

*Why the misery of ill-being
cannot be relieved.*



Abstract and train of thoughts¹

The misery of ill-being cannot be relieved.

It is a vital element in human nature, and is as necessary to some as pleasure is to others.

The religious philanthropist does not do good just for the sake of doing good, but also with an eye to his own salvation. 3

The secular philanthropist, socialist at heart, hopes to make men happy by helping them materially. 3

Ill-being is not only endurable but agreeable to those who endure it, not from love of vice but from love of that very state which the wealthy classes call misery. 4

Kind and considerate regard for others will sometimes bring out the worst qualities of those who led a fairly presentable life, when kept down by pain and despair. 5

Indiscriminate benevolence can be severely harmful as all, but those blind in their love of the suffering of the poor, are compelled to admit. 5

Practical charity is not one of the declared objects of our Society though the flame of brotherly love and sympathy in action with every living creature, whether man or beast, burns silently in the heart of every true Theosophist. 5

A heartfelt appreciation of Theosophy will help to soften the atrocities of life by creating the charity which afterwards, and of its own accord, makes itself manifest in practical works. 6

Even the hollow men prize their vice and live by it.

Suggested reading for students.

Selections from our Down to Earth Series. 8



¹ Frontispiece by Eychanchan.

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First published in *Lucifer*, Vol. I, No. 3, November 1887, pp. 161-69. Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, ("LET EVERY MAN PROVE HIS OWN WORKS") VIII pp. 159-71. Only excerpts from pp. 166-70 & 163-64 presented herein.

Full text under the title "Let every man prove his own works," in our Living the Life Series.

Excerpt from pages 166-170:

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.

The secular philanthropist, socialist at heart, hopes to make men happy by helping them materially.

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.

Ill-being is not only endurable but agreeable to those who endure it, not from love of vice but from love of that very state which the wealthy classes call misery.

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.

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 dou-

ble-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.

Kind and considerate regard for others will sometimes bring out the worst qualities of those who led a fairly presentable life, when kept down by pain and despair.

But, in recognising this, he also makes another discovery. He sees that it takes a very wise man to do 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.

Indiscriminate benevolence can be severely harmful as all, but those blind in their love of the suffering of the poor, are compelled to admit.

Practical charity is not one of the declared objects of our Society though the flame of brotherly love and sympathy in action with every living creature, whether man or beast, burns silently in the heart of every true Theosophist.

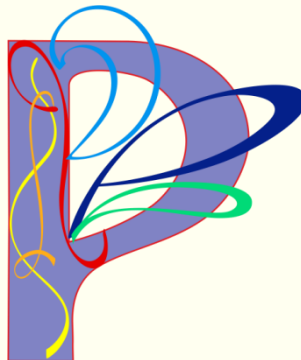
As soon as he begins to understand what a friend and teacher pain can be, the Theosophist stands appalled before the mysterious problem of human life, and though he may long to do good works, equally dreads to do them wrongly until he has himself acquired greater power and knowledge. The ignorant doing 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 in them lies, to a better understanding of the mystery of life, and to a better knowledge of the peace which lies beyond it.



A heartfelt appreciation of Theosophy will help to soften the atrocities of life by creating the charity which afterwards, and of its own accord, makes itself manifest in practical works.

Excerpt from pages 163-64:

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 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.



Even the hollow men prize their vice and live by it.

Short excerpt from Alexei Maximovich Peshkov's¹ "Twenty-six Men and a Girl" (1889). A translation from the Russian by J.K.M. Shirazi was included in *Creatures That Once Were Men, and other Stories*, New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1906. The same translation was subsequently republished in the *World's Great Romances*. New York: Black's Readers Service Co., 1929; pp. 242-52. Many other publications elsewhere.

THERE ARE MEN TO WHOM THE MOST PRECIOUS AND BEST THING in their lives appears to be some disease of their soul or body. They spend their whole life in relation to it, and only living by it, suffering from it, they sustain themselves on it, they complain of it to others, and so draw the attention of their fellows to themselves.

For that they extract sympathy from people, and apart from it they have nothing at all. Take from them that disease, cure them, and they will be miserable, because they have lost their one resource in life — they are left empty then. Sometimes a man's life is so poor, that he is driven instinctively to prize his vice and to live by it; one may say for a fact that often men are vicious from boredom.



¹ Primarily know as Maxim Gorky.

Suggested reading for students.



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