

MADAME BLAVATSKY'S MAGICK—REAL OR FAKE?

The 150th Anniversary of “H.P.B.’s” Birth
Renews Controversy Surrounding The Claims
For History’s Greatest Occultist.

By
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The case of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (or H.P.B., 1831-1891) is the most famous and—
from any standpoint—the most instructive in the annals of Psychological Research. It is the only
known instance of an Occultist being investigated by a committee of recognized
Parapsychologists, the 1884 Council-appointed Committee of the London-based Society for
Psychical Research, members of which were treated by Mme. Blavatsky to phenomena they
admittedly could not explain in normal terms to their own satisfaction (Journal, American S.P.R.,
July 1962, pp. 133-34). This Committee’s 1885 verdict—that H.P.B. was “one of the most
accomplished, ingenious, and interesting imposters in history”—, contrary to widespread
misinformation, never has been officially that of the S.P.R. itself. And it appears only in a Report
that was published (as this writer in 1966 was the first to discover) without the required sanctions
of the Society’s Council and therefore in violation of its own Official Rules (Journal, S.P.R., No.
742, p. 189)!

While I appreciate what notice has been given by Dr. J. Gordon Melton to the “hefty
envelope” of “material” I provided to aid him in his evaluation of Marion Meade’s Madame
Blavatsky, The Woman Behind the Myth, I do wish he had shared even a bit of that information
with the readers of Fate. On receiving this same material, or upon only being apprised of its
principal content, more than one book-review editor with a national circulation decided to kill or
drastically alter intended notice of this book. It is certainly untrue that Meade’s work suffers only
from what Dr. Melton represents as “a few minor weaknesses...” The material provided (which,

upon request, will be sent to any editor of a nationwide publication) includes photocopies of original published sources necessary to prove that:

1. While pretending to expertly evaluate the content, nature and worth of H.P.B.'s writings, particularly The Secret Doctrine, her 1888 magnum opus, Ms. Meade's summary (her pp. 413-13) of that book is almost entirely plagiarized—largely word-for-word, without quotation marks or credit of any kind (136 passages of from 2 to 13 words each, verbatim et seriatim)—from a conspectus of the same work published in 1930 under the editorship of the Department of Philosophy of Columbia University (Theosophy A Modern Revival of Ancient Wisdom, by Alfred Boyd Kuhn, Ph.D.; pp. 197-209, 223-231).
2. To bolster her weak fund of “evidence” against the “Mahatma Letters,” writings attributed to H.P.B.'s Teachers, the Kashmiri and Rajput Gurus (Masters), Koot Hoomi and Morya, Ms. Meade (pp. 235-37) plagiarizes from an attack published at London in 1936, Who Write the Mahatma Letters?, by H.E. and W.L. Hare (esp. pp. 37-41, 57). Again with many passages verbatim, sans quotation marks or credit, she misappropriates 38 passages, each of 2-16 words seriatim, which she palms-off as her own creation in ideas and language—while giving no hint of the unchallenged rebuttals issued at the time in answer to these self-same criticisms!

Alluding to one controversial Mahatma letter, Dr. Melton asserts, “one oh HPB's Masters had plagiarized a lecture” by Henry Kiddle, “previously published in a Spiritualist periodical...” This imprecise allegation is apt to conjure up the image of H.P.B.'s copying “in a feigned hand”, the printed lecture and appending to it the Master's name. The truth is that only a minor portion of the lecture was incorporated as a minor part of the letter, a few sentences reworked, as it were,

with both additions and subtractions, interspersed here and there in the latter (much as an “editorial re-write”). But consider these facts: (a) the extreme improbability that an accomplished writer like H.P. Blavatsky, the author of Isis Unveiled (published years before, and now—when nothing by Kiddle has been in print this century—, 104 years later, enjoying greater reception than ever, after having sold some half-million copies), should have had to resort to the tedious copying and patch working of thus plagiarizing inane passages such as those in question; (b) the even less credible notion that, if so doing, she would deliberately choose to openly plagiarize passages from an address of (as Meade puts it) the “fairly well-known... president of the American Spiritualist Alliance,” printed in a recent number of a prominent and hostile journal competing with the magazine of which she herself then was editor (the two sharing numerous mutual subscribers); (c) and that at no time has anyone produced documented proof of a similar plagiarism to be found anywhere in the thousands of printed pages of published writings by H.P.B. or her Adept-Teachers (despite the blatant example of how brazenly Ms. Meade resorts to sheer fabrication in trying to strengthen weak accusations against H.P.B., shown in this instance by her disingenuous attempt, p. 230, to reduce the incongruity of deliberate plagiarism by this totally imaginary fiction: “Helena had... extreme weariness at... times when she ran out of ideas and, in a pinch, would grab the nearest book or magazine, sometimes copying word for word”). Finally (d), since in this instance, plagiarism was certain, the question is, was it conscious or unconscious? On being queried, the Master involved took responsibility by explaining, “The letter in question was framed by me while on a journey and on horseback. It was dictated mentally... I was physically very tired by the ride of forty-eight hours consecutively, and (physically again) half asleep. Besides this, I had very important business to attend to psychically, and therefore little remained of me to devote to that letter” (The Occult World, by

A.P. Sinnett, 4th edition, p. 212). He went on to add that, “unwittingly” he had telepathically “transferred” his “reminiscence” of certain of Kiddle’s remarks, memories unconsciously assimilated into a parallel train of thought during his own peculiar state of physical fatigue and psychic stress. Ms. Meade (p. 270), noting it came three years late (in 1883), calls this explanation “remarkably glib...” A facile post-hoc alibi, unworthy of credit? If so, why then do critics suppress mention of this highly pertinent, almost prescient, last line of the Mahatma’s original, disputed letter of 1880: “I took no sleep for over 60 hours” (The Mahatma Letters etc., 3rd and revised edition, p. 24. Ms. Meade quotes the 1883 explanation given above, but she is careful not to take any notice of this line!). And, significantly, the offending passages cluster in the closing third of the missive, as if with waning attention. So, why is it that those who profess to look askance at this minor plagiarism, conscious or unconscious as it may have been, do not themselves have to go “over 60 hours” with “no sleep” to overlook the obviously deliberate and major plagiarisms of such as Meade?

Indeed, when it comes to spotting, for suppression, any bit of notable evidence in Mme. Blavatsky’s favor, her critics are wide-awake, keen-eyed and vigilant. So, for one, is Ms. Meade when taking care not to tell her audience that, of the five professional handwriting experts on public record as having compared specimens of Mahatma writings with that of Mme. Blavatsky herself, all five (four of these in certificates of determination provided for publication) reached the same conclusion, viz., that H.P.B. could NOT have written the Mahatmic samples examined. This leaves the nay-sayers with not so much as one written word by any expert to the contrary! As for one man’s unsupported claim that his two experts “changed their opinion” (which would have meant jeopardizing their professional credibility as experts in the courts of England!), the preponderance of solid evidence is that his claim was a hoax. This claim was made by Dr.

Richard Hodgson, who, in the end, was unable to persuade his fellow-members of the S.P.R. investigating Committee that H.P.B. wrote Mahatma letters “in a feigned hand”! (See, Obituary: the “Hodgson Report” on Madame Blavatsky: 1885-1960, by “Adlai E. Waterman,” the present writer; Section IV.)

Of nine of the ten major studies published since 1884 (8 during the last 54 years) defending the paranormal reality of H.P.B.’s phenomena—the majority of these defenses unchallenged, and several untouched at all by H.P.B.’s critics—, Ms. Meade gives not a single word these have brought to the record. The only exception is found in her Note 70 (p. 487) in which she appropriates from the above-mentioned A.S.P.R. Journal (p. 134, and from this writer), without quotation marks or any recognition of the printed source, 36 of 44 words seriatim presented as her own!

To enhance the spurious façade of scholarship attached to her book, Ms. Meade refers familiarly to the contents of the five primary sources (printed in 1884, 1885 and 1893) in which are historically rooted the counter-claims that Mme. Blavatsky’s phenomena were fraudulent and faked. These five basic works comprise 524 pages—of which, for Meade, 98% are terra incognita, fundamental anti-Blavatsky data unread or unseen, as proven by internal evidence of her work. Of the 74 quotations appearing in the Meade book and attributed to these five primary sources, at least 64 can be traced (as I have) to later, more accessible books from which these quotations were copied (some even from a number of the ten major defenses of H.P.B., otherwise ignored!), copied by Meade at second-hand and without credit to these unacknowledged secondary sources. And yet, when charged to (but not proven of) H.P.B.,

Meade sanctimoniously condemns this literary practice, heartily endorsing it to be “plagiarism” (pp. 158, 169).¹

An example of Ms. Meade’s camouflaged “skimming” from unacknowledged sources is seen in her quotation of more than nine lines (pp. 343-44) attributed to Dr. Hodgson’s 1893 “The Defence of the Theosophists” (S.P.R. Proceedings, IX, p. 159). Her quotation exhibits 32 variations from the 1893 original (which, on internal evidence of her own book, Meade has never read), but 31 of these 32 changes agree with the same butchered quotation as it appears on page 11 of Alex Baird’s 1949 biography, The Life of Richard Hodgson.

Far from being “a few minor weaknesses,” these grave transgressions of research and reportorial standards—though by no means the most serious discovered in Meade’s book and brought with full documentary proof to Dr. Melton’s private attention, December 1980—, are in themselves, I suggest, sufficient to completely erase any claim on credibility which Marion Meade presumes to make in professing to be a trustworthy reporter of the life of Madame Blavatsky. They demonstrate not only a devious and systematic suppression of important evidence vital to the defense of H.P.B., but even a shocking neglect and ignorance—cunningly concealed—of the primary sources at the heart of the anti-Blavatsky case, and which alone supply the original details brought against H.P.B.’s claim and therefore necessary for and therefore necessary for any judgment. The whole of this sham research into the life of a subject best known as writer of research into the life of a subject best known as writer of The Secret Doctrine, culminates not in Meade herself reading this famous book, but in her palming-off, as her own thoughts and words upon it, those of an earlier biographer who did the research, and

¹ Upon request, a summary of this writer’s findings on Madame Blavatsky *The Woman Behind the Myth*, will be mailed to anyone sending 35¢ in stamps to The Blavatsky Foundation (Box 1543, Fresno, CA 93716); and notice will be given inquirers of the forthcoming publication of my fully documented, definitive critique of this Meade biography.

reading and the summarizing of that work! In wake of the recent Pulitzer Prize hoax, any fair-minded and informed reader, who can appreciate that honesty is the foremost criterion by which to judge any reporter or reporting of facts, will not for any instant agree with Dr. Melton in placing great store by Marion Meade's "wealth of new information," in finding her book to be "by far the best work to date on HPB," or of being "impressed" or "more impressed than ever" with it (even after reading—?—this writer's "hefty envelope" of material debunking the Meade literary hoax!).

Therefore, until one verifies independently the original sources and facts-on-record, no credit can be given to whatever "Meade recounts"—especially when she pictures H.P.B. as having "simply lied to people..." Far from the biographer's accusations being "undeniable", too often it is her reader who is being "lied to"! Dr. Melton reveals himself to be an eager victim of this literary legerdemain. For example, he apparently does "not find it difficult to accept" Ms. Meade's tale that "vases appeared 'mysteriously' in the magic box at headquarters." But had he taken the trouble to look up her references for this, or even to read either circular or book of mine sent to him ("Masters of the Lie," p. 5; Obituary etc., Sec. VII—which also disposes of the question of "receipts"), he would have known that these vases appeared as "apports" not where Meade's account (pp. 264-65) places them, in "the shrine" or what the S.P.R. Committee labeled a "Conjuror's Box" at H.P.B.'s Society headquarters in India, but at a different location altogether, within a bookcase on another wall (see "Colonel Olcott's Flower Vases," S.P.R. Proceedings, III, pp. 323-25). This is but one of many facts which go to prove that this current biographer has never read the S.P.R. Committee's Report, the so-called "Hodgson Report." Here, instead, her biographical work (like another recent hack-work, Masters of the Occult, by Daniel Cohen, p. 159) simply borrows—blunders and all, but strictly with no mention of the real

(secondary) source—from Gertrude Marvin Williams’ atrocious fabrication of 1946, Priestess of the Occult (p. 203); a book discredited six months after its appearance when its author refused in writing to defend her work against the never-answered and definitive critique, my The Truth About Madame Blavatsky. Despite its relevance to his intended review, obviously this was not one of the “footnote references from Meade’s book” Dr. Melton was “checking” during his “several days in the Theosophical library,” since, had it been, he would have caught Meade’s mix-up (she confesses, p. 263, to finding the Shrine controversy “dizzying”), the “Hodgson Report” not being among the “items critical of HPB” which are “difficult to locate...” (I borrowed my first copy from the California State Library, at the age of 15).

For Dr. Melton, Ms. Meade “traces a pattern of fake miracles worked by HPB who learned to cheat as a Spiritualist medium and who never gave up the practice.” Here the “buzz words” miracles and Spiritualist medium simply appeal to prejudice. These ignore that Mme. Blavatsky consistently proclaimed “absolute disbelief in miracle” (Obituary etc., p. ix), asserting such phenomena as questioned were no more than the natural (not supernatural) effects of faculties “inherent in every man, called out by so few” (Isis Unveiled, vol. II, p. 618). Equally ignored is that her career as a “Spiritualist medium”, a child-automatist conveying written “messages from the dead,” ended once and for all at the age of 15—three years before modern Spiritualism made its debut with the Fox sisters in America. Where and when and from whom, then, did H.P.B. learn the “stock-in-trade of mediumistic phenomena” (to quote the review) which became “HPB’s miracles...”?

With his free-flowing imagination, Dr. Melton—I venture to say—has never had the slightest need of Marion Meade to make him “sure that HPB was a fraud, a trickster and a liar.” (In a letter of November 1980, before “the conclusion” of what he calls “my investigation,” he

expressed to me like certainty of H.P.B.'s guilt.) Howbeit, he wishes the reader to believe that, not only because of “the accounts of the fakes,” but also, “Because there are so many informants reporting episodes of fraud, it is not difficult to accept the testimony of Madame Emma Coulomb...” In two examples and more here cited, the concerned reader now, I suggest, have seen enough of Ms. Meade’s “accounts of the fakes”—to be on guard in looking where the fakery really lies. So, what about this “unprecedented number of witnesses against HPB” that Meade “has assembled...”?

The “first” of these is Mrs. Jennie Holmes—it seems only Dr. Melton prefers to call her “Jennie”—who, we are told, “accused HPB of arranging fake materialization séances to impress Henry Olcott, A.P. Sinnett, Franz Hartmann and Vsevolod S. Solovyov.” If this is a good example of Dr. Melton’s standard of accuracy, it need not encourage anyone to reply upon what he calls (in his paragraph preceding) “my investigation...” By all previous accounts (even that of Meade), the last that Mme. Blavatsky had anything to do with Jennie Holmes (a Spiritualist medium) or her séances, was in 1875 in America (from which H.P.B. departed in 1878, never to return)—some four, eight, and ten years before H.P.B. first met, successively, Sinnett and Hartmann in India, and Solovyov in Europe! As for whatever accusation Mrs. Holmes brought against H.P.B., it was—so far as the available record shows—either corroborated by any second party (not even by her medium-husband, who would have had to be involved), nor supported by any material evidence or incriminating documents. In fact, the so-called confession of Jennie did not surface till 14 years later (in 1889), and if given at all, was given orally and not in writing. This last bit of precaution, calculated perhaps to save Jennie from a legal charge of libel on something that was never repeated, has enabled a parade of hostile myth-makers to exploit the “confession” to the point of preposterous excess now foisted upon Fate’s readers by Dr. Melton.

Meanwhile, the only accusatory feature of it agreed-upon by all from 1889 down to Meade, in the only portions of the alleged confession portions of the alleged confession put into quotes (see Meade, p. 135), says nothing about H.P.B.’s “arranging fake materialization séances” or (to quote Meade, whose scope of fantasy seems somewhat inferior to Dr. Melton’s) “the spurious phenomenon”—!

As for the allegation that another “informant,” witnessing against H.P.B., was “a Bombay jeweler who repaired a brooch HPB subsequently ‘apported’ to A.O. Hume’s wife”, consider the following. The S.P.R. Committee agent, Dr. Hodgson, in his usual dubious and less-than-frank manner, discusses this “brooch incident” in his Report, pages 267-68. Conformable with what he says there and elsewhere, as with other uncontradicted facts-on-public-record, these points emerge: (1) In Meade’s book (pp. 225-26) the Bombay gentleman in question is misnamed “Seervai” and wrongly identified as a “jeweler.” (2) Like Jennie Holmes, Mr. Hormusji S. Seervai, by name, lacked an important corroborating witness (the jeweler who had “repaired” H.P.B.’s brooch)—a witness about whom Hodgson, very suspiciously says nothing at all, as if anything he might say thereupon would weaken or demolish his theory of fraud—; and, Seervai did not submit his testimony in writing (and Hodgson, who was fond of supporting his allegations with “certificates”, fails even to put Seervai’s alleged statement into quotes, as Hodgson might have done were he trusting upon more than mere memory of their mutual conversation.). (3) the only information Seervai gave, six years after the event, according to Hodgson, was that, upon reading a published “description of the brooch, Mr. Horumusji found that the description exactly fitted the brooch which had been entrusted to him for repair by Madame Blavatsky” some time before the reported “apportation” phenomenon. Meade’s statement that “the clasp was broken” is her own fiction—or a pretended exercise in

retrocognitive clairvoyance—; and her claim that, upon seeing the printed description “several weeks” after the wondrous incident, “Seervai... told his side of the story to the Bombay Gazette,” is a gross invention she has cribbed without acknowledgement from Priestess of the Occult (p. 151). Dr. Hodgson reports only that Mr. Hormusji’s claim of the identification from the published description, “is confirmed by that of two other witnesses,” both of whom remained unnamed, while Hodgson makes no claim he himself took the testimony of either (again, six years after the event). (4) But this published “description” of the brooch-apport, which “exactly fitted the brooch” earlier possessed by H.P.B., amounts to no more than that of “an old-fashioned breast-brooch set round with pearls, with glass at the front, and the back made to contain hair” (Sinnott, p. 80). How many kinds of brooches might answer to this vague and incomplete description, even though differing in size, in substance (whether of gold or silver, is not stated), color of glass, number of pearls, even shape, etc.?! It was Mme. Blavatsky’s own suggestion for the arch-skeptical Mr. Hume to have the brooch his wife had “lost” and recovered (phenomenally, found in a garden flower-bed at once after she had been asked by H.P.B., at a dinner-party, to think of “anything she particularly wished for,” whereupon “this brooch... flashed across her mind”) “sent to the jeweler... who will or will not identify it” (The Mahatma Letters etc., p. 461). She also calls Seervai “Wimbridge’s partner and my mortal enemy”—which may cast some sidelight on the six-year memories of Seervai and his “witnesses”). (5) But, oddly enough, and as with the jeweler himself (whose opportunity to examine and accurately identify HPB’s brooch far exceeded that of Seervai), Hodgson’s report yields no indication whatever that he inquired of anyone concerning the question of correspondence between the state of the brooch returned to Mrs. Hume and positively identified as her own, and the point-of-repair made to HPB’s article. Neither does Hodgson by the veriest hint disclose whether or not he undertook the

simple and obvious expediency of testing this question of identity by submitting the Hume brooch to examination by Seervai and/or Seervai's jeweler, or even of himself examining the Hume brooch to determine whether or not it showed any sign of repair. If he did not, why not? He relates that, on going to investigate at Bombay, he was met by Hume, "who gave me much assistance then and afterwards" (S.P.R. Proceedings, IX, p. 134). The tide of muddy obfuscation loosed upon this incident by the Hodgson Report is a sad and sorry substitute for the identification test, unmet or results suppressed!

According to Ms. Meade, Allan O. Hume, former Secretary to the Government of India, and soon to be known as "Father of the Indian National Congress," from first to last "had always assumed the phenomena to be fraudulent" (p. 344). She also asserts he resigned from H.P.B.'s Society after a year or two. Both allegations are false, obviously calculated to deprive Mme. Blavatsky of a powerful witness in public standing. To the last, and despite all Hodgson could marshal to dissuade him, Hume took the position, reported by the investigator (p. 275) "that 'despite all the frauds perpetrated, there have been genuine phenomena, and that, though of a low order, Madame Blavatsky really had and has Occultists of considerable though limited powers behind her; that K.H. is a real entity... and that he has had some share directly or indirectly... in the production of the K.H. letters.'" "

Dr. Melton names still another "informant," viz., "Mary Billing who not only confessed to delivering a letter from a Tibetan Master to Charles Massey... but produced Madame Blavatsky's letter with instructions on how to arrange the 'miracle' for Massey's benefit." Alas, had he taken care to read the Hodgson Report (pp. 397-400)—and who can be so bumptious as to profess to instruct the public on H.P.B.'s guilt or innocence without first reading at least that Report?!—, Dr. Melton would have know: (1) That the delivered letter to Massey was not from a

“Tibetan Master,” but from “a Brother in Scotland”; (2) that “Madame Blavatsky’s letter with instructions” was declared by her to be a forgery, in whole or in part (what Meade, p. 254, presents of this letter’s content, was not copied from Hodgson, as she pretends, but from Arthur Lillie’s 1895 Madame Blavatsky, p. 158—14 of her copy’s 16 departures from the Hodgson text being in agreement with Lillie’s!); (3) that this “letter with instructions” was not brought forward by Mrs. Billing (the medium, “who had then ceased to reside in this country”) but by her (estranged) husband, Dr. Billing; (4) that everything indicates Dr. Billing did not allow this questioned document out of his own hands, it only being read by Massey who “took a copy of the first part” of it; (5) that, although its existence was brought to attention of the S.P.R. Committee in 1884, nothing indicates it was offered for their examination or that of their handwriting experts (in spite of the Committee’s demonstrated preference for such “expert opinion” in like matters of controversy)—or, if thus examined, the determination was suppressed; and, finally (6) Mrs. Billing “confessed” to nothing! The false claim that she did so and “even showed Massey Madame’s letter of instruction”, is no more than a gross double-canard promoted by Meade (p. 255) who—never having read what the S.P.R. Committee’s Report shows on the matter—, has gotten these falsehoods straight from that unplumbed pit of prevarication, Priestess of the Occult (p. 188), though without giving its author credit for inventing these malicious fictions!

Naturally, it is to be expected that anyone so credulous as to prefer Williams or Meade over Hodgson and Company, or to accept Ms. Meade—or Dr. Melton—on the foregoing parade of accusations against Madame Blavatsky, should find no obstacle in believing the Coulobms and anyone else accusing H.P.B. of anything and everything. But for those less so inclined, I recommend the following studies—which on no point ever have been successfully

contradicted—containing fully documented, minutely detailed disproof of all the major claims and bases of the Coulomb-missionary-Hodgson-S.P.R. Committee attacks of 1884-85:

OBITUARY: The “Hodgson Report” on Madame Blavatsky: 1885-1960, by Adlai E. Waterman (1963), obtainable now only from The Blavatsky Foundation (Box 1543, Fresno, CA 93716), ppd., in hardback for donation (tax-deductible) of \$5.00 or more.

“The ‘Hodgson Report’ on Madame Blavatsky,” by Adlai E. Waterman; pp. 188-197, December 1969, Journal of the Society for Psychical Research (inquire: The Society for Psychical Research, 1 Adam and Eve Mews, London W86UG, England). This is a defense of Obituary, etc., by its author, replying to a critical review by Dr. Robert H. Thouless, a former President of the S.P.R., who afterwards in a print declined to answer this rebuttal or to defend his review against its counter-criticisms. in 96 years this marks the only occasion when a book defending H.P.B. has been noticed or reviewed—or a defense of H.P.B. has appeared—in the pages of the Society whose 1884-85 Committee condemned her.