

# White Lotus Day

Annie Besant

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Note: Dr. Besant's Address was delivered in London in 1904 and has not before been published.

*May the Eighth is universally observed by Theosophists as a day of affectionate remembrance of workers in The Society who have passed over. White Lotus Day is the name which the President-Founder gave to it in "Executive Orders" published in this journal in May 1892, to commemorate the death of his great Co-Founder, H. P. Blavatsky, the year before. Though she did not suggest any particular form of observance, she regarded it as highly desirable that members should meet together on the anniversary of her death*

IT is an interesting and significant fact that on this 8th of May, all the world over men and women are recalling to mind those who have been labouring in The Theosophical Society, who have changed their place of labour from the physical to other planes, but who are still working for the same movement, still inspired by the same ideal.

## **A Universal Commemoration**

Early this morning, as it would be to us, in far-off Burma, they began the celebration. Then, across the sea to India, Adyar will have made its own welcome to the day. And then, across that vast continent of India, these celebrations will have been found with the mark which ever accompanies such remembrances there, that thousands upon thousands of the poor will have been fed, fed in the name of H.P.B. and those who have laboured in the same cause. So it will have come onwards into Italy, Germany, Norway and Sweden, Holland and Belgium, and France, on to ourselves, and a few hours hence on the American continent similar celebrations will be taking place, until all round the world the cry has gone, and until in far-off Francisco, and far down to the South in Australasia, the same memories have been invoked, the same gratitude expressed. Naturally it is impossible, save by medium of written words, that the workers in one country too far off to meet face to face with others, can be known by name.

It would not, I think, add much to your knowledge if I mentioned many names of Indian workers. They would carry with them no meaning to your mind, although the name Tukaram Tatya you will probably remember because you have seen his

name as the publisher of books in India. But it matters not that their names are not known, inasmuch as their work is living; and rather than speak to you meaningless names I would speak of the two hundred and eighty branches of The Theosophical Society that now stretch from North to South and East to West of India [in 1904—Ed. Note.]; I would show you rather their work than their names. You have there a growing movement of immense power, increasing rapidly year after year, inasmuch as some seven hundred new members joined us in the last year. And just as you see in a building the beauty of the building as a whole, to which every brick which is built into the walls adds its own quota of strength and of stability, so we see in the growth of the great movement in India the memory of the builders who builded and are building, and our heart goes out to them in other worlds and in this for the work that they are doing.

And so here in Europe where names themselves carry with them closer memory, we cannot but remember Piet Meuleman, the heart and life of the movement in Holland—brave, strong, loyal, devoted, working for the movement since she has gone away, as she worked for it while with us here. Nor can we forget here in England the name of Louisa Shaw of Harrogate; nor may we forget, when glancing over at America, the name that Mr.

Mead recalled, the name of W.Q. Judge, nor the name of Dr. Anderson who has left us rather recently, going after our brother Judge [1] in his exit, but coming back into the movement once again and giving his later years as he gave his earlier, to the building up of The Society in America. He, too, on the other side of what we call death, is working with even redoubled energy and vigour, and still working for his beloved West Coast, to which his heart was so closely wedded.

[1] For related comments see Annie Besant's article, "Theosophical Worthies, William Quan Judge" in *The Theosophist* June 1909 pg 351-4—Ed.Note.

It seems almost invidious, however, to name many names, for one is sure to forget the names of so many who deserve to be remembered; so we will only send abroad from our meeting here to those who have gone off this plane to the next a message of love which, without any names, will find its way to them and greet them on the other side, telling them that we show our love and gratitude most by working for the cause to which they gave their lives, hoping that we may so utilize the power that they can send over to us, that the movement may be even stronger by their passing than by their being still amongst us. And to that memory of love and gratitude we also add a word of greeting to those who are on their way back to us again, seeking to

find in new bodies in the physical world fresh opportunities of service, fresh work to do for Theosophy and for the world.

### **Let Us Now Praise H.P.B.**

And from those scattered thoughts to many belonging to many lands, we come back to the centre of our celebration, to H. P. Blavatsky, to some of you necessarily a name rather than a living personality. But from every one of you who are wiser, happier, nobler because she lived and died, should go out a message of love and gratitude undying. For if you feel gratitude to the parents who have given you life; if you give love to the father and mother to whom you owe the body you wear, what gratitude and love, then, do you owe to her to whom you owe that birth into nobler possibilities which, without her, might not have been?

Sometimes I hear it said: "Why speak so much of H.P.B., we who did not know her?" Because, without her, this present movement would not be as it is today; because she was the chosen pioneer, the chosen bearer of the torch of light; because into her brave hands the Masters of Compassion and Wisdom placed the torch which was to enlighten the world, placed the banner which, wherever it flies, cries aloud, as it were, by the voice of the

standard-bearer: "Here is the flag under which Wisdom may be found; here is the beginning of the Path which, trodden, will lead to peace, and service, and liberation." It is hers for all the years to come, to stand there holding the banner which shows the entrance to the Path; hers for all the centuries which lie before us to stand as the messenger who brought the message to the world. It matters not whether it has reached us through her lips as it reached many of us, or whether the message has come by written word or by tradition of her teaching, it is still the message that she was chosen to give, and therefore we owe undying gratitude and all the love that loyal hearts can give, to the one who opened for us the gateway to the Path to Light.

### **H.P.B.'s Monument**

Truly has it been said that H.P.B. is the greatest of our workers, and to me it was a most happy thought of her friend and secretary, George Mead, to put it as he put it to us today, that *The Stanzas of Dzyan* and *The Voice of the Silence*, with *The Secret Doctrine*, were the true answer to the report which struck her wellnigh to death. For truly no other answer could have been as effective, not a thousandth part as powerful in its effect on the world now and in all ages to come. The phenomena the most startling, the powers the most striking, the miracles (if we

choose to call them so) the most dazzling, which she might have wrought when raised from her bed of death, would not have been one-thousandth part as strong and convincing as that book which stands as her monument for all time to come, and as the exquisite poetry and the marvellous spiritual life which well out from the *Book of the Golden Precepts* that she was commissioned to translate for the Few.

It is to those books of hers which serve as our guides and text-books in our studies, it is to those that she will owe her most undying fame. Only those who do not know can undervalue *The Secret Doctrine*; only those who do not study can think lightly of that wondrous book. And although I cannot for a moment pretend that I have a right to add much in the way of testimony to the value of *The Secret Doctrine*, this I can say, that in every study I have made, if I have found it clash with that book, I have re-made that study in order to see if I have not somewhere erred; and wherever, after long struggle, some new facts seemed to emerge from the vast stores of nature, I have felt sure that the investigation was right and well carried on when I found it throw light on some obscurity. Each word we have been able to spell out of Nature's secrets has only increased our reverence for the wondrous sweep of H.P.B.'s knowledge, the strength of her grip, the profundity of her wisdom.

Not that for one moment I should dare to say that her book cannot contain mistakes, for she herself in closing it said it was sure to contain error. But it does not matter that here and there you may get error in detail, that here and there you may get blundering in the transferring to the lower plane knowledge that it is difficult here to clothe with words, if you find the whole book is instinctive with life, if you find great truths told there with a strength of grasp which never wavers, if you find the whole marvellous picture outlining before you the growth of a universe, and the growth of the worlds within it, and find it makes life intelligible and takes away all fear of death.

In the work she was privileged to do, where every power of brain, of mind, and of the higher bodies also was taxed in order to perform so gigantic a task, you must expect to find difficulty, obscurity, nay, occasional perplexity on the part of the seer herself. Enough if she was able to bring to us knowledge that none other in our time has brought, knowledge that you cannot parallel anywhere outside the mighty scriptures of the world. So great she was in the message she brought, so humble in the fashion of the bringing; always referring back to the Great Ones who sent her, claiming only to tell what she had been taught; speaking only to make the world know a little of that which lay behind, waiting for fit



students to investigate and unravel. And you may remember that in the beginning of *The Secret Doctrine* she quoted that famous passage: "I have brought a bouquet of flowers, nothing is mine except the string that binds them."

### **The President-Founder**

Nor should we forget one who is still living with us, the President-Founder of The Society, Colonel Olcott. He worked hand in hand with H.P.B., organizing as she inspired, building up on the outer plane as she breathed in the soul upon the inner, shaping the body as she helped the soul to incarnate in that body, father of the form as she was mother of the life, working in a cause greater than that of The Society she built. One in a vast line of thinkers and of teachers, hers is the glory that she was not the first nor the last, that behind her stretches a spiritual ancestry and before her a long spiritual posterity.

Mr. Keightley truly said, in speaking of The Society, that it should be a microcosm of the world. And how marvellously has this Society grown since H.P.B. transferred her energies temporarily from this plane! How it has spread in every direction! How it has grown in variety and power! How more and more, we can see represented in it the many phases of human temperament, and of human

thought! And the way in which we can best show our devotion to her memory and our belief in her Teachers is in taking advantage of the opportunities which are thronging around us, and in making The Society what she dreamed it should be, the true leader of the Theosophical movement in the world.

### **The Glory of Theosophy**

For Theosophy is a far vaster thing than a few doctrines picked out from ancient books. Theosophy is a far greater thing than that which we often speak of under the name, the teachings which are chosen out of the vast store of the Divine Wisdom. Theosophy means in the fullest sense of the word the Divine Wisdom out of which all Wisdom springs, not religions only, but all that is wise in the history of the race, through the whole of the nations over the surface of the globe. There is no Wisdom which is true Wisdom that is not a rill from that great source of the Divine Wisdom. Theosophy may claim as part of its manifestation every striving after light, as every manifestation of the light; every aspiration of the human spirit after the Divine, as well as the expressions of those strivings in the many religions of the world.

And it seems to me that the glory of The Theosophical Society lies in the fact that it has the marvellous privilege to stand as the pioneer of that

vast Theosophical moment over the whole of the world which is seen not in The Society alone, but in every revival in every religion, in every philosophy, in every new discovery in every science; for all light comes from the Masters of Wisdom, and it is not only in the one candlestick that we call The Theosophical Society. Nay, the justification of The Society is in the universality of the movement.

Wherever, all the world over, mankind is finding its way towards light and truth, wherever you find an inspiration stirring which is helping the human race onwards towards its great consummation, there is one of the signs of the Theosophical movement. We see it in all the streams of thought that are changing the face of the intellectual world. We see it in the line along which modern science is going, rapidly crossing the borderland between the physical and astral planes, and discovering problems whose solution will take it far beyond the physical plane. We see the Theosophical movement in the greater spiritual life, in the increasing depth of spiritual aspiration in the churches and the religions all over the world. That is part of the great movement behind which stand the Masters of Wisdom, and this Society is only that through which the great life forces are passing out to the world at large. That is our function.

## A Channel for Life Forces

Truly in our First Object are we called "a nucleus"; we are that and nothing more, a centre whence the life forces go forth, to organize a channel through which the life energies play, and if for a moment we forget our true function, to be a nucleus, to be a channel, and think that it is we only upon whom the blessing of the great Masters of Wisdom and Compassion rests, and that this Society is great in itself and not in its work, then we shall block up the channel. For our power lies not in what we are ourselves, but in that which goes through us to the world, not in the mere growth in numbers of adherents of The Society, but in the spreading of the ideas that it lives to propagate, in the turning of men's hearts to the Divine, in the opening of their minds to the Wisdom.

So that it is well that on such a day as this, while we begin with the memory of a Founder, we should close with a feeling for the Movement. Vaster than anyone however great, deeper than any thought however splendid, loftier than any climbing upwards of any mind however inspired, is this great movement of which we are privileged to be the servants at the present time. No better *karma* for any human being than to come within the limits of this nucleus, than to make a fragment of the walls

of this channel. But the privilege does not lie in our presence here, but in the life of the Masters which spreads out into the world, and this I have seen, I, who travel in country after country, and see the Movement in all parts of the world and in all continents: that wherever this Theosophical Society goes there is new life, new power of thought, new energy and devotion, new service of humankind. It wins adherents within the limits of the Church, and that Church gains new life. It sends some of its children among the teachers of a philosophy and that philosophy begins to inspire the world. It finds its adherents amongst the children of Science, and those begin to lead the scientific world, and to throw out the thoughts that are gradually made firm, gradually substantiated by ever renewed experiment.

And my belief in The Society, my belief in the work, my belief in H.P.B., does not rest so much on the fact that I knew and loved her, does not rest so much on my knowledge even of that which lies beyond the physical, and of those great Masters whose servant I fain would be; my belief is founded most in the reality of the spiritual life which is breathing through every part of the world, and which I find follows The Theosophical Society wherever that Society goes. It proves itself a channel by the effects of the life that pours through it, as the Sun in heaven

proves itself a life-giver by the light it pours down upon the world.

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Perish The Theosophical Society rather than be ungrateful to H.P.B. — AN ELDER BROTHER.