

Introductory Study Paper 1; THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY



"The Society was formed to assist in showing to men that such a thing as Theosophy exists, and to help them to ascend towards it by studying and assimilating its eternal verities."

H. P. Blavatsky, 'The Key to Theosophy'

ORIGINS

At a time when spiritualism was the subject of wide-spread discussion and responsible journalism in America, a group of serious-minded men and women came together in the apartments of Madame Blavatsky in New York to share a common interest not only in the topic of the day but also in a wide variety of intriguing subjects. These, according to the records of the meetings, ranged from mediumship and magical phenomena to contemporary scientific discoveries, curiosities of nature and the beliefs and practices of ancient civilizations.

At one of these meetings, the question was asked: "Would it not be a good thing to form a Society for this kind of study?" The date was September 7th 1875.

In the course of the next few weeks, the formal organization of the Society proceeded with the election of officers, recording of minutes, passing of resolutions, and so on, until on 17th November of that year the President-Elect delivered his Inaugural Address and The Theosophical Society was thus fully constituted. This date has ever since been celebrated as the date of the Society's formation.

Of the persons present at the preliminary meetings, those who remained to contribute to its firm establishment included Colonel **Henry Steel Olcott** (President), **Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky** (Recording Secretary) and **William Quan Judge** (Counsel).

AIMS AND ATTITUDES

A few sentences abridged from Colonel Olcott's Inaugural Address convey the seriousness of purpose, the idealism and the envisaged scope of the Society's future operations.

"In future times, when the impartial historian shall write an account of the progress of religious ideas in the present century, the formation of the Theosophical Society, whose first meeting under its formal declaration of principles we are now attending, will not pass unnoticed. What is it that makes me proud to stand as the mouthpiece and figure-head of this movement? It is that in my soul I feel that behind us, behind our little band, behind our feeble, new-born organization, there gathers a MIGHTY POWER that nothing can withstand - the power of TRUTH! Because I feel that we are only the advance-guard, holding the pass until the main body shall come up. Because I feel that we are enlisted in a holy cause, and that truth, now as always, is mighty and will prevail. We are investigators, of earnest purpose and unbiased mind, who study all things, prove all things, and hold fast to that which is good. We seek, inquire, reject nothing without cause, accept nothing without proof: we are seekers, not teachers."



H. S. Olcott



W. Q. Judge

GROWTH AND ORGANIZATION

Articles in the New York press found an interested readership around the world. Before the turn of the century, national Sections of the Society had been formed in the United States, England, India, Australia, Sweden, New Zealand, the Netherlands and France.

Today the Society is established in some fifty countries. Except in matters of detail, its organization remains largely unchanged since formation. The government of the International Society is vested in a General Council on which each National Secretary is represented by its principal officer, democratically elected.

Membership is open to all (from the age of 10 years) who are in sympathy with its Objects as publicly declared in its literature:

First To form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.

Second To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science.

Third To investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man.

THEOSOPHY - the subject of Study Paper No.2 - is nowhere narrowly defined in the literature of the Society. The word has the literal meaning of Divine Wisdom. From the beginning of recorded time, every civilization has shown evidence of a more or less secret body of knowledge variously expressed in symbols, myths, folk-lore, religious rituals and a tradition of wise men, prophets, magi, semi-divine figures who once involved themselves in the affairs of mankind.

Theosophy is science, that is, knowledge - an inclusive knowledge of the whole cosmic process. The Theosophical Society lays no claim to the entire or exclusive possession of this knowledge. It does but point the way, through its extensive literature, to the gradual discovery of aspects of that knowledge, encouraging the seeker to pursue the sign-posts towards the horizons of Truth.

AN INTRODUCTORY READING LIST

W. Q. Judge, the author of one of the earliest attempts to write an epitome of theosophical teachings, writes:

"Theosophy is that ocean of knowledge which spreads from shore to shore of the evolution of sentient beings; unfathomable in its deepest parts, it gives the greatest minds their fullest scope, yet, shallow enough at its shores, it will not overwhelm the understanding of a child."

This being so, it is hardly possible to draw up a reading list that will meet the needs of both new inquirer and the experienced student. These few suggestions will, it is hoped, lead to the exploration of the almost inexhaustible literature of Theosophy.

Outlines of Theosophy

The Mystery of Life - Clara Codd

The Ocean of Theosophy - William Q. Judge

The Key to Theosophy - H. P. Blavatsky

Theosophy: What's it all about? - Geoffrey A. Farthing

On the history of The Theosophical Society and its Founders

Damodar and the Pioneers of the Theosophical Movement - Sven Eek

The Dawning of the Theosophical Movement - Michael Gomes

Old Diary Leaves - Henry Steel Olcott

Blavatsky and Her Teachers - Jean Overton Fuller

(Titles that are out of print may be obtained from Libraries)

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