

*HP Blavatsky remembered
by Henry Travers Edge*



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Article compiled by Boris de Zirkoff.

HENRY TRAVERS EDGE WAS A PERSONAL PUPIL OF H.P.B. in the London days, born at Cubbington, near Leamington, Warwickshire, England, January 6th, 1867; died at the Theosophical Headquarters, Covina, California, September 19th, 1946. His father was Francis Edge, a Clergy man of the Church of England, and his mother, Cecilia Tarratt Edge. He was educated at Malvern College from 1880 to 1886; thereafter at King's College, Cambridge. In 1889, he entered for the Natural Sciences Tripos, in Chemistry, Physics and Geology, taking high honours. He then studied a year in Germany, and taught in various institutions in England. In 1899 he resigned his post as Demonstrator in Practical Physics at the Royal College of Science, South Kensington, London, in order to accept Katherine Tingley's invitation to join the Theosophical Headquarters Staff at Point Loma, California.

Henry T. Edge's acquaintance with Theosophy dated from the early days of The Theosophical Society. The background of this is best outlined in his own words:

. . . Of a pronounced nervous mental temperament and physique, I had begun at a very early age to devour what scientific books I could come across; lacked the power of concentration necessary for reading or for assiduous study, but had a quick bright mind that readily picked up a store of miscellaneous information and stored it up in a retentive memory ready for use when required. Thus the scientific element entered as one skein in the fabric. On the moral side I was always of a conscientious and religious disposition.

At about eighteen a third element manifested itself, which may be called the mystical, concerned with interest in the occult and "supernatural." The attitude of scientific materialism received a rude shock from the reading of Catherine Crowe's *The Night Side of Nature*, which is a collection of ghost-stories made by that novelist, the cumulative evidence of which is enough to convince a competent mind of the reality of phenomena attested by universal experience of all ages

I realized that these stories of the "supernatural," after filtering off the trash in them, were essentially facts; and that, however irritating they might often be to my acquired sense of what might be allowed to be possible in a trim scientific scheme of the universe, I had to fit them in somehow, and must accordingly stretch my boundaries. . . .

Having thus passed a portal, it is not surprising that I soon found other books to feed my new curiosity; among which I will mention Bulwer Lytton's *The Haunted and the Haunters*.¹ This story contains a vivid description of a Black Magician, who by developing the will, with the aid of a rare natural aptitude, has found the means of prolonging his life through the centuries, and who periodically celebrates a fictitious funeral and reappears among men in a new guise and a new name, to perpetuate the enjoyment of his sensual proclivities. His will is supreme and resistless and his character one of surpassing grandeur and dignity, but (alas) evil.

Here then comes a crucial point in my mental life — the antagonism between the high ideals of human attainment thus depicted, and the voice of conscience and love of good. Power on one side, goodness on the other; how *could* such opposing forces ever be reconciled? Yet the inner man, the clear-seeing function of the mind that lies below the surface, must have been prescient of the issue so soon to supervene; else why was it that the even course of my life and avocations was so little disturbed? Truly we have that within us which sees and knows, and fulfils its calm ends despite our blind struggles. Still thy mind and strive to hear and acquiesce in that higher wisdom.

Phrenology — Swedenborgianism — Psychic Research — anything off the beaten track, anything available in those days (1885-87). An accident, laying me on my back and giving an opportunity for study and reflexion; the change from school to the freedom of university life; the studies and laboratory work, the many new-found friends; into this busy scene came Theosophy, the goal to which I had from earliest self-consciousness been dimly striving, to resolve my enigmas and reconcile my conflicting motives.²

I was in early manhood a student at Cambridge University, reading for honours in science. In pursuance of the aforesaid instinct, I had been attending meetings of some society (its name I struggle in vain to remember), whose object was, as far as one could see, somewhat different from that of scientific skeptics who denied and scoffed at all apparitions and occult phenomena. The method of this society was to accept the possibility of such phenomena, but to reduce them by every possible means to the level of the commonplace. It was very learned, very documentary, very dry-as-dust and uninspiring; and I ceased to think any more about it and its doings, at the very first chance I had to find something better worth thinking about.

How vividly stand forth in one's memory the incidents — nay, perhaps, the one incident — marking a turning-point in one's life! I can see, on August 15th, 1887, a young student in cap and gown walking along the King's Parade, and meeting a cousin, who was an undergraduate of Caius College, and who stopped me to say: "Have you read that book, by Mr. Sinnett, called *Esoteric Buddhism*, all about worlds and planets and races and rounds . . . ?"

¹ In its original and complete form, not in the abbreviated and altogether emasculated form in which it later appeared.

² [*The Theosophical Path*, Point Loma, California, Vol. XXXVII, February 1930]

What he said, I don't recollect, but it was enough to send me straight to the University Library after that book. It was out, but another book by the same author, *The Occult World*, was in; and from that afternoon I had entered upon a new phase of my life — begun my life, one might almost say — been born again, as it were. There was a child's handful of other books on Theosophy or near-Theosophy; some of them still known, others forgotten; but no *Key to Theosophy*, no *Voice of the Silence*, no *Secret Doctrine* — though there was *Isis Unveiled*.

I lost no time in communicating with H.P. Blavatsky's agents in London, and obtained an introduction to certain Theosophists resident near Cambridge. It was at the country-house of these members that a small band, chiefly of members of the University, constituting the Cambridge Lodge of the Theosophical Society, used to hold its meeting; and the recollection of those days is full of poetry and music to the recorder, but to the reader will be of secondary interest to my recollections (such as they are) of H.P. Blavatsky herself.

And here it must be said that the record will be more an impression than a diary, more a picture than a description. Not being gifted or hampered with a photographic memory or a passion for detail, my memory brings up a general idea, in which the salient features stand out regardless of chronological sequence, and things blend into one another to form a composite.

It must have been at the end of the term, near Christmas, 1887, that I first went to see H.P. Blavatsky. The association of ideas has hallowed the memories of the underground railway with its sulphurous smoke, and the street-names that lay along the route.

H.P. Blavatsky was then residing, with a little group of helpers, in a small semi-detached house in a residential quarter of London, West — 17 Lansdowne Road, Holland Park, W. I arrived just before the evening meal, so that my first meeting with her was a social one. After the meal we adjourned to the sitting-room, where H.P. Blavatsky habitually entertained her guests and visitors in the evenings. At that time of life I was what I should describe as shy and backward, admirably formed to play the part of a silent and unobtrusive spectator.

The first impression which I got of H.P. Blavatsky was the same as that which so many others have got, and at which some of them have stopped short — namely that she was an eminently *human* person. I say "first" advisedly, because, as will be seen, that was not the only impression.

Now, assuming H.P. Blavatsky to be a great character, what ought one expect to find? Experience and records of great characters, or prominent characters, might suggest one or other of two things. We might expect the person to strike us at first sight with awe, as from one who was not only great but was aware of the fact and not unwilling that you should also be aware. Or, on the other hand, perhaps he would be a person of extraordinary simplicity, a great one but not wishing to enact that part. Which of these supposed persons, if either, would be truly great? Number 1 would certainly be acting a part, and his self-consciousness would add an element of littleness detracting from his greatness.

Number 2 even *might be* acting a part — affected simplicity. But in the really great person the simplicity would be no pose, but merely his natural character expressing itself naturally and without art.

It would be quite impossible to connect the idea of H.P. Blavatsky (as I saw her — and that is what I am concerned with at present) with pose or vanity or vain-glory or self-consciousness. Whatever view one might take of her or her mission, at least one must conclude that here was a thorough, earnest, and sincere character; the kind that would scorn simulation or dissimulation; the kind so sure of its own sincerity as to feel no need for any attempt to impress it on people.

In short I saw simply a very vivacious and interesting Russian lady, talking on a variety of subjects and expressing each emotion as it came along, with the ease and alertness which we all have in early childhood and so soon lose. Such people hate humbug or pretence of whatever sort. No doubt there are some who feel uncomfortable in the presence of such a person. No doubt I should have felt uncomfortable had she not been so kind.

The evening was spent in the sitting-room where H.P. Blavatsky was wont to receive her guests and visitors; and, though I can recall nothing definite, my impression was the same. Extreme versatility and a mind active enough for several persons at once, were noticeable. H.P. Blavatsky could carry on two conversations at once, in different languages, and have enough spare energy left to require occupation in a game of solitaire. And yet all this external activity might have served mainly to keep the body quiet while the *mind* was busy in activities whose nature we cannot surmise but whose existence was surely indicated by the depth of those wonderful eyes.¹

The many extant portraits will give an idea of her features; and in this connexion I remember roughly, though without the exact words to quote, a description given in a novel of that period, in which novel she enters as a character and is treated with much sympathy and respect by the author.² In this description the remarkable contrasts of the face are emphasized. In many respects the physiognomy was Turanian; but in place of small dark deep-set eyes were eyes unusually large, and light grey or blue-grey in colour. The massive jaw and firm mouth were contradicted by the small alert nose; the complexion sallow, the hair medium brown, fine in texture, crisp and wavy. Fitting signature of a Light-Bringer into a world needing light: the eyes showing the irradiated mind, the powerful, rugged features marking the strength demanded by such a contact. To be a connecting link, a buffer, what a rare union of purity and clarity with strength and toughness is required! Stature short and stout, and at that time, owing to the infirmities brought about by a life of most strenuous and un-sparing devotion, very corpulent and dropsical. A most nervous and excitable temperament in a lymphatic physique.

¹ [The *Theosophical Path*, Vol. XXXII, June 1927]

² *Affinities: A Romance of Today*, by Rachel M. Campbell-Praed. London: Bentley & Sons, 1885; and G. Routledge & Sons, 1886, 8vo.

The manners of this lady were entirely natural and unaffected; in which respect she conveyed the impression of a child: the same alertness and freedom of gesture. But a grown-up child, a much-travelled and well-informed child; full of animation, passing easily from topic to topic and diffusing her own enthusiasm into her auditors. Thinking aloud, as it were, scorning petty hypocrisies, having nothing to conceal. Many of these traits doubtless pertaining to nationality and family, others peculiar to herself.

I was by temperament excellently qualified for the part of silent listener, which has its advantages and disadvantages. My recollections are vague as to detail. Not living in London, my visits to H.P.B. were infrequent and intermittent; their number and particular features are lost in a general haze. Yet perhaps, as said before, this circumstance may be regarded as serving to filter out the non-essentials and preserve the essence.

The *second* time I visited her, she stated that I had already been, not once, but *twice* before; and spoke of a visit which (as she said) I had made before my last visit. She described the dress I had worn (which was verified by a friend at Cambridge as being the one he was accustomed to see me wearing). She told me what I had said on the occasion of the alleged visit. I had told her (she said) about an illness giving me an opportunity to study and reflect. This was true, as mentioned above; but I had never told H.P.B. Upon being asked whether it was in my astral body that I had been present, she said:

“No, he was just as he is now.”

Now it is true that I was at that time much addicted to day-dreaming, especially when taking walks; and nothing is easier than to see how my entire mind, and perhaps a good deal more, might be transferred; but the question of the physical presence is a mystery the solution of which I hereby leave to my readers to exercise their intuition upon.

In October, 1888, returning from vacation to my rooms in Cambridge, I found on my table a copy of *Lucifer*, containing an announcement in which H.P.B. invites Theosophists to embrace the opportunity for a deeper study of Theosophy; and this marks another great epoch in my life. It is here however that we trench upon matters not pertaining to this magazine. Much must therefore be represented by a hiatus, or by those rows of dots or stars by which the printer loves to signify a jumping-off place for the imagination. If you are fond of mystery, what more mysterious can you have than such a row of dots?



However, it is here that I came in contact with H.P.B. the Teacher, and first became conscious of that relationship between teacher and pupil which is so much more than any ordinary relationship, whether between ordinary teachers and pupils or in any other bond.

Real teaching is not conveyed orally or by writing. The marks by which a Teacher is recognized as such are well known to those who are privileged by this relationship. There is first the power to teach: which does not consist in

telling you what you must believe, but in calling your attention to what you want to know. A Teacher is a revealer, an opener of one's eyes; one who has something to give to those who can ask — who can give the right “password.” Then there is the responsiveness of the Teacher to one's secret aspirations and other feelings; which does not mean thought-reading, if you please, for that would amount to burglarizing another person's mind, a thing no Teacher would do. What I do mean can be illustrated by an instance.

Having on one occasion, while far away from London, chanced to be thinking of H.P.B., and to have achieved some kind of realization of her real character and work, I had felt a glow of the true Love go forth from my heart. The next time I saw the Teacher, she had something for me, something which only a Teacher can give, something which not even a Teacher can give except to one who has *asked*. “Knock, and it shall be opened to you.”

Thus was H.P. Blavatsky recognised as a Teacher, as one able to teach by more intimate means than oral instruction.

She turned one's aspirations into the right channel and inculcated the Heart-Doctrine, which supersedes all personal motives by the power of universal Love — the life of the Spiritual Man. The Teacher can appeal directly to the real Self of the pupil, causing him to recognize the Light and Truth, even though his brain-mind may not see it; and thus he is able to dedicate himself inwardly by a vow whose power will ever afterwards guard and guide him.

One thing which H.P.B. said in my presence was this: that, when she had first met me, she had said to herself: “Here is a young man who has an eventful occult life before him. He has two paths open: in the one he will be happy; in the other miserable. I wonder which he will choose.”

Another time she put into my hands the manuscript of *The Voice of the Silence* and sent me to another room to read it.¹

In 1888 Henry T. Edge received his diploma of fellowship in The Theosophical Society, signed by Col. Henry Steel Olcott, President, and A.J. Cooper-Oakley, Secretary. Shortly thereafter he became a personal pupil of H.P.B. and was entrusted by her with private literary and office duties, which he continued to perform until her death on May 8th, 1891. His diploma was “Endorsed valid under the Constitution of The Theosophical Society in Europe” by William Quan Judge as President, September 23rd, 1895.

After a few years of varied activities at Point Loma, H.T. Edge was appointed Head Master of the Boys' Department of the Rāja-Yoga School. He was one of the original incorporators of Theosophical University on December 18th, 1919, and became its President on November 21st, 1939, which post he held until June 19th, 1946. At Point Loma, he taught Latin and Greek, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Geology. He also conducted classes in *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*. For forty-six years, he contributed *gratis* his time and his talents to the educational and literary work

¹ [*The Theosophical Path*, Vol. XXVII, February 1930]

conducted at Point Loma; he was also generous in his financial support of the Society's activities.

From 1888 until his death in 1946, Dr. Edge was an incredibly prolific contributor to various Theosophical periodicals, including H.P.B.'s *Lucifer*, the Point Loma weeklies, *The New Century*, *The New Century Path* and *The Century Path* (the three published in succession from September 30th, 1897 to June 11th, 1911); the monthly and later quarterly *Theosophical Path* (July 1911 to October 1935); *The Theosophical Forum* (published monthly, beginning in September 1929, and contributed to by H.T.E. from 1929 until his death in 1946). As an illustration of his literary creativity, a collection of his contributions to *The Theosophical Path* between July 1911 and December 1916 alone, under his own name or initials and under the pseudonyms H. Travers, T. Henry, Ariomardes, The Busy Bee, Magister Artium, T.H. and Student, includes 197 articles. He made numerous contributions defending H.P.B.'s memory, explaining her mission, and expounding her teachings continuously for more than half a century.

Among his lengthier monographs are: *Studies in Evolution*;¹ *Questionnaire on Evolution*;² *The Universal Mystery-Language and its Interpretation*;³ *Theosophical Light on the Christian Bible*;⁴ and Manuals on *Theosophy and Christianity*, *The Astral Light*, and *Evolution*.⁵ All of his writings reveal the sound, balanced judgment of a Cambridge-trained scientist and scholar, illuminated by his life-long study and acceptance of Theosophy as he had learned it from H.P.B. and those who followed faithfully in her footsteps.

On May 9th, 1946, in his eightieth year and near the end of his earthly sojourn, failing in health and facing ingratitude and misunderstanding, he wrote to sympathetic friends in part as follows:

Dismissing doubt and fear from our hearts, and with full confidence in the spiritual power thus evoked, let us stand together in valiant defence of our convictions and of the great work for which our Teachers have sacrificed so much. It may well be that trials like the present are needed in order to infuse new vigour into the hearts of members, and to spur them to stand on their own feet. This is no time to stand still and wait; for the Masters cannot help us unless we make the appeal. It is the time for action, and even the oldest and feeblest can act on the spiritual plane by assuming the right attitude.

It is my earnest wish to spread far and wide the confidence which inspires me and which I feel has given me renewed strength to meet the obligation which my situation entails. Not a morning nor a night passes without my vision going back to 1886 when, at the feet of H.P.B. I dedicated my life to her Cause.

¹ Papers of the School of Antiquity, No. 8, Point Loma, California, The Aryan Theosophical Press, November, 1916.

² Theosophical University Press, Covina, California, 1943; repr. by Point Loma Publications, San Diego, California, 1979, as *Design and Purpose*.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*, 1945. The last two reprinted in a slightly revised form by Point Loma Publications, Inc., San Diego, California, 1973.

⁵ Re-issued by Point Loma Publications in 1974-75.

A TRIBUTE TO H.P. BLAVATSKY
BY A PERSONAL PUPIL

Some years prior to that, writing in *The Theosophical Path*,¹ he had said:

The crowning privilege of an eventful life has been my intimate personal relationship with H.P. Blavatsky, as pupil of that great Teacher. This extended from 1887 until her death, while she was carrying on at her London residence her work of promulgating Theosophy, by her receptions to inquirers and the publication of her books and magazines. She showed me that Theosophy is the most serious movement of the age, and that it requires of its adherents entire devotion to the Heart-Doctrine; and her own life was the noblest exemplar of her teachings. In the face of illness, incessant and malicious opposition, and at great pecuniary sacrifice, she toiled heroically at her great work for the bringing of Truth, Light, and Liberation to discouraged humanity.



¹ Vol. XX, January 1921