

THE COULOMB CONSPIRACY

WHILE the Founders were in Europe, there began what is known as the Coulomb conspiracy. The Coulobms husband and wife came to reside with the Founders in Bombay in 1880. H. P. B. had met Madame Coulomb in Cairo. In 1880, these two had opened a boarding house at Galle in Ceylon but with no success. Madame Coulomb wrote then to H. P. B. asking for a loan. The result was that H. P. B. told her that, if she cared to come to India with her husband, work would be found for them. So the two Coulobms came and were given what work was possible. The husband was good at carpentry, and a job was secured for him at a factory but he lost his job, and so work was found for him at the residence of the Founders. Madame Coulomb was given the work of superintending the house-keeping. Later, Coulomb was put in charge of the small library of the Society, and his wife was given simple secretarial work. When the Founders left for Bombay, the two Coulobms came with them and resided at Adyar.

In February, 1884, the Founders left for Europe. The management of Headquarters was then put in the hands of a Board of Control. This Board found that Madame Coulomb was often trying to obtain loans from members who came to Adyar. Difficulties quickly arose between the Board of Control and Madame Coulomb, and finally the Board dismissed both husband and wife.

After the Founders left in February, no one resided in the upper part of the building, where was H. P. B.'s room and

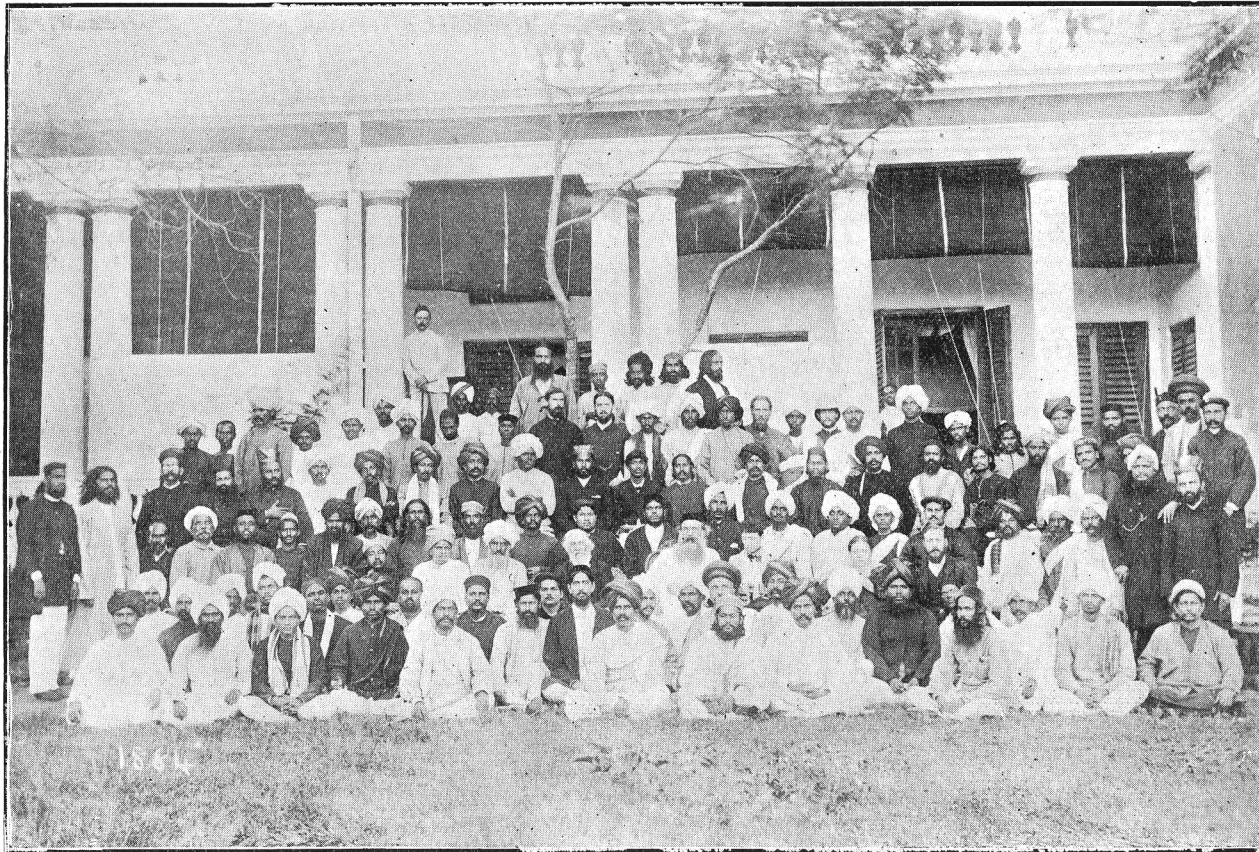


FIG. 100
CONVENTION, 1884

In Centre : Colonel Olcott, Mrs. Cooper-Oakley, H. P. B.
In the back row, in fez standing : Dr. F. Hartmann. Also in back row : C. W. Leadbeater

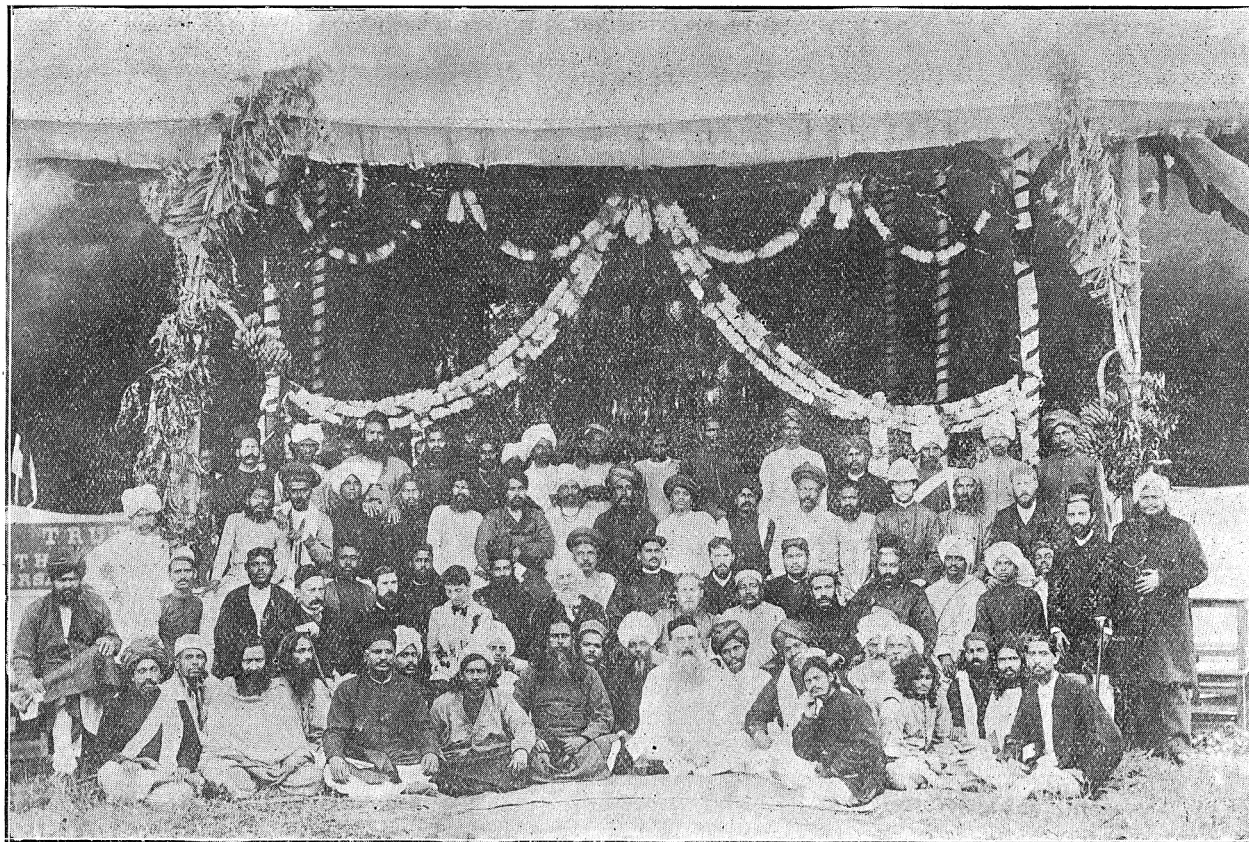


FIG. 101

CONVENTION, 1884

In centre: C. W. Leadbeater. To left: General Morgan, Mrs. Cooper-Oakley, Mr. Cooper-Oakley, Dr. F. Hartmann.
To right: Norendro Nath Sen, N. D. Khandalawala

next to it the "Shrine Room". For several weeks hardly anybody came upstairs except the Coulombs. A plot was now hatched by them, which would enable them to revenge themselves on the T. S. Coulomb was a carpenter, and he contrived a wooden slide at the back of the Shrine, and an opening in the wall behind it, where was H. P. B.'s room. As before H. P. B.'s departure dozens of people had for several months not only seen the Shrine, but also examined it carefully, when finally in the accusation against H. P. B. this sliding panel was mentioned, it was obvious that it had been put in by Coulomb after the departure of H. P. B. At the same time, certain letters were forged by Madame Coulomb, letters supposed to have been written by H. P. B.

Here enters into the conspiracy one of its most disgraceful factors. This was the rôle played in the conspiracy by the Christian missionaries of Madras. Ever since the T. S. began its work in India, the revival of Indian religion and culture had of course begun to put obstacles in the way of missionary effort. Each year that passed made missionary activities harder, as the Founders of the T. S. and their band of workers inspired Hindus to revive their ancient culture. Sanskrit schools had been established, and translations of Hindu Scriptures were begun, and a counter-progaganda started. When therefore the two Coulombs came with their forged letters, the missionaries of Madras saw an excellent way of annihilating the Theosophical Movement. They took up the Coulombs, and an attack was launched on the Society, by offering so-called evidence to prove that the Masters were an invention of H. P. B., and that the letters phenomenally produced in the Shrine were written by H. P. B., and placed there with her connivance by the Coulombs.

In the early part of this year, when Colonel Olcott and Mohini Mohun Chatterjee were in London, they had been examined with regard to the phenomena by members of the Society for Psychical Research. The S. P. R. had a novel problem

presented before it, which was that phenomena of various kinds usually associated with disembodied spirits were now said to be performed by living people. A preliminary report was made by the S. P. R. When the missionary charges were published, the S. P. R. decided to send out a young Australian, Richard Hodgson, to come out to India to examine witnesses and report on the charges.

On the publishing of the charges of fraud and trickery against her, H. P. B. returned as quickly as she could to India. She was accompanied by C. W. Leadbeater (Fig. 102) and Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Cooper-Oakley (Fig. 103). At the Convention which took place in December, H. P. B. expressed her determination to

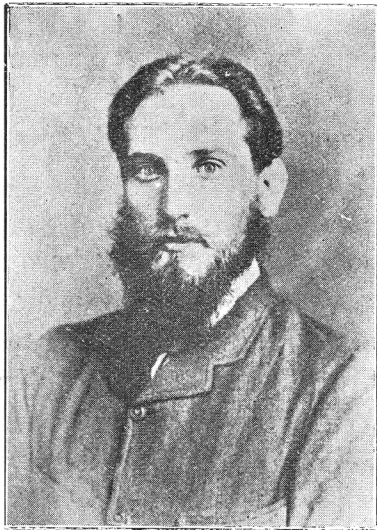


FIG. 102
C. W. LEADBEATER



FIG. 103
MRS. ISABEL COOPER-OAKLEY IN 1913

prosecute the Coulombs and the missionaries for libel. The Society however interfered, and dissuaded her, against her protests, from her proposed legal action. The reason for the decision of the Society was given by Colonel Olcott as follows in his address to Convention.

“Much has been made out of the fact that she did not go into Court to vindicate her character against the

palpable libels of the Missionary and allied parties. For this *she is not to blame*: quite the contrary. But for my vehement protests she would have dragged the adversaries into the Madras Court as soon as she got back from London, *via* Cairo, in 1884. A friend had offered her Rs. 10,000 to cover the expenses. It was then barely a fortnight before the time for the Annual Convention of our Society—December 27th, 1884—and I insisted upon her waiting until a Special Judicial Committee of the Convention should advise her as to her proper course. We were—I told her—the property of the Society, and bound to risk our private preferences and selves for the public good. She was stubborn to that degree, that *I had to threaten to quit my official position* before she would listen to reason. The Convention met, and the case was referred to a Committee composed of Hindu Judges and other legal gentlemen of high official and private standing. They unanimously reported against H. P. B.'s going to law; for one reason, because there was but the shadow of a chance of getting justice from a prejudiced Anglo-Indian Jury, in any case involving questions of eastern religious science (*yoga*), or the existence of (to process-servers) inaccessible Mahatmas; and, for another, because neither a favourable nor unfavourable verdict would be likely to change the opinions of those respectively who know, and did not know the truth about psychical powers (*Siddhis*), and her possession of them; while, finally, the most sacred feelings of Hindus and Buddhists were sure to be outraged by the ribald banter of counsel when cross-examining the witnesses as to matters of personal knowledge or belief. The Convention adopted unanimously the views of the Committee, and H. P. B. was forced to yield to the majority

and nerve herself up to bear the consequences. The outrageous Salem riot case, which was then fresh in the public memory, gave great weight to the committee's decision in the present instance. Though restrained, H. P. B. was not convinced, and but for the constant opposition of her best friends, would have gone into Court at several later stages of the controversy, when the grossest personal insults were used as bait to entice her into the trap set by her enemies whose bitterest spite has ever been against her personally. She chafed like a caged lioness, and thus aggravated her physical ailments, *viz.*, a form of Bright's disease, an affection of the heart, and a tendency towards apoplexy. The climate enfeebled her, and the worry was killing her so fast that her medical adviser at last gave me the following certificate:

'I hereby certify that Madame Blavatsky is quite unfit for the constant excitement and worry to which she is exposed in Madras. The condition of her heart renders perfect quiet and a suitable climate essential. I, therefore, recommend that she should at once proceed to Europe and remain in a temperate climate, in some quiet spot.

(SIGNED) MARY SCHARLIEB,

31-3-85

M. B. and B.Sc., London.'

Dr. Scharlieb privately warned me that H. P. B. was liable to drop down dead at any moment in one of her paroxysms of excitement. I lost no time after that—you may believe—in sending her away to Italy in the most unobtrusive way possible. Dr. Scharlieb's husband superintended her embarkation, providing the stretcher upon which she was carried, and arranging with the captain of the French steamer for hoisting her aboard from the small boat, in an invalid chain hung in slings."

Soon after Convention was over, H. P. B. had a serious relapse and her life was despaired of. Colonel Olcott and C. W. Leadbeater were in Burma at the time, and the former was recalled. Medical opinion said that H. P. B. could live only a few days longer and that she was sinking. But an event took place which changed not only her future, but also in many ways the progress of the Theosophical Movement. The Master of H. P. B. appeared to her, and put before her two alternatives. One of these was to escape from all further calumny and suffering by quitting the body; the other alternative was to live on for a few years longer, in spite of the suffering still awaiting her. If she were to choose the latter alternative, there was the



MADAME H. P. BLAVATSKY

Secrétaire Général

DE LA SOCIÉTÉ THÉOSOPHIQUE

MADRAS (Inde)

FIG. 104

H. P. B.'s VISITING CARD

possibility of her achieving a great dream of hers, which was to write the *Secret Doctrine*, which she had been planning since 1882. H. P. B. chose the suffering still awaiting her, in order that she might leave a little more knowledge and inspiration to the few who were still faithful to the Masters. Thereupon her Master magnetised her with spiritual forces, so that instead of sinking in the course of the night she was distinctly on the road to recovery by the next morning.

Colonel Olcott and the members of the Executive determined on medical advice that the only hope of regaining strength was for H. P. B. to leave India. H. P. B. was sent away by the first

available boat from Madras. She was accompanied by Dr. F. Hartmann, Miss M. Flynn and an Indian disciple of the Master K. H., M. Krishnamachari, who was known also as "Bawajee". H. P. B. landed in Naples and settled for a while at Torre del Greco. After a few months, she left for Wurzburg in Germany.

In the meantime Mr. R. Hodgson's report was issued, declaring H. P. B. a forgerer and a trickster, Colonel Olcott a

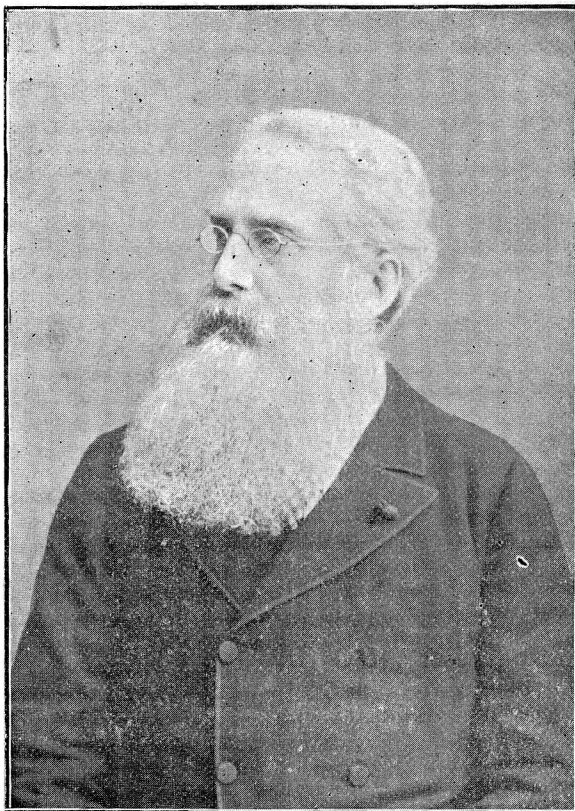


FIG. 105

H. S. OLCOTT IN 1884

dupe, and all those who had attested to the phenomena as either in league with H. P. B. or simply hallucinated. All kinds of so-called proof were given that the handwriting on the letters of the Masters was similar to the handwriting of H. P. B. Every point which in any way questioned the decision of the S. P. R. was ignored, as for instance when Mr. F. W. H. Myers admitted that the letter received in 1870 by H. P. B.'s aunt, Madame N. Fadéef at Odessa, was in the handwriting of the Master K. H. As in 1870 H. P. B. had

been away from her relations for nearly two years, it was obvious that the letter could not have been forged by H. P. B., delivered as it was by an oriental messenger who disappeared before the eyes of Madame Fadéef. The testimony on oath of

Indians and Europeans was utterly ignored, and the S. P. R. drove hard its case against H. P. B. that she was a trickster and a charlatan.

To those who had known H. P. B. personally, or had carefully studied the teachings coming from the Masters, the report of the S. P. R. was not of the slightest consequence. Any one who was at all really observant could note, on reading the letters from the Master K. H. published in 1881 in the *Occult World*, the most noteworthy fact about those letters. This was the unique attitude to the problem of human life, the attitude of a mind surveying things from a far loftier standpoint than is possessed by even the most cultured of mankind. Every one who knew H. P. B. knew what was her character and temperament. Heroic as she was and full of occult knowledge, she was yet far remote from the lofty standpoint shown towards the problems of life by the Adepts, who outlined Their philosophy in the letters which the S. P. R. proclaimed to be forged by H. P. B. It was the intrinsic evidence of the letters themselves which was the supreme proof, to those who had sufficient spiritual sense awakened within them to be receptive to truth. To those who judged even merely from a judicial standpoint, there were enough facts absolutely contrary to those offered by the S. P. R., to prove the worthlessness of its case. Some of these facts were promptly issued by the General Council of the T. S. in a pamphlet which bears the title, "Report of the Result of an Investigation into the charges against Madame Blavatsky".

The world which is always willing to listen more to condemnation than to praise has naturally remembered H. P. B. far more by the judgment of the S. P. R. than by the judgment of those who investigated facts without any bias against occultism. It little matters now that this S. P. R. report was published. True, it condemned her as a forger and a charlatan; but could such a trickster inspire the progress of a supremely idealistic Movement like the T. S.? Within forty years of her

condemnation, forty-one countries in the world honour her name as the Herald to the modern world of a wonderfully idealistic gospel of life. Furthermore, since 1885, so much more has been published concerning H. P. B. and her relation to the Masters, including the publication practically of all the letters received from Them, that any one can to-day judge for himself whether the Adept Teachers are the creations of H. P. B.'s brain, or are real living Beings full of lofty vision and intense compassion.



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THE FOUNDERS IN LONDON

In 1888