

≈ PRINCE PAVEL DOLGORUKII ≈

BEFORE LEAVING HER HOME and family, HPB had already acquired a conception of the Masters that would determine her understanding of her later encounters. When she was five years old, she was introduced to Tibetan Buddhism as practiced by the Kalmuck tribe of the Astrakhan steppes. Her maternal grandfather, Andrei de Fadeev, was appointed by the Russian government as the administrator of Kalmuck affairs. While Helena's father was away on military duty, her mother took her to live with the Fadeevs, and during this time she became acquainted with the Kalmucks. Helena's mother wrote a novel about Kalmuck life, which was later translated into French. Their leader Prince Tumen and his Tibetan lama both impressed Helena profoundly. Far more important to her development, however, was the library of Prince Pavel Dolgorukii, HPB's maternal great-grandfather. HPB wrote of him that "my grandfather on my mother's side, Prince Paul Vasilyevitch Dolgorouki, had a strange library containing hundreds of books on alchemy, magic and other occult sciences. I had read them with the keenest interest before the age of 15."¹ Prince Pavel lived with his daughter's family until his death in 1838. Helena did not permanently join the household until 1842, following her mother's death. Thus, although there must have been some contact between Helena and her great-grandfather, she read the books in his "strange library" after his death. In light of her later career, it would seem that these books were the most important influence on HPB's conception of the Masters.

In *Old Diary Leaves*, Colonel Olcott alluded to this library in reference to the Comte de Saint-Germain: "If Mme. de Fadeef—H.P.B.'s aunt—could only be induced to translate and publish certain documents in her famous library, the world would have a nearer approach to a true history of the pre-Revolutionary European mission of this Eastern Adept than has until now been available."² The reason for this allegation is revealed in a footnote to HPB's 1857 article "A Few Questions to Hiraf." She alludes to "the thorough metamorphosis of nearly the whole of the European map, beginning with the French Revolution of '93, predicted in every detail by the Count de St.-Germain, in an autograph MS., now in the possession of the descendants of the Russian

nobleman to whom he gave it.”³ HPB’s Aunt Nadyezhda was apparently the descendant in question, in light of Olcott’s allusion to the same manuscript. Several themes in HPB’s adult life can be traced to her exposure to the books in Prince Pavel’s library. Her fascination with alchemy, magic, and occult sciences was only part of the profound impact of the hours she spent poring over his hundreds of books. The Saint-Germain manuscript to which she alluded inflamed her imagination with the idea of mysterious adepts manipulating occult undercurrents of European politics. Its predictions of the course of nineteenth-century history would have inspired her with the belief that she, too, could be part of the same underground effort in which her great-grandfather had been involved with Saint-Germain. The books in his library would have directed her to the world of Freemasonry as the realm through which secret Masters were to be approached.

A. E. Waite identifies a “Grand Prince of Dolgorouki” in his *New Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* as “a distinguished Russian military commander in the days of Empress Catherine II. Also an important member of the Strict Observance.”⁴ The Rite of the Strict Observance was founded in Germany by Johann Gottlieb von Hund around 1754. The central legend of the Rite, to which HPB subscribed in *Isis Unveiled*, is that Masonry is a perpetuation of the Knights Templar. Its founder “claimed to derive his knowledge and authority from unknown Superiors, to whom implicit obedience was due, and this accounts largely for the success of his system,” according to Waite.⁵

In Russia, the doctrine of the Unknown Superiors was particularly important in the Rosicrucian Masonry introduced into the Strict Observance lodges by Nikolai Novikov. In 1778 Novikov moved from St. Petersburg to Moscow when Prince Nikita Troubezkoï and his brother Yuri did so and urged him to follow. Dolgorukii joined the Lodge Latone, which was transferred to Moscow along with the Isis and Osiris lodges by the Troubezkois.⁶ In a letter Nikita Troubetskoi referred to those “who belong to the real Inner Order,” alluding to the Harmonia Lodge which Novikov formed in 1780 seeking the “inner perfection and the union of all Masons,” consisting of only eight or nine members who called themselves “Brothers of the Inner Order.”⁷ It is unclear whether Prince Pavel Dolgorukii figured among this number, but the higher degrees introduced by Novikov studied alchemy, magic, and the Kabbalah, which corresponds to HPB’s description of his library.⁸ There were nine Rosy Cross degrees in all, in which members were pledged to secrecy regarding the Head of the Order, to whom they pledged unquestioning obedience.⁹ The myth of the Secret Chiefs was clearly an influence on HPB’s conception of the Masters. The nine Chiefs of the

degrees allegedly lived in Egypt, Cyprus, Palestine, Mexico, Italy, Persia, Germany, India, and England. All these countries figured significantly in HPB's search for the Masters, and in many of them she met persons who provided her with information which contributed to her synthesis of Theosophy. The source from which all this intriguing information was derived, "The Rosy Cross in Russia," was published in *The Theosophical Review* in 1906. Its author, "A Russian," refers to a manuscript "bearing the date 1784—one of the inaccessible sources—[which] states: 'Simson [a Rosicrucian of Berlin] believes that the true Masonry will arise once more from Tibet.'"¹⁰

This suggests that "A Russian" may be the same person to whom HPB referred in the introduction to *The Secret Doctrine*:

[T]here is a well-known fact, a very curious one, corroborated to the writer by a reverend gentleman attached for years to a Russian Embassy—namely, that there are several documents in the St. Petersburg Imperial Libraries to show that, even so late as during the days when Freemasonry, and Secret Societies flourished unimpeded in Russia, i.e., at the end of the last and the beginning of the present century, more than one Russian mystic travelled to Tibet via the Ural mountains in search of knowledge and initiation in the unknown crypts of Central Asia. And more than one returned years later, with a rich store of such information as could never have been given him anywhere in Europe.¹¹

After a brief but intense flowering of Rosicrucian Masonry in the early 1780s, Catherine the Great grew suspicious of the strength of the lodges, which numbered around 150. By 1792, the French Revolution inspired her with such fear of secret organizations that she had Novikov arrested, tried, and imprisoned. Her severity may have been inspired by Novikov's previous career as editor of satirical journals that lampooned the Russian aristocracy.¹² For "supporting the Masonic sect and the printing of dissolute books concerning it" he was sentenced to fifteen years in prison.¹³ But after less than three years of imprisonment, he was released upon Catherine's death. Prince Pavel Dolgorukii was not among those imprisoned for what amounted to heresy charges, which suggests that he was not among the highest officials of the Rosy Cross. Nevertheless, the contents of his library probably included many of the forbidden books for which Novikov and his fellows were imprisoned. It may be significant that Dolgorukii's wife was Countess Henriette de Plessis, identified by Sylvia Cranston as "daughter of a persecuted French Huguenot nobleman, who emigrated to Russia and served in the

court of Catherine the Great.”¹⁴ HPB’s interest in occult Freemasonry was combined with an attraction to French anti-Catholic elements, which appeared in her later associations.

It is not a mere coincidence that HPB was later to call her Masters “Oriental Rosicrucians.” The legend of Oriental Rosicrucian wisdom conveyed from Unknown Superiors, first encountered in Prince Pavel’s library, became the subtext of HPB’s teachings. Much that from the twentieth-century perspective has seemed to originate with her is clearly related to ideas in the general mystical and political thought-stream of the Russian generations previous to her own. While learning all the contents of her great-grandfather’s library, HPB would inevitably have contacted the teachings of the Strict Observance, including the doctrine of Unknown Superiors. Russian Rosicrucianism’s legend of a worldwide network of Masters and a secret link with Tibet was a profound influence on HPB’s development. This does not imply, however, that her later teachings were no more than a rehashing of material derived from Prince Pavel’s library. As will be shown, her life was filled with encounters with teachers who merit the appellation “Sages of the Orient.” But it must be remembered, in comparing the reality of these encounters with the myth which has surrounded them, that HPB’s childhood had been spent in a fantasy world which would affect the way she understood her later experiences. Her encounters with genuine spiritual teachers of myriad traditions were interpreted according to a mythology of Unknown Superiors in Tibet derived from the library of Prince Pavel.