

YOU WOULD LOVE HER IN SPITE OF HERSELF

By Henry Steel Olcott

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H.P.B.¹ had one trait of character that has made her memory so precious to most of her former colleagues—winsomeness. She might drive you almost mad with her sayings and doings, might make you feel ready to run as far away from her as possible, yet when she changed from one extreme to the other in her treatment of you—as she would in a flash—and looked and spoke to you with a sort of childlike blandness, your anger would vanish and you would love her in spite of herself.

Moreover, there were special elements about H.P.B. that gave her power over others, *viz.*:

- (a) Her amazing occult knowledge and phenomena-working powers, together with her relation to the hidden MASTERS.
- (b) Her sparkling talents, especially as a conversationalist, with her social accomplishments, wide travels, and extraordinary adventures.
- (c) Her insight into problems of philology, racial origins, fundamental bases of religions, and keys to old mysteries and symbols; certainly not the result of study, for a more restless and eccentric student there never was.

She was not all smoothness or courtesy—far from it. When the mood was on her she was all that, but at other times she spared nobody, no matter how rich, powerful, or highly placed they might be. As to trained literary faculty, she had none. She wrote under inspiration, thoughts flashed through her brain like meteors, scenes painted themselves before her mental vision and died out often when but half caught, parenthesis bristled through her paragraphs so as to sometimes interminably stretch out her sentences, and she would—as it now appears—catch up and use other men’s writings as though they were her own—intent only on fitting their formulated thoughts into the working out of her theme. In short, she was a genius in the same sense as Shakespeare and others, who took materials as they were found, and worked them into the amalgam upon which they put the stamp of their own individuality.

¹ Helena Petrovna Blavatsky

Take her two great books, for instance.² She has sinned a hundred times against the canons of literary usage as regards acknowledgement of authors drawn upon, but upon both is spread the golden web of her own high powers, and *The Secret Doctrine* is found, year by year, more and more like an inexhaustible mine of occult knowledge. That is what makes widening circles of students reverence her memory, and turn their backs in scorn upon those pigmies, like Solovyoff,³ who work like ants to distil acids to squirt on her clothing.

Her occult powers made her sought after by Spiritualists, impelled by avid curiosity; discredited by men of science, who mistrusted all such pretensions; hated by the modern priests and pastors, who ought to have been able to cap her phenomena by like ones of their own, but could not; and feared by the orthodox multitude, who saw in her a black sorceress and dared not come near her.

This uncanny evil reputation even extended to myself by reason of our association. "Dear me! Colonel Olcott," said Lady X to me one day at her luncheon table. "How very different you are from what I had expected." "And what—may I venture to ask" —I asked, "had your ladyship expected?" "Oh, you know," she replied, "we all thought that if we should meet you, you would throw on us some magic spell; but, really, you are just like ourselves!"

This feeling among her acquaintances accounts for much of the latitude accorded her as to conduct and conversation. The same instinct makes the courtier think the King can do no wrong, and society pass over as "eccentricity" the millionaire's solecisms in manners, which they would revolt against in a poor man. One never knew at what moment she might do some wonderful feat of magic, or perchance whisper in their ears some message from the unseen Powers. Then, again, it was a frequent experience that the scoldings she gave her intimate friends proved subsequently to have been most timely checks in a wrong path, turnings into the right one and blessed kindnesses.

Association with her was a continual excitement, and the most sluggish temperament was roused into some show of activity. She was truly a great woman—to confound, if we may, the carcass with its indwelling entity, which seemed to me as far removed as possible from the ideal of the gentler sex.

This excerpt has been edited by the Department of Education

² *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*.

³ Vsevolod Solovyoff, author of *Modern Priestess of Isis* and critic of H. P. B.