

THE BRITISH THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY.

At a meeting of this Society, held in London on July 2nd, 1882, the President, Dr. G. Wyld, resigned his office, and the question of the present condition and prospects of our Society was considered.*

The undersigned was deputed to communicate with the President Founder in India, Colonel H. S. Olcott, and to state the result of the correspondence, and any recommendations suggested by it, at the next meeting of the Society, which then adjourned till 4 p.m. on Sunday, the 5th of November next, at 38, Great Russell Street. Preparatory to that meeting, it will be convenient to review shortly the considerations which dictated the above course, and to inform members (especially those who will be unable to attend) of the effect of the communications which have

* The reasons I gave for my resignation were :—

1. That the heads of the Society in Bombay had asserted their disbelief in " a personal or impersonal God," and hence had ceased to be Theists or entitled to the name of Theosophists. (See Theosophist for May, p. 6, Supplement.)

2. That they had systematically, and without discriminating between popular or verbal and esoteric or Theosophical Christianity, continually ridiculed that faith, in contravention of the law of the Society as to universal toleration.

3. I therefore urged that our Society should cease to be a *branch* paying a money tribute, but dissolve and reconstitute itself an independent Theosophic Society of Great Britain, in friendly correspondence with the East. But finding that the Fellows were divided on this question, I, in order to avoid the responsibility of splitting the Society, resigned my office.—GEORGE WYLD, M.D.

passed, and of the recommendation which will be submitted in consequence.

It is generally felt that we have not as yet realised any of the hopes or expectations which led to our association four years ago. Our meetings have been chiefly occupied with the consideration of papers contributed on the individual responsibility of members, but we have pursued no study in common, have done no organised work, have conducted no—or very few—experiments, and, in a word, can point to no encouraging results. For this state of things there are some of us who think that the parent Society is partly responsible. We associated in general sympathy with the aims and principles set forth at the foundation of the New York Society in 1875, and we expected that our work in this country would receive an original impulse and direction from leaders possessing peculiar information and opportunities. Such suggestions as we received were, however, of the vaguest description: the head-quarters of the Society were transferred to India: it there assumed a public character, well calculated, no doubt, to conciliate native support and sympathy, but apparently foreign to the objects contemplated when this branch was established.

Those objects may be prefaced and stated briefly as follows.

As well the proved facts of modern phenomenal spiritualism, as their frequently ambiguous character, and the prevalent doubts of the best observers as to their significance and tendency, had turned the attention of thoughtful minds to the older history of the subject, and especially to the treatment of these and similar mysteries in the long neglected studies formerly known as the Occult Sciences. It was felt that the representatives of modern physical science, who, with a few distinguished exceptions, have scornfully and persistently ignored facts patent to nearly every investigator, and attested by an enormous mass of evidence, were no longer to be trusted as exclusive guides to what are and are not profitable studies in natural

philosophy. But the extended field of research and speculation thus opened to us could not fail to include man himself, his relations to the several kingdoms of life and intelligence disclosed, or believed to exist, and even to the Highest Principle of all. Thus our problems invaded the region of theology and religion, and justified the name of a Society which sought to build up psychological and spiritual science to its Summit. The pursuit of such inquiries presupposes freedom from exclusive attachment to any system which fails, if it does not even purposely decline, to afford them satisfaction. The members of the Theosophical Society are necessarily freethinkers in the best and largest sense of that phrase. On the other hand, the futility of individual speculation, aided even by the most developed conceptions of modern philosophy, to penetrate the mysteries of our being must be recognised not less than the insufficiency and uncertainty of all orthodox teaching in any known and popular religion.

If, therefore, we were left to the resources open to every student who has access to books, it must be acknowledged that agreement on certain general principles of conduct and inquiry would form no adequate basis or reason for association. We, however, had more definite expectations; and it is upon the sincerity with which we can still entertain them, and on the prospects of fulfilment, that our present decision with regard to the continued existence and future course of the Society must depend.

The English branch of the Society was formed in reliance on information which seemed to us credible, that a developed system of psychological science already existed in the world, and that the persons in possession of this knowledge would accept us as pupils. Much has been said by our respected leaders of the parent Society in censure of our supposed expectation that we should be gratified by experimental exhibitions of "occult" power by these far distant teachers. It has been suggested that some here, as in America, were attracted to the Society by

idle curiosity and avidity for "phenomena." This impression rests on a misconception which must be cleared away. Some of us did, indeed, think it possible that practical illustrations and demonstrations of teaching might be afforded; but the conditions rendering this possible or the reverse were among the things we expected to learn. So far as our minds entertained this possibility at all, it was simply as a conceivable result of advanced proficiency on our parts, and of the recognition of this by our teachers.

But it was soon apparent, not only that such possibly extravagant hopes would be disappointed, but that there was not the disposition we had presupposed even to open a school, or to admit that we were qualified for instruction by the mere acceptance of the very general pledges and principles which formed the conditions of membership of our Society. Later on, an express avowal of this attitude was elicited by certain distinguished Anglo-Indian Fellows. We learned that the knowledge we aspired to was a jealously guarded secret, that there was no inclination to impart it on any terms whatever, and that it could not possibly be acquired except upon conditions generally impracticable. We further discovered that there was on the part of these mysterious Adepts of the East, whose existence was so confidently asserted, a contempt for the European mind, which seemed to deny all hope to persons of our race and education.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that an impression gained ground among us that we had been misled; that we had ceased to be closely united to the parent Society by common objects and sympathies; that none of the results we had looked for could be expected; and that though "theosophy" and "occult science" must still offer interesting fields of study, no special facilities for cultivating them were to be obtained by association in this country. So that, whether the evidence did or did not justify belief in the "Adept Brothers," and in their knowledge and powers, was a question which practically concerned us not at all, they recognizing no relation

with the Theosophical Society, or at least with our branch of it.

Other causes tended to dissolution. It was thought that the religious convictions of Christian members of the Society were misrepresented by its leaders in India, and by its organ in the press there, and were treated with a rudeness hardly consistent with the tolerant principles professed as one of the bases of association. The disbelief in a Personal God, publicly avowed in the same quarters, seemed still more radically at variance with the first principle of a Society designated "Theosophical." Those who attended our meeting last July are aware that this was a principal cause of the regretted resignation of our President, Dr. Wyld. It would be impossible to examine the justice or foundation of these complaints, without going into discussions obviously out of place in such a circular as the present. The undersigned must, however, express his own belief that they rest on misunderstandings to which popular declarations on these difficult subjects are especially and invariably liable.

The above survey was necessary in order that, appreciating our position hitherto, members may be better able to decide on the recommendations which will be submitted at our next meeting. As these recommendations will not affect the constitution or rules of the Society, but refer only to the future direction of its studies, it will be unnecessary to obtain the assent of a general meeting.

Acting on the commission received from the meeting last July, the undersigned wrote to President Olcott, laying before him generally the above considerations, and representing the probability of an early dissolution of the Society here as the result of them. His reply, received by the return mail, will be read, so far as it is official, on the 5th November. Communications were also received from two members of the Indian Society, whose recommendations deserve, and will doubtless obtain, the highest consideration at our hands—Mr. Sinnett and Mr. A. O. Hume. Readers of "The Occult World," of papers which have

appeared in *The Theosophist* and in *Light*, and of the second edition of "Hints on Esoteric Theosophy," will be aware that both these latter gentlemen have satisfied themselves, with what they describe as absolute certainty, of the existence of the alleged "Adept Brothers." They have further succeeded, to a great extent, in overcoming the reserve which has been so impenetrably maintained towards ourselves. Some of the teachings vouchsafed to these favoured Fellows, have already been made public. We may imperfectly understand them at present, but assuming them to be genuinely from the source to which they are ascribed, and that this source is one of knowledge and not of ignorant and fraudulent pretence, in a word, that the whole foundation of the Theosophical Society is not an audacious fiction, we must all admit that they demand our deepest heed and study. If there are any still among us to whom the above assumption seems too large, to such no inducement can be offered to remain. For the prospect of regular and continuous instruction has at length been held out to us, but on the express supposition that we sincerely profess at least a provisional faith in our teachers. It may be thought, however, that the Society is unnecessary for receipt of teachings which there is no objection to publish. The reply is that it is the existence of a Society pledged to entertain them that alone procures their publication. The dissolution of the British Theosophical Society would be accepted, we are told, as an indication that the European mind is too unprepared for the systematic exposition of the truths developed during many ages of intense pursuit by the most spiritual-minded men of the East. But if we unite in willingness to accord them respectful attention, our Society here will, for the future, through Mr. Sinnett, be the recipients of expositions which, we are assured, have not hitherto been given to the world at large. It is not to be expected that these expositions, dealing as they will, with the whole nature of man, and of the life hereafter, so far as traceable by occult science, can be

adequately apprehended and gauged by the casual reader who skims over them as mere novelties or eccentricities of speculation. They will require regular and systematic study, with the understanding that the meaning of the authors must be profoundly realised before a competent judgment can be formed. Our attitude must be that of learners in a school, who do not begin by questioning the knowledge of their teachers. This provisional faith it was that led the greatest and most renowned philosophers of old to seek initiation into "Mysteries" of which they could before have known only by repute. We cannot get perfect evidence that teaching is worth acquiring till we have acquired it. If the doors of this school are indeed open at last, there will be no credulity in entering them, though in entering we must abandon for a while the airs of independent criticism. This, then, is the proposition made to us. If we can make the necessary presupposition, without otherwise committing ourselves, these teachings will in future be regularly transmitted to the president for the time being, of this Society. It is suggested that he shall have them printed as they arrive, and that copies shall be distributed among the members, who will consider them at their meetings, putting aside all other speculations for the present. This arrangement will also provide advantage to members unable to attend regularly at the meetings, and will enable others to come prepared by careful, private study. Commentaries, elucidations, and comparisons with other systems of theosophy or occult science from members, will of course be acceptable.

Colonel Olcott considers that this Society should have undertaken the different branches of investigation proposed by the newly-formed Society for Psychic Research. He blames us for having left that ground unoccupied, and advises us to develop activity in these directions. It must be observed, however, that we are not a Society proposing to re-verify facts already known to a wide circle of investigators, but to advance to the *rationale* of them,

and to further arcana. Nevertheless, the evolution of the deeply interesting and very various phenomena of clairvoyance, and psychic action between distant points, should be kept in view, as among the experiments we should lose no opportunity of pursuing. What, however, is most urgently required, is regular and well-directed study, and this the above-mentioned offer seems to promise us.

The undersigned will be glad to receive intimations from members unable to attend on the 5th November, of their views in respect to the above suggestion for the future direction of the Society's work. It is submitted that there is no other escape from a permanently false position, with the alternative of dissolution.

C. C. MASSEY,

1, Albert Mansions, Victoria Street,
London, S.W.

October, 1882.

POSTSCRIPT.

The note on the first page has been added by Dr. Wyld by my consent.

Attention is called to the September number of *The Theosophist*, in which the Editor (Mme. Blavatsky) accepts the charge of atheism only as the word is used "in the orthodox theistic sense." As regards the money payment, that can only be made to cease by a resolution of a general meeting, confirmed by the General Council in India.

C. C. M.