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LEANDER EDMUND WHIPPLE, EDITOR

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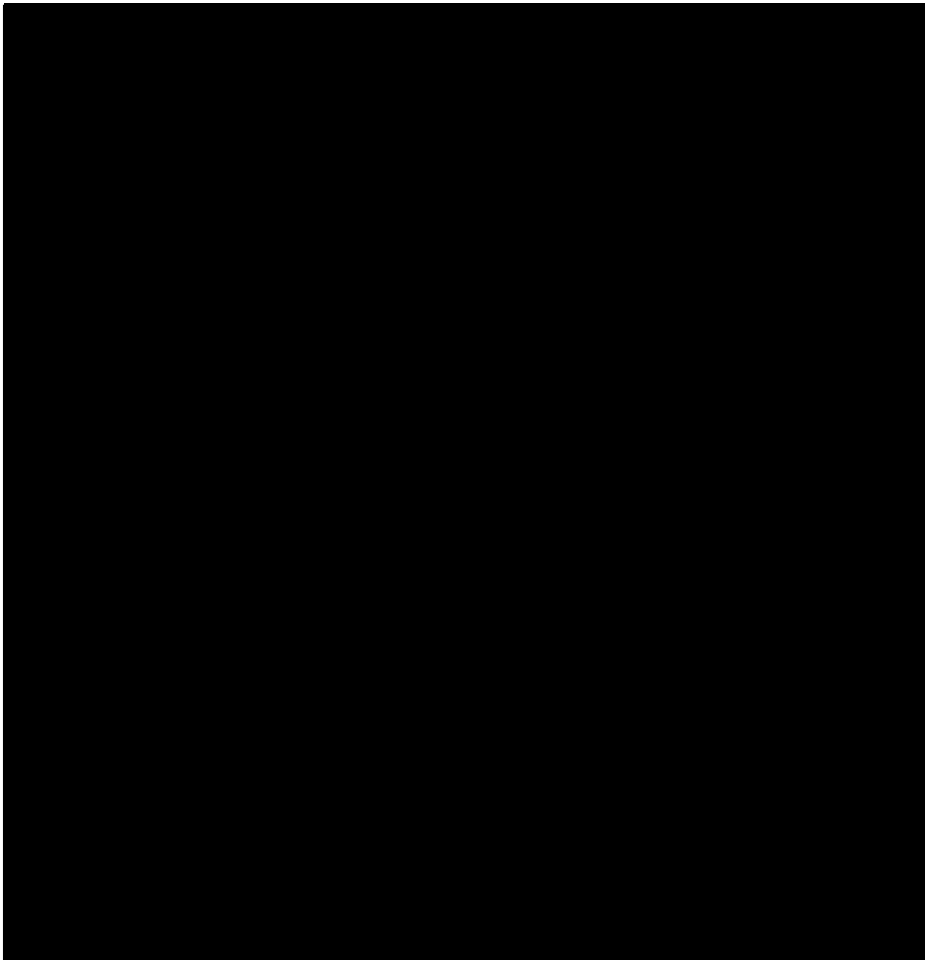
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THE WORLD OF THOUGHT

WITH EDITORIAL COMMENT

HENRY STEEL OLCOTT.

The death of Colonel Henry S. Olcott at Adyar, Madras, on the 17th of January last, removes the last of the original Theosophical Circle. His vital forces had evidently been failing for several months; and a fall received on the steamer when returning from America compelled him to remain in a hospital at Genoa. He recovered sufficiently to make his way by slow stages to India. His death is attributed to exhausted vital force.

My own acquaintance began with Colonel Olcott in 1877. I was alone at home one afternoon in the early autumn when he was announced. He recognized me at once, but I had no recollection of him. I had been for thirteen years on the staff of *The Evening Post*, while he had been in the service of the Government, and part of his duties brought him into peculiar relations with some of the managers. Probably he saw and conversed with me. It was not my habit to exhibit my beliefs on subjects beyond our common life, and he hardly expected to find me familiar with such matters. He soon told his errand. Mr. J. W. Bouton, the bookseller, had referred him to me to examine the manuscript of Mme. Blavatsky. I had barely heard of her before, and had been told of a Theosophical Society in New York, but had been too busy to give the matter further attention. It seemed curious that Mr. Bouton should send him to me in such a way. I had edited four treatises which he had published, and visited him several times during the season. He had just sailed for England, and I went to New York on the morning that he left, to wish him the *bon voyage*. But not a word had he said of Col. Olcott or Madame Blavatsky. He often seemed to me to do business in a somewhat erratic manner, though I found him always mindful of the main chance.

At his pressing invitation, I visited Col. Olcott's abode on 47th street. There he introduced me to Madame Blavatsky. As they have taken a wide though good-natured liberty in describing me, I will recount some of the impressions which I received. Mme. B. was portly, large-chested, broad of abdomen—in short, what I conceive to be a Tartar figure. Her hair was golden like that of the goddess Aphrodité, her head large, the brow full, and other features well filled out. She knew well how to adapt her conversation to every one's humor, but she did not scruple to denounce, or to speak contemptuously to individuals. No man was more devoted or considerate of her than Col. Olcott, who executed faithfully her every wish, yet she would sometimes lash him, calling him "flapdoodle" and deriding his acts. He smarted severely; that I could see, yet he did not resent it as most persons would. He was respectful to her always.

When he first introduced me to her he spoke as if he thought that I was to enjoy a grand privilege. He treasured her utterances and treated them as a prophet would receive revelations.

To myself, Mme. Blavatsky was always courteous and even deferential. At times the maid was commanded to turn off all callers; but no sooner was my voice heard, than I was admitted. Among those resolutely excluded was the late Professor Joseph R. Buchanan. I know not why. Prof. Buchanan had hobbies and philosophic views of his own, and perhaps did not brook contradiction. Leaders are almost always adversaries, even when in the same field, and my own experience has led me to keep free of the "Boss." Mme. Blavatsky was widely intelligent; she could converse upon almost any subject freely. At her instance Col. Olcott did me a service for which I had abundant cause to be grateful.

He brought me the manuscript to read and report upon. Regarding it as a matter of honor, I acted with no regard to the wishes of the writer, but solely to the pecuniary interest of the publisher. I thought it too long for a single volume, and sometimes unnecessarily verbose. I reported this, adding that there was material for revolution in the work. The next that I heard of it was that Mr. Bouton handed the sheets to me and asked me to cut it down all that it would bear. This I did as I best could judge, careful to remove no expression or sentiment of the author, or to mar the

congruity of the work. It was my purpose to reduce the manuscript to the dimensions of a single volume. Mme. B. accepted my effort with a good grace. All that I had discarded, some two hundred pages of manuscript, she said was "flapdoodle." But after Mr. Bouton undertook the publication, she added enough to make two volumes. But I have no cause to find fault. My vanity was appeased. She procured such essays and papers of mine as were obtainable and used what she found suitable, giving me abundant credit. Mr. Bouton, however, took pains to provide for himself. He gave me nothing for what I did, and took out the copyright in his own name, refusing every proposition for its purchase. I have suggested to several Theosophists to purchase the plates, but they replied that these are too much battered to be desirable. But, more probably, the finances are too low; besides sects and parties in the second generation often differ widely from what they had been at first.

The original Theosophical Society had been organised in 1875, with the following officers: President, Henry S. Olcott; Vice-Presidents, Dr. Seth Pancoast of Philadelphia, George H. Felt; Recording Secretary, John S. Cobb; Corresponding Secretary, Helene P. Blavatsky; Treasurer, Henry S. Newton; Librarian, Charles Sothoran; Councillors, Rev. J. H. Wiggin, Wm. H. Britton, Richard B. Westbrook, C. E. Simnas, H. D. Monachesi; Counsel, W. Q. Judge.

There are several significant facts connected with this organisation. I have heard the members given as two hundred and fifty. Many of them had been avowed Spiritualists, and the foremost desire seemed to be the acquiring of power to control the elements. Mr. Newton was a leading spiritualist, and soon became unfriendly to the organisation. Others followed, till the number became only a handful. Mrs. Britton, also a spiritualist, gave up her connection and published a volume of her own which was regarded as in violation of the pledges. Dr. Pancoast prepared a manuscript but died before publishing. So, when I became acquainted with the party, the most of them had returned to their former relations.

One thing occurred which both brought the society into notice, and proved the starting point of another movement. Baron de Palm, an impoverished nobleman of Germany, had affiliated with the Theosophists. He was in low health. Col. Olcott gave him kind attention, and he in return bequeathed his belongings, with the condition

that his body should be cremated. Dr. Le Moyne, an old-time abolitionist and candidate for vice-president, had built a crematory furnace at Washington, in Western Pennsylvania, and thither in early winter the body was taken. Col. Olcott had been a "newspaper man," and took pains that the matter should be duly published. He was always conscious that printer's ink was serviceable, and that it was better to be criticised and even made sport of than not to be noticed at all.

In due time Mme. Blavatsky's work was published, and at Mr. Bouton's suggestion it was named "Isis Unveiled." That season she seemed to be collecting herself for a change. The rooms on 47th street were gayer than ever. That autumn the trees in the woods exhibited more variagated colors in the leafage than has since been the case, and the woman who kept their place in order constructed some characteristic devices with the leaves. The eastern side of the dining room was decorated with the double triangle or six-pointed star, and there was a long array of tropical animals, the tiger, elephant, and other creatures, and likewise a man, all were represented in solemn procession. I have seen this several times described, and the writers drew somewhat upon their imagination. When the establishment was broken up, I carried these away and placed them in the hall-way beside my bed-chamber. The wind played sad havoc with the leaves. Years afterward I presented it to Miss C. G. Hancock, a cousin, in Sacramento, and she presented it to Theosophists in San Francisco.

That fall, Madame Blavatsky announced that "the Brothers" had directed her to remove the Theosophical Society to India. I had repeatedly advised her to write of the arcane and superhuman acts of these personages, but she always professed to be not permitted. The place in 47th street was dismantled, and a short time later, not far from New Year's day, the group were under way.

Up to the inception of the Theosophical Society, Col. Olcott had been known as a spiritualist. He had lectured, he had written books about what he had seen. In this capacity he first met with Madame Blavatsky in Vermont, and she certainly had been familiar with spiritualists. Judge Edmonds, who stood high in that department, greatly admired her mediumistic powers.

Setting sail from New York, December 17th, 1878, Col. Olcott

and his party arrived at Bombay, February 16th, 1879. Here they established themselves, and in October the first number of *The Theosophist* was issued. It purported in its title to be "a monthly journal devoted to Oriental Philosophy, Art, Literature, and Occultism: Embracing Mesmerism, Spiritualism and Other Secret Sciences." It also announced that the Society was in alliance with the Indian Arya Samaj, headed by the pandit Dayanand Saraswati, and with the Buddhists of Ceylon. Col. Olcott possessed rare ability as an organiser, and branch societies soon began to be formed in various parts of the world. Many Hindus of rank also became identified with them. But a year or more afterward the Pandit refused longer to approve the Society, and it continued after that to work solely on its own lines. Four years later the headquarters were removed to Adyar in the Presidency of Madras, and have remained there ever since.

About this time the movement was assailed by various adversaries, apparently resolved to destroy or perish in the attempt. The Rev. Joseph Cook, always spoiling for a fight, began. The Coulombs followed. Rev. Moncure Conway also visited the place and gave his account. It fell upon Col. Olcott to conduct the movement and especially to champion Mme. Blavatsky. This he did with a zeal and positiveness inspired by his extraordinary devotion and confidence in her.

In 1884 both Col. Olcott and Mme. Blavatsky visited London, accompanied by several Hindu scholars of distinction. Here they were visited by Mr. Gladstone, Prof. Crookes, Alfred Russel Wallace, Lord Rayleigh, Professor Sidgwick.

The Society for Psychic Research appointed a committee to go to Adyar and investigate the charges of trickery made by the couple against Mme. Blavatsky. Professor Hodgson made a report stating that she had in concert with the Coulombs produced fraudulent phenomena. Col. Olcott promptly came to her defense and showed himself not only sincere in his convictions, but a man hard to overcome. The Theosophical Society did not suffer from this assault.

Mme. Blavatsky's health was broken, and she spent her time thenceforth mostly in Europe in endeavors for its restoration. She died in London in 1898. The management of the Society devolved upon Col. Olcott. It proved a rugged duty. A controversy arose

with Mr. William Q. Judge, who had resuscitated the movement in New York, and it resulted in the separation of a large part of the Societies in America and their reorganisation as a separate body, with Mr. Judge as the leader. His death was followed by a further division, and the new movement fell under the lead of Mrs. Katherine Tingley, now of Point Loma, San Diego County, California.

Col. Olcott continued to direct the Society at Adyar, and the various branches affiliated with it. He travelled much, and every where made friends. His unselfishness astonished every one. A disciple in Australia having made him heir, he repaired to the place, and surrendered the estate. He was a philanthropist and strove to benefit the people of Southern India and Ceylon. He founded schools and colleges which have rendered services of untold value. His affection for India was evinced by his passionate desire to get back there before he died. He had lived there thirty years; a great religious movement had come forth under his hand; and however it may culminate, its past history is one to do him honor.

The last time that I saw him he delivered an address at the Scottish Rite Hall in New York. I rode with him to Orange and he appointed a time for an interview; but he went west instead.

Of rumored wonderful phenomena, I never saw any that he had anything to do with. I am willing to believe much, but I dread being humbugged. He was rather fond of using expressions to signify superior communication, but I always kept close to "hard pan." I do not mean to intimate that they ever dealt with any hocus-pocus, and I hardly think that they did. Every thing that I ever saw was rational, inside the bounds of common sense, and they were persons, as every body knows, of superior intelligence.

Col. Olcott was a native of Orange, New Jersey, and a brother of his has been prominent many years in business and political matters. He has also other kindred there. He was born August 2, 1832, and was a somewhat precocious student. He had superior qualifications for business, was of inflexible probity, and if he had devoted himself to the acquiring of wealth, he might have realised a fortune. Whether he chose the more excellent part, others must judge. He followed his convictions, and devoted himself to the resuscitation of the "Wisdom Religion." The results are by no means discreditable. The professed Theosophists number at least fifteen thousand, scat-

tered, however, into rival camps. But his death leaves his organisation without a head. Whether it will merge with rival bodies is not probable. But it may be a question whether an equal will succeed to him. I remember him for his kindness, his suavity, his sincerity. Let those who knew him better praise him accordingly. A. W.

WEIGHING HUMAN SOULS.

Doctor Duncan Macdougall, of Haverhill, Mass., affirms that the soul is a ponderable substance, and that it has a weight that can be ascertained. He is president of a Society for Psychical Research, and several other physicians are associated with him in his investigations. The method employed consisted in placing a dying person upon the platform of a pair of scales, which had been so constructed as to be sensitive to a weight of less than the tenth of an ounce. Dr. Macdougall tells of five experiments of the kind, and in each case the instant that the heart ceased beating there was a loss of weight of a full ounce. There appears to be no reasonable doubt of the accurateness of the tests.

It is too serious a topic to jest upon, but we are reminded of the vehement utterance of a man who was greatly disgusted at the mean action of another, that a thousand such souls could dance on the point of a cambric needle and have as much room as a mouse in a two-story house. But taking the matter seriously, it appears as an argument that the soul is little or nothing else than a material substance of a sublimated character, and nothing beyond. Logic and philosophy both assume that the spiritual substance being alive is first in order as a cause and that the body proceeds from it as an effect, and is therefore subject to it. Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes states that he had seemed to perceive at the moment of dying a something luminous passing from the body of the individual. We instinctively speak of a dead body as "it," recognising that the personal distinction has left it, hardly thinking of it as man or woman. May it not be probable that the loss of weight apparent at the moment of dying is due to the expiring of breath from the collapsing of the lungs?

All life passes over from being to being. There is no step in Nature into non-being.

—Liedge.