

The Work of Theosophists by C.W. Leadbeater

Address delivered at the inauguration of the Federation of Theosophical Lodges
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[Page 1] I THANK you for your very hearty welcome, and I beg to offer you my hearty good wishes in return. Bombay is, as you say, the gateway of India towards the West, and so it happens that those from Western nations who come here to learn often enter by it. But I would have you remember that, though the Founders of the Theosophical Society are both of Western descent, Those who inspired them and sent them forth to do that vast and wondrous work were not Westerns but Easterns — not English nor Russian nor American, but Indian. The Society was founded in New York, but the knowledge upon which it was founded came from India; and we of the West can never forget that.

You who were born in this country cannot possibly understand what a revelation Oriental [Page 2] philosophy was to us in Europe. You have all your lives been aware of certain great facts of Nature; you have known of Evolution, of Reincarnation, of Karma, and so you have been able to form a rational theory of life. But we in the West knew none of these things; a few advanced thinkers were working at the idea of the evolution of form, but had no conception of the evolution of the ego, or soul. We had to keep our science and our religion in watertight compartments; for the one studied the facts of Nature and the other ignored or denied them.

But here suddenly burst out a great light in the darkness, here was a system set before us which was actually credible and reasonable, which brought order into all the chaos and confusion, solved a vast number of previously inexplicable problems, and gave us not only a hope but a certainty of future progress. You cannot wonder at our enthusiasm.

You spoke of me as a pillar of the Theosophical Society, which rather amused me, for I certainly never considered myself from that point of view. I have always avoided taking any office in the Society, except that I was its [Page 3] Recording Secretary for the year 1885, succeeding in that office Damodar Keshub Mavalankar, the son of the first President of your Blavatsky Lodge. You mentioned some books that I have written, and spoke of me as an Occultist, a title such as that is far too great an honor for me; I have always thought of myself as a student to whom certain advantages have been given, in order that I might thereby render a little help to my fellow-students. You are of course aware that in some of the books which you mentioned I have only a small part, for in several of them I had the very high honour of collaborating with our great President. It is very kind of you to say all these nice things about your visitors, and I suppose that the best acknowledgment that we can make is to try to live up to the excellent character that you give us.

Having thanked you for your welcome, let me now turn to the serious business of the meeting. The

Blavatsky Lodge, founded by H. P. B. and Colonel Olcott, was the first in India, and I think that I may very heartily congratulate you on its fifty years of solid work for the Cause, on the ability of many of its [Page 4] prominent members, and on the ready generosity which it has always displayed in connection with all Theosophical work. Now I have the honour and the pleasure of congratulating you on another forward step — the foundation of the Bombay Theosophical Federation.

I take it that the object of a Federation of Theosophical Lodges is always to bring those Lodges into closer connection with one another, and to establish a centre where all those members may meet at such times as they find convenient. You have in India two great Centres — the International Headquarters at Adyar, which is the true centre of the whole Society, and the centre of your Indian Section at the City of Benares. But the distances in this country are vast, and it must inevitably happen that there are many members who cannot gather at either of these points when the National Convention is held. It is therefore undoubtedly a good thing in the interests of the work that local Federations should be formed, so that those who cannot attend the great Convention may, nevertheless, obtain somewhat similar advantages without needing to travel so far. [Page 5]

It is, indeed, a very good thing that our members should meet as often as possible. I am sure that all of you who have attended one of the great Conventions must have been impressed with the strong feeling of Brotherhood on such occasions, and the joy of old friends meeting again after perhaps a prolonged separation. Of course, there is generally on such occasions much to be learned from lectures delivered by some of the older members, by those who have specialized along certain lines, or by those who have more time for study; yet I think that the promotion and intensification of that strong and joyous feeling of Brotherhood is perhaps the greatest benefit of all. The more often we meet, the better we shall understand one another, and that is one of the implied objects of our Society.

It may be that sometimes there has been a tendency to forget that great central idea. We have so splendid and so fascinating a system of philosophy that it is very natural that we should spend much of our time in studying it, discussing it, and lecturing about it; but we must not forget that the very object of its promulgation is to explain and to prove [Page 6] the great doctrine that all men are brothers. We are so interested in our studies that there is often a tendency to argue about them, and sometimes in such argument a member becomes unduly excited and tends a little to forget that very Brotherhood which is the basis of it all.

I do not know whether you realize that there was a time in the history of our Society when its members were liable to expulsion if it could be shown that they had spoken ill of a brother member; I am afraid that if that rule were enforced in the present day, our membership would be suddenly and rapidly reduced. Those of us who try to follow most closely the teaching and example of the great Masters of the Wisdom are gradually allowed the privilege of drawing into closer relation with Them. Such fortunate pupils are always extremely anxious to help more and more of their brethren to share the advantages which they enjoy, but naturally their success in such efforts depends upon the qualifications of the candidates. I think that you would be horrified if you knew how many of our brethren have missed the opportunity of gaining [Page 7] those advantages by this one sin of malicious gossip.

I know how terribly prevalent it is in the outside world; but that is no excuse for us, who are trying to study the inner and higher side of life as well as the merely physical. We know perfectly the harm that is done

by evil speaking and misunderstanding; the more we can meet together, the more we shall develop real brotherly feeling which will make misunderstanding and slander alike impossible. So I am always very much in favour of any kind of social gathering at which our members can come to know each other more intimately and to appreciate one another more truly.

You may have heard a little story of Charles Lamb which illustrates this point rather well. It seems that he was one day speaking disparagingly of a certain man, and the friend with whom he was conversing said to him: "You seem to have formed a bad opinion of this person; I thought you hardly knew him". "Of course I don't know him", replied Lamb; "if I knew him, I should like him". I think that is true of more people than one might suppose.[Page 8]

I hope that this Federation will have splendid success in whatever work it may attempt, and that in coming to know each other more intimately members may be encouraged to work even more strongly and enthusiastically together than they have done hitherto.

There is one point that it might be well to mention here. Be very careful that in your enthusiasm for this new Federation you do not neglect your personal duty to the Lodge to which you belong. Each Lodge is in itself a Center radiating good influence over its neighborhood; and the amount of that influence depends upon the regular attendance of its members at its meetings, and the energy and perseverance which they display in carrying on its work. Never think of what you can obtain *from* the Lodge, but of what you can give *through* the Lodge. The Lodge must be a unity in itself, though also an integral part of the larger unity of the Federation. A Lodge in which there is disunion, in which there are bickerings, jealousies, carping criticism and personal ill-feeling, will not be a source of strength to the Federation, [Page 9] but a weak and vulnerable point in it. There must be nothing of that sort here, if we are to reap the full benefit of today's work.

Much of your Address of Welcome seems to me to consist of a statement [I might almost say a complaint!] that the lectures and writings of our beloved Krishnaji [J.Krishnamurti] have upset the minds of many members, and shaken their faith in theosophical teaching, so that some have even left the Society in consequence. This is obviously not the time for the discussion of such matters, as they have nothing to do with the founding of the Federation; but I shall be glad to deal with them as fully as you wish at our Question Meetings. All I need say now is that if any man's comprehension of the great facts of Nature can be so easily shaken, then it *ought* to be shaken, for its foundations are evidently quite insecure.

The system which is called Theosophy is simply a statement of certain great and incontrovertible facts of Nature; nothing whatever that anyone can say or do will alter those facts, so it is foolish to deny them or fight against them; it is wiser to adapt ourselves to them. The only question upon which there [Page 10] can reasonably be any discussion or argument is how that adaptation can best be achieved and that is what each man must decide for himself.

Once more let me remind you that the Theosophical Society exists to promote Brotherhood, and to help to remove all the barriers to mutual understanding which arise from the differences of race, creed, sex, caste and color. It encourages the study of Comparative Religion, in order to show that all religions are

fundamentally the same in their requirements, and the study of the inner side of Nature, in order that we may thereby draw nearer to the Reality which lies behind this outer Maya, and order our lives accordingly. This is the fundamental object of our Society; and all that is done and said on its behalf is done and said with the view of promoting that object.

If people do not understand the Oriental system of philosophy upon which the whole idea of Brotherhood is based, it has to be explained to them; and even here in this country, where everyone is supposed already to know a great deal of that, it is often necessary to remind them of it, and to show [Page 11] how the inferences that can be drawn from the knowledge it gives may be applied in daily life. Obviously the only reason that any person can have for leaving such a Society is that he has ceased to accept the principle of Universal Brotherhood. If he has reached that stage, I fear that he would be of little use to the Society, nor would it be of much help to him until he had recovered that much of faith.

Remember that we do not join the Theosophical Society for the sake of any teaching that it can give us, for practically all that we have received has now been published openly to the world — except for certain directions as to meditation and other practices of Yoga, in which instruction can only be safely given under strict promises.

We ask no one who applies for admission to the Society what his belief may be; that is his own affair. We ask him only whether he accepts this idea of Brotherhood and is willing to work for it. Any man is always at liberty to change his point of view: he may receive new light upon some subject, he may look upon a truth from a new angle and so see additional facets of it. That is unquestionably [Page 12] all to the good. Truth has many facets, and the more of them a man can see, the wider become his sympathy and tolerance. The more light we can have on any subject, the better, so that the man's conception of it may widen out. But no widening of his consciousness should ever be allowed to interfere with the work that he is doing to help his brethren. It is true that in the course of its cycle of evolution the world is just now passing through a trying period, not only of commercial but of spiritual depression; a period in which a spirit of great restlessness, unreasonableness and unbelief is abroad. There has never been a time when the enlightenment of the Ancient Wisdom has been more needed than now. But can you not see that this very condition of affairs is a *test* for us — a test for the firmness of our foundations, of the living reality of our convictions, of our power to persevere under difficulties ? Are we coming well through that test, or are we not ?

There are weak brethren who say: " How can I know whether I am passing the test ? I am confused; I am uncertain; some teachers give this advice, others give that; I know not [Page 13] what to *believe*". Our Masters will not ask you what you *believe*; that, as I have said, is your own affair; but They *will* ask you what good work you are doing. You *can* know; you have an infallible criterion, if you will only be absolutely honest with yourselves. Are you living a higher, purer, nobler, and above all a more unselfish and *useful* life than you were ? Are you thinking ever less and less of yourself and your progress, less and less of gratifying your desires and your emotions, and ever more and more of serving your fellow-men ? Are you working more strenuously than ever ? If so, then you are passing your test; you are advancing, and our Masters' blessing will rest upon you. But those who for fancied self-realization or self-development forsake the helping of their brethren are moving backwards, not forwards. Deeds, not words alone, are the sign of real progress.

I have said that we do not join the Theosophical Society because of anything that we hope to obtain from it; we join it because we know that it exists for a good purpose — the promotion of Brotherhood — and we wish to [Page 14] take part in that good work. It is not for ourselves or for any benefit that we hope to gain that we band ourselves together in this work; for the work is entirely altruistic and is intended solely for the benefit of our fellow-men,

All work for the betterment of mankind is the Masters' work. Special lines have been indicated to us, and we are doing our best along those lines; but we most fully recognize that there are many other ways of doing good, and we are always glad that our brothers should help to promote any of them. To feed the bodies of the poor is indeed a good and worthy act, and often it is all that can be done for them; to feed their souls with spiritual knowledge, if you are able to give it, is a still higher deed; but there is no reason why both lines should not be followed simultaneously.

Anything that can be done to promote or to help towards a sane, humane and rational education is good work — exceedingly good work; and I am very glad to hear that much has been done in that direction here in Bombay. Another splendid enterprise which our lady [Page 15] members especially can take in hand is the attempt to ameliorate the lot of women, to raise their standards of life, and to spiritualize the entire conception of marriage. There is plenty of good work to be done in the world, and every member of the Theosophical Society should be ready and willing to give help in any direction that he can. In this connection I should like to draw your attention to a very helpful list of minor activities which our good brother P. Pavri has published in his book on *The World-Teacher*, commencing on page 122.

At this present time it seems to me there is another undertaking to which every Indian Theosophist should set his hand if he has any opportunity of doing so. You of course understand that the Theosophical Society takes no part whatever in politics, and in that matter every one of its members is absolutely free to go his own way and to express his own individual convictions. But there is at least one thing in which we can all join, and that is the endeavor to promote peace and unity among Indians, to allay prejudices and to persuade all that Brotherhood is greater than sectarianism. The great Spiritual Hierarchy [Page 16] is striving to unify India, and it is precisely this lack of brotherly feeling which is the chief obstacle in the way of the achievement of that most desirable end. Therefore, anything whatever that we can do to help our brethren, both Hindu and Muhammadan, to rise above communal differences and realize that both are equally part of the great Indian Nation of the future, is obviously a direct piece of work on behalf of our Masters.

In some places there is a similar prejudice existing between Brahman and non-Brahman, and the same suggestion would apply there. No one need be asked, or should be asked, to give up his individual opinions; but once more there is no sense in denying the facts of the case — there *is* a difference between the presentation of religion by the Muhammadan and the Hindu; there *is* often a difference between the education and the outlook of the Brahman and the non-Brahman. But it is our duty to emphasize that, though these differences of opinion and outlook do exist, they must never be allowed to interfere with the far greater fact that we are all brethren, and must all stand together to make that Brotherhood effective. [Page 17]

All Indians must learn to lay aside the purely selfish and personal point of view, and to look forward to and prepare for the magnificent future of this great country, of which all of them alike are children. We

must think of that glorious future, and we must work for it; and the first thing to do is to bring these divergent elements together into one mighty force. If India is to be, as she undoubtedly ought to be, the spiritual leader of the world — if she is to fill her appointed place as the land through which the mighty forces of Shamballa may be distributed to the world, she must first of all overcome these petty rivalries and divisions which weaken her so terribly. Therefore we must all strive with all the energy at our command to promote unity, not asking any person to give up his private beliefs, but asking them all to join together for the purpose of this highest and noblest work.

Many other questions suggest themselves in connection with this. The opposition of all good men and women to child-marriage, for example, is based upon the scientific certainty that finer and stronger bodies are produced when both parties to the marriage are fully [Page 18] matured; and remember that such bodies as those are absolutely necessary for the great Indians who will take incarnation among us in the near future, and this present generation should already be providing such vehicles. I know that pandits can quote texts from the alleged Laws of Manu in support of infant marriage; but I think you should remember, in the first place, that you have absolutely no definite evidence that our Lord Vaivasvata Manu is responsible for those laws in the form in which they at present appear; and in the second place, that humanity is after all evolving, and that conditions have changed enormously during the thousands of years which have passed since the time when those laws are supposed to have been laid down.

Many of us have in the course of our work had the wonderful privilege of meeting the Lord Vaivasvata and serving Him in various ways; and I can tell you that He is an eminently sensible and practical person, and that His one desire for His Motherland of India is that she should progress in all ways, both physical and spiritual; and He will consequently be in favor of any movement [Page 19] which tends in that direction. We *must* unite, and we must remove from the Indian escutcheon these blots which disgrace its unique civilization in the eyes of the world. Our great President, who is especially His agent, has frequently written and spoken of these points, and her books and lectures deal with them far more satisfactorily than I can.

You have the admirable Organization of the Boy Scouts, in which each member is expected to do one good turn every day. A member of the Theosophical Society should go very much further than that; he should do many good turns every day, as many as he can; and he should ever be watchful for an opportunity to offer service. The Theosophist should be known to his friends and neighbors as one who is always ready to give any assistance or advice that he can, as one who thinks little of himself and much of the helping of his fellows. I trust that everyone of us may obtain that high reputation, and be careful always to live up to it; and I hope and believe that the work of this Federation will presently bring its members to that noble and desirable consummation. [Page 20]

I cannot end my address more fittingly than by reading to you a fragment which was found only a few days ago among Madame Blavatsky's papers — apparently the conclusion of an article, though the rest of it is missing. It runs as follows :

One eternal Truth, and one infinite changeless Spirit of Love, Truth and Wisdom in the Universe, as one Light for all, in which we live and move and have our Being . . . We are all Brothers. Let us then love, help and mutually defend each other against any spirit of untruth or

deception "without distinction of race, creed or color".

Since this fragment has thus unexpectedly been discovered just before I left Adyar to come here, let us take it as a message from our noble Founder to our newly-formed Federation. Let us live in the light of this high ideal which she sets before us; let us steadfastly obey this command which she lays upon us, that, following in her footsteps, we may one day stand where she stands, that we may one day come to help the world as she has helped it.