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Madame Théon, Alta Una, Mother Superior

The Life and Personas of Mary Ware (1839–1908)

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Abstract

The Cosmic Movement was founded in the early 20th century by two mysterious esoteric teachers, Max Théon, and his wife, Madame Théon. Madame Théon, who was also known as Una and Alma, had a leading role in the movement—but, her disciples did not know her real name, her origins, or her history before she met Théon. This article shall introduce new information concerning the early history of Madame Théon, which enables to determine with precision her identity and origins, the main stages in her life, and her intellectual and spiritual activities and transformations.

Keywords

Cosmic Movement – Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor – Universal Philosophic Society – Max Théon – Madame Théon

1 Introduction

The November 1908 issue of the *Revue Cosmique*, the journal of the French occult group, *Le Mouvement Cosmique*, opened with an obituary, entitled ‘La Place Vide’ (The Empty Place). The unsigned article mourned the passing of an unnamed female psychic:

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No more do we see her dear form, of harmonious lines, her likable face so good and so tender, furrowed by long years of a Psychic Fighter's life; nor her sweet smile like a sunbeam which chases away sadness, nor her calm and majestic bearing fit for a pre-eminent Victress! No more do we hear her melodious voice, her gentle words inspired by wisdom, that powerful and profound poetry which flowed like a magnificent river from the pure source of the Soph, and through which this great intelligence expressed itself in the immense range of her vast knowledge! The dear psychic children kiss no more her small hands of a Sensitive, her small industrious and diligent hands, ceaselessly occupied with works of art and literature, as also—and above all—with the care of the sacred life of the Home, the blessed shelter of love!¹

The obituary, as we know today,² was written by Mirra Alfassa, who was then a disciple of the Cosmic Movement, and later became the collaborator of Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry, in Southern India. The unnamed woman she was mourning was Madame Théon, the wife of the leader of the Cosmic Movement, known by the name Aia Aziz, or Max Théon (1848–1927) (Fig. 1).

Few of Théon's biographical details are known, and fewer still of his wife's. Although she had a leading role in the Cosmic Movement, and much of the Movement's publications were written by her, her disciples did not know her real name, her origins, or her history before she met Théon.³ Until today, her identity and biography have been shrouded in mystery. This article will put an end to some of that mystery.

A literary description of Madame Théon, under the name Alma, is found in an autobiographical novel, *Un Séjour chez les Grand Initiés* (1931), written by one of the followers of the Cosmic Movement, Claire Thémanlys. Another source of information about Théon and his wife are the memoirs of Mirra Alfassa. The memories of Claire Thémanlys and Mirra Alfassa give us vivid and enthusiastic descriptions of Madame Théon, during the last years of her life. Yet, they contain very little information concerning her identity and earlier biography. Much more information was revealed through the research of Christian Chanel, in his 1992/1993 PhD dissertation on Max Théon and the Cosmic Movement. Chanel

1 *Revue Cosmique* 7, no. 11 (November 1908), 637. I followed the translation of Sujata Nahar, *Mirra the Occultist*, 257–258.

2 Nahar, *Mirra the Occultist*, 257.

3 Christian Chanel, 'De La "Fraternite Hermetique De Louxor" au "Mouvement Cosmique": L'Oeuvre de Max Théon', 215.

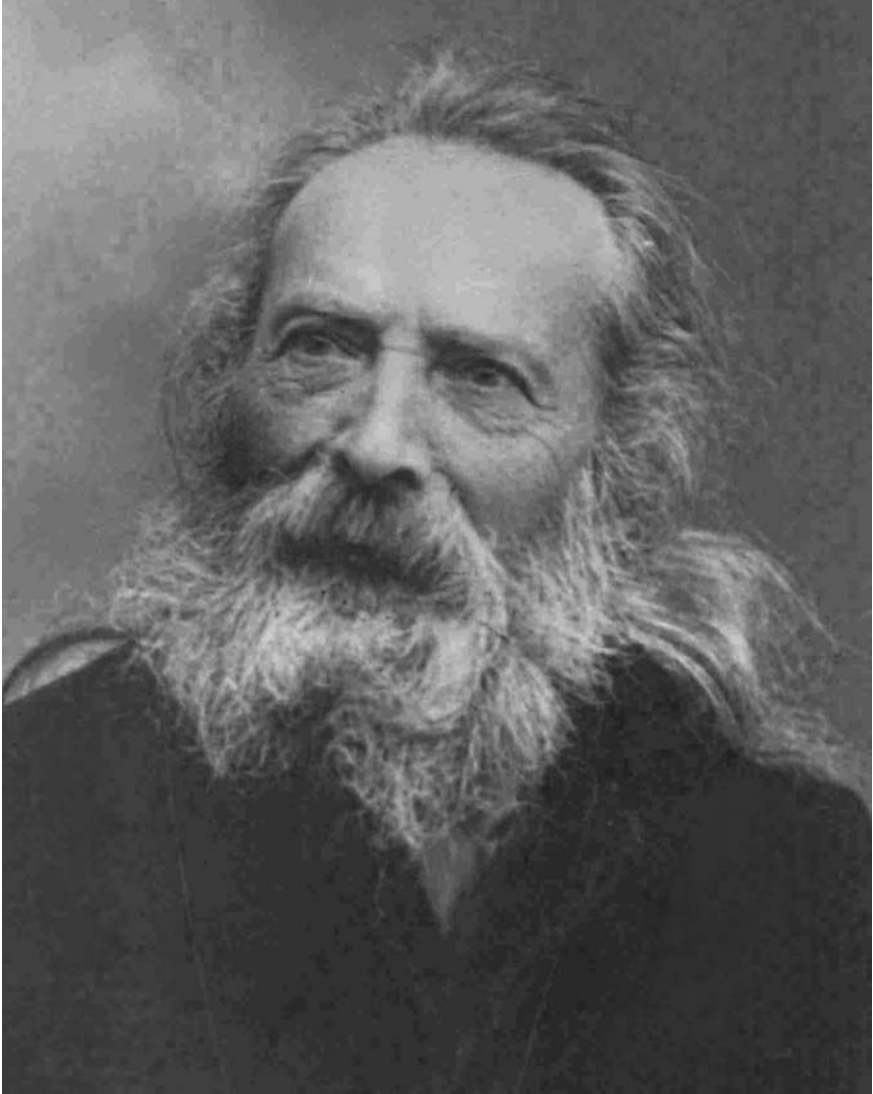


FIGURE 1 *Max Théon*

found the 1885 marriage certificate of the Théons, in which they were registered as Mary Chrystine Woodroffe Ware and Louis Maximillian Bimstein (Fig. 2).⁴ He also located the registration of Madame Théon's death, on 10 September, 1908, in Jersey, in which she was registered as 'Miriam Lin Woodroff, femme

⁴ Ibid., 216.

1885. Marriage solemnized at the Registrar's Office in the Parish of St. Martin in the County of Middlesex.

No.	Time Married	Name and Surname	Age	Condition	Residence at the time of Marriage	Father's Name and Surname	Rank or Profession of Father
121	First Week 1885	Louis Maximilian Bimstein	30 years	Bachelor	27 Dorset Street, W. (London)	Jules Lion Bimstein	Rabbi
		Mary Christine Woodroffe Ware	27 years	Spinster	Belgrave Road, W. (London)	William George Ware	Quinteman

Married in the Registrar's Office according to the Rites and Ceremonies by License by law by me,

This Marriage was solemnized by me, *L. B. Bimstein* in the Presence of us, *A. Wolfe* *F. A. Ashmole Registrar* *S. Bond Superintendent Registrar*

FIGURE 2 Marriage certificate of Mary Christine Woodroffe Ware and Louis Maximilian Bimstein

de Max Théon.⁵ Furthermore, Chanel was able to determine that prior to her marriage, during the years 1884–1885, Madame Théon had been active in Spiritualist and occult circles in London, under the name of Una.⁶

Notwithstanding these important findings, there is still very little known about the identity, background and early history of Madame Théon, before she appeared as Una, in 1884. In this article, I shall reexamine the information about Madame Théon, and introduce new sources concerning her origins, life and work.⁷ The new information presented in this article will enable us to determine with precision the origins and family background of Mrs. Théon, the main stages her life, and her intellectual and spiritual activities and transformations. Before turning to examine these new sources, I shall discuss the Cosmic Movement briefly and the information concerning Madame Théon/Una which was passed on by her disciples and revealed through the research of Chanel.

2 The Cosmic Movement

In the early 1900s a new esoteric movement, *Le Mouvement Cosmique*, became active in France. At the head of the Movement stood a mysterious teacher known by the name Aia Aziz and his wife. The couple resided at the time in Villa Zarif, near the town of Tlemcen, in northwestern Algeria.

5 Ibid., 94.

6 Ibid., 216–229.

7 I would like to extend my thanks to Ewa Raziell, Ilan Themanlys, Yoel Themanly and Tal Gilad, who gave me access to manuscripts and letters which are in their possession. I am extremely grateful to Elisabeth Whitehouse, the archivist of the Marcham Society for the invaluable information she gave me. I am also grateful to Sheila Dunford, the chairman of the Society and her husband Eric for their kind hospitality during my visit to Marcham.

Aia Aziz, who was known also as Max Théon, was formerly the grand master of the exterior circle of the *Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor* (H.B. of L.), an esoteric movement that had been active in England in the 1880s. Théon, who first appeared in London in 1884, as an ‘oriental healer’, was probably born in Poland, ca. 1850, possibly as Eliezer Mordechai Bimstein.⁸ In 1885, a year after their marriage, Théon and his wife left London, traveled through France, and eventually settled in Algeria, from where they directed the activities of the Cosmic Movement.

The Movement’s major publication was the *Revue Cosmique*, which appeared regularly between 1901 and 1908, edited first by F. Ch. Barlet—the pseudonym of Albert Faucheux (1838–1921), a well-known French occultist and the former representative of the H.B. of L in France—and after his resignation, by Théon himself, under the name Aia Aziz. Further writings of the Movement were published in *La Tradition Cosmique*, which appeared in 1904 and 1906 (more volumes were printed in 1920 and 1962). These publications included articles on the Cosmic Philosophy, literary works and book reviews. Many of the publications of the Movement, especially those published in *Le Tradition Cosmique*, were based on revelations received by Madame Théon in a state of trance supervised by her husband.

The Cosmic Movement claimed to restore the lost perennial wisdom, the ‘cosmic tradition’, which antedated all religions, and united and harmonized science and theology. The declared objectives of the Movement were to improve the state of humanity and to demonstrate to the ‘psycho-intellectual’ human being the true object and aim of life and the extent to which human capacities could be developed. The Cosmic Movement aspired to spiritualize humanity, and raise it to a higher level, teaching that through evolution, human beings could achieve a state of complete immortality. Spiritual practices played an important role in the Movement. Théon and his wife developed and practiced clairvoyance and trance techniques and many of the writings of the Movement were written by Madame Théon in such a state of trance.⁹

8 On the question of the identity and birthplace of Théon, see Chanel, ‘L’Oeuvre de Max Théon’, 137–139; Godwin, Chanel, & Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 8–9. On Théon’s early activities in the framework of the H.B. of L. see Chanel, ‘L’Oeuvre de Max Théon’, vol. 1: 203–286; Godwin, Chanel & Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 17–21.

9 See Chanel, ‘Théon, Max’, 1112–1113; Heehs, ‘The Kabbalah’, 226–227. For a comprehensive discussion of the Cosmic Philosophy see the second volume of Chanel’s ‘L’Oeuvre de Max Théon’.



FIGURE 3 *Louis and Claire Thémanlys*

After F. Ch. Barlet left the Movement, Louis Moyse (1875–1943), who adopted the pseudonym Thémanlys, became the director of the Movement's center in Paris. His wife, Claire (b. 1883), the daughter of the famous art dealer Eugène Blot (1857–1938), was also active in the Movement, as well as her parents and siblings (Fig. 3). Another prominent member of the Movement was Mirra Alfassa (1878–1973), who was then an art student at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris. Mirra's first husband, the artist Henri Morisset (1870–1956), and her second husband, a former clergyman and lawyer Paul Richard (1874–1964), were also active in the Movement. As mentioned above, Mirra Alfassa later moved to India and became the spiritual partner of Sri Aurobindo. The ideas of the Cosmic Movement had a considerable impact on the Integral Yoga developed by Sri Aurobindo, and the emblem of Max Théon, a lotus within a hexagram, was adopted by Aurobindo.¹⁰

In September 1908, Madame Théon died during a visit to Europe. Théon (who continued to reside in Zarif until his death in 1927), became much less involved in the activities of the Movement, and the *Revue Cosmique* ceased publication soon after the death of Madame Théon. Louis Thémanlys contin-

10 Godwin, Chanel & Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 338; Chanel, 'L'Oeuvre de Max Théon', vol. 1, 28; vol. 2, 519; Heehs, 'The Kabbalah', 233–239. According to Mirra Alfassa, Sri Aurobindo read the publications of the Cosmic Movement, found interest in them, and adopted some of its terminology. See Nahar, *Mirra The Occultist*, 42.

ued to direct the Movement, and published a few issues of a new journal, *Le Mouvement Cosmique* (in 1913, 1914 and 1920). Later, he founded another group, *Idéal et Réalité* (and published a monthly review with the same name) which combined interest in the Cosmic Philosophy and the arts.

Pascal Thémanlys (1909–2000), the son of Louis and Claire, who was active in the *Idéal et Réalité* group, and later emigrated with his mother to Israel, continued to teach and publish the writings of the Cosmic Movement. In the 1970s Pascal founded the group *Argaman*, dedicated to the study of Kabbalah and Cosmic Philosophy, which is still active today. The writings and the ideas of the Cosmic Movement are also studied and practiced today by small groups in France and Turkey.

3 Alma

In 1907, the recently married couple, Louis and Claire Thémanlys, traveled to Algeria, to visit Villa Zarif, near Tlemcen, the residence of the two mysterious masters of the Cosmic Movement. The young couple spent three months, from April to June, with their masters at Villa Zarif.¹¹ More than twenty years later, in 1931, Claire Thémanlys published a short book, *Un Séjour chez les Grands Initiés* (Fig. 4), which is based on her recollections from that visit. In the book, the young neophytes are called Stella and Ary, and the ‘Great Initiates’, are called Aïa, and Alma.¹² Following Claire Thémanlys, some later sources refer to Max Théon’s companion as Alma, although she herself probably never used this name.¹³

Claire Thémanlys describes Alma, as they saw her when they first entered Villa Zarif: ‘Alma, the saintly companion of the great initiate, was there, standing smiling, so good, and so radiant’.¹⁴ When the young couple woke up the next morning, they saw Alma sitting in the garden, wearing a big red shawl and writing:

11 The arrival of the couple in Zarif, on April 15, and their departure on June 28, was noted in Teresa’s diary.

12 These names are mentioned also by Louis Themanlys in “L’Instructeur”, published in the last volume of the journal *Idéal et Réalité*: ‘Aïa Aziz la grand animateur et Alma la sainte réfléchitrice’, *Idéal et Réalité*, no. 54–55 (1930), 148; Chanel, ‘L’Oeuvre de Max Théon’, vol. 1, 513.

13 Heehs, ‘The Kabbalah’, 224.

14 Thémanlys, *Un séjour*, 7.



FIGURE 4 *Claire Thémanlys, Un Séjour chez les Grands Initiés*

She wrote without stop, peacefully, in a corner of the garden. She wrote in such a state of rest that puts to sleep in her and around her the petty daily concerns. She wrote what her soul hears and sees from beyond the veil. She wrote what knowledge dictates to her, she wrote the stories and memories of conscious humanity, whose voice speaks and inspires her. She wrote as if in prayer.¹⁵

Claire Thémanlys wrote that Alma had extraordinary visionary powers, and that she could see several planes of life at the same time, from the physical degree to the seventh heaven.¹⁶ The 'Royal Sensitive', as she called her, spent her days writing her visions, under the guidance of her husband. The manuscripts, which she wrote in English, were copied and translated into French by her secretary, Teresa.¹⁷ According to Claire, Alma saw the invisible realms in the

15 Ibid., 10.

16 Ibid., 9.

17 Ibid., 25.

same way as she saw the visible world around her. She could foretell future events,¹⁸ and knew every small detail about the character and appearance of people she had never met.¹⁹ She also had supernatural powers of telekinesis, levitation and manifestation.

For example, during breakfast, when Claire asked her about the reality of supernatural phenomena, the table began to move towards the astonished Claire, and to follow her, without anyone touching it.²⁰ On another evening, following Claire's request that Alma would demonstrate some 'experiences', a tablecloth folded itself without human touch, furniture moved in the room and rose in the air, and little white olive flowers covered the room. That evening, Claire wrote, was the beginning of a series of 'phenomena' that continued regularly for several weeks.²¹ In addition to her psychic and supernatural powers, Claire considered Alma to be highly accomplished: 'Her erudite knowledge equaled the extent of her psychic gifts. She spoke a number of ancient and modern languages, and was learned in science, mathematics, medicine, and astronomy'.²²

Claire Thémánlys' memoirs end with a description of the last meal the young couple had with their hosts, before leaving Zarif. Alma holds the hand of the young woman, and assures her that within the calm of passivity, only the immutable, divine light exists: 'You will always be, even if far away from us, cradled on the waves of our tenderness'.²³

4 Madame Théon

Another member of the Cosmic Movement who visited Villa Zarif, and later, recorded her memories of the visit, was Mirra Alfassa. Alfassa met the Théons for the first time in 1905, during their visit in Paris. A year later, in July 1906, she travelled to Villa Zarif (Fig. 5). Her first husband, Henry Morisset joined her a month later, and the couple stayed in Algeria until September. In July 1907 (a month after Claire and Louis Thémánlys left Zarif), Mirra arrived for her second visit, this time, without her husband.²⁴

18 Ibid., 26, 28, etc.

19 Ibid., 92.

20 Ibid., 27.

21 Ibid., 66–68.

22 Ibid., 93.

23 Ibid., 99.

24 See Teresa's diary, entries from: July 14, August 17, September 13, 1906 and July 18 1907.



FIGURE 5 *Mirra Alfassa, Villa Zarif*

Mirra Alfassa, who divorced Henry Morisset, married Paul Richard in 1911. Paul Richard also visited Zarif, in January 1907.²⁵ In his biography, he relates his memories of the visit:

These arcane pursuits and the long hours of meditation in my freezing room were made bearable by the atmosphere of life and meaning which surrounded Mrs. Théon. Although she spoke little she struck me as a really spiritual person with great gifts of intuition. I never saw her again, but I heard later that she disappeared under mysterious circumstances while staying in a small town on the northern coast of France. She simply walked, deliberately or not, right into the ocean.²⁶

After their marriage, Mirra and Paul traveled to India, where they met Aurobindo Ghose (1872–1950), the former radical Indian political activist who became a spiritual leader. After the First World War, Mirra Alfassa, who was

²⁵ Teresa's diary, January 7 1907; Richard, *Without Passport*, 50.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, *Without Passport*, 51. Richard was less impressed with Théon, who, he says, looked the part of the Master, 'with his long hair, Jewish skull cup and monastic robe', *Ibid.*, 50. Richard says he didn't learn anything special from him, except some Kabbalistic interpretations of the scriptures.

recognized by Aurobindo as the incarnation of the divine female power, established Sri Aurobindo's Ashram in Pondicherry, where she lived for the rest of her life.

In Sri Aurobindo's Ashram, Mirra Alfassa recounted her activities in the Cosmic Movement, and of her visits to Villa Zarif to her disciples.²⁷ Her stories provide little biographical information on Madame Théon. She did not know her given name or her original surname, but said that Madame Théon was English, and that she was born on the Isle of Wight.²⁸ She said that she was blind in one eye,²⁹ and described her as 'a small woman, fat, almost flabby—she gave you the feeling that if you leaned against her, it [her body] would melt!'³⁰

Mirra Alfassa related the extraordinary supernatural powers of Madame Théon: 'she would will a thing to come to her instead of going to the thing herself; instead of going to get her sandals when she wanted them, she made the sandals come to her. She did this through a capacity to radiate her matter—she exercised a will over her matter—her central will acted upon matter anywhere.'³¹ Similar to Claire Thémanlys, she mentioned that Madame Théon had telekinetic powers. According to Alfassa, Madame Théon once used her powers in a playful manner, as a sort of practical joke aimed at frightening a rich Arab merchant who visited the Théons and pestered them with ridiculous questions.³²

27 Stories about Mirra's visit to Villa Zarif, which she told the children of the Ashram in 1957, were published under the title, 'Souvenir de Tlemcen', in the *Bulletin du Centre International d'Education Sri Aurobindo*. The piece was later published in the collection *Entretiens 1957–1958*, which was first published in 1969. In this publication, the name Théon was not mentioned, and Mirra referred to her hosts in Tlemcen as Madame and Monsieur x. Many more stories and memories about the Cosmic Movement and its leaders, which Mirra related to her disciple, Satprem (Bernard Enginger), were recorded by him in the 13 volumes of the *The Mother's Agenda* (first published in 1979). On the basis of the information in *The Mother's Agenda*, as well as other sources and documents, Sujata Nahar, a disciple of the Mother (and Satprem's companion), wrote a detailed biography of the Mother, entitled, *The Mother's Chronicles*. Mirra's activities in the cosmic movement and her visits to Algeria are described in the third book of *Chronicles*, *Mirra the Occultist*, which contains a chapter dedicated to Mrs. Théon.

28 La Mère, *Entretiens 1957–1958*, 66.

29 *Mother's Agenda*, vol. 4, 114.

30 *Mother's Agenda*, vol. 1, 442.

31 Nahar, *Mirra the Occultist*, 134.

32 La Mère, *Entretiens*, 69–70. I have followed the translation of Nahar, *Mirra the Occultist*, 121–122.

Mirra Alfassa was especially impressed by Madame Théon's mediumistic and clairvoyant abilities:

Madame T ... was an occultist with great powers. She was a remarkable clairvoyant and had mediumistic faculties. Her powers were of an exceptional order. She had received an extremely thorough and rigorous training, and could exteriorize, that is to say, from her material body she could go out in a subtle body, in full consciousness, and do this twelve times in a row, up to the extreme limit of the world of forms ... She remained almost always sunk in a trance, but so well had she trained her body that even when in a trance—that is, when one or more parts of her being were exteriorized—her body had a life of its own and she could walk about and even attend to certain chores.³³

Mirra Alfassa related that Mrs. Théon spoke (in English) during her trance and that her visions were noted down. These texts were translated into French, by another English lady who made all the classic mistakes in her translations.³⁴ The texts were sent to Paris, where Louis Thémanlys and Mirra Alfassa prepared them for print in the *Revue Cosmique* and *La Tradition Cosmique*.³⁵

Then it was sent to me in Paris for correcting. It was literally impossible. There was this Thémanlys, my brother's schoolmate; he wrote books, but he was lazy-minded and didn't want to work! So he had passed that job on to me. But it was impossible, you couldn't do a thing with it. And what words! Théon would invent words for the subtle organs, the inner senses; he had found a word for each thing—a frightful barbarism! And I took

33 La Mère, *Entretiens*, 66–67 (I followed the translation of Nahar, *Mirra The Occultist*, 118–119). See also La Mère, *Entretiens*, 68 (Nahar, *Mirra The Occultist*, 119).

34 Nahar, *Mirra The Occultist*, 21. See also *Mother's Agenda*, vol. 3, 58, Nahar, *Mirra The Occultist*, 42.

35 La Mère, *Entretiens*, 68; *Mother's Agenda*, vol. 1, 441; Nahar, *Mirra The Occultist*, 21, 42, 119. Sujata Nahar cites a postcard which was sent on August 25, 1905, from Tlemcen, in which Théon, who signed the letter, Aïa Aziz (Théon), applauds Mirra Alfassa for her rendering of the Chronicle of Chi: 'Your transcription of the "Chron of Chi" is full of life and of liveliness. Merci. The termination of the brochure is worthy of our mutual friend, and cannot fail to be of great use to the Cause we all love and serve together.' Nahar, *Mirra the Occultist*, 25 (A photocopy of the postcard is included, *Ibid*, 26). Nahar cites another letter, dated July 20 1905, which also relates to the preparation of texts for publication in the *Cosmique Revue*. See *Ibid*, 24.

care of everything: I found the printer, corrected the proofs—all the work for a long time.³⁶

Mirra described the writing of Mrs. Théon as ‘... stories, narratives, an entire initiation in the form of stories. There was a lot in it, really a lot. She knew many things. But it was presented in such a way that it was unreadable ... The story was almost childish, but there was a whole world of knowledge in it. Madame Théon was an extraordinary occultist. That woman had incredible faculties, incredible.’³⁷

About a year after Mirra Alfassa visited Tlemcen for the second time, Madame Théon died, during her visit to Jersey. Her death was a great blow to the Cosmic Movement. In the October 1908 issue of the *Revue Cosmique* the editors announced that due to the death of one of the major collaborators, the publication of the Review might be delayed, or even stopped.³⁸ Indeed, only two more issues of the *Revue Cosmique* were published (November and December 1908). As mentioned above, the November issue opened with an unsigned article, entitled ‘The Empty Place’, which mourned the passing of Madame Théon, without mentioning her name. Mirra Alfassa (who informed Sujata Nahar that she was the author of the article), concluded her obituary with a promise to continue to walk the path of ‘the beloved’ with the hope of her return:

And it is by no means a dream, this, not a baseless construction: surely she will return! Surely she will appear before us, visibly even to the neuro-physical state ... Let us march on courageously straight ahead, let us pursue this path on which She has led us: it is painful at this moment; but as we walk on it our pain will lessen until we hear the heroic chants of the glad victory, when the last dark veil, drawn aside, reveals to us the so dearly Beloved, who conquers us and brings us happiness, as a Triumphant Queen!³⁹

36 Ibid, 441–442.

37 *Mother's Agenda*, vol. 1, 441–442; Nahar, *Mirra the Occultist*, 25.

38 *Revue Cosmique*, 7, no. 10 (1908), 573.

39 *Revue Cosmique* 7, no. 11 (1908), 638. I have followed the translation of Nahar, *Mirra The Occultist*, 259–260.

5 Una

The memories of Claire Thémanlys and Mirra Alfassa provide us with important information and vivid descriptions of Madame Théon and her activities during the last two years of her life. Yet, they do not provide any information concerning her prior life.

Further information concerning Madame Théon and her activities in the late nineteenth century was revealed by the research of Christian Chanel, who received access to the archives of the followers of the Cosmic Movement, which included the diary of Théon's secretary, Teresa (whose birth name was Augusta Rolfe).⁴⁰ Chanel also located several historical documents, which shed further light on Max Théon and his wife.

Through his investigations, Chanel was able to establish that prior to her marriage, Madame Théon was known as Una, an occultist who was active in London in 1884–1885, and founded a group called 'The Universal Philosophic Society'. Chanel noted that the ideas of Una as presented in the pamphlets published by the Universal Philosophic Society, and as reported in a contemporary Spiritualist journal, *The Medium and Daybreak*, anticipated some of the basic teaching of the Cosmic Movement.⁴¹

Chanel was able to identify the future Madame Théon with Una, following the information he found concerning the date of Théon's marriage, which, according to Moïse J. Benharoche-Baralia, one of the later followers of the Cosmic Movement, took place on 21 March 1885.⁴² In the London general registration office he found a marriage certificate from the same date, between Louis Maximilian Bimstein and Mary Chrystine Woodroffe Ware, witnessed by Augusta Rolfe (the above mentioned secretary of Théon, known as Teresa).⁴³ Furthermore, he found that Teresa wrote in the entry of the same date in her diary: 'Una was married'. Two days earlier, on 19 March, Teresa wrote: 'We came to live at 11 Belgrave Road St. John's Wood'. This, indeed, is the address of the bride according to the marriage certificate. The same address was given in the advertisement for the services of 'Théon, the Eastern Psychic Healer', which was published in 1885 in the *The Medium and Daybreak*.⁴⁴

40 Chanel, 'L'Oeuvre de Max Théon', vol. 1, 216–217.

41 Ibid., vol. 1, 224–229.

42 Benharoche-Baralia, *A L'Ombre de la Tradition Cosmique*, vol. 1, 225. See Chanel, 'L'Oeuvre de Max Théon', vol. 1, 185; vol. 2, 911.

43 Ibid., vol. 1, 137, 216. The document is produced Ibid, vol. 2, 912. See also, Godwin, Chanel & Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 293.

44 *The Medium and Daybreak* (July 3, 1885), 431. Godwin, Chanel & Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor*, 295–296.

Una is mentioned several times in Teresa's diary in the entries of the years 1884–1885. It is clear that they were very close, and used to live together, at least part of the time. Teresa noted in her diary several lectures given by Una, at the 'Bijou Academy' on Leigh Street and at 167, Seymour Place.⁴⁵ Many of the entries from this period relate to visits of Teresa and Una to the theater. Indeed, in the first mention of Una, on 17 August, 1884, Teresa noted that she and Una visited Birmingham, following the Theatrical Company that staged the play 'The Unknown' at the Theatre Royal.

As mentioned above, Teresa noted on March 21 that Una was married. After the marriage, Teresa mentions the name Una only once more, noting that on June 14 Una gave her last lecture at Seymour Place. On May 6 Teresa brings up the names Théon and Théona for the first time (Teresa noted that she went with Théon and Théona to see Sir Randal Roberts' play, 'A Dangerous Game' at the Lyceum). From this period on, Teresa will refer in her diary to her patron, whom she formerly called Una, as Théona.

Apart from the information provided by Teresa in her diary, there are other sources concerning Una and her activities in London, during the years 1884–1885. Two pamphlets which were written by Una, *Objects, Axioms, Laws etc., of the Universal Philosophic Society* and *Sayings of the Sibyl Alta Una, by Una, high priestess of Pan, the light God and Eros* were printed in 1884 by the Universal Philosophic Society. The foundation of the Universal Philosophic Society, and the lectures given by Una in its framework, were reported in the *The Medium and Daybreak*, the weekly Spiritualist periodical edited by James Burns.

The founding of the Universal Philosophic Society, headed by Una, was announced in *The Medium and Daybreak* in July 1884. The objectives of the Society were to spiritually reform society:

The belief in Deity will be communicated by inspirational means to such atheists who are dissatisfied with the material view of creation and the general aim of the greatest teachers will be, by scientific induction, and a transmitted sympathy with the beings invisible to ordinary sight, not only to impress their hearers with a vaster conception of the Great Unseen World, and of their relationship to this life and inhabitants, but also to actuate the concentration of their souls upon the culture of the spirit—earnestly and perpetually subduing the power of the self.⁴⁶

45 Entries of November 2, 1884, March 1, 1885 and June 14, 1885.

46 *Medium and Daybreak* (July 11, 1884), 439. See Chanel, 'L'Oeuvre de Max Théon', vol. 1, 270, note 61. An advertisement by Una was published also in *The Era* (September 13, 1884), 20,

The main principals of the Universal Philosophic Society were presented in *Objects, Axioms, Laws etc., of the Universal Philosophic Society*. According to the pamphlet, the philosophy of the Society is: 'Non atheistic, non dogmatic and non aggressive', and its three main objects are liberty of thought, annihilation of fear, ignorance and superstition, and the uttermost evolution of 'the highest specimens of the noblest earthly being (Man) intellectually, morally and socially'.⁴⁷ In the second pamphlet published by the Universal Philosophic Society, *Sayings of the Sibyl Alta Una* (Fig. 6), Una, 'the high priestess of Pan, the light God and Eros' says that she has lived nine times upon the earth, 'in order to attract, concentrate, and diffuse the light, love and life of Pan, the Light King, Eros'.⁴⁸ Una declared that in her previous incarnations, religion caused humanity to worship death and darkness and to reject light, love, and life. Yet, in her present, ninth reincarnation 'light will prevail over darkness, science over superstition, life over death'.⁴⁹

Una advocated political, social and religious reforms. She called for a 'super-socialistic' international government, which would bring a gradual and non-violent cessation of all class privileges.⁵⁰ She declared that the attainment of international super-socialism required the complete and utter annihilation of religion, which is 'the root of all evil, the barrier of all progress'.⁵¹ Una emphasized the rights of women to 'sexual selection', and called the state to encourage the union of the highest type of humanity and discourage the union of the lowest.⁵²

Between July 1884 and January 1885, Una gave a series of lectures which were reported in the *Medium and Daybreak*.⁵³ In one of these reports, James Burns, the editor of the journal, described Una's appearance:

stating that: 'Una, of the Universal Philosophic Society, authoress and lecturer, begs courteously to intimate she is in no way associated with the Lady who advertises with Como as Thought Reader etc.' Como and Una appeared at the time as 'Illusionists, thought readers and second sight sceancists'. See *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette* (September 11th 1884), 5.

47 Una, *Objects, Axioms, Laws, &c.*, 2.

48 Una, *Sayings of the Sibyl Alta Una*, 2.

49 *Ibid.*, 3.

50 *Ibid.*, 4.

51 *Ibid.*, 8.

52 *Ibid.*, 7.

53 The first lecture was held on July 20, 1884 at the Camden Institute of Music. See *Medium and Daybreak* (July 25th, 1884): 471. Una also attended lectures given by other Spiritualists—she is mentioned as one of those who aided at a lecture given by Rosemund Dale Owen. See: *Medium and Daybreak* (December 1884): 323.

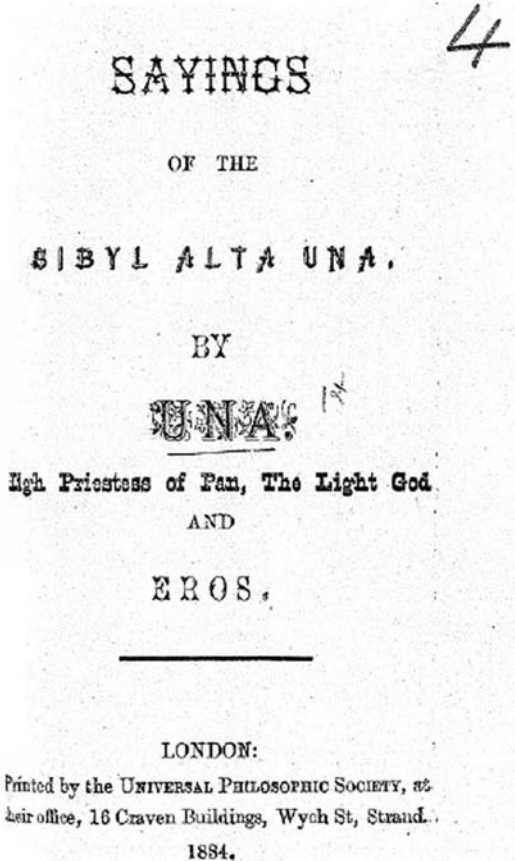


FIGURE 6 Sayings of the Sibyl Alta Una

She is every inch of a womanly woman—a little tender bud of womanhood, shrinking, like the moss rose within its calyx, under the kindly protection of an umbrageous hat. The voice is low, sweet and sympathetic, the influence warm and attractive ... her light blue eyes are upcast, her small delicate hands and arms are moved gently in graceful attitudes.⁵⁴

In her lectures Una called for scientific research on the occult sciences, in order to reveal the latent power in man and nature.⁵⁵ She stated that there is one

⁵⁴ Ibid. (August 8, 1884), 519.

⁵⁵ Ibid. (December 5, 1884), 772.

great undivided whole, from pure spirit to gross materiality, and that the more spiritual (or less material) could permeate the less spiritual (or more material) existences.⁵⁶ She claimed that there are nine states or degrees of being (Body, Nerve Body, Soul, Mind, Spirit, Super-Spirit, Essence, Super-Essence and Central Essence), on which 'the power of ubiquity and the duration of existence' depend. These gradations of being correspond to the spheres of the solar system, and to different lights or colors.⁵⁷

Una discussed also social issues, and called for improvement of the conditions of the 'lower orders' so that they could enjoy the right to holiness, happiness and freedom.⁵⁸ Yet, she claimed that only the intellectual, social and moral leaders gained an immortal ego, while the souls of the masses are dispersed in 'more general improved condition'.⁵⁹ In another lecture, dedicated to "Woman's Rights", Una advocated woman's right to protection, education, rest and benediction, and asserted her visionary and spiritual role: 'By the clearness of her inner vision, she would see constantly before her the light track that stands out before those who have attained to a certain amount of habitual rest—the rest which is the great sine-qua-non of the initiated in all mysteries ...'.⁶⁰ Much of her lecture was dedicated to condemning the portrayal of women in the Bible (both in the Old and New Testaments): 'Woman especially should be protected from the Bible, which insults her from beginning to end, according her no respect, and imputing to the leading representatives actions of the most detestable meanness'.⁶¹

Una dedicated some of her lectures to Shakespearean plays. In November 1884 she lectured about *Hamlet*, and about its recent production at London Princess's Theatre, by the actor Wilson Barrett.⁶² In January 1885 she lectured, 'psychologically and critically', on *Othello*, and 'with philosophical comments' on the *Taming of the Shrew*.⁶³ Her lectures were accompanied by music performances, songs, and poetry readings by herself and her followers. She concluded one of her lectures with 'a beautiful poem written by herself, and by her read, with dramatic effect'.⁶⁴ Another lecture, according to the report, began with

56 Ibid. (December 5, 1884), 772.

57 Ibid. (December 12, 1884), 791.

58 Ibid. (October 31, 1884), 698.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid. (November 14, 1884), 726–727.

61 Ibid., 726.

62 Ibid., 727.

63 Ibid. (January 9, 1885), 30; (January 16, 1885), 46.

64 Ibid. (October 31, 1884), 698.

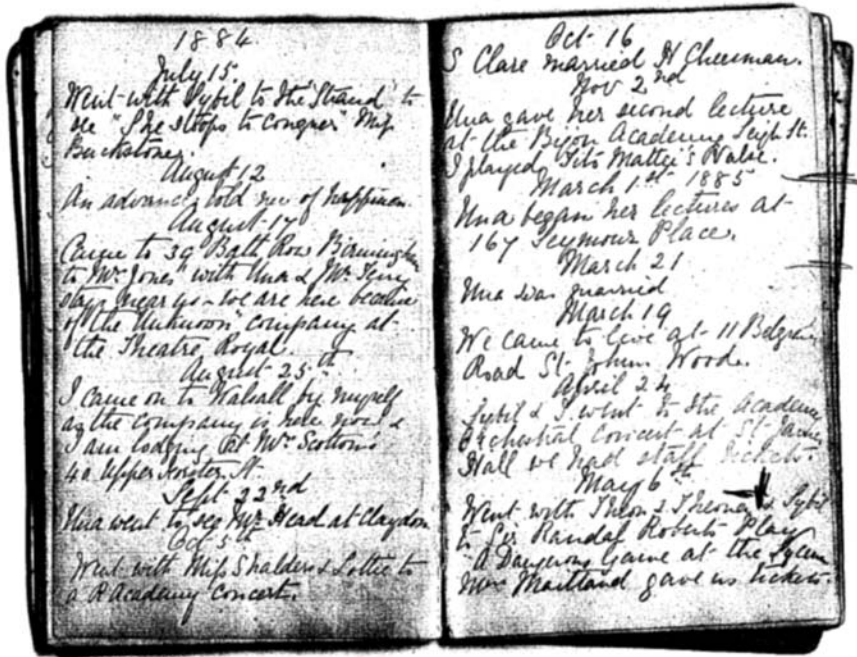


FIGURE 7 Teresa's diary

songs, performed by Mademoiselle Gomez, and recitations from *The Lady of Lyons* and of a comic poem written by Una, performed by the actor Leonard Terry.⁶⁵ In her diary (Fig. 7), Teresa noted that she played at the second lecture that Una gave at the 'Bijou Academy'.⁶⁶

Una's lectures were discussed, and criticized, in the pages of the *Medium and Daybreak*. In an article on mediumship, published on 12 December 1884, the author, who called himself Anthropologos, criticized Una, and accused her of contradictions in her teachings.⁶⁷ On 9 January, 1885, Anthropologos published a more comprehensive attack, which criticized Una's claim to past incarnations and her theory of the nine gradations of being.⁶⁸

65 Ibid. (December 5, 1884), 771–772. Leonard Terry was mentioned in the first report of the Universal Philosophic Society, *Ibid* (July 11, 1884), 439. Terry himself gave a lecture in "The Academy", which was advertised *Ibid* (January 2, 1885), 9.

66 Teresa's Diary, November 2, 1884.

67 *Medium and Daybreak* (December 12, 1884), 786. Una answered to his allegations in a letter to the editor published *ibid* (December 26, 1884), 824.

68 *Ibid*. (January 9, 1885), 20–21. See also Anthropologos' criticism of Una in his essay on psychological influences, *ibid* (December 19, 1884), 803.

Una was eventually criticized also by James Burns, the sympathetic editor of the journal. On 4 January, 1885 Una gave a lecture on ‘The Spiritualism of the Future’.⁶⁹ In the lecture, she claimed that although she did not deny the possibility of the return of deceased relatives and friends through a medium, there was a danger that non-human beings may personify them and deceive the mediums. James Burns added some remarks to his report on the lectures, in which he attacked Una and asserted that her position regarding Spiritualism was close to that of the Theosophists. Una’s criticism of Spiritualism probably brought an end to her good relations with Burns, and this was the last lecture of Una’s to be reported in the journal.⁷⁰

Apart from the two booklets that Una published, the reports in the *Medium and Daybreak*, and the information concerning Una in Teresa’s diary, there are a few unpublished manuscripts that were probably written by Una in 1885, following her meeting with Théon.⁷¹ One of the texts is a vision that begins with the words: ‘I the Light King the supreme the eternal to the God Théone Greeting’. The text contains instruction to Théon regarding ‘the Syble’, the Light King’s chosen one, who was given him ‘to be for thee Knowledge which is light; life also and love’. The text instructs Théon to lead her through her trance, and ‘send her by your power where you will. No spheres of knowledge and wisdom are closed against her forever’. Interestingly, the text refers to Théon’s ‘race and people’, indicating that Théon’s Jewish origins were significant to Una.

Théon’s Jewish identity plays a central role in another prophetic text, which was written on 11 March, 1885, a few days before their marriage. The text, entitled ‘To Théon Maccabeus David from Judas Maccabeus regarding the Hebrews’, includes a message from God, ‘The I that I am’ to the people of Israel, regarding the messianic mission of ‘Théon Macabeus David the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.’ Two songs, which were probably also written during the same period, one entitled ‘The Lion of Judah’ (carrying a similar messianic message), and the other in memory of the Anglo-Jewish Philanthropist Moses Montefiore (who died in July 1885), were published, in Hebrew translation, by the *Argaman Group*.⁷²

As mentioned above, following her marriage to Théon, Una gradually stopped the activities of the Universal Philosophic Society, and stopped going by the name of Una. In March 1886, a year after their marriage, the Théons,

69 Ibid. (January 16, 1884), 36–37.

70 Chanel, ‘L’Oeuvre de Max Théon’, vol. 1, 221.

71 Chanel, ‘L’Oeuvre de Max Théon’, vol. 1, 223.

72 *Or Hadash Al Zion*, 43–47. Chanel, ‘L’Oeuvre de Max Théon’, vol. 1, 223.

together with their secretary Augusta Rolfe/Teresa, left London and crossed the English Channel to France.⁷³ After a year and a half in France, they settled in Algeria, and eventually, established the Cosmic Movement.

6 Mrs. Forest

Before turning to the attempts to recover information concerning Una/Théona, prior to her appearance in London in 1884, I would like to present another interesting source that gives a contemporaneous literary depiction of Una. As I shall show, Una provided the inspiration for one of the important characters in George Moore's novel, *A Mummer's Wife*, which was first published in 1885.⁷⁴ *A Mummer's Wife*, the second novel of the Irish author George Moore (1852–1933), tells the story of an unhappily married Midlands seamstress, Kate Ede, who elopes with a handsome traveling actor and theater manager, Dick Lennox, and becomes his mistress and then wife. Kate joins Dick's company and plays lead roles in light operas. She soon becomes disillusioned with the travelling life, takes to drink, gradually deteriorates and dies as a miserable alcoholic in a London slum.

A secondary, but important character in *A Mummer's Wife* is Mrs. Forest, an eccentric, wealthy woman who falls in love with Dick and finances his theatrical productions in London. Dick's relation with Mrs. Forest stimulates Kate's envy and hastens her deterioration. Yet, it is Mrs. Forest who volunteers to nurse the dying Kate and sits by her deathbed.

There are many indications that George Moore modeled the character of Mrs. Forest on Una. The most decisive one is the title of a work that Mrs. Forest is writing, as she sits by Kate's bed: 'The Sayings of the Sybil by Alta Una.'⁷⁵ *A Mummer's wife* is a novel, and using its depiction of Mrs. Forest to determine further information about Una should be done carefully and tentatively. Yet, as *A Mummer's wife* is a realistic novel, whose author was known to record physical details precisely, its depiction of Mrs. Forest may give us a vivid impression of Una, as seen through the eyes of George Moore.

73 Teresa's Diary, 8 March, 1886.

74 The book was actually published in November 1884. A year after its first publication a slightly revised edition was published, with the author's preface added. Later, Moore published a completely revised edition of the novel, which became the standard version of the work. See Gilcher, 'Collecting Moore', 139.

75 Moore, *A Mummer's Wife* (1885), 434; Idem (1937), 396.

Mrs. Forest (in the later version of the novel, her given name, Laura, is mentioned) appears in the later part of the novel. Dick meets her accidentally, at the pier in Hastings, in East Sussex, where he was traveling with his theatrical company. Dick notices, 'a strange looking creature' wearing a green silk dress and a black battered bonnet.⁷⁶ When he approaches her, he learns that she is studying a poem she wrote, which she plans to recite at a lecture on the chastity of the marriage state, at the Working Men's Club.⁷⁷ After introducing himself as an actor, Dick listens to the recitation of the poem, 'Harpetiae: The Offspring of Neptune and Terra, Daughters of Earth and of Ocean'.⁷⁸

The woman invites Dick to visit her at her hotel, and gives him her card, which states: 'Mrs. Forest, Mother Superior of the Yarmouth Convent'. Reading it, Dick exclaims to himself 'Mother Superior! Classical Cartoons! Chastity of Marriage! What a combination!'.⁷⁹ Later Dick learns that the convent that she established as a refuge for the weak of spirit was a thing of the past.⁸⁰

Following their first meeting, Dick visits Mrs. Forest at her hotel. In the meeting (which is described in detail only in the later version of *A Mummer's Wife*)⁸¹ he learns that Mrs. Forest is operatically inclined, and that she is looking for a musician to compose an opera she was working on, that concerned 'Buddhists, stars, daggers, and flowers'.⁸² Mrs. Forest, who falls in love with Dick, leased a theater in London for him, where he could produce a light opera written by his colleague, Montgomery, and prepare for 'a grand spectacular piece on an Indian subject', to be written by Mrs. Forest (according to the later version, the name of the play was 'Incarnation').⁸³

After moving to London, Kate, Dick's jealous wife, discovers in her husband's pocket one of the 'Classical Cartoons' written by Mrs. Forest, as well as a note from which she learns that Mrs. Forest leased a theater for her husband's company.⁸⁴ An immediate inflammation of jealousy accelerates Kate's deteriorating condition.

76 Ibid. (1885), 349.

77 In the later version, the lecture is about the inherent nobility of man, and the necessity of man worship. Ibid. (1937), 312.

78 Ibid. (1885), 350–351; and see Ibid. (1937), 313–314.

79 Ibid. (1885), 352; and see Ibid. (1937), 315.

80 Ibid. (1885), 352. According to the later version, the Convent was intended for the reformation of dipsomaniacs, Ibid. (1937), 319.

81 Ibid. (1937), 316–320.

82 Ibid. (1885), 352.

83 Ibid. (1885), 362. Cf. Ibid. (1937), 325.

84 Ibid. (1885), 361–362.

After Dick leaves Kate, whose health worsens because of her drinking, Mrs. Forest offers to take care of her, 'as she had already met Kate in a previous life and would see her again some centuries hence, it was only just that she should start off at once to nurse her'.⁸⁵ Mrs. Forest tends to the dying woman: 'Henceforth, Mrs. Forest's place was by Kate's bedside, and, all the while committing the absurd lucubrations to paper—"Sayings of the Sybil" by Alta Una, for the general use of mankind, and choruses of policemen and nuns for the particular benefit of Dick—she strove to unite the discrepant office of nurse and librettist'.⁸⁶

Moore brings many citations from *The Saying of the Sybil Alta Una*, (especially in the first version of the novel),⁸⁷ as well as from Mrs. Forest's, 'Classical Cartoons', and from her song for the light opera.⁸⁸ As the citations from *The Sayings* are accurate, it is possible that the other citations are taken from unknown writings of Una.

Moore relates that Mrs. Forest was 45 years old, and describes her as short (less than five feet high) and fat.⁸⁹ He mentions (only in the first version) that she had a glass eye⁹⁰ (as mentioned above, Mirra Alfassa also stated that Madame Théon had only one eye). In the first version of *A Mummer's Wife* Mrs. Forest is described very pejoratively. Moore describes her 'monstrous coquetry' making 'grotesque movements', and says that, 'It was impossible not to think of her but as an inmate of an asylum'.⁹¹ The unfavorable nature of the description of her character was mitigated in the later version of the novel, which portrayed her in a much more complex, and sympathetic way. Moore omitted most of the derogatory descriptions, as well as some of the ridiculous expressions of her love to Dick.⁹² Moore also added some details concerning Mrs. Forest's history. During her meeting with Dick in her hotel in Hastings, Mrs. Forest tells him of a platonic love affair she had when she traveled to Bulgaria, and gives Dick two volumes of poems she published in Bulgarian. After her Bulgarian adventure, she traveled to many parts of China, and returned home full of love for Eastern civilization. Mrs. Forest also tells of a three-year engagement

85 Ibid. (1885), 433. Cf. Ibid. (1937), 394–395.

86 Ibid. (1885), 433.

87 Ibid. (1885), 434. Cf. Ibid. (1937), 396–397.

88 See: Ibid. (1885), 350–351/(1937), 313–314; Ibid. (1885), 361/(1937), 325; Ibid. (1885), 368/(1937), 397; Ibid. (1885), 434.

89 Ibid. (1885), 353, 368.

90 Ibid. (1885), 351, 368, 436.

91 Ibid. (1885), 349.

92 Ibid. (1885), 367–368.

she had to a man from Somerset, which was broken and almost brought her to suicide. Finally she related that after she left the Yarmouth Convent, she converted to Catholicism.⁹³

Although many of the details concerning Mrs. Forest are fictional, it is clear that her character is based on Una, whom George Moore probably met in 1884, when he was working on his novel. In preparation for writing, Moore met with actors in London, and joined a tour of a light opera theatrical company, managed by his friend Richard (Dick) Mansell (originally Maitland), who was the model for the character of Dick Lenox.⁹⁴ Una, as we have seen above, was very much interested at this time in the theater, and George Moore probably met her in theatrical circles in London, or during his tour with Mansell's company. Teresa mentions in her diary that she and Una visited Birmingham on 17 August, 1884, 'because of the Unknown company at the Theatre Royal.' *The Unknown* was one of the plays that Richard Mansell's traveling company performed during the summer of 1884.⁹⁵

7 Mother

Una, who was depicted in Moore's novel as Mrs. Forest, made her appearance in London in the summer of 1884. In the *Mummer's Wife*, Mrs. Forest relates her past adventures to Dick Lenox, which include travels to Bulgaria and China, a platonic love affair and a failed engagement. According to the novel, Mrs. Forest was in her past the mother superior of a convent. Much of this information is probably fictional. Yet, the last detail (which surprised Dick Lenox), can be corroborated with other sources. As I shall show in this section, before her appearance as Una, the future Mrs. Théon was indeed the mother superior of an Anglican convent.

93 Ibid. (1937), 317–319.

94 Moore, *A Communication to my friends*, xxv; Malcolm *Old Gods Falling*, 53; Frazier, 'Preface', 6; Frazier, *George Moore*, 19, 87–88, 96–97. I am grateful to Anthony Patterson who helped me find this information.

95 See the advertisements and reports on the tour of the company in *The Era* (August 23), 17, *Edinburgh Evening News* (27 August), 4 and *The York Herald* (August 27), 5. On August 25, Teresa noted that that she came to Walsall by herself, following the company. Possibly, she and her patron were acquainted with Richard Mansell (or with his brother and partner, William) already in 1882. Teresa mentions several times in her diary, in August and September 1882, "Mr. Mansell", who is connected to the London theater scene.

Una is mentioned in Teresa's diary for the first time in the summer of 1884. In his dissertation, Christian Chanel raised the possibility that Teresa knew Una previously, from her days at a convent in Claydon, where Teresa resided from the late 1860s.⁹⁶ Chanel discarded this option, because Teresa does not mention this explicitly. Yet, a close reading of the diary shows that Teresa did indeed know Una before 1884. The future Una/Théona features in Teresa's diary from its very beginning, yet, under another name—'Mother', the mother superior of the Anglican convent in Claydon.

Teresa, whose birth name was Augusta Rolfe,⁹⁷ began writing her diary in May 1876. At the time, she was a sister at the Anglican monastery, *The Convent of the Lord Jesus & The Holy Angels*, in a small village, Claydon in Suffolk, not far from Ipswich. The nunnery was established in the late 1860s by Joseph Leicester Lyne, known as Father Ignatius (1837–1908), an Anglican deacon, who, under the influence of the Oxford Movement, initiated a monastic reform in the Church of England, and by the Rector of Claydon, Father George Drury (1819–1895).⁹⁸ The convent came to public attention first in 1867, when Augusta Rolfe's father broke into the convent and 'rescued' his daughter (who returned to the convent after her father's death).⁹⁹

In 1878, the convent came once again to public attention, this time in the context of Father Drury's refusal to hold a burial service for an unbaptized infant (the son of Baptist parents) in a church in Akenham, near Claydon. The case brought much negative attention both to Father Drury and to the Claydon nunnery, and was followed by a libel case brought by Drury against the editor of a local newspaper.¹⁰⁰

96 Chanel, 'L'Oeuvre de Max Théon', vol. 1, 218. Sujata Nahar (*Mirra the Occultist*, 55), on the other hand, accepts the possibility that Alma and Teresa were friends from their convent days at Claydon.

97 Augusta Rolfe was born on June 27, 1845 in Bocking, Braintree district, Essex, daughter of William and Elizabeth Margaret Rolfe. See Chanel, 'L'Oeuvre de Max Théon', vol. 1, 217.

98 Ibid, vol. 1, 268, note 41. On Lyne and his monastic reform see Sockman, 'The Revival', 164–172.

99 The incident was reported in the contemporary press as well as in the proceedings of the *The Akenham Burial Case*. See Chanel, 'L'Oeuvre de Max Théon', vol. 1, 217. Fletcher, *In a Country Churchyard*, 63; Idem, *The Akenham Burial Case*, 129–131.

100 The proceedings of the case are brought in Fletcher, *The Akenham Burial Case*, 82–205. See also idem, *In a Country Churchyard*, 51–75. Drury won the case, yet, as Fletcher summarized (Ibid., 65), 'it was a legal victory but a moral defeat'. Drury had claimed 2000 pounds damages; the judge awarded him 40 shillings.

From the very first entries in Teresa's diary, in May 1876, the mother superior of the convent (whom she only ever refers to as 'Mother') is mentioned. A close reading of the diary reveals that Mother, Una and Théona, are the same person, Teresa's life-long companion and patron.¹⁰¹

Teresa diary is laconic, yet it contains interesting information concerning the daily routine, activities and interests of the mother superior and the nuns in the convent during the years 1876–1884. The sisters maintained the Benedictine rule, which was introduced by Father Ignatius. Life in the convent included prayers, housework, school teaching, community and missionary work, as well as games, teas, and picnics. Mother and the nuns had close relations with Father Drury, the rector (who is usually called 'Father' in the diary), and his family. Although life at the convent was usually uneventful, Teresa mentions the troubles Father had with the Bishop of Norwich¹⁰² and his lawsuit against the editor of the *East Anglian Daily Times*, concerning the Akenham Burial Case.¹⁰³ Teresa mentions also local hostility towards the nuns. On 28 February, 1878, she noted: 'We found Minnie our faithful Tabbie cat hanged by a cord on the garden palings; it has evidently been done out of spite to us; poor puss was quite dead and stiff'.

In 1881, life at Claydon nunnery changed. The good relations and collaboration between Mother and Father Drury seem to have ended during this period. On 24 April, Teresa noted: 'Mr. Drury refused our dear Mother communion'. This is the last time that Reverend Drury (who before this entry was always referred to by Teresa as 'Father'), is mentioned in the diary. It is unclear why Drury refused to give Mother communion but it may be related to the interest that Mother developed in Spiritualism at that time. We do not know when exactly this interest began, but on 23 February, 1882, Teresa noted: 'I played at Mother's lecture on Spiritualism in Ipswich'.

At that time, Teresa, stopped wearing the nun's habit and moved to London.¹⁰⁴ Mother remained in Claydon longer, but eventually, she also moved to London. Teresa kept her close relations with Mother during the years 1882–1884, and she mentions her frequently in her diary. Although they did not live together, they met, travelled together and corresponded in letters. 'Mother' is

101 This becomes evident, for instance, from the mention of Una's visit to Mr. Head, in Claydon, on September 22, 1884. Previously in the diary, there are several mentions of Mother's meetings with the Head family in Claydon.

102 Teresa's Diary, April 5, 1878, June 17, 1878.

103 Teresa's Diary, March 11, 1879.

104 On July 7, 1881, Teresa wrote that she put off her habit. On September 16, 1881, she wrote that she and Sister Camille came to live at 69 Saint Augustine Road, Camden Square.

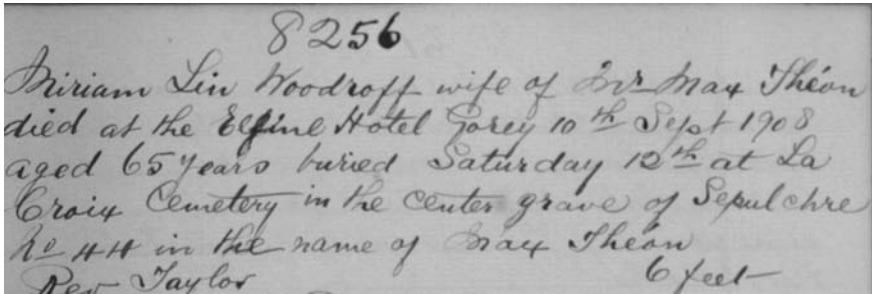


FIGURE 8 *Death certificate of Miriam Lin Woodroff*

mentioned for the last time on 22 April 1884. Afterwards she changes her identity to Una. Then, soon after the marriage of Una on March 1885, the name Una is dropped, and the name Théona is used in the rest of the diary.

8 Mary Ware

Teresa's diary gives us interesting details concerning the life and activities of Mother during her Claydon period, and concerning her transformation from the mother superior of an Anglican nunnery, to the Spiritualist and occultist Una. Yet, Teresa does not give us any information concerning the name, identity and early history of the future Mrs. Théon.

As mentioned above, Christian Chanel found two documents that give the name, and some biographical details, of Mrs. Théon.¹⁰⁵ According to the 1885 marriage certificate, the bride was registered as Mary Chrystine Woodroffe Ware, daughter of William Jessey Ware, age 27 (hence, born 1858). According to her death certificate (Fig. 8), from 1908, her name was Miriam Lin Woodroff (Fig. 2), and her age 65 (hence, born 1843).

Notwithstanding the contradictions between the two documents, some of the details in them, and in Teresa's diary, made it possible to find further information with the help of digitized data-bases (which were not available to Chanel when he did his research). According to the marriage certificate, the bride's first name was Mary, and her surname Ware. A search of the 1881 England census shows that Mary Ware, age 36, was registered as the head of 'The Convent' in Claydon. One of the two other 'inmates' of the convent was Augusta Rolfe. Ten years previously, in 1871, Mary Ware, age 29, was registered as the

¹⁰⁵ Chanel, 'L'Oeuvre de Max Théon', vol. 1, 216, 494.

head of the household in Claydon, whose other six residents were all unmarried women (Augusta Rolfe was not amongst them). Mary Ware's profession, as well as of the other residents, was 'Sister of Mercy'.

Both the 1871 and 1881 censuses give us information concerning Mary Ware's place of birth, the village Sutton Courtenay in Berkshire. This information enabled me to find her registration in the 1861 census. At that time, Mary Ware, age 21, born in Sutton Courtenay, lived in Cedrus Villa, St. Giles' parish, Oxford, with her widowed mother, Sarah Combs (45 years old, born in Marcham, Berkshire).

I found some more information about Mary Ware in the earlier censuses of 1851 and 1841, which somewhat confused me. According to the 1851 census, a Mary Ware, age 11, born in Sutton, lived in Marcham, Berkshire (the village where her mother came from, not far from Sutton Courtenay), in the household of her grandmother, Mary Stone. Mary Ware, age 1 year old, was registered in the 1841 census, living in Marcham, in the household of William Stone and Mary Stone. According to both registrations, other members of the Stone and Ware families lived in the same household, including Sarah Ware (Mary Stone's daughter in law).¹⁰⁶ While it was clear that Sarah was Mary Ware's mother, it wasn't clear who her father was, what the relations between the Ware and Stone families were, or why Sarah Ware, Mary's mother, was registered later, after they moved to Oxford, as Sarah Combs.

The information I found on the website of the Marcham Society,¹⁰⁷ as well as further information which the archivist, Elisabeth Whitehouse, kindly provided me, clarified all these questions, and made it possible to establish the final details of Mary Ware's biography. According to this information, Mary Ware's father was indeed William Jesse Ware, as registered in her marriage certificate.

106 According to the 1851 census, the members of the family were Mary Stone, the head of the household (age 59, maltster and farmer), her sons, Thomas Ware (age 36, farmer's son), and Edward Stone (age 23, farmer's son), her daughter in law Sarah Ware (age 35, annuitant) and her granddaughter, Mary Ware (age 11). According to the 1841 census the members of the family were: William Stone (age 45), Mary Stone (age 50), Henry Stone (age 16), Esther Stone (age 14), Edward Stone (age 12), Thomas Ware (age 25), Sarah Ware (age 25) and Mary Ware (age 1). The census does not specify the birth places or the relations between the household members.

107 <http://www.marchamsociety.org.uk/archive.php> The webpage contains information on the Stone family, gathered from parish records, directories and censuses, including the Stone family memorial stone found in All Saints' Church graveyard. On the basis on this information the archivist created a family tree, and summarized the history of the family.

Mary Ware¹⁰⁸ was born in June 1839, and baptized on 20 June,¹⁰⁹ at Sutton Courtenay, Berkshire (today, in Oxfordshire). Her parents were William Jesse Ware and Sarah Coombs Bradfield. William Jesse Ware was the eldest son of William and Mary Ware, of Latton, Wiltshire. After William Ware senior died, in 1821, his widowed wife married William Stone of Marcham, the owner of the farm and malthouse known as Green Farm.

Mary Ware's mother, Sarah Coombs (or Combs) Bradfield, was born in Marcham in 1815, to Edward Bradfield (1762–1838) the baker of Marcham, and Sarah Woodroof (1782–1816).¹¹⁰ It is interesting to note that Mary Ware used the name of her maternal grandmother in her 1885 marriage certificate.

William Jesse Ware and Sarah Coombs Bradfield were married in 1838. Their daughter Mary was born in June 1839. William Jesse died on 28 March, 1840, when Mary was less than one year old (Fig. 10).¹¹¹

After the death of William Jesse, Sarah and her baby daughter Mary moved from Sutton Courtenay to her mother-in-law's household in Marcham. Mary Ware spent her childhood there, on her grandmother's farm. By 1856, Mary's step-grandfather (William Stone), her grandmother (Mary Stone) (Fig. 11), and all her uncles from the Ware and Stone families had died.

The only surviving members of the family were Mary Ware and her mother, Sarah, who inherited the family's considerable property. It was probably this inheritance that enabled Mary Ware to finance the activities of the Claydon convent, and later, to support Max Théon and the Cosmic Movement. By 1861, Mary Ware, who was already 21 years old, moved to St. Giles' parish, Oxford with her mother.¹¹² It is most likely in Oxford that Mary Ware became acquainted with the Anglo-Catholic reform ideas of the Oxford Movement, and became

108 Her surname was recorded in the *England Select Births and Christening, 1538–1975*, as Weare.

109 In her diary, Teresa noted 'Mother's Birthday' on 20 June, 1877.

110 The information is based on data found in Ancestry.com databases. The Bradfield family carried the tradition of baking in Marcham for more than a hundred years. See Whitehouse, 'Commercial Bakeries', 41–42. Edward Bradfield and Sarah Woodroof were married in 1804, and had eight children.

111 See the memorial engraving, cited on the Marcham society website: 'Sacred to the memory of WILLIAM JESSE eldest son of the late WILLIAM WARE of Latton, Wilts who departed this life March 28th 1840 aged 28 years'.

112 Mary's mother, who was registered in the 1861 census as Sarah Combs, was married in 1862 with William Cheesman. Mrs. Cheesman is mentioned quite frequently in Teresa's diary, who sometimes calls her grandmother. Sarah's stepdaughter, Maud Cheesman, is also mentioned in the diary.



FIGURE 9 *The Ware family memorial*

interested in conventual life. As we have seen, ten years later, in 1871, Mary Ware was living in Claydon, as the head of the controversial Anglican convent.



FIGURE 10 *William Jesse Ware's memorial*



FIGURE 11 *Mary Ware's grandmother's memorial*

9 Mary Ware in the Local Press

Another resource from which further information concerning Mary Ware can be found is the digitized British newspaper collection. A search for Miss Ware, from Claydon, in the newspapers of the period, brings up many interesting results.

On 14 March 1882, *The Bury and Norwich Post*, and *Suffolk Herald*, published an article entitled 'Claydon and its Teachers'. According to the article:

About eleven years ago a convent was built at Claydon by a Miss Ware, who became the Mother Superior, and founded the English Order of St. Benedict. The relations between the convent and Claydon Church were very intimate, and the Rev. G. Drury, the Rector, became Director to the nuns. Demonstrations of the 'No Popery' character were not wanting at first, and after a time the property in the convent was conveyed to the Rev. George Drury in trust for the Order. In time the black habits and white wimples of the nuns became familiar in the streets of the village and at the cottage doors, and the sisters gained a reputation for kindly deeds and generous charity.¹¹³

The nunnery in Claydon was in fact founded by Mary Ware even earlier than indicated in this article. The earliest references to the convent, and to its mother superior, which I was able to find, appeared in early 1867, in the reports about the forceful removal of Augusta Rolfe from the convent by her father. According to a report from February 1867, Miss Rolfe, from Braintree, had joined the Claydon nunnery about six weeks previously, and received the name Sister Teresa.¹¹⁴ A few weeks later, her father, Dr. Rolfe, with about twenty other men, broke into the nunnery, and carried Sister Teresa away by force, back to her home in Braintree.¹¹⁵ According to a report from April 1867, 'Sister Mary' arrived at Braintree, trying to bring Augusta back to the nunnery, but Dr. Rolfe refused to have any communications with her.¹¹⁶

113 *The Bury and Norwich Post*, and *Suffolk Herald* (March 14, 1882), 7.

114 In her diary, January 9, 1877, Teresa noted 'This is my fete day I have been sister ten years today'.

115 *The Evening Standard* (February 8, 1867), 5. The incident was brought up in the proceedings of *The Akenham Burial Case*. See Fletcher, *The Akenham Burial Case*, 129–133. Reverend George Drury mentioned in his testimony that the Reverend Mother was ill in bed at the time the nunnery was broken into, and that he tried to stop the men that came to fetch Teresa from entering her room.

116 *Bury and Norwich Post*, April 2, 1867.

Another event, which also concerns worried parents of one of the sisters, occurred five years later. On July 1872, the Reverend R. Longe, Vicar of Coddendam, reported the attempts of the parents of Melinda Smye, 'who was enticed away and admitted into a convent in Claydon' to visit their daughter, and the refusal of 'The Lady Superior' of the convent to allow the visit.¹¹⁷ In relation to this event, a letter entitled 'The Claydon Conventional Burlesque', signed by 'an Anglo-Catholic', was published in the *Ipswich Journal*. The author of the letter offered: 'a warning and caution to the public in general, concerning this miserable religious farce, which is being enacted in the village of Claydon, under the auspices of Mr. Drury and Miss Mary Ware.'¹¹⁸ He describes in detail the way Mary Ware 'allured' new candidates to the convent:

For instance, before a new guest arrives, upon whom the 'Mother' has fixed her jealous eye, great preparations are made—the 'Convent' is tidied up, flowers are prettily arranged in every room—books setting forth the religious life in glowing colours are scattered about ... The 'Mother' pets and flatters her up to the skies, holds long conversation with her in which she tells her of the great vocation God has given her—nay more, with endearing word and caress she whispers into the wondering ears of the delighted girl, that long since our lord vouched to her (the 'Mother'), a wondrous vision, in which she beheld this new Postulant, clothed in the Benedictine habit, the prop and pillar of the glorious Convent, *fac simile* of the middle ages, which was one day to flourish in the village of Claydon, the admiration of all.¹¹⁹

In April 1881, the *Ipswich Journal* reported the activities of the 'Church of England Christian Association', which was established by Mary Ware: 'About 40 members belonging to this auxiliary branch were entertained to a bountiful tea through the hospitality of Miss Ware, superior of the Convent'.¹²⁰ Mary Ware was aided in this venture by George Drury, who, according to the report, took much interest in its success.

Yet, a year later, the local press reported that the long cooperation between Mary Ware and George Drury ended in unpleasant discord (this, as we have seen above, was reflected also in Teresa's diary). In March 1882 the *Bury and Norwich Post and Suffolk Herald* reported that the Rector and Mother Superior

117 *Essex Standard*, June 28, 1872.

118 *The Ipswich Journal* (July 20, 1872), 7.

119 *Ibid.*

120 *The Ipswich Journal* (April 26, 1881), 2.

could not agree as to the manner in which the convent was run.¹²¹ According to *The Ipswich journal*, Drury claimed that the management of the nunnery was not conducted by Mary Ware according to the original agreement.¹²² Following the strained relations between the former collaborators, a dispute emerged concerning possession of the nunnery, which was built by Mary Ware, but entrusted to George Drury. The dispute was settled with an agreement that the building would be returned to Mary Ware's possession, subject to the condition that it would not be used for religious purposes without the rector's consent.¹²³

Mary Ware and her supporters celebrated the victory against Drury with great pomp. A village feast was organized, and about 130 people were invited to a dinner at the lecture hall. Following Mary Ware's victory speech, the heroine was carried in a chair to the convent gates on the shoulders of her supporters, at the head of a procession. At the convent a song of triumph, the refrain of which was 'home from our victory returning,' was led by the precentor and loud cheers were given.¹²⁴

At that time, Mary Ware began giving public lectures, first at the lecture hall in Claydon, and later in a theater in Ipswich. These lectures, according to a report from March 1882, excited considerable interest. According to the report, Miss Ware's lectures 'indicated broader views in regard to nonconformity than were formerly reputed to be entertained at the convent'. The report observed that: 'The lady, indeed, seems to aspire to become, in a more limited sphere, a kind of female Luther or Wesley. She proclaims herself to her "children" the leader of a mission which is not to be confined to Claydon, but to win for Christ's kingdom the hearts and souls of men and women in Ipswich and more distant places.'¹²⁵

Mary's 'nonconformist' views provoked criticism. In December 1882, *The Ipswich Journal* published a letter to the editor, entitled 'Miss Ware's Teachings', written by E.S.E. Saunders. The letter accused Miss Ware of following the ideas of the celebrated Atheist Charles Bradlaugh (1833–1931). It claimed that she falsely professed herself a Christian lecturer, although she was actually an 'echoer of Bradlaugh and of the shallow school of modern infidelity'.¹²⁶ It can be inferred from Saunders' excited letter, that Mary criticized Christianity in her lectures for rejecting science, and that she spoke slightly of

121 *Bury and Norwich Post and Suffolk Herald* (March 14, 1882), 7.

122 *The Ipswich Journal* March 11, 1882.

123 *Bury and Norwich Post and Suffolk Herald* (March 14, 1882), 7.

124 *Ibid.*

125 *Ibid.*

126 *The Ipswich Journal* (December 23, 1882), 11.

the Bible, which, she said could not be relied upon, because of its repeated copies. In the lectures, Mary presented ideas concerning the psychic force, which is dependent on moral, intellectual and natural power, which Saunders identified as 'Spiritualism or sorcery'. The only part of the lecture Saunders agreed with was Mary's claim that the mission of women is to comfort and to bless.¹²⁷

10 Conclusion

The information presented in this article enables us to determine with precision the identity of Madame Théon and the main stages of her biography. Mary Ware was born in Sutton Courtney in 1839, and raised in a wealthy farmer family, headed by her Grandmother, in Marcham. Later, she moved with her widowed mother to Oxford, where she probably became acquainted with the Anglo-Catholic reform ideas of the Oxford Movement. In the late 1860s she founded a nunnery in Claydon and served as its mother superior for more than a decade. In the early 1880s she became interested in Spiritualism and the occult, as well as in the theater, and started to develop her esoteric and socio-religious reformist ideas. In 1884, in London, she adopted the persona of Una, and established the Universal Philosophic Society. In 1885, she married Max Théon, the Jewish esotericist and healer, who stood at the time at the head of the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor. In 1886 the couple left England, and after a stay in France, finally settled in Algeria. In the early 1900s, the couple initiated the Cosmic Movement. Many of the doctrines of the Movement, and many of its publications, were based on the ideas and visionary writings of Mary Ware. In September 1908, Mary Ware died at the age of 69. Her ideas and writings, many of them published anonymously, had a considerable influence on the later developments of the Cosmic Movement, in Europe, Israel and India. The newly discovered information concerning the early history of Mary Ware contributes to our knowledge and understanding of the Cosmic Movement and will enable further research into the writing and activities of Mary Ware, one of the most influential and intriguing female psychics and occultists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

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