

HOW BEST TO BECOME A THEOSOPHIST

by Henry S. Olcott

(*The Theosophist*, March & May 1880)

The London *Spiritualist* gives space to a full report of the inaugural address of George Wyld, Esq., M. D., (Edin.), the newly elected President of the British Theosophical Society, a branch of our own — which we lack the room to print. Dr. Wyld's paper is marked, by the force, learning and sincerity, which are his recognized personal characteristics. It teaches the true doctrine that adeptship, or the attainment of a full spiritual condition, is only possible for those who bring the bodily lusts of all kinds under the control of the higher and better nature, and, in a series of apt quotations from the four Gospels of the New Testament, he endeavours to convince his audience that Jesus, though perhaps not the very and only Son of God, was at least the highest type of human spirituality ever vouchsafed. to mankind. At the same time. Dr. Wyld affirms that every man may become a "Son of God", his rule being "*So to empty our souls of self that the Father, becoming manifest in His Sons, illuminates and regenerates the world.*" This species of Christian adeptship our respected brother places even above the adeptship of the East, which, he says "is secret and mysterious, and bidden from all except a select few, who have passed through an ordeal so severe and dangerous that many, it is said, perish in body or in soul on making the attempt, and into which select few, so far as we know, no woman has ever been admitted."

In these utterances, so foreign to the views entertained by a large majority of Theosophists, our Oriental friends will see a practical evidence of the truly republican and cosmopolitan nature of the Theosophical Society. Dr. Wyld is an enthusiastic admirer of the character of Jesus, and yet sees his way clear to the accomplishment of that personal spiritual unfolding towards which we all aspire. Indeed, it is but natural with strong thinkers, his path seems to him the best and surest one, and he lays his scheme before his Society and the world with an ardent longing for its acceptance. Brahmos will doubtless recognize the very essence of their own ideas coming from this good Theosophist's lips, and see that our journal was not wide of the mark in saying upon its first appearance that there was ample room for Brahma and Parthana Samajists and even liberal Christians, in our fellowship. Our London brother means every word he speaks on this theme, and his opinions are respected by us just as much as though he had avowed his faith in either of the ancient Eastern religions, which some of us think the best ever evolved by man. If he had been in India, studied the ancient philosophies, and seen the Eastern adepts and the practical proofs of their lofty science, he would, beyond doubt change the views he now expounds so eloquently. And all this may come in time.

But, in thus conceding to Dr. Wyld the full right of private judgment, it must not be forgotten that like the rest of us, he speaks only for himself, and neither the Theosophical Society as a whole, nor even the British branch, as a body, is responsible. The very idea of "Brotherhood of Humanity" and "Republic of Conscience," both of which synonyms apply to the basis on which our Society is building up, covers the principle of strict intellectual reciprocity. Any attempt to make the Society a propaganda, whether of Christianity or any other single religion, would at once strip it of the first quality of cosmopolitanism and make it only a sect. For myself, I am free to say that there is no adequate proof to my mind either that Jesus was the Son of God, that he said or did the things ascribed to him, that either one of the four Gospels is anything better than a literary fabrication, or that Jesus ever lived. Nor do I see that the ideal character of Jesus is any nobler than that of Gautama, if so noble. At the proper times and places I have maintained these views, and hope to do so often again. So far from sharing Dr. Wyld's ideal of Christianity, I have, after nearly fifty years of practical observation and experience in Christian countries and among the teachers and professors of Christianity, been forced to conclude that it is a bad religion and fosters every sin and vice against which its ethical code inveighs. And yet this is but my individual opinion, and in expressing it, I no more compromise our Society than does Dr. Wyld, who is so strong an admirer of Jesus, by expressing his, or than Mr. Massey by his article in this number of the THEOSOPHIST, or the Swami Dayanand, or our orthodox Hindu fellows, or the high priest Sumangala, or any other adherent of any special sect or theology, by what they respectively teach. We are all individual and free as to personal beliefs, but are knitted together by the strong ties of intellectual reciprocity and universal brotherhood.

Nor is Dr. Wyld warranted in his definition of the nature of Oriental adeptship, as given in the following terms: "The Oriental adept obtains magical or soul power over matter, *which he uses for his own ends* — and over spirits. But the Christian adept has no dealings with low or weak spirits, except to convert them or to cast them out, but his life is spent in openly transmuting his spiritual powers into good works for the good of mankind." The implication here is most unequivocal — the Eastern adept uses his acquired power for selfish ends and consorts with low and weak spirits with a less commendable object than that of converting or casting them out; and, unlike his Christian compeer, does not "transmute his spiritual powers into good works for the good of mankind". Since I, as an individual, am commenting upon the opinions of Dr. Wyld as an individual, I am bound to say that nothing could be farther from the real state of the case. Whatever the Christian adept may or may not do of beneficent deeds — and church history is not all one-sided on that question — it is most certain that the Eastern adept's first and last aspiration is to benefit mankind by making himself purer and better than they. So far from consorting with low and weak spirits, the very elementary instruction he receives is to avoid them and rid himself of their fatal influence by becoming too holy for them to approach him. Not a single "Eastern adept" comes within Dr. Wyld's hypothesis, except the problematical practitioner of Black Magic or Sorcery, who uses his knowledge of arcane natural

powers to gratify carnal appetites and desires, and *invariably falls victim to the evil spirits he has drawn to his aid.*

It is equally incorrect to say that no woman has become an adept. Not to mention one example which will immediately recall itself to every Theosophist, I may say that I personally have encountered in India two other initiated women, and know of a number of others in the East. Some women, it must be remembered, are of that sex only in body — taking sex to mean that negative quality of individuality which Dr. Wyld evidently had in mind when thinking of them. If Jesus made adepts by breathing on men, so that they could under this *afflatus* do "miracles"; and if Loyola, Theresa, Savonarola, and the Curé D'Ars, possessed the power of aethrobacy and healing, so have hundreds of "Eastern adepts" in Indian history healed their multitudes, "miraculously" fed the hungry, and raised the dead: as for air-walking, the readers of this paper need not be told that in India, even an English doctor admits, it is an exact physiological science.

My friend Dr. Wyld deploras that in Great Britain there are no examples of adeptship to refer to; to which I reply that I could name to him at least one British Fellow of the Society, who, in modest privacy has by intelligent self-discipline already acquired very marked results in this direction; while I have, with my own eyes, seen in the streets of London one of the most eminent of Eastern adepts, who has that to look after, which is a transmutation of his powers for the good of humanity. These "adepts", "Rosicrucians", "initiates", or whatever else we may choose to call them, go about the world — as Professor Alexander Wilder so clearly told us last month — without being suspected; mingling in crowds but not affected by them and doing what is best to be done, and out of purest love for their fellow-men. Those only are permitted to recognise them whom it is necessary they should reveal themselves to, for the attainment of a definite object. But this one thing is indisputable, that, whether they outwardly call themselves Buddhists, Hindus, Parsis or Christians, they are absolutely at one in spirit, and that spirit is to become spiritually great, so that great good may be done by them to the whole world.

HOW BEST TO BECOME A THEOSOPHIST

by Dr. George Wyld,
President of British Theosophical Society.

London, 19th March, 1880.

DEAR COLONEL OLCOTT,

The Theosophist for March has just come to hand, and in order to catch the post, I sit down to write to you at once a few hurried lines.

I thank you for the kind and flattering words you use in speaking of my Presidential address, but at the same time I think you somewhat fail to appreciate the full meaning of the position I take.

When I speak of an Oriental adept, I distinctly declare that I do so with all deference, confessing my imperfect information and even my ignorance. When, for instance, I say that "the adept obtains magical powers which he uses for his own ends and over spirits", you misinterpret me by implying selfish ends and consorting with spirits.

This is the reverse of what I meant. I meant that his ends were more private than public, and that he *commanded* but did not consort with weaker spirits than himself.

As I intend shortly to reprint six of my papers which have during the last two years appeared in the *Spiritualist*, I will take care to express myself so as to correct the words on which you inadvertently misinterpret my meaning.

I suppose you at once admit that the adept works chiefly in secret, and that so far he differs from those Christians who, in the history of the church, obtained divine powers. I will also note what you say about female adepts, although we in London are under the belief that H. P. B. led us to understand that no *fully* initiated female adept existed.

You say, your "fifty years" experience forces you to conclude that Christianity is a bad religion, and fosters every sin and vice against which its ethical code inveighs."

Surely you have not pondered your words — for how can a *perfect ethical code* foster every sin and vice?

What you mean is that — so-called Christian churches and priesthoods have been guilty of every sin and vice. I might with equal logic say. Buddhism must be an abominable religion, because I find the most degrading ignorance and vice is to be found in many of the lamaseries of Thibet.

But, instead of reasoning thus, I, in my address, speak of esoteric Buddhism with the greatest reverence and respect, and I assert that esoteric Christianity and esoteric Buddhism are in their central spirit identical.

I hope you may be able to insert this short letter in the *Theosophist*, because I wish my Oriental brothers to understand that, in all I write, I desire truth only, and I am prepared now and always to stand thereby at whatever cost.

Moreover, I feel this, as a conviction of my soul, that, were I admitted to intimate conversation with a truly spiritual adept, we should find our views on religion, in their central essence, identical.

Believe me, dear Brother, Yours sincerely,

GEORGE WYLD, M. D.

Notes on the above

My explanations of the real motive of the Indian ascetic's severe course of self-spiritualization, as given in the article to which Dr. Wyld adverts, were so clear that, upon a second reading, I do not see that further elucidation is called for. I think I showed that the acquisition of divine powers, to use them for good of mankind and not for private benefit of any kind, was what is sought. The ascetic of India "works in secret" while developing his powers, only because contact with the *filthy selfishness* and sensualism of the world would prevent the development. And if the full adept, after becoming such, lives apart, it is because he can thus best work for humanity. Though unseen, he is nevertheless ever doing good. I recall no instances of Christian "adepts," or, indeed, any of another faith — who did not at least gain their powers by fasting, meditation, and seclusion; nor any who afterward freely lived and mingled with the gluttonous and vicious crowd. The long list of untrained religious ecstasies we will not take into account. Whether epileptics, mediums, natural clairvoyants, or mesmerized neurotics, they are not to be mentioned in the same breath with the instructed powerful initiate of Esoteric Science, to whom nature's secrets are known and her laws his auxiliaries.

I re-affirm that I have met some female ascetics possessed of magical powers, and know of more. But I did *not* say that either of these or any female had reached the highest possible degree of power in occult science; there are many stages, and all persons do not reach the same.

Dr. Wyld should not make me appear to call the Christian ethical code "perfect". If it were perfect, then it certainly would not lend itself to a double interpretation and so foster every vice and sin. In my judgement, the doctrine of vicarious atonement, the very basis of Christianity, neutralizes all its lofty moralities, since it pretends that faith, not merit, secures salvation. In this respect. Buddhism is vastly superior.

As to the degrading ignorance and vice in the lamaseries of Thibet, if Dr. Wyld has "found" them there, it must have been through the eyes of some imaginative book-maker; for no real traveller — the Abbé Huc *not* excepted — has had the chance to make such a discovery. However, let us offset the lamasery, which we

do *not* know to be a nest of sensualistic recluses, against the Christian monastery and nunnery which we *do* know to have so often been such, and confine ourselves to the main subject. The author of a very recent essay, speaking in an Australian magazine from the stand-point of personal observation says: — "On the other hand, savage and uncivilized races may be found, whose domestic life is in the highest degree moral, as the Zulus, among whom crimes, such as we reward them, do not exist, and a more honest, truthful, and chaste race is not to be found, as I can affirm from years' residence among them. And that this morality arises from intuition is proved by the fact that, when they are educated and taught `Bible truths,' they immediately become immoral, and, like the English mistress who puts into her advertisement, `No Irish need apply,' the Natal mistress says, `No Christian Kuffir need apply', for, when Christianised, the men are thieves and the women unchaste."

On behalf of Buddhist, Vedaist, Jain and Parsi, I am quite satisfied to let the moral code of either of these faiths, which alike teach that merit can alone save, be compared with the code of Christianity, which teaches that the sinner may be saved from the natural consequences of his sin by faith in the vicarious efficacy of the blood of one named Jesus. As was remarked in my previous article, if my respected friend and brother. Dr. Wyld, were to study Eastern philosophies under Eastern masters, his opinions would certainly change.

H. S. OLCOTT
Bombay, April 1880.

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