

THE OBJECTS OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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THE purpose of a Society is indicated and summed up in its declared objects. A change in the latter denotes a fresh outlook and intention, and since the objects of the Theosophical Society have from time to time been altered and revised, this historical retrospect would not be complete without a reference to the changes that have taken place.

For nearly thirty years, since the last revision in July, 1896, the three objects, declared in the Memorandum of Association at the time of the Incorporation of our Society, have remained unchanged. The fact that from 1875 to 1896 they have been revised repeatedly, and that the idea of Universal Brotherhood, now our primary object, was altogether absent when the Society was founded, may come as a surprise to many of our members. That the Masters, who were the real Founders of the Society, had this object in view from the very beginning is certain, but it is equally evident from the existing records that the Brotherhood idea was, to outer appearance, the outcome of the natural evolution of the Society.

The By-Laws of 1875 begin as follows :

- I. The name of the Society is "The Theosophical Society".
- II. The *objects* of the Society are, to collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe.

There was only this one object, and commenting on it Colonel Olcott writes in his *Old Diary Leaves*, vol. I, p. 120 :

The Brotherhood plank in the Society's future platform was, therefore, not thought of; later on, however, when our sphere of influence extended so as to bring us into relation with Asiatics and their Religions and social systems, it became a necessity, and, in fact, the cornerstone of our edifice. The Theosophical Society was an evolution, not—on the *visible plane*—a planned creation.

The idea of Brotherhood appears, so far as the records show, for the first time in 1878, in connection with the intended amalgamation of the Society with the Arya Samaj. But after receipt of an English translation of the rules and doctrines of this body, it became evident that the amalgamation could not be carried out, owing to the sectarian character

of the Arya Samaj. Quoting again from *Old Diary Leaves*, vol. I, pp. 398—401 :

The Theosophical Society resumed its *status quo ante*; and H. P. B. and I drafted and the Council put out two circulars, one defining what the Theosophical Society was, the other (dated September, 1878), defining a new body, the "Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj of Aryavart," as a bridge between the two mother societies, giving in detail the translation of the A. S. rules, etc., and leaving our members perfectly free to join the "link-society," as I called it, and comply with its by-laws, or not.

Our London Branch, which after more than two years of preliminary *pourparlers*, had formally organised on the 27th June, 1878, under the title of the "British Theosophical Society," issued its first public circular as "The British Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj of Aryavart."

Colonel Olcott then quotes the rules in the circular.

"1. The British Theosophical Society is founded for the purpose of discovering the nature and powers of the human soul and spirit by investigation and experiment.

2. The object of the Society is to increase the amount of human health, goodness, knowledge, wisdom, and happiness.

3. The Fellows pledge themselves to endeavour, to the best of their powers, to live a life of temperance, purity and brotherly love. They believe in a Great First Intelligent Cause, and in the Divine Sonship of the spirit of man, and hence in the immortality of that spirit, and in the *universal brotherhood of the human race*.

4. The Society is in connection and sympathy with the Arya Samaj of Aryavart, one object of which Society is to elevate, by a true spiritual education, mankind out of degenerate, idolatrous, and impure forms of worship, wherever prevalent."

This was . . . the reflection of the tone, though not of the actual letter, of my New York circular of the same year. In both . . . the brotherhood of mankind is declared. . . . The step we were taking in resuming the Society's autonomy upon discovering the sectarian character of the Arya Samaj, drew from us the categorical declaration of principles, in which were embraced: (1) the study of occult science; (2) the formation of a nucleus of universal brotherhood; (3) the revival of Oriental literature and philosophy. In short, all the three Declared Objects upon which the T. S. has been building itself up during the subsequent years.

The New York circular referred to by Colonel Olcott is not available, but in vol. I, p. 179 of the *Theosophist* we find the following Rules

and By-Laws revised in 1879, and ratified in 1880, based evidently on the principles enunciated in that circular :

1879

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY OR UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD

Principles, Rules and By-Laws, as revised in General Council, at the meeting held at the Palace of H. H. the Maharaja of Vizianagram, Benares, 17th December, 1879. Revised and ratified by the Society, at Bombay, February the 26th and 28th, 1880.

The plans are declared to be as follows :

- (a) To keep alive in man his spiritual intuitions.
- (b) To oppose and counteract—after due investigation and proof of its irrational nature—bigotry in every form, whether as an intolerant religious sectarianism or belief in miracles or anything supernatural.
- (c) To promote a feeling of *brotherhood* among nations; and assist in the international exchange of useful arts and products, by advice, information, and co-operation with all worthy individuals and associations; provided, however, that no benefit or percentage shall be taken by the Society for its corporate services.
- (d) To seek to obtain knowledge of all the laws of Nature, and aid in diffusing it; and especially to encourage the study of those laws least understood by modern people, and so termed the Occult Sciences. Popular superstition and folklore, however fantastical, when sifted, may lead to the discovery of long-lost but important secrets of Nature. The Society, therefore, aims to pursue this line of inquiry in the hope to widen the field of scientific and philosophical observation.
- (e) To gather for the Society's library and put into written forms correct information upon the various ancient philosophies, traditions and legends, and, as the Council shall decide it permissible, disseminate the same in such practicable ways as the translation and publication of original works of value, and extracts from and commentaries upon the same, or the oral instructions of persons learned in their respective departments.
- (f) To promote in every practicable way, in countries where needed, the spread of non-sectarian education.
- (g) Finally, and chiefly, to encourage and assist individual Fellows in self-improvement, intellectual, moral, and spiritual. But no Fellow shall put to his selfish use any knowledge communicated to him by any member of the First Section; violation of this rule being punished by expulsion. And before any such knowledge can be imparted, the person shall bind

himself by a solemn oath not to use it to selfish purposes, nor to reveal it, except with the permission of the teacher.

The Society consists of *three sections*. The highest or First Section is composed exclusively of proficient or initiates in Esoteric Science and Philosophy, who take a deep interest in the Society's affairs and instruct the President-Founder how best to regulate them, but whom none, but such as they voluntarily communicate with, have the right to know.

The Second Section embraces such Theosophists as have proved by their fidelity, zeal, and courage, and their devotion to the Society, that they have become able to regard all men as equally their brethren irrespective of caste, colour, race or creed; and who are ready to defend the life or honour of a brother Theosophist even at the risk of their own lives.

The administration of the superior Sections need not be dealt with at present in a code of rules laid before the public. No responsibilities connected with these superior grades are incurred by persons who merely desire ordinary membership of the third class.

The Third is the Section of Probationers. All new Fellows are on probation, until their purpose to remain in the Society has become fixed, their usefulness shown, and their ability to conquer evil habits and unwarrantable prejudices demonstrated.

Advancement from Section to Section depends on merit only. Until a Fellow reaches the first degree of the Second Section, his Fellowship gives him but the following rights: (1) to attend the Society's meetings, (2) access only to printed matter, such as books and pamphlets of the Society's Library, (3) protection and support by the President and Council in case of need and according to personal merit, (4) instruction and enlightenment, upon what he reads and studies, by Fellows of the Second Section; and this whether he remains at home or goes abroad and wherever he finds a Branch of the Theosophical Society; every Fellow being obliged to help the others as much as the circumstances, in which he is placed, will allow.

A uniform initiation fee of one pound sterling or its equivalent in the local currency shall be exacted from every Fellow at the time of his application.

There are three kinds of Fellows in the third Section, *viz.*, Active, Corresponding and Honorary. Of these the Active only are grouped in degrees according to merit; the grade of Corresponding Fellow embraces persons of learning and distinction who are willing to furnish information of interest to the Society; and the diploma of Honorary Fellow is exclusively reserved for persons eminent for their contributions to Theosophical knowledge or for their services to humanity.

The above rules of 1879 show a remarkable expansion of the one object of 1875, a rapid evolution of the Society in the direction of our present three objects, and bringing in definitely the idea of the Masters, through the division into three Sections, of which the first is composed exclusively of proficientes or initiates in Esoteric Science.

The next revision of the rules which we can trace was made by the General Council in 1885. In the meantime, however, we come across many modifications of the objects adopted by various Lodges to suit their own ideas and fancies. A few of these may aptly be quoted, as a curiosity and as showing the fluidic state of the Society in those early years. They are found in the *Theosophist* Supplements of 1883 and 1884.

(1) CIRCULAR FROM THE HIMALAYAN ESOTERIC T. S.

Objects and Constitution of the Theosophical Society :

- (a) The formation of a Universal Brotherhood ;
- (b) The union of the individual Monad with the Infinite and Absolute ;
- (c) The subjugation of passions ;
- (d) The study of the hidden mysteries of nature, and the development of the psychical powers latent in man.

Clause *b* is probably unique, and no other Branch has postulated in its Constitution such a supreme object.

(2) THE BOLARUM THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

or

THE PSYCHO-SCIENTIFIC BROTHERHOOD :

By-Laws :

- (a) To promote the moral regeneration of the community ;
- (b) To cultivate the feelings of Universal Brotherhood ;
- (c) To promote the study of the Ancient Aryan Religion as far as practicable.

The members *must*, after their admission to the Branch Society, lead a life of temperance, purity and brotherly love.

(3) THE SECUNDERABAD THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

Rules :

- (1) To cultivate and promote the feeling of universal brotherhood towards other Theosophical Societies and mankind at large ;
- (2) To forward by all practical measures, the morality and spiritual progress of the people ;

(3) To study and otherwise encourage the revival of ancient Aryan literature and science ;

(4) To afford every possible help to the Parent Society and advocate the cause of the same both by word and deed.

(4) THE CUDDALORE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

(a) To cultivate the feeling of Universal Brotherhood ;

(b) To promote the moral well-being and the spiritual interests of our fellow-men ;

(c) To encourage the study of Aryan and other Eastern Literature ;

(d) To co-operate with the Founders and Promoters of the Parent Society.

(5) THE LONDON LODGE OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

The special objects of the London Lodge are (1884) :

(1) The investigation of the nature of existence, with a view to the comprehension and realisation of the higher potentialities of man ;

(2) The revival of research connected with occult science and esoteric philosophy ;

(3) The examination of religious systems from an unsectarian standpoint, for the purpose of demonstrating the substantial identity subsisting beneath their apparent diversity ;

(4) The reconstruction of religion on a scientific and of science on a religious basis ; and the elaboration of a perfect system of thought and rule of life.

We note as an interesting fact that in those early days many of the branches did not call themselves the Madura or Secunderabad, etc., *Lodge* of the T. S., but simply the *Madura Theosophical Society*, etc., sometimes acknowledging their connection with Headquarters by a definite By-Law to co-operate with the Founders and Promoters of the Parent Society, to afford every possible help to the Parent Society, etc., and using their own discretion in formulating the objects. This was probably due to the fact that the so-called Parent Society had not yet formulated, in a clear and concise shape, its principal objects, so that they could serve as a stable basis for all its Branches, and which no Branch should have authority to change, though they might add any *special* objects decided upon.

We find such a formula, an approximation to the three objects now known to us, for the first time in the Annual Report of 1885 (p. 78), in which the revised rules are stated as follows :

(1) To form the nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, creed or colour ;

(2) To promote the study of Aryan and other Eastern literatures, religions and sciences;

(3) A third object, pursued by a portion of the members of the Society, is to investigate unexplained laws of nature and the psychical powers of man.

The Theosophical Society, in America, in its Constitution and Laws, adopted on April 24, 1887, confirms the above three objects, with a slight alteration of the third object, in which the words "pursued by a portion of the members of the Society" are left out and the word "latent" is added after psychical powers (*i.e.*, the psychical powers latent in man). This same Constitution definitely acknowledges the Headquarters of the Society in India in Art. II and III:

The General Secretary shall be the official means of communication with headquarters in India;

All charters and diplomas come from headquarters in India. Provisional charters and diplomas may be issued by the General Secretary by the advice and consent of the Executive Committee, pending advices from India, and are to be delivered up when the permanent diploma is received.

Then follows a clause:

The General Rules of the Theosophical Society are declared in force so far as they do not conflict with these rules, *i.e.*, with the rules of the T. S. in America, which is a curious reversal of the universal practice obliging Branches to formulate their rules so as not to conflict with the rules of the authority from which they derive their charters, and not *vice versa*.

Since 1885 the General Council has revised the three objects four times, in 1888, 1890, 1894 and 1896. The changes are slight, but none the less important, and clarify the aims of the Society; they are best understood if we follow each object separately:

CHANGES IN THE THREE OBJECTS OF THE T.S. FROM 1885 TO 1896:

First Object

1885: To form the nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed or colour;

1888: To form the nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, *sex, caste* or colour;

1896: To form *a* nucleus of *the* Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour;

The words in italics denote the changes, namely the addition of sex and caste in 1888, and the transition in 1896 to *a* nucleus of *the* Universal Brotherhood, a significant alteration, implying that Brotherhood exists as a fact in nature, that it only remains for us to acknowledge and live up to it by forming a nucleus for the purpose, one of many nuclei that have existed from time to time.

Second Object

1885: To promote the study of Aryan and other Eastern Literatures, religions and sciences;

1888: To promote the study of Aryan and other Eastern Literatures, religions, *philosophies* and sciences;

1890: To promote the study of Aryan and other Eastern Literatures, religions, philosophies and sciences, *and to demonstrate their importance to humanity*;

1894: To promote the study of Aryan and other Eastern Literatures, religions, philosophies and sciences, and to demonstrate *the importance of that study*;

1896: To *encourage* the study of *comparative religion, philosophy and science*;

The changes are self-evident, tending towards breadth and conciseness.

Third Object

1885: A third object, pursued by a portion of the members of the Society, is to investigate unexplained laws of nature and the psychical powers of man.

1888: [Unchanged, with the following clause added:] The fellows interested in this third object now form a distinct private division of the Society under the direction of the Corresponding Secretary.

This change coincides with the formation of the Esoteric Section of the T. S.

1890: To investigate unexplained laws of nature and the psychic powers *latent* in man.

1896: To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man.

In this last revision, the word *psychic*, before "powers," is omitted, and in this third object also the trend of changes is towards breadth and conciseness.

From this short review of the objects of the Society, it is clear that they were subject to a distinct evolution, though of so slight a nature that we discover the presence of the main ideas already in the first revision of 1879, and that it was merely the outer form that had to find an adequate expression through various changes. For thirty years, the last revision has satisfied our needs, and it is indeed difficult to conceive of a broader, more comprehensive form, appealing both to heart and mind. Will this be always so, or will the course of evolution lead the T. S. to a still higher outlook and destiny? None can tell, nor need it disturb us, so long as we preserve an open mind, and beware of that rigidity which might prevent us from seeing ahead, and from accommodating ourselves to changing conditions as they arise.