

Public Speeches at the Second Annual Convention of the European Section of the Theosophical Society

by W.Q. Judge, G.R.S. Mead,
Count Leiningen, H. Burrows, A. Besant

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William Q. Judge in the Chair

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[Page 3] LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, — This is the concluding meeting of the Second Annual Convention of the European Section of the Theosophical Society, and it is thrown open to the public in order that we might have an opportunity of telling you, if we can, in an unmistakable way, some of our views about Theosophy, so that you will understand perhaps a little better than you did last year what Theosophy is and what we are about.

The proceedings this evening will consist of addresses by myself, by Mr. George R. S. Mead, General Secretary of the European Section, by Mr. Herbert Burrows, who is well known in this country, and by Mrs. Annie Besant, who is also, I think, well known.

I will now very earnestly and respectfully ask you to give your attention to myself. As chairman of this meeting, as chairman of the Convention which has just closed, as the General Secretary of the American Section of the Theosophical Society, and as one of those who, with Colonel Olcott and Madame "Blavatsky, founded the Theosophical Society seventeen years ago, I have been asked to speak to you a little about the Theosophical Society. Last year Colonel Olcott himself, as the President-Founder of the Society, addressed a similar meeting, but of course I will not say what he said, nor shall I go over the same ground.

Now the Theosophical Society was, as I said, founded seventeen years ago, in the city of New York, in America. When it was started, a stream of jokes in the newspapers, laughter, ridicule of every kind, greeted it and people thought, "This new thing, this new *fad*, in our *faddy* country, will soon expire". But you see that although many of those who joined us from the spiritualist body have disappeared from our ranks, we have still a few delegates to present to you tonight as [Page 4] representing the Society. It is a Society which now extends all over the civilized world, and into many parts of what you are pleased to call the uncivilized world.

This Theosophical Society was started by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, as I said; and she and he worked together in it with some of us unflinchingly, she as much as he. Her life on this earth has been ended. But Colonel Olcott is still living, and working for the Society in India. To him we must give the

greatest credit, for he has worked against all sorts of opposition, both within and without the Society; and without him as a bold and fearless pioneer we should not have reached the influence which we have now attained. So we have all been giving him credit today, and we wish you to remember him. Whether you belong to our Society or not, or whether you believe as we do or not, all present must approve a fearless man.

The Theosophical Society has three objects. Those objects are: first, to found the nucleus of a universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, class, sex, colour, or previous condition. This is our first and our most important object; this is our only creed. It admits belief in any particular creed. It does not say you must give up this, that, or the other — except what is bad and immoral. It asks you only to accept the idea that universal brotherhood is a thing we should strive for. And, in order to give support to that hitherto Utopian idea, it has two other objects; one of which is to study, investigate, look into, the philosophies and religions of the past, for that includes the present, because our philosophy and our religion have grown out of the past, it is but a counterfeit presentment of what the ancients knew and taught, and you have nothing of your own that is particularly new. Today, as of old, in the time of Solomon, it is true that there is nothing new in this world under the sun. We thought that the second object was important, because, while we are looking into the religions and philosophies of the past and present we shall perhaps discover the one truth which must underlie all systems of religion and philosophy. We have come to believe that all systems of religion, Buddhism, Brahmanism, Confucianism, what you call Christianity, all rest on one basis, all flow from one old school. And if we can cut away the husks, the crusts, about this central truth, we shall at last have arrived at the truth about it. The only revelation which is possible is the revelation which comes to man by his own experience, by his own effort, by his own suffering. He learns in no other way, and all the revealed books of the past are revelations from the human heart and soul to itself. [Page 5]

Our third object, to support these other two, because we are living in the world surrounded by phenomena, is to investigate the psychical laws that govern man and nature. With these three objects we have covered the whole field. By the first we embrace progress in social life. If it were attained and made real it would cure all the evils that legislation vainly attempts to cope with, and which legislation hitherto has failed in any way to cure. The last one, the investigation of psychical laws of man and nature, you may say has not been pursued by us. But we think it has been pursued by us in the proper way. We have in London and in America what people call the Psychical Research Society, which engages itself with what it grandly calls investigation into psychical phenomena, consisting, as far as my experience goes, in recording a number of dreams, visions, apparitions and thoughts, in the mass not so large as we have had before; but they give no explanation. We have discovered in the investigation of the ancient philosophies that they have thought out all the psychological laws of nature, and have given a system of philosophy which is scientific and explains them all. Some have been investigating this system of philosophy, so that when we come to look at the things about us we may be able to explain them without going to the trouble of making a lot of books recording these things without any explanation. We are, therefore, pursuing the last object in the proper way. Then we are prepared to show that we have discovered in this and other countries that certain faculties are coming out which are of a dangerous character. Psychical characteristics are showing themselves more than ever before. In my country I know (I have had it brought to my attention in print as well as by words) that men and women are striving to exercise the powers which are indicated by what you call telepathy and hypnotism, for selfish purposes and for nothing else. Theosophy teaches us that it is a dangerous thing to go into phenomena of this character unless you have first prepared the ground by showing men why they should be moral, why they should not practise these things for selfish purposes. For we consider that those who practise telepathy,

hypnotism, and the like, for their own selfish ends, are just as immoral as the dynamiter or the burglar. We think you have no right to burglarize the mind of another; and we know many men and women in this city and in other cities who would break open the minds of their fellows to discover secrets for their own profit.

The Theosophical Society has been investigating these three objects in a philosophical and scientific manner, and all we ask of any one who wishes to join us is that he should believe and attempt to [Page 6] practise "Universal Brotherhood", so that we may begin to form the nucleus around which the real brotherhood may at last accumulate itself.

I have said that the Theosophical Society extends all over the world. I have seen it in India, America, and this country. It is in Africa, it is in New Zealand, it is in the Isles of Europe about the various seas. It is all over India, and is connected there not only with bodies which are visible, but with bodies of men who keep themselves unknown. It is connected there with societies counting thousands upon thousands of men in their ranks, and they are all devoted to high purposes. They are not the heathen you think they are, but worshippers of a single God or spirit, and, as St. Paul has said to you, "an unknown God." That is the Christian God, for the Christian *Bible* says you cannot discover or find out God. If you cannot discover or find Him out you cannot describe Him, or give Him attributes. And the poor heathen says, "We cannot discover Him, or find Him, but we attempt to follow a high ideal"; and they are not the miserable heathen you think them.

This Society then embraces Europe, Asia, Africa, and America — and this has been done in seventeen years. Do you consider that we have been snuffed out or that we have failed? I think not. We have succeeded against opposition such as no Society in this century has succeeded against. The press and the pulpit have attacked us without reason, have libelled us, and told lies about us. But we forgive them because we are weak human beings as they are, and we know the right will prevail; that is, justice will prevail; and we have enormous confidence that this Theosophical movement will be the greatest movement of this of any other century, small as it seems today and weak as we appear to you to be.

The Theosophical Society is without a creed, but any society devoting itself to a definite object must at last accumulate within its ranks a number of members who all think more or less alike; and that is just what has happened in the Theosophical Society. A great many of us, the majority I will frankly say, think about alike, but not because we have forced belief into each other. We have come together and said to each other, "Here are these ideas", and it has resulted in the majority having come to one conclusion. But the Society is always free and open. It has no dogmas. The doctrines we have put principally forward among a great many others for investigation cover everything; we are so presumptuous as to say that Theosophy is large enough to cover all Science and all Religion, to make indeed Science [Page 7] religious, and Religion scientific — but among all these doctrines we think there is a truth of the highest importance to humanity, because sorrow prevails everywhere, and we are attempting by our Society's work to find a cure for sorrow. We think that evils will never be cured by legislation. You have been legislating all these long years and have not succeeded. We have still our strikes, our sorrows, our poverty. We began without anything against us in America, and today there is the same thing there as here. As one of our great investigators of criminal records says, crime in America is worse than in England in proportion. With all your legislation here is the same evil, and so we bring principally forward three doctrines which we think of the highest importance.

The first is Justice; we call it Karma; you can call it Justice, but the old Sanskrit word is Karma. It is that you will reap the result of what you do. If you do good you will get good; if you do evil you will get evil. But it is said that man does not get his deserts in many cases. That is true under the old theory. But the next step is that we bring forward out of Christianity, Buddhism, Brâhmanism, that doctrine under which it becomes true, and that is Reincarnation. This means we are all spiritually immortal beings, and in order to receive our deserts we must all come to the place where we have done the good or the evil, so that today you have come to this life from some other life. If you have been good you are happy, if you have been evil you are unhappy, just because you lived in a corresponding way in that life. And if you are not caught up within this life you will be caught up within the next one which is coming. For after you die you have a slight period of rest, and then return to this civilization which you have made, and for which you are responsible, and for which you will suffer if its evils are not eliminated.

And the next doctrine is that all these spiritual beings in these bodies are united together in fact, not in theory; that you are all made of one substance; that our souls vibrate together, feel for each other, suffer for each other, and enjoy for each other; so that in far China people are suffering for the evils of people in London, and people in London are suffering for the evils of people in China, and in New York the same. We are all bound together with a bond we cannot break, and that is the essential unity of the human family, it is the basis of the universal brotherhood.

We bring these three doctrines prominently forward because ethics must have a basis not in fear, not in command, not in statute laws, but in the man himself. And when he knows that he is united with everyone [Page 8] else, and is responsible for the progress of his brother, he will then come to act according to right ethics. And until he so believes he will not, and our sorrows will increase and revolutions will come on, blood will be shed, and you will only rise then out of the ruins of that civilization which you hoped to make the grandest that the world has ever seen.

We hope that the day will soon come when these doctrines will be believed and practised, which this movement, called the Theosophical movement, has thus brought prominently forward.

The limit of my time having been reached, I have to call the next speaker, to whom you will please give your kind attention, Mr. George R. S. Mead.

Mr. G. R. S. Mead then addressed the meeting.

MR. CHAIRMAN, FELLOW THEOSOPHISTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, — My task tonight is to refer very briefly to the work of the past year in the European Section of the Theosophical Society, and only in that one Section, as it would be too long now to trespass on the work of the American and Indian Sections as well.

The first point of interest I have to tell you is this. As those of you will remember who were present on a similar occasion last year we then passed a resolution in honour of our leader who had just left us. We resolved that we should start a fund for the publication of such translations as would unite the East with the West in the manner that she, Madame Blavatsky, had laboured to unite the Occident with the Orient. For this purpose a fund has been raised throughout the Theosophical Society, and we are in treaty for the

publication of translations of books which have not yet been brought to the notice of the English-reading public. We are trying to procure a translation of one of the most important divisions of the Buddhist Scriptures. It is called the *Abhidharma*, and deals with the religio-philosophy and psychology (in the right sense of the word) of Buddha.

We are also trying to procure the translation of the *Vishuddhi Mârga*, or "Path of Purity", a compendium, spoken of most highly, which they say contains valuable information, belonging to the same philosophy or religion, or whatever you may call Buddhism. These we hope to begin with, and so start a series — if I may venture to predict — a series of sacred books of the East, under the auspices of the Theosophical Society, translated by our own members, and by men who believe in the books they translate.

In order to commemorate the memory of our guide and friend, one of our members, a distinguished sculptor in Sweden, well known on [Page 9] the Continent for the beauty of his work, offered to present the Society here with a casket for the ashes of the body of H. P. Blavatsky. Today the casket arrived among us; and the gift is of most beautiful construction. It was designed from a sketch by one of our members here, an artist of great merit, Mr. Machell, and it has been executed by Herr Sven Bengtsson of Lund, in Sweden. It is in the shape of a *dâgoba* (a dome-shaped reliquary building common to Buddhist countries) and at the four corners there are smaller *dâgobas*. At the top of this dome-shaped building there is a lotus flower, enshrining a heart, and from the heart comes a flame of fire. It must not be supposed, however, that there will ever be any tendency in the Theosophical Society towards anything approaching relic worship. In the East it is the custom after the cremation of the body of the dead to scatter the ashes to the winds, and perhaps it would have been as well to have so scattered the ashes in the present case. But in this country it is not the custom to do so, and as we could not well decide in the hurry of the moment, it was passed over. But I am confident, speaking in the names of all our members present, I may assure the public that they will find it very difficult indeed to ever bring any such accusation against any member of the Theosophical Society as that of relic worship. In this case it is honour paid to the dead, and no more.

I now pass on to give you in a few words an idea of the work that has been done. Our lodge meetings (to which we invite strangers) in Europe have amounted to the respectable number of about 1,000; and we have had here, and on the Continent, public lectures numbering between 200 and 300. But perhaps the most remarkable fact is the enormous amount of literature we have turned out. We have three magazines in English, one in Swedish, one in French, two in German, one in Dutch, and one in Spanish — not a bad record for a Society numbering so few members as ourselves. As to books and papers, we have turned out 156 books and pamphlets; there are eleven in the press; translations of twelve books are ready to be published; and eighteen are in hand — this in one year. We have also established in London a printing press of our own, at which we employ about twelve hands; and I do not think you will be able to say that we are unpractical or unbusinesslike in this. There is an idea among the public that Theosophists — or rather the members of the Theosophical Society — are mystic dreamers. But instead of that as a practical fact you will always find we have too much to do instead of too little. The press we have established differs from presses in Europe; that is to say, we have imported one of the best machines we can procure from [Page 10] America, and America is, I believe, admitted to be foremost in machinery. Moreover, we try to be ahead of the times in employing women labour in printing. They say we have the pick of the women compositors in London.

We have also a long record of articles and letters written by our members to the press, some 2,500 at

least; which is one way we have of trying to bring our ideas before the public. I do not say that it is altogether an efficacious way, because in a Society like our own, dealing with difficult subjects, our members are often filled with over-zeal rather than with discretion, but still it does remove some misconception and brings our ideas forward before the public.

Perhaps you will be interested to hear that not only in Great Britain is Theosophy making great strides, but also on the Continent. For instance, in Sweden, in Norway, in Finland and Denmark, there is such enthusiasm among our members that lately a scheme has been started of a somewhat novel character. I mention this only to show you how Theosophists are trying to be without distinction of class or caste. We have all heard of people going about to different watering places with packs of wares on their backs. In this case the wares are Theosophical literature, and the *colporteur* goes about and lectures on the nature of the literature he has to sell. But in this case instead of the lecturer being an ordinary bagman, it is a distinguished baron who has undertaken the task. If Theosophy brings about such changes of opinion in ordinary conventionality in a place like Sweden, where people think so highly of titles, I think we have here a good instance that shows there is something in Theosophy that has a distinct, practical bearing on our actions in ordinary life.

In France we have established a strong centre, and our work has been noticed by many people of talent and worth. Our movement there is now on a sound footing, on a firm basis. For instance, the distinguished orientalist Émile Burnouf is giving us his assistance in our endeavour to bring before the public in a generally understandable way the leading ideas of the East.

We do not suppose that the public will understand the technical books; but we think many of the books on ethics are books containing ideas, ideas of the first importance, that ought to be known by the Western world; and many of us consider that just as when Rome conquered Greece, and Greece in its turn conquered her Roman victors by the power of her philosophy, and as the Renaissance, and following it the Reformation, arose in Europe by the philosophers and their treasures being driven out of Byzantium and taking refuge in Western [Page 11] Europe, so today the union of the thought of the East and West will bring about enormous changes of thought and opinion, and will be an encouragement for greater effort than at present we dream of.

Now in drawing my remarks to a conclusion I would refer to a fact that is probably in the minds of most of you. In the autumn of last year our friend Annie Besant, in making her farewell address at the Hall of Science, ventured a statement that seemed to those who knew anything about it to be very simple. She was speaking about Madame Blavatsky, and about the many attacks that had been made upon her character; especially that she was accused of fabricating letters, and saying they had come from those she called her Masters. Mrs. Besant said that since H. P. Blavatsky's death she had received letters from the same individuals, and therefore that it was impossible for Madame Blavatsky to have forged such letters. Instead of people taking these statements as they were made, the most absurd misstatements arose throughout the press, not only of this country, but of the whole world. These misstatements were repeated and amplified, and a controversy arose as to Theosophy. In the *Daily Chronicle*, as you know, for upwards of five weeks this controversy was continued, as many as from two to six columns a day being inserted. Of course only a few of the letters that were written were worth reading; the majority of them showed to anyone who had studied the subject that those who were putting forward their peculiar views and criticizing the matter had no real knowledge of the subject. But it did one good — it brought to the notice of people far and wide all over the world that there was such a thing as Theosophy, and that

there was a Society called the Theosophical Society. The consequence was that a large amount of enquiry has been made concerning the Society.

In the past year Theosophy has been spoken of in the palace and in the workhouse. Colonel Olcott, the President-Founder, on a recent visit here, had the honour of an interview with the King of Sweden, who is greatly interested in many of the subjects that the Theosophical Society is interested in. One of our papers, a simple pamphlet, one that can be easily understood, was read in one of our large East-end workhouses to an appreciative audience. These facts prove that Theosophy is suited to all classes of society.

Moreover, we can see by the opinions expressed against us that there must be a great force and strength in our opinions, and also that there is hope that when we are better understood a great many more will be our friends than at present are so. On the one hand we find, for instance, a distinguished member of the Society of Jesus, while [Page 12] admitting the actuality of such things as psychical phenomena, while admitting phenomena spoken of in connection with the early days of this Society, while admitting that the philosophy we discuss and put forward is one that meets the wants of the times, and is a great attraction to the mind of the nineteenth century, nevertheless assigning our efforts to the "enemy" because this particular phase of Theosophy does not come through the channel of the Roman Catholic Church. On the other hand, we have a prominent minister of the Congregationalist body inviting us to discuss Theosophy in his church, and recommending his congregation earnestly to study the matter. You here see the difference of opinion; we can see from this also that Theosophy appeals to many minds, and that condemnation from one side does not mean that it should be condemned by all. Privately, also, we know of ministers of the church who have joined our ranks, and also of those high in the church who attend our lectures, and are in communication with our members. And we know of men distinguished in science, art, and literature, who take the greatest interest in our movement, although they are not identified with it as members; nor do we wish to force them to become members of the Theosophical Society. Of course we are pleased to receive into our ranks any one, but naturally we would sooner have those who are in earnest about the matter. What we want is a body of men and women who will throw their thought out into the world to leaven the thought of the age, not in the way we think the thoughts ourselves, but in the direction which will help on the world, and make us all better men and women and more hopeful of the future that lies before us.

The CHAIRMAN: As representing the French, and also the German Theosophists, Count Leiningen, one of our members, will now address you for a few minutes in French upon the subject of Theosophy.

Count Leiningen then addressed the meeting in French.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—My colleague and brother, Mr. Mead, has just given you an account of the activity and success of the T. S. during the last year.

As a contrast to this external presentment of the Society I want — as far as the limited time allows — to say something of the inner essence of Theosophy, of the true goal of mysticism and Theosophy, and of the inward work of the Theosophist to reach that goal.

Through the history of all nations and of all times runs — like a red thread through a dark texture — occult knowledge and mystic traditions, and when other philosophical systems and sciences appear and vanish in rapid succession, occult teachings appear again and again. But it [Page 13] seems that we ask in vain for the real result of this teaching. We find no tangible effect in the culture which would justify such assiduous study, so many sacrifices, and the relinquishment of all that the world holds desirable. In consequence of this the question forces itself upon us, What is really the good of mysticism? and, although we know the external effects of the T. S., to what does the Theosophist aspire?

Now it is rather difficult to give a true idea of the nature of this goal of mysticism, and of the way and means to attain it before the student himself has, to a certain degree, found this way. This may seem to be paradoxical, as, for instance, it would be rather difficult for an inhabitant of Holland, who had never been out of his own country, to form for himself a true and perfect idea of the Alps, although they may have been described to him at length, but the moment he sees them he attains a knowledge which years of study would never have given. The goal of mysticism and Theosophy, which is identical with the true destiny of humanity, consists in the awakening of the inner spiritual man, of the divine spark and image of God, which in Sanskrit is called *Âtmâ*. To explain what is meant by this, I must mention that recent experiments in psychology have shown that our internal personality that which says "I" in us and shows itself externally by will, character and remembrance, cannot be our real, eternal, divine essence, for our personality, our external "I" is accessible to strange influences, can at will be transformed, or even wholly exchanged, and, just for this reason, cannot be unchangeable, eternal and divine. This is rather the external expression, the effect of the principle which slumbers in us, or of the divine essence or force which lies deeper in the consciousness. It must be resuscitated, and to do this, to become conscious of and to kindle the divine spark, glowing deep in our interior, into the blazing flame which devours all the lower elements of man until the whole being becomes spiritually regenerated and assimilated to the essence of God Himself, this, I say, is the true goal of the mystic and Theosophist.

Now, to show briefly the way to this goal and the means to attain it, I will give the four chief conditions which are named by the sacred book of the Indians, the *Kaivalyanavanita*. The first is the knowledge or true discrimination between the eternal and temporal, that is to say, the knowledge of everything that is included in the terms past, present and future.

The second is the renunciation of the enjoyment of any of the fruits of our actions in this or any other life, and of anything otherwise desirable in the world, for by the perfect knowledge of the first condition, [Page 14] all this has become quite valueless to us; we must do our duty from no egotistical motive, not to become rich or famous, not for any hope of a heaven, or for any fear of a hell, but only because it is our *duty*, because our Karma has assigned us this place and this work, and because we are ourselves a part of the great wheel of the universe.

The third condition is the acquirement of the six qualifications which consist especially in obtaining the complete mastery over ourselves, not only over our external motions, but also over our imaginations.

The fourth point is the striving for the liberation of all aspirations of the soul. We must always feel the burning longing for the awakening of the inner spiritual life, and always have an immovable faith in our divine essence. It is not said in vain that "faith moves mountains", it is an invincible power, and a confidence in our forces makes them irresistible.

We do not strive to attain any magic powers, but aim at the perfection and spiritualization of the mystic regeneration of man, and to this end we must focus all our forces. All contradiction, all vanity, all ambition, and all selfishness must be eliminated and melted in the fire of the one pure, spiritual, divine love.

And when we are in doubt, when our sight is darkened, when we do not know how to act for the best, if we only ask ourselves how He, who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life", would have acted, then we would be sure not to miss the path to take in order to gain the goal of all true mystics and Theosophists; if we only do this a new and golden age would soon arise, true culture and civilization would advance, and all social miseries would vanish.

The CHAIRMAN: Now will you give your attention to Herbert Burrows, who will announce his own subject.

Herbert Burrows then addressed the meeting.

MR. CHAIRMAN AND FRIENDS, — Last May twelve months our honoured teacher and friend, H. P. Blavatsky, closed one stage of her life, and there are those on this platform who caught her last look and heard her last words. When that sad office was over, that faithful band, few in number, knew what they would have to encounter in their Theosophical propaganda in this England of ours. They knew they would have to face the calumny which had not spared Madame Blavatsky during her life. They knew that for the time being they would have to submit to the gibes and jeers of those who could not look beneath this outer veil which we call matter. They knew they would have to face the laughter of those individuals who scorn anything [Page 15] which approaches to a lofty ideal of human life; and looking at all this from a human point of view, one could not have wondered if these men and women had thought that for the time being Theosophy was under a cloud. In fact, it was so prophesied in the press, and the opinion which ran through the papers for a few weeks after Madame Blavatsky's death was that this Society of ours was founded on fraud, and would end in folly. But if ever there has been a prophecy which was falsified by events it was that prophecy with regard to the future of the Theosophical Society. A year ago we held our first Convention of the European Section of the Society, and, as some of you will remember, we also held a meeting almost as large as this at the Portman Rooms. But public interest in Theosophy was not then so much excited as it was a few months afterwards, when that event took place to which Mr. Mead referred in his address — the absorbing public attention which followed that simple announcement by Annie Besant at the Hall of Science. You remember that one of the great London dailies, the *Daily Chronicle*, thought it well to open its pages to the subject, not for two or three days only, but for five consecutive weeks, many of its columns being taken up every day with arguments for and against Theosophy; and from that time forward our Theosophical propaganda has increased, not only here but all over the continent of Europe and in other parts of the world. As a student of human nature, I say that this goes far to prove that our Theosophical Society and propaganda and Theosophy itself were not quite what our opponents declared they were in their attacks on us after H. P. Blavatsky's death. For every sociologist knows that any movement that has been founded simply on fraud falls to the ground in a very short time.

Not one of you in this room who knows Annie Besant and myself (and I put it egotistically for the time being, because, through past circumstances, through no credit of our own, we are better known to you

than some others on this platform) would dare to get up in this or any other meeting of Englishmen and women and accuse us of conscious fraud. You may say we are foolish, you may say we are deceived, I put that on one-side for a moment, because that is simply a matter of personal opinion. But I put it to you that in the lectures and addresses which you have heard during these past months from us and from other members of our Society, there has been set before you an ideal of ethics which you can hardly find equalled in any other system of religion, philosophy, or science which is before the world at the present time. It is with this system of ethics as it touches the social life that I have to deal, and whether or not you agree with the [Page 16] particular way in which that system works itself out, I think I may fairly ask you to say that principles and ideas which have for their object the highest moral welfare of humanity are worthy of a patient hearing and a candid examination by rational men and women.

There are Theosophists in this hall tonight who have travelled from many lands to our Theosophical Convention which we have been holding during the last two days, and of which this is the closing meeting; and they have come because they are swayed by one common idea, and that idea is expressed in its widest sense in the first object of the Theosophical Society, which was put to you by our chairman in his opening address; that is, the endeavour to found the nucleus of a universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, sex, creed, caste or colour. All Theosophists — mystic dreamers as some of you suppose us to be — would be the first to acknowledge that it is not enough simply to put such an ideal before the world without doing something to bring it to a practical issue. And it is with regard to that practical issue, and the way Theosophists would treat our present civilization — or so-called civilization — that I wish to speak to you. I say so-called civilization because those of you who have known me for some time (and the course of my thought has not altered since I became a Theosophist) know that when I thus speak of civilization I mean that a great deal of it is little more than civilized barbarism, and that unless something is done in this age to improve and transform that civilized barbarism, the last state of Europe will be worse than the first.

If you have read our pamphlets and other writings you know that the fundamental conception of Theosophy is this; that men and women are thinking intelligent entities; that they are not simply the body, but that the real spiritual human being passes into and uses the body as an instrument by which to bring about and perfect certain results, on what is called the material realm or plane. And in close connection with that idea is the other great tenet of Theosophy: that the most powerful thing in the universe is thought; that the whole of this physical material realm is but the outward manifestation, and that the real universe lies hidden in the more potent realm of thought. And so we look on the worse aspects of this civilization of ours, this civilized barbarism, as concrete bad thought. Always in the world there are two currents of thought going on, one on the right side and one on the wrong side, and what is really the problem of evil is the struggle between those two currents for the mastery. Now unfortunately one of [Page 17] the traits of this thought in human nature as at present expressed in our civilization is the trait of selfishness. If one of you were asked to describe the cardinal sin of our nineteenth-century life, you would probably say that that cardinal sin is the sin of selfishness. And that is the one great sin against which Theosophy strikes, and it hopes to strike against it in two ways: first by the hidden power of thought on its own plane, and then by that power of thought translated into the concrete acts of life. And it is the Theosophical ideas as to these concrete acts of daily human life, which may be roughly classed into selfish and unselfish, that I would put before you.

I know it has been said during the last year or two that everybody who takes up Theosophical ideas shuts himself, or herself, off from the active propaganda of everyday life. That is not true. It is true that in

certain cases those who feel that they have a call, as it were (to use a phrase very familiar to our English ears), to what they believe to be a higher and more effective propaganda, have devoted themselves mainly to that instead of the ordinary social work, which a number of people can do equally as well. We believe in such a thing as the specialization of function. We do not believe it is possible for all men and women to do everything equally well; and we believe it is a good thing when men and women have found out what they can best do, And so some Theosophists think that the best thing to do is chiefly so to wield that power of thought in the way of public ethical teaching as to influence for good the general thought of mankind. But this specialization of function also leads a number of Theosophists to interest themselves, and rightly so, in the social problems of the age. These social problems are to them, as to many outside their ranks, simply crystallization of thought; but much of that thought has become selfishly active, and the consequence is that in many respects its result is a hideous travesty of what it really ought to be. I do not think that any true brotherly men and women would, if they had the power, make such a civilization as this for themselves. Wherever we look, in the literary, in the artistic, in the scientific, in the religious, in the social worlds, there is growing up a most profound dissatisfaction with our nineteenth century life — a dissatisfaction which is based-on high and moral grounds. And those grounds are that in a vast number of cases the outward material conditions help to make virtue difficult and vice easy, help to repress the good in man and develop the evil, and that it is the bounden duty of all lovers of the race to strive their utmost for the general improvement and true evolution of all.

Those of us who believe in social legislation all admit that it should [Page 18] be so directed as to give to those who need and deserve, the chance of obtaining better physical conditions. Theosophy says with everybody else that these things should be; but the best men and women of the day know that these are the least part of real human life, and that in struggling for them they should be looked on, not as the end, but as adjuncts to the real end, that real end being the mental, moral and spiritual improvement of mankind. That improvement as a possibility in human evolution lies at the root of the dissatisfaction of which I have spoken, and to this inner development all the ethics of Theosophy are directed.

Taking then this great basic Theosophic principle of the brotherhood of the race, that brotherhood depending on the spiritual unity of man, the Theosophist is impelled by his Theosophy to do something more than hold it up as a far-off ideal to be attained countless ages hence; he is bound to act it out in his own life and to translate it now and here into the social, the civic, the national life of the country at large. If he believes that a certain general course of outward evolution is necessary for his own development as a real human being, he is bound to help others to attain that development, not necessarily in precisely the same exact way, because that would be practical automatism, but certainly on the same broad general lines. Justice and brotherhood to him are no mere phrases, but real living truths whose outward expression should make up the sum total of the relations of human beings with each other.

Obviously, in a world-wide Society which exacts no pledges from its members but the single one of working for universal brotherhood, there can be no fixed rule as to the exact way in which that pledge should be fulfilled by every member. We are not a political society — neither a Tory, Liberal, nor Home Rule organization, neither Socialist nor Anarchist. In our ranks we have men and women of all creeds and all classes, of all political opinions and of no political opinions, if you can conceive such, and any attempt to bind them to one common course of action would be necessarily a failure. But, as the chairman pointed out to you, in the main they are swayed by this one common idea, that it is their bounden duty to express in a concrete form in their relations with others the best side of those brotherly thoughts and principles which go to make up the best of their own inner lives. Nothing new in this — it is

a story as old as the hills, but we assert that these old ethics need a new affirmation in this age, and that in our philosophy which lies behind them we have that sure ground which ordinary religion and philosophy fail to give. [Page 19]

And so the objects of our Theosophical Convention, which we have just been holding, have been these: First to increase the feeling of Theosophical brotherhood, and next to strengthen the individual Theosophical life; because we hold very, very strongly that you cannot make other people what you are not yourself; if you are impure in your own thought then you act impurely on others; if you are selfish in your own life it is impossible that unselfishness can proceed from you and influence the world. Therefore, first the Theosophist attempts to improve himself physically, mentally, morally and spiritually. But above all things the Theosophist says that if improvement stopped with him he would be not the most unselfish man but the most selfish, and the result of that is not the mere effort to gain these occult powers of which you have heard, not the mere fitting of yourself here for a better life in the future, but that every power of mind, body, or spirit which you can gain, loses all its force and all its reason unless it is directed into channels which shall bring about this universal brotherhood as the only true and lasting basis of that new society which shall surely come.

So you see we leave our members perfectly free to take up what line of action they choose. We do not bind them to Socialism, to an Eight Hours' Bill, or to any particular scheme for the housing of the poor. If they choose to join a society to get better houses for the people, if they choose to organize to get an Eight Hours' Bill, well and good. We leave them free to hold whatever individual opinions they will about religion, about the various departments of life, about social problems, only we pledge them that they shall work for the universal brotherhood of man, and we expect them as reasonable, sane, intelligent people not simply to sit in their own rooms and merely meditate about humanity. We expect them in the face of this imperfect civilization (which is the outcome of the concentrated bad thought of past ages), to examine it and see how it has been formed and on what it is based; and if they are satisfied that there is selfishness instead of unselfishness at the root, if they find that there is oppression and wrong instead of justice and right, we say they are false to every principle of Theosophical life if they do not throw themselves into some active channel (and that channel we leave to them), in order to bring about a purer and nobler civic and national life, based on the principles they hold good for themselves as individuals. Without giving up any article of my social creed, without withdrawing a single thing I have ever said on any public platform, from Socialistic or any other standpoint, I hold that what I have put to you is a reasonable active [Page 20] motive for Theosophical life. And I have put it roughly like this in order to show you that we are not in our thoughts and ideas and actions the mystical dreamers which, as Mr. Mead said, we are often supposed to be. Remember this, the next age depends on what this age is; and as the people by whom you are surrounded are influenced by you directly, so the mass of the next age will be influenced by the way the mass is considered and treated in this. And if into that next age are carried over the traits of selfishness, injustice, unbrotherliness, hatred and enmity, which have been some of the distinguishing marks of the end of this nineteenth century, then, instead of that age being the golden era for which all thinkers have striven, it will be but like its predecessors, the incarnate expression of the foolish selfishness of man. And so the message of Theosophy to the Western world is this: that outward civilization is useless, nay mischievous, unless it go hand in hand with inner morals, that the individual life is the centre from which true civilization must proceed, but that that individual life loses its real self if steeped in selfish isolation. Only as a conscious part of the great human whole can the single human life attain its full beauty of stature; every ignoble thought, every selfish act retards its growth, and renders more difficult of realization those golden days to which we can now but point the way.

The CHAIRMAN: Please listen to Annie Besant.

Mrs. Annie Besant then addressed the meeting.

FRIENDS, — In the speeches to which you have been listening there has been, as the careful listeners will have discovered, a consecutive line of thought. Our President-elect to begin with told us something of the past of the Society, something of its object, something of its hopes. Then the General Secretary of our special Section told us of the work that in the past year had been put by that Section to the general credit of the Society. Then our brother Leiningen from Austria spoke of mysticism and its true meaning of its real object — the development of the divine life in man. Then, following him, Herbert Burrows told us of the ethical side of Theosophy, of the practical duty that that ethical thought imposes on every true Theosophist. And in closing the meeting, that which has fallen to my duty to lay before you is a glance backward over the past year in respect to the bearing of the growth of scientific thought on the teaching which is bound up in the Esoteric Philosophy, so that you may see how that Philosophy is becoming justified by the advanced thought even of the Western world, and how even in that advancement of thought in the West, as in that synthetical teaching of the East which explains it, you have the real scientific basis [Page 21] of our ethic, and the compelling motive for human conduct and human thought.

Now those of us who are at all familiar with the teaching of the writer who left us last year, know that in dealing with the Evolution of the universe and of man, a distinct succession is traced in which the universe and man answer the one to the other. You will also know that in this cosmical development we find arranged in definite order that which the ancients used to speak of as the elements of the universe: earth, water, air, fire, and ether. Beyond the ether I need not, for my present purpose, pass. You know that so far as regards human development, with our Philosophy, that that also proceeds in definite order: that behind us in the Evolution of the Globe lie four Races of mankind; that ours is the fifth, and that we, at the present stage of the world's progress, stand as the fifth sub-race of that fifth Race. Side by side with this position of humanity at the moment is the development cosmically of this fifth element of ether on the material plane. What is the result of scientific investigation during the last year? What has been the special line along which our great discoverers have been travelling, and following which they have added to our knowledge truths of the most vital significance? It matters not whether you turn to the physicist, the chemist, the electrician; you will find that each one of these classes of scientific men has been investigating ether, studying ether; finding there fresh sources of energy, fresh explanations of mental phenomena, looking to that new thought and new possibility as that which will unroll in the centuries that lie before us fresh possibilities of our power over nature for the enrichment and the strengthening of man. Naturally so, say Theosophists, because as the fifth element and the fifth Race develop together, so you have with the development of the fifth Race the development of the fifth principle, which is the mind of man. It is natural, it is inevitable, that direction of the thought of our scientists. The growth of science must be along that particular line, and they are only spelling out syllable by syllable the truth revealed in Occult theories centuries and centuries ago. For what is this ether of which they speak? It is that in which lie hidden those forces of the universe which are the moulding and the controlling energies to be manifested in the near future. It is this, as Professor Crookes has told us, that has in its subtle medium myriads of vibrations hardly understood yet, so far as the elements of them are concerned, in modern science, but in which he tells us there lie possibilities which will cast into the shade every power that man has wielded over nature. In those vibrations, he tells us, lie the possibilities of the [Page 22] hidden powers of communication of human thought; possibilities of a new organ in the human brain answering to those vibrations, as the eye answers to the vibrations of the ether, which we

know as light. And then along the line of the latest discoveries instruments are beginning to be manufactured whereby can be produced waves of ether, from the eight-ten millionths of a millimetre up to thousands of miles in length. He says you may here utilize all these forms of vibration for communication of thought. So that this is no dream of science, but a possibility that lies for realization in the near future; that any two men on the surface of the globe, separated by thousands of miles of sea and land, using this instrument which is now becoming within human capacity to make, will be able to speak, will be able to hear, will be able to send their thoughts speeding across land and sea, so that there will be no more distance separating mind from mind, and friend from friend, but they will use these ethereal vibrations as the chariot on which their thoughts will pass from the one to the other.

Not only so, but, as I said, there is a possibility dawning of an organ in the human brain which, without the instrument that science makes, may be the instrument by which these waves may be transmitted and received. Is it only today, asks the Occult student, that you are discovering that possibility in the brain of man? It has been utilized for centuries; it has been known to the student these hundreds of years. You have laughed at us when we said it was possible; you scoffed when we said these communications could be made. You have said, "See those fools, those dreamers, those frauds", no later than last September; and now your own science justifies our "folly", and shows how our "fraud" may be possible of scientific attainment.

Once again across the Atlantic comes a message from an American electrician, and he says that in this ether we are studying, in these vibrations which we only just begin to think we understand, lies all explanation of hypnotic phenomena, all explanation of mesmeric phenomena, feeling and power; here lies all explanation of transference of thought.

What is mesmerism? what is hypnotism? as they are called. The vibrations of the ether, used unconsciously by some, consciously by others, who are able to manipulate it at their will, control it at their desire, directing it and controlling it by knowledge and by will, so that these vibrations shall travel as desired, and carry out that which the mind within has determined. For, he tells us, that in the human brain, permeating every element of the nervous tissue, covering as with [Page 23] an envelope every molecule of the brain, there is ether; the brain vibrating in its nerve-molecules sets in vibration the ether with which each is enveloped, and the brain, vibrating as you think, sends out these ether waves in all directions by the force of cerebration; and those wave currents going from one brain strike another brain, and there set up vibrations similar to themselves. Do not we know this of music? When one string is struck another string attuned to answer to the same note sounds it, although no bow touched it, although nothing but vibration put it into motion. Do not we know in electrical science that when we have two consonant circuits, you can by setting up a current in one cause a current in the other? That is true of sound and of electrical vibration; that also, he says, is true of thought, and that when one human brain is the generator and another human brain the receiver there you have a possibility of thought-transference, when mind has been brought into attune with mind. And then, he says, though this he puts as a wild dream, may not we even go further, and be able one day to photograph these subtle vibrations? May not we be able, when we have obtained our sensitive plate with the impression on it, to keep it and bring it into the presence of another brain attuned to it, and awake there the thoughts, so to speak, that we had buried in our plate, and so have a veritable thought machine.

So from America, Europe, wherever you go, you find this study is fascinating the thoughts and minds of every scientist. It is exactly what H. P. Blavatsky prophesied years ago; before they had dreamed of it

she experimented with it; and before they discovered it she declared it. You called her a fraud when she gave you of her knowledge; you will be bound to admit her supremacy when your scientists stumble along the road where she walked without faltering and without doubt.

But mighty as is the promise of the future, great as is this unrolling of realms to be discovered and conquered by the mind of man, on the fringe of which our thinkers stand today, what will avail the discovery, what will be the gain to humanity at large, if selfishness is still to be the rule of life and brothers are to fight with brothers for the use of every new discovery that science brings? And here comes in Theosophy, showing you how your science should be the basis of your ethics, and how your knowledge of the universe should be transmuted into the love and service of human kind; for the ether medium vibrating here vibrates in other realms, to yet subtler forces than our scientists are dealing with. It vibrates in those subtler realms to every impulse of the human thought, and of the human mind, and of the [Page 24] human spirit. And it is in that there lies the importance of our understanding of the scientific truth. For if everyone of you be generators of these waves going out into the world from you, then that thought power of yours is the mightiest power that man can hold either for the good or for the evil of mankind. And then you learn that every time you send out into this universal element currents of anger, currents of hatred, currents of jealousy, currents of desire, currents of taking unfair advantage of your neighbours, currents of revenge, and currents of evil passion of any kind, that those currents you start, strike upon others and stimulate them into producing similar impressions, so that the force that goes from you tends to degrade your brethren and to lead to their moral injury, to their social degradation.

And then you learn how true it is that all men are brothers, since these vibrations which each man sets up must travel through all space and come into the life of each. You learn that in a vast city like our own all these ether vibrations playing round us help to move our thought, to stimulate our action, push us in one direction or the other, upwards towards the divine, or downwards towards the brute. Then we learn that if we would spread good we must think good. No matter what evil is done against us, or what evil may dash its waves against us, we must not return it with evil; we begin to understand why a great Teacher has taught his followers that they must not meet evil with evil, but evil with good; for only thus can the evil vibrations be stilled and subdued, and love and charity and harmony overflow the lives of men. If we meet heat by heat we intensify the heat vibration; if we meet envy by envy we intensify the envy vibration; but if when some brother sends against us thoughts of hatred, sends against us a wave of wrath, we meet it not with hatred but with love, not with anger but with pity, not with desire to revenge but with longing to serve, then we have silenced the evil vibration, and the good one passes on from us to help and to pacify the hearts of men. So it is that on knowledge we build our duty, and by understanding we learn to guide our conduct in life.

Some may say we all have thought this ethic; some may say, yes, but every church teaches this doctrine. Aye! but they do not practise it, because they do not understand its scientific basis.

You need wisdom as well as love. You need knowledge as well as desire to serve, and therefore all who are lovers of men and who yearn to be helpers, must add wisdom to their love, must add understanding to their enthusiasm. That I think is the distinguishing mark of Theosophy. Out of love as our impulse we take knowledge as our guide; [Page 25] and so we strive to become the helpers and the servants of men. In days gone past men moved by ambition have striven to rule their brothers, and to be spoken of as kings and conquerors of men. Today a nobler ambition is beginning to thrill through human hearts and consciences. Today a deeper and sublimer longing is moving the noblest and best of human kind — riot

to be ruler, but to be servant; not to be conqueror, but to be saviour; not to seize all for self, but to give one's very self for men. That is the inspiration that is beginning to dominate humanity: and as each man adds to that his own longing for service, at length humanity shall be redeemed — for the divine in us shall have conquered the brute for ever, and that which is eternal and immutable shall use all our power for the good of man.