

Practical Hints for Theosophists

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THERE are probably hundreds of sincere members of the Theosophical Society who are willing and anxious to help "the cause", who yet, from one hindrance or another, find, when they balance their yearly accounts, that they have not given a solitary five-pound-note to help the work which, as "Fellows", they must have so much at heart. This is naturally distressing to them as individuals, and hurtful to the society at large, in that it cramps its power for usefulness.

How can this state of things be altered ?

We all feel that it is humiliating to us as members of this Society to reflect that money is not forthcoming to carry on an energetic propagandism, to know that even the least expensive, most necessary, and most popular method of awakening public interest, is threatened with extinction for want of funds, and that the support which is received by the Society's English official organ, "Lucifer", comes from outsiders, and not, as it should do, from those who have sufficiently appreciated the importance of Theosophical teaching to solicit the privilege of joining the greatest reformatory movement that has arisen since Jesus of Nazareth preached to an unheeding world.

But it is want of knowledge, want of thought, that is answerable for the unsatisfactory state of the treasury of the Theosophical Society. It has been taken for granted that all members must know how much money is needed to carry on an active war against the crass materialism that is eating the spiritual life out of Western nations. Now, it is quite possible that very many have not known, that very many do not even now know, how much the cause is hindered for lack of pence.

It has been taken for granted that all members would have enough common-sense to divine the wants of the war chest. But common sense is a most rare possession. Possibly commonsense and thoughtfulness might have been enough to enlighten us, but we belong to a nation that is not slow to make its wants known, and when no one asks us to put our hands in our purses we come to the conclusion that the contents thereof are not desired.

So it has come to pass that this one and that one has had a subscription, while the Theosophical Society and its needs have been overlooked and forgotten. We very much reverse the children's saying: "Those that ask must not have", though we show our faith in the witty rejoinder, "Those that don't ask don't want".

But the ice has been broken, an authoritative statement has been made, [Page 15] and all members

ought by this time to be aware that money is urgently needed, and knowing this they ought to make it their personal business to see that the coffers are well supplied with the requisite funds for keeping up an active propaganda.

We will suppose, for politeness sake, that the means at the command of the "Fellows" is strictly limited. We will suppose, for the sake of courtesy that the majority of the members of the T. S. are poor; but it is a supposition requiring a great deal of courtesy to cover it, as the teaching of Theosophy in its present stage scarcely appeals to the indigent. The question, then, before us is, " How are poor 'Fellows' to spare money to carry on the work they believe to be of supreme importance to the human race? "

It would be an insult to suggest that anyone whose eyes have been opened to a wider range of vision, from whose heart has fallen the weight of hopeless oppression, that the seeming injustice of the scheme of creation as taught by the churches imposed, can be indifferent to the diffusion of that knowledge which has conferred upon him so priceless a blessing.

We dare not think our brothers indifferent, but we may suppose them to be poor. What can the poor do, and how can they do it ?

The present writer would be very sorry to say anything disagreeable, or to draw odious comparisons, and, being a F. T. S., may be allowed to think that the members of the Theosophical Society are, as a body, vastly superior to the members of any other society whatever, much more to the humble, ignorant "Salvationists", yet — from the self-denial of these poor, unlettered, ranting, rollicking "lads" and "lasses", who are, many of them, only half fed at the best of times, the "Army" received as the proceeds of this year's (1889) "Denial Week" no less a sum than twenty thousand and forty-one pounds. "How is it accomplished by those who only have bare necessities ? " was asked a pleasant-faced Salvationist.

"Well, you see, one goes without sugar, another without tea or meat, or may be without both, for 'Denial Week', and sends the money these would have cost to the General."

Self-denial is an article in the Theosophist's creed. Shall we show wisdom in refusing to take a hint from those whose methods, I fear, too many of us are inclined to despise ? What if we made our self-denial extend over the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year ? What if we took to heart this world's woes ? What if we desire its enlightenment as earnestly as these children of privation and toil desire, what they believe to be, its salvation ? Would it be necessary for our revered teacher to remind us that "the monthly deficits of "Lucifer" have been cheerfully borne by two of our brothers"?

We all suffer more or less, some of us are borne down by the complicated requirements, the senseless superfluities of social life. Might it not be worth some effort to introduce, even if only in our own immediate circle, a simpler [Page 16] mode of living. The saving thus effected in money, time, and health would enable us with ease to carry out our obligations to the T. S., and would, moreover, help to start a reformatory movement for the simplification of life that is a felt want in our day. Why do most of us find that there is such a small sum left when our personal expenses have been met to devote to public objects ? Is it that our tastes are luxurious, our palates difficult to satisfy, our vanity inordinate ? or is it

that we have got into a social groove and will not take the trouble to get out of it — do not look ahead to see whither it is leading us ?

Want of thought can hardly serve as a justification for a course of action that threatens to land us in practical, even though unintentional, selfishness.

Pleasant, social intercourse, dainty dinners, charming costumes are all very well in their way, but if they can only be indulged at the expense of work neglected, of unpaid subscriptions, of deafness to the call of duty, they cost more than they are worth.

But what is our duty, some may say ? Are we not to indulge our legitimate tastes and fancies ?

Yes, decidedly, so that they are legitimate. But let us be practical, let us compare relative values. Money is powerful, but it cannot be spent in two ways at once. What do members of the T. S. want to do ? If they wish to aid in the establishment of a universal brotherhood of humanity, they must themselves act in a fraternal manner. Now, surely it is no brotherly action to spend money upon personal indulgences while surrounded by starving thousands. And thousands are starving, not only for the food that goes to nourish the body, but for the knowledge that should nourish the mind. Others, again, and their name is legion, are kept in a state of semi-starvation for the want of that blessed leisure which alone can enable them to partake of the nourishment around them. It is not only the overwrought seamstress, or the sweater's victim, that pines in the midst of plenty, from sheer inability to snatch sufficient time to satisfy the craving of mind and spirit. Many a man in the pursuit of wealth has converted himself into a machine. He eats and sleeps to keep himself going, but all his energies are exhausted in the fatal, frantic struggle to get the wherewithal to keep up his suburban villa, clothe his wife and daughters, send his son to college, and leave behind enough to enable his womankind to perpetuate the useless existence to which they have been trained. And these same women, are they more fortunate? Have they more leisure ? Not at all. Their lives are consumed in a long, unceasing effort to make a hundred pounds do the work of two. To this they dedicate their lives, to this they sacrifice their health, their temper, or nerves, as the case may be; for this they become deaf to the cry of the distressed needlewoman — cheap clothes they must and will have — the plaint of the never-finished domestic. It has become a "duty", — might we not almost say *the duty*, to make a "good appearance", and many women are giving up all that elevates and consecrates a home for its fulfilment [Page 17]

Of late years we have heard a great deal about dress reform and food reform, but the motive power to give vitality to the movement has been wanting. As long as we are living for ourselves chiefly, it is of no great consequence that our time and our forces are wasted in one way rather than in another; but when we realize that the hunger and nakedness of the destitute are demanding of each one of us a remedy, then we feel that the time and money spent on our frills and flounces mean the shivering of some half-clad child, who might have been warmly clothed with that which has been spent upon our superfluities, the matter receives another aspect. The same with food reform. We may become vegetarians, and think that this is enough, but this we do for the purification of our personal system, and with no regard to its effect on our neighbours; if, being vegetarians, we require elaborate dishes that take long hours to prepare, we do little or nothing to solve the problem of how to get food to the hungry. Some small saving in the cost of living we do effect, but if this is balanced against a great expenditure of labour in the preparation of food, it should not be enough to satisfy Theosophists. Nothing but the least possible

expenditure upon mere personal gratification should content those who feel that to feed and clothe others is as imperative a duty as to clothe and feed ourselves. At least this should be so in the existing state of the world, when hunger and degradation, that money might lessen, are suffered by thousands. If to share one's last loaf is the duty of a Theosophist, surely it is a not less urgent duty so to order the daily life that the blessings of enlightenment may be shared with as many as possible. Duty, we read in the "Key to Theosophy", is "that which is due to humanity, to our fellowmen, neighbours, family, and especially that which we owe to all those who are poorer and more helpless than we are ourselves". This is the debt which, if left unpaid during life, leaves us spiritually insolvent and moral bankrupts in our next incarnation. These are solemn words, and it may seem to some that the little details of daily life are too insignificant to be treated with solemnity, but let such reflect that the noblest, most heroic life is made up of trivial details that win their grand total only when the final account is rendered.