

Madame Blavatsky on the Ancient Theory of Cycles



On the periodicity of cycles, of flux and reflux, ebb and flow of human progress.¹

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Frontispiece by Tanielle Childers.

IT IS NOW SOME TIME SINCE THIS THEORY, which was first propounded in the oldest religion of the world, Vedaism, then taught by various Greek philosophers, and afterwards defended by the Theosophists of the Middle Ages, but which came to be flatly denied by the *wise men* of the West, like everything else, in this world of negation, has been gradually coming into prominence again. This once, contrary to the rule, it is the men of science themselves who take it up. Statistics of events of the most varied nature are fast being collected and collated with the seriousness demanded by important scientific questions. Statistics of wars and of the periods (or cycles) of the appearance of great men — at least those as have been recognized as such by their contemporaries and irrespective of later opinions; statistics of the periods of development and progress at large commercial centres; of the rise and fall of arts and sciences of cataclysms, such as earthquakes, epidemics; periods of extraordinary cold and heat; cycles of revolutions, and of the rise and fall of empires, etc.; all these are subjected in turn to the analysis of the minutest mathematical calculations. Finally, even the occult significance of numbers in names of persons and names of cities, in events, and like matters, receives unwonted attention. If, on the one hand, a great portion of the educated public is running into atheism and scepticism, on the other hand, we find an evident current of mysticism forcing its way into science. It is the sign of an irrepressible need in humanity to assure itself that there is a Power Paramount over matter; an occult and mysterious law which governs the world, and which we should rather study and closely watch, trying to adapt ourselves to it, than blindly deny, and break our heads against the rock of destiny. More than one thoughtful mind, while studying the fortunes and reverses of nations and great empires, has been deeply struck by one identical feature in their history, namely, the inevitable recurrence of similar historical events reaching in turn every one of them, and after the same lapse of time. This analogy is found between the events to be substantially the same on the whole, though there may be more or less difference as to the outward form of details. Thus, the belief of the ancients in their astrologers, soothsayers, and prophets might have been warranted by the veri-

¹ [Theosophists believe in the eternity of matter, the periodicity of the universe, and the immortality of the mind, whether human or animal. — ED. PHIL.]

fication of many of their most important predictions, without these prognostications of future events implying of necessity anything very miraculous in themselves. The soothsayers and augurs having occupied in days of the old civilizations the very same position now occupied by our historians, astronomers, and meteorologists, there was nothing more wonderful in the fact of the former predicting the downfall of an empire or the loss of a battle, than in the latter predicting the return of a comet, a change of temperature, or, perhaps, the final conquest of Afghanistan. The necessity for both these classes being acute observers apart, there was the study of certain sciences to be pursued *then* as well as they are *now*. The science of today will have become an "ancient" science a thousand years hence. Free and open, scientific study now is to all, whereas it was then confined but to the few. Yet, whether ancient or modern, both may be called exact sciences; for, if the astronomer of today draws his observations from mathematical calculations, the astrologer of old also based his prognostications upon no less acute and mathematically correct observations of the ever-recurring cycles. And, because the secret of this science is now being lost, does that give any warrant to say that it never existed, or that, to believe in it, one must be ready to swallow "magic," "miracles," and the like stuff? Says a writer in the *Novoye Vremya*, the best daily paper of literature and politics of St. Petersburg:

If, in view of the eminence to which modern science has reached, the claim to prophesy future events must be regarded as either a child's play or a deliberate deception, then we can point at science which, in its turn, has now taken up and placed on record the question, in its relation to past events, whether there is or is not in the constant repetition of events a certain periodicity; in other words, whether these events recur after a fixed and determined period of years with every nation; and if a periodicity there be, whether this periodicity is due to blind chance or depends on the same natural laws, on which are more or less dependent many of the phenomena of human life.

Undoubtedly the latter. And the writer has the best mathematical proof of it in the timely appearance of such works as that of Dr. E. Zasse, under review, and of a few others. Several learned works, treating upon this mystical subject, have appeared of late, and of some of these works and calculation, we will now treat; the more readily as they are in most cases from the pens of men of eminent learning. Having already in the June number of *The Theosophist* noticed an article by Dr. Blochvitz, "On the Significance of the Number Seven," with every nation and people — a learned paper which appeared lately in the German journal *Die Gegenwart* — we will now summarize the opinions of the press in general, on a more suggestive work by a well-known German scientist, E. Zasse, with certain reflections of our own. It has just appeared in the *Prussian Journal of Statistics*, and powerfully corroborates the ancient theory of Cycles. These periods which bring around ever-recurring events, begin from the infinitesimally small — say of ten years — rotation and reach to cycles which require 250, 500 700, and 1000 years, to effect their revolution around themselves, and within one another. All are contained within the *Mahā-Yuga*, the "Great Age" or Cycle of the Manu calculation, which itself revolves between two eternities — the "Pralayas" or *Nights of Brahmā*. As, in the objective world of matter, or the system of effects, the minor constellations and planets gravitate each and all around the sun, so in the world of the subjective, or the system of causes, these innumerable cycles all gravi-

tate between that which the finite intellect of the ordinary mortal regards as eternity, and the still finite, but more profound, intuition of the sage and philosopher views as but an eternity within THE ETERNITY. "As above, so it is below," runs the old Hermetic maxim. As an experiment in this direction, Dr. Zasse selected the statistical investigations of all the wars, the occurrence of which has been recorded in history, as a subject which lends itself more easily to scientific verification than any other. To illustrate his subject in the simplest and most easily comprehensible way, Dr. Zasse represents the periods of war and the periods of peace in the shape of small and large wave-lines running over the area of the old world. The idea is not a new one, for the image was used for similar illustrations by more than one ancient and mediaeval mystic, whether in words or picture — by Henry Khunrath, for example. But it serves well its purpose and gives us the facts we now want. Before he treats, however, of the cycles of wars, the author brings in the record of the rise and fall of the world's great empires, and shows the degree of activity they have played in the Universal History. He points out the fact that if we divide the map of the Old World into five parts — into Eastern, Central and Western Asia, Eastern and Western Europe, and Egypt — then we will easily perceive that every 250 years, an enormous wave passes over these areas, bringing into each in its turn the events it has brought to the one next preceding. This wave we may call "the historical wave" of the 250 years' cycle. The reader will please follow this mystical number of years.

The first of these waves began in China, 2,000 years B.C. — the "golden age" of this Empire, the age of philosophy; of discoveries and reforms.

In 1750 B.C., the Mongolians of Central Asia established a powerful empire. In 1500, Egypt rises from its temporary degradation and carries its sway over many parts of Europe and Asia; and about 1250, the historical wave reaches and crosses over to Eastern Europe, filling it with the spirit of the Argonautic expedition, and dies out in 1000 B.C. at the siege of Troy.

A second historical wave appears about that time in Central Asia.

The Scythians leave her steppes, and inundate towards the year 750 B.C. the adjoining countries, directing themselves towards the South and West; about the year 500 in Western Asia begins an epoch of splendour for ancient Persia; and the wave moves on to the east of Europe, where about 250 B.C. Greece reaches her highest state of culture and civilization — and further on to the West, where, at the birth of Christ, the Roman Empire finds itself at its apogee of power and greatness.

Again, at this period we find the rising of a third historical wave at the far East. After prolonged revolutions, about this time, China forms once more a powerful empire, and its arts, sciences, and commerce flourish again. Then 250 years later, we find the Huns appearing from the depths of Central Asia; in the year 500 A.D. a new and powerful Persian kingdom is formed; in 750 — in Eastern Europe — the Byzantine empire; and, in the year 1,000 — on its Western side springs up the second Roman Power, the Empire of the Papacy, which soon reaches an extraordinary development of wealth and brilliancy.

At the same time, the *fourth* wave approaches from the Orient. China is again flourishing; in 1250, the Mongolian wave from Central Asia has overflowed and covered an enormous area of land, including with it Russia. About 1500, in Western Asia, the Ottoman Empire rises in all its might and conquers the Balkan peninsula; but at the same time in Eastern Europe, Russia throws off the Tatar yoke, and about 1750, during the reign of Empress Catherine, rises to an unexpected grandeur and covers itself with glory. The wave ceaselessly moves further on to the West, and beginning with the middle of the past century, Europe is living over an epoch of revolutions and reforms, and, according to the author, "if it is permissible to prophesize, then, about the year 2,000 Western Europe will have lived one of those periods of culture and progress so rare in history." The Russian press, taking the cue believes that

. . . towards those days the Eastern Question will be finally settled, the national dissensions of the European peoples will come to an end, and the dawn of the new millennium will witness the abolishment of armies and an alliance between all the European empires.

The signs of regeneration are also fast multiplying in Japan and China, as if pointing to the approach of a new historical wave at the extreme East.

If, from the cycle of two-and-a-half-century duration, we descend to those which leave their impress every century, and grouping together the events of ancient history, will mark the development and rise of empires, then we will assure ourselves that, beginning from the year 700 B.C., the centennial wave pushes forward, bringing into prominence the following nations — each in its turn — the Assyrians, the Medes, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Macedonians, the Carthaginians, the Romans, and the Germanians.

The striking periodicity of the wars in Europe is also noticed by Dr. E. Zasse. Beginning with 1700 A.D., every ten years have been signalized by either a war or a revolution. The periods of the strengthening and weakening of the warlike excitement of the European nations represent a wave strikingly regular in its periodicity, flowing incessantly, as if propelled onward by some invisible fixed law. This same mysterious law seems at the same time to make these events coincide with [the] astronomical wave or cycle, which, at every new revolution, is accompanied by the very marked appearance of spots in the sun. The periods, when the European powers have shown the most destructive energy, are marked by a cycle of 50 years' duration. It would be too long and tedious to enumerate them from the beginning of History. We may, therefore, limit our study to the cycle beginning with the year 1712, when *all* the European nations were fighting at the same time — the Northern, and the Turkish Wars, and the war for the throne of Spain. About 1761, the "Seven Years' War"; in 1810 the wars of Napoleon I. Towards 1861, the wave has a little deflected from its regular course, but, as if to compensate for it, or, propelled, perhaps, with unusual force, the years directly preceding, as well as those which followed it, left in history the records of the most fierce and bloody war — the Crimean War — in the former period, and the American Rebellion in the latter one. The periodicity in the wars between Russia and Turkey appears peculiarly striking and represents a very characteristic wave. At first the intervals between the cycles, returning upon themselves, are of thirty years' duration — 1710, 1740, 1770; then these intervals diminish, and we have a cycle of

twenty years — 1790, 1810, 1829-30; then the intervals widen again — 1853 and 1878. But, if we take note of the whole duration of the in-flowing tide of the warlike cycle, then we will have at the centre of it — from 1768 to 1812 — three wars of seven years' duration each, and, at both ends, wars of two years.

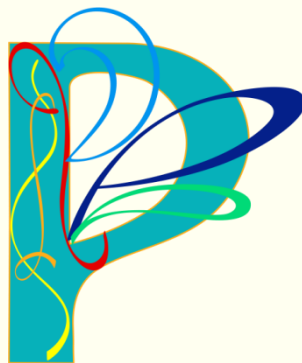
Finally, the author comes to the conclusion that, in view of facts, it becomes thoroughly impossible to deny the presence of a regular periodicity in the excitement of both mental and physical forces in the nations of the world. He proves that in the history of all the peoples and empires of the Old World, the cycles marking the millenniums, the centennials as well as the minor ones of 50 and 10 years' duration, are the most important, inasmuch as neither of them has ever yet failed to bring in its rear some more or less marked event in the history of the nation swept over by these historical waves.

The history of India is one which, of all histories, is the most vague and least satisfactory. Yet, were its consecutive great events noted down, and its annals well searched, the law of cycles would be found to have asserted itself here as plainly as in every other country in respect of its wars, famines, political exigencies, and other matters.

In France, a meteorologist of Paris went to the trouble of compiling the statistics of the coldest seasons, and discovered, at the same time, that those years, which had the figure 9 in them, had been marked by the severest winters. His figures run thus: in 859 A.D., the northern part of the Adriatic Sea was frozen and was covered for three months with ice. In 1179, in the most moderate zones, the earth was covered with several feet of snow. In 1209, in France, the depth of snow and the bitter cold caused such a scarcity of fodder that most of the cattle perished in that country. In 1249, the Baltic Sea, between Russia, Norway, and Sweden, remained frozen for many months and communication was held by sleighs. In 1339, there was such a terrific winter in England, that vast numbers of people died of starvation and exposure. In 1409, the River Danube was frozen from its sources to its mouth in the Black Sea. In 1469, all the vineyards and orchards perished in consequence of the frost. In 1609, in France, Switzerland, and Upper Italy, people had to thaw their bread and provisions before they could use them. In 1639, the harbour of Marseilles was covered with ice to a great distance. In 1659, all the rivers in Italy were frozen. In 1699, the winter in France and Italy proved the severest and longest of all. The prices for articles of food were so much raised that half of the population died of starvation. In 1709, the winter was no less terrible. The ground was frozen in France, Italy, and Switzerland, to the depth of several feet, and the sea, south as well as north, was covered with one compact and thick crust of ice, many feet deep, and for a considerable space of miles, in the usually open sea. Masses of wild beasts, driven out by the cold from their dens in the forest, sought refuge in villages and even cities; and the birds fell dead to the ground by hundreds. In 1729, 1749, and 1769 (cycles of 20-years' duration), all the rivers and streams were icebound all over France for many weeks, and all the fruit trees perished. In 1789, France was again visited by a very severe winter. In Paris, the thermometer stood at 19 degrees of frost. But the severest of all winters proved that of 1829. For fifty-four consecutive days, all the roads in France were covered with snow several feet deep, and all the rivers were frozen. Fam-

ine and misery reached their climax in the country in that year. In 1839, there was again in France a most terrific and trying cold season. And now the winter of 1879 has asserted its statistical rights and proved true to the fatal influence of the figure 9. The meteorologists of other countries are invited to follow suit and make their investigations likewise, for the subject is certainly one of the most fascinating as well as instructive kind.

Enough has been shown, however, to prove that neither the ideas of Pythagoras on the mysterious influence of numbers, nor the theories of ancient world-religions and philosophies are as shallow and meaningless as some too forward free-thinkers would have had the world to believe.¹



¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE THEORY OF CYCLES) II pp. 418-26

SECRET DOCTRINE'S SECOND PROPOSITION SERIES
ON THE EBB AND FLOW OF HUMAN PROGRESS



After Failure (1868) Vasily Vereshchagin, State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg

Suggested reading for students.¹



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- BLAVATSKY ON KARMA AND REINCARNATION
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- PROPOSITION 2 – COMPASSION: THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH²
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- PROPOSITION 2 - DIAGRAM NOTES
- PROPOSITION 2 - KARMA NUGGETS
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- THOUGH FATE COMPREHENDS INFINITE, IT IS FINITE IN ITS OPERATIONS
- WALKER ON REINCARNATION, A FORGOTTEN TRUTH (1888)



¹ Students should be fully conversant with the metaphysical concepts and learning aids set out in our Secret Doctrine's Propositions Series 1 and 3. — ED. PHIL.

² C.A. Bartzokas (*Comp. & Ed.*). *Compassion: The Spirit of Truth*, Gwernymynydd: Philaletheians UK, 2005; v. 05.88.2021; 398pp. This is our first Major Work.