

WHO PLAYED THAT TRICK ON H.P.B.?

THE PUZZLE OF "THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY"

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Sometime in the Spring of 1892, the Theosophical Publishing Society in London issued a work entitled *The Theosophical Glossary* under the name of H. P. Blavatsky, bearing also the imprint of *The Path* Office in New York, and *The Theosophists* at Adyar, Madras, India.

In the February, 1892, issue of *The Path* (Vol. VI, p. 358) it is stated that this work will be on sale in six weeks;¹ and in the April issue of the same year (Vol. VII, p. 28) it is briefly reviewed and described as being edited by G. R. S. Mead.²

This was, of course, about a year after H.P.B.'s death in May, 1891.

However, the text of this work must have been almost ready long before that time, as *The Path* of December, 1890 (Vol. V, p. 2[9]5) under date of November 5, 1890—about a year and a half prior to the actual publication of this work, and months before H.P.B.'s passing—speaks of it as being completed and ready to go to the printer in a few days. It also says that it is to be issued "with the *Archaic Symbolism*," whatever this may have meant.

The work was also briefly reviewed by Col. Olcott in *The Theosophist*, Vol. XIII, April, 1892, pp. 444-45.

The Preface, signed by Mead, is dated January, 1892, ten months after H.P.B.'s passing.

This work contains 389 pages and embodies 2,767 distinct terms with their appropriate definitions,

¹- [. . . in length nearly 400 pages of same size as *The Secret Doctrine*, filled with information of all kinds and throwing much light on many problems in the S.D. and the *Voice of the Silence*.]

²- *Theosophical Glossary*, by H. P. Blavatsky (1892, London, Theosophical Publication Society; New York, *The Path*. Quarto, 390 pages, cloth, \$3.50). This work is a posthumous publication, as H. P. B. saw only thirty-two pages of proofs. It is edited by Brother G. R. S. Mead, and is well printed on good paper. It will be extremely useful to students, not only because it is a glossary, but also from the many hints scattered through it by the author, and as it gives in many cases her own views—always valuable—regarding various subjects. Take FIRE. She says, "The symbol of the living fire is the sun, *certain of whose rays develop the fire of life in a diseased body, impart the knowledge of the future* to the sluggish mind, and stimulate to active function a certain psychic and dormant faculty in man." Here is a broad hint. And about hypnotism she says it is the most dangerous of practices, morally and physically. Under LUXOR she again asserts that the real Brotherhood of that name exists and is the most secret of all, and denies the genuineness of the bogus H. B. of L. that duped so many people. We remember in 1874-5 having conversation with H. P. B. about the real Luxor fraternity. AKASA (page 13) is differentiated from ether with which some have confused it. The articles on MESMER and ST. GERMAIN are both extremely interesting and the last intense suggestive, especially in the last sentence, "Perchance some may recognize him [St. Germain] at the next *Terreur*, which will affect all Europe when it comes, and not one country alone." But space will not allow further reference to the contents of this valuable volume. [ETS copy (Preface dated, London January 1892) has 360 pages]

alphabetically arranged.

The Preface informs us that this work is “almost entirely posthumous” and that H.P.B. “only saw the first thirty pages in proof.” This statement seems to make it easy to deduce that the work did not go to the printer “in a few days” after November 5, 1890, as surely H.P.B. would have seen a good deal more than 32 pages in proof, had the printer been setting up the MS. for the next six months, prior to her passing. From this it would follow that the MS. did not go to the printer until considerably later, possibly in early 1891. What took place during this period of time, and during the balance of 1891, as far as the MS. is concerned, we cannot determine, except in regard to one point, namely, that a certain number of terms with their definitions were excerpted from the MS. and inserted as a Special Glossary into the second edition of *The Key to Theosophy* published still during H.P.B.’s lifetime, at the end of 1890.

As far as Mead is concerned, he lets us know, in his Preface to this work, that H.P.B. desired to express her indebtedness “as far as the tabulation of facts is concerned,” to four works, namely, the *Sanskrit-Chinese Dictionary* of Eitel, the *Hindu Classical Dictionary* of Dowson, Wilson’s *Vishnu-Purâna* and the *Royal Masonic Cyclopaedia* of Kenneth R. H. MacKenzie. He also points out the definitions signed W.W.W. are by W. W. Westcott.

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 acknowledgement 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.

Among the works which were most freely used are the following:

- a.) Those already mentioned above.
- b.) Bonwick’s *Egyptian Belief and Modern Thought*.
- c.) George Smith’s *Chaldean Account of Genesis*.
- d.) *Five Years of Theosophy*: Glossary of Terms.
- e.) Anson’s *Asgard and the Gods*.
- f.) Myer’s *Qabbalah*.
- g.) R. Spence Hardy’s *Eastern Monachism*.
- h.) Emil Schlagintweit’s *Buddhism in Tibet*.

There are 124 terms signed by W. Wynn Westcott; 217 terms identical, or practically so, with the corresponding terms in the Glossary of the 2nd edition of *The Key to Theosophy*; about 25-30 terms from *The Secret Doctrine*; and about 70 terms from *Isis Unveiled*.

When it is considered that for the interpretation and elucidation of facts and terms pertaining to the Kabbalah and other ancient Hebrew matters, the help of W. Wynn Westcott was secured, it is hard to understand why Sanskrit terms were not submitted to competent scholars in India, several such being

staunch Fellows of the T.S. at the time. This certainly would have avoided erroneous spellings and most curious errors in definitions.

It is to be regretted that such errors have been allowed to stand all through the years, giving rise to unfriendly criticism and scorn on the part of people versed in these subjects. It seems difficult to understand why, for instance, *Adhyâtma-vidyâ*, meaning the “science or knowledge of Atman,” would have been defined as “the esoteric luminary.” Curiously enough, it is defined precisely that way by Eitel in his work, and so we are blessed with the errors of honest but inadequate scholars of a previous century. *Amitâbha* is a Sanskrit term meaning “boundless splendour” or “infinite glory”—if any real translation can ever be arrived at; therefore it is not a “Chinese perversion of the Sanskrit *Amrita Buddha*.” *Aindriya* literally means “pertaining to the senses,” and not “Indrani, the wife of Indra.” *Apâna* is one of the prânas, and hardly “a practice of Yoga.” *Arasa Maram* is not Sanskrit but Tamil, as its final *m* indicates (in addition to its meaning); it is the common name for the Pipal tree.

Imagine “Bagavadam” (*Bhâgavata*) described as “a Tamil Scripture on Astronomy and other matters,” while it is one of the most celebrated of the eighteen *Mahapurânas* treating of Vishnu Krishna, the Creation, and the histories of various sovereigns. *Dhyan-Chohans*, if literally translated, means “Lords of Meditation,” and not “Lords of Light.” The term *Me-lha* refers to a Tibetan fire-god; it is neither Sanskrit, nor has it anything to do with Salamanders which are elementals. And when it comes to *Midgard* from the Scandinavian mythology, this term refers to the Earth, the home of men between heaven and hell; the Midgard snake was killed by Thor. It is Nidhogg, and not Midgard, that gnaws at the roots of Yggdrasil, the Ash Tree of Life.

The definitions of the Days and Nights of Brahma are entirely wrong. A Day of Brahma is equivalent in length to 1,000 Mahâyugas. This is a period of 4,320,000,000 years (Cf. *Bhagavad-Gitâ*, VIII, sloka 17). An Age of Brahmâ represents the period of life of Brahma, which is stated in the *Mahâbhârata* to be a period of 100 of Brahmâ’s Years. This is equivalent to 311,040,000,000,000 years, which consists of fifteen figures.

A partial survey of the first *four* letters of the *Glossary* has revealed no less than 40 mistranslations out of about 300 terms, a very high percentage indeed.

The above instances should suffice for our purpose.

A closer examination of the text than that already completed will, no doubt, merely increase the list of errors, and it is doubtful whether it would be of any real value.

We are faced here with a perfectly honest but woefully inadequate attempt on the part of various early scholars to grasp the subtle meaning of Oriental and other ancient terms, and to render their phonetic or actual form in English letters. Since those days, scholarship in the field of Egyptology, Orientalism, Classical research, and the like has advanced very considerably, and the early definitions have become quite inadequate; they have been superseded by a vaster knowledge and far greater accuracy, even though, from the standpoint of occult study, even the scholarship of today is yet far behind and often quite materialistic.

To publish the *Theosophical Glossary* as it now stands simply means to perpetuate willingly and deliberately hundreds of errors; it also means to ascribe them, at least partially so, to H.P.B., imagining that the definitions are hers, as no source of reference is given; while in reality, when adequate explanation and analysis of the text is made, nothing could be more erroneous than to imagine that H.P.B. was herself responsible for the majority of the definitions in the book. It is therefore entirely unjust and unfair to her to

do so.

To correct the hundreds of wrong definitions would be a task of uncertain value, because, no matter how well done, it would still contain errors, some, perhaps, unsuspected by the Editor. To substitute for the definitions of early scholars those of present and better ones, would be a drastic alteration of the entire work. To eliminate all definitions which are by other people besides H.P.B. and, maybe, W. Wynn Westcott, would be possible but probably unwise, as hundreds of terms used by students today would receive no definition at all. To correct as much as can be corrected to insert all the missing references and quotation marks, and then to fill in editorially missing definitions, to make the work more adequate and complete—would mean practically re-writing it. Its size would then be increased very considerably.

There remains the possibility of excerpting from it everything that is obviously H.P.B.'s, which is quite easy to do, because of her style and because of the reference to occult matters which none of the other scholars knew anything about. It might be feasible to add such material from H.P.B.'s pen to the Glossary in *The Key to Theosophy*, with complete explanation of the reasons for so doing, and of the background of this entire subject.

When the nature of the material in *The Theosophical Glossary* is considered without bias or preconceived ideas, and the facts outlined above are kept clearly in mind, it is difficult to believe that the publication of this work in 1892 was done in good faith. Its continued publication today is a disservice to the Cause, and most certainly an utterly unwarranted reflection upon the memory of H.P.B., whose name is made to appear in bold letters upon the title page of a work full of misinformation, and with the production of which she had very little to do. It is high time that these facts be stated without ambiguity for the information of serious students.