

CALLED HOME VALIANT DEFENDER OF H.P.B.

By J. L. Davidge

Champion and defender of H. P. Blavatsky, Mrs. Beatrice Hastings passed over on 30 October 1942, a hero-soul whose valiant defence of H.P.B. against her calumniators and her brilliant effort to reverse the infamous verdict of the Society for Psychical Research condemning H.P.B. as an impostor is one of the epics of Theosophical literature.

For many years Mrs. Hastings wrote mostly anonymously, unknown to the general public, though well known in London literary circles as the famous critic of the *New Age* in its palmy days under Orage, and as publisher from her own press in both French and English, a rare but not quite unique faculty among Englishwomen. Her interest in Theosophical “teachings” was mainly intellectual and speculative, and she admits that she was not connected with any Theosophical Society. Her “feeling of the necessity to defend H.P.B. as a deeply-wronged person arose,” she says, “from a casual reading in a Spiritualist library of the Report of the Society for Psychical Research. I found myself staring at the gaps. As a student I was indignant to find myself required to accept Hodgson’s mere opinion where I wanted evidence.”

Procuring everything she could lay hold of—documents, books, reports, pamphlets—she read voluminously for and against, and her “scales came down in many cases, heavily on the side of H.P.B.”

In several handy volumes Mrs. Hastings shows up the vile impostures of the Coulobms, Solovyoff’s betrayal of H.P.B. and her family in *A Modern Priestess of Isis*, the misquotations and “cunning misplacements of matter” by H.E. and W.L. Hare in their misinformed criticism of *The Mahatma Letters*, and she does so with tremendous effect in vivid and trenchant English and ample documentation.

In January 1938 Mrs. Hastings formed an independent society called the Friends of Madame Blavatsky, with the avowed aim to procure the public withdrawal of the Report of the Society for Psychical Research, 1885. She believed that every attack on H.P.B. was based on that Report, and once it was withdrawn the fame of H.P.B. could be left “to make its own way with a fair field before it.”

The actual judgment of the S.P.R. is given in Mrs. Ransom’s *Short History of The Theosophical Society*. After narrating the method of examination by Hodgson of some of the Masters’ letters submitted very freely by Hume, Sinnett and others, Mrs. Ransom writes (p.214):

“Hodgson returned [to London] in April 1885 to present his inaccurate and misleading report. At the General Meeting of the S.P.R., held 24 June, with F. W. H. Myers in the chair, Prof. Sidgwick read the conclusions expressed by the Committee appointed to investigate phenomena connected with The Theosophical Society. Without the slightest reference to those most concerned, they pronounced this unjust verdict on H.P.B.: ‘For our own part we regard her neither as the mouthpiece of hidden seers, nor as a mere vulgar adventuress; we think she has achieved a title to permanent remembrance as one of the most accomplished, ingenious, and interesting impostors in history.’ This cruel judgment was for many years repeated in *The Encyclopadia Britannica*. It has recently been omitted.”

The S.P.R. is carrying very heavy Karma seeing that Hodgson’s Report has never been withdrawn, though its condemnation of H.P.B. is universally admitted to be wrong. Sir William Barrett, F.R.S., admitted (to

Dr. Cousins in 1915) that the Report was a blot on the proceedings of the S.P.R. and he hoped it would soon be withdrawn—and Sir William Barrett was the chief founder of the S.P.R. and one of its presidents. (*Theosophist*, October, 1925, pp. 4-5.) A frank admission of its error would help to clear the S.P.R.'s escutcheon, but the longer the Society persists in its vilifying verdict and refuses to withdraw it, the deeper will be the stain. It was H.P.B. herself who wrote to Mrs. Sinnett of "Hodgson and Co.": "How terribly they will be laughed at some day."

Hodgson admitted to Dr. Besant herself "that he would have given a very different report, had he known in 1885 what he learned afterwards"—a phrase she used in her Convention Lectures of 1922. Knowing his misjudgment; as the S.P.R. must surely be aware of it, the onus is on them to withdraw the verdict of 1885 or to remain perpetrators of one of the most infamous judgments in history and party to what H.P.B. herself described as "a most damnable conspiracy."

Here is a great opening for some Theosophist or Theosophists with daring will and lively pen to carry on Mrs. Hastings' splendid work to its destined climax and to keep at it until the S.P.R. retracts. She was a courageous woman. All she worked for was justice for H.P.B., the ideal justice for which, as she said, "Voltaire-threw up his studies to vindicate Jean Calas," and for which "Zola faced ruin to defend Dreyfus." Her defence of H.P.B. has been no less heroic, though less in the limelight, but time will give it impetus and power.

I have on my desk two books in which Hodgson is mentioned from contrasting viewpoints. In *My Commonplace Book* J. T. Hackett, an Adelaide lawyer and friend of Hodgson, says "he went out to India in 1884 and thoroughly exposed Madame Blavatsky and her Theosophy'." The other book is *The Mahatma Letters* in which the Master K. H. says: "Mr. Hodgson fell quite easily a victim to false evidence." Mr. Hackett repeats the conventional falsehood of half a century ago. The Master gives the truth.
