

A STUDY IN LEADERSHIP.

To the Editor of THE LAMP :

DEAR SIR,—Recently I had occasion to recount to my mother certain painful experiences, which had rendered it necessary for me (and others) to sever our connection with the organization to which we had hitherto devoted most of our "time, money, and work." My mother, who never shared my enthusiasm, made two very significant remarks upon what I told her. The first was, that the methods were those of the Inquisition; the second, that my experiences, especially in regard to the methods pursued, bore a close resemblance to those of Laurence Oliphant under Thomas Lake Harris.

Now, although I knew that H. P. Blavatsky had taken special pains to warn her pupils against Lake Harris, and especially *his private teachings in regard to sex*, I had never read about Mr. Oliphant's experiences. My mother at once gave me the book and I found that the general resemblance was indeed astonishing; so much so that I feel the main points should be brought to the attention of those who, like myself, have run the idea of leadership to death, and have given our absolute trust and allegiance without pause or question. Like Laurence Oliphant we had to suffer keenly in many ways before fanaticism gave way to reason and conscience. We had forgotten the warnings of our teacher, H. P. B., the horrors of the Inquisition, the object lesson of the Oliphants at our very doors. We had rushed headlong into the very same evil. Shall we ever profit by the experiences of our fellow creatures who are part of us? Surely some will if we do what we can to bring those experiences clearly before their eyes.

It is in this spirit that I now write to you and set down in the briefest possible form the points which struck me in perusing Mrs. Margaret Oliphant's very able and impartial account of the life of her kinsman.*

He is described as of noble Scotch lineage, exceptional literary ability, and blessed with unusual opportunities.

It is not often that such a man is caught by a charlatan, "a mere vulgar impostor," as the book describes him; but in this instance the delusion was immediate and complete. Forsaking his brilliant literary and parliamentary prospects, this extraordinary man, who might have become a valuable servant of his nation went out to Harris' first little community at Brocton, Chautauqua. There he slept in a loft, and worked sixteen hours a day at the roughest farm labour. "He was quite unaccustomed to manual work, and it wearied him, body and soul, but it was thus only, as he felt, 'that the devil could be threshed out of him.'" His mother, Lady Oliphant, joined him the next year and "entered upon her own very bitter probation before he had accomplished his." This consisted partly in the coarse work which she—a very delicate woman—had to do, and partly in being cut off from all intercourse with her son, carried to the point of his going to Europe as war correspondent "without even a look of farewell . . . It was bitter, the highest refinement of cruelty. . . . Thus the prophet put his hand upon the very sources of his life, and controlled them. He must at least have been a man of extraordinary skill and insight, as well as of remorseless purpose and determination."

Returning to Brocton on a hasty visit, he again went to Europe and there became engaged to a beautiful and gifted girl, a Miss le Strange. His mother had meanwhile gone through her "probation," and was allowed to join her son. The part of the book, in which his teachings and methods are explained by Laurence to his fiancée, is full of point and interest. Harris at first opposed the marriage, cunningly enough, but later he gave his permission, for Miss le Strange had considerable property, and in spite of the opposition of hard-headed relatives who saw the danger, it went into the Brocton community, where, according to the rules, it was controlled and administered by the Head. The three were at once summoned thither, and having got them there, the autocrat proceeded to

*Passages between quotation marks are extracts from the book: *The Life of Laurence Oliphant*, London: W. Blackwood & Sons.