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PROLOGUE to *THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE*, No. 8

She was no stranger to controversy: whether it had to do with her psychic phenomena, the letters from Adepts, or her publication of *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, controversies dogged her like paparazzi hound a celebrity. This is not news to those familiar with the life of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. But what may be unknown is that the 1891 publication of *The Voice of the Silence* also sparked a firestorm, albeit on a smaller scale.

Blavatsky had been accused of being a fraud, of forging letters from the Mahatmas, of fabricating the ideas found in *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*. The attacks came from many quarters: Christian missionaries, materialistic scientists, status quo apologists, even disgruntled employees at Adyar. But the animus aimed at *The Voice* came from a rather select and erudite group: Western Buddhist scholars who stated smugly that *The Voice of the Silence* absolutely did not contain any real Buddhist teachings.

Today—more than 120 years later—nobody questions that *The Voice* contains sublime expressions of Tibetan Buddhist teachings. Within this limited space, two examples as to why this is so may be given. In 1928, William Kingsland published *The Real H. P. Blavatsky*; it contained a footnote explaining that a recent Chinese edition of *The Voice* had been endorsed by the Tashi Lama as being “the only true exposition in English of the Heart Doctrine of *Mahayana* Buddhism, and its noble idea of self-sacrifice for humanity.” Forty-five years later, Joy Mills and Helen Zahara, while attending the 97<sup>th</sup> International Theosophical Convention in Adyar, made a side trip to visit the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala. After discussing *The Voice of the Silence*, His Holiness commented that its contents were quite “authentic.”

So what provoked the original dispute? The answer, I think, is fairly simple. At the close of the nineteenth century, most Westerners viewed Tibet as a remote and backward country; few had been there; information about the people and its culture was scant. Western scholars were familiar with the Theravada Buddhism found in southern Asia, an area that was much more accessible. In truth, one can hardly blame them for their ignorance as to the lamaistic teachings from the north. It was not till much later, when Westerners freely traveled to Nepal and Tibet, and after the Chinese Communist invasion of Tibet in the 1950s, that knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism became widespread. Although some of the controversies surrounding HPB are still parroted by lazy authors, the original debate over *The Voice* has long since faded into the “Hall of Silence,” a place history reserves for the misinformed opinions and widely discredited judgments of so-called experts.

**David P. Bruce** is the National Secretary of the Theosophical Society in America.