

MORE ABOUT THE THEOSOPHISTS.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MDME. BLAVATSKY.

So much interest has been excited in so many different circles by the accounts which we have published of the Theosophical Society and Colonel Olcott, that the following report of an interview with Madame Blavatsky, the seeress who founded the new religion, will probably command some little attention. Our representative, who waited upon the modern prophetess at Mr. Sinnett's writes as follows :—

Who is Mdme. Blavatsky? Mdme. Blavatsky is a woman of mystery. Of her life in the past no one can speak. All that is known is that she is the niece of General Fadayeff, the well-known Panslavonic leader, who died the other day at Odessa, and is related to the Dolgorouki family, which is one of the oldest in Russia. Mdme. Blavatsky, however, is noble, not on account of her aristocratic origin or high descent, but from the part which she has played in the establishment of Theosophy in India. There is something inexpressibly bizarre and paradoxical about the strange religious movement of which Mdme. Blavatsky is the founder. That a woman—and that woman a Russian—should be the appointed agent for the revival of occultism as a practical religious faith in our Indian Empire is one of the strangest phenomena of our time. Altogether apart from her peculiar claims as leader of a religious movement which within the last few years has displayed an astonishing vitality, and, while numbering its followers in every capital in Europe, is rapidly extending in

Hindustan, Mdme. Blavatsky is a figure well deserving attention. One of the greatest travellers in the world—there is hardly any country which she has not visited—there are few languages which she does not speak. Her English is not less fluent than if she had been born in Westminster, and probably a good deal more correct. Her reading is extensive, and her knowledge even of the minutest details of English speculative and religious controversies is extraordinarily exact. Her book, "Isis Unveiled"—a new edition of which she is shortly to prepare for the press—is written in English, and displays a vigorous grasp of our language, as well as a very great controversial vehemence. She is contributing, to the leading Russian review, studies of Indian social life and character, and she has long been known as a learned correspondent of the *Moscow Gazette*. But all these mundane distinctions, which entitle her to be regarded with the same interest as that which is commanded by Mdme. Novikoff in a different sphere, are as nothing compared with those mysterious attributes with which in the opinion of believing Theosophists she is invested. For Mdme. Blavatsky is a woman who has stood nearer than any other among mortals—outside Thibet—to the secret of the universe. She it is who, after passing through a long and toilsome novitiate, has been selected as the chosen vessel by which the mysterious Mahatmas have determined to communicate some portion of their jealously guarded hoard of spirit-lore to a generation which as yet but dimly perceives the need of it. If we believe one quarter of the stories confidently repeated by those who have the honour of Mdme. Blavatsky's acquaintance, she lives in constant communion with the unseen. Time and space have no existence for her. While she is sitting on the divan in Mr. Sinnett's drawing-room, smoking her accustomed cigarette, she is holding converse with her chiefs and teachers who in actual flesh are residing in the remotest glens of the Himalayas; nor is this communion purely spiritual. At times the message of the Mahatma will be committed to writing, and a small triangular note neatly folded, bearing the strange Thibetan characters, will flicker into existence from the impalpable air and fall at her feet. To talk to Mdme. Blavatsky is like reading "Zanoni," with this difference, that Bulwer Lytton's hero is the creation of the romancing brain, whereas Mdme. Blavatsky in flesh and blood stoutly asserts that she herself has witnessed or exercised all the mysterious powers after which Zanoni sought. As for Vril, that fatal essence with which the coming race was to be armed, Mdme. Blavatsky is aware not only of its properties and the conditions under which it can be employed, but she sees potential Vril on every side and can employ it should the need arise for any beneficent purpose. To the uninitiate and to those who as yet are groping darkly about the outer portal of the Theosophic temple, Mdme. Blavatsky can necessarily speak but in enigmas. Even to Mr. Sinnett, the chief Theosophist of the London branch of the true believers, she is but allowed to communicate in part. Secrets too vast to be communicated even to him lie hidden in her soul; nor dare she venture to unfold those occult mysteries which, if grasped by persons whose fitness for such powers has not been tested by a long series of probationary stages, might prove disastrous to the world. She moves among men much as one who knew the secret of dynamite might have lived in the Middle Ages, and she trembles as she thinks of the possibility that this dread secret may some time fall into unhallowed hands.

Mdme. Blavatsky is at present in Paris, but she expects to return to London in the course of next month. Within two hours' conversation which I had with this remarkable woman, she expressed herself in very energetic and confident terms concerning the prospects of Theosophy in England. Of all peoples the English, she said, seem to be best fitted to embrace the new doctrine. Supreme in every English head is common-sense and reason, the two faculties upon which Theosophists rely, while below there lies the deep basis of mysticism, a soil in which the pure spiritual truth can take root and flourish abundantly. Of all nations the least prepared for the spiritual doctrine which she teaches are the French, whose shallow, scoffing nature is at once indifferent to reason and proof against all appeals to the inner depths. The Russians were too much given to extremes. They were either so pious and orthodox as to regard all Theosophy as begotten of the devil or so purely materialistic as to deride the very conception of spiritual truth. Not that Mdme. Blavatsky is given to use the term "spiritual," for her contention is always that Theosophy is a science, appealing to the reason, more than a religion appealing to the emotions—an exact science, based, like any other science, upon the recorded result of centuries of experience. Her attitude towards European nations is strictly impartial, for, as she frankly confesses, she loathes the Western world and all its ways. Christianity and civilization are detestable hypocrisies. She dilated for nearly half an hour with much fervour and natural eloquence concerning the melancholy contrast between the professed creed of Christendom and the political actions of Christian nations, proclaiming herself on the side of the heathen whom they despise. She maintained that no European who ever lived among the heathen could call himself a Christian without a blush of shame. Christianity to the heathen—what is that but organized murder and wholesale burglary? "If your Christ were to come to life at this moment in London and to act as you say He acted, what would you do with Him? Send Him to gaol, or shut Him up in a lunatic asylum. Among all your millions of Christians is there one Christ—one who will act upon the principles laid down in your Gospels? I do not know of one. And yet you marvel that the heathen world is not converted by your missionaries!"

Mdme. Blavatsky, it may be mentioned in passing, does not believe in the historic Christ of the Gospels, but in a Christ who, she maintains, was crucified one hundred years before the date usually assigned. This Christ, of whom she always speaks in terms of the greatest admiration, and whom she avers has suffered many things at the hands of those that call themselves by his name, was, like Buddha and Zoroaster, a great Mahatma, versed in the occult science of which she at present is the chief authorized exponent. "We reverence," she said, "Gautama Buddha beyond all other Mahatmas, because he alone of all religious teachers has ordered his disciples to disbelieve even his own words if they conflicted with true reason." The Theosophical Society which she has founded aims first, at the restoration of Buddhism to its original

purity, and it is in this reformation of a corrupt Buddhism that Colonel Olcott has been so assiduous of late. His catechism of Buddhism is only one among many forms of activity, literary and other, which his propaganda has assumed. After the reformation of Buddhism, the second great object of the Theosophists is to restore Brahmanism to the purer ideal which finds expression in the Vedas: a herculean task, no doubt, but one in the accomplishment of which the Theosophists profess unshaken faith. The third great task, quite as formidable in its way as either of the preceding, is to combat a false materialism by the establishment of pure spiritual truth. As explained by Colonel Olcott and Mdme. Blavatsky, the essence of this spiritual truth consists in the cultivation of the inner life and the systematic sacrifice of the lower instincts of our nature to the higher law. The propaganda has met with unexpected success, and at the last conference of the society, which was held at Bombay, the muster included representatives from all parts of India, who were of all races, met on the common platform of truth, justice, and brotherhood. Mdme. Blavatsky is now advanced in years, but she displays remarkable vitality and vehemence in controversy which may well confound less vigorous opponents. That she is alive at all is, according to her own account, due to a semi-miraculous cure affected by the agency of her masters, as she calls the Mahatmas—repudiating the term "spiritual guide" with much indignation—for after the physicians had given her up as incurably ill with Bright's disease, she was completely healed in three days. Her will, however, she laments, is no longer so strong as it was in the old days, when she could rid herself of any disease by sheer will-power. Whatever may be thought of her philosophy or Theosophy, whatever credence may be attached to the account of the mysterious powers she claims to possess—powers upon which, it is fair to say, she lays no stress, nay, appears to regard with the supremest unconcern—she is a woman who, regarded from the purely intellectual stand-point, deserves more attention than she has hitherto received.

BOLINGBROKE.*

WE do not propose to deal here with the very serious charges of plagiarism from a certain Quarterly Reviewer which have been made against Mr. Harrop. They will doubtless be fully discussed by the persons concerned. On the one hand, there is no doubt that what may fairly be called a very serious *prima facie* case has been made out against Mr. Harrop; on the other, it must be remembered that men writing on the same facts and discussing the same arguments have an almost unavoidable tendency to use the same illustrations, and even to fall into the same trick of phrase. Of this, however, no more need be said, for the charge of plagiarism, even if proved, never did harm to a good book, nor did the disproving of it ever better a bad one. If Mr. Harrop had written a good book, it would not have mattered much, except to the sensitive soul of the victim, that he has apparently borrowed facts and arguments, not only without acknowledgment, but with an air of supercilious patronage. But we are not able to say that Mr. Harrop has written a good book. That he discusses Bolingbroke's character and conduct from the point of view of sympathy with the Whig, not the Tory, party, is certainly not against him, for hostile criticism, if the hostility be not unfair (and Mr. Harrop by no means makes a dead set at his subject), is on the whole more likely to be valuable in such cases than friendly criticism. With some remarkable lapses into slovenliness (there is on page 53 one of the very worst examples of writing at once bad and fine that we ever saw), he writes a fairly readable style, though one modelled too closely on Macaulay to be either pure or graceful. No one who is interested in politics and who knows the history of the period will have much difficulty in keeping him company, at least till Bolingbroke's exile, after which he becomes much less worth reading. Besides the above-mentioned blemishes of style the worst fault in the book of a minor kind is the superciliousness with which Mr. Harrop speaks of his predecessors, when, which is not common, he mentions them at all. He himself, we may venture to say, is a writer of whom ninety-nine out of a hundred of his readers hear for the first time, and who certainly does not give any signs of that commanding genius which entitles a man to look down on his fellows. It is awkward for such a writer to say: "It is amusing to notice one of the most recent of Bolingbroke's apologists, Mr. John Skelton, advocate, calmly ascribe these honours an alarming draft on the ignorance of the Scotch reading public." The author of "Thalatta" and the "Essays of Shirley," whatever may be his faults (and there are probably Tories as well as Liberals who do not consider political writing his strong point), is scarcely a fit subject for treatment of this kind by a novice, and especially by a novice who commits such a blunder as "ascribe" for "ascribing" in this very sentence.

All these things, however, Mr. Harrop might have done, and yet have written a good book. Why his book is not good can be easily told. In the first place, he has committed the error of writing a volume of three hundred and fifty pages almost entirely filled with discussion. Hardly any biographical details are given, absolutely no anecdotes, a minimum of account of Bolingbroke's literary and philosophical position, which is not much less remarkable than his position in politics. This is not only an unwise refusal to concede something to human nature's love of the concrete, but it is a fault in art. A leading article of three hundred and fifty pages (for that is what Mr. Harrop's book is) is a monstrosity. Nor are the omitted matters less important as illustrating and explaining

* "Bolingbroke: a Political Study and Criticism." By Robert Harrop. (London: C. Kegan Paul and Co. 1884.)