

MADAM BLAVATSKY—A TRIBUTE

MANLY PALMER HALL

When any thoughtful and fair-minded person is confronted with a book like *Priestess of the Occult*, by Gertrude Marvin Williams, he is likely to feel a genuine sympathy for a person so unfairly and vindictively attacked. It seems rather cruel and unnecessary to set about a systematic process of tearing down the life and work of a distinguished woman who is not alive to defend herself, and most of whose personal friends and associates have also passed on.

Madam Blavatsky was subjected to constant persecution during the years when she was establishing and expanding the Society which she formed. But she had the wisdom and skill to defend the principles for which she stood, often by means little short of miraculous. Perhaps, then, it is not entirely coincidental that just at the time I decided to write this little tribute to her memory, a copy of a letter pertinent to the subject, written by H.P.B. to a personal friend on July 5th 1890, came into my possession. As I am not sure that the contents of this private correspondence has been published, it seems appropriate to quote several extracts which are more to the point than anything that I could say. Let Madam speak for herself.

As usual H.P.B. was in the midst of her critics, and her remarks have the rugged quality for which she was justly famous. As Mrs. Williams is particularly incensed over Madam Blavatsky's claims about the existence of mahatmas and adepts, H.P.B.'s remarks on this controversial issue might have been addressed directly to our Denver authorities.*)

*) In the passages quoted from this letter written in H.P.B.'s own handwriting, the spelling and punctuation have been left exactly as they appear in the original. In a few cases of obvious misspelling of Sanskrit terms, the correct transliteration has been added in brackets. — *Ed. Theosophia.*

"All depends, you see, on what each of us means by *Mahatmas* or *Masters*. To a Hindu, no doubt, from the very learned Subba Row, down to Babula — a 'Mahatma,' Guru or Master, is a naked *Yogi* with a *chignon* of entangled and unkempt hair on the top of the head; one who whether an *Adwaita* [*Advaita*], *Dwaita* or *Visishadwaita* [*Visishtadwaita*], . . . or *Vishnava* [*Vaishnava*], or whatever else, follows the rules of Patanjali, of Chaitanya Sankaracharya [*Chaitanya Sankarâchârya*] or any other of the *known acharyas* [*âchâryas*]; one who calls upon the name of his 330 crown of deities, repeats parrot like his *Aums*, etc., etc., For me and those who *know* the *Masters personally*, our 'Mahatmas' so-called, are *nothing of the kind*. Olcott is home, and you may ask him what our *Masters* are like, whether from the description he had from me in New York and which was never altered to this day, or from the two *Masters* he met personally — one in Bombay and the other in Cashmere. My *Masters* and the *Masters* are *Yogis* and *Munis de facto*, not *de jure*; in their life not in appearance. They *are* members of an *occult Brotherhood*, not of any particular School in India. One of their highest *Mahachohans* lived in Egypt and went to Tibet only a year before we did (in 1878) and he is neither a Tibetan nor a Hindu; this 'Occult Brotherhood' has not originated in Tibet, nor is it *only* in Tibet now; but what I always said and maintain to this day is, *that most of its members and some of the highest are, and live constantly, in Tibet, because of its isolation and freedom from Christians; that its origin is of untold antiquity, and is as much Masonic as present Masonry is little Masonic; . . . and finally that if I spoke only (to our Fellows of T. S.) of two or three Masters it is because my own Masters happen to be a Rajput*

by birth — and 'Koot hoomi' a Cashmerian, and therefore these were likely to be more authoritative with the Hindus than the rest of them. Ask Olcott, Sinnett, and even Hume, and even the latter could not without saying a *lie* tell you that I had not repeated this to them over and over again adding many a time that even *few lamas* knew the whole truth about the '*Chapa*' (men-spirits) as they call them on account of their having so little to do with the general mass of the people. I said and repeat, that they are *living men* not 'spirits,' or even *Nirmanakayas*, that their knowledge and learning are immense, and their personal holiness of life is still greater — still they are mortal men and none of them 1000 years old as imagined by some. What I said and say, was and is, the truth; those who will have it, all right; those who see in what I say a cleverly concocted romance by me, are also welcome. . . . When we went to Pondichery with Olcott to form a Branch, instead of fifty or sixty members we got but three or four. Why? Simply because I had said to an influential member that our Mahatmas did not sit buried in the earth letting their toe and finger nails grow a yard long and the birds make nests in their top-nots — for such was his idea. He left the 'U.S. and led away almost all others. Ask Olcott, he must remember the fact. And yet in the very room where visitors came to see us, in the crowd there stood a *living Mahatma*, whom I knew for years, who lives in the neighborhood, but whom no one

seemed to know in Pondichery, and who was mistaken for a Malayalin — a stranger!"

We cannot expect those who have no conception of an inner mystical life and no intention of seeking enlightenment through the unfoldment of their own inner faculties to understand or appreciate the esoteric tradition. They will not investigate, therefore, cannot equip themselves with the means of passing an intelligent judgment.

The late Srimat Kuladananda Brahmachary, one of the most deeply venerated of the Madhwacharya Order, said to me in Calcutta years ago, "If the West really wants to understand the Eastern mystics it is not so difficult. Select from your Universities a group of your outstanding students and professors; send them to us, and let them remain for five years following our instructions and obeying our rules; then let these men pass judgment upon our methods and our accomplishments."

The thousands of sincere and aspiring men and women in all parts of the world, who are proud to acknowledge the debt which they owe to Madam Blavatsky, will be properly indignant at a book which is so obviously an enterprise in catchpenny journalism. But they will remain forever grateful for the light of Eastern wisdom brought to the West by the white Yogini. We will always revere her as a faithful, unselfish servant of the Masters of Wisdom.

OUR TITLE-PAGE

The portrait of H.P.B. which appears as frontispiece in this issue is but little known to Theosophists. Most students are familiar with the one in which H.P.B., with shawl wrapt round her head, is looking straight at us. Some have referred to it as the "Sphinx." When Messrs. Elliot and Fry of London took that portrait in 1888, two further negatives were made. They were rejected by H.P.B. The better of these two is reproduced on our title-page, by kind permission of Doris Grove, General Secretary, The Theosophical Society in England (Adyar), which latter holds the copyright to the portrait. It was originally published in *The Theosophist*, April, 1946.