**MR. BERTRAM KEIGHTLEY'S ACCOUNT  
OF THE WRITING OF "THE SECRET DOCTRINE"**

The first I saw of The Secret Doctrine manuscript was on a visit paid to H.P.B. at Ostend, at the very beginning of the year 1887. I had gone over to urge upon H.P.B. the advisability of, coming to settle in London for the purpose of forming a centre for active work in the cause of Theosophy. There were six of us in all who felt profoundly dissatisfied with the deadness which seemed to pervade the Society in England, and we had come to the conclusion that only H.P.B. could give efficient aid in restoring the suspended animation of the movement, and initiating active and wisely directed work. Of these six - with H.P.B. the original founders of the first Blavatsky Lodge - two only, alas! now remain active workers in the Society.

During the few days I then spent at Ostend with H.P.B., she asked me to look over parts of the MSS. of her new work, which I gladly consented to do.  Before I had read much it grew plain that The Secret Doctrine was destined to be by far the most important contribution of this century to the literature of Occultism; though even then the inchoate and fragmentary character of much of the work led me to think that careful revision and much re-arrangement would be needed before the manuscript would be fit for publication.

On a second visit a week or two later, this impression was confirmed by further examination; but as H.P.B. then consented to come and settle in or near London as soon as arrangements could be made for her reception, nothing further was done about it at the time.

Not long after my return to England we learnt that H.P.B. was seriously ill, in fact that her life was despaired of by the physicians in attendance. But, as usual, she disappointed the medical prophets and recovered with such marvellous rapidity that soon after we were able to make arrangements for her coming to England, to Upper Norwood, where a cottage, called Maycot, had been taken for her temporary residence.

The move was effected without any untoward event, though the packing up of her books, papers, MSS., etc., was a truly terrible undertaking, for she went on writing till the very last moment, and as sure as any book, paper, or portion of MSS. had been carefully packed away at the bottom of some box, so surely would she urgently need it, and insist upon its being disinterred at all costs. However, we did get packed at last, reached Maycot, and before we had been two hours in the house, H.P.B. had her writing materials out and was hard at work again.  Hr power of work was amazing ; from early morning till late in the evening she sat at her desk, and even when so ill that most people would have been lying helpless in bed, she toiled resolutely away at the task she had undertaken.

A day or two after our arrival at Maycot, H.P.B. placed the whole of. the so-far completed MSS. in the hands of.Dr. Keightley and myself, instructing us to read, punctuate, correct the English, alter, and generally treat it as if it were our own - which we naturally did not do, having far too high an opinion of her knowledge to take any liberties with so important a work.

But we both read the whole mass of MSS. - a pile over three feet high - most carefully through, correcting the English and punctuation where absolutely indispensable, and then, after prolonged consultation, faced the author in her den - in my case with sore trembling, I remember - with the solemn opinion that the whole of the matter must be re-arranged on some definite plan, since as it stood the book was another Isis Unveiled, only far worse, so far as absence of plan and consecutiveness were concerned.

After some talk, H.P.B. told us to go to Tophet and do what we liked. She had had more than enough of the blessed thing, had given it over to.us, washed her hands thereof entirely, and we might get out of it as best we could.

We retired and consulted. Finally we laid before her a plan, suggested by the character of the matter itself, viz., to make the work consist of four volumes, each divided into three parts:  (1) the Stanzas and Commentaries thereon; (2) Symbolism; (3) Science. Further, instead of making the first volume to consist, as she had intended, of the history of some great Occultists, we advised her to follow the natural order of exposition, and begin with the Evolution of Cosmos, to pass from that to the Evolution of Man, then to deal with the historical part in a third volume treating of the lives of some great Occultists; and finally, to speak of Practical Occultism in a fourth volume should she ever be able to write it.

This plan we laid before H.P.B., and it was duly sanctioned by her.

The next step was to read the MSS. through again and make a general re-arrangement of the matter pertaining to the subjects coming under the heads of Cosmogony and Anthropology, which were to form the first two volumes of the work. When this had been completed, and H.P.B. duly consulted, and her approval of what had been done obtained, the whole of the MSS. so arranged was typewritten out by professional hands, then re-read, corrected, compared with the original MSS., and all Greek, Hebrew, and Sanskrit quotations inserted by us. It then appeared that the whole of the Commentary on the Stanzas did not amount to more than some twenty pages of the present work, as H.P.B. had not stuck closely to her text in writing. So we seriously interviewed her, and suggested that she should write a proper commentary, as in her opening words she had promised her readers to do. Her reply was characteristic: "What on earth am I to say ? What do you want to know? Why it's all as plain as the nose on your face! ! !" We could not see it; she didn't - or made out she didn't - so we retired to reflect.

As an interpolation, I had better state here that in the autumn of 1887 - October, if I remember aright - we all moved into London, to 17, Lansdowne Road, Notting Hill, where the Countess Wachtmeister, who had been on a visit to Sweden ever since H..P.B. left Ostend, joined us in establishing the first T. S. Headquarters in London. During our stay at Maycot, Lucifer was founded, being published originally by Mr. G. Redway, H.P.B. keeping on all the while writing her articles, and also turning out further MSS. for The Secret Doctrine., These and other T.S. work had to be attended to, and as sub-editor of Lucifer I found my hands pretty full, so that many weeks were consumed, and I think the removal to Lansdowne Road effected, before the problem of the Commentary on the Stanzas was finally solved.

The solution was this: - Each sloka of the stanzas was written (or cut out from the type-written copy) and pasted at the head of a sheet of paper, and then on a loose sheet pinned thereto were written all the questions we could find time to devise upon that sloka. In this task Mr. Richard. Harte helped us very considerably, a large proportion of the questions put being of his devising. H.P.B. struck out large numbers of them, made us write fuller explanations, or our own ideas - such as they were - of what her readers expected her to say, wrote more herself, incorporated the little she had already written on that particular sloka, and so the work was done.

But when we came to think of sending the MSS. to the printers, the result was found to be such that the most experienced compositor would tear his hair in blank dismay. Therefore Dr. Keightley and myself set to work with a type-writer, and alternately dictating and writing, made a clean copy of the first parts of volumes I. and II.

Then work was continued till parts II. and III. of each volume were in a fairly advanced condition, and we could think of sending the work to press.

It had originally been arranged that Mr. George Redway should publish the work, but his proposals not being financially satisfactory, the needful money was offered by a friend of H.P.B.'s, and it was resolved to take the publication of Lucifer into our own hands. So the Duke Street office was taken, and business begun there, the primary object being to enable the T, S. to derive the utmost possible benefit from H.P.B.'s writings.

Of the further history of The Secret Doctrine there is not much more to say - though there were months of hard work before us. H.P.B. read and corrected two sets of galley proofs, then a page proof, and finally a revise in sheet, correcting, adding, and altering up to the very last moment: - result:  printer's bill for corrections alone over 300 [pounds].

Of phenomena in connection with The Secret Doctrine, I have very little indeed to say. Quotations with full references, from books which were never in the house - quotations verified after hours of search, sometimes, at the British Museum for a rare book - of such I saw and verified not a few.

In verifying them I found occasionally the curious fact that the numerical references were reversed, e.g., p. 321 for p. 123, illustrating the reversal of objects when seen in the astral light. But beyond such instances of clairvoyant vision, I have no further phenomena directly bearing upon the production of The Secret Doctrine to record.

Finally I must not omit the valuable assistance which was rendered by Mr. E. D. Fawcett. Before I went to Ostend he had been in correspondence with H.P.B., and later on he also worked with and for her on the book at Lansdowne Road. He supplied many of the quotations from scientific works, as well as many confirmations of the occult doctrines derived from similar sources. It would not be right in giving any account of how The Secret Doctrine was written to omit to mention his name, and as I have not done so in the proper chronological sequence, I repair the omission now.

Of the value of the work, posterity must judge finally. Personally I can only place on record my profound conviction that when studied thoroughly but not treated as a revelation, when understood and assimilated but not made a text for dogma, H.P.B.'s Secret Doctrine will be found of incalculable value, and will furnish suggestions, clues, and threads of guidance, for the study of Nature and Man, such as no other existing work can supply.

B.K