

THE EDUCATIONAL WORK OF THEOSOPHISTS

I. OLCOTT PANCHAMA FREE SCHOOLS

THE Panchamas, belonging to what is euphemiously called the Pancham:



FIG. 217

MISS S. E. PALMER

or "fifth" caste, are outside the pal of Hindu social and religious organization. They are "untouchables," tha is, contact with them pollutes a cast man. There are sixty millions of then in India, and their lot is not only extreme poverty but also complete social ostracism. In 1894 Colonel Olcott started a free school for imparting elementary education in Tamil, coupled with instruction in conversational English, fo the Panchama children near the T. S. Head quarters at Adyar. The first school building, Olcott School, was a mud hut and the work began with a teacher and 45 children. Dr. W. A. English became the first Superintendent of the school. The school grew in strength, and soon a brick hut with tiled roof was erected. In June 1896, Sir Arthur Havelock, the Governor of Madras, visited the school and this visit of the Governor drew the attention of the educational authorities

of Madras to the existence of the school.

In 1898 another school, called the H. P. B. School, in honour of H. P. B., was opened at Kodambakam, about seven and a half miles from Adyar. In the same year, Miss S. E. Palmer came from America and became the Superintendent of both the schools.



FIG. 218

MRS. N. A. COURTWRIGHT

A third school named Damodar School, after Damodar K. Mavalankar, was started at Teynampet with 27 children on October 2nd, 1899. Mylapore was the next place, where a fourth school was opened in September, 1901, bearing the name of the Tamil saint Tiruvalluvar. Mrs. N. A. Courtwright of America worked for the welfare of the schools when Miss S. E. Palmer left for work in Benares in 1901. She introduced Kindergarten teaching into the schools, with a view to attracting more children, and there was a gradual increase in

the strength of the schools.

In 1905 all the schools were brought under the management of a Board of eight members. It was decided to call the schools "Olcott Panchama Free Schools". A fifth school, the Annie Besant School, was opened at Krishnampet in May, 1906 at the suggestion of the Madras Municipality, mainly for the uplift of the scavengers of the locality. The Municipality gave free use of two huts, and also a small contribution of Rs. 240. The schools have been maintained from donations mainly sent by Theosophists outside India.

In 1907 there was a heavy deficit, and it was suggested that the schools should be handed over to the Madras Corporation. But the Board of Management decided otherwise, and sent out an appeal to Theosophists for financial assistance. In 1909 the Municipality of Madras, on the request of the Board, built a brick shed to accommodate the growing number of students of "Besant Free School," and in 1914 put up extensions both to Damodar and Annie Besant Free Schools.

All the schools have been

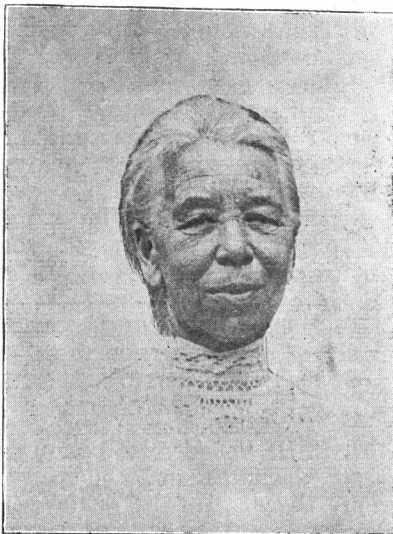


FIG. 219

MISS C. KOFEL

carried on under great financial difficulties by those who are interested in the uplift of the unfortunate Panchama children. Miss C. Kofel worked faithfully for the schools from 1907 till she retired in 1921. Miss E. Orr carried on the work in the same spirit for two years. The present Superintendent is M. Krishna Sastri. The strength of the schools has always been increasing. It is encouraging that the schools have been recognised as model elementary free schools by the educational authorities of the city. Sir Harcourt Butler and the Director-General of Education in Japan both visited the schools, and remarked that they were worthy to be copied by other cities. In 1913 Lord Pentland, the Governor of Madras, visited the schools and left an encouraging remark in the Visitors' Book. "It has been a great pleasure to me to visit this school, and to see the energy and resource which characterise the management, as well as the 'bright and happy pupils.'"

The upkeep of these schools is very heavy, and the annual expenditure amounts to nearly Rs. 13,000. Madras Municipality gives Rs. 3,500 a year, and the rest has to be realised from donations. The schools have been an abiding memorial to Colonel Olcott's tenderness and pity for the down-trodden and the oppressed. His action in founding these schools for the "untouchables" has opened out to them new careers, as English speaking employees to Europeans and to those Indian Theosophists for whom "untouchability" does not exist. He has thereby given them not only a better economic status, but also a self-respect gained from education.

II. EDUCATION IN INDIA

Besides the educational activities of Colonel H. S. Olcott, in Ceylon among the Buddhists and in South India among the Panchamas, the Theosophical Society has directly or indirectly been instrumental in a considerable amount of educational activity in India. The foremost worker and pioneer in this field has been the present President of the T. S., Dr. Annie Besant. On coming to India in 1893, she found that the purely secular education provided by the Government institutions had led educated Indians to that state of reckless and dry agnosticism, from the darkness of which she had herself emerged, helped by the touch of Theosophy.

Naturally attracted to the deep philosophy of Hinduism, she made her home at Benares, and lectured throughout the length and breadth of India on the religious education of the youths and maidens of the country. She was able to impress on the minds of Hindu leaders the need for the establishment of institutions, where religious instruction should be provided, and a small school with the two highest classes was started in a small house in the city of Benares in 1898. Among the pioneers who helped Dr. Besant were Babu Bhagavan Das, Babu Upendra Nath Basu, Babu Gyanendra Nath Chakravarti, Pandit Cheda Lal, Mr. Bertram Keightley, Dr. Arthur Richardson, Miss Lilian Edger and a few others.

Within a year of the establishment of the school, *i.e.*, in 1899, the Maharajah of Benares donated a big block of buildings and a large piece of land, to the value of over Rs. 50,000, in the outskirts of the city. The school was soon transferred to these palatial and beautiful buildings, and new classes were opened in the school and the two Intermediate classes were also opened. Dr. Richardson was the first Principal, and Mr. Harry Banbery, the first Headmaster. To evoke an interest in the essentials of Hinduism, Dr. Besant herself gave a course of lectures in the autumn of each year on some topic of Hindu mythology, ethics or philosophy. The first course of lectures was delivered in the autumn of 1899, and the *Mahabharata*, *Hindu Ideals*, *Shri Rama Chandra the Ideal King* were among the subjects taken up in the following years.

The fame of the Central Hindu College, as it was called, soon grew, and it was steadily increased by the *Central Hindu College Magazine*. Students began to flock from all parts of India, and a new type of culture, which was at once patriotic and religious, began to grow and spread from this institution. In 1903, Mr. G. S. Arundale and his aunt Miss Francesca Arundale came to Benares. Mr. Arundale came as Professor, and was later Head Master, and still later Vice-Principal. He became Principal on the death of Dr. Arthur Richardson. Miss Arundale set about the establishment of a Girls' School, and it was soon established with Miss Arundale as Principal.

The work of Mr. Arundale in the educational world in India has been invaluable. He introduced new ideals in education, and inculcated the spirit of dedication so necessary in the field of education. From 1908 to 1913, the institution grew in numbers and influence, and the movement for the establishment of the Hindu University was inaugurated.

It was during this period that a large number of young Indian workers gathered round Mr. Arundale, and the spirit of Theosophy and true Brotherhood was strongly felt in the Central Hindu College. The institution was in due course handed over to the authorities of the Hindu University, after its founding.

To carry on the work of Theosophical education, the Theosophical Educational Trust was established in 1913 as a registered body, with Dr. Besant as the President and about twenty other members. Under its auspices a Theosophical School for boys, and a Theosophical School for girls were established at Benares, and several other schools, which were being conducted in various parts of the country by Theosophists, were handed over to the Trust, chief among them being those at Madanapalle, Bankipur, Bhavnagar, Prodattur and Coimbatore. Mr. Ernest Wood, who was Secretary of the Trust, did very valuable work in collecting funds and in supervising the working of these institutions. Thus the second phase of the work of Theosophical Education was that of diffusion. The published Annual Reports of the Trust give ample testimony to the value of the work done. These institutions became rapidly popular, for they followed the traditions of the C. H. C., but had the advantage of not being confined to one religion, as was but natural under a Theosophical Trust.

In the meanwhile, the national movement for Home Rule or Swaraj had grown in strength, largely due to the vigorous work of Dr. Besant, and it was felt that the Universities, which were dominated by officials of the Government, interfered too much with methods of education of the young, which had in view the making of patriotic citizens. As a result of this general feeling in the country, and as a protest in favour of the handing over of the educational machinery of the country into the hands of Indians, the Society for the Promotion of National Education was established, and the Theosophical Educational Trust handed over most of its institutions to the S. P. N. E. for management, although ownership of the land and buildings remained with the T. E. T. Although the S. P. N. E. was a Society which included many non-Theosophists, the largest part of the real work of education was done by Theosophists, both in the field of administration and instruction. The S. P. N. E. established a National University at Adyar, with literature, science, agriculture, commercial and teachers training departments, and the work flourished for six years. During its brief life-time, it sent out graduates fully imbued with the spirit of Service and Sacrifice.

On the introduction of the Reforms in India, and the consequent handing over of the portfolio of Education to an Indian Minister, it was felt that the work of the S. P. N. E. was over, and in April, 1924, the S. P. N. E. handed back all the institutions, and transferred all their assets and liabilities, to the Theosophical Educational Trust.

The work of the Trust has begun again with full vigour, and the Trust now manages the Boys' School and Girls' School and College at Benares, the College and School at Madanapalle, the College and School at Adyar, and the Girls' School at Mylapore, Madras. The other institutions which work under the auspices of the Trust are the Boys' Schools

at Bankipore, Bhavnagar and Shuklatirth in Gujerat, and the Girls' Schools at Kumbhakonum and Coimbatore. There is also a Village Montessori and Industrial School in Adyar.

During the last year, Mr. J. Krishnamurti has been working vigorously and collecting funds for the establishment of a Theosophical University in Madanapalle, but that is still in the womb of the future. However, the value of Theosophical Education is recognised by all, and the establishment of a real Theosophical and International University will be but the culmination and a fruition of the work so far done.

III. EDUCATION IN CEYLON

Theosophists have been very closely connected for many years with education in Ceylon. The first Buddhist Schools of the Island were started by Colonel Olcott in 1880. Under the impetus of his enthusiasm for Buddhism, an educational movement under the direction of Buddhists was started in Ceylon. Many Theosophists from other lands came and helped the movement, among them being C. W. Leadbeater, who founded a small Boy's School, which slowly expanded till it is the present Ananda College with over a thousand boys. Other Theosophists who have helped as teachers or in the management of Buddhist Schools and Colleges are Charles Powell, Dr. J. Bowles Daly, H. Banbery, Rev. J. Tuyssul Davies, C. Jinarājadāsa, M. U. Moore, and Fritz Kunz. Mr. F. W. Woodward was long associated with education in Ceylon as principal of Mahinda College, Galle. After his departure, two other Theosophists, F. G. Pearce and W. T. Troup, became principals.

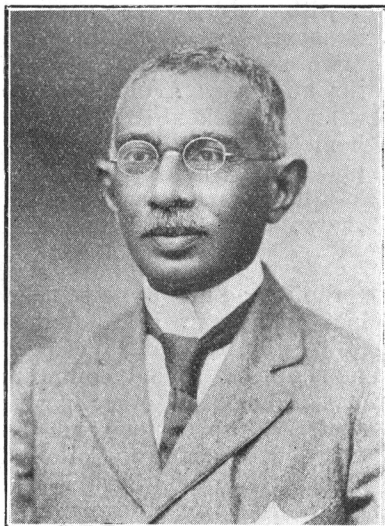


FIG. 220
PETER DE ABREW



FIG. 221
MRS. M. MUSÆUS HIGGINS

The management of Buddhist schools and colleges has been completely in the hands of the Buddhists of the Island, and the Theosophists

have merely given their assistance to the best of their ability to a much-needed educational effort.

A most valuable piece of work for Sinhalese girls was that begun in 1891 by two devoted Theosophists, Mr. Peter de Abrew, and Mrs. Marie Musæus Higgins. A small school named after Princess Sanghamitta, daughter of the Emperor Asoka, who brought the famous Bo-Tree to the Island, was begun by these two workers. Very soon the small day school developed into a boarding school. The school has steadily grown, adding building after building. In 1907, a department was added for the training of teachers. In 1918 the school was raised to the rank of a College, and it now provides some of the finest teachers for Girls' Schools in the Island. Many Theosophists have been associated with Mrs. Higgins, among them being Mrs. E. Pickett and Mrs. Preston from Australia, and Miss Kofel from Switzerland.

IV. EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

Theosophical education in England has run along two lines; first, the establishment of schools and educational institutions where a free hand could be given to the practical working out of Theosophical ideals, and experiments made in new educational methods; and second, the endeavour to permeate all existing Branches of Education with Theosophical ideas. Two bodies were formed in 1915 to carry out these respective aims, the Theosophical Educational Trust and the Theosophical Fraternity in Education.

The Theosophical Educational Trust with which the names of Dr. G. S. Arundale, Mrs. B. Ensor, Mrs. J. Ransom, Mr. H. Baillie-Weaver and others are associated, began by opening two schools, the Garden City Co-Educational School at Letchworth, (afterwards known as Arundale School) with Dr. Armstrong Smith as Principal, and Brackenhill School at Bromley, Kent, for children who were homeless, or in worse care. Various other English schools in different places came under the control of the Trust, and in 1918 King Arthur Co-Educational Boarding School near Edinburgh, and Moray School in Glasgow, the latter a day school for young children, were started.

The work at Letchworth grew very rapidly, and a new school, St. Christopher, with Miss I. King as Principal opened in 1919, Arundale House being now used for boarders. In 1922 it was decided to centralize the work of the Trust at Letchworth and build a school community round St. Christopher, and accordingly those schools in other parts of England which had not already been transferred to Letchworth were given up, and all efforts were concentrated there. A Training College for teachers, of which Miss Violet Potter is Principal, and a theatre where good plays and lectures are given, are two of the latest developments. The community has always attracted much attention from those interested in pioneer educational work, and the difficulty has been to take in all the children whose parents were desirous of placing them there. Self-Government and the adoption of individual time-tables have been two of the most successful changes from conventional methods of education.

The Theosophical Fraternity in Education was formed in 1915. It has diligently pursued propaganda in existing educational fields, published books and pamphlets and organised summer schools and international congresses. At the first Congress held at Calais in 1921, the new Education Fellowship was started for those who believed in the new principles of education, but were unable to accept the Theosophical foundation on which they rested. A quarterly international magazine, *The New Era* is published in English, French, German, Italian and Bulgarian.

V. EDUCATION IN JAVA

The Nederlandsche Indische Theosofische Bond voor Opvoeding en Onderwijs was established during the Convention of the Indonesian Section T. S., at Soerakarta, April 1920. It now has after five years of strenuous work several Branches in the principal towns of Java and its membership is 200.

Within this League are also brought in some institutions which work along the same lines and which already existed before this date, the most important among them being the Goenoeng Sari Training College for Teachers, started in 1913. This institution is by far the oldest Theosophical enterprise along educational lines in the Indonesian Section, and happily so, because it is now ready to be the backbone of the whole Theosophical Educational Movement in this country. Its staff consists entirely of members of the Theosophical Society, which is also the case with all members of the Board, whose president is the General Secretary of the Section. The College with over 120 pupils is of ever growing importance for the Theosophical work for education in Java, because it every year produces some twenty teachers, who receive regular Government diplomas, and who yet have been trained along Theosophical lines and ideals, although not necessarily all becoming members of the T. S. However, they always spread, wherever they may find their work, ideals of mutual and brotherly respect for all races, for all religions and for all their fellowmen. An ever increasing number of them is employed in the growing number of elementary schools which the League is in the course of establishing in different cities.

Several of these Theosophical Elementary Schools are already in working order in Java. They are called Ardjoena (Arjuna) Schools after the great Javanese national hero of that name in *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavad-Gita*, and this great and noble prince is the example for the children. There are already two of these schools in Batavia (Weltevreden and Meester Cornelis), one in Buitenzorg, two in Bandoeng, one in Pekalongan, one in Poerwakarta, one in Soerakarta, one in Djokjakarta. In these schools, Dutch is the language used in teaching, besides the vernacular, and a special course of studies is being followed in order to adjust the education to national customs and wants, yet trying at the same time to prepare the pupils for the necessary modern knowledge they want for their livelihood.

In addition to this, one school for very young children is working in Bandoeng, preparing, as it were, for the somewhat more advanced

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Ardjoena schools; this school is called Abimanjoe (Abhimanyu) school, Abimanjoe being the son of Ardjoena. Under the auspices of the N. I. T. C. O. O., there are also working two Montessori schools, one in Bandoeng and one in Soerabaia, while a third one is being established in Weltevreden. These are the latest additions to the educational work of Theosophists in Java, whilst there is also in the course of establishment a school for Chinese children in Soerabaia which will be carried on in the same lines as the Ardjoena schools.

There is also an offshoot to Goenoeng Sari Training College—the Pandava School. The Goenoeng Sari pupils, seeing that so many poor parents cannot afford to send their children to any school at all, started—quite on their own—a school where these children could have very elementary teachings without paying any fee at all. This school has been working for several years with great success.

There are thus working at present under the auspices of the Ned. Ind. League for Education: one Training College for Teachers (Dalton system), nine Ardjoena Schools, two Montessori Schools, one Abimanjoe School, having altogether about 2,000 pupils and about 50 teachers. This is the result of only five years' work.

VI. EDUCATION IN AMERICA

The School of the Golden Gate, California, was started in 1916 and carried on more or less successfully till 1924 when it came to an end for lack of funds.

VII. EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

Morven Garden School, Sydney, was founded in 1917, as a boarding school, chiefly owing to the efforts of Mr. T. H. Martyn, who took a great interest in it, and worked hard for it. For five years it was carried on successfully with donations from members, but in 1922 the troubles which arose in the Sydney Lodge affected the school so seriously that it had to be closed in 1923.

VIII. EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND

Vasanta College, Auckland, founded in 1919, was first a day school, next a boarding school, and has now returned to its original status. The number of pupils at present attending is about 30, but under the capable management of Miss Darroch, it is quickly justifying the hopes entertained concerning it, and is practically self-supporting, only a small annual donation being given by members of the New Zealand National Society.

IX. BRAHMAVIDYA ASHRAMA

It was one of the intentions of the President-Founder of the Theosophical Society that the Theosophical influence should permeate all departments of life. For this reason Colonel Olcott identified the

Annual Conventions of the Society with the art-crafts of India. But while this influence has been exerted with incalculable effect in many beneficent activities by Fellows of the Theosophical Society, it was not until the founding of the Brahmavidya Ashrama in October, 1922, that an effort was made to bring under the light of Theosophical interpretation the entire field of knowledge and activity, systematically and continuously, and to do for culture in general what had been done for religion and philosophy in particular.

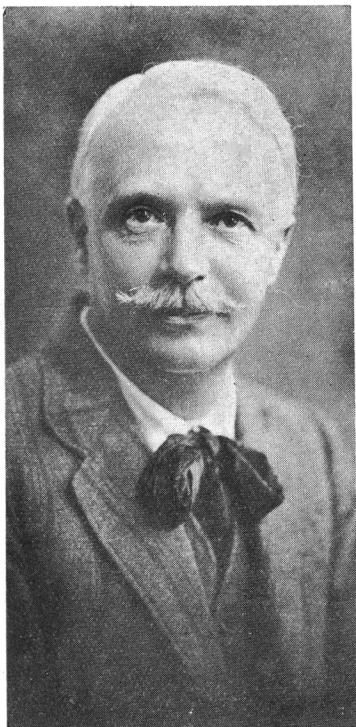


FIG. 222

J. H. COUSINS, D. LITT.

by Dr. G. S. Arundale, "The Philosophy of Beauty and an Eastern Contribution," by Dr. James H. Cousins, "Gnosticism," by Miss M. W. Barrie, M.A., "The Growth of Civilisation," by Professor B. Rajagopalan, M.A. Others are in view.

The students of the Ashrama have come from all the continents, and form, as Bishop Arundale has declared, the nucleus of a World University. Its work, in a phrase, is, "the synthetical study of universal knowledge and culture on the principle that these, in their racial, credal, national, local and individual aspects are essentially related and mutually illuminating expressions of the One Cosmic Life".

The first session of the Brahmavidya Ashrama was inaugurated by Dr. Besant in a series of lectures under the general title of "Brahmavidya" which outlined the work of the Ashrama in the study of Mysticism, Religion, Philosophy, Arts and Science. The subjects have been worked out during the following three years by specialists in a series of 366 lectures in 76 groups. Synopses of the lectures, with references to books, have been filed for future use; and on this basis of information on the evolution of culture the Ashrama has proceeded to a synthetical study of the main phases of nature and super-nature (substance, form, vitality, consciousness and super-consciousness, as expressed in the kingdoms elemental, mineral, vegetable, animal and human, and super-human. The work of the Ashrama is under the direction of Dr. J. H. Cousins.

A series of transactions is being published, the first group being—"Brahmavidya," by Dr. Annie Besant, "The Ashrama Ideal,"