



## A GREAT CHARLATAN

### THE MYSTERIOUS MADAME.

By 'Ephesian'.

The Bodley Head. Price 7s. 6d. net.

MADAME Helena Blavatsky has been pronounced "one of the most accomplished, ingenious and interesting charlatans of history." And certainly this lively biography goes far to confirm that statement.

The story of her life is of particular interest to us in India, since a portion of it was spent in Bombay, Allahabad and Simla; and it was the leadership of her Theosophical Society that Mrs. Besant fell heir to upon the death of Madame Blavatsky and her associates.

#### Cigarettes and Oaths

Madame Blavatsky (or "H.P.B." as she preferred to call herself) was in truth an amazing woman. Fat, ugly, coarse, addicted to red flannel dressing gowns, cigarettes and oaths, a glutton for food, she was nevertheless possessed of some magnetic quality of leadership that brought in a continuous flow of disciples, despite the exposures and scandals that punctuated her career. Born in Russia a hundred years ago, of good stock, she was married at the age of seventeen, to General Blavatsky. She left him, however, after three or four months.

#### Concocted History

The twenty-five years that followed, up to the beginning of her public career in New York, she has accounted for in her remarkable book "Isis Unveiled"—an amazing concoction that includes a tour of Tibetan avatars, where she learned the mysteries of the "masters;" lonely trips in the wilder parts of the Caucasus where all manner of supernatural experiences (all uncorroborated) befell her. She claimed too, to have fought in Garibaldi's ranks against the French.

But there is, alas for her reputation, independent evidence to show that these years were spent in a more ordinary, if less conventional fashion. Sundry men appear to have had a share in her life, and there is fairly sound evidence of a baby who lived only a few years.

Madame Blavatsky began her career as a spiritualist in America by recruiting a secretary-companion in the person of a Colonel Olcott who was at that time writing spiritualistic articles for the papers. The association lasted until the death of the latter whose extraordinary gullibility made him as clay in the hands of the domineering Blavatsky. He seems, however, to have been a man of pleasing personality with some talent for organization. His writings were an important source of material for the present book.

#### "H.P.B." in Simla

Madame's occult societies in America and England being driven by dissension and quite unproductive financially, she achieved a connection with the Arya Samaj in India, and shortly after betook herself with a small suite to Bombay. She was received with respect by the Indian members, but she was looking for wealthy and influential disciples and none was forthcoming in Bombay. Eventually, however, she found what she sought in the person of Mr. Sinnett, the then editor of the *Pioneer* at Allahabad. The Sinnetts appear to have been an easy conquest, and H.P.B. basked in the society of the elite and enjoyed the luxury of a carriage and pair. The Sinnetts, greatly daring, took her with them to Simla. "H.P.B." we are told, "burst upon this little world like a rocket. Sinnett and Hume gravely introduced her to Members of the Viceroy's Council, and she made spirits rap inside their startled heads. Mrs. Sinnett invited Commissioners' wives to meet her at tea, and she puffed cigarette-smoke in their faces and advised them to turn Buddhist. Simla shuddered, and capitulated. Soon she and Olcott were accepted as an entertaining addition to the amenities of the place."

But spirit rappings were merely a concession to the curious. Madame's real interest lay in the occult messages that came from the invisible "masters." The versatile lady had a wide range of handwritings. Sinnett, as the most useful of her disciples, was the most often favoured with messages from the unknown. The unsuspecting man was duly impressed when these notes appeared on his desk, or fluttered from the ceiling, or arrived enclosed in letters



Madame Blavatsky

from other people. He does not appear to have been struck by the fact that when Madame was absent from his house, the "masters" used the public mails!

#### Exposure

The exposure of her methods that resulted from a quarrel with two of her assistants, was later corroborated by her own rash letters to an old friend in Russia in whom she confided more than was wise. A weaker person would have been crushed for ever, but H.P.B. returned to England, flayed her enemies, founded the Esoteric department of the Theosophical Society, and enjoyed the satisfaction of success ere the results of over-eating and rheumatic fever carried her off the scene.

#### Self-Deception

The biographer, obviously no believer in occult messages, has given Madame Blavatsky a fair deal. He never minimises her good qualities,—her generosity and kindness, her loyalty to old friends, her fearless courage and unwavering will power. He excuses her inability to distinguish truth from falsehood (a fault of hers from early childhood), and grants her the excuse of self-deception in the end. He is willing to believe in her sincerity in the excuse she always made when detected in a fraud,—namely that she had been temporarily under the power of black magic and was therefore not responsible! But he is merciless in following up the evidences of chicanery and deception so abundantly manifest throughout her amazing career.

The biographer's style is admirably vivid throughout. He has skilfully managed masses of material without slipping into the pitfall of digression or overmuch detail. He reveals a tolerance for human error without allowing it to cloud the issue. In short, he shows himself to possess all the qualities of the capable biographer.

## THE PAYING GUESTS

BLOOD MONEY, By John Goodwin.

Putnam, Price 7s. 6d. net.

Another good "hot weather thriller" with plenty of action from the very first page. The plot is an excellent one and masterfully executed. It concerns a certain financially embarrassed Lord Trent, and two American girls who come to Stanways—the family estate—as paying guests. Lord Trent, a handsome, enigmatic character, has no qualms in urging upon his son the wisdom of achieving matrimony with the American heiress. His son, with the impulsiveness of youth, promptly loses his heart to the other girl, who—we are led to believe—is but a penniless maid-companion.

#### Enter the Crooks

The knowledge of the girl's wealth brings down a gang of crooks upon Stanways,—not the usual type of crook, but a set of people who have a personal motive which could not be related without revealing the plot. An eavesdropping butler is found murdered; Lord Trent's son suspects his father (and so do we); strange faces are seen peering in open windows; and the American girl who is the target of the gang is found dying of a bullet wound, but disappears mysteriously before help can be summoned. All very mystifying and exciting to the end, when Romance steps in and Murder walks out. The several characters are well drawn, and the story is entirely plausible.

## THE PROGRESS OF PUBLIC HEALTH

HEALTH AND SOCIAL EVOLUTION, By Sir George Newman K.C.B., M.D.

George Allen and Unwin, Ltd. Price 4s. 6d. net.

The march of progress in medicine and hygiene from the days of the Black Death to the present time, as given in these Halley Stewart Lectures of 1930, is one of which the British nation may be proud. It is a splendid record of the growth of humanitarianism and public spirit, and the reaction of health upon the destiny of a nation.

#### Historical Resumé

These interesting discourses are more than a history of medicine. They draw a vivid picture of social and economic conditions from feudal days downward; and of the slow and gradual growth of public conscience towards the conditions of industrial labour, and the plight of the ill and needy among the lower classes. The lecturer tells of the days when children under ten worked 17 hours daily in filthy, unventilated, badly-lighted rooms, and women were completely without protection as to hours or wages. He traces the municipal reform which followed the industrial revolution, and the life and work of men like Jeremy Bentham and Robert Owen in improving those conditions. The growth of a public service in health and sanitation and its beneficial effects as regards infant mortality, tuberculosis, social diseases and other ills that arise from ignorance or disregard of the rules of health,—are sketched in against a background of political and religious development which in turn explains the progress of public health.

#### "Muddling into Health"

The author raises an interesting question at the end, when he asks of the danger of the State's social service taking the place of individual responsibility. He deplores—rightly—the fact that the study of hygiene, eugenics and healthy living is ignored or neglected in most schools and colleges. "The English people," he says, "muddle into health, or chance upon it, or just ignore it." And, by neglecting available knowledge, fall easy victims to charlatans, quacks and fads. Equally sane are his comments on birth control, and the saving of the "unfit." Individual enlightenment rather than legislation, will solve these problems, and there is no "short cut." We recommend this book, both for its historical interest and for the sound common sense and wisdom of its conclusions.