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Theosophy

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T H E O S O P H Y .

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George A. Shahan.

THEOSOPHY.

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What is Theosophy ? The term is derived from two Greek words, "Theos" - God, and "sophia" - wisdom or knowledge. Theosophy is then etymologically, knowledge of or about God. It is direct, in contradistinction from revealed knowledge. It isn't supposition; it isn't deduction from phenomena; but is positive knowledge of God. How is such knowledge acquired ? Can the finite touch and comprehend the Infinite ? Theosophists say yes, and pushing aside tradition, reason and scripture, they pass through the sphere of the senses and acquire a direct knowledge of the Spiritual.

The man that can thus overcome the limitations of sense-perception and come into such certain and unlimited mental grasp of the Absolute, both modern science and philosophy deny. There is with these ever the invisible, intangible, unsearchable, back of the veil of matter, known only through revelation or as the necessary explanation of the intelligent and intelligible world.

Theosophists claim that there may be as much certain knowledge respecting accessible parts of the unseen world as of the seen. But Theosophy is a universal science. "God is all and in all". A knowledge of God removed from all inference must therefore include a knowledge of his workings, that which he has made, and the final cause of all. It then embraces the world of matter and of spirit. We are concerned with it only as a religion.

Spirit in itself is permanent and potent, matter is transient and inert. There are then beyond matter principles of activity or potencies, and a realm of reality not accessible to man unless the limitations of matter can be passed. Now the Theosophist asks where the limitations are drawn and why, and whether there is not in man a faculty which when sufficiently developed can grasp the world of substantial reality. In answer he says there is no limitation, that man has this faculty and that by cultivating it he has been able to pierce the realm of the spiritual, comprehend the truth, witness the reality of the unseen and handle the strange forces there present. Thus Theosophy comes to be a "wisdom religion". Persons who through a process of development, have come to such mental mastery of the

world are called "adepts". As a sign of their rank, they pass in the eyes of their less developed brethren as "Thaumaturgists". An "Adept" is able "to read thoughts and purposes and influence both from any distance; disintegrate the particles composing any object and cause them to be carried to another clime and there to be reintegrated to their original form; produce sounds and motions at will; cause flowers to bloom and objects to fall from mid-air; communicate instantly with brother Adepts in this world or in any other; suspend the connection between body and spirit and pass at will from point to point, hindered by no obstacle and hampered by no time". This being true they need no miracles, no phenomena and no revelation from God.

Theosophy is not a creed. It is rather a mass of knowledge respecting man, the Universe and God, which Adepts have handed down from age to age. But in keeping with other religions only that fulness of knowledge has been given which might be put into practical use. The objects of Theosophy are three-fold: to establish a universal brotherhood; to study the laws of nature yet unexplained and the powers belonging to mankind. No one seeking admission into the society is asked his religious beliefs. Among them may be found Agnostics, Buddhists, Jews and representatives of almost all religions. The platform of the society is as broad as the Universe and its freedom of thought is unqualified.

Theosophy holds two fundamental doctrines, namely, Reincarnation and Karma. In these they claim to find peace and happiness. Both the doctrines are grounded on evolution.

According to the doctrine of reincarnation the selfhood of any life is ^{re}born again and again in the flesh. Thus one man has not one body but many. This gives a man the experience that comes out of a thousand lives. Each time the ego is reincarnated it comes in a different rank, sex or nationality, so that in the end one has a vast experience. The end of this series of reincarnations is that one may attain to symmetrical development through a universal experience and opportunity. The intellect is thus brought in touch with all phases of the world. But one is more than intellectual: one is emotive. If the emotive nature were confined to one rank, sex or

nationality, it would be necessarily limited. In order that one may be emotively developed, the succession of reincarnations give one the experience of father, mother, etc., through all existing relationships. Besides being intellectual and emotive, one is moral. Many are not unideal but are given over to certain kinds of evil. Why is this? Should one be created for being good, and another be discredited for being evil? No. These elements of conduct come out of evolution and are the result of a former life which one ~~cannot~~ cannot change now. Each is the kind of man the stage of evolution chances to find him. If one is good it is only because one has attained it by successive reincarnations through which the other is yet to pass. Still further, one is spiritual - a spark from the Great Sun to which he is to be reunited. This spark is enveloped in the material, and to refine it and make it a purer essence ready for the reunion requires an infinite series of reincarnations. When the spirit is wholly purified there is no more cause for rebirth - the wanderings are at an end.

The question is raised, Why have we no remembrance of past lives if there were such? Theosophists claim that memory is continuous and that when a certain stage of development is reached all the past will come vividly before the mind.

There is still another ground for reincarnation. This life is one of probation. At death the soul is tested and enters upon its reward. This being true, one should have a definite knowledge of that to which one's life should conform, and the reward offered for faithfulness. Some have this knowledge, but the percent is small. What about the millions that never had an opportunity to learn? Justice says all should have the same test, in preparation for which all should have equal light. But such knowledge and preparation could come only through many times living. There are those always unwell, those burdened with toil and care, not having time for proper development. Many die in infancy. How can these have equal opportunity with all others except by reincarnations? All men are incarnated once, and if this is reasonable and necessary, why aren't many times equally so?

Let us consider briefly the interval between death and re-birth.

It is unfortunate for us in our thirst for knowledge at this point that the Adepts have given us so limited an explanation. As to the length of time, nothing is given. According to the analysis that the Adepts have made of man, he consists of seven constituents, called principles. These are, spirit, spiritual soul, human soul, animal soul, astral body, vitality, and human body. "The human soul is the organ of intelligence; the animal soul is the organ of desires and affections". There is an intermixture of purer and baser elements associated with these organs, and at death these elements part. The separation takes place in Kama Loka, but how it is effected and how the more refined spiritual principles are introduced into Devachan, the realm of pure spirits, is not given. Devachan is a realm where effects work out results, all cause having ceased at death. When the gathered forces which in this realm operate to produce results are exhausted, the ego goes out from Devachan and appears in another body. This is the process of ordinary soul-progress. There is no hell except for abnormal spirits lost to refinement by reincarnation.

The second doctrine is that of Karma. "Karma expresses the balance sheet of merit and demerit". It expresses the moral resultant of any life. When the forces which operated on the spirit in Devachan are exhausted and the time for rebirth has come, it is Karma that determines the place, rank and external conditions into which the spirit shall go. When at the end of any life there is no moral resultant there will be no rebirth. Nirvana has been attained. The doctrine of Karma gives every man his just due for two reasons: every man makes his own Karma, and Karma never makes a mistake.

Theosophy is a pure theory, framed to satisfy insatiable minds thirsting for a certainty of knowledge beyond their ken. If it recognizes at all the need of help from that spiritual world with which it is so familiar, it neither offers nor shows the possibility of obtaining it. So far as any help offered by Theosophy is concerned, God and man are unrelated. It is next to mockery that a world of spiritual forces should be so accessible and yet so set over against the possibility of appropriation. But what about the validity of this absolute certitude? It rests upon no evidence at all that appeals to the ordinary mind. The Adepts catalogue their exper-

ience, and this is the show of evidence. Whatever may be true for the Adepts, no such experience is possible for the less developed brethren, and to ask them to exercise an intelligent belief in the theory taxes credulity. We are inclined to ask what is in the workshop behind the veil of matter, and if all looks different as one looks from behind or before ; or is there any "behind" or "before" ? and what kind of human intelligence is that which becomes infinite in its scrutiny and grasp ? We are further inclined to ask where one might go to come nearer to the world of spirit than one is now.

Finally the theory reduces itself to a "common-sense" philosophy which demands lumps - a childish curiosity that wants to examine the toy internally. A rational view of the intelligent and intelligible world establishes the fact that all human knowledge is relative, and while it rises into the realm of certitude it rests primarily upon certain postulates or preconditions which are themselves neither proved nor capable of proof. Theosophy is a universal science. "God is all and in all". It is not clear how God is identified with the world. If we are to judge from the dualism implied from the references to a potent and active spirit and a transient and inert matter, God and the world are not at all identified ; but if we consider that "God is all and in all", in such a relation as to imply that a knowledge of God includes a knowledge thorough knowledge of the world, it is difficult to regard it as other than a species of pantheism. But Theosophy abounds in inconsistencies and this is one of them. Another appears in connection with the first object of the Theosophical Society, namely, to establish a universal brotherhood. Since "God is all and in all", and man himself is part of this "all", what brotherhood could be established other than exists in the nature of things. ? Further, if Theosophy does not rise to the Theistic conception of the world, how is it to escape that fatal dualism included in its system ? and if it rises to this conception, how is it to maintain its claim for that unlimited theatre of finite intelligence ?

The doctrine of reincarnation is a very pleasing one when considered in the light of that perfect development which it is supposed to effect, but when viewed in the light of that almost endless series wherein the self is not free but driven from behind by forces

of the character of the former life of which it is wholly oblivious, it sinks to a realm of thickest gloom.

The theory of Karma is a makeshift to account for the return of the spirit to another body. Of its nature and times, even the omniscient Adepts are ignorant.

The rewards set before men by this system are too far off and human conduct is too predetermined to have any lively effect upon men. It is a wisdom religion, not one that offers help. It leaves men to struggle upward in weakness and alone. Its fatalism palliates sin and disrobes virtue. Theosophy may be suited to angelic natures but for man it has neither help, comfort, nor truth.

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