

*Paradox is the natural
language of Occultism*



Abstract and train of thoughts¹

The paradoxes of occultism must be lived, not uttered only.

The Alpha and the Omega, or the beginning and the end of life, is selflessness.

Only in the profound unconsciousness of self-forgetfulness, when all is silence without as within the inner citadel, can the truth and reality of being reveal itself to the eager heart. 3

The inner paradox. 5

The outer paradox. 5

Reflections upon the seemingly contradictory world we live in.

There is no room in the world for one who is not prepared to become a full-blown hypocrite.

Many newspaper editors show a decided leaning towards the mysteries of the archaic past. 10

No pagan, even of the lower classes, believed that the soul would return into its old body. But cultured Christians do. 11

Who can have the patience to read 1,500 pages of dreary metaphysical twaddle for the sake of discovering in it a few facts, however valuable? 13

Wealth leads to impunity, poverty to condemnation even by the law, for the impecunious have no means of paying lawyers. 14

What is good for the Masonic goose is not fit sauce for the Theosophical gander. 15

Suggested reading for students.

From our Living the Life Series. 17



¹ Title page illustration: "Illusions," by Ilene Meyer.

The paradoxes of occultism must be lived, not uttered only.

The Alpha and the Omega, or the beginning and the end of life, is selflessness.

Only in the profound unconsciousness of self-forgetfulness, when all is silence without as within the inner citadel, can the truth and reality of being reveal itself to the eager heart.

First published in *Lucifer*, Vol. I (2), October 1887, pp. 120-22.

Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE GREAT PARADOX) VIII pp. 125-29.

[The authorship of this article is somewhat uncertain. Some of its sentences and expressions do not seem to be in H.P. Blavatsky's style, yet the "atmosphere" is her own. Bertram Keightley, closely associated with her on the Editorial work connected with *Lucifer*, definitely states in his *Reminiscences of H.P. Blavatsky* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1931) that besides writing her own Editorials, Blavatsky also wrote "many other articles under more than one *nom de plume*," and the one of "Faust," appended at the end of the present article, may have been one of them. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

Paradox would seem to be the natural language of occultism. Nay more, it would seem to penetrate deep into the heart of things, and thus to be inseparable from any attempt to put into words the truth, the reality which underlies the outward shows of life.

And the paradox is one not in words only, but in action, in the very conduct of life. The paradoxes of occultism must be lived, not uttered only. Herein lies a great danger, for it is only too easy to become lost in the intellectual contemplation of the path, and so to forget that the road can only be known by treading it. [126]

One startling paradox meets the student at the very outset, and confronts him in ever new and strange shapes at each turn of the road. Such an one, perchance, has sought the path desiring a guide, a rule of right for the conduct of his life. He learns that the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end of *life* is selflessness; and he feels the truth of the saying that only in the profound unconsciousness of self-forgetfulness can the truth and reality of being reveal itself to his eager heart.

The student learns that this is the one law of occultism, at once the science and the art of living, the guide to the goal he desires to attain. He is fired with enthusiasm and enters bravely on the mountain track. He then finds that his teachers do not encourage his ardent flights of sentiment; his all-forgetting yearning for the Infinite — on the outer plane of his actual life and consciousness. At least, if they do not actually damp his enthusiasm, they set him, as the first and indispensable task, *to conquer and control his body*. The student finds that far from being encouraged to live in

the soaring thoughts of his brain, and to fancy he has reached that ether where is true freedom — to the forgetting of his body, and his external actions and personality — he is set down to tasks much nearer earth. All his attention and watchfulness are required on the outer plane;

He must never forget himself, never lose hold over his body, his mind, his brain.

He must even learn to control the expression of every feature, to check the action of each muscle, to be master of every slightest involuntary movement.

The daily life around and within him is pointed out as the object of his study and observation. Instead of forgetting what are usually called the petty trifles, the little forgetfulness, the accidental slips of tongue or memory, he is forced to become each day more conscious of these lapses,

Till at last they seem to poison the air he breathes and stifle him,

Till he seems to lose sight and touch of the great world of freedom towards which he is struggling,

Till every hour of every day seems full of the bitter taste of self, and his heart grows sick with pain and the struggle of despair.

And the darkness is rendered yet deeper by the voice within [127] him, crying ceaselessly,

Forget thyself. Beware, lest thou becomest self-concentrated — and the giant weed of spiritual selfishness take firm root in thy heart; beware, beware, beware!

The voice stirs his heart to its depths, for he feels that the words are true. His daily and hourly battle is teaching him that self-centredness is the root of misery, the cause of pain, and his soul is full of longing to be free.

Thus the disciple is torn by doubt. He trusts his teachers, for he knows that through them speaks the same voice he hears in the silence of his own heart. But now they utter contradictory words; the one, the inner voice, bidding him forget himself utterly in the service of humanity; the other, the spoken word of those from whom he seeks guidance in his service, bidding him *first* to conquer his body, his outer self. And he knows better with every hour how badly he acquits himself in that battle with the Hydra, and he sees seven heads grow afresh in place of each one that he has lopped off.

At first he oscillates between the two, now obeying the one, now the other. But soon he learns that this is fruitless. For the sense of freedom and lightness, which comes at first when he leaves his outer self unwatched, that he may seek the inner air, soon loses its keenness, and some sudden shock reveals to him that he has slipped and fallen on the uphill path. Then, in desperation, he flings himself upon the treacherous snake of self, and strives to choke it into death; but its ever-moving coils elude his grasp, the insidious temptations of its glittering scales blind his vision, and again he becomes involved in the turmoil of the battle, which gains on him from day to day, and which at last seems to fill the whole world, and blot out all else beside from his

consciousness. He is face to face with a crushing paradox, the solution of which must be lived before it can be really understood.

The inner paradox.

In his hours of silent meditation the student will find that there is one space of silence within him where he can find refuge from thoughts and desires, from the turmoil of the senses and the delusions of the mind. By sinking his consciousness deep into his heart he can [128] reach this place — at first only when he is alone in silence and darkness. But when the need for the silence has grown great enough, he will turn to seek it even in the midst of the struggle with self, and he will find it. Only he must not let go of his outer self, or his body; he must learn to retire into this citadel when the battle grows fierce, but to do so without losing sight of the battle; without allowing himself to fancy that by so doing he has won the victory. That victory is won only when all is silence without as within the inner citadel. Fighting thus, from within that silence, the student will find that he has solved the first great paradox.

The outer paradox.

But paradox still follows him. When first he thus succeeds in thus retreating into himself, he seeks there only for refuge from the storm in his heart. And as he struggles to control the gusts of passion and desire, he realises more fully what mighty powers he has vowed himself to conquer. He still feels himself, apart from the silence, nearer akin to the forces of the storm. How can his puny strength cope with these tyrants of animal nature?

This question is hard to answer in direct words; if, indeed, such an answer can be given. But analogy may point the way where the solution may be sought.

In breathing we take a certain quantity of air into the lungs, and with this we can imitate in miniature the mighty wind of heaven. We can produce a feeble semblance of nature: a tempest in a tea-cup, a gale to blow and even swamp a paper boat. And we can say: "I do this; it is *my* breath." But we cannot blow our breath against a hurricane, still less hold the trade winds in our lungs. Yet the powers of heaven are within us; the nature of the intelligences which guide the world-force is blended with our own, and could we realise this and forget our outer selves, the very winds would be our instruments.

So it is in life. While a man clings to his outer self — aye, and even to any one of the forms he assumes when this "mortal coil" is cast aside — so long is he trying to blow aside a hurricane with the breath of his lungs. [129] It is useless and idle such an endeavour; for the great winds of life must, sooner or later, sweep him away. But

- If he changes his altitude in *himself*;
- If he acts on the faith that his body, his desires, his passions, his brain, are not himself, though he has charge of them, and is responsible for them;
- If he tries to deal with them as parts of nature,

Then he may hope to become one with the great tides of being, and reach the peaceful place of safe self-forgetfulness at last.¹

“FAUST”



¹ [Note to Students: Also consult “Occult laws and paradoxes,” and “Occult laws can be entrusted only to those who live the life directed by Theosophy,” in the same series. — ED. PHIL.]

Reflections upon the seemingly contradictory world we live in.

Open your ears; for which of you will stop
The vent of hearing when loud Rumour speaks?
I, from the Orient to the drooping west,
Making the wind my post-horse, still unfold
The acts commenced on this ball of earth:
Upon my tongues continual slanders ride,
The which in every language I pronounce,
Stuffing the ears of men with false reports.
I speak of peace, while covert enmity
Under the smile of safety wounds the world:
And who but Rumour, who but only I . . .

— SHAKESPEARE¹

Why, I can smile, and murder while I smile,
And cry, 'Content,' to that which grieves my heart,
And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
And frame my face to all occasions.

— SHAKESPEARE²

There is no room in the world for one who is not prepared to become a full-blown hypocrite.

First published in *Lucifer*, Vol. III, No. 18, February 1889, pp. 441-49.
Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (A PARADOXICAL WORLD) XI pp. 1-13.

WE LIVE IN AN AGE OF PREJUDICE, dissimulation and paradox, wherein, like dry leaves caught in a whirlpool some of us are tossed helpless, hither and thither, ever struggling between our honest convictions and fear of that cruellest of tyrants — PUBLIC OPINION. Yea, we move on in life as in a Maelström formed of two conflicting currents, one rushing onward, the other repelling us downward; one making us cling desperately to what we believe to be right and true, and that we would fain carry out on the surface; the other knocking us off our feet, overpowering, and finally drowning us under the fierce, despotic wave of social propriety and that idiotic, arbitrary and ever wool-gathering public opinion, based on slander and idle rumour. No person need in our modern day be honest, sincere, and righteous in order to curry favour or receive recognition as a man of worth. He need only be a successful hypocrite, or have become for no mortal reason he himself knows of — popular. In our age, in the words of Mrs. Montagu, →

¹ [*Henry IV*, 2nd Part, Induction, lines 1-11]

² [*ibid.*, VI, 3rd Part, Act III, scene 2, lines 182-85]

. . . while every vice is hid by hypocrisy, every virtue is suspected to be hypocrisy . . . and the suspicion is looked upon as wisdom.¹

Thus, no one seeming to know what to believe, and what to reject, the best means of becoming a paragon of every virtue on blind faith, is — to acquire, *popularity*.

But how is popularity to be acquired? Very easily indeed. Howl with the wolves. Pay homage to the favourite vices of the day, and reverence to mediocrities in public favour. Shut your eyes tight before any truth, *if* unpalatable to the chief leaders of the social herd, and sit with them upon the dissenting minority. Bow low before vulgarity in power; and bray loud applause to the rising donkey who kicks a dying lion, now a fallen idol. Respect public prejudice and pander to its cant² and hobbies, and soon you will yourself become popular. Behold, now is your time. No matter if you be a plunderer and murderer combined: you will be glorified all the same, furnished with an aureole of virtues, and allowed even broader margin for impunity than contained in the truism of that Turkish proverb, which states that “a thief not found out is more honest than a Bey.” But now let a Socrates and Epictetus rolled into one suddenly become *unpopular*. That which will alone remain of him in the hazy mind of Dame Rumour is a pug nose and the body of a slave lacerated by the plying whip of his Master. The twin sisters, Public Opinion and Mrs. Grundy,³ will soon forget their classics. Their female aspect, siding with Xantippe, will charitably endeavour to unearth various good reasons for her outbreaks of passion in the shape of slops poured over the poor bald head; and will search as diligently for some hitherto unknown secret vices in the Greek Sage. Their male aspect will see but a lashed body before its mental eye, and will soon end by joining the harmonious concert of Society slander directed against the ghosts of the two philosophers. *Result*: Socrates-Epictetus will emerge out of the ordeal as black as pitch, a dangerous object for any finger to approach. Henceforth, and for aeons to come, the said object will have become *unpopular*.

The same, in art, in politics, and even literature. “A damned saint, an honourable villain,” are in the present social order of things. Truth and fact have become unpalatable, and are ostracised; he who ventures to defend an unpopular character or an unpopular subject, risks to become himself *anathema maranatha*.⁴ The ways of Soci-

¹ [Cf. “While every vice is hid by hypocrisy, every virtue is suspected to be hypocrisy. This excuses the bad from imitating virtue, the ungenerous from rewarding it, and the suspicious from trusting it. Because credulity is a folly, suspicion is looked upon as wisdom, as if it was not as necessary a part of wisdom to know what to believe, as what to reject. Doubt should lead to enquiry, and enquiry to knowledge; but our modern sceptics think fit to remain in uncertainty, rather proud to believe less, than to know more than other people.”

The Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, with Some of the Letters of her Correspondents. Part the first, containing her letters from an early age to the age of twenty-three. Published by Matthew Montagu, Esq., M.P., her Nephew and Executor. London: Printed for T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1809. Vol. II, p. 85. — ED. PHIL.]

² [Singing in a whining way, from the Latin *cantare*, to sing. Cant was at first a beggar’s whine, hence hypocrisy. Cf. W.W. Skeat’s *Etymological Dictionary of English*, 1835-1912. — ED. PHIL.]

³ [A figurative name for an extremely conventional or priggish person, a personification of the tyranny of conventional propriety. A tendency to be overly fearful of what the respectable might think is also referred to as Grundyism. Although she began life as a minor character in Thomas Morton’s play *Speed the Plough* (1798), Mrs. Grundy was eventually so well established in the public imagination that Samuel Butler, in his novel *Erewhon*, could refer to her in the form of an anagram (as the goddess Ydgrun). As a figure of speech she can be found throughout European literature.]

⁴ [Cf. *1 Corinthians* xvi, 22: “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Marana-tha,” KJV (Greek: *εἴ τις οὐ φιλεῖ τὸν κύριον, ἦτω ἀνάθεμα. Μαράνα θά*); *i.e.*, if one does not love the Lord, let him be cursed because the Lord is coming. — ED. PHIL.]

ety have contaminated all those who approach the threshold of civilized communities; and if we take the word and severe verdict of Lavater for it, there is no room in the world for one who is not prepared to become a full-blown hypocrite. For,

He who by kindness and smooth attention can insinuate a hearty welcome to an unwelcome guest, is a hypocrite superior to a thousand plain-dealers,¹

— writes the eminent physiognomist. This would seem to settle the line of demarcation and to preclude Society, forever, from becoming a “Palace of Truth.”

Owing to this, the world is perishing from spiritual starvation. Thousands and millions have turned their faces away from anthropomorphic ritualism. They believe no longer in a *personal* governor and Ruler; yet this prevents them in no wise from attending every Sunday “divine service,” and professing during the week adherence to their respective Churches. Other millions have plunged headlong into Spiritualism, Christian and mental science or kindred mystic occupations; yet how few will confess their true opinions before a gathering of unbelievers! Most of the cultured men and women — save rabid materialists — are dying with the desire to fathom the mysteries of nature and even — whether they be true or imaginary — the mysteries of the magicians of old. Even our Weeklies and Dailies confess to the past existence of a knowledge which has now become a closed book save for the very few. Which of them, however, is brave enough to speak civilly of the unpopular phenomena called “spiritualistic,” or dispassionately about Theosophy, or even to abstain from mocking remarks and insulting epithets? They will talk with every outward reverence of Elijah’s chariot of fire, of the board and bed found by Jonah within the whale; and open their columns for large subscriptions to fit out scientifico-religious expeditions, for the purpose of fishing out from the Red Sea the drowned Pharaoh’s golden toothpick, or in the Desert, a fragment of the broken tables of stone. But they would not touch with a pair of tongs any fact — no matter how well proven — if vouchsafed to them by the most reliable man living who is connected with Theosophy or Spiritualism. Why? Because Elijah flying away to heaven in his chariot is a Biblical orthodox *miracle*, hence *popular* and a relevant subject; while a medium levitated to the ceiling is an unpopular *fact*; not even a miracle, but simply a phenomenon due to intermagnetic and psycho-physiological and even physical causes. On one hand gigantic pretensions to civilization and science, professions of holding but to what is demonstrated on strictly inductive methods of observation and experiment; a blind trust in physical science — that science which pooh-poohs and throws a slur on metaphysics, and is yet honeycombed with “working hypotheses” all based upon speculations far beyond the region of sense, and often even of speculative thought itself: on the other hand, just as servile and apparently as blind an acceptance of that which orthodox science rejects with great scorn, namely, Pharaoh’s toothpick, Elijah’s chariot and the ichthyographic explorations of Jonah. No thought of the unfitness of things, of the absurdity, ever strikes any editor of a daily paper. He will place unhesitatingly, and side by side, the newest ape-theory of a materialistic F.R.S., and the latest discourse upon the quality of the apple which caused the fall of Adam. And he will add

¹ [Rev. John Caspar Lavater, *Aphorisms of Man*, 3rd ed. of 1794, Aphorism 600, p. 209]

flattering editorial comments upon both lectures, as having an equal right to his respectful attention. Because, both are popular in their respective spheres.

Many newspaper editors show a decided leaning towards the mysteries of the archaic past.

Yet, are all editors natural-born sceptics and do not many of them show a decided leaning towards the Mysteries of the archaic Past, that which is the chief study of the Theosophical Society? The “Secrets of the Pyramids,” the “rites of Isis” and “the dread traditions of the temple of Vulcan with their theories for transcendental speculation” seem to have a decided attraction for the *Evening Standard*. Speaking some time since on the “Egyptian Mysteries” it said:¹

We know little even now of the beginnings of the ancient religions of Thebes and Memphis. . . . All these idolatrous mysteries it should also be remembered were always kept profoundly secret; for the hieroglyphic writings were understood only by the initiated through all these ages. Plato, it is true, came to study from the Egyptian priests; Herodotus visited the Pyramids; Pausanias and Strabo admired the characters which were sculptured so large upon their outer casing that he who ran could read them; but not one of these took the trouble to learn their meaning. They were one and all content to give currency, if no credence, to the marvellous tales which the Egyptian priests and people recounted and invented for the benefit of strangers.

Herodotus and Plato, who were both Initiates into the Egyptian mysteries, accused of believing in and giving currency to marvellous tales invented by the Egyptian priests, is a novel accusation. Herodotus and Plato refusing “to take the trouble” of learning the meaning of the hieroglyphs, is another. Of course if both “gave currency” to tales, which neither an orthodox Christian, nor an orthodox Materialist and Scientist will endorse, how can an editor of a Daily accept them as true? Nevertheless the information given and the remarks indulged in, are wonderfully broad and in the main free from the usual prejudice. We transcribe a few paragraphs, to let the reader judge.

It is an immemorial tradition that the pyramid of Cheops communicated by subterranean passages with the great Temple of Isis. The hints of the ancient writers as to the subterranean world which was actually excavated for the mysteries of Egyptian superstition, curiously agree. . . . Like the source of the Nile itself, there is hardly any line of inquiry in Egyptian lore which does not end in mystery. The whole country seems to share with the Sphinx an air of inscrutable silence. Some of its secrets the researches of Wilkinson, Rawlinson, Brugsch, and Petrie have more or less fully revealed to us; but we shall never know much which lies concealed behind the veil of time.² We can hardly hope even to realise the glories of Thebes in its prime, when it spread over a circuit of thirty miles, with the noble river flowing through it, and each quarter filled with palaces and temples. And the tyranny of the Ethiopian priests, at whose command

¹ [The excerpts that follow are from the London *Evening Standard* of October 19th, 1888. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

² The more so since the literature of theosophy, which is alone able to throw light on those mysteries, is boycotted, and being “unpopular” can never hope to be appreciated. [H.P. Blavatsky]

kings laid down and died, will always remain one of the strangest enigmas in the whole problem of primitive priestcraft. . . . ¹

It was a tradition of the ancient world that the secret of immortality was to be found in Egypt, and that there, amongst the dark secrets of the antediluvian world which remained undeciphered was the “Elixir of Life.” Deep, it was said, under the Pyramids had for ages lain concealed the Table of Emerald, on which, as the legend ran, Hermes had engraved, before the flood, the secret of alchemy; and their weird associations justified the belief that still mightier wonders here remained hid. In the City of the Dead to the north of Memphis, for instance, pyramid after pyramid rose for centuries towering above each other; and in the interior passages and chambers of the rock-cut tombs were pictured the mystic wisdom of the Egyptians in . . . quaint symbols. . . . A vast subterranean world, according to tradition, extended from the Catacombs of Alexandria to Thebes’ Valley of Kings, and this is surrounded with a whole wealth of marvellous story. These, perhaps, culminate in the ceremony of initiation into the religious mysteries of the Pyramids. The identity of the legend has been curiously preserved through all ages, for it is only in minor details that the versions differ. The ceremonies were undoubtedly very terrible. The candidates were subjected to ordeals so frightful that many of them succumbed, and those who survived not only shared the honours of the priesthood, but were looked upon as having risen from the dead. It was commonly believed, we are told, that they had descended into hell itself . . . They were, moreover, given draughts of the cups of Isis and Osiris, the waters of life and death, and clothed in the sacred robes of pure white linen, and on their heads were placed the mystic symbol of initiation — the golden grasshopper. They . . . were instructed in the esoteric doctrines of the sacred college of Memphis. It was only the candidates and priests who knew those galleries and shrines that extended under the site upon which the city stood, and formed a subterranean counterpart to its mighty temples and those lower crypts in which were preserved the “seven tables of stone,” *on which was written all the “knowledge of the antediluvian race, the decrees of the stars from the beginning of time, the annals of a still earlier world, and all the marvellous secrets both of heaven and earth.”*² And here, too, according to mythological tradition . . . were the Isiac serpents which possessed mystic meanings at which we can now only vainly guess. When the monuments are silent certainty is impossible in Egyptology; and in thirty centuries vestiges have been ruthlessly swept away which can never be replaced.

No pagan, even of the lower classes, believed that the soul would return into its old body. But cultured Christians do.

Does not this read like a page from *Isis Unveiled*, or one of our theosophical writings — minus their explanations? But why speak of thirty centuries, when the Egyptian

¹ Because these priests were real Initiates having occult powers, while the “Kings” mentioned *died* but for the world. They were the “dead in life.” The writer seems ignorant of the metaphysical ways of expression. [H.P. Blavatsky]

² Much of which knowledge and the mysteries of the same “earlier races” have been explained in *The Secret Doctrine*, a work, however untouched by the English dailies as unorthodox and unscientific — a jumble, truly. [H.P. Blavatsky]

Zodiac on the ceiling of the Dendera temple shows three tropical years, or 75,000 solar years? But listen further:

We can, in a sense, understand the awful grandeur of the Theban necropolis, and of the sepulchral chambers of Beni Hassan. . . . The cost and toil devoted to the “everlasting palaces” of departed monarchs; the wonders of the Pyramids themselves, as of the other royal tombs; the decoration of their walls; the embalmed bodies, all point to the conclusion that this huge subterranean world was made a complete ante-type of the real world above. *But whether or not it was a verity in this primitive cult that there was an actual renovation of life at the end of some vast cycle is lost in learned conjecture.*

“Learned conjecture” does not go far nowadays, being of a pre-eminently materialistic character, and limited somehow to the sun. But if the unpopularity of the Theosophical Society prevents the statements of its members from being heard; if we ignore *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, *The Theosophist*, etc., full of facts, most of which are as well authenticated by references to classical writers and the contemporaries of the MYSTERIES in Egypt and Greece, as any statement made by modern Egyptologists — why should not the writer of the “Egyptian Mysteries” turn to Origen and even to the *Æneid* for a positive answer to this particular question? This dogma of the return of the Soul or the *Ego* after a period of 1,000 or 1,500 years into a new body (a theosophical teaching now) was professed as a religious truth from the highest antiquity. Voltaire wrote on the subject of these thousand years of *post-mortem* duration as follows:

This opinion about resurrection [*rather “reincarnation”*] after ten centuries, passed to the Greeks, the disciples of the Egyptians, and to the Romans [*their Initiates only*], disciples of the Greeks. One finds it in the VIth Book or the *Æneid*,¹ which is but a description of the mysteries of Isis and of Ceres Eleusina;

*Has omnes, ubi mille rotam volvere per annos,
Lethæum ad fluvium Deus evocat agmine magno:
Scilicet immemores supera ut convexa revisant.*²

This “opinion” passed from the Pagan Greeks and Romans to Christians, even in our century, though disfigured by sectarianism; for it is the origin of the *millennium*. No pagan, even of the lower classes, believed that the Soul would return into its *old* body: cultured Christians *do*, since the day of the Resurrection of all flesh is a universal dogma, and since the Millenarians wait for the second advent of Christ on earth when he will reign for a *thousand* years.

¹ [verses 748-50]

² [This passage should be completed by the addition of verse 751 which runs thus: “*Rursus et incipiant in corpora velle reverti.*” Rendered into English, this passage reads:

All these who in this place have whirled away a thousand years,
Are summoned by the Divinity in a vast throng to the river Lethe.
So that they, having lost their memory, may revisit again the heavenly vault,
And begin to ponder the thought of returning once more to their bodies.

— Boris de Zirkoff.]

Who can have the patience to read 1,500 pages of dreary metaphysical twaddle for the sake of discovering in it a few facts, however valuable?

All such articles as the above quoted are the paradoxes of the age, and show ingrained prejudices and preconceptions. Neither the very conservative and orthodox editor of the *Standard*, nor yet the very radical and infidel editors of many a London paper, will give fair or even dispassionate hearing to any Theosophical writer. “Can any good come out of Nazareth?” the Pharisees and Sadducees of old are credited with asking. “Can anything but *twaddle* come from Theosophical quarters?” repeat the modern followers of *cant* and materialism.

Of course not. We are so very *unpopular!* Besides which, theosophists who have written the most upon those subjects at which, in the words of the *Evening Standard*, “we can now only vainly guess” are regarded by Mrs. Grundy’s herds as the black sheep of Christian cultured centres. Having had access to Eastern secret works, hitherto concealed from the world of the profane, the said theosophists had means of studying and of ascertaining the value and real meaning of the “marvellous secrets both of heaven and earth,” and thus of disinterring many of the vestiges now seemingly lost to the world of students. But what matters that? How can one so little in odour of sanctity with the majorities, a living embodiment of every vice and sin, according to most charitable souls, be credited with knowing anything? Nor does the possibility of such charges being merely the fruit of malice and slander, and therefore entitled to lie *sub judice*, nor simple logic, ever trouble their dreams or have any voice in the question. Oh no! But has the idea ever crossed their minds that on that principle the works of him who was proclaimed:

The greatest, wisest, meanest of mankind,

ought also to become unpopular, and Baconian philosophy be at once shunned and boycotted? In our paradoxical age, as we now learn, the worth of a literary production has to be judged, not on its own intrinsic merits, but according to the private character, the shape of the nose, and the popularity or unpopularity of the writer thereof. Let us give an example, by quoting a favourite remark made by some bitter opponent of *The Secret Doctrine*. It is the reply given the other day to a theosophist who urged a would-be Scientist and supposed Assyriologist to read the said work. “Well,” he said, “I grant you there may be in it a few facts valuable to students of antiquity and to scientific speculation. But *who can have the patience to read 1,500 pages of dreary metaphysical twaddle* for the sake of discovering in it a few facts, however valuable?”

*O imitatores! servum pecus.*¹ And yet how joyfully you would set to work, sparing neither time, labour nor money, to extract two or three ounces of gold from tons of quartz and useless alluvial soil. . . .

¹ [O imitators! you servile crowd!]

Wealth leads to impunity, poverty to condemnation even by the law, for the impecunious have no means of paying lawyers.

Thus, we find the civilized world and its humanities ever unfair, ever enforcing one law for the wealthy and the mighty, and another law for the poor and the uninfluential. Society, politics, commerce, literature, art and sciences, religion and ethics, all are full of paradoxes, contradictions, injustice, selfishness and unreliability. Might has become right, elsewhere than in colonies and for the detriment of “black men.” Wealth leads to impunity, poverty to condemnation even by the law, for the impecunious having no means of paying lawyers are debarred from their natural right to appeal to the courts for redress. Hint, even privately, that a person, notorious for having acquired his wealth by plunder and oppression, or unfair play on the Stock Exchange, is a thief, and the law to which he will appeal will ruin you with damages and court expenses and imprison you into the bargain for libel, for “the greater the truth, the greater the libel.” But let that wealthy thief slander your character publicly, accuse you falsely of breaking all the ten commandments, and if you are in the slightest degree unpopular, an infidel, or too radical in your views, no matter how honourable and honest you may be, yet you will have to swallow the defamation, and let it get root in the minds of people; or, go to law and risk many hundreds or even thousands out of your pocket and get — *one farthing damages!* What chance has an “infidel” in the sight of a bigoted, ignorant jury? Behold those rich speculators who arrange bogus quotations on the Stock Exchange for shares which they wish to foist upon an innocent public that makes for everything whose price is rising. And look at that poor clerk, whose passion for gambling — which the example of those same wealthy capitalists has fired — if caught in some small embezzlement, the righteous indignation of the rich capitalists knows no bounds. They ostracise even one of their own *confrères* because he has been so indiscreet as to be found out in dealings with the unhappy wretch! Again, what country boasts more of Christian charity, and its code of honour, than old England? Yes, you have soldiers and champions of freedom, and they take out the deadly machine-guns of your latest purveyor of death and blow to fragments a stockade in Solymah, with its defending mob of half-armed savages, of poor “niggers,” because you *hear* that they *perchance* may molest your camps. Yet it is to that self-same continent you send your almighty fleets, into which you pour your soldiers, putting on the hypocritical mask of saving from slavery these very black men whom you have just blown into the air! What country, the world over, has so many philanthropic societies, charitable institutions, and generous donors as England has? And where, on the face of the earth, is the city which contains more misery, vice and starvation, than London — the queen of wealthy metropolises. Hideous poverty, filth and rags glare from behind every corner, and Carlyle was right in saying that the Poor Law was an anodyne — not a remedy. “Blessed are the poor,” said your Man-God. “Avaunt the ragged, starving beggar from our West End streets!” you shout, helped by your Police Force; and yet you call yourselves His “humble” followers. It is the indifference and contempt of the higher for the *lower* classes which has generated and bred in the latter that virus which has now grown in them into self-contempt, brutal indifference and cynicism, thus transforming a human species into the wild and soulless animals which fill the Whitechapel dens. Mighty are thy powers, most evidently, O, Christian civilization!

What is good for the Masonic goose is not fit sauce for the Theosophical gander.

But has not our Theosophical “Fraternity” escaped the infection of this paradoxical age? Alas, no. How often the cry against the “entrance fee” was heard among the wealthiest Theosophists. Many of these were Freemasons, who belonged to both institutions — their Lodges and Theosophy. They had paid fees upon entering the former, surpassing ten times the modest £1, paid for their diploma on becoming Theosophists. They had to pay as “Widow’s Sons,” a large price for every paltry jewel conferred upon them as a distinction, and had always to keep their hands in their pockets ready to spend large sums for paraphernalia, gorgeous banquets with rich viands and costly wines. This diminished in no way their reverence for Freemasonry. But that which is good for the masonic goose is not fit sauce for the theosophical gander. How often was the hapless President-Founder of our Society, Col. H.S. Olcott, taunted with *selling theosophy* for £1 per head! He, who worked and toiled from January 1st to December 31st for ten years under the broiling sun of India, and managed out of that wretched pound of the entrance fee and a few donations to keep up the Headquarters, to establish free schools and finally to build and open a library at Adyar of rare Sanskrit works — how often was he condemned, criticised, misjudged, and his best motives misinterpreted. Well, our critics must now be satisfied. Not only the payment of the entrance fee but even that of two shillings yearly, expected from our Fellows to help in paying the expenses of the anniversary meetings, at the Headquarters at Madras (this large sum of two shillings, by-the-by, having never been sent in but by a very limited number of theosophists), all this is now abolished. On December 27th last “the Rules were completely recast, the entrance fee and annual dues were abolished,” writes a theosophist-stoic from Adyar. “We are on a purely voluntary contribution footing. Now if our members don’t give, *we starve and shut up* — that’s all.”

A brave and praiseworthy reform but rather a dangerous experiment. The “B. Lodge of the T.S.” in London never had an entrance fee from its beginning, eighteen months ago; and the results are that the whole burden of its expenses has fallen upon half a dozen of devoted and determined Theosophists. This last Anniversary Financial Report, at Adyar, has moreover brought to light some curious facts and paradoxical incongruities in the bosom of the Theosophical Society at large. For years our Christian and kind friends, the Anglo-Indian missionaries, had set on foot and kept rolling the fantastic legend about personal greediness and venality of the “Founders.” The disproportionately large number of members, who, on account of their poverty had been exonerated from any entrance fees, was ignored, and never taken into account. Our devotion to the cause, it was urged, was a *sham*; we were wolves in sheep’s clothing; bent on making money by psychologizing and deceiving those “poor benighted heathen” and the “credulous infidels” of Europe and America; figures are there, it was added; and the 100,000 theosophists (with which we are credited) represented £100,000, etc., etc.

Well, the day of reckoning has come, and as it is printed in the General Report of *The Theosophist* we may just mention it as a paradox in the region of theosophy. The Financial Report includes a summary of all our receipts *from donations and Initiation*

fees, since the beginning of our arrival in India, i.e., February 1879, or just ten years. The total is 89,140 rupees, or about £6,600. Of the Rs. 54,000 of donations, what are the large sums received by the Theosophical (Parent) Society in the respective countries? Here they are:

IN INDIA	Rupees 40,000
IN EUROPE	Rupees 7,000
IN AMERICA	Rupees 700!!
Total 47,700 rupees or £3,600 ¹	

Vide *infra* “Theosophical Activities”: “The President-Founder’s Address.”

The two “greedy Founders” having given out of their own pockets during these years almost as much, in the result there remain two impecunious beggars, practically two *pauper*-Theosophists. But we are all proud of our poverty and do not regret either our labour or any sacrifices made to further the noble cause we have pledged ourselves to serve. The figures are simply published as one more proof in our defence and a superb evidence of the PARADOXES to be entered to the credit of our traducers and slanderers.



¹ [About £373,135 in today’s money, based on the percentage increase in the Retail Price Index from 1889 to 2023.]

Suggested reading for students.



From our Living the Life Series.

- ATTUNE YOUR SELF WITH THE SELF IN ALL
- BLAVATSKY ON BUDDHISM
- BRAHMANISM IS THE ELDER SISTER OF BUDDHISM
- CAN THERE BE JOY WITHOUT LOVE?
- CHARITY EMPTIES HER PURSE WITH AN INVISIBLE HAND
- DELIGHT IN THE BEAUTY OF THE SOUL
- DENUNCIATION IS NOT A DUTY
- DISCORD IS THE HARMONY OF THE UNIVERSE
- EMERSON ON LOVE
- EVIL OMENS AND MYSTERIOUS DISEASES
- GODLESS BUDDHISM IS PHILOSOPHICAL AGNOSTICISM
- GOETHE'S MAXIMS AND REFLECTIONS
- HAPPINESS IS BUT A DREAM
- HARTMANN ON CHASTITY
- HYPOCRISY, DIAGNOSES AND PALLIATIVES
- IMPRISONED IN THE NARROW VASE OF DOGMATISM
- JUDGE ON THE UNIVERSAL APPLICATIONS OF DOCTRINE
- JUDGE ON THE UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD
- LET EVERY MAN PROVE HIS OWN WORKS
- LET YOUR DAILY LIFE BE YOUR TEMPLE AND GOD
- LÉVI ON THE POWER OF MIND, UNRUFFLED BY DESIRE - TR. WAITE
- LODGES OF MAGIC
- MARCUS AURELIUS' MEDITATIONS - TR. CASAUBON
- MEDICINE OF THE MIND
- OCCULT LAWS AND PARADOXES

LIVING THE LIFE SERIES
SUGGESTED READING FOR STUDENTS

- OCCULT LAWS CAN BE ENTRUSTED ONLY TO THOSE WHO LIVE THE LIFE DIRECTED BY THEOSOPHY
- OPPOSITE AND OPPOSING FORCES ARE CONVERTIBLE
- PHILOSOPHERS AND PHILOSOPHICULES
- PLUTARCH ON HOW WE MAY PROFIT FROM OUR ENEMIES - TR. HARTCLIFFE
- PLUTARCH ON HOW WE MAY SHOW OFF WITHOUT BEING ENVIED – TR. LANCASTER
- PLUTARCH ON LOVE - TR. PHILIPS
- PLUTARCH ON MAN’S PROGRESS IN VIRTUE – TR. TOD
- PLUTARCH ON MORAL VIRTUE
- PLUTARCH ON WHETHER VICE IS SUFFICIENT TO RENDER A MAN UNHAPPY
- PROCLUS ON THE GOOD, THE JUST, AND THE BEAUTIFUL
- PROVERBIAL WISDOM FROM THE HITOPADESHA
- PYTHAGOREAN ETHICS AFTER STOBÆUS
- PYTHAGOREAN SYMBOLS - TR. BRIDGMAN
- SENTENCES BY SECTUS THE PYTHAGOREAN - TR. TAYLOR
- SERJEANT COX ON THE NEGATORS OF SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION
- SEVEN OCCULT TAMIL PROVERBS
- SPIRITUALITY IS NOT A VIRTUE
- THE ENNOBLING POWER OF THORACIC EXPANSION
- THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS THE TEMPLE OF TRUTH
- THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU BY TOLSTOY
- THE KREUTZER SONATA
- THE NELLORE YANADIS
- THE NILGIRI SANNYASIS
- THE NOBLE AIM OF EDUCATION IS TO AWAKEN THE DIVINITY WITHIN
- THE POWER TO HEAL
- THE PRAYER OF THE TRUE PHILOSOPHER IS HIS ADORATION
- THE SAYINGS OF LAO TZU - TR. GILES
- THE SCIENCE OF LIFE BY BLAVATSKY AND TOLSTOY
- THE STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE
- THEAGES ON VIRTUE
- THEOSOPHICAL JEWELS - LIVE IN THE IDEAL
- THEOSOPHICAL JEWELS - THE RAINBOW OF HOPE
- THOU SHALT CROUCH AT MY FEET

LIVING THE LIFE SERIES
SUGGESTED READING FOR STUDENTS

- TRUTH DESCENDS LIKE DEW FROM HEAVEN
- WHAT SHALL WE DO FOR OUR FELLOW-MEN?

