

C. W. LEADBEATER



***A TEXTBOOK
OF THEOSOPHY***

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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Chapter I

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WHAT THEOSOPHY IS

"There is a school of philosophy still in existence of which modern culture has lost sight." In these words Mr. A.P. Sinnett began his book, *The Occult World*, the first popular exposition of Theosophy, published thirty years ago. [Namely in 1881.] During the years that have passed since then, many thousands have learned wisdom in that school, yet to the majority its teachings are still unknown, and they can give only the vaguest of replies to the query, "What is Theosophy?"

Two books already exist which answer that question: Mr. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* and Dr. Besant's *The Ancient Wisdom*. I have no thought of entering into competition with those standard works; what I desire is to present a statement, as clear and simple as I can make it, which may be regarded as introductory to them.

We often speak of Theosophy as not in itself a religion, but the truth which lies behind all religions alike. That is so; yet, from another point of view, we may surely say that it is at once a philosophy, a religion and a science. It is a philosophy, because it puts plainly before us an explanation of the scheme of evolution of both the souls and the bodies

contained in our solar system. It is a religion in so far as, having shown us the course of ordinary evolution, it also puts before us and advises a method of shortening that course, so that by conscious effort we may progress more directly towards the goal. It is a science, because it treats both these subjects as matters not of theological belief but of direct knowledge obtainable by study and investigation. It asserts that man has no need to trust to blind faith, because he has within him latent powers which, when aroused, enable him to see and examine for himself, and it proceeds to prove its case by showing how those powers may be awakened. It is itself a result of the awakening of such powers by men, for the teachings which it puts before us are founded upon direct observations made in the past, and rendered possible only by such development.

As a philosophy, it explains to us that the solar system is a carefully-ordered mechanism, a manifestation of a magnificent life, of which man is but a small part. Nevertheless, it takes up that small part which immediately concerns us, and treats it exhaustively under three heads—present, past and future.

It deals with the present by describing what man really is, as seen by means of developed faculties. It is customary to speak of man as having a soul. Theosophy, as the result of direct investigation, reverses that dictum, and states that man *is* a soul, and *has* a body—in fact several bodies, which are his vehicles and instruments in various worlds. These worlds are not separate in space; they are simultaneously present with us, here and now, and can be examined; they are the divisions of the material side of Nature—different

degrees of density in the aggregation of matter, as will presently be explained in detail. Man has an existence in several of these, but is normally conscious only of the lowest, though sometimes in dreams and trances he has glimpses of some of the others. What is called death is the laying aside of the vehicle belonging to this lowest world, but the soul or real man in a higher world is no more changed or affected by this than the physical man is changed or affected when he removes his overcoat. All this is a matter, not of speculation, but of observation and experiment.

Theosophy has much to tell us of the past history of man—of how in the course of evolution he has come to be what he now is. This also is a matter of observation, because of the fact that there exists an indelible record of all that has taken place—a sort of memory of Nature—by examining which the scenes of earlier evolution may be made to pass before the eyes of the investigator as though they were happening at this moment. By thus studying the past we learn that man is divine in origin and that he has a long evolution behind him—a double evolution, that of the life or soul within, and that of the outer form. We learn, too, that the life of man as a soul is of, what to us seems, enormous length, and that what we have been in the habit of calling his life is in reality only one day of his real existence. He has already lived through many such days, and has many more of them yet before him; and if we wish to understand the real life and its object, we must consider it in relation not only to this one day of it, which begins with birth and ends

with death, but also to the days which have gone before and those which are yet to come.

Of those that are yet to come there is also much to be said, and on this subject, too, a great deal of definite information is available. Such information is obtainable, first, from men who have already passed much further along the road of evolution than we, and have consequently direct experience of it; and, secondly, from inferences drawn from the obvious direction of the steps which we see to have been previously taken. The goal of this particular cycle is in sight, though still far above us but it would seem that, even when that has been attained, an infinity of progress still lies before everyone who is willing to undertake it.

One of the most striking advantages of Theosophy is that the light which it brings to us at once solves many of our problems, clears away many difficulties, accounts for the apparent injustices of life, and in all directions brings order out of seeming chaos. Thus, while some of its teaching is based upon the observation of forces whose direct working is somewhat beyond the ken of the ordinary man of the world, if the latter will accept it as a hypothesis he will very soon come to see that it must be a correct one, because it, and it alone, furnishes a coherent and reasonable explanation of the drama of life which is being played before him.

The existence of Perfected Men, and the possibility of coming into touch with Them and being taught by Them, are prominent among the great new truths which Theosophy brings to the western world. Another of them is the stupendous fact that the world is not drifting blindly into

anarchy, but that its progress is under the control of a perfectly organized Hierarchy, so that final failure even for the tiniest of its units is of all impossibilities the most impossible. A glimpse of the working of that Hierarchy inevitably engenders the desire to co-operate with it, to serve under it, in however humble a capacity, and some time in the far-distant future to be worthy to join the outer fringes of its ranks.

This brings us to that aspect of Theosophy which we have called religious. Those who come to know and to understand these things are dissatisfied with the slow æons of evolution; they yearn to become more immediately useful, and so they demand and obtain knowledge of the shorter but steeper Path. There is no possibility of escaping the amount of work that has to be done. It is like carrying a load up a mountain; whether one carries it straight up a steep path or more gradually by a road of gentle slope, precisely the same number of foot-pounds must be exerted. Therefore to do the same work in a small fraction of the time means determined effort. It can be done, however, for it has been done; and those who have done it agree that it far more than repays the trouble. The limitations of the various vehicles are thereby gradually transcended, and the liberated man becomes an intelligent co-worker in the mighty plan for the evolution of all beings.

In its capacity as a religion, too, Theosophy gives its followers a rule of life, based not on alleged commands delivered at some remote period of the past, but on plain common sense as indicated by observed facts. The attitude of the student of Theosophy towards the rules which it

prescribes resembles rather than which we adopt to hygienic regulations than obedience to religious commandments. We may say, if we wish, that this thing or that is in accordance with the divine Will, for the divine Will is expressed in what we know as the laws of Nature. Because that Will wisely ordereth all things, to infringe its laws means to disturb the smooth working of the scheme, to hold back for a moment that fragment or tiny part of evolution, and consequently to bring discomfort upon ourselves and others. It is for that reason that the wise man avoids infringing them—not to escape the imaginary wrath of some offended deity.

But if from a certain point of view we may think of Theosophy as a religion, we must note two great points of difference between it and what is ordinarily called religion in the West. First, it neither demands belief from its followers, nor does it even speak of belief in the sense in which that word is usually employed. The student of occult science either *knows* a thing or suspends his judgment about it; there is no place in his scheme for blind faith. Naturally, beginners in the study cannot yet *know* for themselves, so they are asked to read the results of the various observations and to deal with them as probable hypotheses—provisionally to accept and act upon them, until such time as they can prove them for themselves.

Secondly, Theosophy never endeavours to convert any man from whatever religion he already holds. On the contrary, it explains his religion to him, and enables him to see in it deeper meanings than he has ever known before. It teaches him to understand it and live it better than he did, and in many cases it gives back to him, on a higher and

more intelligent level, the faith in it which he had previously all but lost.

Theosophy has its aspects as a science also; it is in very truth a science of life, a science of the soul. It applies to everything the scientific method of oft-repeated, painstaking observation, and then tabulates the results and makes deductions from them. In this way it has investigated the various planes of Nature, the conditions of man's consciousness during life and after what is commonly called death. It cannot be too often repeated that its statements on all these matters are not vague guesses or tenets of faith, but are based upon direct and oft-repeated *observation* of what happens. Its investigators have dealt also to a certain extent with subjects more in the range of ordinary science, as may be seen by those who read the book on *Occult Chemistry*.

Thus we see that Theosophy combines within itself some of the characteristics of philosophy, religion and science. What, it might be asked, is its gospel for this weary world? What are the main points which emerge from its investigations? What are the great facts which it has to lay before humanity?

They have been well summed up under three main heads.

"There are three truths which are absolute, and which cannot be lost, but yet may remain silent for lack of speech.

"The soul of man is immortal and its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendour has no limit.

"The principle which gives life dwells in us and without us, is undying and eternally beneficent, is not heard or seen

or smelt, but is perceived by the man who desires perception.

"Each man is his own absolute lawgiver, the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself, the decreer of his life, his reward, his punishment.

"These truths, which are as great as is life itself, are as simple as the simplest mind of man."

Put shortly, and in the language of the man of the street, this means that God is good, that man is immortal, and that as we sow so we must reap. There is a definite scheme of things; it is under intelligent direction and works under immutable laws. Man has his place in this scheme and is living under these laws. If he understands them and cooperates with them, he will advance rapidly and will be happy; if he does not understand them—if, wittingly or unwittingly, he breaks them, he will delay his progress and be miserable. These are not theories, but proved facts. Let him who doubts read on, and he will see.

Chapter II

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FROM THE ABSOLUTE TO MAN

Of the Absolute, the Infinite, the All-embracing, we can at our present stage know nothing, except that It is; we can say nothing that is not a limitation, and therefore inaccurate.

In It are innumerable universes; in each universe countless solar systems. Each solar system is the expression of a mighty Being, whom we call the LOGOS, the Word of God, the Solar Deity. He is to it all that men mean by God. He permeates it; there is nothing in it which is not He; it is the manifestation of Him in such matter as we can see. Yet He exists above it and outside it, living a stupendous life of His own among His Peers. As is said in an Eastern Scripture: "Having permeated this whole universe with one fragment of Myself I remain."

Of that higher life of His we can know nothing. But of the fragment of His life which energises His system we may know something in the lower levels of its manifestation. We may not see Him, but we may see His power at work. No one who is clairvoyant can be atheistic; the evidence is too tremendous.

Out of Himself He has called this mighty system into being. We who are in it are evolving fragments of His life, Sparks of His divine Fire; from Him we all have come; into Him we shall all return.

Many have asked why He has done this; why He has emanated from Himself all this system; why He has sent us forth to face the storms of life. We cannot know, nor is the question practical; suffice it that we are here, and we must do our best. Yet many philosophers have speculated on this point and many suggestions have been made. The most beautiful that I know is that of a Gnostic philosopher:

"God is Love, but Love itself cannot be perfect unless it has those upon whom it can be lavished and by whom it can be returned. Therefore He put forth of Himself into matter, and He limited His glory, in order that through this natural and slow process of evolution we might come into being; and we in turn according to His Will are to develop until we reach even His own level, and then the very love of God itself will become more perfect, because it will then be lavished on those, His own children, who will fully understand and return it, and so His great scheme will be realized and His Will, be done."

At what stupendous elevation His consciousness abides we know not, nor can we know its true nature as it shows itself there. But when He puts Himself down into such conditions as are within our reach, His manifestation is ever threefold, and so all religions have imaged Him as a Trinity. Three, yet fundamentally One; Three Persons (for person means a mask) yet one God, showing Himself in those Three Aspects. Three to us, looking at Them from below, because

Their functions are different; one to Him, because He knows Them to be but facets of Himself.

All Three of these Aspects are concerned in the evolution of the solar system; all Three are also concerned in the evolution of man. This evolution is His Will; the method of it is His plan.

Next below this Solar Deity, yet also in some mysterious manner part of Him, come His seven Ministers sometimes called the Planetary Spirits. Using an analogy drawn from the physiology of our own body, Their relation to Him is like that of the ganglia or the nerve centres to the brain. All evolution which comes forth from Him comes through one or other of Them.

Under Them in turn come vast hosts or orders of spiritual beings, whom we call angels or devas. We do not yet know all the functions which they fulfil in different parts of this wonderful scheme, but we find some of them intimately connected with the building of the system and the unfolding of life within it.

Here in our world there is a great Official who represents the Solar Deity and is in absolute control of all the evolution that takes place upon this planet. We may image Him as the true KING of this world and under Him are ministers in charge of different departments. One of these departments is concerned with the evolution of the different races of humanity so that for each great race there is a Head who founds it, differentiates it from all others, and watches over its development. Another department is that of religion and education, and it is from this that all the greatest teachers of history have come—that all religions have been sent

forth. The great Official at the head of this department either comes Himself or sends one of His pupils to found a new religion when He decides that one is needed.

Therefore all religions, at the time of their first presentation to the world, have contained a definite statement of the Truth, and in its fundamentals this Truth has been always the same. The presentations of it have varied because of differences in the races to whom it was offered. The conditions of civilization and the degree of evolution obtained by various races have made it desirable to present this one Truth in divers forms. But the inner Truth is always the same, and the source from which it comes is the same, even though the external phases may appear to be different and even contradictory. It is foolish for men to wrangle over the question of the superiority of one teacher or one form of teaching to another, for the teacher is always one sent by the Great Brotherhood of Adepts, and in all its important points, in its ethical and moral principles, the teaching has always been the same.

There is in the world a body or Truth which lies at the back of all these religions, and represents the facts of nature as far as they are at present known to man. In the outer world, because of their ignorance of this, people are always disputing and arguing about whether there is a God; whether man survives death; whether definite progress is possible for him, and what is his relation to the universe. These questions are ever present in the mind of man as soon as intelligence is awakened. They are not unanswerable, as is frequently supposed; the answers to them are within the reach of anyone who will make proper