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## Some Observations on the Claims made by Boris de Zirkoff and others

Jan 10, 1999 10:34 PM  
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Some Observations on the Claims made by Boris de Zirkoff and others  
about Madame Blavatsky's THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY

by Daniel H. Caldwell

In the book THE PERENNIAL WISDOM --- FUNDAMENTAL TEACHINGS OF  
H.P. BLAVATSKY: A STUDY GUIDE TO THE VIDEOTAPE, etc. by April  
Hejka-Ekins, Jerry Hejka-Ekins and Brett Forray, the following  
comments are made on THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY.

"Published in 1892, this is a posthumous work. Research by Boris de Zirkoff ('Who Played the Trick on H.P.B.?' THEOSOPHIA, Vol. 24, No. 3) indicates that H.P.B. had far less to do with writing this glossary, than previously assumed. According to Mr. de Zirkoff, after H.P.B.'s death, the unfinished manuscript was still too thin for publication, therefore the editors added a considerable number of definitions from outside sources, without acknowledgement to the readers. Sometimes W. Wynn Westcott, one of the editors, penned his own definitions. These however, are identified by his initials. Some of the above definitions have proven to be incorrect. The portion of manuscript material actually penned by H.P.B. for this glossary was apparently added to the second edition of THE KEY TO THEOSOPHY in 1890, during her lifetime. Nevertheless, THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY remains an important reference if this history is kept in mind."

>From the above quote from THE PERENNIAL WISDOM, let us focus on the following TWO statements:

[1]

- > The portion of manuscript material \*actually penned\* by H.P.B.
- > for this [Theosophical] glossary was apparently added to
- > the second edition of THE KEY TO THEOSOPHY in 1890,
- > during her lifetime.

Asterisks added. The time period referred to is Autumn 1890.

[2]

- > According to Mr. de Zirkoff, after H.P.B.'s death, the
- > unfinished manuscript was still too thin for publication,
- > therefore the editors added a considerable number of definitions
- > from outside sources, without acknowledgement to the readers.

I ask the interested reader to COMPARE the above two statements with what Madame Blavatsky herself wrote in the Preface to the Second edition of THE KEY TO THEOSOPHY:

- > In order to further facilitate the Study of Theosophy, which the
- > 'Key' has already made an easy task, I have added a copious
- > 'Glossary' of all the technical terms found in it [the 'Key'].
- > Most of the definitions and explanations are transcriptions or
- > abbreviations from the larger 'Theosophical Glossary', which will
- > shortly be published together with the Treatise on 'Archaic
- > Symbolism.' It is hoped that both 'Glossaries' will supply a
- > long-felt want, and that the larger one will cover the whole
- > range of occult terminology as completely as possible.
- >
- > H.P.B.
- >
- > Theosophical Headquarters,
- > 19, Avenue Road,
- > London, N.W.
- >
- > 1890.

[A side note: Unfortunately, Mr. de Zirkoff does not refer to this quote from HPB in his article on the Theos. Glossary.]

Does anyone see a contradiction between the statements made in THE PERENNIAL WISDOM and HPB's prefatory remarks to the 2nd ed. of THE KEY?

In the autumn of 1890, HPB's own words indicate that she had a larger MSS of which the part added as a glossary to the 2nd ed. of the KEY was only a portion of that larger MS.

Therefore, what does the following statement really tell us?

- > The portion of manuscript material actually penned by H.P.B. for
- > this glossary was apparently added to the second edition of THE
- > KEY TO THEOSOPHY in 1890, during her lifetime.

Yes, the glossary added to the 2nd ed. of the KEY was "actually penned" by H.P.B. but. . . WHO had compiled and written the larger MS existing also at the same time (autumn 1890)?

Also in comparing the two statements from the PERENNIAL WISDOM, what were the differences (if any) between (1) "the portion of manuscript material actually penned by H.P.B. for this glossary [autumn 1890]" and (2) the "unfinished manuscript" found at HPB's death (May 1891) and deemed "still too thin for publication"?

Mr. de Zirkoff's article on THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY was entitled "Who Played That Trick on H.P.B.?: The Puzzle of 'The Theosophical Glossary'."

In his article, Mr. de Zirkoff does not actually tell us who played the "trick".

The writers of THE PERENNIAL WISDOM are more specific:

> Research by Boris de Zirkoff. . . indicates that H.P.B. had  
> far less to do with writing this glossary, than previously  
> assumed. According to Mr. de Zirkoff, after H.P.B.'s death, the  
> unfinished manuscript was still too thin for publication,  
> therefore the editors added a considerable number of definitions  
> from outside sources, without acknowledgement to the readers.  
> Sometimes W. Wynn Westcott, one of the editors, penned his own  
> definitions. These however, are identified by his initials. .  
> ...

Who were the editors? They identify Westcott as one of the editors. Unless there are primary source documents I am not aware of, Westcott was \*not\* one of the editors. He was a \*contributor\* to the Glossary at HPB's specific request. In a document in HPB's own handwriting, she says:

> Kindly helped for a number of Kabalistic terms by W. Wynn  
> Westcott M.B., F.T.S. Hon. Magus, Soc. Ros. etc. etc. [All  
> the terms explained in this work by Brother Wynn Westcott are  
> invariably signed with his Initials---'W.W.W.']

Reading G.R.S. Mead's January 1892 "PREFACE" to THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY, it would appear that Mead was the sole editor. And I guess if a "trick" was played on HPB, it was by G.R.S. Mead himself.

In this same preface, Mead tells the reader:

> THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY labours under the disadvantage of  
> being an almost entirely posthumous work, of which the author  
> [HPB] only saw the first thirty-two pages in proof. This is all  
> the more regrettable, for H.P.B., as were her wont, was adding  
> considerably to her original copy, and would no doubt have  
> increased the volume far beyond its present limits. . . .

Compare Mead's words just quoted with the PERENNIAL WISDOM quote:

> According to Mr. de Zirkoff, after H.P.B.'s death, the  
> unfinished manuscript was still too thin for publication,  
> therefore the editors added a considerable number of definitions  
> from outside sources, without acknowledgement to the readers.

If we believe a "trick" is involved here, then Mr. Mead is the trickster and is guilty of lying, etc.

And in the third paragraph of the Preface, Mead explicitly says:

> H.P.B. desired also to express her \*special\* indebtedness, as far  
> as the tabulation of facts is concerned, to the SANSKRIT-CHINESE  
> DICTIONARY by Eitel, THE HINDU CLASSICAL DICTIONARY of  
> Dowson, THE VISHNU PURANA of Wilson, and the ROYAL MASONIC  
> CYCLOPAEDIA of Kenneth Mackenzie.

Asterisks added.

Now did HPB herself extract material from these four sources and

incorporate them into THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY or did Mr. Mead do it and then (as part of the "trick" scheme) simply attribute the above words to HPB?

As Mr. de Zirkoff points out, there are 2, 767 distinct terms in THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY.

William Emmette Coleman, one of HPB's hostile critics, writes (in 1895) as follows on THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY:

> The whole of this book, except the garblings, distortions and  
> fabrications of Madame Blavatsky scattered through it, was copied  
> from other books. The explanations and definitions of 425 names  
> and terms were copied from Dowson's HINDU CLASSICAL DICTIONARY.  
> From Wilson's VISHNU PURANA were taken those of 242 terms; from  
> Eitel's HANDBOOK OF CHINESE BUDDHISM, 179; and from Mackenzie's  
> MASONIC CYCLOPAEDIA, 164. . . .

425 + 242 + 179 + 164 = 1010

According to Coleman, the explanations and definitions of 1,010 terms were copied from these 4 books.

What did Mr. de Zirkoff say about what was copied from these 4 books?

In Mr. de Zirkoff's unpublished notes [found in the archives of the late Walter A. Carrither's Jr.] the following totals are found:

"From Dowson (D) 414" terms  
"From McKenzie (about) 100" terms  
"From Eitel. . . . 125" terms

In BdZ's notes, there is no total for the number of definitions from Wilson's VISHNU PURANA.

Compare the totals of Coleman and de Zirkoff.

Using Coleman's total, we find that more than 1/3 of the definitions in THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY are from these 4 books by Dowson, McKenzie, Eitel, and Wilson.

Coleman accuses Blavatsky of plagiarism of these terms. Coleman also accuses HPB of massive plagiarism in her OTHER works. See Coleman's article entitled "The Sources of Madame Blavatsky's Writings", pp. 23 et seq in Solovyov's A MODERN PRIESTESS OF ISIS (1895).

I would guess (?) that Mr. de Zirkoff would attribute these "appropriations" to the "trick" of G.R.S. Mead.

But Mr. Mead specifically tells the readers of THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY:

"H.P.B. desired . . . to express her \*special\* indebtedness, as far as the tabulation of facts is concerned, to the SANSKIRT-CHINESE DICTIONARY by Eitel, THE HINDU CLASSICAL DICTIONARY of Dowson, THE VISHNU PURANA of Wilson, and the ROYAL MASONIC CYCLOPAEDIA of Kenneth Mackenzie." Asterisks added.

Having studied THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY and compared it with HPB's other writings, I am of the opinion that when compiling the THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY, HPB used various books as

reference works from which she extracted "the tabulation of facts" and then added in numerous instances (what Mr. de Zirkoff characterized as) "an occult interpretation" of these facts.

In his \*published\* article Mr. de Zirkoff writes:

> From such a statement it would appear that The Theosophical  
> Glossary is a work mainly by H. P. Blavatsky, with a certain  
> number of quotations from a fairly small number of works. This  
> impression has become pretty well established in the Theosophical  
> Movement, and several editions of this work have been published  
> by various Theosophical Organizations.  
>  
> The facts, however, differ considerably.  
>  
> A careful analysis of the definitions and of the probable  
> sources from which they were borrowed, has disclosed that out of  
> the 2,767 definitions, a minimum of 2,212 have been taken from  
> the works of a large number of scholars, either verbatim or with  
> very minor alterations, and with no acknowledgment whatsoever; in  
> a few cases a line or two has been added, giving an occult  
> interpretation probably by H.P.B. herself; such instances are  
> very few.

Take note of the latter part of what is written above:

> . . . in a few cases a line or two has been added, giving an  
> occult interpretation probably by H.P.B. herself; such instances  
> are very few.

Consulting the photocopy of Mr. de Zirkoff's copy of THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY (found among Mr. Carrither's papers and books), I find that this statement by Mr. de Zirkoff is off the mark. In fact, the word "few" as used by Mr. de Zirkoff should be replaced with the word "numerous".

There are numerous definitions found in the THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY where you find a "tabulation of facts" from some authority and to this Madame Blavatsky has added anywhere from several lines to whole paragraphs of "occult interpretation." Take for example the entry on "Scarabaeus" on pp. 293-294 of THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY.

Apparently H.P.B. gives extracts from three authorities (Rouge, Maspero, and Deveria) quoted in Bonwick's EGYPTIAN BELIEF AND MODERN THOUGHT, pp. 73-75. To each of these quotes, she adds her "occult interpretation".

Take another one on p. 285 of the T.G. under the entry for "Sakwala". The first 4 or 5 lines are extracted from R. Spence Hardy's EASTERN MONACHISM, p. 4 et seq and the remaining text for this entry was apparently written by H.P.B. giving the "esoteric" interpretation.

I could give numerous other examples.

I find approximately 350 terms (in whole or part) identified by Boris de Zirkoff as being from H.P. Blavatsky's pen. This count \*excludes\* the terms extracted from ISIS UNVEILED (30?), THE SECRET DOCTRINE (25?), or the terms (217) in the glossary published also in the 2nd edition of the KEY.

In Dec 1998 on Theos-Talk, the following "negative" opinions about HPB'S THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY were posted by two other Blavatsky students:

STATEMENT 1: "The Glossary is indeed full of errors. . . . Had I the time I would find dozens of entries I think are suspicious and contradict earlier writings of HPB, especially the SD. . . . Mead wrote a great deal of it, and it waited for HPB's approval. After she died, the MSS. were simply published without HPB's thoroughgoing edit. Much of what's in there is from HPB, and I feel certain much is not."

STATEMENT 2: "The fact is that HPB died before she had finished one third of the TG. The unedited manuscript was picked up by other much less informed theosophists who added to it and produced the present inconsistent and garbled version."

[Compare these statements with what Boris de Zirkoff wrote in his article on the TG.]

It would appear that the above two statements are based on the reasoning

that since there are alleged "errors" and "contradictions" in the THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY, therefore, H.P. Blavatsky did NOT write those portions of the text. Instead, it is hypothesized that, G.R.S. Mead or other unnamed "less informed theosophists" wrote the portions containing

the errors and inconsistencies. It is alleged that these "additions" to

HPB's genuine manuscript were written sometime after May 8, 1891 but prior to the publication of THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY in early 1892. The added material was incorporated into HPB's text and palmed off as genuine Blavatsky writing.

This appears to be the gist of the reasoning in the above two statements.

These two opinions appear similar to the ones previously made by Boris de Zirkoff and Jerry Hejka-Edkins.

First of all, these are SERIOUS ALLEGATIONS against Mr. Mead and other personal students of HPB.

Let us take the above reasoning and see if it holds up in light of the following evidence:

For example, Boris de Zirkoff writes that "the definitions of the Days and Nights of Brahma are entirely wrong [in THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY]."

Are we to conclude therefore that HPB could not have written those definitions? Is that what Mr. de Zirkoff is asking us to do? I assume this is his line of thinking.

But these SAME definitions appear in the 60-page glossary appended to the second edition of THE KEY TO THEOSOPHY. This second edition of the KEY was published in late 1890 while HPB was still alive. And in the Preface to this second edition, HPB writes:

"I have added a copious 'Glossary' of all the technical terms. . . .[to this second edition]."

Or take the original edition of THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE. H.P.B. writes in a note to the main text:

"Eternity with the Orientals has quite another signification than it has

with us. It stands generally for the 100 years or 'age' of Brahma, the duration of a Kalpa or a period of 4,320,000,000 years." pp. 74-75.

Yet Dr. Jean-Louis Siemons considers the time-period given as "a palpable error." And in the Theosophy Company's edition of THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE, the error has also been "corrected."

Would Boris or Rich or Leon maintain that these "errors" in texts published during HPB's lifetime were ALSO made by G.R.S. Mead or other unnamed "less informed theosophists"?

Another example:

Rich writes---

"Here are the few investigations I have time to share today, a few Glossary entries which have minor typos to serious errors of fact. . . "

He then cites several including the following example:

"Dugpas: According to my knowledge (and I'm checking with my prof) the word does not mean anything close to "red hat." Rather, one of its various homonyms (and it's tough to know which one because HPB spells things phonetically and not "correctly" with silent letters) it means evil, poisonous. I have previously posted my feelings on this topic, but the hard and fast distinction which may in the 15th century have applied to Yellow and Red Hats is not only misleading but pernicious, condemning as

it does most Tibetans to the Evil School. But then HPB contradicts herself, and states that most Dugpas live in Bhutan, unaware of pure Northern Buddhism. So does Dugpa mean "Red Hat" for HPB (in which case Tibet is full of them) or "Bonpo," a practitioner of native Tibetan religion -- most of whom currently live in Bhutan. I think it's the latter, and we should all stop castigating the poor Lamas who belong to schools predating the Gelugpa (Dalai Lama) sect. But in any case, the translation "Red Hat" is, I feel certain, completely wrong. I'll update you with my (practising Buddhist) professor's knowledge."

It is unclear to me whether Rich believes HPB was in "error" when writing about "dugpas" OR whether the "error" should be blamed on poor Mr. Mead.

But if Rich or Boris is insisting that this is another "error" indicating that HPB did NOT write it, then please turn to THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE, p. 90 and read HPB's note on the Dugpas:

"The \*Bhons\* or \*Dugpas\*, the sect of the 'Red Caps,' are regarded as the most versed in sorcery. They inhabit Western and little Tibet and Bhutan. They are all Tantrikas. . . ." [Compare this to what KH writes about "Tantrikas".]

Is there an "error" here in the VOICE note? Is Rich ready to attribute this statement in the VOICE to the pen of Mead or "other much

less informed theosophists"?

Also consult published articles in which HPB writes about the Dugpas. Are there "errors" about the dugpas in these writings of HPB (published during her lifetime)? Example: HPB writes: "In Sikkim and Tibet they

are called Dugpas (red-caps). . . ." COLLECTED WRITINGS, VI, p. 198. Also reprinted in Theosophy Company's 3 volume edition of HPB's THEOSOPHICAL ARTICLES (article on "Elementals.")

The above observations are just a few instances that convince me that Boris de Zirkoff's contentions concerning THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY are in gross error.

In her labors on the manuscript of THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY, Madame Blavatsky compiled "definitions" of terms from more than a dozen scholarly books. In numerous entries of this compiled material, H.P.B. then ADDED her "occult interpretation" or esoteric viewpoint.

Many of the errors to be found in the GLOSSARY are derived from errors in the books from which H.P.B. extracted the "tabulation of facts".

In light of the above, there are no good reasons to accuse G.R.S. Mead of adding additional material to the manuscript of THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY after H.P.B.'s death.

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