

*Tributes to Charles Sotheran,  
Originator of the term Theosophy.*



## Tributes to Charles Sotheran, Originator of the term Theosophy.

A gentleman of broad culture and refinement,  
profound learning, and noble character.

By **Laura C. Langford-Holloway** and **Boris de Zirkoff**.

From *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (BIBLIOGRAPHY) I pp. 525-28.

**C**HARLES SOTHERAN: Author, Bibliographer, and Scholar, born at Newington, Surrey, England, July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1847; died in New York in 1902. Son of Charles and Frances Elise (Hirst) Sotheran, and relative of the famous London Booksellers of the same name. Educated in England in private schools and St. Marie's College, Rugby. Married Mrs. Alice (Hyneman) Rhine, October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1893. Came to the U.S.A. in 1874, and began reportorial work on the *New York World*. Was literary Editor of the *New York Recorder* and *Star*, and Editor of the *New York Echo*, a short-lived journal which he published for a time. Was connected with Sabin & Sons, Booksellers in New York, in the editing of their journal, *The American Biblioplist*. Later, he was connected editorially with several other journals both in U.S.A. and England. Sotheran was a prominent Mason and representative in U.S.A. of the Swedenborgian Rite. He was the author of the following works:

*Alessandro di Cagliostro, Impostor or Martyr?*, 1875;

*Percy Bysshe Shelley as a Philosopher and Reformer*, New York 1876;

*Horace Greeley, and Other Pioneers of American Socialism*, New York 1892 and 1915;

*The Theatres of New York*, 1893.

Also numerous separate bibliographies.

His rather fiery temperament kept him and his friends in a turmoil. He took active part in the founding of the Theosophical Society [T.S.], but only three months later made some inflammatory speeches at a political street meeting, to which Mme. Blavatsky strongly objected. Sotheran resigned from the T.S. in a huff, but six months

later apologized for various critical and unfriendly remarks he had made, and was reinstated. This episode, however, should not prejudice the reader against Sotheran. He was a remarkable man in more ways than one, and his role in the work of the Society in its early stages of growth should not be judged by the above-mentioned unfortunate episode. We have a source of interesting information about Sotheran as a man and thinker in Mrs. Laura C. Langford-Holloway's<sup>1</sup> account entitled "Helena Petrovna Blavatsky: a Reminiscence," published in *The Word*, New York, Vol. XXII, December 1915, pp. 136-53, wherein she writes as follows:

. . . Knowing as I did of the friendship existing between herself [Mme. Blavatsky] and Mr. Chas. Sotheran, one of the ablest newspaper writers ever in New York, a man of broad culture and a rarely noble character, I have sometimes wondered that her biographers have not manifested more interest in the man and his services to her. Mr. Sotheran was a member of the Rosicrucian Society, a Mason of exalted rank, and a writer versed in the history of all Oriental systems of religious thought. [527] He was the originator of the word "Theosophy," as the name for the new society, and it was he who introduced to Madame Blavatsky the scholarly men whose names are mentioned in connection with *Isis Unveiled*. He was the most influential champion Madame Blavatsky possessed while living in New York, and he was an ideal friend — royally true and unvaryingly helpful. He was eager that she should be identified with the circle of literary people about her, for he felt a real admiration for her great mental ability, and desired that others should appreciate her. A spirit of self-depreciation that decreased her influence, he had noted, and this he tried to help her overcome. It was a defect in her character, this tendency to underrate her ability, and he urged her to combat it. He had little success in this effort, for she cared not at all for her accomplishments and only sought recognition in her occult work.

It was often asserted — on what basis of proof I never knew — that Mr. Sotheran was acquainted with one, at least, of the Brotherhood of Adepts, and was, in some way, identified with their broad aims for the betterment of the race. And it was generally understood that he had met Madame Blavatsky abroad, and knew of the task she was undertaking in this country. He, at least, held an exalted view of her genius, and urged her to write, and deprecated her interest in religious "fads" as he characterized spiritism. He opposed public *séances* in an uncompromisingly bitter way. So strong was his hostility to the subject, that he would never engage in conversation on it, or kindred themes. Nor did he ever concur in the claim that Madame Blavatsky's position required that she should investigate the matter thoroughly.

His attitude was that she was a genuine occultist, with reasonable powers of mind, and had been trained to use them. And he often asserted that occultism was a noble study, and one about which the West did not know anything whatever.

The services of this man to the Theosophical Society in its beginnings have never been justly recognized. He was a helper, without whom the work of society

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<sup>1</sup> [1848-1930)

organization, of research work in connection with *Isis Unveiled*, of securing a publisher for this work, and then of having it properly placed before the public, would not have been half so efficiently performed.

Mr. Sotheran knew New York, and had a position among men that was unique. His life was singularly free of entanglements; he was most fortunately situated to enjoy his advantages [528] as a man of great ability and attainments, of ample financial resources, a bachelor, and one of a group of New Yorkers who lent character and dignity and prestige to the best circle of society.

He was an admitted occultist, but was opposed to the prominence given [to] occult phenomena on the ground that it could but add to the burdens imposed by the ignorant upon those who demonstrated laws they could not master. And he deplored the tendency of many about Madame Blavatsky to have her become the miracle-worker of the age. He spoke of her intellectual ability as of far greater value to the new Society than any mere psychic power she possessed, and he tried to counteract the influence of those who, appreciating her less, would have had her waste her time upon phenomena. A wise friend he was, and a true prophet, for he counselled her to discourage those who expected her to entertain them with signs and wonders, and to insist upon the serious study of the hidden forces of nature . . .

This description, while showing ignorance of certain facts, which pertain to the orders received by Mme. Blavatsky from her Superiors to work for a time with the outward Spiritualistic Movement, gives nevertheless an interesting picture of Sotheran's many-sided character and should be recorded here for posterity.

BORIS DE ZIRKOFF

*Compiler and Editor of H.P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*



## Suggested reading for students.



- BLAVATSKY ABOUT TO UNVEIL ISIS
- BLAVATSKY DEFENDS ISIS UNVEILED
- PAGES FROM ISIS UNVEILED

— *in our Blavatsky Speaks Series.*

- ISIS UNVEILED IS A TREASURE OF LIGHT.
- ISIS UNVEILED IS THE MAJESTY OF TRUTH UNVEILED

— *in our Theosophy and Theosophists Series.*



### **From our Theosophy and Theosophists Series.**

- A DEBT OF GRATITUDE TO LORD LYTTON
- A LAY CHELA ON OCCULT STUDY
- A LAY CHELA ON THE SECRET DOCTRINE
- A THEOSOPHICAL LOVE FEAST IN FRANCE
- A THIRSTY HORSE-LEECH PLEADING ADMISSION TO THE T.S.
- ALETHEIA IS OUR GOD AND DOGMA
- ANCIENT ETHICAL WORSHIPS
- ARCHAIC THEOSOPHY IS PRE-BUDDHIST WISDOM-RELIGION
- BLAVATSKY DEFENDS BLAVATSKY
- BLAVATSKY DEFENDS THE KEY TO THEOSOPHY

**THEOSOPHY AND THEOSOPHISTS SERIES**  
**SUGGESTED READING FOR STUDENTS**

- BLAVATSKY ON ANNA KINGSFORD
- BLAVATSKY ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SOUL AND SPIRIT
- BLAVATSKY ON THE ORIGIN AND SOURCE OF THE SECRET DOCTRINE
- BLAVATSKY ON THE THEOSOPHY OF DR. N.I. PIROGOV
- BLAVATSKY ON THE TRAVELLING TRUTHSEEKER
- BLAVATSKY ON THE VEILED PHRASEOLOGY OF THE PURANAS
- BLAVATSKY REFUTES ARGUMENTS AGAINST THEOSOPHY
- BLAVATSKY REFUTES THE ASSERTIONS OF A FRENCH THEOSOPHIST
- BLAVATSKY'S OPEN LETTER TO FELLOW THEOSOPHISTS
- BUCK ON THE NATURE AND AIM OF THEOSOPHY
- COLD METAPHYSICS VERSUS DIVINE WISDOM
- CONDUCT AND DUTIES OF A TRUE THEOSOPHIST
- CORY'S ANCIENT FRAGMENTS (1832)
- COSMOPOLITANISM IS FAR HOLIER AND NOBLER THAN GRASPING GREEDINESS CLOAKED IN PATRIOTISM
- DE ZIRKOFF ON CHARLES JOHNSTON
- DE ZIRKOFF ON EDWARD DOUGLAS FAWCETT
- DE ZIRKOFF ON FRANZ HARTMANN
- DE ZIRKOFF ON GERALD MASSEY
- DE ZIRKOFF ON HP BLAVATSKY COLLECTED WRITINGS
- DE ZIRKOFF ON SUBBA ROW
- DE ZIRKOFF ON THE COUNTESS OF CAITHNESS
- DE ZIRKOFF ON THE DREAM THAT NEVER DIES
- DE ZIRKOFF ON THE SECRET DOCTRINE
- DE ZIRKOFF ON THE SIBYLLINE ORACLES
- DE ZIRKOFF ON THE THIRD VOLUME OF THE SECRET DOCTRINE
- DE ZIRKOFF ON THREE EMINENT THEOSOPHISTS
- DE ZIRKOFF ON WILHELM HÜBBE-SCHLEIDEN
- DE ZIRKOFF RECALLS HIS FORMATIVE YEARS IN RUSSIA
- EARLY THEOSOPHICAL DOCTRINES EXPOUNDED BY H.P. BLAVATSKY
- EASTERN LIGHT SHINES ON WESTERN MINDS
- EASTERN THEOSOPHY IS NEITHER A CREED, NOR A RELIGIOUS BODY
- ESOTERIC BUDDHISM HAS RENDERED PRECIOUS SERVICE BY POPULARIZING, IN ESOTERIC FORM, ESOTERIC TRUTHS.



**THEOSOPHY AND THEOSOPHISTS SERIES**  
**SUGGESTED READING FOR STUDENTS**

- ESSENTIAL THEOSOPHICAL DOCTRINES
- GLIMPSES OF THE FATHOMLESS MYSTERIES OF ZOROASTER
- HARTMANN ON HOW TO ENTER THE PATH TO INFINITE LIFE
- HARTMANN ON THE HARMONICAL SOCIETY
- HOW THEOSOPHY REKINDLED TRUE BROTHERHOOD IN INDIA
- HUMANITY SEEMS TO PROGRESS BY INVENTING ONE DISCOVERY AFTER THE OTHER
- IMPORT AND POTENCY OF NUMBERS AS SYMBOLS
- IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT
- ISIS UNVEILED IS A TREASURE OF LIGHT
- ISIS UNVEILED IS THE MAJESTY OF TRUTH UNVEILED
- JUDGE AND DE ZIRKOFF ON GEORGE MEAD
- JUDGE ON THE HEART DOCTRINE
- JUDGE ON THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT
- JUDGE ON THE TRUE THEOSOPHIST'S PATH
- JUDGE ON THEOSOPHICAL STUDY AND WORK
- KEYS TO THE MYSTERY LANGUAGE
- LET THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY PERISH, THAN FORSAKE THE CAUSE OF TRUTH
- MEDITATION ALONE WILL NOT LEAD TO THEOSOPHIC DEVELOPMENT
- MYSTERIES ARE SACRED TRUTHS
- MYSTERY IS NOT UNREVEALED KNOWLEDGE
- NO THEOSOPHICAL JOURNAL CAN SATISFY ALL CREEDS AND BELIEFS
- OCCULT TRUTH IS NATURE WITHOUT THE ILLUSORY VEIL OF THE SENSES
- OUR GOD IS HUMANITY AND OUR CULT THE LOVE OF OUR FELLOW-MAN
- OUR ONLY DELIVERER AND SAVIOUR
- PLEDGED STUDENTS' PRESCRIBED GUIDE FOR CONDUCT
- PREREQUISITES TO MEMBERSHIP OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY
- PRESIDENTIAL AUTHORITARIANISM IS AN AFFRONT TO BROTHERHOOD
- SPURNED THE SUBSTANCE AND CLUTCHED THE SHADOW
- STUDENTS HAVE A CHOICE OF TWO PATHS
- SUBBA ROW DEFENDS ESOTERIC BUDDHISM
- SUBBA ROW'S ESOTERIC WRITINGS (1895)
- THAT WHICH IS FALSE CAN ONLY BE KNOWN BY TRUTH
- THE ADYAR THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY BELITTLED THE MASTERS

**THEOSOPHY AND THEOSOPHISTS SERIES**  
**SUGGESTED READING FOR STUDENTS**

- THE AIMS AND MISSION OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY FULFILLED
- THE BROTHERS OF THE ROSY CROSS NO LONGER EXIST
- THE CROWN JEWELS OF THEOSOPHY (PHOTO ALBUM)
- THE EMPYREAN PHILOSOPHICAL EXHORTATIONS OF ZOROASTER
- THE POWER OF THE TRINITY OF KOSMOS MANIFESTS THROUGH THE FOUR PRINCIPLES OF MAN
- THE REVIVAL OF EASTERN OCCULT PHILOSOPHY
- THE SUN OF TRUTH FEARS NO LIGHT AND NEEDS NO LIES
- THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IS NOT A NURSERY FOR BUDDING ADEPTS
- THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ARCANES TERMS
- THEOSOPHIA - FOUNTAIN, PERSPECTIVES, PRACTICE (DRAWING)
- THEOSOPHIA: INNER WISDOM
- THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT, THE GREAT MORAL BUT SILENT FORCE
- THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY - ESOTERIC SECTION (LETTERHEAD)
- THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY - MISSION AND FUTURE
- THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY - MONOGRAM 1 (LOGOTYPE)
- THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY - MONOGRAM 2 (LOGOTYPE)
- THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY - OBJECTS AND EARLY ACCOMPLISHMENTS
- THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY - SEAL 1 (LOGOTYPE)
- THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY - SEAL 2 (LOGOTYPE)
- THEOSOPHICAL SYMBOLS (TRUE TYPE FONT)
- THEOSOPHIST IS WHO THEOSOPHY DOES
- THEOSOPHISTS DEFINED ATTITUDINALLY, ETHICALLY, PHILOSOPHICALLY (DRAWING)
- THEOSOPHY AND THEOSOPHISTS
- THEOSOPHY BRINGS THE WISDOM OF LOVE BEFORE THE EYE OF THE SOUL
- THEOSOPHY IS DEEPER MONISM THAN SECULARISM, AND MORE PHILOSOPHICAL
- THEOSOPHY IS RELIGION ITSELF AND SUBLIME CODE OF ETHICS
- THEOSOPHY IS THE PRECIOUS PEARL WITHIN THE SHELL OF EVERY RELIGION
- THEOSOPHY IS THE SCIENCE OF TRUTH AND THE RELIGION OF JUSTICE
- TRIBUTES TO DE ROBIGNE MORTIMER BENNETT
- TRIBUTES TO SIR HENRY MORE
- TRIBUTES TO WILLIAM QUAN JUDGE
- TRUE THEOSOPHISTS ARE ALWAYS UNDER THE MASTER'S EYE



**THEOSOPHY AND THEOSOPHISTS SERIES**  
**SUGGESTED READING FOR STUDENTS**

- TRUTH IS ALWAYS MIXED WITH ERROR AND HINDERED BY TECHNOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE
- TWO JOURNALS DEVOTED TO THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN
- VERNAL BLOOMS BY WILLIAM QUAN JUDGE
- VISTAS OF VIRTUE AND TRUTH
- WADIA'S RESIGNATION FROM THE TS
- WHAT SORT OF MAN THE REAL PHILOSOPHER SHOULD BE?
- WHEN PURE LOVE IS PERVERTED, HUMANITY QUIVERS
- WHO CAN MEND THE BROKEN SOCIETY?
- WHO CAN READ THE RIDDLE OF THE SERPENT?
- WHO SHOULD BE INVITED TO THEOSOPHICAL MEETINGS?
- WHY A BRAHMIN ABANDONED HIS CASTE
- WHY PAGAN SYMBOLISM IS INDESTRUCTIBLE?

