

On the Watch-Tower

RADHA BURNIER

Letting go

One of the important things that the Buddhist teaching brings to the world, although the world does not take much notice of this teaching, concerns impermanence. Most things do not last in this world, yet people feel that there are other things which do, and that they must hold on to them. In *Light on the Path* there is a brief reference to a Real Path, which a person can tread once he has left behind attachment to everything in this world. That means shedding every thought, feeling, and liking, until the mind is completely free of attachment.

Attachment can only be to things that we know; and one can enter the field of the unknown only when the known ceases to be. The unknown may include substances of which we have no idea at all at present, but we cling to something or the other in this world hoping it will be a substitute. It may be members of the family or friends with whom we have close relationships. In a certain part of our brain we know that this is impossible, but we do not accept it. This is why mourning for people who are no more goes on. This clinging, this attachment, is one of the serious ills which the human being encounters, and incarnations pass before non-attachment is even considered a virtue.

From all accounts, J. Krishnamurti was greatly attached to his brother. Dr Besant was like a mother to him, but there was also his younger brother, who was to help him in his work. The brother died in California when Krishnamurti was not even present; and for two or three nights Krishnamurti had to struggle, not with the fact, but with himself. He rose out of it like a fresh person, for he had understood the whole problem of attachment. This was one of the disconcerting things about him: that he did not seem to need company. This can happen to any of us, but we do not want to let go. People find it difficult to accept the truth of impermanence. Nothing lasts in this world. When we come to see this — that everything in the world perishes — we ask: Is there a Self which transcends this rule?

A river starts as a small stream and becomes a mighty river. Actually, the water which one saw a minute ago has flowed away and new water arrives. So the river is continually different, there is nothing which may be called 'the river'. This is something to contemplate. It is not the same river as we saw yesterday; the water has gone to the ocean. Yet it is still a river, though the water is not the same. It is almost a paradox — a problem that the human mind cannot grasp, because it is not tangible.

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Thich Nhat Hanh, a well-known Buddhist teacher, says that as change takes place constantly in everything, we must try to realize through meditation that change is for the good. Impermanence is not misery, but we do not like to face it. Life is continually moving on, but we would like it to stop and change when we want it to change. We would like to see changes in some things as, for example, in grains of corn. This will take a little time, but time is a kind of illusion that we experience. The grain which is sown grows and becomes corn. If change did not take place, the grain of corn would not become a plant and be of use. Growth makes it possible for the corn to fulfil itself, for us to enjoy the corn, and new corn to grow. So we must learn to accept constant change, but our minds are such that they do not accept change. This is the beginning of sorrow.

Most children remain happy even in difficult circumstances. They play, enjoy themselves with a little mud or whatever there is, and remain happy. The question of accepting or not accepting does not arise in their case, because life is play, and when a toy ceases to be interesting, they leave it and play with something else. So almost like a child, we can let go of a thing which is amusing or beautiful. But we cannot do so when it remains in the memory and we want to experience the same thing over and over again, maybe with some slight changes which please us. Thus the feeling of self is created by an attitude which refuses to accept what cannot be forever.

None of us is the kind of independent individual we think we are. It is part of the self to imagine one is a strong individual, if possible more than everyone else. But if we go into it we will find that, like everyone else, we are dependent on so many different things for our existence, and the idea of an independent or permanent entity is a wrong idea. It is worthwhile for us not only to think about this, but to meditate upon it. Is this body, and the particular situation we find ourselves in, not very temporary? We may live for one hundred years, but what is one hundred years in history? It is nothing. So the question we have to ask ourselves is: 'What really lives? What is the feeling of selfhood which arises in us?' We must find this out for ourselves. Of course, there are philosophies which say that there is a permanent *ātman*, which is the root of everything that exists. Even if that is so, we have to understand the small self, and the many things which we experience as an illusion.

More and more waste

The modern world has many problems, and among them is the problem of disposing of waste which we humans are creating in vast quantities day by day. Millions of tons of waste containing many dangerous substances, like chemicals, are being dumped here and there, wherever the rich countries find it possible to rid themselves of the problem. Mostly, the rich create the waste, and the poor endure the consequences.

West Africa is 'growing' every day

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by accepting rubbish in order to gain whatever may be worthwhile out of it. In South America the great forests of Brazil, which have helped to keep the earth's temperature down and form a treasure-house of animals, plants, etc., found nowhere else, are being razed rapidly. It is said that logging alone is causing irreparable damage to the Amazon's forests, and that they must be protected from further damage. There are other countries which can be used as dumping grounds because rich countries need space for producing more fuel, for purposes which do not serve humanity in a basic way.

In an article recently published in *The Guardian Weekly* it is reported that whole communities in West Africa are virtually living in a toxic environment created by the business of dumping waste, which is growing day by day. In Lagos, about a million computers (most of which cannot be used) are brought by ship to be disposed of. The European Union is regulating the movement of e-waste in a more rational way, but no such effort is being made by the United States and other rich countries.

This problem is very difficult to resolve, except by reverting to a much simpler lifestyle. The population of the world is growing, and the imaginary needs of people are also accelerating as modern society proceeds to equip itself with more and more things. But this situation has not yet arrived, because there are countries in Africa and other poor areas which are willing to let their people

suffer by receiving what others discard.

Apart from the question of creating waste, there are other problems. Are all the gadgets available necessary to treat the sick? The illness itself may be the result of our way of life, which is becoming increasingly complicated. People are now facing the choice of having medical support for all kinds of imaginary problems. For instance, those who have the problem of not being able to walk properly are resorting to new knees and other new body parts. There may be a time when bodies will consist of much extraneous material, simply because technology has been advancing and makes possible 'miracles', largely by experimentation on other creatures. Health may be worse as a result of all the efforts made to progress in that direction.

When the time comes, objects which seem so necessary to present-day populations might be given up, and people will have to revert to a simpler way of living. Then progress will take a different course and there will be more attention given to inner change, not merely to outer comfort.

Actually, there is no difference between inner change and outer action. Whenever we envisage seriously an inner change, our external action also becomes different. If we see that much of the waste created is the result of only wanting more, and that it has only a useless impact on the person who acts, there may be a change. If we realize that we are only creating more waste for no valid reason, waste will be reduced. So we need to give

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attention to our thinking on this subject, not merely dumping the waste somewhere without being criticized.

All that we think of as 'inner' and 'outer' is interconnected. The world as it is depends on our thinking. So it is important to examine whether the thought is correct or not. Is it right for anybody to create waste which can be avoided? If so, let the constructive work begin.

Animal Testing

Millions of animals are being used in laboratory experiments every year. We are told that the vast majority of them are rats and mice, but they also use higher animals which suffer more when used for experiments. The very thought of such a thing happening around the world makes one shudder.

Dr Jane Goodall, well-known primatologist, gave a recent talk in Brussels on the advancement of medical knowledge without experimentation on animals. She proposed that a Nobel Prize should be set up for research without using animals for the purpose. According to her, proceeding away from animal research is a goal towards which 'all civilized nations should be moving'. She spoke at a meeting organized by animal rights groups and Members of Parliament to put pressure on the European Community. At this stage it is unlikely that all her proposals will be accepted, but it is necessary to go on saying these things until public opinion changes, as it has done to some extent in the European Union.

Most scientists believe that using ani-

mals for research has made a considerable difference in many fields of medicine, but at the same time we see the enormity of the crime of using living creatures in this field. It is a good thing that several governments have funded studies on other methods for the past few years with some success. Fewer mammals, for instance, are being used for testing on animals sensitive to a certain chemical, which means that many tests on dogs can be dispensed with. We are told that, in Canada, in many cases they have replaced mammals with fish, and in the Netherlands only ten monkeys are used to produce a vaccine for which formerly 5,000 monkeys were involved. New scanning technologies help doctors to learn without the need for invasive surgery on live animals.

But from the Theosophical point of view there are other ways in which to obtain knowledge, and experiments which necessarily involve cruelty are immoral. J. Krishnamurti mentions briefly the existence of other methods in the following passage:

If we could establish a deep abiding relationship with Nature, we could never kill an animal for our appetite, we would never harm, vivisect, a monkey, a dog, a guinea pig for our benefit. We would find other ways to heal our wounds, heal our bodies. But the healing of the mind is something totally different. That healing gradually takes place if you are with Nature, with that orange on the tree, and the blade of grass that pushes through the cement, and the hills covered, hidden, by the clouds. ✧

Some Sources of Inspiration

IAN HOOKER

SOME two thousand years ago, the Alexandrian sage, Philo Judaeus, wrote:

Sometimes, when I come to my work empty, I have suddenly become full, ideas being in an invisible manner showered upon me and implanted in me from on high. . . . For then I have been conscious of a richness of interpretation, an enjoyment of light, a most keen-sighted vision.¹

We are all aware of men and women, fellow members perhaps, whom we find inspiring, and of others who seem to lack any spark at all. The early leaders of the Theosophical Society, and others since, have been inspirational to an extraordinary degree. And large numbers of rank-and-file members have been so deeply committed and eager to help that they have poured their heart and soul into the work without seeking thanks or recognition. This in itself is contagious, and strengthens the work, but, to spearhead the efforts of a Lodge, some capacity to inspire, to generate enthusiasm, is needed. However earnest leaders or speakers may be, without some capacity to inspire, their earnestness is likely to be only

minimally contagious, their efforts only minimally productive. Ability to inspire is so crucial for the furtherance of our work — the lifting of a little of the heavy karma of the world through the popularizing of the Ageless Wisdom — that it may be of use to examine the ideas of some of those who have shown uncommon insight into the nature and sources of inspiration. Few of us may be able to drink as deeply from the fount as Philo Judaeus, but we can all aspire, we can all try.

Addressing the question as to the sources of inspiration, a distinguished Indian philosopher and statesman, Dr S. Radhakrishnan, has written:

The sources of man's spiritual insight are twofold: objective and subjective — the wonders of the world without and the stress of the human soul. In the Vedas the vast order and movement of Nature engages attention. Their gods represent cosmic forces. In the Upanishad-s we return to explore the depths of the inner world. 'The self-existent pierced the openings of the senses so that they turn outward, . . . not inward into himself; some

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wise man, however, with his eyes closed and wishing for immortality, saw the self behind' (*Katha Upanishad*, iv.1). From the outward physical fact, attention shifts to the inner immortal self situated at the back of the mind, as it were. We need not look to the sky for the bright light; the glorious fire is within the soul. The soul of man is the keyhole to the landscape of the whole universe, the Ākāśa within the heart, the limpid lake which mirrors the truth. The altered outlook brought about a consequential change. Not the so-called gods, but the true living God, the Ātman, has to be worshipped. God's dwelling-place is the heart of man.²

Complementing this viewpoint is that of Rabindranath Tagore, another great luminary of the Hindu Renaissance:

It seems to me that unconsciously I followed the path of my Vedic ancestors, and was inspired by the tropical sky with its suggestion of an uttermost Beyond When I was eighteen, a sudden spring breeze of religious experience for the first time came to my life and passed away leaving in my memory a direct message of spiritual reality. One day while I stood watching at early dawn the sun sending out its rays from behind the trees, I suddenly felt as if some ancient mist had in a moment lifted from my sight, and the morning light on the face of the world revealed an inner radiance of joy. The invisible screen of the commonplace was removed from all things and all men, and their ultimate significance was intensified

in my mind; and this is the definition of beauty. . . . After four days the vision passed away, and the lid hung down upon my inner sight. In the dark, the world once again put on its disguise of the obscurity of an ordinary fact.³

In these days of ready access to anthologies recording the memories of many who have recalled mystical or at least super-sensory experiences, it is not hard to find examples of Nature-mysticism somewhat akin to that quoted above. From the seventeenth century English poet and mystic, Thomas Traherne:

Your enjoyment of the world is never right, till every morning you awake in Heaven; see yourself in your Father's palace; and look upon the skies, the earth, and the air as Celestial Joys: having such a reverend esteem of all, as if you were among the Angels. . . . You never enjoy the world aright, till the Sea floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars.⁴

Unable to endorse any sort of formal religion available to him, and thought by his contemporaries to be atheistic, the nineteenth century English writer Richard Jefferies is now regarded as a Nature-mystic of the highest order. He too looked outwards. Aware of his own soul, he was nevertheless uncertain of its immortality. In his spiritual autobiography, he wrote:

With all the intensity of feeling which exalted me, all the intense communion I held with the earth, the sun and sky, the

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stars hidden by the light, with the ocean — in no manner can the thrilling depth of these feelings be written — with these I prayed, as if they were the keys of an instrument, of an organ, with which I swelled forth the notes of my soul, redoubling my own voice by their power. The great sun burning with light; the strong earth, dear earth; the warm sky; the pure air; the thought of ocean; the inexpressible beauty of all filled me with a rapture, an ecstasy.⁴

It is clear that these highly sensitized souls and many others of whom we have record, led lives of great inspiration and richness. It is not clear, however, that they were able to place their experiences in a context that would enable them to develop their gift, or enable others to reach out effectively and seek this deeper kind of awareness. Evelyn Underhill, in her monumental study, *Mysticism*, helps in this regard. A very gifted mystic herself, she has analysed forms of mysticism of varying depth, and has, for example, typified Nature mysticism as ‘the self’s first escape from the limitations of its conventional universe, . . . [thus receiving] an immense assurance of a great and veritable life surrounding, sustaining, explaining its own’.⁵

To evaluate her work fairly would require possession of a comparable gift, failing which one can only marvel at her depth of knowledge and insight. It can be shown, on the other hand, that theosophical writers examining these deep, interior dimensions of human experience,

have achieved, with singular clarity, a comprehensive rationale, which relates the diverse forms of interior experience to the various levels within the human being, as laid out in classical theosophical studies. From this perspective, which, for many of us, beckons and guides, a few examples follow.

J. J. van der Leeuw was a young Dutch Theosophist who left the Netherlands in the early 1920’s to support the work of Bishop C. W. Leadbeater in Australia. He proved highly successful as an organizer, and, for a few years, as an occultist and writer. In 1925 he published *The Fire of Creation*, a study of the Holy Ghost and of inspiration — still probably the best work of its kind available to us. To van der Leeuw, inspiration was closely related to enthusiasm, and both to idealism. To be enthused, he wrote, is to be filled with God:

The touch with the power of God the Holy Ghost is inspiration. . . . When this divine breath of creative Fire touches man, he is instantly galvanised into creative activity; he is inspired in some way according to his particular genius or Ray . . . it is that touch of the creative Power of the Holy Ghost which makes man more than man, . . . to talk to such a one is to be thrilled by a power which carries us with it and kindles within us a similar enthusiasm.⁶

Similarly, according to van der Leeuw, we do not have ideals, ideals have us. Ideals, from his standpoint, exist in the world of the higher mind, the world of the

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Real. It will be apparent to those familiar with theosophical concepts that the writer is identifying 'the world of the Real' with the theosophist's 'causal plane', seen also as the domain of the Soul, or reincarnating individuality:

To be an idealist means not only to have touched the world of the Real but also to have made that the centre of our life and work. . . . The idealist, whether fully conscious of the fact or not, is established in the world of the Real, Plato's world of Ideas. . . . Thus the idealist constantly pours the power of that higher and real world with all its beauties and glories into this world of outer existence, and as such he is a life-bringer to humanity.⁶

There will be many who see themselves as idealists, but would be discomfited by such a claim on their behalf. Similarly, many have had moments of illumination and high resolve who would not think of claiming for themselves the accolade of 'mystic'. Nevertheless it is noteworthy that so many have been brushed lightly with intimations of the higher consciousness. The transience of these touches might prompt those so blessed to set them aside, but the pedigree of these glimpses might well be much more elevated than realized at the time.

That van der Leeuw's view of the source of inspiration is the journey inwards, becomes even more apparent when we read the suggestions offered to those who are themselves seeking to enter 'the world of the Holy Ghost'. He recommended that the meditating aspirant

should fix his attention on the link between the lower and higher selves (or *antahkarana*), then endeavour to withdraw inwards, away from our world image, stilling our image-making faculty to emerge into the world of the Real:

Our first impression there is like that of the prisoner in Plato's cave who has discovered the world behind him. We are dazzled by the light of that inner world, though it is no light seen by the eyes, but a kind of inner illumination. We are conscious of an inner experience in which we seem to comprehend the entire world; we are aware of a rapture and an all-pervading sense of utter reality which we should never have dreamed possible.⁶

Bishop Leadbeater's explanation of episodes of inspiration, or intuitive realization — or mystical awareness — is fully consistent with that of van der Leeuw, but is characteristically more matter-of-fact, less dramatic. He wrote in terms of the real person, or reincarnating individuality, influencing the personality — that is, the ordinary, everyday self. Theosophically expressed, he explains episodes of elevated feelings and insights as the action of the Soul, or Ego, endeavouring to communicate with the personality. Other writers (for example, see endnote 4), commenting on episodes of mystical awareness, refer to the conviction of many of their subjects that they knew, thereafter, beyond any possibility of doubt, that all life is one, and that 'I am not the "I" I thought I was'. Leadbeater's explanation carries us further, in that

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he employs concepts, which, to those familiar with them, shed a clear light upon the apparent mystery of sudden super-sensory glimpses:

Most people are conscious of times when they are filled with splendid inspiration and exaltation, with glowing devotion and joy. These moments, of course, are precisely those when the ego succeeds in impressing himself upon the lower consciousness; but that which is then felt is, in reality, there all the time, though the personality is not always conscious of it. The aspirant should endeavour to realize, both by reason and by faith, that it is *always* there, and it will then appear as though he actually felt it, even at times when the link is imperfect, and when he does not feel it in the personal consciousness. . . . Moreover, it is obvious that while the mind is responding to the appeals of the physical, astral, and lower mental planes, it is not likely to hear the message that the ego is trying to transmit to the personality from his own higher planes.⁷

These comments by Bishop Leadbeater yield encouragement and an immediate goal to pursue. This is so especially for those who are able to accept as a working hypothesis the notion that the Ego, or Higher Self, from time to time endeavours to impress some message or idea upon the personality, but finds the clamour of thoughts and feelings obstructive. One is then encouraged to intensify one's efforts to quieten the personality and identify with the higher

consciousness; that is, to meditate upon the Higher Self, to try to reach that dimension and live from there. Also attributed by Leadbeater to the influence of the Ego, or Higher Self, are instances of a person suddenly feeling totally convinced by some recent insight, without being able to offer any clear rationale for it to another person:

Even before we have any definite consciousness on the intuitional plane we often receive reflections from it. Intuitions occasionally come through into our daily life, and although most of these impressions from the higher self which are genuine come rather from the causal world than from the *buddhic*, still now and then we receive a flash of the real knowledge of the spirit which cannot express itself on any level lower than the *buddhic* plane. These priceless flashes bring us a knowledge which we feel to be absolutely certain, though in many cases we cannot give any intellectual reason for it.⁸

Lest theosophical terms obscure meaning for some readers, it should be explained that 'causal world' refers to the same level of elevated awareness that van der Leeuw identifies as 'Plato's world of ideas'. Further, that 'buddhic plane' is regarded as a yet more subtle and refined realm of existence, such that awareness at that level is characterized by direct apprehension of the unity of all living things, by a compelling and profound love for all, and by the unerring perception of truth. Should the existence of

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these dimensions of consciousness be accepted, it will follow that an individual in whom they are unfolding will have access to intuitive knowledge and inspiration, simply by entering a meditative state.

The difference between mind and intuition has been well summed up by George Arundale:

The mind reasons, compares; the intuition beholds. The mind climbs step by step; the intuition is looking already over the top . . . and knows of no ladder, no comparison, nor any processes whatever.⁹

Again, from a theosophical perspective, the importance of an intuitive faculty latent in all, emergent in some, can hardly be overstated. Perhaps it is perception of this faculty emerging in unusually sensitive scientists, which led Dr Ravi Ravindra to typify the scientific approach to the Sacred as

much more likely to be expressed these days in terms of Wonder, Beauty, Mathematical Harmony, search for Truth, Cosmological Order or for Unity of laws and forces — all the exalted feelings highly valued in the Great Traditions of the world as marks of a truly spiritual, or religious, mind.¹⁰

Pursuing this line of thought a little further, it is helpful to quote a statement attributed to Albert Einstein:

The intellect has little to do on the road to discovery. There comes a leap in consciousness, call it intuition or what

you will, and the solution comes to you and you don't know how or why. All great discoveries are made in this way.¹¹

It is suggested that even more important than the illumining of the mind by the inflow of insight, is the elevation of the feelings which comes from any touch of buddhic consciousness. A highly significant realization or discovery very often brings also feelings of exhilaration, of wonder and deep gratitude. Dr Richard Bucke in his ground-breaking study *Cosmic Consciousness*¹² wrote of immense joyousness, of the realization that the cosmos is a living presence, that the foundation principle of the world is love. And as with all such experiences, it appears that the experience itself has absolute authority for the person thus uplifted. In more formal language, such experiences are self-authenticating.

Towards the end of a lecture series published in 1912 as *Initiation: the Perfecting of Man*, Dr Annie Besant offers comments which clarify further for us the Theosophical rationale as to the nature and sources of inspiration. These comments enable us better to grasp the common source of the very diverse modes of super-sensory experience touched upon in this commentary. Already we have noted the existence of individuals sensitive to deeper levels of awareness — to ideas from the 'world of the Real' or causal level, or to intimations of the oneness of all living things arising from openness to the even subtler *buddhic* dimension. In the course of

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reviewing various ways in which a Master of the Wisdom, an Adept who has chosen to remain in touch with this world, can help to ameliorate the ignorance and suffering of human beings, Dr Besant added:

Never a great inspiration flashes into mind or heart, never some mighty thought illuminates a whole field of knowledge, never some exquisite form of beauty, whether for sound or vision, comes winging its glorious way into our earthly atmosphere but comes from that great Hierarchy that lives for the helping of man, ever plans new ways, works out new schemes, by which evolution may be quickened.¹³

Unless we are very possessive of our better moments, our brighter ideas, our reputation, perhaps, for originality, most of us will readily accede to this notion. It remains true, however, that great inspirations, of whatever type or nature, have still to be registered by the human psyche at some level. We have still, therefore, to make the journey inwards. The occult treatise, *Light on the Path*, advises us to seek out the way, both by retreating within, and by advancing boldly without. It continues, in part:

Seek it by plunging into the mysterious and glorious depths of your own inmost being . . . and seek it by making the profound obeisance of the soul to the dim star that burns within. Steadily, as you watch and worship, its light will grow stronger. Then you may know you have found the

beginning of the way. And when you have found the end its light will suddenly become the infinite light.¹⁴

Which brings us back to the declaration made by Professor Radhakrishnan: ‘Not the so-called gods, but the true living God, the Atman, has to be worshipped. God’s dwelling-place is the heart of man.’²

Stated otherwise, each one of us, each aspirant, is himself, herself, the Path. Each of us has to become his or her own source of inspiration — by journeying within. Yet this is only part of the story, albeit an essential part. In Dr Besant’s lecture, quoted above,¹³ explaining how the Masters of the Wisdom pour out inspiration for humans to grasp and apply, she continued:

Some of these take as pupils and disciples those who are willing to tread the path that They have trodden so that the ranks of the great Hierarchy may never be depleted, so long as men need helping, so long as humanity is dwelling on our globe.

It follows that for those privileged to be thus drawn close to a Master of the Wisdom there is yet another path to inspiration. The very fact of such a relationship, once the disciple realizes its existence in his waking consciousness, must in itself be an abiding inspiration. So too the subtle ongoing contacts between Master and disciple. Elsewhere in the same series of addresses, Dr Besant spoke of the consciousness of the newly accepted disciple beginning to blend with

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the consciousness of the Master. Here is inspiration indeed! And that is another form of inspiration to which we may all aspire, providing we are prepared to travel the long slow journey of, perhaps, a number of lives, and make the

necessary effort and the necessary sacrifices. As expressed in *Light on the Path*: 'Then do you enter into a partnership of joy, which brings indeed terrible toil and profound sadness, but also a great and ever-increasing delight.' ✧

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In every age there have been Sages who had mastered the absolute and yet could teach but relative truths. For none yet, born of mortal woman in our race, has, or could have given out, the whole and the final truth to another man, for every one of us has to find that (to him) final knowledge *in* himself.

H. P. Blavatsky

Disintegration and Progress (Part I)

P. KRISHNA

THIS is meant to be a dialogue between us, positing the truth as the unknown, and investigating together to discover it. The opinions of any individual, however great, are not important. Agreeing or disagreeing with opinions is not learning. Krishnaji pointed out that even what *he* said was not important, but the questions were. It is important to investigate them through our own observation of life and consciousness. He also pointed out that the spirit in which we investigate those questions is more important than the questions themselves, because this inquiry is not in order to find an answer. Answers, ideas, and solutions are trivial things, because they do not contribute to wisdom; they contribute only to knowledge. When we know the answer, it becomes an idea, a piece of knowledge in our head. But that knowledge does not bring wisdom — wisdom being a by-product of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge is not knowledge about the self, but that understanding which one has come to through one's own perception of the truth. It is something real for oneself and not merely an idea. It is only such knowledge, if you might

call it knowledge at all, that contributes to wisdom, to an actual transformation within us. It is an organic change in the way one relates with people and things, with the whole world, and also with oneself.

The dilemma facing modern society is that we have progressed tremendously in knowledge, in science, technology, in the arts, philosophy, history, geography, the environment, and everything else, but we have not evolved psychologically. Through our knowledge we have obtained a lot of power which has enabled us to change outwardly the way we live. Between the way we were living in 1905 all over the world, and the way we are living today there has been tremendous change. They say that society has changed more in the last one hundred years than it had in thousands of years before that. But not everything has changed.

Krishnaji raised the question: Has there been psychological evolution at all? Have we become wiser in the last 1,000 or 2,000 years? We have read the *Mahābhārata* and are familiar with its characters. Are we wiser today, or are

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we still like Duryodhana, Bhima, Śakuni, Arjuna and others? Some of us may be a little wiser, but basically don't we still live with the same divisions — the same hatred, the same propensity for war, the same cunning and greed which existed 5,000 years ago? This means there has been no psychological evolution at all. The fact that we have arrived at tremendous power without growing in wisdom explains why society has become so much more dangerous, why there is degeneration all around us.

In our understanding and wisdom we are still primitive, but we now have all the power derived from so-called progress, making life more dangerous. Is the measure of hatred or inner violence in our consciousness any different from what it was in our forefathers? Certainly its manifestation, which depends on how much power we have, has changed a million times — and that is what has made the situation so dangerous. The fundamental question to be asked, even if it seems an impossible question, is: Why have we not grown in wisdom? This dilemma was expressed very beautifully in a poem called 'The Rock' by T. S. Eliot.

Where is the life we have lost in living?

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries
Bring us farther from God and nearer
to the Dust.

Is progress an illusion? Are we really intelligent? If we are, then why are we facing this degeneration? Krishnaji pointed out that there is no intelligence without love and compassion. So have we defined intelligence unintelligently? I am raising these questions for us to deliberate on; the answers are not important, but the questions are. We learned from Krishnamurti the importance of staying with questions, and exploring them in our daily life through observation of our own consciousness and how it responds in various relationships, without coming to any conclusions or forming strong opinions. In that exploration there is the possibility for a learning mind, approaching the issue with humility, to come to a deeper perception which is not merely a conclusion of thought. It is that deep insight which brings about transformation in consciousness. The rest of it is only a change in ideas, which does not contribute to transformation, to self-knowledge or wisdom.

Let us explore this question in that spirit, without the desire to find answers, merely to understand all its implications and to understand what *is*. 'What *is*' is not only what is visible on the surface. When one probes deeply one discovers that there is much more than one sees in superficial viewing or through analysis and argument. So with that awareness that we really do not know the truth, and with a state of mind which is not attached to any opinions, let us explore what *is* for the love of understanding. That is the essence of the learning mind, which is

Disintegration and Progress (Part I)

also the religious mind — religion being the quest for truth, and truth being the unknown.

One such question is: Why does anything that man touches, discovers, or invents become so complicated? We invented money — this seems a very simple, intelligent device, invented for the convenience of barter. But that invention today has become a vast economic system with interest and foreign exchange rates, stock market speculation, and investment, and nobody can predict what is going to happen. What is worse, that thing which we invented now dictates our life. It dictates what our children will see and read, and what education they will receive. They are no longer free to do what they are interested in doing because money is being dangled in front of them and they are being led in that direction. So we have become slaves to our own invention.

Take sexuality: We did not invent it, but got it as a gift from Nature. Animals and plants have it too. It has come through evolution. But no animal has made of it so complex a thing as we have, a whole world of pornography, of child abuse, and the pursuit of pleasure at any cost. Even if we want to buy a car or a toaster, sex is used to promote it!

Einstein found the equation $e = mc^2$. It is a great truth that mass is simply another form of energy. But immediately man said, 'Can I use this to make a bomb?' This comes from the hatred in our consciousness. About sixty per cent of the

entire scientific budget comes from that of the Defence Department. This means that the entire scientific effort is not merely directed to discovering the truth about Nature, but to killing. They call it 'defence'! A humorist once said: 'Never believe something until the Government denies it.' So when they call it 'defence', we know what they mean.

Why does anything that we touch become corrupt and complicated? What is the relationship between evil and good? All this disorder outside is the same as the disorder within, in our consciousness, and the root of it is the ego process in each human being. You can contain its manifestation, and that is what we are trying to do through organizations like the United Nations, the police force, laws, courts, and so on. All this division between you and me, my country and your country, my religion and your religion, brings in this business of the 'mine' and the 'not mine'. From there arises disorder. If we do not tackle it there, the rest follows as a logical consequence.

We are only treating the symptoms outwardly and containing them. It is like getting boils all over the body, and trying to treat each boil and heal it, without asking: Why am I getting these boils all over the body? Unless the cause is eliminated, the illness will continue. We are continuously having wars, and there are deep-rooted reasons for those wars. Those reasons are not eliminated by the United Nations or by diplomacy and so on; on the contrary, they are maintained.

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The problems will never be solved.

So what is the deeper cause of these problems? We are not really dealing with the problem intelligently. We must ask ourselves: What is this ego process? Where does it originate? Is it inevitable? Is it our own creation or Nature's? Is it possible to end this process within oneself and be free? These are all fundamental, living questions. We must go into it afresh, without wondering whether it is possible or not. When we say, 'it is impossible', it takes away the energy from exploring, because the mind says it wants to attempt only that which is possible. Is it impossible because it is innately so, or because we have not paid serious attention to this problem? One must do this exploration without seeking a result, which means for the love of it, for the sake of understanding.

What is this ego process? Is it there in Nature? We can see that trees have no ego. Animals have very little ego, if at all; they are like little children. We were not born with the ego. Then where does it come from? There may be great disasters in Nature. The tsunami that destroyed much may be very inconvenient, but it does not come in order to kill us.

There is no intentionality in Nature, and it is that intentionality which comprises the ego. Nature has cosmic order which follows certain laws that the scientists are trying to determine. That order creates all the phenomena — sometimes convenient, and sometimes not. But it is not intentionally trying to create either. Since there is no ego in Nature, why is it there in us? Are we born with it? Children fight, but the next day they have forgotten it; they do not go on with their hurt, and are friends again. Whereas if adults fight, it is so difficult for them to forget and forgive, and to die to that hurt.

Obviously we are not born with the ego, we have built it up as we grow up. It is difficult for a grown up to make friends with another human being. The mind is calculating, cunning. It says: Should I make friends with him or not? Will it be beneficial or not? It goes on all the time in subtle ways. In childhood we did not do that. We were friends with the neighbour's child or with the servant's child. There was an innocence which is replaced by the ego process. So what is this ego process? Can we explore it more deeply?

(To be continued)

By the recognition of that power that we have either to help or to mar by our own thoughts the lives of other men, how to hinder or help the evolution of the race, we become deliberate workers for human progress and for the progress of all evolving beings.

Annie Besant

Studies in *The Voice of the Silence*, 12

JOHN ALGEO

THE preceding group of verses, 150–160, dealt with the Path as a communal experience, a band of servers who, life after life, unselfishly devote themselves to the welfare of others. The next dozen verses focus on the individual's inner self. They treat the theme of Wisdom and humbleness, and in the process play with the concept of opposites, which are not always what they seem.

VERSES [161–172]:

[161] Be humble, if thou wouldst attain to Wisdom.

[162] Be humbler still, when Wisdom thou hast mastered.

[163] Be like the ocean which receives all streams and rivers. The ocean's mighty calm remains unmoved; it feels them not.

[164] Restrain by thy Divine thy lower Self.

[165] Restrain by the Eternal the Divine.

[166] Aye, great is he, who is the slayer of desire.

[167] Still greater he, in whom the Self Divine has slain the very knowledge of desire.

[168] Guard thou the lower lest it soil the Higher.

[169] The way to final freedom is within thy Self.

[170] That way begins and ends outside of self.²⁸

[171] Unpraised by men and humble is the mother of all rivers, in Tirthika's proud sight; empty the human form though filled with Amṛta's sweet waters, in the sight of fools. Withal, the birthplace of the sacred rivers is the sacred land,²⁹ and he who Wisdom hath, is honoured by all men.

[172] Arhans and Sages of the boundless Vision³⁰ are rare as is the blossom of the Udumbara tree. Arhans are born at midnight hour, together with the sacred plant of nine and seven stalks,³¹ the holy flower that opens and blooms in darkness, out of the pure dew and on the frozen bed of snow-capped heights, heights that are trodden by no sinful foot.

COMMENT. Verses 161–3 deal with the association of true Wisdom and humility, which is very old, very widespread, and very important. In an ancient ritual catechism, the question is asked of one

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called 'Most Wise': 'Why Most Wise?' And the answer given is 'Because most humble'. True Wisdom is knowing the limits of one's knowledge, so the English poet William Cowper (1731–1800) wrote:

Knowledge is proud that he has learn'd
so much;

Wisdom is humble that he knows no
more.

The word 'wise' is related to the Latin verb *videre* 'to see' and thus to English words like 'vision', as well as to the Sanskrit word *veda* 'sacred knowledge'. The word 'humble' derives from the Latin word *humus*, meaning 'earth, ground, soil'. The sacred knowledge of Wisdom comes from seeing clearly into the ground of things. Wisdom is not something airy; it is anchored in the earth.

The person who is truly wise has the calm of the deep ocean, as opposed to the turbulence of the stream or river. Streams and rivers are symbols of life in its changing nature, ever flowing on. The ocean is a symbol of eternity in its vastness and peace. Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgītā* is caught in a battle, which is really the stream of life; he learns from Kṛṣṇa to find the ocean of eternity within himself.

The image of ocean and river brings us to another subject: The question of our identity, of who or what we really are. This is, in one sense, the subject of both the *Bhagavadgītā* and of *The Voice of the Silence*. Verses 164–70 explore three levels of self-identification: the Eternal, the Divine, and the lower. The lower

self is the self of desire and of desire-knowledge, which in Theosophy is called the personality or *kāma-mānasic* self. HPB identifies it in a gloss:

Gloss 28. Meaning the personal lower self.

The Divine is the higher self — Theosophically, the individuality or *buddhi-mānasic* self. That Divine higher self cannot actually be 'soiled' by the lower self. But the experience of the lower self allows the higher self to grow, and if the experience of the lower self is not of such a nature as to promote the growth and development of the higher self, metaphorically it can be said to 'soil' it, that is, fail to promote its evolution, which is the reason for the lower self's existence.

The Eternal is the ultimate and ultimately free Self in us and in all things — the *ātmā*. It is the ocean of final freedom. What does it mean to say that the way to that final freedom or Eternal Self 'begins and ends outside of [the lower personal] self'? One meaning of verse 170 may be that the higher cannot come out of the lower. Although the experiences of the lower self contribute to the evolution of the higher self, the latter is not created out of the former. Our Divine nature emanates from the Eternal; it does not evolve from the lower self.

The Theosophical view of evolution diverges critically from Darwinian or Neo-Darwinian concepts in just this way. Our lower self is the product of animal evolution, though even so it is modelled on the fruit of past evolutionary eras and is

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not solely the result of adaptation to the current environment. But our basic human nature does not result from animal evolution in this world-period. Rather it is the consequence of a projection of the Divine Self, an emanation from the Eternal One Self, into the animal, lower personal self. As HPB says in *The Secret Doctrine* (2:81):

Between man and the animal — whose Monads (or Jiva-s) are fundamentally identical — there is the impassable abyss of Mentality and Self-consciousness. What is human mind in its higher aspect, whence comes it, if it is not a portion of the essence — and, in some rare cases of incarnation, the *very essence* — of a higher Being: one from a higher and divine plane?

As, in general evolution, human nature does not begin in the lower self, and does not end with it, so too in our personal development, our human identity does not begin or end within the limits of the personal self. If we wish to come to final freedom, we must do so by identifying ourselves, not with the personality, but instead with the higher Self or individuality. That Self is the way to our freedom from personal limitations.

Verse 171 may seem to be a change of subject, but in fact it is only a different way of looking at the same thing. A 'tirthika', as HPB indicates in a somewhat ironic way, is anyone who belongs to a religion other than yours — in Western terms, a 'heathen' or 'infidel':

Gloss 29. *Tirthikas* are the Brāhmanical sectarians beyond the Himālayas called 'infidels' by the Buddhists in the sacred land, Tibet, and vice versa.

Bigots do not recognize values other than their own. And so another religion's sacred river is regarded as just muddy water, even though it may flow from the 'sacred land'. So too the human form or nature may seem 'empty' (of spiritual value) to the unwise, although it is filled with the waters of immortality (*Amṛta*) or Eternity. *Amṛta* is literally 'non-death' (from a-, as also in English 'atonal', 'amoral', etc. plus the root *mṛ* 'die', found also in English 'mortal'). The fool thinks human nature is empty, merely the result of random mutation and natural selection. But it is filled with the 'sweet waters' of immortality, 'Amṛta', which is also used as a term for the elixir of immortality, like that from the philosophers' stone of the Alchemists. That is, our humble human personality contains the Divine self or immortal individuality, which only the wise perceive.

Arhans or arhats (mentioned in verse 172) are, as noted before, enlightened beings. HPB explains 'boundless vision' in a gloss:

Gloss 30. Boundless vision or psychic superhuman sight. An Arhan is credited with seeing and knowing all at a distance as well as on the spot.

Remember, however, that the word 'wisdom' is related to the word 'vision', so 'Sages of the boundless Vision' may

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also be thought of as those who have acquired the Wisdom. Their vision is not so much of outward things, as into themselves. Rare, indeed, are those sages who know themselves. The *udumbara* is a kind of sacred fig tree that figures in Hindu mythology as an ally of the gods in their struggle against the demons.

The midnight hour, when *arhans* are born, is the darkest time of the night. It is traditional for holy beings to be born at the darkest hour, as Christ's birthday was located at the winter solstice, the darkest time of the year. They are born in darkness because they renew the light of Wisdom. So also HPB comments on 'the sacred plant of nine and seven stalks':

Gloss 31. See gloss 22 above, Shangna plant.

It is a plant from whose fibers is woven a cloth from which is made an initiation robe symbolic of Wisdom. This plant too blooms in darkness because it represents the coming of Light. Darkness, cold, the winter, midnight — all these are humble, yin qualities. But out of them comes the Light of Wisdom, which is also warmth, summer, and noontide. Darkness and light, yin and yang, and all other pairs of opposites are necessary in the world. Opposites need not be antagonists. They may be complements.

MEDITATION: 1. Visualize either of the following:

(a) A river, winding through the countryside, in some places broad and slow-moving, in other places swift and turbulent

with white water, but ultimately flowing into the ocean, whose calm depths are undisturbed by the river's course.

(b) A solitary sacred fig tree growing in the snow at the top of a mountain and marvellously blooming at the hour of midnight, shedding its fragrance into the crisp night air.

2. Consider ways in which things that are opposites are complementary rather than oppositional, such as the diamond and the lotus flower (as in the mantra *Om mani padme hum*, 'Oh the jewel in the lotus, ah!'). Also consider ways in which things are not always what they seem to be.

The next group of nine verses concerns the nature of our quest, both as a struggle between parts of ourselves and as a path that divides into two branches.

VERSES [173–181]:

[173] No Arhan, O *lanoo*, becomes one in that birth when for the first time the soul begins to long for final liberation. Yet, O thou anxious one, no warrior volunteering fight in the fierce strife between the living and the dead,³² not one recruit can ever be refused the right to enter on the Path that leads towards the field of battle.

[174] For, either he shall win, or he shall fall.

[175] Yea, if he conquers, Nirvāna shall be his. Before he casts his shadow off his mortal coil, that pregnant cause of anguish and illimitable pain — in him will men a great and holy Buddha honour.

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[176] And if he falls, e'en then he does not fall in vain; the enemies he slew in the last battle will not return to life in the next birth that will be his.

[177] But if thou wouldst Nirvāna reach, or cast the prize away,³³ let not the fruit of action and inaction be thy motive, thou of dauntless heart.

[178] Know that the Bodhisattva who liberation changes for renunciation to don the miseries of Secret Life,³⁴ is called 'thrice honoured', O thou candidate for woe throughout the cycles.

[179] The Path is one, disciple, yet in the end, twofold. Marked are its stages by four and seven Portals. At one end — bliss immediate, and at the other — bliss deferred. Both are of merit the reward: the choice is thine.

[180] The one becomes the two, the Open and the Secret.³⁵ The first one leadeth to the goal, the second, to Self-immolation.

[181] When to the Permanent is sacrificed the mutable, the prize is thine: the drop returneth whence it came. The Open Path leads to the changeless change — Nirvāna, the glorious state of Absolute-ness, the Bliss past human thought.

COMMENT. Verse 173 tells us that treading the Path is a long and arduous journey, not an easy short cut. Just wanting to reach the end of our quest does not bring us to it. Yet, as the Tao-Te-Ching says, the longest journey begins with the first step. So we must begin if we are ever to arrive. This verse also, however,

promises that no one who wants to undertake the quest is ever refused.

Verses 174–6 tell us that no effort made on this journey is ever in vain. Everything we do to advance on that Path will produce its effect. Verse 174 points out the obvious fact that we will either win or fall in this task. If we win, we will have our due reward; if we fall, the experience has not been a failure, for whatever we have achieved, however little or great it may be, will carry over to our next life and become the foundation for a renewed effort then. These verses are reminiscent of the ending of HPB's memorable statement, 'There is a Road':

For those who win onward, there is reward past all telling: the power to bless and save humanity. For those who fail, there are other lives in which success may come.

These verses also use and explain the metaphor of a battle, which is a very frequent alternative to the metaphor of a journey. The battle is, of course, an interior one, a conflict between aspects of ourselves. So gloss 32 explains that the 'living' and the 'dead', between whom the battle is fought, are both ourselves:

Gloss 32. The 'living' is the immortal higher Ego, and the 'dead' — the lower personal ego.

Verse 177 begins a focused discussion of the two Paths, which is the major symbolic theme of this second fragment. The Path of discipleship, which is the process of coming into knowledge of

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oneself and of wholeness — both within ourselves and with all life around and above us — reaches a dividing point. The one Path becomes two. One of the branches leads to liberation from limitations and pain, that is, it takes us out of this world and brings us to Nirvāna. The other branch, however, returns to this world, giving those who take it the opportunity to become Servers of humanity, or Bodhisattva-s of Compassion.

The phrase ‘cast the prize away’ has a gloss (33) referring the reader to a later gloss (34) to verse 306 in Fragment 3. That later gloss is a long discussion of the doctrine of the *trikāya* or ‘three bodies (of the Buddha)’. That doctrine will be treated in detail in the third fragment of *The Voice*. It includes the *dharmakāya*, which is the Buddha body of those who take the Path of Liberation to Nirvana, and the *nirmānakāya*, which is the Buddha body of those who take the Path of Renunciation of Nirvāna in order to remain in the world and serve it.

As gloss 34 says, those who take the Path of Renunciation of a Nirmānakāya lead a ‘Secret Life’ because they are in, but not of, the world. Consequently they work in quietness and mystery for the welfare of all beings and especially of humanity:

Aspiration is a movement of one’s heart and mind towards something pure and beautiful, the beneficent influence of which it receives and embraces with the wholeness of itself. It is a flame of consciousness, uprising and merging into some aspect of the infinite beauty of the eternal Spirit.

Gloss 34. The ‘Secret Life’ is life as a Nirmānakāya.

The two Paths are also called ‘open’ and ‘secret’, as verse 180 states and gloss 35 explains:

Gloss 35. The ‘Open’ and the ‘Secret Path’ — or the one taught to the layman, the exoteric and the generally accepted, and the other the Secret Path — the nature of which is explained at initiation.

The Open Path is exoteric because all religions speak of salvation or illumination or enlightenment or liberation as the goal of life. But the other Path is esoteric or Secret because the ideal of remaining in the world as a behind-the-scenes helper of humanity is not a common theme in exoteric religions, being taught chiefly in the esoteric tradition.

The four portals referred to in verse 179 are perhaps the four states of verse 22, and the ‘seven portals’ are dealt with in Fragment 3, entitled ‘The Seven Portals’.

MEDITATION. Think about choices in life that must be made. Think of the choice between personal benefit and selfless service of others. Can we benefit ourselves while ignoring others? Can we serve others without benefiting ourselves? Imagine a road that divides, at whose fork you stand. ✧

N. Sri Ram

Wagner's *Parsifal* (Part II)

ALAN SENIOR

Act I

Something had gone disastrously wrong. The world had run out of meaning and the Grail king, standing for the established order, was impotent and the land wasted. But a youthful hero was destined to find the Grail, which would be glimpsed and then discarded due to a failure to understand its nature and purpose. The action takes place on or near Monsalvat (the Mountain of Salvation) somewhere in Gothic Spain, where the Castle, built by the knights, contains the Temple of the Grail. However, as we said earlier, for Wagner real locations play no part in the plot and he deliberately confuses time and space. After the Prelude, the First Act opens with trombones sounding the reveille, an awakening call to summon the knights to undertake spiritual endeavours. In the forest the chief knight Gurnemanz arouses those few fellow-knights who have remained as defenders of the Grail and are often sent out into the world to right wrongs, to uphold justice, and to protect the weak. Gurnemanz stands for Higher Manas, or the Mind-Principle. In him, full mental development is indicated, but an even higher state of consciousness will be



The Grail Temple, Bayreuth 1882.

(After the design by Paul von Joukowsky.
©Cologne Theatre Museum.)

needed to redeem the Brotherhood. Amfortas the Grail-king (derived from the Latin *infirmitas*, 'infirmity') arrives borne on a litter for his morning bath in the lake. He is the son of Titurel, the aged founder of the Order of Grail Knights and builder of the Castle as a sanctuary to house the holy relics.

Amfortas is sometimes referred to as

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the Fisher King who, in the Arthurian story, rules over the wasteland. He must be healed before the land can be made fertile again. In some traditions the fish has special significance and was used by the early Christians as a password and symbol for Christ. The Fisher King is also linked to the salmon in Celtic folklore — the king of fish and the symbol of knowledge. There is also a play on words in French, where ‘fisher’ and ‘sinner’ are almost identical (*pêcheur/pêcheur*). There are many references to fish in the Gospels, and in ancient Hindu literature the first Avatāra of Vishnu was a fish. HPB calls it an inheritance from the Chaldees — the Babylonian Dagon, the man-fish who was the instructor and interpreter for the people. So the fish is a sacred symbol in many mystery cults, leading people back from death to life, to a higher level of themselves. Jesus’ mission was to make the disciples ‘fishers of men’ (Matt., IV:19, Mark, I:17, Luke, V:10, where it is equated with proselytizing).

Returning to the story, Amfortas (who is not a tragic figure in Wolfram but is called a fisherman in Book Five) has a wound that will not heal and neither the bathing nor any herbal remedies can ease his pain for long. It can only be healed by the application of the holy Spear in the hands of the rightful holder; on the Path of Return only the One, not the many, can help, for Amfortas represents lower Manas. Now the wild, female figure of Kundry rushes in with a small crystal vial — yet another remedy for Amfortas,

having been conveyed a great distance from a far-off land. Wagner took this idea from the Bible story of Mary Magdalene’s use of a costly ointment obtained from a distant land, carried in an alabaster jar for anointing Jesus. In the ‘Mabinogion’ Kundry is Herodias, wife of Herod, condemned to wander forever because she laughed at the head of John the Baptist, and there is a reference to this in Act II. But Wagner, whilst retaining the name Herodias, has her condemned instead for laughing in the face of Jesus as he carried his cross, a curse which has sentenced her to constant rebirths as a seductress, chained to previous actions from life to life. Now she seeks forgiveness by serving the Grail knights as messenger.

Kundry was adapted by Wagner from the loathsome damsel Condrie and another one called ‘Condrie la Belle’, sister of Gawain, in *Parzival*, and this probably gave Wagner the idea to make her a dual character. The name ‘Kundry’ also ties in with the German *Kunde* (meaning news or information), appropriate for her role as messenger. There is another link here with Mary Magdalene, who has been called ‘apostle to the apostles’ and the word *apostle* in Greek also means ‘messenger’, exactly her role at the Resurrection. But, knowing that Wagner studied Eastern religions, the name may also be linked to ‘kundalini’, defined as ‘serpent power’ or ‘she who is coiled’, and Kundry does arrive clothed in a robe of snake-skins. This occult, fiery power, when aroused into action, can kill or create, and is called ‘serpentine’ as it works

Wagner's *Parsifal* (Part II)

spiral-like in the body, manifesting as two great forces of attraction and repulsion. So Kundry stands for the irrational soul of man, the animal nature — helpful in its legitimate state of service to the higher man, but fraught with deadly peril when allowed to rule rather than obey.

The snakeskin also symbolizes the doctrine of rebirth, for as the snake sheds its skin periodically, so the Ego in its evolution takes on one body after another to gain experience here on earth. In answer to the knights' declaration of distrust in Kundry, Gurnemanz answers:

Under a curse she well may be from some
past life we do not see, seeking from sin
to loose the fetter, by deeds for which we
fare the better. Surely 'tis good she follows
thus, helping herself while serving us.

But Kundry is periodically subjugated by the evil magician Klingsor, who transforms her into a woman of exquisite beauty — a seductress to help him overcome the knights — and she can be freed only by one who resists her temptations. She alternately serves the Grail knights and Klingsor, sometimes responding to the call of the higher self, then yielding to the lure of the lower sense-life. The pious knights are ignorant of this dual nature and remain unaware that it is she who has seduced and ruined Amfortas. Klingsor forever seeks to divert the knights from their spiritual quest into a world ruled by desire; as Wagner states: 'beclouding the divine judgement of man through the sense

impressions of the material world, and thereby leading him into a world of deception.'

Now Kundry warns that, should the balsam she has brought fail, there will be nothing else to relieve Amfortas' suffering; in other words, nothing within the limitations of ordinary knowledge can heal or transform the inner consciousness. Theosophy tells us that inner strivings towards higher consciousness can lead to an actual change in the physical atoms which will respond to higher energies and a subsequent gain in physical matter. Thus Kundry, in her service to the brotherhood, symbolizes Matter, and she aids her own evolution as well as that of the knights, holding them together whilst their consciousness is focused on spiritual things — 'heads in the clouds but feet on the ground', as the saying goes.

The holy Spear which pierced the side of Christ is always associated with the Grail, and here it was lost by Amfortas, falling into the hands of Klingsor, scarcely mentioned in Wolfram. This was thrust into the side of Amfortas, causing the wound that will not heal, brought about by his descent into the realm of desire; only Gurnemanz saved him from becoming a prisoner in Klingsor's magic castle. Klingsor typifies *kāma* (desire) that led to some unholy act for which he wishes to atone, be redeemed, and enter the Brotherhood. But his egoism, ambitions and desires remain, witnessed when he tried to seize the Grail, and had been turned away. So he resorted to

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sorcery, set up a rival domain and created an enchanted castle with a luxuriant pleasure garden filled with seductive flower-maidens (featured in Act II).

This Garden of Illusion was designed to entrap the Grail knights, to destroy their pure will and violate their vow of chastity, thus weakening the Brotherhood. Now only a few remain as defenders of the Grail. Amfortas had set out with the holy Spear — a universal symbol of the spiritual will — to overthrow this evil, but was beguiled by ‘a woman of fearsome beauty’, only later identified as Kundry in her lowest aspect as the slave of Klingsor, the great Ensnarer. In the words of HPB: ‘It is not the flesh which is always the tempter, but the Lower Manas, which, by its images, leads the flesh into temptation.’

Amfortas, symbolizing this concrete lower Manas, whilst under the influence of glamour, was bewitched, and Klingsor was able to wield the Spear, wounding him in the side so that he was left an abandoned wreck. Purity was lost, the will perverted, and desire triumphed. Amfortas’ wound is ‘humanity’s great pain’ and will not heal, but his original sacred resolve enables him to at least prevent total ruination. When at prayer he received a vision of a chosen one — ‘the blameless fool’ — arriving as the deliverer, someone of great compassion rather than intellect. He is one who has knowledge of the true Self, being free from conditioned existence, which, in the words of Śri Śankarāchārya (author of *The Crest-Jewel of Wisdom*) ‘will

lead to the thoroughly realized unity of the self with Brahman’.

All that happened in the past. Now a wounded swan flutters in from the lake and falls dead with an arrow in its breast. A stalwart youth (Parsifal) appears as the perpetrator of this deed, but at this stage he remains unconscious of any wrongdoing. Wagner has here superimposed his Buddhist reading of an episode in Gautama’s life when he comforted a swan wounded by his wicked cousin Devadatta. A swan in Sanskrit is the Hamsa signifying the soul or spirit which migrates to and from the body. When Hamsa is associated with Kāla (Eternity) it becomes ‘the Swan of Eternity’, always in existence. It is also a compound of Aham-Sah — ‘I-He’ or ‘I am That’ — so the swan is the separate self (individual consciousness) at one stage, and, when transcended, becomes Paramahamsa. This indicates that Parsifal has slain or transcended the separated self and is ready to proceed towards the all-consciousness, or Buddhi. It is interesting that the Finnish epic poem, the Kalevala, contains the same idea. Here ‘The Swan of Tuonela’ (depicted in the third movement of Sibelius’s *Lemminkäinen Legends*, Op. 22) transcends time and mortality in its form of Paramahamsa, and thus cannot be slain by Kullervo in his desire to kill it whilst under the influence of a Kundry-type temptress, Pohjola’s daughter.

But now, with Gurnemanz’s guidance, Parsifal sees the error of wanton destruction and the slaying of an inoffensive creature, thus instilling in him compas-

Wagner's *Parsifal* (Part II)

sion and a resolve to kill no more. Wagner had acquired a Buddhistic sense of the sacredness of all life and was pointing out that harmless living (*ahimsā*) is an essential prerequisite to the spiritual life. From 1878 until his death a few years later he was writing articles deploring the wickedness and degeneracy of society, with its blood sports and vivisection, advocating vegetarianism in its place.* So Parsifal destroys his bow, but when questioned has no knowledge of his name, parentage, or past life. This suggests the *buddhic* level whereby the spiritual Soul in man — the vehicle of *Ātmā* — lies beyond individuality and the different personalities of past lives.

Kundry adds that he was brought up in the wilderness by his mother, Herzeleide ('Heart's Sorrow'), secluded from the dangers of battle that had killed his father before her son's birth. Being confined to the wilderness with no knowledge of his true nature — 'in the dark', as it were — suggests incompleteness, whilst the absence of any paternal influence ('the Father') means that he was prevented from accomplishing his true destiny, remaining childlike and comfortable, but with no scope for soul-growth. So he had to break away from these restrictions and 'went forth', but at this stage remains foolishly unworldly, without experience. He recalls how he saw a troop of knights passing on the edge of the forest, pursuing them day and night. Thus he had intuitive knowledge of his spiritual affinity with the Grail knights. Gurnemanz suspects, from further revela-

tions of Parsifal's background, that here may be the pure-minded fool promised for the relief of Amfortas, and he decides to take him to the Castle to share in the love-feast of the knights and the uncovering of the Grail.

The time of this holy feast of the Brotherhood approaches to the sounds of the *Verwandlungsmusik* (depicting the stage transformation from meadowland to the Hall of the Grail) and we hear the motif of the Grail as the procession enters the great Hall. This is a powerful orchestral interlude with long sustained trombones softly swelling. Peals of bells are also heard as the knights move with stately tread. They arrange themselves at the table with the chorus: 'To the last love feast' and pages bring in the covered Grail. Youths in the gallery sing a chorus of penitence and the Motif of Faith is heard as if sung by angels, whilst the orchestra whispers a brief postludium, perhaps the most exquisite musical effect of the whole work.

The knights implore the guilt-wracked guardian, Amfortas, to perform the sacred rite of the Grail service, so that the sight of the Grail might renew their resolve to carry out great deeds. It is uncovered, illuminating the surrounding gloom with its brightness. The light poured forth is the beneficent light of wisdom, and on seeing it Parsifal is expected to ask the formal question: 'Whom does the Grail serve?' but he remains silent, understanding nothing of the ritual. Although it seems to be an unimportant, even irrelevant question it has been highlighted

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by many poets in order to make us ponder on an answer. Some maintain that it serves the Grail king and is located within him, his 'kingly' nature. Feminists might say that it serves the realm of the Goddess, that of Nature, mystery, and love. Perhaps the best answer is that it serves the Kingdom — in esoteric terms, the Higher Self. In other words the Grail serves those who wish to serve; having been transformed by it, they become completely selfless, attaining a higher level of consciousness, a new meaning to life when a completely pristine level of thought, feeling, and understanding has been achieved.

Although Parsifal fails to ask the question, he feels great compassion and, physically, the wound in the side of Amfortas, who cries out in agony, bleeds afresh whenever the Grail is revealed. Esoterically, those imprisoned in the lower mind cannot bear the sight of divine wisdom. Amfortas laments the fact that he has betrayed the Cause by succumbing to sensuality and illusion. His sickness exemplifies the corruption of humanity itself. Parsifal feels sympathetically the same pain, but fails to understand why, remaining dumb. As HPB says: 'To feel *compassion* without an adequate practical result ensuing from it, is not to show oneself an *altruist*, but the reverse. Real self-development on the esoteric lines is action.'

This theme of compassion permeates the entire music-drama and comes from Wagner's realization, through his studies of Buddhism, that compassion is indeed

the Law of laws, of which the Buddhist ideal — the Bodhisattva whose being is wisdom — is the ultimate expression. *The Voice of the Silence* also states that 'thou canst not travel on the Path before thou hast become that Path itself. Let thy soul lend its ear to every cry of pain like as the lotus bares its heart to drink the morning sun.' But Parsifal has not yet reached that stage, and the Call is refused. In the words of Joseph Campbell:

The myths and folk tales of the whole world make clear that the refusal is essentially a refusal to give up what one takes to be one's own interest. The future is regarded not in terms of an unremitting series of deaths and births, but as though one's present system of ideals, virtues, goals, and advantages were to be fixed and made secure.**

For Wagner, too, a myth was a vehicle for human knowledge, acquainting us with our real selves and our present condition, using symbols and characters to give objective form to our inner compulsions whilst conveying meanings that are timeless. Myths, he realized, are a way of both concealing and revealing ideas of sanctity, holiness, and redemption, and in 'Parsifal', as in *The Secret Doctrine*, we are invited to participate in these mysteries.

Meanwhile, Gurnemanz asks Parsifal if he understands what he has seen, but overcome by the suffering he has witnessed he cannot answer. Not yet 'fully awakened' he looks on in dumb amazement, overwhelmed by the visions en-

Wagner's *Parsifal* (Part II)

countered. His heart and mind are not yet attuned to 'the great heart and mind of all mankind' as *The Voice of the Silence* directs us to unremittingly contemplate, for true compassion must be functioning before selfless action can take place. Angrily, Gurnemanz calls Parsifal a mere fool and thrusts him from the Temple in disgust. However, a heavenly voice proclaims once more that the pure-minded fool shall know through compassion. Parsifal has intuitively found his spiritual kin and destiny, which can eventually lead to an expansion of consciousness. But for some years he will wander in the world of actions and temptations, learn-

ing to deal with the pressures, allurements, and illusions of the outside world — its emotionalism, charms, and intrigue, all attempting to turn his head and divert him from the higher life. These trials demand courage, perseverance, and devotion to truth, which will decide whether he remains pure and virtuous, for Christ taught that a man must be born again of the spirit, and without temptation there is no transformation. If Parsifal meets these demands, made upon all seekers of truth, he will be able to return the Spear, heal Amfortas, and restore the wasteland to fruitfulness.

(To be continued)

References

* Unfortunately, as we know, Wagner also maintained that racial impurity was the source of evil and that 'the bloodthirsty Jewish god of war, property, and power' had corrupted Christianity, 'the religion of compassion and renunciation'. This anti-Semitism was, however, a principle rather than a practice but Wagner despised the 'scabrous, corrupt, ignorant, Jewish-led German Press' and this detestation even extended to the music of Mendelssohn, a Jew. But Sir Georg Solti, that great Wagner conductor, stressed that anyone who could create the first four bars of 'Tristan', the epitome of love and beauty, whether he be anti-Semite, revolutionary, liberal or royalist, is first and foremost a musical genius and will remain so as long as our civilization lasts.

** *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, pp. 59-60, Princeton University Press, 1973.

Erratum

In Part I of this series, on p. 343 (June 2008 issue), third paragraph, the word 'crazy' should have read 'skivvy', meaning 'domestic servant'. The mistake is regretted.

Fragments of the Ageless Wisdom

From *My Autobiography: A Fragment*

What India teaches us is that in a state advancing towards civilization, there must be always two castes or two classes of men, a caste of Brāhmans or of thinkers, and a caste of Kshattriyas, who are to fight; possibly other castes also of those who are to work and those who are to serve. Great wars went on in India, but they were left to be fought by the warriors by profession. The peasants in their villages remained quiet, accepting the consequences, whatever they might be, and the Brāhmans lived on, thinking and dreaming in their forests, satisfied to rule after the battle was over.

And what applies to military struggles seems to me to apply to all struggles — political, religious, social, commercial, and even literary. Let those who love to fight, fight; but let those who are fond of quiet work go on undisturbed in their own special callings. That was, as far as we can see, the old Indian idea, or at all events the ideal which the Brāhmans wished to see realized. I do not stand up for utter idleness or sloth, not even for drones, though nature does not seem to condemn even *hoc genus* altogether. All I plead for, as a scholar and a thinker, is freedom from canvassing, from letter-reading and letter-writing, from committees, deputations, meetings, public dinners, and all the rest. That will sound very selfish to the ears of practical men, and I understand why they should look upon men like myself as hardly worth their salt. But what would they say to one of the greatest fighters in the history of the world? What would they say to Julius Caesar, when he declares that the triumphs and the laurel wreaths of Cicero are as far nobler than those of warriors, as it is a greater achievement to extend the boundaries of the Roman intellect than the domains of the Roman people!

F. Max Müller

Theosophy and the Present Age

ANON

ACCORDING to the *Secret Doctrine*, about 4,990 years ago the cycle we are now in began, called, in Occultism, the Black Age (Kali Yuga). For us of the Aryan fifth sub-race of the Fifth Root Race, this cycle will endure thousands of years more. We are taught by the 'Masters' that periods of light must be succeeded by periods of darkness; the former having passed away for this race, the latter now reigns. This cycle, as its name implies, is one of feeble spirituality, dominated on the contrary by gross materialism. In discussing, therefore, the effects of the strenuous efforts now being made to scatter broadcast the tenets of the old Wisdom Religion on the present age, these characteristics must be constantly borne in mind. The full reasons which induced the 'Adepts' to select the commencement of the last quarter of this century as a proper time under Karmic law to openly advance Theosophy, is probably known to them alone. A very high authority in occult matters has, however, mentioned two considerations which influenced the 'Leaders of the World' in this matter. The occult forces operating through some thousands of séance-rooms had led to the wide diffusion of very erroneous beliefs respecting human post-mortem states:

scientific materialism was rapidly destroying all spirituality in the cultured classes of today. In 1875, therefore, the devoted servants of the great brotherhood founded by their order the Theosophical Society, and the publication of a portion of the esoteric wisdom commenced in *Isis Unveiled*, and has lately culminated in *The Secret Doctrine*. Putting forward as it does the synthesis of religion, philosophy, and science, claiming to be the base upon which all the esoteric creeds of today rest, and offering a solution of some of the darkest problems of life, the old Wisdom Religion has received a varied reception from the people of this age. It is not surprising that it should excite a vast amount of enmity in some quarters, for, as an occultist has lately said, 'every truth is born into the world amidst yells of hatred'. Other minds of wide and liberal tendencies have welcomed it with ardour, and worked hard and well to spread its tenets far and wide.

The great mass of sectarians, on the contrary, have viewed it with dislike or indifference, according to the strength of their attachment to the various religious ideas of this age. It is not, however, exceeding truth to assert that of the numerous assailants of Theosophy, not

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one has properly understood its principles, whilst of the writings of some, it can be positively affirmed that they remain a lasting memorial of the depths of degradation to which the unchecked sway of prejudices and ignorance can drag the human mind.

The fundamental differences between the teachings and beliefs of so-called Spiritualists and Theosophists are easily stated. The latter deny the agency of 'spirits' in the production of the well-known phenomena of séance-rooms, contending, on the contrary, that these can be exhibited in open daylight, and by the exercise of natural powers, now latent in most men and developed only in a few at present. The occultists have proved their case by exhibiting these abnormal powers, many times, and in many places, attested by a mass of evidence that nothing can shake. If the occult explanation of 'spiritualistic' phenomena is not accepted the latter will for ever remain inexplicable, a subject of jest for scoffers, and the despair of many believers, for the latter know that these incidents occur, but at the same time see the absurdity of attributing the utter nonsense often given forth by raps, etc. to the spirits of the dead.

The quarrel of Occultism with materialistic science begins at the very base. Everything is composed of indivisible atoms in constant motion, and Ether fills all interstellar space, says the latter. Matter, Force, and Ether, therefore, compose the universe from the materialist point of view, although science admits that it really knows nothing of the constitution of either.

Occultists deny the essential truth of the atomic hypothesis; analyse, they say, the smallest conceivable atom, and you have a mathematical point only, with none of the attributes of matter, using the word in an ordinary sense. Potential space, then, in Occultism, is entirely composed of lives, combined and differentiated in the One Life. The latter vibrates alike in the suns of space and the smallest grain of sand. There is nothing dead in the universe; all that is, lives. Materialistic science will never be able to explain the now well-known phenomena of mesmerism, clairvoyance, etc., as it does not recognize any faculties in man beyond the five senses and their exercise on the physical plane. On the other hand, Occultism asserts that there are several states of consciousness, each with its appropriate senses, in the human organism. Thus, it explains clairvoyance as the sixth, and coming sense, being now developed in a few persons only, but in the distant future to be common to all. The views of eminent scientists respecting the origin and history of the universe and man are purely speculative and subject to constant changes. Alone and unapproachable in its majestic sweep of conception is the stupendous system of physical, mental, and spiritual evolution, embracing the cosmos, given to this age in *The Secret Doctrine*. Blind and molelike does physical science grope its way on this plane, constantly mistaking effects for causes, lost amidst the illusions of the senses. In spite, however, of the general materialism of scientific men, some of the most

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intuitional amongst them seem to be on the verge of reconciling their advanced views with the teachings of Occultism. A mass of evidence proving this assertion is given in *The Secret Doctrine*. As time goes on, it will become more and more apparent that it is Theosophy alone that can bridge the present chasm between religion and science, showing them both to be but parts of the One Truth. Truth must be always one. The spectacle, therefore, presented by this age of divorce betwixt religion and science, of bitter and ceaseless controversies between the leaders of the two schools cannot be permanent. It is only the old Wisdom Religion that can establish harmony and consolidate all branches of human knowledge; and in so far as it prevails in the future will darkness vanish and peace and light reign. It is only, perhaps, in the cycle to come that the great debt now due to the custodians of esoteric knowledge will be properly recognized. Until then a few only will welcome it, the majority continue to reject.

Before the 'Adepts' drew from their vast stores of archaic lore and published considerable portions of human history, what did the foremost scholars of this age really know of the remote past? Very little of the early days of the Aryan race; beyond, nothing. Now, thanks to those who know, we have the main outlines of human history for the past 18,000,000 years. At last, we really know something of the submerged continents and lost giant races of old. The civilized builders of the walls of Tyrius; of the Cyclopiian ruins

scattered throughout Asia, Europe, and America; the architects of the huge statues of Bamian and Easter Island. The rash attempts formerly made by so-called scholars to compress the history of the world into some 6,000 years have now almost ceased; and the general public will soon be able to hear, without any severe shock to their religious ideas, that the great continent of Atlantis sank beneath the waves over 4,000,000 years ago and Lemuria suffered the same fate milleniums before. The advance of the cycle of knowledge is slow, but sure.

In nothing does the conceit of some Occidental minds show itself more prominently than in the denial of the very existence of the 'Masters of Wisdom' by those who for the sake of their own credit as men of capacity and intelligence, might well pause before coming to such a decision. For in so doing they deliberately reject a mass of reliable evidence which would suffice, apart from prejudice, to prove the matter to the satisfaction of any reasonable inquirer. Want of space now prevents the collection and marshalling of all these easily available proofs. It may be affirmed, however, that no believer in the doctrine of the constant evolution and progression of the human race can consistently deny the probability of the present existence of these Elder Brethren; those, in fact, who are the outcome of ages of struggles and conquests over the lower self in human nature, and whom the not-remote future will see looked up to by ordinary men, as ideals of all that is good and true. ✧

Books of Interest

ENLIGHTENED LIVING, by Dr V. V. Chalam, Theosophy Prachara and Sikshana Samithi, Karnataka Theosophical Federation, Bangalore, 2007, pp. 153.

Enlightened Living is a compilation of thirty articles and speeches of Dr V.V. Chalam, a long-standing TS member and former Director, Institute of Technology, Banaras Hindu University. Delegates to the international Convention at Adyar had the privilege of listening to his Theosophy-Science Lectures in 1987 and 1999.

This compilation is valuable, for it consists of articles on serious topics, such as Self-inquiry, A Meditative Life, Moving beyond the Mind, The Art of Living, H. P. Blavatsky, H. S. Olcott, Annie Besant, and the basic teachings of Theosophy. The publisher should be congratulated for bringing out these articles in a handy book.

One can see the scientific approach of the author on various subjects. In the article 'Powers Latent in Man', when describing the Etheric Double, Dr Chalam states that a group of biophysicists and biochemists at Kirov State University experimented with the 'etheric double' using the electron microscope, and in Kirlian photographs we can see the phantom limb attached to a body. The author also writes about psychokinesis, which demonstrates the power of mind over matter; some persons can even break a glass

tumbler from a distance by merely fixing a concentrated gaze on it! He quotes Dr J. B. Rhine of Duke University, who has conducted scientific investigations for the last few years: 'Mind does have a force that can affect physical matter directly.'

The articles entitled 'Be a Buddha', 'The Buddha's Clarion Call', and 'Metta Meditation' are based on the Buddha's teachings, and will help remove misconceptions. 'Be a Buddha' starts with the striking sentence: 'Everyone can become a Buddha', and points out ten fetters on the path of spiritual growth, including personality, belief, sceptical doubts, attachment to rites and rituals, etc. Dr Chalam quotes Dr Graham Howe's words: 'To read a little Buddhism is to realize that the Buddhists knew 2,500 years ago far more about the problems of psychology. . . . We are now rediscovering the Ancient Wisdom of the East.'

The Buddha said: 'The world is led by the mind, by the mind the world is drawn along, all have gone under the sway of the mind', and his words, 'make an island of yourself; make yourself your refuge', are still relevant in a world where the blind lead the blind. He advises: 'In our quest for God, we think too much, theorize too much, and talk too much. Instead, let us be silent. Let us contemplate. Let us drop all preconceived notions and images.'

K. DINAKARAN

Theosophical Work around the World

Russian Fellows-at-Large

Fellows-at-Large (attached to Adyar) in Moscow organized a celebration of the centenary of the original foundation of the Theosophical Society in Russia, attracting about fifty participants. The programme included lectures on the history of the Society and its objects. On this occasion, many Theosophical books, including Russian translations of C. W. Leadbeater's *The Hidden Side of Things* and *The Masters and the Path*, were sold. The Russian translation of the *Bhagavadgītā* by Dr Anna Kamensky is available online.

The Moscow group recently held its last meeting before the summer recess, with an attendance of seventeen, including two visitors from Nizny Novgorod, who reported on a recent conference of Ukrainian Theosophists in Dnepropetrovsk which they had attended.

Olcott Memorial High School

This school was founded at the instance of the President-Founder, Col. H. S. Olcott, who realized that certain classes of people who were called 'untouchables' at the time had no educational opportunities. So he started a school to educate the children and look after them with money he collected. The school has grown, with over 600 boys and girls who receive education up to the tenth class. The Principal, Mrs Lakshmi

Suryanarayanan, is enthusiastic about raising their level in life, and does her best to raise funds to help the children.

Funds have been raised from individuals in India and abroad, and from various other sources (for instance, Asha for Education, a charity run by young people). Efforts continue in order to find more help for the children, who are mostly first generation learners.

We are happy to announce that recent examination results have been more encouraging than in previous years, with very few failures. The School Leaving Certificate was attained by 75% of the students, which is good by the School standards. Over the years some graduates have done extremely well and gone on to hold good positions. Many have retained a high sense of values.

The school functions in the south-eastern portion of Besant Gardens and has large grounds in which the children happily play and work. The School is improving with the attention that is given, and many of the poor people in the surrounding areas are able to take advantage of the free education offered.

The Government of Tamil Nadu provides a free meal, and the School staff adds more vegetables and a protein supplement in the form of lentils to improve the quality of the food. A nutritious breakfast is also provided to all the children by the Society. ✧