

WHAT KILLED WILLIAM Q. JUDGE?

PART I

Ernest Pelletier

It has long been accepted by theosophists that William Q. Judge, co-Founder of the Theosophical Society (along with H.P. Blavatsky and Colonel H.S. Olcott), died as a result of initially contracting Chagres fever. He died at nine a.m. Saturday, March 21st, 1896 with his wife by his side, an attending professional night nurse, his physician, and his devoted pupil, Ernest T. Hargrove. Investigation suggests that Judge did not die from any disease but rather as a result of iatrogenic causes.

Ague is a term used to define the recurring fever and chills of malarial infection. Popularly, the disease was known by names expressive of the locality in which it was prevalent. Chagres fever, sometimes called yellow fever, is a malarial type of disease with manifested periodic attacks of chills, fever and sweating. Chagres fever was also known as “Panama fever”.¹ The name is derived from Chagres, a port in Panama from which people would reach Panama City on the Pacific Coast by travelling up the Chagres River. Steamships which ran from Boston and New York City to the Caribbean would port at Chagres.²

Judge, a struggling young New York commercial lawyer, “travelled often to the northern part of the South American continent and also to Mexico.”³ His travels in the early 1880s took him to Carúpano, Venezuela, where he was doing business with a silver mining company.⁴ During one of his trips Judge was infected with Chagres fever, a “febrile disease caused

by an arbovirus, transmitted by phlebotomine sandflies.”⁵ This malignant type of malarial fever often has a predilection to develop into tuberculosis.

Just a few short years after the Society was formed in New York both Blavatsky and Olcott left for India in December 1878, leaving behind General Abner Doubleday as President *ad interim*, W.Q. Judge as Counsel to the Society, and his brother, John Judge, in charge of conducting the affairs of the Society in the United States. Judge had been admitted to the State Bar of New York in 1872 and had married Ella Smith in 1874. He was twenty-seven years old when Blavatsky and Olcott left. The young Irish immigrant lawyer, often penniless, was struggling to make a living in a city recovering from the American Civil War. Times were harsh in those days, especially in New York where the Irish were not always looked upon as favourable members of the community, and the populace was not in the least interested in joining a philosophical society. In a letter to Olcott, November 4th, 1883, Judge stated that “people are dead here, and it will be uphill work when we begin to ask for dues and so on to cover expenses.”⁶ When Olcott and Blavatsky left America, the Society had been nearly dormant and as Olcott himself later stated, “there were no meetings of the Society for two years before our departure We made no attempt to revive the meetings — knowing it would be useless.”⁷

Despite this uphill struggle to establish the Theosophical Society in America, and the developing mal-

1. “A Glossary of Old Medical Terms”, <http://members.tripod.com/PearlsPad/Medical.htm>
2. “[I]n 1881, a French company was granted concessions to build a sea-level canal through Panama, but its efforts failed” because of a dreadful malaria outbreak. The Americans later succeeded in building the Panama canal, which also changed the flow of the Chagres river which used to flow to both coasts. (<http://home.att.net/~history240/history240lecture-pages17.html>).
3. “A Weird Tale.” *Theosophy (Path)*, Vol. XI, August 1896, p.135.
4. In Judge’s article, “A Weird Tale”, the inference is that his travels to South America were not just for business purposes. In fact Jasper Niemand (Julia Keightley) suggests that he may have gone to South America in search of “The Lodge” which H.P. Blavatsky described as “a Branch of the Great Lodge” (*The Irish Theosophist*, Vol.4, May 1896, p.142). As a result of Judge’s and his followers’ efforts, the Hargrove group started the first Theosophical Society in South America in Caracas, Venezuela, circa 1906.
5. “Quality and Relevance of Research and Related Activities at The Gorgas Memorial Laboratory — A Technical Memorandum, August 1983.” Glossary of Terms, p.82. (<http://www.wws.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/byteserv.prl/~ota/disk3/1983/8316/831612.PDF>).
6. *The Theosophist*, Vol. 53, October 1931, pp.67-68.
7. *A Historical Restrospect — 1875 - 1896 — of the Theosophical Society*, pp.18-19. “Published by The Society” as a 32 page pamphlet in 1896. Full text in the General Report of the Twenty-First Anniversary of the Theosophical Society, pp.2-33.

ady within him, Judge managed to establish a network of dedicated students throughout America. By the early 1890s, because of overwork, his health was deteriorating. He needed help — someone he could trust with the responsibilities of communicating the correct keynotes of theosophical ideas across to his fellow countrymen — American and Canadian.

While attending the European Section Convention in London in July 1892, Judge met Ernest T. Hargrove for the first time. Hargrove was a young twenty-one year old member of the Society⁸ who had spent time at “the London Headquarters at 19, Avenue Road, writing reviews for *Lucifer*, lecturing at Branches”⁹ and corresponding for the magazine, *The Vahan*. Although studying law at the time, he devoted more time to Theosophy than he did to his law studies. Both met again at the 1893 Convention in London. This time Hargrove asked Judge for an autographed copy of his recently published book, *The Ocean of Theosophy*. Judge wrote in it: “To Ernest Hargrove, from William Q. Judge: The light within is the only light which lighteth every man who cometh in the world; the Mahatmas and the light within are not different.” A few years later he told Hargrove, “I was told to write that.”¹⁰

Upon first meeting Judge, Hargrove had recognized that he was “an Occultist.”¹¹ Hargrove had been extremely impressed with “Judge’s simplicity of demeanor . . . felt something great, and had loved it.” His blood began to boil when “the air became thick with rumours adverse and hostile to Judge”¹² and wrote to assure him of his loyalty. A few months later, in October 1893, Hargrove expressed his wish to work with Judge in America. Judge responded:

Certainly if you ever could in justice to all your affairs and to the T.S. come to America, then I should be glad to see you, but am not yet able to say come now.¹³

Judge wrote to Hargrove on February 8th, 1894 inviting him to come and participate at the San Francisco Midwinter Fair and to attend the Eighth Convention of The T.S., American Section to be held there as well. Judge wanted Hargrove to participate



William Q. Judge

meet so many whole souls you will never want to live in London any more.”¹⁴ Judge had spent many weeks in London in early 1884, awaiting the arrival of Blavatsky and Olcott from India, and had felt very uncomfortable the whole time he was there.

Hargrove took advantage of Judge’s offer and arrived in New York on March 31st, 1894. He was to represent the European Section and Countess Wachtmeister, who travelled with him on the same ship, had been appointed to represent the Indian Section of the T.S.

On Thursday, April 5th, after the Aryan T.S. meeting, Judge and his wife, Ella M. Judge, Countess Wachtmeister, and E.T. Hargrove, left New York for San Diego. They were joined en route by Dr. J. D. Buck of Cincinnati, Judge’s good friend and one of the doctors who looked after his well-being. Dr. Buck was a practicing Homeopathic physician who at times travelled with Judge on long trips. After their arrival in Los Angeles at 7 p.m. on April 10th, Judge, Dr. Buck and Hargrove went and spoke at a Branch meeting. The others, being too tired to go, stayed behind at the Hollenbuck Hotel. The next day Hargrove and Judge started early for San Diego. They arrived at one o’clock, had lunch, and addressed a large Branch meeting until five. This was followed in the evening by a public lecture in Unity Church. From San Diego they returned to Los Angeles on April

8. Hargrove joined the Theosophical Society as a member-at-large in late summer 1891 without even having made the acquaintance of another member. He joined upon seeing a placard on a wall with the large heading “Theosophy” advertising a lecture by Annie Besant.

9. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 28, April, 1931, p.317.

10. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 29, April 1931, p.318.

11. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 28, April 1931, p.318.

12. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 29, April 1931, p.318.

13. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 29, April 1931, p.321.

14. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 29, July 1931, p.38.

13th for more lecturing and interviews. Hargrove explained:

So it continued, day after day, without intermission. I was young and sufficiently able-bodied, besides which the experience, for me, was novel, but Judge had been doing the same kind of thing for years, and was already suffering from the premonitory symptoms (wrongly interpreted by doctors as “liver”) of his last illness. How he stood it, is not easy to explain, except on the ground that his intensity of devotion kept his body going without the slightest sign of mental or nervous fatigue.¹⁵

From there they went on to San Francisco to attend the first session of the Religious Parliament on the 16th where both Judge and Dr. Buck gave talks. The

next day Judge addressed the Parliament as the General Secretary of the American Section of the Theosophical Society and Dr. Buck spoke as a representative. A few days later, April 22nd and 23rd, the American Convention assembled in the same building, the new Golden Gate Hall. “Judge was received with enthusiasm everywhere, either because of, or in spite of, attacks in the newspa-



Ernest T. Hargrove

pers, which naturally made the most of the stories circulated from Adyar against him.”¹⁶ The charges came out of India, from Olcott and Annie Besant, that Judge was guilty of misuse of the names and handwritings of the Mahatmas. He was accused of falsely pretending to receive and transmit messages from the Masters in order to gain power for himself in the Society. At the time these accusations surfaced Judge tried to shield Besant by not mentioning her by name in public. On February 7th, Olcott had written a letter to Judge demanding that he resign his Vice-Presidency or face a Judicial Committee. On March 10th, Judge had cabled his reply that the charges were absolutely false, telling Olcott that he could take whatever proceedings he saw fit and

informing him that he (Judge) was going to London in July.

After the Convention Dr. Buck left on Friday, April 27th for the East, while Countess Wachtmeister continued on a tour to various cities in California and along the Pacific Coast for the following few months.¹⁷ Judge sent Hargrove to lecture in Santa Cruz and San Jose. Meanwhile Judge visited Oakland, returning to San Francisco before proceeding to Sacramento where Mr. and Mrs. Judge and Hargrove rejoined. They arrived in Portland, Oregon, on May 1st for more meetings and lectures and then on to Seattle. It was there that Hargrove received a telegram from London. He wrote:

In Seattle, to my indescribable disappointment, I was called back to England on account of illness there — needlessly, as it happened. Judge was not at all pleased, and I much regret now that I did not complete the tour with him, as he travelled — meeting members and lecturing wherever he stopped — to Victoria, B.C., Port Townsend, back to Seattle, Tacoma, Olympia, Portland, and so to Chicago and New York by way of Salt Lake City (a large public meeting in the Salt Lake Theatre), Aspen, Denver, and Omaha.¹⁸

Dr. Jerome A. Anderson, President of the San Francisco Branch, expressed fondness for Hargrove. He wrote:

Mr. Earnest [sic] Hargrove . . . deserves more than a passing mention. . . . Bro. Hargrove lives and breathes Theosophy as his daily life. Possessing an address as pleasant [i]s rare, and a flow of language at all times ready to clothe his thought, he was at once a leading and strong figure among our speakers, and ably, indeed, represented our brothers of the European Section.¹⁹

By the time Judge returned home to New York it was time for him to pack up again and go to London to meet his accusers in a trial arranged by the President, Colonel Olcott. The trial or “Judicial Committee” was merely a kangaroo court of sorts to strip Judge of the title of Vice-President of the Theosophical Society and to cast suspicion upon his character. On July 4th, Judge and Dr. Buck arrived at Southampton and were greeted at the dock by Hargrove and Dr. Archibald Keightley who took them to London. Judge appeared tired and frail.

15. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 29, July 1931, p.42.

16. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 29, July 1931, pp.42-43.

17. Mrs. Sarah W. Cape, a member of the Aryan Branch, New York, who joined the Society on June 17th, 1890, was included in the Visitors’ Register and mentioned as a delegate from New York to the San Francisco Convention. She accompanied Wachtmeister on at least part of her lecture tour. (*The Pacific Theosophist*, Vol. 4, May 1894, p.157.)

18. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 29, July 1931, p.45.

19. *Pacific Theosophist*, Vol. IV, May 1894, p.156.

Here is what Hargrove had to say on the matter of the trial.

In their haste to give Judge his death-blow, they had lost all sense of the decencies: they had acted as if it were permissible to call a man a liar and a cheat, and then, without furnishing him with any Bill of Particulars, to haul him into Court and demand that he prove the contrary.²⁰

Throughout the entire ordeal Judge stayed at the Headquarters facing his accusers daily, instead of residing with friends. Dr. Buck did the same.

After the Judicial Committee Judge left on Saturday, July 21st, to return to New York.²¹ All this excitement and pressure evidently took its toll on Judge and when he returned home he was ill again. For the next few weeks he rested at the Griscoms near New York.²² Mr. Griscom wrote the following:

Of the "Row" itself I cannot speak, but upon result of it I know and that is the effect the bitterness and strife had upon the health and vitality of Mr. Judge. Day after day he would come back from the office utterly exhausted in mind and body, and night after night he would lay awake fighting the arrows of suspicion and doubt that would come at him from all over the world. He said they were like shafts of fire piercing him; and in the morning he would come downstairs wan and pale and un-rested, and one step nearer the limit of his strength; but still with the same gentle and forgiving spirit. Truly they knew not what they did.²³

Immediately after this brief rest Judge started "a vigorous 'campaign for Theosophy' by lecturing for

Branches in Massachusetts, Maine, Rhode Island, Maryland and elsewhere."²⁴ After the trial Judge worked even harder than before. Like the Wandering Jew, one wonders if this was not the start of Judge's constant moving from place to place in order to find peace and repose from his beleaguering assailants.



Clement Acton Griscom, Jr.

By late fall of 1894 it became apparent to his friends and acquaintances that Judge's health needed some serious attention. After a lecture tour to the mid-western States, Judge returned to New York City on January 17th, 1895. The next day he wrote to Hargrove, who was still living with his parents in London after returning home in May 1894:

I am so sick just now that I cannot send any letters. . . . My Chicago trip was all right and useful, but this is my ordinary death year, and hence I am just waiting until the Rubicon is passed.²⁵

Judge mentioned that he had contracted a cold in Chicago and as a result had developed a bad cough. Hargrove, concerned about his mentor's health, decided to consult with his parents for a possible return to America to continue the work he had started with Judge.²⁶

By February 1895 Judge's health had utterly broken down. It was at this time that Katherine Tingley²⁷ offered to make arrangements for him to get away for rest and treatment. She proposed to go ahead of Judge to Mineral Wells near San Antonio, Texas, to prepare for his arrival. It was "hoped that change of air and relief from work will enable him to rally."²⁸ She "rented a small, poorly-furnished house from a

20. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 29, October 1931, p.108.

21. *The Path*, Vol. 9, March 1895, pp.432-434.

22. Clement Acton Griscom Jr. and his wife, Genevieve Ludlow Griscom, were Judge's best friends. At times Judge would stay there entire weeks, commuting to and from work each day. "Mr. Griscom had a marvelous memory, not for useless figures, but for minute details of events. . . ." (*Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 16, April 1919, p.319.)

23. *Theosophy (Path)*, Vol. XI, May 1896, pp.50-51.

24. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 29, January 1932, p.238.

25. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol.30, July 1932, p.31; *Theosophical Forum New Series*, Vol.1, No.3, July 1895, p.48.

26. His father, James Sidney Hargrove, was one of London's best known solicitors and an author of repute. His family heritage had such noted men as the eighteenth century Lieutenant General Hargrove, Governor of Gibraltar, and Sir Martin Frobisher who fought against the Armada. The best known was an Aird, on his mother's side, who was a member of Parliament. It is no wonder that the family tradition would have exacted a heavy burden on the young Hargrove to stay in England.

27. It has never been made clear when Judge actually met Mrs. Tingley. E.A. Neresheimer, a close friend of Judge, claimed that he was first introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Tingley in the fall of 1893 after Judge returned from The Parliament of Religions held at the Chicago World's Fair where he had met Mr. Tingley. They were introduced on the prospect of a business enterprise. Neresheimer was a businessman and Philo Tingley was an inventor. According to Neresheimer, Judge was already acquainted with Katherine Tingley by this time. It does lead one to wonder why she didn't join the Theosophical Society until October 13th, 1894.

28. *The Path*, Vol. 9, March 1895, p.439.

German woman.”²⁹ On February 13th, 1895 Judge left New York for Mineral Wells. Tingley looked after his health as well as “acting as his amanuensis when he was too ill to write himself.”³⁰ After a month or so he returned to New York to prepare for the annual Convention, which was held April 28th and 29th, 1895 in Boston.

After the Convention Judge returned to New York and then proceeded to Cincinnati where he wrote to a friend, “I am away from home for my health [which is] much hurt by others’ hate.”³¹ Judge was referring to Annie Besant and “the conspirators against his Theosophical reputation.”³²



Philo Tingley

Hargrove was in Barmouth, England, when he wrote to Judge on July 20th, 1895 saying that he had arranged matters with his parents “and was sailing for New York at an early date.”³³ Hargrove left London on August 24th, 1895³⁴ and arrived in New York on August 30th, 1895.³⁵ When he arrived Judge was staying with Dr. Buck in Cincinnati. He wrote to Hargrove, September 2nd, 1895: “There is no telling where I may go, at this critical point.” Hargrove noted that this was in ref-

erence to “Judge’s physical condition,” meaning his health had greatly deteriorated.³⁶

Judge told Hargrove to stay with the Griscoms, who lived in Flushing, Long Island, until about September 15th or 25th. He told him to familiarize himself with all the theosophists in the New York area, and instructed him to be careful what he said, who he could trust and who to be on his guard against. He also told him that when the time was right



Katherine Tingley

they would meet again and spend time together but that in the meantime they could communicate in ways other than writing. Hargrove mentioned: “Always I carried Judge’s last letter with me in my pocket. It helped me, I believed, to keep in touch with him.”³⁷ This was some of the *practical occult knowledge* which Judge had instructed Hargrove to do in order to “keep the link unbroken” between them.³⁸ Judge always kept a watchful eye for would-be occultists whom he could tutor in *practical occultism*.³⁹

By early September 1895 Judge was feeling quite optimistic about his recovery. He wrote to Hargrove:

29. *Some Reminiscences of William Q. Judge*, a paper by E.A. Neresheimer.

30. *William Quan Judge, Theosophical Pioneer*, compiled by Sven Eek and Boris de Zirkoff. Wheaton, IL, Theosophical Publishing House, 1969, p.34.

31. *Letters That Have Helped Me*, compiled by Jasper Niemand. Los Angeles, CA: The Theosophy Company, 1946, p.185.

32. *Some Reminiscences of W.Q. Judge*, a paper by E.A. Neresheimer.

While at Mineral Wells, Judge kept a record of his experiences and observations in which an individual nicknamed “Kali” is mentioned, likely in reference to Annie Besant. In *The Canadian Theosophist*, (Vol. 13, June 1932, p.125), James Morgan Pryse, admitting that he didn’t read much of the notebook, presumed it to be in reference to Mrs. Judge.

33. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 30, July 1932, p.37.

34. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 30, October 1932, p.122.

35. *The Path*, Vol. 10, September 1895, p.199.

36. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 30, October 1932, p.122.

37. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 30, October 1932, p.128.

38. This kind of occult instruction is passed on from Master to Chela in order to facilitate communications. “H.P.B. left us and her last message for the Society was given to Mrs. Oakley the night but one before she died. At three a.m. she suddenly looked up and said ‘Isabel, Isabel, keep the link unbroken; do not let my last incarnation be a failure.’” (*The Path*, Vol. 9, July 1894, p.124.)

39. It is entirely probable that Judge had considered Hargrove as a possible occult successor before he considered Tingley but Hargrove was still very young at the time. There have been serious suggestions made that Judge contemplated Julia Keightley as a successor. (She was formerly Mrs. Julia ver Planck, a young widow, who later married Dr. Archibald Keightley. She wrote under the pseudonym “Jasper Niemand.”) In a letter dated December 9th, 1894 Judge wrote that she “ought not to let herself be too well known at all. She is too sensitive, and it injures her. . . . If J.C.K. got to be too personally and urgently sought after, she would be killed.” (*Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 29, January 1932, p.246.) Her health and her shyness may also have been considerations.

“My health-chances better. I’ve almost paralyzed the bacilli tuber’s.”⁴⁰

By October Judge had travelled to North Carolina and then to Aiken, in South Carolina, where again he was seeking clear fresh air for his health. The following month Judge, still in Aiken, revealed an almost complete list of the prescribed medications he was taking to rebuild his health. He wrote:

Just glance at what I have to do medically:

Water, drink 4 times a day. Carbon pills.
Hepar Sulph. and Phos.—homeopathic.
Oxygen, inhale 3 times.
Lynosulfite, inhale as often as you can.
Listerine, gargle to try to stop sore throat.
Some d— thing after meals.
Hot treatment nightly.
Be in the open air all the time.
Where does the *Path*, etc. come in.⁴¹

During this time Hargrove kept his correspondence going with Judge, informing him of all the happenings concerning the Branches’ activities and the people he was meeting. Judge in return was giving Hargrove advice on how to deal with certain members and with Branch affairs. Hargrove was on a three month tour which took him to Boston on September 29th, 1895 then up to Toronto on his way west and south. From Macon, Georgia, where he was December 17th to 22nd, he went to Aiken for Christmas where he stayed with the Judges in a boarding-house for a two week period. Hargrove left Aiken for Washington to deliver a lecture on January 7th, 1896. On January 9th, the Judges left for Cincinnati where they stayed for two weeks with the Bucks and then went to visit Dr. Buchman in Fort Wayne, Indiana. They left there on January 31st and arrived at Grand Central Station, New York, at 6 p.m. on February 3rd, where they went to the Lincoln Hotel on Broadway until a suitable apartment could be found.

Hargrove observed, upon seeing Judge again in New York:


He was far more ill than when I had left him at Aiken some three weeks earlier: he was much

weaker, his cough was more frequent, his digestion gave him greater pain, he could barely whisper. But he insisted upon my spending an hour or more with him daily, while he went over details of the Work in its many ramifications. When he could, he whispered his comments or directions; at other times he wrote notes on scraps of paper.
...⁴²

On February 22nd the Judges moved to an apartment on the third floor of 325 West 56th Street. “From that day he grew weaker and weaker.”⁴³ Dr. Rounds, Judge’s physician, “warned him that unless he would consent to give up all work, he would throw away his only chance to recover.”⁴⁴

Early in the morning of the day he died, Judge wished to see Hargrove. He whispered to him to go fetch a doctor, a specialist, who had been called on previous occasions to consult with his regular physician. Hargrove pleaded with this famous (unnamed) New York specialist but he refused to come without the regular physician being present. Upon returning, Hargrove found Judge in the usual manner — sitting upright on the sofa. Shortly afterwards his regular doctor came calling but Judge refused to see him.⁴⁵ For weeks, because of the incessant racking cough, the bad throat which caused aphonia (laryngitis), and the indigestion problems he was having, he could no longer lay down to sleep, only catching a few winks at a time while sitting. He approached death with clarity.

After Judge’s death conflicting reports were recorded. Dr. Rounds “said that the condition of his lungs could not have caused his death; that death had been due to ‘failure of the heart’s action’.” Hargrove wrote that “all the other doctors who had examined him had agreed that his heart was as sound as a bell”.⁴⁶

These are the facts as we know them. These facts will now be analyzed in conjunction with research which will reveal the most likely cause of Judge’s death. 

40. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 30, October 1932, p.124.

41. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 30, January 1933, p.210. Judge’s first concern was always theosophical work — to the point of including the *Path* as part of his medical regimen.

42. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 32, January 1935, p.203.

43. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 32, January 1935, p.204.

44. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 32, January 1935, p.204.

45. *Theosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 32, January 1935, p.205, and *Theosophy (Path)*, Vol. XI, May 1896, pp.36-37.

46. *Theosophy (Path)*, Vol. XI, May 1896, p.37.