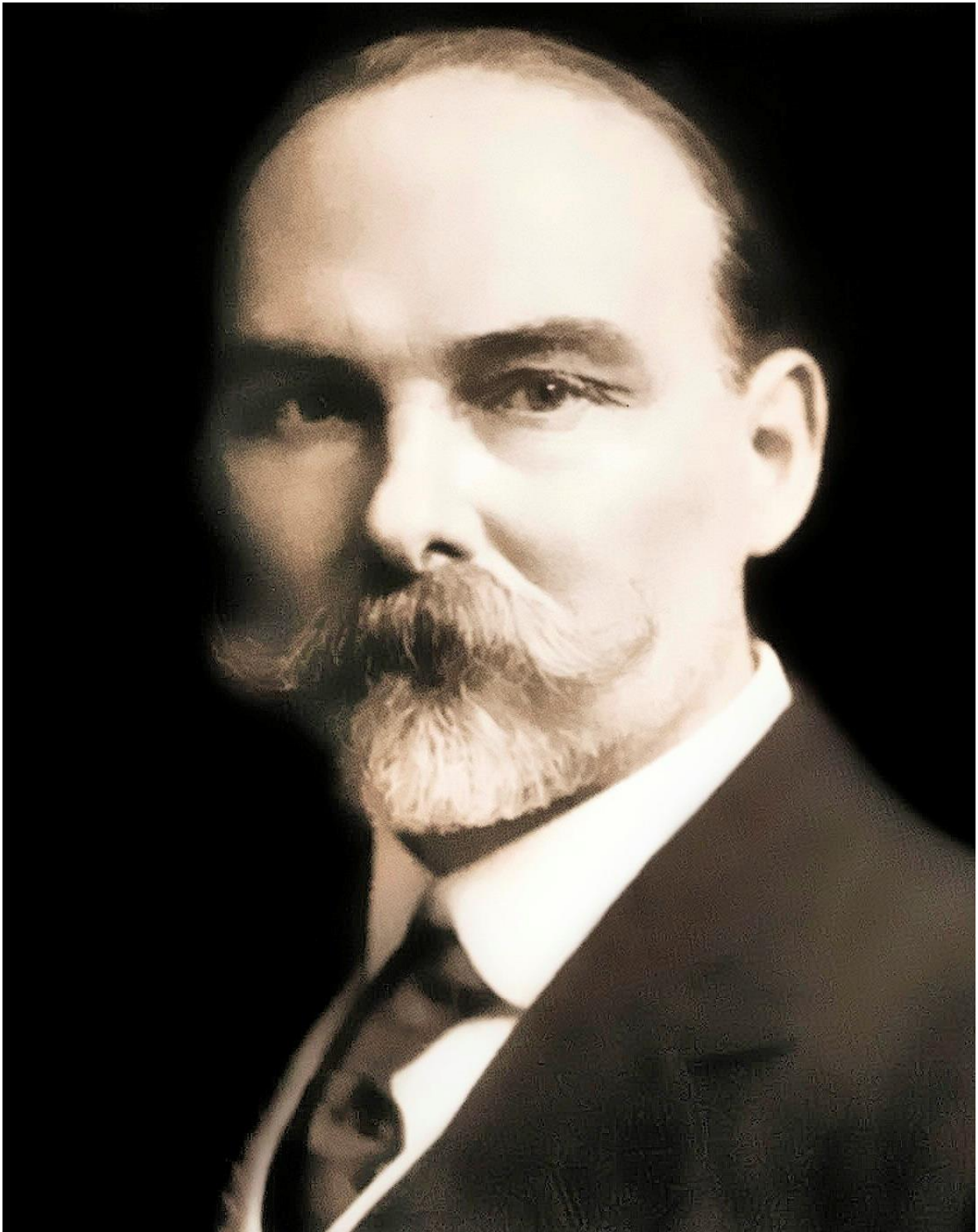


*Judge and de Zirkoff on  
George Robert Stowe Mead*



## William Judge on George Mead

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George Robert Stowe Mead is the General Secretary of the European Section T.S., and works day in and day out at the Avenue Road Headquarters in London. He is an Englishman and was born in 1863. His father, Col. R. Mead, late deputy Commissioner Her Majesty's Ordnance,<sup>1</sup> is a distinguished Ordnance officer. So George's childhood was spent among soldiers, sailors, cannon shot, shell, guns and bayonets. His education was obtained mostly at King's school, Rochester.

At St. John's College he won school scholarship, and proper Sizarship<sup>2</sup> at Cambridge. He then "went up" destined to read for mathematics supposed to be his forte. Pastors and masters said he must be a "wrangler." But he took the bit in his mouth, threw mathematics to the dogs, and read for Classical Tripos. In that he took classical honours. So far life was aimless and creedless, but unconsciously he was looking for something in life as a reality.

Having become a full-blown A.B.<sup>3</sup> the query was "what to do?" He was offered a chance in an old established practice of an uncle in the law. He refused this, and while looking about taught at a large preparatory school. In 1884 when he went down for Cambridge he read *Esoteric Buddhism*, and then wrote to B. Keightley, saw Mohini, and was put on the track of Hindu philosophy, where he felt as if at home. Then he read all he could find on the subject, with no taste for phenomena, but the latter were also studied as a necessity. After three years of teaching he became restless and resolved on a new path, entering as an undergraduate at Oxford to read for classical honours and take up philosophy so as to get a fellowship and then come out for Theosophy.

After reading fourteen hours a day for five months, rest became necessary, and, the risk in the scheme seeming too great, he went to France to Clermont Ferrand and entered at a small university there, following the literary and philosophical lectures for six months. While there he was able to start many on Theosophy and Spiritual-

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<sup>1</sup> [Deputy Commissary-General of Ordnance, a branch of government service dealing especially with military stores and materials.]

<sup>2</sup> [Scholarship]

<sup>3</sup> [*Artium baccalaureus*, Bachelor of Arts]

ism, and had an epitome of discussions printed in French. This made a small riot, pulpits preaching against Spiritualism. From there he came back to London, taught once more for a year, then left, and met H.P. Blavatsky.

Two days after Blavatsky came to London in 1887, he met her at Norwood. She as usual asked him to stop; all seemed familiar as if he had known them all his life. He spent holidays at Lansdowne Road house, working as was possible. In July 1889 he came to work under Blavatsky for good, giving up all else. Since then, there he has been, and there he also lost that great and good friend whom to know was to admire and revere. No more can be said, as life is all before him, and perhaps he is destined to work long and well for the old T.S.

Mead is strong in word and manner; his eye is bright, clear, and sincere; his voice not unusual; his devotion undoubted. About the medium height, he is built for work and to last. All that we sorrowfully confess is that his hair is just beyond the auburn, like some sunset afterglow.



## Boris de Zirkoff on George Mead

From *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (BIBLIOGRAPHY) XIII pp. 393-97.

Born at Nuneaton [England], March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1863, son of Colonel Robert Mead, H.M. Ordnance, and Mary. Educated at Rochester Cathedral school, (Mr. Langhorne) and St. John's College, Cambridge, B.A., 1884, and M.A., 1926. Shortly after graduating with honours, Mead joined the Theosophical Society, and in the same year began teaching at a public school, 1884. He had begun the study of mathematics at Cambridge, but soon changed to the classics, gaining a knowledge of Greek and Latin, which was to be an asset in forthcoming years. About this time he read *Esoteric Buddhism* and became associated with Bertram Keightley and Mohini Chatterji; then followed an intense interest in Hinduism, developed by studying philosophy at Oxford, and curiosity regarding spiritualism causing a brief stay at a French university at Clermont-Ferrand. He first met Blavatsky in 1887:

“When I first went to her to work permanently (1889), I was a young man of whom she practically knew nothing, except that from May 1887 . . . when she returned to England for the last time, I spent no little of my holidays in visits to Maycott, Upper Norwood, and to 17 Lansdowne Road, Bayswater. Nevertheless, with childlike confidence, and with one of those large and eccentric gestures of hers, she handed over to me at once the keys of her desk and bookcases and tossed over, unopened, her voluminous correspondence, bidding me answer it as best I might (and “be d \* \* d”), as she wanted all her time for writing her articles and books . . .”

Mead remained her private secretary for the last three years of her life, while in forming the European Section of the Theosophical Society, he was its General Secretary beginning July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1890. Within a year, Blavatsky had passed away, and Mead in company with Annie Besant took over as editors of *Lucifer*, begun by Blavatsky in 1887. Besides his other duties,

Mead's career as an author began with his first publication, *Simon Magus*, an Essay, 1892.

With Mrs. Besant he also edited a collection of Blavatsky's miscellaneous papers, which was issued as “Volume III” of the *Secret Doctrine*, Adyar, 1897;

*Theosophical Glossary*, 1892;

*Key to Theosophy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1893;

*Five Years of Theosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1894;

*A Modern Panarion*, 1895;

*Lucifer* continued until 1898 (Vol. XXI) when it was succeeded by *The Theosophical Review*, edited solely by Mead.

In 1899 he married Laura Mary Cooper, sister of Mrs. Cooper-Oakley (who authored *Le Compte de St. Germain*), and daughter of Frederick Cooper, I.C.S.<sup>1</sup> She lived until

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<sup>1</sup> [Indian Civil Service]

1924. Also during that period he was vice president and later president of the Blavatsky Lodge, London. He continued to edit *The Theosophical Review*, contributing many articles and reviews, of the latter there were about 18 in *Lucifer*, and 45 in *T.R.*<sup>1</sup>

About this time began the prominence of Mr. Leadbeater as his many writings were published, and increasing numbers were drawn into the society by his views, and by his references to his “psychic” experiences, which views were not always shared by earlier members.

At the beginning of 1906, grave charges were brought against C.W. Leadbeater by several scandalized mothers in the U.S.A., whose young sons had been taught certain morally oblique practices. After a great deal of publicity and legal action by the distraught mothers, a Judicial Committee was convened by Col. Olcott. The evidence being clear and incontrovertible against Leadbeater, his resignation from the Theosophical Society was accepted to close the matter.

In May 1908, a new phase of the above-mentioned events cropped up, when Dr. Weller van Hook, General Secretary of the American Section wrote an Open Letter to his Section defending Leadbeater’s position and ideas.

A large number of members in the then British Section were deeply concerned over the state of affairs, and the Annual British Convention in July 1908, carried a resolution requesting the President and General Council of the T.S. to put an end once for all to this matter. After full deliberation, the President and the Council “saw no reason why Mr. Leadbeater should not be restored to membership.” Whereupon upwards of 700 members in England resigned from the Society. Mead of course, was one of them. In a Valedictory published in the February 1909, issue of *The Theosophical Review* (No. 258), he bid farewell to his readers, as Editor of the Review, specifically stating that he had lost confidence in the President and its chief Officials.

About 150 of the dissidents and some 100 others who approved, joined together to found the Quest Society and to publish a new journal with the title of *The Quest*. *The Quest*, a quarterly review, began in October 1909, and continued with Mead as editor until it ceased publication in 1930. It attracted many serious scholars who contributed valuable articles considered as source material today. Mead carried on these activities despite severe financial difficulties for 21 years, finding time to work for the welfare of Indian students as Secretary of the Northbrook Society. The financial reverses of 1929–30 spelled an end to the Quest Society, but he became active in the newly formed Society for Promoting the Study of Religions, becoming a member of its council. His last public appearance was at a meeting of The Royal Asiatic Society, where he delivered a lecture on the Mandaeans, a subject with which he was on the most intimate terms, as shown by the many articles appearing in *Quest*. He died September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1933 at the age of 65, after returning from a holiday in bad health. Of all the members of the Theosophical movement throughout the years, G.R.S. Mead was one of the few true scholars to emerge. His studies bearing upon the origins of Christianity constitute the only real bridge between early Gnosticism and the

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<sup>1</sup> [*Theosophical Review*]

philosophy of the Mandaeans, with what has come to be called “Christianity” in this century. A collection of all of his works would fill several volumes, and provide students with an invaluable aid for research. John M. Watkins, his literary executor found no papers in his estate.

Some of the chapters on various subjects contained in Mead’s published works appeared at first in one or another of the magazines of which he was the Editor. After some editing, revising and sometimes augmenting the text, they were incorporated into the MSS. of his published works. The list of the latter is quite imposing. We mention them in a chronological sequence:

- 1 “Among the Gnostics of the First Two Centuries,” *Lucifer*, Vols. XIX and XX, December 1896 through August 1897. Marked as “to be continued,” but no continuation [became] available.
- 2 *Simon Magus. An Essay.* London, Theosophical Publishing Society, and *The Path*, New York, 1892; 91pp. Printed at the H.P.B. Press. Valuable analysis of the Source Material. (Paper covers)
- 3 *Select Works of Plotinus.* Thomas Taylor; 1817. Edited with Preface and Bibliography by G.R.S. Mead. London. G. Bell & Sons, 1895; lxxiv + 343pp.; no index. Bohn’s Philosophical Library. Also 1914, in Bohn’s Popular Library. Also 1929.
- 4 *The World-Mystery.* Four Comparative Studies in General Theosophy. London & Benares, Theosophical Publishing Society, 1895; 200pp. Index, Second ed., 1907. Originally appeared in *Lucifer*.
- 5 *The Upanishads.* Translated into English with a Preamble and Arguments by G.R.S. Mead and Jagadīsha Chandra Chattopādhyāya. Two small volumes. London, Benares, Madras, Theos. Publishing Society, 1896; 137pp and 98pp., respectively.
- 6 *Pistis Sophia.* A Gnostic Gospel . . . for the First time English ed. from Schwartz’s Latin Version of the only known Coptic MS. and checked by Amélineau’s French version. Valuable Introduction and Bibliography. London & Madras, Theosophical Publishing Society, 1896; xlv + 394pp.; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. rev. with annot. bibliography, 1921.
- 7 *Orpheus.* 1896; 208pp. Copious Bibliography. Second ed., London, J.M. Watkins, 1865.
- 8 *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten* London & Benares. Theosophical Publishing Society, 1900; xxviii + 630pp.; extensive Bibliographies. Second edition: University Books, New Hyde Park, N.Y. With Introduction by Kenneth Rexroth; lxvii + 633pp. Copious Index.
- 9 *Apollonius of Tyana*, the Philosopher-Reformer of the First Century A.D. A critical study of the only existing record of his life, *etc.* London & Benares, Theosophical Publishing Society, 1901; 159pp.; Bibliography. Second ed., University Books, New Hyde Park, N.Y., 1966. Foreword by Leslie Shepard; xxii, 168pp.; *New Index.*

- 10 *The Gospel and the Gospels*. A Study in the most recent results of the lower and the higher criticism. London, Benares, Theosophical Publishing Society, 1902, 215pp.
- 11 *Did Jésus Live 100 B.C.? An Inquiry into the Talmud Jésus Stories, the Toldoth Jeschu, etc.*, London & Benares, Theosophical Publishing Society, 1903; xvi + 440pp.
- 12 *Thrice-Greatest Hermes*. Studies in Hellenistic Theosophy and Gnosis. Vol. I — Prolegomena; xvi + 481pp.; Vol. II — Excerpts and Fragments; xii + 371pp. Copious Index. Vol. III — Sermons; xi + 403pp. London & Benares, Theosophical Publishing Society, 1906.
- 13 *Echoes from the Gnosis*. Twelve small booklets entitled: I. The Gnosis of the Mind. II. The Hymns of Hermes. III. The Vision of Aridaeus. IV. The Hymns of Jésus. V. The Mysteries of Mithra. VI. A Mithraic Ritual. VII. The Gnostic Crucifixion. VIII. The Chaldaean Oracles, i. IX. The Chaldaean Oracles, ii. X. The Hymn of the Robe of Glory. XI. The Wedding-Song of Wisdom. XII. The Words of Heraclitus. London & Benares, 1908, etc. Averaging about 100pp.
- 14 *Some Mystical Adventures*. London, John M. Watkins, 1910; 303pp. *Quests Old and New*. London, G. Bell & Sons, 1913; x + 338pp. Index.
- 15 *The Doctrine of the Subtle Body in Western Tradition*. London, John M. Watkins, 1919; 109pp. Second Impression, 1967.
- 16 *The Gnostic John the Baptizer*. Selections from the Mandaean John Book. London, John M. Watkins, 1924; ix + 137pp.

