the influence of Western models upon her thinking, especially that of Plato. Blavatsky was convinced that reincarnation was a staple theologoumenon of the antique West and taught by Jesus: Blavatsky, Collected Writings, VD. X, 56-59. A good and concise analysis is offered in Hanegraaff, New Age, 455, 481-482. As noted by Hanegraaff, it should be remembered that Blavatsky’s reliance on a nineteenth century hybridised Entwicklung meant that her schemata precluded the human reincarnating as an animal, except in most peculiar circumstances: ‘the natural law of evolution ... proceeds spirally in curves that never re-enter into themselves, but ever ascend to so-called higher planes’: Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. XI, 151; see also Neufeldt, In Search of Utopia, 247. As such, Blavatskian reincarnationism is best understood as ‘ascendant metempsychosis’. Blavatsky noted ‘the belief of Bruno in the Pythagorean metempsychosis’: Blavatsky, Isis Unveiled, vol. 1, 95.
79 Mendoza, The Acentric Labyrinth, 84-85.
80 Johnston, ‘Giordano Bruno’, 175.
Boehme, Lévi and Bruno are three examples of theoreticians of cosmology, time, and history whose influence can be discerned in Blavatskian Theosophy. Others might have been selected, among whom Swedenborg and Schelling (1775-1854) may well prove significant. Delineating the various tributaries which fed into Blavatsky's extraordinary synthesis is an enormous task, but one which is of present concern only in so far as it contributes to an understanding of the topos of the Master within Theosophy. Those few authors who have commented upon the possible origins or precursors of the Masters within Western thought (as opposed to the vast majority who have identified Theosophical Master-ship with Hindu adepthood) have isolated prototypical Masters within the 'Unknown Superiors' of Baron von Hund's Freemasonic Rite of Strict Observance, or in the legendary Christian Rosenkreutz, or in the mythic stories which acrete to such esoteric adventurers as Cagliostro, or even in the spirit guides of Spiritualism. While such notables may have provided something of an historical template for Serapis Bey, Tuitit Bey, Koot Hoomi, Morya, Djual Kul, Hilarion, inter alia, the conceptual component of Theosophy (as mediated by the

It would be obvious to the reader that a prime antecedent for Blavatskian ascensus/descensus imaging and macrocyclicism (and one which influenced each of the three esotericists examined supra, though to sharply varying degrees) is the Corpus Hermeticum (together with the Asclepius). For a brief examination of the Hermetica see infra ch. 23.

A study of the influence of the German Idealists upon Blavatsky might prove fertile ground. Schelling is especially interesting as his reworkings of Swedenborg indicate his direct esoteric 'credentials': see Friedemann Horn, Schelling and Swedenborg: Mysticism and German Idealism, trans. George F. Dole, Swedenborg Foundation, West Chester, Pennsylvania, 1997. Schiller would also have been of interest to Blavatsky through her acknowledged hero, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, who translated much of Schiller into English and who referred regularly to the German within his esoteric novels, particularly Zanoni (Blavatsky's favourite): see T. H. S. Escott, Edward Bulwer, First Baron Lytton of Knebworth: A Social, Personal and Political Monograph, George Routledge and Sons, London, 1910, 281. For Blavatsky on Schiller cf., eg., Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. XII, 79; vol. IX, 60.

Although not strictly within the purview of this study, a history of occultism qua occultism is important for a full understanding of Blavatsky (and remains unwritten). In this context Swedenborg's rejection of the traditional esoteric Naturphilosophie for Cartesian dualism would figure as perhaps the most significant precursor for Blavatsky's attempts to rationalise esotericism: see the formidable anthology of Swedenborg studies in Robin Larsen, Stephen Larsen, James F. Lawrence & William Ross Woofenden, eds., Emanuel Swedenborg: A Continuing Vision. A Pictorial Biography & Anthology of Essays & Poetry, Swedenborg Foundation, New York, 1988. The ramifications of the entry of scientific rationalism into esotericism, particularly within the nineteenth century, are enormous; cf. Hanegraaff's acknowledgement that one of Faivre's intrinsic characteristics of esotericism would have to be reformulated: Hanegraaff, New Age, 424-429. Of the other esoteric historiographers and cosmographers who may have influenced Blavatsky, Martinès de Pasqually and Jean-Baptiste Willermoz are likely candidates; Hugh Urban has noted the emanationist character of their cosmographies in a brave comparative paper: Hugh B. Urban, 'Elitism and Esotericism: Strategies of Secrecy and Power in South India Tantra and French Freemasonry' in Numen, XLIV:1, January, 1997, 1-38.

Masters to Blavatsky) and their idiosyncratic rôles with regard to the dynamics of transmission, revelation, authority, and pedagogy in Theosophy are wholly unrelated to these ‘crypto-Masters’. It follows that the Masters of Theosophy are more likely the products (if such they be) of Blavatsky’s very broad acquaintance with esoteric cosmologies and anthropologies than of regurgitated mythotypes from earlier formulators; regardless, a likely fruitless inquiry into the aetiology of the Masters will avail nothing toward a typology. It is the type of the Theosophical Master which would, to a significant extent, define Theosophy to the world at large, and which would provide the springboard for future reformulations throughout the twentieth century and, no doubt, into the twenty-first. As Part Four of the present work aims to show, Blavatsky’s presentation of the Master gestalt is steeped in exactly the sort of macrohistorical and metaphysical speculation as depicted in the works of Boehme, Lévi, and Bruno. Although the Master qua gestalt is not readily reducible to one form or another, it is clear that the only means to isolate significant types of the Master is by a close analysis of the infrastructural underpinnings of Theosophy, for - in a very real sense - the Master is Theosophy.\(^5\)

**A Renovated Prisca Theologia**

Blavatsky’s primary motivation for the publication of *The Secret Doctrine* was to establish the veracity of an esoteric prisca theologia and to demonstrate its significance for the modern world. She averred that only the Ancient Wisdom could arrest the precipitous decline into materialism, naturalism, ‘scientism’, and reactionary ossified cultus. She was by no means unique in her polemics, but what separated her from others with similar purpose was that she integrated her bêtes noires into a macrohistorical and cosmological pageant of Entwicklung which reduced such philosophies to the status of devolutionary, self-arresting and, thus, ‘evil’ (according to the Blavatskian paradigm) diversions. To some degree she was required to parry with, and even occasionally emulate, her enemies, particularly with regard to the

\(^5\) This notion is underscored by the intimate relationship (in fact, identity) between the Master and the text: see *infra* ch. 23, 25.
forcefully persuasive conclusions of Darwinist evolutionism. That she was able to
maintain the elite ontology of the human as well as the majesty and voluntarism of the
divine, while at the same time raise evolutionism beyond the biological and social to
the domain of cosmic imperatives, is testament to her ingenuity:

The reason of all evolution is the gaining of experience. The
Dhyâni-Chohans are made to pass through the 'schools of life':-
'God goes to school'.

The means which she adopted for this effort were not primarily the gleaning of Oriental
religious motifs as has been customarily assumed, but the insightful analysis of trends
present in Western esotericism, trends which have even today garnered little scholarly
interest. While the leitmotif of ascent and descent is an acknowledged mainstay of
esoteric thought, little curiosity has been aroused by its common associates,
macro cyclicism and Age theory.

Blavatsky's fusion of such notions as heavenly ascent, aeonic periodicity, and cyclic
historiography allowed her to broaden sufficiently the parameters of her Theosophy so
as wholly to encompass discrete religions and philosophies (such as Christianity and
Darwinism) - accepting some parts, rejecting others - and ultimately to propose 'the
synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy'. This synthesis, once examined in
isolation from the morass of detail which she appended rather futilely in order to
'prove' it, does indeed propose a soteriology reminiscent of optimistic gnosticism, 'a
striving for “restoration of lost wholeness”'. It would be hard to find words more
opposite to the Blavatskian synthesis than those of Bruno: 'from unity to unity,
passing through a multitude of middle terms'.

In so doing Blavatskian Theosophy is occasionally faced with a dilemma: if there are more
successful species than homo sapiens, and yet of an 'unevolved' nature (such as viruses), how is
anthropocentrism maintained as the central pivot of evolutionism? Thus it is that an Australian
Theosophist was able to state of 'rabbits, foxes, cattle ticks, and other pests' (and, by extension, all
vermin) that '[i]t is true that these may be superior forms, and therefore more suitable for the further
evolution of life'; yet the 'white race which caused the destruction is reaping the result in suffering
from pests that hamper its operations': H. H. Hungerford, 'Kangaroos and Karma', in The Australian
Theosophist, 9:3, 15 July, 1931, 75. It is not insignificant that indigenous persons, who may well
have had their own views about the real 'pests', do not rate a mention.

This yearning is regarded by Hanegraaff as the defining characteristic of gnosis (though he posits
other constituent factors); see Hanegraaff, 'A Dynamic Typological', 12 et passim.

Bruno, Cause, Principle and Unity, fifth dialogue, 93.
Blavatskian Gnosis

Hanegraaff has proposed an ideal dynamic typology of 'post-Gnostic' gnosticism which has certain resonances for an understanding of Blavatsky.\(^9\) He has made a cogent case for an idealised analytical demarcation between reason, faith, and gnosis.\(^9\)

'Gnosis' he further divided between those possessed of a *latent* and an *actual* gnostic disposition; the former 'describes images, not ideas', the latter 'ask[s] him/[her]self systematic questions' about the imagery and accords 'the status of knowledge' to his inner experience.\(^9\) Explicit (actual) gnosticism can be further divided between 'artistic gnosticism' and 'occultistic gnosticism'.\(^9\) For Hanegraaff, 'artistic gnosticism' represents as pure a form of gnosticism as can be presented in such a theoretical abstraction; it is characterised by a 'combination of visionary intuition and a systematic intellect' and is communicated in strictly metaphorical terms.\(^9\) 'Occultistic gnosticism', obversely, is an attempted *rapprochement* between 'gnosis' (as personified by the artistic gnostic) and 'reason': it 'is "not anymore" fully gnostic because it is already on its way to rationality'.\(^9\) Hanegraaff, who does acknowledge 'transitional forms' between the ideal types, employs terms such as 'shallower', 'reductionist', and 'failure' in describing 'occultistic gnostics' who have, to employ a common (perhaps artistic gnostic) metaphor, 'sold their souls to the devil' of rationalisation, and who have not acknowledged the ineffability and abstractness of inner numinous experience.\(^9\) 'Occultistic gnostics', in attempting to rationalise the epistemological divide between inner transcendent experience and exterior mundane paradigms, are ultimately incapable of accepting the paradoxy on its own terms and thereby reduce the spiritual valency of their experience in a quest for discursiveness.\(^9\)

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\(^9\) Hanegraaff, 'A Dynamic Typological', 5-43. That Hanegraaff has considered Theosophy within the rubrics of his argument can be inferred from a reference to 'reincarnation in modern theosophy [sic]' (p.36).

\(^9\) Ibid., 9-11.

\(^9\) Ibid., 11-16, esp. 14.

\(^9\) Ibid., 15ff. Nowhere in his paper does Hanegraaff explain or justify his choice of the terms 'artistic' and 'occultistic' in this context, although qv. p. 42n31. His selection of the term 'occultistic' is in accord with his later published characterisation of occultism as the preference for causality over correspondence (thus, one presumes, discursiveness over metaphor): Hanegraaff, *New Age*, 422-482. The selection of the term 'artistic' is more ambiguous. He does, however, refer the reader to his unpublished thesis of which the 'A Dynamic Typological' appears to be an abstract.

\(^9\) Hanegraaff, 'A Dynamic Typological', 15.

\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^9\) Ibid., 15, 21, 24.

\(^9\) Ibid., 21-22 (for a 'theology of paradox').
According to this well-reasoned schemata, Blavatsky would in all probability be the incarnation of 'occultistic gnosticism'. There can be little doubt that she possessed an abundance of the constitutive elements of the latent gnostic disposition; further, her engagement with personal gnoseological intuition was systematic and interpretive, thus ensuring she qualifies as an 'actual gnostic' under Hanegraaff's typology. Most significant, perhaps, is that Blavatsky articulated her inner experience and convictions in ratiocinational terms, employing language, concepts, and paradigms germane to the scientific and philosophical thought of her time. Her pronounced tendency to express her 'inner knowing' as universally true, as fact, locates her, according to Hanegraaff's typology, within 'the more extreme wing of "occultistic gnosis"'.

While it is possible to argue that 'artistic gnosis' is a more intriguing and enlightening form of gnosis ('an intellectually satisfying internally coherent view of life') than is

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98 It should always be recalled that in accordance with a methodology of empiricism (thus with no preordained axiomatical position), exact statements about Blavatsky's personal gnosticism must be held in a certain stasis because her claims were predicated upon external revelation. If the Masters exist/existed, and if Blavatsky mediated their teachings without undue colouration, then Theosophy is not an idiosyncratic 'occultistic gnosis' (viz. Hanegraaff), but a genuine revelatory praisa theologia and philosophia perennis (albeit one with an apparently quixotic engagement with modern scientific rationalism). It could also be noted that although Hanegraaff (in his seminal New Age) does mention Blavatsky's Masters, he has nowhere acknowledged her claim that Theosophy was theirs to give, not hers to intuit, and thus that it must fall properly under his definition of 'faith' and not 'gnosis': Hanegraaff, New Age, 454. This observation underscores the problematics of any theoretical abstraction which deals with gnosticism as a revelatory gnosis involving a putative exterior source. One could, of course, argue that such gnosis by definition cannot be instigated by external agency, though one is then forced to silence on all questions regarding the transmission of religious numinosity: initiation, angelic visitation, sacrament, inter alia. Hanegraaff's dynamic typology is none the less useful for such unavoidable limitations.

99 According to Hanegraaff the four defining characteristics of the latent gnostic disposition are: an 'existential feeling (or: awareness, intuition, even conviction) that there is "more" to existence than meets the eye; a fascination with 'the depths of the human mind'; that ultimate purpose lies in self-realisation; a desire for a 'restoration of (lost) wholeness'. See Hanegraaff, 'A Dynamic Typological', 11-12.


'occultistic gnosis' ('an intellectually unsatisfying pseudo-rationality') on certain subjective grounds, historiographically quite the reverse might be true.\textsuperscript{102} For all of its occasionally forced exegesis, syncretisms, and attempted harmonising, the Blavatskian œuvre is likely more valuable as a document of nineteenth century preoccupations than would be the productions of the 'artistic gnostics' - for the simple reason of its engagement with prevailing paradigms.\textsuperscript{103} Blavatsky's esotericism is fundamentally polemical and, in its stridency, what may have been lost to the mapping of 'the radically other dimension of being' and the 'logic[s] of paradox', has been added to its popular appeal in order to enhance the prospects of success of its self-designated messianic agenda.\textsuperscript{104} Blavatsky's eccentric dialectical synthesis of gnosis and reason was born in direct and conscious opposition to a similarly baroque nineteenth-century outgrowth from the union of faith and reason: 'scientism'. (Interestingly, Hanegraaff, in discussing his tripartition of faith, reason, and gnosis, has observed evidence of intercourse between gnosis and reason ['occultistic gnosis'], and gnosis and faith [gnostic doctrine], but passes over interaction between faith and reason).\textsuperscript{105} This last is of primary historical importance in any analysis of Theosophy.

Blavatsky's synthesis of gnosis and reason was intended to provide a contrapuntal force against the growing tendency to accord to the dictates of science a religious awe,
and the dogma of religions a scientific certainty. In this, her Theosophy was instituted that Lévi might be proved correct: 'Science and faith can and ought mutually to counterbalance each other and produce equilibrium; they can never amalgamate'. That 'scientism' and Blavatsky's 'occultistic gnosticism' might occasionally grow to mirror one another seems not to have occurred to those involved, and may constitute the ultimate irony of the Theosophical endeavour.

The quasi-religious aura which today surrounds the dictates of science (even when those dictates are rarely understood and regularly refuted) has its direct genesis in the nineteenth century. Such is often agreed by scholars. Unfortunately, less interest has been devoted to the ways in which philosophical and scientific rationalism entered the religious domain with similar vigour at precisely the same time. In this context (i.e., a discussion of 'scientism') it is of profound significance to analyse the neoscholasticism which dominated Roman Catholic doctrinal discourse in the latter nineteenth century. Such discourse is exemplified in the dogma of papal infallibility which was ascribed doctrinal status during the (First) Vatican Council in 1870. Hans Küng has noted:

[Vatican I] is not completely described by the attribution to it of restorationism, romanticism and traditionalism ... [Indeed] it was marked by the very spirit of rationalism against which it violently protested (Hans Küng, Infallible?: An Enquiry, trans. Erich Mosbacher, Collins, London, 1972, 135, 137).

Cf. also Philip Hughes, The Church in Crisis: A History of the Twenty Great Councils, Burns & Oats, London, 1960, 294-324. There is a cogent argument that many late nineteenth-century (and twentieth century) doctrinal formulations (such as ex cathedra infallibility) are coloured by a quixotic desire to achieve the definitional certainties of the cognate sciences. Blavatsky was absolutely clear regarding infallibility:

We do not believe in the possibility of an infallible knowledge. We reject the idea that absolute infallibility can be bestowed upon even the highest adept (Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. IV, 487).

One is reminded of Thomas Huxley's injunction that 'irrationally held truths may be more harmful than reasoned errors': T. H. Huxley, 'The Coming of Age of the Origin of Species' in Science and Culture and Other Essays, Macmillan, London, 1882.
CHAPTER 15

THE FINAL YEARS

The Esoteric Section

The last great undertaking of Blavatsky's life was begun during the same month that the first volume of The Secret Doctrine was published: October, 1888. In the pages of Blavatsky's new magazine, Lucifer, Olcott announced the formation of an 'Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society'. The Head of the 'ES', as it became known, was to be Blavatsky, and her students in the ES would have no corporate connection with the 'Exoteric Society'.

The proposition to found an inner circle within the Theosophical Society was not a popular one with Olcott. Relations between the Adyar and London bodies, strained since the SPR report, had become even more agitated by Blavatsky's decision to agree to the founding of her own Theosophical lodge (at the behest of her coterie of students, and named for herself) and to initiate Lucifer which inevitably competed with The Theosophist. That Olcott capitulated is evidence of Blavatsky's persuasive power, and of his justifiable fear of open schism.

Blavatsky, as the 'mouthpiece' for the Masters, would provide all teachings for the ES. The objective of the ES was such that:

[E]ach member of this Section will be brought more closely than hitherto under His influence and care if found worthy of it. No student, however, need inquire which of the Masters it is.

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1 Spierenburg, The Inner Group Teachings, 2nd ed., vi-viii. Lucifer began publication 15 September, 1888 and was edited by Blavatsky until her death in 1891 (Mabel Collins Cook and Annie Besant variously co-edited).
2 Spierenburg, The Inner Group Teachings, 2nd ed., vii. By this is meant that while members of the ES would also be members of the Theosophical Society, Blavatsky would maintain complete sole authority in the former. In common Freemasonic parlance, Blavatsky was deemed the 'Outer Head' of the ES; the requisite Master would be the 'Inner Head'.
3 Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 396, 407ff; Ransom, A Short History, 251.
5 Ibid., viii.
The ES was not the first inner group within the Theosophical Society, but it differed from others in that it came under the direct patronage of a Master, and was entirely Blavatsky's domain. Indeed, within a year she had decided to convene a semi-secret gathering within the Esoteric Section, called the 'Inner Group', devoted to 'advanced teaching' and directed enticingly to 'practical occultism'.

The Inner Group

Much has been made of the secrecy surrounding the Inner Group of the ES, and it has become commonplace among Theosophists to suspect that the 'practical occultism' which took place within the specially-constructed 'Occult Room' was of such a high

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2 The term 'practical occultism' was employed by William Quan Judge for the Inner Group. Judge was appointed Blavatsky's representative of the ES for America in December, 1888: see Spierenburg, *The Inner Group Teachings*, 2nd ed., viii-xi.
order that none of the pledged members ever spoke of it.  
(More likely, whatever ceremonial was undertaken was of a rather anodyne type and by far the greater part of each weekly meeting was taken up with lectures delivered in Blavatsky’s unvarying Socratic method).  
Contributing to this atmosphere of mystique was the fact that the Inner Group comprised six men, seated to Blavatsky’s right, and six women, seated to her left. This quasi-apostolic arrangement was perhaps more welcome synchronicity than design; two non-English members were pledged, and one further member, William Wynn Westcott (1848-1925), appears to have been admitted honoris causa (and received copies of all correspondence).

Although certain of Blavatsky’s ES ‘Instructions’ have been in the public domain for some years, only recently have the ‘Minutes’ been circulated in an undeniably authentic

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1 The workings of Blavatsky’s Inner Group have occasioned extraordinary myth-making in Theosophical Circles. There is a marked tendency in self-designated occult (and particularly occult initiatic) orders to suspect the ‘Great Secret’ to be vouchsafed to a tiny esoteric coterie, directly from the mouth of the magus, seer or master. Aside from this particular psychopathology (which is not restricted to esoteric groups), the Inner Group has become famous for the Occult Room. Purpose built, it was attached to Blavatsky’s room - she was supposed to have had a window built between the two in order to oversee ‘the student in Yoga’ - and was either heptagonal or octagonal, and covered in various metals: the only significant description is by C. Jinarajadasa, who attempted to recall the interior well over 30 years after he had visited the room (reprinted in Spierenburg, The Inner Group Teachings, 2nd ed., 215). Van Egmond unwisely states in the body of his article that there were seven walls, but notes in a footnote that ‘the room may have been eight-sided’: Daniël van Egmond, ‘Western Esoteric Schools in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’ in van den Broek & Hanegraaff, eds., Gnosis and Hermeticism, 320, 342n16. Admittedly, in all likelihood van Egmond is right. It is a shame that, although he notes that ‘the “inner Order” of the Golden Dawn made also [sic] use of such a heptagonal room!’, he does not mention the legendary Rosicrucian vault from which both, certainly, drew direct inspiration: see Arthur Edward Waite, The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross: Being Records Of The House Of The Holy Spirit in Its Inward And Outward History, University Books, Secaucus, New Jersey, 1973, 132. The entire house in which the Occult Room was situated, was later destroyed.  
There are minutes of 22 meetings ranging from 20 August, 1890, to 15 April, 1891. Spierenburg has reproduced the ‘Minutes’ from a typewritten version of Alice Leighton Cleather’s handwritten duplicate of W. Q. Judge’s copy of the official ‘Minutes’ (as authorised by Blavatsky). Even accounting for the irregular transmission, there seems to be no reason to question Spierenburg’s text.

10 Westcott has been an under-examined link between the Theosophical Society, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and the Freemasonic Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia: see R. A. Gilbert, Magical Mason: Forgotten Hermetic Writings of William Wynn Westcott, Physician and Magus, Aquarian Press, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, 1983. Westcott, who published widely upon Kabbalism, numerology, and Hermeticism, was forced to quieten his occult activities in 1897; as Coroner for North East London, his superiors felt such activities were not appropriate to his position. Aleister Crowley noted that ‘he was paid to sit on corpses, not to raise them; and that he must choose between his Coronership and his Adeptship’: see id., The Golden Dawn Scrapbook: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Order, Samuel Weiser, Yorke Beach, Maine, 1997, 48-49, 79.

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version. It is a curiosity that, of all her œuvre, these ‘Minutes’ are perhaps the least read and assessed, yet comprise the last expansive testament of Blavatskian Theosophy. A sifting though of all the occultist minutiae of these teachings reveals that the ‘practical occultism’ of the Inner Group was a species of gnostic heavenly ascent, which, for all of its ostensibly Oriental metaphysical vocabulary and mythology, is akin to a highly Neoplatonicised Kabbalah.

Extending her septenary systematics, Blavatsky taught a seven-fold scale of emanations from the Absolute Unknowable to the world of forms. Employing a vast

17 The first five ‘Instructions’ were published in Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. XII, 513-538, 542-570, 599-641, 654-673, 689-712 (inc. colour plates I, II, and III, opposite p.580). Most of the ‘Minutes’ were included in a melange of materials which were published posthumously in 1897 as the third volume of The Secret Doctrine: H. P. Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy, vol. III, Theosophical Publishing Society, London, 1910; cf. supra ch. 12. For a publishing history of the ES documents see Spierenburg, The Inner Group Teachings, 2nd ed., xxi-xxv. Spierenburg’s book has superseded all other versions, and includes one further set of ‘Instructions’ (no. VI). Note that ‘Instruction’ I, II and III were written by Blavatsky, that no. IV was approved by her, and that nos. V and VI were issued subsequent to her death but are considered genuine records of Blavatsky’s oral ES teachings (as comparisons with the ‘Minutes’ have indicated).


14 Cf., eg., the Neoplatonism which undergirds the following, otherwise highly Orientalised, teaching on Mahat (Sanskrit: ‘the Great One’):

Mahat is the manifested, universal Parabrahmic Mind (for one Mahâmanvantara) on the third plane. It is the law whereby the Light falls from plane to plane and differentiates. The Mânasaputras are its emanations (Spierenburg, The Inner Group Teachings, 2nd ed., 10).

range of correspondences, Blavatsky aligned this septenary scale of descent with human endocrinology and neurology, with colours and human sense perception, with angelic hierarchies and physical elements, and so on - all allocated to a particular locus along the vertical axis from purest spirit to densest matter. The degree to which knowledge of such correspondences actually comprised the heart of the teaching is noted by Blavatsky:

The important thing to be kept secret was the way in which such teachings were put into practice, the correspondences.17

Blavatsky reconfigured the traditional notion of the Kabbalistic sefirot (as hypostatisations of divine attributes)18 into Lokas, or 'planes of substance'.19 She thus incorporated Hindu cosmological principles into her descensus framework and presented each as an emanatory gradation of spirit into substance. The Theosophist, not ontologically sundered from pure Spirit but a 'Divine consciousness' hypostatically united with dense matter, is required to traverse each of the Lokas in order to gain 'individualised self-consciousness', and thus precipitate personal evolution:20

Now all these 14 are planes from without within, and states of consciousness through which man can pass, and must pass, once he is determined to go through the 7 paths and Portals of the Dhyâni.

One need not to be disembodied for this. All this is reached on earth

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16 The septenary scale pervades the teachings; an illustration of some of the correspondences is found in Spierenburg, The Inner Group Teachings, 2nd ed., 54-55.
17 Ibid., 14-15.
18 The tension between Neoplatonic emanationism and Kabbalah is nowhere more evident that in the question of the relationship of the divine with the sefirot: were they a part of (and thus hypostatisations), or separate from God? Scholem has maintained that the creative tension brought about by the attempted synthesis of these systems ultimately allowed the Kabbalists to avoid both pantheism and dualism by positing a dialectical movement within God himself: a concise overview is to be found in David Biale, Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1979, 134-137.
19 Spierenburg, The Inner Group Teachings, 2nd ed., 53. The Loka, from the Sanskrit for 'locality' or 'world', refer to the 21 zones which comprise the Hindu cosmos. The 21 loka are divided into three septenaries, (the 'tri-loka'), one each for the celestial (and super-celestial), subterranean and purgatorial/hellish worlds: see Walker, The Hindu World, vol. 1, 253.
20 Blavatsky notes in Meeting XIV (4 February, 1891):
The Ego starts with Divine consciousness; no past, no future, no separation. It is long before realizing that it is itself; only after many births does it begin to discern, by this collectivity of experience, that it is individual. At the end of its cycle of incarnations, it is still the same divine consciousness, but it has now become individualized self-consciousness (Spierenburg, The Inner Group Teachings, 2nd ed., 69).
in one, or many, of the incarnations.  

The *Dhyanis*, each allocated a place within the strata of *Lokas* from spirit to matter, comprise the angelology so reminiscent of Kabbalistic theurgy and it is the task of the Theosophist to strive ‘towards assimilation with the inhabitants of the Lokas’. This systematic ‘assimilation’ requires a technology predicated upon the chains of sympathies which unite the cosmos; the Master Koot Hoomi described this universal concordism in the following terms:

Nature has linked all parts of her Empire together by subtle threads of magnetic sympathy, and, there is a mutual correlation even between a star and a man; thought runs swifter than the electric fluid, and your thought will find me if projected by a pure impulse, as mine will find, has found, and often impressed your mind. We may move in cycles of activity divided - not entirely separated from each other.

The ‘subtle threads of magnetic fluid’ may only be activated by the application of ‘Imagination’ and will; these Blavatsky picturesquely deems the ‘lightning conductor which leads the electric fluid’. Typically, Blavatsky employs a Sanskrit term, *Kriyasakti* (literally, ‘the power of action’) to denote the potentialities of engaged imagination:

It is significant that Blavatsky mentions 14 of the 21 *loka* in her schemata, thus concentrating on the celestial (and super-celestial) and subterranean spheres, and ignoring purgatorial *Naraka*, the 7 *loka* of hellish suffering. The latter have no application in Blavatskian Theosophy. It is no coincidence that Blavatsky has included the celestial and subterranean schemata as parallel conditions. In this she is emulating the so-called ‘fifth world’ of the Kabbalah, the *kellipot*, comprised of the detritus of creation and occupied (in terms of Kabbalistic angelology) by perverse spirits. Blavatsky’s *Pāḍāla*, for example, is a subterranean (one supposes in a figurative sense) *loka* filled with ‘elementals of animals, and nature spirits’ (Ibid., 49), rather than with the more normative *Nāgas* or serpent-demons of Hinduism. Demons have no ontic necessity in Blavatsky’s evolutionist cosmology and, anyway, the serpent is always a cipher for wisdom. For the *kellipot* see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 138-139 *et passim*. A cogent summary of the Theosophical position on the 14 *loka* is offered in Judith M. Tyberg, *Sanskrit Keys to the Wisdom Religion: An Exposition of the Philosophical and Religious Teachings Imbodied [sic] in the Sanskrit Terms used in Theosophical and Occult Literature*, Point Loma Publications, San Diego, 1976, 85-95; cf. also Elsie Benjamin, *Search and Find: Theosophical Reference Index (Following the Blavatsky Tradition)*, Point Loma Publications, [San Diego], 1978, 79.


21 Ibid., 53. It is significant that Blavatsky mentions 14 of the 21 *loka* in her schemata, thus concentrating on the celestial (and super-celestial) and subterranean spheres, and ignoring purgatorial *Naraka*, the 7 *loka* of hellish suffering. The latter have no application in Blavatskian Theosophy. It is no coincidence that Blavatsky has included the celestial and subterranean schemata as parallel conditions. In this she is emulating the so-called ‘fifth world’ of the Kabbalah, the *kellipot*, comprised of the detritus of creation and occupied (in terms of Kabbalistic angelology) by perverse spirits. Blavatsky’s *Pāḍāla*, for example, is a subterranean (one supposes in a figurative sense) *loka* filled with ‘elementals of animals, and nature spirits’ (Ibid., 49), rather than with the more normative *Nāgas* or serpent-demons of Hinduism. Demons have no ontic necessity in Blavatsky’s evolutionist cosmology and, anyway, the serpent is always a cipher for wisdom. For the *kellipot* see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 138-139 *et passim*. A cogent summary of the Theosophical position on the 14 *loka* is offered in Judith M. Tyberg, *Sanskrit Keys to the Wisdom Religion: An Exposition of the Philosophical and Religious Teachings Imbodied [sic] in the Sanskrit Terms used in Theosophical and Occult Literature*, Point Loma Publications, San Diego, 1976, 85-95; cf. also Elsie Benjamin, *Search and Find: Theosophical Reference Index (Following the Blavatsky Tradition)*, Point Loma Publications, [San Diego], 1978, 79.


The first step towards the accomplishment of Kriyāsakti is the use of the Imagination. To ‘Imagine’ a thing is to firmly create a model of what you desire, perfect in all its details. The will is then brought into action, and the form is thereby transferred to the objective world. This is creation by Kriyāsakti.25

*Kriyāsakti* enables the Theosophist ‘to produce external, perceptible, phenomenal results by its own inherent energy’.26 The employment of *Kriyāsakti* is no less than a microcosmic emulation of the Creative power of the cosmos; the manipulation of the Quintessence.27 Such divine faculty is devastating if placed in the hands of the unenlightened majority: the Atlantean conflagration is a salutary lesson in its abuse by the uninitiated.28 Blavatsky is quite declarative in ruling the paucity of candidates to whom such powers could be entrusted during her own day, for the vast majority are too heavily ensconced in matter - thus ‘materialists’. Those in whom spirit predominates (those in higher evolutionary sub-races, and especially those Monads incarnating in the far-distant sixth and seventh Rounds of this cycle)29 and who are prepared to undergo onerous chelaship, may be granted the ability to employ *Kriyāsakti* to the benefit of themselves and others:

Learn first the notes, then the chords, and then the melodies. Once the student is master of every chord, he may begin to be a co-worker with nature and for others. He may then by the experience he has gained of his own nature, and by his knowledge of the ‘chords’, strike such as will be beneficial in another.30

There can be little doubt that Blavatsky’s teachings about *Kriyāsakti*, when coupled with her septenary correspondences (whose efficacy, in characteristically Blavatskian thinking, rests upon causal principles)31 constitute the necessary framework for a

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29 Judith Tyberg notes that the ‘Ancient Wisdom teaches that the Seventh Race of mankind will bring forth its offspring by means of Kriyā-sakti’; Tyberg, *Sanskrit Keys*, 99.
31 Cf., e.g., Blavatsky’s discussion of occult anatomy, especially the rôles of the coccyx, the spine[st] and the spleen: in ibid., 17-18, 174-184 *et passim*. 

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theurgy. It is certain that such teachings calmed the fears of some that 'practical occultism' was to be a chimera, even within the Inner Group. Yet, as ever, Blavatsky eschewed any notion that the Theosophical Society was 'a sort of occult academy, an institution established to afford facilities for the instruction of would-be miracle workers'. For her, the prime goal of Theosophy was always to be restitutio rerum ad integrum by means of shedding the cloak of matter which occludes true vision, and thereby expediting the involution to Spirit:

The fewer the coverings over sense-consciousness, the clearer the vision, for each envelope adds something of illusion. Only when the true discerning or discriminating power is set free is illusion overcome, and the setting free of that power is ... the attainment of Adeptship.

**Heavenly Ascent**

The basic orientation of the Inner Group teachings is toward a gnostic heavenly ascent, supported at every juncture by the template of the Western esoteric traditions. The ascent to the Kabbalistic-sounding 'Rootless Root' is predicated upon the Theosophist's relationship with his "inner god" ... [who] gives him this power", for intellect alone will not suffice: 'it is the intellect plus the spiritual that raises man'. In order to gain from the exalted experience of 'identification' with the spirits of the higher Lokas, the Theosophist is required to employ an active memory, reminiscent of the 'Art of Memory' so beloved of Renaissance Hermeticists like Bruno: 'In order to remember the higher state on returning to the lower, the memory must be carried upwards to the higher. An Adept [Master] may apparently enjoy a dual consciousness'. Indeed, the Master remains central, in a literal sense, to the entire exercise; Koot Hoomi noted:

Your best method is to concentrate on the Master as a Living Man within you. Make his image in your heart, and a focus of concentration, so as to lose all sense of bodily existence in the one

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1 Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. VI, 333.
3 Ibid., 168.
5 Ibid., 60, 173-174. For the 'Art of Memory' see *supra* ch. 14.
The Inner Group teachings are the natural progeny of Blavatsky’s public writings. In the 15 years between the establishment of the Theosophical Society and the inauguration of an official Inner Group of the Esoteric Section, Blavatsky’s Oriental enculturation may have provided a fitting idiom in which to express the pre-Biblical *prisca theologia*, but it did not fundamentally alter her profound engagement with the esoteric complex of the West. The Inner Group members were encouraged to identify themselves, psychically and physically, with the Master, and by engaging their creative imagination with the secret correspondences vouchsafed by him through their prime chela, Blavatsky, ascend through the spheres, garnering treasured gnosis along the way:

For the Inner Group the effort would be to bring all things down to states of consciousness. Buddhi is one and indivisible really; it is a feeling within, absolutely inexpressible in words. All cataloging is useless to explain it.\(^{38}\)

Such gnosis, if recalled in memory and impressed within the body, could penetrate through the intervening strata to the mundane tier and be brought to bear upon the Theosophist’s personal quest for conscious evolution and ultimate reintegration.

At the interstice between gnostic heavenly ascent (to be practised during singular earthly lives) and the karmically-reticulated macrocyclicist progressivism of the multiply-incarnating human Monad, stands the figure of the Master. He is tangible proof of the evolutionary gains to be made in both singular and multiple lifetimes.

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\(^{37}\) Koot Hoomi (from an unpublished Mahatma letter to A. O. Hume, 1882?) in Spierenburg, *The Inner Group Teachings*, 'Instruction No. V', 2nd ed., 173, xxiii. There seems to be no reason to suspect the Master’s letter should not belong to the canon of Mahatma letters. Even though the quotation is taken from an ‘Instruction’ issued after Blavatsky’s death, portions of the letter had been published in her lifetime with no adverse comment from her.

The concept of ‘internalising’ the Master is not dissimilar in some respects to certain Kabbalistic theurgical practices which emphasise the identification of the Kabbalist with Adam, and with such mesocosmic entities as Enoch-Metatron: see Idel, *Kabbalah*, 33, 60, 66, 67, *et passim*; Hanratty, *Studies in Gnosticism*, 67. For Blavatsky’s own interest in Enoch-Metatron see *infra* ch. 28.

\(^{38}\) Spierenburg, *The Inner Group Teachings*, 2nd ed., 49. ‘Buddhi’, in the Theosophical sense, is defined as follows: ‘Buddhic, the sense of being one with the Universe; the impossibility of imagining itself apart from it’: ibid., 49. *Buddhi* can be interpreted as the human faculty which permits the reception of gnosis; it can also be the gnostic experience of numinosity (as here): see Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, 228n, 453, 572; vol. 2, 81.
Having undergone the ordeals of adeptship, he signifies the value of the gnosis achieved through ascensus; having incarnated in successively more ‘spiritualised’ forms, he indicates the veracity of a cosmological optimistic progressivism. In such ways he is the exemplar of Blavatsky’s individual and cosmic evolutionary programmes.

It should not be forgotten that the source of the Masters’ Theosophy is ultimately angelic. The Dhyanis - at the upper reaches of the hierarchy of Spirit, and proximate to the Absolute - who incarnated into some of humanity’s distant Lemurian ancestors, furnished the protean human with a spark of divinity sufficient to quicken the evolutionary impulse:

What is human mind in its higher aspect, whence comes it, if it is not a portion of the essence - and, in some rare cases of incarnation, the very essence - of a higher being: one from a higher and divine plane? Can man - a god in the animal form - be the product of Material nature by evolution alone[?]

The Dhyanis-Masters of the Third Root Race, the result of a hypostatic union of the Dhyanis and the most advanced human Monads of the Lemurian era, became the first Masters in this Round and the ultimate progenitors of the Ancient Wisdom. Since their time, the elite band of Masters has subtly directed the evolutionary progression of humanity, occasionally selecting a chela to whom to entrust a portion of their sacred theosophy. In 1875 the Brotherhood sponsored the establishment of the Theosophical Society, agreeing to oversee its development and vouchsafe to it the undying wisdom. The Masters’ teaching was to be the spiritual antidote to the materialist and naturalist poisons of an era dominated by talk of a Creator-less creation. The Masters reassured Theosophists that such ruptures in the epistemological fabric of Western civilisation and self-reflection as posed by Darwinian natural evolution and Comtist Positivism did not require a capitulation of scientific rationalism (and a likely clamouring to get inside the ‘ark’ of Biblical certainties), but its reconfiguration as a tool of the Spirit.

37 Ibid., vol. 2, 81. This ‘portion of the essence’ is reminiscent of a cardinal concept of antique Gnosticism, the ‘seed of light’, ‘parcel of gold’ or ‘precious pearl’ which is the fragment of divine ontology manifest (or, indeed, trapped) in material creation: see Hanratty, Studies in Gnosticism, 28.
The occultist enterprise was an attempt to gainsay the ascendency of a monolithic materialism by employing its own Enlightenment vocabulary of reason. Notions of evolution and progression were reconstrued as cosmic imperatives, so too the traditional metaphorical discourse of Western esotericism was made popularly acceptable by being represented as a reasonable spiritual alternative. That Blavatsky 'press-ganged' reason into service against itself is no more, and probably no more less, quixotic than equally poignant attempts by such other children of the Aufklärung as Karl Marx (1818-1883), Sigmund Freud (1818-1883) and, ironically, Darwin himself. These men presented humanity as being in thrall either to an economics-driven metahistory, an ultimately irrational psychopathology or the dictates of an unforgiving, unpredictable, and unconscious nature. Such paradigms, though presented in the vesture of reason, ultimately reflect a world in which reason cannot penetrate to the core of universal processes - and in which those who rely upon it are as ill-fated as anybody else. Blavatsky's 'rationalising of the non-rational' in order to combat dreaded materialism - a quest personified by the figure of the spiritualised Master - may not have been so immediately influential as the formulations of Marx, Freud, and Darwin, but in all seriousness it may simply be too early to tell.

The Passing of Blavatsky

During the early months of 1891, Blavatsky's health deteriorated considerably. She maintained her writing and teaching schedule as well as she could, completing much of her *The Theosophical Glossary*, conducting weekly meetings of the Inner Group and attending such other gatherings as she was able. By May she was mostly confined to bed, having suffered from bronchial congestion in the wake of a bout of influenza. On the morning of Friday, 8 May, she was barely able to move and died quietly at

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noon, encircled by three of her most devoted disciples. Her body was cremated on Sunday, 10 May, in Woking, England, and the ashes separated into three parts: for the Societies in Adyar, New York, and London.

There is a final irony in the parting of Blavatsky. For at least ten years prior to her death she had claimed to have been encountering people who suspected that she was an impostor who had stolen the papers of the real Mme. Blavatsky. In support of their accusation, a number of such people had alleged that they had seen her tombstone in Aden. In a jocular letter to Prince Dondoukoff-Korsakoff, Blavatsky explained the confusion: for some time she had included among her baggage a gravestone bearing the engraving, ‘Helena P. Blavatsky died...’, to be used for identification purposes should anything dire befall her during her more exotic adventures. At a stop in Aden, in 1871, her beloved ‘Abyssinian monkey’, Koko, died. Blavatsky, tiring of the burden of the stone, used it as a marker for her pet, painting an epitaph to Koko over the engraviture: ‘The favourite monkey of H. P. Blavatsky died in 1871, etc.’ Over time, ‘what was added in paint was effaced by the rains, while my engraved name remained’. That she should bury a monkey, the prime icon of Darwinism, under her own marker and yet live on herself, is itself a fitting epitaph for Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.

Details of the death of Blavatsky are to be found in Cranston, H. P. B., 404-411; Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 453-456. The three disciples present were Walter Old, Claude Wright, and Laura Cooper.


That no Theosophist or commentator, religionist or otherwise, has noted the irony, might unfortunately be another sort of epitaph.
PART THREE

CHARLES WEBSTER LEADBEATER
Charismatic Authority in Post-Blavatskian Theosophy

A favourite topos of the study of New Religious Movements is the 'Postcharismatic Fate' of such groups following the demise of the inspirational leader. In the case of Theosophy the situation is somewhat complicated by the nature of Theosophical authority. In principle, the visible leaders of the Theosophical Society are but the prime chelas of the Masters, who comprise the real and abiding authority. Throughout her Theosophical career, Blavatsky had sagely balanced the rigours of being the sole 'mouthpiece' of the Masters, and the democratic ideals upon which the Society had been instituted (which suggested that any worthy individual might be accepted under a Master's pupilage). While it is true that during her lifetime many once enthusiastic Theosophists had abandoned the Society for the reason that they found the notion of the trans-Himalayan Brotherhood incredible, of greater significance is the fact that, of those who remained, none ever really attempted to usurp her position as the nexus between the Masters and the world at large. For Theosophists, her authority was inviolable.

During the decades which followed Blavatsky's death, the Theosophical Society splintered. While many theories have been suggested as to the causes of the various schisms, none has adequately encompassed the conceptual foundations of the disagreements. It is simply not sufficient to rationalise these schisms on the basis of disputes over an Oriental versus an Occidental ethos or legitimacy of succession. Catherine Wessinger has acknowledged the centrality of the Masters to the issue of

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1 Cf., eg., Miller, ed., *When Prophets Die* for a discussion of the issue in regard to such religious bodies as the Shakers, Christian Science, and the Unification Church, *inter alia*.

2 The Master Koot Hoomi noted the centrality of Blavatsky to the Masters' enterprise:

[I]mpoorfect as may be our visible agent - and often most unsatisfactory and imperfect she is - yet she is the best available at present (*The Mahatma Letters*, 1993 ed., [Letter No.2: 19 October, 1880] 9).

3 Jackson, *The Oriental Religions*, 171.

4 Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom*, 103.
what might be termed the 'apostolicity' of succession in the Society. Her argument is sound in so far as she recognises that the 'routinization of charisma' must be predicated upon the Masters devolving their authority upon one or more acknowledged leaders. There are several attendant questions left unaddressed by Wessinger. In the first instance, if a leader subsequent to Blavatsky were to propose teachings which differed from hers, how then would Theosophy require rearticulation in order to maintain its claim to provenance of the *prisca theologia*? Similarly, if two leaders both claim sole authority from the Masters, what is the criterion by which to select between the two?

Such apparent post-charismatic pitfalls were openly played out in the years subsequent to Blavatsky's demise. Foundational to the dilemma was the recognition that while acceptance of the ontic reality of the Masters, and the deference due them, was axiomatical for the Theosophist, there were no empirical means to adjudge another's claim to chela-ship or authority. Such means as there were to prove one's ascendancy, or indeed to arrogate to oneself the authority of the Masters, were all employed: a new Mahatmic correspondence began in earnest, clairvoyant and Spiritualist contact was alleged, and claims to have encountered the Masters in dreams or in the flesh became widespread.

A number of Theosophists, desirous of a methodological resolution to the issue of charismatic succession, resolved the confusion by ascribing to the works of Blavatsky a revelatory significance as an orthodox canon of Masters' Theosophy; others could claim to be her successors as ambassadors from the Brotherhood but only to the degree

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7 Wessinger, 'Democracy vs. Hierarchy', 101ff.
8 Ibid., 105. The main concern of Wessinger's thesis is the tension within the Society between notions of democracy and hierarchical authoritarianism. Her observations are acute, but fail to take account of the centrality of textual revelation within Theosophy. Few modern religions have availed themselves so completely of the printed word. It follows that C. W. Leadbeater, who held no significant position within the administrative hierarchy of the Society, maintained his exalted status (as 'the Elder Brother') by means of his voluminous writings, mostly presented as direct revelation via clairvoyance. Following Blavatsky's lead, all future claimants to contact with the Masters published massively, thus concretising their position.
8 See *infra* p. 254ff.
that they didn’t overstep ‘Scripture’.² Any hermeneutical or exegetical position which could be proved to contradict her authoritative pronouncements could be deemed heterodox and a likely indicator of improbity on the part of the claimant to authority. Naturally, this position engenders a broad spectrum of axiomatical stances; from the belief that the essence, however defined, of Blavatsky’s teachings should not be contradicted, but may be expanded, reinterpreted or modernised (the minimalist position),¹⁰ to the a priori contention that Theosophical revelation is closed, Blavatskian formulations and writings are inerrant¹¹ and that the Masters have seen fit to ‘retire into solitude and our kingdom of silence once more’ (the maximalist position).¹² The advantages of this attitude are numerous: a fundamentally literalist hermeneutic, a closed creed, and an established mechanism for adjudicating upon claims of authority. The disadvantages are essentially the same as attend upon any claim to meta-empirical genesis for scriptural revelation: disputes concerning the degree

²This position has come to be known colloquially as the ‘Back to Blavatsky’ school. It would appear that this trend is in the ascendancy at present. The only major Theosophical division which has maintained something of this ethos since its inception is the United Lodge of Theosophists, founded in Los Angeles in 1909 by Robert Crosbie. The ULT, as it is known, has reacted strongly against the tendency to glorify particular individuals (other than Blavatsky!) which has characterised most other Theosophical divisions; the majority of their teachings and literature is published anonymously. The ULT vision of the history of the Theosophical Society is contained in Anonymous [Garrigues, ed.], The Theosophical Movement; id., The Theosophical Movement, 1875-1950, Cunningham Press, Los Angeles, 1951. Cf. also Campbell, Ancient Wisdom, 143-146.

¹⁰ The ‘minimalist position’ is perhaps best represented among the early divisions by The Theosophical Society in America, led by W. Q. Judge, which seceded from the Adyar Society in 1895. Judge was later succeeded by Ernest Hargrove as President and Katherine Tingley (1847-1929) as Outer Head of the ES. Soon Tingley was in full control and reorganised the body along communitarian and ‘utopian’ lines, renaming it the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society. The Group occupied a large estate at Point Loma, close to San Diego, from 1897-1942, and is known popularly as ‘The Point Loma Theosophists’ (though they now reside for the main in Pasadena/Altadena). There is no single volume representing the Point Loma position on the history of the parent body. The closest approximation is Charles J. Ryan, H. P. Blavatsky and the Theosophical Movement, Theosophical University Press, Pasadena, 1937. A second edition, including appendices on the later history of the Point Loma Theosophists, was issued in 1975 by a a small group who had separated from the main body: id., H. P. Blavatsky and the Theosophical Movement, Point Loma Publications, San Diego, 1975. A scholarly study of the Point Loma community is Emmett A. Greenwalt, California utopia: Point Lama: 1897-1942, 2nd ed., Point Loma Publications, San Diego, 1978.

¹¹ ‘[N]ot in a jot or in tittle is there a contradiction or a disagreement in all she ever wrote’: Anon. [Garrigues, ed.], The Theosophical Movement; 41. This position, that of the ULT, includes Judge among the ‘canon’. In more recent publications the literalism has been relaxed somewhat. A good index to the degree of inerrancy any author accords to Blavatsky is the attempt to harmonise the views on reincarnationism in both Isis Unveiled and The Secret Doctrine. John Algeo (an Adyar Society official) deems such attitudes to be ‘Theosophical fundamentalism’ and evidence of ‘neotenic Theosophy’: John Algeo, ‘Theosophy vs. Neo-Theosophy’ [rev. art.], in The American Theosophist, 78:6, November/December, 1990, 3; id., ‘The Tree of Theosophy: Prolegomena to a History of Theosophical Thought’ in ibid., 4.

of instrumentality of Blavatsky in the transmission of the Masters’ teaching, problems with regard to intra-textual contradiction, and agreement upon the composition of the canon.

Another alternative to the problem of charismatic authority was to allow competing claimants to exist coevally, with the likely result that the popularly preferred candidate (often on the basis of a more spectacular revelation) would ultimately gain ascendancy.13 This position tended to view Blavatsky as the materfamilias of Theosophy, but not as its sole conduit of inspired teachings. The Blavatskian œuvre could be supplemented by further instructions from the Masters as mediated by their representatives, thus obviating any appeal to an official canon.14 Contradiction or incompleteness in Blavatsky could be summarily ignored;15 alternative visions could be articulated on the basis that the Masters tailor their revelation to suit the temper and preparedness of the times, and that their amanuenses are invariably fallible. In this position, too, variant stances can be discerned. Some, espousing a Theosophical doctrinal developmentalism,16 attempted to build upon Blavatskian foundations by extending her programme of religious and philosophical concordance, thus incorporating new correspondences into a preordained infrastructure. Others saw the bedrock of Blavatsky’s Theosophy as a springboard to entirely new domains and

13 This point of view is best exemplified by the Theosophy of Charles Webster Leadbeater who was the éminence grise of the parent body, the Adyar Society, for the first three decades of the twentieth century. Leadbeater’s redaction of Theosophy is one of the most fantastic of all, for which see infra chs. 17-24. For the Adyar Society’s view of Theosophical history see Ransom, A Short History; id., The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Book of the Theosophical Society: A Short History of the Society’s Growth from 1926-1950, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1925; Jinarajadasa, The Golden Book. For the history of the Adyar Society in America, see Joy Mills, 100 Years of Theosophy: A History of the Theosophical Society in America, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Illinois, 1987.


15 A novel means to circumvent contradiction in Blavatsky was to suggest that she was only occasionally ‘occupied’ by an adept, and that at other times she was speaking as herself, or even under the influence of unscrupulous entities. Of those who subscribed to this view, of particular interest is Charles George Harrison (1855-?). For details see Harrison, The Transcendental Universe, 85-90 et passim. It might be noted that William Quan Judge believed that ‘the Being in that old body called H P Blavatsky is a mighty Adept’: William Q Judge to James Morgan Pryse, 3 September, 1889, in William Q. Judge, Practical Occultism: From the Private Letters of William Q. Judge, ed. Arthur L. Conger, Theosophical University Press, Pasadena, California, 1951, 162.

16 For the term ‘doctrinal developmentalism’ (particularly with regard to Cardinal Newman) see infra p. 327n10.
configurations. This latter position produced occasional convincing innovations; more often the results were highly mannered and sometimes quite baroque.

In espousing the view that the Blavatskian synthesis was the beginning, and not the end, of the Masters’ revelation, such individuals had intuited the hunger for novelty which characterised a significant proportion of the popular membership. So, too, they could circumvent certain of her strictures, most notably her reluctance to pursue Spiritualistic necromancy or goetic theurgy. The relegation of Blavatsky from the status of sole agent of the Masters and mediatrix of their teachings meant, however, that a degree of despotism entered the Society. When two claimants to the Masters’ authority, or, more drastically, two individuals who each claimed the mandate of the same Master, were forced to compete, the indentured authority tended to prevail. Equally problematical was the inference that, having no circumscribed doctrinal boundaries, Theosophy might implode under the weight of innovation and anarchy. Without Blavatsky as the measure of Theosophy, centralised authority tended to be undermined in favour of subjective inspiration and partial dogma.

The only other viable alternative to what have been called the opposing ‘Back to Blavatsky’ and ‘Neo-theosophy’ schools, was to reconsider the foundational tenets of the Society entirely, and to redefine notions of charismatic authority, succession, and dogma accordingly. The great majority of those who undertook this reevaluation ultimately moved out of the ambit of Theosophy, many to found new organisations. Interestingly, few of those who entirely re-articulated Theosophy abandoned the notion of revelation from a meta-empirical realm; most, in fact, maintained a belief in Masters, whether terrestrial or celestial, as a central article of faith.

17 Such was the essence of the dispute between Alice Bailey, on the one hand, and Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, on the other: both claimed the Master Djwul Khul for their own: see infra Appendix E. That Djwul Khul [sic] and Bailey’s ‘the Tibetan’ were deemed to be one and the same is evident: see Foster Bailey, “The Arcane School - Its Esoteric Origins and Purposes” in Alice A. Bailey, The Unfinished Autobiography of Alice A. Bailey, Lucis Press, London, 1951, 298-299.

18 The term ‘neo-Theosophy’ has been used pejoratively to refer to the variations of Theosophy espoused by Leadbeater, Besant, and others. Apart from such usage, however, there appears to be no reason for it not to be employed in a scholarly context.

19 Rudolf Steiner’s Anthroposophy is a case in point, for which see infra Appendix E. John Algeo has termed such groups ‘para-Theosophical systems’, citing Steiner specifically: Algeo, “The Tree of Theosophy”, 2.
Such are the philosophical and doctrinal responses of Theosophists to the vexing question of assessing the genuineness of post-Blavatsky claims to chelaship. These delineated positions were (and are) fluid; a large number of individuals, and many entire lodges, vacillated between one attitude and another. The conundrum remains to this day: with Blavatsky gone, how can direct contact with the Masters be achieved, and when it is claimed, how can it be tested?20

William Quan Judge and the Unfalsifiability of Masters' Mandates

Koot Hoomi had stated that Blavatsky was 'our sole machinery, our most docile agent'.21 In the wake of her death, immediate questions presented themselves to her successors: who was to lead the Society at large?; who was to lead the ES?; how would the world be divided?

Immediately upon news of Blavatsky's passing, Olcott and Judge journeyed to London. Of prime concern to Besant and Judge was the Headship of the ES. On 27

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May, 1891, they issued jointly a memorandum to their fellow ES (and thus also Inner Group) members:

We who write to you claim over you no authority save such as she [Blavatsky] delegated to us.\textsuperscript{22} We are your fellow students, chosen by her - the Messenger of the Masters of Wisdom - as Their channels to the measure of our ability, during this period of darkness.\textsuperscript{23}

During Olcott's time in Adyar, the ES had grown to a position of preeminence within the larger parent body. Although attempts were made to minimalise the appearance of oligarchy, such as the change of name from the Esoteric Section (ES) to the Eastern School of Theosophy (EST),\textsuperscript{24} the body began to consolidate centralised power. Olcott feared the worst:

The E.S. and especially the I.G. ... and other rings within rings I consider a danger and a possible source of great wrong and evil ... So long as the E.S. does not work against the Constn. [Constitution] of the T.S. I shall not oppose it, but when it does then I fight ... I shall be sorry to have either of you [Besant or Judge] P. T. S. [President of the T.S.] if that devilish Cabinet Noir of yours is to be kept up.\textsuperscript{25}

Many years later, Annie Besant (then Outer Head of the ES) summarised the balance of power:

\textit{The existence of a secret body to rule the outer Society made the constitution of the T.S. a mere farce, for it was at the mercy of the inner ... The greatest power will always be in the hands of the}\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{22} Judge had been appointed Head of the ES in America by Blavatsky on 14 December, 1888; Besant had been appointed Chief Secretary of the Inner Group of the Esoteric Section and Recorder of the Teachings on 1 April, 1891: see Spierenburg, \textit{The Inner Group Teachings}, 2nd ed., viii-ix, xv.


\textsuperscript{24} Spierenburg, \textit{The Inner Group Teachings}, 2nd ed., xviii. The Eastern School of Theosophy was later renamed the Esoteric School of Theosophy (EST), an attempted rapprochement between the two titles. It has always been referred to popularly as the ES (thus obviating any need to remember whether it is a Section or a School). For details see Dudley W. Barr, 'The T.S. and the E.S.' in \textit{The Canadian Theosophist}, 47:3, July-August, 1966, 52; N. Sri Ram, 'Some Comments on "The T.S. and the E.S."' in \textit{The Canadian Theosophist}, 47:5, November-December, 1966, 98-99; Mills, \textit{100 Years}, 14ff. For the sake of consistency all further references will be to the 'ES'.


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E.S., and not in the head of the Society ... I know that I exercise a quite unwarrantable power ... At any time during the last fifteen years I could have checkmated the Colonel [Olcott] on any point if I had chosen. 26

The Council of the ES (which, in effect, comprised the Inner Group members) agreed that Besant and Judge should manage the ES, ostensibly as joint Outer Heads: Judge for America, Besant for the rest of the world, with her Headquarters situated in London. 27 The apparent Mahatmic imprimatur to this arrangement was provided by several pithy messages which immediately began to appear from 'M' (Morya?), such as a note found among Besant's ES papers bearing the message that 'Judge's plan is right'. 28 Besant, elated by the contact, publicly affirmed her faith in the correspondence, thus bolstering Judge's authority in the Society at large. For his part, Judge had begun to astound Theosophists with his claim to be receiving 'Masters messages', some of which were published in the American Theosophical journal, The Path. 29

Judge's assertions were not welcome news to Olcott, who suspected that the joint Outer Head was involved in a significant fraud; not only had Judge complained

26 Annie Besant quoted in N. D. Khandalvala, 'Some Reflections Regarding the Theosophical Movement' in The Theosophist XXIX, October, 1907, 33-34. It is of profound significance for Theosophical historiography that few authors have correctly 'placed' the ES within the larger body: cf., eg., Campbell, Ancient Wisdom. For much of its history, the ES has been the motivating force behind virtually all developments within the 'exoteric' Society. Studies of the Society have been disproportionately reductive in their assessment of the ES, and have tended to marginalise its influence. The reasons for this have probably to do with access to privileged information: see Brendan French & Gregory Tillett, 'The Esoteric Within the Exoteric: Secret Societies in the Theosophical Society', forthcoming.


29 The Path was begun by Judge in 1886. For the text of his Masters messages, and commentary, see Anon. [John Garrigues, ed.], The Theosophical Movement, 1875-1950, 167-171; see also K. R. Sitaraman, Isis Further Unveiled: or Some More Light on the Pre-W. Q. Judge-Mahatmas, Addison & Co., Madras, 1894.
plaintively for years about a lack of contact with the Masters, but the 'M' seal which was appended to the correspondence had been made for Olcott as a present to Blavatsky's Master Morya. Blavatsky had claimed the seal defective and stored it away among her belongings, from which it disappeared during 1888. Though the evidence against Judge is not insignificant, the words of the Mahatma letters should not be forgotten:

> Remember what I [Koot Hoomi] said to you [Sinnett] some two years ago, 'were H. P. B. to die before we found a substitute', the powers through which we work in our communications with the outside world may permit the transmission of two or three letters more, then it would die out and you would have no more letters from me.

During the ensuing years of conflict between Olcott, Judge, and Besant, the authority to represent the Masters remained the issue of paramount concern. Judge enlisted Besant's help to marginalise Olcott's influence outside of India and to threaten the withdrawal of valued American funds. Indeed, he suggested to Besant that, should she travel to India, she would likely be poisoned - a dire prediction given tacit authority by Judge's Master. Besant travelled instead to America and became embroiled in a controversy regarding a never-specified sexual *mesalliance* supposedly involving the

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30 Olcott noted:

> My confidence in him, however, received a severe shock, for he made pretences of intimacy with the Mahatmas which were absolutely contradicted by the whole drift of his private letters to me since we parted at New York: he had been constantly importuning me to get messages from them, and complaining of their obstinate silence (Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves, Fourth Series*, 346-347).

31 On the matter of the seal, Olcott had further misgivings: it had once been used by Judge in a letter to him: Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom*, 108-109. Olcott relates a story about Judge sending a 'Koot Hoomi' letter to C. Carter Blake and mistakenly 'he signed it by misadventure with his own name instead of the mystical "K.H." initials'. Olcott's story is somewhat complicated, and perhaps undermined, by the suspicion of a plot by Jesuits to use the letter as leverage against the Society: Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The History of the Theosophical Society: Sixth Series* (April, 1896-September, 1898), The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1975, 312-314; cf. also id., *Old Diary Leaves, Fourth Series*, 496. There seems little evidence that the seal was given to Blavatsky as a 'joke': Wessinger, Annie Besant, 69.


33 Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom*, 106. The American Section of the Society had grown exponentially under Judge and had come to be by far the most financially successful of all the Sections. It also comprised a large majority of the membership of the ES. Cf., eg., Mills, *100 Years*, 16-17 et passim.

34 Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves, Fourth Series*, 537-538, 544-545.
President-Founder, Olcott. The latter, believing himself to be reduced 'to a sort of cipher or figurehead', responded with his resignation. Six months later, Olcott revoked his decision, having received a clairaudient message from his 'Guru' [Master] denying him permission. In the interim, Judge, with Besant's support, had been elected (Acting) President by the American and European Sections. The situation was resolved by an Executive Notice, dispatched by Olcott on 21 August, 1892, announcing his resumption of office, much to the relief of the popular membership.

In 1893, Besant finally travelled to India where she became more fully acquainted with the Colonel and was made aware of the latter's allegations against Judge. In response, a quorum of Adyar Theosophists, including Olcott and Besant, brought charges of fraud and mendacity against Judge, and instigated an in-house judicial inquiry. Judge responded, tellingly:

[O]n constitutional and executive principle I shall object from beginning to end to any committee of the Theosophical Society considering any charge against any person which involves an inquiry and decision as to the existence, names, powers, functions, or methods of the 'Mahatmas or Masters' ... The Society has no dogma as to the existence of such Masters ... Hence the President's alternatives ... are mistakes, and are the initial steps to the promulgation of the dogma of belief in the 'Masters'.

Judge's comments cannot but be considered disingenuous, given that he employed his communications with the Masters in proselytising Theosophy. Nevertheless, his observations indicate the established tendency to consider the Masters as a sine qua non doctrine of Theosophical belief, a belief pattern which grew in the wake of the leadership tangles which beset the Society following Blavatsky's death. The Judicial Committee, trounced by Judge's sophistry regarding the unempirical basis of an

35 Olcott had once before proffered his resignation (or mentioned his intent) to Blavatsky. It seems that his motives were twofold: in the first instance he wished to impress upon Blavatsky her need for him, and thus his requirement for more respect and authority; second, it appears his very real enthusiasm for Buddhism and the Sinhalese meant that he had other options in the Orient apart from Theosophy. See in ibid., 157, 269, 455-466.

36 Ibid., 460-461.

37 Mills, 100 Years, 14-17.

38 Anon. [John Garrigues, ed.], The Theosophical Movement, 1875-1950, 208-209.
investigation into any alleged communications with Masters, decided to appease the latter and accept him back into the fold.\textsuperscript{39} Soon thereafter copies of Besant’s analysis of the charges against Judge were printed in the October and November editions of the \textit{Westminster Gazette}. The author, F. Edmund Garrett, understood the ramifications of the Judicial Committee’s decision: ‘every Theosophist is in future free to circulate Mahatma messages, but no Theosophist to test their genuineness’.\textsuperscript{40}

Predictably, Besant’s imputation of fraudulent messages, stolen seals, and outright perfidy to Judge caused immediate consternation in the popular membership, until then generally unaware of any controversy. In response, Judge deposed Besant from the Outer Headship of the ES; Olcott then attempted to force Judge’s resignation.\textsuperscript{41} Ultimately, the stand-off was resolved in April, 1895, when virtually the entire American Section seceded from the Adyar Society and reconstituted as The Theosophical Society in America under Judge.\textsuperscript{42} Although many of the American lodges were later readmitted to the parent organisation, the Judge schism ensured that for many years the original home of the Society would play little part in its subsequent development.

\textit{A New Mouthpiece for the Masters}

With Judge’s expulsion, Olcott’s life Presidency was assured, and Besant’s Outer Headship of the ES reconfirmed. The Judge schism had, however, brought to the fore a number of potentially disquieting notions, not the least of which was the shift of power from the ‘exoteric’ Society to the ES. Olcott, always concerned about ‘rings within rings’, had had his fears confirmed that the ES might gradually usurp his authority and alter the direction of the Society. It might be wondered, then, why no overt struggle between Besant and Olcott ensued, as it had with Judge. The reason, it

\textsuperscript{39} Ransom, \textit{A Short History}, 298.

\textsuperscript{40} Quoted in Campbell, \textit{Ancient Wisdom}, 110. Cf. also, Anon. [John Garrigues, ed.], \textit{The Theosophical Movement}, 574-595. Garrett’s source was Walter Old, a member of the Judicial Committee. The Westminster Gazette articles were published as a book, \textit{Isis Very Much Unveiled, Being the Story of the Great Mahatma Hoax} (Westminster Gazette Office, London, 1894), and went through three editions in one year.

\textsuperscript{41} Campbell, \textit{Ancient Wisdom}, 110-110.

\textsuperscript{42} The American schism involved most of the roughly 6000 members of the Society in the U.S.A. Judge died within a year and was succeeded by Katherine Tingley, for whom see infra Appendix E. See also Mills, \textit{100 years}, 25-31; Campbell, \textit{Ancient Wisdom}, 111.

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appears, subsists in the characters of the two persons involved.

Olcott had been President for twenty years. His early interest in Spiritualism and occultism had, to a discernible degree, given way to the propagation of a pan-national Buddhism, a ‘great International Buddhist League’, which he had begun to foster in the form of the Mahâ-Bodhi Society.\textsuperscript{43} To this end he travelled tirelessly throughout Ceylon, Japan and elsewhere. Olcott’s Theosophy had changed hardly at all since the publication of \textit{Isis Unveiled}:

\begin{quote}
I may say that my Theosophical education has been obtained almost entirely from that book \textit{[Isis Unveiled]}; for my life has been so busy of late years that I have had no time for reading.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

For Olcott, the fundamental truths of the Society were enshrined in its original Objects: fraternalism, the dissemination of Oriental religion, and the discernment of the esoteric truths behind exoteric structures.\textsuperscript{45} His interest in the Masters devolved upon their teachings, rather than their person:

\begin{quote}
All professed teachings of Mahatmas must be judged by their intrinsic merit; if they are wise they become no better by reason of their alleged high source; if foolish, their worthlessness is not nullified by ascribing to them the claim of authority.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

Olcott feared a cult would develop around the person of Blavatsky, and around her Masters. Though a steadfast believer in both, he divined that both chela and Master were becoming the subject of adulation \textit{sui generis}.\textsuperscript{47} Significantly, he discerned the same tendency developing around the person of Annie Besant:

\begin{quote}
If the walls around our Society were less resistant, her [Besant’s] blind admirers would be already digging out a niche in which to
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{44} To combat the cult of personality which was growing around Blavatsky, Olcott began to write his ‘historical reminiscences’, later to become the six-volume \textit{Old Diary Leaves}. To this end, he published such details as Blavatsky’s bigamous marriage: Olcott, \textit{Old Diary Leaves, Fourth Series}, 457, 476-477.
place the idol for worship.  

Annie Besant, for her part, was quite a newcomer to Theosophy. Famous in her own right as a spokesperson for such causes as the National Secular Society (the ‘Secularists’), Freethought, socialism, the Fabian Society, trade unionism, female emancipation generally, and birth control specifically, Besant had wholeheartedly embraced Theosophy in 1889. She has been deemed ‘a phenomenon; a pioneer of pioneers’, and in her social activism, in particular, the epithet is warranted. It is subtracting nothing from her achievements to suggest that she was temperamentally disposed to the elation of conversion: Nethercott recognised as much in dividing his two biographies of Besant, not into parts or volumes, but into nine ‘lives’.

Blavatsky observed shrewdly: ‘She is not psychic nor spiritual in the least - all intellect.’ In this context, it is instructive to note George Bernard Shaw’s impressions:

Like all great public speakers she was a born actress. She was successively a Puseyite Evangelical, an Atheist Bible Smasher, a Darwinian Secularist, a Fabian Socialist, a Strike Leader, and finally a Theosophist ... She ‘saw herself’ as a priestess above all: that was how Theosophy held her to the end. There was a different leading man every time: Bradlaugh, Aveling, Shaw, and Herbert Burrows.

That did not matter. Whoever does not understand this, as I, a

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49 Ibid., 457. It should be noted that, for all of his dislike of the ES, and fear of the Society’s devolution into sectarianism, Olcott was very fond of Besant personally: ‘that dear, unselfish, modest woman’ (in ibid.).


50 Dinnage, Annie Besant, 11.

51 Nethercott, The First Five Lives; id., The Last Four Lives. Some might argue that the elation of conversion to Theosophy would have dimmed for Besant, who was a member for over forty years. It is part of the argument of the present research that the Besant-Leadbeater partnership ensured continuing novelty and thus a repeated experience of conversion to varying ‘Theosophies’.

playwright, do, will never understand the career of Annie Besant. Shaw’s almost negligent reference to the ‘different leading man’ is of profound significance for the historiography of Theosophy. In the second edition of her autobiography, published in 1908, Besant herself had noted the ‘half-blind faith of the pupil in the teacher’, with specific reference to her relationship with Blavatsky. It is also significant in this context that her Theosophical allegiances tended to shift in sympathy with any individual who could exert sufficient influence: initially, and successively, Judge and Olcott gained her partisan support, later Leadbeater would benefit likewise.

It can be adduced that the passing of Blavatsky had brought about something of a conceptual interregnum. Olcott, disinterested in the incipient theurgy of the Inner Group and fearful of the elitism of the ES, assumed the mantle of responsibility, but only in so far as statesmanship and his accustomed rôle as administrator would allow. He sought a more specific engagement with Oriental religion, albeit predicated upon universalist assumptions. Besant, Blavatsky’s anointed successor in matters esoteric yet only recently converted from a once passionately-defended secularism, was for the most part unable to provide any ideational framework or conceptual development, yet possessed a remarkable gift for elucidating the views of others. As George William Russell (‘AE’, 1867-1935) observed, Besant was ‘silly mystically if eloquent and

54 Annie Besant, An Autobiography, 2nd ed., The Theosophical Publishing Society, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1908, ‘preface to third impression’. Suspicions regarding the sexual nature of Blavatsky’s and Besant’s friendship can be dismissed as unfounded; cf., eg., Warren Smith: Certainly the early endearments between her [Besant] and Mme. Blavatsky were such that the lesbian overtones can hardly be overlooked (Smith, The London Heretics, 161).
55 Others have been mentioned: Nethercott suggests Charles Voysey, Thomas Scott, and Moncure Conway as playing the part of ‘leading men’ (Nethercott, The First Five Lives, passim; id., The Last Four Lives, passim). Perhaps the most significant of the occult influences over Besant between Judge/Olcott and Leadbeater was Rai Bahadur Dr. Gyanendra Nath Chakravarti (1863-1936), Professor of Mathematics and Physical Sciences at Allahabad University. Besant for a time considered him a tremendous occult authority and her teacher on the ‘earthly plane’. She went so far as to suggest he was a ‘Master in the flesh’, though she later repudiated him. See Tillet, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 1, 214-215; Anon. [Garrigues, ed.], The Theosophical Movement; 443-448, 452-454.
56 Olcott, Old Diary Leaves, Fifth Series, 272.
golden-tongued otherwise'.

It is in the figure of Charles Webster Leadbeater that Theosophy can truly be said to have chartered new non-Blavatskian terrain. The partnership of Besant and Leadbeater would provide, respectively, the oratorical and the ideational impetus behind the Adyar Society for the first 30 years of the twentieth century. (Crucially, Leadbeater provided the vital factor in undergirding Besant’s authority: contact with the Masters). A number of commentators have referred to Leadbeater as having ‘Svengalised’ Besant; Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) opined: ‘I do not think that Mrs. Besant is a hypocrite; she is credulous and she is duped by Leadbeater’. Many others have compared Leadbeater with Blavatsky, much to the diminishment of the former. Such comparisons are inevitable, but need not be so partisan and reductive; it is true that Leadbeater’s Theosophy may not have evidenced the same erudition and conceptual sophistication as his forebear, but in its own way Leadbeaterian Theosophy is no less challengingly imaginative.

57 G. W. Russell to Ernest Boyd, c.1915, in Henry Summerfield, That Myriad Minded Man: A Biography of G. W. Russell ‘AE’, 1867-1935, Rowman and Littlefield, Totowa, New Jersey, 1975, 134. It should be recalled that Russell (who wrote under the nom de plume ‘AE’) was by no means averse to ‘mysticism’, being attracted to Blavatskian Theosophy and to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. He was disheartened by post-Blavatskian Theosophy: ‘It’s dreadful, after old H. P. B.’ (in ibid.).

58 William Loftus Hare has noted that ‘for more than twenty years [Annie Besant] was no more than an eloquent mouthpiece for her ineloquent colleague’: William Loftus Hare, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’ in The Canadian Theosophist, 15 June, 1934, 121-122; Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 1, 18.

59 Gandhi to Pranjivan Mehjta, 8 May, 1911, in ibid., 16-17.

60 Here the literature is vast. Cf., eg., E. L. Gardner, There Is No Religion Higher Than Truth: Developments in the Theosophical Society, The Theosophical Publishing House (London) Ltd., London, 1963. D. MacKinnon felt moved to write an eight stanza poem (which, one suspects, was designed to be sung to the tune of ‘I Am The Very Model Of A Modern Major-General’ from Gilbert & Sullivan’s Pirates of Penzance), of which two verses give sufficient sense of the total:

Who wouldn’t be a devotee of up-to-date Theosophy?
Which supersedes all cults and creeds and every known philosophy.
It’s [sic] students scan the cosmic plan, and sub-divide the Trinity:
And may with ease obtain degrees that certify divinity.

I do not speak, I haven’t the cheek, about the scheme original
- divulged to us by H. P. B. which we now safely pigeon-hole.
We now have saints whose vision paints a future more fantastical;
And we can fool the golden rule and make it more elastical.
CHAPTER 17

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THE LEADBEATER ASCENDANCY

Until the publication of Gregory Tillett’s *The Elder Brother* in 1982, Charles Webster Leadbeater had never been accorded significant scholarly attention.¹ His empirically-falsifiable self-referential claims had previously evaded scrutiny, and remained, along with his empirically-unassailable assertion of occult power, within the domain of faith. Tillett had an advantage over biographers of Blavatsky, who have been, reluctantly, required to accept at face value the fabulous stories of Blavatsky’s youthful wanderings due to the lacuna of evidence. Unfortunately for contemporary Leadbeaterian Theosophists, Tillett was able to undermine the fanciful mythopoeia in which Leadbeater had indulged, and rewrite the standard histories - on the basis of a birth certificate.²

Childhood and Youth

According to Leadbeater, he had been born on 17 February, 1847, in Stockport, Cheshire.³ He had been introduced to the occult at an early age by a demonstration of psychology in his home by Edward Bulwer-Lytton.⁴ At the age of twelve, he had

¹ Tillett’s *The Elder Brother* was the foundation for his subsequent Ph.D. thesis, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’. The latter, as the more extensive, has been employed for the present work.

² The Theosophical Society attempted to anticipate Tillett’s researches by a biography of their own. Hugh Shearman, an avid Leadbeaterian, wrote a short booklet on the subject (incorporating some of Tillett’s research - though without acknowledgement): Hugh Shearman, *Charles Webster Leadbeater: A Biography*, St. Alban Press, London, 1980. For recent attempts to undermine the veracity of Tillett’s researches see [Various], ‘Correspondence Received’ in *The Liberal Catholic*, 64:5, 1997, 21-28.

³ Leadbeater never wrote an autobiography, but did assist and endorse the work of A. J. Hamerster (1883-1951): A. J. Hamerster, ‘C. W. Leadbeater’ in *Round Table Annual, Order of the Round Table*, Adyar, Madras, 1932; cf. also Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 3, 958n1-2. Leadbeater did write an account of the death of ‘Gerald’: see in ibid., vol. 1, 77-83. Besant and Jinarajadasa both furnished further details in their writings; the latter particularly so: cf., e.g., his unpublished ‘Memo for a Biography of C. W. L.’, a copy of which is in the possession of the present author. See also Clara Codd, *So Rich a Life*, Institute for Theosophical Publicity, Pretoria, 1951, 292ff. The following story of Leadbeater’s early life is assembled from these sources, each either endorsed by Leadbeater or authoritative as having derived from him; relevant details are to be found in Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 1, ch. 2-3.

⁴ Of all the occult luminaries Leadbeater might have selected, Bulwer-Lytton had the most significance, particularly as his character ‘Zanoni’ (from the 1842 novel of the same name) is a Theosophically-acknowledged accurate representation of a Master: see *infra* ch. 29.
accompanied his parents and younger brother, Gerald, to Brazil, where his father, the director of a railway company, had been engaged to construct a new line. During the sojourn, the young Charles and his brother had been first attacked by 'Red Indians' \[sic\], and then by 'renegade insurgents' who murdered Gerald. Charles later sought his revenge upon the leader of the rebels, General Martinez, besting him in swordplay. Just as the youth was going to kill Martinez, the spectre of his slain brother appeared and held back his arm. Further adventures awaited the boy: he was shown the lost treasures of the Incas and allowed to view their descendants' (!) rituals (in which he later saw Freemasonic parallels). The family returned to London in 1861 and Charles subsequently enrolled as an undergraduate at Queen's College, Oxford, in 1865 or 1866, though he never took his degree due to the loss of the family fortune in the 'Black Monday' crash of 1866. Leadbeater worked in various clerical positions, and was a regular communicant in the 'Anglo-Catholic' Church of All Saints, Margaret Street, until his ordination in the Church of England in 1876.9

Tillett's researches have indicated conclusively that Leadbeater was indeed born in Stockport, but on 16 February, 1854. His claim of having met Bulwer-Lytton is not impossible, but highly unlikely. His father was a bookkeeper (to a railway company); there is no record of Gerald.8 Travel in South America is unlikely and, were it true, Leadbeater's memory is defective in particulars.9 Oxford University has no data to support his claim to matriculation and the existence, let alone the loss, of any family

5 Tillett notes that there was no 'Black Monday', rather a 'Black Friday': 11 May, 1866 (see Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 1, 90).
6 This date (i.e., 1876) is provided by Jinarajadasa, and may well be a mistake, as others tend to suggest 1878 (presumably for ordination to the diaconate) and 1879 (for the priesthood): in ibid., 85.
7 Many Theosophical authorities (particularly those involved with the Liberal Catholic Church) have not accepted Tillett's findings with regard to Leadbeater's true date of birth. Such a religionist position is very difficult to defend, however, as the evidence in this instance is overwhelming (including a birth certificate listing by name all relevant parties). For Liberal Catholic Church responses see [Various], 'Correspondence Received' in The Liberal Catholic, 64:5, 1997, 21-28. See also a recent biographical article: Maurice H. Warnon, 'Biographical Notes on Charles Webster Leadbeater: 1847-1934', [Various], 'Correspondence Received' in The Liberal Catholic, 64:5, 1997, 21-28. See also a recent biographical article: Maurice H. Warnon, 'Biographical Notes on Charles Webster Leadbeater: 1847-1934', <http://www.kingsgarden.org/English/Organizations/LCC.GB/leis/Leadbeater.html>, downloaded 12 June, 2000.
8 The absence of Gerald is highly significant, strangely, for future Theosophical history. Leadbeater claimed that his protégé, C. Jinarajadasa, was the incarnation of his murdered brother, and had him brought to England for supervision and education. Jinarajadasa was later to become President of the Theosophical Society (Adyar) and Outer Head of the ES.
9 Note, for instance: the use of Spanish terms in (Portuguese-speaking) Brazil; no record of popular uprisings or of 'General Martinez'; inaccurate understanding of the history of rail in Brazil. For these and other discrepancies, see Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 3, 959n8,9; 960n14 et passim.

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fortune appears most unlikely. Leadbeater was indeed ordained, although in 1879, for the decidedly ‘low-church’ parish of St. Mary’s, Bramshott.\(^{10}\)

Leadbeater back-dated his birth by almost exactly seven years.\(^{11}\) It seems probable that his intention was to further cement his identification with Annie Besant, who was herself born in 1847. In so doing, Leadbeater’s probity is naturally brought into question on other matters. While it is impossible to prove or to disprove his assertions of having fought a werewolf,\(^ {12}\) it is possible to dismiss outright his first ‘Theosophical’ experience. In his 1925 book, *The Masters and the Path*, Leadbeater claimed to have met the Master Morya in London in 1851.\(^ {13}\) The attempted identification with Blavatsky’s first encounter is unsubtle, and blatantly untrue, for he was not to be born for another three years.\(^ {14}\)

*Introduction to Theosophy and Occult Apprenticeship*

Leadbeater’s interest in Theosophy conformed to a common pattern of a progression from fantastic literature, to a general fascination with supernaturalism, and thence to Spiritualism.\(^ {15}\) Having encountered Sinnett’s *The Occult World* in 1883, Leadbeater immediately understood the fruitlessness of his dalliance with necromantic Spiritualism, and joined the Society within the year. As part of the London Lodge, Leadbeater engaged in the strange blend of Theosophy and Spiritualism which Sinnett had been espousing since his return from India. It was during this time that Leadbeater wrote his first letter to the Master Koot Hoomi, having been encouraged to do so by

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\(^{10}\) Leadbeater’s curacy of St. Mary’s, Bramshott, seems to have been arranged by his uncle, the incumbent minister, Revd. William Wolfe Capes. Admitted as a ‘Literate’ (i.e., not a University graduate), he does not appear to have been required to gain much of a theological education; rather, the examinations appear slight: see in ibid., vol. I, ch. 3.

\(^{11}\) It might be conjectured that by changing his birth date from the 16th to the 17th of February, Leadbeater felt his romanticising might remain undetected.

\(^{12}\) C. W. Leadbeater, *The Masters and The Path*, 40-41. This account is made all the more problematic because Leadbeater noted that many years later Morya made reference to the encounter: ‘did you not see how even then I singled you out?’ (in ibid.).

\(^{13}\) For Blavatsky’s 1851 encounter see supra ch. 6.

\(^{14}\) Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. I, 99-110. It is significant that Besant, on the other hand, was converted to Theosophy on the basis of reading *The Secret Doctrine*: see supra ch. 15. Leadbeater’s interest in Spiritualism carried over into his Theosophical works: cf., eg., C. W. Leadbeater, *Spiritualism and Theosophy: Scientifically Examined and Carefully Described*, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1928.
one of the spirit guides (‘Ernest’) of an associate, William Eglinton (1857-1933)." No response was forthcoming.

As outlined supra, Leadbeater’s first encounter with the formidable Blavatsky was during the period of dissent between the followers of Sinnett and Anna Bonus Kingsford; it seems he was firmly in the former camp, characterised by belief in the Masters and a steadfast devotion to Orientalism. Blavatsky seems to have been rather ambivalent about the young curate, occasionally transposing his first two initials for comic effect, though she seems genuinely pleased to have converted a clergyman. 17 Leadbeater, having pleaded with Blavatsky for a reply to his letter, was stunned when the latter apparently precipitated just such a correspondence while rolling a cigarette. The news could not have been better:

Since your intuition led you in the right direction and made you understand that it was my desire you should go to Adyar immediately, I may say more. The sooner you go the better. Do not lose one day more than you can help ... Greeting to you, my new chela. 18

Leadbeater immediately sundered all personal and professional ties and, on the evening of 4 November, 1884, departed London and sailed for Alexandria, where he was again to meet up with Blavatsky. *En route* from Egypt to Colombo, Blavatsky set about Leadbeater’s occult education. Little is known about its content other than that on one occasion the new chela was required to circumambulate the ship’s deck carrying aloft a full chamber pot. 19 The occult virtue of such activity is unknown; more likely it was a typically Blavatskian test of obedience, cruelly designed to undermine Leadbeater’s obvious pomposity. 20

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16 The letter, sealed inside multiple envelopes, was sent to Eglinton. In reply, Eglinton stated that the letter to the spirit Ernest had disappeared. Some days later the letter reappeared with a note (from the spirit?) stating that the letter to K. H. had been delivered and would likely elicit a response.


20 Count Hermann Keyserling (1880-1947) noted that Leadbeater’s ‘occultism was as genuine as his pomposity’. Further, ‘[h]e was stupid, yet I liked him for his quaint mixture of occult gifts and an incredible naïveté’: see Rom Landau, *God is my Adventure*, Faber & Faber, London, 1953, 175.
Upon arrival in Colombo, the party was met by Olcott and plans were hurriedly arranged for the new arrival to take pansil just as the Founders had done. Blavatsky was delighted: ‘the parson Theosophist ... to become a Buddhist and a novice - I was revenged’. The group sailed to Madras, and then journeyed to Adyar, arriving 21 December, 1884, just in time for the rigours of Hodgson’s investigation and the ruptures it brought to the headquarters. Within months, Blavatsky had departed from India, never to return, and Olcott was busily engaged in a series of lecture tours around the country - the estate was all but deserted. Leadbeater’s initial euphoria at the beginning of his great Theosophical adventure was soon replaced by a fear that the occult training he had believed awaited only his arrival in India was not going to eventuate.

In later years Leadbeater asserted that his isolation, first at Adyar, then in Ceylon (as the first Principal of the Buddhist High School, founded by Olcott, from 1886 until his return to Adyar in August, 1888) were not as dispiriting as may be imagined, but were, rather, filled with regular visits from Djwal Kul, Koot Hoomi, and Morya. The Masters had singled out Leadbeater for especial instruction, and were inculcating within him the psychic gifts which hitherto had been unknown to him: ‘It should be understood that in those days I possessed no clairvoyant faculty, nor had I regarded myself as at all sensitive.’ The training was rigorous, but after 42 days, Kuthumi ‘intervened and performed the final act of breaking through which ... enabled me thereafter to use astral sight while still retaining full consciousness in the physical body’. This initiation was followed by a further year of concerted effort during which several Masters offered instruction, and even Blavatsky herself appeared in an

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22 Ibid., 158ff.
24 Leadbeater, How Theosophy, 150: ‘It should be remembered that at that time no one among us except Madame Blavatsky herself (and to a certain extent Damodar) had developed astral sight while still awake in the physical body’.
25 Ibid., 156.
26 Ibid., 158.
'astral body' in order to assist.27 It should be noted that Leadbeater's descriptions of arduous, but glorious years spent in his occult training in India and Ceylon appear to contradict the letters he sent to Blavatsky, Olcott, and Sinnett. Tillett, who examined the correspondence in the Adyar archives, concluded that Leadbeater seems to have been 'miserable, unhappy and lonely'.24

Leadbeater returned to London in late December, 1889.29 From the time of his arrival he appears to have been marginalised within the official London Theosophical milieu centred around the Foundress; he did not join the Blavatsky Lodge, was never invited to enter the ES, and was certainly not considered for the Inner Group.30 Blavatsky's early ambivalence toward the 'parson Theosophist' may well have developed into something approaching contempt: never one to broach rivals, Blavatsky's position as envoy from the Masters was potentially compromised both by Leadbeater's claims to special instruction, and by the Spiritualistic contacts with the Master Koot Hoomi which he was providing for Sinnett's group.31 Leadbeater's obscurity was not to continue: on 21 May, 1889, he met Annie Besant.


See Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 1, 166.

At his Master's urging, Leadbeater had brought with him the young Curruppumallage Jinarajadasa, whom he later claimed as his reincarnated brother: see supra p. 265n8. There was a terrible debacle when Leadbeater attempted to spirit the thirteen year old away from his parents. The boy's father threatened Leadbeater with a gun, but the situation was soon thereafter resolved in Leadbeater's favour. See in ibid., 178.

It seems likely that Leadbeater visited Blavatsky only twice before her death, though he later claimed to have been her friend and pupil. See in ibid., 182; vol. 3, 980n55.

As the Mahatma correspondence had ceased, Sinnett was attempting to contact the Masters through alternative means. Blavatsky and Sinnett were not even on speaking terms at the time. It is significant that Leadbeater's teachings (via Koot Hoomi) agree with Sinnett's, but disagree with Blavatsky's, particularly with regard to the positions of Mars and Mercury within the Planetary chain, i.e., whether they comprise a part of the earth chain (as Leadbeater and Sinnett suggested) or ontologically separate chains (the Blavatskian position). Compare Sinnett, Esoteric Buddhism, 136 ('there are only two other worlds of our chain which are visible ... Mars and Mercury'); C. W. Leadbeater, A Textbook of Theosophy, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1914, 123 ('4C is ... Mars. Globe 4D is our own Earth ... Globe 4E is ... Mercury') contra Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, vol. 1, 164 ('neither Mars nor Mercury belong to our chain'). Attempts to minimise the discordance founder on the declaratory nature of Blavatsky's rebuttal: cf., eg., Algeo, 'The Tree of Theosophy', 4. It might be significant in this context that Sinnett was Leadbeater's patron: Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 1, 178. Leadbeater's attraction to Sinnett's popularist works is obvious:

Although Madame Blavatsky herself had previously written Isis Unveiled, it had attracted but little attention, and it was Mr. Sinnett who first made the teaching really available for western readers (Leadbeater, A Textbook, 15). 269
Besant, newly acquainted with Theosophy, had become a sometime member of Sinnett’s ‘Inner Group’. She and Leadbeater soon earned a popular following, caused, in the main, by regular lecturing on behalf of the Society and by answering queries about Theosophy in the pages of the British Theosophical journal, *The Vahan*. Leadbeater wisely avoided any involvement in the disputes over charismatic authority and succession in the wake of Blavatsky’s death, choosing instead to continue to build his profile as an authority on Theosophy and the Masters. It seems he was not alone in claiming a personal mandate from the Brotherhood; Olcott noted a disturbing phenomenon:

I have knowledge of at least seven different psychics in our Society who believe themselves to be in communication with the same Mahatmas and doing their work, who have each a knot of disciples or adherents about them, and whose supposed teachers give orders which conflict with each other’s!33

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32 *The Vahan* (Sanskrit: ‘vehicle’) was begun in December, 1990, and survived until 1921.

33 Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves, Fifth Series*, 272. Blavatsky had noted a similar trend in the years immediately preceding her death:

Great are the desecrations to which the names of two of the Masters have been subjected. There is hardly a medium who has not claimed to have seen them, Every bogus swindling society, for commercial purposes, now claims to be guided and directed by ‘Masters’, often supposed to be far higher than ours! (Blavatsky, *The Key*, 191).

It is informative to note one such circumstance of ‘mediumistic Masters’. Frederick Leigh Gardner, who joined the Theosophical Society in 1884, had been in contact for some time with several ‘guides’, the most notable being a spirit named Merilhac. On 29 September, 1884, he was informed by another medium that his guide was in fact Koot Hoomi. Subsequent messages from the latter came via mediumship. Typical is the following (uncorrected for punctuation):

*Mr. Gardner’s Mahatma is Koot Hoomi*, and we wish him to know it, we have not told you this before, If Mr. Gardner will now use the Mahatmas own name he will strengthen the rapport, but he must not tell anyone ... My dear children there is no difference: we have only just brought you out of darkness into light you may now know us face to face: but be prudent and do not let it be known outside your own group: let things reveal themselves, if they do you will then know it is right for them to be known: but do not be the first to tell the facts for in many respects we have to work in secret ... Tell Mr. Gardner that my influence can reach him just as it ever did, no matter where I am or how employed, I can always attend spiritually to my charges; He must appeal to me ever, and ask my help, I will give it as soon as I can, for being ‘en rapport’ My will thrown in his direction is sufficient and thought answers to thought’ (F. L. Gardner’s diary record of 29 September, 1884, in ‘MSS of F. L. Gardner, Frater De Profundis Ad Lucem of the G. D. Séances in 1881/2 with alleged communications with Blavatsky’s “Mahatmas”’, unpublished manuscript, Yorke Collection, Warburg Institute, London).
Clairvoyant Investigations

As the controversy about the 1894 Judicial Committee into Judge's mandate raged, Leadbeater involved himself in the production of his first esoteric treatise. In November of the same year he had given a lecture to Sinnett's group, entitled 'The Astral Plane', and later decided to publish the talk as a book. This was to be no ordinary book: the Master K. H. carried the galley proofs off to the Museum of Records within the stronghold of the 'Great White Brotherhood', explaining that 'The Astral Plane was an unusual production and a landmark for the intellectual history of mankind'. The book provided the template for the entire Leadbeater œuvre: the style is discursive, reading in a part like an introductory science text, yet the materials under discussion exist wholly beyond the bounds of empirical survey. The author considered himself a 'practiced investigator' called upon 'to classify' and 'to catalogue' the astral plane - which was 'as real as Charing Cross'.

Koot Hoomi aptly summarised the objectives of the book:

The Master explained that hitherto, even in such great civilisations as that of Atlantis, the sages of the occult schools had approached the facts of Nature [such as the astral plane] not from the modern scientific standpoint, but from a different angle. The occult teachers of the past had sought more the inner significance of facts, what might be termed the 'life side' of Nature, and less the 'form side' of Nature, such as characterizes the scientific method of today ... On the other hand, for the first time among occultists, a detailed investigation had been made of the Astral Plane as a whole, in a manner similar to that in which a botanist in an Amazonian jungle would set to work in order to classify its trees, plants and shrubs, and so write a botanical history of the jungle.


19 C. Jinarajadasa, 'Introduction', xiv-xv. Again, Koot Hoomi's comments were conveyed to the author via Leadbeater.

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Immediate parallels with Blavatsky’s methodology (her ‘occultistic gnosis’) are obvious: the multiple-tier cosmology is presented as an ontic reality, a truth beyond scientific discovery but apparently describable in quasi-scientific terms. Blavatsky’s Masters had vouchsafed such knowledge to her through access to such documents as the *Book of Dzyan*, and through personal instruction; Leadbeater’s Masters had availed him of sufficient occult power, ‘astral perception’, that he was enabled to view the Theosophical metastructures at first hand.

For those aspiring chelas not gifted with such ‘utter certainty of knowledge based on [astral] experience’, cleaving to one so adept would assist in the development of ‘higher sight and deeper knowledge’. Indeed, the acquiring of such skills would not only furnish the individual with the secrets of ‘biology, physics, chemistry, astronomy, medicine, and history’, but would place the aspirant’s foot ‘on that great Upward Path which leads men to the sublime heights of adeptship’. The confidence of Leadbeater’s assertions, assumed to be sufficient conviction of his elevated status, appealed particularly to Annie Besant, who herself was at the time bereft of such faculties - a not altogether comfortable position for the newly incardinated Outer Head of the ES and *de facto* dogmatist of the Society. Indeed, given the debacle over Judge’s communications from the Masters, coming on the heels of equally problematical incidents involving Blavatsky (the Kiddle ‘plagiarism’, the Coulomb affair, and the Hodgson Report), and in the absence of physical visitations from envoys of the Brotherhood, Leadbeater’s astral contact with the Masters at least appeared authoritative, and was, perhaps conveniently for all, unfalsifiable.

The success of *The Astral Plane* encouraged Leadbeater to extend the range of his seership from the subtle planes of existence into Theosophical temporality. John Varley (1850-1933), a member of Sinnett’s London Lodge, proposed to make a comparative study of Theosophical and modern academic ethnology. Leadbeater
offered his clairvoyant assistance and began to delineate Varley’s previous incarnations in order to elucidate the progress of the Root Races. Leadbeater was able to trace ‘Erato’, Varley’s Ego, through sixteen previous lives, beginning in the sixth sub-race of the Fourth Root Race (Chaldea; 19 245 B.C.E.). The rich detail afforded to the particulars of Varley’s incarnations, including such minutiae as exact lifespan, pastimes, geography, and domestic life, were such as to accord to Leadbeater’s astral vision a documentary exactitude in the minds of his associates. Of profound significance is his realisation that his astral vision could right the wrongs of historiography:

What splendid possibilities open up before the man who is in full possession of this power may easily be imagined ... Not only can he review at his leisure all history with which we are acquainted, correcting as he examines it the many errors and misconceptions which have crept into the accounts handed down to us; he can also range at will over the whole story of the world from its very beginning, watching the slow development of intellect in man, the descent of the Lords of the Flame, and the growth of the mighty civilisations which they founded.

One of the distinct advantages of Leadbeater's systematic mapping of the past lives of fellow Theosophists via the 'Akashic Records' was that he was thus able to alter the record of history such that later accretions and distortions could be avoided. Blavatsky

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42 The process is described in C. Jinarajadasa, 'Occult Investigations' in The Theosophist, LIX, 6 March, 1938, 54-61.
43 In Blavatskian Theosophical parlance, the 'Ego' is an indissoluble compound of the 'Monad' and 'Manas' (or 'Higher Mind'). After physical death, the Ego casts off its lower Manas in the purgatorial Kāmā-loka (or 'Desire World), which may well become ghosts or the guides of Spiritualism, and travels to the Devachan, a state of bliss and rest, where it will await its next incarnation: cf., eg., Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. X, 219.
44 Varley's incarnations were ultimately published in book form by C. Jinarajadasa in 1941: C. W. Leadbeater, The Soul's Growth Through Reincarnation: Lives of Erato and Spica, ed. C. Jinarajadasa, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1949. 'Erato', the Muse of lyric poetry, was the name employed by Leadbeater for Varley; 'Spica' stands for Francesca Arundale (? - 1924), the natural aunt and adopted mother of the third President of the Society, George Arundale (1878-1945). Leadbeater intended initially to use the names of constellations, but ran out after demand for past lives exceeded 300: Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 1, 199.
45 The 'Lords of the Flame' are the Dhyanis who descended into human incarnation in the Third Root Race; see supra ch. 13.
herself had stressed the fallibility of human record-keeping; esoteric religions, for example, were but the ossified redactions of the *prisca theologia*. Leadbeater was able to confirm Blavatsky’s pronouncements, not by replicating her method of employing a universal textual hermeneutic to ‘dissolve’ the exoskeleton of history, but by direct observation of history *in progress*.

There is, however, one significant point of departure between Blavatsky and Leadbeater, even at this early stage. For the former, the application of the esoteric keys of interpretation (in the main as a textual hermeneutic) was in itself a spiritual exercise, *a species of ascent*. The knowledge of the esoteric web which links nature, text, and history together in sympathetic concordance - let alone the ability to manipulate the strands of this web which such knowledge engenders - is itself transformational, initiatory. For Leadbeater, his means of knowing (clairvoyance, astral perception) are but latent faculties in the human and convey no spiritual advantage:

'[Clairvoyance] has been called ‘spiritual vision’, but no rendering could be more misleading than that, for in the vast majority of cases there is no faculty connected with it which has the slightest claim to be honoured by so lofty a name.'

Besant, excited by the stimulus of new revelation, soon began to collaborate with Leadbeater in his researches. She had been hampered in her first efforts by a lack of psychism, but, under Leadbeater’s tutelage, developed such gifts between 16 and 21 August, 1895, during a working holiday in Box Hill, Surrey. Seated in the open air, Leadbeater and Besant would investigate the Devachanic Plane astrally, while their companions Bertram Keightley and Jinarajadasa looked on, the latter taking notes for subsequent publication. Besant exulted in her new-found prowess, and in its

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48 'Ibid., I.
49 C. W. Leadbeater, ‘Dr. Besant’s First Use of Clairvoyance’ in *The Theosophist* LIV:1, October, 1932, 11-13 (the article is a reprint of a letter from Leadbeater to Francesca Arundale, 25 August, 1895).

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instigator, and invited Leadbeater and Jinarajadasa to move into the London Headquarters.

Leadbeater was now ensconced within the upper echelon of Theosophical power and influence, due in major part to Besant's patronage and the advantages of their mutual symbiosis. His astral investigations continued apace, more often than not assisted by Besant who would confirm his visions; the astral and devachanic planes were ever more elaborately mapped, and the demand for past-life biographies increased exponentially. Not all were impressed by the rôle he had come to assume as the premier Theosophical visionary within the London Theosophical community. Bertram Keightley was concerned about the disproportionate emphasis on 'lower mental senses':

It meant, in the forced unfolding and constant use of the astral and lower mental senses, a tremendous outpouring of the 'personality' at the expense of the real High Self, and might ultimately lead to most dire results.\(^{31}\)

Olcott, with a perspicacity typical of his later years, noted a tendency to personal adulation within the membership; he was surely referring to Leadbeater:

[A]n idol they must have; and H. P. B. having passed out of reach, they are clustering around the next personage available. Not even workers of lesser knowledge and nobility of character escape this euphemistical tendency ... I could name others still, among our prominent workers, who are in peril from a like adulation. Let us hope that they may see their danger before their heads get turned.\(^{52}\)

Leadbeater's output was prodigious and began to recommend itself to areas outside of the traditional purview of Theosophical conceptualists. Soon he was writing on Theosophical ethics, particularly with regard to the education of children: 'It is simply impossible to exaggerate the plasticity of these unformed vehicles'.\(^{53}\) Leadbeater's


\(^{52}\) Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves, Fourth Series*, 458.


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work with children extended to individual tuition: he oversaw the London branch of the Lotus Circle, a loosely-structured gathering for Theosophists' children, and formalised his customary arrangement of selecting a few boys for special personal guidance. He had become, in Tillett's term, an 'occult paediatrician'. (It should not be forgotten that many of those Theosophists who later decried Leadbeater for abusing his position with the children were among the first to hand theirs over for his rarefied tuition. It might be noted that such elite occult training earned much distinction for the parents and boys so selected).

The occult partnership of Leadbeater and Besant flourished throughout the final years of the nineteenth century and beyond. Their joint investigations extended the range of synoptic Theosophy, yet remained for the major part within the metastructural idiom fashioned by Blavatsky. They examined the geography of space and discovered four further planets within the solar system; they mapped the rise and fall of continents, and of the ephemeral civilisations which peopled them; and they continued to extend their investigations of the incarnating human Ego further into history. Such investigations must really be considered as the provision of psychic archaeology and astronomy for the broad membership; their value lay not so much in their intrinsic revelations, so much as in their capacity as confirmation of the Blavatskian Theosophical cosmohistory. The broad correlation between Blavatsky's mapping of the multiple worlds and eras of historical human experience, and the visionary journeys of Leadbeater and Besant along those preconstructed paths, allayed fears that Blavatsky had engineered the entire Theosophical edifice herself, and, of profound significance, reassured the membership that the self-same Masters who had provided the ideational constructs of Theosophy in the first place were even now still directing it.

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54 The Lotus Circle was conceived by the Theosophist Herbert White (1878-1917) in New York in 1892: see Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 1, 213; vol. 3, 988n53. Leadbeater was also involved in William Walters 'The Golden Chain', another American group for Theosophists' children: in ibid., vol. 1, 229; vol. 3, 992n31. For an introduction to the Lotus Circle, and a selection of their songs, see Anonymous, The Lotus Song Book: (Words Only) For the Use of Lotus Circles, The Lotus Journal, London, 1907.

55 Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 1, 212.

56 Ibid., 217ff.
Occult Chemistry

A number of authors have emphasised the utter originality of Leadbeater’s next major venture: the psychic investigation of the atom. Yet the shift in Leadbeater’s gaze from the macroscopic to the microscopic should be seen as an entirely normative development in his clairvoyant researches. ‘Occult Chemistry’, as he termed it, was to fascinate Leadbeater for the remainder of his life and provide the medium through which he could proclaim the priority of clairvoyance over the physical sciences. For Leadbeater, the results of his atomic investigations did not supplant the deductions of empirical science, but perfected them, for the adept could observe the operations of atomic and molecular chemistry and physics on planes unavailable to the mundane scientist. Sinnett regarded the ‘ultra-microscopic’ clairvoyant investigations as an overdue rejoinder to the lead achieved by ‘ordinary science’:

[Ordinary science has overtaken the occult research I am dealing with, but that research rapidly carried the occult student into regions of knowledge whither, it is perfectly certain, the ordinary physicist must follow him at no distant date.]

Leadbeater’s initial forays into the atomic and sub-atomic worlds were modest. He noted the difficulties of beginning with gold (Sinnett’s suggestion), a ‘heavy metal of

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97 Cf., eg., Elizabeth W. Preston, ‘C. Jinarajadasa and Occult Chemistry’ in The Theosophist, 74, 11 August, 1963, 361-366. Preston notes that Jinarajadasa told her that ‘Occult chemistry is the Mahā Chohan’s hobby’ (p.366). The Mahā Chohan, in Leadbeaterian Theosophy, has undergone the 7th initiation and is the Master to such other Masters (of the 6th initiation) as K. H., M., etc. In answer to the presumed originality of Occult Chemistry, Graharne Barratt noted the similarities, particularly in the descriptions and illustration of the ‘anu’, to the illustration of the atom in the Spiritualist Edwin D. Babbit’s Principles of Light and Colour of 1878: see Graharne W. Barratt, ‘Letter to the Editor’ [in ‘Correspondence’], The Canadian Theosophist, XXXIV:8, 15 October 1953, 121-127. Leadbeater referred to Babbit’s book in Occult Chemistry (Besant & Leadbeater, Occult Chemistry, 2nd ed., 10), and the book had been in the library of the London Headquarters of the Society since 1896 (Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 3, 990n16).

98 Leadbeater’s first investigations were published in 1895 in the November edition of Lucifer; his last investigations (into ‘Double Hydrogen’ or ‘Deuterium’) were completed 13 October, 1933, only months before his death. See C. Jinarajadasa, ‘Occult Investigations’ in The Theosophist, LIX, 9 June 1938, 281-282; id., The Golden Book, 174-175.


40 A. P. Sinnett, ‘A Preliminary Survey’ in ibid., 1-2. Sinnett further noted: [Occult Chemistry] will one day be a recognised vindication of the method that will at some time in the future be generally applied to the investigation of Nature’s mysteries. For the later research which this volume deals with does establish the principle with a force that can hardly be resisted by any fair-minded reader (in ibid., 3).
high atomic weight', and chose instead to examine elements with low atomic valencies, such as hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen. Leadbeater encouraged Besant to attempt 'ultra-microscopic' psychism herself, and proclaimed the result of her clairvoyant efforts to be the molecule of carbon. Soon their joint investigations became more complex and involved minute analysis of the periodic table. During a break in a walk along Hampstead Heath, the pair were able to discern the ultimate monadic particle, christened the 'anu', which constituted the foundational unit of atomic physics. Hydrogen consisted of eighteen such units, oxygen possessed 290. By a process of simple arithmetical division (290 divided by eighteen equals, approximately, sixteen - the accepted atomic weight of oxygen), Leadbeater was able to confirm the veracity of the periodic table on occult grounds and, significantly, posit the occult anu as the constitutive predicate for the physical atom.

In time, Leadbeater and Besant - the latter in a very minor capacity - examined almost all of the then known elements. The resulting descriptions and illustrations are quite

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41 Ibid., 2.
42 Nethercott, The Last Four Lives, 50ff.
43 The 'Periodic Table of the Elements', arranged by atomic weight, was first conceived by Dimitri Mendeleev (1834-1907) and became a subject of especial interest to Theosophists due to the influence of Sir William Crookes (1832-1919). Crookes, an avid Theosophist and chemist, discovered thallium in 1861 and was responsible for the 'Crookes Tube', the forerunner of the modern light globe; he maintained an interest in Leadbeater's investigations for many years: see C. Jinarajadasa, 'Occult Investigations' in The Theosophist, LIX, 8 May 1938, 173.

Sinnett is far too confident also, that science must soon come to recognize the validity of the Occult Chemistry work. In the event another 60 years were to elapse before what now appears to be true identification began to emerge, namely the recognition of the ultimate physical atom as a quark, or more strictly as the subquark named in 1979 as the omegon (in ibid., 13).

It should be noted that Smith is writing of his own researches - considered fanciful by peers: cf. infra p. 279n67.
46 Leadbeater's initial investigations were into gaseous elements, all commonly available. Later he was supplied with dense elements by Sir William Crookes: see C. Jinarajadasa, 'Occult Investigations' in The Theosophist, LIX, 9 June 1938, 279 et passim. Later still, Leadbeater employed 'nature spirit scouts' to contact known repositories of the elements required: in ibid., 279-280.
baroque by any standard, and have gained no significant scientific support. This last is of crucial importance, as it is simply not feasible to suggest that these occult investigations were metaphorical or allegorical in intent; Leadbeater’s visions were emphatically to be regarded as fact:

I think we may claim that Theosophy has ... applied the modern scientific spirit to this problem of the unseen world, and has tabulated its observations and built up a coherent system.

The ramifications of the failure of *Occult Chemistry* to attract recognition from scientific peers (as Leadbeater considered them) have serious repercussions for the reception of much of his Theosophical pedagogy. When Leadbeater claims that ‘an astral form passes unconsciously through a physical wall’, or that it does not matter 'whether we say that a ghost has passed through a wall, or a wall has passed through a

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67 The third edition of *Occult Chemistry* is very much enlarged on earlier versions and includes 230 illustrations of the elements. At atomic (and sub-atomic) level, the elements tend to replicate in shape (and character?) such animals as snakes and ‘cheese-mites’, and such objects as bundles of sticks and eggs. Rheumatic fever appears to be the result of ‘arrow-headed creatures’. See Annie Besant & C. W. Leadbeater, *Occult Chemistry: Investigations by Clairvoyant Magnification Into the Structure of the Atoms of the Periodic Table and of Some Compounds*, 3rd ed., eds. C. Jinarajadasa & Elizabeth Preston, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1951, 382-384 et passim.


The awkwardly titled *Extra-Sensory Perception of Quarks* is a technically excellent *Chariots of The Gods* ... I could never escape the feeling the author was searching for the origin and forms of atoms and elementary particles amid the shapes of snowflakes in the sky and figures of diatoms in the sea (E. Walker, ‘A Book Review of “ESP Of Quarks”’ [rev. art.], from *Theta*, 10:1, 1982: reprinted in *Theosophical Research Institute - Wheaton - Newsletter*, 10, September, 1982, 7-8).

69 Leadbeater noted, in a related context:

I am not attempting, therefore, in this book to prove that clairvoyance is a reality; I take that for granted, and proceed to describe what is seen by its means (C. W. Leadbeater, *Man Visible and Invisible: Examples of Different Types of Men as Seen by Means of Trained Clairvoyance*, Theosophical Publishing Society, London, 1902, 5-6).

ghost' or indeed that a 'gnome passes freely through a rock, and walks about within the earth, as comfortably as we walk about in the air', such apparently metaphysical acts are presented axiomatically as scientifically explicable phenomena based entirely upon causal principles. Thus astral forms, ghosts, and gnomes, once occupants of a meta-empirical realm of myth, fantasy and illustrative folklore and entirely unrestrained by the laws which govern materiality, are granted a specific ontology contingent upon the dictates of scientific rationalism, even if the latter are mediated through an occult prism. The implications of this extreme occultistic stance for Leadbeater's later depiction of the Masters are clear.

The results of such overt reductionism were twofold: in the first instance, his appeal to scientific discursiveness (and, somewhat paradoxically, scientific method) enabled his conclusions to be falsifiable. Thus it is assumed that if his 'scientific' statements about the construction of the atom and its mobility are empirically proved incorrect, ergo gnomes and ghosts - explained in the same terms - do not exist. Second, and of a more far-reaching significance, if such metaphysical entities as ghosts are presented as subject to rational laws, they are a priori denied the greater part of their parabolical potentialities, and the mythic mesocosm between the divine and humanity is suppressed. This tendency, less pronounced but nevertheless present in Blavatsky, stands in contradistinction from the stated Theosophical goal of 're-enchanting' the cosmos.

Leadbeater and Besant extended their surveys to include the analysis of disease and the description of 'thought forms'. The latter provides evidence of a return to certain of the preoccupations of Spiritualism: Tillett noted that Spiritualist journals of the early

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70 For quotes see Besant & Leadbeater, Occult Chemistry, 2nd ed., 'Appendix, viii.
71 Often the investigators would be required to move atoms about in order to check the validity of their molecular identifications. The 'experiments' read as if they were performed in a physics laboratory: cf., eg., the discussions of carbon monoxide and calcium carbonate in Besant & Leadbeater, Occult Chemistry, 3rd ed., 358.
72 This argument is, of course, no less reductionistic, but can be applied to Leadbeater's attempted rationalisation with devastating effect. The argument is not dissimilar to that applied to Paul Johnson's identifications of Blavatsky's Masters as men in her acquaintance. By ascribing mundane identities to the Masters, many have assumed that ipso facto all meta-empirical claims can be dismissed - a position that Johnson rejects. See supra ch. 1.
1890s were referring to attempts to photograph thoughts.\textsuperscript{73} In fact, there is evidence to suspect that by the end of the century Leadbeater had exhausted many of the more obvious avenues of Theosophical cosmology, ethnography, and historiography. There is little to suggest that he was more than superficially familiar with the Blavatskian œuvre; his references to her works are few, and his analyses tend to be cursory and uncritical. Indeed, readers of the Leadbeaterian redaction of Blavatskian Theosophy are left with the sense that his extremely successful popularising of the Founder’s formulations (the ‘Penny Catechism’ of her Summa Theologica) reflect the real depth of his engagement. As a consequence, Leadbeater’s clairvoyant investigations of the solar system, the Root Races, reincarnationism, and the planes of existence had exhausted, or so he seems to have thought, the more obvious possibilities of psychic exploration available to him from the Blavatskian template. Occult Chemistry and Thought Forms can be said to exist on the periphery of the Blavatskian domain; very soon thereafter he was required to search further afield.

\textit{Theosophical Homiletics}  

By the end of the nineteenth century, Leadbeater’s position in the Theosophical Society appeared unassailable. His already voluminous publications encouraged the spread of his reputation as a great Theosophical seer, and he was soon in demand for overseas lecture tours. In late 1899, following an address to the European Section of the Society at their annual convention, Leadbeater travelled to the Netherlands, where he was greeted as a man of ‘profound learning and deep knowledge’.\textsuperscript{74} From the Netherlands, Leadbeater journeyed to New York and began a tour which would include Boston, Toronto, Toledo, Chicago, Seattle, Washington, and San Francisco.\textsuperscript{75} Despite friction with The Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society,\textsuperscript{76} the tour was a resounding success, in large part due to Leadbeater’s acknowledged expertise in thought forms in much of the psychical photography of the contemporary New Age.\textsuperscript{77} Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 1, 225. One can discern the influence of Leadbeater’s Thought Forms in much of the psychical photography of the contemporary New Age.\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 229. Tillett notes that Theosophical journals in the Netherlands referred to him as a ‘meteor’.\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 230. Following Judge’s death in 1896 (and the almost immediate schisms as a result of argument over succession), Katherine Tingley in February, 1898, renamed The Theosophical Society in America as The Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society. By 1900 the Universal Brotherhood had moved to a large property in Point Loma, California. See John Cooper, ‘The Theosophical Society in Australia’, part 1, Master of Arts thesis, School of Studies in Religion, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1986, 35-36; cf. also Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 1, 230-231. For Tingley and the subsequent history of the ‘Point Loma Theosophists’ see infra Appendix E.
the matter of the Theosophical education of children.\textsuperscript{77}

As the tour progressed, it soon became apparent that Leadbeater's status as an 'initiate', enhanced by his skills at oratory and acknowledged facility at psychism, had placed him on a par with Besant as the shining stars in the Theosophical firmament. He was in demand wherever he went; his American tour was followed immediately by similar engagements in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy.\textsuperscript{78} Soon a 'Leadbeater Fund' had amassed sufficient finances to allow him to return to America for an extended tour, and so began a 28 month lecture series which succeeded in attracting a large number of converts to Theosophy (and some from the Universal Brotherhood).\textsuperscript{79}

The tenor of Leadbeater's lectures can be ascertained from his books of the early 1900s, many of which are collations of his public addresses.\textsuperscript{80} For the most part, his talks concentrated upon what might be termed occult technologies: clairvoyance, Mesmerism, telepathy, dreams, Spiritualism, and Mind Cure.\textsuperscript{81} Theosophical ethics are also emphasised: vegetarianism, 'how to build character', 'Theosophy in every-day life', and the 'abuse of psychic powers'.\textsuperscript{82} Typical is the following:

[Theosophy] considers all the various religions as statements of that truth from different points of view; since, though they differ much as to nomenclature and as to articles of belief, they all agree as to the only matters which are of real importance - the kind of life which a good man should lead, the qualities which he must develop, the

\textsuperscript{77} In March, 1902, Leadbeater was granted a charter to convene a Lotus Lodge for youths considered too old for the Lotus Circle. The Lodge produced a magazine, The Lotus Journal. See Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 1, 232.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 231.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 232-238.


\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., passim.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 10.
There are occasional addresses upon religious themes, particularly of an eschatological nature, though again they tend to highlight Leadbeater’s astral perceptions and the synoptic subjects of Spiritualism. It is significant that the talks seem to have simplified Blavatskian conceptions almost to nil, which reinforces the suspicion that he was either uninformed about, or uninterested in, the broad esoteric canon.

In sum, Leadbeater’s lectures most closely approximate a form of Theosophical homiletics. His references to external sources are rare: for inspiration and support he relies upon his ‘faultlessly accurate’ clairvoyance. Emblematic of Leadbeater’s sermonising are the ever-increasing references to ‘God’ in his lectures and publications. Blavatsky begrudged all the traditional nomenclature of the divine in her writings, and allowed the term ‘God’ in a limited sense only; Koot Hoomi was quite unequivocal:

Neither our philosophy nor ourselves believe in a God, least of all in one whose pronoun necessitates a capital H.

Leadbeater’s An Outline of Theosophy, based upon his American lectures, devoted an entire chapter to ‘The Deity’. He suggested that ‘the existence of God [is] the first and greatest of our principles’, he appeared not to deny the possibility of a personal God (a certain anathema to Blavatsky), and he made liberal use of the ‘capital H’.

It is highly significant that Leadbeater mentions Blavatsky once only in this work, and in reference to her ‘monumental’ The Secret Doctrine: he suggests that ‘students’ first read Besant’s Ancient Wisdom (Annie Besant, The Ancient Wisdom: An Outline of Theosophical Teachings, Theosophical Publishing Society, 1897) and Sinnett’s Growth of the Soul (A. P. Sinnett, The Growth of the Soul: A Sequel to ‘Esoteric Buddhism’, Theosophical Publishing Society, London, 1896): ibid., 75. References to his own and Besant’s works are numerous.

Typical is C. W. Leadbeater, The Other Side of Death: Scientifically Examined and Carefully Described, Theosophical Publishing Society, London, 1904; heaven, hell, and purgatory are granted special mention, as are folkloric phenomena such as vampires, hauntings, and so on. Noteworthy are Leadbeater’s comments regarding the usefulness of the dead:

[All the information which we have about the astral world might be obtained by any intelligent denizen of that world. So we frequently find particulars which we are in the habit of calling Theosophical coming through other channels; and that would be so still more often if it were not for the fact that most dead people are not trained scientific observers; they describe just what they see close round them, and do not try to see their world as a whole (Leadbeater, Invisible Helpers, 9).


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C. W. Leadbeater, An Outline of Theosophy, 74.

Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. IV, 68; vol. VI, 141-143.


Ibid., 23 et passim.
The reasons why Leadbeater’s books and lectures became so immediately popular are simple to ascertain. In the first place, Theosophy was reconfigured sufficiently to simplify Blavatskian propositions so as to make them more accessible and less erudite. Second, it was ‘theologised’ to a degree such that fewer disharmonies could be detected between Theosophy and conventional religion. Indeed, Leadbeater’s redaction ensured that Theosophical religious claims became more palatable to an audience comprised in large part by those who wished to maintain adherence to confessional Christianity while at the same time enjoying the frisson of Theosophy. Third, Leadbeater exhibited none of Blavatsky’s reticence about the achievement of occult powers: his 1903 book, The Other Side of Death: Scientifically Examined and Carefully Described, includes chapters with the beguiling titles ‘How to Meet a Ghost’ and ‘How Clairvoyance is Developed’. Fourth, Leadbeater could rely on the enticement he personified in propre persona. Like Blavatsky, his reputation for paranormal capacities ensured that many people would initially be attracted to him from curiosity or wonder, and from these would be drawn potential Theosophists and Leadbeaterian disciples.

There is a detectable difference, however, in the discourse of metaphysical power between Blavatsky and Leadbeater. The former tended to emphasise the gulf between the Masters and the general populace (including chelas such as herself in the latter category), thus accentuating ‘psychic powers’ as something of a gift granted her for evangelical purposes. The latter made many fewer references to the Masters and emphasised that ‘unconscious powers are possessed by all of us’, thus broadening the possibilities of chelaship beyond those fortunate few adopted by the trans-Himalayan Brotherhood. A further consequence of this emphasis on personal attainment is the inference that those few possessed of such faculties (‘conscious exercise of these powers is only for the few among us at present’) are themselves popularly assumed

90 Leadbeater, The Other Side, ‘Contents’.
91 Leadbeater, Some Glimpses, 233.
92 Ibid.
to be 'Master-like'. The tendency to reconfigure chelaship from the notion of direct access to the Masters (or indirect, via letters) to acceptance of the psychically-derived teachings of their anointed chelas, personified by Leadbeater and Besant, would characterise Leadbeater’s tenure as Theosophical theoretician, and would thus assist in divesting the Society of its specifically Oriental axis, and pave the way for those cultural paradigms beloved by the Outer Head and her éminence grise.

93 It might be noted that Leadbeater’s ambivalence about his own latent occult capacities and the necessity of the Masters is nowhere better illustrated than in his account of his own ‘initiation’. After strenuous preparatory work, ‘the Master Himself [K. H.] intervened and performed the final act of breaking through which completed the process, and enabled me thereafter to use astral sight’. The author is quick to add, ‘I was given to understand that my own effort would have enabled me to break through in twenty-four hours longer, but that the Master interfered because He wished to employ me at once in a certain piece of work’: Leadbeater, How Theosophy, 158.
Allegations of Misconduct

Leadbeater's American tour was soon thereafter followed by a lecture series in Australia and New Zealand, and then by an extended series of talks throughout India. Early in 1906, he stopped in Benares at the home of Besant, expecting to continue his occult investigations. Soon afterward, Besant received a letter from Helen Dennis, the parent of one of Leadbeater's special charges, accusing the latter of 'teaching boys given into his care habits of self-abuse and demoralizing personal practices'. The ramifications of this charge with regard to Leadbeater's reputation have created more consternation among Theosophists than perhaps any other issue of the twentieth century.

Little space need be allocated for an examination of these allegations, as they have scant bearing on Leadbeater's Theosophy and have been examined at length by Tillett. In a customary Theosophical reaction, Olcott appointed a committee (the Council of the British Section inter alia) to investigate the complaints of the various American parents. Leadbeater, interviewed by the committee, admitted that he had given advice to several boys regarding the 'prophylactic' purposes of masturbation; it appears he recommended the practice to some youths as an alternative to 'unchastity' and in order to forestall unwanted developments 'on the other planes'. More significant, even by modern standards, is his admission that there 'might have been a certain amount of indicative action' and touching, and that in a number of cases the advice was

1 Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 1, 238-241.
2 Helen Dennis to Annie Besant, 25 January, 1906; from a copy of the original in the possession of the author. Mrs. Dennis was the Corresponding Secretary of the ES in America (for the Adyar Society); see Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 3, 994n1.
3 Ibid., vol. 1, ch. 10. For publication of the relevant documents, cf. also The Theosophic Voice, vol. 1: 1, May, 1908, 4-23; 'Veritas', Mrs. Besant and the Alcyone Case, Goodwin & Co., Mylapore, Madras, 1913, passim.
4 Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 1, 255-262.
5 The age of one of the youths is known: Douglas Pettit was fourteen at the time of the allegations: in ibid., 244.
6 Ibid., 258.
unsolicited.⁷ Besant did her best to seek a rationalisation for his actions, but ultimately repudiated him and agreed that his resignation should be accepted by Olcott.⁸ The ‘meteor’, it seemed, had fallen to earth.

It is important to note that attempts by modern Leadbeaterian Theosophists to diminish the significance of the Elder Brother’s⁹ activities are disingenuous: Shearman, who considered Leadbeater’s actions to have been ‘harmless’, believed the charges to have been ‘exaggerated and quite unevidential allegations of immoral character’⁰. As it happens, the evidence is overwhelming: Leadbeater admitted the veracity of the charges and a letter was discovered with a section in code which - when translated - read:

If it will not come without help, he needs rubbing more often, but not too often or he will not come well. Does this happen when you are asleep Tell me fully [sic]. Glad sensation is so pleasant.

Thousand kisses darling."¹¹

No more acceptable than Shearman’s religionist defence, is Webb’s reductionist characterisation of Leadbeater as a ‘mildly homosexual clergyman’."¹² The fact remains

Ian Hooker (using the above reference) suggested that Leadbeater taught ‘the practice of masturbation [so] that they should work on the purifying of thoughts and feelings while gradually extending the interval until the practice could be discontinued’: I. R. Hooker, ‘The Foundations of the Liberal Catholic Church’, Master of Arts thesis, Department of Religious Studies, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1981, 121. The only source given for this rationale is Shearman (p.53), though there are intimations to this effect in other primary documents.

⁸ Besant wrote a vituperative letter about Leadbeater to the members of the ES (dated 9 June, 1906). In it she captures some of the vehemence of her earlier days of social activism: ‘[Leadbeater’s teaching] befools the imagination, pollutes the emotions and undermines the health’: copy of the original in the possession of the author.

⁹ Such is the honorific granted to Leadbeater by his disciples even today. It is also, significantly, a titled granted to the Masters: cf. Ransom, A Short History, 367.

¹⁰ Shearman, Charles Webster Leadbeater: A Biography, 22.


¹² Webb, The Flight, 56. Too rarely a distinction (even for ‘diagnostic’ purposes) is drawn between pederasty (including ‘Hebephilia’) and homosexuality. There appears to be no evidence that Leadbeater was ever attracted to, or sexually involved with, adult males or females. Thus to describe him as ‘[h]omoerotically inclined’ or to ascribe to him ‘homosexuality’ is incorrect and evidence of poor scholarship: for the latter, see Randy P. Conner, David Hattfield Sparks & Mariya Sparks, Cassell’s Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol, and Spirit: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Lore, Cassell, London, 1997, 212-213.

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that his actions were deemed criminal in England and the U. S. A. (the countries where the allegations were brought and heard), and remain so to this day. Leadbeater was fortunate not to have been charged with the offences by the relevant authorities.

One of the boys, Douglas Pettit, swore in his first deposition that ‘Charles W Leadbeater also told me that the practice was recommended by his Master and teacher [and that the] reciprocal practice continued for the greater part of seven months’. Later, the same youth charged that he and two other boys had had sexual relations with Leadbeater and that he had told them that the Masters ‘preferred this form of sexual relationship to heterosexual intercourse’. Tillett notes that Leadbeater never denied the charges. The degree to which the Masters can have sponsored the advice given by Leadbeater to the boys is impossible to determine, but there can be little doubt that Blavatsky, whose moral teachings tended to be primly Victorian, would have been outraged:

Real divine theurgy requires an almost superhuman purity and holiness of life, otherwise it degenerates into mediumship or black magic.

For Blavatsky, the results of moral turpitude have a profound significance for he who would claim chelaship:

Sensual, or even mental self-gratification, involves the immediate loss of the powers of spiritual discernment; the voice of the MASTER can no longer be distinguished from that of one’s passions ... [or] the right from the wrong; sound morality from mere casuistry.


Ibid., vol. 3, 959n10. It is noteworthy that another Theosophist and follower of Besant, Dr. Weller van Hook (1862-1933), claimed that the Master K. H. had informed him that Leadbeater’s advice to the boys had been correct and that ‘[t]he introduction of this question into the thought of the Theosophical world is but the precursor of its introduction into the thought of the world’: Nethercott, The Last Four Lives, 107-108. For possible contradictions between the Masters’ utterances to Olcott and van Hook, cf. The Theosophic Voice, 1:2, August, 1908, 24-71; The Theosophic Voice, 1:3, Nov.-Jan., 1908-1909, passim.

Jinarajadasa inadvertently compromised his teacher by admitting that Leadbeater had been accused of sodomy during his sojourn in Ceylon from 1886-1889 (while Principal of the Buddhist High School?): in ibid., vol. 3, 998n36.

Blavatsky, The Key, 2.

Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. IX, 259.
The ‘Adyar Manifestations’

Leadbeater was estranged from Besant for a period of six months, during which he continued to send her plaintive letters. Nethercott has suggested:

His persistence, his humility, his constant reminders of the many astral meetings they had been privileged to attend with the great Hierarchy from the lowest rank to the very Highest, were too much for her to stand against.18

Leadbeater’s reinstatement to membership came as the direct result of several visitations by Morya and Koot Hoomi to Olcott, events which have subsequently become known as the ‘Adyar Manifestations’.19 The Colonel was by then elderly and in poor health, a situation not improved by the strife over Leadbeater which had riven the entire Society. Accounts vary as to the exact order and nature of events, but it appears that the Masters visited Olcott and Besant astrally on at least one occasion in early January, 1907, and followed this with a ‘plainly visible, audible, tangible’ visitation during the evening of 5 January.20 This latter, witnessed by Olcott, his secretary Marie Russak (1867-1945), and an Adyar Theosophist, Mina Renda, had as its purpose the installation of Besant as Olcott’s successor.21 Olcott immediately circulated an account of the event, noting his decision to appoint Besant was based on the Masters’ decision: ‘They most decidedly considered her the best fitted for the office’.22 Olcott’s circular caused a deal of controversy, with the British Section denying he possessed such plenary powers and questioning the veracity of the Masters’ appearance. Olcott then fuelled the fire by issuing a long statement, entitled A Conversation with the Mahatmas, in which he claimed the Masters wished ‘the Leadbeater case’ had not been aired publicly, and that they rued the loss of one of their ‘most respected’ and indefatigable members.23 Olcott and Besant both wrote to

18 Nethercott, The Last Four Lives, 98.
20 Ibid., 101-102; Ransom, A Short History, 366.
21 Both Russak and Renda were staunch supporters of Leadbeater and followers of Besant; both also claimed psychic faculties. Russak, secretary to Olcott and later to Besant, claimed to be able to receive psychic messages from the Masters: see Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 3, 999n5, 1000n6.
23 Ibid., 102.
Leadbeater, the former in the following terms:

I do implore you from my death-bed to bow to Their judgment in the matter and make a public statement that you will give Them and us your solemn promise to cease giving out such teachings. It might be that if you did this the masters would open out the path of reconciliation to the Society, and you could take up the great work you were obliged to give up.24

The British section, led by G. R. S. Mead (1863-1933), doubted the witness statements on the basis that both women were ‘remarkably psychic’, and objected utterly to the rapprochement with Leadbeater. Mead did not accept that the Masters could be so ‘utterly indifferent to grave moral obliquity’.25

Olcott’s will was clear: Leadbeater was to be welcomed back, and Besant was to be President. (The degree to which he came to these conclusions independent of the cajolings of Besant and her supporters has provoked much comment).26 In his last days, visits by the Masters became frequent, and Olcott was to be seen prostrating himself at their feet.27 On the morning of 17 February, 1907, Olcott died, surrounded by his Indian doctor, Russak, Renda, and Besant.28 The latter, who later wrote about the event, noted that alongside Morya and Koot Hoomi, Serapis and Blavatsky were

25 Nethercott, The Last Four Lives, 102. In a letter to Mead, Rudolf Steiner stated that ‘[w]e would become the laughingstock [sic] of the non-theosophical world if these revelations became known at all’: Steiner, From the History, 281.
26 There appears to be little doubt that Besant oversaw much of the Colonel’s correspondence during this period, and that a large percentage of the official Adyar account of events comes directly from her writings or influence. Meade has noted that Olcott’s ‘thinking became increasingly muddled’ towards the end of his life, but gives no reference in support: Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 459.
27 This activity was witnessed by Marie Russak: Murphet, Yankee Beacon, 310-311. Nethercott suggested that ‘[a]s a result of this testimony ... Mrs. Russak soon became an influential leader in the T. S., and a confidante and close friend of Annie Besant’: Nethercott, The Last Four Lives, 104. Meade observed that ‘in his final illness he would leap out of bed and fall to his knees, claiming that K. H. and M. were in the room’, but disingenuously makes no reference to the witness accounts of Russak or Besant: Meade, Madame Blavatsky, 459.
28 Nethercott is alone in suggesting the date of Olcott’s death to have been 16 February: Nethercott, The Last Four Lives, 104. The death of Olcott on 17 February has significant resonances for Leadbeater’s self-referential claims, for it is not unlikely the reason he selected the date for his birthday (which properly should have been 16 February). Thus he could claim to have shared Besant’s year of birth as well as a significant connection with the President-Founder. Such connections were confirmed when, in 1922, the date of 17 February was selected as ‘Adyar Day’: see Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 2, 864.

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also present. That Olcott should have passed away in the company of his first Master, and his first and greatest occult friend, possesses a certain symmetry.

Immediately following Olcott’s death, the battle for the Presidency began in earnest. Sinnett, who had been acting as President during Olcott’s infirmity, suspected there were ‘cunning black powers at the back of Mrs. Besant’ and encouraged the belief in British and American Theosophists that the ‘Adyar Manifestations’ were the result of sinister forces. Ultimately, however, Besant was victorious and was declared President on 28 June, 1907, having received 89.46% of the 10,984 votes cast. A number of leading Theosophists, particularly the heads of the American and British Sections (such as Sinnett) resigned in protest.

Almost immediately, Besant and Leadbeater resumed their occult investigations, and began an ambitious project to map the previous lives of all significant Theosophists, past and present. Besant began to refer to the 1906 Committee as a ‘travesty of justice’ and an occult significance was asserted for Leadbeater’s ‘martyrdom’. Emily Lutyens, who joined the Society at this time, recorded the affair’s esoteric exegesis:

We were told that this dreadful ordeal which he had to undergo was the symbolic crucifixion through which every candidate for the Arhat Initiation must pass.

In Leadbeaterian Theosophy, the Fourth, or Arhat, Initiation, comes immediately below the Fifth Initiation, the Asekha (otherwise known as the Adeptic Initiation). The significance of Leadbeater’s claim to be an Arhat becomes clear when it is recognised that the Masters (Koot Hoomi, Morya, Serapis, inter alia) are themselves

29 Nethercott, The Last Four Lives, 104-105.
30 It appears that both Leadbeater and Sinnett had been playing something of a double game, for their correspondence (often critical of Besant) continued after the former’s disgrace. See Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 1, 382-383.
31 For a breakdown of the votes into national figures, see Nethercott, The Last Four Lives, 108, but cf. discrepancies in Ransom, A Short History, 372.
32 Besant had immediately sought Sinnett’s resignation, citing his lack of belief in the ‘Adyar manifestations’ as the reason. His departure was acrimonious, though he later returned. See Nethercott, The Last Four Lives, 109; Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 1, 383.
33 Ibid., 395.
34 Ibid., 398.
only one step further: they have taken the Sixth Initiation, the Chohan.\textsuperscript{26} The circumstances of the Arhat Initiation were characterised by Leadbeater him as follows:

In Christian symbology the Fourth Initiation is indicated by the suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of the Christ ... The Initiate attracts some attention, and gains a certain amount of popularity and recognition. Then there is always the traitor to turn upon him and distort what he has said and done, so that it appears to be evil ... Then follows a rain of obloquy ... There have been those who have fallen at that very terrible test, and have had to go back and begin their Initiation work over again; but for the man who can endure it without flinching, it is certainly a very wonderful experience, however terrible ... The peculiar type of suffering which invariably accompanies this Initiation clears off any arrears of karma which may still stand in the Initiate's way.\textsuperscript{27}

Leadbeater's ignominy had been successfully reconstrued as a necessary martyrdom, and, ironically for some, a trial he had endured for the ultimate benefit of the Society. Any future interference in the Arhat's activities would provoke dire consequences: Weller van Hook (1862-1933), an ardent Leadbeaterian, began to receive quite unequivocal messages from the Masters on the subject: Theosophists ... would do well to measure their conduct carefully, for upon their conduct toward their leaders in difficult crises and upon their view of the situation at critical moments will depend the amount and kind of aid accorded to them individually by the Brothers in this and in future incarnations.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{26} Leadbeater, \textit{The Masters and the Path}, 218-300, esp. 281ff. The 'Asekha' Initiation is deemed to be that of the 'Superman'. Only at this stage may the 'Adept' take pupils. It appears that 'the Master Djwal Kul' must have been at this fifth stage early in Leadbeater's Theosophical career, and later progressed to the sixth. It is not insignificant that, although Leadbeater mentions himself as being an Arhat, and later pronounces a few other Theosophists (notably Besant and Krishnamurti) as being of the same rank, he does not mention Blavatsky's status, other than that she 'had not attained Adeptship - has not yet, if you come to that': C. W. Leadbeater, 'Bishop Leadbeater', in ['Issued by the O. H.'] Shishya, vol. 1:4, January, 1933, 26-31, esp. 31.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 219-223. One is left to wonder what initiatory significance the public exposure of the affair had upon the boys and families involved.

\textsuperscript{28} Weller van Hook, quoted in \textit{The Theosophic Voice}, 1:1, August, 1908, 29. Van Hook penned three open letter to the Society in defence of Leadbeater. He later claimed that they were 'dictated verbatim by one of the Masters. It is not permitted to give the name': in ibid., 26.
Besant, who claimed to have been informed by Blavatsky on the Inner Planes that Leadbeater must be defended, ultimately engineered his reaccession to membership (against some vociferous opposition) at the annual Convention, held in December, 1908. She was later to write:

Then came the effort to tear us apart, and for a brief space I was led, by the lie that he had confessed to evildoing, to break with him; but soon discovering the falsehood, I joined hands with him yet more closely, never again to have a cloud between us. Together we went through bitter trials, and faced wellnigh incredible difficulties, for we held a sacred trust.

Leadbeater was welcomed back to the Adyar estate, and into the heart of the Society. As his patroness, Besant was thereafter unstintingly loyal, and he benefited enormously from the immense power which she wielded as the first individual to hold the Presidency and the Outer Headship simultaneously. From this time, access to the Masters, which had proliferated throughout the membership through psychic and Spiritualist practices for the previous twenty years, began to be ever-more concentrated

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97 Besant noted in the private journal of the ES:
I was told by H. P. B. last spring, when I 'went home' to the Master's ashrama one night, that a defence of Mr. Leadbeater must be made against the distortions and exaggerations continually poured out on him. ([Annie Besant] 'Issued by the O. H. of the School', The Link, November, 1908, 72).

98 Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 1, 397-399.
42 Besant’s loyalty was in large part due to her reliance on Leadbeater’s clairvoyance and contact with the Masters. Edouard Schuré noted as much:

Since Mr. Leadbeater was condemned by the General Council of the TS, Mrs. Besant has publicly announced her condemnation of the educational principles of which he was accused. Her verdict about the theosophist whose unworthiness has been recognized was most severe. Through an unbelievably sudden change of mind, she later soon declared her intention to allow Mr. Leadbeater to be readmitted to the TS, and also she successfully - though not without some difficulty - won the majority vote from her associates. Her excuse for this change of mind was compassion and forgiveness. The actual reason was that the President needed Leadbeater in her occult research, and that this co-operation appeared necessary for her to maintain her authority. It is clear to those who have followed her words and deeds since then, that Mrs. Besant has succumbed to the fatal suggestion of her dangerous companion, in that only under the spell of his absolute authority would she be able to see, think, and act (quoted in Steiner, From the History, 262-263).
in the person of Leadbeater and, to a lesser extent, Besant.\textsuperscript{43} Their exalted status as initiates (with Leadbeater an acknowledged \textit{Arhat}) ensured that their psychic dictates assumed the status of revelation from the Masters; indeed, Besant regarded their psychism as inherently more trustworthy than Blavatsky’s methods:

The attempt made by some ill-instructed Theosophists to set up this wonderful and splendid book [\textit{The Secret Doctrine}] as an inspired revelation dictated by the revered Masters, accurate in every detail, and free from any error, is ill-judged and mischievous ...[Blavatsky] often, in her humility, buttresses her own true statements with a mass of rubbish from inferior writers, picked up hap-hazard; on minor points she often speaks hastily and carelessly; and further she confuses her teachings with excessive digressions.\textsuperscript{44}

The sometimes highly mannered developments of Theosophy which occurred hereafter cannot therefore be ascribed to the vagaries of Leadbeater’s psychism, but to the will of the Masters. It was the Masters, then, who encouraged Leadbeater within weeks of his return to anoint a young Brahmin boy from the Adyar estate as the physical vehicle of the coming Christ, and to inaugurate a new dispensation of ritualism to hasten the advent. Prior to discussing Leadbeater’s promotion of the young Krishnamurti as the ‘Vehicle of the Coming’, it is worthwhile to examine some of those institutions which would aid in the preparation for the Theosophical \textit{Parousia}. That some of these bodies, such as Freemasonry and Christian ecclesialism, would likely have horrified Blavatsky, is only evidence of how far Leadbeater was able stretch the fabric of the Theosophical template.

\textsuperscript{43} One wonders if Besant’s acquiescence in this matter relates (perhaps in an ironic sense) to a message from K. H. which she claimed to have received in 1900:

\begin{quote}
You have for some time been under deluding influences. Shun pride, vanity and love of power. Be not guided by emotion but learn to stand alone. Be accurate and critical rather than credulous ... The cant about ‘masters’ must be silently but firmly put down ... You will have to leave a good deal of your emotions and credulity before you become a safe guide (reprinted in \textit{The Eclectic Theosophist}, No. 101, Sept/Oct, 1987, 1).
\end{quote}

It is interesting that, in his examination of this letter, Vernon Harrison concluded ‘it is a good simulation of KH’s hand, but nevertheless a forgery’: Harrison, \textit{H. P. Blavatsky and the SPR}, 46.

\textsuperscript{44} Annie Besant, ‘On the Watch-Tower’ in \textit{The Theosophical Review} XXIV:144, 15 August, 1899, 486.
Blavatsky viewed Freemasonry as an empty mausoleum; where once the Mysteries had flourished and initiations been proffered, only superstition and hollow ceremonial remained. Masonry, robbed of its esoteric heart, had fallen into the purview of aristocracy and ecclesiasticism:

Professedly the most absolute of democracies, it is practically the appanage of aristocracy, wealth, and personal ambition. Professedly the teacher of true ethics, it is debased into a propaganda of anthropomorphic theology.¹

The only bastion of the pristine ‘esoteric Masonry’ is the Oriental Brotherhood:

We have no wish to make a pretence of exposing secrets long since hawked about the world by perjured Masons. Everything vital, whether in symbolical representations, rites, or passwords, as used in modern Freemasonry, is known in the Eastern fraternities; though there seems to be no intercourse or connection between them.²

It has long been recognised that in its gestation period the Theosophical Society grew to adopt certain Freemasonic paraphernalia, including a degree structure, passwords, and initiations.³ Blavatsky, perhaps through her early association with such Freemasonic entrepreneurs as Sotheran, Rawson, and Yarker, began to entertain the notion of a reformed Masonry: ‘the time has come to remodel masonry and restore those ancient landmarks’.⁴ Yet, by the end of the 1880s, Freemasonry had all but

² Ibid., 376. Blavatsky wrote of her own Masonic background thus:


disappeared from her writings and appeared only once in *The Secret Doctrine*, and in the context of esoteric etymology. It appears that Blavatsky had finally decided that Freemasonry was too sectarian and exoteric for her tastes. Interestingly, Olcott, who had not appeared in Lodge for 34 years, was welcomed to attend during a New Zealand Tour of 1897; the experience was not inspiring, and he 'came away impressed by its puerile character as compared with Theosophy':

One might say that the spirit of Theosophy, especially in its aspect of brotherhood and religious tolerance, was there, but buried out of sight in the husks of formalism and a species of theatrical display.

*Origins of a Feminine Freemasonry*

Freemasonry reentered the Adyar Society through the initiation of Francesca Arundale in Paris in 1895. 'Co-Masonry', as this form came to be called, had its origins in the sometimes fractious internecine rivalries of nineteenth century French Freemasonry. In 1879, several Craft lodges removed themselves from the jurisdiction of the Supreme Council of the *Grand Loge Générale Écossaise*, which had been inaugurated in 1804 by the Comte de Grasse-Tilly as the French division of the Ancient and Accepted [Scottish] Rite in England, and formed the *Grand Loge Symbolique Écossaise de France*. One such lodge, the *Loge Les [sic] Libres Penseurs* ('The Free Thinkers'), which met at Pecq in Seine-et-Oise, performed the hitherto unthinkable act

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8 Blavatsky came to claim that Masonry had been 'spoiled' by the 'lethal plotings' of the Jesuits who delight in destroying occult societies. It had become 'a mere convivial Benefit-Club'. See Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. XIV, 266-267.
9 Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, Sixth Series, 228.
10 Ibid.
12 Ibid., 193.
and initiated a woman. On 14 January, 1882, seven Master Masons participated in the initiation of Maria Desraimes (1828-1900), a woman renowned for her feminist social activism, and President of the Association for the Emancipation of Women. The lodge was suspended for a time, and later initiated no more women. Not to be halted in her quest for a confraternal Masonry, Desraimes, together with a committed feminist from the Supreme Council of France, Georges Martin (d. 1916), herself initiated, passed, and raised sixteen women between 4 March and 4 April, 1893. The new Masons soon thereafter formed a Grand Lodge, La Grand Loge Symbolique Écossaise [Mixte] de France, and their own Craft lodge, Le Droit Humain. The latter initially worked only the three degrees of so-called ‘Blue Masonry’, but proved...

12 John Hamill & Robert Gilbert, eds., Freemasonry: A Celebration of the Craft, Mackenzie Pub., St. Albans, Herts., 1992, 212. For the sake of completeness it should be noted that Desraimes was not the first woman to be initiated into Freemasonry, but, it appears, the first to do so with revolutionary purpose. One notable earlier case involved Elizabeth St. Leger (later the Hon. Mrs. Aldworth), who in 1713 stumbled into a lodge working in her father’s house, and was then initiated into the two available degrees to forestall any violations of secrecy. The story does not appear to be apocryphal. See Hamill & Gilbert, World Freemasonry, 183, 185.


14 So-called ‘Adoptive Rites’ of Freemasonry, open to women, existed in pre-Revolutionary France, but worked only four degrees (Apprentice, Companion, Mistress, and Perfect Mistress) and were necessarily attached to Male Craft lodges. Unlike Co-Masonry, they were in the main controlled by men. Hamill & Gilbert state that they ‘were designed to provide an analogue of Masonry for women’: Hamill & Gilbert, Freemasonry, 212. The Order of the Easter Star, established in the U. S. A. in 1850 by Robert Morris, is not properly a Freemasonic Rite.


16 Martin described himself as ‘feministe en même temps que maçon’: in ibid., 116.

17 Ibid., 117; Hamill & Gilbert, World Freemasonry, 186.

18 Waite, A New Encyclopaedia, vol. I, 117. The new Lodges were formed on, or soon after, 4 April, 1893.

19 The ‘Blue’ or ‘Craft’ lodges are, properly speaking, the three degrees sponsored and conferred in the United Kingdom by authority of the United Grand Lodge (or those conferred elsewhere by Masonic authorities recognised by the United Grand Lodge): Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason. In practice, the term ‘Craft’ tends to be inclusive of the higher degrees (and side degrees such as Mark and Royal Arch) of the Ancient and Accepted [Scottish] Rite, but is also used generically for Freemasonry in general. The higher degrees have proliferated wildly (Hamill & Gilbert have estimated the number to be in the vicinity of 1400 degrees: see supra), although few outside the ‘Scottish Rite’ are considered orthodox by United Grand Lodge. It should be noted that there is no historically-verifyable connection between these Écossais rites and Scotland, and that the connection is based on certain spurious claims about the chivalric/Templar origins of Freemasonry: Hamill & Gilbert, Freemasonry, 40 et passim. For the history of the Ancient and Accepted [Scottish] Rite in England see A. C. F. Jackson, Rose Croix: The History of the Ancient and Accepted Rite for England and Wales, Lewis Masonic, London, 1980, esp., 3-16; 32-46.
to be so popular that it had soon grown sufficiently to require the establishment of a new Masonic authority for the conferring of degrees up to the 33rd. A governing body was established under the Presidency of Georges Martin and nine other Grand Inspectors General of the 33rd degree on 11 May, 1899. It took as its title, 'the Supreme Council of International Co-Freemasonry Consisting of Sovereign Grand Inspectors General of the 33rd and Last Degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite'.

Francesca Arundale soon interested Besant in the new phenomenon and, in 1902, seven Theosophists travelled to Paris to be duly initiated and to gain a warrant for England. Besant immediately established her first lodge, Human Duty No. 6, and a few years later changed the name of the organisation from 'Joint [Mixte] Freemasonry' to 'Universal Co-Freemasonry' and became ensconced as the 'Most Puissant Grand Commander of the Co-Masonic Order for Great Britain and her Dominions Overseas'. Hereafter Co-Masonry in the English-speaking world became

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[T]he distinctive title of the Supreme Council is:- Supreme Council of Sovereign Grand Inspectors General of International Co-Freemasonry, *La Droit Humain* (Thirty-third and Last degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite).

21 Esther Bright, *Old Memories and Letters of Annie Besant*, The Theosophical Publishing House, London, 1936, 83-84. Esther Bright and her mother were two of those who accompanied Besant to France. Leadbeater stated that Besant had 'been offered initiation by Mdlle. Deraismes': Leadbeater, *Glimpses*, 327. Although such contact is not impossible, one wonders why Besant waited until two years after the French woman's death to join.

22 Hamill & Gilbert, *World Freemasonry*, 186; C. W. Leadbeater, 'The Convention at Adyar' in *The Liberal Catholic* III:6, Adyar Convention Number, 1925-1926, 105. Although Besant was Grand Commander, and the peak of authority outside of Europe, the Presidency of the Supreme Council of the Order was maintained by Georges Martin's wife, Maria Georges Martin, upon the death of Desraimes in 1900. Although the literature of the period often contends that Besant was 'Grand Master', only the French Head of the Order held the office of 'Most Puissant Sovereign Grand Commander and Grand Master': the present author is indebted to Revd. Laurence Langley for this observation.
almost synonymous with Theosophy.

The 'reintroduction' of Masonry into Theosophy has caused some commentators certain consternation. It is not insignificant that few of Besant's biographers ever mention her Masonic affiliations, even though she possessed the 33rd degree and was the titular head of Co-Masonry for much of the world (though technically under an obedience herself), and for a period of 30 years. Some have suggested that Besant yearned for the ritualism of her youth, others have suspected her Masonic activities were an unconscious parody of authoritarianism. The likely truth is that she felt a familiar triumph at having usurped a privilege from the powerful, in this case a traditional bastion of male exclusivity and authority. Since her conversion to Theosophy she had been shunned or marginalised within the gambit of her proactive social causes, in no small part due to her rejection of secularism. Co-Masonry had the dual advantages of cleaving very well into both the democratic ideals and esoteric historiography of Theosophy, as well as the political agenda of female emancipation.

Sri Prakasa recorded his memories of a suffragette procession of 1912:

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23 There have been numerous schisms. The Honourable Fraternity of Antient Masons (HFAM), established by four Co-Masonry lodges in 1908, is now called The Order of Women Freemasons and admits only women; it is not Theosophical. The Honourable Fraternity of Ancient Freemasons broke with HFAM in 1913 over the right to work the Royal Arch side degree, and thus works only the three Craft degrees; it is not Theosophical. The Order of Ancient Free and Accepted Masonry for Men and Women (AFAM) was formed in 1923 as a Theosophical Co-Masonry in the 'Back to Blavatsky' tradition. It had close links with Arthur Edward Waite's Golden Dawn derivative, The Fellowship of the Rosy Cross (its founder, Alice Bothwell-Gosse, and subsequent Grand Master, Marjorie Debenham, were both members of Waite's Fellowship, as was the poet and novelist, Charles Williams [1886-1945]) and The Society of the Divine Wisdom, a Blavatsky study group. The AFAM archives have long been a source of primary materials for students of Theosophy and the Golden Dawn. One further schism occurred in 1933 when Besant's daughter, Mabel Besant-Scott, established another group with George Alexander Sullivan ('Marcus Aurelius'), the Rosicrucian Order of the Crotona Fellowship. It is from this group that Gerald Gardner (1884-1964) claimed to have received a 'traditional' witchcraft initiation, as a result of which he established the first 'Wicca' covens. For details see infra Appendix E. It should be noted that there are Co-Freemasonic lodges outside of France that have never allied themselves with Theosophy, but the number is few.

24 The most recent biography, Anne Taylor's Annie Besant, does not mention Co-Masonry at all. Nethercott mentions the Masonic temple being built at Adyar, and the journal Co-Mason, but never explains to what these refer: Nethercott, The Last Four Lives, 116. West includes in a footnote that 'A minor activity was the introduction of Co-Masonry to India': West, The Life, 190n.

25 Williams has suggested '[s]he took a childlike pleasure in parading in gorgeous satins and gold lace': Williams, A Passionate Pilgrim, 304. Note that Williams is incorrect in suggesting that Besant was initiated 'about 1890': in ibid., 303.

26 'The reckless brilliance of her career has been in part an expression of this jealousy of men in general': in ibid.

27 'She also found satisfaction in being identified with the advance guard of her own sex who, only a few years earlier, had acquiesced in her ostracism': in ibid.
Various women that took part in the procession were dressed after the great women of the past who had played their part in history. Queen Boadicea, Joan of Arc, and others were all there ... [Besant] wore the Mason’s robes that day. Usually Masonic Lodges admit only men.38

_Theosophical Freemasonry_

The rituals employed within the Co-Masonic lodges under Besant’s control were initially variants of the French originals or of the English ‘Scottish Rite’. In 1908, Co-Freemasonry printed ‘The Dharma Working’ which, in contradistinction from its title, contains negligible Oriental components and is not demonstrably different from the various texts employed by lodges of the ‘Scottish Rite’.29 There are some minor alterations, such as the suggestion that Masonry was derived not from the ‘Building Crafts of the Middle Ages’, but from ‘the Ancient Mysteries, once forming the heart of every great Religion’.30 More significant, perhaps, is the inclusion of an invocation to the ‘most worthy and venerable master of the wisdom’, and offerings to the elementals of the four cardinal directions.31 In 1913, Besant obtained permission to revise the English ritual, and included an increased number of oblique Theosophical references. In this she was assisted by a new light in the Theosophical firmament, James Ingall

[T]he language differs throughout in many places of the rituals and some of the prayers are changed. All essential points, however, remain - it being understood that - subject to these variations - the text follows the Scottish working (Waite, _A New Encyclopaedia_, vol. I, 119).
30 This alteration may suggest a Theosophical interpretation of Masonry, but is equally likely a response to an enormous body of mystico-Masonic literature of the day which suggested that Freemasonry in its (lost) earliest variant was the storehouse of ‘the Mysteries’. For typical examples (some themselves influenced by Theosophy) see John Yarker, _The Arcane Schools_, William Tait, Belfast, 1909; J. S. M. Ward, _Freemasonry and the Ancient Gods_, Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., London, 1926; id., _Who Was Hiram Abiff?_, The Baskerville Press, London, [1925]. Leadbeater referred to each of these works in his books on Freemasonry.
31 Universal Co-Masonry, _The Dharma Working, passim_.

300
Wedgwood (1883-1951).32

Wedgwood had, like Leadbeater, prepared for the Anglican ministry, but upon hearing Besant lecture on Theosophy in 1904 he was converted and left the Church prior to ordination.33 He rose speedily through the ranks and had become General Secretary of the English Section by 1911.34 In 1912 he and Marie Russak founded the Temple of the Rosy Cross,35 with rituals apparently communicated to Besant from the Master the

32 Few figures in the history of twentieth century Theosophy are more deserving of a scholarly biography than Wedgwood. James Wedgwood was the great grandson of the potter and proto-industrialist, Josiah Wedgwood (1769-1843), the grandson of the Spiritualist Hensleigh Wedgwood (1803-1891) and the nephew of Effie Wedgwood (1839-1934) and Hope Wedgwood (1844-1935), both Spiritualists and supporters of Besant’s social activism. He was associated with Anglo-Catholicism and a member of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament (like Leadbeater) and of the elusive Order of Corporate Reunion: see Peter F. Anson, Bishops at Large: Some Autocephalous churches of the Past Hundred Years and Their Founders, Faber & Faber, London, 1964, 344-345; id., Abbot Extraordinary: Memoirs of Aelred Carlyle, O. S. B., The Faith Press, London, 1958, 84. For Wedgwood’s various ecclesial affiliations see infra ch. 20. One relation of James Wedgwood, Camilla Wedgwood (1901-1955), referred to Theosophy in the following terms:

I am glad ... that I was infected with the Theosophical germ in my teens; it is a safe inoculation against a serious attack in my fifties ... Christian Science and Theosophy both seem to me excellent escapist cults for the emotionally maladjusted ... but Theosophy is probably the more satisfying of the two (Camilla H. Wedgwood to Helen Pease, 14 May, 1940, in D. Weatherell & C. Carr-Gregg, Camilla: C. H. Wedgwood 1901-1955: A Life, New South Wales University Press, Sydney, 1990).

33 Anson, Bishops at Large, 345.


Count, who was said to provide revelation to its founders. The Temple was comprised of ceremonial of a distinctly Masonic type, with overlays of Kabbalism, astrology, and Christian sacramentalism. Not surprisingly, Leadbeater's emphasis on the centrality of revelation (mostly in his person) was such that the Temple was closed (under Besant's authority) in 1914 - ostensibly as the result of a personal message from the Masters demanding its dissolution.

Wedgwood was initiated into Co-Masonry in 1910, and by the following year had risen to become the Very Illustrious Supreme Secretary 33° of the British Federation. Further laurels were added when, in 1914, John Yarker conferred upon him the titles of Prince Patriarch Grand Conservator 33° 95° of the Rite of Memphis, Absolute Grand Sovereign 33° 90° of the Rite of Mizraim, and Sovereign Grand Inspector

The 'Master the Count' is otherwise known in Leadbeaterian Theosophy as the Master the Comte de St. Germain or the Master RakoczilRagoczi. In previous lives he was Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, Robertus the monk, Hunyadi Janos, Christian Rosenkreutz, Roger Bacon, Proclus, and St. Alban. He is the Head of the Seventh Ray, which means that his responsibility for humanity is 'ordered service', in which capacity he oversees ceremonial magic and 'employs the services of great Angels, who obey Him implicitly and love to do His will'. He has an especial love of Latin. See Leadbeater, The Masters and the Path, 286-288. Blavatsky mentioned the 'Counte de Saint-Germain' regularly, and in glowing terms: he was an exceptional chela (Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. IV, 607) and a trained occultist whose abilities approached those only expected during the Fifth Round (ibid., vol. V, 144-145). She never, however, appears to have considered him a part of the particular Brotherhood overseeing the Theosophical Society. Leadbeater cleared up the confusion by noting that the Master the Count was none other that the 'Hungarian Adept' mentioned in Sinnett's The Occult World. There are various biographies of the elusive yet historical Comte de Saint-Germain, mostly of a Theosophical hue: see Isabel Cooper-Oakley, The Count of Saint-Germain, Steinerbooks, Blauvelt, New York, 1988; Jean Overton Fuller, The Comte de Saint Germain: Last Scion of the House of Rakocz, East-West Publications, London, 1988; Manly P. Hall, 'Introduction' in The Comte de St.-Germain, The Most Holy Trinosophia of the Comte de St.-Germain, The Philosophical Research Society, Inc., Los Angeles, 1963, ix-xxxviii. The best concise discussion is Boris de Zirkoff, 'Count de Saint-Germain' in Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. III, 523-528. De Zirkoff notes that there is no historical reason to suppose that the Comte de Saint-Germain and the Transylvanian Prince Rákóczy were the same person (p.525).

Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 2, 574.

Ibid. The Temple of the Rosy Cross was ultimately reconstituted with the aid of Jinarajadasa into a more normative Leadbeaterian mould, designed to venerate past World-Teachers, and retitled the Ritual of the Mystic Star. It is still worked as a public ritual throughout the Theosophical World, especially at the Krotona Institute (originally the Crotona Centre), a communitarian body established by the Adyar Society in California in 1910: see Joseph E. Ross, Krotona of Old Hollywood: 1866-1913, vol. 1, El Montecito Oaks Press, Montecito, California, 1989, 148-150. For the history of the revision see Jinarajadasa 'Issued by the O. H.', The Disciple, vol. 1:10, January, 1938, 202-207; Anonymous [C. Jinarajadasa], 'The Ritual of the Mystic Star', in The Disciple, vol. 1:4, February, 1935, 40-43. For the ritual, see C. Jinarajadasa, The Ritual of the Mystic Star: A Form of Service for Worship and Consecration, 2nd ed., privately printed, Adyar, Madras, 1938; id., The Meaning and Purpose of the Ritual of the Mystic Star, 2nd ed., The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1945. See also Emily Lutyens, Candles in the Sun, 71: the author noted the 'extraordinary changeability, not to say fickleness, on the part of the Hierarchy'.

Ibid., 575.
General 33° of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite (Cerneau). Yarker also arranged that Wedgwood would be granted honorary membership of the Ordo Templi Orientis by its Outer Head, Theodor Reuss (1855-1923).

Wedgwood initiated Leadbeater into Co-Masonry on 12 June, 1915. Leadbeater’s decision to enter Masonry perplexed some at the time as he seems to have exhibited little interest in, or knowledge of, the Masonic arcana, and to have eschewed ceremonialism. Soon thereafter, and with remarkable alacrity, he had risen to the 33rd degree and had become the Administrator General in Australia, his then residence. Leadbeater’s attitude to Freemasonry had changed during his initiations, for the ritual had activated memories of similar ceremonial in previous lives and, as he recalled in a subsequent address to the Lodge, the accoutrements were also familiar:

I did not know, any more than any other candidate, what to expect when I joined you; but my first sight of a Masonic Lodge was a great and pleasant surprise to me, because I found I was perfectly familiar with all its arrangements, that it recalled exactly similar arrangements which I knew six thousand years ago in ancient Egypt.

leadbeater, Glimpses, 362. For Yarker’s entrepreneurial Freemasonry see supra ch. 4.


Ransom, A Short History, 416; Cooper, ‘The Theosophical Society’, part 1, 98.

Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 2, 576. He later claimed that he had not previously joined Co-Masonry as he had had too little time to devote himself properly: C. W. Leadbeater, Ancient Ideals in Modern Masonry: An Address given to the Sydney Lodge, No. 404, in 1915, The Epworth Printing and Publishing House, Sydney, 1917, 3. Nevertheless, Emily Lutyens noted that, only a couple of years prior to his Masonic initiation, Leadbeater was entirely dismissive of such interests:

He was also very scathing about the Temple of the Rosy Cross and its ritual, and also about Co-Masonry. He scoffed at people wishing to shut themselves up behind closed doors in order to perform mystic rites (Emily Lutyens, Candles in the Sun, 45).

I am quite aware that that is a startling statement, yet I assure you that it is literally true.\textsuperscript{45}

Leadbeater was delighted to discover that Co-Masonry was in the purview of the Master the Count, one of his personal Masters, and that the reason he had not known this before was simply that he ‘had never spoken to Him on that subject’.\textsuperscript{46} In traditional Freemasonry, the Supreme Being is often rendered as T. G. A. O. T. U. (The Great Architect Of The Universe);\textsuperscript{47} for Leadbeater and other Theosophical Co-Masons, of more immediate significance was the Inner Head of Freemasonry, the Master the Count, who was also abbreviated to an acronym, the H. O. A. T. F. (the Head Of All True Freemasons).\textsuperscript{48} Leadbeater explained to his brethren\textsuperscript{49} that the H. O. A. T. F. was known to him personally and that they’d last met ‘walking down the Corso’ in Rome.\textsuperscript{50}

Soon Leadbeater was engaged in clairvoyantly investigating the origins of Freemasonry. With the aid of Wedgwood, he drafted questions for the Master the Count, and was supplied with ample responses which proved his suspicions to be correct: speculative Masonry was the repository of the great hieratic Mysteries of ancient Egypt.\textsuperscript{51} He was subsequently able to explain the entire development of Egyptian religion and the lineaments of Masonic history by applying his ‘perfectly

\textsuperscript{45} Leadbeater, \textit{Ancient Ideals}, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{48} It is customary for a portrait of the Master the Count (de Saint Germain) to be hung either in the east (above the chair of the Right Worshipful Master) or in the north (above an empty chair) to signify that ‘[u]pon His recognition and assent as Head of the Seventh Ray the validity of all rites and degrees depends’: C. W. Leadbeater, \textit{The Hidden Life in Freemasonry}, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1926, 15. The image is unveiled when the Lodge is ‘opened’. For a discussion of the image and its use in Co-Masonry see Charles Shore, ‘The Picture’, in \textit{The Australian Co-Mason}, vol. 29:1, June, 1998, 2-6. (Charles Dunbar Tatham Shores [1887-1979] was consecrated a bishop in the Liberal Catholic Church in 1946). There is occasional tension between Theosophical Co-Masonic lodges and non-Theosophical Co-Masonic lodges about the appropriateness of the image.
\textsuperscript{49} It is an interesting historical artefact that in Theosophical Co-Masonry highly gendered language remained for some time, even, in some instances, to the present. Besant (the Grand Master) and other female Masons continued to refer to themselves as ‘Brothers’: see Waite, \textit{A New Encyclopaedia}, vol. I, 119. Such language appears to apply today: see [Universal Co-Masonry], \textit{First Degree}, Vasanta Press, India, n.d.; Universal Co-Masonry, \textit{Ritual of Second Degree}, Publicity Press, Sydney, n.d. The present author has been informed that several authorities in contemporary Co-Masonry are encouraging a change.
\textsuperscript{50} Leadbeater, \textit{Ancient Ideals}, 5.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 5.
natural but super-normal faculties'.

His works, *Glimpses of Masonic History* and *The Hidden Life in Freemasonry*, both published in 1926, describe a remarkable initiatic chain from Thoth/Hermes (also nominated as the 'World-Teacher') in 40,000 B.C.E. to Annie Besant. Only with the conjunction of Theosophy and Masonry - afforded by the latter's initiation - was the original link with the Great White Lodge reestablished.

Between 1916 and 1925 Leadbeater revised the rituals of Co-Masonry, by order of the H. O. A. T. F. The rituals, which included Rosicrucian, Mark, and Royal Arch degrees, were redacted to conform occultly with the ancient Egyptian workings and proved so successful that the Master the Count 'deigned to work [the Craft degrees] in His own Lodge'.

Their success may have been due to Leadbeater's increased familiarity with irregular Freemasonic Rites, for a number of which he had been granted a patent.

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52 Leadbeater, *The Hidden Life*, x (author's preface).

53 It should be noted that there had been a number of revisions prior to Leadbeater's. The first edition of the rituals appeared in 1904, the second in 1908, the third in 1913, and the fourth in 1918. Leadbeater's version of 1925 is thus normally considered the fifth edition, and is that currently used by Theosophical Co-Masonic lodges (at least in Australia), though it is often erroneously referred to as the '1928' version. It tends to be the case that in most countries contemporary Co-Masons employ the rituals of the local (Male) Craft lodges. The name 'Dharma' seems not appear after 1916.

54 Leadbeater, *Glimpses*, 328.

55 In 1923 Leadbeater had had the 95\textsuperscript{°} of the Ancient Order of Memphis-Mizraim conferred upon him by Jean Baptiste Bricaud (1881-1934) via correspondence. Bricaud's Masonic affiliations were very broad indeed. For the present purposes, his authority to warrant Leadbeater was as *Grand Hierophante du rite ancien et primitif de Memphis-Misraïm*. He was also the Patriarch of the *Église Gnostique Universelle*, with the religious name Tau Jean II. (The forced interpenetration of neo-Gnosticism, occultism, and episcopal succession became something of an industry in the first decades of the twentieth century). For Bricaud see R. Swinburne Clymer, *The Book of Rosicruciae*, vol. II, 90-95; Koenig, 'Introduction', *passim*; Anson, *Bishops at Large*, 126 et *passim*; 'T.[Tau] Apiryon', *The Invisible Basilica: History of the Gnostic Catholic Church*, <http://www.hermetic.com/sabazius/history_egc.htm>, downloaded 29 September, 1999. See also C. W. Leadbeater to J. Bricaud, 10 January, 1921: copy of original in the possession of the present author.

Leadbeater also received an extensive warrant to 'all rights and privileges of the Rite of Memphis' from Reginald Macbean (1859-1942) in the mid-1920s. Macbean, who had been made a Grand Inspector General 33\textsuperscript{°} of Co-Masonry by the Supreme Council in Paris in March, 1921, was, on 12 July of the same year, initiated to the rank of Grand Master in the Rite of Memphis at the Sanctuary of Palermo. He later became a brother of the British Federation of Co-Masonry and, following the enactment of Mussolini's laws against Italian Freemasonry in May, 1925, organised that Leadbeater (together with Wedgwood, George Arundale, Oscar Köllerström, and Jinarajadasa) would receive a full patent for the Rite of Memphis. See C. Jinarajadasa, 'The Rite of Memphis' in *Morning Star*, vol. IX:4, October, 1943, 53-55. The warrant was later activated as the foundation charter for Leadbeater's Egyptian Rite of the Ancient Mysteries, a highly secret Theosophical Rite which is still worked in various centres of the Adyar Society to this day: see infra ch. 22.
In 1915, Leadbeater stated that only Theosophy could provide the crucial hermeneutical keys to make sense of Masonry:

I must explain to you what we had in our minds with regard to all this - that we regarded a meeting of the Lodge as a manifestation of our religious belief in various ways, and we held in connection with it a great body of knowledge which fits in absolutely with all your ceremonies, and the way in which you carry out your work.\(^5^6\)

Crucially, Leadbeater had achieved a semiotic leap from believing that the signs and tokens of Freemasonry were but signifiers of occult truth (no matter how misapplied or misunderstood by normative Masonry), to accepting that they were *innately*
efficacious in conveying initiatory character.\textsuperscript{57}

Within ten years his attitude to what he now considered to be the necessary ontological perichoresis (on the Inner Planes) between Theosophy and Co-Masonry had evolved further still, such that it had come to include various novel adventist themes. Co-Masonry had now become one of the official World Movements which would usher in a new era characterised by three specific events: the influence of a new Ray, the

\textsuperscript{57} In this context it is worth considering a similar progression which may be detected in the development of Mormonism. Recent scholarship has emphasised the deep roots which the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has thrust into Western esotericism; of these the most significant single institutional influence is likely to have been Freemasonry. Indeed, the Temple endowment rituals, garments, and signs of Mormonism are replete with direct and indirect borrowings from Masonry. Prior to the 1840s it was rare (though not unknown) for Freemasonic authorities to claim for their rites, signs, and tokens an eschatological significance as guarantees of heavenly reward. In Mormonism, on the other hand, similar or identical signs and tokens to those used in Freemasonry are granted exactly such a significance. This progression in thought, as yet under-researched, is a fascinating prefiguration of Leadbeater’s concept of ritual efficacy and of his fusion of esotericism, Christianity, and Freemasonry. D. Michael Quinn, in an otherwise comprehensive analysis of the esoteric components of Mormonism, has concluded that Mormonism’s emphasis on ‘heavenly ascent’ (significant also in the present context) was derived, not from Freemasonry, but from ‘ancient occult mysteries’:

To be sure, Masonic rituals also shared some similarities with the ancient mysteries, of which Brigham Young was aware. However, these were not linked to a central concept of heavenly ascent, which was fundamental to both the occult mysteries and to the Mormon endowment. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to regard as superficial the similarities existing between Freemasonry and Mormonism. By contrast, the ancient occult mysteries manifest both philosophical and structural kinship with the Mormon endowment. (D. Michael Quinn, \textit{Early Mormonism and the Magic World View: Revised and Enlarged}, Signature Books, Salt Lake City, 1998, 234).

In emphasising possible antique and early modern sources for Mormon ‘heavenly ascent’ theology, Quinn has left under-examined the degree to which, from the late eighteenth century, speculative Freemasonry underwent regular injections of esoterism (from the Christian-Hermetic-Rosicrucian wellspring) and applied itself to sponsoring new cosmological, eschatological, and soteriological (to say nothing of political) paradigms. Such paradigms, particularly those which accommodated a theologised \textit{Entwicklung}, were eminently attractive for those such as Blavatsky and Joseph Smith (1805-1844) who wished to posit such doctrines as deification, \textit{creatio ex deo}, the covalency of matter and spirit, a sinless Fall, and the eternity of matter. Thus Freemasonry should be seen as a link between Mormonism and the ‘ancient occult mysteries’ and not as an accidental association. For a valuable study of the influence of the Hermetic-alchemical philosophies and iconographies on Mormon cosmology see John L. Brooke, \textit{The Refiner’s Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844}, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

Leadbeater was by no means unaware of Mormonism, having visited Salt Lake City and its Temple during his American lecture tours: see C. W. Leadbeater, ‘The Mormons and Their City’, in \textit{The Australian Theosophist}, July, 1931, 73-75. Blavatsky herself claimed to have investigated the Mormons, though she was unsurprisingly repelled by polygamy and considered Joseph Smith and Brigham Young (1801-1877) to be ‘leaders of the blind - the one without knowledge, and the other worse than useless’: Blavatsky, \textit{Collected Writings}, vol. XII, 257. The place of Mormonism within the occultistic progressivist dynamic of the nineteenth century is as yet not fully explored (though Brooke’s \textit{The Refiner’s Fire} is a brilliant introduction), but promises to be an extremely fruitful enquiry.

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development of the sixth sub-race, and the imminent Coming of the World-Teacher.

The Seven Rays

The doctrine of the Seven Rays became a staple motif of the New Age religious movements of the latter twentieth century, no doubt based upon the popularising of the concept through the influence of Leadbeater and Alice Bailey.58 The term can be traced to Blavatsky, who posited that human personality types can be allocated to one of seven categories, and then incorporated into a septenary schemata that included the angelic hierarchy, planets, days of the week, metals, the octave, and the colours of the spectrum.59 Blavatsky appears to have employed the term ‘Seven Rays’ as but one part of a broad system of correspondences (or, perhaps more accurately, causal relationships).60

Leadbeater, intuiting the macrocyclic periodicity at the core of Blavatsky’s imaging of history, seized upon the logical, if previously unacknowledged, inference that each era would be dominated by a particular Ray. By ‘allocating’ one specially chosen Master to each Ray, a Master whose attributes and responsibilities reflect the qualities of that Ray and are thus mirrored in the era, he was able to superimpose upon the Blavatskian...


60 The most developed teachings regarding the Seven Rays are to be found in ibid, vol. XII, ‘E. S. Instructions II’, 542-580. Blavatsky proposes a means of ascertaining one’s Ray:

Get wool of the seven colours; wind round the annular finger of the left hand a piece corresponding to the colour of the day, while meditating, and record the results. This is to discover the ray to which the student belongs (Spierenburg, The Inner Group Teachings, 2nd ed., 5).
synoptic historiography his (or his Masters') own temporality. Thus he could apply his unique overlay upon the broad cosmo-historiography of Blavatsky, and yet remain more or less within the strictures of her Theosophical idiom.

Leadbeater posited that his own era was under the influence of the Sixth Ray, and was characterised by devotionalism and religious piety; unsurprisingly, the Master of the Sixth Ray is the Chohan Jesus. Unlike Blavatsky, however, Leadbeater reasoned that Christianity, as the religion of the Sixth Ray, was an acceptable evolutionary force and not a species of self-arrest. In fact, according to Leadbeater, the era of Christianity had included seven pinnacles of evolutionary development (or 'sub-cycles'): the thaumaturgy of the ‘earlier Saints’; the Gnostics; the Astrologers; St. Simeon Stylites and the Flagellants (who developed ‘will-power’ by endurance); the Alchemists and Rosicrucians of the Middle Ages; the contemplative monastic orders; and the ‘external forms’ of the Roman Catholic Church.

According to Leadbeater (The Masters and the Path, 269), the Masters and the Rays are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RAY</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>MAGIC</th>
<th>LAST RELIGION</th>
<th>MASTER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Fohat, Shechinah</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>Brahmanical</td>
<td>Morya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
<td>Raja Yoga (Human Mind)</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>Kuthumi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Akasha</td>
<td>Astrology (Natural Magnetic Forces)</td>
<td>Chaldean</td>
<td>Venetian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Birth of Horus</td>
<td>Hatha Yoga (Physical Development)</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>Serapis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Alchemy (Material Substances)</td>
<td>Zoroastrian</td>
<td>Hilarion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Incarnation of Deity</td>
<td>Bhakti (Devotion)</td>
<td>Christianity, etc. (Kabala, etc.)</td>
<td>Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>Ceremonial Magic</td>
<td>Elemental Worship</td>
<td>The Count</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Leadbeater claimed that the table was given to him by the Master Djwal Kul during his training in Adyar: in ibid., 267-269. Not all Masters are allocated to Rays; some, like Djwal Kul, seem to have something of a minor portfolio, likely because he ‘attained Adeptship only a few years ago’: in ibid., 46. Another, given the Ego title 'Jupiter', is allocated to the First Ray as the ‘Guardian of India for the Hierarchy’: in ibid., 281-282. There are two other Masters who were seen through Leadbeater’s clairvoyance into past lives: ‘Vulcan’ (‘known in His last earth-life as Sir Thomas More’) and ‘Athena’ (‘known on earth as Thomas Vaughan, “Eugenius Philalethes”’); Annie Besant & C. W. Leadbeater, Man: Whence, How and Whither: A Record of Clairvoyant Investigation, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1913, 7; for Vaughan see Arthur Edward Waite, ed., The Works of Thomas Vaughan: Mystic and Alchemist (Eugenius Philalethes), University Books, New York, 1968. Note that no magic is given for the First Ray, nor a characteristic for the Seventh.


Ibid., 291.
As with all of the Rays in an ever- reticulating system, each has to give way to another. The Sixth Ray was, by Leadbeater’s time, in a state of decline, characterised, significantly, by materialism:

The sixth or devotional Ray was dominant during the Middle Ages; as its power waned we had a period of disbelief, irreligion and profound ignorance of the inner side of life.64

According to Leadbeater’s historiography, the Seventh Ray was just dawning, and, unlike its predecessor, would not be characterised by religion, but by Ceremonial Magic. This would be the era of practical occultism.65 It is not insignificant that Leadbeater chose Spiritualism ‘as a premonition of the influence of the coming Seventh Ray’.66

Leadbeater’s articulation of history thus cogently addresses an otherwise evident contradiction between his Theosophy and Blavatsky’s. She had deemed religious ceremonial to be ossified cultus, and practical magic as anti-evolutionary.67 Moreover, she seems to have believed that the process of re-spiritualisation and reintegration into the Absolute would necessitate a personal gnosis, bereft of creeds and overt theurgy. Leadbeater, whose interests were avowedly Spiritualistic and theurgical, was able to refashion the Theosophical historiographical template such that ceremonial of a Masonic type was no longer deemed to be reactionary or anti-progressive, but an evolutionary stimulus coming in the wake of degenerate materialism. The often blind devotionalism of the Sixth Ray was to be replaced by scientific occultism, under the administration of The Master the Count, whose dual responsibilities would reflect the temper of the age: ‘ceremonial magic’ and ‘the growth of modern physical science’.68

Co-Masonry would both usher in, and exemplify, the coming Ray because its initiations will potentiate conscious personal evolution:

65 It is significant that the last time the Seventh Ray was dominant was during the Atlantean period: Leadbeater, The Masters and the Path, 291-292.
66 Ibid., 291.
67 Blavatsky had stated:
Practical theurgy or ‘ceremonial magic’, so often resorted to by the Roman Catholic clergy in their exorcisms, was discarded by the Theosophists (quoted in J. D. Leechman, Besant or Blavatsky, Canadian Theosophical Loyalty League, Vancouver, n.d., 16).
68 Ibid., 286-287.
Such surely is the destiny that awaits our beloved Order in the future; such the splendour that will transfigure the Craft in the years that are to come, until within its temple walls once more is raised - not only in symbol but in actual fact - the ladder which stretches between earth and heaven, between men and the Grand Lodge above.

The Emergence of the Sixth Sub-Race

Concomitant with the resurgence to power of the Seventh Ray was to be the imminent evolution of the sixth sub-race. In his clever appropriation of the motif of the Seven Rays, it might be argued that Leadbeater had drastically truncated the vast expanses of Blavatskian macrohistory, and had focussed upon a more readily accessible time frame of thousands, rather than many millions, of human years. He was to apply the same historiographical delimitation to her esoteric ethnography and the concept of Root Races. Koot Hoomi, in a Mahatma letter, had noted that the Fifth Root Race has existed as a discrete species for about one million years. Leadbeater, curiously citing Koot Hoomi as a source, wrote the following:

You know of course the old Theosophical tradition that the fifth root-race commenced about a million years ago. Quite at the beginning of our enquiries we saw that this could not be true.

Koot Hoomi escorted Leadbeater, on the astral plane, to the Museum of the Brotherhood and allowed him access to maps which verified that the genesis of the Fifth Root Race, the Aryan, could be traced to 79 997 B.C.E., only about five

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69 Leadbeater, Glimpses, 332.
71 C. W. Leadbeater, The Fifth Root-Race and its Migrations, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1948, 2. (The book is in fact a long letter from Leadbeater to Jinarajadasa, dated 12 September, 1910). Leadbeater attempted, in vain, to compound his account and that of Blavatsky and her Masters; the problem was that she had been quite unequivocal: ‘Now our Fifth Root-Race has already been in existence - as a race sui generis and quite free from its parent stem - about 1,000,000 years’ (Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, vol. II, 435).
72 Leadbeater, The Fifth Root-Race, 4; but cf. appended map which gives the date as 79 797 B.C.E.
thousand years before the loss of Atlantis. Indeed the most appropriate date for the beginning of the Race was 75,025 B.C.E., when 700 persons were selected by the Masters as 'Rootstock'. As the Aryan Race developed, it passed through various sub-races (the Arabian, the Iranian, the Keltic [sic]) until the fifth sub-race emerged, the Teutonic.

In Leadbeater’s visioning of ethno-historiography, the time of the Teutonic sub-race was soon to be over; a sixth sub-race was to develop in and around the Pacific basin, and eventually find its home in the continent which would rise there:

'[T]he Occult Records tell that [the new Continent] will rise where now the Pacific spreads, where once Lemuria stretched, the home of the sixth Race. In that far-distant future huge and wide-spread destruction, volcanic fires, earthquakes, tidal waves, will split North America into pieces and she will sink beneath the waves, and [the new Continent] will arise, born of fire as fire destroyed Lemuria, and yield new home to a new Race.'

73 Blavatsky suggested that the conflagration of Greater Atlantis (which occasioned the end of the fourth continent and the demise, in the main, of the Fourth Root Race) occurred about 850,000 years ago: Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. II, 433. Leadbeater had brought the great inundation forward in time, but was able to justify such a change on the grounds that Blavatsky had noted that there were some remnants of the 'Lesser' land mass left as late as 11,000 B.C.E. (thereby allowing her to incorporate Plato’s account).

74 In Blavatskian Theosophy the Masters oversee and assist in the development of the Races, but normally from some distance. In Leadbeaterian Theosophy the Masters are actively engaged in eugenics, and regularly breed and cross-breed to achieve the desired result. There are copious examples; typical is the following:

When first he [the Manu] brought over his 9,000 He had chosen five-sixths of them from the fifth sub-race, but had intermixed one-twelfth of Akkadian blood, and one-twelfth of Toltec, each the best of its kind. Now, after the second destruction He thought that a little more of the Toltec infusion was needed (Leadbeater, *The Fifth Root-Race*, 5).

For further discussions of this ethno-historiography see infra Appendix D.

75 Leadbeater’s nominations for the various sub-races of the Fifth Root Race do not seem to agree with those of Blavatsky: ibid, 8-35 contra Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. II, 436, 444-446. They do, however, agree on America (specifically, it seems, the U. S. A.) as the crucible for the sixth sub-race.

76 Annie Besant, 'The Opening of the New Cycle' in *Theosophy in Australasia*, vol. XXV:II, 1 February, 1920, 521. Besant sought support for the notion of a conflagration in the Pacific in geopolitical and seismological statistics, noting that 1071 earthquakes had occurred in 20 months; in ibid. Such evidence was apparently available for those who were prepared to see the signs: 'I keep my eyes wide open for these coming changes, and so isolated facts, occurring from time to time, are seen in their true relations, and thus become significant' (in ibid.). Cf. also C. W. Leadbeater, *The Beginnings of the Sixth Root Race*, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1971, 141.
Both Besant and Leadbeater found examples of the new racial type among the children of California and Australia. The new sixth sub-race was ‘a fine physical type’, exhibiting intellectuality and strong ‘will-power’: ‘the square jaw, the broad forehead, the face of a strong intellectual man’. These ‘children of the New Age’ would be characterised by a powerful faculty of intuition, and would replace devotional religion with practical magic. Indeed, Leadbeater noted in his clairvoyant investigations into the sixth sub-race that a few would still espouse the ‘older form of Christianity’, but ‘[t]he majority regard these people as hopelessly out-of-date’.

Leadbeater was clear in establishing a link between membership of the Theosophical Society, and the emergence of the new sub-race. It was as yet very rare for an individual to be completely of the new race, ‘except in our own tiny circle’. For those in the general membership unfortunate enough to be of the fifth sub-race, there was some consolation:

\[M\]embership in the Society is verily a training by the Masters that, if successful, will fit the man to be reborn in the community of the Sixth Root-Race, when it is established on the physical plane.

Blavatsky herself had noticed a few children of ‘the new coming (6th) race’. Unlike Besant’s and Leadbeater’s descriptions, however, she suggested that most of the children were regarded by ‘official science as exceptional monstrosities’: see Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. VI, 116-117.


\[t\]he exact points of difference are largely in head measurements, in the proportion of the different parts of the body, and so on - in all the characteristics by which ethnologists discriminate between the different races (C. W. Leadbeater, *Australia & New Zealand: The Home of a New Sub-Race*, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1916, 3).

It is not surprising that the sixth sub-race would be, in the main, dolichocephalous, with ‘delicate, well-shaped hands and feet, thin fingers and oval nails’: Leadbeater, *The Masters and the Path*, 262-263.

In typically Theosophical arithmosophy, each sub-race has a relationship with the particular Root Race which shares its number. Thus the Fifth Root Race grew out of the fifth sub-race of the Fourth Root Race. That the sixth sub-race of the Fifth Root Race is characterised by intuition and practical magic means *ergo* that the Sixth Root Race will share similar traits. See Besant, ‘The Opening’, 516; Leadbeater, *Australia*, 7.

Leadbeater, *The Beginnings*, 121.


Ibid., 265.
The 'physical plane' home of the new race would be established in California 'about seven hundred years from now'.83 The singular importance of the Theosophical Society appears to continue even here, as the Manu of the sixth sub-race will be Morya, and the Bodhisattva will be Koot Hoomi.84

That the fifth sub-race should be labelled the ‘Teutonic’ is no less purposeful a choice than Blavatsky’s selection of ‘Aryan’ as the name for the Fifth Root Race. Leadbeater’s and Besant’s announcements of the imminence of the sixth sub-race came to prominence during the second decade of the twentieth century, a period of specifically anti-Germanic rhetoric in English discourse.85 When war finally erupted, the savagery came to be interpreted as but a symptom of the decay which had beset the fifth sub-race.86 The events of exoteric history needed only the correct esoteric interpretation:

83 Ibid., 263.
84 Ibid. By this time the Masters M. and K. H. will presumably have gone beyond the Sixth (Chohan) to the Seventh (Mahachohan) Initiation. Blavatsky described the Manu as following:

[T]hey are one and all the manifested Energies of one and the sam [sic] LOGOS, the celestial, as well as the terrestrial messengers and permutations of that Principle which is ever in a state of activity ... [They] emanate the universe and all in it collectively, and ... represent in their aggregate the manifested LOGOS (Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, vol. II, 310).

Each Round has two Manus: the Root Manu and the Seed Manu. The first appears at the beginning of a Round; the second comes at the end as the ‘seed’ for the Round to come, and often is seen to rescue a remnant of humanity at the time of a pralaya or cataclysm:

[T]he seven Minor Manus ... are made to preside over the seven races of this our planet. Each of these has to become the witness of one of the periodical and ever-recurring cataclysms (by fire and water in turn) that close the cycle of every Root-race (Blavatsky, Collected Writings, vol. IV, 578; note that Noah is an allegorical type of the Root Manu).

In Leadbeaterian Theosophy, the Manus appear less metaphysical (as ‘Energies’), and more as divine agents who operate terrestrially:

[The Manu’s] term of office begins with the slow gathering of the egos who are going to work under Him at the commencement of the new race, and through all the successive sub-races as they appear one by one. During the hundreds of thousands of years of the history of a Root Race, He directs the building of variant after variant of the sub-races, and Himself incarnates in each sub-race to set the form for it (Jinarajadasa, First Principles, 209).

For ‘Bodhisattva’ see infra p. 316ff.
86 This idea has several parallels in other macrohistorical constructs of the era, which commonly suggested the need for a tremendous purge of human (Western) civilisation. One such construct was that of Oswald Spengler, who interpreted the war as a logical necessity. Indeed, it was ‘the type of historical change of phase occurring within a great historical organism of definable compass at the point preordained for it hundreds of years ago’: Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West, vol. I, London, 1926, 47-48.
Those who stand behind and direct the evolution of the world are unquestionably utilizing [the war] for great and high purposes, and thus wringing good out of the very heart of ill.

The ‘great and higher purposes’ appear to be the exaltation of successful Egos (‘It has raised them at one stroke more than many lives under ordinary conditions would raise a man’) and the removal of those with reactionary tendencies:

[T]he Deity intends that humanity shall evolve, and if part of humanity deliberately casts itself out of the line of evolution, that particular set of bodies and minds must be wiped out, and must begin again under other conditions.

Indeed, in a somewhat disturbing call to arms, Leadbeater suggests that while soldiers may assist their country in life, they may actually do a greater service to their race in death:

Remember that unselfish and awakened egos are needed at this very moment for the Sixth Sub-Race, which is beginning most prominently in America and Australasia. Perhaps there was no other way to get them in sufficient numbers and in a sufficiently short time, except through some great world-conflict.

The First World War, then, was at heart a theatre for the play of progressivism. The combatants were divided between those who ‘are fellow-workers together with God’ on the side of evolution, and those who supported devolutionary tendencies.

Significantly, the same war was fought (and, apparently, by many of the same Egos) in Atlantis. Leadbeater suspected that had the war with Germany not been forthcoming, ‘it would have been with some tremendous uprising of the much less developed races ... the backward nations’. The inference is that British Imperial

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88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., 460.
90 Ibid., 478.
92 Leadbeater noted that ‘[t]he Lords of the Dark Face in Atlantis were intensifying themselves as separated beings against the stream of evolution’. In this instance, Leadbeater states that Atlantis fell ‘some twelve or thirteen thousand years ago’; he suggests that when Poseidonis (an island in the Atlantis-group) fell, 65 million people died in one day: see Leadbeater, *The Hidden Side of Christian Festivals*, 456-459.
93 Ibid., 471-472.
civilisation, including the U. S. A. (which he considered more or less a part of the Empire), is the summit of evolution, and its driving engine. He cements this association by identifying the Germans of his time as 'savages', thus fusing psychological and physiological self-arrest, and promoting a deceptively ethnographic justification for war:

I am stating facts based on knowledge and not on supposition when I say that it is actually a kindness to these ruffians to kill their bodies, for in that way we save their souls from this madness. They are simply dangerous wild beasts who must be sent back into the savage tribes to which they belong ... they must learn their lesson.

Leadbeater, who exhorted all to contribute to the war effort, was in an ideal position to discuss the carnage for he had experienced it himself; he felt it his duty to visit the battlefields astrally, and to offer succour wherever he could. He led a band of 'Invisible Helpers', comprised in the main of Theosophists killed in action, whose task it was to select from among the dead those souls to be reborn immediately. Others, such as King Edward VII (1841-1910) and General Lord Roberts of Kandahar (1832-1914), also assisted.

Aside from the ‘unparalleled opportunity’ for evolution which the First World War afforded, and the possibility ‘to pay off masses of karma’ in a single lifetime, the war

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94 Ibid., 465.
95 Leadbeater, Australia, 5; id., The Hidden Side of Christian Festivals, 481. The Germans, it seems, ‘are at the lowest and most savage stage of evolution’: in ibid.
96 Ibid., 481-482. It might be noted that Leadbeater’s editors noticed the problematical aspects of his analysis of the war. It appears that a number of copies of the first edition had the entirety of Part Three (‘Addresses during the War’) excised from the text; curiously the table of contents was not altered, so some copies are otherwise inexplicably 60 pages shorter than others. The second revised edition of 1973 excised these Addresses from both the text and the table of contents.
97 Ibid., 479. Tillett notes that the Hindu doctrine of ‘Ahimsa’ which ‘inspired Theosophists to become vegetarians, anti-vivisectionists and opponents of the wearing of furs, did not inspire Leadbeater to oppose the killing of Germans’: Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 2, 563. There is a certain amount of irony in the fact that in the same address Leadbeater can decry alcohol, smoking, gambling, and extravagant dress as the indulgences of ‘the vast majority of people [who] are still unevolved, still brutally selfish’, and yet consider the killing of Germans to be the proper activity of those who would gain ‘a rapid rebirth in [the] new Sub-race’. See Leadbeater, The Hidden Side of Christian Festivals, 490, 498-499.
98 Ibid., 481.
100 Ibid.
was a sign of the imminence of the coming of the World-Teacher.\footnote{Leadbeater, \textit{The Hidden Side of Christian Festivals}, 482, 493}

\textit{The Coming of the World-Teacher}

In Leadbeater’s cyclic historiography the resurgence to power of the Seventh Ray and the emergence of the sixth sub-race are inextricably bound to the imminent arrival of the World-Teacher. In order to understand the significance of the World-Teacher within the Leadbeaterian evolutionary scheme it is necessary briefly to analyse the hierarchical structures which underpin the Inner Government of the World.\footnote{Leadbeater, \textit{A Textbook}, 9.}

At the edge of knowing exists the Absolute, beyond language and comprehension. Beneath the Absolute is the Solar Logos who equates to what ‘men mean by God’.\footnote{C. W. Leadbeater, \textit{The Christian Creed: Its Origin and Signification}, 2nd ed., Theosophical Publishing House, London, 1920, 33ff. It might be noted that Leadbeater reduced the vast temporalities of Blavatskian cosmo-history (via the employment of a periodicity based on the Seven Rays and a much truncated ethnogenesis), so too he delimited the cosmological focus by concentrating on one particular solar system rather than the expanse of the universe.} (Each solar system is the emanation of its own Solar Logos, who is to be understood in a trinitarian aspect).\footnote{A good exposition of the Leadbeaterian hierarchy of Masters is to be found in Jinarajadasa, \textit{First Principles}, 204-211. Jinarajadasa, who later became President of the Society, was for many years Leadbeater’s most ardent disciple and secretary. For comprehensiveness it should be noted that there is also a ‘Silent Watcher’ at the level of the Tenth Initiation, who appears to be the ‘Unmanifested’ aspect of the Trinitarian Solar Logos, and yet also its agent. One suspects that the Silent Watcher is the ‘connection’ between the Solar Logos and the ten-fold Initiatory hierarchy, and, as a result, is necessarily somewhat ineffable (and thus confusing for the reader): in \textit{ibid.}, 206.}
The Solar Logos exists beyond the Tenth Initiation and has as his lieutenant the Lord of the World, who, at the level of the Ninth Initiation, is properly the Head of the Great White Brotherhood.\footnote{Ibid., 207-208. Joscelyn Godwin makes the point that the probable first use of the term ‘Lord of the World’ (in a Theosophical context) was by Alice Bailey in \textit{her Initiation: Human and Solar} (Lucis Publishing Co., New York) in 1922: Godwin, \textit{Arktos}, 98. The degree of cross-fertilisation between Bailey and Leadbeater remains to be studied. It is known that Leadbeater possessed copies of a number of Bailey’s books - several bearing his signature exist in the Adyar Library.} The Lord of the World does not normally manifest in human form as he is ‘too lofty’, having completed his own evolution on Venus, six and a half million years ago.\footnote{It is known that Leadbeater possessed copies of a number of Bailey’s books - several bearing his signature exist in the Adyar Library.} It is his responsibility to oversee the\textit{ processus} of evolution. Beneath the Lord of the World is the Buddha,
whose task it is to 'transmute and draw down to our level' the forces from planes too subtle for humans to comprehend.\textsuperscript{107} The Buddha, who, at the level of the Eighth Initiation, is the highest achiever so far in the Earth chain of evolution, oversees the plan of humanity's spiritual development and is the prime teacher.\textsuperscript{108} Under the Buddha are three offices within the hierarchy which parallel, to some extent, the trinitarian aspects of the Solar Logos, and are each at the level of the Seventh Initiation: the Manu, the Mahachohan, and the Bodhisattva:

For the entire period of a Root-Race the Manu works out the details of its evolution, and the Bodhisattva, as World-Teacher, Minister of Education and Religion, helps its members to develop whatever of spirituality is possible for them at that stage, while the Mahachohan directs the minds of men so that the different forms of culture and civilisation shall be unfolded according to the cyclic plan.\textsuperscript{109}

Beneath the three officers of the Seventh Initiation are the seven Masters of the Sixth Initiation. A number of these Masters are familiar from Blavatskian Theosophy (Morya, Koot Hoomi, Serapis, Hilarion) while others belong to the Leadbeaterian redaction (the Count, Jesus, and 'the Venetian Master').\textsuperscript{110} The Fifth Initiation, the Asekha, is that of the Adept, and was curiously unoccupied by any Theosophist, at

\textsuperscript{107} Leadbeater, \textit{The Masters and the Path}, 319. It should be noted that the 'Buddha' is seen as an office within the Hierarchy, and not as an Ego or human individual. Thus, although the present Buddha was known in his last incarnation as Siddartha Gautama, past and future Buddhas have no connection with the historical Gautama.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 315-320. There are also three 'Pratyeka Buddhas' (which are equated by Leadbeater with Sarandana, Sanaka, and Sanâtana in the Hindu tradition) who exist at the level of the Buddha, but have none of his teaching responsibilities. The Pratyeka Buddhas have little function within Leadbeaterian Theosophy and are probably a necessary incorporation of Blavatskian themes: cf., eg., Blavatsky, \textit{Collected Writings}, vol. XIV, 434-435. Christmas Humphreys - himself an admirer of Blavatsky - noted that in Mahâyâna Buddhism the 'mystery about the true status' of the Pratyeka Buddhas is unresolved: Christmas Humphreys, \textit{Buddhism}, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1955, 156. See also James Santucci, 'Foreword' in Govert Schiller, \textit{Krishnamurti and the World Teacher Project: Some Theosophical Perceptions}, Theosophical History Occasional Papers vol. V, Theosophical History, Fullerton, California, 1997, Xn14.

\textsuperscript{109} Leadbeater, \textit{The Masters and the Path}, 305. The similarities between Leadbeater's descriptions of the Manu, Bodhisattva, and Mahachohan and traditional concepts of the divine hypostases of Christianity are self-evident - and more exaggeratedly so than in Blavatsky's formulations.

\textsuperscript{110} The latter ('the Venetian Master') is the Master of the Third Ray, that of adaptability: ibid., 382-383. Although Leadbeater states that he is 'one of the greater Teachers whom H. P. B. spoke of as Chohans' (id., \textit{Talks on the Path}, 617), the present author has been able to find no reference to such a (Theosophical) Master in Blavatsky's \textit{œuvre}. It might be added, in order to avoid further confusion, that the Venetian Master is not the Venutian Master; in other words, the former presumably comes from Venice, the latter (the Lord of the World) from Venus.
least according to Leadbeater.\textsuperscript{111} The Fourth Initiation, the \textit{Arhat}, was that achieved by Leadbeater during the scandals of 1906-1908, and subsequently by select other Theosophists such as Besant and Krishnamurti.

Within Leadbeater’s articulation of the hierarchy of the Brotherhood, special emphasis is placed upon the office of the World-Teacher, or Bodhisattva.\textsuperscript{112} This office, once the preserve of the Lord Gautama (who has gone on to take the Eighth Initiation and is now the Lord Gautama Buddha), was occupied during Leadbeater’s time by the Lord Maitreya.\textsuperscript{113} The Lord Maitreya’s province is the inculcation of religion among humans and, to this end, he actively involves himself in the generation of those creeds which will advance the cosmic evolutionary impetus. His oversight of the spiritual domain is such that on some occasions he will deign to overshadow certain individuals and make of them great leaders. So it was that he directly inspired Laotze (c.600 B.C.E.) and Confucius (c.551-478 B.C.E.) in China, Pythagoras (c.582-500 B.C.E.) in classical Greece, and Shankaracharya (8th century C.E.) and Mahavira (6th century C.E.) in India.\textsuperscript{114} On rare occasions, and normally only when he first takes office from the last Bodhisattva, he will incarnate in human form.\textsuperscript{115} During the Lord Maitreya’s tenure as Bodhisattva he incarnated as the child Krishna, and then later as the Christ in Palestine.\textsuperscript{116} Leadbeater remained somewhat ambivalent regarding the exact nature of this last incarnation as Christ - an ambivalence which would eventually

\textsuperscript{111} One suspects that the Fifth operates as something of a ‘buffer zone’ in the Leadbeaterian system, separating the highest Theosophists (i.e. Leadbeater, Besant, Krishnamurti, \textit{inter alia}) of the Fourth Initiation, the \textit{Arhat}, from the Masters of the Sixth Initiation. Were Leadbeater to have claimed the Asekha Initiation, he would likely have been expected to perform supernatural feats in the flesh, rather than on the Inner Planes. In later years George Arundale claimed (and Besant, who had voluntarily forfeited her own psychism sometime earlier, happily announced) that he, Leadbeater, Krishnamurti, Jinarajadasa, Wedgwood, and Besant had all taken the Fifth Initiation on 14 August, 1925: Emily Lutyens, \textit{Candles}, 134-135; Mary Lutyens, \textit{Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening}, John Murray, London, 1975, 214-215. It appears that Leadbeater did not believe the claim that \textit{any} Theosophist had taken the Fifth Adeptic Initiation: ‘he hoped that he and Mrs Besant might do so in their next life’ (in ibid., 221-222).


\textsuperscript{113} Leadbeater, \textit{The Masters and the Path}, 313ff.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 334.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 51.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 50-51, 334-335; but cf. id., \textit{The Hidden Side of Things}, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1968,156-159.
be startlingly revealed in his advocacy of Krishnamurti as the vehicle for the Lord Maitreya, for which see infra.\textsuperscript{117} (Indeed, misunderstandings about the exact nature of the descent of the Lord Maitreya into or upon the young Brahmin have ensured that the vast bulk of Krishnamurti scholarship is highly misleading).\textsuperscript{118}

Within Theosophy, messianic discourse is somewhat confused and confusing for the simple reason that the meta-empirical potentialities of the Masters are such that the attribution of messianism is never far below the surface. Trompf has argued that Blavatskian Theosophy was such as to have obviated the necessity for ‘one special Incarnation’.\textsuperscript{119} He is correct in so far as the development of the Pilgrim Monads to a level of incarnational experience sufficient for them to be reintegrated into the Absolute is a process undergone in an endless cyclic reticulation, thus accommodating numberless incarnations and visitations of the Dhyani-Chohan Masters. Yet within this enormous temporality, Blavatsky brackets human development into more manageable Rounds, each of which incorporates seven Races. At the beginning of each Round ‘a Dhyan Chohan, [who] belonged to another System, and was thus far

\textsuperscript{117} In one section of \textit{The Masters and the Path}, Leadbeater states:

This plan of borrowing a suitable body is always adopted by the Great Ones when They think it well to descend among men, under conditions such as those which now obtain in the world. The Lord Gautama employed it when He came to attain the Buddhahood, and the Lord Maitreya took the same course when He visited Palestine two thousand years ago (ibid., 50-51).

Yet in the same book he also states:

Twice He has Himself appeared - as Krishna in the Indian plains, and as Christ amid the hills of Palestine. In the incarnation as Krishna, the great feature was always love; the Child Krishna drew round Him people who felt for Him the deepest, the most intense affection. Again in His birth in Palestine, love was the central feature of His teaching (ibid., 334-335).

Such apparent discrepancies may well have been engineered so as to leave open as many options as possible for Leadbeater’s own esoteric quasi-adventism, for which see infra ch. 21.

\textsuperscript{118} Although Leadbeater does not seem to have experienced a strong theological training for his ministry in the Anglican Church, one nevertheless suspects that the figure of Krishnamurti cannot be properly placed within the Leadbeaterian religious Weltanschauung unless scholars have more than a passing acquaintance with Christology. Consequently, it appears Edouard Schuré was incorrect in his superficial assessment that the promotion of Krishnamurti as the Vehicle for the World-Teacher was an attempt to revive the Oriental mythemes of the Society in the face of (Steinerian?) Christian esotericism:

\textit{Like a bomb - or rather, like a fabricated firework - the Alcyone affair burst upon us. For this affair is truly nothing but the answer of Adyar to the resurgence of Christian esotericism in the West, and I am convinced that, without the latter, we would never have heard a word about the future prophet Krishnamurti} (quoted in Steiner, \textit{From the History}, 264).

For Krishnamurti, see infra ch. 21.

\textsuperscript{119} Trompf, ‘Macrohistory’, 280.
higher than a *Buddha* would appear as the first spiritual teacher.\textsuperscript{120} Crucially, a similarly exalted figure would appear at the close of the Round:

The one who will appear at the close of the seventh race - at the time of the occupation of the next higher planet by humanity - will again be a Dhyan Chohan. The passage of humanity into a planet and its going therefrom to another - are two critical junctures, necessitating the appearance of a Dhyan Chohan. At its first appearance, the seed of 'spiritual wisdom' has to be implanted and then carried on to the next planet, when the period of obscuration of the inhabited planet approaches. The intervening disturbances, caused by racial cataclysms, on the globe, do not destroy that seed and its growth is ensured by the appearance of the intermediate *Buddhas*.\textsuperscript{121}

If each Round were begun and closed by the appearance of a Dhyani-Chohan Master, then analogously each Race would be begun and closed by a Buddha-Bodhisattva.\textsuperscript{122} (So, too, the last quarter of each century would witness some form of intervention by the Brotherhood to aid human development).\textsuperscript{123} Yet even though Blavatsky taught that

\textsuperscript{120} H. P. Blavatsky, 'The Future Buddhas' in id., *Collected Writings*, vol. VI, 267.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 267-268.

\textsuperscript{122} The distinction between a Buddha and (his) Bodhisattva in Blavatsky's writings is a difficult one. Suffice to say that Blavatsky considered a Bodhisattva to be the hypostatisation of a Buddha in the world of form: see Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. XIV, 390-391 et passim.

\textsuperscript{123} Blavatsky had noted:

\begin{quote}
I must tell you that during the last quarter of every hundred years an attempt is made by those Masters, of whom I have spoken, to help on the spiritual progress of Humanity in a marked and definite way (Blavatsky, *The Key*, 194; see also Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. XII, 120)
\end{quote}

She further commented:

\begin{quote}
No Master of Wisdom from the East will himself appear or send anyone to Europe or America after that period, and the sluggards will have to renounce every chance of advancement in their present incarnation - until the year 1975. Such is the LAW (id., *The Original Programme of the Theosophical Society and Preliminary Memorandum of the Esoteric Section*, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1974, 71).
\end{quote}

This last comment, given to the advanced students of the ES, was to pose some problems for Leadbeater and Besant. When asked, the latter noted that Blavatsky was speaking of a 'general rule':

Q. 45. H. P. B. said that no Master of the Wisdom would appear in Europe or America after the end of the 19th century; how can this be reconciled with the coming of the Lord Maitreya? F. N.

Ans. It cannot. At that time apparently no one, outside the circle of the Masters, knew anything about the coming of the Lord Maitreya. H. P. B. was evidently thinking of the general rule, that a Messenger comes in the last quarter of each century ([Annie Besant] ‘Issued by the O. H. of the School’, *The Link*, February, 1912, 158).
each Race would have its greater and lesser avatars, she afforded a special place to the Maitreya - 'the last MESSIAH' - who will only return at the culmination of the 'Great Cycle'.\textsuperscript{124} This exclusive treatment of the Maitreya is in accord with Blavatsky's programme to incorporate Oriental motifs into her grand macrohistory with as little modification as practicable, for she was well aware that in normative Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Maitreya would appear only when the cosmos is in a highly \textit{regenerate} state, a 'golden age'.\textsuperscript{125} Thus the Maitreya could hardly be the appropriate avatar for the highly materialistic and \textit{degenerate} Fifth Root Race;\textsuperscript{126} indeed, it is no surprise to discover that Blavatsky believed the Maitreya would only come to earth in the highly (re)spiritualised Seventh Root Race:

He will appear as Maitreya Buddha, the last of the Avatars and Buddhas, in the seventh Race. This belief and expectation are universal throughout the East. Only it is not in the \textit{Kali yug} [sic], our present terrifically materialistic age of Darkness, the 'Black Age', that a new Saviour of Humanity can ever appear.\textsuperscript{127}

It follows, then, that Blavatsky's Theosophy of 'Rounds' did espouse a messianism: but, significantly, one that appeared highly graduated - from the supreme angelic Dhyani-Chohans through various Bodhisattvas and thence to the less exalted Masters (Morya, Koot Hoomi, \textit{inter alia}). Yet the emphasis on the centrality of the Maitreya to the scheme, and the insistence that he will not appear until nearly the end of the Round, suggests that Blavatsky had a higher soteriological purpose in incorporating him into her eschatology. The only likely conclusion is that she intended to underline the optimistic progressivism inherent in her evolutionism: \textit{the Lord Maitreya is not a premillennial herald but a post-millennial expectation}, who will incarnate 'into the whole of humanity collectively, not in a single individual'.\textsuperscript{128}


\textsuperscript{125} The Maitreya would appear only when the human lifespan was 80,000 years. The earth would be remarkably fecund and covered with jewels and flowers, and moral turpitude would be a thing of the past: see Conze, \textit{Buddhism}, 116-117; Geoffrey Parrinder, \textit{Avatar and Incarnation}, Oxford University Press, New York, 1982, 158-161 \textit{et passim}.

\textsuperscript{126} Blavatsky, \textit{Collected Writings}, vol. XIV, 354 \textit{et passim}.


\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., vol. III, 185.
The germ of Leadbeater's notion of the Lord Maitreya was present in Blavatsky's thought, but his recension drastically altered the cyclicism of her formulation. Gone is the association of the Maitreya with the glorious re-spiritualisation of the Seventh Root Race. In its place Leadbeater has again radically condensed Theosophical cosmohistory so that all the characters of the Blavatskian pageant are brought into very near historical reach, occasionally, it might be said, 'bumping shoulders'. Thus the Maitreya, whose descent into all humans was to be the indicator of the close of the Round and imminent reabsorption into the Divine, instead became reconfigured as a special emissary of the Masters, who brought in his wings the promise of occult advancement through ethnogenesis (the new sixth sub-race) and ceremonial (the Seventh Ray). In the process of change from the Blavatskian to the Leadbeaterian positions, it might be noted that the Maitreya had shifted from embodying a peculiarly esoteric chiliasm to defining a specifically Theosophical adventism. In other words, regardless of his designation as the World-Teacher, the Lord Maitreya was to come primarily for Theosophists. The new religion would get its 'one special Incarnation' after all.

129 That Blavatsky had no sense of the imminence of the 'World-Teacher' is proved by John Cooper's unpublished article, 'Blavatsky and Krishnamurti: Did Madame Blavatsky predict a World Teacher?' (n.d.).
CHAPTER 20

THE LIBERAL CATHOLIC CHURCH

The conjunction of the new World-Teacher with the emergence of the sixth sub-race and the ascendancy of the Seventh Ray would be nowhere better represented than in the new Theosophical endeavour, the Liberal Catholic Church. It is in no sense surprising that Leadbeater would find a renewed interest in liturgy and ecclesiasticism, given his occult investigations of ritual and his convictions regarding the value of ceremonial for the coming New Age, but there is some degree of irony when it is remembered that Blavatsky spent much of her literary career pouring unmitigated scorn upon institutionalised Christianity.

The attitude of Theosophy to Christianity had always been problematical, in major part due to the unresolved tension in Blavatsky’s thought between Christianity as a remnant of the prisca theologia in possession of some veiled or garbled version of the philosophia perennis, and Christianity as ossified cultus and authoritarian ecclesiastical regime. (Blavatsky’s own suppressed Russian Orthodoxy has never been adequately examined). Her hostility to Christian dogmatism was only exacerbated by the regular attacks made against her by the defenders of the various Christian churches. Further, there can be little doubt that Blavatsky’s Orientalism was a foil not only to orthodox Christianity, but also to competing esoteric formulations of a specifically Christian hue.

2 Cf., eg., Anonymous, Theosophy Exposed, or, Mrs. Besant and Her Guru. An Appeal to Educated Hindus, The Christian Literature Society (S. P. C. K. Press), Madras, 1893 (although published following Blavatsky’s death, the work republishes many such attacks and her responses). High on Blavatsky’s list of Christian calumnies was the publication of the Blavatsky-Coulomb correspondence (very possibly forged by either of the Coulombs) in the Madras Christian College Magazine.
3 In this context it is worth remembering that prior to her premature death in 1888, Anna Bonus Kingsford was the most obvious pretender to Blavatsky’s throne as premier esoteric formularist of her era. There can be little doubt that at least a part of the animosity between the women was due to competitiveness; significantly, Blavatsky changed her opinion of Kingsford immediately following the latter’s death. The best and most concise analysis of Kingsford’s Hermetic Christianity is to be found in Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment, 333-346 et passim.
At the core of Blavatsky's animus to Christianity was her conviction that dogmatism, exclusivism, and a literalist exegesis were *impedimenta* to the evolutionary imperative; indeed, the doctrine of Vicarious Atonement alone, according to one interpretation, can remove all motivation for conscious personal evolution. While her opposition was certainly more vociferous than most, she was by no means alone in her views. Aside from the confronting challenges of materialist science and Positivist, or even atheistical, philosophy, new social scientific disciplines, particularly *Religionsgeschichte*, were busy disturbing the grounds of hallowed truths. New historical and comparative methods were applied to the domain of heretofore unassailable Christian confessional claims - sometimes to devastating effect. One result of this breach in the edifice of Christian dogmatism was that many individuals, who had otherwise been unable to reconcile a Christian allegiance with their esotericism, and yet who felt predisposed to what might be called the Christian *topoi*, found themselves in an environment conducive to the development of novel Christian historicities and theologies.

*Theosophical Christianity and Christian Theosophy*

Joscelyn Godwin has traced the roots of the ahistorical allegorising favoured by the late nineteenth century esotericists to the field of mythistorical speculation which emerged a century prior. The desire to find in Christianity an historical veil for the veneration of the phallus or the sun, exemplified by the works of Richard Payne Knight (1751-1824) and Constantin Francois de Volney (1757-1820) respectively, or for other non-normative theories of Christian origins, dovetailed agreeably with many

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2 For *Religionsgeschichte* (as well as the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*) see Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, 119-171. It is a predictable irony that several of the dictates of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* have themselves become something of an ossified orthodoxy in the academy. In this context it is worthwhile to examine how one such orthodoxy (which is of particular relevance to the present research: the ascensus-descensus motif) has been subsequently deconstructed: see Ioan Petru Culianu, *Psychanodia I: A Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and Its Relevance*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1983.

an esotericist's project to deny Christian exclusivity. With the growing professionalism of the Religionsgeschichtler, such eccentric heterodoxies were increasingly marginalised, only to resurface in the metamythographies of such late nineteenth century esoteric auteurs as Blavatsky. Some, such as Blavatsky, employed these speculations aggressively and polemically, desiring to dismantle Christian assertions of ontological uniqueness; others chose instead to deconstruct Christianity with a view to reclaiming it as the fountainhead of esoteric gnosis.

Among the latter none could claim more of a lasting influence in the London Theosophical milieu of the 1880s than Anna Bonus Kingsford, and her loyal associate, Edward Maitland. The particular contribution of Kingsford, and such figures as William Kingsland (1855-1936), to the occultist endeavour was their promotion of Christ in relativistic terms, and as something of an exoteric composite of esoteric traditions. Their hermeneutical exegesis was premised on the assumption that the historical gospels were but blinds drawn over the arcane secrets of adeptic initiation. To this end, all scripture became grist to the mill of extreme, and often defiantly arbitrary, allegory. Further, since doctrinal extrapolations based on anything but figurative grounds were resolutely denied (and ecclesial dogmatism abhorred),
entirely novel interpretations and syncretisms could result. Thus it is that karma and
reincarnation could be shown as the proper truths of Jesus’ message, and evolution
(physical and spiritual) as the real meaning of the Exodus.

The new figurative typologies and allegories sponsored by the esoteric treatment of
scripture allowed for Christianity’s reintroduction into the ambit of Theosophical
universalism. Indeed, Kingsland noted as much:

And the proof that the key which Theosophy offers is the true one,
is its universality. The proof lies in the fact ... that it does unify the
records and teachings, which, taken in their mere outward form,
appear to be contradictory and mutually destructive.

The introduction of Christianity as a focus for Theosophical exegesis began in
Blavatsky’s time, though only in a very limited and partisan sense. Various other
Theosophists intuited the potential of an esoteric Christianity; by the time of
Leadbeater’s reintroduction into the Society in 1908, such reflection had grown to

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10 It should not be forgotten that this extra-eclesial allegorising was matched to some degree by
intramural discussion of doctrinal developmentalism - particularly so in England where the influence of
John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801-1890) was keenly felt, especially by the Roman Catholic
Modernists. Newman’s An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine (1845) has often been
used by subsequent theologians in order to justify the influence of history in the formulation of
doctrine - a position, one suspects, Newman himself would not have publicly advocated. See John
12 Ibid. (1895), 20-21.
13 Blavatsky published ‘The Esoteric Character of the Gospels’ in Lucifer in 1887: see Blavatsky,
Collected Writings, vol. VIII, 172ff.
become something of a minor industry.\(^{14}\) One notable feature of the Theosophical discourse on Christianity, and one which received both Blavatsky's and the Masters' imprimatur, was the project to divorce the historical Jesus from the theological Christ. Blavatsky further undermined traditional Christological claims by insisting that Jesus of Nazareth was in fact 'Jeshu ben-Panthera'\(^{15}\) and had been born before 100 B.C.E.\(^{16}\)


One of the most influential figures in Theosophical Christianity is Edouard Schuré (1841-1929), who appears to have been much influenced by Antoine Fabre d'Olivet (1767-1825). Schuré's *Les Grande Initiés (The Great Initiates: Sketch of the Secret History of Religions*, 2 vols., trans. Fred Rothwell, Rider, London, 1922), first published in 1889, placed Jesus firmly within the lineage of exponents of the *philosophia perennis*. The present author has observed that Schuré's book is particularly beloved by several contemporary Neopagan groups.

\(^{15}\) The spelling is different in just about every instance of use. The story of Jesus' patrimony from the soldier Panthera/Panthira/Pandera (thus 'Jeschu ben Pandera') is a late Talmudic anti-Christian polemic, and repeated in the much later *Toldoth Jeshu*. It appears to have been mediated to Blavatsky by Gerald Massey (1829-1907): see infra p. 328n16. See also Mead, *Did Jesus Live 100BC?*, 129-130.

\(^{16}\) See Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, vol. IV, 361-362, vol. IX, 19n, 225-226; see also Leslie Price, 'Jesus in Theosophical History' in *Theosophical History*, vol. 1:3, July, 1985, 38-45. Blavatsky's thoughts on the person of Jesus and the details of his birth were influenced by Gerald Massey, who had contributed articles on such themes to her journal, *Lucifer*. The '100 B.C. Theory', as it is known, was begun in earnest with the publication of G. R. S. Mead's *Did Jesus Live 100BC?* in 1903; Mead based much of his early research for the book on Leadbeater's clairvoyance. 100 B.C.[E.] Theory has become something of a fixation for some Theosophists and Liberal Catholics: cf., eg., Geoffrey Hodson, *Clairvoyant Investigations*. The most substantial argument (547pp.) in favour of the theory was forwarded by an English Liberal Catholic Priest, and remains unpublished: G. Nevin Drinkwater, 'The Lost Century in the Early Church and the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Reorientation of Christian Origins', n.p., n.d.
Just as Christianity was beginning to undergo Theosophical analysis, so, too, Theosophy was gaining converts within the established churches. The popular revival of mysticism, sponsored in large part by the works of Dean William Inge (1860-1954) and Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), encouraged a degree of commingling of persons and ideas with the result that a number of confessional Christians found themselves within a curiously occult orbit. The Roman Catholic writer, Robert Hugh Benson (1872-1914) noted:

Theosophists are wonderfully alive to what may be called the more mysterious and spiritual elements in the Catholic Religion ... There are certain points of view that they understand better than many uneducated Catholics.

While Theosophy garnered little interest among Roman Catholics, it proved quite enticing for a number of Anglicans, particularly those who espoused Anglo-Catholicism. Several clergymen joined the Society, including William Alexander Ayton, C. W. Scott-Moncrieff (some of whose hymns were subsequently incorporated into the hymnal of the Liberal Catholic Church), and W. F. Geikie-Cobb (who also

17 See William Wayne Emilsen, 'The English Mystical Revival (1900-1914)', Bachelor of Divinity (Hons.) thesis, School of Divinity, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1981.
18 Evelyn Underhill's interest in Christian esotericism extended to the practical: she was initiated into Arthur Edward Waite's Independent and Rectified Rite (a precursor of his later mystically-inclined Fellowship of the Rosy Cross) in July, 1904, and had progressed to the grade of 3°=8° ('Practicus') prior to resigning from the Order a few years later. Two of Underhill's early works (published under the pseudonym 'John Cordelier') exhibit Theosophical influence: The Path of Eternal Wisdom: A Mystical Commentary on the Way of the Cross (John M. Watkins, London, 1911) and The Spiral Way: Being Meditations upon the Fifteen Mysteries of the Soul's Ascent (John M. Watkins, London, 1912). For the first biography to encompass Underhill's membership of an esoteric Order see C. J. R. Armstrong, Evelyn Underhill, Mowbrays, London, 1975. Interestingly, Waite, who was himself a Theosophist for a time, had met Leadbeater and noted, 'I shrank instinctively, almost indeed in a physical sense': Arthur Edward Waite, Shadows of Life and Thought: A Retrospective Review in the Form of Memoirs, Selwyn and Blount, London, 1938, 197.
19 Anson, Bishops at Large, 343-344.
became an active member of Co-Masonry). The attraction of the esoteric Orders for certain Anglican clergymen was not restricted to Theosophy; a small number became involved in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and its associated Cromlech Temple.

(As a consequence of its popular appeal, Theosophy was denounced by both Roman Catholic and Anglican authorities. The Anglican episcopate discussed Theosophy at its 1920 Lambeth Conference, where a Committee report was tabled, 'Appointed to Consider and Report Upon the Christian Faith in Relation to Theosophy'. The Committee concluded sagely that '[t]he attraction of Theosophy for many thoughtful Christian minds lies largely in its presentation of Christian faith and life as a quest', and pleaded 'for a larger place to be given in the teaching of the Church to the mystical elements of faith and life'. Nevertheless, it concluded that Theosophy and Christianity were ultimately incompatible. The first specifically Roman Catholic denunciation of the Liberal Catholic Church was published in 1919, and included a

\[37\] Anson, *Bishops at Large*, 343-344. Scott-Moncrieff was the father of the Scottish Roman Catholic author. The process whereby clergy and, occasionally, whole congregations gravitate toward Theosophy and related domains continues to the present day. When the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregationalist Churches moved into union in Australia in 1975, one Congregationalist minister, Revd. Mario Schoenmaker, (together with a significant number of his congregation) declared independence as The Church of the Mystic Christ, later to become The Independent Church of Australia. The degree to which Schoenmaker's theology is explicitly Theosophical can be discerned from the Church's various publications: cf., eg., Mario Schoenmaker, *A Short Occult History of the World*, ICA Press, Caulfield, Victoria, 1989.

\[22\] For the Golden Dawn see *infra Appendix E*. It is interesting that more than one authority has stated that the Anglican Guild of St. Raphael, a large extant healing ministry, began as an initiative of a Golden Dawn descendant, the Stella Matutina: cf., eg., Francis King, *Ritual Magic in England: 1887 to the present day*, Neville Spearman, London, 1970, 129. The present author has heard the same confident assertion from authoritative Golden Dawn adepts from continuing British temples. Howe notes, rightly, that no proof has yet been offered that 'the founders ... were, almost without exception, members of the Stella Matutina': Howe, *The Magicians*, 274n1.

The Cromlech Temple was a Kabbalistic-Masonic ceremonial Order whose higher degrees required a Christian confession; it is said to have been mostly peopled by clergymen: see King, *Ritual Magic*, 134-140, 207-212; Ithell Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom: MacGregor Mathers and 'The Golden Dawn*', G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1975, 138, 195.

preface by Herbert Thurston. 24 Indeed, a large number of Christian polemical works were produced, particularly during the Besant-Leadbeater era, in order to counter the influence of the Society. 25

Parallel developments can be discerned at the close of the first decade of the twentieth century: the development within the Theosophical Society of a Theosophical Christianity, and the espousal within confessional circles of a Christian Theosophy. Both movements were to find fulfilment in an entirely novel form of Theosophical ceremonial: the Liberal Catholic Church.

*Episcopi Vagantes ('Wandering Bishops')*

Immediately prior to the First World War, Wedgwood had approached Besant about securing episcopal consecration for use in the Temple of the Rosy Cross, or some similar Theosophical theurgical activity. Besant had replied that the episcopacy could only be employed for the church for which it was created, and so Wedgwood began to seek out ecclesial affiliation that would allow him to harmonise his esoteric and

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ecclesiastical interests. Soon thereafter Wedgwood initiated contact with Archbishop Arnold Harris Mathew (1852-1919), Primate of the Ancient Catholic Church of England, Scotland and Ireland, and, as a sign of good faith, sent Mathew a copy of Besant's *Theosophy.* Curiously, Mathew appears to have raised little objection to the tenets of Theosophy, and almost immediately thereafter baptised and confirmed Wedgwood *sub conditione.* Within the year, Wedgwood had been admitted to Minor Orders, ordained Deacon, and then Priest on 22 July, 1913.

The tiny church into which Wedgwood was ordained had begun life in curious circumstances. Mathew, whose own presbyteral vocational path had proved somewhat erratic, had been championed by a coterie of disaffected Catholics, and

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30 In defence of Mathew it might be noted that Besant’s *Theosophy* (T. C. & E. C. Jack, Edinburgh, n.d.) was designed for a non-Theosophical readership (being one of the few Theosophical works published outside of the Society), and de-emphasises the most confronting of Theosophy’s claims. Nevertheless, there are sufficient indications of possible contradiction with Christianity to suspect that Mathew was unwilling to look into the matter too closely, for risk of losing a prized recruit (who was financially solvent - and who offered the possibility of a congregation).

29 Tillett, ’Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 2, 583-584. Wedgwood had been required to confess belief in the Seven Ecumenical Councils, the Sacraments, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the decrees of the Council of Jerusalem, the doctrine of Transubstantiation, and the Sacrifice of the Mass. As Tillett has noted, '[i]just how these could be reconciled with Theosophy remains something of a mystery’: in ibid., 581.

26 In defence of Mathew it might be noted that Besant’s *Theosophy* (T. C. & E. C. Jack, Edinburgh, n.d.) was designed for a non-Theosophical readership (being one of the few Theosophical works published outside of the Society), and de-emphasises the most confronting of Theosophy’s claims. Nevertheless, there are sufficient indications of possible contradiction with Christianity to suspect that Mathew was unwilling to look into the matter too closely, for risk of losing a prized recruit (who was financially solvent - and who offered the possibility of a congregation).

31 The present author is indebted to His Eminence Abba Seraphim, Metropolitan of Glastonbury and head of the British Orthodox Church of the British Isles (Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate) for assisting with his expertise in the history of *episcopi vagantes* Orders, and for access to the archives of the British Orthodox Church and the Catholic Apostolic Church.

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encouraged to seek episcopal consecration from the Old Catholic Church of Holland. Upon returning to England, Mathew discovered that the large congregation he had been led to believe would immediately flock to his banner had been simply a ruse by a small number of ambitious Roman Catholic priests to secure access to the episcopacy and circumvent the authority of their own superiors. The disenchanted Mathew soon became a magnet for bishops manqué - performing at least ten consecrations himself - ensuring that it is his posterity to have become the paterfamilias for a large percentage of contemporary episcopi vagantes.

Subsequent to his ordination, Wedgwood encouraged a number of other Theosophists to become involved in the Ancient Catholic Church; Reginald Elphinstone Astley Loftus Farrer (1874-1933), Bernard Edward Rupert Gauntlett, and Robert King (1869-1954) were all ordained by Mathew in July and August of 1914. (It is not known for certain that Robert King was consecrated by Mathew, but it is likely that he was.)

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32 The Old Catholic Church of Holland is one of the churches forming part of the Utrecht Union of Old Catholics (based on common acceptance of the 1889 Declaration of Utrecht). Churches of the Utrecht Union possess valid Catholic Orders, but are considered schismatic due to a rejection of papal authority and ex cathedra infallibility. Since 1931 churches of the Utrecht Union have been in full communion with Anglicans. See C. B. Moss, The Old Catholic Movement, its Origins and History, S. P. C. K., London, 1948.

33 Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 2, 582.

34 Ibid.

35 Soon after his disillusionment over the illusory congregation awaiting him in England, Mathew seems to have become partial to rather grand claims (styling himself Count Povoleri de Vicenza, de jure Earl of Llandaff, etc). In 1910 he declared autonomy and independence from the Old Catholic Church of Holland (which had rejected his initial offer of resignation), and proclaimed himself the Old Catholic Archbishop of London. Thereafter he ordained and consecrated somewhat indiscriminately, and regularly changed the name for his fledgling church: English Catholic Church; Western Orthodox Catholic Church in Great Britain and Ireland; Anglo-Catholic Church; Catholic Church (Latin and Orthodox United); Ancient Catholic Church; Old Roman Catholic Church; Western Catholic Uniate Church, inter alia. See Anson, Bishops at Large, 156-215.

36 Before his ordination within the Liberal Catholic Church, Gauntlett had been a member of the Catholic Apostolic Church (the ‘Irvingites’). He was consecrated by Willoughby on 26 September, 1915. He left the Church on 14 March, 1924, after the then Presiding Bishop, Wedgwood, had become involved in a sex scandal. He later became a lecturer on British Israelitism. See in ibid., 344, 368.

37 Robert King was a professional psychic and astrologer and was ordained into the Liberal Catholic Church in August, 1914. He, too, was consecrated by Willoughby on 26 September, 1916, and appears to have resigned due to the scandals of 1921-1922 (although there is some evidence he assisted in the later consecration of Bishop Housfield in 1928). King published a number of occult works: Robert King, The Lord's Prayer: An Esoteric Interpretation, Golden Hind Press, Chatham, Kent, n.d.; id., Lectures on the Occult, n.p., n.d. He is perhaps best remembered as the teacher of the occult writer and Liberal Catholic Priest, W. E. Butler (1898-1978), for whom see infra Appendix E.

insignificant that Farrer and King, like Wedgwood himself, were homosexual). By the end of the same year Mathew had begun to realise that a significant proportion of his clergy were Theosophists, and that it might indeed prove difficult to coalesce Theosophical beliefs with Christian ones. It appears that, until this time, Mathew had tended to ignore or overlook differences, and in some cases to provide his own novel ecumenism:

I believe their 'Great Teacher' is not any individual but the Divine Church - _ite docete omnes gentes_ - wh[ich] remains the _Vox Deo ad hominibus_.

Mathew's increasing desire to purge Theosophists from his ranks led to a schism in the body. Ultimately, Wedgwood and his fellow Theosophists departed from Mathew's obedience:

These circumstances make it totally impossible for me to continue my official relations with you, and I hereby submit my resignation from your movement. Since you have broken faith with me this resignation is tantamount to a declaration of independence and I shall continue my ministration.

During a synod of the Theosophical clergy, held on 10 December, 1915, Wedgwood was elected as leader and was subsequently consecrated as a bishop in the London Co-

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39 That there existed something of a homosexual ecclesiastical subculture among the various _episcopi vagantes_ can hardly be doubted. As one example, Mathew ordained and later consecrated as coadjutor an Anglo-Catholic priest who had been forced to resign his benefice, Frederick Samuel Willoughby (1862-1928). Bishop Willoughby was later dismissed by Mathew following a series of articles in _John Bull_ which exposed his pederasty: see Anson, _Bishops at Large_, 193-198; _John Bull_, June 20, 1914; 15 May _et seq_. For a homosexual subculture in religious orders of the time see Timothy d'Arch Smith, _Love in Earnest: Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English 'Uranian' Poets from 1889 to 1930_, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1970, 189-190. It might also be added that (if one were to define Leadbeater's sexual proclivities as homosexual, as opposed to pederastic), the first three Presiding Bishops of the Liberal Catholic Church were homosexually-inclined: Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 3, 1041nl61 (Tillett interviewed the Revd. Ron Rivett, later the Vicar-General for Australia).

40 T. H. Redfern, 'Bishop Mathew and his Theosophical Clergy' in _The Liberal Catholic_ XXX:3, July, 1956, 81.

41 J. I. Wedgwood to A. H. Mathew in Bernard M. Williams, 'Archbishop Mathew and the Old Roman Catholic Rite in England, Together with Some Notes on Subsequent Events', unpublished and undated manuscript in the archives of the British Orthodox Church of the British Isles.
Masonic Temple by Willoughby, King, and Gauntlett on 13 February, 1916. Thus it was that Wedgwood received a strangely mediated Apostolic Succession; a tradition, incidentally, that Blavatsky had considered a 'gross and palpable fraud'. Theosophy now had a Church.

Leadbeaterian Liberal Catholicism

Wedgwood soon enthused Leadbeater with his plans and the latter made an almost unprecedented rise through the ranks. On 15 July, 1916, Leadbeater received baptism, confirmation, all the Minor Orders, and the Diaconate sub conditione; exactly one week later he was elevated to the episcopacy, with the blessing of the Lord

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42 Since Willoughby's public disgrace via the *John Bull* articles, he had removed himself from Mathew's obedience and appears to have been quite happy to consecrate Wedgwood. He claimed that he was soon to be reunited with the Roman Catholic Church and so he speedily consecrated King and Gauntlett so they might be available for Wedgwood if he was not. Willoughby's career as an episcopus vagans continued after Wedgwood's consecration, so his submission to Rome appears to have been somewhat fanciful. It seems that, for his part, Wedgwood was somewhat reluctant to be consecrated by Willoughby whose reputation was being repeatedly besmirched by rumours of homosexuality (see supra p. 334n39). As a result, Wedgwood attempted to gain consecration from the Dutch Old Catholic bishops, but was refused. He contacted several episcopi vagantes, notably Vernon Herford (1866-1938) of the Evangelical Catholic Church, but was rejected. It appears he went so far as to consider the Malabar Indian Catholics of the Syrian succession, but eventually resigned himself to Willoughby's ministrations. See N. A. Ellingsen, 'History of the Liberal Catholic Church' in *The Liberal Catholic Church*, XVIII, March (pp. 92-95); April (pp. 102-106); May (pp. 122-126); June (pp. 138-141), 1938; also discussions with Gregory Tillett (September, 1999). For Willoughby see Hooker, 'The Foundations', 184ff: it might be noted that Hooker (b.1931) is the current Presiding Bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church. For Herford see George F. Tull, *Vernon Herford, Apostle of Unity*, Broadacre Books (Bradford) Ltd., n.pl. [Bradford?], 1958.


45 It might be recalled that Leadbeater's initial rejection of Christianity had been rather dramatic: he gave vent to his contempt by burning the Church of England *Catechism* in 1886: see Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 1, 173-174.

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Maitreya:46

[The Lord Maitreya] thought the movement would fill a niche in the scheme, and would be useful to Him. From what He said I inferred that He Himself had so guided events as to produce this curious result, that a branch of the Catholic Church, having the Apostolic Succession in a form which cannot be questioned, should be entirely in the hands of Theosophists, who are willing and eager to do exactly as He wishes ... It will slowly spread, but will be ready to receive a sudden impetus when He wants to use it; it is to mark time now, but to be prepared to march forward when the order comes.47

Of his own consecration, Leadbeater was careful to emphasise that he was but serving the will of the Masters:

[I] am to act as intermediary between the LORD and this branch of His Church, referring to Him any points of action or of doctrine upon which it desires instruction.48

Wedgwood and Leadbeater soon set about reworking the liturgies of Mathew’s English version of the Dutch Old Catholic Missal to bring them into accord with

46 Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 2, 592. Leadbeater was ordained sub conditione due to his Anglican Orders. Wedgwood noted of the consecration that:

[S]everal Masters came, the Lord Maitreya and the Lord Buddha, and the Star shone out. When he said his first Mass afterwards, four Masters came in, and the Master Jesus stood there the whole time. ([J. I. Wedgwood], 'Private' (Circular to clergy), n.p., n.d., I).

Leadbeater’s consecration was originally kept somewhat secret from the general membership, but his penchant for wearing full episcopal vesture and desire to be addressed as ‘Bishop Leadbeater’ meant that the public were soon informed.


48 Ibid., 4. It is interesting that Leadbeater’s Master told him that had he remained in the Church of England, he would have reached the episcopate in the same year, so all he had lost were ‘the emoluments and the social position’: in ibid., 5.
Theosophical tenets. Leadbeater noted that his instructions from the Lord Maitreya were to keep 'the old magic' of the Eucharist, but to reconfigure the ceremonial so that the faithful could 'directly invoke His Power in the great magical acts'. Indeed, the Lord Maitreya informed the two bishops that they were Reformists:

This was in fact the new reformation, and we were doing part of the work that the REFORMATION had been intended to do, but had failed ... The fourth sub-race did not mind whether the thing made sense or not, provided it sounded nice and produced the desired effect.

Leadbeater incorporated an additional benediction into the Eucharistic Rite, one which had originally been written by Besant under the inspiration of the Master Morya for use within the ES. The First Ray Benediction, as it has become known colloquially, depicts the degree of Theosophical penetration into the Rite:

May the Holy Ones whose pupils you aspire to become, show you the Light you seek, give you the strong aid of their compassion and their wisdom ... May that peace brood over you, that power uplift you, till you stand where the One Initiator is invoked, till you see his

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For Mathew's liturgy, see [Old Catholic Church in Great Britain], The Old Catholic Missal and Ritual, Cope and Fenwick, London, 1909. Leadbeater and Wedgwood were influenced by a number of texts in the production of the liturgy. Some of the more obvious include: (for Roman ceremonial) Adrian Fortescue, The Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described, Burns and Oates, London, 1917; (for Anglo-Catholic ceremonial) Henry Cairncross, E. C. R. Lamburn & G. A. C. Whatton, Ritual Notes, W. Knott and Son, London, 1894; Anonymous, The Offices of Celebrant Deacon and Subdeacon at High Mass, The Society of SS Peter and Paul, London, n.d. (a copy with Leadbeater's bookplate exists in the Liberal Catholic Church Clergy Library, Sydney); (for Catholic Apostolic ceremonial) [Catholic Apostolic Church], General Rubrics of Rules for the Celebration of the Divine Offices, Catholic Apostolic Church, London, 1865. For the ceremonial of the Liberal Catholic Church see J. A. Mazel, Ceremonies of the Holy Eucharist, Liberal Catholic Church, Sydney, 1924; Irving Cooper, Ceremonies of the Liberal Catholic Rite, St. Alban Press, Sydney, 1934. For the Catholic Apostolic Church (or 'Irvingites') see Rowland Davenport, Albury Apostles, United Writers, n.pl., 1970. A comprehensive examination of one aspect of the Liberal Catholic Rite is to be found in Laurence K. Langley, 'The Collects of the Liberal Catholic Liturgy: their History, Language and Structure, with an Excursus on Benediction of the Most Holy Sacrament', a monograph submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Diploma of Religious Studies, Liberal Catholic Institute of Studies, n. pl., 1999. It might be noted that two advent collects and one prayer were excised from the Liberal Catholic Church liturgy in 1942, as they were considered to reflect adventist themes to do with the World-Teacher.

C. W. Leadbeater to A. Besant, 12 December, 1916, in Jinarajadasa, On the Liberal, 6, 8.

Wedgwood, 'Private', 3

Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 2, 603. The Master Morya was identified by Besant as the Inner Head of the ES.
Star shine forth. The First Ray Benediction has proved to be something of an on-going irritation for those Liberal Catholics who wish to diminish the Besant-Leadbeaterian influence. The third Presiding Bishop (who succeeded Leadbeater in the office), Frank W. Pigott, pointed out the possible contradictions:

Then who is the One Initiator? Some intelligent non-Theosophical Christian will want to know that sooner or later. What can we say except what we have been told, namely, that he is a Being from the planet Venus. And if that were to become known no other Christian body worthy of the name could possibly recognize us as a Christian Church. That is the crux of the whole of this matter.

By 1920, the Liberal Catholic Church possessed the necessary governing structures (a constitution, a liturgy, a Statement of Principles) to constitute an international Church premised on thoroughly Theosophical principles. Leadbeater's control of the fledgling movement was enhanced when, on 7 March, 1922, Wedgwood resigned as

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19 It should be recalled that in the Leadbeaterian hierarchy, the Lord of the World - who, at the level of the Ninth Initiation, is the Head of the Inner Government - came to earth from Venus, having completed his evolution 6 500 000 years ago.
21 The name was adopted in synod on 6 September, 1918.
22 [Liberal Catholic Church], Statement of Principles, Summary of Doctrine and Table of the Apostolic Succession, Liberal Catholic Church, London, 1920. This work is explicitly Theosophical, unlike the more general versions printed in 1916 and 1918 by Wedgwood.
Presiding Bishop. A year later Leadbeater was enthroned in his place.

The (Magic and) Science of the Sacraments

Joselyn Godwin, in speaking of Leadbeater, has noted that, '[a]t heart he was a magician, and the Mass was his preferred rite of ceremonial magic'. An examination of Leadbeater’s writings on Christianity indicate the objective truth of this assessment. It was in 1899 that Leadbeater turned for the first time from descriptive visionary experience to the more demonstrably historical field of Christian doctrinal claims. Specifically religious themes had been noticeably absent from his early publications, and only reappeared in the wake of Besant’s lectures on ‘Esoteric Christianity’ in July and August of 1898. The latter had exercised her prodigious oratorical skills to great effect and had succeeded in bringing the Theosophical exegeses of Christian scripture and clairvoyant investigations of Christian origins into the forefront of Theosophical

59 Wedgwood’s resignation seems to have been an attempt to forestall further inquiry into his homosexual practices. He had for some time been the subject of public rumour. Indeed, E. L. Grieg, the Secretary of the Sydney lodge of the Society, hired an investigator. Nethercott noted: Grieg had Wedgwood followed by a private detective, who saw him visit eighteen ‘public conveniences’ within two hours and then explain to the police that he was trying to find and rescue a young man who had ‘gone wrong’ but who had been his friend in a previous incarnation (Nethercott, The Last Four Lives, 324n).

Following his resignation, Wedgwood moved first to Paris, and then retired to Huizen in the Netherlands. His later years were troubled by symptomatic syphilis, which he had contracted in Sydney, and by the rigours of a cocaine addiction which had destroyed much of the cartilage of his nose; when travelling to England, it appears he was obliged to smuggle the drug in the hollow of his episcopal crozier: from a signed transcript of interview between G. J. Tillett and Rex Henry (Wedgwood’s secretary), 9 August, 1982, Mijas, Spain. It might be noted that Wedgwood’s travails were explained in much the same terms as Leadbeater’s had been in 1908: he was preparing for his Fourth, or Arhat, Initiation (which involved a ‘crucifixion’): Nethercott, The Last Four Lives, 366. Wedgwood never received treatment for his syphilis, stating to Rex Henry that, as an Initiate, the diagnosis could not possibly be correct: in transcript of interview between Tillett and Henry, 9 August, 1982, Mijas, Spain.

60 Norton, The Willow, 54-56. For clarity it should be noted that although ‘enthroned’ is the technical term in ecclesiastical parlance, Presiding Bishops of the Liberal Catholic Church are not enthroned literally (as in other confessions).

61 Godwin, The Theosophical Enlightenment, 368.

though.63 Leadbeater’s first treatise on Christianity, *The Christian Creed: Its Origin and Significance*, is hardly remarkable, and echoes many of the common *topoi* of such studies: the disciple Jesus and the Master ‘the Christ’64 are distinct entities; the Palestinian Jesus was born in 105 B.C.E., was an Essene, and had been initiated into the Egyptian Mysteries.65 Only in 1913 did Leadbeater’s attention turn to the ceremonial of Christianity, and to an esoteric interpretation of the sacraments.66

63 Besant’s newly reinvigorated interest in Christianity had been presaged perhaps by Blavatsky, who had noted prophetically:

But this doctrine [Theosophy], let us hope, will never lead her to make ‘her communion at a Christian altar’, in other words to renounce the whole and the absolute for the part and the finite (‘H. P. M. [sic]’ [H. P. Blavatsky], ‘The “Nine Days’ Wonder” Press’ in *Lucifer* IV:24, 15 August, 1889, 448).

64 It needs to be noted that there is some confusion in the Leadbeaterian *œuvre* regarding Christological nomenclature. In the simplest terms: Jesus was a Palestinian mortal born in 105 B.C.E.; the Master (or Chohan) Jesus is the Master of the Sixth (i.e. devotional) Ray, and plays little rôle in the Leadbeaterian system other than to assist in bracketing the era of devotion (the Sixth Ray) from that of ceremonial magic (the Seventh Ray); the ‘Master Christ’ is in fact the Bodhisattva (Lord) Maitreya (or ‘World-Teacher’) who incarnated as, or temporarily overshadowed, the Palestinian Jesus; the Second Person of the (Solar) Logos, though typologically related to the Lord Maitreya, ‘existed ages before the Lord Maitreya came into evolution’ and appears to be the impetus for manifestation in the solar system: see Leadbeater, *The Masters and the Path*, 310-312. Dion Fortune, who was later to become famous for the creation of her own occult orders, noted that:

The Liberal Catholic Church, though using Christian ceremonial, aimed at contacting, not the Master Jesus, but the Lord Maitreya; in fact, in Theosophical circles the Master Jesus was very much the poor relation (Dion Fortune, *The Inner Light Magazine*, September, 1931).

It should be added for consistency that the Palestinian Jesus appears later to have become the Master Jesus through conscious evolution and sacrifice. This, interestingly, infers that one Master overshadowed another (crypto-)Master; this is not at all incompatible with Leadbeaterian Theosophy generally: see Leadbeater, *The Hidden Side of Things*, 192-163. Unsurprisingly, given Theosophical Christology, the Master Jesus does not reside in the Himalayas, but among the Druze of Mt. Lebanon in a Syrian body: Annie Besant, *The Masters*, Theosophist Office, Adyar, Madras, 1912, 61-62.67


Following his consecration, Leadbeater's writings on Christianity moved beyond the ambit of historical speculation and fully into what can only be called the technology of grace. By applying his clairvoyant vision to sacrament and ceremonial, he was able to pronounce the mechanical means by which grace is vouchsafed to the faithful; significantly, grace is not contingent upon preparedness or suitability, and it is not in and of itself sanctifying or prevenient. For Leadbeater, theological grace was but the 'physics of the higher worlds', a 'divine strength', a *power*: An infinite flood of the higher type of force is always ready and waiting to pour through when the channel is offered, just as the water in a cistern may be said to be waiting to pour through the first pipe that may be opened.

Leadbeater's ruminations on the inner nature of the Sacraments, the liturgies, the rubrics, and such other ecclesiastical accoutrements as vestments, incense, and music, are contained in his *The Science of the Sacraments* of 1920. The thesis of the text is best summarised by a statement the Lord Maitreya had made four years earlier:

Please bear in mind that, however desirable the edification of your congregation may be, it is not the primary object of the Mass. The drawing down of the force and the formation of a perfect instrument for its distribution must be the chief consideration.

According to Leadbeater's clairvoyant vision, the dynamics of the divine power were comprehensible only in terms germane to physics and engineering. Repeatedly, when discussing the Eucharistic Rite, he suggested that its primary function was 'the

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67 One suspects that Leadbeater was further attracted to the theological notion of grace because, like Masonic initiation and clairvoyant vision, it is empirically unfalsifiable. The general (and thus also the Theosophical) public were inured to the articulation of invisible grace, thus ensuring that the transition from traditional concepts of grace to that of ceremonial magical power was smooth and simple.


69 Leadbeater, *The Science of the Sacraments*, 379. One suspects that it is this analogy which has led to Leadbeater's theology sometimes being called 'plumbing theology', a term of a somewhat derogatory nature, though demonstrably accurate. The present author is indebted to Rev. Laurence Langley, a Liberal Catholic priest, for this observation.


construction and utilization of a magnificent machine for the liberation of force*. No
detail in the edifice of power could be left to obstruct that flow, so all of the traditional
elements of the Rite were reconstrued as spiritual circuits and lightning rods, each
collecting and distributing supersensible power.

A couple of examples will suffice in order to illustrate the extent of
Leadbeater's occultistic rationalisation of the dynamic transmission of divine power.
The priest's chasuble, a standard Eucharistic liturgical vestment, is reconstrued as both
battery and distributor. It is worth quoting the description of its circuitry at length:

The forces radiating from the Host and Chalice are caught up by the
central orphrey or pillar of the chasuble. They then flow upwards,
passing along the humeral orphreys and round the neck-band to the
opposite pillar. Thus when the priest is facing the Altar a torrent of
force pours out from the central radiating disc on the back, and also
from the lower point of the chasuble, and when he faces the people
this disc and the pillar beneath it gather up the force and send it
streaming over the shoulders to the front pillar, thence to radiate out
upon the people. The forces boiling up inside the chasuble are
cought by the metal apparel of the amice and swept into the general
circulation, although a certain amount may overflow from under the
edges of the vestment.73

Further examples of the sort of Leadbeaterian metaphysical reductio ad absurdum
which abound in The Science of the Sacraments could be noted: the priest's biretta
has 'the same character as that of a cork in a bottle - to prevent evaporation and
consequential waste';74 the episcopal pectoral cross 'is a permanent receiving and

73 Leadbeater, The Science of the Sacraments, 16.
74 Ibid., 569 (a diagram illustrating the flow of power is included as a visual aid). It has been noted by
an eminent Liberal Catholic authority that for the most part the vestments themselves could be done
away with, provided appropriate metal wires were substituted in the same places. It might be noted
that the present author has observed that (likely due to the current price of gold and silver thread, and
metallic embroideries) the vast majority of Liberal Catholic clergy today use cotton or synthetic
threads on their vestments, thus, surely, upsetting Leadbeater's exacting magnetic dynamics of power
transmission. The use of such substitutes is, however, allowed for under Liberal Catholic Church
canon law.
74 Ibid., 569.
discharging station';\textsuperscript{75} the lit altar candles are ‘a telegraph wire to the feet of the Leaders of [the] Rays';\textsuperscript{76} incense ‘is carefully compounded from certain gums, the undulation-rate of which harmonizes perfectly with spiritual and devotional vibrations’.\textsuperscript{77}

To cement the Theosophical character of the services, Leadbeater linked the appurtenances of church worship with the Seven Rays. Thus seven jewels, each representing one Ray, were embedded in the altar stone (replacing the more normative relics), and further jewels were placed in each of the six altar candlesticks and tabernacle cross; so, too, seven ‘Ray Crosses’ (each with requisite stone) were hung around the interior of the church, and further jewels incorporated into a bishop’s pectoral cross and crozier.\textsuperscript{78} The magnetic currents from each of the Rays as they passed from one talismanic jewel to another, combined with the dynamism of the flow of power into and out of all the ecclesial accoutrements, ensured that the Mass became a powerful transistor, mediating power from the Inner Planes to the mundane tier, and fulfilling the (now optional) injunction of the priest:

\begin{quote}
Brethren, we have built a temple for the distribution of Christ’s power, let us now prepare a channel for its reception.\textsuperscript{79}
\end{quote}

It should always be remembered that when Leadbeater wrote of ‘Christ’s power’, it was that of the Lord Maitreya to which he referred; the Liberal Catholic Church was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 571. Similarly, the church building itself is a receptacle of occasional bursts of concentrated power, and thus could require ‘earthing’. Ergo a tradition developed whereby a metal rod (copper?) was inserted from the altar stone deep into the bedrock. Although this tendency was never universal, it was followed in the relatively recent construction of the Auckland Cathedral in New Zealand. It might be added that it was logical in the Leadbeaterian redaction that more ‘power’ would be produced by those in higher Orders. Thus it was that bishops were deemed to possess greater faculties than priests. (Not unnaturally, such a system engenders a profound reliance upon apostolic continuity). For a clairvoyant description of an episcopal consecration see A. G. Vreede, ‘Church News: The Outer and Inner Side of a Bishop’s Consecration’ in \textit{The Liberal Catholic, XXVI: 4}, October, 1948, 101-103.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Leadbeater, \textit{The Science of the Sacraments}, 515. In fact, some discussion has been held in Liberal Catholic Church publications about the possibility that the candle of a particular Ray (i.e. that of the celebrant) will burn faster than any other: see L. Furze Morrish, “Ray-Candles” and the Celebrant’ in \textit{The Liberal Catholic, XXVII:4}, October, 1950, 123-124.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Leadbeater, \textit{The Science of the Sacraments}, 94.
\item \textsuperscript{78} For the jewels and Rays see in ibid., 98-102, 499-505. For the Rite of Consecration of the jewels (some, in fact, are gems) see [Liberal Catholic Church], \textit{Pontifical Ceremonies}, Liberal Catholic Church, London, 1935. It should be noted that a priest is entitled to wear a (smaller) pectoral cross, but in such cases the jewels are arranged differently.
\end{itemize}
very much a preparatory vehicle for the coming of the World-Teacher. Thus it is crucial to recognise that where other Christian liturgies were deemed by Theosophists to be the responsibility of the Master Jesus of the Sixth (devotional) Ray, Liberal Catholic liturgies were considered the special province of the Lord Maitreya, the latter existing on a higher level of initiation than the former. Indeed, the Master Jesus was further diminished by relegating his influence to the 'exoteric' churches of the waning Sixth Ray: as the Liberal Catholic Church was the product of the Seventh Ray (significantly, that of ceremonial magic), it was ostensibly much more closely allied to the Master the Count. For all of the *ex post facto* rationalising undertaken by Liberal Catholic Church apologists in the seventy years following Leadbeater's death, the Theosophical relativism which lies at the core of Liberal Catholic beliefs remains in obvious tension with the Church's otherwise deceptively normative Christian credal formulae. As an instance of this tension it is noteworthy that, although the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is printed in service books, few of the clergy or congregation accept its articles as having any basis in historical reality, nor indeed any particular

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82 Ian Hooker, the current Presiding Bishop, in his 1981 M. A. thesis on the Church's history, concluded that although the Church has Theosophical roots and may be considered 'unorthodox', its *Statement of Principles* 'does not eliminate an essential minimum of Christian belief'. It might be significant, though, that his whole concluding chapter nowhere mentions Jesus, only (the) Christ. For Hooker, Christ is 'the Master of Masters'; nevertheless, the overtly Nestorian Adoptionism, coupled with the tendency towards a Docetic reading of the Passion, indicate that the Church's theology is very far indeed from a Christological position capable of being considered familiar to most Christians. See Hooker, 'The Foundations', 437-439 *et passim*. The third Presiding Bishop, Frank Pigott, attempted somewhat disingenuously to explain the differences between Liberal Catholicism and Traditional Catholicism as devolving upon reactions to liberalism and modernism: F. W. Pigott, *The Parting of the Ways: Teachings of the Liberal Catholic Church Compared and Contrasted with Traditional Catholic Teachings*, The St. Alban Press, Sydney, 1925.
theological valency. Perhaps the most strikingly emblematic instance of the thoroughly Theosophical underpinnings of the Liberal Catholic Church is the portrait which hangs above the reredos facing the congregation. The image appears to be a rather sentimental devotional depiction of Jesus, such as is seen in many iconodulist Western churches. In point of fact, it is a portrait of the Lord Maitreya, based on sketches made by Leadbeater in 1911, and identical to the one used in the ES.

It has been noted that Leadbeater rarely departed from the ideational infrastructure of Blavatskian Theosophy, choosing instead to reconfigure her macrohistory and cosmology within a much truncated temporal and spatial span. The *dramatis personae* of Blavatskian Theosophy were thus brought into much closer 'contact', which - when combined with the rather baroque outpourings of Leadbeater's clairvoyant perception - ensured that the most eccentric constructs of Theosophy were greatly exaggerated. It could thus be argued that Leadbeater tended more to embellish

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83 In point of fact, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is not commonly publicly uttered at services; a substitute 'Act of Faith', written by Jinarajadasa, tends to be recited instead. Having printed the orthodox Creed in his Liturgy, Leadbeater noted in *The Christian Creed*: 'Was crucified, dead and buried' ... The astonishing evolution of a perfectly reasonable allegory into an absolutely impossible biography has a very sad influence on the entire Christian Church and upon the faith which it has taught, and the enormous amount of devotional sympathy which has been poured forth through the centuries in connection with a story of physical suffering that is wholly imaginary is perhaps the most extraordinary and lamentable waste of psychic energy in the history of the world (Leadbeater, *The Christian Creed*, 81).


84 To this day, a large percentage of senior clergy and bishops in the Liberal Catholic Church are also members of the ES. The original portrait of the Lord Maitreya, of which most contemporary versions are photographic reproductions, was painted by ES member Maria Kirby on the basis of Leadbeater's sketch of 1911; Besant noted that 'there is perceptible in this a likeness to the traditional Christian pictures of the Christ: [Annie Besant] 'Issued by the O. H. of the School', *The Link*, May, 1912, 3-4. See also C. Jinarajadasa), 'The Pictures of the Masters' in ('Issued by the O. H.'), *The Disciple*, vol. IV:4, Feb, 1918 - May, 1920, 164-166; C. Jinarajadasa), 'Notes by the O. H.' in ('Issued by the O. H.'), *The Disciple*, 1:7 [New Series], July, 1936, 95.
than to invent. However, when assessing the schematics of Leadbeater’s sacramentalism, it becomes apparent that he departed from the Theosophical philosophical template and turned instead to a more typical theurgical paradigm.

For Leadbeater, the liturgy was the *modus operandi* for the attraction and dissemination of power. Although he tended to employ the more orthodox terminology of ‘grace’, it is self-evident that his definition of grace was reconfigured to uphold specifically Theosophical ends: to aid the aspirant to evolve beyond his ken, and to facilitate ever-higher initiations. For Blavatsky, such evolution was considered personally-generated, though with the aid and encouragement of the Masters. In this sense the dynamics of transformative power came from *within without*. For Leadbeater, on the other hand, the ritual itself was deemed *de facto* efficacious: crucially, thus, the transformative power of Liberal Catholic sacrament is predicated on adherence to the concept of *ex opere operato*, and thus comes from *without within*. Such distinctions might appear slight, but are in fact central to an appreciation of Leadbeater’s Liberal Catholicism *qua* ceremonial magic.

Blavatsky believed the employment of supersensible powers was premised on the moral probity and strength of will of the operator:

> Our varied experience has taught us two important truths, viz.: that for the exercise of [magical power] personal purity and the exercise of a trained and indomitable will-power are indispensable.

Wedgwood, as first Presiding Bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church, employed the standard Thomistic argument of *ex opere operare* (but necessarily reconstrued it as an occult principle):

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85 The relationship between sacramental liturgy and ceremonial magic is a complex one, made even more difficult in this case because the entities called upon by Leadbeater (angels and other highly-evolved forms) are deemed to be benefit and thus do not require the abjurations more commonly associated with demonic goetic theurgy. Richard Kieckhefer has noted that the fifteenth century necromantic magic ‘borrows the conventions of liturgical prayer and has efficacy resembling that of the sacraments’. His contention that many of such ‘magics’ were the ‘translation of official rites into an unofficial and largely private setting’ might have some place in explaining the appropriation by Theosophists of Christian, and particularly Catholic, ceremonial. See Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer’s Manual of the Fifteenth Century*, Sutton Publishing, Stroud, Gloucestershire, 1997, 17.

Christ Himself is the true administrator of all sacraments, Whose power can and does work irrespective of the private fancies or personal unworthiness of the human instrument He uses in the interests of His people at large.87

The attractions of a doctrine of inherent efficacy were immediately obvious to Leadbeater. In the first place, concentration on moral rectitude was transformed to an attention to the exacting details of elaborate ceremonial, as only the latter could ensure the correct 'pipes' were opened to facilitate the release of power.88 Second, the traditional emphasis on the relative worthiness of minister and congregation to receive the gift of grace is altered such that focus is rather to be placed upon the technology of access to power - a power that is now entirely morally non-discriminatory.

The major obstacle for Leadbeater to overcome in appropriating the Mass as an occult theurgy was not, ironically, of Christian, but rather of Theosophical origin. The logistics of ceremonial magic, as with sacramental liturgy, are such that mesocosmic or intermediary entities are normally invoked as mediators of divine or demonic power, which is then commonly made manifest in objects or statues (or, indeed, in the species of the Eucharist).89 Christian liturgies abound with references to such intermediaries, whether through the preeminent mediation of the incarnate Christ, or the intercessions of angels and saints. Theosophy, on the other hand, had tended to suppress notions of supplication; Blavatsky's emphasis was always on what might be termed lineal karmic

87 J. I. Wedgwood, 'The Old Catholic Church' in *The Occult Review* XXVII:6, June, 1918, 349.
88 The *ex opere operato* doctrine thus served to mitigate the otherwise obvious contradiction in having a Christian Church of the 1920s administered by homosexually-active priests and bishops. One suspects that a psychological interpretation is not unwarranted: if an individual (who is probably *de jure* if not *de facto* 'excommunicate' anyway) is deemed unable to receive sacramental grace on account of a canonical impediment (immorality), he might well feel able to receive it via exact performance of ritual. Such a contradictory notion (which assumes a highly deterministic theology of grace) would be rejected in normative Christianity, but poses many fewer problems for Leadbeaterian Liberal Catholicism in which such mechanistic determinism is presupposed.
retribution: the individual Monad evolves on its own merits alone.90 The Masters achieved prominence, not by grace or adoption, but by single-handed effort and sacrifice, and the assistance they give is a soteriological gnosis, not a deterministically-salvific 'power'. Thus for Blavatsky there was no necessary mechanism for the devolution of 'power' from those higher in the cosmic chain of evolution to Fourth Round humans below.

Leadbeater's Theosophical sacramentalism, obversely, required a meta-empirical agency to gather and distribute the 'divine strength' among the congregation. To this end he developed a complex angelology; each angel was allocated to a particular Ray, and had specific responsibilities within the liturgy.91 As the angels necessarily attend upon the eucharistic minister, their servile character is such that they cannot be reconciled with the exalted Dhyani-Chohans of Blavatskian cosmology. Thus Leadbeater allocated to the angels another 'stream of evolution' and another 'kingdom of nature'; they became, as in Christian angelologies, the invisible creation paralleling

90 There is one particular exception which occurred with the Dhyani-human hypostaseis in the Third Round. Here the exalted beings who had evolved in another System actually descended into flesh in order to accelerate evolution. Significantly, though, this occurred only once - and in another Round - and no similar event will occur until the descent of the Bodhisattva into all humans at the close of the present Round.

91 Cf., eg., Leadbeater, The Science of the Sacraments, 189-191, 207-214, et passim. In Leadbeater's scheme only a small percentage of angels have dealings with humanity. Their primary tasks are service (often to humans) and glorifying God 'by self-unfoldment (which men call evolution)': in ibid., 189. An idea of Leadbeater's angelology can be gained from his correspondence:

I think you will be interested to hear how the work of our local Angel is going on. You will remember that we arranged with a certain quite advanced Angel to take charge of a long strip of the foreshore here ... There was already a local Deva in charge of the particular promontory on which this house is built; but as he was at a decidedly lower level, he was perfectly willing to come under the patronage of an Overlord. The methods of this Overlord have been very interesting. He makes this house his centre of operations, and uses for his purposes whatever spiritual force he can get from any of us. I am glad to say that he is pleased, not only with the large amount of such force that some of us can give him, but with the unusual variety of it ... Most people here are members of the Esoteric School, so the influence of the Master Morya plays through them; others are Masons, and through them he can get something of the power of the Master the Prince [Count] Ragoczy. The Bishops and Priests again have, of course, been especially ordained and consecrated as channels for the use of the Lord Maitreya (C. W. Leadbeater to Bro. [D. M.] Tweedie, 21 March, 1923: copy of original in the possession of the present author).
Such a compromise with Christian models has the benefit of bringing Christian mythologems under the Theosophical aegis; thus, for instance:

[The] Hierarchy of His glorious Saints [is] well known to us under its other name of the Great White Brotherhood.

Yet the positing of binary streams of evolution unduly upsets the pivotal Blavatskian theologoumenon that the hierarchy of being is ordered solely according to the depth of the Monad’s engagement in matter.

The interpretation of Christian sacramentalism as ceremonial magic did not, of course, begin with Leadbeater. Yet the comprehensiveness of his occultistic reassessment of ecclesiology and sacrament, and the deceptively scientific postulation and detail, combined to ensure that Leadbeater’s occult exegesis of Christianity and Christian rites were his most original contribution to twentieth century esotericism. That the

92 Leadbeater, The Science of the Sacraments, 189; Jinarajadasa, First Principles, 17-20 (n.b. the illustration of the two streams of evolution). It is crucial to recognise that the angels do not seem to act altruistically:

The method of angelic evolution being, as I have said, largely by service, a ceremony such as the Eucharist offers for them a remarkably good opportunity, and they are not slow to avail themselves of it (Leadbeater, The Science of the Sacraments, 190).

93 Ibid., 219.

94 A crucial, and probably inevitable, challenge for esoteric synthetists is the difficulty in reconciling different base-number arithmosophies. Thus Leadbeater’s compromise between the Theosophical (Blavatskian) model and the (Roman) Catholic one is nowhere more tellingly illustrated than in the difficulty of fitting the traditional nine angelic hierarchies into Theosophy’s fixed septenary scale. In the early stages of discussion regarding the substitution of (Ray) jewels for relics, thought was given as to whether nine jewels should actually be used: from a signed transcript of interview between G. J. Tillet and Rex Henry, 9 August, 1982, Mijas, Spain; taped interview by Michael Godby of Oscar Kölleström in the possession of the present author (n.p., n.d.). According to the Librarian of the Liberal Catholic Church Clergy Library (Sydney), Revd. Laurence Langley, there is extant at least one altar stone with nine holes containing jewels, presently in the Church Archives in Sydney. Leadbeater’s response to the challenge is not wholly convincing:

Angels have been divided into nine Orders; the names used for them in Scripture are given in the Liturgy. Of these, seven correspond to the great Rays of which the solar system is composed, and two may be called cosmic, as they are in common to some other systems (Leadbeater, The Science of the Sacraments, 190).


95 Leadbeater’s occult exegesis of liturgy did not stop at Christian ceremonial. He provided a clairvoyant view of the occult properties of a Theosophical Rite, known as the Bhārata Samāj Pāja, which Krishnamurti and others had developed as a form of ecumenical Westernised Hinduism: see C. W. Leadbeater, Bhārata Samāj Pāja: A Ritual of Hindu Congregational Worship, giving a Translation in English of the Sanskrit Ritual, With a Description of its Occult Effects as seen by Clairvoyance, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1948.
dynamics of the transmission of power appear wholly deterministic serves only to reinforce the epistemological shift in esoteric philosophy from notions of mysterious, if nevertheless efficacious, correspondence, to scientific-sounding causation. Indeed, there is no small irony in the fact that a self-proclaimed occultist divested the hallows of Christianity of their mystery, and in their place offered science.
Of the controversies that surrounded Leadbeater and Besant throughout their Theosophical careers - few of which have since abated - none is more volatile than their promotion of Krishnamurti as the Vehicle for the World-Teacher. Ultimately, all the resources of the Theosophical Society and its affiliated bodies (the Liberal Catholic Church, Co-Masonry, and others) were brought to bear on the propagation of this especially Theosophical adventism, and each suffered the losses, and even ignominy, of its collapse.\textsuperscript{2}

The literature by and about Krishnamurti is vast.\textsuperscript{3} It is not within the scope of the present research to examine Krishnamurti’s post-Theosophical career as a popular itinerant philosopher, nor, indeed, to enquire into the continuing fascination which his

\textsuperscript{1}Terms such as ‘Vehicle’ and ‘the Coming’ (most often capitalised) were preferred by Theosophists of the day and have been retained for consistency.

\textsuperscript{2}The fact that Theosophists are still bitterly divided about whether the World-Teacher did actually come or not provides convincing support for a continuing dynamic of cognitive dissonance. For ‘consonance-dissonance’ and the theory of ‘cognitive dissonance’ see \textit{supra} ch. 1.

works exert upon the thinking of present-day Theosophists. Nevertheless, it is fair to suggest that Krishnamurti is almost invariably seen by latter-day commentators as something of an antinomian phoenix, rising from the ashes of naïve Theosophical messianic expectation. This view may have some provenance in fact, but still seems to accept axiomatically that Krishnamurti’s mature philosophy somehow irrupted into his thinking, fully-formed, following his rejection of his rôle as Vehicle for the Coming. The problem is founded in the marked tendency of virtually all Krishnamurti scholarship to misinterpret the nature of the Coming itself; Leadbeaterian adventism, for all of its protestations to the contrary, must be understood within the ascensus framework of Theosophical evolutionism - thus it was not primarily concerned with the mode of the descent of the Bodhisattva, but with preparations for the ascent of the Vehicle. It was an exercise in Master-making.

The Discovery and Training of the Vehicle

Within weeks of Leadbeater’s readmission to membership in December, 1908, he had returned to the Adyar estate and begun again his occult pædeutics. Very soon he had singled out a young Brahmin boy, Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986), whose father worked on the estate, as being of singular promise. Leadbeater’s assistant, Ernest Wood (1883-1965), was surprised by the claims made in the boy’s behalf:

Leadbeater told me that Krishnamurti would become a spiritual teacher and a great speaker. I asked ‘How great? As great as Mrs. Besant?’ ‘Much more’, he replied. And shortly after that he said that Krishnamurti would be the vehicle for the Lord Maitreya.

The Master Koot Hoomi had confirmed Leadbeater’s assessment of the otherwise unremarkable thirteen-year-old’s potential, and that of his eleven-year-old brother,
Nityananda (1898-1925): 'There is a purpose for that family to be here, and both those boys will undergo training which you will hear more about later'.

Adventist themes had been present within the Leadbeaterian framework since at least as early as 1901. By 1908, Besant and Leadbeater were publicly foretelling the imminent return of the World-Teacher, the former with rousing lectures, one entitled 'The Coming Christ'. The fervour which such talks imbued within the Theosophical community ensured that membership numbers rose dramatically, and young candidates for elite training by Besant and Leadbeater were ever available. One of the latter, Hubert van Hook (1896-?), the son of Leadbeater's American champion, Dr. Weller van Hook, was considered for a time to be a possible candidate for the Vehicle, but was eventually overlooked in favour of Krishnamurti. Leadbeater was soon able to confirm his intuition about Krishnamurti's primacy by reference to the boy's earlier

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8 Besant, *The Changing World*, 132-154. It is not insignificant that in the same series she delivered a lecture entitled 'The Coming Race', dealing with Theosophical ethnography. It is surely more than a coincidence that the lecture shares the same title as a novel of 1871 by the ever-popular Bulwer-Lytton which features a (deceptively) utopian subterranean world inhabited by a race, the 'Vril-ya', possessed of a supersensible power, the 'Vril', which many esotericists have subsequently identified as being comparable to Lévi's 'Astral Light'. It is interesting to conjecture if the novel was mediated to Besant by George Bernard Shaw, who later acknowledged the novel as an influence on his notion of the 'Superman'. He commented that Bulwer-Lytton's innovative appropriation of Darwinian theory, 'introduces something like scientific method to the modern novel': see John Weeks, 'Introduction' in Edward Bulwer Lord Lytton (Bulwer-Lytton), *The Coming Race*, Woodbridge Press, Santa Barbara, California, 1979, [no pagination given]. Bulwer-Lytton dedicated the novel to Max Müller 'in tribute of respect and admiration'.

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9 An analysis of membership lists indicates that membership rose sharply at the time of the announcement of the Coming. It seems, for example, that international membership rose 20.54% from 1909 to 1910. It is also true that the peak membership of the Society occurred immediately prior to Krishnamurti's dissolving of the apparatus of the Coming (i.e. 43 098 in 1928): see Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 3, 942-947. It is also significant that between 1923 and 1932, 47 800 people entered the Society, and 54 000 people left it: in ibid., 947; cf. also [The Theosophical Society], *General Report of the Theosophical Society for 1932*, The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Madras, 1932, 7-8. For examples of the rather breathless speeches delivered in support of the Coming, see Annie Besant, *The Coming of the World-Teacher*, The Theosophical Publishing House Ltd., London, 1925; C. W. Leadbeater, *Why a Great World Teacher?*, Order of the Star in the East, Sydney, [1915].

10 Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 1, 430. Leadbeater had first noted the boy's potential in his lecture tour of the U. S. A. some years prior, and had announced the fact to Besant (who appears to have immediately accepted him to be the new World-Teacher). Awed by the claims made in his behalf, Hubert's mother, Dr. Anna Whaley van Hook, took the boy to Adyar for training (and never saw her husband again). Hubert appears to have bitterly resented his replacement by Krishnamurti, and ultimately rejected Theosophy in toto: see Nethercott, *The Last Four Lives*, 144. One suspects that Krishnamurti would have been a much more tractable character than Hook (and his parents).
reincarnations which exhibited ‘curiously persistent self-sacrifice’.11

On 1 August, 1909, Leadbeater conducted the astral bodies of Krishnamurti and Nityananda to Koot Hoomi’s house for their first Theosophical rite of passage, Probation.12 The boys, asleep at the time, seem not to have recalled the occasion. Only five months later, on 31 December, 1909, Krishnamurti was accepted as a pupil of the Master Koot Hoomi.13 Besant, away at a Theosophical Convention in Benares, was asked via telegram to be present in the astral and replied by letter that she had indeed been there and was pleased that the Lord Maitreya had given the boy into the Society’s keeping.14 Within days, plans were drawn up for Krishnamurti’s First

11 Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 1, 428; vol. 3, 1009n42. Krishnamurti’s most recent reincarnations (eventually numbering 48 lives) were examined over a period of years, and published intermittently in The Theosophist. Eventually the biographies were collected and published: Annie Besant & C. W. Leadbeater, The Lives of Alcyone, 2 vols., Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1924. (Besant worked on only one or two of the lives but confirmed Leadbeater’s accounts of the others: see Ernest Wood, Clairvoyant Investigations by C. W. Leadbeater and ‘The Lives of Alcyone (J. Krishnamurti): Some Facts Described, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1947, 28). The lives of ‘Alcyone’ (Krishnamurti) ranged in time from 22 662 B.C.E. to 624 C.E. and exhibit a remarkable interlacing of previous incarnations of well-known Theosophists. Indeed, it became something of a badge of honour to have been included. Such interconnections were further examined in Leadbeater’s Man; Whence, How and Whither in which, e.g., Leadbeater and Besant were married in 40 000 B.C.E., and had Krishnamurti and Nityananda for children. Of the over 300 ‘star’ names of the dramatis personae of The Lives of Alcyone, few now remain unidentified: Gregory Robertson, The Identification of Characters in ‘The Lives of Alcyone’, privately printed, Sydney, 1980.

The Lives of Alcyone has proved one of the most ridiculed of Leadbeater’s endeavours. For an account of such see Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 1, ch. 13. Tillett includes stanzas from a contemporary satire:

In the Lives, in the Lives,
I’ve had all sorts of husbands and wives,
I’ve been killed and reborn,
Many bodies I’ve worn,
But my higher anatomy thrives (in ibid., 465).

12 Although no direct record of Krishnamurti’s rite of Probation survives, an account of the ceremony, performed on ‘young ones’, is to be found in Leadbeater, The Masters and the Path, 90-93. It is not unlikely that the latter account was a veiled reference to Krishnamurti’s rite of Probation; such is Tillett’s assumption: Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 1, 423-425. See also Nethercott, The Last Four Lives, 143. It should be noted that a number of Leadbeater’s associates (notably, Russell ‘Dick’ Balfour-Clarke) have spoken of the existence of what has popularly become known as ‘the Golden Books’ of Leadbeater and Besant, in which they kept exact details of the occult advancement of their associates. It is supposed that, due to the pair’s astral perception, the accounts would be identical. Neither of these books, nor Leadbeater’s diary, has been released into the public domain, and are suspected of existing in the ES archives in Adyar.

13 An account of an acceptance of a probationer as a pupil is to be found in Leadbeater, The Masters and the Path, 111-114.

14 Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti, The Years of Awakening, 33-34.
Initiation. He and Leadbeater were secluded in a specially prepared room from the evening of 10 January, 1910, to the morning of 12 January. The Initiation, which took place on the evening of 11 January, was a very grand affair and involved, it appears, the entirety of the named members of the Hierarchy. Leadbeater, Besant, and Krishnamurti each recalled the events. Writing of the Initiation, Besant had no doubt about its significance for herself and her occult adviser:

So it is definitely fixed that the Lord Maitreya takes this dear child's body. It seems a very heavy responsibility to have to guard and help it, so as to fit it for Him, as He said, and I feel rather overwhelmed, but we are together in it and your wisdom will illuminate. I feel we have accepted and pledged our lives to a very solemn task.

During the months of Krishnamurti's rapid occult advancement, his domestic situation became ever more problematical. Leadbeater felt that the family was 'vilely housed' and that he should see to it that the boy 'at least [had] the chance to grow up decently'. To this end, Krishnamurti became ever more enculturated to the Western

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15 It should be recalled that at this time only Besant and Leadbeater were considered to have been initiated at all.
16 Leadbeater had noted in a telegraph to Besant on 31 December that G. E. Sutcliffe had published an article in The Theosophist which suggested that the alignment of celestial bodies on the 11th presaged the birth of the Christ. Though he 'suppose[d] it is too soon to hope for that yet', the date nevertheless had stuck in his mind, particularly when Besant had replied that she 'should not be surprised if the initiation follows very quickly, perhaps on the 11th': in ibid., 34-35.
17 For Krishnamurti's account of the Initiation, see Balfour-Clarke, The Boyhood, 19-24.
18 Krishnamurti was assisted in writing his account by Leadbeater: C. W. Leadbeater to A. Besant, 12 January, 1910, in Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti, The Years of Awakening, 35.
19 It is interesting that in Krishnamurti's account, He (the Lord Maitreya) appears to have said no such thing.
20 A. Besant to C. W. Leadbeater, 12 January, 1910, in Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti, The Years of Awakening, 38.
ideals and behaviour which pervaded the upper echelons of the Society: he was removed from school and taught English, hygiene, and exercise on the estate; he was admitted to the ES and encouraged in its practices of Westernised meditation; he was prohibited (via Master’s instruction) from participating in the annual Hindu rite to commemorate his mother’s death; he ceased, for the most part, to observe strict Brahmin dietary practice and segregation, and even cut his hair to shoulder length. Krishnamurti’s father, Narayaniah, having heard rumours about Leadbeater’s probity, and sensing his authority was being increasingly undermined, began to express doubts about the motives of the Theosophical elders. His attitude, which vacillated for many years between unerringly devotion and utter excoriation, prompted the Masters to suggest to Besant that she separate father from son to as great a degree as possible:

The work you are doing for me [the Lord Maitreya?] is of such importance that you cannot hope that it will escape the attention of the darker powers, and the nominal father by his anger and jealousy offers them a convenient instrument. I regretfully reiterate ... the less he sees of the boys for the next few years the better. He must kindly but firmly be made to understand that he must no more interfere with them in any way.

Even after Narayaniah had been convinced to cede guardianship of his son to Besant, he maintained fears for the boy’s spiritual and physical safety, alleviated only by the

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22 It might be argued, of course, that the selection of a Hindu (critically, a Brahmin) boy, who was then entirely refashioned into the image of an English Public Schoolboy, might speak volumes about what the Lord Maitreya required for his Vehicle. There is no small contradiction between Besant’s espousal of Indian Home Rule and self-determination, and her promotion of a highly Eurocentric (Leadbeaterian) Theosophy with an adventism premised upon British culture as the apex of evolutionary achievement. Leadbeater, for his part, was unashamedly Britannic in his Imperialism, and ethnocentric in his views: as early as 1889 Olcott had regretted that Leadbeater would not ‘get on with those particular races of Asia’: in ibid., 178. Leadbeater’s Theosophy (unlike Blavatsky’s in the main) equates position in human society with position in the evolutionary scheme:

Those who feel sure that they belong to the higher class of egos must prove their nobility by great tolerance and charity towards the less fortunate younger members of the human race; noblesse oblige, and if they are the nobility they must act accordingly (Leadbeater, The Hidden Side of Things, 219).

He sensed that the Theosophical Society would reestablish the natural order:

Aristocracy means government by the best; democracy means government by the people. We hope for a time when democracy and aristocracy will be one. We expect to reach that by our system (Leadbeater, The Hidden Side of Christian Festivals, 470).

23 For the details of Krishnamurti’s introduction into the orbit of Westernised cultural praxis see Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol., 1, ch. 14.

24 Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening, 41.
promise made to him by the Society's leadership that Krishnamurti would be availed of a European education and a grand future.25 Tension between Krishnamurti's natural and adoptive parents would later erupt in bitter court proceedings.

Krishnamurti's occult education initially seems to have been predicated upon the desire to inculcate within him the presumed virtues of British - indeed, English - culture and civilisation. With few exceptions (such as making notes of dreams and practising a method of 'thought-transference' with Leadbeater),26 the training for the aspiring adept was entirely behavioural. Koot Hoomi, himself a Kashmiri Brahmin, instructed Leadbeater in the following terms:

I want you to civilise them; to teach them to use spoons and forks, nail brushes and toothbrushes, to sit at ease upon chairs instead of crouching on the ground, to sleep rationally on a bed, not in a corner like a dog.27

The first fruit of Krishnamurti's steady movement along the path to adeptship was the publication in December, 1910, of At the Feet of the Master, purported to be Krishnamurti's ruminations on the lessons given him during nocturnal visits (undertaken in his astral body) with Koot Hoomi.28 The book, a sentimental and populist tract on spiritual advancement,29 was a tremendous publishing success, and underwent five English and 22 foreign language editions within a year.30

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25 For details of the guardianship drawn up by Sir S. Subramania Iyer, Theosophist and retired Judge of the High Court of Madras, see Nethercott, The Last Four Lives, 149.
27 Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening, 41.
28 'Alcyone' [J. Krishnamurti, At the Feet of the Master, 3rd ed., The Theosophist Office, Adyar, Madras, 1912. The book was considered of such significance by the Hierarchy that a special leather-bound copy was lodged in the Museum of the Great White Brotherhood; Krishnamurti had placed it under his pillow one night and it had gone by morning: see Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 1, 498.
29 Typical is the following:
He who is on the Path ... is as a pen in the hand of God, through which His thought may flow, and find for itself an expression down here, which without a pen it could not have ('Alcyone' [Krishnamurti], At the Feet, 48).
30 Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 1, 500. Leadbeater noted (in 1925) that there had been 40 editions of the book, 'and over a hundred thousand copies have been printed'. Leadbeater, The Masters and the Path, 66.
The actual authorship of *At the Feet of the Master* has been disputed from its first appearance. 31 Ernest Wood noted a similarity in style to Leadbeater, and even a few passages identical with his latest book (*The Inner Life*). 32 An acquaintance of Wood's, Subrahmanyam, stated that he had heard Krishnamurti tell his father in his native Telugu, 'The book is not mine; they fathered it on me', and was promptly banished from the estate by Besant, who told him that ‘Krishnamurti could not have said anything so false’. 33 Other theories about its origins abound, although the consensus view is that Leadbeater was the principal author. 34 Of greater significance is the fact that Leadbeater believed its contents presaged the Coming:

Above all, it bears the imprimatur of the coming World-Teacher, and that is the thing that makes it most valuable - the fact that it shows to us, to a certain extent, what His teaching will be. 35

Thus, regardless of provenance, it appears manifestly clear that Leadbeater was convinced that when the Lord Maitreya came, he would echo Leadbeater's own words, and espouse his particular interests.

Unsurprisingly, the adolescent Krishnamurti gained his own set of disciples, who banded together to form the Yellow Shawl Group, so-called because of their distinctive uniform. Soon an inner group evolved, the Purple Order, whose insignia included shawls, sashes, and badges (no doubt based upon Masonic 'jewels'). 36 In January, 1911, the Order of the Rising Sun was instigated to become a focus for Theosophical adventism in India, with Krishnamurti as the nominal editor of its journal, *The Herald of the Star*. Within six months the ever-efficient Besant had internationalised the Order, and changed its name to the Order of the Star in the East:

31 Cf., e.g., Annie Besant, 'The Authorship of *At the Feet of the Master*', in *The Adyar Bulletin*, November, 1912, 345-349.
33 Ibid., 163.
34 Cf., eg., Rex Henry, 'Notes on the possible origins of "At the Feet of the Master"', unpublished manuscript, 1983: a copy of the original in the possession of the present author. Henry recounts Balfour-Clarke's notion that the book was a summary of the *Viveka-Cūdāmani*, or *Crest-Jewel of Wisdom*, an Indian Vedantist text by Sri Samkaracarya, translated into English by the Theosophist Mohini Chatterji and printed in vols. VII and IX of *The Theosophist* between 1885 and 1888. There are some similarities, primarily in the principles and nomenclature of discipleship.
36 Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening*, 43-44; Nethercott, *The Last Four Lives*, 148-149. The regalia was richly embroidered on satins, and would have proved highly expensive.
The Order of the Star in the East has been established to gather into one body those who, within and without the Theosophical Society, look for the coming of the world teacher, and would fain share in the glorious privilege of preparing the Way of the Lord ... cooperate with nature in her great work of evolution, and utilize her laws for the benefit of yourselves and all around you.\textsuperscript{27}

With the inauguration of the Order of the Star in the East, the promotion of Krishnamurti as the Vehicle for the Coming had reached the popular membership and inspired its collective imagination.\textsuperscript{28} Although membership of the parent Society was not obligatory for membership in the Order, the vast majority of Adyar Society Theosophists rallied to the new banner. Indeed, membership of the Theosophical Society doubled in the years from 1911 to 1928, peaking at 45,098.\textsuperscript{29} The Order of the Star in the East soon became an international phenomenon, with National Representatives in all countries where Theosophy was represented. Its extensive resources in membership and finances allowed for a massive literature to develop, and for regular national and international gatherings of the faithful. ‘Star’ members wore star-shaped lapel pins, and evangelised with a fervour unknown in any previous Theosophical enterprise. It can properly be stated that the Order of the Star in the East was a juggernaut - and Krishnamurti its uneasy pilot.

The first public proclamation of the rôle of Krishnamurti was at the 1911 annual convention of the Society, held in Benares. Here, mass prostrations to Krishnamurti and explosive announcements of devotion culminated, on 28 December, with a seemingly ecstatic response to Krishnamurti’s benediction: ‘May the blessings of the great Lord rest upon you forever’. Besant and Leadbeater interpreted the events as a foretaste of the descent of the Lord Maitreya, with Leadbeater offering a characteristically detailed clairvoyant account of the proceedings:

\textsuperscript{28} Technically the Order of the Star in the East advocated the return of the Lord Maitreya, but did not nominate a single individual as ‘the Vehicle’. In reality, very soon after its founding, members of the Order were aware of Krishnamurti’s candidacy. National magazines were established to promulgate the Coming: see e.g. \textit{The Halcyon: Official Organ of the Order of the Star in the East in New Zealand}, 1:1, 11 July, 1912.
\textsuperscript{29} Tabulation of membership numbers, including national groups, is to be found in Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 3, 944.
I suppose most of them saw nothing, but what they felt shook them to their very souls ... A great circle of the characteristic blue fire of the Lord Maitreya appeared some feet above our Krishna's head and then stretched down into a funnel. Just above the funnel floated the rosy cross of the Master Jesus, and high above all, near the ceiling of the lofty Hall, flashed the Star of the Lord of the World. Down through the funnel poured a torrent of blue fire tinged with rose ...

Round the Hall stood a circle of green devas, with forms twenty feet high.40

Some among those present were not similarly impressed. Nethercott interviewed the then General Secretary of the Indian Section, Bhagavan Das (1869-1958), who responded that 'most of those present ... had noticed nothing at all extraordinary there, except perhaps a very much embarrassed Indian boy handing out slips of paper to a crowd of strangely behaving people'.41 Nevertheless the story cemented the sense of imminence which the proclamation of the Coming had engendered, and focussed all attention upon the young Brahmin.

There was no doubt in the Masters' minds, nor in Leadbeater's, that Krishnamurti would be educated in an English university. Leadbeater was eager, however, that the boy undergo his Second Initiation prior to the commencement of his studies. With renewed unwelcome attention to the scandals of 1906-1908 appearing daily in Indian newspapers, and further agitation from Narayaniah, Leadbeater departed for Europe early in 1912, ostensibly to determine a suitable environment for the boy's preliminary retreat.42 In the meantime, Besant had secured Narayaniah's permission to escort Krishnamurti and Nityananda to England for their education, and departed with alacrity thereafter, on 16 February.43
After brief stops in England, Holland, and France, the boys (accompanied by Balfour-Clarke and Jinarajadasa) met with Leadbeater in Taormina in Sicily, Italy. There Krishnamurti and Jinarajadasa were prepared for their Second Initiation, which took place on the evening of the first of May, at the time of the full moon. Again the boys were presented to the Hierarchy, and questioned about their suitability for such advancement: Krishnamurti's work on *At the Feet of the Master* was greeted by the Masters as evidence of his worthiness and the 'Bodhisattva grew sweet beyond expression as He, the Saviour of the World, listened'. Interestingly, the Bodhisattva Maitreya added the following:

> You have transcended all superstition; you know that a man may find the light in any religion; you know that rites and ceremonies have no intrinsic value, and that all which is done by them can be done without them by knowledge and by will. Above all, you are free from the superstition of the wrath of the Power behind evolution.

Those who suspect that Krishnamurti's mature antinomianism and aversion to religious ceremonial appeared as if from a vacuum need only refer to this passage to become aware that the germ of his thought was to some degree present within Theosophy, prior to its wholehearted shift to ritualism after 1914.

The ensuing years were filled with repeated legal attempts by Narayaniah to regain custody of his children. After an initial loss to Narayaniah in a ruling from the High Court of Madras on 15 April, 1913, Besant turned to the Appeal Court, and then

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44 Leadbeater's choice of Taormina as a suitable occult site for the boys' retreat may not have centred entirely upon the town's reputation as the home of the School of Pythagoras. Taormina was then, as now, a holiday centre for homosexual men. Indeed, it was, according to Rex Henry, Wedgwood's favoured location for this reason. It was also a centre for the production of homosexual erotica: viz. the huge number of photographs of adolescent boys made in the town by Baron Wilhelm von Gloeden (1856-1931). For the latter, see Charles Leslie, *Wilhelm von Gloeden: Photographer*, JFI Photographic Publishers, New York, 1977. Alfred C. Kinsey searched for the von Gloeden plates in 1952 and found many hundreds still extant - he also noted that the fascist government had already destroyed 7000! Kinsey was amazed by Taormina and considered it to be 'teeming with sex': Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, *Sex, The Measure of All Things: A Life of Alfred C. Kinsey*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1998, 428-429.


46 Ibid., 206.

47 Indeed the change in Leadbeater's attitude was dramatic in itself. Emily Lutyens, who met Leadbeater in September, 1912, noted that he 'pours scorn on badges and ritual and dressing up': Emily Lutyens to Edwin Lutyens, 19 September, 1912, in Emily Lutyens, *Candles in the Sun*, 47.
ultimately to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. The latter found in her favour—at least to the extent that certain procedural and jurisdictional points had not been properly considered—but agreed that Narayaniah was able to make a further action should he so choose. It appears that, by this time, the boys’ father had recognised the breadth of international resources which Besant could mobilise in such matters, and resolved to acquiesce. One result of the court proceedings was that Leadbeater’s moral character was again analysed and the minutiae of the 1906-1908 scandal reexamined. While Besant somewhat disingenuously announced that the Privy Council’s decision had exonerated him of all such charges—it did no such thing—Leadbeater chose to search for a new sphere of influence. Electing to avoid the glare of publicity which inevitably followed him in Europe and India, he travelled (via Burma, Java, and New Zealand) to Sydney, Australia, leaving on 20 February, 1914. Sydney, with its enthusiastic Theosophical community, was eventually to become Leadbeater’s occult laboratory.

Leadbeater’s decision to remove himself from Adyar and the Theosophical communities in Europe may well have been influenced by a strain of independence which had begun to surface in Krishnamurti, and by the fact that the young man did not seem to be exhibiting many signs of his early promise. In a letter of 13 October, 1913, Krishnamurti asserted his maturity:

My Dear Brother [Leadbeater] ... I think it is time now that I should take my affairs into my own hands. I feel I could carry out the Master’s instructions better if they were not forced upon me and made unpleasant as they have been for some years. If I feel that I am responsible I shall do my best, for now being about 18 years

48 For details of the case, and excerpts from transcripts, see Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 2, chs. 15, 16; ‘Veritas’, Mrs. Besant and the Alcyone Case; Francis King, Sexuality, Magic and Perversion, Neville Spearman, London, 1971, 130-136. See also [Issued by the National Representative], Mrs. Besant’s Defence: In the Court of the District Judge of Chingleput, O. S. No. 47 of 1912, n.p., [1912].

49 Indeed, Leadbeater’s ‘advice to boys’, and other related incidents, appears to have somewhat captivated the court. Disaffected members (such as Bertram Keighley) gave evidence for Narayaniah. See all references supra p. 326n48.


51 Unlike his brother Nityananda, Krishnamurti was a poor student. Both were rejected for Oxford and Cambridge Universities (possibly on political or religious grounds), but Nityananda matriculated ‘with honours’ to study law at London University. Krishnamurti attempted three times to enter London University, but failed on each attempt. See Mary Lutyens, The Life and Death, 23-25.
old, I think that with advice I could manage ... I have not been given any opportunity to feel my responsibilities and I have been dragged about like a baby ... I feel very much for Mrs Besant that she should have done so much and that the outer result should be a failure.52

Leadbeater’s disenchantment with Krishnamurti was only exacerbated by his own characteristic demand for novelty. Not only did he soon wholly immerse himself in documenting the occult potentialities of Church and Masonic ceremonial, but he also continued to locate new young claimants to great occult promise - such as the thirteen-year-old Desikacharya Rajagopalacharya (called ‘Rajagopal’, b.1900), a Vaishnavite Ayyangar Brahmin from Madras State.53 Given the massive apparatus of the Order of the Star in the East, there was little chance of the young Rajagopal usurping Krishnamurti’s preeminent place as Vehicle, but a certain possibility of threat was evident, as noted by Rajagopal’s daughter, Radha Rajagopal Sloss:

My father has always avoided the limelight. He would never have looked upon himself as Krishna’s rival. Leadbeater and Krishna himself did that.54

52 J. Krishnamurti to C. W. Leadbeater, 31 October, 1913, in Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening, 77.
53 The somewhat tragic tale of Rajagopal is documented by his daughter in Sloss, Lives in the Shadow. Rajagopal became one of Krishnamurti’s most devoted disciples and sought as far as possible to emulate his idol. Krishnamurti, for his part, appears to have begun a secret sexual affair with Rajagopal’s wife, Rosalind, and to have fathered three pregnancies (which resulted in one miscarriage and two terminations - the latter with Krishnamurti’s recommendation). That Rajagopal throughout this time battled with conducting a sexless marriage (so as to follow Krishnamurti’s apparent celibacy), grants him some sort of quixotic heroism; what it says about Krishnamurti is perhaps something different altogether. Mary Lutyens answered Radha Rajagopal Sloss’s book with her own: Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti and the Rajagopals. Lutyens, who acknowledged the truth of the sexual relationship (indeed, Krishnamurti had told her of it), stated that Krishnamurti spoke against celibacy, and was thus consistent in his actions and teachings. Her thesis is somewhat undermined, not only by the inherent dishonesty of the affair (such dishonesty absolutely in contrast with his public teachings), but by the fact that although he acknowledged the sexual act as not being disharmonious with an enlightened life, he nevertheless cultivated something of an ascetic and chaste image of himself for public consumption. For further responses see [Krishnamurti Foundation of America], Statement by the Krishnamurti Foundation of America about the Radha Sloss book ‘Lives in the Shadow with J. Krishnamurti’, Krishnamurti Foundation of America, n.d.; Erna Lilliefelt, KFA History: Report on the Formation of Krishnamurti Foundation of America and the Lawsuits Which Took Place Between 1968 and 1986 to Recover Assets for Krishnamurti’s Work, Krishnamurti Foundation of America, Ojai, California, 1995.
54 Sloss, Lives in the Shadow, 40. Leadbeater claimed that Rajagopal had been Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) in his previous life and was soon to become a Buddha, probably on the planet Mercury: see Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 2, 555.
Over the subsequent decade, Leadbeater’s interest in Krishnamurti seems to have waned, although he remained steadfast publicly. His adventism, though perhaps not so closely focussed upon Krishnamurti, continued to afford him a synthetising spindle around which he could wind his various occult interests and Orders. Significantly, Co-Masonry and Liberal Catholicism were grafted into the Theosophical enterprise most effectively when they were considered as preparatory vehicles for the imminent Coming. Unfortunately, Krishnamurti displayed little interest in ceremonial - and a positive aversion to Christian ritual:

I wrote a long letter to Raja [Jinarajadasa] saying straight that all these side shows kill the main show ... As you know I really do believe in the Masters etc and I don’t want it to be made ridiculous ... I am in a most rebellious mood as you can imagine and personally I don’t want to belong to anything of which I am ashamed.

Although Leadbeater never retreated from his public commitment to the coming of the Bodhisattva Maitreya, his disappointment with Krishnamurti’s assertions of independence encouraged him to broaden the dynamics of Theosophical messianism. He began to teach that the Coming might not eventuate for some fifteen or twenty years, and thus would likely occur after his own death. So, too, he started to speak about an Apostolate:

I have been given to understand [by the Lord Maitreya?] ... that in addition to the body He will use most of the time, and in which He will travel about, He will probably choose some one person in each country, whom He will sometimes inspire when He wishes, whom

56 J. Krishnamurti to Emily Lutyens, 7 August, 1920, in Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening, 121-122. Later he would write regarding the Liberal Catholic Church:

[Y]ou know I am not a ceremonialist & I do not appreciate all the paraphanalia [sic] with all those prayers & bobbing up & down, the robes, etc ... The church lasted 2 1/2 hours & I was so bored that I was nearly fainting. I am afraid I rather showed it (in ibid., 142).

57 Ibid., 125. It is significant that such a statement would have had tremendous appeal to the youths with whom Leadbeater spent the majority of his time. The cause of such enthusiasm is clear: twenty years hence, they would (presumably) have become leaders in the Society, and would be in a position to have personal dealings with the Lord Maitreya. Leadbeater’s involvement with young Theosophists, particularly during his stay in Sydney, resulted in his fostering a number of organisations: In the King’s Service, The Golden Chain, The Order of the Round Table, etc.
He will guide and direct as to what He wants done.\(^{23}\)

A temporary rapprochement was effected between Leadbeater and Krishnamurti during the latter’s visit to Sydney in 1922.\(^{29}\) Leadbeater had established himself in grand style in Sydney, and had surrounded himself with young aspirant chelas, mostly ‘between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five’.\(^{60}\) These young people and the elder statesman of Theosophy were in the same year newly housed in a remarkable property, ‘The Manor’, purchased specially by Leadbeater’s disciples to be their leader’s special occult domain.\(^{61}\) The Manor furnished Leadbeater with all of the necessary resources to instruct his young charges and to oversee their psychic and physical evolution.

Soon after Krishnamurti’s arrival, Leadbeater gave the young man a message from Koot Hoomi which noted that he should be ‘tolerant of divergences of view & of method, for each has usually a fragment of truth concealed somewhere’.\(^{62}\) The Master’s instruction affected Krishnamurti profoundly, and he determined again to be worthy of his calling - and to achieve the same enthusiasm as Leadbeater’s Sydney disciples. Soon thereafter he and his brother travelled to Ojai in California, in the hope that Nityananda’s failing health would improve, and here Krishnamurti set about regaining his links with the Masters.\(^{63}\) Having begun daily meditations on the image

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\(^{23}\) Ibid., 124-125.

\(^{29}\) Krishnamurti had not seen Leadbeater for ten years and found his fondness for the man had returned. This may have been made more pronounced as an emotional response to yet another investigation into Leadbeater’s activities with boys, which resulted in terribly unfavourable media coverage for Theosophy in Australia. Some of the headlines read, ‘Leadbeater: A Swish Bish with the Boys’, and, cruelly, ‘Dandy Coloured Coons’ (a reference to the visiting Krishnamurti and Nityananda): see Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 2, 670. Ultimately, a police investigation was initiated in May, 1922, and Krishnamurti gave evidence in Leadbeater’s behalf. Although the Head of the Criminal Investigation Department stated that he was ‘of the opinion that there are good grounds for believing that [Leadbeater] is a sex pervert’, there was insufficient evidence for independent action: see [E. L. Grieg?], Precis of the Leadbeater Police Enquiry, typed manuscript, n.d., 3 (a copy of the original in the possession of the present author). For significant materials related to the police enquiry see ‘Special Bundle 7792.2’ in the State Archives of New South Wales.

\(^{60}\) Emily Lutyens, Candles in the Sun, 117.

\(^{61}\) The Manor is a rather rambling Edwardian building situated in Clifton Gardens in Sydney. Erected by a wealthy English tile merchant by the name of Bakewell between 1909 and 1913, the building has rather odd dimensions - no doubt the result of Bakewell’s common tendency to incorporate into the construction extra rooms and passages that he had dreamt the night before: Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 2, 692-693. ‘Bakewell’s folly’, as it became known, was not a success with his family, who, upon seeing the 52- room house for the first time, immediately returned to England. Leadbeater’s Australian disciples bought the building, thereafter renamed ‘The Manor’, in 1922, and it became Leadbeater’s particular domain. It has remained the province of the ES to the present day.

\(^{63}\) Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening, 147.

\(^{63}\) For details of the Theosophical community at Ojai see Paul Kagan, New World Utopias: A Photographic History of the Search for Community, Penguin, New York, 1975, 76-84.
of the Lord Maitreya, he started to experience acute pain in and around his head which resulted in occasional delirium and insomnia.44 On the evening of 20 August, 1922, while meditating under a pepper tree, Krishnamurti beheld the Lord Maitreya and the Master Koot Hoomi for the first time in several years, and determined that he wished for 'nothing but to serve the Masters and the Lord'.45 Unsurprisingly, Leadbeater was pleased that Krishnamurti had returned to the fold, and determined that he must be undergoing the Third Initiation:46

The step you have taken is of extreme importance, and makes it certain ... that you will take the next also, before many years are over ... And I am very, very thankful that we have come thus far on the way without serious mishap, for at one time I had a little anxiety, even though I knew all must be well in the end.47

Leadbeater included a none-too-subtle admonition for the rejuvenated Krishnamurti:

You should be absolutely firm and unshakeable now; yet all occult tradition warns us that there are still dangers and temptations up to the very threshold of Divinity. May the LORD grant us to remain ever faithful to Him.48

The symptoms of Krishnamurti's Third Initiation continued unabated in the years following his experience under the pepper tree, much to the apparent annoyance of Leadbeater, who had no precedent for such physiological trauma, and for whom any form of pathology was unacceptable for an Initiate: 'all this is so utterly opposed to what I myself have been taught'.49 He concurred in Besant's assumption that the physical strains on Krishnamurti must be some sort of stigmata, and all a part of the necessary physical purification of the Vehicle before, as he phrased it, 'the strain of the

44 This experience in Ojai was the beginning (but cf. Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti and the Rajagopals, 124-126) of a lifelong series of episodes which devotees of Krishnamurti called 'the process'. During these painful episodes he would behave alternately 'in a very childlike manner' and 'very regal and imposing': Wessinger, Annie Besant, 106n140. A good witness description is offered in Jayakar, Krishnamurti, 124-130, 240-244.
45 Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening, 159, 161. The Buddhic parallels are obvious.
46 For a description of the rights and responsibilities which attend upon the Third Initiation see Leadbeater, The Masters and the Path, 214-217.
47 Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening, 163-164.
48 Ibid., 164.
49 Ibid., 182-183.
actual occupancy'. In a typically scientific-sounding pronouncement, he concluded that the Lord Maitreya was forcibly changing the ‘spirillae in each atom’ of Krishnamurti’s body, thus altering his corporeal nature from that of the Fifth Root Race to that of the Sixth Root Race. Krishnamurti was literally being reconstructed.

After some hesitation on Leadbeater’s part, Krishnamurti and his small entourage travelled to Sydney in order to become involved in Leadbeater’s ES occult training institute at The Manor in Sydney, arriving 3 April, 1925. Relations were strained throughout the visit, with Krishnamurti exhibiting little interest in any of the activities of Leadbeater’s disciples at The Manor. Krishnamurti observed that the apparatus of the Australian contingent of the Order of the Star in the East was fully devolved upon the Coming, to the extent of having built (in 1922-1924) a magnificent neoclassical amphitheatre overlooking the harbour. The amphitheatre, built through the beneficence and ingenuity of the ever-faithful Dr. Mary Rocke, was to provide a glorious venue for the Lord Maitreya - when he finally appeared - to instruct the faithful. Nevertheless, Krishnamurti found it hard to coalesce in such activities, and regularly mocked what he considered the affectations and pretensions of those who professed high occult status. Emily Lutyens’ daughter (and Mary’s sister), Elizabeth, concurred with his assessment:

We just sat around aimlessly most of the time like an inactive Stock Exchange, waiting for another message to come through on the

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70 Ibid., 171: ‘The case is so unique that I suppose the truth is that we can only wait and watch’.
71 Ibid., 206. According to Leadbeater’s *Occult Chemistry*, the Anu, the constitutive component of the atom, is itself comprised of numerous ‘spirilla’. In each spirilla is a further set of 1680 ‘turns’. If there is an ultimate monadic particle, it is far from clear what it is. See Besant & Leadbeater, *Occult Chemistry*, 2nd ed., Appendix, ii-iii.
72 Dr. Mary Rocke’s financial contribution to Theosophy was extraordinary - she was one of the largest single benefactors. Unfortunately, during a journey to India in October, 1927, she fell and received a cerebral haemorrhage, and died from her injuries. Her body was buried at sea. As she had been travelling second class, Besant and Krishnamurti (who were in first class compartments - thanks to Dr. Rocke) did not find out for some time: for details see *The O. E. Library Critic*, August, 1928, passim.
73 The amphitheatre, built at a fee of £20 000, was eventually demolished in 1951. One of the enduring myths which entered Sydney folklore was that ‘Christ’ was going to return and walk (across the water) between the North and South Heads of the harbour and alight upon the amphitheatre. One wonders whether the myth would have been quite so well received (and transmitted) were it to be noted that the Lord Maitreya was the intended visitor. See Jill Roe, *Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia, 1879-1939*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, Sydney, 1986, 287-290.
astral ticker-tape.  

Leadbeater's seclusion at The Manor was soon to have tremendous repercussions - both for himself and for the Vehicle.

**Accelerated Evolution**

Annie Besant, who had come to rely on Leadbeater in all matters touching upon the metaphysical, had turned her attentions elsewhere during his absence. As had happened in the wake of Blavatsky's demise, numerous individuals were claiming psychic contact with the Masters during Leadbeater's absence, and a number of those - no doubt sensing Besant's physical frailty and need for psychic contact with the Hierarchy - were more than willing to become the new 'mouthpieces'. Among the coterie of Theosophists who were able to 'bring through' messages from the Masters, Wedgwood, Köllerström, and George Arundale were the most prolific and influential. Of these, Arundale's messages were ultimately to prove the most remarkable, and also the most dangerous for the equivocating Vehicle.

On 26 July, 1925, Arundale was ordained a priest in the Liberal Catholic Church in Huizen, the Netherlands, and a week thereafter was scheduled to be elevated to the episcopacy. The consecration technically required the approval of the Presiding Bishop, and so Leadbeater was contacted. When his response was not forthcoming, Wedgwood undertook the ceremony on 4 August, having ascertained from Arundale that he had been granted consent by Leadbeater on the Inner Planes. On their return home, a cable from Leadbeater had arrived which communicated his utter

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76 Annie Besant had voluntarily surrendered her psychism by at least 1919 due to her engagement with the politics of Indian Home Rule (though exactly why one should negate a capacity for the other remains unclear): Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening*, 106. Of all of those who 'brought through' messages from the Masters, none seems more poignant than the frail Nityananda, whose message from Koot Hoomi noted that Krishnamurti needed a larger vocabulary - thus the two lads attempted thereafter to memorise one Shakespearean sonnet per day: in ibid., 176. It should be noted that those who claimed the ability to 'bring through' messages in the 1920s (Wedgwood, Köllerström, and Arundale, *inter alia*) would do so psychically through astral perception; in the 1890s the vogue had been for Spiritualist contact. This change is emblematic of Leadbeater's influence.
78 Huizen was the centre of Liberal Catholicism in Europe, due to the significant building efforts of Wedgwood, who had retired there following his resignation as Presiding Bishop.
79 Emily Lutyens, *Candles in the Sun*, 131.
disapproval.\(^{80}\)

This paradoxical disagreement between two acknowledged ‘mouthpieces’ of the Masters was the occasion of the first serious contradiction between the psychic wills of Besant’s occult advisors - but it was not to be the last. Immediately prior to the consecration, Arundale and Wedgwood had summarily announced that they had taken the Third Initiation, and that Arundale’s wife, Rukmini Devi (1904-1986), had taken the Second.\(^{81}\) Three days later Arundale stunned his associates by informing them that he, Wedgwood, Krishnamurti (who was tending his failing brother in Ojai, California), and Jinarajadasa (then at Adyar) had all taken their Fourth Initiation and had thus become Arhats.\(^{82}\) Further messages of a rather baroque nature were delivered via Arundale: all clergy were henceforth to wear silk underwear, and no hats; Arhats were not to eat eggs; the Arhats should prepare for a physical visit with the Master the Count in his castle in Hungary.\(^{83}\) Soon thereafter, occult advancements reached an unprecedented rapidity and scale: within days, Shiva Rao (1891-1975) and Emily Lutyens were advanced to the Second Initiation (though the latter only recalled a very disturbed sleep - a bat had invaded her room),\(^{84}\) and Rukmini to the Fourth.\(^{85}\)

On the evening of 9 August, Arundale ‘brought through’ a remarkable directive: the Lord Maitreya had decided that an Apostolate should be inaugurated to prepare the way for his arrival.\(^{86}\) Besant, Leadbeater, Jinarajadasa, Wedgwood, Arundale, Rukmini, Nityananda, Rajagopal, Emily Lutyens, and Köllerström were all to be Apostles; ‘[t]he

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\(^{80}\) Ibid.

\(^{81}\) Ibid., Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening*, 211.

\(^{82}\) Emily Lutyens, *Candles in the Sun*, 132.

\(^{83}\) Ibid. Bishop Pigott, later to become the third Presiding Bishop, admitted that his funds for such items as silk underwear were very limited.

\(^{84}\) Ibid., 133-134. The incident of the bat is indicative of the fact that initiations were on the whole undergone during sleep, and the initiand was often unaware either of his or her candidacy or of the initiation itself - until informed thereafter. Typical is the case of the trenchant critic of Leadbeater, T. H. Martyn (1860-1924), who suspected the veracity of the account of his own initiation: see T. H. Martyn, *Letter from Mr. T. H. Martyn to Mrs. Annie Besant*, H. N. Stokes, Washington, 1921.

\(^{85}\) Emily Lutyens, *Candles in the Sun*, 133-134. Emily Lutyens and Mary Rocke (1865-1927) were also ‘consecrated Abbess by the Lord to lead an Order of Women He will found later’: in ibid., 132. At this time Emily Lutyens wrote *The Call of the Mother* (Methuen & Co., London, 1926).

\(^{86}\) Leadbeater had himself suggested the possibility of an apostolate, though in less specific terms: see *supra* p. 364ff.
other two are a little undecided'. To cap it all, Arundale announced that for the Seventh Root Race, Wedgwood was to be the Mahachohan, Besant the Manu, and Leadbeater the Bodhisattva. (He himself was to be 'the Chief of Staff' of the Universe, and thus travel beyond the solar system).

On 11 August, the party moved from Huizen to Ommen in order to officiate at the annual camp for the Order of the Star in the East. Besant was so enthused by recent events that when she announced news of the Twelve Apostles to the hundreds of faithful adventists she included Krishnamurti among his own disciples. The mood of the camp was febrile with rumour regarding the proximity of the Coming and the marvel of occult initiation. The latter became even more pronounced when Besant summoned her most faithful followers together and informed them that on 14 August (according to Arundale's account, which she, as ever, confirmed) she, Leadbeater, Krishnamurti, Jinarajadasa, Wedgwood, and Arundale had all taken their Fifth Initiation, and were now 'Adepts'. Later, Rukmini claimed that she, too, had received the Asekha Initiation, but that her associates had somehow 'made a mistake'...
in not recalling it.  

The dramatic events of July and August of 1925 had far-reaching effects. Leadbeater was furious at having been usurped by Arundale, and exclaimed to Ernest Wood that he feared Besant’s impulsiveness would ‘wreck the Society’.  

40 years later, Wood wrote that Besant had informed him of a deal which she had entered into with Leadbeater: ‘[s]he accepted his clairvoyance as if it were her own and he loyally supported her decisions as to what to do’.  

To this end, Leadbeater maintained his public silence regarding the proliferation of occult laurels, but privately noted that he believed none of them had undergone the Fifth Initiation, and hoped only that he and Besant might be so honoured in their next lives.  

Leadbeater, who naturally understood his own initiatory schemata better than Arundale, recognised that to claim Adepthood was to confirm that one had freed oneself from karmic causality.  

Further, an Adept was able to accept personal pupils. In sum, Leadbeater realised, an Adept was very close indeed to being a Master, and he was not at all sure that such men as the indiscrete Wedgwood and the ambitious Arundale would be seen to qualify.  

Crucially, for modern Theosophical history, Arundale (with Besant’s blessing) had, in a matter of weeks, dismantled the elaborately constructed gulf between Theosophists and Masters which Blavatsky, and to a lesser extent even Leadbeater, had spent exactly 50 years assiduously engineering and protecting.  

For once, it seems, Leadbeater and Krishnamurti were in complete accord. Hearing of the events at the Star Camp, Krishnamurti left his brother to the care of the Masters and

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46 Emily Lutyens, Candles in the Sun, 134. According to Tillett, who interviewed Rukmini Arundale at the Adyar estate in 1979, she denied almost all of the events of July and August, 1925: Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 3, 1046n44. She appears not to have had a reliable memory because all other contemporary chronicles agree. It might be added that Rukmini appears to have passed all her five initiations within seven weeks.

47 Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening, 223-224.

48 This observation is rarely made in Theosophical chronicles, but was properly noted in Jayakar, Krishnamurti, 66.

49 It might be remembered that such elevated Masters as Morya and Koot Hoomi were themselves only one step higher, that is Chohans of the Sixth Initiation. So, too, Djwal Kul had only recently been himself an Adept (prior to his Chohan Initiation).

50 The time scale also seemed to bother Leadbeater, particularly with his plans for the Coming. As he stated, Rukmini’s initiations were undergone so rapidly that ‘[i]t is even more than our Krishna[murti] did’: Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening, 222.
travelled to Europe. Upon arrival he informed Besant that he rejected all recent initiations, as well as the concept of the Apostles, and that he had serious misgivings about her recent promotion of a World University and a World Religion. Besant, who considered herself a disciple of Krishnamurti and was by this time a fully committed adventist, was profoundly shocked by the disjunction between the views of her beloved Krishnamurti and the *pronunciamenti* of her psychic advisors, and thereafter entered into a sharp physical and mental decline. Krishnamurti’s faith in the Masters remained undimmed, however, and he appears to have believed that fidelity to the Hierarchy, and to his rather special mission, would save the ailing Nityananda’s life.

*En route* to India for the Jubilee Convention, any skepticism Krishnamurti felt was checked by Arundale, who continued to ‘bring through’ messages from the Mahachohan. Indeed, Mary Lutyens stated that Arundale and Wedgwood were so craven as to suggest that, if Krishnamurti were to acknowledge their Adeptic initiations, and to accept them as Apostles, Nityananda’s life would be spared. All such deals were declared moot, however, by a cable of 13 November, 1925, which announced Nityananda’s death.

It seems that this event ruptured the literalist Theosophical *credo* to which Krishnamurti had tried to conform himself, and sparked the trademark religious iconoclasm which he maintained until his death.

The initial changes wrought in Krishnamurti appeared to augur well for the Coming. At the Jubilee he thrilled Order of the Star in the East members by suddenly switching

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102 Emily Lutyens stated that:

I had been forced to the conclusion that Mrs Besant had been taken in. She was so honest herself that she was incapable of suspecting insincerity where once she had given her trust, especially with regard to George [Arundale], whom she had loved so dearly (Emily Lutyens, *Candles in the Sun*, 141).

103 Arundale claimed that Nityananda’s life had been granted to Krishnamurti as a boon for passing the Fourth Initiation: Nethercott, *The Last Four Lives*, 369; Emily Lutyens, *Candles in the Sun*, 134, 139. Rukmini asked for (and received?) closer union between England and India: in ibid., 134. Krishnamurti had a dream in which he offered to sacrifice all for Nityananda’s sake, and was thereafter told by the Mahachohan that ‘He will be well’. Jayakar, *Krishnamurti*, 67.


105 For details see ibid., 219-220; Jayakar, *Krishnamurti*, 68-69. Within days, Arundale began to ‘bring through’ messages from the dead Nityananda.
to the first person in an address about the Lord Maitreya:

We are all expecting Him who is the embodiment of nobility, and He will be with us soon ... He comes only to those who want, who desire, who long. I come to those who want sympathy, who want happiness, who are longing to be released, who are longing to find happiness in all things. I come to reform and not to tear down. I come to build up, not to destroy.106

Besant interpreted the event as 'the definite consecration of the chosen vehicle ... The coming has begun'.107 Leadbeater was equally convinced that the Lord Maitreya had begun to use his instrument and would henceforth do so more often in order 'to get the Vehicle used to Him'.108 The Jubilee Convention had been a marvellous public success.109 In deference to the Arrival (as opposed to the Coming), the Order of the Star in the East was rechristened the Order of the Star, and the The Herald of the Star was renamed The Star Review.110

Over the next few years, Krishnamurti was several times interpreted as having been overtaken by the Lord Maitreya, but his speeches became ever more nihilistic and iconoclastic:

A new life, a new storm has swept the world. It is like a tremendous gale that blows and cleans everything, all the particles of dust from the trees, the cobwebs from our minds and from our emotions and has left us perfectly clean.111

Unfortunately for the Theosophical elders, it appeared ever more likely that many of their prized philosophies and institutions were to be among the offending cobwebs. Wedgwood (likely with the connivance of Arundale), who resented Krishnamurti’s

106 [J. Krishnamurti], 'Mr. Krishnamurti’s concluding words of an address delivered to Star Members at Adyar on December 28th, 1925' in The Herald of the Star, XV:1, January, 1926, 2.
107 Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening, 224.
109 For the text of the major speeches delivered at the Jubilee see Besant, Jinarajadasa, Krishnamurti, Arundale, Leadbeater & Wedgwood, The Three World Movements. The Jubilee had a few tensions which were kept to the cognoscenti. Messages and a letter were received from the Masters - the contents of which appeared highly partisan in favour of either Arundale or Leadbeater, depending which was responsible for the communication. Besant was also required to demand Wedgwood leave the estate due to an undisclosed sexual scandal: Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 2, 741-746.
110 See Wessinger, Annie Besant, 95.
111 Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening, 224.

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influence, began to suggest that he was in the thrall of black magicians.\textsuperscript{112} Krishnamurti reacted so violently to this assertion that Besant determined never again to question him or his authority, regardless of the problems his teachings might cause.\textsuperscript{113} In fact the President offered to resign (Arundale had received a message from the Mahachohan suggesting she step down in his favour), but was informed by Leadbeater that it was not Morya’s wish that she do so.\textsuperscript{114}

By the middle of 1927, Krishnamurti was lecturing to ES groups that the Masters ‘were only incidents’, a deeply heretical notion for most of the listeners.\textsuperscript{115} At the Star Camp of the same year he stated that ‘[w]hen I met Bishop Leadbeater and the Theosophical Society, I began to see the Master K. H. ... in the form which was put before me, the reality from their point of view’.\textsuperscript{116} Leadbeater began to express private doubts about the Vehicle’s usefulness, wishing ‘he would go away and leave us alone to go on with our work’.\textsuperscript{117} He was even led to state that ‘[t]he Coming had gone wrong’.\textsuperscript{118} Krishnamurti, though, was not so easily to be disposed: although his teachings were becoming ever more devoted to the concept of liberation from all material forms, particularly religious and occult devotions, he never explicitly denied his occasional identification with the World-Teacher, referring elliptically to having

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 234.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 2, 749.
\textsuperscript{115} Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening, 242
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 249.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 762.
\textsuperscript{118} Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 2, 761
become ‘one with the Beloved’. Indeed, without openly rejecting popular Theosophical idioms or aspirations, he was surreptitiously divesting the Society of its occultism:

If your thought is pursuing comfort, you will have shelters, gurus, Masters. You will at once say, ‘Do not Masters exist?’ I say to that, Masters, apparitions, devas, angels, have nothing to do with the realization of spirituality.

Besant’s devotion to Krishnamurti, even in the face of his apparent nihilism, was such that she acceded to his desires and closed down the entire ES apparatus in October, 1928. Leadbeater, aware that the ES was the occult heart of the Society, declared ‘[t]he woman must be mad’, and campaigned for its restitution (which was eventually to occur in December of the following year). To appease critics, and to diminish the concerns of those who were understandably confounded by the discrepancies between his (and the Masters’) teachings and those of the Lord Maitreya’s Vehicle, Leadbeater began to posit ‘twin paths’: mysticism and occultism. In April, 1929, he returned to Adyar, in part to assist the elderly Besant in the Society’s administration, and in part to attempt to rectify the damage caused by Krishnamurti.


120 In Wessinger, Annie Besant, 288, 303n75.

121 Ransom, A Short History, 484.


The Vehicle Charts a Pathless Land

On 3 August, 1929, Krishnamurti addressed the Star Camp at Ommen. In a justly famous speech, he closed the Order of the Star, and declared his eternal antipathy to exterior authority and to mediated religion. It is sufficiently significant to quote at some length:

I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. That is my point of view, and I adhere to that absolutely and unconditionally. Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organised; nor should any organisation be formed to lead or coerce people along any particular path ... In spite of this, you will probably form other Orders, you will continue to belong to other organisations searching for Truth. I do not want to belong to any organisation of a spiritual kind ... If an organisation be created for this purpose, it becomes a crutch, a weakness, a bondage, and must cripple the individual, and prevent him from growing, from establishing his uniqueness, which lies in the discovery for himself of that absolute, unconditioned Truth. So that is another reason why I have decided, as I happen to be the Head of the Order, to dissolve it. 125

About the achievements of the entire Theosophical adventist enterprise he was thoroughly dismissive:

For eighteen years you have been preparing for this event, for the Coming of the World Teacher. For eighteen years you have organised, you have looked for someone who would give a new delight to your hearts and minds, who would transform your whole life, who would give you a new understanding; for someone who

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124 In this context it is interesting to note that Besant later claimed that Krishnamurti would be the focus for a new (World) religion:

I do not say he will make one. But I think that his disciples will form a new religion out of his teachings. I am sure they will. He will not do it. No World Teacher makes a religion. His disciples do it ... That will be the religion of the new sub-race (quoted in Wessinger, Annie Besant, 295).

125 Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening, 272-273. Significantly, he also added at this point that ‘Truth cannot be brought down, rather the individual must make the effort to ascend to it’: Jayakar, Krishnamurti, 75. With a certain poignant irony, one feels sure that Blavatsky would have agreed.

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would raise you to a new plane of life, who would give you new encouragement, who would set you free - and now look what is happening! Consider, reason with yourselves, and discover in what way that belief has made you different - not with the superficial difference of the wearing of a badge, which is trivial, absurd. In what manner has such a belief swept away all unessential things of life? That is the only way to judge.\textsuperscript{126}

Perhaps the most damning indictment of all was reserved for the very occult authorities responsible for his prominence:

You [i.e. members of the Order] have been accustomed to being told how far you have advanced, what is your spiritual status. How childish! Who but yourself can tell if you are incorruptible? You are not serious in these things.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{126} Mary Lutyens, \textit{Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening}, 274.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 275; Jayakar, \textit{Krishnamurti}, 78.
Krishnamurti's complete disavowal of the central tenets of Leadbeaterian Theosophy caused something of a catastrophe for many Theosophists.\textsuperscript{128} Was he speaking as the Lord Maitreya? - in which case the 'Master of Masters' was opposed to all of the bodies which he himself had decreed be set up. Was he speaking just as Krishnamurti? - in which case the Lord Maitreya couldn't possibly intend to use this particular Vehicle, and there was likely to be no Coming at all. Either way the implications were disastrous. Besant, who was deeply attached to the person of Krishnamurti and who had invested many years into his preparation, was torn between an inability to surrender the old forms, or entirely to embrace the new; acceptance of

\textsuperscript{128} An insightful analysis of the various responses to Krishnamurti's apostasy is to be found in Schüller, *Krishnamurti and the World Teacher Project*. Schüller has created a typology to encapsulate the various positions:

1) The project was perceived as genuine and successful;
2) The project was perceived as genuine, but failed;
3) The project was perceived as not genuine and failed (of course); and
4) The project was perceived as not genuine, but succeeded!

Schüller has suggested the appropriateness of constructing 'a comprehensive Theosophical hypothesis about Krishnamurti' (in ibid., 26); the present author suspects that such a Theosophical meta-narrative would require the synthesising skills of a Blavatsky - and no such individual has appeared in the often fractious Theosophical milieu since her death. In this context it is important to note one such attempt: Aryel Sanat [Miguel Angel Sanabria], *The Inner Life of Krishnamurti, Private Passion and Perennial Wisdom*, Quest Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 1999. Sanat's work, which has proved immensely popular in Theosophical circles, is a factually-flawed attempt to reconcile Krishnamurti's antinomianism with Theosophy. Sanat, who avers that '[t]his study has been driven by a passion for the facts' (p.268), appears not to have employed any of the standard biographies of Leadbeater (Tillett's *Elder Brother*), Besant (Nethercott's *The First Five Lives; The Last Five Lives*) or Blavatsky (Meade's *Madame Blavatsky*), yet is evidently aware of them; elsewhere he has referred to 'T[illett]'s rag bio' as 'excrescential' (Aryel [Sanat], 'About Tillett' in <theos-talk@theosophy.com>, posted 12 May 2000; as it happens, Sanat's criticisms of Tillett are wholly without evidential basis). Several of Sanat's statements are suspect: Olcott cannot be considered as having been 'one of the most respected psychic investigators in the world' (p. 7), nor was he 'put in charge of the investigation of President Lincoln's assassination' (p. 7; in fact he was given a special commission to investigate conspiracy); it cannot be argued that Theosophy 'provided the philosophical and aesthetic foundations for the nonobjective art of the twentieth century' (p. 24); it is not possible to conclude that Leadbeater's 'psychic ability has stood up to the more rigorous scrutiny of researchers almost a century later' (p. 41). Sanat also entirely misunderstands Blavatsky's notion of a twentieth century 'avatar' (p. 265). Most problematic of all, Sanat's work reads like something of a methodological soup. It is an odd construction indeed to suggest that '[i]f such teachers [Masters] exist, yet were not behind this powerful and influential movement [Theosophy], would that not be an oversight of colossal proportions on their part?' (p. 24). Nor is it necessary to conclude that Krishnamurti's psychophysical stigmata ('the process') provide evidence for the Masters' existence:

If there were no perennial teachers in charge of the process, then the process remains a mystery - incomprehensible, unknowable. On the other hand, if what K said from when he first experienced the process in 1922 until his death in 1986 is accepted as true - that the process was conducted by the perennial teachers - then the experiences connected with it can be explained and need no longer remain a mystery (p. 30).

It is most unfortunate that Sanat's work, presented as a product of the academy (Sanat is Adjunct Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at the American University in Washington), is so comprehensively flawed. Schüller's *desideratum* thus remains unmet.

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either path would have necessitated the collapse of the intricate Theosophical structure over which she had presided for so long, and which she had helped to create. Many such as the octogenarian Besant - continued to equivocate; others, notably Leadbeater and many of the other Apostles, returned wholesale to occultism. Theosophical organisations such as the Liberal Catholic Church removed all mention of the World-Teacher from their doctrinal formulations.129 For his own part, Krishnamurti drifted in and out of the Theosophical ambit for some months and then resigned from the Society in 1930, noting that his 'teaching is neither occult nor mystic'.130

Very soon recriminations and confusion peaked, and the results of the mass attrition of the membership started to be felt.131 In order to stem the flow, the Theosophical elders proposed various explanations for the failure of the anticipated Coming. Wedgwood, as ever, relied on the influence of black magicians and perverse notions of conspiracy.132 Jinarajadasa rationalised that the Hierarchy had simply postponed the descent of the Lord Maitreya, and in a return to a more normative Mahāyāna postmillennialism, he posited that the Masters would await a period of universal


130 Ibid., 81; see also Anonymous [C. Jinarajadasa], 'The Society and Krishnaji', in *The Disciple*, 1:8, January, 1937, 135-138. It might be added that Krishnamurti was by then quite a wealthy man. The huge assets of the Order of the Star in the East were retained by the Society, but a large trust was established for Krishnamurti, to which he added several personal bequests from devotees. It could be argued that these were small comforts for the loss of a family life and the years of such unique and unsettling attention. George Arundale eventually ordered Krishnamurti off the Adyar estate and he was not welcomed back until 4 November, 1980. One final, no doubt unintentional, irony is afforded by the fact that Krishnamurti died on 17 February, 1986; at the time many found a charming symmetry in the fact that he died on Leadbeater's date of birth (and Olcott's date of death). As it happened, of course, Leadbeater was born on the 16th.

131 Figures vary dramatically regarding the loss of membership to the Society in the wake of Krishnamurti's dissolution of the Order of the Star. Tillett quotes *The Canadian Theosophist* (May, 1940) and *The O. E. Library Critic* (September, 1932) which suggest that between 1929 and 1938 membership dropped by 33.8%, and that in the years between 1927 and 1931, membership fell 66.5%. Although on the basis of other figures, the latter calculation seems highly inflated, the former appears correct. It is more certain that between 1928 and 1939, the number of lodges fell from 1586 to 1105.

132 Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 2, 797. It is not improbable that some of Wedgwood's visions and paranoia might have stemmed from his syphilis - a disease which, left untreated, eventually resulted in his clinical insanity.
Leadbeater, tellingly, came to see Krishnamurti as something of a messiah for the unenlightened masses, whose iconoclasm was the only means to ‘strike hard enough to make the necessary impressions upon a pacydermatous [sic] public’. Krishnaji is not speaking primarily to you and me - men who have accustomed ourselves for years to think of higher things ... he is aiming at the average unawakened entity whose thoughts centre chiefly around horse-racing, prize-fighting, football, business or pleasure; he must find a phraseology which will penetrate a fairly solid wall.

This typically Leadbeaterian rationalisation served its author well. By relegating Krishnamurti’s teachings to the status of (necessarily) exoteric brow-beating, he was able to maintain a structurally-elitist occult credo. Crucial to the exercise was the notion that the Masters do exist, but due to the lack of evolutionary development of the greater part of humanity, their existence, and even their presence in the person of Krishnamurti, must be kept a secret. Only the highly evolved could be expected to realise the truth. Leadbeater had cleverly manoeuvred around questions of the veracity of the Coming, and had returned the belief in the Masters to its proper home: the

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133 Jinarajadasa, The War - and After, 14-23, 27ff. Jinarajadasa also seemed to suggest that Krishnamurti might one day be reconciled with the Society and take his place again as Vehicle. To this end, Theosophists were to work for ‘World Unity’, and seek to establish such bodies as a World Bank, a Central Police Force, and a Central Board of Trustees of Backward Peoples’: in ibid., 54-55.

134 This rather forced rationalisation of Krishnamurti’s teachings appeared in numerous Theosophical publications: for details see Tillett, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 1, 788; vol. 3, 1054n57.

135 ‘Krishnaji’ is a term of honour and endearment which continues to be used by devotees to this day.

136 Ibid.

137 In this context the comments of J. J. van der Leeuw are instructive:

It takes the mental acrobatics of trained theosophical students to reconcile the contradictory facts contained in the earlier revelations and the subsequent teachings of Krishnamurti ... The fact that Krishnamurti denies the value of all these [Co-Masonry, the Liberal Catholic Church, inter alia] is then explained by the fact that he, being ‘only a vehicle’, cannot express fully the ‘glorious consciousness’ which they, the speakers, know so much more intimately than he. Thus it means nothing that he should contradict things previously revealed, it only shows that at that time, it was not the World Teacher speaking - but only Mr. Krishnamurti (J. J. van der Leeuw, Revelation or Realization: The Conflict in Theosophy, N. V. Theosophische Vereeniging Uitgevers Maatschappij, Amsterdam, 1930, 25-26).
Society and, particularly, the ES. His solution had a rather Blavatskian charm.

Privately, Leadbeater suggested that in fact the Coming hadn't happened at all as the personality of Krishnamurti had prevented the Lord Maitreya from occupying his body. Arundale agreed with this explanation of 'obstructive personality': in ibid., 796-797. Frank Borchartd has suggested that failure is 'an intrinsic feature' of the myth of the Renaissance magus; such an observation might be apposite here also: see Frank L. Borchartd, 'The Magus as Renaissance Man' in Sixteenth Century Journal XXI:1, 1990, 57-76.
CHAPTER 22

AN OCCULT LABORATORY

The World Mother and the Seven Virgins of Java

Leadbeater's final years were spent, as ever, in the planning of new occult Orders. In 1928, he and Besant had announced the existence of a previously unknown member of the Hierarchy: the World Mother. The World Mother, as it transpired, was none other than Mary, the mother of [the Master] Jesus, who had later chosen to become an angel and was now to select Rukmini Arundale as her earthly agent. Although the promotion of the World Mother tended to be smothered by the profundity of concentration upon the World-Teacher, it nevertheless proved of interest to the media, particularly when Besant declared a 'World Mother Day' (25 March: the Roman Catholic feast of the Annunciation). One Theosophist suggested that the inauguration of the World Mother was a means of deflecting 'Krishnamurti's smashings'. Others

1 The first mention of 'the Mother' as a member of the Hierarchy (indeed, as a Fourth Person of the Trinity) occurs in Besant, Esoteric Christianity, 261-263. It is unlikely that the idea originated with Leadbeater who was notoriously chauvinistic, but he soon capitalised on it: cf., eg., C. W. Leadbeater, The Masters and the Path, 2nd ed., The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1927 (which includes material on the World Mother, unlike the 1925 edn.); also id., The Masters and the Path, 'Abridged Edition', The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1969, 250-254, which, strangely for an abridged edition, includes significantly more material on the same subject. No doubt Leadbeater was also thinking of Arundale's announcement in 1925 of an Order for Women: see supra ch. 21. It should not be forgotten that Blavatsky herself posited a primal matrix, 'the synthesis of all forces in Nature': Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, vol. I, 137. For Boehmian parallels see Trompf, 'Macrohistory', 277, 280.

2 The figure of Mary is treated at length in C. W. Leadbeater, The World Mother as Symbol and Fact, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1949. Due to her remarkable sacrifice of her son [the Master] Jesus (overshadowed by the Bodhisattva Maitreya), Mary was offered a number of positions in the Hierarchy, but chose instead to become an angel: see Rukmini [Arundale], 'The World Mother', in [Issued by the O. H.] Shishya, 1:3 (new series), August, 1934, 83-91; C. W. Leadbeater, 'A World-Mother Movement', in The Disciple, 1:5, August, 1935, 50-54. It might be remembered that Leadbeater posited dual streams of evolution: human and angelic (thus in opposition to the unitary modelling of Blavatsky). It was never satisfactorily confirmed as to whether the World Mother would overshadow Rukmini, or whether she was simply some sort of special envoy; one suspects that the details were left to follow the events (which didn't "occur"). Rukmini later denied that she was ever supposed to represent the World Mother: see Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 3, 1052n16; see also C. Jinarajadasa, The Problem of Problems, 'For Private Circulation Only', [privately printed?], n.pl., n.d., 10-12.

3 Ibid., vol. 2, 762-763. A journal was started for the movement, but it survived for only one issue: The World Mother, 1:1, May, 1928. In it Besant declared that '[t]he Coming Age is the Age of Motherhood'.

wondered exactly how many more members of the Inner Government there could be.

As a Theosophical movement, the World Mother stalled, but not before Leadbeater had brought to The Manor in 1926/7 seven teenage girls from the Dutch East Indies who were to work especially for her.6 ‘The Seven Virgins of Java’, as they were known, had been selected from prominent Theosophical families and were accorded singular occult status and given a uniform of blue robes and opal rings.7 The girls were trained in various occult disciplines and were admitted to the ES, and, despite their youth, created 33° Co-Masons.

The Seven Virgins became central to Leadbeater’s final occult enterprise. As Krishnamurti’s apostasy from ritualist Theosophy became ever more pronounced, he secretly activated his charter for the Masonic Rite of Memphis, and began the

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5 Tillet notes that there was some speculation about such figures as a possible World Infant: Tillet, ‘Charles Webster Leadbeater’, vol. 2, 766.

6 For clarity it should be pointed out that each of the girls was of Dutch origin - and thus not indigenous to what would now be called Indonesian Java. Most of the girls were selected by Leadbeater during his visits in the late 1920s. At this time he also wrote his clairvoyant investigations into Javanese history, which were published posthumously: C. W. Leadbeater, The Occult History of Java, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1951. Only in his last years did Leadbeater encourage female pupils, but even then they seem to have been considered collectively - unlike the boys who were accorded individual, often private, occult instruction.

7 The blue uniform (and Australian opal ring) were intended as a ‘focus of the influence which She will pour out’: in ibid., 767. The names of the seven girls were: Paula Hamerster, Hilda van der Stok, Eleonora van der Stok, Lilie van Thiel, Marietje van Gulik, Leoni van Gulik, and Hannie Vreede. It might be noted that Paula Mango, née Hamerster - who later married Russell ‘Dick’ Balfour-Clarke - stated in later life that none of the ‘Seven Virgins’ had believed any of the claims made in her behalf, but that each was convinced the others believed. Eventually, apparently, they all realised their shared suspicions: signed transcript of interview with Gregory Tillet (who spoke at length with Paula Mango), 8 September, 1996.
construction of a specifically Leadbeaterian Theosophical Freemasonry. The Egyptian Rite of the Ancient Mysteries, as it was called, was designed to provide what no other Theosophical endeavour had ever felt confident to claim: guaranteed membership of the Hierarchy. In so doing, the Egyptian Rite constitutes the logical culmination of fifty years of Theosophy.

The Egyptian Rite of the Ancient Mysteries

The Egyptian Rite was designed, just as the failed Coming had been, to draw together the powerful occult forces generated by the Liberal Catholic Church, Co-Masonry, and other Theosophical ceremonialist enterprises; indeed, Leadbeater believed it would 'gather up' the various angels. The rituals, variously devised by Bishops Wedgwood, Arundale, and Leadbeater, were ratified by the Master the Count, and were first performed by the Seven Virgins (and others) at the newly-inaugurated Co-Masonic Temple on the Adyar compound, following the reestablishment of the ES in late 1929. Despite some later revisions by Arundale and Nilakanta Sri Ram (1889-1974), the Egyptian Rite is still worked in a number of Adyar Society bodies, and

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8 Leadbeater had received a warrant for 'all rights and privileges of the Rite of Memphis' from Reginald Macbean, sometime after May, 1925. Macbean, who had been elevated to the Grand Mastership of the Rite of Memphis at the Sanctuary of Palermo in July, 1921, was also a Co-Mason, and professed high regard for Leadbeater. Leadbeater was aided in his endeavours by Arundale and Wedgwood, who had both utterly rejected Krishnamurti. For details of the warrant, see supra ch. 19.

That the Egyptian Rite was based on the Memphis warrant is obvious from the writings of the Egyptian Rite renegade, Herbrand Williams:

The Egyptian Rite was chartered by the Sovereign Sanctuary of the Rite of Memphis then seated at Palermo, as a Masonic Body; and there was no warrant whatever for the denial of its Masonic status, particularly in view of the fact that the late Grand Master of the Supreme Council of Universal Co-Masonry had been freely consulted by Bishop Wedgwood at the time of the issue of the Charter (Herbrand Williams, The Work of the Seventh Ray: An Instruction from the Master the Prince Ragoczi (Being Revised notes of an Address delivered at Stamford House, on Whit Monday, 1934, by Captain Herbrand Williams), n.p., n.d., 11)

9 Tillett, 'Charles Webster Leadbeater', vol. 2, 816.
10 Ibid., 814.
11 Nilakanta Sri Ram was President of the Society from 1953 to 1973, and was also Grand Master of the Egyptian Rite.
constitutes perhaps the most secret of their various ceremonies. In many ways, it constitutes Leadbeater's most profound Theosophical legacy.

The Rite itself, not unexpectedly, is a highly ceremonial quasi-Masonic theurgy, with parallels to similar enterprises such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the Fratres Lucis, the Society of Eight, and the Royal Oriental Order of the Sikha and the Sat B'hai. Where the Egyptian Rite differs from other initiatic bodies, notably the various permutations of Rosicrucianism, is in its 'fundamentally Theosophical' structures and metastructures. Not only does it employ the traditional septenary scale of Theosophy (unlike the decadal Kabbalistic systematisation preferred by the overwhelming majority of magical Orders), and require candidates to swear fealty upon a copy of At the Feet of the Master, but it presupposes an exact parallel between the initiatic hierarchy of the Rite and the Hierarchy of the Masters.

12 There has been but one public mention of the Egyptian Rite, in Tillett's The Elder Brother, of 1982. He refers to an 'Egyptian Rite of Ancient Freemasonry', though the official title appears always to have been the Egyptian Rite of the Ancient Mysteries. His use of the name 'Egyptian Rite of Ancient Freemasonry' may well have come from Leadbeater's document of relinquishment of the Grand Mastership which states the following:

Arundale - Adyar - Madras
Dying here I consecrate you as Grand Master of the Egyptian Rite of Ancient Freemasonry. C. W. Leadbeater.
Witness: Heather Kellett (?), 18.2.34 (Copy in the possession of the present author).

One suspects that both were operative titles. George Arundale, the first Grand Secretary of the Egyptian Rite, suggested that '[w]hen not in actual use [the rituals] must be kept under lock and key': [The Egyptian Rite of the Ancient Mysteries], The Egyptian Rite of the Ancient Mysteries, Sovereign Sanctuary of the Egyptian Rite of the Ancient Mysteries, [Adyar], 1932, 'Important Notice'.

13 As Leadbeater believed that Freemasonry began in Egypt, his attraction to the Rite of Memphis is immediately explicable. The Apron worn by Egyptian Rite initiates is to be found as the illustration facing the title page of his The Hidden Life in Freemasonry (1926). There are slight modifications: e.g., the hieroglyphs at the apex of the triangle are replaced with the Biblical 'I.N.R.I.'. Initiates also wear a distinctive cartouche-like necklace.


15 [The Egyptian Rite of the Ancient Mysteries], The Egyptian Rite of the Ancient Mysteries, 'The Temple of the Quest: Ceremony of Opening the Temple in the Stage of Fire', 4.
The first three stages (Fire, Form, and Life) are known collectively as the 'Temple of the Quest'. Through the medium of ritual the candidate is encouraged to divest his or her emotional and physical bodies of impurities, then to do similarly with the mind, and finally with the intuition and will. During the ceremonies, Egyptian Rite officers each personify various of the principles of conscious evolution, as defined by the doctrine of the Seven Rays, and take such names as might be appropriate: *Voluntas, Sapientia, Artifex, Mente, Astra, Etha* (the representative of the 'etheric body'), *Ardua*, and *Angelus*:

In fact, the whole Ritual may be regarded as a dramatization of the true functions of the various Principles and bodies, so externalized that, as in a mystic mirror, the individual sees himself as he is destined to become.16

Having passed the third degree, the candidate is deemed to have become worthy of acceptance by the Masters. The fourth stage, that of the Temple of the Rose and the Cross, is designed to guarantee the aspirant becomes a Probationer:

*Guardian of the Gate*: Knight of the Star, the Watcher in this Outer Court reports the approach to our Temple of a Seeker for the Light, whose selfless and eager search has gained for him Probation in its service by a Lord of Light. He therefore prays admission to our ranks.17

In the fifth degree, the probationer becomes a *chela*, 'an Accepted Servant of the Light', and has been elevated to the Outer Temple, or Temple of the Dawn.18 From there, the *chela* progresses to Initiation in the sixth degree:

[The sixth stage is] the entry into the Inner Temple itself, the Temple of the Star, the service of which is restricted to members of the Great Brotherhood of Light - from the youngest Initiate to the Masters, Lords, Princes, Rulers of Light; nay, to the very King Himself [the Lord of the World]. These are the Brothers of the Light.19

16 Ibid., 5: emphasis added.
17 Ibid., 'The Temple of the Rose and the Cross: Ceremony of Admission to the Temple', 22. Most of this passage was later deleted from the ritual in the 1950s.
18 Ibid., 'The Temple of the Quest: Ceremony of Opening the Temple in the Stage of Fire', 9.
19 Ibid., 10.
Thus the sixth degree is peopled by those ‘who have been privileged to become young members of the Great Brotherhood, the Inner Government of the world’. The seventh stage is occupied by members of the Sovereign Sanctuary, otherwise known as the ‘Governing Body of the Egyptian Rite’ or, crucially, ‘Masters of Light’: Besant as titular Grand Master, Arundale as Grand Secretary, and Leadbeater as presiding genius.

Leadbeater categorised the Egyptian Rite as ‘the most powerful occult ritual in the world’. Its novelty exists in its explicit identification of Theosophical initiation conducted by Theosophists with occult advancement proffered by the Masters. In the simplest possible terms, Leadbeater and his associates had arrogated unto themselves both the rôle and privilege of the Master - as the initiations they conferred were ipso facto deemed to be confirmed on the Inner Planes. Thus, although performed in the name of the Masters, the latter were made effectively redundant, for the ritual itself was sufficient to activate personal evolution.

Where Blavatsky had taught that wisdom was what made the Masters unique (although, by displaying a Masters-granted phenomenalism, she never really closed the door on hysterical Himalayan searches for paranormal boons), Leadbeater concentrated on their occult power. In his occultistic drive to explain the metaphysical in quasi-scientific and rationalistic terms, he came upon the obvious corollary that the Masters’ power could be understood in an identical way. If, then, the Masters’ power belonged in the empirical domain, it could be independently examined and replicated. He had ‘observed’ the occult technologies of the Master the Count and the Lord Maitreya in Co-Masonic and Liberal Catholic services, which had resulted in books classifiable most readily as ‘Do-It-Yourself’ guides. When his first attempt to ‘create’ a Master - through the person of Krishnamurti - proved a demonstrable failure, Leadbeater turned to the Egyptian Rite as the ideal means to control the process of

Ibid.

The term ‘Master’, used in the context of Masonic ritual, can simply infer high degree or leadership of the lodge. In a Theosophical context the term has obvious references to the Great White Brotherhood. Leadbeater would have been aware of the double valency, and exploited it. His selection of the term ‘Master of Light’ is in accord with the Egyptian Rite’s tendency to speak of the Masters as Brothers of the Light: the attempted identity is clear.

Master-making. As a consequence, he could not but usurp the privilege of the Masters themselves. In designating himself a 'Master of Light', with all of the powers which inhere in such an office, Leadbeater had finally compressed the remaining space between mundane humanity and the Great White Brotherhood, and had declared himself the only Master necessary.\

33 The subsequent history of the Egyptian Rite is in itself illuminating in this regard. Within months of Leadbeater's death, Herbrand Williams (a Liberal Catholic Church priest, sometime resident of The Manor, and editor of The Liberal Catholic) had declared that the Master spoke through him, and began issuing 'Instructions'. Arundale, horrified by the imputation, replied that he had 'no authority whatever to accept you as a medium of communication from the Master' and that 'I fear that you are being very grossly deceived'; G. S. Arundale to Capt. [H.] Williams, 29 June, 1934 in Williams, The Work of the Seventh Ray, 17. Williams was suspended from the Egyptian Rite and, together with his associate Basil Beaumont, began to issue various messages from the Master the Count: cf., e.g., ['The Master the Prince Ivan Ragoczi'], Message to the Pupils and Aspirants of the Theosophical Society, n.p., n.d.

Soon after assuming office as President of the Society (and Grand Mastership of the Egyptian Rite), N. Sri Ram sent out a circular to all members of the 4th, 5th, and 6th degrees which eloquently isolated the problems inherent in the (as then formulated) Egyptian Rite:

This is an important communication the object of which is to make it clear that in future those who are admitted to the 4th, 5th and 6th Stages of the Egyptian Rite should not be presumed to be necessarily in the Occult stages to which these stages of the Egyptian Rite may be said to correspond ... It has been too readily assumed that the link made in each stage of the Egyptian Rite would continue automatically to function, even without any special attempt on the part of the person admitted ... As a consequence of the publicity accorded in the past through the Egyptian Rite to the Occult status of individuals, whether real or pretended, there has been much jealousy, disappointment and discouragement, as well as a false judgment of oneself and others ... It has been always true, though a truth not always realized, that each one's progress depends solely upon himself, and not on any organization, however splendid, nor on the favor of any person, however exalted (N. Sri Ram, The Egyptian Rite of the Ancient Mysteries, To Members of the Egyptian Rite, 4th, 5th and 6th Stages, 'Private', Madras, April, 1954).

The Rite, as now constituted, has been altered to take account of this change of direction. Thus:

In the Outer Court you have sought earnestly and served truly, winning the recognition of a Lord of Light. Will you, in this Inner Court, strive with all your heart to deserve Acceptance at his hands?

has become:

In the Outer Court you have sought earnestly and served truly. Will you, in this Inner Court, strive with all your heart to serve the Lord of Light whom you desire to follow ([The Egyptian Rite of the Ancient Mysteries], The Egyptian Rite of the Ancient Mysteries, 'The Temple of the Rose and the Cross', 24, handwritten changes).

Perhaps the most significant change - and one which is emblematic of the subsequent history of the Theosophical Society generally - is that the current Outer Head of the ES (and ipso facto Grand Master of the Egyptian Rite), Radha Burnier, has closed all but the Temple of the Quest. No Probationers, Pupils, or indeed Masters, can now be 'created' by means of the Leadbeaterian theurgy of the Egyptian Rite.
**Leadbeaterian Theosophy and Causative Theurgy**

A short review will indicate that the Egyptian Rite was the logical outcome of all of Leadbeater’s previous clairvoyant and ceremonial occultisms. The first part of his Theosophical career had been spent mapping the Blavatskian terrain, yet he was temperamentally disinclined to engage with a broad cosmo-historiographical vision as she had done, and instead set about reducing her grand metastructures into more manageable portions; the universe gave way to the solar system, the four yugas became truncated and compressed as the eras of the Seven Rays, and the Masters of the Wisdom were depicted as being akin to roving ‘Ministers and Secretaries of State’. In so doing he was able to translate Blavatsky’s sophisticated esotericisms into a popular (and occasionally populist) Spiritualistic occultism, given colour and dynamism by the often fantastic visions afforded him by his astral perception. Whereas Blavatsky’s *modus operandi* was to employ a form of eccentrically-scientific esoteric textual hermeneutic, through which all human discourse could be sifted and reconfigured to expose the underlying *philosophia perennis*, Leadbeater ignored history, scripture, and philosophy altogether, choosing instead a quasi-Spiritualistic visionary process. By focussing on an apparatus of ‘astral perception’ he was able to ‘see’ the Theosophical metastructures at first hand, and describe them for others in terms borrowed self-consciously from scientific rationalism. Necessary concurrence with Blavatsky was maintained by remaining for the most part within the circumscribed boundaries of pre-mapped cosmological, anthropological, and historiographical paradigms.

One of the boundaries which Leadbeater could not ignore, and which he consciously exploited for his own ends, was the figure of the Master. The Masters circumscribed the edges of the Theosophical domain, were its supreme revelators, and the embodiment of its authority. Yet the Masters *qua* Masters were an elite - necessarily at a remove from human commerce. The dynamic tension between the ontological separateness of the Masters, and the exigencies of guaranteeing their oversight and...
personal involvement in the lives of Society members, caused occasional breaches in the Theosophical edifice during Blavatsky's tenure as 'mouthpiece'. Yet the medium of the Mahatma letters, the sheer indomitability of Blavatsky, and the occasional sightings of the Brothers themselves, enabled the Masters to appear sufficiently close to the mundane realm to maintain an adequate esprit de corps among the faithful. Leadbeater, in characteristic fashion, brought the Masters even closer to the membership (while maintaining their necessary physical distance); he was only rarely the recipient of Masters-letters, and had no need to 'produce' Masters in propria persona for the simple reason that he was in constant psychic communication with the entire hierarchy. Conveniently, he was thus also protected from latter-day 'Coulombs' and 'Hodgsons'.

Leadbeater's ardent occultistic desire to rationalise his clairvoyant visions, and to appeal to scientific causality to explain putative meta-empirical phenomena, meant that he was much less interested in the nature of the gnosis conferred by the Masters, than

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26 Leadbeater noted:

Letters used to be received from the Masters ... that was quite a feature of that early system of propaganda. The Masters Themselves not infrequently materialized and showed Themselves among us. I have seen, I think, nearly all of Them in that way in the earlier days. That time has entirely passed. We do not now accept letters for the Masters. They do not materialize Themselves among us. Instead, They communicate, when They wish to do so, through Their pupils, and very rarely, except with those who are already pupils of Theirs. They rarely send messages for outer people (C. W. Leadbeater, 'H. P. Blavatsky' in The Theosophist, LIX:8, May, 1938, 135).

It is interesting to note that many of Leadbeater's latter-day disciples attempted to contact the Masters through his own techniques; Elvis Presley (1935-1977), who regarded Leadbeater highly, attempted such - even to the degree of wearing a green Mahatma-like turban while performing healings: see Goldman, Elvis, 452-453, 464-465, et passim.
in the dynamics of its transformative potentialities. As a consequence, Leadbeaterian Theosophy is, unlike its Blavatskian equivalent, divorced from text and meaning: interest in the Masters is less in the ‘what’, than in the ‘how’. Ergo, the ceremonial of Liberal Catholicism and Co-Masonry is of far greater significance than the transmission of sensible meaning. (To this degree, Leadbeater proposed a form of applied occult semiotics). Yet the value of the revealed text or liturgy, whether The Secret Doctrine or the Missa Romana, is not entirely abandoned - just reinterpreted mechanistically as a conduit for transmutational power: when grace and gnosis are placed in the crucible of Leadbeaterian Theosophy, they reappear simply as power.

In tracing the passage of divine power, mediated by the Masters through ceremonial, and articulating it ratiocinatively as a form of circuitry, Leadbeater had consciously subjugated the meta-empirical to the dictates of the empirical. Empiricism qua empiricism infers replicability, and Leadbeater’s analyses of ritual are thus a species of occult physics (fully akin to his previous occult chemistry) which promises predetermined outcomes if the ceremony is always performed correctly and under identical conditions. Having discerned the scientific basis of the Masters’ power, he logically inferred that he himself could replicate that power. In so doing he must be seen as perhaps the most significant and influential of a thoroughly new breed of twentieth century magicians - the causative theurgists.

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Rudolf Steiner’s assessment of Leadbeater might be apposite in this context, and is reminiscent to some degree of Hanegraaff’s distinction of artistic versus occultistic gnosis:

Mr. Leadbeater’s occult methods ... can only lead to a positive result if, standing behind everyone who enters on the path of development, there is the absolute authority of a guru - which is impossible in the West due to the general cultural situation. Western people can be led to the stage of psychic development where Leadbeater stood only if the part of their guidance that can no longer proceed from the guru is replaced by a mental development that has reached a certain stage. And Mr. Leadbeater lacks this stage of development. In this case I do not refer merely to an intellectual philosophical training, but to the development of a stage of consciousness that consists of inwardly contemplative insight, which simply demands the stage of brain development that must be the prerequisite of the Westerner. In Germany, for example, the way to this kind of learning must be taken from the thought-mysticism of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, which is not at all understood according to its true occult basis (Rudolf Steiner to Annie Besant, July, 1906, in Steiner, From the History, 269-270).
The Making of a Master

The demiurgical powers which Leadbeater arrogated unto himself were nowhere better displayed than in his promotion of Krishnamurti. The young Brahmin was his magical tabula rasa, upon whom he could imprint his magical power, and, through ritual and initiation, cleanse of all impurity (and indigenousness) and elevate into the high echelons of the Hierarchy. Krishnamurti has been regularly interpreted in messianic terms, and there can be no doubt that for the popular membership, and certainly for the media, such was the rôle for which he was groomed. Yet, in placing Krishnamurti within the context of a half-century of Theosophy, it becomes clear that for the leaders of the Society he was, tellingly, the ultimate occultistic experiment.

There are several indicators that the Vehicle was engineered to develop into a Master, and not simply be some form of passive receptacle. Thus, although the dynamics of the Coming of the Bodhisattva Maitreya were never closely articulated, it was always assumed that the Vehicle would require significant preparation to become the requisite worthy tool. Such preparation would be equivalent to that required for the Palestinian Jesus, who himself was used by the Lord Maitreya for a comparable purpose. Consequently, the scholar is aided in assessing the predicted method of the descent of the Maitreya, and thereby also assess the relative position of the Vehicle, by reference to the vocabulary of Christology.

Catherine Lowman Wessinger has gone to some pains to determine how messianism (normally associated with premillennialism) could be found to agree with the Theosophical tendency to value human evolution and progress - which is much more akin to a form of postmillennialism. (It should be noted that the existence of strains of both forms of messianism in one formulation is not entirely uncommon). In order to coalesce these otherwise divergent philosophies, she posits for Besant a 'progressive messianism':

> Since Besant's thought combined elements that have in the past been associated by scholars with pre-millenarianism, i.e., messianism, and a sense of imminence and urgency of the total, collective, terrestrial salvation, with a belief in history that acts in a progressive, evolutionary manner, I have elected to call Besant's final pattern of ultimate concern progressive messianism. This pattern of ultimate concern was not possible until there was a common belief in progress, which in the West dates from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Wessinger, Annie Besant and Progressive Messianism, 314-315).

Wessinger's entire thesis is predicated upon the assumption that Krishnamurti is to be interpreted solely as a Theosophical messiah, for, without a messiah, Theosophical 'progressive messianism' becomes just a form of postmillennialism. If, as is proposed in the present research, Krishnamurti is interpreted primarily as being an experiment in Master-making, then external superhuman agency is removed, evolutionist progressivism is emphasised, and Theosophical postmillennialism is thus underscored. Consequently, the 'ultimate concern' for Theosophy, which is surely 'a common belief in progress', is maintained without recourse to such arbitrary compounds as 'progressive messianism'.
According to Leadbeater and Besant, Jesus had been prepared for his mission by the Essenes (who possessed a vast library of occult works, notably those from the ‘Trans-Himalayan regions’), and was then initiated into the Egyptian Mysteries. Exactly what form this training assumed is unknown, although it is deemed to have been rigorous. At his baptism in the Jordan, the Lord Maitreya/Bodhisattva/Christ descended upon him and remained so for the remainder of his three-year ministry. The Maitreya departed from Jesus at some time during the Passion, certainly by the crucifixion, and Jesus’ physical body died. (The disciple Jesus undertook his Fourth Initiation during his crucifixion). In reward for his self-sacrifice, Jesus was reborn only twice more (as Apollonius of Tyana and Ramanujacharya), was granted the Fifth Initiation, and soon thereafter became the Master Jesus:

In due course [Jesus] received the reward of his self-sacrifice, and attained the Asekha Initiation, thereby becoming one of the Masters of the Wisdom. We reverence Him now, therefore, no longer as the disciple, but the Master Jesus.

There are several discernibly significant ramifications for Krishnamurti’s candidacy as the Vehicle to be drawn from Leadbeater’s and Besant’s accounts of the Palestinian Jesus. In the first place, there is neither a hypostatic union of substance (ousia), nor an identification of the Lord Maitreya’s nature (his physis) with that of Krishnamurti. At most, there can be discerned an occasional prosopically identifiable

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\[35\] Probably the most straightforward account of Besant-Leadbeater Christian historiography/historicity is to be found in Besant, *Esoteric Christianity*, 126-143 et passim.

\[36\] Ibid., 132-133.


\[39\] Leadbeater, *The Hidden Side of Christian Festivals*, 29. It might be noted that Leadbeater here equated the ‘Masters of the Wisdom’ with the Fifth or Asekha Initiation, not with the Sixth or Chohan. It appears that even by 1920 he had not fully stratified his initiatory schematics.

\[40\] The present author is aware of the problematical variety of historical and contemporary approaches to such terms as ousia and physis, and the complexities thereby engendered by their use. Nevertheless, employing such loaded terms in a necessarily broad fashion, they seem to be the most appropriate for discussing what is, after all, a Theosophical Christology.
as a highly simplistic Nestorian adoptionism. In other words, the Christ’s subtle bodies descended into Jesus’ physical body for a portion of the latter’s incarnation; there are distinguishable occasions when the ‘divine’ Person is speaking, and other occasions when the human person is speaking.

In accord with such adoptionism, the preparation of the Vehicle is entirely predictable and necessary; Krishnamurti would need to be perfectly versed in Theosophy, and be physically and psychically fit in order ‘to become the temple of a loftier Power’. Unlike a Spiritualist medium (from whom the Theosophists were ever ready to separate themselves), Krishnamurti was not to be occupied or invaded by a spirit entity, but ‘overshadowed’. To be thus capable, his preparations were presumed to be identical to those required to become a Master. It is highly significant in this context that the Palestinian Jesus was very nearly a Master himself after his service as a Vehicle, and became one very soon thereafter. It is evident that Krishnamurti was considered by Theosophical elders to be about to be similarly blessed and exalted.

Within the framework of Leadbeaterian Theosophy, then, selection as a Vehicle was tantamount to rapid acceleration of personal evolution and a virtual guarantee of joining the Hierarchy. Leadbeater’s articulation of the Coming was thus a concomitant descent of the ‘Master of Masters’ and an engineered ascent of the aspirant-Master, thus although one hesitates to call Nestorius (d. circa 451) a Nestorian, the term ‘Nestorianism’ has gained tenure in every Christological debate and cannot be dislodged. ‘Nestorianism’ is also favoured because it has become something of a catchall for the multifarious Antiochene Christologies: in the present context the closest approximation is probably to that of Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428), who advocated a union effected through grace, and not by nature - although, even here, there is every indication of Theodore’s basic orthodoxy (just a tendency to attempt to rationalise the abstract through necessarily limited discursive language: a tendency of which Leadbeater would have thoroughly approved!). It should be noted that Theodore did not advocate the disengagement of the Logos prior to the crucifixion, as Theosophists have done. For Nestorius and Theodore see Aloys Grillmeier, Christ in Christian Tradition, vol. 1, 2nd ed., Mowbrays, London, 1975, 488-519; Gerard H. Ettlinger, Jesus, Christ & Saviour, Michael Glazier, Wilmington, Delaware, 1987, 160ff; Frances M. Young, From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background, SCM Press, London, 1983, 199-240.

When Krishnamurti began to teach that he was one with his ‘beloved’, and spoke consistently in ‘one’ voice, so to say, Besant began to believe that rather than an occasional message from the Lord Maitreya, there was to be ‘more like a blending of consciousness’: Jayakar, Krishnamurti, 72. She further suggested that he had been accounted worthy to ‘blend his consciousness with that of a fragment, an amsa, of the omnipresent consciousness of the World Teacher’: Mary Lutyens, The Life and Death, 73. Such statements appear suspiciously like ex post facto rationalisations for a Vehicle ‘gone off the rails’. Besant, Esoteric Christianity, 130-131.

See supra ch. 19.
creating a full Master of the Wisdom. The entire process was buttressed from without by Leadbeater’s insistence on the value of causative magical processes; Krishnamurti would be elevated to the status of a Master by magico-scientific ritual, whether Liberal Catholic sacrament, Co-Masonic induction or clairvoyantly-determined initiation. To this degree, Leadbeater’s magical apotheosising of Krishnamurti cannot but be compared with the ‘god-making’ passages of the Hermetic Asclepius, the golem of Kabbalistic lore, and the Paracelsian homunculus. Crucially, to the degree that Leadbeater’s adventism was explained in scientific terms, and founded on what he considered to be empirical principles, the most significant predicate may well prove a literary one: Mary Shelley’s schauerromantik, Frankenstein.

Krishnamurti’s reluctance to engage in ritualism (aside from the greater problem: his disavowal of Theosophy) conspired against Leadbeater’s notion that causative theurgy could create a Master. Where the elderly Besant abdicated from any rôle in refashioning the Theosophical enterprise following Krishnamurti’s apostasy (stating

It should be remembered that Leadbeater considered ceremonial (particularly Eucharistic services) as a means to speed up evolutionary processes:

The great advantage of ceremonies is that they offer an easy way of doing a great deal of good in a short space of time (C. W. Leadbeater, ‘Ritual and Its Use’ in The Morning Star: Journal of the Eastern Federation of the British Empire. Order of International Co-Freemasonry, V:2, April, 1939, 32).

For the Hermetic ‘god-making’ see infra ch. 23. One is reminded of Wouter Hanegraaff’s comments in the context of an analysis of the Renaissance Christian Hermetist, Ludovico Lazzarelli (1450-1500): The goal was, rather, the attainment of a superior gnosis, which naturally entailed the attainment of superhuman powers. The “true human being”, who had ‘discovered the nature of God’ himself, would partake of the latter’s creative/generative power; and he would indeed know ‘how to make it’, i.e. how to procreate a ‘divine offspring’ (Hanegraaff, ‘Sympathy’, 30).

Space disallows treatment of the Golem mythologem as an analogue to Leadbeater’s ‘creation’ of Krishnamurti, other than to note certain suggestive sympathies. First, the creation of the Golem has a relationship of affinity with the formation of Adam. Thus the fashioning of the artificial anthropoid is an imitation of the divine activity, and a usurpation of the divine prerogative. Second, the Golem is invariably silent and remains the subject of its creator. It cannot - even if it possessed such an Adamic trait - express free will. Third, the creation of the Golem is indication of the realisation of mature theosophico-theurgic powers by the magician. Each of these motivations can be discerned in Leadbeater’s magico-scientific attempt to transform Krishnamurti into a Master. For the Golem gestalt see Idel’s masterful work: Moshe Idel, Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1990, esp. 165-195 & part 4; see also Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah, Meridian, New York, 1978, 351-355. For the (erroneous) ascription of Golem-making to Rabbi Yehuda Loew ben Bezalal of Prague (the ‘Maharal’) see Idel, Golem, 251-258; Byron L. Sherwin, Mystical Theology and Social Dissent: The Life and Works of Judah Loew of Prague, Associated University Press, East Brunswick, New Jersey, 1982, 17ff; Ben Zion Bokser, The Maharal: The Mystical Philosophy of Rabbi Juda Loew of Prague, Jason Aronson, Northvale, New Jersey, 1994, 55-58.

Like the Monster, Krishnamurti also turned on his creator. For Mary Shelley see infra ch. 29.
instead, ‘I am his inferior and where I do not understand I suspend my judgment hoping to grow into understanding’), Leadbeater swept away any sense of failure by rationalising the event as a failed scientific experiment.

His next project, the Egyptian Rite, pointedly removed all contingential reliance upon the aspirant. As the graded structure of the Rite corresponded exactly with that of the Great White Brotherhood, and progress from one stage to the next was determined according to ritualised initiation, control could be maintained over the development of candidates, and initiatic grace/power could be conferred via the initiator, rather than through an exterior party (such as the Lord Maitreya). This last is of great significance because meta-empirical agency could be assumed to be present by the initiand, but not required by the initiator - who has arrogated unto himself the function of the Masters to welcome aspirants into the Hierarchy. The Egyptian Rite constituted what Leadbeater had always desired: an occult laboratory. Ernest Wood, who lived for a time at The Manor, later reflected upon his experiences:

[Leadbeater] was running an occult beauty parlour. The auras may have come to look prettier to the clairvoyant eye, but it appeared to me that the people specially cultivated by him lacked in essential qualities of character as compared with others whom I knew, and that the atmosphere of his community encouraged the lack. He was painting dolls.

Wood was wrong: Leadbeater wasn’t painting dolls, he was fashioning adepts.

The Passing of Leadbeater

A forty year partnership ended on 20 September, 1933, with the death of Annie Besant. Well into her eighties, she had never really recovered from the rupture caused by Krishnamurti’s disavowal of his destiny, and spent her final months in a well-earned reverie. She was rightly remembered as a pioneer of female social activism, and holds a place in the Theosophical pantheon surpassed only by Blavatsky. Leadbeater survived her by only six months. He died in Perth, Australia, on 1 March, 1934, having recently congratulated himself on turning 87: he was, in fact, 80.

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42 Quoted in Wessinger, Annie Besant, 296.
43 Wood, Is This Theosophy...?, 288.
Leadbeater is regarded by many of today’s Adyar Theosophists with something approaching awe; he is known, tellingly, as ‘The Elder Brother’, a title otherwise reserved for the Masters. In other parts of the large Theosophical family he is decried as the ‘abomination of desolation’ and considered to be the Trojan Horse which destroyed the Blavatskian edifice. Neither party has doubted his continuing influence; the proliferation of his brand of occultism in the later twentieth century is a powerful legacy indeed. In assessing Leadbeater’s relationship with the Theosophical Masters, some might argue that he constituted himself an occult Prometheus, appropriating the Masters’ prerogatives. Others would reply more elliptically: when Leadbeater appeared, the Work of the Masters was done.

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