

MADAME BLAVATSKY.

It was with a feeling of intense curiosity, and more than ordinary pleasure, that we stood at the door of Mme. Blavatsky's residence in New York, and awaited an answer to our ring. It soon came, and in an odd way, for the door was unlocked by no visible hand, and for a second we did not realize that it was done by electricity. Ascending to the second floor, we were ushered into a tiny reception room, where Col. Henry S. Olcott, the president of the Theosophical society, greeted us with cordiality. We inquired if madame was visible, and he sent a servant to inquire, who returned with a prompt and decisive answer, "No." We had arrived at a very unfavorable hour, it being in the morning, and were informed that it was almost an impossibility to gain access to madame's presence in the day. Conversing, however, with Col. Olcott, while he opened his eggs and took his coffee for breakfast, we questioned him regarding the aims and objects of this society, which is becoming so well known, so much discussed, so well grounded on the basis of cultured and honorable men and women as members, and received for reply, in substance, the following:

The object of Theosophy is individual cultivation in the science and mysteries which madame has given in a measure to the world through her book "Isis Unveiled." It is to initiate some chosen ones into the knowledge of those secrets which are higher and finer than anything now taught, and which are to eventually lift each member to the power and position of an adept. "In religion," he said, "we work to break down old dogmas and carping theologues, whether Christian, Brahmanic, Buddhist, Jewish, Mohammedan or others, and to teach the undeveloped religious philosophy which prevailed before even the Vedas were written, and which furnishes the grains of wheat in every mountain of chaff that has been piled upon any nation and labelled with the names above enumerated."

In the state we wish to spread high notions of honor, patriotism, responsibility, and that international exchange of courtesy based upon the Golden Rule, which would make a brotherhood of humanity possible. In the individual we would purge away the vicious taste, the groveling sensuality, the mean sordidness, the pettiness of aim, the obtuseness as to civil, social and moral obligations, which everywhere prevail under the patronage of the church. This is a wide field, and were our laborers an hundred times more numerous it could not be covered at once. We are not unreasonable or optimistic. We are quite content with the rate of our progress up to this time, and shall add to our roll of Fellows from time to time as they offer themselves (for we solicit no one), if they prove to be in sympathy with our work, and are willing to help us in these projects. And, first of all, we who lead the movement mean to set an example of correct living and dealing which will at least win the respect of the community. "We presume that those who become members are bound by the most solemn oath are initiated by the most fearful and mysterious ceremonies?" we remarked inquiringly. "The pledge we exact," replied the colonel, "is that none who join us shall do anything to retard, by word or deed, our progress. We are quite willing to leave your own conscience to be the monitor. We bind members by no oath whatever, saving their word of honor, to keep strictly secret those matters confided to them which should, in the opinion of their superiors, be kept sacredly private." "But you have rules, by-laws, officers, etc., do you not?" "Certainly! Its officers are a president, two vice-presidents, a corresponding secretary, a recording secretary, a treasurer, a librarian and councillors. At first it was an open body, but later it was reorganized on the principle of secrecy, experience having demonstrated the advisability of such a change." "But what are the benefits to be derived from such a membership? Can all members become adepts?" "By no means! To be admitted into the highest degree, of the first section, the Theosophist must have become freed of every leaning toward any one form of religion in preference to another. He must be free from all exacting obligations to society, politics, and family. He must be ready to lay down his life, if necessary, for the good of humanity and of a brother fellow of whatever race, color or ostensible creed. He must renounce wine and every other description of intoxicating beverages, and adopt a life of strict chastity. Those who have not yet wholly disenthralled themselves from religious prejudices and other forms of selfishness, but have made a certain progress toward self-mastery and enlightenment, belong in the second section. Those only who persevere in these studies, who practice every virtue, and eschew every vice, who subjugate the body to the will, and throw off every tie which binds them to things gross, can become that to which even Mme. Blavatsky has not yet, after all her long life of devotion, perfectly attained. We offer for your zeal, industry and loyalty the reward of an approving conscience, the respect of a brotherhood whose good opinion is well worth having, and the assurance that you are assisting to lay the foundations of a great society whose future is already an established certainty. Already you would be able to meet brothers in the remotest quarters of the globe, and before long the public will know that we have enlisted on our side some of the profoundest scholars and purest souls of the present day." "This is only a branch society, we are told. There are other branches similar to this in New York, are there not?" We have already one established in nearly every country in

Europe. It was only this morning, also, that we had from Bombay full permission to announce our society as the American branch of the Arya Samaj of India. This is a great organization, founded by one of the holiest and most learned men of our age, the Pandit Dyanumund Surswati. His preaching and teaching of ancient Vedic philosophy and ethics have created a profound sensation. Throughout the Indian peninsula among the natives. He preaches against castes, idolatry and superstitious observances of all kinds. Many of the latter, originally devised by the priesthood to increase their power and emolument, have become accepted as of divine authority, after many centuries. Among these are *suttee* (widow burning), sitting *dhurna* (a creditor deliberately starving himself to death at the door of his debtor), and others, for which the Vedas contain no authority.

"What the Pandit teaches is the identical, pure, wisdom religion, about which Madame Blavatsky discourses so learnedly in her 'Isis,' and which was the primal substratum upon which not only Brahmanism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism were built, but which is the essence of Christism when the embroidered sercloths are unwrapped from its body."

"It teaches one incomprehensible, eternal, Divine essence, out of which all things come, and to which all return, in a never-ending series of evolution and involution—'Days and Nights of Brahma.'" "The correspondence for your society must be enormous; who does it, pray?" "Madame. She writes nine languages and reads three more. She converses fluently and daily with her various friends in at least five. You may hear them any evening at her little reception—but madame has concluded to see you." The colonel said this without having moved from his chair; no one had entered the room, the door was shut; there was no visible means by which he could have received this communication of madame's pleasure. We were delighted as well as astonished, and only waited to ask one question before entering her parlour. "There are so many rumors regarding madame, colonel, that one is almost driven to desperation in trying to select which is most probable. Can you tell us how old she is? We have heard that she is thirty, eighty, an hundred; that her countenance is so changeable that at one moment she seems a young girl, at another she seems an old lady. But the general tendency is to believe in her great age!" "Perhaps my sister will tell you," laughed the colonel, as he gave the requisite introductions to that stimable lady and two or three children, who were entering.

"Will you not say how old you think madame to be?" "I think it would be utterly impossible to determine; her age seems to me as mysterious as her character, for all I have known her so long and so intimately. Indeed, although I live in the same house with them," she added, "and see madame at any time, there are some subjects on which she is as non-committal as the Sphinx!" "What is your imagination of her person?" inquired the lady. "We have thought she might be tall, with a thick, compact figure, cold grey eyes, a broad face, a high forehead and light hair." "I declare," exclaimed Col. Olcott, "you must be a clairvoyant! This is a very fair description." Madame was seated in her little work-room and parlour, all in one, and we may add, her curiosity shop as well, for never was apartment more crammed with odd, elegant, old, beautiful, costly and apparently worthless things than this. She had cigarette in mouth and scissors in hand, and was hard at work clipping paragraphs, articles, items, criticisms and other matter from heaps of journals from all parts of the world, relating to herself, to her book, to the Theosophical society, to any and everything connected with her life, work and aims. She waved us to a seat, and while she intently read some article, we had a chance to observe the walls and furniture of this New York Lamasonry. Directly in the centre stood a stuffed ape, with a white "dickey" and necktie around his throat, manuscript in paw and spectacles on nose. Could it be a mute satire on the clergy? Over the door was the stuffed head of a lioness, with open jaws and threatening aspect, the eyes glaring with an almost natural ferocity. A god in gold occupied the centre of the mantel-piece; Chinese and Japanese cabinets, fans, pipes, implements and rugs, low divans and couches, a large desk, a mechanical bird which sang as mechanically, albums, scrap-books, and the inevitable cigarette-holders, papers and ashtrays, made the loose, rich robe in which madame was apparelled seem in perfect harmony with her surroundings. A rare, strange countenance is hers. A combination of moods seems to constantly play over her features. She never seems quite absorbed by one subject. There is a keen, alert, subtle undercurrent of feeling and perception perceivable in the expression of her eyes. It impressed us then, and has invariably, with the idea of a double personality; as if she were here and not here; talking, and yet thinking, or acting far away. Her hair light, very thick and naturally wavy, has not a grey thread in it. Her skin, evidently somewhat browned by exposure to sea and sun, has no wrinkles; her arm and hand are as delicate as a girl's. Her whole personality is expressive of self-possession, command, and a certain *sang froid* which borders on masculine indifference, without for a moment overstepping the bounds of a womanly delicacy. Very, very old! Impossible! And yet she declares it is so; sometimes indignantly, sometimes with a certain pride; sometimes with indifference or impatience. "I come of a long-lived race. All my people grew to be very old. One of my

ancestors lived to be more than one hundred, and preserved all his faculties. You doubt my age? I can show you my passports, my documents, my letters for years back. I can prove it by a thousand things." She began to talk with us in a friendly and cordial manner, tinged with foreign nonchalance and piquancy combined. We explained that our errand was to pay our debts to the author of "Isis Unveiled," but our courteous speeches were hushed with a peremptory command to take a cigarette, which we gladly proceeded to do. The chat was naturally turned into that channel which leads to the great ocean of the unseen mysteries, and we were astonished at the rapidity and fluency of her speech. Her English is far better than the ordinary run of conversation in America, however, for it is absolutely correct; bookish, in fact. Her accent is not very marked. She said, "I can not get your English. I can not pronounce it."

"Why, madame," we replied, "there is hardly a scholar in New York who can equal your elegance of speech."

"Yes, yes, I know," she answered impatiently, "but your accent I can not get it!"

"How do you so preserve your looks, your health, madame? What magic recipe have you to keep your freshness, and all these evidences of youth? Our women of forty, however fat and fair, would sell their eyes, almost, for the knowledge! You must have drunk of the fountain of perpetual youth!"

"That is what we study for," she replied, quietly.

"Well, how long do you intend to live?" we added, laughingly.

"Oh! if no accident occurs, as long as I please; thirty, forty, or fifty years, perhaps. I don't know!"—in the most indifferent manner, as if it were a mere matter of her good pleasure.

"If all the stories we hear about you are correct, you must be the great mystery of the world yourself, madame! Why, do you know, we heard the other day that, instead of having an immense library, as we had supposed it was absolutely necessary you should have, since you quote from at least a thousand authors in twenty languages, you really have no library at all, but when you desire to make use of a passage, say, for instance, in some old Hindoo parchment, that all you have to do is to will it to appear before you, and there it is, ready to be copied! Then we have heard that it is not to be done in that way, but that you can send mental telegrams to brother adepts all over the globe, and they give you the desired information in the same way! Why, we presume, if an adept were in the planet Venus, and you desired his presence by your desk here, all you would have to do would be to mentally call him, and his astral body would cast its shadow on the floor!"

Madame seemed heartily to enjoy the speech. We defy, however, the keenest observer to have discovered whether we were, as one might say, "driving the nail home," or merely amusing her, with our half-badinage. She evidently does not wear her heart on her sleeve.

"Whether these rumours may be true or not," she remarked, serenely, after a singular little smile to herself, "there is certainly nothing supernatural in anything we teach. The wonderful things recorded in the 'Isis,' if they were produced at all, were produced according to the eternal laws. It is all natural, all scientific. You people do not know the laws of your own atmosphere, your own bodies, your own powers. That is all! We do. We have learned the mysteries of real wisdom from those who knew them before us. If you did but hold the key you would see there is nothing in our knowledge or our powers but what is natural and according to the plan of the universe. There never was a miracle, and never can be. What are called miracles were not so. They were produced by natural laws. One must have the gift of fine intellectual powers, moral purity and physical health to attain to the higher mysteries. Not all who live are immortal. Some will be annihilated. Their natural tendency is ever downward. It is inevitable. They can not go higher; they must go lower. Change of some kind constantly takes place. There are two progressions—upward and downward. Those who go downward in virtue, in experience, in taste, will be eventually blotted out and return into the elements. Those who live longest on this earth and ever advance upward will stand the highest when they enter the spiritual life. This is the preparatory school. There begins action."

"Of course, you believe in Spiritualism?"

"We admit the reality of mediumism and mediumistic phenomena, but discourage them unless under very strict precautions, as we think they tend to degrade the medium. Our views are not original—only those entertained by Eastern psychologists. We say that for a pure person to passively submit to the domination of unseen, unknown and uncontrollable influence, is to place himself in very great peril of corruption and ruin. The passive medium takes all the chances of control by the worst as well as the best spirits; in fact, the former class is far more likely to take control, for they are the most intimately connected with the earth. You could not be a medium!"

"Why not?" we questioned.

"Because you are in such perfect health. The elementaries could not control you!"

"Well, which is superior—to be or not to be a medium?"

"I can imagine nothing worse than to be one. They are always sickly, puny, with no

will, no character of their own. A poor, miserable set."

Glancing at a pile of letters which the servant had just brought, we exclaimed: "What an immense correspondence must be yours, madame! And in so many different languages! Tell us; what language do you think in?"

"In a language of my own, which is neither Russian, French, nor any you know."

"It may be in the Pythagorean numbers, who can tell; or in some dead language employed by races who had attained to a civilization of which the present phonograph may have been but the merest commonplace to them. Who knows but madame may sometime find a sheet of tin-foil in some future museum of 'recent excavation,' which she will run into her little instrument here and make talk to her in the very language of her thoughts!" The colonel said this with the mock solemnity of one very amusedly in earnest.

Madame laughed. When we write madame laughed, we feel as if we were saying, laughter were present! for of all clear, mirthful, rollicking laughter that we ever heard, hers is the very essence. She seems, indeed, the genius of the mood she displays at all times, so intense is her vitality. As she now opened her bag of letters, we immediately felt that this interview must end. "You will be quite welcome to come any evening," she exclaimed, busily tearing open envelope after envelope, "and no doubt you will meet many agreeable people. I want to show you my album, also, containing portraits of many of our friends in India," and here her face brightened as a man's does when he is far away from home, and speaks of the dear, beloved spot. "I want to tell you of them, and have you meet others who have lived in that grand country." We accepted the invitation with pleasure.

It was the following evening, after our introduction to various people, among whom were no Americans save Col. Olcott and ourselves, that madame displayed to us her much treasured album containing portraits of foreign members of the Theosophical society. It was, indeed, one of the finest collections of intellectual, cultured, refined faces, that it had ever been our pleasure to examine. Men and women of every nation were there represented. Every type of countenance, from the veteran English general to the Indian philosopher, with his delicate features, clean-cut, expressive countenance and wonderfully perfect form. The costumes were as curious as elegant; and in many cases characteristic of the persons who wore them. Here was a face, filled with self-will, command and power; here one poetic, imaginative and æsthetic.

"India!" exclaimed madame, turning the leaves lovingly. "India! I love it. It is the country of my heart, my soul! Born in Russia, and of Russian parentage, my physical body may be claimed as of that country; but the land of my adoption, the home of my affections and ambitions, is grand old India, ancient of days!" The sparkle, the enthusiasm, of her mood was catching. Conversation was for a moment hushed. The eloquence of her intense emotion was felt by every one to breathe itself from eye, lip and hand.

The conversation becoming more general, we were held breathless, listening to the adventures and incidents happening to the narrators, and which are well worth reproducing. A young English colonel of her Majesty's service—regiment in India, who had been there three years, a perfect hercules in stature, and with a frank genial countenance—detailed the following tricks or phenomena, whichever we choose to call them: "I have seen many fakirs and jugglers perform inexplicable tricks, but I think the best I ever saw, and the most incomprehensible, was one which I am told madame perfectly describes in her book. A juggler in the open air, in the presence of a dozen of our officers, in broad daylight, and nude, excepting a cloth about his loins, took a melon seed which was presented to him by one of our number, and digging a little hole in the earth with his finger, thrust it in, and making some passes over it, the seed soon sprouted and put forth little leaves. It grew and grew, adding leaf after leaf, and flower after flower, until the flowers became fruit, and the juggler handed us the melons, and we cut them up and ate them, finding them very rich and sweet, all within the space of half an hour."

"Do you mean to assert that you ate them—ate fruit grown in half an hour?"

"I not only assert it, but can prove it by 20 witnesses. Why, it is not an uncommon thing at all. The powers of these Hindoos are perfectly marvellous! Here is another thing I saw—and not only I, but a crowd of us fellows—and it can be seen any day:

"One of these nude natives took a common ball of yarn, which we all examined, and holding one end, flung it up into the air. It went up, up, beyond our sight and remained so, our vision only following it perhaps thirty feet. He then told a native boy assistant, perfectly nude, to climb up the yarn. He did so, like a sailor going up a rope hand over hand. He also went out of sight. The juggler then pretended to be angry and called him down. As he did not obey, the native climbed up himself, and also disappeared, the end of the yarn still hanging to the earth. Pretty soon down fell an arm, then a leg covered with blood, and horrible to look at. The trunk of the boy soon followed, then the head and the remaining limbs. With inconceivable rapidity then came down the juggler, sliding on the yarn, and with a commanding gesture waving his wand over the severed members, they, as