

*Boris de Zirkoff on
the Countess of Caithness*



From *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (BIBLIO-BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES TO VOL. VII) pp. 361-63.¹

MARIE SINCLAIR, Countess of Caithness and Duchesse de Pomar, was a life-long friend of both Madame Blavatsky and Col. H.S. Olcott. She was the only daughter of Don Antonio Jose de Mariategui, of Santa Catalina, Macuriges, and was born at Madrid in 1830. In 1853 she married her first husband, General the Count de Medina Pomar, who died in 1868. Her son by this marriage,



Manuel Maria de Medina Pomar y Mariategui, was created Duke of Pomar by Pope Pius IX, on his coming of age in 1875, and the title was recognized and confirmed to him and his heirs by King Alfonso XII of Spain on his accession to the throne. In 1872, she married, as his second wife, Lord Barrogill, head of the Sinclair Clan, and 14th Earl of Caithness, who was born in 1821 and died at New York in 1881. He was well known for his mechanical inventions. In 1879 Pope Leo XIII extended to Lady Caithness by letters patent the title and rank of her son, and she, therefore, became Duchesse de Pomar. After the death of her second husband, she settled in the Avenue de Wagrarn in Paris, and died there November 2nd, 1895.

She was a woman of singular administrative ability; she managed herself her large fortune, kept no housekeeper, and lived in a style becoming her rank and wealth. Her kindness was proverbial; she had a firm will yet her manners were soft and gentle. Lady Caithness called her palace in Paris Holyrood.² It contained the finest hall and concert-room in Paris, where she used to gather her friends to hear scientific, literary, and religious lectures, by men of great renown. She also gave magnificent balls during the season. She made great efforts to fuse the philosophical with Catholic and aristocratic society, and had a cosmopolitan *salon* where celebrities of all kinds met on friendly ground and in an atmosphere of culture and good will. The peculiar side of her nature was in the form in which her Spiritualistic beliefs shaped

¹ Frontispiece: Mary, Queen of Scots, (1542-87) by François Clouet, Royal Collection.

² [Cf. The Palace of Holyroodhouse, commonly referred to as Holyrood Palace, is the official residence of the British monarch in Scotland, Queen Elizabeth II. Located at the bottom of the Royal Mile in Edinburgh, at the opposite end to Edinburgh Castle, Holyrood Palace served as the principal residence of the Kings and Queens of Scots since the 16th century, and is now a setting for state occasions and official entertaining. The name Holyrood, or Holy Cross, comes from a mediæval legend: while hunting in the park, it is said that King David I was about to be attacked by a white stag, when suddenly a shining cross appeared between its antlers. The stag suddenly vanished and the King was saved, and in recognition of this miracle he founded an abbey on the site.]

themselves. She believed herself to be the medium of Mary Stuart, and used to write for hours in a clear, plain, business-like hand, betraying neither neurosis nor excessive imagination, communications from Mary, Queen of Scots.¹ [362]

To quote Col. H.S. Olcott's own words in an Obituary Notice of Lady Caithness published in *The Theosophist*,² when she had passed away at the age of 65:

Soon after the appearance of *Isis Unveiled*, H.P.B. received a most enthusiastic letter from the Countess about the book, offering her friendship, and inviting us to pay her a visit on our way out to India; rumours of which journey had reached Europe. From that time on, correspondence has been kept up between her ladyship and ourselves and our relations have continued unbroken. H.P.B.'s death did not interrupt her friendliness to myself, and I have always visited her when passing through Paris. H.P.B. and I were her guests at her Palais Tiranty, at Nice, in 1884, when she nightly gathered there many of the continental nobility to discuss Theosophy with us, and a number of them joined our Society. My last visits to her were in August and October last, when she seemed somewhat suffering but not at all in a dangerous state of health. We parted in the expectation of meeting again when I should next be called to revisit Europe on official affairs.

From a somewhat early age Lady Caithness was interested in occult subjects, beginning with Mesmerism and Clairvoyance, and following those with Spiritualism, to which she clung to the end of her life. In her Holyrood Palace in Paris, she had a sort of chapel where were held weekly séances of what she called her Star Circle; the presiding genius, of which was the supposed spirit of the lovely and unfortunate Mary, Queen of Scots. She kindly permitted me to attend one of the séances last October, and I was so pleased with an essay that one of her mediums wrote on the subject of "Clairvoyance," which I gave her to do, that I begged it of my hostess for publication. The table rappings, alleged to come from Mary Stuart and Madame Blavatsky, did not impress me much, and I frankly told her so. Nor did I think much of the rapping Medium. But I did have real affection for herself and feel grateful for many acts of gracious courtesy, among them, repeated offers of the use of her gorgeous ball-room for Theosophical lectures and meetings whenever I should desire it. I presided there at one of Mrs. Besant's lectures two years ago, given in French with wonderful fluency and her usual eloquence, and once — in 1884 — she gave H.P.B. and myself a *conversazione*.³ I shall feel her loss as that of a personal friend, and my sincere condolences are offered to her devoted son, the Duc de Pomar, whose beautiful affection for her was charming to witness.

Col. Olcott also points out that a report about Lady Caithness giving Madame Blavatsky a present of 1,000 pounds sterling to spread [363] Theosophy is false. It ap-

¹ [Mary, Queen of Scots, 1542–1587, also known as Mary Stuart or Mary I of Scotland. She reigned over Scotland from 14th December 1542 to 24th July 1567.]

² Vol. XVII, December 1895, pp. 183-85

³ [A scholarly social gathering held for discussion of literature and the arts.]

pears that she paid Blavatsky's Paris apartment for three months in 1884, but no other sums were donated.

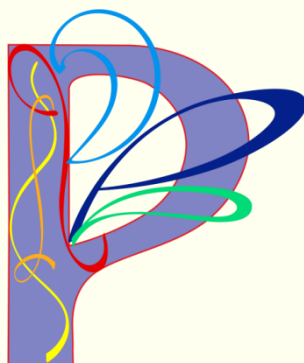
Lady Caithness became the first President of the Société Théosophique d'Orient et d'Occident founded at Paris June 28th, 1883. On May 4th, 1884, Madame Blavatsky and Col. Olcott were present at one of the gatherings of this group of students. In June of the same year the group was reorganized as a regular Branch of the Theosophical Society, with Lady Caithness as President, Dr. R. Thurman and Louis Dramard as Vice-Presidents, and Madame Émilie de Morsier as Secretary. Several renowned personalities, such as Édouard Schuré, Madame Margherita Albana Mignaty, Princess Olga Volkonsky, and Dr. Charles Richet, were members of it for some time. This work, however, did not last very long, as various troubles ensued after a while.

Lady Caithness published a considerable number of works, both large and small. The best-known of them is *The Mystery of the Ages Contained in the Secret Doctrine of All Religions*,¹ which went through at least three editions. It has been said that much of what it contains is the result of conversations and discussions with Madame Blavatsky during her stay in Paris.

Among other works from the pen of Lady Caithness may be mentioned the following ones:

- *Old Truths in a New Light; or, an endeavour to reconcile material science with spiritual science and with Scripture*. London, 1876; 8vo.
- *Serious Letters to Serious Friends*, London, 1877; 8vo.
- *Interprétation ésotérique des livres sacrés*, Paris, 1891; 227pp.
- *Le Spiritisme dans la Bible*, Paris, 1894; 64pp.
- *Le Secret du Nouveau-Testament*, Paris, 1896; 559pp.

In addition to these, she also wrote several Spiritualistic works, embodying various messages received through mediumistic channels, and published a number of booklets on Theosophical and allied subjects, the substance of which had previously appeared in the journal *l'Aurore*, a monthly which Lady Caithness started in 1886, and which continued until 1895, running into 14 volumes.



¹ London: C.L.H. Wallace; 1887; 54pp.