

A Sketch of Theosophy

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Theosophy is knowledge of that which is unknowable to our present faculties. Anyone commencing to study could not do better than make himself acquainted with the modern (and also ancient) science of hypnotism or mesmerism. The volume in the International Scientific series by Binet and Fere, followed by that of Dr. Gregory of Edinburgh on Animal Magnetism, would supply evidence enough that the hypnotic process can show in man the possibility of three distinct planes of consciousness, the one in which we move, think, and have our being, being the lowest. The second stage of hypnotism is that in which the subject becomes nearly unconscious of his immediate surroundings, but acquires the power of seeing and hearing without any regard to distance. A boy, for example, hypnotised in Dr. Gregory's presence, describes with perfect accuracy the doings of persons and the arrangement of furniture in other rooms and other houses. Another power belonging to this, the second plane of consciousness, is that of psychometry. The wife of Professor Denton, the geologist, on being shown a fragment of Cicero's house, described not only this building and the orator, but also the previous owner of it, Sully, the dictator; And from a single bone or tooth of antediluvian animals she saw, and even experienced the sensations of its body and life, many of which details Denton afterwards verified. The third plane of consciousness, known to theosophists as Samadhi, that possible only to the very elect of humanity, is better spoken of later. It is sufficient to point out that hypnotism properly studied will prove the possibility for us of a mode or degree of consciousness intermediate between this samadhic ecstasy and the consciousness of daily life, and wherein new powers of perception, reprovion, and thought arise. The problem of the theosophist is to evolve in himself permanently, what is temporary in the mesmerised subject.

Theosophy recognises seven components, or six sheaths and a nucleus in each individual man. The lowest is the body we see and feel with. An ethereal counterpart or photograph of it, the astral body, is sometimes seen after death in graveyards and at the séances of spiritualists. It is then quite unconscious, and dissolves shortly in the ether, though it has important functions during life.

It may be called the third principle, the second being " life", or that physical force which, during life maintaining the molecular activities of the body, is after death assimilated by those lower organisms whose activity constitutes putrefaction. The fourth principle is that living entity, the animal soul, whose activities man has in common with the lower animals. The fifth is the thinking soul, wherein inheres the conception of " I-ness". Of the sixth and seventh it is sufficient now to say that they are a direct emanation of the Divine Sun of the Universe. It is these which obscurely (for us now) prompt philanthropy, unselfishness and the performance of duty. These are part of the soul of the world, and are not, like the others, individualized for individual men. Now the first item in death is the departure of the whole conscious six principles from the seventh, the body, which then decays. The man then sheds, as it were, the animal soul, and the lowest elements of his mind, leaving them as scarcely conscious remnants in the astral world. These have as their sheath or vehicle the astral body or filmy counterpart of the dead man and from this arises the ghost stories of all nations and times. For to certain individuals

and at certain times it becomes visible, and even when not seen may be felt. But it is not the real man, whose destiny has carried him elsewhere.

The consideration of those various grades in the totality of a man which theosophists term "principles", leads us to the distinction between our *personality* and *individuality*. In common speech the terms are mixed, but very different significance should be attached to them. The individuality is the thread upon which successive personalities are strung, a new personality for every new incarnation of the individuality. But the simile of successive pearls threaded upon one string is not entirely correct. For the pearls are not of equal value, and much of each is worthless. But few of the thoughts, hopes, loves and aspirations of a man's daily life are worthy to enter into his spiritual and permanent individuality, or can represent any sort of growth. Successive lives are successive schools, and we must continue to be taught until we have learnt the lesson. Men spend their lives in the immediate present, and do little which has any bearing upon futurity, far less upon eternity.

They work and think that they may eat, drink, marry, get on, and somehow be happy, and it must often happen that at the end of life there has not been thought or done a single thing which had not for its concern, the mere temporary personality. The man's individuality has not extracted a single lesson from that life, it has not grown, and therefore *that very life* it must live again. But every attempt to do duty for its own sake fully, every act of unselfishness, every act of help to a fellow-creature of whatever kind, by these comes wisdom, by these the stature of man's individuality grows, something has been learnt, there is less to learn, less fight to be fought in the next life, and something of the animal soul has been transmitted into terms of the human and spiritual souls.

The full assimilation of these impulses is not effected during life. After death, when the four lower principles have been cast away, whatever of permanent value has resulted from their life-activity is slowly added to the higher three. The time thus occupied is very extended, and the individual, unhampered by any of the limitations of his earth-personality, with quite freed spiritual vision is said to rest in "Devachan", the "abode of the Gods", the origin of the Christian doctrine of "Heaven". But this state of immeasurably high and clear consciousness (called Samadhi, ecstasy, or trance, if attained during earth-life) must come to an end. The aspirations during life toward ultimate truth or divinity are few, and in time satisfied. The clear devachanic consciousness dies down, a new earth-life dawns, and a new personality and new social surroundings are entered in accordance with the acquired tendencies and deserts of the individual. So the entire conditions of earth-life are the school for growth. We find our place therein in accord with Karma, the law of divine justice. The man of feeble mind has left his mind unused in his former incarnation. Let it not be objected that we have no memory of these former lives. We know that flame burns, yet have forgotten the individual finger-burnings that taught us. So in the greater matters. We have in a measure learnt the lesson, but forgotten the individual facts upon which it is founded. It is well that we should not fool away our time in the vast storehouses of dead houses. We have therefore to recognise that where we are we ought to be, and that the productive worship of this law of conscious justice or Karma is effected in the strict doing of the duties entailed by our surroundings, whatever they may be.

Theosophy states again the Platonic Doctrine of pre-existent ideas, that is it teaches that the visible world is but the clothing, the expression in matter of types pre-idealised in the Universal Consciousness. In the subjective evolution of man he therefore passes from the form to its ideal prototype, and from this inward to the divine mind and reason it expresses. The Theosophist is therefore a Pantheist, and inasmuch as

the septenary man is the epitome of the universe, the Delphic injunction, "Man know thyself", meant — be omniscient. We have seen that the permanent re-incarnating individuality is a trinity consisting of Atma, Buddhi, Manas; or spirit, spiritual soul, and human soul. Theosophy defines Manas (the human soul) as the gazer upon ideas direct; and if it can, so to say, saturate itself with Atma-Buddhi, it gets thereby consciously in union with the inmost mind of the universe, with the producer of the ideas of which Manas (the higher ego) is the spectator and matter the clothing. But Manas is a quality of consciousness but little active in ordinary men. We only know its lower pole as manifested in the operations of brain, its reasoning or logical pole. Its higher pole, the intuitive mind, the receiver of primary direct cosmic ideas beyond the range of reason is nearly inactive as yet in the consciousness of the ordinary man. Using the lowest pole of mind, we can perceive no more than the material universe of forms, and only so far as this can impress the material senses. Using this crude information, we can only reason upon it as fast as the material brain will permit.

It is an hypothesis of the materialist thinkers that mind is a function of matter, and varies therefore in its activity with the rapidity of the molecular changes in the brain and sense organs. To this the Theosophist replies that though the molecular activity of these organs and the brain do vary with each other and correspond, that nevertheless the activity and scope of mind do *not* vary with this molecular activity. To use the illustration of a well-known Theosophist, in childhood the senses are keenest because their molecules are most actively unstable, and the vivid and rapidly changing thought of the child indicate supremely healthy instability of its brain molecules. Yet the *power of thinking* and its depth are then least, though physical activity is at its best. Physical activity begins to go downhill after thirty-five, but mental evolution goes on for some years, and may even go on, ripening and deepening, when the poor physical body has long fallen into decrepitude.

So mind and physique do not vary as each other, but somewhat independently, quite independent of physical changes is the intuitive or spiritual pole of Manas, and hence its power of repeated incarnations.

The lesson is obvious. It is the aim of the Theosophist to let no thought cross his physical mind that is not worthy of permanent life, to raise his whole thinking self to the level of its highest point and thus become immortal. He will spend no energy in any thought or act of physical gratification, no energy in any gratification of that temporary personality he is too apt to regard as his all, thus in time transmuting like the alchemists, the base into the noble, undiminished. If, however, a man make no such attempt, if he never has any aspiration that may link him to his higher Ego, never any thought for others, and never any but a selfish or a sensual one, then it may happen that in time that Ego of which he has remained so ignorant, will desert him, the link will be dissolved, and the bridge to his immortality destroyed.

Therefore it is the aim of the Theosophical Society to bring about practical action on the basis of the brotherhood of men. It is not a school of magic. It does not aim at producing men who can shift furniture without touching it, or who can see their neighbour's thoughts and learn his secrets, or who can hypnotise him into given lines of conduct against his will. Whatever occultism can be learned in the society is taught that it may have an immediate outcome in the betterment of the condition of men. Perhaps it is not at once possible to eradicate selfishness, and it may be that it transmutes into rarefied forms of itself, before vanishing. Theosophy teaches, that *in proportion as a man benefits others does he benefit himself*. Get him to believe this, and, still with his own welfare in view, he works for others. Certainly an improvement on the injuring of others, though the motive be the same.

Man has two opposite poles to his nature; of the lower one we see but too many examples around us wherever men are gathered together; of the possibilities in the other direction we know nothing, or only such as history and tradition have brought down to us in rare and isolated cases. Theosophy teaches that there is a spark of the Divine in each one, the light of which is only dimmed or lost by passion, greed and selfishness, and that until the lower nature or sense of personality is broken down by conscious effort through a long series of incarnations or earth-lives, re-union with divinity cannot be effected. Everything, therefore, which tends to emphasise the sense of personality or separateness, which feeds the lower nature, retards the progress of the Spirit towards re-union; of the objects of the Society; therefore, Universal Brotherhood stands first in order and in importance, and it must not be supposed that this is merely an Utopian dream and means nothing but a rosy prophecy. It falls upon every member of the Society to personally advance this cause, and Theosophy teaches that this can only be done by a persistent self-sacrifice, not occasionally and in public only, but through every moment of the waking life. The results of such a training are far wider, far deeper than will be at once apparent, and to clearly comprehend what these results are, we must go just a little further into Theosophical teaching.

Theosophy teaches that every man contains within himself one principle which far transcends all the others, of the nature of which knowledge, is at present impossible. This is the spirit which is the only permanent and imperishable principle, and it is to the endowment of the spirit with consciousness towards which mankind is tending. The progress of thus bringing the spirit within the field of consciousness is by a removal of those material obstructions caused by selfishness and the sense of personality which alone prevent its accomplishment, and it will thus be seen why the life of the most rigid altruism is enjoined upon all who would rise above their lower natures and make progress on the path which ends in final re-union with Divinity.

One of our leaders has said: "He who does not practise altruism; he who is not prepared to share his last morsel with a weaker or poorer than himself; he who neglects to help his brother man of whatever race, nation, or creed whenever and wherever he meets suffering, and who turns a deaf ear to the cry of human misery; he who hears an innocent person slandered and does not undertake his defence as he would undertake his own — is no Theosophist".

The body itself must be brought under the most rigid discipline, so that it may be made a means toward advancement instead of an obstacle. A broad and generous sympathy with suffering wherever it be met with must be cultivated. Every action and every thought must be in full accord with the man's highest ideal.

The upward evolution of man is an ever-widening bend of fellowship between men, an ever-increasing tendency to think and to sympathise with others, the continuous rise of consciousness, from the lower to the higher, from the personality to the individuality, For consciousness passes from the lower to the higher principles only as man himself develops, and with one who had developed *none* of his higher principles, the self-consciousness would be purely that of personality. The desires of the lower nature cannot be satisfied (the reverse, in fact) by the satisfying of desires in another, and it is only as self-consciousness passes to the individuality, that the happiness of others can be any motive for action. And these desires but grow, with growing attempts to satiate them, they can only be starved by studied neglect, all conscious effort being directed to the benefit of others; and in the midst of the seething misery and grinding poverty, which goes with the majority to make up this boasted nineteenth century civilization, the question constantly arises in every generous mind, "What can I do to lessen the evils

around ?" Many who would gladly give themselves, and all that they have, to lighten the heavy burden of the toilers, are so hemmed in by social environment, so shackled by conflicting duties that their hands are tied and they beat their hearts out against their prison bars. To such Theosophy comes as a liberator, for it teaches that there is a power in *Right Thought*. The silent aspiration after a better social organization, the deep desire for the brotherhood of man is within the reach of all. Mind acts on mind. The long pondered thought will influence the social atmosphere of the thinker. What he can only think, another more happily circumstanced, moved by his thought, may have the power to do. Like the circles that agitate the surface of a lake when a pebble has been thrown in the water, are the waves set in motion through the spheres by a thought. The world is made up by its unit, let each unit set his mind in harmony with the divine mind and the misery and discord that sends its dull groan of pain vibrating through this sad sad hearted world will be changed into a glorious chord of full toned joy. What is wanted of every human being is that he should "stand still long enough to feel the currents of law sweeping through his life, and then think with and obey them".

All of us have heard something about the Willing game, and the exhaustive experiments in thought transference carried on under the auspices of the Psychical Research Society, and whatever ideas we may entertain concerning these gropings into unknown laws, there can be but one opinion about the highly-suggestive nature of the phenomena obtained.

It has been shown that by riveting the attention of any given object till it stands out clearly in the mind's eye, you project an image of that object on the surrounding atmosphere, which acts consciously or unconsciously upon the brains of persons in the neighbourhood of the image so projected. Scenes from life, pictures of places, estimates of character, may be thus and doubtless constantly are silently conveyed from mind to mind.

The odours of flowers, the strains of music, the loved voices of friends, the song of Nature — that low monotone, like a musical sigh long drawn out, which the murmurings of the forest breathe into our ears, the babbling streams whisper — all, in short, of which we obtain cognizance by the bodily senses is wafted to us by waves and vibrations of atmospheric air. But what wafts a thought from mind to mind? What is the nature of that inscrutable power, force, or element, which transmits from soul to soul, sensations, ideas, or powerful impulses to action?

How, for instance, does a panic spread with the rapidity of lightning through a crowd ? There is no need to speak a word, nor even to give a glance. By some subtle, mysterious process the same thought, the same impression and feeling will instantly permeate a mass of people and sway them as the storm winds sway the forest trees. What lies at the basis of this telepathy ? What is the invisible agent of transmission ? It cannot be by mere chance or accident, any more than that the growth of a flower into beauty occurs by accident.

Theosophy teaches there is an *inner* soul-atmosphere along whose etherial waves and vibrations the soul within us receives its daily *pabulum* of thoughts, ideas, and impressions. All the highest inspirations of genius are received from loftier realms of mind by means of this etherial agent of transmission, acting in the invisible realms of the soul-world, within and around us. It is, in few words, an inner aerial ocean, giving mysterious communication between mind and minds — along whose waves the divine grace itself may flow to our souls, when we place ourselves in *mystic rapport* to receive it — the thoughts of angels

be conveyed to us; and indeed the very elements of life be transmitted to everything that exists — as by the Breath of God. In fact this mysterious element was called by the ancient mystics, "The Body of the Holy Ghost".

But more than this, within this translucent atmosphere is reflected, as within a mirror, every thought we have, every action we perform, every word we speak. The soft sighs of love, the cry of brutal rage, the shrieks of misery, dying out of our earthly atmosphere, are prolonged in ever extending echoes in this inner atmosphere.

We live surrounded in visibly by the soul-world we make by our silent, secret thoughts, and inner life, for we project upon it continually the very essence of our being, whether it be good or evil. The record of our lives, that which is known to the world, and that which is unknown, is indelibly photographed around us upon this ambient, living element. Were we more spiritual than material, were the maximum of our growth, or evolution, upon the higher soul-side instead of upon the lower animal side, we should have the inner physic senses opened, by which we should see and hear in this ethereal realm of being. Already do we adventure upon small discoveries in this hidden domain, when we experiment on "thought transference" for the amusement of ourselves and friends. The sensitives, or "percipients" as they are called, have only to concentrate their mental faculties, and by *soul-vision* they read the thought reflected in the "Astral light".

This is by no means, however, a new revelation. It is as old as the world; and is, after all, but a revival of a knowledge possessed by the ancients — lost, or repudiated by modern science, in all probability, as an old superstition. Latterly, however, science begins to stumble upon it, as a possible element, and calls it "luminiferous ether", "radiant matter", "mind-stuff", etc.

Here we have the key to much that is dark in our social system. Murderous thoughts will produce deeds of violence. Greed and low ambitions will bring forth a crop of sweating dens, a phantasmagoria of deformed toilers and skeleton stitchers. The costly drawing-rooms of the West will find their counterpart in the foetid cellars of the East. Thought of self will give us its reflection in a dehumanised monster. Thought of others will silently act on the surrounding world till cleanliness, purity and universal harmony chase away the sad sights that pierce the thin veil that Society, shocked at the sores of Lazarus, has cast over the social ulcer festering in our midst.

The more a man studies the "Astral World", or "Light", the better he is likely to become. We hypnotise each other at other times than those during which we are making passes over them, or holding buttons above their eyes. Emerson once spent an evening with Carlyle during the course of which the two men spoke nothing, but sat wrapped in thought and smoke. Yet, to both, the evening was something very different from one spent by each alone. As with lovers on a summer evening, there was talk without words. The Astral Light (the "thought ether" of Richardson), is at once the vehicle of unspoken ideas and the home of the living thoughts of living and dead men. By these we are hourly hypnotised, by these our own thoughts are coloured, and prompted, and even generated. Our characters are indexed by the sum of our life-thoughts. So in part we are the incarnation of the thoughts of the men who have lived, as our bodies are in part the reunification of the scattered particles. Yet with whatever individuality is our own, we are an ever-playing fountain of new thoughts, streaming forth into the Astral World to blend with those of the past, and to do their part in prompting and moulding the thoughts and characters of our children of

every race and caste.

So the man who better his own life is bettering the atmosphere of the future; in freeing his own thoughts from contamination, is making the moral struggle of the future easier, and aiding the upward set of humanity; a humanity into which he, the individuality, will be again and again reborn, to reap the pleasure and pain of his own sowing. All occultism has this practical outcome, and this is the reason why it is taught in the Theosophical Society.

Modern research has brought to light a fact which has been more than suspected by a certain class of students in all ages. This fact relates to the existence of a very ancient system or body of occult knowledge which can now be traced back in its influence and exoteric forms all through the middle ages, through the Greek and Roman civilisations, and their contemporary dynasties in the East, through Egypt, Persia and India, until it is lost in those far back ages which saw the birth and childhood of the Aryan races.

The idea is being forced upon the attention of scholars, that all the great world religions have been derived from this one primal source, the Great Wisdom Religion, a Secret Doctrine of the Initiates. Many names have been given at different periods of the world's history to this body of occult knowledge, the key to which was kept a profound secret by its custodians, those, viz., who through initiation had earned a right to its deepest mysteries. Sages, philosophers, adepts, and mystics in all ages have drawn upon this Secret Doctrine for their knowledge and inspiration; have hinted as plainly as they dared, at its more recondite secrets and transcendental knowledge.

The nineteenth century has witnessed a great revival of knowledge and science, and it is not to be wondered at that, among other things, this Secret Doctrine should once more emerge from the obscurity into which it was thrown by the superstition, ignorance, and fanaticism of the middle ages, and the influence of ecclesiastical religion.

The element of super-naturalism is fast disappearing under the influence of modern scientific generalisations, and any doctrine or teaching which presents itself for acceptance among the readers and thinkers of today, must undergo this first test, as to whether it can stand in line with the law of the conservation of energy, and the ordered sequence of cause and effect which we discover in every domain of natural phenomena,

Now, not only is this the fundamental claim of the various tenets of the Secret Doctrine itself, so far as it has been presented to the world up to the present time, but if it can be proved fully and indisputably that a transcendental knowledge of man's nature has always existed in the world — so far at all events as we have any historical records — and that all the great religions and philosophies are but echoes or reflections of these occult doctrines, overlaid and perverted in most instances by ages of superstition and ignorance; then the revival of this knowledge will clear away entirely that element of supernaturalism in religion, which is the great cause of the total rejection of all religious doctrines by the intelligent thinkers of the present day. But it will do more than this. In freeing religion from its supernatural element, its work will be constructive of a new and surer basis for the practice of religion as a matter of conduct instead of belief.

The present crisis in the religious world is produced not so much by sheer disbelief as by uncertainty. This is above all an age of enquiry, and woe betide any teaching, religious or scientific, which cannot at any rate make a decent pretence of fulfilling its undertakings, and giving its *raison d'être* in no uncertain voice. That the religion of today is making little or no headway towards the regeneration of the world is manifest to anyone who has taken the trouble to make himself acquainted with the social life of the people. Hideous misery and open, unblushing vice have never been more rampant than they are today, and in the presence of this official religion is dumb and helpless. It knows not the cause and still less the remedy, and apparently cannot distinctly hear the voice of materialism, which loudly scoffs at its claims and derides its fancied remedies.

It must not be supposed that Theosophy is adverse to Christianity or to any other religion in a pure form. It does, however, assert that the pure gem of truth upon which it is founded is obscured by a weight of useless creed under which it is lost to sight. It is by a careful comparison of the world's religions that the Theosophical Society hopes to arrive at a solid basis of truth, and thus to strengthen, and not to weaken, the hands of the religionist.

The doctrine of reincarnation, besides throwing an irradiating light upon the social problems of our day, has a very important bearing on the vexed question of education. Hitherto discussion has confined itself principally to the best methods of developing the human being, for contact and intercourse with his fellow man; and whether, what may be roughly described as the altruistic or the egoistic method has been advocated, whether, to put it in other words, cultivation of the individual powers to their highest perfection, or the concentration of effort on the development of certain faculties, likely to render their possessor of greatest service to the community at large, the end in view, has always been a preparation for use — fulness in this short earth-life. But with the acceptance of the doctrine of reincarnation (and its universal acceptance by educated men is only a question of time), quite other considerations claim our attention. Of necessity the bread-winning faculties must always, for the majority, be those cultivated with the most unremitting attention. And in view of the greatest good of the greatest number it is well that it should be so. But most of us have talents, or at least some proclivities, which we at present entirely neglect, from the hurry of life and the assurance that we shall have little chance of making much progress, which considered as buds that may reward our care some thousands of years hence, by blossoming in glorious perfection, would receive such cultivation as opportunity allowed.

While the doctrine of Karma will act as the most powerful deterrent from evil, its corollary doctrine of reincarnation cannot fail to prove a magical stimulus to good. Plain living and high thinking has held out few inducements, in this materialistic age, for even the "religious", who consider themselves secure of a mansion in heaven, have not seen the necessity of repudiating the advice "to eat and drink", for they too have said "for tomorrow we die", and being "made over" through vicarious atonement, practically see no end to be attained by special effort. But when once the truth strikes home that we are daily and hourly making our own future; that every faculty developed, every virtue cherished, every victory gained over the lower nature, will tell in future incarnations, then education will change its whole methods, and every human being will become an ardent disciplinarian.

But at present there is no question more frequently asked of Occultists than, what is Karma. This arises doubtless from the fact that this term is used so often in Theosophical teachings and writings. In the course of this attempt to define Karma, the reason of such common use of the word will be apparent. The "Key to Theosophy" says "Karma is the Ultimate Law of the Universe, the source, origin, and fount of

all other laws which exist throughout nature. Karma in its effects is an unfailing redresser of human injustice, and of all the failures of nature: a stern adjuster of wrongs, a retributive law which rewards and punishes with equal impartiality, it can neither be propitiated, nor turned aside". It is evident from this description of Karma, that it has many aspects. Thus applied to the Cosmos, it is the great system of spiritual, mental and physical evolution, which *everything* undergoes, outlined in Occult Philosophy. In the human kingdom of nature, we speak of the Karma of collective humanity, also of national and individual Karma. We cannot know what Karma is in itself, its effects being alone known. The experiences of the "wise men" extending over thousands of ages has, however, shown that Karmic laws operate as absolute and unerring *equity, wisdom and intelligence*. The observed order of facts called *laws* by scientific authorities on this plane, are equally unknowable in themselves as Karma to Occultists. No man of science pretends to know the cause of gravitation, or the cause of any other of the universal laws observed working on the physical plane. Karma is perhaps more often referred to by Theosophists in its moral aspect than in any other. Any human action which disturbs the harmony of the course of human evolution in the journey through which all must pass before attaining existence on higher planes than this, creates bad Karma. For any cause set in motion must produce results good or bad, according to the nature of the impulse. Every disturbance of the balance of nature will produce an equal reaction until the equilibrium is restored. An elastic ball thrown against the wall rebounds on the thrower. In like manner the producer of discord must experience himself the rebound caused by his own action. As the "*Key to Theosophy*" says, there is no real distinction between an action and its outcome. One is the natural consequence of the other. Good is Harmony; Evil is Discord. All pain and suffering are results of want of harmony. All kinds of evil consequence or discord are caused by selfishness in some form or other. For selfish action on the part of any of those fragments of the One called humanity, tends to retard the great natural system of evolution, which works incessantly throughout the ages for the elevation of all. Such opposing movements are subject to the unfailing reaction of Karmic law, until the great lesson of life is learnt with pain and suffering by wrong and evil doers. This, then, is the exalted and noble system of Ethics unfolded by Occult Philosophy, teaching the paramount claims of duty, warning of the certain consequences of all thoughts, words, and actions according to their nature, showing the uselessness of repentance once mischief is done, and indicating rewards which follow obedience to the dictates of conscience, and the behests of the Higher Self.

In all probability, the teachings of the Wisdom Religion, or Theosophy, contain no tenet more difficult of comprehension to Western minds than that of reincarnation. We have, of course, no trouble in understanding what is meant by the term, considering the matter in a superficial way. But many of us are quite unable to get a fair mental grasp of this occult truth; it seems constantly to elude all efforts to make it our own. This, however, is not surprising when we consider the circumstances of the case. For although all Theosophical teachings have necessarily great obstacles to overcome before they can stand on the same footing as ideas of Western origin, there are in this matter special difficulties in the way. The greatest of these arises, doubtless, from the fact that the tenet of reincarnation is entirely opposed to the doctrines referring to man's post-mortem state now-taught by the various sects who divide Christendom. These allow each human being but one earth-life. In contrast the Wisdom Religion allots each of us many hundreds. Another, but minor obstacle to the doctrine in question, lies in the notion that many persons have, who possess little or no knowledge of Theosophy, that reincarnation implies rebirths of the human Ego in the forms of animals. How very far this idea is from the truth we shall presently show. There is no doubt that this conception of reincarnation, as implying a degrading association of the human with the animal kind, has prevented the occult doctrine from receiving the consideration it merits. Occultists constantly hear as an objection to reincarnation that we have no memory of our past existences. There is very little weight in this argument plausible as it seems at first sight. For who can say that he has a perfect recollection of the past events of his present life ? If, therefore, none of us can claim a complete

memory in any one stage of life, why expect it to extend over a large number ? But it may be further urged that although the memory is incomplete as regards any particular existence, yet it compares with a total absence of the quality in connecting many lives together.

In order to answer this objection properly we must now give attention to a portion of Occult teaching directly bearing on the matter. Waking and sleeping are both states of consciousness (of which there are several) related to each other, and not differing sufficiently to prevent memory from bridging over the latter, and being more or less continuous in action. It is, however, otherwise with the state of existence which ensues to the Ego after death. This being a state of consciousness on another plane entirely is not bridged by the memory attached to this one. We shall now be asked in all probability, what then is the value of the connection between the numerous earth-lives of the individual ? We will endeavour to explain it. The Ego carries forward into each new incarnation the *results* of its past experiences and actions, its affinities, attractions, and repulsions. It determines the surroundings attending each new birth by its conduct in preceding lives. The *individuality* is ever the same. The *personality* changes each incarnation. Throughout the great cycle of human evolution the former assimilates the essences of these numerous separate existences. Reincarnation, in fact, is one of the chief methods by which the perfect law of Karma works, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of any other way under present circumstances of life by which strict justice could be meted out to all human kind on this plane. A proof that all of us have had previous earth-lives lies in the great differences of capacity, aptitude for progress, and a multitude of other well-known matters distinguishing individuals and races from each other. Advocates of the doctrine of the purely physical evolution of the human race may ascribe these facts to heredity. But if so, they are asserting that mental phenomena can be expressed in terms of physical. In other words, mind may be a mode of motion of matter, and nothing more. For it is impossible to conceive of there being any other connection between parents and offspring, than a physical one. But the idea that states of consciousness exhibit nothing but phenomena of a physical kind, is strenuously denied by the greatest thinkers of the evolutionary school.

Moreover, granting that heredity is the cause of children mentally resembling their parents, as often as not they do not do so, and seldom, if at all, in every particular. If, however, the Occult doctrine of re-incarnation is accepted all difficulties disappear. The Ego incarnates in those circumstances, and under the conditions for which it has before qualified itself in earth-lives. The birth of human beings in evil circumstances and enduring sufferings which they have *apparently* not earned, is unexplainable by either theologians or materialists in any other way consistent with their ideas of divine justice or the reign of immutable law.

Let us now see what the course of the Ego is, during its cycle of evolution. Starting on planes of existence lower than the mineral, it passes through these, and continuing its upward course then through the mineral, able, and animal kingdoms, culminating now in the human. Thus the Ego never descends from a higher to a lower stage, as before hinted at, but always ascends in its spiral path, from lower to higher states.

The old Wisdom Religion being the base of all creeds, its tenets, including Reincarnation, always formed their *esoteric* teachings. The latter doctrine has been openly taught in the chief oriental religions for ages, as most of us know, and a firm belief in it held by hundreds of millions of human beings now and in the past. Those who wish to see this highly important subject ably treated in all its aspects are recommended to read "Reincarnation", by E. D. Walker. This work contains an exhaustive collection of proofs from all

the ages. We will conclude with a quotation from a revered Theosophist: " What you think, what you speak, what you do, as well as whatever results your thoughts, words, and acts produce on yourself, and on those affected by them, and all under the category of the present Karma which will be sure and sway the balance of your life for good or for evil in your future reincarnation."

The belief in Reincarnation continues to grow. Almost unperceived it is beginning to make its way as one of the recognised treaties of today. So plausible is it indeed, and so much supported by evidence, that its presentation alone is causing it to receive careful examination at the hands of many who perceive the highest light which it sheds upon so many perplexing social questions which, without its aid, altogether defy solution.

By the orthodox teaching of today we are told that man lives but once upon this earth, and that during that life he sows the seeds of reward or punishment throughout eternity. That this explanation is not satisfactory, is more apparent today than it has ever been before. The varying duration of human life, opportunities and the absence of them, differences of disposition and character, and a thousand other problems, clamour for a solution which orthodoxy cannot give them.

The Reincarnationist claims for his theory that it not only explains these difficulties, but very many others which face us at every turn, and that it, moreover, supplies a scheme as comprehensive in its operation as it is just and generous. A life of even full duration is pitifully small when compared with eternity, and the stern realities of today and the uncertainty of the hereafter have done much to strengthen the hands of those who would fling away altogether the restraints of religion, saying "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die".

The Reincarnationist teaches: *That every man contains within himself a spark of the Divine, whose mission it is to effect re-union with its Divine source*, by freeing itself from the bands of matter by which it is confined. This cannot be done within the limits of one earth life, but requires a long succession of lives, the circumstances of each one being continued by those of the preceding ones. Each thought and deed sets in motion a force which must react in the same or a subsequent life, bringing in every case its exact counterpart, whether good or evil, and teaching a lesson which must be learned before further progress can be made. There is no sorrow which is not merited, and no joy which is not earned. This force which serves to bring the Ego back on to the earth plane is known as Karma, and is thus beautifully referred to in Sir Edwin Arnold's " Light of Asia " :—

It knows not wrath nor pardon; utter true
Its measures mete, its faultless balance weighs;
Times are as nought, tomorrow it will judge,
Or after many days."

The doctrine of Reincarnation is not unknown to Christianity. Origen and St. Jerome taught it, and St. Augustine refers to it favourably, while distinct traces of it may be found in the Bible. The subject is so full of interest as hardly to need a recommendation. An examination into its claims will not be labour lost, and will result in a wider, clearer idea of the Divine plan and an enlarged human sympathy,