

## THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETIES

### GENERAL STATEMENT<sup>1</sup>

**History.**—Theosophy in modern times and in western civilization belongs peculiarly and particularly to America. It came as a gift to this new civilization, which was destined, in its turn, to spread it from hence throughout the world. It was brought here by a Russian woman of noble birth and astounding mental attainments, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. This religion-philosophy-science was brought by her as the messenger of the guardians and preservers of the ancient Wisdom-Religion—that brotherhood made up of men designated in different ages and epochs as Initiates, Adepts, Magi, Hierophants, Wise Men of the East, Brothers, Masters, or Mahatmas, whose predecessors, after their training and initiation, sent Buddha to the East Indians, Confucius to the Chinese, Jesus to the Jews, and other world teachers to their various peoples. That she was a messenger and nothing more, Mme. Blavatsky maintained from first to last. She laid claim to no originality and disclaimed all invention.

For many years Mme. Blavatsky had been a traveler in the Far East. Ultimately she came in contact with certain men whose mysterious powers and profound knowledge caused her to regard them as Sages of the Orient. From them she sought and obtained instruction. After years of study, instruction, and trial, she was authorized by these Seers to go to America and there establish a nucleus for a Universal Brotherhood, and to give out to the western world so much of the Wisdom-Religion, or the Ancient Wisdom, as they had vouchsafed to her. As a result, on November 17, 1875, in the city of New York, Mme. Blavatsky, William Quan Judge, Henry Steel Olcott, and 15 other persons organized The Theosophical Society, with Colonel Olcott as its first president. The three chief objects of the Society, as stated by Mme. Blavatsky in her *Key to Theosophy*, page 40, were: (1) "To form the nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, color, sex, caste, or creed. (2) To promote the study of Aryan and other Scriptures, of the world's religions and sciences, and to vindicate the importance of old Asiatic literature, such as that of the Brâmanical, Buddhist, and Zoroastrian philosophies. (3) To investigate the hidden mysteries of Nature under every aspect possible, and the psychic and spiritual powers latent in man, especially."

Later, Mme. Blavatsky also formed what was called an "Esoteric Section." This was no part of the Theosophical Society as an organization, but was separate and distinct therefrom, and so it has always remained. Its function was that of a school, or class, made up of the more promising and earnest students, for the study of the profounder teachings of Theosophy. By direct authority of her Eastern Teachers, Mme. Blavatsky was its "Outer Head," and during her life retained full control of the Section, wherever it functioned. The Esoteric Section was at the beginning, and always has been, the heart and brains of the Theosophical movement.

In the Esoteric Section, as well as in the Theosophical Society, Mme. Blavatsky always stressed the forming of a nucleus of a universal brotherhood as being the most important of the three chief objects of the Society, and named the true goal as "that of helping suffering humanity." For those who, misunderstanding or ignoring the real purport of the third object, sought solely to indulge intellectual

<sup>1</sup> This statement was furnished by Col. William Oscar Gilbert, U. S. Army, retired.

curiosity, or to make sham occultism a goal, she had first friendly warning and ultimately severe condemnation. In the second object—to reconcile the different sects and religious systems; to bring religion into harmonious agreement with philosophy and science; by these means to banish religious intolerance and make for a spirit of true brotherhood—she ever maintained a keenness of interest second only to that devoted to the first. And in accord with these views the societies have no creed and no dogma, proclaim tolerance a chief virtue, and in every field of endeavor are guided by the hypothesis that “there is no Religion higher than Truth.”

In addition to the “Fellows” received into the Theosophical Society locally, there were also received into membership persons resident outside New York—in America, Europe, South America, Asia, Australia—who were called “Corresponding Fellows,” a term descriptive not only of their connection with the lodge but of the means and method of their instruction.

Early in 1878 John Storer Cobb, LL. D., the Society’s original recording secretary, was sent to London to organize the British Theosophical Society. This was accomplished in June of that year and was the beginning of the Theosophical movement in Europe. Later in the same year, Mme. Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott were appointed a committee to visit foreign lands and report to the Society. On this mission they landed in India on February 16, 1879, accompanied by two English colleagues who had joined them in London. In India they organized a considerable number of lodges. Mme. Blavatsky established and published a magazine called “The Theosophist,” and through its columns and by personal correspondence kept up her leadership of the Theosophical movement throughout the world. This committee never returned to New York to report in person. In 1887 Mme. Blavatsky removed to London. Here she gathered about her many enthusiastic and devoted workers, founded the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society, established an Esoteric Section for advanced students, and set up the magazine *Lucifer*, which, until her death in 1891, was her personal forum for Theosophical propaganda.

Mme. Blavatsky’s position in the Society was unique. At the organization of the New York lodge in 1875 she was made corresponding secretary. This was the only office she ever held until a year prior to her death, when she was prevailed upon to “accept the duty of exercising the presidential authority for the whole of Europe.” But to the members and to the world at large she was the Theosophical Society. Through her it was organized; through her the members were instructed in the new philosophy, educated in the world-old religion, tutored in universal brotherhood, schooled in the fundamentals of the hidden mysteries of nature, and taught not that man *has* but that man *is* a soul, with psychic powers and spiritual capacities as yet unrealized; through her the world was alternately shocked and fascinated by the boldness of her assertions and the profundity of her knowledge and intelligence; by her the Christian Church was astounded and perturbed by her acceptance of Jesus as an Initiate of the Masters, but by her denial of his Godhood in any special sense; by her the Spiritualists were put on the defensive because of her insistence that the phenomena at their seances were possible of accomplishment by natural means, but that spirits of the departed had no part or parcel therein; by her the scientists were aroused to ridicule by her assertions pointing out wherein nineteenth century science had failed to square with the Ancient Wisdom and by her indictment of science for its failure to recognize in the unseen world a field as fertile for scientific endeavor and as amenable to natural laws as is the world that is seen.

Naturally, Mme. Blavatsky’s word was law in the Theosophical world; and the lodges in different parts of the world were responsive to her utterances, without always making corresponding changes in their printed or written forms. Thus, the *Theosophist* for April, 1880, spoke of “The Theosophical Society or

Universal Brotherhood" and, later, of "The Theosophical Society and Universal Brotherhood"; and by the latter designation the organization soon came to be known. Likewise, in her direction of the movement as a whole, Mme. Blavatsky divided the work into sections—as the Indian Section, the European Section, the American Section—and soon the lodges in the different countries were so known and spoken of, and so spoke of themselves.

When Mme. Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott left for India in 1878, Gen. Abner Doubleday was made president pro tempore, while William Quan Judge was left in charge, locally, of the Esoteric Section, and of the other work in America previously performed by Mme. Blavatsky. At Mme. Blavatsky's death, Mr. Judge, through personal appointment previously executed by her, became "Outer Head" of the Esoteric Section throughout the world and continued also in charge of the other work in America as before.

With reference to the Theosophical movement outside of the United States, it is of interest to note that Colonel Olcott, until his death in 1907, gave particular attention to the work in India, and that Mrs. Annie Besant became the most active worker in Europe, and now, with headquarters at Adyar, India, Mrs. Besant is the international head of that branch of the Theosophical movement with which the American Theosophical Society is affiliated.

Until 1895 Mr. Judge continued to be the guiding spirit of the entire organization. In the four preceding years, however, after the death of Mme. Blavatsky, personal ambitions, as is usual in such circumstances, had aroused rivalries and had produced several seekers for the control of the Society. The strength of these proffered leaderships was tested at a general convention of the Society held at Boston in 1895, when, by a vote of 191 to 10, the constitution of the original Theosophical Society of 1875 was amended by various organizational changes designed to further a broader activity and by changing the name to "The Theosophical Society in America." At the same time Mr. Judge was elected president for life. The dissenting members of the convention, reenforced by about 80 other members of the Society, not delegates to the convention, thereupon repudiated the action of the convention and proceeded formally to operate as a Theosophical society as if under the unamended constitution, and under the name Theosophical Society, American Section. Several of the old lodges remained with this organization, or shortly thereafter joined with it, and by 1906 it comprised 69 lodges. Since then it has had a steady growth and in the current census reported 223 lodges, with a membership of 7,448. Three years ago its name was changed to American Theosophical Society. It is incorporated under the laws of the State of Illinois and has its national headquarters at Wheaton, Ill.

In 1896 Mr. Judge died, having previously named Katherine Tingley his successor as "Outer Head" of the Esoteric Section throughout the world. By virtue of this selection she forthwith became, also, the recognized leader of the Theosophical Society in America, although not until two years later was she formally made the head thereof.

In the meantime, believing, as she then stated, that the work of instruction and preparation had progressed to the point where it could profitably make way for an increased attention to the purely practical side of Theosophy, and that to accomplish this end there was need of a broader and more universal vehicle, Katherine Tingley perfected an organization named "Universal Brotherhood," having for its chief objects those of the original Theosophical Society, and providing an organization capable of encompassing all the branches in the world. She then proposed that The Theosophical Society in America should merge with this organization. The issue was discussed at length before the convention of the latter society called to meet in Chicago in February, 1898. At this convention 145 branches out of a total of 152, and having a combined membership of 3,700,

were represented. By a vote of 266 to 10 (14 delegates not voting), The Theosophical Society in America consolidated with the Universal Brotherhood, merging the two constitutions into one under the name Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society, and at the same time accepted, as "Leader and Official Head," Katherine Tingley and her duly appointed successors. Since 1900 its international headquarters have been located at Point Loma, Calif. In the same year its 218 lodges were closed and their local members enrolled as members-at-large in correspondence with the international headquarters.

As was the case in 1895, when the name of the Theosophical Society was changed to Theosophical Society in America, there was quite a body of dissenting members who repudiated the action of the convention and continued to operate as a Theosophical society as if under the constitution of 1895 and under the name which had been merged with Universal Brotherhood. This time the dissenters appealed to the courts. By decision of the Supreme Court of New York, sitting in New York County (Werner, Justice), it was held that the action taken by The Theosophical Society in America at its convention in Chicago, whereby it merged itself with, and transferred its records and archives to, Universal Brotherhood, was a perfectly legal act. Nevertheless the minority group continued to function as if it were still under the constitution of 1895 and under the name Theosophical Society in America. This organization did not succeed in attracting a large following, the largest numbers reported being 17 lodges with 199 members at the census of 1916.

It remains only to mention that other former members of the original society established in New York City, in 1899, The Theosophical Society of New York, Independent; and that still another body founded the United Lodge of Theosophists, with headquarters at Los Angeles, Calif. The latter society is not represented in this report; it claims to be rather an association of students than a religious body, and has neither constitution, by-laws, nor officers. Several local lodges in other cities, following the same form of organization and having the same name, maintain nominal affiliation with the Los Angeles unit and with each other.

**Doctrine.**—The ultimate base of Theosophy is universal brotherhood. As a science, Theosophy declares universal brotherhood to be a fact in nature; as a philosophy, it begins all reasoning with, and relates all conclusions to, universal brotherhood; as a religion, it bases the social fabric upon, and deduces its code of ethics from, universal brotherhood.

But it uses the term "universal brotherhood" not in a sentimental sense, or as expressing a merely human relationship. On the contrary, the term is used to express the broadest possible relationship of everything that is to every other thing that is; as a picturesque assertion of the fact that each and every thing in the universe—in the all that is—is related to each and every other thing; indeed, is not only related, but proceeds from a common source—a common parent, so to speak. And this common source of all things and the things that proceed therefrom are, according to Theosophy, one and the same thing: The one absolute Essence—the God of the Bible Who is All and in All; a Homogeneity during its Universal Night when every atom has been drawn back into itself and the biblical end of the world has arrived; a Heterogeneity during its Universal Day when by process of unfolding, or evolution, the objective world appears and the *creation* of Genesis is accomplished. In this universe which is One, as in our body which is one, no single part is independent of any other part or unaffected by it. Relationship, or brotherhood, thus becomes a fact in nature and is universal.

To the question, Suppose universal brotherhood exists, what of it? Theosophy has a startling answer: Evolution is toward perfection. The soul, the Ego, is incarnated in a human body to gather experience and forward its own evolution

toward perfection. It must incarnate not once but reincarnate many times in order to become perfect. But evolution moves as a whole. Before the next great stage can be entered upon, the full processes upon this globe must be accomplished. Each and every soul must have reached this goal. Thus, those who are forward in the march must await the laggards' arrival. Theosophy leaves no doubt as to the answer to the question, Am I my brother's keeper?

Theosophy proclaims a Deific Absolute Essence, infinite and unconditioned and so without form, which it would not mind calling God were it not for the present anthropomorphic, personalizing concept of that word; and it teaches "that the *root* of all nature, objective and subjective, and everything else in the universe, visible and invisible, *is, was, and ever will be*" this one Absolute Essence "from which all starts, and into which everything returns," just as all the waters throughout the land started—that is, were lifted by the sun's rays—from the ocean, and in due course will return thereto, each particle thereof still water and still retaining its differentiation from the mass.

Theosophy proclaims that man—not the body, but that which distinguishes the human from the brute—is a soul. It speaks not of the *Nephesh* of Genesis, translated as "living soul," but of the *Nous* of Plato and the *Logos* of St. John, "the word made flesh." This Soul, it teaches, is immortal. Says Mme. Blavatsky, in *Isis Unveiled*, "They [the sages of the Orient] showed us that by combining science with religion, the existence of God and immortality of man's spirit may be demonstrated like a problem of Euclid." In her mammoth work, *The Secret Doctrine*, this demonstration is to be found.

An important teaching of Theosophy is Reincarnation, the tenet that the Soul, or Ego (the real man), is the tenant of many different bodies in many different lives during its evolutionary course down the ages—a teaching that demonstrates Theosophy's idea of evolution to be fundamentally different from the evolution taught by science and feared by the church, namely, the evolution solely of what we call the physical universe. Theosophy postulates a double evolution—one physical and one spiritual. Soul evolution can only be carried on, and Theosophy says it is carried on, by reincarnation. Through the experiences of its many incarnations, the soul is able to progress to the stature, nature, and dignity of Godhood and thus to emancipate itself from the necessity for further pilgrimage. The soul gets nothing by favor, but everything by merit. Literally it works out its "own salvation with fear and trembling." Reincarnation, too, is the doctrine of "another chance." A mistake means not eternal damnation, but a chance in other incarnations to make up for failure. And as a corollary it may be stated that "original sin" finds no place in Theosophy. Reincarnation must not be confused with transmigration. "Once a man always a man" is the saying in the Great Lodge. This doctrine of reincarnation which produces such a shock to the western world is not claimed by Theosophy as its peculiar property; for it points out that a full half of the world believes in it, that the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, is full of it, and that Jesus, if he did not teach it, at least assented to it.

Closely allied with reincarnation is the law of *Karma*, or cause and effect, whereby is struck a perfect balance for merit and demerit. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap;" if not in the life in which the sowing took place, then in some future one; and thus Theosophy explains many seeming injustices and inequalities.

Theosophy combines the fields of science and religion; is a religious science and a scientific religion. It shows how the worlds have evolved, how man has reached his high estate, and what will be the future of the worlds and the future of man. It describes the septenary constitution of man, with its lower quaternary and its higher triad, thus demonstrating the duality of his

make-up and elucidating the eternal struggle between the lower and the higher self. It explains the origin and nature of mind and opens a psychology (including that of the subconscious) whose borders otherwise have barely been touched. It admits the phenomena of the Spiritualists and the "miracles" of Jesus, but denies the interposition of spirits in the one case and of the supernatural in the other, pointing out how each was accomplished by the exercise of natural laws; for psychic forces work according to laws as definite as those attaching in other realms, and neither set of laws can be antagonistic to the other; for throughout the universe the same laws prevail, being duplicated and reduplicated on successive planes; "as in the macrocosm, so in the microcosm;" "as above, so below."

The foregoing is a most incomplete résumé of a few of the teachings of Theosophy. Theosophy deals with manifold subjects new to western thought, has a new (yet old) interpretation for many things that are familiar in science and religion, and, with it all, is hampered by the failure of the English language to have developed, as yet, an ample vocabulary for the expression of the abstract or the description of the metaphysical. There is accessible, however, an extensive literature covering all the branches and aspects of the movement and its teachings.

**Organization and work.**—The several societies are organized along quite different lines. They maintain a corresponding difference in the lines along which their work is conducted. For information on these subjects reference should be made to the matter appearing under the special headings for each organization.

There are a number of orders and organizations—among them the "Liberal Catholic Church" and the "Order of the Star in the East"—which are associated in the public mind with Theosophy, due to the fact that some Theosophists are members of them, and because they have been founded and sponsored by persons whose names are, in the public mind, associated with Theosophical leadership. These organizations, however, as well as the young Hindu heralded by the "Order of the Star in the East" as a new "World Teacher," or as the Christ returned, are disclaimed by the great mass of Theosophists. Furthermore, they are in no way affiliated with, or sponsored by, any one of the Theosophical societies.

**Statistics.**—The bodies grouped under the name Theosophical societies, in 1926, 1916, and 1906, are listed in the table opposite with the number of organizations and members as reported for the three periods. The Theosophical Society in America, which reported in 1916 and 1906, sent no data for 1926. Certain changes in name will be noted, as referred to above; also a lack of any general statistics for the "Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society," which is not represented by lodges, but by unattached members throughout the world. At the beginning of this century the lodges then existing were closed and the membership enrolled as members-at-large in correspondence with the International Headquarters at Point Loma, Calif. No property was reported for 1916 and 1906 and Sunday schools were given for 1906 only.

SUMMARY OF STATISTICS FOR THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETIES, 1926, 1916, AND 1906

DENOMINATION AND CENSUS YEAR	Total number of lodges	Number of members	VALUE OF LODGE EDIFICES		EXPENDITURES DURING YEAR		SUNDAY SCHOOLS	
			Lodges reporting	Amount	Lodges reporting	Amount	Lodges reporting	Number of scholars
<b>1926</b>								
<b>Total for the group</b> .....	<b>224</b>	<b>7,503</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>\$121,850</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>\$141,205</b>		
American Theosophical Society.....	223	7,448	11	121,850	205	140,205		
Theosophical Society of New York, Independent.....	1	55			1	1,000		
Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society.....	( <sup>1</sup> )	( <sup>1</sup> )		( <sup>1</sup> )				
<b>1916</b>								
<b>Total for the group</b> .....	<b>175</b>	<b>5,368</b>			<b>1</b>	<b>1,176</b>		
Theosophical Society, American Section.....	157	5,097						
Theosophical Society, New York.....	1	72			1	1,176		
Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society.....	( <sup>1</sup> )							
Theosophical Society in America.....	17	199						
<b>1906</b>								
<b>Total for the group</b> .....	<b>84</b>	<b>2,336</b>					<b>5</b>	<b>78</b>
Theosophical Society, American Section.....	69	2,080					4	33
Theosophical Society, New York.....	1	90					1	45
Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society.....	( <sup>1</sup> )							
Theosophical Society in America.....	14	166						

<sup>1</sup> Not represented by lodges, but by unattached members throughout the world, reported as over 50,000. The International Theosophical Headquarters at Point Loma, Calif., comprises an estate of some 300 acres, which, together with the buildings thereon, is estimated at the value of \$3,875,000.

# THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INDEPENDENT

## STATISTICS

The data given for 1926 represent one active organization of the Theosophical Society of New York, Independent, in the city of New York. The total membership was 55, comprising 30 males and 25 females, all reported as over 13 years of age.

The membership of the Theosophical Society of New York consists of those persons regularly admitted to membership, who are enrolled as members and who pay dues.

There were no church edifices, parsonages, nor Sunday schools reported in 1926.

Comparative data, 1906-1926.—Table 1 presents, in convenient form for comparison, a summary of the available statistics of this denomination for the censuses of 1926, 1916, and 1906.

TABLE 1.—COMPARATIVE SUMMARY, 1906 TO 1926: THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INDEPENDENT

ITEM	1926	1916	1906
Lodges (local organizations).....	1	1	1
Members.....	55	72	99
Increase <sup>1</sup> over preceding census:			
Number.....	-17	-18	
Per cent <sup>2</sup> .....			
Expenditures during year:			
Lodges reporting.....	1	1	
Amount reported.....	\$1,000	\$1,176	
Current expenses and improvements.....	\$340	\$1,176	
Benevolences, missions, etc.....	\$100		

<sup>1</sup> A minus sign (-) denotes decrease.

<sup>2</sup> Per cent not shown where base is less than 100.

## HISTORY, DOCTRINE, AND ORGANIZATION <sup>1</sup>

### HISTORY

After the separation of the Theosophical Society in America from the original undivided Theosophical Society, a number of individuals in New York who "cared for neither organization or leaders, as such, nor for factional disputes," formed, in 1899, an independent society. Its objects were stated as follows: "To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood without distinction of race, creed, caste, or sex; to study and make known the ancient religions, philosophies, and sciences; to investigate the laws of nature; and to develop the divine powers latent in man."

<sup>1</sup> This statement, which is substantially the same as that published in Part II of the Report on Religious Bodies, 1916, has been revised by William C. Beller, president, Theosophical Society of New York, Independent, and approved by him in its present form.



Requiring the acceptance of no other authority or dogma than that of one's own judgment, the society expects that opinions will be the result of "investigation and not of blind credulity." It believes that purity of purpose is the way, and individual effort the means, by which one can attain wisdom. The universe is divided into nature and mind. The duty of man, which means a soul, is to raise the parts of nature in his charge, so that they shall be conscious in ever higher degrees, until nature-matter becomes conscious as mind-matter. His duty to himself is to become conscious in ever higher degree, until he is consciously immortal and sees himself in others, and others in himself, and to bring his own mind into alignment with the Supreme Intelligence of the universe. Accepting in general the doctrine of Theosophy, as already stated, the society adheres to its religious purpose and considers that the basis of the Theosophical system of ethics is the performance of the duty of the moment. It conducts free public lectures, holds classes, and seeks especially to promote the dissemination of Theosophical teachings. It has no branches or foreign missions of any kind. It has nothing to do with politics, economic questions, religious rites, dogmas, or institutions.