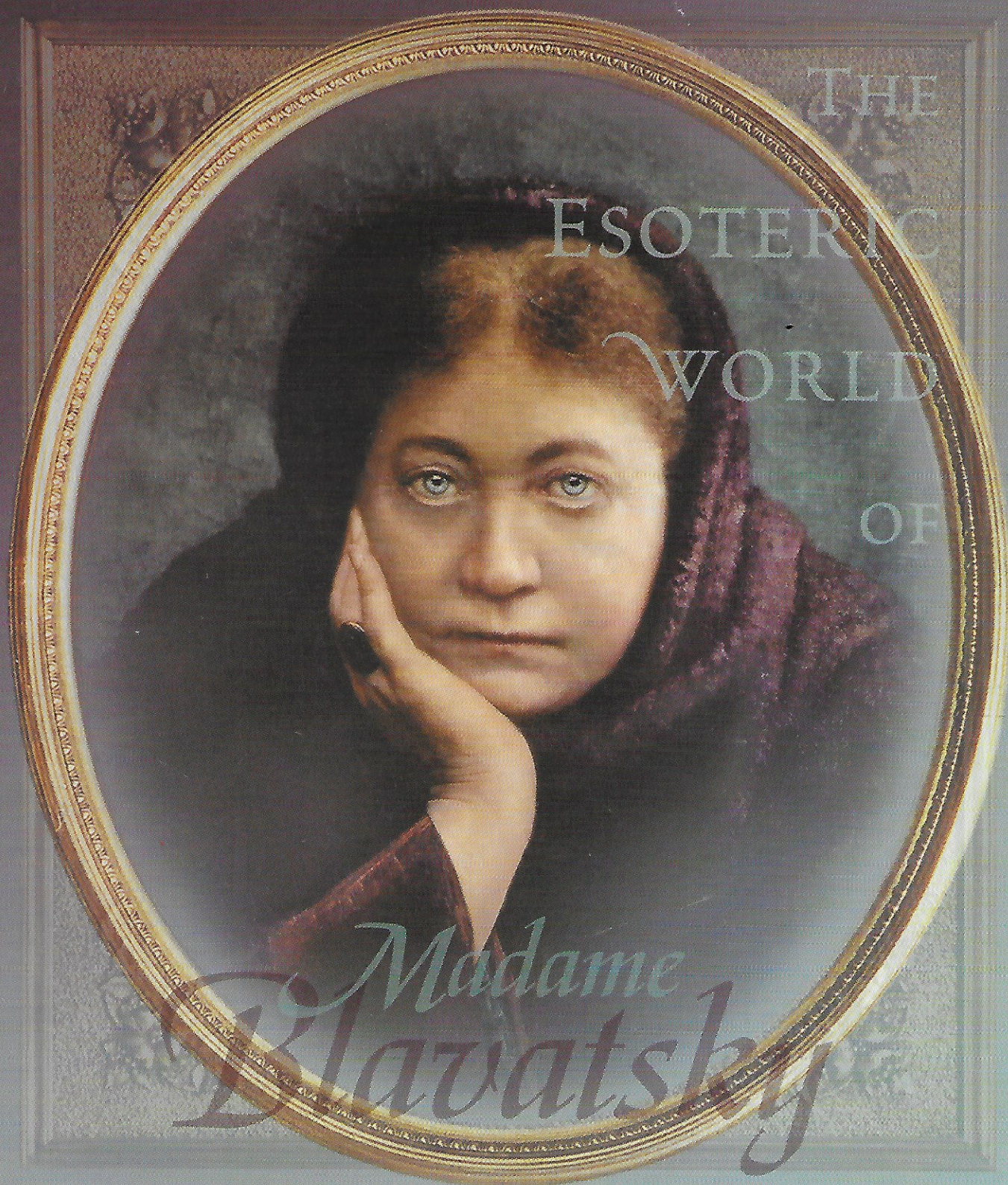


# *The Quest*®

*Philosophy • Science • Religion • The Arts*

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2001

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THE  
ESOTERIC  
WORLD  
OF

*Madame  
Blavatsky*



# *The Quest*®

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**Cover:**

Portrait of H. P. Blavatsky by Dan Doolin,  
based in part on portraits created by photographer  
Enrico Resta and painter/sculptor Gutzon Borglum.

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# THE ESOTERIC WORLD OF

COMPILED BY  
DANIEL CALDWELL



# Madame Blavatsky

## INSIGHTS INTO THE LIFE OF A MODERN SPHINX

*Extracts from the Quest Book published in December 2000*

The baby [Helena Petrovna] was born on the night between [August 11 and 12, 1831]—weak, and apparently no denizen of this world. A hurried baptism had to be resorted to, therefore, lest the child died with the burden of original sin on her soul. The ceremony of baptism in orthodox Russia is attended with all the paraphernalia of lighted tapers, every one of the spectators and actors being furnished with consecrated wax candles during the whole proceedings. Moreover, everyone has to stand during the baptismal rite, no one being allowed to sit in the Greek religion, as they do in Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, during the church and religious service. The child-aunt of the baby—only a few years older than her niece, aged twenty-four hours—placed as “proxy” for an absent relative, was in the first row. Feeling nervous and tired of standing still for nearly an hour, the child settled on the floor unperceived by the elders, and became probably drowsy in the over-crowded room on that hot day. The ceremony was nearing its close. The sponsors were just in the act of renouncing the Evil One and his deeds, a renunciation emphasized in the Greek Church by thrice spitting upon the invisible enemy, when the little lady, toying with her lighted taper at the feet of the crowd, inadvertently set fire to the long flowing robes of the priest. The result was an immediate conflagration, during which several persons—chiefly the old priest—were

severely burnt. That was a bad omen, according to the superstitious beliefs of orthodox Russia; and the innocent cause of it—the future Mme. Blavatsky—was doomed from that day in the eyes of all the town to an eventful life, full of trouble.

—1831, ALFRED P. SINNETT

When her mother was dying, although her eldest daughter was only eleven years old, she was filled with well-founded apprehensions for her future, and said: “Ah well! perhaps it is best that I am dying, so at least I shall be spared seeing what befalls Helena! Of one thing I am certain, her life will not be as that of other women, and that she will have much to suffer!!”

—1842, VERA P. DE ZHELIHOVSKY

Helena cared not whether she should get married or not. She had been simply defied one day by her governess to find any man who would be her husband, in view of her temper and disposition. The governess, to emphasize the taunt, said that even the old man [Nikifor V. Blavatsky] she had found so ugly, and had laughed at so much, calling him “a plumeless raven”—that even he would decline her for a wife! That was enough: three days after she made him propose, and then, frightened at what she had done, sought to escape from her joking acceptance of his offer. But it



# THE ESOTERIC WORLD OF



*Nadyezhda A. de Fadeyev (HPB's aunt)*

was too late. Hence the fatal step. All she knew and understood was—when too late—that she had been accepting, and was now forced to accept—a master she cared nothing for, nay, that she hated, that she was tied to him by the law of the country, hand and foot. There had been a distinct attempt to impress her with the solemnity of marriage, with her future obligations and her duties to her husband, and married life. A few hours later, at the altar, she heard the priest saying to her, “Thou shalt honor and obey thy husband,” and at this hated word, “shalt,” her young face was seen to flush angrily, then to become deadly pale. She was overheard to mutter in response, through her set teeth, “Surely, I shall not.”

And surely she has not. Forthwith she determined to take the law and her future life into her own hands, and she left her “husband” for ever, without giving him any opportunity to ever even think of her as his wife.

Thus Mme. Blavatsky abandoned her country at seventeen, and passed ten long years in strange and out-of-the-way places, in Central Asia, India, South America, Africa, and Eastern Europe.

—1849, NADY EZHDA A. DE FADEYEV

*M*me. Blavatsky with her father and sister had come to St. Petersburg. One night they received a visit from two old friends of their father. Both were anxious to see something.

After a few successful phenomena, the visitors declared themselves positively delighted, amazed and quite at a loss what to make of Mme. Blavatsky's powers. They could neither understand nor account, they said, for her father's indifference in presence of such manifestations. The old gentleman, thus taken to task, answered that it was all bosh and that he would not hear of such nonsense, such occupation being hardly worthy of serious people, he added. The rebuke left the two old gentlemen unconcerned. They began, on the contrary, to insist that Col. Hahn should, for old friendship's sake, make an experiment by writing a word in another room, secretly from all of them, and then asking the raps to repeat it. The old gentleman, proceeding into an adjoining room, wrote a word on a bit of paper, after which conveying it to his pocket, he returned and waited silently, laughing behind his gray moustache.

“What shall you say, old friend, if the word written by you is correctly repeated?”

“What I might say, if the word were correctly guessed, I could not tell at present,” he skeptically replied. “One thing I could answer, however, you may prepare to offer me as an inmate of a lunatic asylum.”

By the means of raps and alphabet we got one word. To our question, whether it was all, the raps became more energetic in the affirmative. We had several triple raps, which meant in our code—Yes! yes, yes, yes!!!

Remarking our agitation and whispering, Madame B.'s father looked at us over his spectacles, and asked—

“Well! Have you any answer? It must be something very elaborate and profound indeed!”

He arose and, laughing in his moustache, approached us.

“We only got one word.”

“And what is it?”

“Zaitchik!”

It was a sight indeed to witness the extraordinary change that came over the old man's face at this one word! He became deadly pale. Adjusting his spectacles with a trembling hand, he stretched it out while hurriedly saying “Let me see it! Hand it over. Is it really so?”

He took the slips of paper, and read in a very agitated voice,—“Zaitchik. Yes, Zaitchik; so it is. How very strange!”

Taking out of his pocket the paper he had written upon in the adjoining room, he handed it in silence to his daughter and guests.

They found on it both the question offered and the answer that was anticipated. The words read thus—

“What was the name of my favorite warhorse, which I rode during my first Turkish campaign?” And lower down, in parenthesis: (“Zaitchik”).

—1859, VERA P. DE ZHELIHOVSKY



# Madame Blavatsky

I was once traveling between Baalbek and the river Orontes, and in the desert I saw a caravan. It was Mme. Blavatsky's. We camped together. There was a great monument standing there near the village of Dair Mar Maroon. It was between Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon [Mountains]. On the monument were inscriptions that no one could ever read. Mme. Blavatsky could do strange things with the spirits, as I knew, and I asked her to find out what the monument was.

We waited until night. She drew a circle and we went in it. We built a fire and put much incense on it. Then she said many spells. Then we put on more incense. Then she pointed with her wand at the monument and we saw a great ball of white flame on it. There was a sycamore tree near by; we saw many little flames on it. The jackals came and howled in the darkness a little way off. We put on more incense. Then Mme. Blavatsky commanded the spirit to appear of the person to whom the monument was reared. Soon a cloud of vapor arose and obscured the little moonlight there was. We put on more incense. The cloud took the indistinct shape of an old man with a beard, and a voice came, as it seemed, from a great distance, through the image. He said the monument was once the altar of a temple that had long disappeared. It was reared to a god that had long since gone to another world. "Who are you?" asked Mme. Blavatsky, "I am Hiero, one of the priests of the temple," said the voice. Then Mme. Blavatsky commanded him to show us the place as it was when the temple stood. He bowed, and for one instant we had a glimpse of the temple and of a vast city filling the plain as far as the eye could reach. Then it was gone, and the image faded away. Then we built up big fires to keep off the jackals and went to sleep.

—1872, COUNTESS LYDIA A. DE PASHKOV

I remember our first day's acquaintance as if it were yesterday. The dinner hour at Eddy's was noon, and it was from the entrance door of the dining room that Kappes and I first saw HPB. She had arrived shortly before noon with a French Canadian lady, and they were at table as we entered. My eye was first attracted by a scarlet Garibaldian shirt the former wore, as in vivid contrast with the dull colors around. Her hair was then a thick blond mop, worn shorter than the shoulders, and it stood out from her head, silken-soft and crinkled to the roots, like the fleece of a Cotswold ewe. This and the red shirt were what struck my attention before I took in the picture of her features. It was a massive Calmuck face.

All sorts of cranky people were continually coming and going at Eddy's to see the mediumistic phenomena,

and it only struck me on seeing this eccentric lady that this was but one more of the sort. Pausing on the door-sill, I whispered to Kappes, "Good gracious! look at that specimen, will you." Dinner over, the two went outside the house and Madame Blavatsky rolled herself a cigarette, for which I gave her a light as a pretext to enter into conversation.

She asked me how long I had been there and what I thought of the phenomena, saying that she herself was greatly interested in such things and had been drawn to Chittenden by reading the letters in the *Daily Graphic*. "I hesitated before coming here," she said, "because I was afraid of meeting that Colonel Olcott." "Why should you be afraid of him, Madame?" I rejoined. "Oh! because I fear he might write about me in his paper." I told her that she might make herself perfectly easy on that score, for I felt quite sure Col. Olcott would not mention her in his letters unless she wished it. And I introduced myself.

We became friends at once.

—1874, HENRY S. OLCOTT

H. P. Blavatsky in her youth





She wrote a considerable part of "Isis Unveiled" in my house at Ithaca, and living constantly with her for these weeks, she continually filled me with amazement and curiosity as to what was coming next. She had a profound knowledge of everything apparently, and her method of work was most unusual.

She would write in bed, from nine o'clock in the morning till two o'clock the following morning, smoking innumerable cigarettes, quoting long verbatim paragraphs from dozens of books of which I am perfectly certain there were no copies at that time in America, translating easily from several languages, and occasionally calling out to me, in my study, to know how to turn some old-world idiom into literary English, for at that time she had not attained the fluency of diction which distinguished the "Secret Doctrine."

She herself told me that she wrote down quotations from books as they appeared in her eyes on another plane of objective existence, that she clearly saw the page of the book and the quotation she needed, and simply translated what she actually saw into English.

The woman was so marvelous and had such mysterious funds of definite knowledge, that I find it much easier to believe her statement than to account for her quotations by any ordinary explanation of memory.

H. P. Blavatsky, 1875



The hundreds of books she quoted were certainly not in my library, many of them not in America, some of them very rare and difficult to get in Europe, and if her quotations were from memory, then it was an even more startling feat than writing them from the ether. The facts are marvelous, and the explanation must necessarily bewilder those whose consciousness is of a more ordinary type.

—1875, HIRAM CORSON

Madame Blavatsky is very justly averse to give manifestations of her occult powers. She rightly holds that if Theosophy cannot assert and maintain its authority by the soundness and beneficence of its principles, it would be idle to try to bolster it up by the exhibition of phenomena which, unless cause and effect are thoroughly understood, might be construed into vulgar conjuring tricks. She wishes that the science with whose promotion she has so thoroughly identified herself should stand or fall on its own merits. It is her hope that men of education and intelligence will make Theosophy the object of careful and scientific study. If the science does not fulfill the promises it holds out, it will be easy for a student to give up the study when he finds his expectations disappointed.

—1882, NORENDRO NATH SEN

A curious happening which has never been effaced from my memory took place in the early part of HPB's stay with us. Many people at that time wished to get into communication with the Masters through HPB, and would sometimes bring letters asking that they should be forwarded to the Masters. HPB always said, "It is not for me to forward the letters; the Masters will take them if They wish," and the letters were put into a certain drawer in her room. Sometimes the writers received a message through HPB, very often they did not; but the drawer was kept open. One day Mr. Sinnett had something he wished to ask of Master KH, and that letter also was placed in the drawer. More than a week passed and there was no answer, and I was grieved, for we all desired that the questions should be answered. Day after day I looked into the drawer, but the letter was still there.

One morning at about 7.30 I went in to HPB (I always went to her room the first thing); I found her at her table, writing as usual, and I said to her, "How much I wish that letter could be taken." She looked very straight at me and said, "Bring me the letter," in rather a severe tone. I gave the letter into her hand. There was a candle on the table and "Light the candle," she said;



# Madame Blavatsky

then giving me the letter, she said, "Burn the letter." I felt rather sorry to burn Mr. Sinnett's letter but, of course, did as she said. "Now go to your room and meditate." I went up to my room at the top of the house. I went to the window, which looked on to a beautiful garden with lovely trees. Before the window there was a box, covered with a pink cloth, and I stood there for a minute or two wondering what HPB meant and what I was to meditate on.

In a few minutes I cast my eyes down on the pink cloth, and in the middle of the cloth there was a letter which either I had not noticed before or which had not been there. I took up the envelope and looked at it, and found there was no address on it; it was quite blank, but it contained a thickness of paper and I concluded it was a letter. I held it in my hand and looked at it once or twice, and still finding the envelope without name or address, I felt sure it must be something occult and wondered for whom it could be. At length I decided to take the letter to HPB, and looking at it once again saw, in the clear writing of the Master KH, Mr. Sinnett's name. That the name had not been on it at the beginning I am sure, nor during the many times when I looked at it most carefully. The letter was an answer to the one I had burnt.

—1884, FRANCESCA ARUNDALE

"What is Theosophy, Madame?" I asked. "Do you call it a religion?"

"Most distinctly not," she replied, "there are too many religions in the world already. I don't propose to add to the number."

"What, may I ask, is the Theosophical attitude towards these too numerous religions?"

Madame Blavatsky thereupon entered upon a long and interesting explanation on this subject, from which I gathered that Theosophy looks upon all religions as good in one sense, and all religions as bad in another sense. There are truths underlying all, and there are falsities overlying all. Most faiths are good at the core, all are more or less wrong in their external manifestations.

—1888, LONDON STAR

**J**persuaded her to go with me to a photographer. What a day! Wind and rain and scurries of autumn leaves. She had no out-of-door clothes. Everything was given away as soon as brought to her.

Unaccustomed to go out, she would not move. "You want my death. I cannot step on the wet stones." Shawls, scarfs, fur were piled on. A sort of Russian turban tied over her head with a veil. Rugs spread from



H. P. Blavatsky about 1878

door to carriage. I raised the umbrella over her head and helped her in.

There disembarkation even more terrible! They don't unroll red carpets in Regent Street for nothing. "Come along, Your Majesty!" I said to keep up the illusion.

Once up the stairs, she flatly refused to have her photograph taken. She was not an actress. What had I brought her to such a place for? Finally she was held, as I knew she would be, by the story of Van der Weyde's own experiments in the adaptation of electricity to photography.

"I will sit for you—only one—be quick—take me just as I am."

I bent over her and whispered, "Now let all the devil in you shine out of those eyes."

"Why, child, there is no devil in me."

She laughed, and we got the famous likeness. She was pleased with it. I was not. She is there, but not all of her. I would have wished something at her writing table—taken by chance—in the long folds of her seamless garment—vibrations of light all around. She really enjoyed the adventure I think, for she told of being "bossed" and "carried as a bundle" for a long time, especially of the "Come along, your Majesty."

—1888, EDMUND RUSSELL



There are those who imagine that because they can crack a joke about a teacup, they have disposed of Theosophy. Madame Blavatsky, they say, "was an impostor, a vulgar fraud. She was exposed by the Coulombs, shown up by the Psychical Research Society." They say all that, no doubt, but when all that is said and more besides, the problem of the personality of the woman remains full of interest, and even of wonder, to those who look below the surface of things.

Madame Blavatsky was a great woman. She was huge in body; and in her character, alike in its strength and weakness, there was something of the Rabelaisian gigantesque. But if she had all the nodosity of the oak, she was not without its strength; and if she had the contortions of the Sibyl, she possessed somewhat of her inspiration.

Of Madame Blavatsky the wonder-worker I knew nothing; I did not go to her seeking signs, and most assuredly no sign was given. She neither doubled a teacup in my presence nor did she even cause the familiar raps to be heard. All these manifestations seemed as the mere trivialities, the shavings, as it were, thrown off from the beam of cedar wood which she was fashioning as one of the pillars in the Temple of Truth. I do not remember ever referring to them in our conversation, and it is slightly incomprehensible to me how any one can gravely contend that they constitute her claim to respect.

*Vera and Charles Johnston with Henry Olcott standing behind HPB and her sister, Vera de Zhelihovsky, London, 1888*



What Madame Blavatsky did was an immeasurably greater thing than the doubling of teacups. She made it possible for some of the most cultivated and skeptical men and women of this generation to believe—believe ardently, to an extent that made them proof against ridicule and disdainful of persecution—that not only does the invisible world that encompasses us contain Intelligences vastly superior to our own in knowledge of the Truth, but that it is possible for man to enter into communion with these hidden and silent ones, and to be taught of them the Divine mysteries of Time and of Eternity.

—1888, WILLIAM T. STEAD

I have often heard Blavatsky called a charlatan, and I am bound to say that her impish behavior often gave grounds for this description. She was foolishly intolerant of the many smart West End ladies who arrived in flocks, demanding to see spooks, masters, elementals, anything, in fact, in the way of phenomena.

Madame Blavatsky was a born conjuror. Her wonderful fingers were made for jugglers' tricks, and I have seen her often use them for that purpose. I well remember my amazement upon the first occasion on which she exhibited her occult powers, spurious and genuine.

I was sitting alone with her one afternoon, when the cards of Jessica, Lady Sykes, the late Duchess of Montrose and the Honorable Mrs. S—— (still living) were brought in to her. She said she would receive the ladies at once, and they were ushered in. They explained that they had heard of her new religion and her marvelous occult powers. They hoped she would afford them a little exhibition of what she could do.

Madame Blavatsky had not moved out of her chair. She was suavity itself, and whilst conversing, she rolled cigarettes for her visitors and invited them to smoke. She concluded that they were not particularly interested in the old faith which the young West called new; what they really were keen about was phenomena.



# Madame Blavatsky

That was so, responded the ladies, and the burly Duchess inquired if Madame ever gave racing tips or lucky numbers for Monte Carlo?

Madame disclaimed having any such knowledge, but she was willing to afford them a few moments' amusement. Would one of the ladies suggest something she would like done?

Lady Sykes produced a pack of cards from her pocket and held them out to Madame Blavatsky, who shook her head.

"First remove the marked cards," she said.

Lady Sykes laughed and replied, "Which are they?"

Madame Blavatsky told her, without a second's hesitation. This charmed the ladies. It seemed a good beginning.

"Make that basket of tobacco jump about," suggested one of them.

The next moment the basket had vanished. I don't know where it went, I only know it disappeared by trickery, that the ladies looked for it everywhere, even under Madame Blavatsky's ample skirts, and that suddenly it reappeared upon its usual table. A little more jugglery followed and some psychometry, which was excellent, then the ladies departed, apparently well satisfied with the entertainment.

When I was once more alone with Madame Blavatsky, she turned to me with a wry smile and said, "Would you have me throw pearls before swine?"

I asked her if all she had done was pure trickery.

"Not all, but most of it," she unblushingly replied. "But now I will give you something lovely and real."

For a moment or two she was silent, covering her eyes with her hand, then a sound caught my ear. I can only describe what I heard as fairy music, exquisitely dainty and original. It seemed to proceed from somewhere just between the floor and the ceiling, and it moved about to different corners of the room. There was a crystal innocence in the music, which suggested the dance of joyous children at play.

"Now I will give you the music of life," said Madame Blavatsky.

For a moment or two there fell a trance-like silence. The twilight was creeping into the room and seemed to bring with it a tingling expectancy. Then it seemed to me that something entered from without and brought with it utterly new conditions, something incredible, unimagined, and beyond the bounds of reason. It spoke the secrets which the nature myth so often murmurs to those who live amid great silences, of those dread mysteries of the spirit which yet invest it with such glory and wonderment.

—1888, VIOLET TWEEDALE



Annie Besant

A pause, a swift passing through hall and outer room, through folding doors thrown back, a figure in a large chair before a table, a voice, vibrant, compelling. "My dear Mrs. Besant, I have so long wished to see you," and I was standing with my hand in her firm grip, and looking for the first time in this life straight into the eyes of HPB. I was conscious of a sudden leaping forth of my heart—was it recognition?—and then, I am ashamed to say, a fierce rebellion, a fierce withdrawal, as of some wild animal when it feels a mastering hand. I sat down, after some introductions that conveyed no ideas to me, and listened. She talked of travels, of various countries, easy brilliant talk, her eyes veiled, her exquisitely molded fingers rolling cigarettes incessantly. Nothing special to record, no word of occultism, nothing mysterious, a woman of the world chatting with her evening visitors. We rose to go, and for a moment the veil lifted, and two brilliant, piercing eyes met mine, and with a yearning throb in the voice: "Oh, my dear Mrs. Besant, if you would only come among us!" I felt a well-nigh uncontrollable desire to bend down and kiss her, under the compulsion of that yearning voice, those compelling eyes, but with a flash of the old unbending pride and an inward jeer at my own folly, I said a commonplace polite good-bye, and turned away with some inanely courteous and evasive remarks. "Child," she said to me long afterwards, "your pride is terrible; you are as proud as Lucifer himself."

—1889, ANNIE BESANT

(Continued on page 22)



# Madame Blavatsky

H. S. Olcott at his desk, May 1903



(Continued from page 13)

Perfect—no; faults—yes; the one thing she would hate most of all would be the indiscriminate praise of her personality. But when I have said that she was sometimes impetuous as a whirlwind, a very cyclone when she was really roused, I have told nearly all. And I have often thought it was more than possible that some of these outbursts were assumed for a special object. Her enemies sometimes said she was rough and rude. We who knew her knew that a more unconventional woman, in the very realest sense of the word, never lived. Her absolute indifference to all outward forms was a true indifference based upon her inner spiritual knowledge of the verities of the universe. Sitting by her when strangers came, as they did come from every corner of the earth, I have often watched with the keenest amusement their wonder at seeing a woman who always said what she thought. Given a prince and she would probably shock him; given a poor man and he would have her last shilling and her kindest word.

—1889, HERBERT BURROWS

HPB and the Lansdowne Road household moved into Mrs. Besant's house in Avenue Road. A lecture hall had been added to the house (a large detached one, standing in a garden) for the meetings of the Blavatsky Lodge, both public and private. She did not appear as frequently as was the case at Lansdowne Road. Failing health had much to say to this, but she would sometimes be present at the Lodge meetings. On such occasions her presence was both an inspiration and a "terror." Once, when Mrs. Besant was in the chair, and a rather lengthy and stupid paper was being read, the whole room could hear HPB's stage whisper of agonized appeal: "Oh stop her, Annie—stop her!"

—1890, ALICE L. CLEATHER

My first intimation of HPB's death was received by me "telepathically" from herself, and this was followed by a second similar message. The third I got from one of the reporters present at my closing lecture in Sydney, who told me, as I was about leaving the platform, that a press message had come from London announcing her decease. In my diary entry for 9th May, 1891, I say: "Had an uneasy foreboding of HPB's death." In that of the following day it is written: "This morning I feel that HPB is dead." The last entry for that day says "Cablegram, HPB dead." Only those who saw us together, and knew of the close

mystical tie between us, can understand the sense of bereavement that came over me upon receipt of the direful news.

—1891, HENRY S. OLCOTT

Madame Blavatsky held that the regeneration of mankind must be based upon the development of altruism. In this she was at one with the greatest thinkers, not alone of the present day, but of all time.

No one in the present generation has done more towards reopening the long sealed treasures of Eastern thought, wisdom, and philosophy. No one certainly has done so much towards elucidating that profound wisdom-religion and bringing into the light those ancient literary works whose scope and depth have so astonished the Western world. Her own knowledge of Oriental philosophy and esotericism was comprehensive. The lesson which was constantly impressed by her was assuredly that which the world most needs, and has always needed, namely the necessity of subduing self and of working for others.

Madame Blavatsky has made her mark upon the time, and thus, too, her works will follow her. Some day, if not at once, the loftiness and purity of her aims, the wisdom and scope of her teachings, will be recognized more fully, and her memory will be accorded the honor to which it is justly entitled.

—1891, NEW YORK TRIBUNE

Daniel Caldwell, M.L.S., is a historical researcher and worldwide authority on H. P. Blavatsky's life and work, having collected documents on the subject for thirty years. Also a professional Web page designer, he lives in Tucson, Arizona.



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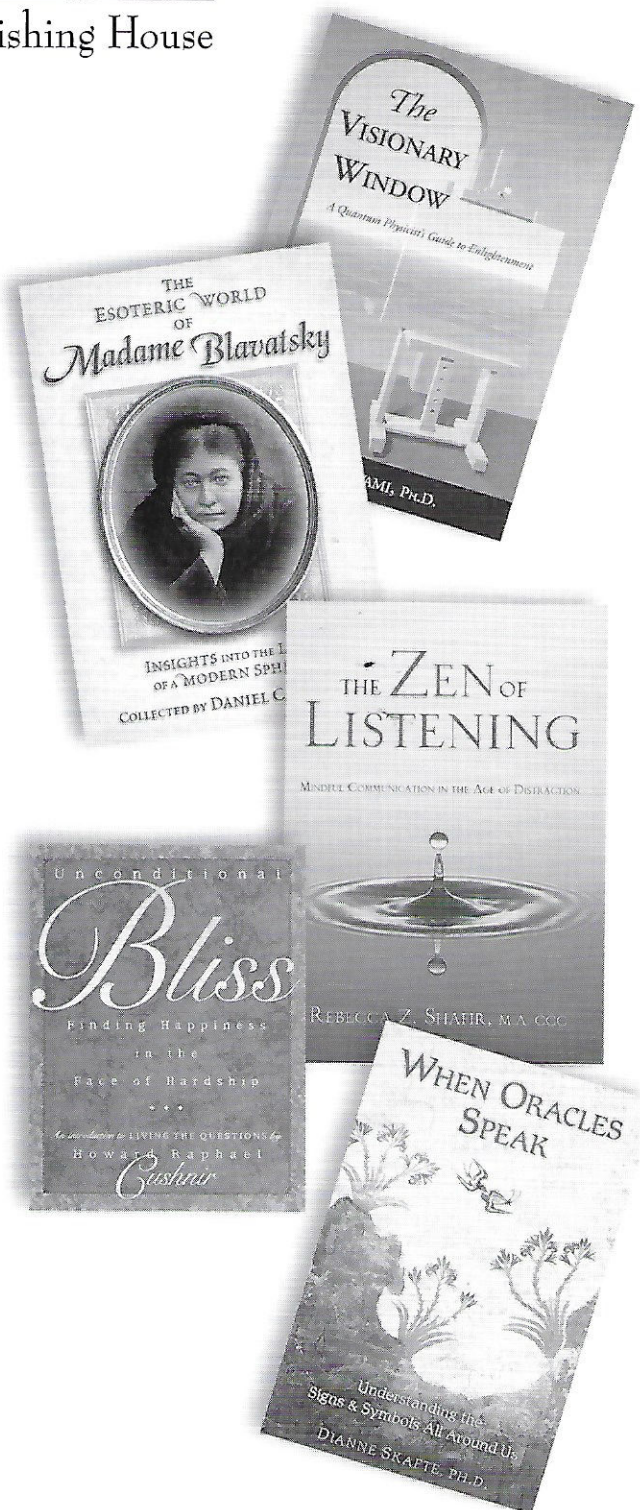
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