

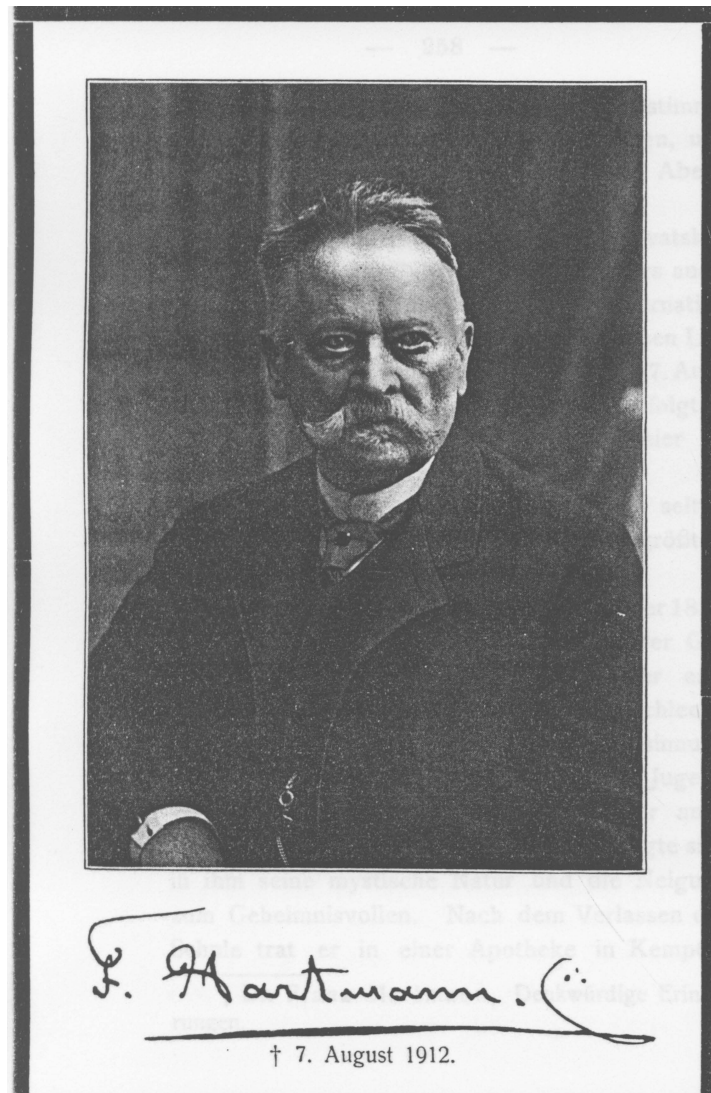


Obituary. Dr. Franz Hartmann, the founder of the International Theosophical Brotherhood. His life and Works.

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Translation from the German by Robert Hutwohl

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We live in a momentous time when the Spirit of Truth is making tremendous efforts, as always happens at the turn of two ages, to remove from the minds of men error and prejudice, the children of superstition, so that the light of truth penetrate and the God in man can reach self-knowledge (theosophy).

From this striving of the spirit, which guides the entire development of the universe and of humanity in particular, the theosophical movement of the present has also arisen and those great men and women have appeared on earth in our day who were destined to serve as instruments of the spirit, to free people's minds from their superstitions.

Among these, besides H. P. Blavatsky, the writer of the *Secret Doctrine*, especially Dr. Franz Hartmann, the founder of the "International Theosophical Brotherhood," whose life and work we look at on the occasion of his August 7th death in his home town of Kempten, we want to bring to mind briefly at our commemoration ceremony today.

The life of Dr. Hartmann was rarely changeful and his work was of the greatest importance for civilized humanity.

Franz Hartmann was born on November 22, 1838 in Donauwörth in Bavaria, where his father was a court doctor³. His mother came from an old Scottish noble family who had to flee England because of their political leanings. The boy spent his youth in Kempten, where he also received his education. From an early age, his mystical nature and inclination towards the mysterious stirred within him. After leaving school, he became an apprentice in a pharmacy in Kempten, but "the petty peddling and the sale of things that not only did not bring the buyer any benefit, but in most cases considerable harm," did not appeal to him. He often changed jobs until, at the age of 21, during the war between Austria and Italy (1859), he enlisted in the Bavarian army. After the peace treaty that followed soon after, he moved to the University of Munich in 1860, where he studied chemistry and medicine. He writes that he was not inferior to his fellow students when it came to cramming and drinking. Franz Hartmann was brought up in the Catholic faith, but he was repelled by the formalities of the Catholic Church, and even more so by the narrow-mindedness of Protestantism, which denies everything that it cannot grasp with its hands.

After completing his university studies, Hartmann made a trip to Paris in 1865. Out of a thirst for adventure, he took a job as a ship's doctor on an emigrant ship and in this way ended up in the United States, where he first settled in St. Louis as a doctor. But he didn't stay here for long either. He visited the Indians of North America, unaccompanied, and in 1871 he traveled to Mexico, where, without recognizing him as he was not yet mature enough, he made the acquaintance of an adept who foretold many things about his later life. After his return to the United States, Hartmann became acquainted with spiritualism. He assiduously attended spiritist circles in New Orleans and made contact with the most famous mediums of his time. He himself writes that it would be difficult to find anyone in America or Europe who has seen more of spiritistic phenomena than he has. "For a long time Hartmann wandered in the fool's paradise of phenomenal spiritism." In 1873 he moved to Texas, where he bought an estate in the lonely forest and set up a farm. Here he married the sister of a neighboring landowner's wife, who died 7 months after the marriage, after which Hartmann sold his house and spent 5 years among the Texas ranchers. In 1878 he owned a mine in Colorado, which brought him nothing. Hartmann moved around the United States for 18 years; nowhere did he find what he was looking for. "The desire to know what the world really is, what the purpose of existence is, whether there is an existence after death and what it is like," became more and more vivid in him. And since he had no certainty and could not find it in spiritualism either, he repeatedly came close to putting a bullet through his head. Then he came across H. P. Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*, which contained just the explanations he was looking for, which prompted him to join the Theosophical Society in America.

When he heard about the mysterious Adepts, he wanted to get in touch with them himself. At the instigation of Master Morya, Hartmann was summoned to India in 1883 by a letter from Olcott, the President of the Theosophical Society in Adyar, to represent him in office during his absence. Since that time Hartmann's name has been linked with the history of the theosophical movement, without his wishing or wanting it.

When Dr. Hartmann returned to Europe in 1885 accompanied by Blavatsky, during a short visit to Colombo, the Buddhist capital of Ceylon, he allowed himself to be accepted into the Buddhist community by the chief priest there, of which H. P. Blavatsky had previously become a member. For Hartmann, however, this did not mean a change of faith, since he had already recognized the unity of all religions and had come to the true faith. "What one changes is not the true faith." While H. P.

Blavatsky, after short stays in Italy and Germany, moved to London, where she died on May 8, 1891 surrounded by her students, Hartmann stayed in Vienna and Hallein, where at the age of 47 he prepared himself for the sublime mission, to which we believe he was destined before his birth.

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Every human being comes to earth to fulfill a specific task there and to prepare for the collaboration in the redemption of suffering humanity, but only a few people of the present are already so far developed that they are aware of their purpose in life and existence, which is why most have not yet fulfilled their human destiny.

It was not for the first time in his planetary life that Franz Hartmann worked on the work of enlightenment. For those who tread the path for the first time rarely have the great insight and high degree of trust that was the case with Dr. Hartmann.

We might wonder why Franz Hartmann only recognized his destiny at the age of 45, if he was a born mystic. But we know that before continuing his journey on earth everyone must repeat his earlier stages of development not only physically but also spiritually. This repetition of the previous life often takes more than one lifetime. Blessed is he who experiences rebirth in his youth and, in full physical health and spiritual strength, is able to continue on the path where he left off his wanderings at the end of the past life.

We observe that those who devote themselves to a scientific profession reach the spiritual life with more difficulty and much later than those who lead a quiet life. It is not easy to overcome the scientific prejudices that often form powerful entities in the inner world. Franz Hartmann first had to go through the school of materialism and spiritism before, after many disappointments in this life, he became receptive to the spiritual life, whereby the masters, the leaders of the theosophical movement, gave him help because they recognized in him as an useful tool and he was karmically connected to them.

It is probable that Franz Hartmann was already chosen by the masters for his mission in Germany before he was born. Apparently it was not the first time in this life that he had contact with the masters; we may assume that he has already spent a long series of lifetimes in the service of Enlightenment and that his Master awakened him in his devachan to resume his work sooner than it could have done unaided, a favor which, like H. P. Blavatsky reports that other students, such as W. Judge because they carried within them a pledge to serve humanity and its Masters. We observe that at the beginning of the theosophical movement in different countries men and women appeared almost simultaneously who worked for the service of brotherhood, and we recognize in this the wise plan of the masters.

How did Dr. Franz Hartmann fulfill his task?

It seems to us that no other race is capable of understanding the teachings of wisdom like the Teutonic people, especially the German people, which Franz Hartmann also repeatedly said. The fifth sub-race of the great Aryan root-race is more closely related to the fifth principle (Buddhi manas) than any other, and their task is to express this principle of independent, abstract thought, the power of reason and conscience, and freedom of belief and authority in a certain degree, as far as this is possible in the fourth planetary round. In earlier centuries, many German mystics, such as Archbishop Meister Eckhart, Paracelsus, Jakob Boehme and even Martin Luther worked on the same task. In our day no one was better able to continue this work than Franz Hartmann, because this mystical power of knowledge was developed in him to a great extent.

Nothing was more natural to him than to publish and explain the writings of the old German mystics anew in order to make them understandable to a wider circle of the people. Because of his knowledge of the *Secret Doctrine*, Hartmann had a special ability to explain and substantiate Christian mysticism scientifically and philosophically and to compare it with the mysticism of the East. The happy combination of Eastern and Western mysticism and philosophy, which are essentially one, gives Franz Hartmann's writings their high, lasting value.

It is difficult to say where Franz Hartmann earned the greater merit: through the explanation of the German mystics or the translation and explanation of the *Bhagavad Gita*, that holy book of the East which can hardly be compared with another of equal value, or through his own essays on the *Secret Doctrine*, the nature

of Theosophy and Brotherhood, or by founding the “International Theosophical Brotherhood,” in which he has created a center of power as the bearer of his ideas, destined to illuminate the light he has kindled and received and further disseminated to the world.

When Franz Hartmann began writing his “Lotusblüten” in 1893, after several of his works had already been published in English, few in Germany had heard anything about the theosophical movement and hardly anyone knew anything really about the nature of Theosophy and brotherhood, while in other countries a rich theosophical literature had already appeared.

Franz Hartmann has achieved extraordinary things during his almost 30 years of theosophical work. He not only wrote 21 volumes of his “Lotusblüten” and several books in English, but also wrote many theosophical essays for English and German magazines and gave many public and private lectures on his travels through Austria, Germany, England and America.

That he was able to achieve so much was only possible because he drew from the wellspring of his own knowledge, so that he did not need any great preliminary literary studies and time-consuming preparations. We are convinced that he was helped in his work by the Masters of Wisdom, who stand by everyone who puts themselves at their service and devotes themselves selflessly and energetically to their work of enlightenment. However, Franz Hartmann was not their irresponsible medium, nor did they dictate the writings to him, which was not necessary for him, since he had enough knowledge of his own. Also, the help of the Masters does not consist in the fact that they transfer their thoughts to the pupil, which hinders rather than promotes knowledge, since violently intruding thoughts are the greatest obstacle to recognizing the truth, the essence of things. What the Masters do is that by the power of their will they disperse the astral and mental clouds of desires and passions surrounding man, allowing the Light of Self-knowledge to penetrate freely into the soul and endow it with omniscience. The perfected one renders this help from the greatest distance, because he is everywhere on our planet with his spirit, wherever he directs his will. In order for the student to receive this help from the Master, it is necessary for him to do his work at a certain hour every day and to concentrate his consciousness on the Master. Franz Hartmann, as he himself said, wrote his “Lotusblüten” as a rule, at least in the earlier years, in the morning from 8 to 11 o’clock. We must not forget that a Master (Christ) lives in every human being, and that there, the task of the outer Masters is to awaken the inner master in man,

whereby they become the saviors of mankind. Franz Hartmann also worked in the power and wisdom of his own inner master.

Franz Hartmann rarely spoke about his connection with the Adepts, but there are private letters in which he reports on this. It is only in general terms that he writes in his writings of his interaction with the Masters, and it is wise that he has done so in this reserved manner. Perhaps many would have followed him if he had put the Masters in the foreground, but this contradicted his insight and task. His intention was to educate people to think for themselves, so he hated it when anyone regarded him as an authority or blindly believed any teaching. For him, dogmatism and mania for authority were the great enemies of mankind. Indeed, it is better that few be helped than that many fall into a new form of superstition.

When Franz Hartmann founded the I. T. V. organization in Munich on September 3, 1897, which elected him its first president, he pointed out in his introductory words that he was acting on behalf of the Master and expressed the hope that the I. T. V. bond that spiritually connects the tolerant and noble-thinking people in all countries to a living community in love and in work for the enlightenment and ennobling of mankind. Let's hope that the wish of the founder will be more and more fulfilled in the future. Hartmann's task was to free the theosophical movement from the excesses caused by addiction to phenomena and occult powers. When he realized that this was not possible within the existing conditions, he founded the I. T. V. on the original basis of tolerance and knowledge of the unity of being created by H. P. Blavatsky,⁴ which as an organization with compulsory confession and authority, as well as with some kind of party system and has nothing to do with people and their views and mistakes and therefore also keeps away from the production of occult phenomena and the addiction to occult powers, on the other hand strives for the realization of brotherhood on the path of purification of the heart and love for all beings. It is not the purpose of the I. T. V. to compete with related organizations, but on the contrary, though autonomous and separate in form, it is to work in harmony with them in its own method of Theosophy. The brotherhood claims for itself the right, following its own nature, to participate independently in the enlightenment of mankind. Independence was also the basic trait in the character of its founder.

In a sense, the I.T.V. is a reformation. Regarding the conditions he found upon his arrival at the Theosophical Society in Adyar, Hartmann writes: "Owing to the stir caused by the exposure of occult phenomena, the reputation of the Theosophical

Society spread throughout the world, but the spirit of the Society departed in the process. Nobody seemed to care anymore about the general brotherhood of men. It just ran along more like an empty phrase that nobody noticed; phenomena had become the main thing.”⁵

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It is not our intention to take the work and character of Dr. Hartmann’s criticism as our own, because we do not have such a right. The judgments about Hartmann’s character will certainly turn out very differently, depending on the point of view from which the observer adopts. Hartmann’s harsh judgments, which he made in the “mailbox” of his “Lotusblüten,” as well as in letters and in personal dealings with people and circumstances, have caused offense in many who saw in it an unloving criticism. However, those who were able to look deeper recognized that Hartmann was not criticizing, but only sharply characterizing the people and their views. He did not look at people and their actions from the point of view of evil, which must be fought and destroyed, but in the light of Theosophy, in which one recognizes that everything that happens arises from ignorance and happens according to the law of justice and necessity.

Both in his life and in his character, Hartmann has some affinities with Paracelsus, Giordano Bruno and H. P. Blavatsky. Like them, he was a strong male character and keen in his judgment. He wrote of Blavatsky that she had a bad habit of making fun of everyone, even her best friends, and giving them the same nickname.⁶ The same applies to a certain extent to Hartmann. He writes of himself that even as a boy he felt a double nature in human beings, for he could hardly stammer when he spoke of a “good” and a “bad” Franz, and “the latter has the good even in later been a lot of trouble for years.”

Franz Hartmann was not yet perfect, nor did he ever pretend to be a saint. He may still have some mistakes, but he is responsible for them himself. For him, what he writes of Blavatsky applies: “Your personal mistakes are nobody’s business because, as far as we know, no one has ever been harmed by them.” He never claimed infallibility for his teachings and judgments either. But Hartmann was inspired by the best and most honest intentions, but he had no diplomatic nature, for

this would have closed the realm of self-knowledge to him. His honesty, business inexperience and trustlessness were, as he himself often lamented, exploited to his detriment by unscrupulous businessmen. It is a prudent requirement that the student of Theosophy should not associate with people of this kind. Failure to observe this principle caused Hartmann some trouble. And yet we know that he recognized the nature of these businessmen.

All those with Dr. Hartmann will confirm what Master M. writes to Hartmann: “If I know anything for certain, it is that I recognize that you are completely free from the prejudices and partisanship that usually accompany a calm and dispassionate pursuit of the main purpose of society, namely, complete equality of men as brothers and elevation above their childish fairy tales, which they call their religion, whether exoteric or esoteric.”⁷

What we admire about Franz Hartmann is his loyalty to the Masters, which gave him the strength to work on his task well into old age despite being ill for many years. He never left the duty he had assumed. Faithfulness is the supreme virtue of a student of Theosophy.

Anyone who works for enlightenment and fraternization must not focus on external success. Viewed from the outside, the success of Hartmann’s work does not appear to be all that great, since neither the state authorities nor the scholars know anything about him at the moment and he is hardly known outside the Theosophical Brotherhood, despite his many writings and lectures.

But this was the fate of almost all true mystics and Theosophists, because they are standard-bearers and pioneers of the future and are therefore not yet understood by the crowd in their time. However, we are convinced that in the not too distant future, when civilized humanity will be more receptive to theosophical ideas after perhaps great suffering, Dr. Hartmann will receive the universal recognition he deserves. Franz Hartmann was undoubtedly one of the greatest philosophers and mystics in history. Almost no other writer before him has brought the highest problems of existence to the mind in such a simple, clear, and yet scientific way as he has. In no book of world literature has the unity (God) been made the focus of the presentation to this extent, as Franz Hartmann does on almost every page of his numerous writings. His writings are religious in the highest sense of the word. Many consider them to be the finest theosophical works known to mankind. It is our wish that they should become the household treasure of every educated family of

the German people. What Plato was for the past civilized world and especially for the Greek people, that Franz Hartmann will become even more for the coming civilized world when the members of the Theosophical Brotherhood fulfill their duty.

He did not invent the teachings that Franz Hartmann proclaimed to mankind, nor were they anything new; no sage has imparted his own teachings, but has only proclaimed to mankind the eternal truths which are the common possession of all the enlightened of the human race. They were all just interpreters of the truth. The teachings of Franz Hartmann will still exist long after German culture has perished.

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There is a duty of all of Hartmann's students, who owe so much to him as their teacher, to whom he opened the path and gave them the peace that is based on the self-knowledge of the truth is based. Anyone who does not put all their strength, all their knowledge and abilities at the service of the brotherhood has not understood the spirit which speaks to us from Hartmann's writings and is not yet able to tread the path that leads to salvation from the shackles of existence.

All of us who feel the gratitude we owe him want to renew our vow in this hour to always work in the spirit and in the loyalty of Franz Hartmann for the brotherhood of suffering humanity, true to the higher self, which is the spirit of humanity and the whole universe. I close my biography of Hartmann with his own words, with which he closed Volume 16 of his Lotus Blossoms in 1900:

"The Lotusblüten should be designed to give the reader a support to elevate himself to that spiritual height and to grow into that sphere where it is possible to get in touch with those high ideals that cannot be humiliated to be penetrated by them and to realize them in yourself . . . For me it was not a question of letting my own light shine before the world, . . . but I have made it my task to fish the most precious pearls from the writings of the truly enlightened of all nations and times, to clean them of the mud clinging to them and to place them in the right light. . . The Lotusblüten were meant to be a collection of the deepest and most sublime teachings ever proclaimed by the sages, but it fell to me to collect the flowers of wisdom and draw attention to their beauty. They are not artificially made flowers,

and they do not belong to me alone, but to the whole world; nothing belongs to me but the string with which they are bound in a bouquet. . .

In what is collected in the Lotusblüten there is sufficient spiritual nourishment for the coming generations of the new century. . . The Lotusblüten come to an end, but not the spirit which is contained in them, and whoever absorbs this spirit has no need of further writings, for it contains the seed from which, with proper care, a new flower of wisdom can unfold. . . So I say goodbye to all readers! and wish that the Holy Spirit of self-knowledge would fill and enlighten them all and come alive in them. But I myself lay down my pen as gladly as I took it up with joy at first, as one who gives up a work which has been entrusted to him, and in which he has nothing to gain for himself, when it is finished. I take no credit for myself and do not concern myself with success, but leave the same to God.

But I do not say goodbye to those who have understood me and have walked with me on the path of truth, because they remain connected to me in the spirit of truth and love.” “Whoever knows himself in truth, knows God, who is truth and reality.”

Peace to all beings in space!

Publisher's afterword.

The “Lotusblüten,” which had ceased to appear with their 16th volume in 1900, were reborn in 1908 in the “Neuen Lotusblüten.” Since that year, Dr. Hartmann published this new magazine and continued in it what he had started in the “Lotusblüten.”⁸ His passing is an irreplaceable loss for us. For those who are left behind, it should and must be a sacred legacy to continue walking in his footsteps, to follow in his footsteps.

We as publishers of the “Neuen Lotusblüten” do not believe that we can do better to honor the memory of the deceased than if we do everything we can, which is our part, to permanently preserve this, his greatest creation. Even if death has wrested the pen from the master's hand, we should continue to pursue his goal, and his memory should continue to be cultivated in these pages.

We have secured the staff of qualified and significant forces and hope that we will succeed in being able to continue the “Neuen Lotusblüten” in an uplifting and instructive manner in the spirit of Hartmann, and we ask for further interest, encouragement, help and support towards our efforts.

Notes

¹ Obituary. Dr. Franz Hartmann, the founder of the International Theosophical Brotherhood. His life and Works. By Herrmann Rudolph. Neue Lotusblüten 5, no. 9-10 (September-October 1912), 257-280 [Dr. Franz Hartmann, der Gründer der Intern. Theosophischen Verbrüderung. Sein Leben und Wirken. Von Hermann Rudolph.] [This article was reformatted from the original, but with the content unchanged other than fixing minor typos. Translation from the German by Robert Hutwohl, ©2026]

² Nach einem in der “Theosophischen Gesellschaft Leipzig” gehaltenen Vortrage. [After a lecture given in the Theosophical Society in Leipzig.]

³ Franz Hartmann, “Denkwürdige Erinnerungen.”

⁴ Sitz Leipzig, Blumengasse 12.

⁵ Lotusblüten. Bd. XI, 145.

⁶ Lotusblüten. Bd. XI, 214.

⁷ Lotusblüten. Bd. XI, 147.

⁸ [R.H.—It has been difficult to determine which was the last article in the Neue Lotusblüten by Dr. Hartmann, before Dr. Paul Harald Grävell assumed the duties of writer and editor. The only way I could determine this was by noting the difference in the quality of the writing in the articles. Dr. Hartmann would have produced a few articles which would have been ready for publication even after his death in August 7, 1912, but my decision had to encompass other parameters. The articles in the magazine, if unsigned, were usually by Dr. Hartmann and Dr. Grävell continued this practice, which made it all the more difficult to determine who was the author.]