

## IV

### “THE SHRINE OF KOOT HOOMI”

In Studies I, II, and III, we have seen how, in building his case against Madame Blavatsky, in striving for her destruction, Richard Hodgson ignored the testimony of witnesses when this threatened his charges; how he disregarded the evidence of the Blavatsky-Coulomb “correspondence” when it proved Madame Coulomb a liar and destroyed her story of “Christofolo;” how he suppressed the fact Madame Coulomb told contradictory versions of the same incidents; and how he cast her assertions aside when they conflicted with his own spurious claims of greater implication. Having discovered how he butchered the truth by suppression, distortion, and mutilation of the testimony of other witnesses—from Mr. Sinnett to Madame Coulomb—, let us now enquire to what nefarious purpose this reporter put the word of Madame Blavatsky herself.

\* \* \* \*

One of the most involved and intricate features of the Blavatsky-Coulomb case concerns the structure and measurements of the Shrine and its surroundings. For example, the east side of the wall behind the Shrine was differently constructed at least four times during the year of 1883. This invitation to confusion allowed the SPR agent a golden opportunity to manipulate the testimony of witnesses to suit his purpose. However, one need not go into all of the ramifications and details of this particular issue in order to explode Richard Hodgson’s “modes of scientific investigation.” One or two illustrations will suffice here.

#### The Testimony of Mr. Rahnavelu

The central controversy here is, of course, whether, as claimed by the Coulombs, there was a thorough passageway for surreptitious transfer from Madame Blavatsky’s bedroom into

the Shrine itself during the period of related phenomena. (Unfortunately, this question was beclouded by some of Madame Blavatsky's defenders who themselves undertook to show that there never had been a hole in the wall behind the Shrine—quite a different and irrelevant position and one impossible to properly sustain.)

Among the best testimonies to the fact that no such thorough back-entrance had existed, is that of Mr. Rathnavelu, editor of The Philosophic Inquirer, who asserts in a report reprinted by Hodgson: “When I had seen the Shrine and its surroundings...on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, 1883, there was a large almirah standing against the wall...The almirah was, at our request to Madame Blavatsky, removed with some difficulty from its place, to allow of the wall on that side being tapped and sufficiently examined by me. I did so, and was then convinced thoroughly that there was no attempt at deception on any one's part.” Hodgson adds that, in answer to his questions, Rathnavelu informed him that “There was muslin between the shrine and the wall...When the almirah or cupboard in the room adjoining the Occult Room was removed, there was visible a plastered wall which sounded hollow. The plaster covered some planking.” Then, continues Hodgson, “At first I understood that Mr. Rathnavelu clearly admitted that the planking, or blocking door, was visible behind the almirah, but he then stated on my repeating the inquiry very definitely, that this blocking door was covered with chunam. On my asking how he knew there was a door underneath, he said he had been told so at the time.” Finally, the interrogator concludes, “The marks of the nails used to keep the plank door in its place are still visible in the recess on the east side of the wall, and it appears clearly that the door was never covered with chunam. Mr. Rathnavelu is quite alone in this peculiar statement.” (Report, pp. 232-33).

In short, we are expected to consider Mr. Rathnavelu's testimony as altogether worthless because he is supposed to have examined some exposed wooden planking and later

“remembered” that it was not exposed, but “covered with chunam.”

Now the first thing we observe is that the witness’s recollections as presented by Hodgson are in two forms: as part of a written report taken from The Theosophist, and as part of Hodgson’s own narration, phrased and printed in Hodgson’s own words (his allegation of what Mr. Rathnavelu told him). But even if the latter is not such as to demand its rejection on general grounds of untrustworthy prepresentation, one can clearly see that there is considerable difference between what Mr. Rathnavelu seems to have definitely said and what Hodgson claims he meant or appeared to mean. Separating observed fact from implied assumption, we note that first, the witness saw nothing but a plastered wall when the almirah was removed. He saw no “planking,” he saw no “door underneath.” (One can understand how the plastered wall “sounded hollow” to Mr. Rathnavelu, especially if, as evidence shows, the plaster may well have been somewhat loosened by rain and flooding; and, more especially, if the listener expected to detect signs of a door underneath.)

Dr. Hodgson purports to have first “understood” that the witness “clearly admitted that the planking, or blocking door, was visible...” But how can this be, for at first all Mr. Rathnavelu “clearly admitted” (in his written report) was that, after the almirah had been removed, he “tapped and sufficiently examined” the “wall.” And, in Hodgson’s own words, the previous reply to questioning was that “a plastered wall” was seen. There is every reason for thinking that, whatever he may have understood, the SPR agent at this point was striving to make his readers understand that Mr. Rathnavelu was reporting the examination of bare wooden planking. This was the “four-paneled wooden boarding” that, in Hodgson’s words (Report, p. 221) “was placed in Madame Blavatsky’s room, at the back of the recess” behind the Shrine. And according to Hodgson and his chief informant, Mme. Coulomb, this “boarding” or

“planking” or “sham door” had been installed to cover a plastered wall. According to Mme. Coulomb, this plastered wall could bear no inspection, for it had in the center “a small breach of about seven or eight inches in length and five or six in breadth—the secret passageway to the Shrine, hidden only by the almirah. So, the issue is clear. If Mr. Rathnavelu on April 1<sup>st</sup> saw the exposed wooden planking of the sham door designed to cover this hole, his examination might well have been defective and his memory certainly unreliable; but if, when the almirah was removed, he saw simply “a plastered wall,” Mme. Coulomb was lying and Hodgson was her ready tool, for then there was no “small breach” as claimed in the plastered wall!

Either Hodgson purports to have first understood” that the witness” clearly admitted that the planking, or blocking door, was visible...” But how can this be, for at first all Mr. Rathnavelu “clearly admitted” (in his written report) was that, after the almirah had been removed, he “tapped and sufficiently examined” the “wall.” And, in Hodgson’s own words, the previous reply to questioning was that “a plastered wall” was seen. There is every reason for thinking that, whatever he may have understood, the SPR agent at this point was striving to make his readers understand that Mr. Rathnavelu was reporting the examination of bare wooden planking. This was the “four-paneled wooden boarding” that, in Hodgson’s words (Report, p. 221) “was placed in Madame Blavatsky’s room, at the back of the recess” behind the Shrine. And according to Hodgson and his chief informant, Mme. Coulomb, this “boarding” or “planking” or “sham door” had been installed to cover a plastered wall. According to Mme. Coulomb, this plastered wall could bear no inspection, for it had in the center “a small breach of about seven or eight inches in length and five or six in breadth”—the secret passageway to the Shrine, hidden only by the almirah. So, the issue is clear. If Mr. Rathnavelu on April 1<sup>st</sup> saw the exposed wooden planking of the sham door designed to cover this hole, his examination might

well have been defective and his memory certainly unreliable; but if, when the almirah was removed, he saw simply “a plastered wall,” Mme. Coulomb was lying and Hodgson was her ready tool, for then there was no “small breach” as claimed in the plastered wall!

Either Hodgson was fortuitously stupid or designedly silent about the date when this “wooden planking” was installed over the plastered wall. In his account of the examination of Mr. Rathnavelu, the whole force of his objection derives from his implication that the “wooden planking” was in place on April 1<sup>st</sup>. Anxious as he must have been to have the reader believe this, Dr. Hodgson only states that, “The Shrine and its appurtenances were fixed in February or March 1883. Shortly afterwards a four-paneled wooden boarding was placed in Madame Blavatsky’s room, at the back of the recess. For some time an almirah (cupboard) stood in front of this recess. The exact dates of the placing of the boarding and almirah and of the removal of the almirah I have not been able to ascertain...The above is put together from the statements of Theosophic witnesses” (Report, p. 221).

We have here, to use Hodgson’s own phraseology, an illustration of the “great ease of inducing by trifling indications the adoption of an altogether erroneous opinion...” While attempting to make it appear that Rathnavelu saw the boarding when the almirah was removed, Hodgson offers no evidence whatever that the almirah ever stood in front of any wooden planking. But note how, in his narrative sequence, he tries to lead the reader towards the assumption that it had. The “almirah (cupboard)” is only introduced after the “wooden planking was placed;” and “the removal of the almirah” in his account follows “the placing of the boarding...” To make way for this, he pleads ignorance of the “exact dates” of “the placing of the boarding and the almirah and of the removal of the almirah”—indeed, from what he writes at this point, one would gather that only two dates were concerned, i.e., the date of “the placing of

the boarding and almirah” and the date “of the removal of the almirah” (another “trifling indication” calculated to engender the erroneous impression that the placing of the almirah had not preceded the placing of the boarding.) Of course, an ignorance of “exact dates” did not excuse Hodgson’s silence here, for he showed no reticence in dating when the “Shrine and its appurtenances were fixed,” viz., “in February or March 1883”—which one could hardly describe as an “exact” date either! Furthermore, it being clear that Hodgson consulted the Coulombs whenever he thought they could strengthen his case, we must naturally suppose that the dates with which they supplied him here did not suit his purpose and were consequently suppressed.

But what are the facts? In his Report, the only obstruction to a full view of the “wooden planking,” according to evidence offered by Hodgson, were “some clothes of Madame Blavatsky” which hung in the recess (Op. cit., p. 341). In her pamphlet—which Hodgson had good reason to ignore on more than one critical occasion—, Mme. Coulomb, recounting her version of the creation of the Shrine, marks the haste with which it was being prepared early in 1883: “Madame was in this great hurry because Mr. Sinnett was expected to come and spend a short time at headquarters in company with his wife and child, on their way to England.

“As soon as Mr. Deschamps sent the cabinet, which is known under the name of ‘shrine,’ it was measured on the spot where it was intended to remain...many folds of muslin...hung in festoons over the shrine...a few knocks with a hammer and chisel made a small breach...” (Op. cit., pp. 51-52).

The Sinnetts duly arrived at Adyar in February 1883, and stayed over for a few days into March, witnessing, among other phenomena, the transmission of messages via the Shrine, as recorded in Early Days of the Theosophical Society in Europe (pp. 39-40). Then, continues Madame Coulomb, “Sometimes [sic] after they had left for England, Madame Blavatsky, with a

view to remove any suspicion that might have arisen in her visitors at seeing letters, flowers, foliage, etc., appear always through the same channel, namely the shrine—ordered other sliding panels to be made in the same occult room...

“Now, returning to the shrine where so much occult correspondence was going on, I shall say that a little later on Madame Blavatsky, fearing to be asked by some one to have the almirah removed to inspect the back of it, devised means which she said would do away with all danger of being discovered. So she asked my husband to give orders to the carpenters to make a sham door of solid boards of teak wood...at the back of the shrine.

About this epoch, General and Mrs. Morgan had given Madame an invitation to go to Ooty, as she was suffering very much from the heat in Madras.” (Coulomb pamphlet, pp. 53-54).

So, some time after the Sinnetts left for England in March, and a little later on again, about the time (“this epoch”) Madame Blavatsky “was suffering very much from the heat” (certainly not earlier than May or June—she went to Morgan’s at Ooty in July, 1883, vide CW, vol. 5, p. xxiv), the “sham door of solid boards” was installed over the plastered wall. Plainly, on Madame Coulomb’s own reckoning, the “small breach” was in the plastered wall before Sinnett’s arrival in February, but the “sham door” or wooden planking was not in place during March, before Mr. Rathnavelu examined the shrine and surroundings on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April the same year. Clearly, this witness could have seen no “planking, or blocking door” behind the Shrine at this date.

Truly, as Hodgson avers, “it appears clearly that the door was never covered with chunam.” But it is not at all true, that, as he continues, “Mr. Rathnavelu is quite alone in this peculiar statement,” for there is no reason whatever to believe that this gentleman ever claimed

or implied the “sham door of solid boards of teak wood installed later under Mr. Coulomb’s supervision was ever “covered with chunam.” On Hodgson’s own showing, the witness simply stated the opinion that the plastered wall “covered some planking” and that “he knew there was a door underneath” because “he had been told so at the time.” Months before the editor of the Philosophic Enquirer was questioned by the SPR agent, Dr. Franz Hartmann, in his Report of Observations etc., had written: “The so-called ‘shrine’ was a simple cupboard, hung loosely to a wall in Madame Blavatsky’s room. I examined it on this occasion and more carefully afterwards, and found it like any other cupboard provided with shelves and a solid unmovable back, hung up on an apparently solid and plastered wall’ (Op. cit., p. 12). And, like Rathnavelu, Hartmann expresses belief that “a door had been in that wall before” and “as Madame Blavatsky told me, had been walled up...” (Loc. Cit.). [As for this expression “door,” it may well be that “doorway” was intended, the former term being commonly used in conversation when really the latter is meant, e.g., “He went out the door”—doorway. Dr. Hodgson asserts the Shrine “was placed against that portion of the wall in the Occult Room where the north window of Madame Blavatsky’s room had previously existed (see Plan)” (Report, p. 221). But the term “north window” is certainly incorrect, for the location of the shrine and wall both face west, and the north windows are in quite different positions. This claim of Hodgson’s—in support of which he cites neither testimony nor first-hand evidence—is intelligible only if we suppose the two apertures in the west wall of Madame Blavatsky’s Room (the doorway into the Occult Room and this “north window”) were at one time both windows, the former being the south window in the west wall, the other, the north. Moreover, there is no denial that both these original windows had been converted into doorways when, after the purchase of the building, the Theosophists had the Occult Room built on. There would at that juncture have been no use of a north window



between the rooms, but there would have been need of two doors (doorways), one leading from the Occult Room into Madame Blavatsky's sitting-room, the other (the "north window"), opening into her bedroom. Such a doorway may well have served its purpose for a period of time, until two or three months later when the proposal was made to build the Shrine and hang it there. If Madame Blavatsky ever told anyone the Shrine hung before a wall where a "door" had once been, and that the "door" had been "walled up"—doorway being meant—, it is clear why Rathnavelu or his informant could suppose the wooden planking of the door itself formed part of the wall. But a psychical researcher is only incidentally interested in what a witness may think about something he never saw; we are interested in what Mr. Rathnavelu saw when the almirah was "removed" with some difficulty from its place"—: "a plastered wall."]

In a word, Hodgson , while admitting the almirah had at least once been removed, tried to conceal as best he could the fact that it had stood directly in front of the plastered wall. And Madame Coulomb, knowing she had to have "a small breach" in this plastered wall, and that for months this aperture could have been hidden on the east side of this wall only by the almirah, tried to conceal the fact the almirah had ever been removed at all—"Madame Blavatsky, fearing to be asked by some one to have the almirah removed to inspect the back of it.."! Naturally, Richard Hodgson did not call on Mme. Coulomb to help him here. He simply ignored her statements and suppressed their implications.

#### How the SPR Agent Made the Muslin & Calico Vanish

We have seen in just one case how the SPR "investigator" did all he could to misconstrue testimony fatal to his passageway-through-the-wall charge. After numerous labors no less deceptive, he seems to have felt his work was well done and that his audience would agree that a "small breach" did exist as claimed during the period of Theosophical phenomena. But quite

apart from the fact these ingenious labors were in vain and that careful and total analysis of all the testimony demonstrates there was no thorough passageway through the wall(s) behind the Shrine, there is even more important evidence to prove that surreptitious entry from Madame Blavatsky's bedroom was impossible.

In his "explanations of fraud," Dr. Hodgson, for reasons not hard to discover, ignored the fact that there was more between the bedroom and the shrine than brick and plaster walls. We have seen how Madame Coulomb in her narrative declares that "many folds of muslin...hung in festoons over the shrine..." But Madame Coulomb "is quite alone in this peculiar statement"! Mr. Rathnavelu testified that this was behind the shrine: "There was muslin between the shrine and the wall..." Indeed, there was more than muslin between the shrine and the wall, for, again according to Hodgson, Mr. Lane-Fox testified, "The Shrine was close to the wall, and muslin and other stuff between the Shrine and the wall...Mr. Lane-Fox...had the Shrine lifted up and he pulled the muslin away, and then some other fabric or 'stuff' which was close to the wall. This other stuff [which the tailor who prepared the hangings of the Occult Room asserts to have been white glazed calico tacked to the wall] was joined not sewn, so that the joining ran down the wall opposite the middle of the Shrine" (Report, p. 327).

Not only did Madame Coulomb mislead her readers by failure to admit the muslin was "between the shrine and wall," her explanations did not even take into account the "calico tacked to the wall"!

As for Hodgson himself, he did no more than admit some of the facts: "A certain space round the Shrine was enclosed by muslin curtains, which were drawn aside from the front when any one wished to approach the Shrine. These curtains were about 7 ft. high on the sides, but on the wall behind the Shrine extended nearly to the ceiling. The wall immediately behind the

Shrine was covered by white glazed calico, tacked to the wall. Two widths of the calico met in a vertical line passing behind the centre of the Shrine” (Report, p. 221). There is some question whether “two widths of the calico” did in fact meet “in a vertical line passing behind the centre of the Shrine.” Dr. Hodgson gives no direct source for this assertion and, as we have seen, when representing the testimony of Mr. Lane-Fox, he then reported that “the joining ran down the wall opposite the middle of the shrine.” Now “opposite” is not at all synonymous with “behind;” in fact, in this case the former term would seem to imply that the joining ran down the wall not behind but before the shrine, for the primary definition of “opposite” by dictionary is “Set over against; facing...Across from and facing” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)! If there was a sheet of calico between the shrine and the wall, an aperture in the wall obviously would not give access to the shrine unless there was also an opening in the intervening cloth. Now Hodgson makes no claim that there was such an opening, a fact which, of itself, renders his charge impotent! But in lieu of such a claim, he wishes to leave the necessary opening to the suspicious imagination of the prejudiced; and so to prepare the way and when relating the testimony of Lane-Fox, attention is called to a joining of calico (described as “the joining”) “opposite the middle of the Shrine.” To get this behind the shrine, it was first necessary to introduce it, and after that it could be described as “a vertical line passing behind the centre of the Shrine”! In Hodgson’s words, such is “the great ease of inducing by trifling indications the adoption of an altogether erroneous opinion”—for a skeptical reader, now provided with the raw stuff on which incredulity thrives, could suppose that a few tacks were secretly removed and lo! An opening through the calico behind the Shrine.

However, even if one chose to concede that a joining of calico passed behind the center of the shrine, Dr. Hodgson’s reader can cite no explanation as to what happened to this calico

tacked to the wall when, it is alleged, Monsieur Coulomb by “a few knocks with a hammer and chisel” smashed a hole—thirty-five or more inches square—through the wall. Madame Coulomb was wise to ignore the calico altogether, for she saved herself a good deal of trouble with attempted explanations. For obviously, the “tailor who prepared the hangings” and Colonel Olcott, who helped decorate the shrine room walls (see his Diary, although Hodgson, who read the Diary, ignored the entry), could not have done their work if any such “small breach” had been made and was there. On the other hand, if the calico was hung first, one would expect it to have suffered some attrition in the later process (if only by displacement of tacks, soiling, and capture of loose plaster)—not to mention that it would have shown wrinkles, tears, or mends suffered over more than a year’s mis-use during the transport of “letters, flowers, foliage, etc.” But Mr. Lane-Fox, who uncovered it, “could not find not the smallest trace of the previous existence of a hole” (Report, p. 327)—not the smallest trace!

Dr. Hodgson passed over the muslin curtains with not so much as an intimation that they were joined in any (vertical line passing behind the centre of the Shrine.” Perhaps he thought anyone with imagination lively enough and suspicious enough to do away with the unwelcome calico could also explain away this second barrier. But we may feel sure he would have lost no opportunity to say something in this direction by way of help if he safely could have...but then there was the tailor. Instead, what do we find? A “Plan of Occult Room, With Shrine and Surroundings,” a plan which proves gross “mal-observation and lapse of memory”—or something worse!—not only on the part of this great detective, but by those eminent Members of the SPR Council who approved his report for publication and caused their Society to pay for the printing of his Plan. That the agent of this Committee of this Council of the society for Psychical Research was indeed well aware that this muslin and calico presented an imminent and fatal

danger to his case can with logic be deduced from the fact that although his Plan included the other curtains, Dr. Richard Hodgson, knowing the facts but with apparent prudence and careful design, suppressed or caused to be omitted from his Plan all signs of the calico wall cloth and muslin curtains separating the Shrine from the wall behind!

To science, of course, it makes no difference whether “letters, flowers, foliage, etc.” are passed through the brickwork of a wall or through the muslin of a curtain—either case it would be a “miracle.” But though Hodgson may have thought he convinced someone there had been a hole through the wall, he found it desirable to overlook evidence he had put in his own report and had never questioned, and, in the final reckoning, rather than face these facts, he took the escape route and ignored altogether the curtains and the wall-cloth which were penetrated neither by his own dissimulations nor by Madame Coulomb’s lies. What he could hide by word-jugglery, by camouflage in his maze of devious explanations, he would have failed to conceal if admitted into the drawing of his Plan—for a picture is worth a thousand words, or ten thousand from a master of literary legerdemain!—; and if he had put the calico wall-cloth and the curtain muslin in his Plan to be set before his audience, the readers would not have failed to note that though a passageway was shown behind the Shrine it did not pass through the calico nor through the muslin.

#### “Traces of this Hole”

If for any reason someone may suppose that this judgment is too harsh on the “greatest detective in the history of psychical research,” some additional illustration of his “modes of scientific investigation” may prove still more convincing.

In his Report of Observations etc. (published about October 1884), and when relating the examination of the shrine and the adjacent wall at the time when Mon. Coulomb surrendered the

keys, Dr. Franz Hartmann writes: “The wall between the excavation as well as the back part of the ‘shrine’ were however, intact, and there was no communication between the two. It was therefore evident, that the work had not been finished” (Op. cit., p. 43). However, when Hodgson later came to print his own Report, he stated: “Dr. Hartmann has since furnished me with a statement in writing which is of interest as affording evidence respecting the hole between the recess and the Shrine. That this hole had manifestly existed and had been blocked up, I had been assured by another Theosophist who is particularly observant, and who discovered its traces independently of Dr. Hartmann” (Op. cit., p. 225). Dr. Hodgson proceeds to quote by “extract from Dr. Hartmann’s written account” thus furnished, and this reads in part: “At what time the hole in the wall was made is as much a mystery to me as it is to you...”

“Of the existence of a movable back to the Shrine and a filled-up aperture in the wall, none of us knew anything, and although superficial examinations were made, they divulged nothing; because to make a thorough examination, it would have been necessary to take the Shrine down, and we were prevented from doing this by the superstitious awe with which Mr. Damodar K. Ravalankar regarded the Shrine...” Dr. Hartmann adds that, nevertheless, “that examination was made, and it was found that the back of the Shrine could be removed” and “that an aperture had existed, which had been plastered up” (Loc. Cit.).

Now Dr. Hodgson fully agrees with the assertion that before the Shrine was removed, Dr. Hartmann and his fellow investigators were “prevented” from making “any thorough investigation of the Shrine...” (Op.cit., p. 226). And the SPR reporter knew the initial belief that there was no movable panel in the Shrine and no “traces” of a previous “hole” in the wall immediately behind the Shrine had been expressed with as much conviction and apparent knowledge as was now this new one (viz., that there was “a filled-up aperture in the wall”). One

can have little doubt that Hodgson really regarded the reliability of Dr. Hartmann and others subscribing to this new claim with no more respect that he had previously, but that, for the sake of his case—for the sake of Madame Coulomb—, he was willing to favor this new claim, even though he himself did not verify it.

However, knowing that the previous search for signs of any erstwhile aperture or passageway behind the shrine had been inadequate because the shrine had not been taken down—apparently in deference to the feelings of some present, or because the inspector had felt satisfied that their search, such as it was, had been adequate—, and realizing that the searchers (Hartmann especially) had been quick to draw a false conclusion from inadequate data, one is forced to ask whether this second examination was appropriate to the requirement, whether their second conclusion was any more warranted than their first. Of course, the plain answer is that it was not. Dr. Hartmann refers confidently to “a filled-up aperture” and to “an aperture” that “had existed” and which “had been plastered up.” But the first thing to be noted here is that Hodgson, in his own words, speaks only of “a hole behind the Shrine” and “traces of this hole.” Clearly, there is a big difference between an aperture, “a passage through,” and an hole (by dictionary definition, “An opening into...a hollow place, a cavity, a pit”). Without thorough and adequate passage through the wall, the alleged trickery concerned would not have been possible whatever else the arrangements, even with a dozen holes in the wall immediately behind the Shrine! The question must therefore be, was such a “filled-up aperture in the wall” ever discovered?

Dr. Richard Hodgson does not claim it was. He repeats that traces of a hole were found, but he succeeds in avoiding any discussion of what these “traces” consisted, and he fails to say what kind of a “hole” this was. What then can Dr. Hartmann mean, asserting “it was found that an aperture had existed...”?

The agent of the SPR Committee corroborated Mme. Coulomb when he described the wall in which this alleged aperture would have had to have been made, as one constructed of “a layer of bricks and plaster” (Op. cit., p. 220). In making a “small breach of about seven or eight inches in length and five or six in breadth,” Mon. Coulomb would have had to have knocked out not only plaster but bricks as well—and to have done so without leaving “the smallest trace” to show on or behind the curtains and wall-cloth. But, far more than this, it is interesting to note that Madame Coulomb in her narrative did not tell what her husband did in January 1884 “In stopping up the hole in back of the shrine;” and Hodgson himself passes quickly around this dangerous juncture, being content to quote Monsieur Coulomb: “The hole in the wall, he said had been blocked up in January, before Madame Blavatsky departed for Europe.”

Now it is evident that for an aperture of this size, the task required the reinsertion of bricks, followed by re-plastering and subsequent application of white-wash to match the surrounding surface. (Dr. Hodgson in his Report also tells us that the “new discovery” of the Theosophists not only showed that “a hole in the wall immediately behind the Shrine had previously existed” and “had been blocked up,” but also that “the wall face in the Occult Room behind the Shrine had been carefully whitewashed so as to conceal the traces of the hole...,” Op. cit., p. 341) To do all this, the Shrine had to be removed as well as the shelf on which it partially rested, the muslin curtains and the tacked-on calico on this wall had likewise to be taken down. Then the aperture had to be refilled with brickwork, and the “wall face in the Occult Room behind the Shrine” re-plastered and re-whitewashed so as to match the surrounding area, leaving “not the smallest trace of the previous existence of a hole.” (To have limited the re-painting to a space on the wall marking the circumference of the blocked-up aperture would have betrayed the repair work, for this fresh white wash—taken from a new mix—would have had to have been



matched and blended with old wash which had been exposed to the rigors and deteriorations of a year's seasons—and it was “very damp” at the Shrine.” After all of this, the shelf and the wall-cloth, and the curtains and the Shrine had to be put back into place, without leaving the smallest trace of their secret displacement (e.g., care would be taken that the tacks in the wall-cloth were reinserted in their former positions, showing no tampering). It is ridiculous to suppose that, amidst all the activity present at headquarters, Mon. Coulomb could have found opportunity for the secrecy and time for the secrecy (in “January 1884”—time for the plaster first, and then for the whitewash, to dry before the shelf and calico and curtains and shrine were replaced without exciting suspicion.) And yet, Hodgson was not able to bring forward a scrap of testimony to show that anyone had seen even a part of any of these things being done. But he could afford to ignore these lacunae in his case because...well, he did all this himself in a single sentence, didn't he?!

Above all, it is preposterous to suppose that any such hole was “filled-up” with a bucketful of wet plaster! Dr. Hodgson himself is wise enough to make no such ridiculous claim, for he repeatedly uses the term “blocked up;” but read what is said by the witness whose testimony forms the foundation of the SPR agent's charge. On page 140 of his “Reply” of 1893, the latter mentions “a written account furnished to me by Dr. Hartmann, given in full on page 225 of my Report...” Aside from the fact the material given on page 225 of Hodgson's Report is therein explicitly introduced as no more than “an extract from Dr. Hartmann's written account”—a fact that affords one more sidelight on the SPR reporter's untrustworthiness in representing other people's accounts, even when written and when noted in his own records!—, it shows as by firsthand testimony, how the “traces of this hole” were discovered: “It was found that the back of the Shrine could be removed, and on moistening the wall behind the Shrine with

a wet cloth, it was found that an aperture had existed, which had been plastered up” (Op. cit., p. 140).

We can understand how Dr. Hodgson ignored this and how Dr. Hartmann, precipitant by nature, and without making “a thorough examination,” made a false inference from inadequate data and jumped to the conclusion there was “a filled-up aperture” when in fact there was nothing of the sort. It was simply another unfortunate blunder. The best proof of this is that, like the best proof of the inadequacy of his former inspection behind the Shrine, the examination he now describes is, on the face of it, quite inadequate to have revealed the previous existence of any such passageway. It is obvious that “moistening the wall behind the Shrine with a wet cloth” would not remove the plaster to a depth required to show the past penetration of any thorough hole—it would, probably at best, and if undertaken with patience persistent to a point of discovery, or with superficiality equal to the previous inspection, do no more than remove the whitewash which before then must have concealed any signs of re-plastering. But this would have been sufficient to stop further examination, for the inspectors would realize with shock that the wall had been repaired, a “hole” had been covered over; and Dr. Hartmann would, of course, be convinced that the Coulobms were correct in their claim that “an aperture had existed,” though, in his words, these things “were made by M. Coulomb after H. P. Blavatsky went to Europe” (Report, p. 225).

And it is understandable why Hartmann, in concert with his fellow-inspectors, made this their secret on pretext that “if at that inopportune moment this new discovery... would have been made public, it would have had a bad effect on the public mind” (Loc. Cit.). “The defence originally offered by the Theosophists was that M. Coulomb had made the trick apparatus after Madame Blavatsky’s departure from Adyar, but had not had time to complete his tricks, and as

one of the proofs of this they pointed out that there was no hole in the wall immediately behind the Shrine. When it was afterwards discovered that not only did the Shrine have a sliding panel in the back, but that a hole had once existed in the wall, thus completing the required communication between the Shrine and Madame Blavatsky's bedroom, it became obvious that the defence originally put forward was very unsatisfactory; so unsatisfactory indeed that Mr. Judge and Dr. Hartmann, to 'save the situation,' suppressed the discoveries and destroyed the Shrine" (See Report, pp. 340-1), (SPR Proceedings, ix., p. 140). What Dr. Hodgson does not here take into account, but what must have been appreciated most of all by the discoverers—especially by the chief discoverer, Hartmann—was that this new discovery could not have been "made public" without a confession of serious error on their part. One need not suppose that they "suppressed the discoveries and destroyed the Shrine" in order "to 'save the situation,'" for Madame Blavatsky in her absence. Their own authority needed protecting, for on this authority the public had been told that there was no sign of a hole nor of a sliding panel at the back of the shrine. The prospect of having to recant is enough to close many a man's mouth.

One also notes the claim that "a sliding panel I the back" of the Shrine together with "a hole" that had "once existed in the wall" thus completed "the required communication between the Shrine and Madame Blavatsky's bedroom..." This a good example of Hodgson's manipulation of the evidence. Among other oversights, this declaration does not take into consideration whether this panel had been moveable during the period of shrine manifestations (in fact, Mon. Coulomb and his wife expressly stated that this panel had not been used for effecting any secret entry—see Report of the SPR, p. 222); and Hodgson here altogether overlooks the important fact that he was able to give no evidence showing "the required communication" had been completed by any kind of passageway through the calico and

muslin—quite apart from the question of what kind of hole had been discovered by “traces.”

What is of more immediate interest however is the assertion that “the defence originally put forward,” and which was not “very unsatisfactory,” had been “offered by the Theosophists...” This is another typical Hodgsonian exaggeration. The “defence originally offered”—at least that part of the “defence” which depended upon “proofs” that there was no “sliding panel” in the Shrine and that “there was no hole in the wall immediately behind the Shrine”—was not “offered by the Theosophists” but by some Theosophists and Madame Blavatsky was not among these defenders. Dr. Hodgson is careful not to say what was “Madame Blavatsky’s explanation of the origin of the “traces of this hole.” That she must have had some explanation would seem evident from the fact that the SPR agent fails to gloat over any claim that she had none. One wonders whether his silence at this point concerning her views was, like many other lapsus silentis in his reporting, merely evidence that he had suppressed something “to ‘save the situation,’” himself!

Fortunately today, we are in a better position than were his readers of 1885 and 1893 to appreciate the cause of this silence, for we find that Madame Blavatsky did have a pertinent explanation, and that, after first learning how Hodgson had put this evidence to his own specially designed use, she replied with some detail in 1886 (vide “My Justification,” pp. 414-17, Complete Works, vi. This document is dated principally by two statements: “I have read about the ‘new discovery’ and it is more damnable than all the rest.” The earliest discussion in print about the “new discovery”—indeed the only other discussion known in writing from this period—was Hodgson’s original revelation and quotation of Hartmann’s account, published in his Report of December, 1885, where it is used as a basis for attack; and Madame Blavatsky’s statement is obviously a reply to an attack. Then, in closing, she writes, “And now it is Col.

Olcott and all of you at Adyar.—“ If you, or any of you, eerily believe that I was every guilty consciously of any trick...then telegraph me where I am...” Clearly, she is addressing the members at headquarters and writing at her place in Europe.) She explains:

“Coulomb on hanging it [the shrine] broke with large nails several times the wall, and had to re-plaster it. He made a hole with a large nail that actually pierced the wall and made a hole on the inner side of the window aperture under the ceiling in the next room and spoilt the marble polish. He had to re-plaster it immediately. This was done for the hook to hang on the shrine. It is not one, but several holes must be found or rather the traces, for the wall of the closed window is very thin and we had the greatest trouble to fix the shrine.

“(3). It is he and his wife who insisted upon putting that mirror inside the shrine because he broke one of the panels in several pieces and had to make another. He was always fixing and taking them out when the cupboard came. I never paid attention because I was always occupied.”

Evidence that “the wall of the closed window” was “very thin” and offered precarious support for any arrangement “to fix the shrine” so that this kind of difficulties—“the greatest trouble”—must have been encountered as here reported, is shown from Hodgson’s own testimony that when the Shrine was finally successfully “fixed,” it had been found necessary to hang it “by two thick iron wires” attached to two “hooks near the ceiling” in addition to having it “rested below on a plank or shelf.” But even then it did not hang aright, for while the “upper part of the shrine was as close to the wall itself as the muslin and calico behind it would allow,” the “lower part” of the Shrine “must have been somewhere between ¼ in;. and 1½ in.” out from the wall (See Report, p. 221).

Dr. Hodgson asserts that when he first inspected “the Occult Room...its walls were

covered with fresh plaster”—from which, presumably, we are to infer that he was therefore prevented from verifying and judging those signs or traces of a hole that had been discovered by Hartmann and others and independently by Ezekial. Thus Hodgson himself is of no help whatever as a witness—unless his apathy and silence here is witness to something—concerning those “traces” discovered “on moistening the wall behind the Shrine with a wt cloth...” But what was it, if anything, that would have prevented his inspection of the rear of this wall behind the shrine, what excuse did he make for not having a report to offer concerning an inspection of the inner side of this wall, the surface of it which faced into the recess behind the shrine? He makes no claim that he found that surface “covered with fresh plaster;” so what was there to halt his discovery of either the “plastered up” entrance to a secret passageway or the exit sign of a large-nail “hole on the inner side of the window aperture under the ceiling in the next room (the recess, formerly a clothes closet or recess in Madame Blavatsky’s bedroom)? Let us see how the slippery Dr. Hodgson contrived to escape from the obligation of reporting this.

In his original Report, he also states: “Now with respect to the side-board aperture and the recess, these were, as I afterwards found, still in existence when I arrived at Adyar, though Mr. Damodar stated to me that the recess had been blocked up. This last statement of Dr. Damodar’s I can regard only as a deliberate misrepresentation. Had I known that the recess still existed, I should of course myself have endeavored to enter, and should at once have discovered the untruth of Mr. Damodar’s account of his own entrance” (into the recess through the aperture made by Mon. Coulomb at floor-level in the east-side wall behind the Shrine)—Op. cit., p. 226.

But what was the “deliberate misrepresentation”? That the recess had itself been “blocked up”? Or that the entrance to it had? Again, we have not the words of the witness, but only the words in which Dr. Hodgson chose to relay a purported statement of the witness. But

Mr. Judge put on record that in the summer or in the autumn of 1884—the meaning is not clear, though at any rate some time before December when Hodgson arrived—he “sent for a man who ‘in my presence bricked up the aperture, re-plastered it, and then re-papered the whole space’” (A. Besant, H. P. Blavatsky and the Masters of the Wisdom, p. 62).

Ah, but read again: what does Richard Hodgson really say? That the recess was not blocked up, though Damodar stated to him it was? He “afterwards found” that “the sideboard aperture and the recess” were “still inexistence when I arrived at Adyar...” Let us ignore the point—though not for want of importance—whether he found this out later the same day or on some later day, and whether he “afterwards found” the true facts by the tongue of Mr. Damodar or someone else. His statement would seem to imply that “the sideboard aperture and recess” were not in “existence” when he left Adyar but only when he “arrived.” Even if this were true, was it a “deliberate misrepresentation” or any “misrepresentation” at all for Mr. Damodar to tell Hodgson “the recess had been blocked up” if only its aperture had been blocked? Of course not. But was the aperture into the recess blocked? We have seen the testimony of Mr. Judge—what was Hodgson’s full testimony on this point? With typical evasiveness, he does not expressly deny that the aperture, the entrance-way to the recess, was blocked—he only pretends to make this denial, at the expense of the absent Mr. Damodar, and for what reason we can guess and shall soon see. But to offer the pretence, he drags in a perfectly irrelevant diversion, a characteristic trick worthy of any adept in literary illusion: the “sideboard aperture” was “still in existence.” And what was this? Not the aperture in the east wall of the recess behind the shrine, not the opening in the “bricked frame,” but the opening in the back of the “sideboard” that had been “placed close against the brick frame...so that there was communication through the sideboard (in the back of which was a hinged panel) with the hollow space” (Report, p. 222-23)!

(In his 1893 “Reply,” p. 137, Hodgson writes, “The sideboard may still be where I saw it last, in the ‘New Room’ ...”).

So Mr. Judge had supervised the sealing of the aperture in the bricked frame, and the entrance to the recess had been thus blocked up (re-bricked, re-plastered and re-papered) many days before Hodgson “arrived at Adyar,” and “Mr. Damodar stated to me that the recess had been blocked up”—but this was “a deliberate misrepresentation.” It was a lie because the “sideboard aperture” was “still in existence”?! And if Hodgson had known that the recess itself still existed and that this sideboard aperture existed too, he would have crawled into the sideboard in the “New Room,” and passing through the “sideboard aperture,” have found himself in the recess behind the shrine-wall of the Occult Room?: But the record does not show Mr. Damodar had denied the “sideboard aperture” still existed—he himself may have taken Hodgson to the “New Room” and pointed out to him this aperture in the sideboard.

It is instructive to trace to its beginning Hodgson’s diversionary use of the term, “sideboard aperture.” He ends by using it as a misleading substitute for bricked-frame aperture; and in leading to this deception, he writes, “Turning now to the specific statements of Mr. Damodar, quoted in Appendix IV., we find that he makes the following assertions....” the first of these purported assertions beginning, “That the sideboard aperture leading to the recess, and the recess itself, were so small that he could enter the hole with difficulty, and when once inside, ‘could only stand abreast, without being able to move either way an inch, or to lift up’ his hand” (Report, p. 228).

But when we turn to Appendix IV, we find that not once does Damodar use the term, “sideboard aperture.” And while representing it on page 228 as part of a “specific statement” or “assertion” of the witness, on page 336, Richard Hodgson is found introducing it this wise: “As



regard the hole [through the sideboard into the recess]...in the presence of Dr. Hartmann and Mr. Lane-Fox, I attempted to enter it.” Here we see that the SPR agent, in starting his quotation of Mr. Damodar’s statement, begins by suppressing words of the witness (“...”), replacing these with his own bracketed, interpolated concoction. By this substitution, he tries to make the reader think that “the hole” referred to by the witness is not the recess itself but “the hole[through the sideboard into the recess],” that Damodar entered the recess “through the sideboard.” But in attempting this remarkable feat, our expert juggler altogether ignores the aperture in the “wooden frame” and brickwork. Thus the way is cleared for him to substitute “sideboard aperture” for wall aperture in his discussion of “the specific statements of Mr. Damodar” and what “Mr. Damodar stated to me”!

But why was it necessary for Richard Hodgson to omit any of the witness’s testimony—written testimony—just at this specific point? It would seem that this was the only way he could get anyone to believe Damodar K. Mavalankar had entered the recess “through the sideboard.” Mr. Damodar, however, continues: “All who know me or have seen me are aware how thin and lean I am [tubercular, and, according to Olcott, weighing less than one hundred pounds. –WAC Jr.]; and, although I was almost half naked at the time, I could enter the ‘hole’ with difficulty. And when once inside I could only stand abreast without being able to move, either way, an inch, or to lift up my hand [in his two versions of this quoted phrase, Hodgson differs in punctuation at three points—which is enough to make one wonder how often the written reports of his witnesses were “improved” upon without acknowledgement.] I was there hardly 10 seconds when I felt choked, and I am firmly persuaded to believe that if I had stopped there two minutes longer I should have fainted on account of suffocation. And this when the cupboard attached to the hole was removed, and there was passage for air through it. How much more suffocating

must it be when there is no such free passage for air?” Thus we see that Dr. Hodgson seizes the opportunity of informing the reader that by “hole” Damodar here means “the hole [through the sideboard into the recess],” in spite of the clear meaning the witness himself attaches to it...” As regards the hole...I attempted to enter it...I could enter the ‘hole’ with difficulty. And when once inside I could only stand abreast...” Now one cannot suppose that here Damodar has

(note: spell check already done to this point!!! missing the continuation pages which should start with a handwritten number “23”)

references to the hole though the sideboard into the recess, for there is no question of standing in a “hole” opened in the back of a sideboard “about 3 ft. high.” What he meant by “hole” was the recess itself; and from his account it appears that he did not even enter by the sideboard aperture, for one of “the specific statements of Mr. Damodar,” one of his “assertions” which his accuser chose to ignore, is that this was “when the cupboard (sideboard) attached to this hole (the hole in the cupboard, the “sideboard aperture”?! ) was removed”!

By what “I can only regard as a deliberate misrepresentation”—or rather a series of the same—, and in lieu of any evidence that anyone had ever entered this recess by way of the wall aperture and by crawling through the adjacent sideboard and “sideboard aperture,” and in order to discredit Mr. Damodar, and at the same time put off any question why he himself had not entered the recess to search there for “traces” of Monsieur Coulomb’s “small breach,” Richard Hodgson butchered Damodar K. Mavalankar’s original statement, substituting his own special term designed to pervert the witness’s account and to seduce the reader’s understanding.

Ever cautious, always foreseeing, consistently covering his tracks, Hodgson adds—lest

anyone suppose that by “sideboard aperture” he did not mean the aperture in the bricked frame (though he could not say what he “meant” without courting quick exposure)—: “I was afterwards informed by another Theosophist that he regarded the aperture and the recess as quite large enough to be used by a person of ordinary size for the production of the Shrine phenomena, and in the meantime I had tested the accuracy, or rather, inaccuracy of Mr. Damodar’s account, by constructing for myself an aperture and a recess smaller than those connected with the Shrine (but, according to the Coulombs, to enter the recess, one had to pass through three apertures and the interior of the sideboard, i.e., the front and rear openings of the sideboard and then the wall aperture itself). Dr. Hartmann, in his pamphlet, gave the dimensions of the (wall) aperture as 27 in. high by 14 in. wide, and these dimensions are nearly as possible correct. This I was subsequently able to ascertain for myself, as the fraud (which with paper, plaster, bricks and mortar had formed the wall) had been stowed away in the compound, and was shown to be by another Theosophist. The recess was alleged by Dr. Hartmann to be about 12 in. deep, and about 5 ft. high; the depth given is about correct, but the height was more nearly 8 ft.—as I found by measurement” (Report, pp. 228-29).

#### Page 24

Having exploited the term, “sideboard aperture” to its fullest, Dr. Hodgson immediately reverted to “aperture.” How explicit his assertions are is shown, when in 1893, he changed “frame” to “bricked frame” and remembered it as “lying in the dust-heap of the compound” (Reply, p. 137). Now one cannot imagine that “a bricked frame”—a frame “about 8 ft. by 4 ft.” according to Hodgson’s Report (p. 222) and filled with bricks and mortar, plastered and papered—was dislodged intact and carried down the stairs at Theosophical headquarters, much less that it was, after all this trouble, thrown out on the “dust-heap”! What Hodgson wants the

reader to understand at this point is that he measured not the aperture in the sideboard but the aperture in the “frame,” the “bricked frame.” And since his reader is never told that this consisted of other than a “wooden frame...with cross-pieces...single layer of half-size bricks...and plaster” together with a certain amount of wall-paper (Ibid., pp. 222, 325), that is to say, because Hodgson in his descriptions and calculations steadfastly ignored the important fact that lathwork was built into this frame (\*), it might be concluded that the size of the aperture in the frame could only be measured by the dimensions formed by the brickwork surrounding the open space which remained when Mon. Coulomb took bricks out to make this opening. If the bricks and mortar and plaster and paper were all gone, if nothing remained but a “wooden frame...with cross-pieces,” the aperture would be no longer “in existence”---but that would mean Mr. Damodar had not put Hodgson off with “a deliberate misrepresentation.”

But if the reader had been told that the size of this aperture could be measured by tracing the fractures and/or repairs in the lathwork boarding of the frame, even though the bricks were missing, even though the aperture itself no longer existed, there would have been no “trifling indication” to lead to the “erroneous opinion” that the aperture was “still in existence,” that the recess had not “been blocked up,” and that Damodar had not kept Hodgson out of the recess by “deliberate misrepresentation.” Thus the fact Hodgson “was subsequently able to ascertain for myself” the “dimensions of the aperture” does not in the least support his denunciation of Mr. Damodar’s veracity.

It is to be noted that while Hodgson gives the dimensions of the recess he “found by measurement,” he does not in his Report tell how he came by this measurement. The fact he

---

\* How Hodgson contrived to destroy reputations by clever suppression and choice mis-statement is illustrated again when he condemns Babajee D. Nath for testifying “In reply to my question,” that “the boarding on the east side of the Occult Room wall behind the shrine” was “like that,” i.e., like “a Venetian window” that had “caught Babajee’s eye” (Report, p. 330). The account of this conversation is, of course, in Hodgson’s words.

immediately preceded the sentence bearing these figures with another showing his examination of “the frame...stowed away in the compound,” is a likely indication that he measured the width and breadth of the recess merely by measuring the size of the frame that had once blocked it, while the depth (“about 12 in.”) could be roughly ascertained by subtracting the depth of two brick partitions from the total depth shown by the wall at the doorway between the Occult Room and Madame Blavatsky’s bedroom (see his Plan). Just as nothing in his account was calculated to make one think he had not “afterwards found” the brick-frame aperture “still in existence,” so nothing was offered to disturb the suggestion that Mr. Damodar’s “deliberate misrepresentation” had deceived and thwarted Hodgson when he would himself “have endeavoured to enter” the recess.

Quite apart, however, from the aperture into the recess, and altogether aside from the question of how Hodgson might have gotten into the recess, in this 1885 attack on Mr. Damodar he makes his readers believe that “of course” he would have “endeavoured to enter” and had he “known that the recess still existed.” Well what about this? Did ignorance prevent this endeavour—or is this mere pretence to make it thought that Damodar impeded his “investigation”?

It was not until eight years after this Report of 1885, and only in his “Reply,” that Hodgson’s readers were permitted to learn that, in his words, he not only had known the recess existed when he was at Adyar, he had entered it and measured it! “But if he did make any other plan, and if it agrees with mine, I venture to congratulate Mr. Judge that he was so close in his judgement about the recess, to which his own showing he had no access except by the aperture in the bricked frame,

[Page 26, 27 & 28 missing](#)

Why did Dr. Hodgson in his Report suppress the fact that he had entered the recess, and had inspected and measured the walls thereof? Why did he keep this important truth from his readers until, in a clash with Annie Besant and William Q. Judge, in 1893, he thought it useful as part of an argument to quell the opposition? It is clear enough why he failed to acknowledge this examination when he wrote in 1885. The paramount question then concerning the recess behind the shrine was not whether Mr. Judge or Dr. Hodgson had measured it with accuracy in preparation for drawing plans, the question then was whether the west-wall behind the shrine had once had an aperture that could have served as a secret passage to the Shrine itself and whether there were any discoverable signs of the previous existence of such an aperture. By saying that, when he “first received permission to inspect it”—though this does not rule out the possibility of inspection before permission—, the Occult Room “walls were covered with fresh plaster,” the SPR agent could excuse himself from verifying or judging the “traces of this hole,” the signs of re-plastering that had been discovered by Hartmann and others in the Occult Room on the western face of the west wall of the recess. And if he could induce his audience to believe that he had been misled by Damodar into thinking “that the recess had been glocked up” even though it had not, and that consequently he himself had not “endeavoured to enter” it, he could also be excused for failing to report any search for similar “traces” on the eastern face of this same wall.

Now it is clear that if Mon. Coulomb had to repair the kind of secret aperture his wife describes, and had to do so in January 1884, as claimed, and if his intention at that time was, as reported, to seal up this recess by closing the entranceway in the bricked frame<sup>1</sup>, there would

---

<sup>1</sup> In her account, Mme Coulomb particularly laments the trouble her husband had in trying to restore the aperture in the bricked frame to its original condition. The special difficulties were so great that the hole in the frame was not even closed three months or so after the repair work (undertaken with great noise and risk of discovery) was allegedly begun. Unless the Coulobms feared this wall hole would be discovered at some future date when the

have been no reason whatever for finishing, re-plastering, and re-painting the aperture's blocked-up inner side of this repair work in the west wall, concealed as it was within the recess. Moreover, such an attempt would have meant not only unnecessary delay and difficulty—when Coulomb was so pressed for time and secrecy that he never succeeded in the avowed purpose of closing the aperture in the bricked frame! —but how could he possibly have finished the repair of this “small breach” from the inside, working in the darkness, suffocation, and confines of a space 12 inches wide or less? Especially, under these conditions, how could he have finished it by re-plastering and re-surfacing and then re-whitewashing the area so that, like the opposite surface of the same partition, it exactly matched the surrounding area of the same wall, a wall that had for more than a year suffered the attritions of seasonal cold and heat, bacteria and insects, an area that would certainly not match a new application of white-washing? Unless we think of something akin to a “miracle”, it is impossible to imagine how, under the circumstances, Mon. Coulomb could have succeeded in any attempt to refinish the inside surface of the west wall of this recess so that, like the contrary and outside surface, it bore “not the smallest trace of the previous existence of a hole.” Even less is it possible to contemplate why he would have seen the desirability of attempting such a feat.

In appreciation of these considerations, and more especially in view of Hartmann's presumptive surmise that the hole had been “plastered up”, one must conclude that if Monsieur Coulomb had as claimed repaired a secret passageway in the west wall of the recess behind the shrine, the evidences of his handwork would have been instantly recognizable, obviously undeniable, and fully exposed when the eastern wall of this recess, the “bricked frame”, was

---

covering sideboard might be moved at Madame Blavatsky's own order (for it was in her bedroom and under her complete authority), one can see no necessity for it to have been repaired at all. The sideboard that concealed its existence so effectively, was itself permanently fixed in position by nails; and the “sideboard aperture” as Hodgson describes it could have been easily disguised and mended by fixing a hinged panel in the back.

dismantled and the inner surface of the opposite partition exposed to daylight and open scrutiny. Then would have been revealed the outline of the refilled aperture, the mis-match of plaster (relatively) old and new, the evidences of re-plastering with signs of overflow and dropping (unretrieved and unnoticed in the previous dark of the recess), the testimony of the white-wash (whether there was none on the re-paired surface, or whether it and the rest of the recess walls matched or whether all had been lately redone within the recess—imagine the drippings which would have spotted the floor in the dark—and so failed to correspond with the rest of the white-wash outside the recess but on the west wall of Madame Blavatsky’s bedroom.) What a bounty of proof there would have been that the re-plastering on the outside of the wall immediately behind the Shrine had not been simply a surface refinish to correct the damage of “several holes” made by nails but had been part of a repair work penetrating through the interior of the wall to its opposite surface! What a vindication for poor “vilified” Madame Coulomb—and what a “scoop” for Richard Hodgson since he was at Madras when the bricked frame was torn down! And one cannot imagine that he would have lost any time before “moistening the wall”—the newly revealed inner surface of the wall—“behind the Shrine with a wet cloth” if he had really believed Monsieur Coulomb had ever opened and reclosed a secret passageway there and if he thought for a moment there was the slightest chance of finding there the same kind of “traces” the Theosophists had previously discovered on the contrary surface!

Nevertheless, Hodgson did enter the recess, he did scrutinize, inspect, and measure there, and, as always, he looked for evidence to damn Madame Blavatsky. But the search for evidence this time was a fiasco. If he had found the slightest material evidence to support the idea of a repaired and “blocked up” passageway that had been designed to open on the shrine, we may be absolutely sure the world would have heard about it without delay. But this alert and clever



detective, intent as he was on trapping his victim, reports nothing of the kind. More than that, he neither explores the issue nor in his Report does he even acknowledge that he explored the recess. At the expense of the reputation of the absent Mr. Damodar, he strives to have us believe that had he “known the recess still existed” he would have “endeavoured to enter”! Let his devotees tell us why Richard Hodgson would have resorted to this deception if he had only wanted to conceal the fact he had entered, and, in this recess, by inspecting the wall immediately behind the shrine, had there discovered “traces of this hole”?!

What Dr. Hodgson did not conceal was that “the marks of the nails used to keep the plank door [“the sham door”, the “wooden planking”] in its place are still visible in the recess on the east side of the wall...” Just as by retort, when he was anxious in 1893 to cite something in depreciation of Mr. Judge, Richard Hodgson was so rash as to betray the fact of his knowledge, entry, and inspection of the recess during his stay at Madras in 1885, so in this latter year, when he wanted to discredit Mr. Rathnavelu, he incautiously revealed his knowledge that the “marks of the nails” left by the “plank door” could still be seen in the recess. But, just as he admitted in 1885 that he knew the dimensions of the recess “by measurement”—without confessing that he had measured the recess from within, so in the same Report, the SPR agent admits the nail-marks “are still visible”—without confessing that he himself had seen them (how he could have found this out was to his readers of 1885 just as mysterious as how he “afterwards found” that “the recess” itself was “still in existence”).

[\(something was hand written and is illegible\)](#)

So, one must conclude, if Richard Hodgson saw anything when he entered the recess, he must have seen the traces of nails which were “still visible”. And this is enough to tell us that when, in what had been Madame Blavatsky’s bedroom, Dr. Hodgson scrutinized the recess side

of the wall behind the shrine, it was, unlike “walls” in the adjoining Occult Room, not “covered with fresh plaster”. Thus one can think of only a single excuse why Richard Hodgson in his Report failed to tell his readers that he had examined the rear surface of the wall immediately behind the shrine position for “traces of this hole”, and why in his Report he resorted to subterfuge and misdirection to conceal the fact of this examination. The reason, of course, is that when he entered the recess he saw that what could be found there was sufficient to discredit the Coulombs for it showed that the only hole that had penetrated the wall immediately behind the shrine was an opening made “with a large nail that actually pierced the wall and made a hole on the inner side of the window aperture under the ceiling in the next room...” To pretend no such entry and examination of the recess had been made on his part was, for Richard Hodgson, undoubtedly the easiest way to conceal his discovery that the signs of re-plastering which had been seen on the west face of this wall and had been taken as the traces of a “plastered up” secret passageway were not matched by similar “traces” on the east face of the same wall, a discrepancy that meant the “small breach” claimed by the Coulombs had never existed, despite their testimony and Blavatsky-Coulomb letters to the contrary.

