

The Prehistory of an Independent Lodge

The Blavatskian View of the Theosophical Movement, From the 1890s to the Decade of 2020

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H.P. Blavatsky at work in 1887. She worked incessantly, and she was not a “political leader”. Instead of gathering personal followers, she spent the time writing.

1. A Lineage That Is Almost Immaterial

Helena Blavatsky died in 1891, some 16 years after founding the theosophical movement in 1875. Soon the movement got into a *karmic fever* of struggle for power and ended up divided in two larger “families” or groups of theosophical associations.

On one hand, we see the Annie Besant lineage, with some 90 percent of the total number of theosophists worldwide.

On the other hand, the William Judge lineage, with some 10 per cent; and this one subdivided in various groups. Of these, the main ones are the United Lodge of Theosophists, the Theosophical Society of Pasadena, and the smaller Point Loma group.

Therefore, between the years 1890 and the 21st century, almost 100 per cent of theosophists belonged, or belong, to one of the two great families, the Besant block or the Judge block.

The *spiritual emptiness* generated by the absence of Blavatsky is something from which the movement has not recovered yet. Far from it. On the very moment Blavatsky disappeared, various disloyalties started disputing political power, and using false psychic powers as tools to obtain positions of leadership; but not all of them equally lost their good sense.

To begin with, the mistakes made by William Judge and the institutions that seek to follow his steps have been far smaller than the failures produced by Annie Besant and her successors.

On the other hand, there was at least one person, a member of the innermost circle and council of the esoteric school created in London by Helena Blavatsky, who did not abandon any part of the original perspective of the theosophical work. Her attitude and her example are valuable, according to the Independent Lodge of Theosophists. Her name is Alice L. Cleather.¹

At the time of the movement's division, 1894-1895, Alice gave her support to William Judge. When the successors of Judge clearly got away from the original teachings, she stepped aside the movement as a whole - in 1899 - and dedicated herself to studies about the common ground between spirituality and music.

Almost two decades later, when the first signs emerged of a rebirth of respect for Helena Blavatsky and her writings inside the movement, Alice came into action again. Alice had been born under the sign of Taurus and her efforts were not in vain. Some initiatives, small and few in number, were organized against all odds and in the opposite direction to the tides created by the charismatic leaders of the two blocks. The inspiring idea of these hardly material projects seemed eccentric if not extraordinary. The intention was to **clearly follow the teachings of H. P. Blavatsky and the Masters of the Wisdom**. It was to leave aside the supposed clairvoyance and imaginary contacts (verbal and visual) of both Besant and Judge with Mahatmas.²

While not taking into consideration the important initiatives which occurred out of loyalty to Blavatsky **inside** each of the institutionalized blocks of the Movement, let us see now the small independent theosophical projects which were developed with **no corporative commitment to smaller thinkers** - and had no bond of obedience, direct or indirect, to the would-be "political successors" of Blavatsky, like Annie Besant, William Judge and Katherine Tingley.

¹ The fact must be mentioned that Portuguese theosophist Visconde (Viscount) de Figanière, equally a personal friend of Blavatsky and a member of her original esoteric school - although not a part of the Council of the School in London - also ceased to have visible activities in the theosophical movement a short time after HPB's death. However, Figanière seems to have taken no public position regarding the division of the movement, and his withdrawal from visible activities was final. His studies went on. Born in 1827, he died in 1908.

² See the article "**On Contacts With Masters**".

* In the first place, we have the **HPB Library**, formed in 1917 under the inspiration of Alice Cleather. It had at least some degree of activity up to the first years of the 21st century.

* Then there is the **Victoria Theosophical Society - Independent**, from Victoria city, British Columbia, Canada, which declared its independence from the Adyar Society in 1923, and was inspired by the writings of Alice Leighton Cleather.

* Another one is the Blavatsky Association, created by Alice Cleather, William Kingsland and others in London, in 1923, and which was active until the midpoint of the 1940s.

* Finally, the **Independent Lodge of Theosophists, ILT**, formed in 2016 by the members of the previous Portuguese-Brazilian lodge of the United Lodge of Theosophists. The small ILT was created but one year before the completion, in 2017, of the one hundred years' cycle of the foundation of the **HPB Library**. The ILT is structured around its own Library, and is active mainly in three languages, English, Spanish and Portuguese.

Let us look at some more information about the tenuous lineage of independent students of Blavatsky and the Masters, *a lineage that barely touches the physical plane*, and which has so far made a few visible efforts to generate organizations that remain independent from secondary leaders, but try to work in the original direction of the movement, without paying too much attention to the denser world of corporate interests and policies.

2. The Blavatsky Association is Founded in London

Alice Leighton Cleather and William Kingsland led in 1923 the formation in London of the Blavatsky Association, with the aim of celebrating the life and teachings of HP Blavatsky. Founded by 30 people, the Association met weekly to study the works of HPB and the Letters of the Mahatmas.

In its study priorities, the Association anticipated by a century a basic factor in the work of the Independent Lodge of Theosophists.

William Kingsland was born on May 5, 1855 in England. In January 1889 he was elected president of the "Blavatsky Lodge" in London, the lodge in which Helena Blavatsky personally participated. William was also a member of the inner group of the esoteric school created by HPB.

In 1909, it was already clear that in spite of her good intentions Mrs. Annie Besant had unknowingly betrayed ethics. She had abandoned the true teachings and left aside the real Masters of the Wisdom. That year Kingsland withdrew from the Society, along with other prominent Theosophists.³

In the early 1920s, Alice Cleather - a former colleague of Kingsland in the inner group of the Esoteric School - had already published her three books in defense of H.P. Blavatsky and the

³ Read "[An Open Letter to Annie Besant](#)".

original teachings.⁴ Cleather's denunciations about the abandonment of authentic Theosophy and the adoption of "spiritual" illusions and fraud had great impact.



Alice Cleather and William Kingsland (photo) were loyal to the authentic teachings

The new wave of respect for facts and for reality swept away the despondency that had paralyzed loyal souls. Organized illusion was beginning to lose strength. William Kingsland became interested in the work of Alice, who lived in India. The dialogue took place by correspondence. Contacts multiplied and involved several people. On November 13, 1923, the Blavatsky Association was created, with Mrs. Iona Davey as its Secretary.

In addition to studying the Letters from the Masters and Blavatsky's texts, the new Association had a "Committee for the Defense of HPB" which actively confronted the slanders circulated by the Society for Psychological Research. Then, as now, the existence of Blavatsky's works troubled both authoritarian churches and conventional science, whose errors were revealed and discussed by classical theosophy.

The Association founded by William Kingsland and Alice Cleather sought to experience HPB's authentic teachings. It left aside the main factors of the pseudo-Theosophical Society led by Annie Besant: power struggles, the renewed scandals around Leadbeater, campaigns for the return of Christ and interpersonal relationships marked by envy and competition, in which each one tried to look like more spiritual than the other.

In the 1920s, there was a broad worldwide movement aiming at the resurgence of the original theosophy. Its success was partial. The United Lodge of Theosophists, created in California in 1909, defended Blavatsky but also followed the ideas of William Judge (1851-1896). The Blavatsky Association considered that Judge had made serious mistakes. It was necessary to pay attention above all to the teachings of Blavatsky and the Letters from the Masters.

⁴ See the [theosophical books by Alice L. Cleather](#) and other writings by her.

William Kingsland wrote important works.

In 1928, he published “The Real HP Blavatsky”⁵, a book which Boris de Zirkoff, the editor of the Collected Writings of HP Blavatsky in 15 volumes, considers “by far the best survey of H.P.B.’s life and work, written sympathetically by one of her personal pupils.”⁶

There is still a basic tendency in human beings to get carried away by appearances, and to delude ourselves with the “political skill” of leaders who present themselves as charismatic.

In the polarization of the dispute between followers of Besant and followers of Judge, those who studied above all the authentic teaching given to the world by the Masters and Blavatsky were seen as meaningless, and disappeared. Ironically this occurred at the same time that HPB was unanimously recognized as the main founder of the movement and the author of most of the central works of theosophical literature.

Against common sense, corporate politics won the day. Thanks to the logic of convenience, the larger theosophical organizations were structured strictly on the personal ideas of Besant or Judge, which seemed to be fashionable in the middle of a fierce competition for power.

In this context of struggle between two propaganda campaigns, the Association founded by Kingsland and Cleather in London had increasing difficulties and lasted but a few decades.

Nazi-fascism was gaining strength in the 1930s. The world was moving towards the World War II. There was no second generation of Theosophists in the Blavatsky Association, and it ended along with the end of the physical lives of its three main founders. William Kingsland and Alice Cleather died respectively in 1936 and 1938. The Blavatsky Association ceased to exist in 1945, as Ms. Iona Davey approached the end of her incarnation, which occurred in 1946.

Despite its limitations, the work of the Association was a success given the circumstances. It was a pioneering effort made in times when illusion - and illusionists - looked like they would win the day. The Blavatsky Association constituted a small victory in anticipation of a better cycle. It was an inspiring moment of lucidity in the Theosophical movement.

The association founded by Alice Cleather and William Kingsland established a positive historical precedent for the future. The same inner purpose re-emerged in other occasions in the 20th century, and a steep, narrow preparatory path was kept open for the long-term theosophical project.

3. Historical Time: Preparing 2075

For the Independent Lodge of Theosophists, too, Alice Cleather’s view of the movement is an effective indication of the future.

⁵ The book is available [online](#).

⁶ Examine the biographical text on William Kingsland, written by Boris de Zirkoff and published in the volume X of the Collected Writings of HPB, pp. 419-424. Specifically about this book, see the lower half of p. 422. The article by Boris is the source of most information about the Blavatsky Association shared in the present article.

As historical time is slow if compared to the time of personal lives, it is quite acceptable that the movement may need, for instance, 200 years, from its inception in 1875 up to 2075, to duly realize that its associations must be inspired by the teachings of its main founder, rather than by the institutional traditions of other lesser authors and “political” leaders such as Besant and Judge.

It is well known and universally accepted that there is no comparison between the writings of H. P. Blavatsky and the writings of A. Besant or W. Judge. Any comparative analysis is meaningless because of the difference in terms of quality, quantity of writings, and wisdom present in them. The distance is oceanic. HPB worked incessantly, and she was not a “political leader”. Instead of gathering personal followers, she spent the time writing.

Due to the depth of her teachings, is it only logical that the very organizational structure of the movement, its guidelines and its methods, should be built on the basis of the teachings of Helena Blavatsky and the Mahatmas themselves, through their Letters.

The view proposed by Alice Cleather of a theosophical action that is independent of both the lineage of Besant and the lineage of Judge, but follows the direct teachings of the Masters and HPB - with no need for intermediaries - seems to make sense to some students.

Over time, they can grow in number.

While the idea of diversity in the movement is a good one, it is interesting to investigate why exactly the very basic idea of organizing the movement according to the teachings of its main founder and the Letters of the Masters has been suppressed for such a long time.

4. The Feeling of Loyalty and the *HPB Library*

In the period between the 1890s and the first two decades of the 21st century, the two institutionally organized blocks of the movement disseminated the works of HPB and other authors. To some extent, they also stimulated the study of Letters from the Mahatmas, each in their own way. Many of their efforts were valuable. The writings and efforts of Robert Crosbie, John Garrigues, B.P. Wadia, Geoffrey Barborka, Sven Eek, C. Jinarajadasa, Virginia Hanson, Christmas Humphreys, Vic Hao Chin, Jr., Grace F. Knoche, Boris de Zirkoff, Richard Robb, Geoffrey Farthing, Jerome Wheeler and many others have great importance.

However, the two blocks, seen in the organizational and practical dimension, did not give priority to the original teachings. With exceptions - such as the brilliant action of G. Farthing - they did not make self-criticism about the mistakes of the movement. They did not review the history and structure of the movement from the point of view of the authentic teachings. They avoided drawing practical lessons from the false enthusiasm and failures experienced from 1895 to the mid-20th century. The two blocks are still in a phase of decadence, with few signs of a beginning of renewal. In the decorative aspects, however, they seem perfectly updated. The soul is largely missing, and the soul does not obey to bureaucracy, or to propaganda.⁷

⁷ About the rejection of the original and true teaching, see also “[Leaving the Masters Aside](#)”, “[The Making of an Avatar](#)”, “[Racism in the Name of Theosophy](#)”, “[Correspondence With Joy Mills](#)” and “[The Fraud in Adyar Esoteric School](#)”.

In 1917, as we saw above, Alice Cleather established the “HPB Library”. Soon after that the Library would operate in Canada. The project was initially developed by Ms. Hildegard Henderson, who had met Alice in 1910 in London. The name “Library” had a symbolic power. It signaled the fact that the initiative was centered on the teaching, on written works, as opposed to imaginary conversations with Masters.⁸

The method of work of the **HPB Library** is made clear in an article on the life and work of the theosophist Michael Freeman, who was its custodian between 1969 and 1991.

Ms. Joan Sutcliffe wrote:

“Nowadays there is an abundance of gurus, and so-called mystical societies flourish. However, the outlook of the H.P.B. Library is based on the recognition of the uniqueness of the effort made by the Mahatmas through H.P. Blavatsky. It occurred at a particular point in the sidereal cycle, 2,500 years after Buddha, and 5,000 years after Krishna. It had the great and esoteric purpose, not to be repeated until another special cyclic point, of actually opening up to humanity at large the age old secret path to the Masters. The way to initiation was made available to whomever could attain it through the living practice of universal brotherhood.”

Joan continues:

“It was this spirit of the Library that Michael devoted his whole life to preserving. Occultly the Library takes the perspective that, in spite of the failure of the T.S. to live up to its original high purpose, the path to the Masters is always open to the determined and one-pointed individual. Anyone can become a chela at any time in one’s inner self. It means establishing one’s own inner commitment, setting one’s own standards and tests, and most importantly the constant redirection of the will. The key words are ‘in one’s inner self’, for this has nothing to do with the personal self, which must be risen above. This is the hardest task, the work of lifetimes, but the inescapable rule.”

She adds:

“In this connection Michael stressed the necessity of making the concept of brotherhood a practical reality, for in his inmost essence the neophyte is one with all other beings. Having sprung from the One Life, the Whole is contained within him as he is in the Whole. Where one’s life is motivated by compassion for all souls, the personal desires and passions lose their vitality; conversely when detachment is attained one can become a helper of humanity.”⁹

⁸ See the article “The H.P.B. Library”, by John Robert Colombo, in “Fohat” magazine, Canada, Spring 2000 edition, pp. 18-20.

⁹ From the article “Michael Freeman and the HPB Library”, published in the magazine “The Canadian Theosophist”, Toronto, Canada, September-October 1991, pp. 85-87, especially pp. 85-86.

Although tenuous from a material point of view, the HPB Library is one of the movement's most interesting historical experiences. It offers a line of lineage of continuous loyalty to the original magnetism of the teaching given by the Mahatmas themselves.

In 1923, the **Blavatsky Association** was created in London. In the same year, the Victoria Lodge, in the city of Victoria, Canada, declared its independence from the two politically organized blocs of the movement, and adopted the same position as Alice, that is: “**neither Besant nor Judge, but the teachings of the Masters and HPB must be studied**”. The **Victoria Lodge** remains active and independent. Historically, it has always had a close proximity to the **HPB Library**.

Due to the difficult conditions of human karma, the magnetic line of full harmony with the teaching of the Mahatmas is almost invisible. Yet it exists. The fruits of the lucid efforts of Alice Leighton Cleather (1854-1938) constitute **material evidence** that a loyalty to the Masters of the Wisdom is possible. Her efforts are a source of inspiration for the Independent Lodge of Theosophists.

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