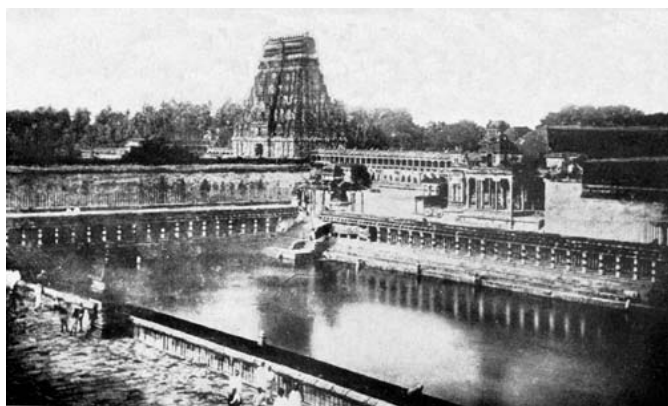


William Q. Judge — The Pilgrim

Ernest Pelletier

William Q. Judge had been jotting down notes and sending them to Julia VerPlanck in order for her to eventually write an occult novel, going so far as to have its title copyrighted under her name in 1891.¹ Over the years he sent her odds and ends of paper with suggestions and describing incidents to be included in various chapters. Judge wrote in one note, “I must tell you first what happened to me in this present life, since it is in this one that I am relating to you about many other lives of mine” (*Letters*, p.95). One such incident from another life described in his notes is the consecration of a temple “on the site of the . . . city of Conjeveram” (now Kanchipuram), which is considered one of India’s most sacred pilgrimage sites (*Letters*, p.94).



Chidambaram, Southern Indian,
from *The Theosophist*, Vol.32, January 1911.

In “The Pilgrim of Eternity” in *Theosophical Movement* the author states, “The institution of the pilgrimage is but a religious reflection of a spiritual verity; the person going on a pilgrimage represents the Eternal Pilgrim, the Human Soul bound for the Shrine of Light in the Land of Perfect Service” and makes the observation that

While the Theosophical Adepts train Their Disciples by a method all Their own, “in one respect it is a specialization of the pilgrimage to a sacred place so common in India”.² (*TM*, p.4)

The Adepts established these places of pilgrimage at a time when spirituality began to decline. Shrines, whether newly built structures or natural sites, were magnetized by Them to ensure the spiritual needs of pilgrims were cared for. The author of “The Pilgrim in Eternity” summarizes it thus:

Within the visible message were hidden the occult hints. The physical pilgrimage was but a reflection of the psychological pilgrimage: sacred shrines, sacred cities, sacred rivers, sacred hills, etc., were psycho-physiological centres to which the Ego must go, and which corresponded to the bodily journey to these places. (p.4)

These sites also ensured that the spiritual heritage of India remained alive in the minds of its people.

On the subject of pilgrimages, in *Echoes From The Orient*, Judge wrote:

In the East the life of man is held to be a pilgrimage, not only from the cradle to the grave, but also through that vast period of time . . . stretching from the beginning to the end of a Manvantara, or period of evolution, and as he is held to be a spiritual being, the continuity of his existence is unbroken. . . . Starting from the great All, radiating like a spark from the central fire, he gathers experience in all ages, under all rulers, civilizations and customs, ever engaged in a pilgrimage to the shrine from which he came. . . . To symbolize this, the whole of India is dotted with sacred shrines, to which pilgrimages are made. . . . (pp.35-36)

It is said that seven cities sacred to Hinduism “represent seven master-chakras of the human constitution” (*TM*, p.5). One of these cities is Conjeeveram. Judge describes the consecration of the temple:

The temple on the site of the present city of Conjeveram was about to be consecrated and the regular priests were all ready for the ceremony. Minor ceremonies had taken place at the laying of the corner-stone, but this was to exceed that occasion in importance. A large body of worshippers were gathered not for the gratification of curiosity, but in order to receive the spiritual benefits of the occasion and they filled the edifice so that I could not get inside. I was thus compelled to stand just at the edge of the door, and that was, as I afterwards found out, the best place I could have selected if I had known in advance what was to take place. A few days before a large number of wandering ascetics had arrived and camped on a spot near the temple, but no one thought much of it because [they were] used to seeing such people. There was nothing unnatural about these men, and all that could be said was that a sort of mysterious air hung about them, and one or two

1. Julia VerPlanck (nee Campbell) was widowed in 1877 and married Dr. Archibald Keightley in 1891. She was also known as Jasper Niemand. The title chosen by Judge for the occult novel was *In A Borrowed Body, The Journey of a Soul*. Julia wrote that *Letters That Have Helped Me*, which included Judge’s notes, were sent to her “at the express wish of H.P. Blavatsky.” (*The Path*, Vol. 9, p.16.)

2. Quotation is from *Echoes From The Orient*, by William Q. Judge, The Magazine *Theosophy*, Los Angeles, CA, 1918, p.35.

children declared that on one evening none of the visitors could be found at their camp nor any evidence that men had been there, but they were not believed, because the ascetics were there as usual the next morning. Two old men in the city said that the visitors were Devas in their "illusionary form," but there was too much excitement about the dedication to allow much thought on the subject. The event, however, proved the old men right.

At the moment when the people in the temple were expecting the priests to arrive, the entire body of ascetics appeared at the door with a wonderful looking sage-like man at their head, and they entered the edifice in the usual formal way of the priests and the latter on arriving made no disturbance, but took what places they could, simply saying: "they are the Devas." The strangers went on with the ceremonies, and all the while a light filled the building and music from the air floated over the awestruck worshippers.

When the time came for them to go they all followed the leader in silence to the door. I could see inside, and as I was at the door could also see outside. All the ascetics came to the entrance but not one was seen to go beyond it, and none were ever perceived by any man in the city again. They melted away at the threshold. It was their last appearance, for the shadow of the dark age was upon the people, preventing such sights for the future. The occurrence was the topic of conversation for years, and it was all recorded in the archives of the city. (*Letters*, pp.94-95)

Sankara is credited with having built Conjeeveram. In an article titled "Samkarcharya's Date", T. Subba Row states that Sankara was a Chela of Patanjali,³ thereby dating this particular temple to the *Sutra* period, pre-500 BCE (BCW, pp.196-197). The individuality ("Judge") had witnessed the instantaneous disappearance of the strangers who consecrated the temple, likely at a time circa this era.

Kanchipuram, formerly Conjeeveram, is called the Golden City of Temples. It is also commonly referred to as the "Varanasi of the south" and is today considered one of the most sacred pilgrimage sites in India, the second holiest after Varanasi. It is situated in Tamil Nadu state in southern India, approximately 70 kilometres (about 50 miles) southwest by road from Madras (now Chennai).⁴

Late in 1882, H.P. Blavatsky and H.S. Olcott relocated from Bombay (now Mumbai) to Adyar, a suburb of Madras, which became the new headquarters

of The Theosophical Society. In 1884 Judge spent approximately four months in India and, as far as can be ascertained, spent most of that time in the general vicinity of the headquarters following his arrival there.

Considering the details he provided for the occult novel, it is quite likely that Judge visited Conjeeveram while at Adyar. He would have had an occult connection to that area and been drawn to revisit it, aware all the while that he was retracing steps taken in a previous incarnation. For, as Judge wrote in *Echoes From The Orient*:

One great reason . . . given by those who understand the inner significance of it, is that the places of pilgrimage are centers of spiritual force from which radiate elevating influences not perceptible to the pig-sticking, wine-drinking traveller. It is asserted by many, indeed, that at most of the famous places of pilgrimage there is an Adept of the same order to which the Theosophical Adepts are said to belong, who is ready always to give some meed of spiritual insight and assistance to those of pure heart who may go there. He, of course, does not reveal himself to the knowledge of the people, because it is quite unnecessary and might create the necessity for his going elsewhere. Superstitions have arisen from the doctrine of pilgrimages, but, as that is quite likely to come about in this age, it is no reason why places of pilgrimage should be abolished, since, if the spiritual centers were withdrawn, good men who are free from superstition would not receive the benefits they now may have. The Adepts founded these places in order to keep alive in the minds of the people the soul idea which modern Science and education would soon turn into agnosticism, were they to prevail unchecked.

But the disciple of the Adept knows that the place of pilgrimage symbolizes his own nature, shows him how he is to start on the scientific investigation of it and how to proceed, by what roads and in which direction. He is supposed to concentrate into a few lives the experience and practice which it takes ordinary men countless incarnations to acquire. His first steps, as well as his last, are on difficult, often dangerous places; the road, indeed, "winds up hill all the way," and upon entering it he leaves behind the hope for reward so common in all undertakings. (*Echoes*, p.36)

Before the aspirant can receive practical instruction he has to be under probation, then tested. Such testing is an "inexorable rule" with the Adepts.

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3. Judge also certainly had an affinity for Patanjali's *Raja* system of yoga and in 1889 was responsible for the publishing of an interpretation of *The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*, with the assistance of J.H. Connelly (see: *Lucifer*, Vol. 4, July 1889, p.387fn). Patanjali was a contemporary of Sankaracharya, to whom much of this temple city is dedicated.

4. <http://www.theindiatravel.com/travel/favourites/pilgrimage/Kanchipuram.htm> and www.tourism-of-india.com/kanchipuram.html.

What Should Theosophists Talk About?

William Q. Judge

When two or three or more Theosophists meet together socially, what should they talk about in the absence of uninterested strangers? It may be said that they should talk like any other people, but this ought not to be the case. The usual worldly custom is to bring up for conversation unimportant matters, often in regard to persons, not infrequently to their detriment, or in regard to transient events, and to discuss these without relating them to permanent and basic principles. Many people talk for the sake of talking, as others read for the sake of reading, regardless of results. But those who know that a "single word may ruin a whole city or put the spirit of a lion into a dead fox" will be more careful of their words. Apart from that aspect of the question, it should be evident that for people who profess to be interested in Theosophy to meet together without discussing it is to fritter away their time and opportunity. To babble out words does not help on the evolution of humanity or inspire any other idea but the natural one that such conversation borders on the idiotic. Nor is there any reason why conversation should not be at once interesting and instructive. It

can easily be led into such channels by anyone present. No one has a right to excuse himself on the ground that "the others" would talk gossip, or about clothes or games or similar things; for a few words and, more important still, a proper attitude of mind will at once lead the conversation into the proper channel. And here again any extreme should be avoided. There is a right time and a wrong time for the discussion of games, clothes, food, and so forth, and there is a decided limit to the usefulness of such discussion. Other topics should be dealt with when fellow students are so fortunate as to meet together. They at least should never part without conversing on some ennobling and uplifting subject that will help them in their work and study. To make that a rule would not only insure much positive good; it would insure against much positive harm.

[Taken from *Vernal Blooms* by William Q. Judge, compiled and published by Theosophy Company, Bombay in 1946, the 50th anniversary of Judge's death. (1966 edition, pp.75-76.)]

. . . **Pilgrim** continued from page 56

It is not enough to know thoroughly what the chela is capable of doing or not doing at the time and under the circumstances during the period of probation. We have to know of what he *may* become capable under different and every kind of opportunities. (M.L., p.236)

The Mahatmas (Adepts of the highest order) describe the pilgrim's path as being on the "shoreless Ocean of Occultism".

Believe me . . . *nothing* short of full confidence in us, in our motives if not in our wisdom, in our foresight, if not omniscience — which is not to be found on this earth — can help one to cross over from one's land of dreams and fiction to our Truth land, the region of stern reality and fact. (M.L. p.358)

After studying Judge's writings, it becomes obvious that he had full confidence in the Mahatmas and had been on the Chela's path for many lives, in search of the "Truth land". As he became more and more aware of his Higher Self, his recollections of past lives became more lucid to him. His temperament changed somewhat after his experiences in India in 1884. He later wrote:

Another rule th[e] disciple must follow is that no boasting may be indulged in on any occasion, and this gives us the formula that, given a man who speaks of his powers as an Adept or boasts of his progress on the spiritual planes, we can be always sure he is neither Adept nor disciple. (Echoes, p.37)

Sources:

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TM "The Pilgrim of Eternity", *The Theosophical Movement*, Vol. 11, November 1940. (Reprinted: Vol. 45, February 1975.)