

The Purpose of Theosophy - Part 1

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ELEMENTARY TRUTHS

THEOSOPHY is not a religion with a creed or code of doctrines to which its followers must subscribe before they enter the fold. An erroneous belief that it is in this way a specific faith has, perhaps, taken hold of the public mind in the Western world, — so far as the subject has obtained attention at all during the last few years, — and the aim of the present explanation is to show what the general character and tendencies of theosophic thought really are; to point out in a concise and simple manner what it is that the study of Theosophy teaches and embraces, as well as what effect the reception of the knowledge to which it leads should have on the lives, work, and intercourse with their neighbours, and humanity at large, of those who try to benefit by and conform to it. Few will deny that for many years past the tendency of intellectual thought and scientific inquiry has been towards Materialism and Agnosticism. Theology has become discredited by reason of having had for its supporters and preachers men who, instead of devoting themselves to the study or science of spirituality, have contented themselves with repeating, parrot-like in many cases, the phrases of those who have gone before; these phrases having been oftener than not originally formulated in order to make their acceptance by so-called heretics at the same time more difficult and more binding and not for any real value or spiritual truth to be discovered in them. In other words, they have clung to the dogmas of their creeds instead of to the spirit of the teaching contained in the words of their various leaders. In spite, however, of this intellectual bias in favour of Materialism, there still remains in human nature the desire for belief in a future life; and the following pages aim at pointing out how the study of Theosophy, or, as it may be equally well called, the Esoteric Doctrine, among other things, shows the reason of this instinctive longing, and what it will necessarily and surely lead to in the future races of mankind.

As Theosophy is not in itself a religion in the common acceptance of the word, hardly even a philosophy, it may and does include among its followers representatives of almost every form of religious belief in the world, as well as many who have no belief at all. It teaches people to search for the fundamental truth that is the basis equally of every creed, philosophy, and science, to discover and put aside the superstructure raised by the superstition, persecution, love of power, ignorance of science, and bigotry of humanity, and thus to lay bare the fact that one truth supports every religion, no matter how divergent they may now appear; that truth being the Divine wisdom of the ancients, discoverable alike in the symbolical writings of the Kabbala, the Books of Hermes, the Vedas, and other sacred books of the East, in the Talmud, the Koran, our own Bible, as well as the teachings of Pythagoras, Socrates, and many of the more recent philosophers. This Wisdom Religion, which is the germ of truth to be found in every form of belief worthy of the name, existed on this planet thousands of years before any of the creeds of Christendom were heard of, before the still more ancient religions of the East were recorded. In support of this last statement it may be explained that the Vedas, said to constitute the oldest book extant, were

for centuries before they were committed to writing, handed down orally from priest to priest, the real knowledge which was to be found in the teaching, being considered of too sacred a character to entrust to any but those who have devoted their lives to the pursuit of this mystical wisdom. And to this day the real meaning of these books cannot be understood from the mere reading of them, even by the best Hindu Sanskrit scholars, inasmuch as by the intonation and variation of the voice an entirely different interpretation is given to the written words. Consequently a student of occultism, desiring to acquire the hidden knowledge that these books undoubtedly contain, must have them recited to him by his Guru (master), who by degrees, as the pupil advances, explains the true interpretation of the symbology.

The searcher for truth will find that Theosophy holds within its grasp an inexhaustible source of knowledge in every groove of thought, whether on the spiritual or physical plane. There is no science, no art, no intellectual pursuit, in whatever direction it may incline, that Theosophy, as now understood, does not embrace and pervade: its study cannot but render wiser and more elevated every human creature.

One of the first truths for a student to realise is that of reincarnation, or spirit-evolution. A belief in this doctrine may be found to permeate nearly all ancient philosophies ; and it recommends itself to the thoughtful mind by accounting satisfactorily for the inequalities in life to be observed everywhere around us, both in the animal and human kingdoms. How is it possible, otherwise, to reconcile the apparent injustice of one man being born in absolute misery and want, in a position where improvement, or even the desire for improvement, is impossible; while another, no more deserving, as far as can be seen, is surrounded by friends, luxuries, and everything that can make life desirable ? How account for the condition of the crippled, blind, constitutionally unhealthy, and morally wicked, compared with those who possess beauty of form, vigorous health, honesty of purpose, and the use of all their senses, except by the theory that all are by degrees working upwards — progressing, not only materially, but also morally and spiritually ? Why are we to accept the theory of evolution up to a certain point, and then cast it off abruptly, saying this is the end, here all progress ceases ? Is it more reasonable to suppose, arguing from analogy, that Nature, having by a long course of evolution through the many and various forms of the inferior kingdoms, developed the humanity of which we now have cognisance, proceeds from this point onward with an infinite hope of spiritual and psychical advancement, which is now only beginning to be dimly perceived as possible, but which, in the course of time, will become an accepted fact; accepted because, instead of, as now, the psychical faculties being of rare and most exceptional occurrence, they may then be the appanage of the majority ? When spiritual evolution has reached this point there may be a much greater difference between those races of mankind who possess such powers and those still without them, than there is now between the North American Indian and the most highly civilised people of the present day. The entities or egos occupying now the bodies of the savage and barbarous races will, in due course, reincarnate in, the bodies of men a little higher in the scale of civilisation, gathering thus, by slow degrees, the experience necessary for a more advanced development — ever improving and progressing.

But it is not necessary here to argue in favour of or against this doctrine; it is enough to show, very briefly, that it has to come into the scheme of theosophic teaching. [*Vide, Old Diary Leaves* Volume I, Chap XVII Reincarnation.] The reader, however, must not imagine that by reincarnation is meant the transmigration of human souls into the bodies of animals, or even back into the lower forms of human existence, for this could hardly be called spiritual progress. It is no more possible for a follower of this philosophy to believe that the human ego can retrograde by now incarnating, as a European of culture and then as an Esquimaux or savage, than it could be for a disciple of Darwin's theory of evolution to think that a man

could degenerate into a monkey or an elephant into a caterpillar. What has ever to be kept in mind is the gradual but sure ascent of every thing upon this globe, from the mineral and vegetable up to man, and from man up to god. But it must not be thought that by this word is meant the Anthropomorphic, or personal God of orthodox Christianity. It is used here as the only available term adapted to express what is variously described as the "Absolute Power", "Supreme Unity", "Ultimate Reality", "Divine Spirit", etc., which pervades all space, and of which the manifestation may be found in every thing around us, both animate and inanimate.

It is the awakening of this Divine Spirit within us that gives rise, in some cases, to a feeling of certainty of a future state, in others to an indescribable longing that it should be so; it is this something belonging to, but independent of the body, that endows earnest Christians, or followers of any other religion, no matter of what age or country, with the hope and assurance of heavenly happiness after death.

On this doctrine of reincarnation depends that no less important one of Karma — the law of cause and effect operating through the merit and demerit of a person's deeds in each life.

Every individual is making Karma either good or bad in each action and thought of his daily round, and is at the same time working out in this life the Karma brought about by the acts and desires of the last. When we see people afflicted by congenital ailments, it may be safely assumed that these ailments are the inevitable results of causes started by themselves in a previous birth. It may be argued that, as these afflictions are hereditary, they can have nothing to do with a past incarnation ; but it must be remembered that the ego, the real man, the individuality, has no spiritual origin in the parentage by which it is re-embodied, but is drawn by the affinities which its previous mode of life attracted round it, into the current that carries it, when the time comes for re-birth, to the home best fitted for the development of those tendencies. Thus, to give a rough illustration, a child blind from birth is not a victim of accident or misfortune, any more than a person who eats or drinks what must produce disagreeable effects, because for the moment it pleases his palate. But in consequence of particular vices or qualities pertaining to his previous incarnation, or perhaps from a general and unchecked tendency in the direction of wrong doing, his ego has surrounded itself by affinities which sweep it into and along those channels that plant it eventually and inevitably in the body of a blind child, there to work out the old Karma, while at the same time making new, to be again and again exhausted, ever improving and purifying, until, as said above, the human race becomes more and more perfect and Godlike. And here it may be remarked, that the human race *en gros*, is improving and evolving to a much higher state of development than we at present — in consequence of our great materiality — can realise; but there are individual exceptions to this steady advance, and although these exceptions, as compared with the mass, are an infinitesimal percentage, they still form a class by themselves, and their eventual disintegration takes place on the astral plane, after the spiritual part of their nature has been, through successive incarnations, repressed and crushed until the ego has at last divorced itself from what alone can give it immortality. A future chapter will put this part of the doctrine more clearly before the reader, when treating of the constitution of man.

This doctrine of Karma when properly understood is well calculated to guide and assist those who realise its truth, to a higher and better mode of life, for it must not be forgotten that not only our actions but our thoughts also are most assuredly followed by a crowd of circumstances that will influence for good or for evil our own future and, what is still more important, the future of many of our fellow-creatures. If sins of omission and commission could in any case be only self-regarding, the effect on the sinner's Karma

would be a matter of minor consequence. The fact that every thought and act through life carries with it for good or evil a corresponding influence on other members of the human family, renders a strict sense of justice, morality, and unselfishness so necessary to future happiness and progress. A crime once committed, an evil thought sent out from the mind, are past recall — no amount of repentance can wipe out their results in the future. "Can the *results* of a crime be obliterated even though the crime itself should be pardoned? The effects of a cause are never limited to the boundaries of the cause, nor can the results of crime be confined to the offender and his victim. Every good as well as evil action has its effects, as palpably as the stone flung into a calm water". [*Isis Unveiled* Volume II, P 542.] Repentance, if sincere, will deter a man from repeating errors; it cannot save him or others from the effects of those already produced, which will most unerringly overtake him either in this life or in the next rebirth.

If men and women kept the law of Karma well in minds shaping their lives in conformity with it, they would not have so much to answer for in regard to harm done to their neighbours. But the ethics of this teaching show that active good is required of its followers as well as abstention from evil; and one of the grandest lessons taught by Theosophy is that of universal brotherhood, which rightly interpreted means a large hearted desire to benefit humanity. Almost every person, no matter how humble, can in one way or another help to comfort by words or deeds some of his fellow-creatures. How much more, therefore, lies in the power of the educated classes? — and it is to the latter that these words are addressed. Philanthropy is open to them on two planes — the physical and spiritual, for they are able both to act and to think; and this philosophy teaches that thoughts may even in some cases be of more importance than actions, inasmuch as the latter, being on the material plane, affect only physical lives in future incarnations while the former, belonging to the higher plane, have consequences even more far reaching, that affect the spiritual and therefore real existence.

The Karma made by our actions and general tendencies decides our future incarnations on this planet; that due to intellectual work and thoughts affects more directly our spiritual condition hereafter, determining the duration and character of heavenly bliss, previous to re-birth on the material plane. Thus, as we pass along our earthly lives, we leave behind us a train of events which no after-repentance can obliterate, which must with absolute certainty bring about their inevitable results in the next re-birth, these being poverty, riches, station, ill-health, deformity, deprivation of one or more of the senses, happiness, misery, a wish to do good without the means, the power of doing good without the desire. All these and every other affliction or blessing to which mankind is subject, all the varying states of happiness and the reverse, are due, not to the caprice of a single birth and life, but are the direct consequences of previous tendencies or actions committed by the individual.

This in bare outline is the great law of Karma. There are of course, details and side-issues innumerable, which it would be out of place to enter upon in an elementary work of this nature. The reader once interested in the philosophy can gather for himself fuller information from the many books now obtainable that deal with these subjects.

OUTLINE OF OCCULT HISTORY

As already stated, the Divine wisdom of the ancients has been the basis and essence of all great popular religions. The unwholesome growth fed by time and human passions that now overrun them, when brushed away, display underneath, the true revelation still uninjured and untouched.

What does this Divine wisdom really consist of, whence comes it, by whom has it been taught, and for what purpose ?

In looking back along the records of the past, it may be observed that the educated members of society have always been in possession of knowledge the diffusion of which among the multitude was thought to be undesirable. In quite the most distant times of which history can give us any information, the highest and, from the present standpoint, the only class with any erudite culture was to be found among those who had been initiated in arcane knowledge by the hierophants of the mysteries. "Every nation had its mysteries and hierophants..... who alone could impart the awful knowledge contained in the Merkaba." [*Isis Unveiled*] Those who had in their keeping this sacred religion were magicians, the word coming from "Mage", or "Magian"; magic being in those days considered, as in truth it was and still is, a Divine science, its study leading to the discovery of the hidden workings of nature, by the cultivation of the spiritual qualities inherent in man. For in order to attain, while in the body, the state necessary for the perception and apprehension of these invisible operations, the initiate must have led a life of absolute purity in all respects — in actions, thoughts, motives, aspiration and desires. It was not the sacerdotal classes in Persia who discovered magic, as some might imagine from the word. Those were called "magic" who became learned in this science.

The study of ancient occult writings discloses the fact that the knowledge and practice of magic has been in the world since the earliest races of man. The following quotation from *Isis Unveiled* may help to assure the reader on these points: — "What we desire to prove is, that underlying every ancient popular religion was the same ancient wisdom doctrine, one and identical, professed and practised by the initiates of every country, who alone were aware of its existence and importance. To ascertain its origin and the precise way in which it was matured is now beyond human possibility. A single glance, however, is enough to assure one that it could not have attained the marvellous perfection in which we find it pictured to us in the relics of various esoteric systems except after a succession of ages. A philosophy so profound, a moral code so ennobling, and practical results so conclusive and so uniformly demonstrable, cannot be the growth of a generation or even of a single epoch. Fact must have been piled upon fact, deduction on deduction, science has begotten science, and generations upon generations of the brightest human intellects have reflected on the laws of nature, before this ancient doctrine had taken concrete shape. The proofs of this identity of fundamental doctrine in the old religions are found in the prevalence of a system of initiation in the sacerdotal castes which had the guardianship of mystical words of power, and a public display of phenomenal control over natural forces indicating association with preter-human beings. Every approach to the mysteries of all these nations was guarded with the same jealous care, and in all the penalty of death was inflicted upon initiates of any degree who divulged the secrets entrusted to them . . . Such was the case in the Egyptian and Bacchic mysteries, among the Chaldean magi and the Egyptian hierophants, while with the Hindus, from whom they were all derived, the same rule has prevailed from time immemorial".

Again, "The mysteries are as old as the world, and one well versed in the esoteric mythologies of various nations can trace them back to the days of the ante-Vedic period in India".

Thus it will be seen that the knowledge and practice of occult science may be traced back in the past as far as historical records extend, and in each successive generation the followers of, and practical workers in, these studies, have always been found among the most brilliant scholars of the day. But notwithstanding that at one period occult research brought in its train persecution, torture and death, it

carried with it such an ardent desire for further knowledge, that no fear of consequences could prevent the pursuit of it when once entered upon by educated men. And it is only fair to assume that something more than theoretical results must have urged on those who risked their lives and reputations in devotion to this superstition, as it is vulgarly called.

The inmost secrets of the science, however, have been retained and scrupulously guarded from the profane by devoted custodians, who have exercised the powers within their grasp only for the advancement of the races, both materially and spiritually, as necessity arose, or the state of humanity allowed. In far distant ages the people on their part regarded these guardians with absolute devotion and reverence, abiding by their laws in simple faith.

From the great root of this science have shot out in various directions, sometimes underground and often unnoticed, branches and tendrils of less virtue and power as they wandered further and further away from the original stem, but ever kept alive and continually breaking out afresh into activity owing to their connection with the far distant source of life. Alchemy, astrology, witchcraft, demonology, sorcery, spiritualism and every other name and form of what is commonly called the supernatural, spring from and owe their existence to the esoteric doctrine of the Ancients. The same order of events may be observed in regard to the various phases of occult, as in those of religious, history, — the same substratum of truth, the gradual separation of groups of people following individual leaders, these in their turn dividing again, each successive rupture carrying the members further away from the truth, until at last it is with the greatest difficulty that the slight thread of resemblance can be perceived that shows the bond of union between these errant sects and their original point of departure.

But it may be asked, how can a sacred science, of such enormous pre-eminence as is claimed for this one, — the avenues to which are, and always have been, guarded with so much care, betrayal of knowledge acquired by an entrance into whose innermost mysteries was punishable by death — how does it happen, then, that in a community barricaded by such stringent rules, and so exceedingly difficult of access, deterioration could, even in the lapse of ages, ever take place? The answer is that deterioration of the real philosophy has never nor can ever set in, for the truths of these sublime mysteries can be given only to those who have, through years of study, preparation, and trial, proved themselves, beyond all doubt, worthy of them; and the fact that there are still custodians of these mysteries, and that initiation there into is the work of perhaps more than one or even two incarnations, shows that corruption, due to time and human desires, has not yet entered their community, nor sullied the purity of their work. At the same time, the position in the world held by these adepts in times gone by was one of immense power. They were the law-givers of their countries, and had entire control not only over the masses, but also over temporal rulers. In spite, therefore, of the austerities and rigour of life required for admittance into the ranks of studentship, numbers, it may easily be imagined, would strive to attain the knowledge that carried with it such inestimable advantages, even from the worldly point of view. Again, those who had by dint of asceticism gained some little insight into the way to work occult phenomena of the physical kind, but who had failed of the higher initiations through, perhaps, want of purity of motive, were tempted, probably, to carry into distant places the limited knowledge they had gathered in the course of their training, and were able with comparative ease to pass themselves off on the ignorant people as real adepts, using thus, for their own personal benefit and aggrandisement, what was only intended to be for the good and progress of humanity at large. False teachers such as these would attract round them pupils or followers who in their turn would be inferior to their masters, until at last the science would be lowered and degraded in public estimation, first in the eyes of the upper

classes, and eventually in those of the lower. History shows that, even in the time of the old Egyptians, belief in the supernatural powers of the priest and oracles, of the temples was, among the aristocracy, fast crumbling away, but the power and authority that the priests still maintained over the army and country at large was too great to be disregarded. The king and his courtiers went on fulfilling their public devotions for the sake of example, and to keep the favour of the priests, and not because they believed in the prophecies of the oracles or the so-called miracles performed at the religious rites and festivals. These may often have become too transparently fraudulent to deceive any but the most illiterate adherents. As long as the hierophants and priests of the temples were true adepts, *i.e.*, had passed their initiations, and were consequently free from all worldly ambition — they had no need of resorting to the jugglery and imposture that eventually wore out the belief of the people and brought discredit upon the religion. But, in spite of this degradation of the science in general estimation, due in part to the lapse of time, and in part to some of the lower forms of its knowledge escaping and being misused, the highest initiation to adeptship has never been taken by any individual who was capable of bringing discredit on the brotherhood, or of divulging to any one the sacred mysteries. None but the deified man could attain the requisite development; and, having reached this height, he would be far above any temptation that the attractions of this world could hold out.

Moreover, there are other roads leading to occult science besides that by which each pupil or chela, in turn, hopes to attain adeptship. Even these may not be easy to climb, training, even for minor achievements, must be severe. But when, as occasionally may have been the case, the aim of the candidate has merely been the accomplishment of phenomena for worldly advantage or the desire for supremacy over his fellow-creatures, these lower aims may have been secured with relative facility, and consequently by students of an ignoble type. The possession of powers by such persons would obviously tend to lower in the eyes of the world the science from which powers spring. And this consideration gives another explanation of the way in which magic, as a source of power, has been turned from its intended use ; and, instead of being recognised as a necessary attribute of real religion, the knowledge of which must be wielded for the benefit of society, has been discredited as a branch of study both from the pulpit and by the State — from the former as being forbidden by the Bible and an unholy pursuit, by the latter as being an exploded and mischievous belief that never had any foundation except in the minds of the ignorant and superstitious people of the olden time.

The history of the rise and fall of all religions may be traced to reasons almost identical in every nation, whether Eastern or Western. The craving for immortality which is inherent in humanity, both among those who are too uneducated to be aware of it, and also among those who are too highly cultivated to admit of its existence, is the feeling that has always influenced people to follow one or another of the religions that have appeared from time to time in the history of the world. These religions, so long as the teaching given by their respective leaders was upheld by their disciples, or descendants, in its integrity, — so long as no worldly prejudices nor selfish motives sullied the lives of the clergy or priests, — would never have fallen into the state of decadence now only too apparent to their most fervent adherents. But when what ought to be regarded only as a vocation, the result of an overwhelming desire to help humanity to a perception of the spiritual in Nature, becomes a profession in which a struggle for pre-eminence is a matter of course, the effect on the religion will and must be the same. Whether that struggle takes the form of a desire for an enlarged sphere of action in the shape of a bishopric instead of a vicarage, or for priesthood in a large and popular temple as against an obscure and comparatively unknown one; gradually, but quite surely, doubts, disunions, separation, and disintegration follow in its train; until, as now, we see, both in the East and West, a large predominance among the thinking classes of agnosticism and atheism, — conceptions which are by degrees filtering down to the humbler working

people. The majority of what are called Orthodox Christians are either those who have neither read nor thought at all on metaphysical subjects, or they are in truth, when their beliefs are dissected, esoteric Christians, with no firm attachment to the dogmas that go to make up and support the Church as it is now constituted.

The immediate disciples of Buddha, Jesus, or any of the other great religious reformers, were raised immeasurably above their contemporaries by contact with, belief in, and assurance of the absolute purity of motive, goodness, and entire unselfishness of their respective teachers, whose moral codes, miracles, and simple lives varied so little that it is hardly difficult for students to see that their knowledge must have been drawn from the same source, although they lived at very different periods of time.

The moral code taught and practised by Jesus, as far as it goes is perfect and most ennobling. But even this has been compatible with persecution, bloodshed, torture, and immorality of every sort. Scientific research and material progress have been paralysed in the desperate struggle of the clergy to maintain their power and supremacy, gained and upheld by violence. From the few simple words of Jesus his followers have been able to build up not only the two vast divisions in Christendom of Protestantism and Catholicism, but also the innumerable sects to be found within their respective folds. In view of all this, it is not surprising, considering its much greater antiquity, that the wisdom-religion of the ancients should have been misrepresented and disguised in the course of successive generations.

Enough has now been said to show the reader — or, at all events, to put him on the track of verifying for himself the fact — that Eastern and Western religions, magic, and occultism, with all their various developments, have one and the same origin.

WESTERN MISCONCEPTIONS OF EASTERN PHILOSOPHY

When European scholars first began to interest themselves, in the translation of the sacred books of the East, it was with no idea that they contained any deep system of thought which when correctly interpreted, would go far to explain many of the enigmas of life, or that in their ancient pages would be found some of the profoundest cosmological truths, — but rather in the pursuit of philological and historical science. Their value to the educated European world was supposed to lie in their great antiquity, and not in the thoughts and ideas contained in them, which were never supposed worth serious study as embodying a philosophy. In the June number of the *Nineteenth Century* of last year [The first edition of this manual for beginners was published in 1885], Professor Max Muller, in the course of an article entitled "Forgotten Bibles", makes the following remarks: Some at least of the most important works illustrating the ancient religions of the East have been permanently rescued from oblivion, and rendered accessible to every man who understands English. Some of my friends, men whose judgment I value far higher than my own, wonder what ground there is for rejoicing. Some, more honest than the rest, told me that they had been great admirers of ancient Oriental wisdom till they came to read the translations of the sacred books of the East. They had evidently expected to hear the songs of angels and not the babbling of babes. But others took higher ground. What, they asked, could the philosophers of the nineteenth century expect to learn from the utterances of men who had lived one, two, three, or even four thousand years ago? When I humbly suggested that these books had a purely historical interest, and that the history of religion could be studied from no other documents, I was told it was perfectly known how religion arose, and through how many stages it had to pass in its development from

fetishism to positivism, and that, whatever facts might be found in the sacred books of the East, they must all vanish before theories which are infallible and incontrovertible".

These remarks illustrate forcibly the fact that the translators, have only appreciated their subject from one point of view, viz., that of its antiquity, and it is obvious that the idea has not occurred to them that these books might have a hidden meaning, which has been wrapped up in a symbology only recognisable to those who have made a study of mystic philosophy. It was not, of course, to be expected that Western Orientalists, or even Orientals educated exclusively in the Western school, should be able to interpret the symbology, but they should have been prepared to accept the possibility of its presence in the documents. These books may, perhaps, have been "rescued from oblivion" by their present translators in regard to the English-speaking public at large; but an earnest inquirer, anxious to fathom the depth of Oriental thought, has even now, with these translations so readily available, to seek an interpretation of their veiled as well as their superficial meaning. Their "rescue" has only been accomplished at the expense of their significance. These books have very much more than a mere historical value, for in their pages are to be found the fundamental truths of a philosophy that is received by many cultured minds as one well worthy of respect on quite other grounds than those of antiquity.

With reference to the Rig Veda, with which Max Muller claims so much familiarity, the following assertion, not unsupported by reason and illustration, is to be found in *Isis Unveiled* " Alchemists, kabalists, and students of mystic philosophy will find therein a perfectly-defined system of evolution in the cosmogony of a people who lived a score of thousands of years before our own era. They will find in it, moreover, a perfect identity of thought, and even doctrine, with the Hermetic philosophy, and also that of Pythagoras and Plato".

Apart from this, it might be asked what philosophers has the world to show in the present generation to compare with those who have passed away ages ago, leaving behind them theories which may perhaps come nearer the truth than those which are above referred to as " infallible and incontrovertible". The ideas to be found in the sacred books of the East are likened by the Professor to the " babbling of babes". Is this the fault of the ideas, or is it not just possible to conceive that the translators, highly educated, painstaking, and studious as they have shown themselves to be, have failed to find the mystical key that will unlock these hidden treasures, and without which these Bibles are comparatively meaningless and useless. Even from the historical point of view these translations must be unsatisfactory for, instead of helping to show the state of intellectual advancement of the people in those remote times, their actual knowledge of, or the theories they were capable of forming about the Universe, they give, — the learned mystics of India maintain — an entirely wrong impression to the reader of what those theories really were, and to what knowledge those who held them had attained. Justice cannot be done to the noble conceptions contained in these books in consequence of the spirit of the teaching being absolutely wanting in the English version. Were it possible to get these translations commented upon or annotated by an educated Brahmin, possessing some knowledge of the Eastern doctrine, the whole philosophy would shine with a splendour which can now be only partially apprehended even by those Europeans who are disciples of Eastern wisdom, and would display the true grandeur and intellectual power of its cosmogony. For, no matter to what sect the Brahmin might belong, whether he would give the reading in favour of one particular sect or another, it would not affect the result, for, as said above, Indian religions may and do differ considerably exoterically, but the broad basis of esoteric identity is recognised by their respective cultured and mystical adherents and priests, and they one and all acknowledge the hidden occult meaning which, underlies each of these writings, and which in order to obtain their proper

appreciation, must be perceived, if not believed in, by the translator.

Without this perception of the fact that occult science is the basis and foundation of all these books, no rendering of them will or can be satisfactory, for it should be the duty and wish of every one engaged in the work of giving to others certain information by putting it from one language into another, first of all to be sure that he has got a true understanding of this author's subject otherwise how can he hope to do justice to the ideas, no matter how feeble and childish they may to him appear?

Eastern philosophy has one great foundation of belief that runs through all the various forms of thought whether orthodox Brahminical, Buddhist, or Vedantist, and this resembles broadly what Mr. Draper gives as that of the stoics or followers of Zeno, "That, though there is a Supreme Power, there is no Supreme Being. There is an invisible principle, but not a personal God, to whom it would be not so much blasphemy as absurdity to impute the form, sentiments, the passions of men . . . That which we call chance is only the effect of an unknown cause. Even of chances there is a law. There is no such thing as Providence for nature proceeds under irresistible laws, and in this respect the Universe is only a vast automatic engine. The vital force which pervades the world is what illiterate call God. The modifications through which all things are running take place in an irresistible way, and hence it may be said that the progress of the world is under destiny: like a seed it can evolve only in a predestined mode".

The charge of Atheism so often brought against Theosophists and students of Eastern philosophy could hardly be more entirely baseless than it is, and would seem to owe its origin either to ignorance of the true work that Theosophists have at heart (*viz.*, the suppression of Materialism) or to a wrong interpretation put upon the meaning of the word in its popular acceptance.

An Atheist is generally supposed to be one who not only does not believe in a God, but who is also convinced that there is for humanity no survival after death.

It would be equally just, and quite as logical to maintain that Spiritualists (who pass most of their spare time in holding communications with their friends and relations who have passed away) are Atheists, as that Buddhists and Theosophists are so. For, although these latter may disagree with some of the conclusions formed by the former as to the spiritual condition of the disembodied souls, they are at one in knowing that such communications are not only possible but of daily and hourly occurrence.

The one thing that a study of Theosophy shows more than another is, that this life is as nothing compared to the next, that the present is but *māyā*, i.e., transitory, whereas the real life is that which pertains to the inner man, and which is apart from the body. While we are in the body we are chained down by it, and are subject to the limitations incurred by its occupation. Freed from corporeal restraints we can take cognisance of existence on another and higher plane where time, distance, and death do not affect us. Buddhism teaches its disciples, among other things, to disregard the cravings of the body by subduing and conquering the desires that have to do with material pleasures, to be uninfluenced by feelings of envy, passion, anger, revenge, to cultivate an ardent wish to benefit humanity, combined with spiritual aspirations. These bodily desires, the lower feelings of our nature, being once destroyed, the inner man can then escape from bondage, and gain while still in this life some of the knowledge and experience of another state of existence, and thereby of the reality of the ever progressing power of the

Divine Spirit within, which likewise animates the whole universe. The mere fact that true Buddhism does not preach a belief in or dependence on a personal God is no proof that the religion is Atheistic, for it recognises in the Universal Spirit all the higher attributes which Christianity assigns to its Deity, while the teaching of Buddhism and of Christianity equally lead to the purification of the body from all worldly cares and ambition. The whole code of ethics as laid down by Jesus is to the end that humanity should be unselfish, so that their inner and spiritual selves may be fit to associate with the Father in Heaven. The Eastern teaching gives very much the same advice — crush and subdue the personality — that you may come to realise your oneness with the *whole*, universal consciousness.

The reader must not, however, suppose that Theosophy teaches Buddhism pure and simple, for this is not the case, but the study of it shows very clearly that the old wisdom-religion, as taught by initiates from time immemorial, underlies all the great religions of the world. Buddhism and Brahminism bear much the same relation one to another as do Protestantism and Catholicism, and they have as many sects and branches within their members as have these Western religions. Esoteric Buddhism was a philosophy before the historical Buddha appeared on the earth, that is to say, the philosophical truth beneath the outer form was there, as it was also in Christianity and Brahminism, before their founders appeared. Thus it will be seen that Oriental philosophy, instead of being atheistical in its tendency, is absolutely the reverse, and has got that character partly from being wrongly interpreted by Western exponents, and partly through the fact that a belief in an anthropomorphic God as the creator of the Universe is discouraged by the greatest Eastern authorities of the day, and is not supported in the teachings of the sacred books of the East.

Mr. Herbert Spencer's "Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed", and his statement that "none of the positive attributes which have ever been predicated of God can be used of this energy", agrees and is identical with the teaching of Eastern philosophy. But, whereas Mr. Spencer says that human finite consciousness cannot conceive of nor approach the Unknowable, which he admits is the "Ultimate Reality", occult initiates assert that the power to do so is latent in mankind, also that this power of faculty can, by special methods of development to the knowledge of which they have access, be brought to dominate and free itself from the restraints of the body, and be rendered able to bridge the gulf that separates the known from the unknown. The deep reverence with which the teachers and pupils of the esoteric doctrine approach the subject of the Great Law, — the Unconscious, Infinite, Ultimate Reality, or whatever name is used to express the idea, — if only faintly realised by Western exponents of other religious beliefs, would go far to dispel the notion so widely circulated that this system is other than the most spiritual of all, for its great object is the cultivation in human beings of the higher tendencies of their nature, thus enabling them to realise for themselves the great truth, that this physical is the transitory and the spiritual the only real life.