



THE
TRUE HISTORY
OF THE
THEOSOPHICAL
..... SOCIETY

OLCOTT



O'DONOVAN'S BRONZE MEDALLION OF MADAME BLAVATSKY.

OLD DIARY LEAVES

THE TRUE STORY OF
THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

BY
HENRY STEEL OLCOTT
PRESIDENT-FOUNDER OF THE SOCIETY

"T is strange—but true; for truth is always strange;
Stranger than fiction."

BYRON.

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FOREWORD.

I N the history of public bodies, the chapter which relates the origin and vicissitudes of the Theosophical Society should be unique. Whether viewed from the friendly or the unfriendly standpoint, it is equally strange that such a body should have come into existence when it did, and that it has not only been able to withstand the shocks it has had, but actually to have grown stronger proportionately with the bitter unfairness of its adversaries. One class of critics say that this fact strikingly proves a recrudescence of human credulity, and a religious unrest which is preliminary to a final subsidence upon Western conservative lines. The other see in the progress of the movement the sign of a world-wide acceptance of Eastern philosophical ideas, which must work for the reinvigoration and incalculable broadening of the spiritual sympathies of mankind. The patent, the undeniable fact is, that up to the close of the year 1894, as the result of but nineteen years of activity, charters had been granted for 394 branches of the Society, in almost all parts of the habitable globe; and that those issued in that latest year outnumbered the

yearly average since the foundation, in 1875, by 29.9 per cent. Statistically viewed, the relentless and unfair attack which the Society for Psychological Research and the Scottish Missionaries delivered against it in 1884, and which it was hoped would destroy it, merely resulted in very largely augmenting its prosperity and usefulness. The latest assault—that through the *Westminster Gazette*—must inevitably have the same ending. The simple reason is that, however thoroughly the private faults and shortcomings of its individual leaders may be exposed, the excellence of the Society's ideas is not impugned in the least. To kill the Theosophical Society, it is first necessary to prove its declared objects hostile to the public welfare, the teachings of its spokesmen pernicious and demoralising. It being impossible to do either the one or the other, the world takes the Society as a great fact, a distinct individuality, which is neither to be condemned nor applauded because of the merit or demerit of its representative personalities. This truth begins to force itself upon outsiders. One of the ablest among contemporary journalists, Mr. W. T. Stead, said in *Borderland*, in the course of a digest of these "Old Diary Leaves" as they originally appeared in the *Theosophist*, that nobody now cares whether the Coulomb and S. P. R. charges of trickery against Madame Blavatsky were true or false; her worst enemies being unable to deny her the credit of having affected modern philosophical thought to an extraordinary degree by popularising certain noble Eastern ideas. The same

holds with respect to her many colleagues, who, like herself, have spread these ancient teachings through the medium of the Theosophical Society. This wonderful organisation, which grew out of a commonplace parlour gathering in a New York house, in the year 1875, has already made for itself such a record that it must be included in any veracious history of our times. Its development having gone on by virtue of an inherent force, rather than as the result of astute foresight and management; and having been so closely—for some years almost exclusively, connected with the personal efforts of its two founders, Madame Blavatsky and myself, it will perhaps help the future historian if the survivor sets down truthfully and succinctly the necessary facts. The series of chapters which now compose this book was begun nearly three years ago in the *Theosophist* magazine, and a second series, devoted to the history of the Society after the transfer to India, is now in progress. The controlling impulse to prepare these papers was a desire to combat a growing tendency within the Society to deify Mme. Blavatsky, and to give her commonest literary productions a quasi-inspirational character. Her transparent faults were being blindly ignored, and the pinchbeck screen of pretended authority drawn between her actions and legitimate criticism. Those who had least of her actual confidence, and hence knew least of her private character, were the greatest offenders in this direction. It was but too evident that unless I spoke out what I alone knew, the true history of our movement

could never be written, nor the actual merit of my wonderful colleague become known. In these pages I have, therefore, told the truth about her and about the beginnings of the Society—truth which nobody can gainsay. Placing as little value upon the praise as upon the blame of third parties, and having all my life been accustomed to act according to what I have regarded as duty, I have not shrunk from facing the witless pleasantries of those who regard me as a dupe, a liar, or a traitor. The absolute unimportance of others' opinions as a factor in promoting individual development is so plain to my mind, that I have pursued my present task to its completion, despite the fact that some of my most influential colleagues have, from what I consider mistaken loyalty to "H. P. B.," secretly tried to destroy my influence, ruin my reputation, reduce the circulation of my magazine, and prevent the publication of my book. Confidential warnings have been circulated against me, and the current numbers of the *Theosophist* have been removed from Branch reading-room tables. This is child's play: the truth never yet harmed a good cause, nor has moral cowardice ever helped a bad one.

Mrs. Oliphant in her *Literary History of England*, (iii., 263,) says of Bentham just what may be said of H. P. B.: "It is evident that he had an instinct like that of the Ancient Mariner, for the men who were born to hear and understand him, and great readiness in adopting into his affections every new notability whom he approved of, . . . he received an amount of service and devo-

tion, which few of the greatest of mankind have gained from their fellow-creatures."

Where was there a human being of such a mixture as this mysterious, this fascinating, this light-bringing H. P. B. ? Where can we find a personality so remarkable and so dramatic ; one which so clearly presented at its opposite sides the divine and the human ? Karma forbid that I should do her a feather-weight of injustice, but if there ever existed a person in history who was a greater conglomeration of good and bad, light and shadow, wisdom and indiscretion, spiritual insight and lack of common sense, I cannot recall the name, the circumstances or the epoch. To have known her was a liberal education, to have worked with her and enjoyed her intimacy, an experience of the most precious kind. She was too great an occultist for us to measure her moral stature. She compelled us to love her, however much we might know her faults ; to forgive her, however much she might have broken her promises and destroyed our first belief in her infallibility. And the secret of this potent spell was her undeniable spiritual powers, her evident devotion to the Masters whom she depicted as almost supernatural personages, and her zeal for the spiritual uplifting of humanity by the power of the Eastern Wisdom. Shall we ever see her like again ? Shall we see herself again within our time under some other guise ? Time will show.

H. S. OLCOTT.

" GULISTAN."

Ootacamund, 1895.



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