

A Few Truths About Theosophy

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A lecture delivered by Bábu Bhagavan Das, M.A, F.T.S at a public meeting at Benares.

Published in "The Theosophist" of September, 1889

Republished in "Theosophical Siftings" Volume 3

The Theosophical Publishing Society, England

[Page 28] THE difficulties in the way of a public advocate for Theosophy are great. There is, first, the general prejudice among the worldly-minded against Theosophists, who are commonly regarded by that class as a set of sentimentalists who talk much and do little. Secondly, there is the fact that the majority of the Indian members of the Theosophical Society are of the younger generation, and a youngster addressing an audience of conservatives runs considerable risk of being thought a violator of the proprieties.

But be this as it may — and ill or well as I may perform this annual task of drawing your attention to matters theosophical — I approach it in sincerity and earnestness. And sincerity and earnestness have often been deemed excuse sufficient for bad performances on subjects far less respectable than Theosophy. Well, then, gentlemen, I shall lay before you a brief account of the ordinary thinkings and doings of Theosophists, and it will be for you to judge whether they deserve encouragement or not.

They believe, in the first place, that there is much imperfection in humanity still. I conceive no one will condemn this belief; it is, at least, very wholesome for young people to entertain it, for if they took it into their heads that they were perfect, they would indeed not try to better themselves.

This imperfection they further believe to be inseparably connected with the antagonism of man and man, a want of union in humanity, a discordance of interests. Want of union they ascribe to selfishness in its innumerable forms, and selfishness they believe to be co-extensive with immorality. And want of union naturally prevents progress in knowledge ; so much of our time is spent in guarding against mischief from others, so much more in doing mischief to these others, that we have very little time left to devote to the pursuit of knowledge.

Observe a prominent fact — the daily growing mass of papers wherever **[Page 29]** business men and money are concerned. It is not difficult to realize and regret that so much time and mental energy have to be wasted in merely counteracting the equally growing evil subtlety of disingenuous persons.

Little hope can there be of progress in knowledge where such waste of mind is rendered necessary by the conditions of life, and, without knowledge, even less is the hope of comfort in life, ignorance being the one sole cause of suffering.

To remedy this state of things the Theosophical Society has proposed to itself, as its first object, Universal Brotherhood, in order to counteract the selfishness whose results are so mischievous. The natural result of this object — to the extent to which it is achieved — is to be leisure for the study of ancient books and sciences, for which the Theosophical Society is forced to entertain a special affection by the loose morals of modern products of human thought, and the inability of these to promote the genuine interests of humanity.

The third object is a development of psychic powers which is expected to be, in turn, the result of a thorough comprehension and practice of the principles set forth in ancient works.

In the degree in which these objects are realized our life on earth would become more desirable. So think the Theosophists.

And here, gentlemen, at this stage of effort at self-improvement, Theosophists have been suspected of political meddling! The word "improvement" some of these sage critics think can mean only political improvement. But the distinction between external advancement and internal progress is patent. The former may be the uncertain object of the science of politics, the sole subject-matter of which is a fight between the clever and selfish on the one hand, and the simple and good on the other. The latter, *i.e.*, internal progress, is the sure aim of Theosophy.

Truly they have ill understood Theosophy who can confound it with politics. Where the former exists the latter will not; a community of Theosophists is expected to be free from struggle, whereas the foundation of politics is strife. Theosophy would develop the reason of all men, so that each may be able to understand and rationally minister to his own as well as other people's higher interests, which, when obtained, may easily help to secure the latter also. Politics, on the other hand, confines itself to these lower interests, the outward concerns of human life, and, never going down to the principles of human existence which regulate these outward concerns, is more likely to fail of its ends than not.

To say that Theosophy is a mere Utopia at this rate, and that the more practical interests of humanity are other than those Theosophy deals with, would be very like watering the leaves of a tree and neglecting its roots, simply because they happen to be invisible. The minds that have left the [Page 30] greatest impress on the world, the great religious reformers, have, in their persons, practically proved that the aim of Theosophy is not an unreliable or Utopian one. Moreover, to fling the word Utopian in the face of any such scheme would be especially out of place in India, where, always, those have been actual realities which enter the best minds of other countries but as dreams. Instance the organization of a vast community into four classes or castes, and a division of each life into four periods or Ashramas, by which the same individual passed from sovereignty to hermitage without the least hesitation. The consequence of this was a finer morality than can be met with now, for the motives to guilt were far weaker; what excites greed now was passed by then in indifference. And it is the result of their Utopian theory of life, so consistently worked out, that the Indians out of all races can show the longest period of civilized existence.

Observe, on the other hand, the ephemeral civilizations of the Greeks and Romans; their duration can be counted by poor centuries. The civilized life of the present so-called great European nations dates within

ten centuries back, and it is very questionable whether it will count as many centuries more. The Occidentals live fast, being eager to make as much as they own out of this physical life, which is all in all to them and can therefore show much material activity and a glitter which is very likely to impose upon the unwary beholder; but such fast and glittering life cannot last as long as the steady and more genuinely comfortable one of the staid Oriental.

The truth is that in these modern times the means always takes the place of the end and thereby causes much mischief.

Are the Theosophists wrong, gentlemen, if they endeavour to do away with this unhealthy condition of affairs, to give a meaning to life, and to restore its proper importance to the end ?

No one, indeed, can imagine that all men can be made to think alike on all subjects, but this cannot be any reason for not trying to make a few men think alike on a few subjects. Whatever amount of unanimity can be established is so much pure gain, and to abandon even an apparently Utopian scheme, simply because it cannot be realized in its entirety, can be but bad policy.

But, setting aside all other considerations, Theosophy could, I think, be sufficiently defended on this one ground. That is, that although the majority of the population of the world are content enough to pass their lives in widespread poverty, vulgarities, meanness, and wranglings, yet when a few unfortunates happen to conceive a sudden dislike to this sort of life, the only thing that can console them is Theosophy. With its doctrines of Reincarnation and Karma, which most if not all the Fellows [Page 31] of the Theosophical Society believe in, Theosophy alone can restore the lost balance of mind — the peace which is indispensable to the steady performance of the duties of life. That its doctrines are false or true will not matter so long as it is conceded that they are a cure as real as the disease they remedy. For this reason, gentlemen, if for no other, Theosophy merits the consideration and encouragement of all. Everyone could thus at least recommend to a faint-hearted friend the proper cure for his weakness, even though he did not require any medicine himself.