

PROBLEMS OF LIFE

FROM THE DIARY OF AN OLD PHYSICIAN\*

By N.I. Pirogoff

(translated from the Russian by H.P.Blavatsky.

TRANSLATORS PREFACE

\*(See pages 135-36 in the present Volume for bibliographical data concerning Dr. Pirogoff's Diary.-- Compiler)

Every cultured man in Europe and America is more or less familiar with Doctor Pirogoff's name. And our readers perhaps may remember what was said of this eminent Russian surgeon and pathologist in "Lucifer" of April last--in the editorial "Kosmic Mind." Some quotations from his posthumous "Memoirs" were brought forward, to show how closely the views of a great man of science approximated to the occult teachings of Theosophy: e.g., his ideas on the universal mind, "infinite and eternal, which rules and governs the Ocean of Life," and also on that bugbear of the materialists--the existence in every organism,, as also outside, in Kosmos, of a distinct Vital Force, independent of any chemical or physical process. It was likewise stated, that the posthumous publication of Doctor Pirogoff's Diary had raised a stir of amazement among the Russian public, and--among the Darwinists and Materialists, his ex-colleagues--quite a storm of indignation, as our eminent surgeon had hitherto been regarded as an "Agnostic," if not an out-and-out Atheist of Buchner's School.

Since then, we have heard it said that a few lines quoted from a man's writings proved nothing, and that the Theosophists had no right to affirm that their views had received corroboration at the hands of such a well-known man of science. Therefore, it has been decided to make lengthy selections from the two volumes of Doctor Pirogoff's "Memoirs", and to publish their translations in "Lucifer." Of course the complete diary cannot be translated, in order to satisfy the skeptics. Nor is it needed: as it is amply sufficient, in order to prove our point, to translate only those pages which contain the writer's intimate thoughts upon the great problems of men. These, consisting of detached fragments, it is intended to publish in a short series of articles. Moreover, an autobiography in the shape of a private diary, interspersed with anecdotes about events and people belonging to a foreign country, would interest an English reader but little. All this is attractive to those only ho are familiar with the names mentioned, and of whose country the author was for over a period of thirty years the pride and glory. Hence only such pages of the Diary as bear upon what we call theosophical and metaphysical questions, or which are of a philosophical character will be translated. The value of such pages is enhanced tenfold for us, as having been penned by a man of science, whose great learning was recognized by all Europe, and whose famous achievements in surgery have been so appreciated, that some of them have become authoritative even in England, always so backward in recognizing foreign--and especially Russian--merit.

\*(E.G., the operation on the tarsus of the foot, called "the Pirogoff Operation.")

Before proceeding with our selections, it may not be out of place, perhaps, to say a few words about the author.

N. I. Pirogoff was born in November, 1810, and died in the same month of the year 1881. Having passed the best years of his youth in the University of Dorpat, the very hotbed of German free thought during the years 1830-60, he was filled, as he himself confesses, with that proud spirit of all-denial, embodied by Goethe in his Mephisto. "Wherefore," he writes, in describing his state of mind in those early days, "wherefore, and to what ends need we suppose the existence of a Deity? What can it ex plain in cosmo-genesis? Is not matter eternal, and should it not be so? Why then this useless hypothesis which explains nothing?"

Elsewhere, however, perhaps years after, treating on the same subject, he writes in a different strain: -- "Though it was a great heathen--de gross Heide-- (as Goethe was called), who said that he talked of God only with God himself, yet I, a Christian, following his advice, also avoid talking of my intimae belief and convictions even with those nearest and dearest to me: the holy to the holy."

This accounts for the amazement experienced by those who knew Doctor Pirogoff most intimately, when on reading his posthumous Diary, they found that he had been an opponent of religion only in its forms, in its church and dogmas; but that ever since his thirty-ninth year he had found what he had craved for; namely, faith in an abstract, almost unreachable ideal, absolutely outside every form and ritualism. His writings show him to be almost profound mystic and philosopher.

Four years after his death,, Doctor Pirogoff's widow and sons gave his papers to be published, and the two volumes from which the following pages are translated were printed at the end of 1887. The first volume contains in full the unfinished "Diary of an Old Physician," and ends in the middle of a sentence, interrupted by death. An Epigraph on its title page explains that the late author wrote it "exclusively" for himself, "yet not without a secret hope that, perchance others might read it too, some day." "The perusal of these posthumous papers leads one to think" adds the Russian publisher in his Preface, "that this last work of the author was connected in his thoughts with his early public writings, as he added to his diary, etc., a sub-title already used by him some twenty years before, in heading his philosophical essays, name.ly "The Questions (or Problems) of Life.'" But as the latter, collected in Volume II, are almost all of a social and educational rather than of a metaphysical character, it is not proposed to treat of them for the present.

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(Occasionally. . .one is beset by thoughts so base and foul, that. . .one feels. . .almost persuaded a times that these thoughts are not one's own, but are suggested by someone else--by that basest of beings that lives in each of us.)

The thoughts of the lower self or "personality," a being distinct from us, truly; the indweller of the man of flesh and but too often the sorry shadow of the true and higher Self and Ego!

(. . .a theory of mine (rather a mystical one, I confess), that the atomic, molecular oscillations (which it is absolutely necessary to postulate in sensations) take place, not in the visible and ever-changing cells of the brain tissues alone, but also in something else besides; in a more subtle, ethereal element, which, interpenetrating the atoms, passes through them, and is impervious to all the organic changes.)

This is a purely occult teaching. Our "memory" is but a general agent, and its "tablets," with their indelible impressions, but a figure of speech: the "Brain-tablets" serve only a upadhi or vahan (basis, or vehicle) for reflecting at a given moment the memory of one or another thing. The records o past events, of every minutest action, and of passing thoughts, in fact, are really impressed on the imperishable waves of the ASTRALLIGHT, around us and everywhere, not in the brain alone; and these mental pictures, images, and sounds, pass from these waves via the consciousness of the personal Ego or Mind (the lower Manas) whose grosser essence is astral, into the "cerebral reflectors," so to say, of our brain, whence they are delivered by the psychic to the sensuous consciousness. This is at\every moment of the day, and even during sleep. See "Psychic and Noetic Action," in "Lucifer,"Nov. 1890, pp. 181, and182. (Present Volume pp. 350 et seq.)

(The collectivity (ensemble) of sensations, furnished to us by all our organs (both those which do not, and those that do communicate with the outward world, with the none-I), is that which we call existence. . .)

Eastern Philosophy--occult or exoteric--does not admit of an "I" separate from the Universe, objective or subjective, material or spiritual--otherwise than as a temporary illusion during the cycle of our incarnations. Ir is this regrettable illusion, the "heresy of separateness" of personality, the idea that our "I" is distinct in eternity from the Universal Ego, that has to be conquered and destroyed as the root of selfishness and all evil, before we can get rid of rebirths and reach Nirvana.

(In connection with Dr. Pirogoff's speculations on the subject of lunacy.) Or loss of mind, as it is very suggestively called, is explained in Occultism as being primarily due to the paralysis of the higher functions in Kama-Manas, the physical mind--and, in cases of incurable insanity, to the reunion of the superior portion of the lower with the Higher Divine Ego, and the destruction, in consequence, of Anaskarana, the medium of communication, an event which leaves alive in man only his animal portion, whose Kamic mind lives hence forward on the astral plane.

(Dr. Pirogoff is unable to accept the then current hypotheses regarding the atoms) Occult philosophy teaches that atoms, so called, are not of this earth but belong to quite a different plane, both of matter and consciousness.

(Nor can my thought linger long on atoms fractoined into granules, pellets, mathematical points and what not else.)

The atomic theory is on a par only with the undulatory theory of light, which necessitates the material agency of Ether. Hence, we are told by the physicists that the hypothetical agent called the ether of space is both elastic, "of extreme tenuity and absolutely imponderable." Nevertheless, this agent is made to perform functions which, if it has to remain the transmitter of light, would make it endowed to the highest degree with the properties of an absolutely hard body. This is exact, mathematical science.

(My mental analysis brings me totally to the necessity of accepting outside these atoms something permeable and interpenetrating everything and everywhere, invisible, formless, ever in motion.. . . .)

If we understand correctly this "something permeable and interpenetrating" all and everywhere, it is Akasa, whose lowest form is the Ether of Space, the latter, however, being considerably different from the "hypothetical agent" or medium of Science.

(My mind does not accept the idea that the mere grouping of atoms into certain forms (e.g., the cerebral cells) could make them eo ipso capable of sensing, desiring and conceiving, unless the faculty of sensing and consciousness were already innate in such units)

Precisely; and this is the chief argument of Theosophy. The chasm between mind and matter is an impassable one, as Mr. Tyndall and all the other Agnostics and Materialists are bound to admit. No the theory of evolution or "heredity" while ever cover or explain the mystery.

(I conceive. . . .a limitless, incessantly rolling and waving ocean of life, formless, containing in itself the whole Universe, penetrating all is atoms,, continually grouping them, then decomposing their combinations and aggregates, and adjusting them to the various objects of being.)

The Ocultists and Theosophists call it "the One Life," the triply manifested Deity or the three Logoi--the one pole of which is negative, the other positive--and the whole circumference and central point--universal mind and the atom. The latter are both abstractions, yet the only Reality.

(This "some one" attuning my organ into unison with the universal harmony, becomes my "I")

Or, as the Occultist would call it, the "Higher Ego," the immortal Entity, whose shadow and reflection is the human Manas, the mind, limited by its physical senses. The two may be well compared to the Master-artist and the pupil-musician. The nature of the Harmony produced on the "organ", the Divine melody or the harsh discord, depends on whether the pupil is inspired by the immortal Master, and follows its dictates, or, breaking from its high control, is satisfied with the terrestrial sounds produced by itself conjointly with its evil companion--the man of flesh--on the chords and keys of the brain-organ.

(And then, the laws of the design and causation of the actions of universal ideation, become also the laws of my "I", and I find them within myself, passing their manifestations from without, within myself, and from myself back into infinite nature)

Had the eminent writer of the Diary studied for years the theosophical and occut literature of the Eastern philosophies, he could not have come into closer harmony of thought with esoteric mysticism. His was a purely natural idealism, however, a spiritual perception of eternal truths, that no scientific sophistry could destroy or even blunt.

(Concerning the affinity of the atoms.) Physical Science, it seems, gives the name of "atoms" to that which we regard as particles or molecules. With us "atoms" are the inner principles and the intelligent, spiritual guides of the cells and particles they inform. This may be unscientific, but it is a fact in nature.

(On the subject of Life-Force.) The bugbear of the modern materialist: that independent Entity denied so vehemently by exact Science and sill believed in, and accepted by, the greatest Scientists, such as Dr. Pirogoff, who prefer truth even to--Science.

(Brain-thought is inadmissable without brain.) Precisely so; but then Occult philosophy reconciles the absurdity of postulating in the manifested Universe an active Mind without an organ, with that worse absurdity, an objective Universe evolved as everything else in it, by blind chance, by giving to this Universe an organ of thought, a "brain." The latter, although not objective to our senses, is none the less existing; it is to be found in the Entity called KOSMOS (Adam Kadmon, in the Kabbalah). As in the Microcosm, MAN, so in the Macrocosm, or the Universe. Every "organ" in it is a sentient entity, and every particle of matter or substance, from the physical molecule up to the spiritual atom, is a cell, a nerve center, which communicates with the brain-stuff or that substance on the plane of divine Thought in which the prime ideation is produced. Therefore, was man produced in the image of God--or Divine Nature. Every cell in the human organism mysteriously corresponds with a like "cell" in the divine organism of the manifested universe; only the latter "cell" assumes in the macrocosm the gigantic proportions of an intelligent unit in this or that "Hierarchy" of Beings. This, so far as the differentiate, divine Mind is concerned, on its plane of ideation. this eternal or ABSOLUE THOUGHT--lies beyond and is, to us, inscrutable.

(Either it (our mind) has to regard all that which exists outside of itself as an illusion, or else the sentient existence of the Universe--the whole of that which is the "not-I"--must be as undeniable to it, as is its own existence.)

Vedantic philosophy explains and reconciles the difficulty in a most philosophical manner, by showing both the "I" and the universe an illusion. Naturally we cannot separate the two, both having to stand or fall together.

(. . . .our brain-mind discovering itself. . .outside of itself, does so for the very reason that it, itself, is only a manifestation of the Higher or Universal Mind.)

Precisely so; and therefore, Occult philosophy teaches us that the human mind (or lower Manas) is a direct ray or reflection of the Higher Principle, the Noetic Mind. The latter is the reincarnating Ego which old Aryan philosophers call Manasaputra, the "sons of Mind" or of Mahat, the Universal Cosmic Mind. In the Hindu Puranas (see Vishnu Purana) Mahat is identical with Brahma, the creative God, the first in the trinitarian group (Trimurti) of Brahma, Visnu and Siva.

(On the subject of abstract concepts in Science.) Professor Stallo has most admirably illustrated and demonstrated this truth in his "Concepts of Modern Science"--of science honeycombed with metaphysics and pure abstractions.

(Mathematicians who now discuss. . .a fourth dimension, may find. . .the necessity. . .of also a fifth dimension.) If Dr. Pirogoff, an eminent scientist, thogth so, then occult philosophy can hardly be taken to task and declared unscientific, in accepting the existence of a seven-dimensional space in co-ordination with the seven states of consciousness.

(Concerning the existence of the limitless and the immeasurable, likened by the author to a new continent which he thinks may never be fully discovered.) Why not, when in course of natural evolution our "brain-mind" will be replaced by a finer organism, and helped by the sixth and the seventh senses? Even now, there are pioneer minds who have developed these senses.

(Concerning a higher Principle, independent of the matter it rules.) Independent, outside of space and time; but dependent within the latter, on matter and substance alone to manifest its presence in phenomena.

(We find ourselves confined within a magic circle. On the one hand.. . .our own organic mind; on the other. . the external works of creative intelligence, which testify undeniably to the existence of another mind,, with attributes for creation not only similar to, but immeasurably higher than our own)

The Vedanta philosophy steps our ot this "magic circle" by teaching that both our own mind and the Universal Mind (Mahat)--the latter in its acts of differentiation and limited creations--are both illusions. For as our minds are but the product of the Universal Mind, so is the latter but a differentiated ray of the absolute Mind or No-Mind. The ONE, or Absoluteness, is the only eternal reality.

(The life-principle. . . .must have the properties of Force and be transformed into material atoms).

Our philosophy teaches us that atoms are not matter; but that the smallest molecule--composed of millards of indivisible and imponderable atoms--is substance. Nevertheless, the atom is not a mathematical point or a fiction; but verily an immutable Entity, a reality within an appearance--the molecule being in occult philosophy but a figment of that which is called maya or illusion. The atom informs the molecule, as life, spirit, soul, mind, inform Man. Therefore is the atom all these, and Force itself, as Dr. Pirogoff suspected. During the life-cycle, the atom represents , according to the geometrical combinations of its groupings in the molecule, life, force (or energy), mind and will for each molecule in space, as each cell in the human body, is only a microcosm within (to it) a relative macrocosm. That which Science refers to as Force, conservation of energy, correlation, continuity, etc., is simply the various effects produced by the presence of atoms, which are, in fact in their collectivity, simply the (spiritual) sparks on the manifested plane, thrown out by the Anima Mundi, the Universal Soul or Mind (Maha-Buddhi, Mahat) from the plane of the Unmanifested. In short, the atom may be described as a compact or crystallized point of divine Energy and Ideation.

This scientific statement will never be accepted by an Eastern Occultist, for he would say that nothing that takes place, no manifestation however rapid or weak, can ever be lost from the Skandhic record of a man's life. The Universal Memory preserves every motion, the slightest wave and feeling that ripples the waves of differentiated nature, of man or of the Universe.

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