

# BLAVATSKY'S QUEER LIFE

## A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF HER CAREER IN THIS COUNTRY.

### DESCRIPTION OF HER PERSON, HER HABITS, AND HER HOME — SOMETHING ABOUT HER ASSOCIATES AND WHAT THEY THOUGHT OF HER.

The General Secretary of the American section of the Theosophical Society, in a letter dated New-York, May 9, says: "So many rumors and statements have appeared in the New-York papers to the effect that Mme. Blavatsky died three weeks ago, and that the death was concealed until yesterday, that I beg to state that a cable just received by me from the private secretary of Mme. Blavatsky reads as follows: 'She died Friday, the 8th of May, at 2:25 in the afternoon.' This hour in London would be about 9 A. M. here, and the telegram of announcement to me was received here between 1 and 2 P. M."

Mme. Helene P. Blavatsky, whose death in London was announced in yesterday's TIMES, and concerning whose career some interesting facts were printed in these columns yesterday, was born in the inner Court circles of St. Petersburg. Her maiden name was Hahn; her husband's name was Blavatsky. She was married to Blavatsky when she was a schoolgirl, and left him a few weeks afterward. Concerning the separation and the reasons therefor stories are told in the inner circles of the Court that would surprise some of the people who have talked scandal about her of late years. These stories have never been published.

Mme. Blavatsky came to New-York early in the seventies, and from the time of her arrival here until now, scandal and misrepresentation have made free with her name. When she appeared in New-York she had certainly learned very much of the philosophy of the Eastern school of religionists. Whether this was a genuine knowledge of religion or not, it is not material in this connection. It is known, however, that she traveled in the Eastern countries. She claims that she traveled from about 1850 to about 1870 among the priests in the East, who professed to hold the secret of the Magian religion. No evidence has been brought to New-York to substantiate this. Neither has it been disputed. So far as New-York knows she appeared here about 1873. It has been said that she was an immoral woman. It has been said that she was a Russian spy. It has been said that she organized the Theosophical Society and conducted it for the purpose of making a living for herself and Col. Olcott, who was said to be connected with her by ignoble ties.

The Theosophical Society, of which she was the parent, was started in New-York some two years after she arrived here. Soon after the inception of this society she encountered Col. Henry S. Olcott. Olcott was then an ardent Spiritualist. Mme. Blavatsky never was a Spiritualist. Olcott, however, had become involved in certain personal difficulties, which led him to sever his own domestic relations and to join forces with Mme. Blavatsky in the formation of a society which they intended should embody the study of an intellectual religion. This was the inception of the Theosophical Society. It became necessary to attract public attention to it. The death of Baron de Palm, who was a genuine Baron and who held numerous titles of nobility, despite the fact that he was a tramp and dependent upon the charity of Olcott for his food and clothing, gave the society a chance to exploit itself.

The funeral, the cremation, the exploitation, and finally the scattering of the incinerated remains of the unfortunate Baron followed, and all served to attract the attention of the public to the Theosophical Society. All this was new to the American public then.

Mme. Blavatsky, about the year 1877, took a flat at the southwest corner of Eighth Avenue and Forty-seventh Street. This was the place that afterward became famous by the name of the Lamasonry. Col. Olcott, having been separated legally from his family, was a joint occupant of this flat. William Q. Judge, who was for years before that time a mystic, joined the two partners, and then began the public career of the Theosophical Society. Concerning this there is very much to be said, more indeed than can be comprised in a newspaper article. The flat itself was a modest apartment of seven or eight rooms on a third floor. The rent was perhaps \$35 a month. The expense of running it, including the table bill and the hire of a servant, and also including the abundant hospitality which Mme. Blavatsky extended to a few personal friends, might possibly have been \$30 a week, possibly \$40. This was the basis of all the stories that have been circulated to the effect that she made theosophy pay while she was in New-York. Offsetting this is the unquestioned fact that she was a correspondent of newspapers in Russia and in Paris during all that time.

In this flat certain wonderful things occurred—at least, they were said to be wonderful. Donovan, the sculptor; Chase, Wimbridge, Harrisse, and others, among the artists; Linda Dietz, and her sister and father, Sara Cowell, Mr. and Mrs. Le Moyne, and Mme. Schevitsch, among actors, and Gen. Abner A. Doubleday, United States Army; Charles Lotheran, the journalist, Mitchell of the *Sun*, Curtis of the *World*, half a dozen Catholic priests, Prof. Alexander Wilder, the famous anthropologist, and a score of other observers, more or less known to fame, are ready to-day to testify to certain happenings in this flat which transcended the recognized laws of events. There were displayed before critics the keenest that could be selected, certain phenomena which could not be explained by any one present. To go into a discussion of them would be to open up a string of fairy stories.

Mme. Blavatsky, while she was willing to work these wonders in the presence of friends, always refused to do anything of the kind when she was confronted with an unfriendly skeptic. Her friends might scoff and good-naturedly question all her powers and she would never get angry, but would laugh and make merry over the alleged wonders without a word of controversy. The moment, however, that any one appeared who was antagonistic to her, was the moment when she closed her shell. It happened in 1878 that she was interviewed by a man who saw both sides of this question. If she was really the person she claimed to be the world was bound to listen. If she was not, it was certain that a worthy successor of Count Cagliostro had appeared. Accordingly he wrote a series of articles which attracted the attention of the whole country. From that moment the Theosophical Society became an accomplished fact.

It has been said that the society has been used as a means of revenue by the two or three who have had charge of all its business affairs. If this by any chance can be true these people are contented with little, for not enough money has come in, in the regular course, to the society to hire a small hall in New-York, let alone paying the expenses of the principal officers in traveling half around the world.

A personal characterization of Mme. Blavatsky, by one who knew her as intimately as any one could, who was not a sworn disciple of hers, is as follows: "She was a woman of apparently sixty years of age when she first became prominent as the leader of the Theosophical Society. A very curious thing about her was that she would look old one day and young the next. I suppose that I was as intimate in my visiting of the Forty-seventh Street flat as anybody was, and I have happened upon her at 10 o'clock in the morning when she seemed to be seventy years old. I have seen her in the evening when I would have sworn that she was not thirty-five. You may take this as the evidence of a man who does not know physiognomy, but W. M. Chase, Donovan, and Wimbridge will all tell you the same, and I can find half a dozen other artists in New-York who will do as much. These are people whose business it is to study faces, and that is what they told me after studying her face week in and week out.

"She was curious in her habits as she was in her appearance. It has been said in the papers that she was very obese, weighing more than 300 pounds. As a matter of fact, she was a woman of slender frame, and she did weigh probably 200 pounds. She was active and quick on her feet, and never made any objection to going out in the evening or in the daytime if there happened to be anything outside which she considered worth seeing. I have taken her to the circus, to see certain people whom Barnum had advertised as Indian magicians. I have taken her to the East River shore to track a ghost which was said to row up and down the river in a small boat every night. I have taken her to the house of a so-called medium, three miles away, where I told her that she was likely to see some clever tricks in Spiritualism. All this happened while she was writing her great work, 'Isis Unveiled,' which has been pronounced 'one of the greatest intellectual achievements of the nineteenth century,' and never knew her to complain of the physical exertion. I only mention this to show how unfounded are the stories about her physical lethargy.

"I might say this as indicating a curious turn or tendency in her mind. She became furious, angry when any one questioned the truth of any story which ordinary people would call supernatural. For instance, when I told her that the ghost of old Shep which she had gone down to the East River to see was probably nothing more than the imagination of a drunken man, she almost put me out of the house. Yet she had no evidence of the existence of old Shep beyond what I had told her.

"The characteristic which she impressed upon all those who met her in a friendly way was, beyond question, sincerity. Of course I can say nothing about the alleged exposure of her trickery in India. Neither do I propose to question the statements of Prof. Coues of Washington as to whether she was an impostor. I can only say that, supposing her to have been one, she was cleverer than all the others who have appeared in New-York within my twenty-five years' recollection."

Into the flat which Mme. Blavatsky occupied during the latter part of her stay in New-York

came a constant procession of people whose importance would be readily recognized if it were possible to give a full list of their names. From all over the world people of distinction came to learn what it was that she was offering under the name of Theosophy. It is safe to say that not one in a hundred went away with any idea of the real significance of what she was teaching. It has been said that she was the only person who knew what Theosophy was. It has also been said that Judge knew and that Olcott knew. But even the best advanced in the society will question this statement.

The Theosophical Society is said to number about 2,000 members in the United States, and it is also said that these members are admitted for money and that the society is kept alive by means of dues and compulsory subscriptions. It is said, moreover, that members on admission to the society bound themselves to obey Mme. Blavatsky's injunctions implicitly, and to render all moral and pecuniary aid in their power to the society. This is not true. Whatever the society may do in the future, and whatever Mme. Blavatsky has said in the past are two things. Whether the society shall go on or not is nothing to the purpose. What Mme. Blavatsky has done is all that need be considered here.

After four or five years' work in New-York she decided to leave this country and go to India, where she had been already assured of ample support for her scheme, which, as she had formulated it, was nothing more or less than a revival of what English scholars have called the "Wisdom Religion of the East." Before going to India she had been assured of the help of one Dya-Nand-Saraswati, a reformer who had traveled through a great portion of India preaching the revival of the original Buddhism as taught by Guatama-Buddha, much in the same way that Martin Luther preached original Christianity some centuries ago. She had also letters full of encouragement from a man named Hurrychund-Chintamon, a learned Pundit, who had translated the Bhagavat-Gita, and who afterward turned out to be a precious swindler.

She believed that the society could be better carried on in India than in America, and after providing for its perpetuation here she started, in company with three or four personal followers, in 1879. The breaking up of the Lamasonry was a mournful occasion to her personal friends. An auction sale was held, at which the few trifles of Oriental bric-a-brac which she had gathered together were sold for nothing at all. The descriptions which have been written of her rooms in Forty-seventh Street seem to have been coined by the writers out of very misty recollections. The real fact is that she had hardly anything of intrinsic value there, and was frequently hard pressed to pay current expenses, even with Olcott's assistance, and he was then practicing law.

After her departure from New-York the Theosophical Society languished so far as New-York was concerned. But letters were received from India, some of which were published here, going to show that a great start in theosophy had been made among the Hindus.

About this time it was noticeable that there were numerous publications in the American and European press to the effect that Mme. Blavatsky was a Russian spy. This is a story which has been told about her at every stage of her career since 1865. None of the writers who have repeated the story have given a single statement as corroborative proof of the story. Yet it has clung to her, and while she was in India there is no question that she was greatly embarrassed by the reiteration of this reflection upon her character.

Concerning her career in India many contradictory stories have reached this country. It is certain that she was accused by very respectable people of imposture. Dr. Hodgson was sent out some six years ago by the London Society for Psychical Research, and he spent two or three months in India with the avowed object of learning whether she was or was not a humbug. A Mme. Coulomb, who had been employed by Mme. Blavatsky as a housekeeper, and who is said to have had some personal difference with her before Dr. Hodgson's arrival, made a statement to that gentleman regarding impostures which she declared that Mme. Blavatsky was guilty of. The report of Dr. Hodgson was beyond a question the heaviest blow that the Theosophical Society ever received. It put into a position of antagonism very many people who had before that remained in an attitude of doubt. It also alienated many who had been up to that time inclined to believe in the professions of the society. Mme. Blavatsky shortly after this left India, and after a little travel in Europe made a residence in London, where she had been for the last three or four years. Since her exit from India there has been a notable revival of theosophy in England. Without a question it is due to her personal influence upon a certain class of English thinkers. No more notable example of this can be cited than that of Annie Besant, who is now a pronounced Theosophist and who had been up to the time of her meeting with Mme. Blavatsky one of the leaders of atheistic thought and a pronounced follower of Charles Bradlaugh.

Mme. Blavatsky was or was not the prophet of a new religion. She said it was old, but it was new to this country, where she introduced it. She was or was not one of the most advanced thinkers of the nineteenth century. She was or was not gifted with certain powers, which she claimed to have learned by a study of the religion of the East, of which powers she gave manifestations freely to those who were willing to see and hear judicially. She was not a common humbug. She did not exhibit her alleged powers for money. She did not lend herself—at least, not while she was in America—to any exhibition for which any individual was charged a penny. She did not demand money from any member of her society, and she did not benefit a penny by the very few dollars paid into the society while she was here. She drew her scanty income from abroad and worked hard for it.

She was a woman of very unusual education, who had a mind that proved itself capable of confusing some of the best intellects of the age. She succeeded in convincing people who did not believe in spiritualism or in supernaturalism that she had powers which they could not explain. She reviled the accepted religions of this part of the world, and offered in their stead theosophy. To this new, or old, creed or belief, theory, or philosophy, whatever it may be, at least 2,000 Americans have given their adherence. Whether she was a Cagliostro or a John the Baptist she has made her impress.

### YALE GLEE CLUB CONCERT.

The forty young gentlemen composing the Yale Glee and Banjo Club—twenty-three in the first and seventeen in the last—who appeared in concert last night at the Madison Square Assembly Rooms, not only scored a distinct musical success, but were successful in adding a substantial sum to the funds of the university crew, for whose benefit the concert was given. The beautiful hall was completely filled by a showily-dressed gathering of society people such as is seldom seen outside the Metropolitan Opera House, and which so forcibly expressed its appreciation of the good things set before it by the amateur vocalists and musicians that the long programme was extended to nearly double its original length.

The numbers assigned the Banjo Club were the Meyer-Lutz "Skirt Dance," which opened the concert; the "Nadji" waltz of Chassaigne, and Gounod's "Funeral March of a Marionette," all of which were admirably played and rewarded with demands for their repetition.

The Glee Club, which is well balanced as to parts and whose members sing with intelligent expression, good articulation, and pure tonality, although all the voices are not of agreeable quality, was heard in "Neath the Elms," the medley "Integer Vita," "Show Me the Scotchman" and "Bright College Years," from the Carmine Yulenslan; the "Cannibal Idyl," Taber; "The Jumbles," Ingraham; "Beware," Williams, and "She Was But Seven," Hawley. The Kitchell-Shepard "On the Water" discovered in Mr. P. J. Wurts a promising rival to the gifted Mrs. Shaw, who has carried the fame of the American whistle to the Courts of Europe; the other soloists, who made a favorable impression in connection with the club being Mr. A. G. Robinson, who sang the "Chanson de Florian" of Godard; Mr. J. T. Carr, who sang the "Lullaby" of Kjerulf, and Messrs. C. P. Renovely and W. N. Runyon, who were heard respectively in the "Predicaments" and "Antigone" of Lee and Tweedy.

While the delivery of some of the more pretentious numbers named was not beyond criticism, the breeziness and rollicking swing with which the old familiar college songs were given amply compensated for whatever shortcomings there were in this respect.

### FOR THE AUDUBON MONUMENT.

All except about \$3,000 of the amount needed for the erection of the Audubon Monument has now been subscribed. Those having charge of the fund are anxious to have it completed as soon as possible. These additional subscriptions have been received:

O. H. P. Belmont, \$100; H. M. Flagler, \$100; Mrs. R. L. Stewart, \$100; C. W. Chapin, \$100; Charles Pratt, \$100; W. D. Sloane, \$100; J. D. Rockefeller, \$100; O. B. Jennings, \$100; W. H. Webb, \$100; Miss Helen T. Barney, \$100; Lewis M. Rutherford, \$100; C. H. Sent, \$100; D. O. Mills, \$100; "A Friend," \$50; S. V. R. Cruger, \$50; T. Lyman, (Brooklyn,) \$25; D. Huntington, \$25; H. Braem, \$25; Mrs. E. Herrman, \$25; J. L. Cadwallader, \$25; G. A. Crocker, \$25; O. L. Hutchinson, (Chicago,) \$20; the Rev. H. McKim, \$20; C. E. Beaman, \$15; M. M. Weid, \$10; B. S. Amend, \$10; J. Patton, (Baltimore,) \$10; F. L. Satterlee, \$10; J. N. Wood, \$10; G. Van Slyck, \$10; Mrs. A. C. Ketchum, \$5; B. De F. Arnold, \$5; F. C. Beck, \$5; Mrs. E. Richards, \$5; F. G. Garretson, \$5; F. Collingwood, \$5; A. J. Dittenhofer, \$5; W. J. Youmans, M. D., \$5; the Rev. J. Mulcahey, \$5; Dr. E. L. Taylor, \$1. Total, \$1,721; previously acknowledged, \$5,003.50; grand total, \$6,724.50.