

*De Zirkoff on
The Secret Doctrine*



Boris de Zirkoff on “The Secret Doctrine”

From *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE SECRET DOCTRINE) X pp. 157-59.
Frontispiece: Portrait of N by Stephanie Syjuco, 2017.

It was in October, 1888, that the First Volume of H.P. Blavatsky’s *magnum opus* made its public appearance. We insert the present explanatory Note at this particular point in our chronological series to indicate where *The Secret Doctrine* belongs, as far as its correct time-sequence is concerned.

The First Volume came off the Press on October 20th, 1888. This is evidenced by a set of the original edition now in the Archives of the undersigned. On the fly-leaf of the First Volume, in rather faint blue pencil, appear the following words in the handwriting of Richard Harte:

This is the first copy ever issued. I got it from Printer by special Messenger on the morning of the 20 Oct. '88 as I was leaving the house 17 Lansdowne Road, with Col. Olcott for India (Col. went personally via Naples). The Second Vol. followed me to India.

R.H.

Both volumes have a greyish binding bearing in the usual place the imprint: Theosophical Publishing Co., Ltd., which was [158] of course in London. Both volumes bear the inscriptions: Printed by Allen Scott and Co., 30, Bouverie Street, E.C. — facing the title-page; and facing the dedication: Entered at Stationer’s Hall. All Rights Reserved.

It would appear that sheets of the First Volume, most likely folded, were sent to W.Q. Judge in New York. At first he planned to have the bound volume ready for distribution in the U.S.A. by October 27th, but all sorts of difficulties arose. One of these had to do with the Appraiser at the Custom House. After Judge had taken out 3 cases, he was told that the book was undervalued. On calculation, it appeared that the 1000 copies came to some 30 cents each. This of course was too low, and Judge was faced with the possibility of a penalty and double duty, the law requiring at the time that a duty of 25% of the market price of the goods be paid; in this case the duty was to be determined by the cost of paper and printing. After much persuasion, the Appraiser consented to let the book through, with the caution that on the next invoice the true value would have to be stated. The cases came from the Custom House the 23rd of October, and were sent to the binder, where the book had to be recollated, as Ameri-

can binders would not accept the risk of collating done abroad. This resulted in further delays.¹

Volume I was mailed to subscribers in America on November 3rd, and Volume II was promised at about the same time as the December issue of *The Path* magazine.²

The American edition was published in a dark brown and a dark blue binding, and bears the inscription: “Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1888, by H.P. Blavatsky, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington, D.C.” — facing the dedication.

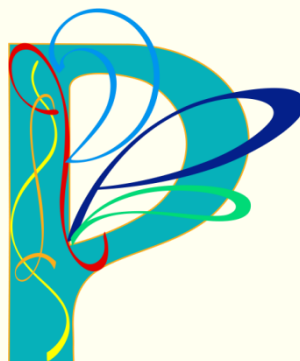
From a statement in *The Theosophist*³ it would appear that the English edition was one of 500 copies only, and was exhausted before the day of actual publication, due to advance subscribers. This necessitated an immediate second impression, which was later very erroneously called “second edition.” It was only a second printing from the same plates.

The Theosophist mentions also a “copious Index and a Glossary” in connection with *The Secret Doctrine*. The Index, however, was a very poor one in this first edition, and no Glossary appeared at all. No definite information seems available as to [159] why no Glossary was included, but Judge, writing to C.H. Whitaker, January 11th, 1889, suggests that it probably was found too expensive to do so.⁴ It is quite conceivable that material for such a Glossary was later used both in *The Key to Theosophy* and in *The Theosophical Glossary*.

It is likely that Volume II of *The Secret Doctrine* appeared sometime in December, 1888; *The Path* magazine, revising its earlier promise, stated that it would reach its subscribers before the January, 1889, issue of the journal.

BORIS DE ZIRKOFF

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¹ Letters of W.Q. Judge to Bertram Keightley, dated October 5th and 26th, 1888, in *Practical Occultism* (Pasadena, California: Theosophical University Press, 1951), pp. 127, 133

² *The Path*, Vol. III, p. 298

³ Vol. X, *Supplement* to December 1888, p. xxx-a

⁴ *Practical Occultism*, p. 139