

APPENDIX

Richard Hodgson's Attack on Damodar K. Mavalankar

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In its Preliminary Report, the SPR Committee endeavored to arrange the witnesses to Theosophical phenomena into four classes, the First Degree being persons “so deeply involved” in an occult incident “that a doubt of its substantial truth involves doubt of their probity.” In this category were put Madame Blavatsky, Mr. Damodar and “perhaps also Col. Olcott” (Op. Cit. Pp. 13, 15). Later, in a Note on the Coulombs, the Committee observes, “There remains one very important point to notice in the Coulomb letters. Throughout them the only persons implicated in trickery are Madame Blavatsky and the Coulombs. Other Theosophists are dupes. Mr. Damodar figures as a person for whom phenomena must be got up, and Colonel Olcott as a person who must not be allowed access to the ‘shrine’ in Madame’s absence, lest he should examine it too closely. This view, however, is very difficult to reconcile with other evidence before us: since these gentlemen cannot have been dupes in the cause of the Phenomena with which they have been connected, whether these phenomena be genuine or not. (Not especially the various accounts or Mr. Damodar’s ‘astral journeys’ in Appendices I. And III...) (Op. Cit., p. 28).

This situation posed quite a challenge to Dr Hodgson when he sailed for India, but it promised even greater difficulty after January, 1885, when, in the Defence Report of the Committee appointed by the General Council of the Theosophical Society, Mr. Damodar testified, “In July, 1883, Madame Blavatsky went to Ootacamund. During her absence, every week without fail, I used to take out all the things from the shrine and clean it myself from the inside with a towel. I cleaned it several times in the presence of Madame Coulomb and on other

occasions in the presence of others. I used to rub hard the grame with a towel, and, had there been any workable panel at the time, it would not but have moved under the pressure” (Op. cit., p. 101)

How did Richard Hodgson get around this?

In his Report, the agent of the SPR gives 14 numbered “Extracts” purportedly “taken” from letters “among those examined by Mr. Netherclift.” Now, in fact, these “Extracts” represent fourteen of the 15 Blavatsky-Coulomb letters belonging to the initial series published in The Christian College Magazine “exposé”. The only one of the 15 which lacks representation is the 12th in sequence, an innocent message written on the back of a letter from Mrs. Carmichael and said by Madame Blavatsky to be “the only clearly genuine letter of the series” (Complete Works, vi, p. 297). It can be readily understood why anyone endeavoring to discredit Madame Blavatsky by mistaken but honest means in limited space might not think it necessary to quote as pertinent a document such as this; but, while the fact only demonstrates Hodson’s readiness to omit evidence that could not be made to serve the cause against Madame Blavatsky, his other omissions at hand prove something else again.

In all his fourteen “Extracts” taken from the CCM of September 1884, this reporter for the SPR departs from the printed text to omit a sentence or more on only four occasions.

1) In his “Extract” No. 4, Hodgson omits the four lines which in the CCM version follow the pseudonymous signature. Translated these read, “I have dined with the Governor and his First Aide-de-Camp. This evening I shall dine with the Carmichaels. She is crazy about me. Heaven help me!” (Complete Works, vi, p. 305). Why he did not want his readers to have this is easy to understand, for after publication of these lines in the missionary journal at Madras, the Pall Mall Gazette of London printed on October 23, 1884, the following statement among others

given by Mme Blavatsky: “The other letters represent me as having made several specific statements concerning matters of fact which are so obviously false that it is difficult to understand how Madame Coulomb could be so stupid as to impute them to me... I am made to announce as if it were a great thing that I had dined with the Governor. As a matter of fact, I never dined with the Governor, although I was invited—a fact which Mrs. Grant Duff, who is now in London, can verify” (Ibid., p. 310).

Though one or two objections voiced by Madame Blavatsky in this printed interview with the press are admitted by Dr Hodgson in his Report, and then apparently only because he thought he could discredit them (see, e.g., re: “les Maharajas de Lahore ou de Benares”), he did not let his readers know of this criticism; and by this calculated omission one learns that the “investigator” not only undertook to suppress evidence and testimony as it supported Madame Blavatsky when it came from her side, but he was also just as ready to conceal evidence dangerous to Madame Coulomb even if to do so he found it necessary to edit and censor the Blavatsky-Coulomb letters themselves!

2) In his “Extract” N. 5, when quoting from the Blavatsky-Coulomb letter first in the CCM sequence, the letter dealing with the Simla-Bombay cigarette experiment, Hodgson reproduces only five sentences, expurgating the remainder which had appeared in the missionary journal and which consists principally of one or two ambiguous lines together with that part of the letter which must have been genuine and which contains the writer’s statement that at Simla she had seen the cigarette in Bombay “clearly at 3 in the morning.” Certainly this was not the type of claim to pass in private between an impostor and her knowing confederate-in-fraud, nor was it of a kind to induce members of the SPR to think the Blavatsky-Coulomb letters were altogether genuine. So Hodgson, being anxious that his audience should accept these letters and

that Madame Coulomb should have her escape rather than that his readers should have the truth, cut it out.

3) In his “Extract” No. 6, Dr Hodgson omits from the text as printed in the CCM only one line (translated): “Do something for the old man, Damador’s father” (Complete Works, vi, p. 301). At first glance it seems rather curious that he should have gone out of his way to suppress this passage, but on page 309 of this Report, Hodgson enters into the allegation that Colonel Olcott had set abroad some “utterly erroneous ideas concerning the actual facts” in the case of Mr. Damodar and his sacrifice of caste and wealth to follow the Theosophical life. He says, “From evidence I obtained in Bombay from several witnesses, and from a series of documents which I was allowed to peruse by an uncle of Mr. Damador, and which consisted partly of letters written by Mr. Damodar, it appeared that his father had been a member of the Theosophical Society, but that he had resigned all connection with it in consequence of the conclusion he had reached that the founders of the Society were untrustworthy. It was also in consequence of this conclusion that he so earnestly entreated his son (not to ‘revert to his caste,’ but) to give up his connection with Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, or at least to live no longer in the same house with them”.

One would gather that Dr Hodgson seems to have thought it safer to expunge the line from the text of this letter rather than try and adjust his remarks at this point into agreement with the circumstance implied by the passage (viz., that for Madame Coulomb at Theosophical Headquarters, “the old man, Damador’s father” was near at hand, perhaps “in the same house” himself).

4) Dr Hodgson’s remaining suppression of this kind occurs in connection with his second “Extract” and is the most important of the number. In the original as given by the CCM Editor,

this tenth “letter” to his series consists of two parts. It begins, “Ma bien chère Amie,” and the first half or so is written in French and is clearly incriminating-this is what is printed in the SPR Report. But Hodgson thought it wise and prudent to suppress the remainder of this document, the latter portion, which is in English and reads:

“Tell Damodar please, the ‘Holy’ whistle breeches, and St. Poulitice that they do not perfume enough with incense the inner shrine. It is very damp and it ought to be well incensed.”
—H.P. Blavatsky (Coulomb pamphlet, p. 55).

Dr Hodgson records that his “Extract” No. 2 was “written by Madame Blavatsky from Ootacamund to M. and Madame Coulomb at Madras, in July or August, 1883” (Report, p. 211) Hence Dr Hodgson had here the very best kind of evidence, prime documentary evidence which neither he nor Madame Coulomb was in any position to deny or discredit, lending support Mr. Damodar’s contention of January 1885 that in “July, 1883” when “Madame Blavatsky went to Ootacamund” he “in the presence of others” regularly “used to take out all the things from the shrine and clean it myself from the inside with a towel”, etc. The text in English explains why this would be done (“It is very damp...” in “the inner shrine”, i.e., the Shrine proper, the hanging cupboard, not the outer shrine, the surrounding curtained area the shrine room or “Occult Room”), and is itself in the form of an order, delegating this special task not to the Coulombs “confederates” who stood guard over a “conjurer’s box”, but to Mr. Damodar and two other “dupes”!

No wonder Richard Hodgson thought it necessary to suppress this order, an order which bears every stamp of authenticity, even to the signature “H.P. Blavatsky” (one notes that this is preceded by the portion in English, and ellipses marks stand between the two, as though something else had appeared here, something so in conflict with Madame Coulomb’s scheme

that she had to do some editing on her own. This would lead one to conclude that the lines in French with incriminating content were added to an unaddressed note or were inserted above a post script of sorts in an otherwise innocent letter, in a blank space offering room for 3 or 4 lines of forgery, the context proper to the original letter being utilized separately as an innocent introduction to some gorged and incriminating editing elsewhere).

Now obviously if while tending the shrine, Mr. Damodar in the presence of his two colleagues was as he says, to “take out all the things”---all the things”---“from the shrine” to “clean it” (of dampness) “from the inside with a towel,” a mirror would be among “the things.” And if, as Mon. Coulomb claimed, there was a “junction between the two halves of the panel,” it would have been exposed there and then before them all, for again the claim is that this alleged junction “was, he says, hidden from those looking at the inside of the Shrine, by a mirror...”! Likewise, if Mr. Damodar (or his two friends, while assisting him), in cleaning the shrine “from the inside” was to “rub hard the frame with a towel” any such half-panel---not to mention the outer panels---which “could be easily pulled up,” as Madame Coulomb described it, and which must have worked freely and quickly if it worked at all, would have been discovered at the first touch! How was it then that Colonel Olcott---who had stood with Madame Blavatsky for almost ten years through thick and thin---was pictured “as a person who must not be allowed access to the ‘shrine’ in Madame’s absence, lest he should examine it too closely”, but this “conjurer’s box” was left to the attendance of Mr. Damodar---“a person for whom phenomena must be got up” ---and “the ‘Holy’ whistle breeches, and St. Poulitice” who were not even confederates by Madame Coulomb’s account?! Plainly, the unrestrained access granted these three witnesses and the special duties delegated them for the care of the Shrine (cupboard) is the best kind of proof that there was no secret aperture, no sliding half-panel with leather handle, to give Madame

Blavatsky any cause to fear free examination of the Shrine. But Dr. Hodgson, with victory, fame, and domination within his reach, was certainly not going to let the testimony of Mr. Damodar and his friends thwart his ambitions; nor was he about to let a passage in a Blavatsky-Coulomb letter stand in his way. So he simply disregarded Mr. Damodar's assertion as the lie of a confederate of Madame Blavatsky, and he ignored what the others could have added by corroboration; finally, to insure the ignorance of his readers, he simply cut out the dangerous part of this Blavatsky-Coulomb "letter" that part which supported the account of Mr. Damodar.

Having stooped to this kind of fraud and deception, having adopted this kind of chicanery as his primary modus operandi, the agent of the SPR was, of course, much less restrained in what he might claim later. Having in his own peculiar manner done away with the known or prospective testimony of three first-hand witnesses as well as the evidence of his own chief documentary source on such an important issue, we find Dr. Hodgson pretending to "learn from Dr. Hartmann that any thorough examination of the Shrine was prevented by the 'superstitious awe' with which Mr. Damodar regarded it" etc. And to cap this contrived climax, he reported that "Dr. Hartmann finally confessed that 'nobody was allowed to touch that d---- Shrine".

All that need be said here is that the first-hand testimony of Mr. Damodar is much to be preferred over the second-hand testimony of Hartmann or any one else as it might be purportedly quoted by Richard Hodgson without corroboration; and no one will deny that a statement documented as part of the "Blavatsky-Coulomb correspondence" is worth far more in resolving this problem than would be anything Richard Hodgson could possibly have devised.

Thus we see once more that what is omitted from the SPR Report is not altogether omitted by accident or for lack of space. What Dr. Hodgson left out when quoting his 14 "Extracts" from The Madras Christian College Magazine, what he suppressed in these four

instances, was evidence he could not brand as ex-post-facto fabrications or perjured testimony obtained or designed by Madame Blavatsky or Mr. Damodar. Instead, they were parts of the prime evidence offered by his own chief witness; and as potential ammunition for the defence of Madame Blavatsky, as obstacles of imminent peril to his own ambition and scheme, they had at all cost to be got out of sight to make way for Richard Hodgson's own illusionary performances.

Equally apparent as malicious enthusiasm was his singular desire to implicate Damodar as a confederate of Madame Coulomb in what Hodgson imagined---or pretended to imagine---were fraudulent exhibitions of Shrine phenomena at Adyar. Not only did he falsely represent that the discovery of the trick carpentry work in Madame Blavatsky's rooms had been an "exposure' by the Coulombs", Hodgson averred that Damodar was a party to these supposed chicaneries and---in a wild moment of imprudent zeal---he emphasized his certainty on this point by his unique use of dual exclamation points, ridiculing as incredible the idea that "Mr. Damodar, highly-developed Chela of Mahatma Koot Hoomi, remained entirely ignorant!!" of Mon. Coulomb's "hole in the wall immediately behind the Shrine" (Report, p.341).

But alas for all these bold and complacent charges, bolstered by ingenious dissimulation. Madame Coulomb---who, if we are to believe Hodgson, was the best authority on the matter---candidly relates that, far from knowing Damodar to be such a conspirator, she and her husband were fearful lest Damodar expose the "trap-doors" should they be revealed to him. To this, her husband adds his own confession: "it was only on the morning of the 16th May that I confessed to Mr. Damodar the existence of the trap-doors (as can be seen by his affidavit), and this confidentially" (Coulomb pamphlet, 2nd ed., p.92). In his uncontested affidavit (printed on page 106 of the same pamphlet), Damodar shows that instead of believing him to be a confederate who knew about these things, "Mr. Coulomb called me aside, and said he wanted to talk to me

privately, as he to communicate a great secret. He asked me whether I was a friend of Madame Blavatsky, and whether I would promise secrecy in regard to what he was going to tell me. He then said that there was a secret passage behind the 'shrine,' and that he therefore would not give up the keys to Madame Blavatsky's room."

But Damodar did not prove to be the kind of "friend of Madame Blavatsky" who would connive at fraud or condone "a secret passageway" even it was revealed as "a great secret" of hers. So the same day (his affidavit begins, "This morning Mr. Coulomb called me aside" etc.) he himself exposed this "great secret", and, sadly remarks Madame Coulomb, "as a reward for the confidential communication made by my husband to Mr. Damodar on the morning of the 16th, we received the following notice...:" (a "NOTICE" given by T. Subba Row, as "Vakil, High Court, Madras", charging the Coulombs with spreading statements "defamatory in their character, and fully calculated to injure the reputation of the Society and the Members thereof, intending thereby to harm, or knowing or having reason to believe, that such imputations will harm the reputation of the Society and its members"---"an offence punishable under Section 500 of the Indian Penal Code"---, demanding that the Coulombs "give a satisfactory explanation of" their "conduct with respect to the allegations aforesaid within 24 hours from the receipt of this notice", or "such proceedings, both criminal and civil, will be taken" against them "as may be considered proper under the circumstances").

As a consequence of Damodar's revelation of this "great secret", the Coulombs received on the following day a notice to leave the premises, and from Madame Blavatsky orders were received by telegraph for the Coulombs "to give up the keys", authorizing Dr. Hartmann to have " 'exclusive' possession of her rooms", the rooms which housed Mon. Coulomb's "sideboard aperture" and other trick machinery. "Accordingly," Madame Coulomb relates, "in the

afternoon my husband went up to deliver charge of Madame's apartment to Mr. Damodar..."
And so resulted the "exposure".

Not only did Richard Hodgson, master of illusion, falsely and brazenly misrepresent before the world the real course of events, the true relation of the principals, and especially the first-hand testimony of Mme. Coulomb herself, concerned with this "exposure" of May, 1884, but he completely suppressed the documents cited and published as well as the explanations given here by his chief witness (and her husband)---documents and explanations which prove his allegations against Damodar K. Mavalankar to be fundamentally and particularly false and extraordinarily deceitful!

As a result of these monumental dissimulations, the Society for Psychical Research, for seventy-three years, has remained ignorant of the truth that, on uncontested evidence and by testimony they are in no position to impeach, public evidence and testimony that has all this time been available to them, not only was Mr. Damodar not a party to the Coulomb conspiracies, but when the "great secret" of Monsieur Coulomb was revealed to him privately he is shown to have been so shocked and angered that, the very same day and apparently without any hesitation or urging whatsoever, he himself directly deliberately precipitated the exposure by being the first to tell the Theosophists of the claim there was "a secret passage behind the 'shrine'", a disclosure that led quickly to the expulsion of the two conspirators and the revelation of their secret handiwork!

So, we see that far from founding his case on available testimony and facts, far from considering all of the evidence or even the most important parts of the evidence in his possession, far from being willing that his readers should have a good look at the truth of the matter, Dr. Richard Hodgson first of all wanted by fair means or foul to destroy Madame

Blavatsky and all that supported her. And he was ready and eager to undertake this even when to do so he had to ignore and suppress the testimony of firsthand witnesses for the Theosophical cause, even when he had to ignore, suppress, or contradict evidence of the Blavatsky-Coulomb letters, and even when he had to hide and misrepresent the word of the Coulobms themselves.

Having by such means “exploded” Madame Blavatsky, her fellow witnesses, and her “occult” phenomena, this darling of the SPR rode on, high on the crest-wave of his newly-found fame and authority, on to even greater triumphs, unquestioned and unsuspected, leaving behind him a wake of pretty pretensions and the rotten bilge of his own deceit. After his sudden and premature death in December 1905, he was posthumously honored by being the first Psychological Researcher in history to have a University endowment fund established in his name, the “Hodgson Fellowship in Psychological Research” at Harvard. One may contrast the regards thus paid to him with the considered judgement of the present critic of Madame Coulomb’s charges, who, in 1947, after referring to this SPR investigator’s remarkable mal-observations and marvelous lapses of memory---derelictions errantly set up as proofs against Madame Blavatsky-- -, alluded to his many important contradictions of evidence and fact and condemned his “profound and gross incompetence.”

But ten additional years of research, discovery and study have led to a radical revision of this viewpoint. For now at last one discerns that, by reason of their multiplicity, uniformity, magnitude, coherence and implication, these “mal-observations” and “lapses of memory” indicate less of a mental than of a moral instability. Whatever one may think of the actions and pronouncements of the Committee appointed by the Council of the Society for Psychological Research “to investigate the phenomena connected with the Theosophical Society”, it is no longer possible to imagine that Richard Hodgson did not know what he himself was doing.