

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky

**“Let every man
Prove his own work”**

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SUCH is the title of a letter received by the Editors of *Lucifer*. It is of so serious a nature that it seems well to make it the subject of this month's editorial. Considering the truths uttered in its few lines, its importance and the bearing it has upon the much obscured subject of Theosophy, and its visible agent or vehicle — the Society of that name — the letter is certainly worthy of the most considerate answer.

*“Fiat justitia, ruat coelum!”*¹

Justice will be done to both sides in the dispute namely, Theosophists and the members of the Theosophical Society² on the one hand, and the followers of the *Divine Word* (or Christos), and the so-called Christians, on the other. [160]

We reproduce the letter:

To the Editors of *Lucifer*.

What a grand chance is now open in this country, to the exponents of a noble and advanced religion (if such this Theosophy be³) for proving its strength, righteousness and verity to the Western world, by throwing a penetrating and

¹ [Latin legal phrase, translating to “Let justice be done, though the heavens fall.” The maxim signifies the belief that justice must be realized regardless of consequences. According to the 19th century abolitionist politician Charles Sumner, there is little doubt that this maxim does not occur in any Latin author. — ED. PHIL.]

² Not all the members of the Theosophical Society are Theosophists; nor are the members of the so-called Christian Churches all Christians, by any means. True Theosophists, as true Christians are very, *very* few; and there are practical Theosophists in the fold of Christianity, as there are practical Christians in the Theosophical Society, outside all ritualistic Christianity. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven- but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (*Matthew*, vii, 21.) “Believe not in ME, but in the truths I utter.” (Buddha's *Aphorisms*.)

³ “This” Theosophy is not a religion, but rather *the* RELIGION — if one. So far, we prefer to call it a philosophy; one, moreover, which contains every religion, as it is the essence and the foundation of all. Rule III of the Theos. Body says: “The Society represents no particular religious creed, is entirely *unsectarian*, and includes professors of all faiths.”



illuminating ray of its declared light upon the terribly harrowing and perplexing practical problems of our age.

Surely one of the purest and least self-incrusted duties of man, is to alleviate the sufferings of his fellow man?

From what I read, and from what I daily come into immediate contact with, I can hardly think it would be possible to over-rate in contemplation, the intense privation and agonizing suffering that is — aye, say it — *at this moment* being endured by a vast proportion of our brothers and sisters, arising in a large measure from their not absolutely having the means for procuring the *bare necessities of existence*?

Surely a high and Heaven-born religion — a religion professing to receive its advanced knowledge and Light from “those more learned in the Science of Life,” should be able to tell us something of how to deal with such life, in its primitive condition of helpless submission to the surrounding circumstances of — civilization!

If one of our main duties is that of exercising disinterested love towards the Brotherhood, surely “those more learned” ones, whether in the flesh, or out of it, can and will, if appealed to by their votaries, aid them in discovering ways and means for such an end, and in organising some great fraternal scheme for dealing *rightly* with questions which are so appalling in their complexity, and which must and do press with such irresistible force upon all those who are earnest in their endeavours to carry out the will of Christ in a Christian Land?

L. F. FF

October 25, 1887.

[161]

This honest-spoken and sincere letter contains two statements; an implied accusation against “Theosophy” (*i.e.*, the Society of that name), and a virtual admission that Christianity — or, again, rather its ritualistic and dogmatic religions — deserve the same and even a sterner rebuke. For if “Theosophy,” represented by its professors, merits on external appearance the reproach that so far it has failed to transfer divine wisdom from the region of the metaphysical into that of practical work, “Christianity,” that is, merely professing Christians, churchmen and laymen lie under a like accusation, evidently. “Theosophy” has, certainly, failed to discover *infallible* ways and means of bringing all its votaries to exercise “disinterested love” in their Brotherhood; it has not yet been able to relieve suffering in mankind at large; but neither has Christianity. And not even the writer of the above letter, nor any one else, can show sufficient excuse for the Christians in this respect. Thus the admission that “those who are earnest in their endeavours to carry out the will of Christ in a Christian Land” *need the help of* “‘those more learned’ ones, whether [pagan adepts] in the flesh, or [spirits?] out of it,” is very suggestive, for it contains the defence and the *raison d’être* of the Theosophical Society. Tacit though it is, once that it comes from the pen of a sincere Christian, one who longs to learn some practical means to relieve



the sufferings of the starving multitudes — this admission becomes the greatest and most complete justification for the existence of the Theosophical Brotherhood; a full confession of the absolute necessity for such a body independent of, and untrammelled by, any enchaining dogmas, and it points out at the same time the signal failure of Christianity to accomplish the desired results.

Truly said Coleridge that “good works may exist *without* saving (?) principles, therefore cannot contain in themselves the principles of salvation; but saving principles never did, never can exist without good works.” Theosophists admit the definition, and disagree with the Christians only as to the nature of these “saving principles.” The Church (or churches) maintain that [162] the only saving principle is belief in Jesus, or the carnalized Christ of the soul-killing dogma; theosophy, undogmatic and unsectarian, answers, it is not so. The only *saving* principle dwells in man himself, and has never dwelt outside of his immortal divine self; *i.e.*, it is the true Christos, as it is the true Buddha, the divine inward light which proceeds from the eternal unmanifesting unknown ALL. And this light *can only be made known by its works* — *faith* in it having to remain ever blind in all, save in the man himself who feels that light within his soul.

Therefore, the tacit admission of the author of the above letter covers another point of great importance. The writer seems to have felt that which many, among those who strive to help the suffering, have felt and expressed. The creeds of the churches fail to supply the *intellectual* light, and the true wisdom which are needed to make the practical philanthropy carried out, by the true and earnest followers of Christ, a *reality*. The “practical” people either go on “doing good” unintelligently, and thus often do harm instead; or, appalled by the awful problem before them, and failing to find in their “churches” any clue, or a hope of solution, they retire from the battlefield and let themselves be drifted blindly by the current in which they happen to be born.

Of late it has become the fashion for friends, as well as for foes, to reproach the Theosophical Society with doing no practical work, but losing itself in the clouds of metaphysics. Metaphysicians, we are told, by those who like to repeat stale arguments, have been learning their lesson for the last few thousand years; and it is now high time that they should begin to do some practical work. Agreed; but considering that the Christian churches count nearly nineteen centuries of existence, and that the Theosophical Society and Brotherhood is a body hardly twelve years old; considering again that the Christian churches roll in fabulous wealth, and number their adherents by hundreds of millions, whereas the Theosophical Brotherhood is but a few thousand strong, and that it has no fund, or funds, at its disposal, but that [163] 98 per cent. of its members are as poor and as uninfluential as the aristocracy of the Christian church is rich and powerful; taking all this into consideration, there would be much to say if the theosophists would only choose to press the matter upon the public notice. Meanwhile, as the bitterest critics of the “leaders” of the Theosophical Society are by no means only outsiders, but as there are members of that society who always find a pretext to be dissatisfied, we ask: Can works of charity that will be known among men be accomplished without money? Certainly not. And yet, notwithstanding all this, none of its (European) members, except a few devoted officers



in charge of societies, will do *practical* work; but some of them, those especially who have never lifted a finger to relieve suffering, and help their outside, poorer brothers, are those who talk the most loudly, and are the bitterest in their denunciations of the *unspirituality* and the unfitness of the “leaders of theosophy.” By this they remove themselves into the outer ring of critics, like those spectators at the play who laugh at an actor passably representing Hamlet, while they themselves could not walk on to the stage with a letter on a salver. While in India, comparatively poor theosophists have opened gratuitous dispensaries for the sick, hospitals, schools, and everything they could think of, asking no returns from the poor, as the missionaries do, no abandonment of one’s forefathers’ religion, as a heavy price for favours received, have the English theosophists, as a rule, done a single thing for those suffering multitudes, whose pitiful cry rings throughout the whole Heavens as a protest against the actual state of things in Christendom?

We take this opportunity of saying, in reply to others as much as to our correspondent, that, up till now, the energies of the Society have been chiefly occupied in organizing, extending, and solidifying the Society itself, which work has taxed its time, energies, and resources to such an extent as to leave it far less powerful for practical charity than we would have wished. But, even so, compared with the influence and the funds at the disposal of the Society, its work in practical charity, if less widely [164] known, will certainly bear favourable comparison with that of professing Christians, with their enormous resources in money, workers, and opportunities of all kinds. It must not be forgotten that practical charity is not one of the *declared* objects of the Society. It goes without saying, and needs no “declaration,” that every member of the Society must be practically philanthropic if he be a theosophist at all; and our declared work is, in reality, more important and more efficacious than work in the every-day plane which bears more evident and immediate fruit, for the direct effect of an appreciation of theosophy is to make those charitable who were not so before. Theosophy creates the charity which afterwards, and of its own accord, makes itself manifest in works.

Theosophy is correctly — though in this particular case, it is rather ironically — termed “a high and Heaven-born religion.” It is argued that since it professes “to receive its advanced knowledge and Light from ‘those more learned in the Science of Life,’” the latter ought and *must*, “if appealed to by their votaries [the theosophists], aid them in discovering ways and means in organizing some great fraternal scheme,” etc.

The scheme was planned, and the rules and laws to guide such a practical brotherhood, have been given by “those more learned in the Science of [practical, daily, *altruistic*] Life,” aye, verily “more learned” in it than any other men since the days of Gautama Buddha and the Gnostic Essenes. The “scheme” dates back to the year when the Theosophical Society was founded. Let anyone read its wise and noble laws embodied to this day in the Statutes of the Fraternity, and judge for himself whether, if carried out rigorously and applied to practical life, the “scheme” would not have proved the most beneficent to mankind in general, and especially to our poorer brethren, of “the starving multitudes.” Theosophy teaches the spirit of “non-separateness,” the evanescence and illusion of human creeds and dogma, hence, in-



culcates *universal love and charity for all mankind* “without distinction of race, colour, caste or creed,” is it not therefore the fittest to alleviate the sufferings of mankind? [165] No true theosophist would refuse admission into a hospital, or any charitable establishment, to any man, woman or child, under the pretext that he is *not* a theosophist, as a Roman Catholic would when dealing with a Protestant, and *vice versa*. No true theosophist of the original rules would fail to put into practice the parable of the “Good Samaritan,” or proffer help only to entice the unwary who, he hopes, will become a pervert from his god and the gods of his forefathers. None would slander his brother, none let a needy man go unhelped, none offer fine talk instead of practical love and charity.

Is it then the fault of Theosophy, any more than it is the fault of the Christ-teachings, if the majority of the members of the Theosophical Society, often changing their philosophical and religious views upon entering our Body, have yet remained practically the same as they were when professing *lip* Christianity? Our laws and rules are the same as given to us from the beginning; it is the general members of the Society who have allowed them to become virtually *obsolete*. Those few who are ever ready to sacrifice their time and labour to work for the poor, and who do, unrecognized and unthanked for it, good work wherever they can, are often too poor themselves to put their larger schemes of charity into objective practical form, however willing they may be.



[Susanita to Mafalda on charity dinners] by Joaquin Salvador Lavado

“The fault I find with the Theosophical Society,” said one of the most eminent surgeons in London to one of the editors, quite recently, “is that I cannot discover that any of its members really lead the Christ-life.” This seemed a very serious accusation from a man who is not only in the front rank of his profession, and valued for his kindly nature, by his patients, and by society, and well known as a quiet doer of many good deeds. The only possible answer to be made was that the Christ-life is



undeniably the ideal of every one worthy in any sense of the name of a Theosophist, and that if it is not lived it is because there are none strong enough to carry it out. Only a few days later the same complaint was put in a more graphic form by a celebrated lady-artist. [166]

“You Theosophists don’t do enough good for me,” she said pithily. And in her case also there is the right to speak, given by the fact that she leads two lives — one a butterfly existence in society, and the other a serious one, which makes little noise, but has much purpose. Those who regard life as a great vocation, like the two critics of the Theosophical movement whom we have just quoted, have a right to demand of such a movement more than mere words. They themselves endeavour very quietly to lead the “Christ-life,” and they cannot understand a number of people uniting in the effort towards this life without practical results being apparent. Another critic of the same character who has the best possible right to criticise, being a thoroughly practical philanthropist and charitable to the last degree, has said of the Theosophists that their much talking and writing seems to resolve itself into mere intellectual luxury, productive of no direct good to the world.

The point of difference between the Theosophists (when we use this term we mean, not members of the Society, but people who are really using the organization as a method of learning more of the true wisdom-religion which exists as a vital and eternal fact behind all such efforts) and the practical philanthropists, religious or secular, is a very serious one, and the answer, that probably none of them are strong enough yet to lead the “Christ-life,” is only a portion of the truth. The situation can be put very plainly, in so many words. The religious philanthropist holds a position of his own, which cannot in any way concern or affect the Theosophist. He does not do good merely for the sake of doing good, but also as a means towards his own salvation. This is the outcome of the selfish and personal side of man’s nature, which has so coloured and affected a grand religion that its devotees are little better than the idol-worshippers who ask their deity of clay to bring them luck in business, and the payment of debts. The religious philanthropist who hopes to gain salvation by good works has simply, to quote a well-worn yet ever fresh witticism, exchanged worldliness for other-worldliness. [167]

The secular philanthropist is really at heart a socialist, and nothing else; he hopes to make men happy and good by bettering their physical position. No serious student of human nature can believe in this theory for a moment. There is no doubt that it is a very agreeable one, because if it is accepted there is immediate, straightforward work to undertake. “The poor ye have always with you.” The causation which produced human nature itself produced poverty, misery, pain, degradation, at the same time that it produced wealth, and comfort, and joy and glory. Lifelong philanthropists, who have started on the work with a joyous youthful conviction that it is possible to “do good,” have, though never relaxing the habit of charity, confessed to the present writer that, as a matter of fact, misery cannot be relieved. It is a vital element in human nature, and is as necessary to some lives as pleasure is to others.

It is a strange thing to observe how practical philanthropists will eventually, after long and bitter experience, arrive at a conclusion which, to an occultist, is from the first a working hypothesis. This is, that misery is not only endurable, but agreeable



to many who endure it. A noble woman, whose life has been given to the rescue of the lowest class of wretched girls, those who seem to be driven to vice by want, said, only a few days since, that with many of these outcasts it is not possible to raise them to any apparently happier lot. And this she distinctly stated (and she can speak with authority, having spent her life literally among them, and studied them thoroughly), is not so much from any love of vice, but from love of that very state which the wealthy classes call misery. They prefer the savage life of a bare-foot, half-clad creature, with no roof at night and no food by day, to any comforts which can be offered them. By comforts, we do not mean the workhouse or the reformatory, but the comforts of a quiet home; and we can give chapter and verse, so to speak, to show that this is the case, not merely with the children of outcasts, who might be supposed to have a savage heredity, but with the children of gentle, cultivated, and Christian people. [168]

Our great towns hide in their slums thousands of beings whose history would form an inexplicable enigma, a perfectly baffling moral picture, could they be written out clearly, so as to be intelligible. But they are only known to the devoted workers among the outcast classes, to whom they become a sad and terrible puzzle, not to be solved, and therefore, better not discussed. Those who have no clue to the science of life are compelled to dismiss such difficulties in this manner, otherwise they would fall, crushed beneath the thought of them. The social question as it is called, the great deep waters of misery, the deadly apathy of those who have power and possessions — these things are hardly to be faced by a generous soul who has not reached to the great idea of evolution, and who has not guessed at the marvellous mystery of human development.

The Theosophist is placed in a different position from any of these persons, because he has heard of the vast scope of life with which all mystic and occult writers and teachers deal, and he has been brought very near to the great mystery. Indeed, none, though they may have enrolled themselves as Fellows of the Society, can be called in any serious sense Theosophists, until they have begun to consciously taste in their own persons, this same mystery; which is, indeed, a law inexorable, by which man lifts himself by degrees from the state of a beast to the glory of a God. The rapidity with which this is done is different with every living soul; and the wretches who hug the primitive task-master, *misery*, choose to go slowly through a tread-mill course which may give them innumerable lives of physical sensation — whether pleasant or painful, well-beloved because tangible to the very lowest senses. The Theosophist who desires to enter upon occultism takes some of Nature's privileges into his own hands by that very wish, and soon discovers that experiences come to him with double-quick rapidity. His business is then to recognise that he is under a — to him — new and swifter law of development, and to snatch at the lessons that come to him.

But, in recognising this, he also makes another discovery. He sees that it takes a very wise man to do [169] good works without danger of doing incalculable harm. A highly developed adept in life may grasp the nettle, and by his great intuitive powers, know whom to relieve from pain and whom to leave in the mire that is their best teacher. The poor and wretched themselves will tell anyone who is able to win their confidence that disastrous mistakes are made by those who come from a different



class and endeavour to help them. Kindness and gentle treatment will sometimes bring out the worst qualities of a man or woman who has led a fairly presentable life when kept down by pain and despair. May the Master of Mercy forgive us for saying such words of any human creatures, all of whom are a part of ourselves, according to the law of human brotherhood which no disowning of it can destroy. But the words are true. None of us know the darkness which lurks in the depths of our own natures until some strange and unfamiliar experience rouses the whole being into action. So with these others who seem more miserable than ourselves.

As soon as he begins to understand what a friend and teacher pain can be, the Theosophist stands appalled before the mysterious problem of human life, and though he may long to do good works, equally dreads to do them wrongly until he has himself acquired greater power and knowledge. The ignorant doing of good works may be vitally injurious, as all but those who are blind in their love of benevolence are compelled to acknowledge. In this sense the answer made as to lack of Christ-like lives among Theosophists, that there are probably none strong enough to live such, is perfectly correct and covers the whole question. For it is not the spirit of self-sacrifice, or of devotion, or of desire to help that is lacking, but the strength to acquire knowledge and power and intuition, so that the deeds done shall really be worthy of the “Buddha-Christ” spirit. Therefore it is that Theosophists cannot pose as a body of philanthropists, though secretly they may adventure on the path of good works. They profess to be a body of learners merely, pledged to help each other and all the rest of humanity, so far as [170] in them lies, to a better understanding of the mystery of life, and to a better knowledge of the peace which lies beyond it.

But as it is an inexorable law, that the ground must be tilled if the harvest is to be reaped, so Theosophists are obliged to work in the world unceasingly, and very often in doing this to make serious mistakes, as do all workers who are not embodied Redeemers. Their efforts may not come under the title of good works, and they may be condemned as a school of idle talkers, yet they are an outcome and fruition of this particular moment of time, when the ideas which they hold are greeted by the crowd with interest; and therefore their work is good, as the lotus-flower is good when it opens in the midday sun.

None know more keenly and definitely than they that good works are necessary; only these cannot be rightly accomplished without knowledge. Schemes for Universal Brotherhood, and the redemption of mankind, might be given out plentifully by the great adepts of life, and would be mere dead-letter utterances while individuals remain ignorant, and unable to grasp the great meaning of their teachers. To Theosophists we say, let us carry out the rules given us for our society before we ask for any further schemes or laws. To the public and our critics we say, try to understand the value of good works before you demand them of others, or enter upon them rashly yourselves. Yet it is an absolute fact that without good works the spirit of brotherhood would die in the world; and this can never be. Therefore is the double activity of learning and doing most necessary; we have to do good, and we have to do it *rightly*, with knowledge.

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It is well known that the first rule of the society is to carry out the object of forming the nucleus of a universal brotherhood. The practical working of this rule was [171] explained by those who laid it down, to the following effect: —

“HE WHO DOES NOT PRACTISE ALTRUISM; HE WHO IS NOT PREPARED TO SHARE HIS LAST MORSEL WITH A WEAKER OR POORER THAN HIMSELF; HE WHO NEGLECTS TO HELP HIS BROTHER MAN, OF WHATEVER RACE, NATION, OR CREED, WHENEVER AND WHEREVER HE MEETS SUFFERING, AND WHO TURNS A DEAF EAR TO THE CRY OF HUMAN MISERY; HE WHO HEARS AN INNOCENT PERSON SLANDERED, WHETHER A BROTHER THEOSOPHIST OR NOT, AND DOES NOT UNDERTAKE HIS DEFENCE AS HE WOULD UNDERTAKE HIS OWN — IS NO THEOSOPHIST.”



Allegory of Charity (1636-37) Jacques Blanchard, Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio

