The Claims of Theosophy

I wish to write in no narrow and intolerant spirit about Theosophy. There can be nothing more contemptibly ignorant than the vulgar prejudice which ridicules Theosophy because it concerns itself with marvels. From that point of view the whole world is a marvel; every operation of thought, speech or action is a miracle, a thing wonderful, obscure, occult and unknown. Even the sneer on the lips of the derider of occultism has to pass through a number of ill-understood processes before it can manifest itself on his face, yet the thing itself is the work of a second. That sneer is a much greater and more occult miracle than the precipitation of letters or the reading of the Akashic records. If Science is true, what more absurd, paradoxical and Rabelaisian miracle can there be than this, that a republic of small animalcules forming a mass of grey matter planned Austerlitz, wrote Hamlet or formulated the Vedanta philosophy? If I believed that strange dogma, I should no longer hold myself entitled to disbelieve anything. Materialism seems to me the most daring of occultisms, the most reckless and presumptuous exploiter of the principle, Credo quia impossibile, I believe it because it is impossible. If these minute cells can invent wireless telegraphy, why should it be impossible for them to precipitate letters or divine the past and the future? Until one can say of investigation “It is finished” and of knowledge “There is nothing beyond”, no one has a right to set down men as charlatans because they profess to be the pioneers of a new kind of Science.

Neither, I hope, shall I be inclined to reject or criticise adversely because Theosophy has a foreign origin. There is no law of Nature by which spiritual knowledge is confined to the East or must bear the stamp of an Indian manufacture before it can receive the imprimatur of the All-Wise. He has made man in his own image everywhere, in the image of the Satyam Jnanam
Anantam, the divine Truth-Knowledge-Infinity, and from wheresoever true knowledge comes, it must be welcomed.

Nevertheless if men claim to be the pioneers of a new kind of Science, they must substantiate their claims. And if foreigners come to the people of India and demand to be accepted as instructors in our own special department of knowledge, they must prove that they have a prodigious superiority. Has the claim been substantiated? Has the superiority been proved?

What Indians see is a body which is professedly and hospitably open to all enquiry at the base but entrenches itself in a Papal or mystic infallibility at the top. To be admitted into the society it is enough to believe in the freest investigation and the brotherhood of mankind, but everyone who is admitted must feel, if he is honest with himself, that he is joining a body which stands for certain well-known dogmas, a definite and very elaborate cosmogony and philosophy and a peculiar organisation, the spirit, if not the open practice in which seems to be theocratic rather than liberal. One feels that the liberality of the outer rings is only a wisely politic device for attracting a wider circle of sympathisers from whom numerous converts to the inner can be recruited. It is the dogmas, the cosmogony, the philosophy, the theocratic organisation which the world understands by Theosophy and which one strengthens by adhesion to the society; free inquiry and the brotherhood of man benefit to a very slight degree.

One sees also a steady avoidance of the demand for substantiation, a withdrawal into mystic secrecy, a continual reference to the infallible knowledge of the male & female Popes of Theosophy or, when that seems to need bolstering, to the divine authority of invisible and inaccessible Mahatmas. We in India admit the Guru and accept the Avatar. But still the Guru is only a vessel of the infinite Knowledge, the Avatar is only a particular manifestation of the Divine Personality. It is shocking to our spiritual notions to find cosmic Demiurges of a vague semi-divine character put between us and the All-Powerful and All-Loving and Kuthumi and Maurya taking the place of God.

One sees, finally, a new Theocracy claiming the place of the
old, and that Theocracy is dominantly European. Indians figure numerously as prominent subordinates, just as in the British system of government Indians are indispensable and sometimes valued assistants. Or they obtain eminence on the side of pure spirituality and knowledge, just as Indians could rise to the highest places in the judicial service or in advisory posts, but not in the executive administration. But if the smaller hierophants are sometimes and rarely Indians, the theocrats and the bulk of the prophets are Russian, American or English. An Indian here and there may quicken the illumination of the Theosophist, but it is Madame Blavatsky or Mrs Besant, Sinnett or Leadbeater who lays down the commandments and the Law. It is strange to see the present political condition of India reproducing itself in a spiritual organisation; it illustrates perhaps the subtle interconnection and interdependence of all individual and communal activities in the human being. But the political subordination finds its justification in the physical fact of the British rule. It is argued plausibly, and perhaps correctly, that without this subordination British supremacy could have no sure foundation. But where is the justification for the foreign spiritual control? The argument of native incapacity may be alleged. But I do not find this hypothesis of superiority supported by the facts. I do not see that Mrs Besant has a more powerful and perfect intellectuality, eloquence, personality or religious force than had Swami Vivekananda or that a single Theosophist has yet showed him or herself to be as mighty and pure a spirit as the Paramhansa Ramakrishna. There are Indian Yogins who have a finer and more accurate psychical knowledge than the best that can be found in the books of the Theosophists. Some even of the less advanced have given me proofs of far better-developed occult powers than any Theosophist I have yet known. The only member of the Theosophical Society who could give me any spiritual help I could not better by my unaided faculties, was one excluded from the esoteric section because his rare and potent experiences were unintelligible to the Theosophic guides; nor were his knowledge and powers gained by Theosophic methods but by following the path of our Yoga and the impulse of an
Indian guru, one who meddled not in organisations and election cabals but lived like a madman, *unnattavat*.

These peculiarities of the Theosophical movement have begun to tell and the better mind of India revolts against Theosophy. The young who are the future, are not for the new doctrine. Yet only through India can Theosophy hope to survive. It may attract a certain number of European adherents, but cannot hope to control the thought and life of the West. Its secretive and Papal tendency is a fatal bar. Europe has done definitely with all knowledge that will not submit itself to scrutiny; it is finishing with the usurpations of theocracy in things spiritual as it has finished with them in things temporal. Even devout Catholics writhe uneasily under the shower of Papal encyclicals and feel what an embarrassment it is to have modern knowledge forbidden by a revenant from the Middle Ages or opinion fixed by a Council of priests no more spiritual, wise or illustrious than the minds they coerce with their irrational authority. Europe is certainly not going to exchange a Catholic for a Theosophical Pope, the Council of Cardinals for the Esoteric Section, or the Gospel and the Athanasian Creed for *Ancient Wisdom* and *Isis Unveiled*.

Will India long keep the temper that submits to unexamined authority and blinds itself with a name? I believe not. We shall more and more return to the habit of going to the root of things, of seeking knowledge not from outside but from the Self who knows and reveals. We must more and more begin to feel that to believe a thing because somebody has heard from somebody else that Mrs Besant heard it from a Mahatma, is a little unsafe and indefinite. Even if the assurance is given direct, we shall learn to ask for the proofs. Even if Kutthumi himself comes and tells me, I shall certainly respect his statement, but also I shall judge it and seek its verification. The greatest Mahatma is only a servant of the Most High and I must see his *chapras* before I admit his plenary authority. The world is putting off its blinkers; it is feeling once more the divine impulse to see.

It is not that Theosophy is false; it is that Theosophists are weak and human. I am glad to believe that there is much truth in Theosophy. There are also considerable errors. Many of
the things they say which seem strange and incredible to those who decline the experiment, agree with the general experience of Yogins; there are other statements which our experience appears to contradict or to which it gives a different interpretation. Mahatmas exist, but they are not omnipotent or infallible. Rebirth is a fact and the memory of our past lives is possible; but the rigid rules of time and of Karmic reaction laid down dogmatically by the Theosophist hierophants are certainly erroneous. Especially is the hotchpotch of Hindu and Buddhist mythology and Theosophic prediction served up to us by Mrs Besant confusing and misleading. At any rate it does not agree with the insight of much greater Yogins than herself. Like most Theosophists she seems to ignore the numerous sources and possibilities of error which assail the Yegin before his intellect is perfectly purified and he has his perfection in the higher and superintellectual faculties of the mind. Until then the best have to remember that the mind even of the fairly advanced is not yet divine and that it is the nature of the old unchastened human element to leap at misunderstandings, follow the lure of predilections and take premature conclusions for established truths. We must accept the Theosophists as enquirers; as hierophants and theocrats I think we must reject them.

If Theosophy is to survive, it must first change itself. It must learn that mental rectitude to which it is now a stranger and improve its moral basis. It must become clear, straightforward, rigidly self-searching, sceptical in the nobler sense of the word. It must keep the Mahatmas in the background and put God and Truth in the front. Its Popes must dethrone themselves and enthrone the intellectual conscience of mankind. If they wish to be mystic and secret like our Yogins, then they must like our Yogins assert only to the initiate and the trained; but if they come out into the world to proclaim their mystic truths aloud and seek power, credit and influence on the strength of their assertions, then they must prove. It need not and ought not to be suddenly or by miracles; but there must be a scientific development, we must be able to lay hold on the rationale and watch the process of the truths they proclaim.