

Theosophical Concepts of Evolution and Religion

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Reprinted from "Theosophical Siftings" Volume 1

The Theosophical Publishing Society, England

THERE is a close connection between Evolution and Religion, because Religion is a manifestation of those evolutionary tendencies which are leading mankind, through cycle after cycle, towards that spirituality and perfection of being which we now conceive of and express under the term *God*.

Evolution in its widest signification implies the development, unfolding, or growth of the perceptive faculties or functions, so as to enlarge the consciousness in relation to its environments. In other words, it is the gradual extension of the boundaries of consciousness. It is the expansion of that internal and hidden principle of life which pervades all nature, and which manifests itself on the outward or material plane in an endless variety of progressive forms, from that which we term *dead* matter up to the highly organized, complex, and self-conscious structure of the human body.

Evolution is that universal principle which forbids anything to stand still. There exists in all things a perpetual inherent strain or tendency towards something which is dimly perceived to be possible in the future. That which exists in the concrete must first exist in the abstract. The real is the sequence of the ideal. There must be a possibility for the ideal, otherwise it could not exist. We see this in every department of human activity. The man of genius is he who grasps the ideal with so firm a hold that he can bring it down in some concrete form to the perception of his fellow-men. The ideal is always pressing in upon us. As human beings, we are conscious of the strain in a great variety of ways. On the plane of the senses it exists as *desire*, and leads men on in restless activity, which is never satisfied even in the attainment of its object; for nothing is more characteristic of human ambition than that the moment the goal is actually reached, or the cup of pleasure raised to the lips, the object appears worthless, there is still a further goal to reach, or the cup of pleasure becomes a draught of poison.

Men are driven at last, by reason of the universality of this experience, into fixing their desires and hopes on a higher plane, where they imagine [Page 2] that the obstacles to their enjoyment of that happiness which they are ever seeking but never finding, will cease to exist; and they turn instinctively to religion for guidance and comfort. But the religious instinct is not merely born of repeated failures to obtain happiness on the material plane. It exists as a *strain* or evolutionary tendency of the higher or spiritual part of our nature, which has its own laws of progression corresponding to those which operate on the physical plane. It is indeed, more strictly speaking, the operation of this *strain* on the higher planes which causes that progression of more and more highly organized forms in the physical world, which is what Science understands by the term Evolution. *Occult* science traces the evolutionary wave through three elemental kingdoms of nature, from thence through the mineral, vegetable, and animal, in succession, until it reaches the human. That which really evolves, the individual *monad*, assumes, time after time, a fresh form or personality, and requires, as the result of its growing consciousness, a more and more perfect organization in which to function. We do not perceive the real man, the Ego, because he exists on

a higher plane than that of the physical senses, but we have some conception of this higher principle in that which we term *character*, and we may read the signature of the real man in the structure of the various parts of the body, the formation of the head, the physiognomy, the shape and lines of the hand, etc. A man who has no generosity, for instance, in his character, will be deficient in certain physical developments which correspond to this quality of the soul. Nature works on clear and definite lines, and similar forces at work on the higher planes will produce similar manifestations on the lower. In this way we come to a knowledge of the higher through the lower, in which we see the higher reflected. So long as our consciousness is centred on the lower, we take the reflection for the real. This is what science is doing at the present day. Science deals with the laws which operate on the material plane, and with regard to the law of evolution she has been able to trace a certain progression of species, and more than suspects, though she cannot actually prove, that the higher forms of life have developed in turn through all the lower; but of those higher and subtle forces in nature by reason of which this progression takes places, she knows absolutely nothing.

Science is agnostic in reference to anything that transcends the material plane, and regards consciousness as inherent in our physiological functions, it being the evolution of these functions which brings an increase of consciousness, and this consciousness has reached the highest perfection in man because he has the most highly organized body, and more particularly the best developed brain. This view docs not permit of any previous existence for that consciousness which is now centred in any particular human being, neither does it permit of any existence for it outside of the [Page 3] physical organization, or after the death of the same; unless indeed, we conceive in some sort of way of a spiritual body being hatched out of the physical.

Science may appear superficially to be leading men into Agnosticism and Atheism, but this is only a passing phase. The value of the scientific work of the age is to be found in those broad generalizations and conceptions of the working of natural law, which finds one principle acting alike in both great and small; and when men have grasped firmly the unity, harmony, and solidarity of the physical universe, they have only to carry their conceptions one step forward, to assimilate their knowledge with their intuition, to carry their conceptions of natural law into the spiritual world, to grasp firmly the universal principle of *Love*, and they will find themselves in possession of a religion founded on reason and knowledge; they will find that science has led them up to a far grander *Monotheism* than that which it was the supposed special mission of the Jewish race to proclaim, and of the *Messias* to complete.

In the meanwhile it would appear inevitable that in the reaction from the intellectual and moral bondage of priestcraft and dogma, men should turn to science for that infallibility which they ever desire, and should lose sight for the time being of the possibilities of their spiritual ideal, in those scientific discoveries and inventions which have revolutionized the conditions of civilization in the present century. There is a danger lest materialism should swallow up all spiritual insight, and men become still further immersed in the illusions of the senses. The individual may pass through this stage in the natural development of his conceptions, and the experience of the individual is repeated on a larger scale in the community, the nation, and the race. But the spiritual forces at work in a man will not allow him to maintain this position long. Sooner or later he must come face to face with his higher self, of whose existence he has hitherto been only dimly conscious. In the far back ages of human history we find that this consciousness took the form of the grossest superstition and idolatry, such as we find prevailing in some races at the present

day; but as the Ego accumulates experience in a sequence of lives or incarnations on the physical plane, he is gradually lifted out of superstition by the aid of reason and knowledge, and there comes a time when he has to bring his intellectual faculties to bear upon those religious dogmas which he has hitherto accepted as authoritative and infallible.

If a man is a religionist merely on account of feeling, sentiment, emotion, or fear which he cannot analyse or define, he will belong to that religion which prevails in the community into which he is born; he will be a slave to the religious opinions of the time, and unable to free himself from the bondage of orthodoxy, from the accumulated mass of formula and dogma which overlies the universal truth.[Page 4]

The intellectual phase of the evolutionary process is largely operative in the present age, and is leading men, in the reaction from superstition, into an attempt to determine all questions by the aid of the intellect alone. The present generation is engaged in intellectually examining the credentials of religion; and religion, as represented by the church, has by no means a liking for the process.

Dogmatic religion is not reasonable; it distinctly repudiates the reasoning faculties, and refuses to permit the intellect to exercise its function of discrimination. To the Christian of today there is no appeal beyond the Bible, and what he conceives to be the interpretation thereof. The Mahomedan equally swears by his Koran, and so with the sacred books of every other religion. When the time comes, however, in a man's experience for his creed to be confronted by his reason, he finds that those doctrines which he has hitherto regarded as sacred and infallible, are not so regarded by others, and that the authority of his own particular church is only one of a great number of conflicting authorities. This is a sad blow to his faith, and he then endeavours to find some intellectual basis, some unanswerable argument in support of his cherished belief. Many men succeed in doing this, or succeed just up to that point where it is most desirable that knowledge and reason should take the place of authority and dogma. Beyond this point they affirm that it is impossible to go, and that what remains is a matter of divine revelation, and can only be grasped — so far as our present life is concerned — by means of *faith*. On the other hand, a man's *faith* may utterly break down in the effort to discriminate between one belief and another, and as often as not he is driven into atheism and an unreasoning contempt for all religion whatsoever.

Man's experience works in cycles, and after rising to the spiritual plane through the emotions of religion, he may again descend into matter, and working through the intellectual plane, he will re-ascend to the spiritual, *plus knowledge*. While on the descending arc he loses sight of the spiritual part of his nature, but on the ascending arc this grows brighter and clearer, and becomes self-conscious, as the result of the experience through which the Ego has passed. There are many such cycles in the evolution of the Ego, the real man, and what is true of the individual is true of the race and also of the whole universe. There is only one law operating in both great and small. That which takes place in the individual unit is a reflection of similar processes which are repeated in ever-increasing magnitudes throughout the circle of eternity. The microcosm reflects the macrocosm. As above so below, is the fundamental truth by which we are able to transfer our knowledge to that which is unseen, and grasp those universal principles which must become the basis of our *faith*. There is a law of correspondences which enables us to penetrate

deeper [Page 5] and still deeper into the workings of nature, but we shall never find a break, we shall never find a *spiritual* world where there is no *natural* law, nor a natural world where spirit is not ever present. The triangles are interlaced. Night and day, summer and winter, these are smaller cycles within the larger ones to which they correspond, and which stretch out in an endless succession of Kalpas and Yugas; the days and nights of Brahmâ; the Manvantaras and the Pralayas. The activity of the day is followed by the unconsciousness and sleep of night. So is our life. The sleep of death is followed by a reawakening, and the man takes up his real life-task at the point at which he left off. As the actions of yesterday are related to those of today, so are those of our previous incarnation related to the present one, and the present becomes the potentiality of the future.

Occult Science possesses an accurate knowledge of the duration of those cycles through which the human race has to pass in its evolution as a whole, from the lower forms of matter up to that unity with the Divine principle which is its ultimate goal.

In the meantime, with regard to that personality in the physical plane which is all that most people know of *man*, this personality may be the expression of any of the many stages in the evolutionary process. The race, as a whole, progresses, because the individual units progress, but the individual units do not keep pace with each other, for in that case there could be no difference of opinion in the world; for all would be in exactly the same state of consciousness, and would perceive things in the same light. The present personality of the man, therefore, represents merely a passing phase in the history of the real man, in the descent of the spirit into matter, and its reascent to the spiritual-plane *plus* self-consciousness. The real man, the Ego, the Divine Ray, must incarnate, must see itself reflected in matter in order to attain to self-consciousness, just as the individual must see his personality reflected in a glass so long as he is unable to step outside of that personality in order to view it.

Until the man has attained to spiritual self-consciousness he will be unable to recognize the illusory and transient nature of that reflection which forms his present personality, and will regard the personality as a real thing, having a separate and isolated existence. Not until the spirit has become fully self-conscious will its evolution on this plane be complete, and the necessity for reincarnation cease to exist. On the physical plane everything is subject to the law of change, there is no permanent state. The personality cannot endure. It fades away with the exhaustion of those forces which produced it, and the spirit sinks into the sleep of death, to reawaken with a new personality, the conditions of which have been determined by the "Karma" of its past incarnation.

In various parts of the world, in different nations and races, we find men in every stage of the evolutionary process, from the savage to the [Page 6] philosopher, and still higher. You cannot make a Plato or a Newton, a Christ or a Buddha, out of a Fetish worshipper in his present incarnation, but you must grant him the possibility of becoming one in a future age; and meanwhile he finds an expression or reflection of that state of consciousness at which he has arrived in one or other of those concrete forms of superstition or religion in which the universal truth finds a partial expression.

Like the movement of a so-called *fixed* star, so is the evolution of a unit of the human race. A thousand years are scarcely sufficient to determine that it does actually move, and our present conceptions of time and space are utterly inadequate to deal with those magnitudes with which we stand face to face, and which we name eternity. It is well that it is so. It is well that we cannot remember the processes by which we have reached our present stage, nor form an adequate conception of that which awaits us. It is well that the sleep of death should obliterate all memory of our previous incarnation, leaving only the aroma, the essence, as a permanent addition to the character of our real, our higher self. To most people one short life-time appears all too long, too hard, too much fraught with sorrow and suffering to be worth living save for the reward of an eternity of bliss. It is well that religion should speak of Heaven to sustain those whose faith is weak, and it is well that she should hold the terrors of Hell over those who cannot perceive the inherent quality of evil. The personality of man shrinks to naught before the infinity of time and space, but in his essence he is Divine, and if he would rise to a knowledge of his divinity and claim his birthright as a "Son of God", he must learn to live in the Eternal, to participate in that consciousness which knows neither time nor space. The illusions of matter must cease to throw a veil over his spiritual perceptions, and human hopes, fears, and passions no longer subjugate him, and bring his spirit back to earth on the current of unsatisfied desire.

To unite religion and science, spiritual truth and natural law, that is what men require in the present age; and having need of this larger knowledge they shall surely find it. Science is slowly leading men up to that conception of the unity of nature which will enable them ultimately to free themselves altogether from the bondage of superstition, and grasp that universal principle which finds its expression in each and every religion. And when men are prepared for this larger knowledge it will take possession of them and become the spirit of the age; for there are those who, having gone before, have become masters and adepts in the higher wisdom, and are ever ready to impart their knowledge to those who are spiritually prepared to receive it.

It is because the age is to some extent ripe for the reception of this larger knowledge that a portion of it has lately been given to the world [Page 7] through the medium of the Theosophical Society and its founders. This knowledge constitutes a portion of the ancient Wisdom Religion, or Secret Doctrine, which was never given to the masses in its esoteric form, but which is the basis of every exoteric religion, and is taught in the Bible as in every other sacred book in every nation and tongue. It is purposely wrapped up in allegory and fable, the lives of historical personages being often taken as the narrative basis. The Church cannot interpret the Bible, for she has lost the key, and clings blindly and doggedly to the letter that killeth, while the spirit of knowledge which men seek has to be found elsewhere. Men turn from the narrow conceptions of the Church to that light which science offers. Ofttimes the reaction leads them to accept the dogma of science with as much unreason as they previously showed in clinging to the dogma of religion; but a basis will surely be found which will make religion scientific and science religious. Such a basis is that which Theosophy now offers to the world, and it remains to be seen how far that which Theosophy teaches can meet the wants of the race in its present stage of evolution.

There exists a great tendency, in reference to Theosophical teachings, to regard these as being merely a set of doctrines which are to take the place of existing forms of religion. It is, perhaps, inevitable that this should be so, owing to the limited ideas of the majority of men in reference to the scope, claims, and

authority of religion, in the common acceptance of the term, and the persistency with which the human mind clings to *form*, to that which is material and tangible. The result of this is, that Theosophy is looked upon in the light of a competitor by those who wield the power of authority in the various churches and sects, and that even those who are sufficiently impartial to give the subject any consideration, do so in the hope of finding some authoritative doctrines which shall take the place of certain others, respecting which they may have their doubts.

Strictly speaking, Theosophy does not teach any doctrine whatever, but there are certain primary concepts which belong essentially to Theosophy, and without which it could not become the common platform on which men of every race and creed can unite. Theosophy looks upon the human race as a whole; its creed is the Brotherhood of Humanity, and its practice Altruism. A Theosophist may be a Christian or a Jew, a Mahomedan or a Buddhist, or any other shade of opinion whatever in the matter of religion, from various causes connected with that progressive state of his real ego, which we have already sketched out; but he can claim no monopoly of truth, and must grant to his fellow-men an equal right to those opinions and beliefs which they may hold for the time being. That such an universal spirit of toleration may prevail is proved by the success which has attended the efforts of the Theosophical Society, and by the thousands of all shades of opinion who have openly joined the movement. **[Page 8]** But still the power of authority holds sway over the majority of human minds, and the *orthodox* of every religion will still continue to regard all other religions, and Theosophy in particular, as a delusion and a snare.

Take, for instance, the Christian, religion, with which perhaps the majority of our readers are more familiar than with any other. What does *orthodox* Christianity teach to those who are brought up within its influence ? It teaches first and fundamentally that it alone is the one truth concerning God and his dealings with man; that to be outside the Christian Church is to be outside the divine favour; that those who reject the Christian teachings are lost sinners, and that the millions who never heard of Christ, are heathens who must perish under the curse of Adam, unless the teachings of the Bible can be brought to them in time. Now let us consider that in this belief millions of men and women have been brought up without any means of knowing better, and that millions of children are being educated in the same manner. We all know how strong is the effect of early training, and how it clings to a man all through his life, however much he may appear to have broken loose from its restraints. When a man who has lived a careless and worldly life finds himself at last on the brink of the grave, his mind reverts to what little he learnt of religion in his early days, and as a drowning man catches at a straw so will he endeavour to obtain some hope to which he can look in the darkness that is closing round him.

It requires a strong individuality, and a wide view of humanity, to enable a man to lift himself out of the bondage of custom and habit. The narrowness and provincialism of the man who has never left his country village is a standing proverb. He judges everything by the standard that pertains to his own little circle of neighbours and acquaintances. Of the great world outside he may know something by report, but he can have only a very inadequate conception of any state of society other than that in which he lives; and should he chance to go out into the greater world, his provincialism is patent in all his doings and sayings. The man who lives only in one narrow religious circle is just as absurd, just as provincial in his ideas as the countryman who knows nothing of the larger life of the city, where the forces which

mould the destinies of the nation are centred, and intensified a thousand-fold, and beat and surge in great waves of human passion and suffering. It is the faculty of living in the larger life of humanity, of grasping the principles which underlie the phenomena, which distinguishes the poet and the artist, the statesman, philosopher, and man of science.

It is only by getting *outside* of a thing that we can view that thing in its due proportion, and assign to it its proper place in relation to the whole. The more we enlarge our consciousness, the smaller becomes the importance of those objects in which it was previously centred. We need to rise [Page 9] above the influence of human passions, hopes, and fears, before we can view these in their proper light. The man who lives in his religion as the countryman lives in his village, and refuses to believe that there is any comfort or safety outside of it, fails to grasp that larger conception of humanity which is the first principle of Theosophy. He fails to grasp the principles which underlie the phenomena, and which make one man a Christian and another a Buddhist, and all equal in the sight of God.

If we say that this is what every *orthodox* religionist does, we shall say that no *orthodox* person can be a *Theosophist*, though he may be member of the Theosophical Society. Of course there are all grades and shades of orthodoxy: “orthodoxy is my doxy, heterodoxy is your doxy”, said Dr. Johnson. But inasmuch as orthodoxy is exclusive, it cannot recognise the fundamental concept of Theosophy, which makes no distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. You cannot have an orthodox Theosophist, because a man is either a Theosophist or he is not one; he has either stepped outside the line which orthodoxy draws between one belief and another, or else he remains within his own narrow creed.

It is undoubtedly a fact that within the Christian Church there is now a much broader and more enlightened spirit than could have been supposed to exist some fifty or even twenty-five years ago, but if the church gives way once she may give way again. If she abandons doctrines which were previously held to be the very essence and essential of religion, where is the final point, the ground from which she cannot be driven ?

With the progress of knowledge, civilization, and science, the conflict which is ever being waged between the new and the old, between established conceptions, hereditary faith, creeds, dogmas, and doctrines — owing much of their power and influence to the very fact of their being established and in possession of the field — is ever changing its ground. Some new generalization, deeper and more comprehensive than any which have preceded it, claims the attention of the conflicting parties, and is raised as a banner round which the fight concentrates. It is most difficult to uproot established ideas of whatever kind, whether in our own mind or that of the community. An established cause has not merely its votaries but its vested interests, it has not merely those who uphold it through force of habit, hereditary conviction, or social convenience, but it has its institutions, its priesthood, and a host of those who are vitally interested, either directly or indirectly, in its maintenance. Hence it arises that any innovation which threatens to overturn the existing order is met by deadly hatred. This is not merely the case as between religion and science. It is exemplified in history in a thousand ways, and we cannot expect that religious institutions should be exempt from the general law. Not merely, however, is religion, not exempt, but it is the most

striking example that can be found. Religion, dealing as it does with man's highest nature, with [Page 10] his most powerful instincts, appealing to his inmost heart and conscience, and professing to be his guide and mentor in this world, and his hope of salvation in the next, exercises such a sway over his mind and imagination that an institution such as the Church is far more powerful than any merely secular organization; nor have there ever been wanting men who seized upon this enormous power, and wielded it for their own ambitious purposes. At the time when the church exercised a temporal as well as a spiritual power, she used that power with terrible effect, and wrote upon the page of history a blackened record of fire and blood. The Church of the present day professes to look with abhorrence on the past history of priestcraft, but the spirit of intolerance and persecution still exists, and there are not wanting in the present time examples of terrorism and cruelty exercised in the name of religion.

History presents to us several well-defined points or centres round which the conflict between science and religion has raged at different times, and in which religion has always been worsted. Such, for instance, was the controversy respecting the position of the earth in relation to the solar system, in which Galileo led the way on the part of science. This was the conflict between the Church and astronomy, in which science has been finally and conclusively victorious. Next we have the conflict with geology, and the controversy respecting the age of the earth, in which matter the church still clings to the Mosaic records. Then followed the grand generalization of science contained in the doctrine of the conservation of energy, which struck at the very root of what religion conceived to be necessary for the exercise of the creative and administrative power of a personal God. In the present day it is evolution which appears as a monster, threatening to swallow up all that religion can still cling to in Biblical cosmogony. Evolution strikes at one of the oldest and most deeply rooted notions of Biblical faith: the idea of the creation and fall of man. If this has to be given up, what becomes of the birth and redemption of Christ? What becomes of the inspiration of the Bible, or even its value as an historical record? The ultimate issue is scarcely doubtful, however, and we have only to look back at the storm of controversy which was raised by such books as Lyell's "Geology", Darwin's "Descent of Man", or Chambers' "Vestiges of Creation"; and note with what complacency these and similar books are now regarded, to be convinced that science must win the day. Already the foremost thinkers, the wisest men in the Church, are endeavouring to modify the accepted interpretation of the Bible, in order to bring it into harmony with the overwhelming weight of scientific evidence. Alas for the apologists! they yield the ground inch by inch, but slowly and surely the wave of advancing knowledge is obliterating the little sand-heaps which they raise in the hope of staying the [Page 11] tide. Science has come to teach much more than an isolated knowledge of matter and its properties. By its inductive methods it has arrived at certain generalizations, at certain conceptions of the operation of universal law, which strike at the very root of the cherished ideas of religion respecting divine interference and revelation. It strikes at the whole record of the Old Testament, so far as that relates in an exoteric form the origin and progress of the race towards divine knowledge, by a series of divine manifestations and interventions. It strikes at the miraculous in the New as well as in the Old Testament. It asserts that the laws of nature never have been, and never will be, broken. It extends to the remotest time, and to the most distant regions of space, the laws and principles which are found to condition us on this earth. It asserts the unity of the Cosmos, the operation of the same laws in both small and great, and the absolute unchangeable-ness and reliability of these laws. Looking back, it traces the present order to a pre-existing one, and that again to an earlier one, an endless sequence of cause and effect, but through all the self-same laws in operation as those which we find at the present day. Looking forward, the same view presents itself. Time is but a conception of our brain, something inherent in our mental constitution. Nature knows no time. She is the same yesterday, today, and for ever. Our little span of life is great in comparison with the life of the lower orders, some of which complete their term in a few moments, yet our longest span is as naught compared with the life of the species, and that,

again is but a passing phase — the whole history of our globe but a raindrop falling into the ocean of eternity.

What name shall we give to these conceptions of science ? Shall we call them Atheism, Materialism, Agnosticism, or do they admit of Deism or Pantheism ? Well, let them be any one or all of these, they exist for the time being as *forms*, representative of various states of knowledge or consciousness of the human mind relative to the universal mind, relative to absolute truth, for absolute truth must include all its manifestations. In the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms, we see that the principle of *life* manifested in thousands of forms, ever ascending the evolutionary scale from what we term *dead* matter to the highly organized and self-conscious animal called *man*. We do not see the transformation from unconscious or *dead* matter to organic structures, nor from the lower forms of these through all the intermediate grades of vegetable and animal up to the human race, for these processes take millions and millions of years, and according to the teachings of occult science are not effected on this globe only. But though the change takes place so slowly as to be imperceptible even to the most extended range of ordinary scientific investigation, yet we may apprehend that all the forms which we now see existing in the various kingdoms of nature are only temporary, partial and progressive manifestations [Page 12] of the *one life*, of that which underlies the form, and of which the form is an expression for the time being, representing a certain idea or state of consciousness.

In the same way with those higher aspects of consciousness which are manifested in the human mind. In no two minds does consciousness exist in absolutely the same degree, any more than two leaves of a tree are exactly alike. Collectively we are able to say that the leaves belong to the same tree or species, and also that a man belongs to a certain class, religion, or school of thought, each of which represents collectively a well-defined idea, or state of consciousness, relatively to that absolute principle or truth which each partially expresses.

Men are ever trying to reach this principle, it is the evolutionary power which prevents them from standing still, and from the time being, because they cannot estimate the forward movement, they fondly imagine that they have found it in some one or other of the *forms or systems* of religion or philosophy.

But the absolute truth must include every religion, every philosophy, and must show the connection and necessity of each. The man, therefore, who only recognises the reflection of truth in one religion, one philosophy, or one school of thought, by whatever *ism* it may be called, is still under the veil of *maya*, has still to learn that the same principle which manifests itself in the outward world in thousands of forms and species, in shapes of loveliest beauty as well as in deadly and hideous forms, manifests itself also in the human soul in corresponding and ever-varying phenomena.

Man is ever collecting from the elements of Nature and building around himself a concrete structure in which to centre his consciousness, until at last he loses sight altogether of the larger possibilities and

nature of his real self, and takes that to be the only real which he has in pain and sorrow succeeded in centring around his personality. We find this illustrated in every phase of his existence, from the larger cycle of the descent of the spirit into matter during the Manvantara, to those smaller cycles which constitute each successive earth-life of the Ego. On the morning of each day, after the sleep and unconsciousness of night, the man awakes, and *necessity* compels him to take up his task at the point at which he left it yesterday. So after the sleep of death, *Karma* becomes active, and the Ego begins to construct a physical body in which it may function and manifest in that *form* which corresponds to its real character or state of consciousness. The child is spiritual, pure, innocent, free; lives half in heaven and half on earth, for the spirit is not yet wholly centred in the physical organization. We watch the growth from childhood to manhood; what becomes of the innocence, the purity, the spirituality? how often do we mourn the loss of these! The veil of the illusion of the senses is complete: the child becomes a man, and loses sight altogether of his higher [Page 13] self, his spiritual nature, or retains it only as a vague aspiration which finds an expression in religious emotion. He commences on a still lower plane, the same process of accretion, accumulation and self-centralization which brought him to earth, and spends his energies, his divine powers, in the gratification of the senses, or the acquisition of wealth, fame, or power; calling these *his own*, and centring in them his whole life and consciousness. Truly did Christ say that a rich man should hardly enter the kingdom of heaven, and that to do so we must become as little children.

It is not that either wealth or fame are in themselves evil, but simply the desire for them which leads men to expend their life forces on that which is illusory and transitory, and which blinds them to the higher possibilities of their nature, and hinders the development of the real, the divine man.

Science endeavours to connect all the phenomena of the universe in one harmonious whole, and to show the inter-dependence and co-relation of every part, and though she has only succeeded in doing this to a very limited extent on the physical plane merely, yet it is fundamental with her that not one atom exists except as an integral and necessary part of the whole, and not one form of life is manifested apart from that universal principle which is active in everything that lives and moves and has its being.

And now what is required is that this principle of unity shall be extended so as to embrace the higher psychical and spiritual aspects of our nature, so as to embrace that inner consciousness of our relation to a higher and unseen world which men in all ages have sought to express in a thousand different ways. What is required is a knowledge of the co-relation of the physical with the spiritual, a bold step forward from matter to spirit, from the seen to the unseen, from the known to the unknown.

Religion is a witness in each individual heart to the possibilities and reality of the unseen universe, and just as men's conceptions of the material world have varied from age to age, and assumed now one form, now another, so have his conceptions of the world of spirit varied and found expression in numberless forms of worship and superstition.

But religion has hitherto drawn a sharp line of demarcation between the natural and the supernatural, between the material and the spiritual. With regard to the spiritual she claims a supernatural revelation, and in so far as each and every religion lays claim in a special sense to such a revelation, there must exist an antagonism between one religion and another in their lower, outward, or exoteric aspect. But that no line of demarcation really exists, such as religion claims, is readily apprehended when we see how science is ever pushing this imaginary line further and further back, is ever carrying *natural* law further and further into those [Page 14] shadowy realms to which the mind of man relegates those personal activities with which he invests his conceptions of a Deity. Darkness and ignorance co-exist with superstition and fear; knowledge and light bring truth and love.

Does God retreat as science advances, or is he the same yesterday, today, and for ever ? To what region can we now relegate those personal activities of the Deity, those *miracles* with which the Old and New Testaments are crammed ? If these are to stand in their literal, external, and narrative form, it rests with those who uphold them, with the church, to bring them into harmony with what we now know respecting the operation of natural laws. But if the first chapter of Genesis, and the Mosaic record of the dealings of Jehovah with his chosen people are to be considered as myths, allegories and fables, what becomes of the connection between the Old and the New Testaments ? If the foundations are taken away, what becomes of the superstructure ?

Although the church as a body still clings to the text of the Bible, there are those in her ranks who perceive the hopelessness of doing so, and who endeavour to meet the enlightenment and science of the age by a corresponding advance. Within the Church, as well as outside of it, the old beliefs are crumbling to dust before the advancing tide of knowledge, which is slowly, but surely, pushing the supernatural further and further back.

And now men no longer believe in the *super*-natural at all, and they reject all and every religion that is based upon supernatural claims. And yet — strange paradox — while supernatural religion is losing its hold on men's minds, supernatural science — if we may use such a term for the time being — is taking possession of the field. While men are casting off the marvellous on which they have hitherto based their conceptions of Deity, there is opening up before them a still more marvellous region, and phenomena which for the time being appear to be nothing more or less than miraculous in the very largest sense of that term. The literature of the day terms with the “occult”. Spiritualism has its thousands of adherents who can testify to the reality of certain phenomena which are not produced by any known physical means. Science, for the time being, denies these manifestations *en masse*, for science is as dogmatic in her way as religion, but even science is now compelled to investigate them, and to testify to the reality of phenomena which she formerly denied. Mesmerism has been dubbed by another name, because science would not acknowledge Mesmer and his teachings, and so now it is called “hypnotism” and under this name has been subject to ample scientific demonstration. Thought-reading and clairvoyance have been attested by a learned and scientific body such as the Society for Psychical Research.. Even ghosts, which have hitherto been considered [Page 15] essentially supernatural, are receiving scientific attention, while works on alchemy, astrology, and palmistry abound.

Truly the supernatural is ever pressing in upon us, and if we drive it back in, one direction, it takes us by a flank movement. But super-naturalism is not necessarily superstition. Superstition implies ignorance and a dread of those powers of which we are ignorant. But now we must drop the term *supernatural*, for the supernatural is no longer a superstition, it is becoming a science.

Those who are acquainted with the teachings of the *Esoteric Doctrine* respecting the evolutionary cycles of the various races, will recognize how this state of things is being brought about in the present age. Man having passed the turning point, the lowest part of the cycle, and being now on the ascending arc, his whole being is becoming more spiritualized, and he is developing additional faculties which enable him to cognise certain things which are beyond the reach of the mere physical functions. But it is no longer with superstitious awe that he will regard the unknown region he is about to enter. With a knowledge of the unbroken sequence of cause and effect on the physical plane, and a reliance on the order and unity of natural law, he will be able to carry his knowledge and conceptions a stage further, and grasp the reality of the higher planes of existence which are not cognizable with the physical faculties, but which nevertheless are objective and real to those faculties (as yet but little known to the majority of men) which correspond with and find their expression on the higher planes. There is no sudden jump from the natural to the supernatural, from the sensuous to the supersensuous, from the physical to the spiritual. The spiritual world is not that which we enter at death: it is here, now, ever present, ever becoming; and if we are not cognizant of it, that is because our spiritual faculties are not developed, because we have no spiritual self-consciousness. Our consciousness is centred in our physical organs, and *matter* on the physical plane appears the only real.

There is no arbitrary line between time and eternity, between past, present, or future; neither is there any line of demarcation between the material and the spiritual. The aspects, laws, conditions, and phenomena of the one are the expression of similar laws conditioning the other.

Men are putting aside superstitious religion based upon supernaturalism. They are putting aside the Bible as a collection of fables and myths no longer tenable, and the question is whether in doing so they are making a progressive or a retrogressive step. It would appear that at first the step must be retrogressive; it is a smaller cycle within a larger one, and commences with a descending arc. The reaction from superstition leads to materialism, but this is only temporary.

And now, when men are demanding a larger knowledge and a deeper spiritual insight, there is discovered to them a possibility and source of [Page 16] knowledge and wisdom far surpassing their largest expectations. This knowledge is only new in the sense that it is now given to the world afresh and in a new form. In reality, it is as old as the hills, for it is the ancient "Secret Doctrine", or "Wisdom Religion", which has been the inheritance of the spiritual adepts and initiates in all ages. It does not supersede, but it gives a new meaning to old beliefs. It does not put aside the sacred books, but it is the true key and commentary to them, for it gives the real meaning of that which they express in allegory and fable.

From the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation, we may read the Bible without this key, and it will claim our superstitious reverence, and belief in its superhuman origin, or be rejected in the light of modern science and criticism. But when once we have apprehended that the Bible was written by men who *knew*, that it is a book of symbolism and not of history, that it contains the same teachings as the sacred books of other nations and races, only wrapped up in a different allegory; there no longer exists for us the necessity of regarding it either with superstitious reverence, or with incredulity; but it becomes to us a storehouse of knowledge which we may verify in a thousand ways, without waiting for an entry into the spirit-world through the gates of death.

It is no loss to cast away the supernaturalism of the Bible if we gain thereby that deeper knowledge which it contains, but which was never given to the world save in allegorical form, having generally, however, some slight historical basis. Is it any loss when we discover the true value and meaning of the fairy tales and romances which delighted our childhood ? And if any ask why this knowledge should be so wrapped up that the real nature of it cannot be recognized without the key which the *Secret Doctrine* supplies, the answer is the same as that which we should give in reference to the fables which delight the childish mind. There are some things we cannot tell to a child in their plain meaning, and others which, if we did tell, he would not understand. The knowledge is there for him to possess in due time, but he must grow up to it, and must reach out to it with his own developed powers and will. Ah! but it is just here that we fail most to realise our position, to realise that we are but as the child to the man that will be. With a view of humanity extending over only a few thousand years at most, and of the individual confined to one brief life-time, how can it be otherwise ? The *belief* that they will live again on this earth is too heavy a burden for most people; and did they really *know* it, they would be utterly crushed. How few there are who even truly realise for one moment that some day they must *die*. It is always *some day* with them, and even that *preparation* for death which they superstitiously believe to be necessary, is put off till the last moment. Then the priest is called in to do that which the man should have been doing for himself all his life-time. Truly did Christ say to his disciples, "I have many things to say unto [Page 17] you, but ye cannot bear them now". The Bible was written for men who were even more childish than we are, and if we think now that we have a claim to be told in somewhat plainer language what its real meaning is, well, — the key is now offered to the world. How many of those who should be most anxious for it will accept it ? We are told that there are seven keys to unlock the sacred treasures, and that each key must be turned seven times; how many in this generation will raise their hand to the lock, and turn the first key once ? Perhaps they will rather examine the key as a curious *forgery*, and even deny that there is any use for it at all.

Just as a deeper knowledge awaits the child when he shall have grown up to that stage where it is possible for him to lay hold of it, so does a deeper knowledge await the human race and the individual when they shall have reached that stage of evolution, that state of consciousness, which makes it possible for them to apprehend it. Then let the key be offered to them, and instinctively they know the use of it. Behold! the truth stands revealed to the inner man, where previously only the form was perceived on the outer plane.

But there is no finality. Deeper and deeper shall we penetrate, but the infinite is ever before us. Those who have gone the furthest realise this the best. There is always an ideal *beyond*. Our greatest geniuses, poets, painters, philosophers, are those who know best that they have but touched the border land of that

in which they excel far beyond all their fellows. And if this be true, where is that finality, that arbitrary line which every religion draws, and refuses to believe that others have the right or the power to step over it except to their own destruction ? Every religion draws the line in a different place, and this fact alone should be sufficient to convince us that there is no one true religion, but that each represents a certain stage in the evolutionary cycle, and that even the highest and best, whichever that may be, must necessarily be only a partial revelation; while the highest and most exalted conceptions of a Deity must not merely fall far short of the actual truth, but be subject to the same kind of change that takes place in the relationship of the child to his father, when the child becomes a man, and no longer regards the father as the highest embodiment of wisdom, knowledge and authority.

Many a child has asked “Who made us” ? and when he is told that it was God, he asks, “Who made God?” It is not merely one veil — that of the flesh — which hides from us the source of our being. There is not one inner man merely, but many. Physical man is the outermost shell which has to be periodically cast off and periodically renewed, until the next inner man has developed sufficiently to live and act consciously without it. The faculties of this next inner man are beginning to be understood in this generation, and the possibility of exercising them on a plane which is just once removed from that of our physical senses is becoming a matter [Page 18] of *scientific* knowledge. But it is not here that we shall find those lines by which religion seeks to limit the illimitable, or those personal attributes with which she endeavours to invest the Deity.

“As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive again”. Yea, truly; only then we must know who Adam and Christ really represent. The one is not the first man who was *created* some 6,000 years ago; neither is the other that which the Church conceives at the present time. Let those who wish to know use the key.

If men are unconscious of the possibility, existence, or necessity, of a deeper knowledge of the Bible than they now possess, they will reject the key that is offered to them, simply because they cannot recognise that it is a key, or that there is anything to open. The material world of sense, form, and colour is the most real thing to us; we cannot conceive of any other aspect of those things with which we are so familiar, and to a knowledge of the real essence of which this very familiarity is the greatest impediment. And yet, one step forward in the development of our faculties, and our conceptions of *matter* become totally altered; for matter is no longer solid and tangible; it is no longer that by which we are conditioned. It does not cease to exist, but our previous conceptions of it are found to be merely the illusions of the senses, the necessary result of a certain state of our consciousness. How reluctant men are to lose their hold of the solid and tangible, and how eagerly they cling to life on the physical plane! And so it is also with the forms in which they clothe their conceptions of the spiritual activities of the universe.

In their lowest aspect they are grossly material. We send missionaries to the poor heathen to show them a better way, a more spiritual light. Are there no missionaries required for *Christian* England ? Are not men asking on every side for more light, more knowledge, more truth than the church can give them ? When they ask for bread, does not the church offer a stone ? Is not the complaint everywhere heard that

the church is losing its hold upon the masses, while those who lead the way in literature, science, or art, for the most part unhesitatingly reject her teachings ? It is not that the Gospel of Christ has ceased to be a power unto salvation for thousands of souls. Far be it from us to say that the church has no message for poor, ignorant, sinful man; only let her not conceive that those forms in which she wraps up the truth, and in which she now presents it to the world, have any finality, solidity, or permanence. Her own history during the present century will negative this view. We hear something of *advanced* views of Christianity in the church, but even the most *advanced* conceptions may be found in a new light to be as illusory as are our present conceptions of the constitution of *matter*, as it exists in relation to our physical senses.

If we wish to convey some idea to the mind of a child, or an ignorant [Page 19] person, we must bring the idea down to the level of his intellectual powers, and present it to him in some suitable form. The human race, as a whole, are but children in spiritual knowledge and power, but there are those who have advanced far beyond the limits which it is possible for us even to imagine, and who from time to time have given to the world in such manner as it was possible to do so, that higher knowledge which they have acquired. They are the "Elder Brothers" of the race.

And now in the present century they have given us a key that we may unlock some of those treasures, some of those deeper mysteries of our being which have become thickly encrusted with the ecclesiastical accumulations of centuries, and were in danger of becoming even further removed from our consciousness in an age of materialism and scepticism.

Theosophical teachings are based upon the larger view of humanity which we are enabled to take by reason of that knowledge of the origin, history and destiny of the race which the "Esoteric Doctrine" reveals. Theosophy is not *a* religion, it is rather *Religion* itself, for it embraces every religion. Those who cannot advance to that point where it becomes possible to form a generalization which shall include every religion as a manifestation of one universal principle, will probably reject Theosophical teachings; but others will find in them the possibility of uniting that which is apparently contradictory and antagonistic in the exoteric forms in which religion presents itself at different times, in every country and race, and in the human heart and consciousness.