

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Sir:

My attention has been called to the biographical sketch, "Madame Blavatsky," by Professor Russell M. Goldfarb of Western Michigan University, published in the Winter 1971 number (vol. V, No.3) of your *Journal of Popular Culture*. As a researcher interested in all that is said of "H. P. B." and her career, I found this paper noteworthy and perhaps superior to most short studies of the subject. It is true that what is stated on one or two points is liable to mislead the uninformed reader, mainly for want of more facts. Thus, in judging some of "her behavior upon arrival in America" as "distinctly embarrassing. . ." ("embarrassing," one might observe, only to certain of her followers by reason of their own peculiar notions about her), the author refers to "her mingling with spirit-raising mediums" and adds the allegation of "seances she conducted in New York at 16 Irving Place. . . ." Here Professor Goldfarb doubtless knows-though his readers will not-that what is significant is that there is no indication on record that Madame Blavatsky in America "conducted" any "seance" in the recognized mode of "spirit-raising mediums" or that she pretended (as they) to put anyone into contact with deceased relatives or acquaintances.

We may pass over the author's obscurities of this order to allegations of his more vulnerable and of graver import. I shall take in order certain statements he has made (666/38) in connection with my book, *Obituary: The "Hodgson Report" on Madame Blavatsky: 1885-1960* (\$1.50, Theosophical Publishing House, Box 270, Wheaton, Illinois).

I. Goldfarb alleges that the "Report" in question, published in 1885 by the British Society for Psychological Research, is "its best known work. . . ." Here he is in accord with popular belief but

not with technical fact. Dr. Richard Hodgson's "Account" etc. was incorporated as Part "2" of the official "Report" of the investigating Committee appointed by the Council of the S.P.R., Part "1" being the "Statement and Conclusions" of the Committee. Legally the Committee Report should not have been published without official sanction of the Society's Council; but it was only in 1966 that we learned the Council's official Minutes for the year 1885 contain no record of any such approval. Apparently the document was published as a "bastard" report (as its internal evidence had led me to first suspect), issued in flagrant violation of the Society's Constitution.

II. Goldfarb alleges that it was Dr. Hodgson's ("his") "conclusion. . . that Madame Blavatsky was 'one of the most accomplished, ingenious, and interesting imposters in history.'" But the judgment quoted *nowhere* appears in Hodgson's "Account" etc. (*Proceedings, S. P. R.*, iii, pp. 207-380). Instead, it comes at the end (p. 207) and as part of the Committee's *own* "Statement and Conclusions" (*ibid.*, pp. 201-207).

Moreover, Hodgson's own "CONCLUSION" in all its parts (*ibid.*, pp. 31213) is not the same as those "conclusions" enumerated by the Committee (*ibid.*, pp. 204-05); and in one very important instance-as my book (p. 47) was the first to note-the Committee significantly *ignored* Hodgson's charge that Madame Blavatsky had written and instigated the writing of "Mahatma letters" in a "feigned hand." They must have had good reason for withholding support of this Hodgson "conclusion," since it also appears his handwriting experts were unwilling to certify to her alleged guilt in this matter. (The only expert certificate he published had deleted from it all mention of Mahatma calligraphic specimens. In fact, all known professional reports on comparison of Mahatmic calligraphy and handwriting by H. P. B. go to show she could *not* have written the examined specimens of the former. The most recent of these-by the late Professor Paul L. Kirk of Shepherd case fame-overturns Hodgson's amateur opinion even on the question

of those samples he himself selected for public reproduction to support his theory; see *The Hall of Magic Mirrors*, by Victor A. Endersby, C. E., P. O. Box 427, Napa, Ca. 94558.)

III. Goldfarb alleges that the above adverse judgment he has (falsely) traced to Hodgson ("his conclusion") was "officially accepted by the Society for Psychical Research. . . ." But, additional to the contemporary evidence (in I, above) to refute this allegation, there is now on record an official document, a disclaimer, from the Society itself. In its July 18 issue for 1968, in a blackguardly article replete with errors it later refused to retract, *Time Magazine* charged that H. P. B. "was accused in 1885 by the Society for Psychical Research in London of fraud, forgery and even of spying for the Czar." Six days later, correcting the magazine's editors in a letter it never printed, the Hon. Secretary of the S. P. R. declared:

"We would point out that, as stated in all copies of the Proceedings of this Society, 'Responsibility for both the facts and the reasonings in papers published in the Proceedings rests entirely with their authors.'

"Comments on Madam Blavatsky were contained in a report by Richard Hodgson in Part ix of Proceedings dated December 1885 and any accusations therein contained are the responsibility of the authors and not this organisation."

From this one may derive a view that-since the appearance in 1963 of the best defence of Madame Blavatsky to date-the Society which published the "Hodgson Report" against her is now more than willing to leave the defence of "its best known work" to others like Professor Thouless, Professor Goldfarb and David Techter (see the enclosed, addressed to the latter, unanswered but received and signed for by him on May 20, 1967).

IV. Goldfarb alleges, "Neither the British nor American Societies for Psychical Research reviewed Waterman's book. . . ."

It is true that the American S. P. R. published no review of this book, a failure which can be interpreted as evidence of an unwillingness to face up to the unwelcomed facts and momentous implications found in this irrefutable indictment of their most famous Secretary (1887-1905). The A. S. P. R. editors, however, displayed no such reluctance when Sir Wm. Crookes and Edmund Gurney came under public attack at about the same time, for then their *Journal* soon appeared with ready defences of both Crookes (*ibid.*, vols. LVII, pp. 215-226, LVIII, pp. 128-133 and 204-09) and Gurney (*ibid.*, vol. 60, pp. 78-84) even though neither of these former leaders in Psychological Research ever had been officials of the American Society. And, in respect to this, it may not be insignificant that, whereas previous official A. S. P. R. prospectuses recalling the history and work of the Society had extolled the achievements of its pioneer Secretary, the most lavishly prepared brochure subsequently issued by the A. S. P. R. fails even to name Hodgson among the honor roll of its illustrious patriarchs.

If Professor Goldfarb finds especially noteworthy his notion that the British S. P. R. too did not review this book, it must be of even greater significance that: (1) it *was* reviewed-in the September 1968 number of their *Journal*; (2) some 8 pages (*loc. cit.*, pp. 341-49), more than the customary space afforded reviews, were given to it; (3) it was thought fit to do this even though more than 5 years had elapsed since the book's first appearance; and (4) it was arranged that the reviewer should be a former President of the S. P. R., Professor Robert H. Thouless, also past President of the British Psychological Society.

Subsequently, in its December 1969 number, the same *Journal* gave even more space to my rebuttal to that review, altogether marking the first time since 1885 that the Society either reviewed a book in defence of Madame Blavatsky or published a defence of her attacking the so-called Hodgson Report of that earlier year. In a still later number of the *Journal* (June, 1970), as

response to this rebuttal which had exposed the serious errors and misrepresentations to be found throughout his review, Dr. Thouless declined to meet the rebuttal arguments of Waterman and retired from the arena with this lame apology: "I do not think it would be of sufficient interest to the readers of the Journal if I were to try to discuss the details of Mr. Waterman's objections to my review" (loc. cit., p. 314).

So, I trust that Professor Goldfarb, in his oversight, did not mean to convey the impression that, in purportedly ignoring this book against what he calls "its best known work. . .", the leading Society in the field of Parapsychology (and the one which, during the 84-year interim had received almost universal credit for H. P. B.'s "exposure" or condemnation) today considers this book and its content beneath contempt.

V. As if the alleged disdain of an authoritative society might not be enough to discredit this book in eyes of most readers, Goldfarb adds his own peculiar condemnation. He points to what he calls "Waterman's obvious lack of objectivity, as witnessed by the concluding sentence of his defamatory chapter, 'A Question of Integrity': '. . . it is no longer possible to imagine that Richard Hodgson did not know what he was doing in the case of Madame Blavatsky.'"

If-as in common usage-the phraseology here is intended to mean that in this book its author's reporting is guided by personal "prejudice," and that his methods of analysis and evaluation give priority to "subjective" bias rather than to "*objective* criteria," the charge must be made that Goldfarb has seriously misled his readers.

For one thing, "the concluding sentence" cited as witness to an "obvious lack of objectivity," is not, of course, a "sentence" but the tag-end of the last sentence in that portion of the book dealing directly with the "Hodgson Report." Taken in its original context, it alludes to the author's stated final discovery of proof (in part, set forth in the pages which immediately

precede it) of Hodgson's guilt of deliberate chicanery, a finding reached against all personal predisposition and one made only after some 15 years of research in this case together with the progressive accumulation of much new evidence (the most damning evidence against Hodgson being, as yet, still unpublished). If this "sentence" is evidence of a "subjective" approach, then the bias factor must be surely a weak one for, as shown in the context ignored by Goldfarb, it took many years of refined analysis and additional discovery to overturn as indefensible the author's own *initial belief* (published in 1947, after some years of study, and also quoted in the context) that Hodgson had innocently condemned Madame Blavatsky only through sheer "*incompetence.*"

The difference between the fragment of sentence quoted by Goldfarb and the use to which he puts it is that while both, as they stand in *his* sketch, could prejudice some readers against the targets of their respective criticisms, and while each statement as there quoted can be described or represented as "lacking in objectivity," Waterman *beforehand* has given the recipients of his statement a whole book packed with objective, documented evidence leading to his statement as a final conclusion, whereas Goldfarb *at the start* gives nothing but a fractured passage to make his readers think Waterman would be the last to build any case on the facts of record and in scrupulous observance of objective *criteria!* His criticism makes as much sense as if one were to wilfully ignore all the weight of 'testimony, evidence and exhibits duly considered by a jury in long deliberation, and then quote only the jury's verdict ("Guilty of murder in the first degree"-deliberate, premeditated homicide), citing it as "witness" to the jury's "obvious lack of objectivity!"

In citing as proof of his opinion against the author only the concluding portion of the last sentence in the book's last chapter critical of the "Hodgson Report," Goldfarb suppresses all

indication that it is preceded by one of the most detailed, documented and record-based critiques to be found anywhere in the annals of Psychical Research, an analysis buttressed at every point by *objective* facts, original testimony or diagrams, given with reference book and page, taken largely from the published works of Hodgson himself and his two chief witnesses, the Coulobms who earlier, self-styled as "her confederates," had pretended to expose Madame Blavatsky. *This is an analysis in which-since its introduction 10 years ago-no defender of Dr. Hodgson has been able to discover for publication so much as a single error in reporting!*

By employing the amputated passage quoted above in such a way as to imply that its author had brought it forth only by reason of a "lack of objectivity" and, therefore, as an unsubstantiated judgment prepared simply to prejudice the reading audience against Hodgson's honesty, and by making his criticism while deliberately *ignoring* both the immediate context and the important mass of unchallenged evidence and new discoveries which, preceding it, had led to this passage as a logical deduction and proven conclusion, by, in fact, ignoring the whole of the book as it constitutes extensive proof of Hodgson's demonstratively conscious frauds against Madame Blavatsky, critic Goldfarb shows himself to be guilty of nothing less than a "lack of objectivity" -although he has been careful not to make it "obvious" to his uninformed readers!

While, in the last analysis, it may be said that all of our *beliefs* are *subjective*, the real test (and, especially so, in as controversial a field as Parapsychology) is whether in reaching them and in presenting and defending them, one holds always to *objective* criteria in dealing with evidence. If so, what objective criterion justifies anyone for dismissing the unchallenged evidence in this book merely because of a *belief* (or of a desire to say) its author suffers from an "obvious lack of objectivity. . . ."? Certainly this alleged lack never prompted its author to do as Hodgson did and as Goldfarb seems to be doing, viz., *to ignore the evidence before them.*

To bring a charge of prejudice-however euphemized-against an author and to expect the readers to be satisfied with it instead of disproof of what the author says, is to attack him and not his book. It is a tactic that panders to the irrational, that can only succeed where there is a "knee-jerk"-reaction to the word "prejudice." One attacks the author and not the book only when the book cannot be met head-on, when the author's reporting cannot be faulted nor his facts confuted. In place of rational discussion and as a substitute for rebuttal by evidence or refutation by record, it incites prejudice against a book or an idea by saying its author is prejudiced. And it leads to the same mental blindness that for generations prevented Theosophists from undertaking any vigorous, thoroughgoing examination of the testimony of Hodgson and the Coulombs and their detested writings against H. P. B. It is self-defeating in the worst possible way. But no real Psychological Researcher, no true 'truth-seeker is ever put off by the cheapjack cry of "prejudice" against any witness, investigator or author. He wants to see for himself what has been said or written, firsthand, not second-hand, and by all sides, not by one only, for he knows a book is good or bad, true or false according to the merit of its actual content, and not according to its author's private beliefs, real or imagined, nor as his methodology is assessed subjectively by friend or foe.

VI. Goldfarb alleges that my chapter, "A Question of Integrity," is "defamatory. . . ." If by this he means to say it goes to "harm or destroy the good fame of" Dr. Hodgson, no one can disagree with him-except on the question whether that "good fame" has been merited. But if, in the more common meaning, he intends to imply that my work casts "aspersions" or "calumny" on Hodgson's "good name or reputation," that, in short, it serves "to slander" one who has been called "the greatest Psychological Researcher of the Golden Age of Psychological Research," then as a charge this criticism itself must be set down as gross calumny against Adlai Waterman.

In content, this particular chapter presents in detail-for *the first time anywhere*-a direct, point-by-point, thoroughly documented comparison of the relative veracity of accused (Mme. Blavatsky) and accuser (Dr. Hodgson), taking into full account and exposing the whole of the latter's amazingly feeble (and completely futile) efforts to convict his would-be victim of lying. In the course of this comparison are enumerated more than 50 "clever misconstructions" (exposed and refuted in detail in the body of my work) "all wonderfully calculated to further the destruction of Mme. Blavatsky; all skilfully executed. . . and almost everyone requiring discriminating, conscious design. . . and careful, cunning introduction and use" by Hodgson. If this inventory constitutes slander and calumny, it is strange that as yet no one has been able to contradict with facts-on-record so much as even one of these many charges!

If Professor Goldfarb thinks anyone of these criticisms as detailed and documented (and, for the most part, resting upon contradictions of testimony between Hodgson and his chosen chief authorities on the case, the Coulombs) in the chapter he spurns as "defamatory," is an aspersion, calumnious or unjust, he has my public challenge to try and substantiate his belief from the open record, book and page!

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RESPONSE:

Most of what Mr. Waterman writes applies to his interesting book, and since opinions and interpretations of any book can differ, I prefer not to engage him in a point by point discussion of matters he chooses to highlight. Nor am I inclined to quarrel with a man who finds one of my articles "noteworthy and perhaps superior to most short studies of the subject."

I would like to take this opportunity, however, to thank prominent Theosophists for their gratifying response to my article on Madame Blavatsky. Mr. Boris de Zirkoff, H. P. B.'s great nephew and the editor of her *Collected Writings*, was kind enough to say that my work was "factual, friendly and ends in a positive note which in itself is of value. Your sources of information are fine, and I gather from them some additional references I did not have myself." Mr. Iverson L. Harris, author of *Mme. Blavatsky Defended* (1971) and former Chairman of the Cabinet, The Theosophical Society, wrote, "Please let me thank you for your open-minded approach to the life, the writing, and the work of the Great Theosophist. In my 82 years yours is the best approach to Madame Blavatsky's contribution to world literature in the realms of religion, philosophy and science, which I have read emanating from a scholar who is not an avowed adherent to her teachings."

Finally, Miss Joy Mills, as national president of The Theosophical Society in America, wrote, "Taken as a whole, we feel your article is to be commended." Perhaps Mr. Waterman will agree that taken as a whole my article injures neither Helena Blavatsky nor Adlai Waterman.

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