

Henry More and "Isis Unveiled"



HENRY MORE

1614-1687

Famous English philosopher,
leading figure of the
Cambridge Platonists

From "Old Diary Leaves" First Series, p. 231-234, 242

By Colonel Henry S. Olcott

"Our next question is, did she [i.e. H.P. Blavatsky] write *Isis* in the capacity of an ordinary spiritual medium, i.e., under the control of spirits of the dead? I answer, Assuredly not. . . . H.P.B.'s case resembled none of them [i.e. mediums]. Nearly all they did she could do; but at her own will and pleasure, by day or by night, without forming "circles," choosing the witnesses, or imposing the usual conditions. Then, again, I had ocular proof that at least some of those who worked with us were living men, from having seen them in the flesh in India after having seen them in the astral body in America and Europe; from having touched and talked with them. Instead of telling me that they were spirits, they told me they were as much

alive as myself, and that each of them had his own peculiarities and capabilities; in short, his complete individuality. They told me that what they had attained to, I should, one day, myself acquire; how soon, would depend entirely upon myself; and that I might anticipate nothing whatever from favour; but, like them, must gain every step, every inch of progress by my own exertions.

". . . And yet, despite the above, I was made to believe that we worked in collaboration with at least one disincarnate entity - the pure soul of one of the wisest philosophers of modern times, one who was an ornament to our race, a glory to his country. He was a great Platonist, and I was told that, so absorbed was he in his life-study, he had become earth-bound, i.e., he could not snap the ties which held him to the Earth, but sat in an astral library of his own mental creation, plunged in his philosophical reflections, oblivious to the lapse of time, and anxious to promote the turning of men's minds towards the solid philosophical basis of true religion. His desire did not draw him to taking a new birth among us, but made him seek out those who, like our Masters and their agents, wished to work for the spread of truth and the overthrow of superstition. I was told that he was so pure and so unselfish that all the Masters held him in profound respect, and, being forbidden to meddle with his Karma, they could only leave him to work his way out of his (Kamalokaic) illusions, and pass on to the goal of formless being and absolute spirituality according to the natural order of Evolution. His mind had been so intensely employed in purely intellectual speculation that his spirituality had been temporarily stifled. Meanwhile there he was, willing and eager to work with H.P.B. on this epoch-making book, towards the philosophical portion of which he contributed much. He did not materialise and sit with us, nor obsess H.P.B., medium-fashion; he would simply talk with her psychically, by the hour together, dictating copy, telling her what references to hunt up, answering my questions about details, instructing me as to principles, and, in fact, playing the part of a third person in our literary symposium. He gave me his portrait once - a rough sketch in colored crayons of flimsy paper - and sometimes would drop me a brief note about some personal matter, but from first to last his relation to us both was that of a mild, kind, extremely learned teacher and elder friend.

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"He never dropped a word to indicate that he thought himself aught but a living man, and, in fact, I was told that he did not realise that he had died . . . on September 1, 1687.

". . . Of the lapse of time, he seemed to have so little perception that, I remember, H.P.B. and I laughed, one morning at 2.30 A.M., when, after an unusually hard night's work, while we were taking a parting smoke, he quietly asked H.P.B. "Are you ready to begin?"; under the impression that we were at the beginning instead of the end of the evening! And I also recollect how she said: "For Heaven's sake don't laugh deep in your thought, else the 'old gentleman' will surely hear you and feel hurt!" That gave me an idea: to laugh superficially is ordinary laughter, but to laugh deeply is to shift your merriment to the plane of psychic perception!

". . . Except in the case of this old Platonist, I never had, with or without H.P.B.'s help, consciously to do with another disincarnate entity during the progress of our work; . . ."

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"In the course of my psychical researches I was once so fortunate as to be for a short time in literary collaboration with a noble English scholar who died several generations ago. He worked in a vast subjective library in 'his castle in Spain,' [i.e. a term meaning "dream," "daydream," or "reverie"] without a thought of rising higher towards *Samadhi*, but with all his vast intellectual power bent upon the pursuit of the philosophical study to which his earth-life had been devoted." - Col. Olcott, quoted by Boris de Zirkoff from an unknown source

"The individual whom Col. Olcott has in mind is Henry More, English philosopher of the 17th century, who was born in 1614, and died September 1, 1687. During his studies at Cambridge, he was delivered from an attitude of early scepticism by becoming immersed in the reading of Platonic writers, and was especially fascinated by Neo-Platonism. He drew around him many young men of a refined and thoughtful turn of mind. Among his pupils the most remarkable was Lady Conway, at whose country seat at Ragley, Warwickshire, Henry More spent at intervals considerable time. In due course, Ragley became a centre of enlightened scholarship and devotion. Henry More was one of the finest thinkers among the Cambridge Platonists, a school of philosophico-religious thought which flourished at Cambridge University in the second half of the 17th century, and which included such men as Ralph Cudworth, Joseph Glanvill, John Norris, and others. Their views tended towards mysticism and the contemplation of things transcendental, and exercised a valuable influence on English theology and on contemporary thought in general. Henry More represented the more mystical and theosophic aspect of the Cambridge Movement, and his life had been marked by humility and charity, no less conspicuous than his piety of thought. Henry More wrote a large number of works, one of the most valuable being the *Divine Dialogues* (1688), summarizing his general views on philosophy and religion." - Boris de Zirkoff

Henry More is quoted from and referred to a number of times in HPB's writings, including throughout "Isis Unveiled" itself.

Here are just a few brief examples...

"Dr. Henry More, the Platonic philosopher, than whom no Englishman ever left a nobler name. . . . we felt proud to think that we shared the fate of Henry More, one of the saintliest characters of his period." ("Doomed" article)

"Although neither an alchemist, magician, nor astrologer, but simply a great philosopher, Henry More, of Cambridge University - a man universally esteemed, may be named as a shrewd logician, scientist, and metaphysician. His belief in witchcraft was firm throughout his life. His faith in immortality and able arguments in demonstration of the survival of man's spirit after death are all based on the Pythagorean system, adopted by Cardan, Van Helmont, and other mystics. The infinite and uncreated spirit that we usually call GOD, a substance of the highest virtue and excellency, produced everything else by *emanative causality*. God thus is the primary substance, the rest, the secondary; if the former created matter with a power of moving itself, he, the primary substance, is still the cause of that motion as well as of the matter, and yet we rightly say that it is matter which moves itself. "We may define this kind of spirit we speak of to be a substance indiscernible, that can move itself, that can penetrate, contract, and dilate itself, and can also penetrate, move, and alter matter," which is the third emanation. He firmly believed in apparitions, and stoutly defended the theory of the individuality of every soul in which "personality, memory, and conscience will surely continue in the future state." He divided the astral spirit of man after its exit from the body into two distinct entities: the "aërial" and the "æthereal vehicle." During the time that a disembodied man moves in its aërial clothing, he is subject to *Fate* - *i.e.*, evil and temptation, attached to its earthly interests, and therefore is not utterly pure: it is only when he casts off this garb of the first spheres and becomes ethereal that he becomes sure of his immortality. "For what shadow can that body cast that is a pure and transparent light, such as the ethereal vehicle is? And therefore that oracle is then fulfilled, when the soul has ascended into that condition we have already described, in which alone it is out of the reach of fate and mortality." He concludes his work by stating that this transcendent and divinely-pure condition was the only aim of the Pythagoreans." ("Isis Unveiled" Vol. 1, p. 205-206)

"We think we see the sidereal phantom of the old philosopher and mystic, Henry More, once of Cambridge University, moving about in the astral mist, over the old moss-covered roofs of the ancient town from which he wrote his famous letter to Glanvill about "witches." The soul seems restless and indignant, as on that day May 5th, 1678, when the Doctor complained so bitterly to the author of *Sadducismus Triumphatus* of Scot, Adie and Webster. "Our new inspired Saints," the soul is heard to mutter, "sworn advocates of the witches who thus madly and boldly, against all sense and reason, against all antiquity, against all interpreters, and against the inspired Scripture itself, will have no Samuel in this scene, but a cunning confederate knave; whether the inspired Scripture, or these in-blown buffoons, puffed up with nothing but ignorance, vanity, and stupid infidelity, are to be believed, let anyone judge." [Quoted from Dr More's letter to Joseph Glanvill, see "Isis Unveiled" Vol. 1, p. 206]

"Rest in peace, O restless soul." ("The Denials and the Mistakes of the Nineteenth Century" article)

FROM THE WRITINGS OF HENRY MORE

"Virtue is to herself the best reward."

"To be inspired is to be moved in an extraordinary manner by the power or Spirit of God to act, speak, or think what is holy, just and true; [Enthusiasm is] a Full, but false persuasion in a man that he is inspired."

"Perfect Scepticisme is a disease incurable, and a thing rather to be pitied or laughed at, then seriously opposed. For when a man is so fugitive and unsettled that he will not stand to the verdict of his own Faculties, one can no more fasten any thing upon him, than he can write in the water, or tye knots in the wind."

"Energie is the operation, efflux or activity of any being: as the light of the Sunne is the energie of the Sunne, and every phantasm of the soul is the energie of the soul."

"The parts of a Spirit can be no more separated, though they be dilated, then you can cut off the Rayes of the Sun by a pair of Scissors made of pellucid Crystall."

"That the Students of Philosophy may be thoroughly exercised in the just extent of the Mechanical Powers of Matter, how farre they will reach, and where they fall short. Which will be the best assistance to Religion that Reason and the Knowledge of Nature can afford."

"When we shall have enumerated those names and titles appropriate to it, this infinite immobile, extended [entity] will appear to be not only something real (as we have just pointed out) but even something Divine (which so certainly is found in nature); this will give us further assurance that it cannot be nothing since that to which so many and such magnificent attributes pertain cannot be nothing."

"Of this kind are the following, which metaphysicians attribute particularly to the First Being, such as: *One, Simple, Immobile, External, complete, Independent, Existing in itself, Subsisting by itself, Incorruptible, Necessary, Immense, Uncreated, Uncircumscribed, Incomprehensible, Omnipresent, Incorporeal, All-penetrating, All-embracing, Being by its essence, Actual Being, Pure Act.*

"There are not less than twenty titles by which the Divine Numen is wont to be designated, and which perfectly fit this infinite internal place (locus) the existence of which in nature we have demonstrated; omitting moreover that the very Divine Numen is called, by the Cabbalists, MAKOM, that is, Place (locus)."

"The famous culmination of More's arguments is to draw close parallels between **Absolute Space** and **God**."

From the entry "Henry More" in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy