

THE O. E. LIBRARY CRITIC

Published monthly at 1207 Q St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

BY

The O. E. Library League

Vol. XXV

October-November, 1937

No. 4

Yearly subscription. United States and Canada. fifty cents; foreign. two shillings sixpence or 62 cents. Single copies, five cents. *Blank* (unfilled) British postal orders and stamps, Canadian paper money and stamps accepted.

"DEFENCE OF MADAME BLAVATSKY"—II

Defence of Madame Blavatsky, Vol. II, The Coulomb Pamphlet. By *Beatrice Hastings*, 4 Bedford Row, Worthing, Sussex, 1937. Paper, 105 pages. 2/6 in England; 80 cents from the O. E. LIBRARY.

In 1872 Madame Blavatsky was in Cairo, and there started a spiritualist society, "La Société Spirite", which soon fell into evil ways and went to pieces. Present at the sittings of this society was a Miss Emma Cutting (later Mme. Coulomb). Madame Blavatsky, being temporarily in distress through lack of funds, Miss Cutting loaned her some money. Madame Blavatsky soon left Cairo and returned to her relatives in Odessa, and Miss Cutting was not heard from until, in 1880, having taken to herself a husband, A. Coulomb, the pair, after wanderings, landed penniless in Ceylon. Mme. Coulomb, having read of the arrival in India of Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, wrote to the former, then in Bombay, and received a kind reply. Mme. Coulomb, who believed that old acquaintance should not be forgot, and, perhaps, seeking a return for past favors, appeared uninvited with her husband at the theosophical headquarters in Bombay, their fare having been paid by the French consul at Galle, and the pair were taken in and adopted by the Colonel and H. P. B., Mme. Coulomb's function being to look after the household, while her husband, a man handy with tools, attended to all sorts of jobs including carpentry. This relationship was continued after the transfer of the headquarters to Adyar, and both were admitted to membership in the T. S., although the wife, nominally a Christian, apparently with emphasis on the devil, proved that she had but one belief, namely, "Coulomb". Although Mme. Coulomb was a person of detestable disposition, gossiping and spying, and her husband being little better, they made themselves essential by relieving the Founders of domestic cares. It would seem that H. P. B., while not blind to Mme. Coulomb's faults, found her too useful to dispense with, and treated her as a friend and even to some extent as a confidante, which the woman repaid with treachery, with helping herself to the funds provided for the market basket, and by backbiting and, it appeared later, with attempts at blackmail. One can well understand that H. P. B., busy with her theosophical work, dreaded nothing more than having the kitchen and bedroom problems thrown on her hands, and so made the best of a bad situation.

There were other reasons for this tolerance, which perhaps can best be shown by quoting from a statement of H. P. B. written about 1889-90, which constitutes part of the Introduction to *E. S. Instructions, No. III*. It reads as follows:

When the notorious Madame Coulomb came to me in Bombay, with her husband, to ask for bread and shelter, though I had met her in Cairo, and knew her to be a treacherous, wicked, and lying woman, nevertheless I gave her all she needed, because such was my duty. But when, in course of time, I saw she hated me, envied my position

and influence, and slandered me to my friends while flattering me to my face, my human nature revolted. We were very poor then, poorer even in fact than we are now, both the Society and ourselves, and to keep two enemies at our expense seemed hard. Then I applied to my *Gurū* and Master, who was then at three days' distance from Bombay, and submitted to his decision the question whether it was right and Theosophical to keep *two such Serpents* in the house; for she, at any rate, if not her husband, threatened the whole Society. Would you know the answer I received? These are the words *verbatim*, the reply beginning with an aphorism from the *Book of Precepts* "*If thou findest a hungry serpent creeping into thy house, seeking for food, and, out of fear it should bite thee, instead of offering it milk thou turnest it out to suffer and starve, thou turnest away from the Path of Compassion. Thus acteth the fainthearted and the selfish.*" You know," went on the message, "*that you are PERSONALLY threatened; you have still to learn that SO LONG AS THERE ARE THREE MEN WORTHY OF OUR LORD'S BLESSING IN THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY—IT CAN NEVER BE DESTROYED . . . Your two Karmas [hers and mine] run in two opposite directions. Shall you, out of abject fear of that which may come, blend the two [Karmas] and become as she is? . . . They are homeless and hungry: shelter and feed them, then, if you would not become participant in her Karma.*"

Since then I have acted more than ever on this principle of trying to help everyone irrespective of what I personally may have to suffer for it.

From what ultimately followed at Adyar, it would seem that the Master's allusion to a snake, as applied to the Coulombs, was entirely too complimentary, and the comparison a reflection on that tribe of reptiles. But to continue.

Mme. Coulomb was continually making insinuations about H. P. B., claiming that she could tell a lot if she wished, and hinting that the often discussed "phenomena" were mere tricks, in which she and her husband, as well as others, were accomplices. The Coulomb woman was greedy after money and attempted to borrow 2,000 rupees from a wealthy theosophist, Prince Harishinghji Rupsinghji, on the eve of the departure of H. P. B. and Olcott for Europe. H. P. B., learning of this, put her foot on it, and—which is a matter of record—Mme. Coulomb vowed to be revenged on her. So violent and slanderous was her talk that the Board of Control, in charge of Adyar during the absence of H. P. B. and Olcott, expelled the pair from Adyar and from the T. S.

So finally Mme. Coulomb, by way of retaliation, got in touch with the Christian missionaries in Madras, and sold to the Rev. Patterson, editor of *The Christian College Magazine*, a bundle of seventy letters, purporting to have been written to her by H. P. B., some of which contained compromising "confessions", directions for arranging faked phenomena, and much more. While many, perhaps most, of these letters were genuine and quite harmless, it is believed that the compromising ones were forgeries perpetrated by M. Coulomb in conjunction with his wife, he being known to be quite expert at imitating handwriting, while in some cases blank spaces in letters of an entirely innocent nature were filled in with compromising sentences.

The Rev. Patterson, whom nothing could have pleased better than demolishing the Theosophical Society, published selected extracts from these letters, and it was this publication which led to the despatch to India by the Society for Psychical Research, of Richard Hodgson, empowered to make an investigation which was the basis of the famous Report of the S. P. P.

Before the advent of Mr. Hodgson Mme. Coulomb had written a pamphlet entitled "Some Account of my Association with Madame Blavatsky, 1872 to 1884", which was published by the Madras Scottish Free Church missionaries, including the Rev. Patterson and his colleagues. In

this pamphlet, besides other charges of trickery on the part of H. P. B., reference is made to a hole in the wall back of the shrine, or cupboard, in which Mahatmic letters were received, the implication being that these letters were the very ordinary productions of Madame Blavatsky or her fellow conspirators, poked through the hole into the shrine for the delight and delusion of the recipients.

It is important to note that Mme. Coulomb, in her effort to get back at H. P. B. and at the Theosophical Society for ejecting her from a position of profit, and while prefacing her pamphlet with the statement that "This pamphlet has originated in the unscrupulous attacks on my character", did not hesitate to attempt the Samsonian act of pulling the theosophical edifice down on her own head at the same time, confessing herself and her husband collaborators in the purported frauds. It is surprising that the bare statements of such a "skunk mephitica",—to use a phrase applied by a Mahatma to a noted medium—should have been accepted with so little analysis by the missionaries, and by Mr. Hodgson.

It is with this "Coulomb Pamphlet" that Mrs. Beatrice Hastings has to do in the second volume of her "Defence of Madame Blavatsky" series. This is probably the first time that the production has been subjected to a careful analysis and exposure, for while the T. S. made an investigation and rebuttal at the time, the results were not published, apparently in the belief that publicity would do more harm than good, and because of reluctance to drag the Mahatmas into public view. As a result H. P. B. and Theosophy have been looked on with contempt by the public at large to this day. For this the "Keep quiet about it" policy is largely responsible. The present volume deals but lightly with the story of the hole in the wall behind the shrine, of which so much has been made, this being reserved for a following volume now in preparation.

Mrs. Hastings is a keen analyst, and picks the Coulomb stuff to bits in a delightful fashion, while admitting that the flaws in the pamphlet and in the purported Blavatsky letters are so innumerable that it would take a large volume to point them all out. And, in fact, even in this volume of about 100 pages she presents so much choice material that for the reviewer to do it justice in his limited space would be like attempting to pack an elephant into a handbox. Suffice it to say that while she writes often sarcastically, she does not indulge in a redundancy of uncomplimentary remarks about Mme. Coulomb, but uses her space to convict her out of her own mouth, showing her many contradictions and assertions which other evidence proves to be impossible. In short, she goes at the Coulomb like a skilled butcher at the corpse of a pig.

Owing to the abundance of evidence against Mme. Coulomb, and her gusto in the slaughter, I think that Mrs. Hastings has not always considered sufficiently that the reader may at times fail to see the connection between the items described and to fit them into their proper place. I found the book at times difficult on first reading, and a second more leisurely one necessary. The reader must be specially advised to study carefully at first the preface and prefatory note, following these with the Appendix No. 1 (p. 93), in order to get a birds-eye view of the sequence of events.

To follow this second volume we are promised a third dealing specially with the shrine phenomena—the story of the hole in the wall—and the "Adyar saucer phenomenon", while a fourth volume will be devoted to pulverizing Solovyoff's book, *A Modern Priestess of Isis*. It is to be hoped that we shall have still more, for Mrs. Hastings, instead of indulging in vague assertions and condemnation, is an expert in hunting up dates and other data, entangling the writers whom she would destroy in their own contradictions and falsehoods. To use a slang term, she makes them fry in their own grease.