

King Lear—The Theosophical Society—and the Path of Heartless Ingratitude

Wise old Shakespeare (or was it Francis Bacon) knew a thing or two about human character, at its noblest, and at its shabbiest. His legendary tragedy King Lear tells the story of the aged King's descent into madness after disposing of his estate between two of his three daughters based on their flattery, bringing tragic consequences for all. How does this all happen?

The monarch, a headstrong old man who is blind to his weaknesses, decides to divide his kingdom amongst his three daughters, according to which one recites the best declaration of love for him. The two selfish daughters Goneril and Regan slobber all over their father with grovelling pretensions of their love for their dearest father, but later as events unfold, treat him with utmost cruelty. Cordelia, the loyal and upright third daughter of Lear speaks without flattery and with honesty. In a rage, Lear disowns her, confusing her candour with insolence. As the plot unfolds we find greed, betrayal, lust for power, cruelty, and above all, *heartless ingratitude* among Goneril and Regan. They are anything but the truth loving, brotherly (I mean sisterly), or caring creatures they professed to be to their father. By contrast, Cordelia remains true to her word and stands by her father when he was in dire distress, despite the manner in which he had previously treated her. The end of the play ends in death everywhere. Regan dies after being poisoned by Goneril and Goneril stabs herself to death. Finally the order to hang Cordelia is countermanded; but it is too late, and Cordelia dies too. King Lear, now a broken man, blind and deranged falls upon Cordelia and also dies.

This is not just a playing out of a mythological tale about a Celtic king in pre-Roman times. The powerful message is not at all far-fetched: it is universal in meaning and never more appropriate nowadays. Let's see why. But first, a couple of general insights. Observe the two-to-one ratio in the filial trio. Shakespeare knew that there are more human vices than virtues: hence two evil daughters to one virtuous one. Then, note that the tragic ending pertains to all concerned; even the virtuous daughter is not spared her untimely death; and the King dies as well.

Let's now delve into the allegorical meaning behind the various characters in the play. The 'King' stands for the supreme head at whatever level: applying, in this case of course, to the Theosophical Society as a whole and at National level; and the 'three daughters' represent its leaders and various officers who have vowed to serve and love the King. It is easy to see how betrayal, lust for power and selfish possession of property and estate by the two selfish daughter-equivalents in the TS are deranging the TS corpus, especially in England. We are not dealing with this just now. The thrust of this article concerns what was italicised above, namely, 'heartless ingratitude': specifically, the attitude displayed by the English Section regarding the untimely death of one that Section's most loyal and tireless workers for over forty continuous years. I refer of course to John Gordon who died after brief illness in May this year.

John was President of the Blavatsky Lodge for over ten years and the Lodge had the grace to arrange for a coach to convey its members to the funeral service. However, I was appalled to observe that neither the current nor the former National President attended the service (at a convenient location from London). Surely it would have been common courtesy and sensitivity for the current self-styled "spiritual head" and the previous National President (one of whom had a birthday party to celebrate in the evening) to have, at the very least, sent a short note of condolence to be read out, moreover, apologising for their absence?

John Gordon has given his life, soul and energy to the TS: witness the countless lectures, substantial books, and massive administrative input. He was the mainstay of the English Section for some forty years. He was on the National Council and Executive Committee and a voice of common sense in the face of the squabbling and squandering of money over Tekels Park of which he was the overall Director in charge. Yes, there was a strong personal agenda, and increasingly so of late, but at least this was fully and sincerely aligned to the greater good of the theosophical movement as a whole. He did his all to promulgate theosophy and the Theosophical Society. (I say this from a close friendship of several decades.) His direct approach did nothing to flatter people and he had the guts to stick to his guns, never stooping to the level of 'Mr ever-so-popular Nice Guy' – the standard posturing of low mentalities pretending to please everyone in order to win votes (echoes of the Goneril and Regan strategy here.) Nor did John ever have a chip on his shoulder despite heavy disappointments in his personal life and frustrations in his dealings with the TS. For a man of such high intellect and vision to have to suffer fools – not to say complete fools – must have been a sore trial, but he shouldered that burden with far more patience and fortitude than I would ever have managed in his situation. Sure, there were sharp differences and disagreements with John, as indeed in my case over the last three years and I make no bones about that. However – other than

the valid excuse of serious personal ill health, a personal family funeral or being abroad – not to put all that aside in order to pay one's last respects to one who has donated quite literally his entire life for the cause of theosophy practically to the day of his final collapse, and not to pay one's last respects to a tireless worker are pathetic indictments of a society that preaches and prattles brotherhood, but whose seniors members and leaders present the counterfeit coin of ingratitude; and of course a cowardly 'let's ignore it' silence is the standard way to ward off uncomfortable facts have to be faced.

I was shown the latest Autumn 2013 edition of *Esoterica* and *Link*. Notwithstanding the fact that it reads more like the National President's attempts to gratify the desires of his 'dear friend' (as he puts it in his editorial) than a serious publication to promote eternal verities, there is not one single word mentioned by either the current or the past National President, or any officers of the Section about John's passing.¹ He might as well never have existed. Surely this dear friend could have been persuaded to spend five minutes of his time to write a short tribute for the funeral and published in *Esoterica* in case the National President felt impotent to do so himself. Several senior members of the English Section are also leading lights (or see themselves as such) in the Theosophical Order of Service (regarded by some of them as an alternate/parallel upwards career path to the main Theosophical Society). But none of these members, some desperately ambitious to be the top leader and who have been on the National Council and Executive Committee for over thirty years continuously, provided any tributes. I have no issue with TOS Members raising money by selling teddy bears and dolls at theosophical events. However a tribute to John by those TOS members who knew him so well for decades would be another way of put words into action: all the interminable verbiage, sermons and platitudes we hear from them about heart-centred awareness, beings of light and energy, transmuting the soul, love, service, wisdom, truth, etc. (It's so easy just to talk, isn't it?)

Link did contain generous tributes to John from many, but again, no mention from the current or former National President. However, *Link* is a cheap looking pamphlet sent out only to Unattached members of the English Section – not to the whole membership, and not internationally. And John was an international figure. He was also well respected, especially in America where he lectured. When he visited Adyar in 2008 (I was also there) the International President granted him permission to view and film the feather or turban retrieved from the archives at Adyar, which Master M. left with Col. Olcott. Is this not a mark of approbation shown towards a senior member of the English Section?

Indelicately put it may be, but I can't help feeling that instead of being just a 98 per cent rehash of Blavatsky, if *Deity Cosmos & Man* had included a small chapter on the need to show respect and gratitude towards a tireless worker – something that the author, a perfect gentleman, would liberally have bestowed were he alive today – then perhaps the starry-eyed devotees of this book and its author might have deigned to write a sincere tribute to John.

So if ever I needed further proof to justify my decision to terminate my membership of the TS, then this display of heartless ingratitude by the once great English Section² now mired in hypocrisy is it. (Incidentally, no Masters or Adepts, et al. are ever going to bother to set right what was once nobly bequeathed and what wilful human stupidity has wrecked – just in case you were wondering.)

Edi Bilimoria

Copies sent to:

- Some members of the English Section, including the current and former National President, Harold Tarn, and Erica Lauber (by post) with her consent
- National President and National Secretary – TS in Australia
- Diana Dunningham Chapotin – International Secretary, Theosophical Order of Service
- Editor: *Theosophy Forward*
- Bernice Croft – New Zealand
- Prof P Krishna and Prof Ravi Ravindra
- Joy Mills, Professor John Algeo and Michel Gomes – America
- Prominent members and officers – TS in Adyar
- Members of John Gordon's family and close friends

¹ The editorial also frankly admits the parlous state of the Foundation for Theosophical Studies now 'virtually in cyber space'. *Esoterica*, the Summer School and various speaker events all come under the aegis of the FTS. **Do we not see here clear signs of the progressive derangement of the 'King', the allegory as explained above?**

² As well as the parent body of the TS and its rubber-stamping General Council in unconsciously sanctioning it on the basis that not one fruit turns rotten without the silent knowledge of the whole tree.