

THE PURPOSE OF THE SOCIETY'S OBJECTS

By Joy Mills

Recently a friend asked me to discuss with him my views on the present work of the Theosophical Society. A member for some years, he was still convinced of the value of the Society, its importance as an organization devoted to the dissemination of Theosophy, but he was concerned about a comment made by a prominent member to the effect that it could take centuries before the ideal of brotherhood would be realized. In my friend's view, this was a defeatist attitude. Further, he said, why should the ideal of brotherhood continue to be emphasized in our First Object if this ideal was virtually unattainable? As I had travelled so extensively, did I feel that brotherhood was a lost cause, an ideal never to be realized in our lifetime?

Some time before the above conversation took place, I had been queried by another member as to the purpose and intent of the Third Object. In this case, the question concerned what the Society was doing or had been doing to "investigate unexplained laws of nature." Was not such investigation the province of science, and since most members are not scientists, were not we a little presumptuous to think we could achieve this object? Furthermore, he continued, what about those "powers" latent in human beings? Were we doing anything to "investigate" such powers, whatever they might be?

An examination of the questions asked by these two members on two widely separated occasions reveals the need for every member to ponder over the purpose and meaning of all three of the Society's Objects. The centenary of their adoption in their present form provides an opportunity to undertake an exploration in some depth of precisely what is aimed at in the Objects as well as the extent to which they are realizable or attainable. An interesting aspect of such an exploration would be a historical survey of the development of the Objects, noting the several changes that occurred during the Society's formative years from 1875 to 1896. For example, the Society's aim as set forth in 1875 was comprised in the single sentence: "The objects of the Society are, to collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe." However, that statement should be read in the light of the preamble to the original by-laws or rules adopted at the time of the Society's founding; that preamble opens with the words "The Title of the Theosophical Society explains the objects and desires of its founders."

Without quoting the 1875 document (preamble and by-laws) in full, it may be noted that a thorough reading of it indicates three essential points that have a bearing on the Society's work. First and perhaps foremost, especially in the light of numerous

other statements by H. P. Blavatsky and H. S. Olcott as well as in *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, the ideal of brotherhood was emphasized from the beginning. In the preamble, the statement is made that “In considering the qualifications of applicants for membership, it [the Society] knows neither race, sex, color, country nor creed.”

The second feature that may be noted is the emphasis given in that preamble to the policy of freedom of thought. Among other statements, the following may be cited: The Society’s “only axiom is the omnipotence of truth, its only creed a profession of unqualified devotion to its discovery and propaganda.”

The third most notable point is that contained in the opening statement of the preamble, as quoted above. It is evident that the very name of the Society indicated its purpose, its aims and objectives. While no attempt was made in that 1875 document to define *theosophical*, and no official definition of Theosophy has ever been imposed on the members, it is clear that there is “such a thing as Theosophy,” to quote H. P. Blavatsky herself. That phrase is found in an answer she gave to the inquirer, in *The Key to Theosophy: The Society*, she said there, “was formed to assist in showing to men that such a thing as Theosophy exists and to help them to ascend towards it by studying and assimilating its eternal verities.”

These three essential features, emphasized in the earliest document issued by the Society at its founding in 1875, may be said to have found explicit expression in the Three Objects as these were finally worded in 1896. It is obvious, for example, that the first principle—brotherhood—which in 1875 was noted as the basic consideration for membership, became finally the foremost pillar on which the Society rested. Not only was an acknowledgement of the ideal to be fundamental to any qualification for membership, but it was to be the aim towards which the members would aspire by themselves becoming a nucleus of a universal brotherhood. One is almost inclined to suggest that the realization of such a universal ideal can scarcely be achieved by humanity at large, if even the members of the Society which holds to such an aim have difficulty forming even a nucleus (which surely means a living center) of a genuine brotherhood! What is aimed at is certainly more than a mutual feeling of good will, although even such a feeling is often hard to achieve in the daily intercourse with all types and kinds of persons whose behavior, views and appearances may all too often seem completely contrary to our own! How far, we may well ask, have we ourselves advanced toward the ideal? To what extent have we engaged in forming a true nucleus of brotherhood? Are our Lodges, groups, centers, examples of what such a nucleus should be? No better place exists to test our First Object than the local branch to which we belong, and yet how often have our Lodges faltered, stumbled, and even fallen on the obstacles created by misunderstandings among members, by intolerant views and dogmatic assertions propounded in the very name of brotherhood? If our

theosophical groups cannot be workshops in which we practice the skills of brotherhood (for the ideal is a skill as well as an art), then can we learn to develop the skills of harmonious relationship in the milieu of daily affairs? Does not the First Object lead us to examine our own conduct, our own reactions, our own relationships with others and with all forms of life, to see whether we have come even close to the realization of the true nature of brotherhood based on an absolute knowledge of the unitary nature of all existence?

Freedom of inquiry, the second principle enunciated at the Society's founding, is encapsulated in the Second Object, encouraging us to expand our horizons, broaden our sympathies, deepen our appreciation for the paths of others, by studying all the fields of human endeavor as represented by the three major categories of religion, philosophy and science. Such study, undertaken not that we may become "walking encyclopedias" or scholastic giants, but rather that we may deepen our understanding of the numerous ways that lead to a knowledge of the One Reality, requires a genuine freedom of thought. The study must be without preconceived ideas, without prejudice or bias, and without blind belief in the superiority of one way over another, if it is to support the first principle of brotherhood. And there can be no other reason for such study, for that ideal is surely the overarching principle for which the Society was founded.

If, then, the fundamental principle of brotherhood, so often reiterated by the founders, H. P. Blavatsky and H. S. Olcott, and by their Mahatmic Teachers, is enshrined in the First Object, and if the principle of freedom of inquiry is implied in the Second Object, what relation exists between the name of the Society and the Third Object? For, as suggested above, the opening statement in the preamble to the 1875 Rules indicated that the Society's designation as *Theosophical* pointed to its purpose, its aim and objectives. Therefore, we may well ask whether there is indeed any relation to be found between the Third Object, which seems to link two quite disparate themes ("unexplained laws of nature" and latent human powers), and the term *theosophical*, a term which for the most part has been left officially undefined? To answer that question demands a close examination of all that is implied in the Third Object in the light, first, of the ideal of brotherhood and, second, of the Society's name.

As already pointed out, there is no official definition of Theosophy, no definition which has ever been imposed on the Society's members, none to which they must pledge some form of allegiance. How often it has been said that our sole bond of union is our pursuit of truth; our single aim the realization of brotherhood, our essential purpose to awaken in ourselves and others the intuitive awareness of the unity of all existence? Could it be that by searching out those hitherto "unexplained laws," embedded both in the universe and in our own nature (since all that is within the

macrocosm is or must be within the microcosm), we inevitably awaken our own latent powers, powers which are a direct reflection of the creative potencies by which a manifested universe (and all within it) is brought into existence? Could it be that the very laws by which this whole vast system comes into being are “unexplained” until we have revealed them in our lives, since we are truly co-creators with the One (since nothing exists outside that Ultimate One), co-participants in the creative processes by which that One reveals Itself in the many? And could it be that in this lies the acme of our human potential, all the powers within us but reflections of the one universal power in its many permutations and manifestations throughout all the domains of existence, throughout all the kingdoms of nature?

On one occasion, to a question concerning the Third Object, the President, Mrs. Radha Burnier, responded (*Human Regeneration*):

This object implies study not only of Nature in its outer manifestation but of the relationship of all things, for all law is a statement of relationships. Knowledge of the laws is power to accelerate progress . . .the understanding of ourselves is connected with the understanding of laws, and of the forces at work behind them.

The ultimate law, we may suggest, is the law of right relationship, which must obtain throughout the universe, maintaining order and revealing both meaning and purpose. No wording describes the beauty and power of that relationship better than brotherhood, the expression in the human kingdom of that love which a poet described as “the burning oneness binding everything.”

And how else shall we know that law, and all “unexplained laws” which evolve from it, except by awakening within ourselves those hidden potentials of our nature which lead to a full and complete realization of our unity? The Neoplatonist, Iamblichus, said it well:

There is a faculty of the human mind, which is superior to all which is born or begotten. Through it we are enabled to attain union with the superior intelligences, of being transported beyond the scenes and arrangements of this world, and of partaking of the higher life and peculiar powers of the heavenly Ones. By this faculty we are made free from the dominations of Fate, and are made, so to speak, the arbiters of our own destinies.

In the first letter from his Adept correspondent, A. P. Sinnett was advised to consider the “deepest and most mysterious questions which can stir the human mind—the *deific* powers in man and the possibilities contained in nature.” As those “deific powers” stir within us, as we awaken to the wonder and glory and mystery of our human-hood, with all its responsibilities as well as its vast potential for doing good, we come to recognize that the Objects of this Theosophical Society are all

interlinked and interrelated toward the single purpose of bringing about the transformation of ourselves and thus of the world.

The Objects point us in the direction we—and one day all humanity—must walk, the direction of *being* brothers, of knowing our brotherhood not just as a theory, but as a reality, acting at every moment in harmony with ourselves, with others, and with all the life that surrounds us. Yes, an ideal perhaps not to be realized in one lifetime, perhaps not to be realized for centuries to come, but truly an ideal for which no effort can ever be lost, no failure to achieve can ever be final, no action toward its attainment ever too small or insignificant.

We have been given magnificent aims to set before ourselves. The purpose of the Objects is clear: to remind us constantly of why we are here, not just as members of this Society, but as men and women walking the ways of humankind toward the gods.