

ESOTERIC BUDDHISM

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Esoteric Buddhism by A. P. Sinnett

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BY

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THE AUTHOR*

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PREFACE
TO THE ANNOTATED EDITION.

SINCE this book was first published in the beginning of 1883, I have come into possession of much additional information bearing on many of the problems dealt with. But I am glad to say that such later teaching only reveals incompleteness in my original conception of the esoteric doctrine,—no material error so far. Indeed I have received from the great Adept himself, from whom I obtained my instruction in the first instance, the assurance that the book as it now stands is a sound and trustworthy statement of the scheme of Nature as understood by the initiates of occult science, which may have to be a good deal developed in the future, if the interest it excites is keen enough to constitute an efficient demand for further teaching of this kind on the part of the world at large, but will never have to be remodelled or apologized for. In view of this assurance it seems best that I should now put forward my later conclusions and additional information in the form of annotations on each branch of the subject, rather than infuse them into the original text, which, under the

circumstances, I am reluctant in any way to alter. I have therefore adopted that plan in the present edition.

As conveying an indirect acknowledgment of the general harmony to be traced between these teachings and the recognized philosophical tenets of certain other great schools of Indian thought, I may here refer to criticisms on this book, which were published in the Indian magazine the *Theosophist* in June, 1883, by "a Brahman Hindoo." The writer complains that in interpreting the esoteric doctrine, I have departed unnecessarily from accepted Sanscrit *nomenclature*; but his objection merely is that I have given unfamiliar names in some cases to ideas already embodied in Hindoo sacred writings, and that I have done too much honour to the religious system commonly known as Buddhism, by representing that as more closely allied with the esoteric doctrine than any other. "The popular wisdom of the majority of Hindoos to this day," says my Brahman critic, "is more or less tinged with the esoteric doctrine taught in Mr. Sinnett's book, misnamed 'Esoteric Buddhism,' while there is not a single village or hamlet in the whole of India in which people are not more or less acquainted with the sublime tenets of the Vedanta philosophy. . . . The effects of Karma in the next birth, the enjoyment of its fruits, good or evil, in a subjective or spiritual state of existence prior to the

re-incarnation of the spiritual monad in this or any other world, the loitering of the unsatisfied souls or human shells in the earth (Kama loca), the pralyic and manvantaric periods are not only intelligible, but are even familiar to a great many Hindoos, under names different from those made use of by the author of 'Esoteric Buddhism.'" So much the better,—I take leave to rejoin,—from the point of view of Western readers, to whom it must be a matter of indifference whether the esoteric Hindoo or Bhuddhist religion is nearest to absolutely true spiritual science, which should certainly bear no name that appears to wed it to any one faith in the external world more than to another. All that we in Europe can be anxious for, is to arrive at a clear understanding as to the essential principles of that science, and if we find the principles defined in this book claimed by the cultured representatives of more than one great Oriental creed as equally the underlying truths of their different systems, we shall be all the better inclined to believe the present exposition of doctrine worth our attention.

In regard to the complaint itself, that the teachings here reduced to an intelligible shape are incorrectly described by the name this book bears, I cannot do better than quote the note by which the editor of the *Theosophist* replies to his Brahman contributor. This note says :—"We print the above letter as it expresses

in courteous language, and in an able manner, the views of a large number of our Hindoo brothers: At the same time it must be stated that the name of 'Esoteric Buddhism' was given to Mr. Sinnett's latest publication, not because the doctrine propounded therein is meant to be specially identified with any particular form of faith, but because *Buddhism* means the doctrine of the *Buddhas*, the Wise i.e. the Wisdom Religion." For my own part I need only add that I fully accept and adopt that explanation of the matter. It would indeed be a misconception of the design which this book is intended to subserve, to suppose it concerned with the recommendation, to a *dilettante* modern taste, of Old World fashions in religious thought. The external forms and fancies of religion in one age may be a little purer, in another a little more corrupt, but they inevitably adapt themselves to their period, and it would be extravagant to imagine them interchangeable. The present statement is not put forward in the hope of making Buddhists from among the adherents of any other system, but with the view of conveying to thoughtful readers, as well in the East as in the West, a series of leading ideas relating to the actual verities of Nature, and the real facts of man's progress through evolution, which have been communicated to the present writer by Eastern philosophers, and thus fall most readily into an

Oriental mould. For the value of these teachings will perhaps be most fully realized when we clearly perceive that they are scientific in their character rather than controversial. Spiritual truths, if they are truths, may evidently be dealt with in a no less scientific spirit than chemical reactions. And no religious feeling, of whatever colour it may be, need be disturbed by the importation into the general stock of knowledge of new discoveries about the constitution and nature of man on the plane of his higher activities. True religion will eventually find a way to assimilate much fresh knowledge, in the same way that it always finally acquiesces in a general enlargement of Knowledge on the physical plane. This, in the first instance, may sometimes disconcert notions associated with religious belief,—as geological science at first embarrassed biblical chronology. But in time men came to see that the essence of the biblical statement does not reside in the literal sense of the cosmological passages in the Old Testament, and religious conceptions grew all the purer for the relief thus afforded. In just the same way when positive scientific knowledge begins to embrace a comprehension of the laws relating to the spiritual development of man,—some misconceptions of Nature, long blended with religion, may have to give way, but still it will be found that the central ideas of true religion have been cleared up and strengthened all the better for the process.