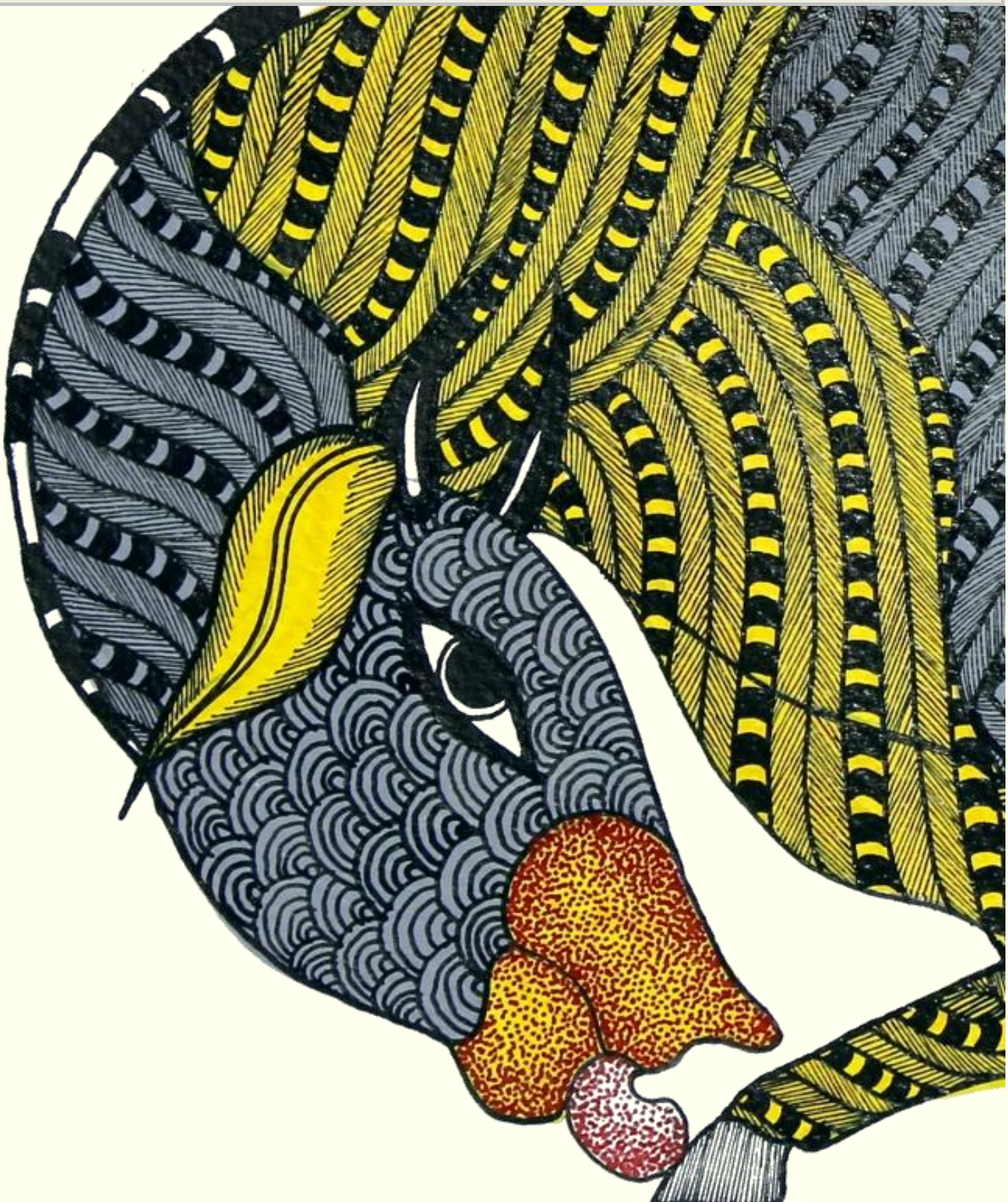


*Theosophy is deeper Monism
than materialistic Secularism,
and more philosophical*



Abstract and train of thoughts

Our age is as greedy to set up new idols, as it is to overthrow the old gods; as ready to give lavish hospitality to new ideas, as to kick out most unceremoniously theories that now seem to them effete.	3
Facts are eagerly sought after by all, from the solemn conclaves of Science who seem to hang the destinies of the human race, down to a hack on the warpath after sensational news.	3
Some words of explanation by Charles Bradlaugh.	5
The Theosophical Society is neither sectarian nor a religious body, but simply a nucleus of men and women devoted to the search after truth, whencesoever it may come.	6
No member is obliged to be in full sympathy with all three objects of our Society; suffice that he should be in sympathy with one of the three, and be willing not to oppose the other two, to render him eligible to membership.	7
Theosophy teaches a far stricter and more far-reaching Monism than does Secularism, and it is far more philosophical.	7
We firmly believe that the elevating and strengthening influence of the doctrines of Reincarnation and Karma, i.e., of Hope and Responsibility, will solve many a social problem that seeks elsewhere in vain for a solution.	8
No Western psychologist has been able to give any adequate explanation even of the simplest phenomenon of consciousness, i.e., sense perception.	8
Our Society is the only body absolutely free from intolerance, dogmatism, and prejudice, and the only one which opens its arms to all, imposing on none its own special beliefs — which are strictly limited to a small inner group within it, called the Esoteric Section.	9



Our age is as greedy to set up new idols, as it is to overthrow the old gods; as ready to give lavish hospitality to new ideas, as to kick out most unceremoniously theories that now seem to them effete.

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. . . the difference is as great between
The optics seeing, as the objects seen.
All manners take a tincture from our own
Or come discolour'd thro' our passions shown.
Or fancy's beam enlarges, multiplies,
Contracts, invents, and gives ten thousand lies.
— POPE¹

“It is, indeed, shorter and easier to proceed from ignorance to knowledge than from error,” says Henry St John, 1st Viscount Bolingbroke.

But who in our age of religions gnashing their teeth at one another, of sects innumerable, or “isms” and “ists” performing a wild *fandango* on the top of each other's heads to the rhythmical accompaniment of tongues, instead of castanets, clapping invectives — who will confess to his error? Nevertheless, all cannot be true. Nor can it be made clear by any method of reasoning, why men should on the one [331] hand hold so tenaciously to opinions which most of them have *adopted*, not *begotten*, while they feel so savagely inimical to other sets of opinions, generated by somebody else!

Facts are eagerly sought after by all, from the solemn conclaves of Science who seem to hang the destinies of the human race, down to a hack on the warpath after sensational news.

Of this truth the past history of Theosophy and the Theosophical Society is a striking illustration. It is not that men do not desire novelty, or that progress and growth of thought are not welcomed. Our age is as greedy to set up new idols as it is to overthrow the old gods; as ready to give lavish hospitality to new ideas, as to kick out most unceremoniously theories that now seem to them effete. These new ideas may be as stupid as green cucumbers in a hot milk soup, as unwelcome to the majority as a fly in communion wine. Suffice it, however, that they emanate from a scientific brain, a recognized “authority,” for them to be welcomed with open arms by the fanatics of science. In this our century, as all know, everyone in society, whether intellectual or scientific, dull or ignorant, is ceaselessly running after some new thing. More so even, in truth, than the Athenian of Paul's day. Unfortunately, the new crazes men run after, now as then, are not *truths* — much as modern Society prides itself on living in an age of facts — but simply corroborations of men's hobbies, whether religious or scientific. Facts, indeed, are eagerly sought after, by all — from the solemn conclaves of Science who seem to hang the destinies of the human race on the correct definition of the anatomy of a mosquito's *proboscis*, down to half-starved penny-a-liner² on the warpath after sensational news. But, it is only *such* facts as serve to pander to one or another of the prejudices and preconceptions, which are the ruling forces in the modern mind, that are sure of their welcome.

¹ [Epistles to Several Persons (Moral Essays), Epistle I, to Richard Temple, Viscount Cobham. — Boris de Zirkoff.]

² [A hack writer or journalist, paid for at the rate of a penny per line.]

Anything outside of such facts; any new or old idea unpopular and distasteful, for some mysterious reason or other, to the prevailing *ism*-ical authorities, will very soon be made to feel its unpopularity. Regarded askance, at first, with uplifted eyebrows and in wonderment, it will begin by being solemnly and almost *a priori* tabooed and thence refused *per secula sæculorum*¹ even a dispassionate hearing. People will begin to comment upon it — each faction in the light of its own prejudice and special craze. Then, each will proceed [332] to distort it — the mutually inimical factions even clubbing their inventions, so as to slay the intruder with the more certainty, until each and all will be running amuck at it.

Thus act all the religious *isms*, even so all the independent Societies, whether scientific, free-thinking, Agnostic or Secularistic. Not one of these has the faintest correct conception about Theosophy or the Society of this name; none of them has ever gone to the trouble of even enquiring about either — yet, one and all will sit in Solomon's seat and judge the hateful (perhaps, because dangerous?) intruder, in the light of their respective misconceptions. We are not likely to stop to argue Theosophy with religious fanatics. Such remarks are beneath contempt, as those in *Word and Work* which, speaking of “the prevalence of Spiritualism and its advance *under the new form of Theosophy*” (?), strikes both with a sledge-hammer tempered in holy water, by first accusing both Spiritualism and Theosophy of “imposture,” and then of *having the devil*.² But, when in addition to sectarian fanatics, missionaries and foggy retrogrades, in general, we find such clear-headed, cool, intellectual giants as Mr. Bradlaugh falling into the common errors and prejudice — the thing becomes more serious.

It is *so serious*, indeed, that we do not hesitate to enter a respectful yet firm protest in the pages of our *journal* — the only organ that is likely to publish all that we have to say. The task is an easy one. Mr. Bradlaugh has just published his views upon Theosophy in half a column of his *National Reformer* (June 30th) in which article — “Some Words of Explanation” — we find some half-a-dozen of the most regrettable misconceptions about the supposed beliefs of Theosophists. We publish it *in extenso*³ as it speaks for itself and shows the reason of his displeasure. Passages that we mean to controvert are underlined.⁴ [333]



¹ [for ever and ever]

² “Many, however,” it adds, “who have had fuller knowledge of spiritualistic pretensions than we have, are convinced that, in some cases, there are real communications from the spirit world. If such there be, we have no doubt whence they come. They are certainly from beneath, not from above.” *O Sancta Simplicitas*,* which still believes in the *devil* — by perceiving its own face in the mirror, no doubt?

*O holy simplicity. Cf. In what strange simplification and falsification man lives! — *Friedrich Nietzsche*.]

³ [in full]

⁴ [Here italicised]

Some words of explanation by Charles Bradlaugh.¹

The review of Madame Blavatsky's book in the last *National Reformer* and an announcement in the *Sun* have brought me several letters on the subject of Theosophy. I am asked for explanation as to what Theosophy is, and as to my opinions on Theosophy. The word "theosoph" is old, and was used among the Neoplatonists. From the dictionary, its new meaning appears to be, "one who claims to have a *knowledge of God*, or of the laws of nature by means of internal illumination." An Atheist certainly cannot be a Theosophist. A Deist might be a Theosophist. *A Monist could not be a Theosophist. Theosophy must at least involve Dualism.* Modern Theosophy, according to Madame Blavatsky, as set out in last week's issue, asserts much that I do not believe, and alleges some things which to me are certainly not true. I have not had the opportunity of reading Madame Blavatsky's two volumes, but I have read during the past ten years many publications from the pen of herself, Colonel Olcott, and other Theosophists. They appear to me to have sought to *rehabilitate a kind of Spiritualism in Eastern phraseology.* I think many of their allegations utterly erroneous, and their reasonings wholly unsound. I very deeply indeed regret that my colleague and co-worker has, with somewhat of suddenness, and without any interchange of ideas with myself, adopted as facts, matters which seem to me *as unreal as it is possible for any fiction to be.* My regret is greater as I know Mrs. Besant's devotion to any course she believes to be true. I know that she will always be earnest in the advocacy of any views she undertakes to defend, and I look to possible developments of her Theosophic opinions with the very gravest misgiving. The editorial policy of this paper is unchanged, and is directly antagonistic to all forms of Theosophy. I would have preferred on this subject to have held my peace, for publicly disagreeing with Mrs. Besant on her adoption of Socialism has caused pain to both; but on reading her article and taking the public announcement made of her having joined the Theosophical organisation, I owe it to those who look to me for guidance to say this with clearness.

C. BRADLAUGH

¹ [Charles Bradlaugh, 1833–1891, English political activist and atheist and freethinker. He founded the National Secular Society in 1866. Here is an excerpt from a letter published in *The Philosophic Inquirer*, Madras, September 24th 1882. Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings* (SYMPATHY OF MADAME BLAVATSKY FOR MR. CHARLES BRADLAUGH) IV pp. 230-31.

To the Editor of *The Philosophic Inquirer*.

My dear Sir and Brother,

I was very ill for the last two or three weeks, and could not therefore attend to business as I ought to. But I have read Mr. Bradlaugh's case, and I feel unable to do justice to my feelings in saying only that I am profoundly disgusted with the shameless, barefaced plot resorted to against him by his enemies. It would be sufficient to turn any honest Christian forever from Christianity and to plunge him into the deepest "heathenism" and atheism, that bare fact that otherwise he would have to belong to the same creed that actuates such men as Sir Henry Tyler and the *tutti quanti*. I respect and admire Mr. Bradlaugh for his fearlessness and the good he does to all who fight for the cause of intellectual freedom; though of course, I cannot as a metaphysical Atheist or Buddhist sympathize with his and your extreme views.

But whether as H.P. Blavatsky I do or do not sympathize with his *all-denying* philosophy, as a Theosophist I am bound — as every other *true Theosophist* — to help him in his deadly fight against rampant bigotry, intolerance, dogmatism, and especially against those unprincipled men who would make *right of might*, and disgrace the majesty of Law and Justice, by making it serve their own tricky, sectarian ends.]

The Theosophical Society is neither sectarian nor a religious body, but simply a nucleus of men and women devoted to the search after truth, whencesoever it may come.

It is of course useless to go out of our way to try and convert Mr. Bradlaugh from his views as a thorough Materialist and Atheist to our Pantheism (for real Theosophy is *that*), nor have we ever sought by word or deed to convert Mrs. Besant. She has joined us entirely of her own free will and accord, though the fact gave all *earnest* Theosophists unbounded satisfaction, and to us personally more pleasure than we have felt for a long time. But we will simply appeal to Mr. Bradlaugh's well-known sense of justice and fairness, and prove to him that he is mistaken — at any rate, as to the [334] views of Colonel Olcott and the present writer, and also in the interpretation he gives to the term "Theosophy."

It will be sufficient to say that if Mr. Bradlaugh knew anything of the *Rules* of our Society he would know that if even he, the Head of Secularism, were to become today a member of the Theosophical Society, such an action would *not necessitate his giving up one iota of his Secularistic ideas*. We have greater atheists in the T.S.¹ than he ever was or can be, namely, Hindus belonging to certain all-denying sects. Mr. Bradlaugh believes in Mesmerism, at all events he has great curative powers himself, and therefore could not well deny the presence in some persons of such mysterious faculties; whereas, if you attempted to speak of mesmerism or even of hypnotism to the said Hindus, they would only shrug their shoulders at you, and laugh. Membership in the Theosophical Society does not expose the "Fellows" to any interference with their religious, irreligious, political, philosophical or scientific views. The Society is not a sectarian nor is it a religious body, but simply a nucleus of men devoted to the search after truth, whencesoever it may come. Mrs. Annie Besant was right when stating, in the same issue of the *National Reformer*, that the three objects of the Theosophical society are:

. . . to found a Universal Brotherhood without distinction of race or creed; to forward the study of Āryan literature and philosophy; to investigate unexplained laws of nature and the psychical powers latent in man. On matters of religious opinion, the members are absolutely free. The founders of the Society deny a personal God, and a somewhat subtle form of Pantheism is taught as the Theosophic view of the Universe, though even this is not forced on members of the Society.

To this Mrs. Besant adds, over her own signature, that though she cannot, in the *National Reformer*, state fully her reasons for joining the T.S., yet she has

. . . no desire to hide the fact that this form of Pantheism appears to promise a solution of some problems, especially problems in psychology, which Atheism leaves untouched.

We seriously hope that she will not be disappointed.

The second object of the T.S., *i.e.*, the Eastern philosophy [335] interpreted esoterically, has never yet failed to solve many a problem for those who study the subject seri-

¹ [Theosophical Society]

ously. It is only those others, who, without being natural mystics, rush heedlessly into the mysteries of the unexplained psychic powers latent in every man (*in Mr. Bradlaugh himself*, as well as in any other) from ambition, curiosity, or simple vanity — that generally come to grief and make the T.S. responsible for their own failure.

No member is obliged to be in full sympathy with all three objects of our Society; suffice that he should be in sympathy with one of the three, and be willing not to oppose the other two, to render him eligible to membership.

Now what is there that could prevent even Mr. Bradlaugh from joining the T.S.? We will take up the argument point by point.

Is it because Mr. Bradlaugh is an Individualist, an English Radical of the old school, that he cannot sympathize with such a lofty idea as the Universal Brotherhood of Man? His well-known kindness of heart, his proven philanthropy, his life-long efforts in the cause of the suffering and the oppressed, would seem to prove the contrary in his practice, whatever his theoretical views on the subject may be. But, if perchance he clings to his theories in the face of his practice, then let us leave aside this, the first object of the T.S. Some members of our Society, unfortunately, sympathize as little as he might with noble, but perchance (to Mr. Bradlaugh) somewhat Utopian ideal. No member is obliged to feel in *full* sympathy with all three objects; suffice that he should be in sympathy with one of the three, and be willing not to oppose the two others, to render him eligible to membership in the T.S.

Is it because he is an Atheist? To begin with, we dispute “the new meaning” he quotes from the dictionary that “a Theosophist is one who claims to have a knowledge of God.” No one can claim *a knowledge* of “God,” the absolute and unknowable universal Principle; and in a personal god Eastern Theosophists (therefore Olcott and Blavatsky) do *not* believe. But if Mr. Bradlaugh contends that in that case the name is a misnomer, we shall reply: *theosophia* properly means *not* a knowledge of “God” but of gods, *i.e.*, *divine*, that is superhuman knowledge. Surely Mr. Bradlaugh will not assert that human knowledge exhausts the universe and that no wisdom is possible outside the consciousness of man? [336]

Theosophy teaches a far stricter and more far-reaching Monism than does Secularism, and it is far more philosophical.¹

And why cannot a *Monist* be a Theosophist? And why must Theosophy at least involve *dualism*? Theosophy teaches a far stricter and more far-reaching *Monism* than does Secularism. The Monism of the latter may be described as materialistic and summed up in the words, “Blind Force and Blind Matter ultimating in Thought.” But this — begging Mr. Bradlaugh’s pardon — is *bastard* Monism. The Monism of Theosophy is truly philosophical. We conceive of the universe as one in essence and origin. And though we speak of Spirit and Matter as its two poles, yet we state emphatically that they can only be considered as distinct from the standpoint of human, *māyāvic* (*i.e.*, illusory) consciousness.

¹ [Consult “Materialism, Spiritualism, Monism,” in our Confusing Words Series. — ED. PHIL.]

We therefore conceive of spirit and matter *as one in essence* and not as separate and distinct antitheses.¹

We firmly believe that the elevating and strengthening influence of the doctrines of Reincarnation and Karma, i.e., of Hope and Responsibility, will solve many a social problem that seeks elsewhere in vain for a solution.

What then are the “matters” that seem to Mr. Bradlaugh “as *unreal* as it is possible for any fiction to be”? We hope he is not referring to those physical phenomena, which most unfortunately have been confused in the Western mind with philosophical Theosophy? Real as these manifestations are — inasmuch as they were *not* produced by “conjuring tricks” of any kind — still the best of them are, ever were and ever will be, no better than *psychological illusions*, as the writer herself always called them to the disgust of many of her phenomenally inclined friends. These “unrealities” were all very well as *toys*, during the infancy of Theosophy; but we can assure Mr. Bradlaugh that all his Secularists might join the T.S. without ever being expected to believe in them — even though he himself produces the same “unreal” but *beneficent* “illusions” in his mesmeric cures, of many of which we heard long ago. And surely the editor of the *National Reformer* will not call “unreal” the ethical and ennobling aspects of Theosophy, the undeniable effects of which are so apparent among the bulk of Theosophists — notwithstanding a back-biting and quarrelling minority? Surely again he will not deny the elevating and strengthening influence of such beliefs as those in Reincarnation and Karma, doctrines which solve undeniably many a social problem that seeks elsewhere in vain for a solution?

The Secularists are fond of speaking of Science as “the Saviour of Man,” and should, therefore, be ready to welcome [337] new facts and listen to new theories. But are they prepared to listen to theories and accept facts that come to them from races which, in their insular pride, they term *effete*? For not only do the latter lack the sanction of orthodox Western Science, but they are stated in an unfamiliar form and are supported by reasoning not cast in the mould of the inductive system, which has usurped a spurious place in the eyes of Western thinkers.

No Western psychologist has been able to give any adequate explanation even of the simplest phenomenon of consciousness, i.e., sense perception.

The Secularists, if they wish to remain consistent materialists, will have perforce to shut out more than half the universe from the range of their explanations: that part namely, which includes mental phenomena, especially those of a comparatively rare and exceptional nature. Or do they imagine, perhaps, that in psychology — the youngest of the Sciences — everything is already known? Witness the Psychic Research Society with its Cambridge luminaries — sorry descendants of Henry More!² — how vain and frantic its efforts, efforts that have so far resulted only in making confusion worse confounded. And why? Because they have foolishly endeavoured to test and to explain psychic phenomena on a physical basis. No Western psychologist

¹ [Consult “Modifications of Consciousness,” in our Major Works Series. — ED. PHIL.]

² [Henry More FRS, 1614–1687, English philosopher of the Cambridge Platonist school.]

has, so far, been able to give any adequate explanation even of the simplest phenomenon of consciousness — sense perception. The phenomena of thought-transference, hypnotism, suggestion, and many other mental and psychic manifestations, formerly regarded as supernatural or the work of the devil, are now recognized as purely natural phenomena. And yet it is in truth the same powers, only intensified tenfold, that are those “unrealities” Mr. Bradlaugh speaks about. Manipulated by those who have inherited the tradition of thousands of years of study and observation of such forces, their laws and modes of operation — what wonder that they should result in effects, unknown to science, but *supernatural* only in the eyes of ignorance.

Eastern Mystics and Theosophists do *not* believe in *miracles*, any more than do the Secularists; what then is there *superstitious* in such studies?

Why should discoveries so arrived at, and laws formulated in accordance with strict and cautious investigation be regarded as “rehabilitated Spiritualism”? [338]

It is an historically recognized fact that Europe owes the revival of its civilization and culture, after the destruction of the Roman Empire, to Eastern influence. The Arabs in Spain and the Greeks of Constantinople brought with them only that which they had acquired from nations lying still farther Eastward. Even the glories of the classical age owed their beginnings to the germs received by the Greeks from Egypt and Phoenicia. The far remote, so-called antediluvian, ancestors of Egypt and those of the Brahmin Āryans sprang once upon a time from the same stock.

However much scientific opinions may vary as to the genealogical and ethnological sequence of events, yet the fact remains undeniable that every germ of civilization which the West has cultivated and developed has been received from the East. Why then should the English Secularists and Freethinkers in general, who certainly do not pride themselves on their imaginary descent from the lost ten tribes,¹ why should they be so reluctant to accept the possibility of further enlightenment coming to them from that East, which was the cradle of their race? And why should they, who above all, ought to be free from prejudice, fanaticism, and narrow-mindedness, the exclusive prerogatives of *religious* bodies, why, we ask, should they who lay claim to free thought, and have suffered so much themselves from fanatical persecution, why, in the name of wonder, should they so readily allow themselves to be blinded by the very prejudices which they condemn?

Our Society is the only body absolutely free from intolerance, dogmatism, and prejudice, and the only one which opens its arms to all, imposing on none its own special beliefs — which are strictly limited to a small inner group within it, called the Esoteric Section.

This and many other similar instances bring out with the utmost clearness the right of the Theosophical Society to fair and impartial hearing; as also the fact that of all the now existing “isms” and “ists,” our organization *is the only body entirely and absolutely free from all intolerance, dogmatism, and prejudice.*

¹ [Cf. “The twelve tribes of Israel never existed,” in our Down to Earth Series. — ED. PHIL.]

The Theosophical Society, indeed, as a body, is the *only* one which opens its arms to *all*, imposing on none its own special beliefs, strictly limited to the small *inner* group within it, called the Esoteric Section. It is truly *Universal* in spirit and constitution. It recognises and fosters no exclusiveness, no preconceptions. In the T.S. alone do men meet in the common search for truth, on a platform from which all dogmatism, all sectarianism, all mutual party [339] hatred and condemnation are excluded; for, accepting every grain of truth wherever it is found, it waits in patience till the chaff that accompanies it falls off by itself. It recognizes and knows of, and therefore avoids its representatives in its ranks — but one enemy — an enemy common to all, namely, Roman Catholicism, and that only because of its auricular confession. But even this exception exists only so far as regards *its inner group*, for reasons too apparent to need explanation.

Theosophy is monistic through and through. It seeks the one Truth in all religions, in all science, in all experience, as in every system of thought. What aim can be nobler, more universal, more all-embracing?

But evidently the world has not yet learned to regard Theosophy in this light, and the necessity of disabusing at least some of the best minds in the English-speaking countries, of the prejudices springing from the tares sown in them by our unscrupulous enemies is felt more than ever at this juncture. It is with the hope of weeding these minds from all such misconceptions, and of making the position of Theosophy plainer and clearer, that the present writer has prepared a small volume, called *The Key to Theosophy*, now in the press, and to be published very shortly. Therein are gathered in the shape of dialogue all the principal errors about, and objections to, Theosophy and its teachings, and more detailed and fuller arguments in proof of the assertions made in this article will be found in that work. The writer will make it her duty to send an early copy — not to the editor of the *National Reformer* — but to Mr. Bradlaugh *personally*. Knowing him by reputation for long years, it is impossible for us to believe that our critic would ever condescend to follow the example of most of the editors, lay or clerical, and condemn a work *on faith* even before he had cut open its pages, merely because of the unpopularity of its author and the subject treated.

In that volume it will be found that the chief concern of Theosophists is *Search after Truth*, and the investigation of such problems in Nature and Man which are mysteries today, but may become secrets, open to science, tomorrow. Is this a course which Mr. Bradlaugh would oppose? Does [340] *his* judgment belong to the category of those that can never be open to revision?

“This shall be your creed and belief, and therefore, all investigation is useless,” is a *dictum* of the Roman Catholic Church. It cannot be that of the Secularists — if they would remain true to their colours.

