

## **Robert Bowen mystery - "The Secret Doctrine and its study" pamphlet by Robert Bowen**

Because so little was known of Robert and the possibility that his son, Patrick, might have been hoping for an opportunity to lead the TS which had been in crisis, the implication has been that the MS may have been put together by Patrick himself to help strengthen his arm for taking over the Presidency. In other words a power struggle was implied. Furthermore, there was no record that Robert had ever attended any of HPB's classes .

### **The pamphlet itself**

Quotes from it have often been used because the substance was generally well - regarded. Ianthe Hoskins wrote "Foundations of Esoteric Philosophy," based around the Bowen notes. The only definite criticism made of it was in the footnotes by Katinka, who, on looking out at the Western world, could find no evidence of Jnana yoga holding any substantial interest. That point, I feel, has been misunderstood for it is Jnana Yoga the Westerner *has* to focus on if full self - realisation is to eventually take place. Would we have the potential to begin to accomplish this, I wonder, during the fifth Round? This is what HPB says about us now: "... *full* realisation of the spiritual Self is impossible for an incarnated 4th Rounder ..." CW VIII p. 96

There has been some interference with the MS nonetheless. It seems that the signing and dating of it will remain a mystery. The earlier version is dated 19 April 1891; the later version, in which an unimportant sentence has been excluded, 23 April 1891. For all we know, the MS may have been dated before April, but that April was chosen because of Robert's observance on how HPB had changed i.e. becoming "mild." and so on before she died a few weeks later.

The subject of some of the substance in the pamphlet is brought up later.

### **Working status of Robert**

Appearing at the foot of the pamphlet is "Cmdr." standing for Commander and "RN" for Royal Navy.

Again the implication may have been that Patrick increased his father's status, but there is no evidence for this. In Patrick's resignation letter to the Hermetic Society in Dublin he refers to his father as having been "a naval officer." If indeed his father had been a Commander, why wouldn't he have said so? Commanders, after all, are at the top of their profession.

A thorough search of Navy records by one of Kew's recommended researchers revealed that Robert had not occupied any position as Officer or Commander in either the Royal or Merchant Navy. However, she pointed out that auxiliary shipping staff were not recorded and that his most likely position would have been what we call today as Purser. Therefore, Patrick could refer to his father as being a naval officer because all senior shipping personnel were termed as officers. Duties of a Purser in the early 19th C. included the recording of ships which were not supposed to be in the area and also of ships carrying slaves. The Navy was the first to be involved in such Intelligence work, a far cry from the sophisticated operations today in Intelligence. It wasn't until 1882 that Intelligence operations began to take on specialised roles.

### **His earlier life**

He was born in 1811 at the family home of Cleady House, Kenmare, County Kerry, in Ireland and a Jesuit education awaited him. From 1814 Jesuit schools in Europe regained something of the prominence they had had in the 200 years following Ignatius's death. The Ignatian insight was that "God is to be found in all things," and importance was given to the learning of languages, history, literature and the humanities.<sup>1</sup> It is apparent that Jesuit

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<sup>1</sup> The word *humanitas* translated the Greek word *paidea*, which had come to mean both the process and the studies that developed moral goodness, devotion to truth, and a disposition to act for the civic good: languages, poetry, history, rhetoric and logic, along with maths, sciences and philosophy of nature. For the humanists these were the subjects that opened the mind, sharpened

education for both Robert and, much later, his youngest son, Patrick, had a strong, benign influence on both men.

Robert had to work to support his two elder sisters until they married. It was the usual custom for sons of the landed gentry to enter the Diplomatic Service until they themselves inherited their properties. But a researcher at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office verified he held no position in any capacity with them. Robert's father lived a long life and so Robert did not become the gentleman farmer until later in his own life, not marrying until he was in his fifties.

He is recorded in the 1862 edition of Thom's Almanac and Official Directory as being one of the Magistrates for the County Kerry area. Robert would have been 51 then.

### Census

However, Robert does not ever appear on any Census record in England or Ireland. There were two Robert BOWENS in London for the 1891 Census taken on 5 April, only two weeks before he supposedly signed the pamphlet, but their years of birth do not coincide with his. Again, the researcher commented that little importance should be attached to Census records for several reasons: many Irish records were destroyed during their civil war in 1921 and British subjects could be overlooked or put down anything on their Census forms for no checks were made.

The Irish Land Registry shows that Cleady House still remained in Robert's name when in his early eighties and he took the young Patrick with him to Africa for the wagon trip. It seems therefore that Robert retained his Irish citizenship and when in London stayed in accommodation or with friends; he could afford to be socially mobile. He also would have had "an old boy" Jesuit network throughout Europe.

### The man himself - much later

Who knew Robert better than anyone else was Nancy Davis,<sup>2</sup> who lived with her grand parents for a year when she was seven years old. Robert was 95 then. She says "he was a very gentle and loving person and could think as a child thinks; he used to tell me stories, and I know now he composed them as he went along. I used to sit on a little stool at his knee." Nancy later realised that the basis for Robert's stories was the Higher Self trying to get through to the personality of his main character and the latter fighting off such influences. She goes on to say, "Patrick was very like him, I think. I have a good memory of everything about Robert. I loved him so much. ...he was such a gentle soul. What he did in his young days I cannot remember, but I did not know if he was in the navy. Who got this information?"

"I cannot be of any help in tracing the MS of the booklet, 'on how to study theosophy.' ... I knew Pat had some fragments of writings of his father's which he found tucked away in bookshelves in his old home. It seems there were volumes of writings at one time. Pat used to see his father continually writing when he was a child and during his growing years. He never saw them, as they were locked away. Before Pat left home ... Robert had told him a little about HPB, but he was young then (15) and it did not interest him. ... My grandmother destroyed all the writings, considering them to be heretical as she was an ardent Church woman ..."

We know how HPB spent much of her days and nights writing and probably few of her letters to correspondents came to light for posterity, not only through general ignorance of their historical value, but through the influence of such people as Robert's wife, who herself, according to Patrick, was an Evangelistical Protestant, and who would consider HPB as being demonic.

We know that Robert was passionate about Greek knowledge and culture. The bulk of his writings in Greek were passed to Patrick when the latter was about 25 and Robert therefore 95. How these MSS were lost we do not know.

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wits, deepened human sympathy, and developed clarity of thought and force in expressing it."  
From "Jesuits and higher education" Boston College, USA, 1994

<sup>2</sup> From quotes from letters from Nancy Davis to Douglas Western concerning Robert Bowen written 1982 - 1985. Douglas was Patrick's ardent student at Bournemouth. Susan Reed (now Fox) in turn was Douglas's ardent student and she publishes all the works of Patrick Bowen.

An Irishman, who shall remain nameless, blamed the wicked English for destroying Robert's "million words." But there is no proof. It might be more likely that because the Greek language and occult cipher was used, nobody understood them and so they were not valued.

### **Dr Anna Kingsford meets Robert**

Kingsford practised as a Doctor in Paris and on becoming dismayed at the experiments on animals being carried out there during the late 1870s, gave lectures all over Europe on the subject, drawing on her inner knowledge of animals being sentient creatures and saying, "animals were a living, conscious portion of the Divine Mind so that every pang suffered by them is suffered directly by that Mind." With such an approach, she aimed to draw intellectual people who might have been able to wield some influence on this grotesque development. In 1882 her book, "The Perfect Way," was published. It explained the misinterpretation of biblical texts over centuries, winning the attention of the newly formed British Theosophical Society and Kingsford became President in 1883 for a short while.

It is not known how exactly Kingsford met Robert Bowen, but according to "An Untold Story," by a previous Irish President of the Theosophical Society, it was she who introduced him to theosophy. She started the London Hermetic Society in 1884 and continued giving lectures in Europe until the last two years of her life. Thus, whether he met her in Europe or London, Robert himself had commented in the pamphlet how he'd known HPB for two years i.e. from 1889. It is interesting to note that both Kingsford and Bowen were Greek scholars and "intellectual" Roman Catholics, as opposed to being merely obedient to the Church Fathers.<sup>3</sup> They had, therefore, much in common.

### **HPB's classes from 1889**

Well documented are the Inner Group Teachings classes held on Wednesdays for selected serious students.

Not so well known were the open classes HPB held in the Lecture Hall on Thursdays. There are at least two sources relating to this, both originals being held by the Blavatsky Study Center. Firstly, in the autumn of 1888 HPB replied to her sister, Madame Jelihovsky, who had been mourning the loss of her son. She laments, " ... if there ever was in the world an over - worked victim it is your long - suffering sister." Among the responsibilities she was involved with were the hundreds of people who attended the Lecture Hall in London every week.

Secondly, a letter written by Claude F Wright in October 1890 mentions how Blavatsky's Lodge meetings were held in the Lecture Hall on Thursdays and each week sees them grow larger and larger. The subject was entitled, "Theosophy, from the root up."

Members of the Inner Group were sworn to secrecy about the existence of their Wednesday classes.

### **The African trip**

One or two years after HPB's death Robert took his young son, Patrick, to Africa with him. Patrick himself said he was only ten or twelve at the time. He followed his father's wagon through the wild Bushlands of the Northern

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<sup>3</sup> Kingsford translated the Hermetic fragments. Her own initiation was Greco-Egyptian, after the method of the Bacchic mysteries, which are the immediate source and pattern of the mysteries of the Catholic Christian Church. She was made President of the TS then because the Masters were desperate to stop experiments on animals, the beginning of another degradation in the world. Kingsford herself also became desperate to achieve this and eventually arranged to meet the Pope, hoping he could wield some strong influence. At the same time she wanted to tell him of her biblical discoveries. If she had met the famous G Garibaldi before going to Rome, he might have told her not to bother to go there! As it turned out, he was right for she was given a cool reception on both counts. Her observations were that the Priests in Rome "resemble black flies buzzing about the putrid corpse of a dead religion." Garibaldi often referred to the Priests as "vipers."

Transvaal, Portuguese East Africa and Mashonaland, (Zimbabwe).

For Robert to have taken his young son with him, he must have been confident in the natives' abilities he had employed to lead them. There was general health to consider and possible danger from animals or other humans. In turn Robert must have won their trust and respect. The venture was not merely to "admire the scenery," but to meet some exalted beings - which he did accomplish. Had he not been worthy of this, would he have succeeded? After all, if these beings become aware that self-centred, unthinking people are looking for them, why would they appear and present themselves?

They met Initiates of the Ancient Brotherhood of Wisdom, Patrick was recognised by Mankanyezi (the Starry One) as a child for some special qualities and was informed he would go far on the spiritual path.

Briefly, the human race story<sup>4</sup> in Africa dates back to more than 40,000 years before the mythical creation of Adam. This story was written by Lord Khem, or Ham, (known as the Greek Thoth-Hermes), who was the scribe of the African builder gods, referred to as the ancient ones of Khem.

The teachings of Lord Khem attracted students such as Pythagoras and Plato - the hermetic teachings - and passed them to the world as Greek philosophy or Pythagoreanism. Western scholars made the world to believe that before colonisation, Africa was a Dark Continent ...."

### **The African effect**

The Wagon trip took so long to accomplish that Robert worried about the boy's education. Patrick himself wanted to be educated in Africa with the Mankanyezi, but Robert had an academic career planned for him following a Jesuit education.

At 15 Patrick ran away from home to sea and made his life in Africa, working for various colonial administrations. He had a natural sympathy with the natives and knew twenty two African languages. Eventually he met an Atlas Berber, an initiated teacher, Mehlo Moya, and was admitted into his Occult Brotherhood. The higher grades of attainment amongst them were spoken of as "Those who Know," and at the apex of the hierarchically ordered organisation was said to be "The Ancient One." Patrick was permitted to copy and publish three fragments, translated from a document in an archaic Bantu language (Isinzu). These fragments point to a connection and common origin with the source from which stem all Esoteric traditions.<sup>5</sup> It has to be stressed that no one Occult Brotherhood would have a monopoly on Knowledge! According to an observation published in the Canadian Theosophist, "Fifty years - plus Ten" Vol. XVI, Nov. 15th, 1935:

"HPB told us that there were six other schools of occultism and that ours was as near to the White Lodge as any of the others....."

It was at Patrick's Initiation that he actually changed his name to Patrick, having been Beamish until then. After his Initiation, it was observed, for instance, that he could mesmerise wild animals with the same ability as that of the aged Fakir, who mesmerised the fierce, Bengali tiger until its eyes became mild.

### **Return to Great Britain**

After more than twenty years in Africa, Patrick returned to England and discovered that the principles of Theosophy were identical in essence to all he had learned in Africa. But he was disappointed to find the TS not of the same calibre when, in his mid - twenties and his father, then 95 , had talked to him about Blavatsky and the TS. For example, he found it had now fractured into different aspects, such as the Liberal Catholic Church.

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<sup>4</sup> From "The Ancient Religion in Africa" by P G Bowen

<sup>5</sup> From "Sayings of the Ancient One" by P G Bowen

We can only speculate as to whether or not Patrick might have keen to take over the Presidency. Who knows? Given the opportunity, he truly may have made a success of it. He was able to equate the Theosophical teachings step by step with his own, whereas during her Presidency, Dr. Anna Kingsford did not seem able to leave the Catholic doctrines at times. At the request of George Russell (AE), Patrick took on the Presidency of the Dublin Hermetic Society and he already had a large following with correspondents.

Anyone having read and studied Patrick's achievements and publications could not fail to be impressed with what he was able to advise on life experiences and teach. Writing about "The Occult Way," to Todd Katz, Sy Ginsberg comments: "Here at last, I had come across a teacher writing not from information - but with an inner knowledge - ever since then I have revered him as my Guru."

### **The pamphlet**

The intention of this investigation into the Bowens' general integrity and credentials was to bring out the relevant history (not their fully known history) of the two men and to try to determine if either Robert or Patrick could have themselves written or embellished on what we believed HPB had given out on how to approach and study Theosophy.

HPB's failing health was particularly evident by April 1891, as we have seen. Some of the symptoms of Bright's Disease (impaired kidney function) include drowsiness, back ache and leg swelling.

Robert comments in the pamphlet how "I felt, especially during these last meetings since she has become so helpless bodily, that we are getting teachings from another and higher sphere." In other words, it would seem as if HPB's perception was operating from a high spiritual plane; hence, for example her observation regarding all the Rounds etc. as "from above" and so on. "'There is neither coming nor passing, but eternal becoming,' she says." on page 1.

HPB herself comments (CW XII p.372) how there is a possibility of reaching in mystic visions the plane of the Higher Manas when the body is weak and exhausted through illness and suffering.

If we bear in mind this perception from a high spiritual plane, it is interesting how the whole pamphlet can then be read and understood.

Robert did well to express her meanings and she said so at the time. He obviously not only had a gift for written expression but a sensitive awareness.

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