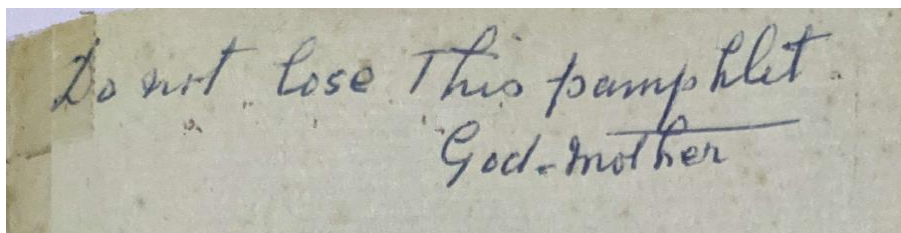


NEUTRALITY

In The Theosophical Society

A PROGRESSIVE UNDERSTANDING



Supplement to the President's Special Letter on The Society's

NEUTRALITY — UNIVERSALITY

1st March 1940



THE ELDER BRETHREN

A MASTER OF WISDOM

Theosophy should not represent merely a collection of moral verities, a bundle of metaphysical ethics, epitomized in theoretical dissertations. Theosophy *must be made practical*, and it has, therefore, to be disencumbered of useless digressions, in the sense of desultory orations and fine talk...

Theosophy, through its mouthpiece, The Society, has to tell the TRUTH to the very face of LIE, to beard the tiger in its den, without thought or fear of evil consequences, and to set at defiance calumny and threats. As *an Association*, it has not only the right but the duty to uncloak vice and do its best to redress wrongs, whether through the voice of its chosen lecturers or the printed word of its journals and publications, making its accusations, however, as impersonal as possible...

The problem of true Theosophy and its great mission are, first, the working out of clear unequivocal conceptions of ethic ideas and duties, such as shall best and most fully satisfy the right and altruistic feelings in men; and second, the modelling of these conceptions for their adaptation into such forms of daily life as shall offer a field where they may be applied with most equitableness. — Written by a Master of Wisdom, *Lucifer*, January 1888.

MESSAGE TO THE MEMBERS OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY FROM AN ELDER BROTHER, 1925

A second half-century of fine promise lies before you. We say to you: You have the power to do more in the immediate future than any other body of men and women has ever achieved before. We say to you: Within this next half-century you can make Brotherhood a living reality in the world. You can cause the warring classes; castes and nations to cease their quarrellings, the warring faiths to live once more in brotherhood, respect and understanding. Make Theosophy a living force in your lives, and through your example, those class and caste distinctions, which for so long have bred hatred and misery, shall at no distant time come to be but distinctions of function in the common service of the nation-family and of the World-Brotherhood...

Support all work and movements in the outer worlds which stand for brotherhood. Consider less what they achieve, and more the ideals which they embody... Cease to judge a movement a cause, an opinion, by the extent to which it appeals to you; satisfies you, or perhaps antagonizes you. Examine rather the measure of its power to be of service to others in their need...

You cannot truly be students of the Divine Wisdom, save as you are active in the service of the Divine Life. Where trouble is, where suffering is, where ignorance is, where quarrel is, where tyranny is, where oppression is where cruelty is — *there* must We find the earnest members of Our Society, those

who study the truths of Theosophy and practically apply them to lead the world from darkness into Light, from death to Immortality, from the Unreal to the Real.

Within the society itself let the Brotherhood for which it stands be real. We have had enough of divisions which separate. Let there remain only distinctions which enrich. Respect all who differ from you. Let your Brotherhood be without, that is, above, distinctions of opinion, as it is already so finely above distinctions of race, creed, caste, sex and colour. As ever, there is only one test for membership of Our Society—a recognition of the truth of the Brotherhood of all life and an earnest desire to make such recognition effective...

We do not ask members of the Society as a whole to hold aught in common save the first great object upon which We receive them into this outer court of Our Temple. But holding that object, honour demands that they shall maintain the Brotherhood they profess to accept by ensuring to others that same freedom of opinion which they rightly claim for themselves. We welcome differences of opinion, so be it that they are held and expressed in a brotherly spirit, courteously, generously, gently, however firmly. There is room in Our Society for any number of opinions and beliefs, however divergent, provided that those who hold them treat as brothers those with whom they have to disagree, whose opinions they may feel constrained actively to oppose. Have not our members yet learned the lesson of Kurukshetra, to disagree, and when need be, to fight, lovingly and generously? Let it never be forgotten that all life is one, even though its forms must sometimes seem to clash.

— (*General Report, 1925*).

THE MAHACHOHAN

The world in general, and the Christendom especially, left for 2000 years to the regime of a personal God, as well as its political and social systems based on that idea, has now proved a failure. If the Theosophists say: "We have nothing to do with all this; the lower classes and the inferior races (those of India for instance, in the conception of the British) cannot concern us and must manage as they can," — what becomes of our fine professions of benevolence, philanthropy, reform, etc.? Are these professions a mockery? And if a mockery, can ours be the true path? Shall we not devote ourselves to teaching a few Europeans, fed on the fat of the land — many of them loaded with the gifts of blind fortune — the rationale of bell-ringing, cup-growing, of the spiritual telephone and astral body formations, and leave the teeming millions of the ignorant, of the poor and despised, the lowly and the oppressed, to take care of themselves and of their hereafter as best they know how? Never! Rather perish the T.S. with both its hapless founders than that we should permit it to become no better than an academy of magic, a hall of occultism. That we — the devoted followers of the spirit incarnate of absolute self-sacrifice, of philanthropy, divine kindness, as of all the highest virtues attainable on this earth of sorrow, the man of men, Gautama Buddha — should ever allow the T.S. to represent the

embodiment of selfishness, the refuge of the few with no thought in them for the many, is a strange idea, my brothers.

— *Lucifer*, August 1888.

THE MASTER K. H.

Every Western Theosophist should learn and remember, especially those of them who would be our followers — that in our Brotherhood, all personalities sink into one idea — abstract right and absolute practical justice for all. And that, though we may not say with the Christians, “return good for evil” — we repeat with Confucius — “return good for good; for evil — Justice.”

— *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 401

THE FOUNDERS

THE SOCIETY'S ORIGINAL AIM

From the Preamble and Bye-Laws of The Theosophical Society, 1875:

“...Whatever may be the private opinions of its members, the Society has no dogmas to enforce, no creed to disseminate. It is formed neither as Spiritualistic schism, nor to serve as the foe or friend of any sectarian or philosophic body. Its only axiom is the omnipotence of truth, its only creed a profession of unqualified devotion to its discovery and propaganda. In considering the qualifications of applicants for membership, it knows neither race, sex, colour, country nor creed.”

THE PRESIDENT-FOUNDER'S IMPARTIALITY

“It may be as well to say a few words about the attitude of the Society towards caste and other social abuses that swarm about us... There is a necessary reformatory work to be carried on by specially fitted caste reformers individuals, and societies. It is as much outside the field of our Society's corporate activity as diet; intemperance, widow remarriage; chattel slavery, the social evil, vivisection, and fifty other outlets for philanthropic zeal. As a Society we abstain from meddling with them, though as individuals we are perfectly free to plunge into the thick of either of the fights that they occasion.

The Theosophical Society ignores the differences of sex, for the Higher Self has no sex; also of colour, for that is neither white, black, red, or yellow like the human races; of rank, wealth, and political condition, worldly power or literary rank, for It is above all these limitations of the physical man — spotless, immortal, divine, unchangeable. That is why, as President, I never commit the Society to one side or the other of these questions.

— Colonel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, III, 69-71.

THEOSOPHY AND POLITICS

The tenacious observance by the founders of our Society of the principle of absolute neutrality, on its behalf, in all questions which lie outside the limits of its declared “objects,” ought to have obviated the necessity to say that there is a natural and perpetual divorce between Theosophy and Politics. Upon an hundred platforms I have announced this fact, and in every other practicable way, public and private, it has been affirmed and reiterated.

Before we came to India, the word Politics had never been pronounced in connection with our names; for the idea was too absurd to be even entertained, much less expressed. But in this country, affairs are in such an exceptional state, that every foreigner, of whatsoever nationality, comes under Police surveillance, more or less; and it was natural that we should be looked after until the real purpose of our Society's movements had been thoroughly shown by the developments of time.

That end was reached in due course; and in the year 1880, the Government of India, after an examination of our papers and other evidence, became convinced of our political neutrality, and issued all the necessary orders to relieve us from further annoying surveillance.

Since then, we have gone our ways without troubling ourselves more than any other law-abiding persons, about the existence of policemen or detective bureaus.

I would not have reverted to so stale a topic if I had not been forced to do so by recent events. — I am informed that in Upper India, some unwise members of the Society have been talking about the political questions of the hour, as though authorised to speak for our organization itself, or at least to give to this or that view of current agitations the imprimatur of its approval or disapproval...

That our members, and others whom it interests, may make no mistake as to the Society's attitude as regards Politics, I take this occasion to say that our Rules, and traditional policy alike, prohibit every officer and fellow of the Society, *as such*, to meddle with political questions in the slightest degree, and to compromise the Society by saying that it has, *as such*, any opinion upon those or any other questions.

The Presidents of Branches in all countries will be good enough to read this protest to their members, and in every instance when initiating a candidate to give him to understand — as I invariably do — the fact of our corporate neutrality.

So convinced am I that the perpetuity of our Society — at least in countries under despotic or any degree arbitrary Governments — depends upon our keeping closely to our legitimate province, and leaving Politics "severely alone," I shall use the full power permitted me as President-Founder to suspend or expel every member, or even discipline or discharter any Branch which shall, by offending in this respect; imperil the work now so prosperously going on in various parts of the world.

(Sd.) H. S. OLCOTT, P.T.S.

(Sd.) H. P. BLAVATSKY, (Corr. Sec. T.S.)

Official:

Headquarters, Adyar, 27. 6. 1883

OUR THREE OBJECTS

... the Indian National Congress. This remarkable political body was formed by certain of our Anglo-Indian and Hindu members after the model and on the lines of the Theosophical Society, and has from the first been directed by our own colleagues; men among the most influential in the Indian Empire. At the same time, there is no connection whatever, barring that through the personalities of individuals, between the Congress and its mother body our Society. It would never have come into existence, in all probability, if Colonel Olcott had suffered himself to be tempted into the side paths of human Brotherhood, politics, social reforms, etc., as many have wanted him to do. We aroused the dormant spirit and warmed the Aryan blood of the Hindus, and one vent the new life made for itself was this Congress...

Though but a minority of our members are mystically inclined, yet, in point of fact, the key to all our successes as above enumerated is in our recognition of the fact of the Higher Self — colourless; cosmopolitan, unsectarian, sexless; unworldly, altruistic — and the doing of our work on that basis. To the Secularist, the Agnostic, the Sciolistic Scientist, such results would have been unattainable, nay, would have been unthinkable. Peace Societies are Utopian, because no amount of argument based upon exoteric considerations of social morals or expediency, can turn the hearts of the rulers of nations away from selfish war and schemes of conquest.

Social differentiations, the result of physical evolution and material environment, breed race hatreds and sectarian and social antipathies that are insurmountable if attacked from the outside. But, since human nature is ever identical, all men are alike open to influences which centre upon the human "heart," and appeal to the human intuition; and as there is but one Absolute Truth, and this is the soul and life of all human creeds, it is possible to effect a reciprocal alliance for the research of and dissemination of that basic Truth.

— H. P. Blavatsky, *Lucifer*, September 1889

DR. BESANT: SECOND PRESIDENT

IMPARTIAL ATTITUDE OF THE T.S.

I am asked to send you the following, which I have said over and over again, but which I am asked to repeat once more:

“The T.S. has no tenets as a Society. It does not favour the views of any one creed or league which it shelters, above the views of any other creed or league which it shelters. The T.S. is absolutely neutral and impartial to all such subsidiary matters, and is and will remain without distinction of creed.”

I add: is neutral and impartial to all views, except Brotherhood, whether primary or subsidiary. I am a little tired of repeating this, and hope that I shall not be asked to say it again. This is both my official and personal view.

— *The Theosophist*, July 1912.

THE GROWTH OF THE T.S.

“Its Objects have been changed several times during the last thirty-seven years, but were fixed by the incorporation of 1905, and one of the subsidiary clauses in the Memorandum of Association gives the T.S. the right of doing ‘all such things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of’ our Objects.”

— *The Theosophist*, July 1912.

TWO VIEWS

There are two views of Theosophical work, one narrow and one wide, which are current in The Theosophical Society, and on which members should make up their minds, and having done so, should act accordingly. The first is the view that the Divine Wisdom consists in the teaching of a certain body of doctrines, whether by writing or by speech; to write articles, to give lectures, on Reincarnation and Karma, on the Life after Death, on Yoga and Interpretation of Symbols, on the Planes, Rounds and Races — this is Theosophical, and this is the only proper work of The Theosophical Society. A certain application of these teachings to the conditions of the day is perhaps allowable, but such application tends to stray into forbidden paths, and is of doubtful desirability. The other view is that the Divine Wisdom, “sweetly and mightily ordering all things,” exists in the world for the world’s helping, and

that nothing is alien from it which is of service to Humanity. The chief work of those who profess themselves its votaries will therefore be the work which is most needed at the time, and the pioneer work along the lines which will shape the coming pathway of the world. At one time, when the great truths of religion have been forgotten and when materialism is strong, it will be its chief work to spread the forgotten truths and to assert the predominant value of spirituality. At another, when a people is to be prepared for the Lord, educational methods and improvements will claim its earnest attention. At another, it will be called to work for social reformation along lines laid down by Occultism. At yet another, to throw its energies into political effort. For those who take this wider view, the country they are living in, the circumstances which surround them, must largely condition the form of their activities. And since the T.S. is international, it can only suggest great principles, and leave its members to apply them for themselves. It can lay down Brotherhood, but whether that shall be cultivated and made practical by Individualism or Socialism, by Toryism, Liberalism or Radicalism, by Monarchy or Republicanism, by Autocracy, Aristocracy or Democracy — on all this the T.S. pronounces no opinions. It can only say: "Son, go and work for Brotherhood; think out the best way for yourself, and act."

It is obvious that since I entered the T.S., I have encouraged the wider view, and while I have done my fair share in spreading Theosophical teachings all the world over, I have also worked vigorously in outside matters, for education, and for many social reforms, as, in India, the abolition of child-marriage and the reform of the caste-system, and in England for the abolition of vivisection, for reforms in penology, for justice to coloured races, for the introduction of Federation into the Empire, and for a system of electorates which should weigh heads as well as count them. Since elected to the Presidency, I have endeavoured to organize the many activities of those who agreed with me in Theosophizing public life, so that no activity should compromise the neutrality of The Theosophical Society, while members should remain perfectly free to work in any of them; and the result has been a great influx into the T.S. of energetic workers, and especially of young workers, who find their inspiration in Theosophical teachings, and their happiness in translating them into practice.

Both these lines of thought, the exclusive and the inclusive, have their place in the T.S., and it is eminently desirable that both should be present in The Society. The first ensures the steady propagation of Theosophical teachings, and the permeation of all religions with them — the Theosophizing of all religions; the second ensures the application of those teachings to public work, the permeation of all public activities with them — the Theosophizing of life. While the T. S. was small in numbers and its environment was hostile, the first demanded all the energies of the little band of Theosophists. Now that the T.S. is large, and the environment fairly friendly, the second is necessary for the growth of its influence. The first prepares for the new form of religion — the second for the new form of civilization. They are complementary, not hostile. But let neither depreciate the other, nor minimize its value. Let each do its work, and recognize that the other has also its place and its work.

— *The Theosophist*, September 1917

SHOULD LODGES BE NEUTRAL?

(From an Address by Dr. Besant)

... Now, how far does this neutrality go? Clearly it does not mean that individual members of The Society are to be neutral. Every individual must be left free to press any point that he believes to be of value, and to express any truth that he thinks to be erroneous. You cannot limit the freedom of individual Theosophists intellectually, or in the field of action. You must leave them to find out their own way and to work out their own thought.

But what about a Lodge of The Theosophical Society? Should that be neutral or not? That is, I think, a matter for a Lodge to decide for itself. Personally, I think it is a healthier Lodge, where you get people of different thoughts to argue things out and discuss them. But I know of nothing in our Constitution which would prevent a number of Theosophists, who think along similar lines, joining together to pursue certain lines of study or action for which there is a certain basis of common acceptance. This has been done, and with very good results. Take, for instance, Ceylon. Colonel Olcott formed a number of Buddhist Lodges there, and now most of the Lodges there are Buddhist Lodges. You have to judge how you are more likely to spread thought, and whether it will be useful to form a Lodge for any particular type of person and so affect a larger number of people. There is nothing in the Constitution of The Society which prevents the formation of Lodges holding any particular truths or doctrine as a basis of admission to that Lodge. You can have, for instance, a Christian Lodge, if you like...

We have had in India Islamic Lodges, Lodges to which only Muhammadans or Mussalmans could be admitted, and I cannot see anything in that which is undesirable, if people wish to do it. A Lodge is autonomous and can make its own rules, and provided there are plenty of Lodges that are free, without regard to special doctrines; there is no reason why people should not join together along lines of research, taking for a basis truths on which they are already agreed. I do not think personally that that touches the neutrality of The Society, but The Society as a whole must not commit itself to any particular line of doctrine or of action, and thus commit its members. That is why I always insist that The Society is not committed to any views I personally hold, for I take very definite lines of action, but they commit no member, nor keep out anyone.

All subjects of education, of religion, and of social or political reform are clearly subjects on which we must remain neutral as a Society. We cannot commit ourselves to certain religions, educational reforms, or lines of social reform, or political thought — all these are clearly subjects on which we must remain neutral as a Society. A man may be against many lines of social reform, and yet be a good student and a helpful member of The Society. Nor could we commit ourselves to any political views, or schools of thought, because we are international, and the views of each Nation will be different. But there is nothing in any one of these schools of thought which should disqualify a person for membership in The Theosophical Society. These seem to me to be the broad lines that all should accept, and that is what I

mean by the Neutrality of The Theosophical Society. We must not commit ourselves to any particular line of thought or action *as a Society*.

— *The Theosophist*, May 1921

A RULING BY DR. BESANT

From the Minutes of the General Council 1925 (*General Report*, p. 333):

“The President ruled that it was not proper for the General Council, as a part of the work of the T.S., to authorize leagues outside of national boundaries as it might lead to political difficulties... She also added that she did not think that the Council should do anything to identify the Society with any racial disputes. In the end she remarked that it was laid down by Col. Olcott that individual members could take any line they chose, but that they must not involve the Society as a whole.”

SPECIAL CASES OF LODGES

From the Minutes of the General Council 1912 (*General Report*, p. 255):

“The President wished to know the opinion of the Council as to how far the expression of any special belief was legitimate in any Lodge corporate action, *e.g.*, an address. She doubted if any such expression were legitimate if even one member objected, unless a Lodge affirmed that belief as a condition of membership. The general opinion was that in an open Lodge the majority should not impose on a minority their decision on such a question. If all the members of the Lodge were unanimous, then only was it legitimate, not otherwise.”

From the Minutes of the General Council 1923 (*General Report*, p. 274):

The President wished to know the views of the Councillors... whether it were possible for her to sanction the formation of a Lodge, to be called ‘The Socialist Lodge’, in the Theosophical Society in England with the object of studying Socialism and discussing social problems in the light of Theosophy.

“The Council after careful consideration came to the conclusion that though the objects were in themselves good, the name of the Lodge was likely to be misunderstood as formed for the propaganda of Socialism, and might lead to the introduction of party politics and so involve the neutrality of the T.S., hence the Council did not advise sanctioning such a Lodge in the T.S.”

DR. ARUNDALE: THIRD PRESIDENT

FROM NEUTRALITY INTO UNIVERSALITY

For the moment we are slowly emerging from the stage of Neutrality. We are beginning to realize that Universality, with, of course, its obligations, is the positive attitude which must replace the negative attitude. But we are still far from the time when in the very name of Universality we shall be able to lead the world in certain directions. The nearer Adyar draws to every Section, and the nearer every Section draws to Adyar, the sooner will The Theosophical Society be in a position to use the magic of its wisdom to pierce the darkness with its light. Today, The Society as such cannot make any pronouncements save those in the words of its three Objects. It cannot denounce, nor can it extol, save in the most general terms. But the time will some day come when through The Society will come pronouncements which shall be both the delight of its membership and the salvation of the world. The Society is not only a body of students. It is also, in embryo, a body of leaders. The Society is not only a body of Truth-seekers. It is also, in embryo, a body of knowers of wisdom beyond the knowledge of the world. As soon as the power of Adyar flows backwards and forwards from centre to circumference, regularly, steadily, purely, strongly, so soon will our Society become the dominant note in the world's affairs, and its present task will then cease. The world will have become Theosophized, and our Society will move onwards to fresh fields and pastures new.

— *The Theosophist*, June 1935

ALL-INCLUSIVE BROTHERHOOD

Our brotherhood is not true nor is it really Theosophical unless it is all-inclusive. So it seems to me that it is certainly impossible for The Society to take any sides with regard to any particular opinion, with regard to any particular view which may happen to be prevalent. We have been asked, for example, to denounce Italy and to declare that Abyssinia should have the whole weight of The Theosophical Society behind her. That to me would be a very improper activity on the part of The Theosophical Society. We have been asked to stand behind the Douglas Credit Scheme as the truest manifestation of Theosophy in the economic field. There again it seems to me we have no mandate so to do. Our business is to stand for universal and all-inclusive Brotherhood and to encourage every member to study the great truths which are the precious heritage of The Theosophical Society and to apply them in the ways that seem to each to be best in every department of human life and especially to that end has the Theosophical Order of Service been constituted, so that individual members and groups of members may incarnate their understanding of Theosophy along the particular lines of interest to them.

I feel so keenly about this Universality of The Theosophical Society, that here is a home; a refuge, a happy home for all no matter what their opinions or who they are, no matter what they have done, no matter how the world sees them, no matter what their circumstances. The Theosophical Society is the home of all, and it must be maintained as such and therefore kept at its own splendid high, may I even say Divine level, so that people living in the heights of The Theosophical Society may be able to descend into the valleys and plains of the outer world and there through differences try to reflect that Divinity they know in The Theosophical Society itself.

— *Adyar Convention*, 28 December 1935.

THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

It is a grave mistake, and dangerously injurious to the well-being of The Society; for The Society to adopt towards any individual, policy or philosophy any attitude other than that of independence.

The Theosophical Society as such can have no more to do with one person, or movement, or policy, or philosophy, than with another.

For example, Dr. Besant's Indian Home Rule activities did in fact, however much she constantly made clear that she was working in this field individually and not as President of The Theosophical Society, disturb The Society's independence — less because of herself, doubtless she was performing her duty, more because of the timidity of certain members whose fear alone caused her work in some measure to become a danger.

Similarly, her views with regard to Mr. Krishnamurti and his work, which were entirely personal to herself, and to those who happened to think with her, also involved the neutrality of The Society, and have led to an entirely natural declaration by Mr. Krishnamurti that he has no association whatever with The Theosophical Society, just as The Society would declare, if need arose; that it has no association with him or with anyone else...

For a time, too, the advent of The Liberal Catholic Church, and the association of a number of a number of members with Co-Freemasonry, caused not a little rightful alarm even among those who may personally have been attracted towards these movements.

No less must The Society refuse identification with a movement called "Back to Blavatsky". Blavatsky is no more a creed than Besant or Leadbeater, *fons et origo* of our life though she was.

To go back into the more remote past, the Founders' pronouncement — among others — with regard to Christianity, and as to the conditions under which membership might be withdrawn, and no less their establishment of a formal relationship between The Society and The Esoteric School, have been events which in the first two cases at the time, and as regards The Esoteric School even now, have tended to affect the independence of The Society, in the first case towards religions, in the second towards the freedom of membership, and in the third towards the whole matter of esotericism.

It has been stated that the Masters have declared The Theosophical Society to consist of three Sections — the first, Themselves; the second, the Esoteric School; the third, the general membership. It has also been stated that the Esoteric School is the heart of The Theosophical Society. So may it be; but such declarations could never be allowed to have any binding significance in our Constitution unless and until, by the will of the members formally expressed, they were incorporated therein.

The history of The Society clearly shows that the moment there arises a tendency to associate it with any external movement or person its power and purposes diminish in intensity, so that before long such tendency disappears almost as if automatically.

Does not the supreme value of the service of The Theosophical Society to the outer world depend upon a perfect freedom from all identification or association with movements or persons?

I would repeat that when I use the word “independence” I mean that The Society as such is entirely free from all association with any person, policy or philosophy. I would use the word “universality” but for the possible implication that The Society positively favours, definitely endorses, every view held by every member. The Society’s universality or independence consists in its entire absence of discrimination so far as regards membership either for or against any opinion or activity on the part of individual members or groups of members, and only requires that there be adherence to the spirit of the Three Objects, to which every member subscribes on admission. The Society is an Ocean. It is not a river, nor a group of rivers.

— *The Theosophist*, February 1937

THE CONGRESS FLAG

A curious question was sent up during the course of the recent International Convention at Benares. We were asked why, among the various countries’ flags which have been sent to us as presents from the Sections, we do not substitute for the official Indian Flag what has come to be known as the Congress Flag — a flag adopted by an Indian political party, called the Indian National Congress, as the real flag of India.

Were we to do so we should be immediately plunging the whole of our Society throughout the world into local Indian politics, and might well become the centre of a most unpleasant controversy. For while the Indian National Congress is probably the strongest political party in India, there are also other parties, which might in their turn invent and demand our usage of other flags. For example, there is a very strong Muhammadan party outside the Congress, which, for aught I know, may not at all accept the Indian National Congress Flag. Of course, we should immediately come into conflict with the Government of India and all the local Governments. In a word, The Theosophical Society would be allying itself to a political party, and I cannot conceive of any more insane policy, however much we

might even go so far as to admit, which of course we cannot, that the Indian National Congress represents the Indian Nation as a whole.

The Theosophical Society, as a great international organization, cannot under any circumstances enter into the local politics of any individual country. As an international body it must function in every country under the auspices and protection of the Government as by law established in that country. It is therefore bound to regard the official flag of the country as the country's national flag, even though it may so happen that a substantial proportion of the citizens of the country may not recognize the flag. It is of the utmost importance to realize that The Theosophical Society in each country, in its various Sections, in duty bound to respect the prevailing Government and its laws, though of course individual members are free to do whatever they may consider right in the interests of good citizenship.

It should also be clearly remembered that The Theosophical Society exists and is able to do its work in every Section by the grace of the Government of the country, and the least each Section can do as an official body is to pay due respect to the Government which accords the facilities the Section enjoys. As we have seen in Russia and in Germany, the Government as by law established can at any moment kill a Section, and I feel bound to say that were a Government to find a Section of our Society taking active part in internal politics and possibly opposing the Government itself, it would hardly be a blameworthy proceeding if it removed the Section out of existence.

— *The Theosophist*, June 1937

THE GREATEST SERVICE WE CAN RENDER

My own position is that it is the present duty of The Theosophical Society to intensify the eternal and fundamental principles constituting the Life of Brotherhood without, as a Society, entering into any denunciations or criticisms. On the other hand, it is the duty of individual members actively to oppose such forms whereby, in their opinion, the Life of Brotherhood is flouted and denied. I do not consider it the duty of The Society to enter the political arena in any part of the world, or the economic arena, or any other arena. The Society renders its greatest service in pouring pure Life into the world, the Life of Theosophy and the Life of the three Objects just as they are. The Society's work is to drench the world with Life. It is the duty of every individual member to take that Life and direct such of it as he can upon the impure places. In this way The Society stands for the prevention of disease, while the individual member stands in addition for the cure of disease such as he finds around him and recognizes as disease.

Is this a cowardly attitude? Does this savour of pretence? Are members being hypnotized by such an attitude? On the contrary, I hold that such an attitude is the only attitude consistent with the accord of perfect freedom to every member to live according to his conscience and to work according to his convictions. I regard The Theosophical Society as an oasis of solidarity in the midst of a desert of conflict and difference. I hold that The Society is the one movement in the world into which any one can take his personal opinions and convictions and know that they will be respected. The Society collects

differences. The Society exists, as it seems to me, at all events in these days, to cause Brotherhood to triumph over differences, so that the great circle of Brotherhood remains unbroken even by the most tempestuous difference. Itself it exists to lay down and propagate the canons of healthy living. Its members must perform such surgical operations as they deem to be necessary in order that these canons may successfully be observed.

Our three Objects give us the great - the great principles of healthy living — Friendship, Understanding, the search for Truth. Theosophy is the Science of all three. And the glory of our Movement lies in an almost miraculous reconciliation between great enunciations of Truth and each individual's perfect freedom to approach and understand them according to his own individual and awakening genius.

— *The Theosophist*, September 1937

A PERSONAL STATEMENT

The time has come for me as an individual member of The Theosophical Society, not as its President nor in any official manner whatever, to sound a note of warning to my fellow-members as to the grave dangers which at present menace the whole world...

Wherever war is exalted, physical force extolled, ruthless imperialism fostered, the young fed to the machine of militarism, the conquests and the persecutions of the weak, be they humans or animals, justified as being necessary to the expansion and well-being of the strong — there should ardent Theosophists be active to resist such attacks on brotherhood and to promote the cause of peace and goodwill...

Those who have carefully read The Society's history will have noticed how from time to time most emphatic utterances have been delivered by the Founders, both officially as well as unofficially. Individual members and groups of members have also from time to time taken most emphatic stand for or against different circumstances occurring both within and without The Society. And my great predecessor Dr. Besant, and her distinguished colleague Bishop Leadbeater, have never shrunk from what some of us would call endangering the neutrality of The Society when circumstances seemed to necessitate some positive personal declaration. The strong neutrality of The Society has indeed enabled them to speak, and to leave The Society undisturbed, save for a few vitalizing ripples or an occasional clarifying storm. I am clear that present circumstances need such positive declarations...

Never before have I believed in the neutrality of The Society as I believe in it now. For I see with unveiled vision that The Society must be the refuge of all, the home for all, the protector of all, while I see with the same clear-piercing eyes that each one of us must be chivalrous warriors for the cause we know in our hearts to be the Masters' cause. So do you and I fight for our Right, even while our Rights may clash. So does The Society live above the clouds of warfare and the dust of conflict — neutral, yes,

from one point of view, but universal, leaving none out, with doors wide open to all without distinction of beliefs or of actions.

MY INDIVIDUALITY

Even though I be President of such a Society and have it in duty to preserve such universality at all costs, still must I fulfil my duty as an individual, as must every one of my fellow-members. Some may hold I compromise this universality by so doing. I hold a contrary view, or I should not do it. I hold The Society is the stronger, not the weaker, for my expression of my highest individuality, as I hold The Society is the stronger for such expression on the part of every other member.

— *The Theosophist*, December 1937

THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBER'S DUTY

I hope my fellow-members generally will approve the expression of my personal views regarding the world situation, not necessarily to agree with them, possibly to oppose them, but to approve their utterance by G. S. Arundale. They appeared in the December [1937] *Theosophist*. The call to me to give a warning against the dangerous spread of the spirit of militarism and tyrannical authority was imperative, and I had the precedent of my predecessor's identification in her personal capacity with the movement for Indian Home Rule. I still maintain the views I set forth in the September Watch-Tower of *The Theosophist* on page 477. The Society as such must ever be neutral and universal. But every member of The Society should be anything but neutral, launching himself with the insight of a fiery Theosophy-illuminated wisdom into the burning fray of evolutionary growth.

The President as an individual member must be no exception to this. And, as Dr. Besant so truly pointed out at Chicago in 1929 during the course of the World Congress, all danger of identification of any particular views with The Society as a whole would largely disappear if every member were more active for Theosophy and for The Theosophical Society. Where there is inactivity, or indifference, as Dr Besant said, there is danger of identification — the fault lying not with the ardent protagonist of certain opinions but with the lethargy of the rest of us. Our motto is "There is no religion higher than Truth." With such a motto, what wonder if many members seek Truth eagerly and proclaim it as they deem they have found it. And if any obstacle were to be placed between any member, whether holding office or not, and such search and proclamation, the very life and purpose of The Society would be in the gravest of danger. The neutrality of The Society is never more in evidence than when every member of it, whoever he may be, is free to seek his Truth and to express it. And the President must be no more than *primus inter pares*.

— Presidential Address, *The Theosophist*, January 1938

THE CHALLENGE OF THE WAR SPIRIT

I am torn between what seems to be an urgent duty — to cause a Society which stands for Universal Brotherhood to speak with no uncertain voice when its high purposes are degraded by infamous persecutions — and what is perchance the higher duty still, of remaining silent as a body, though calling upon every individual member to work; as he has never, perhaps, worked before, in the cause of that Universal Brotherhood which is so menaced on all sides in these days of darkness.

I make no apology for asking you to listen to the words of some of our elders, as, for example, that wonderful passage in Dr. Besant's Presidential Address of 1915:

"We who are servants of the White Brotherhood [*], who regard Love as the supreme virtue, and who seek to enter into the coming age of Brotherhood and co-operation, we can but follow the Guardians of Humanity, and work for the triumph of the Allied Powers who represent Right against Might, and Humanity against Savagery. The Theosophical Society, the Society of the Divine Wisdom, founded by Members of the White Brotherhood [*] and their Messenger in the world, must throw itself on the side which embodies the Divine Will for Evolution, the side on which are fighting the Supermen of the day. If by this we lose the members we had in the Central Empires, after the war is over and the madness of it is overpassed; it must be so. Better to lose our members than to lose the blessings of the Brotherhood, better to perish, faithful to the Right, than to become a fellowship of Evil."

[*] Editors note: The term 'White Brotherhood' as it was meant is a universal term, in the limited English language, that refers neither to race nor gender, but the white light of the spirit within everything and everyone, containing all colours of the spectrum, light and dark. It symbolises our commonality with the divine parent, the One Life, in which we live and move and have our being, that which connects all of us as a spiritual family, which is eternal; and which is greater than the ties of a blood family and beyond sex, which life after life are only transient attributes. The White Brotherhood are the Adepts, saints or rishis etc, the perfect human beings that are the culmination of all human evolution, leading to the immanent and transcendent Divine Life.

And those strong words of hers in October 1915 referring to the tearing down of the Theosophical work in Germany which "was to destroy one of the great forces working for progress in the religious world...

"To be neutral under such conditions is to betray humanity, for the fate of the world for generations hangs in the balance, and the neutral helps to weigh it down on the wrong side."

And heed a comment on her previous utterances in *The Theosophist* for October 1917:

"It would be well to devise some method the Society should decide for itself what it means by neutrality. Does neutrality impose upon it officially indifference to all the great questions of Right and Wrong? May it not, as a Society, stand up for Religion, for Justice, for Freedom, for Humanity? In the great struggles which usher in a new civilization, must it crouch in a corner silently, while the great and good are grappling with the forces of evil? When the World Teacher comes, must it stand aside and see

Him crushed for lack of help, pleading its neutrality, while Judas betrays and Peter denies? Neutrality in matters of varied religions, of party politics, of disputes on philosophy, of education, of social reform, is one thing; but neutrality on questions of the evolution and degradation of Humanity is quite another. When GOD and the Devil are at grips — to use the old terms — neutrality is cowardice, neutrality is crime.”

And again refer to the Presidential Address for 1915, wherein Dr. Besant declares:

“Were the war an ordinary one, it would not rend us apart, but in this war are in conflict not men, but principles: principles of Good and Evil in which a spiritual Society cannot remain in the safe and pleasant fields of neutrality, without being false to its fundamental verities.”

Here indeed are the issues made abundantly plain. Shall we say that the world-wide persecution of the Jews involves the principles of Good and Evil, and that our Society “cannot remain in the safe and pleasant fields of neutrality, without being false to its fundamental verities”?

In *The Theosophist* for June 1933 (Watch-Tower) Mr. Jinarajadasa tells us that “persecution anywhere and in any form is an outrage on Universal Brotherhood.” Shall or shall not The Society protest as such against an outrage on its vital First Object? Then again in *The Theosophist* for May 1921, Dr Besant postulates that The Society should be neutral as regards “any teaching or any line of action that does not controvert that basis [Universal Brotherhood] of our Society.” The Great War seemingly did controvert this basis, and Mr. Jinarajadasa declares that persecution is an outrage on Universal Brotherhood. If so, do we not again find ourselves being drawn to the conclusion that the persecution of the Jews in Germany demands from The Society an abandonment of its neutrality?

And did not a Master say in the early days of The Society: “Theosophy through its mouthpiece, The Society, has to tell the TRUTH to the very face of LIE, to beard the tiger in its den, without thought or fear of evil consequences, and to set at defiance calumny and threats. *As an Association* it has not only the right but the duty to uncloak vice and do its best to redress wrongs, whether through the voice of its chosen lecturers or the printed word of its journals and publications...”

— *Lucifer*, January 1888

Our President-Founder was never confronted by a situation such as now exists. Not in the political field but rather in the field of religion and social reform were the problems which faced him. And just as Dr. Besant makes it abundantly clear that there can be no official dogmas or doctrines, or teachings of any kind, endorsed and made official by The Society as a whole, so did Colonel Olcott hold, stressing the vital importance of The Society never taking sides in social and religious controversies.

In fact, while the neutrality of The Society has frequently been “compromised” by the speeches and activities of its two founders, of Dr. Besant, and of other leaders, in the sense that the outside public always tends to identify The Society with the utterances of its most prominent members, the only occasion on which The Society was actually committed by its General Council to an abandonment of its

neutrality was in the case of the official pronouncement on a World Religion in 1925. But this pronouncement itself was cancelled at a subsequent meeting of the General Council held in 1930.

So far, then, the General Council has never, save in the case of the quickly-to-be rescinded resolution regarding a World Religion, made more than a very general pronouncement on world affairs, as in its Resolution, 2 January 1935:

“RESOLVED that the General Council, aware of the grave menace of War, calls upon members of The Theosophical Society throughout the world to do all in their power to minimize the danger, especially by promoting active goodwill where there is a tendency to racial, national, religious and other antagonisms.”

To maintain this neutrality now — this is the question. I think I had better say at once that while, of course, I shall submit myself with all respect to any decision to which the General Council may come, and while my own personal inclinations are strongly for a great statement on the part of The Society in respect of the present awful tyrannies and awful persecutions, nevertheless I feel irresistibly constrained to come to the conclusion that it will not be wise or helpful for The Society, as such, to intervene by way of a official pronouncement.

NEUTRALITY IN THE CRUCIBLE

Why have I come to this conclusion? Because I do not think that The Society, as such; is yet strong enough to be able to discern unerringly, impersonally, which wrongs should, and which wrongs should not, be the subject of an official statement. If we, as a Society, denounce the persecution of the Jews as a crime against Brotherhood, where shall we stop? There are innumerable crimes against Brotherhood crying aloud for redress. Shall not member after member call upon the General Council to denounce in no uncertain terms the particular wrong which to his eyes looms no less large than, say, the particular wrong with which we are for the moment concerned? If we admit one wrong, we shall have to be occupying ourselves in studying every other wrong presented to us, and The Society will be in a constant state of agitation over the General Council's acceptance of this wrong as worthy to be the subject of a resolution, and its rejection of that wrong as being of lesser importance or in other ways being unfitted for an official pronouncement.

I think for the present it is still safer, as our President-Founder has said, to remain “above all these limitations of the physical man, spotless, immortal, divine, unchangeable,” until that deeper wisdom which shall come in the course of years enables it, while dwelling in the heights, to descend into the valleys in the dignity and in the power of a perfect peace.

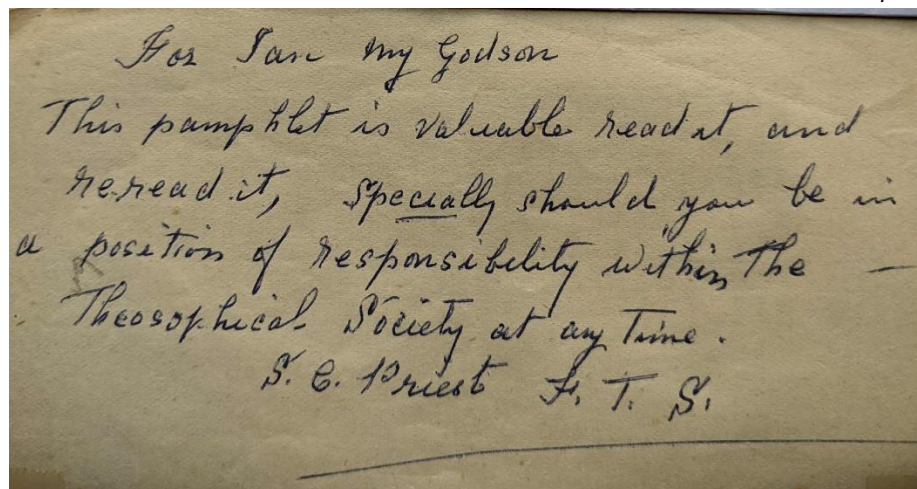
Moreover, I should like to add that I am not in favour of individual Lodges passing resolutions even on the subject of the persecution of the Jews. In India, for example, a Lodge passing such a resolution might well lay itself open to a demand from its Mussalman brethren to denounce what they

regard as the persecution of the Arabs in Palestine. There is almost as much feeling among our Mussalman brethren about what they regard as atrocities committed upon the Arabs, as there is our own feeling as to the persecution of the Jews. A Lodge which opens the door to one resolution may soon find itself committed to many another, when its main purpose as a Lodge is to spread Theosophy and be open freely to all seekers after Truth who accept The Society's three Objects. If a Lodge once becomes a centre for such activities in the outer world, the Universal Brotherhood to which it is pledged is in danger of breaking into pieces, so that it descends from the universal into the particular, from breadth into narrowness. It will become identified with certain attitudes towards public questions and soon with teachings and dogmas and doctrines of all kinds. It will exemplify a particular brotherhood instead of the Brotherhood universal.

But as for the individual, from the time of the President-Founder we have been "perfectly free to plunge into the thick... of the fight." And it has been overwhelmingly demonstrated to me that The Society as a whole, with only the very rarest exceptions, demands of me that I shall continue the practice of my predecessors in expressing my own personal views on such subjects as may seem to invite such expression. Section after Section has emphatically endorsed not only the right but the duty of the President constantly to acquaint the membership with his opinions on current affairs. As one General Secretary phrased it — The Society has the right to know what kind of man the President is in all the details of his views.

Of course, as has also been indicated, I must express my views as wisely as I can and with as little as possible of compromise to The Society.

— *The Theosophist*, January 1939



For Sam my Godson
This pamphlet is valuable read at, and
re-read it, Specially should you be in
a position of responsibility within the
Theosophical Society at any time.
S. C. Priest F. T. S.