

Is Belief in the Masters Superstitious or Harmful? by Annie Besant

Reprinted from The Theosophist, Vol XXXV, December 1913

Published in 1919

Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai [Madras] India
The Theosophist Office, Adyar, Madras. India

[Page 1] AMONG the saddest pages of human history are those pages on which are written the stories of religious controversies, of religious persecutions, of religious wars. Look back, far back in history, and you will find many such pages in the past; and for the most part those controversies arise not over the deep, essential, and spiritual truths of religion, not about those vital facts on which human souls are fed and human conduct is based. More often they come from subsidiary questions, and most of the bitterness which we find in them is due to comparatively trivial differences of opinion. There are, however, certain facts, common to all religions, which from time to time are challenged by materialists, sceptics, unbelievers of every kind; there are certain points common to all religions, round which from time to time controversy arises; and while it is not worth while to add to the turmoil of battle where unimportant and trivial matters are concerned, it may be worth while, when some general truth is attacked under a special [Page 2] form, to draw the attention of the thoughtful to the importance of that truth, and to defend it from attack, leveled perhaps at a special conception, but none the less in reality undermining the central thought of all the religions of the world. Violent State persecution has for the most part passed away in civilised lands; and yet almost all civilised countries, I am sorry to say, still find it necessary to defend by the laws of the land, feelings which would be outraged by attack, beliefs which, because sacred and holy to many, might stir the passions of men in defence when ruthlessly and thoughtlessly assailed. Even in England, where one religion for the most part rules, there have been limits set to the controversies allowed on religious subjects. Argument, respectful and thoughtful, that is now everywhere in England permitted; but ridicule, assault, attack, causing pain to the holiest feelings of humanity, that, even in free England, is punished by the law of the land. Here in India where many religions live side by side, the law is very much sterner on this question. Quite lately in Burma, for instance, a Burman monk was arrested because he had attacked Christian missionaries, and thereby outraged Christian feeling.

I believe that human nature is fundamentally good and not evil, and that where pain is given it is given thoughtlessly for the most part and not deliberately. Because I would fain, if I can, make you realize a little of how religious feelings may be pained and outraged by things that are said in thoughtlessness, I would ask you to substitute the name *Theosophy* [Page 3] for your own Faith, whatever it may be and the name *Master* for the name holiest to you, in the Faith which you profess. I would ask the Christians amongst you to think how you would feel if the divine name of your Teacher, the Lord Jesus, were assailed as the Masters are assailed, I would ask those of you who are Musalmans to think how you would feel if ridicule and outrage and insult were poured out on the name of your great Prophet, Muhammad. I would ask you who are Buddhists to think how you would feel, if similar treatment were meted out to the Lord Buddha; and you who are Hindûs to ask yourselves how you would feel if the sacred name of Shri Kṛṣṇa took the place which has been occupied by the name *Masters*. I know that this substitution cannot be, for the law would not permit it. If that were done in any Indian paper, at once the Government would step in and stop it. I ask you, is it generous, to say nothing of justice, because people are in a minority, to allow their holiest feelings to be ridiculed and outraged with impunity ?

Because they are known to be peaceable and law-abiding, it is thought safe to allow them to be vilified and insulted. And I would appeal to all that is best in you, most generous and most noble, to set your faces against a line of attack that in every great city in the land has outraged the feelings of some of the noblest of your citizens; for there is no one great city in India where some of the leading citizens are not Theosophists, men who are respected for their knowledge, venerated for the nobility of their lives, leaders in [Page 4] every good work for their religion and their country. It is not alone in Madras that we are represented by such men as Dr. S. Subramania Iyer, who is seated here. There is no one great city in India where such men are not among us, and is it right, is it generous, whether you agree with them or not, to pour outrage and insult upon them? I leave it to you to judge, for it is not we who are hurt by such attack. There was a time in the Roman Empire, at the beginning of the present era, when Christianity was persecuted, when Christians were spoken of with insult, when monstrous crimes were imputed to them, when they were charged with practicing immorality at their sacred feasts, and with being worshipers of an ass's head. That did not rebound on Christianity to injure it, but it reacted on the ancient Paganism to destroy it. And that is what always happens, for truth cannot be killed by persecution; it is the persecutor who always, in the end, is slain.

Now I will not answer abuse by abuse; I believe that pain inflicted is inflicted, for the most part, ignorantly and thoughtlessly; I believe in that great excuse spoken by the Christ when His enemies slew Him: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". I would try to explain our beliefs rather than strike back at our assailants, and it is because of that, that I come among you this afternoon, simply to lay before you something of what I believe and know of the Masters of the Wisdom. Then you may judge, after listening to our side of the question, how far such belief is either superstitious as regards religion, or [Page 5] harmful to the State or the community in which such a belief may prevail.

And first, in order to make quite clear what I mean, I may define the word *Master*. For it is a term which has been specially adopted by us who are Theosophists to indicate a certain definite status in Occultism. *Master*, is an English equivalent for the name *Jīvanmukta*, the liberated Spirit, more familiar here. We mean a man who has become perfect; it is not equivalent to the Hindū *Avatāra*, nor to the Christian Divine Incarnation — a coming down of God in human form; but it indicates, on the contrary, a slow climbing up by man in life after life, until the God within him has become manifest and shines out through a perfect humanity to the world; a man who through hundreds of past lives has struggled and has fought; a man who, having reached a high point in human evolution, has then placed his feet on the Path, of which later I shall have something to say; who has trodden that Path of Holiness step by step; who has passed Initiation after Initiation; and who has finally reached human perfection, but remains in touch with the world of men, in order to help others to tread the path which He has trodden, and to reach the perfection which He has reached. That is what the Theosophist means when he speaks of a Master. A perfect Man in whom the Divine Spirit is unfolded.

If you realize that that is the thought underlying the word, you will recognize at once that there is nothing in it repellent in any way, or possibly harmful. I ought perhaps to say that no member of the [Page 6] Society is asked to believe in the existence of these Masters. We do not expect that anyone joining us shall affirm belief in the existence of these perfect Men. But at the same time I am bound to say that where that belief is strong, there the Society goes forward, and where it is weak, there the Society is of little effect. For so inspiring is the conception, so ennobling is the idea, so truly does it make one realize that what man has done man can do, that the very thought uplifts. For these are not Gods of a different nature from ourselves, who have done what we cannot do; but They are bone of our bone, flesh of our

flesh, human with our humanity, having lived on earth as we are living today. Out of the imperfection They have climbed, step by step, with toil and struggle and anguish, and now have reached the liberation which opens to Them the gateway of Nirvāna — of that which the Christian would call final Salvation. — They have turned back from its threshold for the helping of Their weaker brethren, in order that they too may find the Peace, that their weakness may be aided by the strength which These have achieved. That is meant by the name *Master* .

And now to explain the rest of the title. I will take *superstitious* to mean — for the time, it is not a full definition — a belief which is not founded upon reason. The fuller explanation would be: “A belief which, being irrational, takes the unessential as the essential”. But the absence of a rational basis for a belief may serve as a fair working definition of a superstition. The man does not know why he believes [Page 7] it; he has no evidence for it; neither by the testimony of his senses nor by the logic of his reason is he able to justify his belief. My duty, is, then, to answer the question: “Is belief in the Masters a superstition?”

There are two ways in which you may regard this idea of Masters, one general and one particular. Both are important in the forming of your judgment. In the first place — the general — we seek to discover whether there are in the history of the world, Men who have fulfilled the conception which I have just sketched to you. Men who have become perfect and yet have remained in touch with man. Now if we look at the history of the great religions, we shall find mention made of such Men in every sacred literature, Men who embody divine perfection in a human form. You cannot read any of the ancient books of the Hindûs without finding the mention of Men who had reached liberation, who were what is called *Jīvanmuktas*; Their stories shine out from page after page, history is full of Them. If you read the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*, or even later books, you find Them. In the *Purānas* you constantly see mention of the presence of such Men, who, from time to time, at Their own will and not at the command of anyone else, manifest Themselves as Men among men. Nārada, the great Rshi, visits the Kings of ancient India, to enquire as to the welfare of their kingdoms, the discharge of their royal duties. Many names will spring to your memories, those of Yājñavalkya and of many another. You have there Men [Page 8] who had reached liberation, some of whom take pupils, guiding them on the Path to liberation, mingling from, time to time in human affairs, more and more rarely in later days right down the great stream of Indian History, so long as she was really great, you find these living Men manifesting, giving counsel, instruction, and reproof. Unless Hindûism, as a whole, be a superstition, These, whom we call Masters, have existed and continue to exist.

The same is true of the great religion founded by the Lord Buddha. He, with His disciples, the Arhats, bore testimony in the world of His day to the reality of the Path and the truth of liberation; if you go to Burma now, you will find the Burmans believing that among Those who were His disciples there are still some who, instead of leaving the earth as They have the right to do, are remaining upon earth in order to guide and to instruct; and when I asked a, Burman how you can attract the attention of such an One, if you desire to tread the Path of Holiness, I was told in answer that They see the man in whose heart the flame of love is lighted, and that They reveal Themselves to him and teach him. Moreover, all Buddhists believe in the present existence of the Bodhisattva, the Supreme Teacher, the next Buddha, and they look for His coming to the world as the Lord Gautama came twenty-five centuries ago. Unless Buddhism be a superstition, These, whom we call Masters, have existed and continue to exist.

In Zoroastrianism you find the testimony to one mighty Teacher, whom it calls the Prophet, the [Page 9] Founder of the Faith, it was Zarathushtra, the divine Man, who laid the basis of that ancient and mighty

religion. And if you come, still further down the stream of time, to Christianity, you find there the conception of Jesus, Perfect Man as well as very God. And those who believe in Him think that He is living in a physical human body, for how does the article of the Church run? "Christ did truly arise again from death, and took again His body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature; wherewith He ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until He return to judge all men at the last day". The Christian falls into heresy, if he denies the continued existence of the physical body of His Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The prophet Muhammad was Man among men, and I do not know how far in popular Muhaminadanism the Muslims regard their Prophet as still within the reach of human cry; but among the Sûfis, tracing their teaching down from Ali, the beloved son-in-law of the Prophet, there is certainly the belief in the existence of Teachers who may be reached by the earnest and the devoted, and they acknowledge also the existence of the same Path which is believed in by the Hindû and the Buddhist, the Path by which men may become divine, may reach perfection. I ought also to mention that the "Roman Catholics, among Christians, teach the existence of that same Path, by treading which sainthood is attained.

The only difference between the Theosophist and any one of you is, that we believe in the great a [Page 10] Prophets of *all* religions, while some of you believe in your own Prophet, and deny Those of the religions to, which you do not belong. But it is surely no great fault in us that we honor and respect all divine Men without exception. Every Faith has at its heart, at its core, the belief in such a Being, the life of such a Man.

Now, of the existence of all these great Teachers in the past, with the exception of the Lord Buddha and the Lord Muhammad, there is very little evidence which would be called historical, proving that They existed. The historical evidence for the existence of the Christ — I do not challenge it, because I know that He lived — is very, very small, and anyone who has studied Christian history is well aware that contemporary evidence to His existence is lacking. His Church and His Faith, prove Him to have existed, far more effectively than any document which could be brought forward as evidence for His life on earth. And the same is true as regards the Hindû Rshis. There is nothing that the Western scholar would accept as evidence for the historical existence of Those. And that is worth remembering, for though it in no sense disproves Their existence, it thrusts you back upon the deeper testimony of religious consciousness and of unbroken tradition. There lies your only proof that They were and are. And any blow that you may strike at the belief of others rebounds upon yourselves, for the very existence of your Rshis, of your Christ, is far more open, in many ways, to challenge. Only the materialists and the unbelievers will triumph, if a fatal blow can be [Page 11] struck at the belief of God manifest in the human form, the just Man made perfect, the Master.

I do not know if objection will be made by any believer in any religion to the testimony of those who speak from their own experience, a testimony which is, to me, far stronger than that which can be found in any literature which Western scholars may rend into pieces, which to me is far surer and far loftier than the authority of any priest or preacher. This testimony is the love that pours out to Them from millions of human hearts. Modern Kings and Popes cannot rival this; no conqueror in history is crowned with fame so undying, no physical benefactor with love so immortal. Who shines out as the object of adoration so profound, so lasting, as the Lord Buddha, as Srî Krshna, as the Lord Christ? That is practically impregnable, even though the scholars may deny the historical proof of Their existence. They live in the hearts of men; They are no dream.

But you may say: "That is all very well as a general principle. We will even go further, and admit, as you have elsewhere argued, that it is logical that some men should have advanced very far, have climbed very high during the immense time through which humanity has existed; we do not deny that some figures shine out in history as mighty Rulers, as mighty Teachers; moreover reason admits the possibility, since humanity has been living on earth for so many million years".

But you may say there is a difference between you and Theosophists, Theosophists believe that such [Page 12] Men are still living, and that the Path to perfection is still open. As to these ideas, most religious people apparently hesitate to affirm their belief. In some far-off heaven, perhaps, but not at hand, not living upon earth, not men as we are men, though higher, grander, more perfect, than we are I admit the difference. We, who are believers in the Masters, believe in the reality of the Divinity of the human Spirit, climbing today as he climbed in ages past, showing out and unfolding now his Divinity, as in the past he unfolded that same Divinity among our ancestors and forefathers. That is true. But do you declare that the divine Spirit no longer lives in man, or that his divine strength is weaker? We believe that men today may climb as men in the past have climbed; we believe that the Christ spoke no impossible thing when He said to the disciples round Him: "Be ye also perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. "Do Christians believe that to be a possibility? If so, they admit the possibility of the existence of Masters in the flesh today. If they do not believe it, they brand their Lord as giving them a command impossible of fulfilment. Surely it must be sad to hold so exquisite an ideal and at the same moment to deny it, to declare it to be impossible, a dream never to be fulfilled.

Turning to particular evidence, you say: "What evidence have you of Their present existence?" There is far more evidence available for any of you of the existence of the Masters whom we speak of as behind the Theosophical Society, than there is [Page 13] for the existence of any great religious Teacher of the past, who is revered by those who follow Him. That is the point to which I next wish to bring you. The others are far away in the past, and we cannot cross-examine the witnesses. But the witnesses to this are among you at the present time, or have only lately passed through death, leaving their testimony behind them. Some are still living among you, as I say, and their testimony is open for any one of you to investigate for yourself. Let us quietly look into it.

Now there are four ways in which one may come into touch with a person at a distance. Firstly by traveling; then the physical body of the one comes face to face with the physical body of the other. That, to most people, would be the most satisfactory of all, and that we have. Secondly, a person at a distance may go in the subtle body, to a place where another is in full waking consciousness, and there may materialize himself, so as to be visible to ordinary eyesight. That evidence we have. Thirdly, there is testimony which may be given by anyone whose inner eyes have been opened — who is clairvoyant — and who, living in the physical body and in full waking consciousness, can see a man in what we call his astral form. That was very much challenged and thrown aside by almost every one in the early days of Madame Blavatsky, but now many of our scientific men affirm it, and very few are prepared to deny the possibility of it. There is so great a weight of evidence with regard to its possibility, [Page 14] that it may fall into the third class of evidence; the observer is waking and in the physical body, and the observed is in the subtle body. That evidence we have. Then there comes the fourth possibility, for those who have developed the power of leaving the physical body at will, without loss of consciousness; they can go to the places at which the Masters live, in the various countries of the world, and see the Masters in Their physical bodies while they themselves are in the subtle body. That evidence we have.

There are thus four classes of evidence: (1) where both are present in one place; (2) where a materialization of the one visible to the physical sight of the other is present; (3) where the clairvoyant observer is in the physical body and the observed is in the subtle body; and (4) where the observed is in the subtle body, and the observer is in the physical body. Now we have a mass of evidence of all these four classes. A good many of the people who give it are still living and available, so that they can be directly questioned and judged by ordinary canons of evidence. The two who first gave evidence of all the four classes — Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott — passed away, but have left their testimony. On Madame Blavatsky's name I pause for a moment, because of the insults of those who did not know her, who accused her of chicanery and fraud; but we who knew her and still know, we bear our testimony that no nobler, wiser, man or woman has lived in the present generation upon earth. The insults, the mud, which fanatics and sceptics throw upon her memory, [Page 15] disgrace only the throwers. Evidence of the possibility of the facts she alleged has been accumulating since she passed away. Those who have looked into the evidence against her know how weak it is.

Let me take one illustration. I have seen the testimony of Dr. Hodgson in the S. P. R.'s Report. But had he had any serious experience in psychical matters when he came out to Adyar? Did he not, later in life, with his riper judgment, admit as possible and real, a mass of phenomena such as he denied in the crude days of his youth, when he set himself to investigate the psychical phenomena at Adyar? I met him before he died, after he had gathered much experience, after he had investigated such phenomena for years, and had experimented with Mrs. Piper and others; he then told me honestly enough: "If I had known then what I know now, I would never have issued the Report as sent out". Madame Blavatsky came into conflict with the materialism of the day, and she broke it with her lion's strength, and on her devoted head have fallen all the insults, while the beliefs that she asserted are now becoming the beliefs of the scientific world. Colonel Olcott was never accused of fraud; he was said to have been hypnotized, psychologized, a very usual form of accusation, and one which it is practically impossible wholly to rebut. His testimony was clear and strong: that in America he had seen his Master with his own physical eyes, and had received from Him His turban, which he always treasured; that here in India he had seen Him many times, and he placed some [Page 16] of these occasions on record in the *Old Diary Leaves*; one, of which he tells us, was that time when the Master Morya visited his bungalow in Bombay in the flesh, coming in full daylight and on horseback; Master Koot Hoomi he also met at Lahore in His physical body. He saw Them often with his physical eyes — for he was not clairvoyant — when They materialized. The late Subba Rao and Mr. Leadbeater, in their physical bodies, visited the Nilgiri Master in His physical body in His own home, and the latter met physically the Master Razoki in Europe, the Master being also in the physical body. The testimony is clear; hallucination does not explain it, nor is there any sign of hypnotization. But you may say that, after all, Colonel Olcott was dominated by this idea, was prepossessed by it. He was not dominated by it in New York, when he did not believe, but was convinced by his own eyes. What about Pandit Bhavani Shankar, who is still living, still available, who writes: "I have seen the latter (my venerated Gurudeva, K. H.), my Master, in His physical body and recognized Him". Take, if you prefer it, the testimony of an Englishman, Mr. Brown, who has said, in print, that he saw the same Master in Lahore, "in His own physical body". Damodar has left on record that he saw in His physical body at Lahore the same Master whom he had seen in astral form at Adyar; and also that he met Him in Jammu, and was in an āshrama for some days where he met several Masters. Mr. Mohini Chatterji says that he met the same Master in the Madras Presidency, [Page 17] Mr. S. Ramaswamier and Mr. R. Kesava Pillai, Inspector of Police, also saw Masters in the physical body near Sikkim. I am quoting from statements mostly made close to the time of the seeing, available for any of you. Can a little of such evidence be brought to sustain the existence of any great religious Teacher in the past?

Can you say that all these men are deliberately deceiving the people around them ? But why ? A man who deceives has an object in deceiving — money fame, credit, or some such thing. But by confessing that he has stood face to face with a living Master he receives only scorn, contempt and insult. Why should a man go out of his way in order to gain such a reward ? And there are others similarly, whose records are, some of them, given in the little book of mine called *Madame Blavatsky and the Masters of the Wisdom*, wherein you may read first-hand testimony of those who, in *their* physical bodies, have seen the Masters in *their* physical bodies, face to face, and who in their physical bodies saw the Masters in the subtle. Mr. Ross Scott, the late Judicial Commissioner of Oudh, sitting in the shadow of a veranda at Adyar, when the library was in full light, saw the figure of the Master, apparently a living physical man, walking to a table, whereon a letter was subsequently found. Numbers of people now living amongst you have seen similar things; you can ask them, question them. Government officials many of them, reasonable men, respected in the community to which they belong. What [Page 18] right have you to brand them all as liars or unconscious deceivers? Their testimony would hang a man. You would send a man to jail for life on the testimony of one or two of them. If you refuse that same testimony when it is not a matter of criminal law, but a matter which your prejudices prevent you from believing, then we have the right to say you do not wish to know, you have made up your minds that such things cannot be. But the evidence is there.

Take the second kind of evidence: those who in waking consciousness have seen Them materialized. Very many bear witness to that, and the evidence is in print for all to read. Many again in waking consciousness have seen Them clairvoyantly. I myself have seen Them in both these ways. I was never accused of falsehood until a Madras Paper began its persecution of me. Throughout my long public life that accusation has never been made. I do not appear to be particularly hallucinated, for I am able to keep on its lines an International Society, that has its representatives in nearly every civilized country of the world. If I am a hysterical, emotional, or hypnotized person, I am concealing it very cleverly. And, despite the afore-mentioned Paper I think I may claim to be believed when I speak. Now I have seen these two Masters while wide-awake in my physical consciousness, They sufficiently densifying Their bodies for me to see Them with my physical eyes. In the early days I could not see, as I can see now, subtle forms of matter, for it was just after I came into the Theosophical Society. And yet, in 1889, in Fontainebleau, [Page 19] I saw the Master, clear, definite in form. I knew Him not. At the time I was only impressed with the splendor of His appearance; but when next day I described what I had seen to H.P.B., she at once recognized the description, as I myself later recognized its accuracy when I grew familiar with that great Teacher. So on many occasions, I have seen others of the White Lodge, over and over again, in houses in other lands, as well as in Their own āshramas, to which I have learnt to go in the subtle body. You may do the same, if you will pay the price. Many others, men and women of different nations, Western as well as Eastern, who have developed the power to see, the power to know, bear similar testimony. Are all these reputable men and women, respected and honored in the various circles in which they move, to be branded as deceivers, or as hallucinated, because they bear testimony to a fact which they know to be true. After all, you take testimony on any point, provided it be not that of the existence of a perfect Man. You have not been to Central Africa, and yet you are willing to take the testimony of people who have been there. Many of you have not seen the King-Emperor, but you believe those who have seen him, and you do not ask that he should be produced for your amusement at a particular place, in order to convince you that such a person exists. Still more is that the case when you are dealing with experiences of your own, which are not always subjective but also objective. How many Christian Saints have borne testimony that they have seen [Page 20] their Master, the Lord Jesus How many Yogis in this land bear witness that they know their Teachers, have been in Their presence, have learned from Their lips ? You must take up the attitude of Lombroso, that all religious experiences are hallucinations and madness, if you deny; and then you rob humanity of all that is fairest in its experience,

of all that is oldest in its life on earth. Both generally and particularly, the evidence is overwhelmingly strong from every religion. From each religion, from a large number of educated men and women, who bear testimony to the existence today of Those whom we call the Masters. Moreover there is a growing body of scientific testimony to the fact of materialization. Apart from Sir William Crookes, early in the field, you have Alfred R. Wallace, you have the sceptic Lombroso, just mentioned, converted by his own experiments; you have Gurney, Myers, hosts of witnesses. To deny this possibility now, is merely to prove that you are ignorant. The denial is no longer a cautious scepticism; it is deliberate prejudice and wilful obstinacy.

But it may be said: even if there be evidence that the Masters exist, is it not dangerous, mischievous, and harmful to believe in Them. How, and in what way? I said I would speak of the Path by which they have become Masters, the Path which some of us are treading today and which you may tread, if you will. Now it is recognized at least in four great living religions of the world — Hindûism, Buddhism, amongst the Sûfis in Islâm and among the Roman Catholics in Christianity — that there is a Path of swift evolution whereby man, [Page 21] the man of the world, may become a Saint, may reach to perfection. The Roman Catholic Church has a discipline, clear, definite, and precise, through which it leads those who have a true vocation for he religious life; the Path of Purgation or Purification; of Illumination — where divine knowledge illumines the mind; of Union — where the man becomes one with God. That is the Christian view. The Buddhist and the Hindû give the same account of the Path, and it is marked out in definite stages. The names are different, but the meaning of each name is closely similar. You may read of it in the writings of Shrî Shankaracharya, you may read of it in the Buddhist Scriptures, wherein you have the record of a great Teacher's instructions. It is said that when a man through many, many births has fixed his heart and mind on reaching perfection, that in one birth he comes to the point where he is within measurable distance of that perfection, and the lives that lie before him are limited in number. In order that he may approach that Path and pass through its stages there are certain conditions laid down. These are the conditions necessary to make a man fit to learn the Vedânta, to become the Adhikâri, the man ready for instruction. Probably, you all know these qualifications, four in number; and you can say if the practice, the evolution, of these can be harmful to anyone. The first is Discrimination between the real and the unreal, the fleeting and the eternal; surely no harm can be done by trying to develop this. The second is Dispassion, the conquest of the [Page 22] lower nature, the transmutation of the lower desires into the higher, until at last no desire is left but that of doing the Divine Will. Then come the six mental jewels: control of mind, control of body, speech and action, endurance, tolerance, cheerfulness, faith. There does not seem to be anything harmful in these. Lastly, there is eagerness for Union, love of God and man. Hindûs and Buddhists are entirely at one in prescribing these as qualifications for admission to the Path, and they are sometimes called the Probationary Path. They are virtues of which every religion is in favor. They are more precisely laid down in the Eastern religions than in the Western, as definite qualifications, which must be developed to some extent, before the Path itself can be entered. But the Path of Purification, of the Roman Catholic, is the same as this Probationary Path. Even if there were no Path, if it were only a beautiful dream, yet the men who developed these qualifications would be better citizens and better members of the community than those in whom they were not developed. Surely there can be nothing harmful in preparatory teaching of that kind, which, we say, leads to a knowledge of the Masters.

The second and third stages of the Roman Catholic are covered by the five Initiations of the Hindu and Buddhist. The first of these is the Parivrâjaka — the homeless man — according to the Hindûs. For he is seeking for his home in a higher region, and earth has no longer power to hold him. The Buddhists call it the Srotâpatti, and speak of the new Initiate [Page 23] as “he who has entered the stream”, of which the

other shore is Masterhood. In that he may stay for seven lives; before he leaves it, he must cast wholly off the *fetters* which are doubt, superstition, and the sense of separateness. Surely again, there, is nothing harmful. And then, when those are wholly thrown aside, the second Initiation comes, Kutīchaka, "he who builds a hut for he becomes the builder of his subtle bodies, and makes them capable of activity in the higher planes of existence". The Buddhist calls him the Sakrdāgamin, he who takes but one more compulsory birth. Then the third, the Hamsa, "I am He", called by the Buddhists the Anāgamin, "he who receives (compulsory) birth no more". Herein he casts off all passion of every kind, utterly and for ever, and all possibility of anger, even the subtlest and most refined. There, again, there is nothing harmful, even if you do not believe. And the striving after these is the treading of the Path. Then he becomes the Parmahamsa, "above the I", or what the Buddhists call the Arhat, the venerable. He is on the verge of union, compulsory rebirth for him is over, and when he has cast off the fetters which still clog his feet, the last traces of desire for any special life in the form or the formless worlds, when he has thrown away pride, when he cannot be disturbed or shaken, when ignorance falls off from him as a veil, then he has reached human perfection, and then, and then only, can he present himself for the fifth great Initiation, that which makes the Master, the Jīvanmukta, the liberated Spirit, the perfect Man. He is [Page 24] crowned with knowledge, he reaches the last goal that can be reached by man, and he becomes the Immortal, the Free, the Master of life and death, the Man who has become divine, a Savior of the world. By the trending of that Path is the Master made.

I ask you to judge what in it there is, that can be harmful to any human being, what in that teaching, known to the most ancient Faiths and believed in *practically* by ourselves, can harm any country in which we happen to be citizens? That is what we are trying to do; that is the goal we are endeavoring to reach; and if, amidst the storm of detraction we remain peaceful and happy, it is because, to some extent, we have acquired some of the qualifications which are demanded by the ideal towards which we strive.

I am Irish by birth and temperament, with the hot temper of my native land. When I was a freethinker and a politician, I was not the most peaceable of human beings, but struck hard with pen and tongue when struck. If I am not mingling in these newspaper controversies in Madras and Bombay, it is because in so doing I should only embitter strife, and I may not use the weapons of untruth and misrepresentation used by my antagonists. I have the right to defend the Society, but I would fain try first to exhaust enmity by forbearance, rather than give reviling for reviling, or railing for railing. "Without the use of very plain speech, which would hurt the feelings of my assailants, no effective answer is possible. Let us try if good life and silence will [Page 25] avail against vituperation and slander. I believe that truth wins by life, rather than by talk; and I, who know how to use both tongue and pen in defence of aught that I believe to be good, I would not, if I can avoid it, speak one word to injure one human heart, nor reply with one bitter sentence to all the bitterness that has been heaped on that which I love more than life. For the world is so built that victory in the long run lies with truth and not with falsehood. You may attack, slander, abuse, you may impute motives and say cruel things, without investigation into whether they be true or not. There are two ways of answering an attack: to fling back mud for the mud that is thrown, or to follow the example of the great Teachers of the world and realize that "hatred ceases not by hatred, but hatred ceases by love". And so this afternoon I have tried only to explain our position, and to show you why we believe, and what the effect of such belief must be upon conduct. I ask you, if you will, to ask yourselves whether there is anything in that belief which is not noble and worthy, which is not likely to inspire to noble living and to help men to strive towards all that is best and purest in humanity. We do not do you any harm, we Theosophists; I may go farther and say that we have done you much of good. Before Theosophy was heard of in India, Zoroastrianism, Hindūism and Buddhism were despised and looked down upon by the Western world. Even Government admits that Theosophy has had a great share in the

revival of Hindûism; but I will tell you where [Page 26] we do sometimes make enemies. We are against the rigid, literal interpretation of dogmas that cause bitterness and controversy in the modern world. We speak for liberty, tolerance, width of view, the striking off of modern excrescences upon the ancient Faiths, and we show how their noblest promises are possible of realization today. Contrast the India of today with the India of 1880, and you will measure something of the change that the teaching of the Ancient Wisdom has brought in your land. And so, we ask that you will at least give us credit for good intentions, that you will realize that we are doing our best, even if, not knowing us, you think many ill things of us. All through the world's history, leaders of a new religious movement have been attacked and reviled, and yet in the long run they are recognized as light-bringers to the world. If only I could share with any one of you, who misunderstand us, the strength and the joy, the power and the serenity that come from the knowledge that the Masters *are*, that we are not orphans in a world bereft of God, that we do not cry out and have no answer, that we are not deserted in a desert, without a guide, without a friend. I bear you witness, I who know, that what your Scriptures tell you *is true*; that there is a subtle body of the Spirit that can leave the physical, and know what in the physical body it cannot know; this is what your teachers have taught you and you have forgotten. If you believed Hindûism — you do not really believe it or you would not laugh at us who do believe it — then you would know that its glories are true and possible [Page 27] for you to realize, that all the greatest things that religion has promised, are promises of Truth and are not lies, that men *can* climb the Path, *can* scale the mountain. If you do not agree with us, at least let us go our own way, doing our work, striving to help, to comfort and to console. We cannot keep to ourselves the truth we know, but we never attack the Faith of another man. We cannot remain silent where we are bidden to speak, but we speak gently and persuasively, and we blame none if they do not believe. And so, friends, whether you agree with us or not, take at least this thought from me, who know the existence of the Masters to be truth and light and life; if it be true, no attacks upon it can prevent the spreading of the truth; if it be a dream and false, it will perish by its own falsehood. In the days of the childhood of Christianity a wise Jewish Judge once spoke a word of wisdom. The teachers of Christianity were brought before him as disturbers of the peace, as madmen stirring up the commonwealth. "Refrain from these men and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to naught. But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God".

I repeat to you in the twentieth century those words spoken in the first. The fire of time tries every work and will burn up the stubble; only the pure gold will remain. We are content to stand that test. We are willing to face the world with our message, and to be, as our forerunners were, despised, rejected of men. Some of you will believe, for your hearts will [Page 28] answer to the message; some of you will answer, for your own past will voice itself in heart and brain. For you who do not believe, and are angry because we believe where you do not, on you may there be the blessing of the Peace which is incarnated in the Masters, and may the Light come to you from other lips and in other ways, although from us you may despise it and reject it.