

Of that Master an ancient Scripture
says :

There lives a Master in the hearts
of men,
Who makes their deeds, by subtle
pulling strings,
Dance to what tune he will.
With all thy soul, trust him,
And take him for thy succour.

So shalt thou gain
By grace of Him, the uttermost
repose,
The eternal peace.

It is to such high purpose, to
man's discovery of himself, that
Co-Freemasonry is devoted and is
dedicated.

THE MESSAGE OF PLATO

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I HAVE recently been reading a most illuminating book, *The Message of Plato*, by Professor Edward Urwick, recently Head of the Ratan Tata Department of Social Science and Administration of the University of London, and now, I believe, of Toronto University, who was once a pupil of Madame Blavatsky. The book is now out of print, having been published in 1920. I wish it could be reprinted, for nowhere have I come across the essence of the Platonic teachings so beautifully and so penetratingly put. If this essay of mine should catch the author's eye, I beg him to forgive me for here presenting what seems to me the digest of his lovely book.

Perhaps the first point the writer makes is that the attitude of Plato

to his great master Socrates was entirely eastern in attitude and conception. The Guru to the eastern "chela" is not merely the teacher, but, as the word implies, the "dispeller of darkness," the giver of a spiritual life which forms a for-ever unpayable debt. This was the attitude of Plato to his master. In everything he accorded Socrates the full measure of honour and responsibility.

And in his teaching too, as Professor Urwick so amply proves, his principles were fully in line with the ancient eastern philosophy, even to the use of certain conceptions and similes, so that one is forced to the conclusion that Plato derived his knowledge from the East. We know he journeyed in eastern lands, and H. P. B. tells us that he, was

an "Initiate" of the Ancient Wisdom, although his master Socrates never attained such a degree. Socrates used to say of himself that he was but a "mid-wife" to those fit for the Wisdom. He had never himself fully realized the goal, but he knew instinctively where it truly lay. Another proof that Plato was an Initiate lies in the fact that although he ridiculed and criticized practically every known philosopher and sophist of Greece, ancient and modern, he never criticized Pythagoras, but spoke of him with the greatest reverence and respect.

Professor Urwick outlines the eastern ancestry of Plato's faith in a masterly manner. Plato's account of the two Paths or arcs of life, the lower path of noble achievement in this world, a necessary preparation for the other, and the higher path of Religion, pure and undefiled. These are clearly the well-known Pravritti and Nivritti Mārgas. And the tremendous discussion in *The Republic* of the question of "Righteousness," often with narrower connotations translated "Justice," he shows to be exactly parallel to the Sanskrit "Dharma." For the Greek word *Dikaiousune* means just that, the "rightness" of the paths he is discussing for each stage of life.

Again, in Mr. Urwick's understanding, the whole story of the Ideal State in *The Republic* is not a rather dreary-sounding and impossible Utopia, meant to be re-

alized on earth, if that might be, but a more mystical field of the evolution of qualities in the soul, just as the Field of Kurukshetra in the *Gītā* is really the battle-ground of the soul. And he here relates the three qualities of Plato, who, with true insight, knows that they are the same in the macrocosm, society, as in the microcosm, man, to the three gunas of Sanskrit literature. *Epithumia*, Desire, belonging to the sense-perceptions only, and never getting anywhere, since the satisfaction of desire means but its continual rebirth, is clearly *Tamas*. *Thumos*, Passion, the active *Rajas*, is on a higher scale, for it creates ambition, the desire to excel. And just as *Epithumia* is capable of submission to wise control, so *Thumos* has the virtues of loyalty and fortitude. *Logistikon*, Reason, intelligence, is *Sattva*, and should rule the other two in the good man, equally as in the Good State. In this latter, the three qualities are typified by the three chief classes, the Producers, the Auxiliaries or Fighters, and the small number of Guardians or philosophic Rulers. Here, again, we have the eastern parallel in the three castes of Hinduism, the Vaishyas, Kshatriyas and Brahmins.

On the lower path, the Path of Pursuits of Ends, these qualities play their part, and rightly so. But once the Higher Path is reached they are transcended. The soul

passes "beyond the qualities," and a new and different faculty is now born and comes into play. This is the divine *Nous* of Plato, by which alone, he says, can a man really know the Eternal Good. His Ideal State, like Socrates himself, is always looking for those "rare natures" who are capable from childhood of being trained to discover that Higher Path and to tread it. One day all men must grow to find it and tread it. Upon that Path the soul is free. No compulsion binds it but the law of its own intense purpose and insight. When *Nous* awakens the soul will see its way, and no man can tread it except that soul itself. Therefore all education in Plato's eyes consists in so framing life that the awakening of *Nous* will become possible. Life for Plato has an eternally *spiritual* foundation, and all his education is directed towards spiritual ends. The soul must be free from selfishness, particularity, separateness, the Sannyasi of the East. To take a parallel from Christianity, the Sermon on the Mount has now become his law, the law of Love, of Christ-consciousness. "The law of the spirit of Christ hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (*i.e.*, Karma), wrote S. Paul.

Plato illustrates this by his famous allegory of the Cave. There all are held prisoners, viewing only the shadows of things. Plato wanted to get men to leave the cave, to "turn

round" and to see the sun itself, although such a conversion could not fail to be at first blinding to the unaccustomed eyes of the soul. For this Upper Path led to the true Goal of Life, the supreme Good, the *summum bonum* of all philosophy and thought. The Power which enabled a man to tread it lay asleep within all of us. None of the powers of ordinary life, however good or perfect, could bring a man into relationship with God. Beyond the qualities, beyond even the reason, the intelligence, lay the divine *Nous*, a word hard to define. Perhaps we would call it today the divine Intuition. And Plato's method of arousing it was by a strenuous process of dialectics. Fundamentally, Plato's road was the Path of Wisdom. To him the Way of Devotion or Service, necessary as these were, were inferior paths, merging at last into the *Gñāna* Path which was so essentially his.

Many things in his writings remind one of the saying of Mr. Krishnamurti: His insistence that the Upper Path is a "Pathless Land," fit only for strong souls, because to tread it one must renounce all personal ties, interests and aims. The Path of Pursuit of Ends is the path of self-development. Here, on this Upper Path, there is no longer any self to develop. With this thought in mind one can understand the extraordinary

regulations in Plato's Ideal State with regard to the community of wives and children. This was not a State. It was a symbol of the selfless state of the perfecting man.

His fierce and subtle process of dialectics also remind one strikingly of Mr. Krishnamurti's system of argument and discussion. The rungs of the ladder which leads to the "pathless land" were forged by the intense exercise of the intelligence. Again, here we are reminded of H.P.B.'s description of the way Adepts are made, that they "become, they are not made," and they become so by virtue of "self-devised and self-initiated" methods, "thus ascending through every degree of intelligence."

But the most interesting part to me is Plato's description of the divine Nous, the power by which alone a man may "see God," and become eternally happy and at rest. He does not minimize the difficulties of the way, nor the dangers to be encountered. Until a man has reached the Upper Road, he is always liable to fall, to degenerate, however noble in life. The qualities will drag him down unless he never fails in vigilance and will. All things must pass. God alone is eternal, and the knowledge of God alone sure and everlasting. When the philosopher has found this supreme goal, he must come back to the dark world of the Cave from which

he has escaped, to pay back the debt to Nature and to others who helped him, by teaching, ruling, serving. But the science of this world, the philosophy, the politics, were not real to Plato until they were lit by the truth of a diviner world. To him philosophy was the pursuit of the Eternal Good, not an arrangement of pleasing conception, and so he brought to that quest an ardour, a vision, a consecration, which can only be called religious. He cannot describe that upper air. When his young interlocutors ask he can but reply that no one would be able to follow him did he essay such an impossible description. Like all knowers of Truth, he could never explain intellectually what he had found, for there are no parallels in words, or even in mental conceptions, which can rightly tell us. Can a rose-bud know what is the sunshine to which its heart will open? Can a child know what is that world into which it will presently be born? But we can know that there is a road, and tread it with loyalty and faith. When the awakening comes the Light will be then our sole guide, our only path through the Trackless Land.

In Plato's Ideal State, which really means the training of the soul for the Upper Path, poetry and the arts take a very secondary place, are indeed described by him as hindrances upon the Path. For

to him these are not reality but semblances, beautiful indeed, but not real. This seems strange in Plato the poet, the lover of the beautiful. That has its place on the lower reaches, but the white austere peak of the Ultimate Knowledge asks us to put aside even that, for all things, all phenomena, must perish save His Face, the Great Noumena behind the universe. He whose soul is called by the Supreme Good must perforce essay that austere and terrible—in seeming—path, for he cannot do otherwise. Here I am reminded of Krishnaji's prose-poem, *The Path*. In glowing, often terrible words, Krishnaji describes that austere impersonal Lover who held his soul, in spite of misery and terror, and his sole allegiance, until the Day came in which his soul was born to bliss for evermore. A Resurrection is always preceded by a Crucifixion, a dayspring by a dark night of the soul. To such an austere, awesome, lonely path does Plato point us. But we know that the final path, the snowy peak, is always lonely. No one, not even the dearest of brothers, can tread it with us or for us, however many and various are the preliminary

paths that arise from the mountain sides. When the time comes for the final flight of the alone to the Alone, there is nothing in the universe but God and the soul. Naked stands the soul before the naked Christ. But when once again the soul turns from the Eternal Noumena to the never-ending phenomena of lower worlds, it finds that in all it loved and had ever loved there was the Eternal Lover, God.

Thus Plato's *Republic* is the Kingdom of the Soul. Did he hope that it would ever exist on earth? He does not tell us truly, though he does tell us that it could only be possible when men are willingly ruled by God-illuminated men. But I think he meant it chiefly as a rule and as an ideal for the aspiring soul in man. His own words seem to bear this out :

In heaven there is laid up a pattern of it, methinks, (the Platonic world of Divine Ideation or Archetypes), which he who desires may behold, and beholding may set his own house in order. But whether such an one exists, or ever will in fact exist, is no matter ; for he will live after the manner of that city, having nothing to do with any other.

For men's wisdom increases with reference to what lies before them.

EMPEKOKLES