

A Lecture to Enquirers into Theosophy and Practical Occultism

by **W.W. Westcott, F.T.S.**

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[Page 5] I HAVE been requested to speak to you this evening for a short time on the subject of Theosophy and the Occult Sciences. There can be no doubt that the established form of religious Christian instruction has for many years now failed to satisfy the aspirations of the more enquiring of the people. The rapid advances made by science have enabled it to contest and overcome the ordinarily received explanations of Biblical statements on many subjects connected with the groundwork of the Jewish faith, upon which you must remember the foundation of the Christian exoteric religion was laid. The rapid advances made by Science in the investigation of the structure of vegetable and animal beings, coupled with the demonstration of the so-called Natural Laws, have limited the popular conceptions of the Spiritual and have tended more and more to a gross materialism. *Pari passu* with this material development there has grown with its growth and strengthened with its strength a type of selfishness, which is fatal to a high spiritual development of the inner man.

To combat these evil tendencies of the present day is the self-imposed function of the Fellows of the Theosophical Society. Far be it from any of us to boast of any success that may have been gained, we are content to devote time and funds to the execution of our schemes and to await the verdict of posterity upon our conduct. Our aims are to cultivate a brotherhood of the whole human race, — a family of brothers all seeking a high ideal of mental and bodily purity, offering on the altar of mutual improvement, lives of self-sacrificing zeal. For such of us as have time — and opportunity — and education there are other objects of attainment, the search into the records of the past; the lives and writings of sages of a vanished age and race may yet be pregnant with many a seed of wisdom which may be fertilized and bring forth a rich crop of good in the future. For such again as have still rarer attributes, we offer the inducement of the successes of some of us, to pursue investigations into the hidden mysteries of nature and into the secrets of man, — his constitution, his origin, and his destiny.

The presence here today of your earnest faces leads me to hope that all of you have been convinced that there is a something to be learned [Page 6] beyond the knowledge of the schools, beyond the contents of the Encyclopaedias; and an attainable aim beyond that even of living respected and dying regretted.

The Theosophy of which I am the unworthy exponent is not a Theology, is not a Religion, and I am not concerned in founding any new sect, nor even in trying to tear you away from the Faith of your choice or of your upbringing. By Theosophy I plead for the elevation of your lives, and for your development into beings of purer aspirations and enlarged powers, so that on resigning the earthly garments you now

wear, you may not only reach a haven of calm, but may in some future age and state once more start into active existence on a higher plane; and that you may escape the degradation which a life of earthly impurity and sordid cares and enjoyments will surely be the forerunner of. Your futures are in your own hands, by your own thoughts and actions shall your future lot be decided. The law of Karma is an unerring law, and the cause must be followed by its effects, — as ye sow so shall ye also reap.

The doctrines which we teach describe no *place* for reward, no New Jerusalem, and no bottomless pit for a Hell, but we say that this earth is the scene of your future existence and that your course of life in the personality to follow will be framed, by a law unerring in its justice and implacable in its accuracy, to avenge the faults of your present existence and to acknowledge the successes in development which you may now attain. In the same manner we say your present life is fashioned by the Karma of your past, your attributes are tintured by the follies and the sins of a former existence. Human knowledge is too finite for any man to tell you in what you have sinned in the past life, any more than anyone can tell you *what* were the sins of your youth which mayhap have tintured the life you are living today — but the cases are similar and the effect is equally registered in your life history.

This Karma is as accurate in its perception, and as relentless in its action as the All-seeing Eye of the personal deity of the orthodox among you, it is the never-failing Law which supplies to every cause its appropriate effect whether of a moral, spiritual or physical nature: of it again may be paraphrased the attribute of the Christian God, "not one sparrow may fall to the ground" without the corresponding effect, however minute that result may be.

Like the law of gravity of the scientist, its effects are around us, and may be appreciated, — and the law itself as an entity is equally unappreciable.

Karma is the recompenser for suffering and the stern hand of retributive justice upon the evil doer. The poverty, squalor and misery which exist today are truly the effect of some antecedent wrong-doing of the past, for Karma exists as a fate devolving upon nations, as well as a [Page 7] redresser or executioner of an individual. Too true to be turned aside by regret or by prayer, it is also too firm in its decrees for any to, escape its effects. The punishment for a crime must be borne, — and *then* may come surcease of sorrow and future joy.

Once more I can refer to the Christian Bible for an appropriate quotation, "With what measure you mete it shall be measured to you again", here is the law described, oh ! that other parts of this volume had been permitted to remain unaltered, and to represent as truly the words of Jesus called the Christ. That Jesus was a great prophet, or rather great teacher, no one can deny, but alas, like almost every other great master in the past, he left no writings of his own, and the scattered sayings that have survived him, have been so emended, added to, taken from, and mistranslated, partly by inadvertence, often by design, until the whole volumes designed to illustrate the doctrines of the master fail us in our hour of need.

The scattered fragments of ancient truth found in the teachings of Jesus demonstrate his Initiation, the complete volumes of his church teach us how frail is mankind, and how fallible is tradition.

The words I have quoted are indeed the words of truth such as a master may speak, and there is no context to point us to a vicarious redemption, which by the sacrifice of another shall enable us to escape the just penalties of our failings.

In further recognition of this Law, did Jesus, like Buddha, preach self-abasement, practical altruism, forgiveness of others. In knowledge of Karmic retribution did they teach, cease to do evil, learn to do well, resist not evil, and render good for evil — for by such means your personal future is improved and evil deeds shall recoil on the head of the transgressor, and perchance your good examples may at length be not without good effect on the evil doer. An evil action returned by you lays up for your future a sin to be atoned for, while your act which may produce a present pain may relieve your aggressor of a share of his punishment in the future. I do not wish to be understood to mean that you standing with me here in this land, where selfishness is rampant and the Kali Yuga is upon us, can carry out this auspicious line of conduct in its entirety, but little will probably be gained by Quixotic and isolated instances of high conduct, but the Theosophist can resist and refrain from active evil, and lose no opportunity of aiming at this ideal himself and teaching it to his neighbours.

We hold that Jesus then, has been misrepresented and his teachings gradually altered by successive generations of his followers, too many of whom formulated their own ideal of his meaning and by dominant personality succeeding in obscuring in the course of centuries his primitive doctrine. We teach that the orthodox scheme of the constitution of man, as a compound of body, soul and spirit, fails to carry with it a correct [Page 8] appreciation of the real nature of humanity, and we say further that the simple ideal of a Soul to be saved is incorrect and misleading. By the orthodox it is laid down that the whole nature of man is desperately wicked on account of a primal sin of the first human beings, and that even if anyone can resist further wickedness in life, yet the original sin in his constitution will necessitate his damnation, in the absence of a saving faith in a vicarious redemption. Theosophy assures us that this whole idea rests on a mis-conception, and is founded on an allegory, and further that the Genesis legend was not even written nor formulated for centuries after the date of its reputed author, Moses. The Wisdom Religion traces indeed in Genesis a resemblance to the origination of certain races in a remote past, but condemns as incorrect the Christian scheme which has been founded on this Jewish basis. It has been truly said that Christianity is founded on the Devil, who is of vital importance to the whole scheme, for if the primal temptation and fall be erased there exists no foundation on which is needed any Redemptory structure. But even here if we excise all the personal powers from the narrative we get another expression of Karmic Law, that primitive, even as present man, must be punished for his sins, but his punishment is not to be averted by the sacrifice of an innocent being, however exalted in his rank and constitution.

We confess indeed that Christ Jesus was God, or as we say, was overshadowed by the Highest Divine Essence, the Atma-Ray of the Absolute, and as an ultimate incarnation of a series of lives of self-exaltation by suffering and by personal humility, was of immense importance to us ordinary men, — but we claim that each one is also God in the same sense, however far removed from him, or from Buddha, or from Pythagoras, or Zoroaster, who have all been great souls, Mahatmas if you will, and have all been great teachers — each specially suitable to his time and the necessities and peculiarities of his nation. We claim that each one of us has the potential divinity within us, the Triad of the Spiritual, which is indeed Christos, the Ray from the Supreme Atma, the Buddhi vehicle or mode of communication, and the Manas, Mind or Consciousness of the Individual: these three inspire each personality here present, and in each one of us there is a possibility of advancement and spiritual elevation if we do but live so cleanly

and so purely in this life of sorrow, weakness and temptation, as to dissipate the Veil which hides us from our higher selves and permit us to reach up and perceive that sublime essence of the Christos Spirit, that our personality may grow by its reflection and become strong by contemplation of its purity. And the pure and serene ray of Atma which by exaltation we may yet perceive, will by a series of ever widening powers, and ever ascending stages of development, at length attain in the Pralaya of the future that Nirvana or absorption into the Absolute Deific essence [Page 9] which is the heaven of the Esotericist, as it has been the dream of the Kabbalist, and the constant and much misunderstood ambition of the millions of living Buddhists.

With these exhortations then, my friends, which are applicable to every conscious human being, and which serve to point to the Universal scheme of the Elevation of Man, I propose to leave the general subject and to request your attention to the Path which *may* be trod by the Few. I have already hinted at the third object of our society, the investigation of the "hidden mysteries of nature", if I may borrow a phrase from the Freemasons, who also profess the same ideal, they too claim for their Order that it is a system of Morality. I, as a Freemason, acknowledge both the claims, but I blush to think of how little study the members of the order give to the mysteries, and again I regret to confess that the doctrines of morality are often insufficient to preserve the high character of the members. No matter now, Freemasonry had secrets, even if its present professors have lost them, and Theosophy has had secrets, and has them still; the so-called occult sciences are a reality, — but their existence is a veiled one, and rightly so, for were the powers which are unknown to the world, but which really exist, only known to the selfish among men, and were evil men but able to wield the powers which can be learned by the pure, the amount of human suffering might be intensified and the foundations of human institutions might be shaken. Small wonder then that such powers should be strictly guarded; — and perhaps I might say small wonder that the scientific world scoffs at their existence. The selfishness which our vaunted civilization tends constantly to increase, and which orthodox religion certainly further intensifies, is fatal to any hope of acquiring magical power. The Higher Magic has always existed, among a few adepts in every age, and probably will never be widespread; benevolence is its mainspring, and test stone, and immense power may be gained and wielded by the pure, if he do but exercise patience, self-restraint, self-sacrifice, and mental and bodily purity; to him is not alone good Karma, but enlarged powers of usefulness, and a higher perception of the secrets of existence, and glimpses "beyond the Veil where others sit".

But commensurate with these enlarged powers are the dangers of these occult pursuits, many are the pitfalls, greatly increased are the temptations to sin, immense may be the dangers to life and mental soundness which ignorance and recklessness will expose the tyro to suffer.

Waves of attraction to the Unseen World seem to sweep over men's minds at intervals, and many get seized with a craze for occult research, whether they be or be not fitted for such pursuits. It has been said the Magus is born not made, just as has been said also of the Poet, and there is an element of truth in the assertions. However it is certain that the [Page 10] expression of the desire for the occult is no *proof* of suitability for such study: I do not think we who know some little of these subjects have any right to bar the door of progress to others if they can progress, but we are within the right to cease to *encourage* anyone who fails in his promises, in his efforts, or who is found to be manifestly too weak or too erring. I do not assert that it is impossible for a man alone to make himself an adept, but I do insist on the extreme rarity of the occurrence; a teacher is distinctly necessary and so is a system. No one but a teacher who has himself followed the Path with success can lead others; and no neophyte can fail to be

assisted in his researches by one who has discovered the blind, but often alluring bye-paths which lie to right and left of the narrow way of progress in occultism. No one but he who has threaded the maze can warn of the pitfalls and quagmires in which mind and body may be engulfed. Be warned in time then, ye aspirants, and beware of the evil effects of rushing in like fools where angels might well fear to tread. Tempt not the powers which haunt the entrance to the caves of Olympus, unless you know yourself armed with virtue, purified by restraint, furnished with the weapon of knowledge and guarded by a high purpose and exalted aspirations — not for persona pre-eminence but for enlarged powers of doing good to your fellow creatures.

The chief danger of occult study lies in the fact that to certain persons of peculiar constitution the way to unusual powers lies open to some extent, and may remain open, although the actor be *not* pure in mind and body, and in those cases there arises that dark shadow of the Higher Magic which has existed from time immemorial in isolated cases, and at times in large groups of men, and which is properly designated Black Magic. This fearful possibility, like its great and high predecessor, is also often scoffed at by the outer world, which indeed has grown so clever in the last century or two as to deny even the possibility of its existence and even to repeal laws which the men of past times deemed necessary for its repression: and yet Black Magic is a great fact, it does yet exist, and incautious students may be led into it and may fall into its meshes, and come to moral ruin, almost as surely as he who with perverse will seeks the black art for his personal aggrandisement or for the pursuit of revenge.

Evil forces and evil remanets of humanity may exist around us unperceived and unknown to men in their ordinary condition, but he who oversteps the threshold of the unseen world may expose himself to their action. For example, he who tampers with spiritualism not only exposes his senses to be deceived by fraud, which is rife whenever money or personal gain is obtained by occult arts, but also endangers his intellect by the reception of lying and ensnaring allusions which may be uttered by mediums at the instigation of evil forces — Kama loka shells of [Page 11] suicides — and perhaps others, to whose insidious advances the man who makes no such experiments is not exposed. Modern England is not free from sorcerers, who also in India are well known to exist and form societies of reprobates known as Dugas, Red Caps or Black Magicians.

If one once take the first step from the ordinary walks of life, nothing but a powerful will and a fixed intention of benevolence can keep the student from harm.

The Wisdom of the Himalayan Adepts is able, I have no doubt, to lead the student as far along the path of Practical Occultism as finite man can tread, and can lead him safely. There have been in various countries, and there are still, other mystics, whose learning no doubt came from the same parent stock but from lapse of time and remoteness of place, has become somewhat differentiated from that of the Indian teachers. Probably there is no one in this country who has gone far enough in more than one system to judge of their final identity; at any rate there are other small groups of observers who can show part of the way to Occult Science, the only one I mention is that of the Kabbalists, who combining the secret doctrines of the remote Hebrew Esoteric Rabbis with the Hermetic doctrines of the Ancient Egyptian mysteries, and the Chaldee Magic, are still, in secret, teaching their methods to favoured pupils.

I have myself been through a large portion of their tuition, which perhaps is most properly named Rosicrucian, and passing from their system I have been favoured by the teachers of Theosophy with an

insight into the first glimpses of Eastern Occultism. I am not going to say tonight anything more concerning the Rose and the Cross, and indeed I should dissuade anyone who has taken up the Theosophic teaching, from beginning any other such study, for the second will certainly tend to mar success in the first.

One cannot well move along two lines at once, even if they be nearly parallel in parts of their course.

There is one other matter I should like to utter one warning about, and that is with regard to the Hypnotic experiments which are now once more the public rage: and here again I do not propose to show you anything nor give any instruction in the art, but I only desire to give a solemn warning to anyone disposed to these proceedings. Be well assured that you will suffer a Karmic penalty for any evil that may result from it. If you are the means of paralysing the mental consciousness of any person, you must be answerable for all effects, whether intentional, or due to your ignorance, or your will. It is a terrible thing to take away a man's sense, even by means of chloroform, for you put his life in danger; still more if you paralyse his actions by Will power supervening on passivity, do you endanger his intellect and his future course of life. You are in the wrong [Page 12] if you experiment on human consciousness; if the hypnotic sleep must be used, let it be employed alone by such as are purposely purified and who have been instructed by those who know. I say again Hypnotic powers are not fit for purposes of public amusement, nor for public experiment; their use even by ordinary medical men is to be condemned because wielded in ignorance, the temporary relief of disease which has been observed by such is often fallacious; there is a positive danger that a bodily nervous ailment may be checked and converted into a moral failing; and lastly there is a definite degradation of anyone who is coerced by the will of another.

Bodily and intellectual and moral strength coincide with Positivity, with him who can guide and lead, and can bear with fortitude his fate; beware of the state of acquired negativity, laying one open to every evil influence, to mediumship and to failure. The greatest praise is due to Dr. Norman Kerr, who a few weeks back at Birmingham, in condemning Hypnotism as a treatment, said: "Let the whole profession set its face against the practice as a hazardous and unreliable remedy, never free from the risk of perilous consequences, liable to the gravest abuses, operative only in a limited number of patients, liable to produce conditions of brain conducive to mental unsoundness, and to transmit to posterity permanent morbid nervous susceptibilities with an ill-balanced and unstable brain — more especially in these days of nerve riot, exhaustion, and unrest, when over-wearied Nature yearns with an unutterable yearning for oblivion and repose".

There may be some among you to whom it shall come, that initiation for which I have longed, but believe me Adeptship is not to be obtained by one life: as has been said, you must have a Birthright, in other words in many previous existences you must have gained more and more footing in the Path. Secondly, you must be prepared to sacrifice all earthly ambitions. Thirdly, you must cast aside all earthly pleasures which are not pure, you must abstain from all bodily defilement, from all mental dissipation: it has been said "he who drinks beer, thinks beer", this is the key-note, mental and moral elevation can hardly be obtained except by the sacrifice of very many habits deemed permissible by society: abstinence from alcohol is of the greatest importance, and animal food mars the purity of the body, and, sexual enjoyment, even if we neglect the consideration of its physical devitalization, even by its mental claims so distracts the attention of the mind as to render passion incompatible with adeptship. Although you must exist on this physical plane, you must live above it. The body is neither to be condemned nor neglected, but to be used only as a local habitation and a name. Fourthly, be ready to study at all times, be prepared

to sift the true from the false, let no glamour deceive you, no prestige mislead you. [Page 13] Fifthly, recognise your faults, your own special failings, seek for no reward, hope not for gratitude, for that only which comes unsought is to be appreciated. Sixthly, consider well before the Path be entered, and having begun — look not back, remember the allegory of the Pillar of Salt, pause not in your progress, for no sluggard can succeed; and Seventhly, proclaim not your progress as you pass the milestones of the Path, nor your communications with higher powers to the foolish. Contemplate the emblematic Sphinx of antiquity, that complex symbol whose claws and limbs as of a Lion teach audacity, whose loins as of a Bull denote strength and patient endurance, whose Human Head suggests the cultivation of the mind; and whose Wings as of an Eagle may enable you to mount into those higher planes of thought and existence which are flooded with the radiance of the Incomprehensible One All.

In proportion to the love existing among men, so will be the community of property and power. Among true and real friends, all is common; and, were ignorance and envy and superstition banished from the world, all mankind would be friends. The only perfect and genuine republic is that which comprehends every living being. Those distinctions which have been artificially set up, of nations, societies, families and religions, are only general names, expressing the abhorrence and contempt with which men blindly consider their fellow-men. I love my country; I love my wife; the city in which I was born, my parents and the children of my care; and to this city, this woman, and this nation, it is incumbent on me to do all the benefit in my power. To what do these distinctions point, but to an evident denial of the duty which humanity imposes on you, of doing every possible good to every individual, under whatever denomination he may be comprehended, to whom you have the power of doing it? You ought to love all mankind; nay, every individual of mankind. You ought not to love the individuals of your domestic circle less, but to love those who exist beyond it more. Once make the feelings of confidence and of affection universal, and the distinctions of property and power will vanish.

SHELLEY (Essays and Fragments).