

THEOSOPHICAL WORTHIES:

William Quan Judge

By Annie Besant

The Theosophist June 1909 Pages 351-4

THE third name which rises before the mind when one thinks of the founding of the Theosophical Society, after those of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Henry Steele Olcott, is that of William Quan Judge, one of its Vice-Presidents. Others went before him in this office, but they left little impress upon it. In the earliest *Bye-Laws*, printed in October, 1875, we read: *President*, Henry S. Olcott. *Vice-Presidents*, S. Pancoast, M. D., George Henry Felt. *Corresponding Secretary*, H. P. Blavatsky. *Recording Secretary*, John Storer Cobb. After the names of Treasurer, Librarian, and Councillors: *Counsel to the Society*, William Q. Judge. A little later, these first two Vice-Presidents vanish, and in 1880 General Abner Doubleday is made Vice-President, and is so notified from India; but none of these became well-known to the Society at large, while, out of that first New York croup which stood round its cradle, the name of the young and then unnoticed lawyer rises up clear and distinct as one of the great workers and leaders in the movement which has since become world-wide.

Born in Ireland, his karma led him to America, and there, he tells us, "in 1874, in the City of New York, I first met H. P. B. in this life. By her request, sent through Colonel

H. S. Olcott, the call was made in her rooms in Irving Place. . . . It was her eye that attracted me, the eye of one whom I must have known in lives long passed away. She looked at me in recognition at that first hour, and never since has that look changed. It was teacher and pupil, elder brother and younger, both bent on the one single end, but she with the power and the knowledge that belong but to lions and sages."

He was beside H. P. B. through those early days, saw the exercise of her wonderful powers, and shared in the founding of the Theosophical Society. And throughout the remainder of her life on earth, the friendship remained unbroken, and during the later years she regarded him as her one hope in America, declaring that if the American members rejected him she would break off all relations with them, and know them no more.

After the departure from America of the two Founders, the interest for a time died down, and W. Q. Judge passed through one

of those terrible times of struggle and inner desolation, of gloom within and disappointment without, which are the destiny of all elect souls. Spiritual and intuitional, he was also extraordinarily capable as an organiser and a leader. But those qualities at first lay hidden, for there was naught to organise or to lead. He would go and "hold a meeting by himself" week after week, holding the lonely

citadel for the coming days. Gradually a few gathered round him, and the days of solitary working passed away for ever. He travelled over to Europe and knit closer his tie with H. P. B.; went on to India—at the time of the Coulomb conspiracy—and took an active part there in the defence of the Society. His return to America marked the beginning of the upward arc of the Society there.

Then came the revelation of what was hidden under the reserved demeanor of the young lawyer: an unquenchable energy, a profound devotion, an indomitable will. And these were held together by a single aim—the spreading of the truths of Theosophy, the building of an organisation which should scatter the seed over the land. During the succeeding years, aided by a band of willing and capable workers, whom he inspired with his own fiery zeal—Mr. Fullerton, Dr. Buck, Mr. Neresheimer, Mr. Spencer, Mrs. J. Campbell Ver-Planck—he built up a strong and admirably equipped Section, and made it the instrument that was needed for the work. He founded the magazine called *The Path*, one of the most remarkable of theosophical journals, and in this appeared some of the most admirable articles which have seen the light, the best, being from his own pen and from that of his most devoted disciple, Jasper Niemand. He wrote a few vigorous and lucid books, which are still sought after in the Society.

While at the height of his power and his usefulness came the cloud which enshrouded the last years of his life.

Between the President of the Society and himself had appeared an ever-widening gulf, and at last the President—having gathered a mass of evidence against him, charging him with the misuse of the Mahātmās' names and handwriting—deputed Mrs. Annie Besant to draw up the case and lay it before himself, the General Council and a Judicial Committee. Mr. Judge successfully defended

himself on the grounds: 1st, that he, as Vice-President, could not be tried on such a charge; the General Council, on the motion of Messrs. Keightley and Mead, on July 7th, 1894, decided that the point was well taken; 2nd, that any official decision involving the question of the existence or non-existence of Mahātmās would jeopardise the neutrality of the Society on matters of opinion. The Judicial Committee, on June 10th, followed the decision of the General Council on the first point, and refused, on the 2nd, to consider the charge at all, as to do so "would be a violation of the spirit of neutrality and the unsectarian nature and constitution of the Society." Mr. Judge thus, in his own defence, established for the future the full liberty of members of the Theosophical Society, and members have been left to guard themselves, by the exercise of their own intelligence and conscience, on all matters of opinion and all claims to superphysical authority. Some members, alarmed for the morality of

the Society under such conditions of freedom, brought forward a proposal for Mr. Judge's expulsion, on the ground of forgery, at the subsequent Anniversary Meeting at Adyar, but it was defeated by the interposition of Mrs. Besant, and no evil results have followed.

In April, 1895, the great Theosophist made a fatal blunder; he seceded from the Theosophical Society, leading almost the whole American Section with him, and reorganising it under the title of "The Theosophical Society in America," the old name for all Sections. Most, though not all, of his colleagues went with him, and only a few scattered Lodges remained to carry on the charter of the Section. Unfortunately for the future of the movement he had built up, Mr. Judge did not long survive to guide it. His health, long undermined by persistent dengue fever, was further assailed by serious lung trouble, and he gradually sank, passing away on March 21st, 1896, at about 9 a.m.

His real work, the spread of Theosophy in America, was splendidly performed, and his memory remains as a lasting inspiration. His strength has passed back into the Theosophical Society, which has nearly regained in America the point of numbers and influence at which he left it. Most of his colleagues have separated themselves from the leader he chose when his insight was clouded by physical disease, and remain as an independent

organisation, loyal to his memory. But he himself has come back into the ranks in which for long years he worked so nobly. The error has worked itself out in the vanishing away of the great organisation he left, which is now confined to a few scattered places. The good remains as a ever-potent force, incarnating itself in the spreading society which represents Theosophy in America. Let the ill be forgotten, and let only the good survive, for William Quan Judge must ever have his place among THEOSOPHICAL WORTHIES.

What we most need is such a theosophical education as will give us the ability to expound Theosophy in a way to be understood by the ordinary person. This practical, clear exposition is entirely possible. That it is of the highest importance there can be no doubt whatever. It relates to and affects ethics, every-day life, every thought, and consequently every act. The most learned, astute, and successful church, the Roman Catholic, proceeds on this basis. Should we refrain from a good practice because a bigot takes the same method? The priests of Rome do not explain, nor attempt to explain or expound, the highly metaphysical and obscure, though important, basis of their various doctrines. They touch the people in their daily life, a knowledge of their own system in all details enabling them to put deep doctrine into every man's

language, although the learning of the preacher may be temporarily concealed. With them the appeal is to fear; with us it is to reason and experience. So we have a natural advantage which ought not to be overlooked.

WM. Q. JUDGE in *The Path*.