

THEOSOPHY, AND ITS RELATION TO SPIRIT-
UALISM, CHRISTIAN SCIENCE,
AND GENERAL REFORM.

AN ESSAY

BY

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Theosophy, and its Relation to Spiritualism, Christian Science, and General Reform.

Being frequently requested to give an impartial review of theosophical teachings in connection with Spiritualism, Christian Science and other distinctive systems of philosophy and phases of thought exciting considerable interest in all parts of the world, we desire to present our opinion on the great central question of Theosophy from an utterly unbiased standpoint; we do not wish to be regarded as authority or representative in anything we say, only to do justice to a movement, which through extravagant eulogy on the one hand, and unmerited condemnation on the other, is frequently much misunderstood and grievously misrepresented by partisans on both sides of the border. Theosophy, if the word has any definite meaning whatever, cannot possibly be an expression

of the views of a few distinguished individuals, therefore an attack made on a noted woman like Madam Blavatsky, is not necessarily an attack on Theosophy, any more than a personal abuse of the Archbishop of Canterbury would signify an assault upon the Church of England. Indeed we may safely and consistently take a much stronger position and declare that genuine Theosophists acknowledge no human leader anywhere, but depend upon the divine voice within the soul to enlighten and guide them in all directions. The Theosophical Society with its headquarters in India and branches all over the world, is without doubt valuable as a means of bringing people together who are mutually interested in an inquiry into the mysteries of the Occult world, and furnishing opportunities for a systematic study of Aryan literature, and that of Mysticism in general; as the co-operative effort of many minds is likely to produce richer results than solitary, disconnected endeavors, many cogent reasons may be adduced favoring the establishment of lodges everywhere. But apart from fraternal union and various aids to study and experiment by way of collateral advantages, no one understanding anything of the sublime purport of Theosophy and the immense influence for good that its teachings must of necessity exert upon society at large if legitimately carried into

practice, can for an instant suppose that joining a society can qualify anyone even slightly for becoming an Adept, unless it be that we so take into consideration the mental stimulus afforded by intelligent and well directed societary effort, as to perceive that the very fact of organization for mutual advancement must help to unfold the psychic powers of those who honestly band themselves together for mutual elevation. Between Theosophists and Spiritualists there is often a great deal of wordy war and sometimes, unfortunately, considerable acrimony of feeling; this arises inevitably from prejudice on both sides, coupled with a lack of anything like due appreciation of the comparative merits of Theosophy and Spiritualism which are really one when both are rightly comprehended. Theosophists advocate the paramount necessity of individual growth and development, they insist forcibly upon the need of self-culture in its highest phases, at the same time they admit the value of genuine phenomena and are anxious that the word of truth should be accompanied by signs and wonders. The true Spiritualist equally with the sincere Theosophist places spiritual culture above physical demonstration and urges that sensuous proof of man's consciousness beyond the grave is chiefly valuable as an incentive to genuine reform in every direction. Spiritualists are apt to revere the past too little;

they are often apt to throw aside the inspired literature of antiquity as though it contained no kernel of important inner meaning, while Theosophists often rush to the other extreme, almost idolizing Sanscrit documents and perhaps somewhat superstitiously venerating mysticism for its own sake. The glamour of mystery surrounding both Theosophy and Spiritualism attracts many curious persons to both systems, some of whom not desiring much if anything more than the gratification of curiosity, idly toy with mysteries for a while and then either through loss of interest or some discouraging mishap turn from these researches, and become very loud and emphatic in their denunciations of what they too highly lauded. Theosophists are properly speaking men and women possessing sufficient breadth of mind, and depth of character, to enable them to safely navigate unusually deep waters, but may it not be stated with equal truth that it requires some stability of thought and purity of desire, to investigate Spiritualism advantageously? Too much is made by far of the differences between Spiritualists and Theosophists; the truth is, all so-called advanced thinkers differ radically among themselves chiefly on account of their marked individuality and decided detestation of ecclesiastical or other restraint from the bondage of which many have but recently broken loose. Some, indeed many, objectors

to Theosophy, are constantly harping on this one string; why, say they, do you turn to a remote land such as India and to past ages for spiritual enlightenment, when modern advantages both in Europe and America are far greater than any of old, dim, remote portions of the earth. To this criticism we reply by saying that the present degraded condition of India is in no sense the result of following the pure teachings of the Vedas and other sacred books, but is the consequence of an almost total disregard of their most imperative inculcations, just as the degradation in Christendom cannot logically be referred to the teachings of the New Testament but rather to a method of procedure diametrically opposed to the alleged teachings of Jesus and his disciples. Theosophy does not make gods of Mahatmas or Himalayan Brothers, as many people ignorantly suppose; it simply acknowledges that a long and systematic course of spiritual or psychic cultivation tends to unfold latent inherent psychic and spiritual power just as a special course of training in any artistic, intellectual or physical direction tends to develop the faculties especially brought into requisition by such training. Theosophy does not confound spirituality with morality, but makes a clear and forcible distinction between moral or ethical culture and the development of an interior sense enabling its possessor to come

into the possession of knowledge concerning man and the spiritual realm utterly inaccessible to those whose only qualifications are intellectual, moral, or both. The Mahatmas (great souls) are men who have so lived for long periods of time that they have discovered spiritual secrets which, after all, are not secrets any more than the treasures hidden in the earth are secret until some one discovers their whereabouts and brings them to the surface by means of hard and diligent effort. Secrets of Being cannot be imparted to the multitude except as the masses grow ready to receive and interpret them; every unprejudiced person must be fully aware that no lesson can be taught to scholars until they are prepared to learn it; the cry against Occultism, as though it were a system of wilful, unnecessary secrecy, an endeavor on the part of few privileged minds to hide truth from the world at large, is as puerile, false, and unfair as it would be to bring similar charges against a professor of mathematics because he did not explain every problem solved in the university class-room, in some primary school where children were just beginning to add, subtract, multiply and divide. Spiritualism, it is claimed, is a free revelation for all people, and so it is, but where is the Spiritualist, who, if he relate honestly the results of his experience, can say other than that promiscuous and careless intercourse with

the invisible world, is fraught with much danger and calculated to produce confusion rather than harmony on earth. Persons need not be scholars, but they must be actuated by pure motives, guided by the highest considerations for the public good, before they can with benefit or even impunity, set to work to cultivate mediumship. Theosophists and Spiritualists are in many places quite united; in San Francisco, a great deal has been accomplished toward the evolution of a school of philosophy broad enough to allow of unrestricted fellowship between enquirers after spiritual truth; it must be confessed that external organic efforts in this direction do not promise much, but the seed is growing in the fertile soil of many noble minds and is even now bearing fruit, not in public display, but in many eminently practical works of usefulness. The difficulty with many people is the tenacity with which they cling to a name, rather than an idea, forgetting that principles and not words are the essentials. Many Spiritualists object to Theosophy as a word, and if you tell them of the beauty of its teachings and the wonderful character of some occult phenomena you have witnessed they will simply tell you you are advocating Spiritualism, and calling it Theosophy; this may be all very true, and vice versa, but if it is, why not in the name of reason, let it be known, that simply words

are matters of dispute, and if it be so the dispute itself is a miserable and unworthy "tempest in a teapot." On the question of Reincarnation, Spiritualists are everywhere divided about equally; the Oriental doctrine of Karma, which only means sequence, is a veritable bone of contention among those who haggle over the stupid dogma of rewards and punishments, so much insisted upon by many theologians, not knowing that neither true Spiritualism nor Theosophy endorses such a doctrine in any sense whatever. What we sow we must inevitably reap, here or hereafter; we are not rewarded for doing well or punished for being guilty of error except in the sense in which the words reward and punishment are used in the excellent proverb, "Virtue is its own reward; vice its own punishment." He or she who acts wisely is of necessity benefited in consequence of that act, while folly necessarily entails suffering upon all who are guilty of it. This recognition of utterly impartial justice in the scheme of the Universe is the foundation alike of all enlightened philosophy and jurisprudence, it is the essence of Mosaism and Christianity as well as of Hinduism, and needs only to be plainly taught in every school and home throughout the world to speedily effect a complete, most desirable, and all will surely admit, deeply needed reformation in human thought, speech

and conduct. He who sins, suffers because he sins; he is not punished by an outside power, he punishes himself. Universal law in this respect is absolutely inexorable, but is nevertheless, on closer inspection, in its very inexorability, seen to display the character of divine love and wisdom, for all penalty is educational, retribution is never vindictive, but tends ever to the betterment of the sufferer's own condition, so that whatever he passes through is a discipline needed to advance his spiritual progression. Suppose our memories are defective and we cannot now trace our connection with the past, what we undergo at present, is exactly what we need to endure and in the very conditions in which we find ourselves, whatever they may be, we are afforded the best possible opportunities for improving our state. Christian Science as taught by Mrs. Eddy, of Boston, and many others, is at its base, Theosophy, though the Eddy school is accustomed to clothe metaphysical ideas in such intensely abstract language as to seemingly leave no room for the visible universe even as an effect. Theosophy does not teach the non-existence of matter in the extreme sense, by any means, though it refers everything to spirit as the sole originating power. Whatever may be said or thought of Christian Science by its opponents, no intelligent person can reasonably dispute its position that

all spiritual development on the part of any individual must be made manifest in works of healing, using the word healing as applicable primarily to the moral, secondarily to the mental, and finally to the physical condition of man on earth. In Mr. Sinnett's theosophical romance, "Karma," some of the occult phenomena recorded might easily lead a superstitious old English gentleman to think the Devil had a hand in producing it. Causing panes of glass to fly out of window frames, and forest trees to be uprooted without apparent contact with any object whatsoever, may indeed demonstrate the marvelous potency of some strange occult force in nature, but it does not prove the beneficent character of the mystic agent. Power without goodness is very dreadful and often highly dangerous. Neither the physical phenomena of Occultism or Spiritism, constitute an evidence of the action of a power it is desirable for us to enter into communion with, unless beyond the sigus and wonders, an influence is exerted to bless mankind, morally, mentally, and physically. The spiritual science of health and healing, now being so extensively and earnestly studied by those whose sincere desire it is to render practically beneficial all the truth they can derive from inspiration, introspection, and all other means of spiritual advancement, is a manifestation of occult agency of

so beneficent a type that the works which are accomplished by faithful students, are themselves a triumphant vindication of the power of spirit, to bless and save, and an unanswerable refutation of every phase of calumny and opposition, "By their fruits ye shall know them." No system however venerable, no philosophy however profound, can meet with general acceptance and prove its divine origin unless it demonstrates its goodness, not simply its marvelousness.

While ardently encouraging and recommending a studious perusal of "occult literature," our conclusion is and must be, practical Theosophy means truth ridding the world of crime and sickness.

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