

H.P.B. BY ONE WHO KNEW HER

(There are at the Theosophical Headquarters only three left who had any contact with H.P.B. One is Mr. G. Soobiah Chetty and another myself. My contact was brief, as I saw her only twice as a boy when C.W. Leadbeater went to call on her in London and I accompanied him. The third resident, M. Subramania Iyer, for many years a prominent theosophical worker in Burma, had a glimpse of her as a boy of twelve. Colonel Olcott and H.P.B. left the train at Chingleput on their journey from South India to Madras. By invitation of a public committee the two Founders left the train and were taken in procession. The boy Subramanian had heard of the two strange white visitors and so was in the procession and saw H.P.B. Some two hours later the Founders continued their journey to Madras.

But Mr. Soobiah Chetty as a young man saw H.P.B. constantly during the three years of her residence at Adyar. He is still living at the Theosophical Headquarters. Though unable to be present at the White Lotus Day celebration, he sent the following message. - C. Jinarajadasa.

After his return from Guntur and Nellore in 1882, Colonel Olcott expressed his intention of changing the Headquarters of the Theosophical Society from Bombay to Madras. A few friends of Madame Blavatsky soon collected a sum of money and the house, "Huddleston Gardens," which was the old name of the Headquarters, was purchased. In connection with the selection of the place, I desire to say that when within a few days of her arrival in Madras, H.P.B. came to look at the place, she suddenly said: "Master says, 'Buy this place'." H.P.B. always acted under the direction of her Master.

In this place H.P.B. lived and labored from 1882 to 1885, when she left for Europe. She always rose early and set to work immediately. She was a tireless worker.

I recall her massive head and I remember its remarkable size and shape. I also remember the steady penetrating gaze of her eyes. She would open her mouth and eyes wide and laugh with the innocence and naturalness of a child.

It was sometimes said that she was an eccentric woman. I do not agree. Whatever took place in or about her was beyond doubt out of the normal, and she was most undoubtedly endowed by nature with psychic powers which she controlled. I do not also agree that she was ill-tempered as was frequently alleged. There was nothing violent or brutal in her and any quick change in her was a consequence of her long and intense previous occult training. It was also frequently alleged that she was a credulous woman. I again say that it is wrong. Credulous she was not, and she was not a fool either. She felt that it was undignified and unspiritual to suspect a fellow-being.

Every line of her face was instinct with power. Her every action proclaimed it. When she brought the two palms of her hands together and bent them so as to form a cup, a loud explosion was heard; musical bells rang clearly in the rooms in which she happened to be; voices were heard; and missives dropped from above. All these happenings were spontaneous.

As far as I knew, her only enemies were the Christian missionaries and their tools and sympathizers. Her hatred of Christian dogma and ecclesiasticism was twisted and misrepresented as a hatred of the ethics of Christ or of the Christian religion itself. It was as false as it was wrong. She hated religious dogma and ecclesiasticism unreservedly and universally. It just simply happened that the Church which gave itself superior airs received a more devastating exposure than any other institutional religion.

There are two important features of her life and character and disposition that I would like to lay great stress on. Her devotion to her Master, and her abiding faith in His benevolence and guidance, were the most conspicuous among her numerous virtues. She did not take any credit at any time to herself, it was always the Master in her thoughts or in her words and acts. The other feature is her overwhelming sense of Universal Brotherhood. It was from the precept and practice of it that she forgave most freely and wholeheartedly men and women who slandered her.

I appeal to you to cultivate equal faith in the Masters who watch over us all, and to practise Brotherhood in an equally efficient manner. We talk of Brotherhood but most of us like to choose our friends. We talk of democracy, but what can be more democratizing than Universal Brotherhood? The democracy of politicians and statesmen is tribal or national, but the Universal Brotherhood of the Theosophical Society is democracy in the truest and highest sense of the word. -
From The Theosophist for June.

The Purchase of Adyar Headquarters: A Reminiscence of H.P.B.

By G. Soobiah Chetty

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One evening in April, 1882, as I was returning from office, I noticed a large crowd near Pachiappas. There were many carriages waiting, amongst them was my father's also. On enquiry I learnt that a lecture was to be delivered by an American gentleman on "The Common Foundation of Religions". My father's presence assured me that the lecture must be worth hearing. I made up my mind to have the benefit of it. Though the crowd was "crushing," I managed to secure a position sufficiently good to hear every word spoken. The lecture was, as I expected, very interesting and illuminating. H. P. B., some time after, told my father that parts of it had been dictated by one of the Masters.

On returning home, I found that my father was one of the few who had invited Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky to Madras, to form a branch of the Theosophical Society in this city. My father's permission having been obtained, my brother and I put in our applications for membership the next morning (27-4-1882). There were already over 20 applications received. Next evening, while addressing the applicants, Colonel Olcott made a reference to the Great White Lodge and said that, within a hundred miles of Madras, there lived One of this august Fraternity.

Three days after, my father directed my brother and me to go to Tiruvellum to make proper arrangements for the reception of the founders and the few friends who had been selected to accompany them. The object of the visit, we were told, was to pay respects in person to the Master who lived somewhere near this village. On the morning of the Sunday following they all arrived. A procession with music escorted H. P. B. and H. S. O. to the place assigned for their lodging. We waited for some time to be told when to get ourselves ready to go to the Ashrama, but to our disappointment we were told, after a long waiting, that we could not go, as the Great Ones do not appear before a crowd of layman, like ourselves. It was afterwards rumoured that only H. P. B. and Subba Row, had the privilege of going there. Even Colonel Olcott could not go.

At about five o'clock in the evening, H. P. B. came out. We walked around the village and a visit to the Old Temple was proposed. It is on a river bank. H. P. B. said it is an historic one, and is likely to become a centre of learning at some future time. It was a fine moonlight evening. We sat on the river bed, which was quite dry, till about 8 p.m. H. P. B. talked about several matters, her talks were very interesting. We dispersed to meet again at 10 p.m. We met in the open veranda in front of the lodging. A discussion arose as to who should be chosen to take up the presidency of the Madras Branch, when suddenly H. P. B. got up and held Subba Row's two hands in hers. There was silence, for a few minutes; then

a rustling noise like the moving of a paper was heard; we then noticed a paper falling from the roof.

It was a Communication from Master M., I read it: I do not remember now the exact words; but there was a reference in it to Dewan Bahadur Naghanadhan Row, who was afterwards elected President of the Madras Branch.

We returned to Madras the next morning [Monday].

On the Wednesday following, H. P. B. drove into town; she met me while passing in Mount Road; she stopped her carriage, as I also mine. I got down immediately and went to her. She told me that she was leaving for Nellore and Guntur on Saturday, and desired me to accompany her. I said it might be difficult for me to obtain leave and that my going would depend upon this contingency. She insisted on my going and said it was Master's wish. I applied for leave the next morning and it was refused, and I communicated this to her and not having heard from her till Saturday morning, I thought I was not wanted. No, it was to be otherwise. She, on her way to the Boat Basin station - where a boat was waiting to take her to Nellore - called on my father and request him not to stand in the way of my going with her. After some hesitation, he yielded and gave his permission. I could not at once go, as I was taking my dinner. H. P. B. left promising to wait for me at the Boat Basin. I left soon after and joined her at about midnight. We sailed within about 15 minutes.

The journey to Nellore was not particularly eventful. We reached Nellore on the evening of the third day. Next morning I was not feeling well, due to want of proper food during the journey. She advised me not to be particular about little things, and suggested that I should go to the well opposite and draw water and pour it over my head. I did as advised, though Colonel Olcott objected. I felt all right soon after.

Colonel Olcott had much writing to do and he was busy at his table. H. P. B. was talking to friends who had come to see her. She wanted to know what date it was. I said a calendar would be helpful. She looked at me for a minute or two; then a noise was heard as if something had fallen from the roof; due to the fall on her table - which was about 15 to 20 feet from where we were talking - of a diary for 1882. I picked it up. She tried to precipitate the name of the person for whom she intended it. She did not succeed.

That evening the Colonel spoke to a small audience on mesmerism. Next day about 40 members were admitted.

As far as I was concerned, this day was rather unwelcome. I received a telegram from my office, directing me to return at once. I telegraphed back asking for permission to resign. It was refused, and the next message was from my father advising me to return and not be foolish. H. P. B. permitted me to return remarking that she would not encourage disobedience to parents.

I returned, but only to get back again as soon as I could. No sooner did I join the office, then I applied for leave; it was granted, but without allowance, and I left Madras that very evening, travelling by train to Renigunta, and thence to Nellore by quick marches. I was in time to join the party of friends, who were preparing to go to Muthukur to meet H. P. B. and H. S. O., who were expected to return from Guntur. She was glad to see me back.

I sat with her while going to our lodging at Nellore, and she related to me what had happened during my absence and made a special reference to a Communication she had received from her Master. Without waiting for her permission, I request Mr. V. V. Naidu to show it to me. He had it in his purse. I was not permitted to see it, nor to know anything about its contents. This was a lesson to me.

While in the carriage, H. P. B. asked me how it had happened that I was able to go to Madras, and come back to Nellore so soon. I told her that I had taken the overland route. We reached Nellore at about midnight.

Next evening a Brahmana Yogi - Brahmananda Swamy - came to see H. P. B. A long conversation was held. He was a good Samskrt scholar, but not an Occultist. We stayed at Nellore for two days. Then we started for Madras not by the Boat Canal, but via Renigunta and thence by rail. We left Nellore after dark. Next morning we had to cross a wide stream; it was dry and the bed was very sandy. The carriages were hard to pull. H. S. O. and I got down from our carriages and helped the coolies to drag H. P. B.'s carriage to the other side. The Colonel remarked that I was responsible for this change of route, and said I should not henceforth sit with her in her carriage, she however heard this and as hitherto, made me sit with her in her carriage. We talked about many matters. Her talks were edifying and I benefited considerably by them.

The conversation turned on the Bombay residence, "Crow's Nest". She said it was a rented house; then I asked her if she would make Madras the Headquarters of the Society, if a suitable place could be secured. She said she would consider my suggestion, and communicate her decision to me after reaching Mylapore.

We reached Renigunta rather late for the train to Madras. We waited till next morning in the station waiting-rooms. At the station an incident happened: H. P. B. came where the scales were and wanted to be weighed. I put weight after weight, she weighed heavier than any and all of them. Then she weighed lighter as weights were removed. We arrived at Madras the next morning by the Bombay mail, where friends were waiting to receive the party.

A meeting of the Madras Branch was called for that evening. The Colonel was asked by H. P. B. to put the proposal regarding the transfer of the Headquarters to Madras. While doing so the Colonel said that if sufficient inducement were offered the proposal could be considered. Three friends came forward, promising to contribute Rs. 250 each in case a suitable place were secured. This was

rather a good start. I was encouraged to go ahead. No time was wasted in making a search and before next evening, I had information about the Huddleston Gardens - Adyar; our Headquarter Bungalow was then known by this name.

Details were then obtained as to the price, owner, etc. It was found that it had been mortgaged for Rs. 7,500. The owner was willing to sell the property for Rs. 1,000 subject to this lien. After the price had been fixed, my brother and I requested H. P. B. and H. S. O. to inspect the property. On the 31st of May, the founders, my brother and myself drove to Adyar. As soon as we reached the main building, H. P. B. got down and went straight upstairs. The rest of us went about inspecting the riverside bungalows, out houses, godowns, etc. H. P. B. after a few minutes, sent for me. I ran up to her; she said: "Soobiah, Master says buy this." Before leaving for Bombay, she was pretty certain that there would be nothing wanting on our part to secure the property for the Society, and see Master's desire carried out.

June and July passed without much being accomplished, though several attempts were made to obtain contributions. I received a letter from H. P. B. in August and I wrote to Mr. Iyalu Naidu to know exactly what he would do. He said he could lend Rs. 3,500 only and the remaining Rs. 5,000 should be secured elsewhere. Mr. Iyalu Naidu a few days later came to see my father and tried his best with his old friend whom he had known for nearly half a century, but with no result.

The parting of the friends was rather unpleasant. A fortnight after, I entreated my father not to let slip a very good opportunity of doing some service. He refused to do anything beyond contributing Rs. 250 towards the purchase. At about three in the morning (the next day) he called me and said he would give me Rs. 1,500 as soon as the day dawned. I could not sleep further, but waited anxiously for the sunrise. He, then, gave this sum with instructions as to how the receipt should be worded. The advance was made and property secured.

On the 17th of November following, the remaining Rs. 7,000 was paid, and the purchase completed. H. P. B. and H. S. O. entered the Headquarters as their permanent abode on the 31st of December, 1882.

Old Diary Leaves

- by G. Soobiah Chetty

[Reprinted from *Adyar Notes and News*, August 9, 1928, pp. 5-6.]

In May, 1882, while returning from the Guntur-Nellore trip [see *The Adyar Notes and Notes*, No. 10], a proposal was made by me to H. P. B. to transfer the Headquarters from Bombay to Madras. She received it well, but Colonel Olcott was not altogether in favor of it. Soon after returning to Mylapore, where the Founders were staying when they first came to Madras to open a Branch there, H. P. B. desired Colonel Olcott to convene a meeting of the Madras Branch, and put this proposal before the members. The proposal was very well received, and Rs. 750 were at once promised. Other contributions were also promised by people outside of Madras. This being a good start, attempts were made at once to find a suitable place. Our present Headquarters, then known as "Huddleston Gardens," was in the market. So, within two days, details regarding the property were obtained. The price required was Rs. 8,500, though the rent that was demanded was as high as Rs. 175 or Rs. 200. The price having been finally fixed, H. P. B. and H. S. O. were requested to inspect the property, and see whether it would meet their requirements. On the Saturday following, the Founders and myself went to the property and inspected it. As the inspection was going on, H. P. B. said: "Subbiah, Master wants this purchased." So there was no further inspection. Mr. Muthiah Pillai, the owner, who was also a dealer in furniture and sundries, was soon seen. He was willing to sell the property for Rs. 1,000 subject to a mortgage on it for Rs. 7,500. The mortgagee, Mr. Aiyaswami Pillai, was then approached. He was willing to continue the mortgage, and was also willing to reduce the rate of interest, if monthly payments were promised. As the interest at 9 per cent per annum was far below Rs. 66, the rent the Founders were paying for the Crow's Nest in Bombay, and as nearly Rs. 1,000 had been promised, the prospects of securing the property for the Society were bright. This was very encouraging, and it was then decided to make the purchase subject to this mortgage. But before leaving for Bombay, H. P. B. said that, as the Master had said that the property should be purchased, it would be better if attempts could be made to purchase the property without any mortgage standing on it. Within a few months, through the help of Mr. Muthuswami Chetty (father of Mr. G. Subbiah Chetty) and Mr. P. Ayyalu Naidu, the sum required for the purchase, namely Rs. 8,500, was fully obtained, and the property was purchased and the sale was completed on November 17, 1882.

On December 31, 1882, H.P.B. and H.S.O. with Bavaji, Damodar and the Coulombs, and Babula (H.P.B.'s servant) arrived in Madras and took up their residence for the first time in a habitation belonging to the Society. Before 1883 was over, the full sum of Rs. 8,500 was contributed by friends all over India, and the Founders then became the absolute owners of the property. H.P.B. brought with her a double-bodied phaeton and an Arab horse, the latter a present from

Damodar's father. A jutka and a pony were soon added. Some years after this, the Arab horse died. Then Col. Olcott purchased a big fine phaeton and a pair of white walers. At the time of Col. Olcott's death, only one of the horses was alive, and that too was too old for work. A. B. who was then in Madras purchased a fresh waler, which died in harness while being driven from Madras to Adyar. There were also two small jutkas and ponies intended for the use of Office assistants and other residents.

The Departments then in existence were the Recording Secretary's Office, and *The Theosophist* Office. Col. Olcott made many improvements to the building. The present lecture Hall was built by adding to the old portico and verandah. Then the Library Building, the Shrine Room, President's Rooms, Office Hall (present Private Secretary's Office) on the first floor were added to the main building. Three cottages for Office Assistants were also constructed. The swimming bath was improved and changed into residential quarters. Mr. Sambiah, who built a cottage for himself, was the Engineer in charge of all constructions.

At the time of the purchase of the property, there were only standing on the plantation a few mango trees and about 23 cocoanut trees. The Colonel planted about 300 cocoanut trees, and 200 of them are now remaining. When Dr. Besant became President many more were added - cocoanut, mango and other fruit trees.

The residents during Col. Olcott's time were Mr. Sambiah Chetty, Mr. K. Hanumantha Rao, Mr. Santhana Iyengar, Mr. Srinivasa Iyengar and Mr. Subramania Iyer (Bhojanasala keeper).

The value of the property at the time of the Colonel's passing away may be fixed at Rs. 25,000. On January 25, 1907, I came to live here as a resident. Soon after the passing away of Col. Olcott, an E. S. Conference was held here. Mr. A. K. Sitarama Sastri, who came for the E.S. Conference, continued his stay, and has since become a very important personage! Dr. Besant wanted to build a small cottage for her use as kitchen and dining room. It is in this cottage that Mr. B. Renga Reddy is now living.

In 1908, Olcott Gardens and Blavatsky Gardens were purchased for Rs. 23,000 and Rs. 40,000 respectively. In 1909, Besant Gardens and Damodar Gardens were also purchased for Rs. 80,000 and Rs. 25,000 respectively. Sometime after, Besant Grove was also purchased.

During Col. Olcott's time, the extent of the Estate was about 28 acres. Now, it is nearly ten times that. The value of the Estate now is about Rs. 500,000.

Reminiscences of H.P. Blavatsky

by G. Soobiah Chetty

[Reprinted from *The Theosophist*
(Adyar, Madras, India), October 1931, pp. 47-49.]

Friends, I will relate to you four or five incidents that came within my knowledge. I had very hard treatment from H.P.B. often; I bore it, knowing what she was. During 1883 or 1884 I used to come here to Adyar every day from my home in Mylapore, spending the night and going away early in the morning. One evening when I came, she was sitting just here. She took my new chaddar, and next morning she did not give it back to me. Next day she had turned it into a blouse, and put it on. I was very pleased, and thanked her for the privilege of using my cloth! That evening she spoke to Bawaji, Damodar and me about the Tibetan Dugpas and Gelugpas. Two days afterwards I met her; she stopped and called me. I was wearing a red turban. She took the turban and threw it down, and said, "Soobiah, I hope you won't wear a red turban again."

One morning I was about to go. She said, "Do not go, I have some work for you." She gave me a lot of papers to copy, twelve sheets of foolscap. I copied it and gave it to her. She looked at it, crumpled it and threw it into the waste-basket. She was in a rage. I went home and to the office, but I couldn't do much, thinking of this incident. At one o'clock it struck me that I had written on both sides of the paper. So I hurried out and copied it all again, writing on one side only, and then gave it to her. "I suppose after this, Soobiah, you won't copy on both sides in case of matter for the press. This is a very good lesson for you, and will make you feel your duty."

The third incident was this: I was the youngest of the lot of her office helpers, and was requested by my friends to ask her an important question. That day she was very kind, and so it was a good time for the question. "Madame," I said, "you preach control of temper, but you go into outbursts now and then." "Soobiah, that is my loss and your gain. If I didn't have that temper, I should have become an Adept by this time."

She went to Ootacamund one summer, and sent for me. I went and stayed seven or eight weeks with her there, living in the same house. One day a European gentleman came to see her and I announced him. She said, "I do not want to see him." Because he was a man of high position, I persuaded her to see him. He asked impertinent questions, and she treated him similarly. When he left, she said, "You had better not bring any more such people to me. He came to examine me and ridicule me. Do not introduce such people."

Another day she gave me letters to post. "Have you any money left?" She asked. "Yes, Rs. 14 or 15," I said. She said, "You can't have any left. You must have spent some of your own money. You are looking thin; your father will think I am

not taking proper care of you." Once when I was in her room in the evening, the Master appeared. I saw His arm materialise as He gave her a paper.

Another incident was in regard to my house in Mylapore. One morning just as I was getting up, a message came to go to her. She said: "Your father wants you, you had better run." I found my father's mother had died just an hour before. Two days after, she asked me the details of the death. She thought her passing away was inauspicious. She suggested that my father and the family vacate the house where we lived, but my father would not go. Fifteen days afterwards she again requested him to vacate the house for seven months or seven weeks. He would not. The result was there were four deaths within eight months in the family. Then my father agreed to go. Just before we left the house, H.P.B. said: "This is more fitted to be a Roman Catholic Church than a residence". The house had to be shut up for a few years. I wanted to sell it at any price. One day a man came and offered Rs. 10,000. He gave me Rs. 1,000 cash; I did not even know to whom I had sold it. It was for a Roman Catholic Convent. A year or two afterwards I went to the house to see it. The Lady Superior showed me round. She took me to the hall where H.P.B. had said this - it was a Roman Catholic Chapel! But she had passed away a year before that, and so I could not write it to her.

April 19-The Founders sail for Madras on board the SS India, arriving the 23rd. Meet for the first time T. Subba Row and G. Soobiah Chetty (ODL., II, 342-43; Ransom; 170; LBS, p. 142; Theos., III, Suppl. to June, 1882, p. 1; G. S. Chetty's recollections in Theos., Vol. XLVII, Meh., 1926, p. 741).

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April 26—H.S.O. delivers his lecture on "The Common Foundation of All Religions," at Pachiappas Hall, Madras. Ace. to H.P.B., parts of it had been dictated by one of the Teachers (ODL., II, 344; G. S. Chetty's recoll. as above).

April 27—Madras Theosophical Society founded, with Divân Bahâdur R. Ragonâth Râo as President, and T. Subba Row as Corr. Sec'y (ODL., II, 343-44; Theos., III, Suppl. to June, 1882, p. 2).

April 30—The Founders in company of some of the newly-admitted Fellows go by rail to Tiruvallam, near Arcot, to visit one of the oldest temples of Southern India. It is likely that H.P.B. saw somewhere in the vicinity one of the Adepts said to live there. Return to Madras next day (ODL., II, 344; Theos., III, Suppl. to June, 1882, p. 2; G. S. Chetty's recoll. as above, p. 742).

April—A. O. Hume publishes Hints on Esoteric Theosophy, No. 1 (Vania, 110).

April—The Sinnetts go to Simla and take up residence at a house called the Tendrills; they are joined after a time by the Gordons (Autobiogr.).

May 3—H.P.B. and H.S.O. start in the evening on their trip up Buckingham Canal in a houseboat, on their way to Nellore and Guntur. They are accompanied by several of the newly-initiated Fellows sailing in a second boat. They reach Nellore on the evening of the third day (ODL., II, 347; Ransom, 170; Theos., III, Suppl. to June, 1882, pp. 2-3; G. S. Chetty's recoll. as above, pp. 743-45) .

May 10—The Founders and their party, after organizing the Nellore Branch, re-embark on the same boats; they disembark at Padagangam, after an unusually fast trip due to favorable winds; from here they travel 55 miles to Guntur, carried in palanquins through some of the most difficult and dangerous terrain, fording streams and evading cobras in a temperature of 100° Fahrenheit. They reach destination at nightfall on the 15th. After an unprecedented reception on the part of the whole population, and the founding of a Branch, the Founders leave Guntur on the evening of the 18th and retrace their way to the Buckingham Canal and Nellore. After a stay of three days, they leave May 27th by bullock-carriages for Tirupati, the nearest railway station some seventy miles off, and return to Madras by rail on May 30th (Vivid description in ODL, II, 345-60, and Theos., III, Supplements to June and July, 1882).

May 31—Date on which the property of Huddleston's Gardens was found, to be used as a new Headquarters for the Theosophical Society. The idea of moving the Headquarters from Bombay to Madras had been suggested by Soobiah Chetty and had already

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been discussed at a meeting of the Madras Branch (ODL., II, 360; G. S. Chetty in Theos., Vol. XLVII, Mch, 1926, pp. 745-46) . The Founders visit the property in company with S. Chetty and his brother. H.P.B. gets an intimation from her Teacher to secure the property (Ibid.; Theos., Vol. L, May, 1929, pp. 117-19).

Nov. 17—Balance of Rs. 7,000 paid by S. Chetty's father to secure the property of Huddleston's Gardens and complete its purchase (S. Chetty's recollections in Theos., Vol. XLVII, Mch., 1926, pp. 746-47) .