**DR. ARCHIBALD KEIGHTLEY'S ACCOUNT
OF THE WRITING OF “THE SECRET DOCTRINE"**

The first news I had of The Secret Doctrine was the advertisement in The Theosophist. I was told in 1884 that Madame Blavatsky was engaged in writing a book, but I did not know what. Then I heard that the book was to be called The Secret Doctrine, that various people had been consulted as to its construction, and that all the moot points of Hindu Philosophy had been submitted to the late T. Subba Row, who had also made various suggestions as to its construction. Afterwards I found that he had done so, sketching out very roughly an outline, but this was not followed.

Then came the news that Madame Blavatsky's health had broken down and that she was compelled to leave India to save her life. I next heard of her as in Italy, at work, and finally at Würzburg, whence she came to Ostend.

Of the work done previous to my going to Ostend I know nothing. From various causes it came about that I went to Ostend to see H.P.B.; there I found her living with the Countess Wachtmeister, hard at work writing from six a.m. till six p.m., only omitting very short intervals for meals. She wrote and slept in one room, emerging to meals in the next room. When I arrived I learned that her susceptibility to cold was so great that the utmost care had to be used in airing her rooms during the winter.

Very soon after arriving I was handed a part of the MSS. with a request to emendate, excise, alter the English, punctuate, in fact treat it as my own, a privilege I naturally did not avail myself of. The MSS. was then in detached sections, similar to those included under the heads of "Symbolism" and "Appendices" in the published volumes. What I saw was a mass of MSS. with no definite arrangement, much of which had been patiently and industriously copied by the Countess Wachtmeister. The idea then was to keep one copy in Europe, while the other went to India for correction by various native collaborators. The greater part did go at a later date, but some cause prevented the collaboration.

What struck me most in the part I was able to read during my short stay was the enormous number of quotations from various authors. I knew that there was no library to consult and I could see that H.P.B.'s own books did not amount to thirty in all, of which several were dictionaries and several works counted two or more volumes. At this time I did not see the Stanzas of Dzyan, though there were several pieces of the Occult Catechism included in the MSS.

At a later date I again went to Ostend to carry out the arrangements for bringing H.P.B. to England. The main difficulty was to get her papers and books packed up. No sooner was one packed than it was wanted for reference; if part of the MSS. were put in a box it was certain to be that part which already contained some information which had to be cut out and placed elsewhere: and as H.P.B. continued to write until the very day before her departure, such was her unflagging industry, it was not an easy matter to get her belongings packed.

When she arrived at Norwood the reverse process went on, but the difficulty was to get unpacked quickly enough. One day was yielded, but six a.m. of the following day found her at her table. All through the summer of 1887 every day found her at work from six to six, with intervals for meals only, visitors being with very rare exceptions denied or told to come in the evening. The evenings were given up to talk and discussion, and only on rare occasions was any writing done then.

All through that summer Bertram Keightley and I were engaged in reading, re-reading, copying and correcting. The last amounted to casting some of the sentences in English mould, for many of them were “literal translations from the French”. One remarkable fact is worth noticing. It was not long before the genius loci became apparent and in most of the MSS. written after the date of arrival in England there was very little of this kind of correction needed.

Many of the quotations had to be verified, and here we should have been lost if it had not been for a hint from H.P.B. She told us one night that sometimes in writing down quotations, which for the purpose of the book had been impressed on the Astral Light before her, she forgot to reverse the figures for instance page 123 would be allowed to remain 321 and so on. With this in mind verification was easier, for one was puzzled on examining all editions in the British Museum to find in several cases that the books did not contain the number of pages. With the reversal matters were straightened out and the correct places found.

Much of the MSS. was type-written at this period. This was H.P.B.'s opportunity. The spaces were large and much could be inserted. Needless to say, it was. The thick type-MSS. were cut, pasted, recut and pasted several times over, until several of them were twice the size of the original MSS. But in it all was apparent that no work and no trouble, no suffering or pain could daunt her from her task. Crippled with rheumatism, suffering from a disease which had several times nearly proved fatal, she still worked on unflaggingly, writing at her desk the moment her eyes and fingers could guide the pen.

Then came the time of the founding of Lucifer. This work had to be added to that of writing The Secret Doctrine. As for the articles for Russian papers there were constant and imploring demands. None were to be had, for the pressure of other work was too great.

In September came the move to London, to Lansdowne Road. This was not so bad, for the books and papers could be arranged, packed and unpacked, and re-arranged the same day. The same method of work was followed and day succeeded day until the time came for going to press.

During the greater part of the period in London H.P.B. had the assistance of E.D. Fawcett, especially in those parts of the second volume dealing with the evolutionary hypotheses. He suggested, corrected, and wrote, and several, pages of his MSS. were incorporated by H.P.B. into her work.

Needless to say our work went on. We had to carry the general scheme (if it would be called such in a work which was professedly a foe to the process of crystallization of thought) in our heads. We had to draw H.P.B.'s attention to the repetitions occurring in the isolated sections, and so far as possible in this way to act as watchdogs and help her to make the meaning as clear as possible.

But all the work was hers. A few stops here and there, a few suggestions, the correction of a French-spelled word, was ours; the rest was H.P.B.'s own, and all was approved by her.

During this period in London came inevitable interruptions; H.P.B. might try as she would, but friends and curiosity-seekers would not all be denied. Then, too, there was Lucifer with its regular monthly "Stand and Deliver" so much time and copy; Blavatsky Lodge and other meetings; letters to read and answer all interfered with work. Failing health and strength came, and it was an increasing task to rise so early or to work so late. Still time continued and work went on, and the estimates of printers were examined. Certain requirements as to size of page and margin were particular points with H.P.B., as also were the thickness and quality of paper. Some of her critics had disliked the thickness of Isis Unveiled, so the paper had to be thinner so as to reduce the size. These points decided, the book began to go to press. It so happened that I was called into the country and so did not see the first half or more of the first volume as it passed. But it went through three or four other hands besides H.P.B.'s in galley proof, as well as in revise. She was her own most severe corrector, and was liable to treat revise as MSS., with alarming results in the correction item in the bill.

Then came the writing of the preface, and finally the book was out. The period of work and excitement was over and all was quiet till the first copy was delivered.

A. K.