

It is a privilege and an honor to write this Foreword to a book which seems to me a significant addition to the publishing history of *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, one of the most important volumes in theosophical literature.

First of all, a tribute must be paid to Vicente Hao Chin, Jr., President of the Theosophical Society in the Philippines, for his initiative, determination, and the enormous amount of work he has done in making the volume available.

My contribution to this new edition of the *Letters* consists of Notes compiled while I was conducting several terms of study in the subject at the Krotona School of Theosophy in Ojai, California. These courses completed, it occurred to me that it might be helpful in promoting a wider study of the *Letters* if my class Notes were put in more readable form and copies sent to several of the major theosophical libraries. This was done.

Among those who received a copy was Vicente Hao Chin, Jr., who immediately felt that they should be published for a still wider distribution. At the same time, he was considering the possibility of publishing the *Letters* in chronological order, rather than under the topical headings as used in the three editions already available.

Students of the *Letters* are deeply indebted to George E. Linton for the chronology which he developed from prolonged study of the original letters in the British Museum and which was used in the *Readers' Guide to the Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* (George E. Linton and Virginia Hanson, 2nd ed., 1988). Serious study has been made of a number of previously developed chronologies, but it is believed that this arrangement is as nearly accurate as it is possible to be.

As every student of the *Letters* knows, they were seldom dated. A.P. Sinnett, to whom most of them were addressed, often noted the date of receipt, but even this was occasionally overlooked, and apparently dates were sometimes inserted after considerable time had elapsed. Sinnett commented that had it been apparent from the beginning that the correspondence would develop as it did, he would have kept more careful records. His wife, Patience Sinnett, kept a diary which ran into 37 volumes over the years, but unfortunately these volumes have disappeared. It has been speculated that they may have been destroyed in bombings during World War I. The letters, themselves, however, have been kept safely in the British Museum under irrevocable deed. Steps have been taken to preserve them; also, George Linton has had them microfilmed and these films are on file in several places, including the headquarters of the American Section of the Theosophical Society.

A final word of appreciation to Vicente Hao Chin, Jr. is certainly in order. It seems not too much to hope that this edition will be the most widely used and studied in the years to come.

VIRGINIA HANSON

# Preface to the Chronological Edition

## I

The present edition was conceived to respond to a long-felt need of students of the Mahatma Letters arising from two difficulties: (1) The letters are hard to follow in the previous editions since the issues and events mentioned in the letters are not in their proper sequence. The significance of the Mahatmas' words on such issues is therefore often missed by the reader. (2) The reader is often left in the dark regarding the circumstances surrounding the letters, in addition to the fact that many names and references are obscure to the modern reader.

As a result, relatively few theosophists have been encouraged to study the Mahatma Letters. This is a pity because this is one of the most important theosophical sourcebooks.

The publication of the *Reader's Guide to the Mahatma Letters* by George Linton and Virginia Hanson has greatly helped in filling this gap. And we are grateful to both of them for their valuable efforts. Still, it is cumbersome to read the Mahatma Letters while constantly referring to one or two other books at the same time. Hence the need for a chronological edition with annotations.

In this edition, the letters are numbered and arranged according to the probable dates of receipt. The original numbers are placed alongside the chronological number. Short annotations have also been added before each letter to acquaint the reader with the events and circumstances that surround the letter.

These annotations were written by Virginia Hanson, who has devoted years of study of the Mahatma Letters, and who has written a number of books on the subject, primarily *Masters and Men*, the *Reader's Guide to the Mahatma Letters* (with George Linton), and *Introduction to the Mahatma Letters*. In 1986, after many years of handling classes on the Mahatma Letters, Mrs. Hanson collected her copious notes on the letters and bound them under the title "Notes on the Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett." The present editor discussed with her about the use of "Notes" in a chronological edition of the Mahatma Letters. She strongly supported the idea and gave permission to use any part of her "Notes" for this purpose. The new footnotes of this edition (identified by a "C-ED." at the end of each footnote) are also primarily based on the "Notes." Some of them are based on the *Readers' Guide to the Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett* compiled by George Linton and Virginia Hanson. The notes preceding the letters in the Appendices, however, were supplied by the present editor.

The text of the letters in this edition follows that of the Third Edition of the *Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett* (edited by C. Humphreys and E. Benjamin), including the footnotes. No change has been made except obvious typographical errors (*e.g.*, "knowledge" instead of "knowledge", "of couse" instead of "of course"). Other than these, this edition has faithfully retained all spellings and punctuations of the third edition.

In this edition, the following text formats were adopted:

(a) Letters not written by the Mahatmas are set in sans serif type to distinguish them from the Mahatma letters. In previous editions, same types were used, which can sometimes cause confusion.

(b) The Mahatmas occasionally underline certain words in letters written by others. These are similarly underlined in the present edition, instead of using bold italics as in previous editions.

(c) The footnotes of the previous editions that refer to letter numbers, pages, or typesyles were corrected in this edition to conform with the revised format and pagination of the new edition. These corrections are always placed in brackets.

New appendices have been added here to include all known letters or notes to A.P. Sinnett or A.O. Hume that were not included in the Mahatma Letters. These are: (a) the first letter of Mahatma K.H. to Hume, reprinted from *Combined Chronology* by Margaret Conger (Theosophical University Press, Pasadena); (b) letters found in *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, Series I, edited by C. Jinarajadasa (Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar), and (c) those found in *Letters of H.P. Blavatsky to A.P. Sinnett*, transcribed and compiled by A.T. Barker (Theosophical University Press, Pasadena).

## II

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PREVIOUS EDITIONS

After Mr. A.P. Sinnett died in 1921, his Executrix, Miss Maud Hoffman, arranged with Mr. A. Trevor Barker to edit and publish the Mahatma letters. This came out in December, 1923, followed by a revised edition in 1926.

In his Preface, Mr. Barker stated:

The reader must bear in mind that with only one or two exceptions none of the letters were dated by the writers thereof. On many of them, however, the dates and places of receipt have been noted in Mr. Sinnett's handwriting, and these appear in small type immediately under the Letter Numbers.

It should be understood that *unless otherwise stated*:

1. Each letter has been transcribed direct from the original.
2. Every letter was written to A.P. Sinnett.
3. All footnotes are copies of notes which appear in and belong to the letters themselves, unless signed (Ed.) in which case they have been added by the compiler.

Mr. Barker writes further that "the reader is asked to believe that the greatest care has been taken in the work of transcription; the whole MS. has been checked word for word with the originals, and everything possible done to prevent errors. It is however probably too much to expect that the printed book will contain no mistakes, they are almost inevitable."

In 1962, a third edition was issued under the joint editorship of Christmas Humphreys and Elsie Benjamin. The third edition involved a meticulous review of the transcription of the previous editions. The edition benefited from the invaluable assistance of Mr. C. Jinarajadasa, the late President of the Theosophical Society, Mr. James Graham, and Mr. Boris de Zirkoff, compiler of the *Collected Writings* of H.P. Blavatsky.

As the present edition is primarily based on the Third Edition, it is necessary to

quote Mr. Humphreys and Ms. Benjamin regarding the basis of their transcription as contained in the Preface to that edition:

The idea of transcribing the material exactly as it appeared was at once abandoned. One reason alone sufficed, that Trevor Barker had already made many corrections in spelling, punctuation and the like, and it was therefore decided to produce a book of the maximum value to students while remaining faithful to the thoughts behind the original.

But voices have been loudly raised in the past about changes in later editions of the works of early Theosophical writers, and it is therefore important to be able to declare, as is now declared, *(a) that in this Work no single word has been added, save in square brackets to make the sense clear; and (b) that no single word has been omitted save in a few cases where its presence was an obvious grammatical error.*

Mr. Humphreys and Ms. Benjamin also stated that the treatment of the text followed the following principles:

The spelling of names, places, non-English phrases and the like has been revised, and attempts made at greater consistency in the use of capital letters and italics. Quotations from books and of foreign phrases have been corrected where errors have been found.

No attempt has been made to achieve consistency in the use of diacritical marks. When used they have been left, but none has been added. The Masters' spelling of Sanskrit words is sometimes a North Indian variation of the classical spelling, and the former has not been changed.

There have been many changes in the punctuation. In most cases the corrections were obvious improvements, and in no case made any possible alteration to the meaning. Sometimes, however, it was very difficult to understand a sentence until the addition of a comma, or its removal, suddenly made sense. In those cases such a change has only been made after all concerned agreed that it was necessary to clarify the meaning.

As contained in the same Preface, the editors of the third edition also carefully considered the re-arrangement of the letters in chronological order. They studied six known chronological arrangements — by Miss Mary K. Neff, Mrs. Margaret G. Conger, Mrs. Beatrice Hastings, Mr. James Arthur, Mr. G. N. Slyfield and Mr. K. F. Vania — and decided to abandon the idea due to the divergence in the order of the different lists. They also decided against including other known letters to Sinnett and Hume since "it would be difficult to decide where such addition should stop."

The Third Edition left out the appendix of Mr. Barker on the "Mars and Mercury" controversy, as well as the bulk of the Introduction of Mr. Barker in the first and second edition, on the grounds that they were primarily comments and had no place in the compilation.

The present editor wishes to thank Mrs. Virginia Hanson for her invaluable role and support in the preparation of this edition; and to George Linton, Joy Mills, Radha Burnier, Adam Warcup and Daniel Caldwell for their suggestions and encouragement. The text was carefully typeset and proofread by Pia Dagusen. She also prepared the new extensive index of this edition. The text was reviewed and proofread by Eugenia Tayao and Roselmo Doval-Santos. To them and others who have helped, we express our deep gratitude.

VICENTE HAO CHIN, JR.

# Guide to Reading the Chronological Edition

Letter No. 3A

(ML-3A) Rec. Oct. 20, 1880

Mr. Sinnett had been asking phenomena, and he was extreme, personal contact with the Mahatma

I saw K.H. in astral form on the night of 12 immediately afterwards being rendered unconsci in the adjacent dressing-room where I saw anothe "Serapis" by Olcott, — "the youngest of the chol

**My Good "Brother,"**  
In dreams and visions at least hardly be an "element of doubt." near you last night by something receive it back on the Hill. I keep n modest white will do as well for w

I conceive that at the close of a | Chohans does not develop from chao but seriatim.

Correctly conceived. Nothing in ly, all being subjected to the same once the process of the maha cycle them all.

could accept him as our real guide, intellectually his superiors. This is a putting it, but que voulez vous? With to an understanding....

<sup>1</sup> Transcribed from a copy in Mr. Sinnett's handwriting. — (ED.)

<sup>1</sup> Query, cycles of necessity. — (Eds.)

<sup>1</sup> This friend is his chela, Djual Khul, who was accompanying him on this trip. He is freque to as "the Disinherited." — (C-Ed.)

1. The original Letter Number in the first three editions of the Mahatma Letters (preceded by ML)
2. The Chronological Number
3. Notes to the letters by Virginia Hanson (in italics and indented)
4. Original annotations or notes by A.P. Sinnett (in small types)
5. The Mahatma Letters (in bold type)
6. A non-Mahatma Letter (in sans-serif type)
7. Comments by Mahatmas on the letters (in bold type)
8. Underlined texts in non-Mahatma letters are words underlined by a Mahatma
9. Footnote by A. Barker: ends with (ED.)
10. Footnote by C. Humphreys and E. Benjamin: ends with (EDS.)
11. Footnote by editor of Chronological Edition based on "Notes" of Virginia Hanson: ends with (C-ED.)

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<b>A.O.H.</b>	<b>Allan O. Hume</b>
<b>A.P.S.</b>	<b>Alfred P. Sinnett</b>
<b>D.K. or Dj. K.</b>	<b>Djual Khul</b>
<b>H.P.B.</b>	<b>Helena P. Blavatsky</b>
<b>H.S.O.</b>	<b>Henry Steel Olcott</b>
<b>Isis</b>	<b>Isis Unveiled by H.P. Blavatsky</b>
<b>K.H.</b>	<b>Mahatma Koot Hoomi</b>
<b>LBS</b>	<b>Letters of H.P. Blavatsky to A.P. Sinnett, transcribed and compiled by A.T. Barker</b>
<b>L.L. or L.L.T.S.</b>	<b>London Lodge of the Theosophical Society</b>
<b>LMW-I</b>	<b>Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom, First Series, edited by C. Jinarajadasa Mahatma Morya</b>
<b>ML</b>	<b>Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett, transcribed and Compiled by A.T. Barker</b>
<b>ODL</b>	<b>Old Diary Leaves by H.S. Olcott</b>
<b>OW</b>	<b>The Occult World by A.P. Sinnett</b>
<b>T.S.</b>	<b>Theosophical Society</b>

*The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* is considered one of the more difficult texts in theosophical literature. It touches on many tangled situations and contains many profound concepts; these are made more abstruse by the fact that, at that time, no nomenclature had been developed through which the Mahatmas could communicate their deeply occult philosophy to English-speaking persons. It is, nevertheless, a drama of tremendous power and insight, a drama of human aspiration, of success and failure. It is a story in time but its message is timeless, whether we regard it as narrative, as occult philosophy, or as revelation.

### **What is a Mahatma?**

In an article by H. P. Blavatsky entitled “Mahatmas and Chelas,” (*The Theosophist*, July, 1884), she tells us the meaning of the term:

A Mahatma is a personage who, by special training and education, has evolved those higher faculties and has attained that spiritual knowledge which ordinary humanity will acquire after passing through numberless series of incarnations during the process of cosmic evolution, provided, of course, that they do not go, in the meanwhile, against the purposes of Nature. . .

She goes on into a discussion of what it is that incarnates and how the process is used as an agent of evolution, resulting in the attainment of Adeptship.

In a letter written to a friend on July 1, 1890, H.P.B. has some other interesting things to say about Mahatmas:

“They are members of an occult Brotherhood [but] not of any particular school in India.” This brotherhood, she adds, did not originate in Tibet, and some of its members live outside of Tibet, but “most of its members and some of the highest are, and live constantly, in Tibet.”

Then, speaking of the Mahatmas, she says: “They are *living men*, not ‘spirits’ or even Nirmanakayas<sup>1</sup>. . . Their knowledge and learning are immense, and their personal holiness of life is still greater — still they are mortal men and none of them 1,000 years old, as imagined by some.”

In a conversation in 1887 with the author Charles Johnston (husband of H.P.B.’s niece, Vera), when Mr. Johnston asked H.P.B. something about her Master’s age (the Mahatma Morya), she replied, “My dear, I cannot tell you exactly, for I do not know. But this I will tell you. I met him first when I was twenty. He was at the very prime of manhood then. I am an old woman now, but he has not aged a day. He is still in the prime of manhood. That is all I can say. You may draw your own conclusions.” When Mr. Johnston persisted and asked whether the Mahatmas had discovered the elixir of life, she replied seriously: “That is no fable. It is only the veil hiding a real occult process, warding off age and dissolution for periods which would seem fabulous, so I will not mention them. The secret is this: for every man there is a climacteric, when he must draw near to death: if he has squandered his life-powers, there is no escape for him; but



if he has lived according to the law, he may pass through and so continue in the same body almost indefinitely.”<sup>2</sup>

### **How Did the Letters Come to be Written?**

The authors of the letters are the Mahatmas Koot Hoomi and Morya, usually designated simply by their initials.

The Mahatma K.H. was a Kashmiri Brahman, but the time we meet him in the letters, he was a monk of the Gelugpa or “Yellow Hat” division of Tibetan Buddhism. He refers to himself in the letters as a “Cis- and Trans-Himalayan cave-dweller.” H.P.B. says in *Isis Unveiled* that Cis-Himalayan is a very ancient Aryan doctrine, sometimes called Brahmanical, but really having nothing to do with Brahmanism as we now understand it. Trans-Himalayan is a Tibetan esoteric doctrine, pure, or “old Buddhism.” Both Cis- and Trans-Himalayan come from one source originally — the universal Wisdom Religion.

The name “Koot Hoomi” is a mystical name which he instructed H.P.B. to use in connection with the correspondence with A.P. Sinnett. He spoke and wrote French and English fluently.

There are statements in theosophical literature to the effect that the Mahatma K.H. was educated in Europe. He was familiar with European ways and European thinking. He was most erudite and occasionally wrote passages of great literary beauty.

The Mahatma Morya was a Rajput prince — the Rajputs being the ruling caste of northern India at the time. He was “a giant, six feet eight, and splendidly built; a superb type of manly beauty.”<sup>3</sup>

Well known is the fact of the establishment of the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875. In 1879, the two principal founders of the Society, H.P. Blavatsky and Col. Henry Steel Olcott, moved the headquarters of the Society to Bombay, India and, in 1882, to Adyar, Madras, in southern India, where it remains.

There was in India at the time a very fine, educated English gentleman named Alfred Percy Sinnett. He was editor of *The Pioneer*, a leading English newspaper published in Allahabad. He became interested in the philosophy being expounded by the two Theosophists and was curious about the remarkable happenings that seemed to be taking place wherever H.P.B. was.

On February 25, 1879, nine days after the founders arrived in Bombay, Sinnett wrote to Col. Olcott expressing a desire to become acquainted with him and H.P.B. and stating that he would be willing to publish any interesting facts about their mission in India.

On February 27, 1879, Olcott replied to this letter. Thus began what Olcott terms “a most valuable connection and gratifying friendship.” The founders were invited to visit the Sinnetts in Allahabad, which they did in December of 1879. There the Sinnetts joined the Theosophical Society, and the founders met other visitors who were to play some part in the affairs of the Society: A.O. Hume and his wife Moggy, from Simla, and Mrs. Alice Gordon, wife of Lt. Col. W. Gordon of Calcutta.

The following year, the founders visited the Sinnetts at their summer home in Simla, at that time the summer capital of India. There they became better acquainted with the Humes and their daughter, Marie Jane (usually called Minnie). Hume's consuming hobby was ornithology and he maintained an ornithological museum in his large home, which he called Rothney Castle, on Jakko Hill in Simla; he also published a periodical on ornithology which he called "Stray Feathers." Professionally he had been for some time an influential member of the Government.

It was at Simla that the events took place which eventually led to the letters published in the volume, *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*. H.P.B. performed some amazing phenomena which she attributed to the Mahatmas with whom she was in more or less constant psychic contact. Sinnett was convinced of the genuineness of these phenomena, and in his book *The Occult World* he was at great pains to stress their authenticity.

He was also of a practical and scientific turn of mind, and he wished to know more about the laws which governed these manifestations. Specifically, he wished to know about those powerful beings whom H.P.B. called "Masters" and claimed were responsible for the phenomena. He asked her if it would be possible for him to get in touch with them and receive instructions from them.

H.P.B. told him that it was doubtful but said she would try. She first approached her own Master, the Mahatma Morya, with whom she was primarily linked through the occult training she had undergone earlier in Tibet, but he refused point blank to have anything to do with such an undertaking. (Later, however, he took over the correspondence for several months under very special circumstances.)

Apparently H.P.B. tried several others without success. Finally, the Mahatma Koot Hoomi agreed to undertake a limited correspondence with Sinnett.

Mr. Sinnett addressed a letter "To the Unknown Brother" and gave it to H.P.B. to transmit. As a matter of fact, he was so eager to argue his case convincingly that he wrote a second letter before he received a reply to the first one. Then followed the remarkable series of letters which went on for several years and which, among other far-reaching results, eventually found their way into the published volume.

VIRGINIA HANSON

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<sup>1</sup> One who no longer incarnates but who has chosen to renounce Nirvana until the end of the Manvantara in order to help the struggling pilgrims still on earth.

<sup>2</sup> *Collected Writings*, Vol. VIII, p. 392.

<sup>3</sup> *Collected Writings*, Vol. VIII, P.399.

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