
MADAME BLAVATSKY.

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Her Character, Conduct and Creed.—Was She a
Literary Thief?

BY W. H. BURR.

Madame H. P. Blavatsky was a learned woman; she could write Greek and Hebrew. I corresponded with her in 1877 and paid her personally for a copy of "Isis Unveiled." In one of her letters she said: "My only curse is, that I know English so imperfectly. I am going to study it now that I have nothing better to do." Having read her books (two large volumes,) I inferred that she had an editor, for the English of "Isis Unveiled" is excellent. In 1892 I learned that Dr. Alexander Wilder, was the editor of the work, and was credibly informed that he did not believe she was the real author, but that she came in possession of some manuscripts of Baron Palm, a learned Russian, who had died in New York and was cremated. Thereupon I addressed an open letter to Dr. Wilder, sending a copy to the Truth Seeker, which published it a fortnight later. Getting no response from Dr. Wilder I again wrote to the Truth Seeker saying: "Dr. Wilder is silent, but if he should ever venture to speak I am quite sure he would not say he believed the book was written by Madame Blavatsky."

Some six months before I sent that letter to Dr. Wilder an article on "Madame Blavatsky" appeared in The Better Way, signed Hannah M. Wolff. She is the widow of the late John B. Wolff, president of the First Spiritual Society of Washington, D. C. I knew Mrs. Wolff when a girl. She became acquainted with

Blavatsky sometime before the publication of "Isis Unveiled." She describes her as well educated and intellectual, with marvelous conversational powers, but with "no more sense of propriety or feeling of natural modesty than the cat or the dog that sprawls about the floor at will." At first Blavatsky was stopping at the Working Woman's Home, for economical reasons. A few weeks later, having as she said received a large sum of money from Russia, she was staying at an expensive hotel, where she gave a lunch to half-a-dozen ladies at an expense of five dollars each. She said she had been with Garibaldi in his struggle for liberty in Italy, and exhibited a scar of what she claimed was a sabre wound. She smoked tobacco to great excess, using frequently, as she said, a pound a day. She also used haschish and several times tried to induce Mrs. Wolff to take some. She said she had smoked opium, seen its visions and dreamed its dreams, but the beatitudes of haschish were as heaven to opium's hell. In all these interviews Blavatsky never mentioned Theosophy. Professing ignorance of Spiritualism she was taken by a gentleman to a lecture by E. V. Wilson, who at the close gave her a remarkable test, which she said was her first experience of that sort. Very soon after that she professed to have a singular development of occult power. She claimed that photographs left in her drawer would become colored.

But I now proceed to give in Mrs. Wolff's own words the part of her article relating to an attempted literary fraud by Blavatsky:

"About this time she called at my rooms and told me that she was doing some literary work in English, and not being sufficiently conversant with the language to write it with grammatical correctness, she wished to secure my services as editor. In reply to my inquiry as to the nature of the work she said that it was on the government of the United States. I ventured to suggest that it might be thought

an impertinance for a person who had been so short a time in the country as herself, who had so little insight into its institutions, to attempt such a structure; but she cried me down and declared that I must examine before I condemned it. She left, engaged to bring the manuscript in a few days.

"In the meantime I had met Mrs. V., the lady who shared the apartment with her and told her of the proposition. She looked quizzical and said: 'When you get that manuscript let me know and I shall have something to propose to you. Do not engage to attempt the work until I have seen you.' In a few days the unfinished manuscript was left at my rooms. I dropped a line to Mrs. V. and she promptly responded by coming to see me. 'Now,' said she, 'I want you to go to Brooklyn with me to the house where this thing was written, while Madam was the guest of the people who are Russians.' We went and I found Mr. M—— and wife very cultured and charming people. Mrs. V. told our host that Madame Blavatsky had asked me to edit her work on our government. 'Did she tell you it was original?' he asked. 'Certainly,' I replied; 'she claimed that it was an expression of her own views of our government in satire.' 'Well,' said he, 'the portion that you have is translated from this volume,' taking a book from the case near by; 'the second volume she borrowed when she left here and it has not yet returned.' The book was the work of a celebrated Russian humorist, whose name has escaped me. Mr. M—— said: 'If you will follow me on the pages you have I will translate a few paragraphs from the print.' This he did. The manuscript was an almost verbatim translation of the book. United States being substituted for Russia, President for Czar,' and certain other needful changes and adaptations being introduced. The Madame's pretended original work was a complete theft.

"When I returned the manuscript with a note explaining my reasons for not accepting the commis-

sion, she made no reply, but later, when I accidentally met her and brought up the matter, she sneeringly said that, as Americans were almost entirely ignorant of Russian literature, she saw no harm in what she had attempted. This closed my personal acquaintance with the high priest of Theosophy."

The creed of Blavatsky was clearly stated in her letters to me. I quote a sentence from one dated Oct. 10, 1877:

"I do not believe in Spiritualism, but I believe in the phenomena, which, as it takes place, must proceed from some natural causes as yet undiscovered by science."

In another letter dated Nov. 19, 1877, she gave a full exposition of her creed as follows:

"Let us settle, once for all if you please, as to the word "Spiritualist." I am not one—not at least in the modern and American sense of the word. I am a Shwabhavika, a Buddhist Pantheist, if anything at all. I do not believe in a *personal* God, in a direct Creator, or a "Supreme" [Being]; neither do I confess to a *First* cause, which implies the possibility of a *Last* one—and if so, then what comes next? I believe in but one eternal, indestructable substance, the Shwabhavat, or invisible, all-pervading matter, whether you call it God or many Gods in partnership. But this is not the First cause, but only the eternal emanation of the universal, *incomprehensible* something, which is neither first nor last, but had neither beginning, neither will it have an end. The epithet "Atheist" in my book [Isis Unveiled] does not apply to those who disbelieve in a personal God, but to them who equally reject the God of the Christians and the "Anima mundi" of the ancients; who attribute the whole of the visible and invisible world to blind *chance*—which is a word void of sense in relation to the economy of nature as a whole and can, at best, be applied to individuals, the results of the everlasting work of this *whole*. If you did not

know of any Atheist who had nightmares I did. And my own brother to begin with, one of the brightest intellects of the Moscow University. Unable to solve the problem, What is God? (the God of the Christians,) whence he proceeded and who created him, the young fellow had brain fever and went mad. He was cured with great difficulty in a lunatic asylum in Germany, where he remained from 24 to 31 years of age. Then again Schleiermacher, the German Professor of Theology and several others.

"You are right in saying that you see no inconsistency in being an Atheist and at the same time a Spiritualist. I am an Atheist in the Christian sense of the word and yet I believe in the survival of the *real inner* man after the dissolution of his physical body or his outer terrestrial garment, and I believe in the immortal or third principle in man. But I do not believe the following:

"1. I deny that immortality is achieved by every man, woman or child. Immortality must be won, or as John says, 'The kingdom of heaven must be taken by violence.' ['From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence.' Math. xi:12.] But a very small percentage of the human race becomes immortal, i. e. very few individuals become *gods*. 'Know ye not ye are gods?' ['Is it not writter in your law, I said Ye are gods?' John x:34] The rest are sooner or later *annihilated*, and their bodies and souls are disintegrated, and while the atoms of one return to the elements of physical nature, the more sublimated atoms of the other, when no longer cemented by the presence of their individual 'spirits'--which are alone immortal, as everything real becomes subjective--are violently torn loose from each other and return to the more sublimated elements of spiritual nature.

"2. I emphatically deny that the spirits of the dead can show or manifest themselves objectively in any way or manner. But I do believe and know

that these spirits have the power (if their finer astral entity survives) to impress mortals on earth, to inspire and teach them, etc.

"3. I do not believe in the so-called materializations of our dead ones. But I believe that the astral souls (erroneously called spirits) within a living body have the same powers or faculties as those who have forced themselves from their earthly presence. Therefore I believe in some of the manifestations produced by mediums, but hold that pretty nearly all such phenomena are the result of the freaks of the spirits of the mediums themselves, unconscious to themselves, and are often helped by the 'elementary,' or those disembodied men and women who, having parted forever from their immortal spirits, vegetate within the atmosphere of the earth, which alone attracts them, and use the organs of weak mediums to lead through them a fictitious life, and cheat *annihilation* for a short time yet. If the *inner man* of a sleepwalker, who is ignorant sometimes even of reading and writing in his normal state, can write very often beautiful poetry, play the violin and do that which his body would never do when awake, why not believe that their spirits or *inner selves*, when disembodied, can do the same? Why wonder and attribute the phenomena to the agency of disembodied spirits when they are simply due to the invisible and real self of the medium?

"Thus, as I do not believe what your Spiritualists teach, I am *not* a Spiritualist. But as I believe in the survival of the astral soul, and the immortality of the 'spirit,' I am not a nihilist, either. I confess that the term "Atheist" is improperly used; but this is the fault of the English language, not mine. What other term would you use? Even the modern Hindoostance—let alone the mother tongue of all, the Sanskrit—has expressions which are utterly untranslatable into your European poor tongues. I am not an Atheist—quite the reverse; and yet I completely reject the

idea of a Creator or a Supreme God, who is in the least concerned in the government of this world. How would you call me then? Neither am I a Pantheist, pure and simple, for beyond visible nature, and within its immutable, eternal laws, I place a spiritual, purely subjective intellect, the unconscious *Deus ex Machina* of all, though neither its guide nor Ruler. Buddhist philosophy and metaphysics, even in their exoteric literature, are beyond the comprehension of the average civilized Christian; as to the esoteric Eastern teachings they are simply inaccessible to the greatest metaphysical European mind—unless he is *shown* that which he cannot comprehend by simple argumentation, and all his five senses are brought together to testify to his reason that which he is allowed to learn practically as well as theoretically within certain sanctuaries and through imitation.

"Excuse my long and not very clear arguments. I would if I could express myself more clearly. But besides being a foreigner, with a very limited knowledge of English, I am placed face to face with a public, which, however, intelligent and scientifically trained, is yet unable to grasp even theoretically that which is demonstrated practically in certain pagodas, and therefore perfectly plain to me.

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"P. S. I have read over the present scribble, and I know that your verdict upon reading it will be that I am a d—— fool. So be it, nor do I blame you for sharing the ideas of every respectable and civilized citizen of America in regard to my religio-metaphysical views and unconventional habits."

The character, conduct and creed of Blavatsky, as above shown, and especially as described by Mrs. Wolff, agrees with the testimony of others. Dr. Sarah E. Harvey spent a few months last year in Washington, and occasionally spoke at the Spiritual sociables. She gave an account, in my hearing, of

her early acquaintance with Blavatsky. The two women attended a spiritual meeting where a good deal was said about Jesus. On coming away Blavatsky expressed her disapprobation of that kind of talk in very emphatic and characteristic language—to wit: "Damn your Jesus."

George Francis Train lectured in Washington year before last several times, and speaking of Blavatsky, in answer to a question, he said she called on him and proposed having a discussion of some subject (Spiritualism, if I remember right,) in the newspapers. He readily consented, but the discussion did not take place. And Train told his audience that he had not talked with her ten minutes before he was convinced she was a Russian spy.

Blavatsky's imperfect English was not very glaring in her letters to me. I told her that the only striking error I noticed was when she called Ernest Renan a flapdoodle. And now, as evidence that she profited by my correction, when her presence was manifested to Prof. Elliot Coues (Kowz,) through a medium in San Francisco, he bantered her on her facial features and secret doctrines until she exclaimed, "It is all damned flapdoodle." It is pertinent here to say that Prof. Coues was antagonistic to Blavatsky and organized a rival Theosophic society, and the first thing that her departed spirit said to him was "Elliott Coues. I hate you, I hate you."

In regard to Theosophy I have not yet been able to get a clear and satisfactory definition of the word. Atheism not being repugnant to its teachers or Masters it seems to me that the "Theos" ought not have been prefixed to the "sophos." The best definition of Theosophy I have heard was that given by the late Darius Lyman, namely, "Spiritualism gone to seed." The head center of Theosophy in America stigmatizes Spiritualism as the worship of devils. Theosophists deny that we can communicate with the dead. They hold that spirit manifestation, if not