

The Council,
The Society for Psychical Research,
1 Adam and Eve Mews,
London W8, England

To the Honorable Council:

In October 1955 I posted a letter of petition to the Council of the Society for Psychical Research, which letter, not having reached its destination, is herewith (by copy, verbatim except for corrections in designation of one enumerated document) again directed, together with some clarifying addenda.

(COPY)

The Council,
The Society for Psychical Research,
31 Tavistock Square,
London W.C. 1, England.

Gentlemen:

By way of introduction to this petition, I desire to state that, as a member of this Society and as an earnest student of Psychical Research for several years, I am at the moment engaged on a personal inquiry into the original evidences in the case of Madame Blavatsky. It is my hope and expectation to exhaust every conceivable possibility of obtaining published and unpublished material of importance, or possible importance, known, or suspected, to exist, in whatever quarter, upon this matter.

In accordance with this intention, I have secured by original or facsimile every important—and practically every known—printed article, pamphlet, and book on the subject. This includes many little-known items—for example, Mme. Coulomb's revelations in the first edition which, apparently unbeknownst to Richard Hodgson, and despite any publisher's declarations to the contrary, differed from the later printings in certain few but vital particulars.

Through the assistance of officials of the H.P.B. Library (Canada), The Theosophical Society (Adyar, India), The Theosophical Society (Pasadena, California), The United Lodge of Theosophists, as well as from the custodians of the unpublished mss. notes of the late Blavatsky-apologist, Mrs. Beatrice Hastings, from the Records of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, from the Madras Christian college, and from numerous other sources, both partial and impartial, I have obtained on my own initiative a great fund of distinctive and original—hitherto unpublished or unsuspected—documents and evidence concerning the case. In this respect, I must acknowledge with special appreciation the recent receipt of certain unpublished annotations secured from the Library of this Society through the disinterested but kind efforts of Mr. Salter and others.

In addition, I have contacted the heirs of Professor Coues who, as is known, received at least some of the Blavatsky-Coulomb documents for possible use in his legal defence against the suit by Madame Blavatsky in 1891. This contact has been made in order to obtain, for expert examination by modern methods of document analysis, specimens of the most important of the disputed letters.

As a result of all this activity, which I began ten years ago, there is now every reason to believe that new discoveries of decisive importance can be brought to bear upon the case. On the one hand, new evidence, apparently unknown to the S.P.R. Committee of 1884, has come to attention demonstrating by proof of her own statement that Mme. Coulomb irrevocably discredited her self-made claim of having manufactured spurious Mahatma apparitions by trick use of a dummy. On the other, for example, documentary proof has now been secured—which no Theosophist is in a position to deny—implicating Madame Blavatsky in (by her own words) “imposture and false pretence.”

If my studies in this direction are completed, I hope to present the conclusions of my research, whatever their ultimate nature and final shape, to this Council and Society. It would, however, be of no moment merely to project one's views on such a controversial and historically-important subject—however reasonable those views might appear, nor even however authoritative they might be considered. It is therefore my express and irrepressible design to incorporate with possible observations a complete transcription of all original and important and hypothetically-important documents, testimonies, and observations ever made on the subject to the knowledge of the writer. This will be not only especially valuable in view of the increasing rarity of much of the material—some parts of which, at present in the writer's possession, constitute the only known and printed copies extant—, but, I hopefully foresee, will be commendable as an example in Psychological Research of the impartial reproduction of contrary evidences. In contemplation of such a prospect, I need hardly add that I am not a member of the Theosophical Society, nor have I ever been affiliated with any mystical or occult group.

Therefore, I wish to inquire whether permission might be granted for the writer to obtain, with all costs chargeable to himself, photographic facsimiles of as many of the following documents as may be in the custody of or obtainable by the authority or influence of the Council of this Society. In contemplation of publication, use of such documents would, of course, be dependent upon the desires of the Council, both as to place and form of publication, in respect to which the writer begs to suggest his hope that all such materials might be published completed by facsimile or, otherwise, verbatim ac litteratim. It is also, as a matter of course, expressly understood that such permission, if granted, could signify no more than that this Council is cognizant of the fact such documents as cited should no longer remain unpublished, that truth

never suffers from additions of fact, and that it is never too late in the day to add to the world's fund of knowledge.

1. Perhaps the most important of these unpublished documents is a “written statement by Madame Blavatsky covering 7-1/2 pp. foolscap,” providing, especially for the official inquiry, her rebuttal to certain charges made by Mme Coulomb in the first half of her pamphlet. This statement is complementary to the aforementioned annotations, taken from the second half of Richard Hodgson's copy of the Coulomb publication. (In reference to which, see Report of the Committee Appointed to Investigate Phenomena Connected with the Theosophical Society, S.P.R. Proceedings, vol. iii, pp. 281-282). The contents of this statement have never been reproduced in whole or in part except for two or three lines to be used as calligraphic evidence against the author (Ibid., Plate I, B (ix)).
2. A letter of Madame Blavatsky's, addressed “Enghien, Friday,” to Mr. C.C. Massey, parts of which were used by the S.P.R. Committee towards a refutation of her reply to the Billing-Massey charges (Ibid., pp. 398-99).
3. A letter from Professor Smith, Member of Council, The Theosophical Society, replying to Richard Hodgson's inquiry regarding the “letter sewn with silk,” parts of the reply being used in Hodgson's criticism of the incident; and a letter by Mrs. Smith, “on behalf of her husband,” shown by Hodgson to be to the discredit of Smith's perspicacity (being used in Hodgson's criticism of the incident; and a letter by Mrs. Smith, “on behalf of her husband,” shown by Hodgson to be to the discredit of Smith's perspicacity (Ibid., p. 377 and p. 378).

4. A letter provided by Mme. Coulomb and attributed to Madame Blavatsky, extracts from which are given, against the latter, on page 215 (A letter provided by Mme. Coulomb and attributed to Madame Blavatsky, extracts from which are given, against the latter, on page 215 (Ibid.)).
5. Letters to “a Hindu”, from Madame Blavatsky and Col. Olcott, from which extracts were taken, in criticism of the respective authors, appearing on page 316 (Ibid.).
6. The “fragmentary script” by Madame Blavatsky, in its unpublished context, being “a few broken lines in Russian,” the only part of the scripts ever published being used in contribution to Hodgson’s “Russian spy” theory (Ibid., p. 317).
7. Letters from Madame Blavatsky to Mr. A.O. Hume (Ibid., p. 283)—parts of which were used as evidence against their author, see footnote, p. 301 (Ibid.).
8. K.H. letters to Mr. Hume—parts of which were used as evidence against “K.H.” (Ibid., pp. 302-303, 380A, “Explanation of Plates”).
9. Letters of Madame Blavatsky to various parties, to Mr. Massey (July, 1879), Mr. Hume (1881-1882), Mr. Massey (1884), Mr. Myers (1884)—parts of which were used against the author, though never reproduced in whole (Ibid., p. 290).
10. Dr. Hartmann’s “written account” “respecting the hole between the recess and the Shrine,” an “extract” only of which was ever given—in use against the author—despite Dr. Hodgson’s later, erroneous, statement the “written account” had been “given in full on p. 225 of my Report...” (Ibid., pp. 224-225. Proceedings, S.P.R., vol. ix, p. 140).
11. Shorthand notes taken at the Committee’s examination of Mr. A.P. Sinnett, reproduction of which was once promised the Society (S.P.R. Journal, vol. i, p. 93),

- but parts only of which were ever printed, and then only for use to discredit the respondent (Proceedings, S.P.R., vol. iii, p. 256 ff.).
12. A “long document professedly in the handwriting of Bhavani Shankar”—used as calligraphic evidence against its alleged author and others (Ibid., p. 380).
 13. Copy of the “instructions” mentioned in first sentence of “THE REPORT OF MR. F.G. NETHERCLIFT, EXPERT IN HANDWRITING, ON THE BLAVATSKY-COULOMB DOCUMENTS” (Ibid., p. 381), directing Netherclift’s professional examination of the documents submitted; together with a copy of—or original of—“A telegram in a different handwriting,” mentioned in the body of this REPORT; and the “REPORT” complete, of which extracts only have as yet been published.
 14. Original specimens or parts of the disputed “Blavatsky-Coulomb Correspondence”.

Other documents, not noted and as yet unpublished, may be thought of or may come to attention as containing material clues to the case, and which would doubtless be of value and interest to historians and critics. Foremost among these—as elucidating certain vague points at issue—would be the personal notations of Dr. Hodgson himself—especially those taken down during his interrogation of the witnesses in India (as, for example, the notes of his conversations with Madame Blavatsky [Ibid., p. 282, first passage]). But despite the fact such personal notes and memos as may exist were made by their author in his capacity as official inquirer and could rightly be considered the property of this Society or its Council, the re-examination and public revelation of such notations might perhaps be liable to ethical criticism akin to the sort that might be brought against Dr. Hodgson’s unauthorized publication of private correspondence to the personal embarrassment and difficulty of the correspondents.

From this viewpoint—one of moral propriety—, there is, it seems to me, —if one may be permitted to make here, with due deference, such an expression of opinion—every reason to make available, with assurance of complete and uncensored publication, these enumerated documents (or copies thereof). There were, —with the exception of those listed under (13)— written by the Theosophists (for the most part by the accused herself) and were in all cases presented to Dr. Hodgson, as agent of the Council’s Committee, for the information of this Society; but, apparently, were used and published only in so far as the given extracts or references could, evidently in his private judgment or that of the Committee, expose or injure the respective authors in the eyes of the public.

Seventy years ago, Professor Sidgwick, as President of the Society, declared that if, after reading the evidence of the Committee, “any members of the Society should still think it a profitable pursuit to fish for ‘psychical’ phenomena in these troubled waters, it is perfectly open to him to do so, and to bring his results before us” (Journal, S.P.R., vol. i, p. 464).¹ It is the proposal of the writer to attempt some such venture, and by baiting the hook with such forgotten facts as this Council may help provide, thus troll the unplumbed depths of dim but potent history, perchance to catch for man today some new and unguessed truth.

Most respectfully yours

In acknowledgment of the above petition, Miss. Horsell, Secretary, under date of 2 November 1955, wrote “to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of October 13th addressed to the Council of our Society.” Then she added: “We shall be glad to help you as far as we can, with regard to the references you require to Madame Blavatsky. It will however take some

¹ Correction: On February 13, 1885, Professor Sidgwick resigned as the Society’s first President, and assumed Editorship of the Journal.

considerable time to look up these, and when this had been done I will bring the matter before our Council. I will therefore write you again later.”

About a year later, having received no further word in the meantime, I inquired concerning the progress of the search. Again Miss. Horsell replied: “With regard to certain unpublished data in the case of Madame Blavatsky which you outlined in your letter of the 13th October 1955, we have looked up a good many references but have found none of the documents, nor do we know where they are likely to be, if indeed they existed at all.”

By letter of February 2, 1957 to Miss. Horsell, I responded as follows: “It is true that all, or at least most all, of the items detailed in my letter of 13 October 1955 re Madame Blavatsky were shown by Dr. Hodgson to be either in this possession or the custody of the investigating Committee, so that is difficult to imagine that they have disappeared. It may be that, as Committee Chairman, and as the financial sponsor of the inquiry, Professor Sidgwick may have filed the materials with his records. Whether search in this direction would turn up anything I have no way of knowing. In any case, however, I should like to know whether you think there is any intention of continuing this search for data; and, whether my letter of above date to the Council will be presented as a matter of course.

Respectfully yours”.

The reply to this came from the Hon. Secretary, Mr. W.H. Salter who, on 11 February 1957, wrote, “I am afraid I cannot say that I think that any further search for the papers regarding Mdme Blavatsky would be practicable. We are extremely under-staffed and our past records are most voluminous.”

I took this reply to mean that Mr. Salter, on his own initiative, saw fit to close this matter, without a thorough search of the “voluminous” records and without permitting my petition to reach the Council to which it was addressed. Therefore, on April 25, 1957, I replied to this letter, thanking Mr. Salter for undertaking to locate for me in the Piper case records a certain unpublished name, but saying: “Also, if you will excuse my persistence, I would like to hear whether or not your office intends to forward my letter of 13 October 1955 to the Council. From Miss. Horsell’s reply of 2 November 1955, I somewhat understood that this was to be done—in any case it was my request. I fully appreciate the difficulties of a staff-shortage, as well as a possible understanding that this matter can be of little importance after so long a time. However, if you read my letter to the Council you will see that I think I have good reason to believe that the Society should welcome a full review of this case, and that the Council will sometime be quite anxious to, if possible, recover or rediscover these documents and have them published.

“Anyhow, I should like to hear the Council’s expression upon this matter, and if lack of staff help on the search can be remedied by money, I think I could offer some assistance in that direction. As you may perhaps know I paid twenty-dollars to have the annotations copied [into long-hand] from the Coulomb pamphlet in the Library.

“Hoping to hear further at your convenience,”

“Sincerely”.

My letter of this date was Registered (7534, Fresno, Calif., Apr 25 1957); and a Return Receipt was requested, this latter, when received, showing that the letter was signed for by Mr. Salter on delivery, April 29, 1957. Mr. Salter however did not acknowledge the inquiry nor have I heard anything from him since.

The response of 11 February 1957 brought to mind the suspicion that “our past records” might not be filed in altogether orderly fashion, and that they might be in need of some sorting and indexing. However that might be, the Annual Report of the Council for 1957 (pp. i-ii) referred to the “large number of records sitting with mediums and other phenomena... a great quantity of business papers and miscellaneous correspondence” which had been “amassed” during “the Society’s long tenancy of 31 Tavistock Square”; and it is stated that, “A selection had also to be made among the numerous records of old sittings and cases, many of which had ceased to have any present value for research. Those that are still of value have been transported to the new premises.” This, it is reported, “involved a great deal of work in selecting and setting aside the books and other documents that were to be retained.” All of which would lead one to presume that any still-existing records and data from the Blavatsky case which may have been preserved by the Society would have been discovered during this process of exhaustive selection. Having been alerted to the present petition for copies of such material, it was to be hoped that Mr. Salter and his staff of helpers would take the precaution to look for or set aside—in line with the promise of 2 November 1955—any such documents. Vainly, I hoped from some word from the Hon. Secretary’s office that this apparently complete examination of the files having been made, it could now be said whether or not any one of these several documents still existed in possession of the Society.

However, within the last year or two, I have heard informally from another source that no one at S.P.R. headquarters knows anything about the present existence or former disposition of any of these items.

Now with the possible exception of those which come under (14) in my listing, there can be no doubt that the documents specified (not to mention other related ones, not identified but

nevertheless not unwanted) were held by the Society or its Committee or the Committee's agent, Dr. Hodgson, in 1885 when the Report was prepared. One need only cite the "written statement by Madame Blavatsky covering 7-1/2 pp. foolscap", supplementing her annotations in Hodgson's copy of the Coulomb pamphlet (still presumed to be in the S.P.R. Library—see Besterman's Catalogue), a statement expressly provided for the investigating Committee and its agent. Then again, take the shorthand record of Mr. Sinnett's testimony before the Committee. In July 1884 the promise was made to the membership (Journal SPR, i, p. 93) that the evidence "taken down in shorthand"—Mr. Sinnett being among those giving evidence in person—"will be shortly issued in a separate form." But, as a matter of fact, neither his evidence nor any appreciable portion of it so obtained has ever been made available.

To the historian in *Psychical Research*, such originals of firsthand testimony by principals in so celebrated a case must be prized as of immense historical and analytical worth. Moreover, it is altogether too difficult to believe that the Committee of 1884-5 did not itself realize that even then the documents carried a special value, as indicated by the unusual contemporaneous notoriety of this case, the first and most famous official verdict by any Council-authorized committee. For one, F.W.H. Myers must have attached importance to these documents because, within the year (in his Introduction to Phantasms of the Living), he was referring to it as the one case in which the Society had to deal with the rise of a new religion; and in time this same sense of importance seems to have persisted with the Committee's members, the last survivor being Mrs. Sidgwick who, in her Jubilee Address of 1932, recalled the "great effect" it had produced upon their minds at the time. Clearly, the Blavatsky case marked an epoch in the history of the Society and its leaders who founded the basic rules of methodology in modern *Psychical*

Research. The case provided a great boost to the infant S.P.R., and, down through the years, has alone projected the Society's name into practically every encyclopaedia in the world.

If the precious original records, documents and file of this uniquely important case are missing—when there can be no doubt that they were formally in possession of the Society or its Committee or, at any rate, in custody of the Committee's agent—, I am sure the Council will appreciate being apprized of the fact, remarkable as it would seem if true. Likewise, I suspect that the Council might indicate some interest and action looking towards the possibility of otherwise locating and/or recovering or reclaiming the documents.

The current number of the Supplement to the Journal reports that the Society's research files, having required "considerable re-arrangement after the move from 31 Tavistock Square, have now been sorted and re-indexed", thanks to Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Cook ("Annual Report of the Council for 1958-1959"). If it can again be said that the searchers and sorters "have found none of the documents" from the Blavatsky case (as was the situation in January, 1957), then we are face-to-face with a stark fact of tragic dereliction or oversight that sometime in the past robbed this Society of its rightful possession of some of its most valuable historical property. As a member of more than ten years' standing in this Society, I would have to register my indignation at so needless a catastrophe.

But as the present petitioner, I call attention to my request of 1955 (with italics now added), that permission "be granted for the writer to obtain, with all costs chargeable to himself, photographic facsimiles of as many of the following documents as may be in the custody of or obtainable by the authority or influence of the Council of this Society".

There can hardly be any doubt that these documents were originally offered to and obtained for this Society and were (or should be still) its rightful property. Hence, if these still

exist and are not in the Society's possession, nevertheless they ought to be. In such a circumstance, the present request becomes also a petition for the Council to reclaim and recover for the Society what is rightfully its own.

This, of course, raises the question where the records went when the Committee disbanded upon completion of its assignment. If kept by Dr. Hodgson, there is no prospect of finding them, for at his death his research files were either destroyed or returned to S.P.R. headquarters; and I am assured by Mrs. L.A. Dale, Research Associate of the American Society for Psychological Research (an office she had just recently resigned), that to her positive knowledge none of Hodgson's papers on the Blavatsky case were in possession of the A.S.P.R. at any time during her long tenure of office. The documents, with others, of course, may have been retained by the Committee Chairman, Professor Sidgwick; and it may be that he passed them on to Mr. Myers, who took a leading part in the investigation. Alternatively, the records and papers concerned may ultimately have come into the possession of the last surviving Committee members, Mrs. Sidgwick. Or, at lastly, the Committee files may have been permanently held by its secretary, Mr. J.H. Stack (although it is difficult to supposed that they were not recovered upon his early death, as indeed one can hardly supposed that the records would be left in his custody even until then). Thus, in event that a search of the archives proves none of the indicated documents are where they should be, the only promising avenues of inquiry would seem to be for this Council to use its good influence in initiating a search for these papers among effects left to the heirs of Professor and Mrs. Sidgwick, Mr. Myers, and Mr. Stack.

Properly amended to date, the questions under petition therefore resolves itself into three parts:

1. Whether permission might be granted for the writer to obtain, with all costs chargeable to himself, photographic facsimiles of as many of the indicated documents as may be in the custody of or obtainable by the authority or influence of the Council of the Society, whether or not such documents are now known to exist.
2. Whether, by directed inquiry, the Council shall undertake to satisfy itself that none of the indicated documents (or others of the same order) can be found in the files or archives of the Society, and so state by official reply, promising a notice of its findings.
3. Whether the Council, in such event, shall, in the interests of the Society, undertake to institute a thorough inquiry or search elsewhere for the indicated documents, looking towards their location and/or recovery, the present petitioner to be informed of any such discovery.

* * * *

Having noted with pleasure the recent announcement that the Society has been so fortunate as to acquire by gift from its President a photo-copying machine, may I request permission to obtain, with all costs chargeable to myself, photographic facsimiles of some few or the annotated pages in the (aforementioned) copy of the Coulomb pamphlet presently in the Society's possession?

* * * *

Since my petition of 13 October 1955, the report of Mrs. K.M. Goldney and Messrs. Dingwall and Hall, The Haunting of Borley Rectory, has been "Published under the auspices of the Society of [sic] Psychical Research." Following the method of Richard Hodgson himself, the

reporters have not hesitated to make extensive use and interpretation of original, private, unpublished notes attributed to the accused. In light of this practise being therefore adopted as a perfectly valid procedure in Psychical Research, one might suggest that it would be unfair to anyone accused by any investigator using this method, to in turn fail to open to critical inspection that investigator's own private notes. If the investigator can publicize the private records of a subject, records not intended for publication, the like documents of the investigator should in all fairness be open for similar inspection and criticism. In view then of the approved adoption of this double-edged methodology, the discursive remarks along this line which come just after the fourteen enumerated listings in the above petition, appear altogether invalid and out of date as they might be applied to any private, unpublished records of the Committee (or its agent) appointed to investigate Theosophical "phenomena".

Awaiting your esteemed response,

Most respectfully yours,

Walter A. Carrithers, Jr.,

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Fresno 2,

California, USA