

Review Of Blavatsky and Her Teachers Letter From Mr. Daniel Caldwell PART ONE

[Editor's Note: *Mr. Daniel Caldwell, in a letter dated 9 December 1988 to the former editor Leslie Price, gave a lengthy estimation and critique of Jean Overton Fuller's biography of Blavatsky. Herein are reproduced the relative passages from that letter in addition that section of his letter entitled "The Location of the 'Ravine in Tibet'." Miss Fuller's response follows.]*

. . . I have been waiting for more than three years to read *Blavatsky and Her Teachers*. After having now read it, I find this biography exciting and thought-provoking . . .

Miss Overton Fuller (hereafter referred to as J.O.F.) has obviously done a great deal of work in researching and writing this biography of H.P.B. She has also made some very significant discoveries. The most outstanding discovery (in my mind) is chapter 58, "The Language of the Coulomb Letters," on pages 148–53. If her discovery holds up under close scrutiny (I believe it will!) then J.O.F. has shown that H.P.B. did not write the "Coulomb letters, at least not the incriminating parts!

In documenting that Madame Coulomb knew Italian, J.O.F. writes:

In her pamphlet Madame Coulomb obligingly lets slip that they did not go direct from Cairo to Ceylon but went first to Calcutta, where she gave Italian lessons to Lady Temple. (153)

J.O.F. does not give Madame Coulomb's own words or the exact page reference. Readers might like to see Madame Coulomb's own words as found on page 4 of her 1884 pamphlet:

Being strangers in this town [Calcutta], we had a good deal of trouble to find occupation, but finally did. I was employed in a school from 9 A.M. to 3 P.M., and in the spare hours I used to give private lessons, both in French and Italian to several ladies belonging to the elite of the society there. I also had the honour of giving lessons in Italian to Lady Temple, wife of Sir Richard Temple, late Governor of Bombay...

J.O.F. also quotes from Josephine Ransom's *Short History of the Theosophical Society* that Madame Coulomb knew both French and Italian. Ransom's information is derived from the Supplement to *The Theosophist*, June 1881, second page of Supplement where the relevant extract reads:

Assistants to the Corresponding Secretary:... Mme. E. Coulomb, French and Italian...

I found Chapter 68 on “The Medical Certificate” very interesting. In this chapter J.O.F. refutes certain statements made by Marion Meade in her biography [of Madame Blavatsky (1980)].

Appendix I on “The ‘Bolt’ or Dondoukoff-Korsakoff Letters” is guaranteed to provoke controversy among Theosophical and Blavatsky scholars. J.O.F. contends that the 16 letters from H.P.B. to Prince Dondoukoff-Korsakoff are forgeries written by some unknown Russian and palmed off on the Theosophists. It should be noted that both C. Jinarajadasa and Boris de Zirkoff believed these letters were genuine H.P.B. After reading and rereading this appendix, J.O.F.’s arguments have failed to convince me that these particular H.P.B. letters are forgeries

Although I have enjoyed reading J.O.F.’s biography, I must add that numerous errors (some trivial, some not so trivial) are to be found in this volume. In the remainder of this letter, I will detail ten mistakes under three headings (I, II, and III).

I. The Location of the “Ravine in Tibet

In Chapter 12 entitled “Tibet,” pp. 24–27, J.O.F. writes:

Morya lived near the Grand Monastery of Trashi Lhunpo... Trashi Lhunpo, and the little town of Shigatse beneath its walls, are on the River Nyang... about 150 miles west-south west of Lhasa. Morya’s house was in a ravine where a stream was flanked by higher mountains than those at Shigatse. He had arranged that Madame Blavatsky should stay at the house of his friend and colleague Koot Hoomi... Koot Hoomi received at his house young Tibetan chelas... Presumably, they had been sent from Trashi Lhunpo... His house was near enough for them to have ridden there daily from the monastery... Djwal Khool... later... made for Madame Blavatsky a picture of the ravine... on silk, in misty blue, green and silver tones (24).

J.O.F. informs the reader that the “picture of the ravine” shows Master Morya “wearing a white.. .turban... [and]. riding a... horse... He is approaching the steps of his house... Djwal Khool stands in the stream, holding a pole. At bottom right is a tiny temple, typically Tibetan, with two prayer-flags. Out of the picture, we are told, is a bridge leading to Koot Hoomi’s house, off right round a bend.” (24–25)

Where is this “picture of the ravine” preserved? J.O.F.’s text and endnotes provide no answer. The answer (if one is lucky enough to find it!) is on the second page of the illustrations (between pp. 136–37) where the picture in question is reproduced with the caption “The Ravine in Tibet. Morya riding to his house.” See p. 24. Theosophical Society Adyar.

But where does J.O.F. get her information about the picture being on silk “in misty blue, green and silver tones”? The illustration in J.O.F.’s book is in black and white. Did she view the original picture at Adyar or obtain a colored photo from Adyar? Or...?

Furthermore, where does she derive the information that Djwal Khood made the picture? Where did she get the information that Koot Hoomi's house is "out of the picture... off right round a bend?" J.O.F. writes "we are told." By whom? Where is the source? She gives no source in her text or the accompanying endnotes.

I assume that she may be deriving some of her information ("we are told") from C.W. Leadbeater's *The Masters and the Path*, 2nd ed., pp. 16–18.

But even more important is the question: what are J.O.F.'s sources for the statement that the Masters Morya and Koot Hoomi lived in two houses in a ravine in the vicinity of "Trashi Lhunpo and "Shigatse," Tibet? As far as I can ascertain, her endnotes (pp. 243–44) to Chapter 12 do not document the source(s).

Several other Theosophical writers¹ have also claimed that K.H.'s house (or in some versions, his sister's house) where H.P.B. stayed was at or near Shigatse, Tibet. From the primary sources these writers cite, I do not understand how this "claim" was derived. With the appearance of this new H.P.B. biography, I am even more puzzled by J.O.F.'s undocumented assertion that "The Ravine in Tibet" is near Shigatse!

I do not deny the possibility that Morya and Koot Hoomi may have had residences in or around Shigatse. They may even have had residences at "Trashi Lhunpo!" But my research indicates that the "Ravine in Tibet" is located in the vicinity of "Little Tibet, i.e. Ladakh (As the crow flies, Ladakh is more than 600 miles to the northwest of Shigatse. Rudok in western Tibet is approximately 600 miles (northwest) from Shigatse; Leh, Ladakh is about 725 miles (NW) from Shigatse.)

To support my hypothesis, I submit the following primary source documents:

(a) Letter from H.S. Olcott to A.O. Hume (dated 30 September 1881):²

I have also personally known—[Koot Hoomi] since 1875. He is of quite a different, a gentler, type, yet the bosom friend of the other [Morya]. They live near each other with a small Buddhist Temple about midway between their houses.

In New York, I had... a colored sketch on China Silk of the landscape near [Koot Hoomi's] and my Chohan's residences with a glimpse of the latter's house and of part of the little temple.

(b) Letter from H.S. Olcott to Damodar K. Mavalankar (dated 4 October 1880):³

. . . the Tibetan temple... you will see the very image of in a coloured painting on silk that lies on my bureau in my bed-room, and that was magically produced by her [H.P.B.] for me in New York one day

(c) Article by H.P.B. in reply to Arthur Lillie's criticisms (dated 3 August 1884):⁴

. . . I have lived at different periods in Little Tibet as in Great Tibet... I have stopped in Lamaistic convents... I have visited Tzigadze [Shigatse], the Tashi-Lhunpo [Trashi Lhunpo] territory and its neighbourhood... As to my having been in Tibet, at

Mahatma Koot Hoomi's house, I have better proof in store—when I believe it needed
....

(d) Letter from H.P.B. to Franz Hartmann (dated 5 December 1885):⁵

A lake is there, surely, and mountains plenty—if where Master is; if near Tchigadze [Shigatse]—only little hillocks.

(e) Letter from H.P.B. to Mrs. Mary Hollis Billings (dated 2 October 1881):⁶

Now Morya lives generally with Koot Hoomi who has his house in the direction of the Kara Korum Mountains, beyond Ladak, which is in Little Tibet and belongs now to Kashmire. It is a large wooden building in the Chinese fashion pagoda-like, between a lake and a beautiful mountain

(f) Letter from Damodar K. Mavalankar to William Q. Judge (dated 28 June 1881):⁷

. . . I was getting out of the body... I saw I was in a peculiar place. It was the upper end of Cashmere at the foot of the Himalayas. I saw I was taken to a place where there were only two houses just opposite to each other and no other sign of habitation. From one of these came out the person... 'Koot Hoomi .:' It was his house. Opposite him stops .: [Morya] Brother K—ordered me to follow him. After going a short distance of about half a mile we came to a natural subterranean passage which is under the Himalayas There is a natural causeway on the River Indus which flows underneath in all its fury After walking a considerable distance through this subterranean passage we came into an open plain in L—k [Ladakh]. There is a large massive building thousands of years old What was that I saw? was taken in some mysterious way in my astral body to the real place of Initiation

I now give several extracts from *The Mahatma Letters* which possibly relate to K.H.'s house in the vicinity of Ladakh

(g) Letter III B from K.H. to A.P. Sinnett (dated 20 October 1880):⁸

. . . the present [note] is...dated... from a Kashmir valley.

(h) Letter III C from K.H. to A.P. Sinnett (dated 20 October 1880):⁹

your last note... was received in my room [in a Kashmir valley!] about half a minute after the currents for the production of the pillow-dak [involving the brooch No. 2 and Letter III B] had been set ready and in full play. [Underlining added.]

Compare the above-quoted words of K.H. in extracts (g) and (h) with J.O.F.'s comments (178) on Mahatma Letter III B:

. . . III B was sent by Koot Hoomi from a Kashmir valley, where presumably he had no paper. He might have used his trip to Amritsar to buy paper, but even if he did, it was probably packed on to his horse and he had perhaps not thought to buy ink and a pen, having these in Tibet.

Contrary to what J.O.F. writes, K.H. could have had not only paper, but pen and ink in his room in the residence located “in a Kashmir Valley.” Furthermore, K.H. did not go to Amritsar until sometime after October 20!

(i) Letter IV from K.H. to A.P. Sinnett (dated 29 October 1880):¹⁰

. . . the other day... I was coming down the defiles of Kouenlun—Karakorum you call them... I had gone personally to our chief... and was crossing over to Ladakh on my way home.

(j) Letter 49 from K.H. to A.P. Sinnett (dated early August 1881):¹¹

Just home... I now come from Sakya-jong . . . From Ghalaring-Tcho Lamasery..., I crossed to Horpa Pa La territory... and thence—home.

(k) Letter 13 from Morya to A.P. Sinnett (dated January 1882):¹²

. . . the iceberg now before me (in our K.H.’s home)...

Is Morya referring to a glacier (in the mountain/lake area of Ladakh) that he sees as he looks out the window(s) of K.H.’s home?

(l) Letter 22 from K.H. to A.O. Hume:¹³

. . . the lake near which, with my fingers half frozen I now write to you this letter.

Could this be the lake near K.H.’s house (located beyond Ladakh) which is mentioned in several extracts quoted above??

(m) Letter 140 from H.P.B. to A.P. Sinnett (dated 6 January 1886):¹⁴

. . . I was... in Mah. K.H.’s house. I was sitting in a corner on a mat and he walking about the room in his riding dress... as Master [Morya] was not at home, I took to him [EK.H.] a few sentences I was studying in Senzar in his sister’s room I am bidding goodbye to his sister and her child and all the chelas

Is “Mah. K.H.’s house” in the vicinity of “Little Tibet?”

I give two more sources relevant to the subject under discussion:

(n) Comment by Vera Johnston on one of H.P.B.'s letters to her relatives:¹⁵

She [H.P.B.] had once spent seven weeks in a forest not far from the Karakoram mountains, where she had been isolated from the world, and where her teacher alone had visited her daily, whether astrally or otherwise she did not state. But whilst there she had been shown in a cave-temple a series of statues representing the great teachers of the world

(o) Reply by Countess Constance Wachtmeister to a question about H.P.B.'s stay in Tibet:¹⁶

I cannot tell much about H.P.B.'s stay in Tibet. I only know that she lived there for three years, that she resided in the house of the sister of the Master K.H.... She learned the Tibetan language, and her time was chiefly occupied in reading and writing. There was an extensive library for reference.

If I am mistaken in placing the "Ravine in Tibet" in the vicinity of Ladakh, then how does one reconcile the extracts I have quoted with some better hypothesis about the location of the "Ravine?"

Daniel Caldwell

Reference Sources

¹ Boris De Zirkoff, "Helena Petrovna Blavatsky: General Outline of Her Life Prior to Her Public Work," *H.P. Blavatsky Collected Writings, Vol. I: 1874–1878*. Compiled by Boris de Zirkoff (Wheaton IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1966), xlviii; Howard Murphet, *When Daylight Comes* (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1975), 56; H.J. Spierenburg, "Dr. Steiner on H.P. B.," *Theosophical History*, Vol. I, No. 7 (July 1986): 168–69.

² Anonymous, *Hints on Esoteric Theosophy*, No. I. First ed. (Calcutta: Calcutta Central Press Co., April 1882), 83.

³ *Damodar and the Pioneers of the Theosophical Movement*. Compiled and annotated by Sven Eek. First ed. (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1965), 158.

⁴ Boris de Zirkoff, comp., *H.P. Blavatsky Collected Writings, Vol. VI: 1883–1884–1885*. Compiled by Boris de Zirkoff (Los Angeles: Blavatsky Writings Publication Fund, 1954), 272, 274.

⁵ “Letters of H.P.B. to Dr. Hartmann,” *The Path* (January 1896): 299.

⁶ *The Theosophical Forum* (Point Loma, CA), Vol. 8, No. 5 (May, 1936): 345.

⁷ *Damodar and the Pioneers of The Theosophical Movement*: 60–62.

⁸ *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*. Transcribed, compiled, and with an introduction by A. Trevor Barker. 2nd ed. (Point Loma: Theosophical University Press, 1926), 11. Same page in 3rd ed. (edited by Christmas Humphreys and Elsie Benjamin. (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1962).

⁹ *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*.

¹⁰ *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*, 12.

¹¹ *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*, 280, 284, 286; 3rd ed., 276, 280, 282.

¹² *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*, 73; 3rd ed., 72.

¹³ *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*, 140; 3rd ed., 137.

¹⁴ *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*, 478–79; 3rd ed., 471.

¹⁵ “The Letters of H.P. Blavatsky. II,” *The Path* (January 1895): 299.

¹⁶ *The Theosophical Forum* (New York, NY), no. 59 (May 1894): 12.

* * * * *

THEOSOPHICAL HISTORY

July 1990
\$3.00



A Quarterly Journal of Research
ISSN 0951497X