

A Fragment on the Requirements of Theosophical Life

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THE mission of Theosophy is dual in its nature, to refine the imagination and to cultivate the will. Refinement of the imagination implies its training to perceive higher and subtler degrees of truth, and cultivation of the will involves assimilation and use of the higher degrees recognised by the Ego.

It should give birth to neither creed nor dogma because it acknowledges no authority but teaches that each individual is responsible to his own higher self for all that he is and all that he may become.

The present period of mental freedom and individualism is a revival of those halcyon days of Greece when philosophy was taught at the Portico and in the Grove, and both Epicurean and Stoic instilled the Delphic Oracle into the minds of students, "Know thyself". But both these and contemporary masters clung to that baneful distinction of methods which today among the Christians promotes a host of diverse and incongruous rituals and denominations.

The Stoic said he desired virtue only: not pleasure, but the denial of pleasure is the highest virtue, the self-torturing ascetic alone enters the haven of wisdom. While the Epicurean persuasively declared that he, too, desired virtue only, but since virtue brings the *highest* pleasure he would not destroy his capacity for wholesome and perfect abandon to happiness by barbarous mutilations, but would refine and exalt his sense of beauty and harmony by the channel of pleasure, and thus invite and enchain progressively the better and the best.

Their ultimate aim was one, but their methods differed, and caused the most radical opposition among their respective votaries. But naturally, as the Grecian was behind us in the ages, the veil curtaining the occult powers and potencies was also denser, and psychic phenomena enfolded in obscurity. Every age adds to the sum of knowledge by contributing its own experiments and aspects of life. With the larger perspective and more exalted standpoint of our spiral round we can examine both schools and recognise their virtues and deficiencies. Both were correct as far as they went, but one took a departure at the development of will and the [Page 14] other at the line of imagination; neither fully recognised how inseparable these two functions of the Soul must ever be; both stopped short when they declared a given method as a universal method.

The inexhaustible variations of nature, whose multiples of seven grow beyond human calculation, should teach man that no two minds can follow one line of evolution, or conform in detail to a given code of

morals, each mental centre being the focalization of aeons of impressions, assimilations and reflections. Within the universe of imagination, no two can occupy the same point. "As like as two peas" is a phrase frequently used to express almost identity, but there never were two peas alike, nor even two atoms. Far less can the most subtle and potent inhalations of the soul be labelled and parcelled and be made generally applicable to man as a moral panacea.

All active methods as well as all passive experiences that lead to the recognition of innate power, a larger consciousness of tenderness and charity and helpfulness towards man, are correct. *There is no one method.* Each man must seek his own and abide by it, for our paths of evolution are as manifold as human types.

In fact the degree of evolution of any personality is determined by his independence of *thinking and willing*, his rebellion against the modifications of environment and race-habit.

A. R. Parsons in a lecture on "Parsifal" pithily declares:..... "while all Christians may be united in charity, the only ones who can think just alike are those who never think at all beyond the point of thinking it best to let others do their thinking for them".

Let each man think out his own thoughts as he feels his own feelings, and his education in Theosophy will have begun. It is the essence of all philosophy to accept the truth under every garb and in all masquerading systems promulgated by wistful Humanity.

The vexing questions of past ages regarding man's relations to pure spirit are simplified in the popular axiom that man is an epitome of the universe and contains within himself on a small scale all the potencies of the unlimited whole — as a drop of water contains the same proportion of gases as the vast sea. Holding, then, within himself the eternal essence and its antithesis, it would seem evident that he is responsible not to any outside agency or remote consciousness for the qualities and attributes of his being, but is in fact his own preserver and his own destroyer.

The scheme of vicarious atonement, which in its literal acceptance has so long clouded the intelligence and impeded the moral freedom of men, is no longer found to involve that justice which we demand in the foundation of things, and the honest mind discards an idle play of words where its most sacred potencies are involved. [Page 15]

That every atom has within itself a portion of divinity, that every man has within himself the possibilities of a God: this is reiterated again and again in all the Mysteries from the most ancient to the present day.

Modern science declares the same idea in the inseparability of substance and force. The germ or life-essence of each individuality exists immaculate in the pure ethers and cannot be corrupted or destroyed — it is the real vital kernel that feeds the consciousness of man, *with a determination to exist somewhere and somehow*, that lifts him from the gloom of misfortune and lovelessness and whispers of a possible immortality.

The inspiration to act comes from the Unknown and is irresistible. Ceaselessly he works, feels and reflects under the impetus of this secret power, vacillates between the higher and lower poles of consciousness, and if he exhausts the resources of his environment before being poised in the subjective sphere of purified imagination, he resumes a new environment, and the struggle with a round of experiences begins anew in persistent variation, until the purpose of his inmost soul is accomplished. What the purpose may be is left to the discovery of his imagination and to the realization of his will. Were perfect indifference possible, then alone might break the connection between the human consciousness and the higher or overshadowing intelligence.

Each may apply the test to himself and ascertain to what degree he is poised in the upper or lower half of his dual nature. If he is exercising to the fullest capacity those functions which lead into the abstract, refining his imagination by study of the beautiful and the true, cultivating his will by overcoming natural obstacles without and within himself, he may be certain that a firm cord binds him to his soul, that he is linked to "the thing in itself" as some German savants would say.

No one can determine for another whether he is in possession of a soul, for however inert and self-centred an Ego may appear, hidden in some repressed and unapproachable nook there are latent virtues which, though burning low, will surely burst forth in new volumes of life throughout the series of incarnations. But for himself, on the contrary, man can positively realize how far he is linked to his own soul by the character of his motives, whether they spring from the abyss of egotism and self-devotion and in gratification of mere sensuous demands, or whether they result from the eager stress to meet and mingle with the essence of things — to give oneself — to serve.

It is this soul service that creates genius and distinguishes it from an ordinary, average, imitative mind. The genius forgets his personality in contemplating and expressing the abstract; in music, in poetry, in art and philosophy, he views the reflection of universal harmony, he *feels* it until he becomes it. Rich in imagination, rich in will to shape his ideal on the [Page 16] phenomenal plane, he is a true magician and works towards the germination of the world's soul.

Kant defines will as "a kind of causality belonging to living agents, in so far as they are rational", and freedom as "such a property of that causality as enables them to be efficient agents independently of outside cause determining them; as, on the other hand, necessity is that property of all irrational beings which consists in their being determined to activity by the influence of outside causes". All ethical philosophers agree that the dearest purpose of being is the subjection of the blind forces of nature and movements of mere instinct to the conscious royalty of the *will*. The world seems but a great initiation ground in whose successive phenomena the will is to be trained and purified. Emerson recognised it in these lines:

“So nigh to grandeur is our dust
So near to God is man,
When duty whispers low ‘thou must’
The youth replies ‘I can’ ”.

Webster defines will merely as exercise of volition. It is more than this, it is *intelligent* exercise of volition. Volition we share in common with brutes, but will belongs exclusively to man.

We are constantly being brought into relation to two sets of laws, the *natural* or physical, and *moral*. Natural law relates to phenomena only, while the moral deals with noumena or inherent realities. When the *natural* law and the *moral* law are antithetic it depends entirely on the purity of the will, *i.e.*, to what extent it has been cultivated and allied to reason, whether the natural or moral law shall hold the ascendancy.

True spirituality is not virtue merely, or goodness; it is the perception of the inherent truth of things — the power to free the consciousness from the obscuring bondage of sense and lifting it into the heights of pure reflection.

Unfortunately spirituality and piety have too long been associated, until the former has come to be synonymous with a degenerate, negative, pious attitude unfitting the mind for real exaltation.

To be truly spiritual is to think much, to feel much and thereby to live much. For who thinks *much* cannot degenerate. "It is a *little* learning", which is dangerous. At that point where the will of man suspends a natural law we have the vanishing point of the phenomenal world, and enter upon the presence of the transcendental — the abode of the soul.

All nature is full of apparent contradictions, because intangible but potent forces are at work, yet to be apprehended by man. With all the vast range of experimental medicine the most learned physician cannot define the action of a drug upon the nervous system — he observes effects merely. While magnetic laws are still so obscure that after observing the phenomena of human affinity and antipathy for centuries, man still wonders [Page 17] why he feels attracted or repelled by certain individualities and terms such instincts "love" and "hate".

At every turn we meet effects of mysterious and complex causes. The law of gravitation appears almost universal, yet it is totally suspended at that instant when the plant sends its first cell upwards and away from the clogged earth, in radical opposition to the magnetic vortex of our globe, and triumphantly lifts its delicate blossom to the zenith.

Man also takes his departure from the animal kingdom at that instant when he resolves to *act* in harmony with his *intuitions* or inspiration of truth, at whatever cost to his immediate personality. It is then that the law of mere instinct sinks back into inaction and death.

He thereby contributes to the finer forces of nature and becomes the crucible in which pure spirit is wrought; hence it becomes the highest duty of man to use every occasion for the cultivation of his will, so that whether impoverished in all that he holds dear, or on the pinnacle of bliss, he may constantly realize the immaculate power of self-government.