

Charles Johnston gives his account of his first meeting with H.P. Blavatsky at her new residence at “Maycot”, Norwood, near London, soon after her arrival from Ostend in the spring of 1887.

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HELENA PETROVNA BLAVATSKY

By Charles Johnston

“I understand, Socrates. It is because you say that you always have a divine sign. So he is prosecuting you for introducing new things into religion. And he is going into court knowing that such matters are easily misrepresented to the multitude, and consequently meaning to slander you there.” —PLATO.

I first met dear old “H. P. B.,” as she made all her friends call her, in the spring of 1887. Some of her disciples had taken a pretty house in Norwood, where the huge glass nave and twin towers of the Crystal Palace glint above a labyrinth of streets and terraces. London was at its grimy best. The squares and gardens were scented with grape-clusters of lilac, and yellow rain of laburnums under soft green leaves. The eternal smoke-pall was thinned to a gray veil shining in the afternoon sun, with the great Westminster Towers and a thousand spires and chimneys piercing through. Every house had its smoke-wreath, trailing away to the east.

H. P. B. was just finishing her day’s work, so I passed a half-hour upstairs with her volunteer secretary, a disciple who served her with boundless devotion, giving up everything for her cause, and fighting her battles bravely, to be stormed at in return, unremittingly for seven years. I had known him two years before, in the days of Mohini Chatterji, the velvet-robed Brahman with glossy tresses and dusky face and big luminous eyes. So we talked of old times, and of H. P. B.’s great book, *The Secret Doctrine*, and he read me resonant stanzas about Universal Cosmic Night, when Time was not; about the Luminous Sons of Manvantaric Dawn; and the Armies of the Voice; about the Water Men Terrible and Bad, and the Black Magicians of Lost Atlantis; about the Sons of Will and Yoga and the Ring Pass-Not; about the Great Day Be-With-Us, when all shall be perfected into one, re-uniting “thyself and others, myself and thee.”

So the half-hour passed, and I went downstairs to see the Old Lady. She was in her writing-room, just rising from her desk, and clad in one of those dark blue dressing-gowns she loved. My first impression was of her rippled hair as she turned, then her marvellously potent eyes, as she welcomed me: “My dear fellow! I am so glad to see you! Come in and talk! You are just in time to have some tea!” And a hearty handshake.

Then a piercing call for “Louise,” and her Swiss maid appeared, to receive a voluble torrent of directions in French, and H. P. B. settled herself snugly into an armchair, comfortably near her tobacco-box, and

began to make me a cigarette. The cuffs of a Jaeger suit showed round her wrists, only setting off the perfect shape and delicacy of her hands, as her deft fingers, deeply stained with nicotine, rolled the white rice-paper round Turkish tobacco. When we were comfortably alight, she told me a charming tale of Louise's devotion. She had got away from her base of supplies somewhere, in Belgium I think, and things were rather tight for a while. A wealthy gentleman called to see the famous Russian witch, and tipped her maid munificently. As soon as he was gone, Louise appeared, blushing and apologizing: "Perhaps madame will not be offended," she stammered, "but I do not need money; *enfin—madame consentira . . .*" and she tried to transfer the *douceur* to her mistress.

Louise's entry cut short the story, and H. P. B. turned with a quizzically humorous smile to another theme: "Of course you have read the S. P. R. Report?—The Spookical Research Society—and know that I am a Russian spy, and the champion impostor of the age?"

"Yes, I read the Report. But I knew its contents already. I was at the meeting¹ when it was first read, two years ago."

"Well," said H. P. B., again smiling with infinite humour, "and what impression did the frisky lambkin from Australia make upon your susceptible heart?"

"A very deep one. I decided that he must be a very good young man, who always came home to tea; and that the Lord had given him a very good conceit of himself. If he got an opinion into his head, he would plow away blandly, and contrary facts would be quite invisible. But your case was not the first on the list. They had a paper on modern witchcraft, at which another of your accusers proved that pinches and burns could be sent by thought-transference to a person miles away. It was quite gruesome, and suggested ducking-stools. Then you came on. But as far as I could see, the young Colonial had never really investigated any occult phenomena at all; he simply investigated dim and confused memories about them in the minds of indifferent witnesses. And all that Mr. Sinnett says in the *Occult World* seems to me absolutely unshaken by the whole Report. The Poet, the third of your accusers, came down among us after the meeting, and smilingly asked me what I thought of it. I answered that it was the most unfair and one-sided thing I had ever heard of, and that if I had not already been a member of your Society, I should have joined on the strength of that attack. He smiled a kind of sickly smile, and passed on."

"I am glad you think so, my dear," she answered in her courtly way, "for now I can offer you some tea with a good conscience." Louise had laid a white cloth on the corner table, brought in a tray, and lit a lamp. The secretary soon joined us, receiving a tart little sermon on being unpunctual, which he was not. Then we came back to her friends, the Psychological Researchers.

"They will never do much," said H. P. B. "They go too much on material lines, and they are far too timid. That was the secret motive that turned them against me. The young Colonial went astray, and then the bell-wethers of the flock followed in his wake, because they were afraid of raising a storm if they said our phenomena were true. Fancy what it would have meant! Why it would practically have committed Modern Science to our Mahatmas and all I have taught about the inhabitants of the occult world and their tremendous powers. They shrank at the thought of it, and so they made a scapegoat of this poor orphan and exile." And her eyes were full of humorous pity for herself.

"It must have been something like that," I answered, "for there is simply no backbone in the Report itself. It is the weakest thing of the kind I have ever read. There is not a shred of real evidence in it from beginning to end."

"Do you really think so? That's right!" cried H. P. B.; and then she turned on her secretary, and poured in

a broadside of censure, telling him he was greedy, idle, untidy, unmethodical, and generally worthless. When he ventured an uneasy defence, she flared up and declared that he “was born a flapdoodle, lived a flapdoodle, and would die a flapdoodle.” He lost his grip, and not unnaturally made a yellow streak of egg across her white tablecloth.

“There!” cried H. P. B., glaring at him with withering scorn, and then turning to me for sympathy in her afflictions. That was her way, to rate her disciples in the presence of perfect strangers. It speaks volumes for her, that they loved her still.

I tried to draw a red herring across the track,—not that there were any on the table. We were limited to tea, toast and eggs.

“The funny thing about the Psychical Researchers,” I said, “is that they have proved for themselves that most of these magical powers are just what you say they are, and they seem to have bodily adopted, not to say, stolen, your teaching of the Astral Light. Take the thing that has been most made fun of: the journeys of adepts and their pupils in the astral body; you know how severe they are about poor Damodar and his journeys in his astral body from one part of India to another, and even from India over to London. Well, they themselves have perfectly sound evidence of the very same thing. I know one of their Committee, a professor of physics, who really discovered thought-transference and made all the first experiments in it. He showed me a number of their unpublished papers, and among them was an account of just such astral journeys made quite consciously. I think the astral traveller was a young doctor, but that is a detail. The point is, that he kept a diary of his visits, and a note of them was also kept by the person he visited, and the two perfectly coincide. They have the whole thing authenticated and in print, and yet when you make the very same claim, they call you a fraud. I wonder why?”

“Partly British prejudice,” she answered; “no Englishman ever believes any good of a Russian. They think we are all liars. You know they shadowed me for months in India, as a Russian spy? I don’t understand,” she went on meditatively, yet with a severe eye on her secretary, “I don’t understand how these Englishmen can be so very sure of their superiority, and at the same time in such terror of our invading India.”

“We could easily hold our own if you did, H. P. B.,” ventured the patriotic secretary, pulling himself together, but evidently shaky yet, and avoiding her eye. She was down on him in an instant:

“Why!” she cried, “what could you do with your poor little army? I tell you, my dear, when the Russians do meet the English on the Afghan frontier, we shall crush you like fleas!”

I never saw anything so overwhelming. She rose up in her wrath like the whole Russian army of five millions on a war footing and descended on the poor Briton’s devoted head, with terrific weight. When she was roused, H. P. B. was like a torrent; she simply dominated everyone who came near her; and her immense personal force made itself felt always, even when she was sick and suffering, and with every reason to be cast down. I have never seen anything like her tremendous individual power. She was the justification of her own teaching of the divinity of the will. “But H. P. B.”—hesitated the secretary. But she crushed him with a glance, and he desperately helped himself to more buttered toast only to be accused of gluttony.

Again I attempted a diversion: “There is one thing about the S. P. R. Report I want you to explain. What about the writing in the occult letters?”

“Well, what about it?” asked H. P. B., immediately interested.

“They say that you wrote them yourself, and that they bear evident marks of your handwriting and style. What do you say to that?”

“Let me explain it this way,” she answered, after a long gaze at the end of her cigarette. “Have you ever made experiments in thought-transference? If you have, you must have noticed that the person who receives the mental picture very often colours it, or even changes it slightly, with his own thought, and this where perfectly genuine transference of thought takes place. Well, it is something like that with the precipitated letters. One of our Masters, who perhaps does not know English, and of course has no English handwriting, wishes to precipitate a letter in answer to a question sent mentally to him. Let us say he is in Tibet, while I am in Madras or London. He has the answering thought in his mind, but not in English words. He has first to impress that thought on my brain, or on the brain of someone else who knows English, and then to take the word-forms that rise up in that other brain to answer the thought. Then he must form a clear mind-picture of the words in writing, also drawing on my brain, or the brain of whoever it is, for the shapes. Then either through me or some Chela with whom he is magnetically connected, he has to precipitate these word-shapes on paper, first sending the shapes into the Chela’s mind, and then driving them into the paper, using the magnetic force of the Chela to do the printing, and collecting the material, black or blue or red, as the case may be, from the astral light. As all things dissolve into the astral light, the will of the magician can draw them forth again. So he can draw forth colours of pigments to mark the figure in the letter, using the magnetic force of the Chela to stamp them in, and guiding the whole by his own much greater magnetic force, a current of powerful will.”

“That sounds quite reasonable,” I answered. “Won’t you show me how it is done?”

“You would have to be clairvoyant,” she answered, in a perfectly direct and matter-of-fact way, “in order to see and guide the currents. But this is the point: Suppose the letter precipitated through me; it would naturally show some traces of my expressions, and even of my writing; but all the same, it would be a perfectly genuine occult phenomenon, and a real message from that Mahatma. Besides, when all is said and done, they exaggerate the likeness of the writings. And experts are not infallible. We have had experts who were just as positive that I could not possibly have written those letters, and just as good experts, too. But the Report says nothing about them. And then there are letters, in just the same handwriting, precipitated when I was thousands of miles away. Dr. Hartmann received more than one at Adyar, Madras, when I was in London; I could hardly have written that.”

“They would simply say Dr. Hartmann was the fraud, in that case.”

“Certainly,” cried H. P. B., growing angry now; “we are all frauds and liars, and the lambkin from Australia is the only true man. My dear, it is too much. It is insolent!” And then she laughed at her own warmth, a broad, good-natured Homeric laugh, as hers always was, and finally said:

“But you have seen some of the occult letters? What do you say?”

“Yes,” I replied; “Mr. Sinnett showed me about a ream of them; the whole series that the *Occult World* and *Esoteric Buddhism* are based on. Some of them are in red, either ink or pencil, but far more are in blue. I thought it was pencil at first, and I tried to smudge it with my thumb; but it would not smudge.”

“Of course not!” she smiled; “the colour is driven into the surface of the paper. But what about the writings?”

“I am coming to that. There were two: the blue writing, and the red; they were totally different from each other, and both were quite unlike yours. I have spent a good deal of time studying the relation of

handwriting to character, and the two characters were quite clearly marked. The blue was evidently a man of very gentle and even character, but of tremendously strong will; logical, easy-going, and taking endless pains to make his meaning clear. It was altogether the handwriting of a cultivated and very sympathetic man.”

“Which I am not,” said H. P. B., with a smile; “that is Mahatma Koothoomi; he is a Kashmiri Brahman by birth, you know, and has travelled a good deal in Europe. He is the author of the *Occult World* letters, and gave Mr. Sinnett most of the material of *Esoteric Buddhism*. But you have read all about it.”

“Yes, I remember he says you shriek across space with a voice like Sarasvati’s peacock. Hardly the sort of thing you would say of yourself.”

“Of course not,” she said; “I know I am a nightingale. But what about the other writing?”

“The red? Oh that is wholly different. It is fierce, impetuous, dominant, strong; it comes in volcanic outbursts, while the other is like Niagara Falls. One is fire, and the other is the ocean. They are wholly different, and both quite unlike yours. But the second has more resemblance to yours than the first.”

“This is my Master,” she said, “whom we call Mahatma Morya. I have his picture here.”

And she showed me a small panel in oils. If ever I saw genuine awe and reverence in a human face, it was in hers, when she spoke of her Master. He was a Rajput by birth, she said, one of the old warrior race of the Indian desert, the finest and handsomest nation in the world. Her Master was a giant, six feet eight, and splendidly built; a superb type of manly beauty. Even in the picture, there is a marvellous power and fascination; the force, the fierceness even, of the face; the dark, glowing eyes, which stare you out of countenance; the clear-cut features of bronze, the raven hair and beard—all spoke of a tremendous individuality, a very Zeus in the prime of manhood and strength. I asked her something about his age. She answered:

“My dear, I cannot tell you exactly, for I do not know. But this I will tell you. I met him first when I was twenty,—in 1851. He was in the very prime of manhood then. I am an old woman now, but he has not aged a day. He is still in the prime of manhood. That is all I can say. You may draw your own conclusions.”

“Have the Mahatmas discovered the elixir of life?”

“That is no fable,” said H. P. B. seriously. “It is only the veil hiding a real occult process, warding off age and dissolution for periods which would seem fabulous” so I will not mention them. The secret is this: for every man, there is a climacteric, when he must draw near to death; if he has squandered his life-powers, there is no escape for him; but if he has lived according to the law, he may pass through and so continue in the same body almost indefinitely.”

Then she told me something about other Masters and adepts she had known,—for she made a difference, as though the adepts were the captains of the occult world, and the Masters were the generals. She had known adepts of many races, from Northern and Southern India, Tibet, Persia, China, Egypt; of various European nations, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, English; of certain races in South America, where she said there was a Lodge of adepts.

“It is the tradition of this which the Spanish Conquistadores found,” she said, “the golden city of Manoa or El Dorado. The race is allied to the ancient Egyptians, and the adepts have still preserved the secret of

their dwelling-place inviolable. There are certain members of the Lodges who pass from centre to centre, keeping the lines of connection between them unbroken. But they are always connected in other ways.”

“In their astral bodies?”

Yes,” she answered, “and in other ways still higher. They have a common life and power. As they rise in spirituality, they rise above difference of race, to our common humanity. The series is unbroken.”

“Adepts are a necessity in nature and in supernature. They are the links between men and the gods; these ‘gods’ being the souls of great adepts and Masters of bygone races and ages, and so on, up to the threshold of Nirvana. The continuity is unbroken.”

“What do they do?”

“You would hardly understand, unless you were an adept. But they keep alive the spiritual life of mankind.”

“What does it feel like, to go sailing about in your astral body? I sometimes dream I am flying, and I am always in the same position; almost lying on my back, and going feet foremost. Is it anything like that?”

“That is not what I feel,” she said; “I feel exactly like a cork rising to the top of water, you understand. The relief is immense. I am only alive then. And then I go to the Master.”

“Come back to what you were saying. I ought not to have interrupted you. How do the adepts guide the souls of men?”

“In many ways, but chiefly by teaching their souls direct, in the spiritual world. But that is difficult for you to understand. This is quite intelligible, though. At certain regular periods, they try to give the world at large a right understanding of spiritual things. One of their number comes forth to teach the masses, and is handed down to tradition as the Founder of a religion. Krishna was such a Master; so was Zoroaster; so were Buddha and Shankara Acharya, the great sage of Southern India. So also was the Nazarene. He went forth against the counsel of the rest, to give to the masses before the time, moved by a great pity, and enthusiasm for humanity; he was warned that the time was unfavorable, but nevertheless he elected to go, and so was put to death at the instigation of the priests.”

“Have the adepts any secret records of his life?”

“They must have,” she answered; “for they have records of the lives of all Initiates. Once I was in a great cave-temple in the Himalaya mountains, with my Master,” and she looked at the picture of the splendid Rajput; “there were many statues of adepts there; pointing to one of them, he said: ‘This is he whom you call Jesus. We count him to be one of the greatest among us.’”

“But that is not the only work of the adepts. At much shorter periods, they send forth a messenger to try to teach the world. Such a period comes in the last quarter of each century, and the Theosophical Society represents their work for this epoch.”

“How does it benefit mankind?”

“How does it benefit you to know the laws of life? Does it not help you to escape sickness and death? Well, there is a soul-sickness, and a soul-death. Only the true teaching of Life can cure them. The dogmatic churches, with their hell and damnation, their metal heaven and their fire and brimstone, have

made it almost impossible for thinking people to believe in the immortality of the soul. And if they do not believe in a life after death, then they have no life after death. That is the law.”

“How can what people believe possibly affect them? Either it is or it isn’t, whatever they may believe.”

“Their belief affects them in this way. Their life after death is made by their aspirations and spiritual development unfolding in the spiritual world. According to the growth of each, so is his life after death. It is the complement of his life here. All unsatisfied spiritual longings, all desires for higher life, all aspirations and dreams of noble things, come to flower in the spiritual life, and the soul has its day, for life on earth is its night. But if you have no aspirations, no higher longings, no beliefs in any life after death, then there is nothing for your spiritual life to be made up of; your soul is a blank.”

“What becomes of you then?”

“You reincarnate immediately, almost without an interval, and without regaining consciousness in the other world.”

“Suppose, on the other hand, you do believe in heaven, say the orthodox El Dorado?”

“Your fate after death is this. You have first to pass through what we call Kama Loka, the world of desire, the borderland, in which the soul is purged of the dross of animal life; of all its passions and evil desires. These gradually work themselves out, and having no fresh fuel to keep them burning, they slowly exhaust themselves. Then the soul rises to what we call Devachan, the state which is distorted in the orthodox teaching of heaven. Each soul makes its own Devachan, and sees around it those whom it most loved on earth, enjoying happiness in their company. If you believed in the orthodox heaven, you see the golden city and the gates of pearl; if you believed in Shiva’s paradise, you find yourself in the midst of many-armed gods; the Red-man sees the happy hunting grounds, and the philosopher enters into the free life of the soul. In all cases, your spirit gathers new strength for a fresh incarnation.”

“Must you come back? Is there no escape?”

“If your material desires are unexhausted at death, you must. Desires are forces, and we believe in the conservation of force. You must reap the seed of your own sowing, and reap it where it was sown. Your new life will be the exact result of your deeds in your preceding life. No one can escape the punishment of his sins, any more than he can escape the reward of his virtues. That is the law of Karma. You must go on being reborn till you reach Nirvana.”

“Well, it seems to me that all that is more or less contained in the orthodox beliefs, only a good deal distorted.”

“Yes,” she answered; “that is just it. The orthodoxies do contain the truth, but their followers do not understand it; they put forth teachings which no intelligent man can accept, and so we are all drifting into atheism and materialism. But when we Theosophists show them how to interpret their teachings, it will be quite different. Then they will see how much truth they had, without knowing it. The stories in Genesis, for instance, are all symbols of real truths; and the account of the Creation there, and of Adam and Eve, has far more real truth than Darwinism, once you understand it. But that can only be done by Theosophy.”

“How would you, as a Theosophist, set about it?”

“Well,” she answered, “in two ways: first, by giving out the truth, as it is taught today in the occult schools, and then by the comparative method; by setting people to study the Aryan and other Eastern scriptures, where they will find the other halves of so many things that have proved stumbling-blocks in the Bible.”

“For instance?”

“Take that very teaching of heaven and hell and purgatory. The sacred books of India light up the whole of it, and make it a thoroughly philosophic and credible teaching. But you must study the Oriental religions before you can fully understand what I say. Remember that in the Old Testament there is absolutely no teaching of the immortality of the soul, while in the New Testament it is inextricably confused with the resurrection of the body. But the Upanishads have the real occult and spiritual doctrine.”

“Well, I can thoroughly understand and sympathize with that; and to put forth any such teaching at a time like this, when we are all drifting into materialism, would seem a big enough work for any school of adepts and Masters. I can see how the teaching of rebirth would make life far more unselfish and humane, and therefore far happier. What else do you teach, as Theosophists?”

“Well, Sir! I am being cross-examined this evening, it would seem,” she answered with a smile, and rolled me another cigarette, making herself one also, and lighting up with evident relish. “We teach something very old, and yet which needs to be taught. We teach universal brotherhood.”

“Don’t let us get vague and general. Tell me exactly what you mean by that.”

“Let me take a concrete case,” she said; and glanced meditatively at her secretary, who had been listening quietly and with serious and sincere interest to all she had been saying, even though he had heard much of it from her, time and again. He began to grow a little uneasy under her gaze, and she noticed it and instantly fastened upon him.

“Take the English,” she said, and looked at him with those potent blue eyes of hers, as though he in his own person must answer for the sins of his race.

“H. P. B.,” he said, rising with a sigh from the table; “I think I had really better go upstairs and go on copying out the manuscript of *The Secret Doctrine*”; and he disappeared.

“Do you think he will?” said H. P. B. with a smile of infinite good-humour. “Not he; he will cuddle into his arm-chair, smoke endless cigarettes, and read a blood and thunder novel.” She was mistaken, however. When I went upstairs to say good-bye, he was in the arm-chair, serenely smoking, it is true; but it was a detective story. He sat upon it, and said something about getting to work.

“Take the English,” she repeated. “How cruel they are! How badly they treat my poor Hindoos!”²

“I have always understood that they had done a good deal for India in a material way,” I objected.

“India is a well-ventilated jail,” she said; “it is true they do something in a material way, but it is always three for themselves and one for the natives. But what is the use of material benefits, if you are despised and trampled down morally all the time? If your ideals of national honour and glory are crushed in the mud, and you are made to feel all the time that you are an inferior race—a lower order of mortals—pigs, the English call them, and sincerely believe it. Well, just the reverse of that would be universal

brotherhood. Do them less good materially—not that they do so very much, besides collecting the taxes regularly—and respect their feelings a little more. The English believe that the ‘inferior races’ exist only to serve the ends of the English; but we believe that they exist for themselves, and have a perfect right to be happy in their own way. No amount of material benefit can compensate for hurting their souls and crushing out their ideals. Besides there is another side of all that, which we as Theosophists always point out. There are really no ‘inferior races,’ for all are one in our common humanity; and as we have all had incarnations in each of these races, we ought to be more brotherly to them. They are our wards, entrusted to us; and what do we do? We invade their lands, and shoot them down in sight of their own homes; we outrage their women, and rob their goods, and then with smooth-faced hypocrisy we turn round and say we are doing it for their good. There are two bad things: hypocrisy and cruelty; but I think if I had to choose, I would prefer cruelty. But there is a just law,” she went on; and her face was as stern as Nemesis; “the false tongue dooms its lie; the spoiler robs to render. ‘Ye shall not come forth, until ye have paid the uttermost farthing’.”

“So that is what the adepts sent you forth to teach?”

“Yes,” she answered; “that and other things;—things which are very important, and will soon be far more important. There is the danger of black magic, into which all the world, and especially America, is rushing as fast as it can go. Only a wide knowledge of the real psychic and spiritual nature of man can save humanity from grave dangers.”

“Witch-stories in this so-called nineteenth century, in this enlightened age?”

“Yes, Sir! Witch-stories, and in this enlightened age! What do you call it but a witch-story, that very experiment you told me of, made by my friend the Spookical Researcher? Is it not witchcraft, to transfer pinches and burns, pain and suffering, in fact, though only slight in this case, to another person at a distance? Suppose it was not as an experiment, but in dead earnest, and with dire malice and evil intent? What then? Would the victim not feel it? Could he protect himself? And would not that be witchcraft in just the sense that sent people to the stake and faggot all through the Middle Ages? Have you read the famous witchcraft trial at Salem? Yes, Sir! Witchcraft in this very enlightened age,—the darkest, most material, and unspiritual that the world has ever seen.”

“Oh, but sending pinches by thought-transference can do no great harm?”

“You think not? Well, you don’t know what you are talking about. That is the privilege of the young! Once the door is open for that sort of thing, where do you think it is going to be shut? It is the old tale; give the devil an inch, and he will take an ell; give him your finger, and he will presently take your whole arm. Yes, and your body, too! Do you not see the tremendous evils that lie concealed in hypnotism? Look at Charcot’s experiments at the Salpêtrière! He has shown that a quite innocent person can be made to perform actions quite against his or her will; can be made to commit crimes, even, by what he calls Suggestion. And the *somnambule* will forget all about it, while the victim can never identify the real criminal. Charcot is a benevolent man, and will never use his power to do harm. But all men are not benevolent. The world is full of cruel, greedy, and lustful people, who will be eager to seize a new weapon for their ends, and who will defy detection and pass through the midst of us all unpunished.

“Yes, Sir! Witch-tales in this enlightened age! And mark my words! You will have such witch-tales as the Middle Ages never dreamt of. Whole nations will drift insensibly into black magic, with good intentions, no doubt, but paving the road to hell none the less for that! Hypnotism and suggestion are great and dangerous powers, for the very reason that the victim never knows when he is being subjected to them; his will is stolen from him, and mark my words: these things may be begun with good motives,

and for right purposes. But I am an old woman, and have seen much of human life in many countries. And I wish with all my heart I could believe that these powers would be used only for good! Whoever lets himself or herself be hypnotized, by anyone, good or bad, is opening a door which he will be powerless to shut; and he cannot tell who will be the next to enter! If you could foresee what I foresee, you would begin heart and soul to spread the teaching of universal brotherhood. It is the only safeguard!”

“How is it going to guard people against hypnotism?”

“By purifying the hearts of people who would misuse it. And universal brotherhood rests upon the common soul. It is because there is one soul common to all men, that brotherhood, or even common understanding is possible. Bring men to rest on that, and they will be safe. There is a divine power in every man which is to rule his life, and which no one can influence for evil, not even the greatest magician. Let men bring their lives under its guidance, and they have nothing to fear from man or devil. And now, my dear, it is getting late, and I am getting sleepy. So I must bid you goodnight!” And the Old Lady dismissed me with that grand air of hers which never left her, because it was a part of herself. She was the most perfect aristocrat I have ever known.

It was long after that, before we came back to the question of magical powers. In August, 1888, H. P. B. had a visit from her old chum, Colonel H. S. Olcott. He was writing, at a side table. H. P. B. was playing Patience, as she did nearly every evening, and I was sitting opposite her, watching, and now and then talking about the East, whence Colonel Olcott had just come. Then H. P. B. got tired of her card game, which would not come out, and tapped her fingers slowly on the table, half unconsciously. Then her eyes came to focus, and drawing her hand back a foot or so from the table, she continued the tapping movement in the air. The taps, however, were still perfectly audible—on the table a foot from her hand. I watched, with decided interest. Presently she had a new idea, and turning in my direction, began to send her astral taps against the back of my hand. I could both feel and hear them. It was something like taking sparks from the prime conductor of an electric machine; or, better still, perhaps, it was like spurting quicksilver through your fingers. That was the sensation. The noise was a little explosive burst. Then she changed her direction again and began to bring her taps to bear on the top of my head. They were quite audible, and, needless to say, I felt them quite distinctly. I was at the opposite side of the table, some five or six feet away, all through this little experiment in the unexplained laws of nature, and the psychical powers latent in man.

No experiment could have been more final and convincing; its very simplicity made it stand out as a new revelation. Here was a quite undoubted miracle, as miracles are generally understood, yet a miracle which came off. But at our first meeting, Mme. Blavatsky did not even approach the subject; none the less, she conveyed the sense of the miraculous. It is hard to say exactly how, but the fact remains. There was something in her personality, her bearing, the light and power of her eyes, which spoke of a wider and deeper life, not needing lesser miracles to testify to it, because in itself miraculous. That was the greatest thing about her, and it was always there; this sense of a bigger world, of deeper powers, of unseen might; to those in harmony with her potent genius, this came as a revelation and incentive to follow the path she pointed out. To those who could not see with her eyes, who could not raise themselves in some measure to her vision, this quality came as a challenge, an irritant, a discordant and subversive force, leading them at last to an attitude of fierce hostility and denunciation.

When the last word is said, she was greater than any of her works, more full of living power than even her marvellous writings. It was the intimate and direct sense of her genius, the strong ray and vibration of that genius itself, which worked her greatest achievements and won her greatest triumphs. Most perfect work of all, her will carried with it a sense and conviction of immortality. Her mere presence testified to the vigour of the soul.

1. The “meeting” which Charles Johnston mentions was one held by the S.P.R. in London, on June 24 1885, at which Richard Hodgson read part of his Report. Johnston, in his Address at the Convention of the T.S. in America, April, 1907 (see the *Theosophical Quarterly*, New York, Vol. V, July, 1907), calls it a “fearful meeting.”— [Boris de Zirkoff] [Boris made an error calling it a “fearful meeting” whereas Johnston stated “. . . I was present at that fateful meeting.”]

2. It was part of H.P.B.’s mission to “break up the moulds of minds”. Talking to a devotee of Science, she would expose its ignorance and berate its dogmatism; talking to an orthodox Protestant, who would be unlikely to approach her except from curiosity, she might expatiate on the greater liberality of her own, the Russian Church, or pour contempt upon the then current conceptions of heaven and hell. Speaking to Charles Johnston, at that time twenty years old, she will doubtless have had in mind that he was preparing for the Indian Civil Service, and that his father was a prominent Orangeman (Johnston of Ballykilbeg, M. P.). Naturally, therefore, she used her opportunity to excoriate British rule in India,—much to Mr. Johnston’s amusement when he recalled the incident in later years, for his service in India had filled him with admiration for the spirit and methods of British rule and he thoroughly understood H.P.B.’s motive in abusing it as she did to him.—The Editors [of *Theosophical Quarterly*].