

The Occult Sciences by Henry S. Olcott

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In the tenth chapter of his famous work, entitled *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, David Hume attempts to define the limits of philosophical enquiry. So pleased was the author with his work that he has placed it on record that with the "wise and learned" — a most necessary separation, since a man may be wise without being at all learned, while modern science has introduced to us many of her most famous men who, though bursting like Jack Bunsby with learning, were far, *very* far from wise — his (Hume's) postulate must be "an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusions". For many years this oracular utterance was unquestioned, and Hume's apophthegm was laid like a chloroformed handkerchief, over the mouth of every man who attempted to discuss the phenomena of the invisible world. But a brave Englishman and man of science — who we are proud to say accepted the diploma of our Theosophical Society — to-wit, Alfred Russell Wallace, F.R.S., has of late called Hume's infallibility in question. He finds two grave defects in his proposition that a miracle is a visitation of the laws of Nature;" since it assumes, firstly, that we know *all* the laws of nature; and secondly, that an unusual phenomenon *is* a miracle. Speaking deferentially, is it not after all a piece of preposterous egotism for any living man to say what is, or rather what is *not*, a law of Nature? I have enjoyed the acquaintance of scientists who could actually repeat the names of the several parts of a bed bug and even of a flea. Upon this rare accomplishment they plumed themselves not a little, and took on the airs of a man of science. I have talked with them about the laws of Nature and found that they thought they knew enough of them to dogmatize to me about the Knowable and the Unknowable. I know doctors of medicine, even professors, who were read up in physiology and able to dose their patients without exceeding the conventional average of casualties good-naturedly allowed the profession. They have dogmatized to me about science and the laws of Nature, although not one of them could tell me anything positive about the life of man, in either the states of *ovum*, embryo, infant, adult or corpse. The most candid medical authorities have always frankly confessed that the human being is a puzzle as yet unsolved and medicine "scientific guess-work." Has ever yet a surgeon, as he stood beside a subject on the dissecting table of the amphitheatre, dared tell his class that he knew what life is, or that his scalpel could cut away any integumental veil so as to lay bare the mystery? Did any modern botanist ever venture to explain what is that tremendous secret law which makes every seed produce the plant or tree of its own kind? Mr. Huxley and his fellow-biologists have shown us protoplasm — the gelatinous substance which forms the physical basis of life — and told us that it is substantially identical in composition in plant and animal. But they can go no farther than the microscope and spectroscope will carry them. Do you doubt me? Then hear the mortifying confession of Professor Huxley himself. "In perfect strictness," he says, "it is true that we know nothing about the composition of any body whatever, as it is!" And yet what scientist is there who has dogmatized more about the limitations of scientific enquiry? Do you think that, because the chemists can dissolve for you the human body into its elementary gases and ashes until what was once a tall man can be put into an empty cigar-box and a large bottle, they can help you any better to understand what that living man really was? Ask them; — I am willing to let the case rest upon their own

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unchallenged evidence.

Science? Pshaw! What is there worthy to wear that imperial name so long as its most noisy representatives cannot tell us the least part of the mystery of man or of the nature which environs him. Let science explain to us how the littlest blade of grass grows, or bridge over the "abyss" which Father Felix, the great French Catholic orator tauntingly told the Academy, existed for it in a grain of sand, and then dogmatize as much as it likes about the *laws of Nature*! In common with all heretics I hate this presumptuous pretence, and as one who, having studied psychology for nearly thirty years, has some right to be heard, I protest against, and utterly repudiate, the least claim of our modern science to know all the laws of Nature, and to say what is or what is not possible. As for the opinions of non-scientific critics, who never informed themselves practically about even one law of Nature, they are not worth even listening to. And yet what a clamour they make, to be sure; how the public ear has been assailed by the din of ignorant and conceited criticasters. It is like being among a crowd of stockbrokers on the exchange. Every one of the authorities is dogmatizing in his most vociferous and impressive manner. One would think to read and hear what all these priests, editors, authors, deacons, elders, civil and military servants, lawyers, merchants, vestrymen and old women, and their followers, admirers and echoing toadies have to say — that the laws of Nature were as familiar to them as their alphabets, and that every one carried in his pocket the combination key to the Chubb lock of the Universe! If these people only realized how foolish they really are in rushing in

"..... where Angels fear to tread,"

— they might somewhat abate their pretences. And if common-sense were as plentiful as conceit, a lecture upon the Occult Sciences would be listened to with a more humble spirit than, I am afraid, can be counted upon in our days.

I have tried by simply calling your attention to the confessed ignorance of our modern scientists of the nature of life, to show you that in fact all visible phenomena are occult, or hidden from the average inquirer. The term *occult* has been given to the sciences relating to the mystical side of nature — the department of Force or Spirit. Open any book on science or listen to any lecture or address by a modern authority, and you will see that modern science limits its enquiry to the visible material or physical universe. The combinations and correlations of matter under the impulse of hidden forces, are what it studies. To facilitate this line of enquiry, mechanical ingenuity has lent the most marvellous assistance. The microscope has now been perfected so as to reveal the tiniest objects in the tiny world of a drop of dew ; the telescope brings into its field and focus glittering constellations that — as Tom Moore poetically says —

"..... stand
Like winking sentinels upon the void
Beyond which Chaos dwells;"

the chemist's balances will weigh matter to the ten-thousandth part of a grain, by the spectroscope the composition of all things on earth and suns and stars is claimed to be demonstrable in the lines they make across the spectrum, substances hitherto supposed to be elements are now proved to be compounds and what we have imagined compounds, are found to be elements. Inch by inch, step by step. Physical Science has marched from its old prison in the dungeon of the Church towards its desired

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goal — the verge of physical nature. It would not be too much to admit that the verge has been almost reached, but that Edison's recent discoveries of the telephone, the phonograph and the electric light, and Crookes's of the existence and properties of Radiant Matter, seem to have pushed farther away the chasm that separates the confessedly Knowable from the fancied Unknowable. The recent advances of physical science tend to mitigate somewhat the pride of our scientists. It is as though whole domains previously undreamt of were suddenly exposed to view as each new eminence of knowledge is gained, just as the traveller sees long reaches of country to be traversed upon climbing to the crest of the mountain that had been shutting him in within a narrow horizon. The fact is that, whether regarded from her physical or dynamical side, Nature is a book with an endless variety of subjects to be studied and mysteries to be unravelled. And as regards Science, there is a thousand times more that is Occult than familiar and easy to understand.

The realization of this fact, both as the result of personal enquiry and of conversation with the learned, was one chief cause of the organization of the Theosophical Society.

Now, it must be agreed that, while the first necessity for the candid student is to discover the depth and immensity of his own ignorance, the next is to find out where and how that ignorance may be dispelled. We must first tit ourselves to become pupils and then look about for a teacher* Where, in what part of the world, can there be found men capable of teaching us a part of the mystery that is hidden behind the mask of the world of matter? Who holds the secret of Life? Who knows what Force is, and what causes it to bring around its countless, eternal correlations with the molecules of matter? What adept can unriddle for us the problem how worlds are built and why? Can any one tell us whence man came, whither he goes, what he is? What is the secret of birth, of sleep, of thought, of memory, of death? What is that Eternal, Self-Existent Principle, that by common consent is believed to be the source of everything visible and invisible, and with which man claims kinship? We, little modern people, have been going about in search after this teacher, with our toy lanterns in our hands as though it were night instead of bright day. The light of truth shines all the while, but we, being blind, cannot see it. Does a new authority proclaim himself, we ran from all sides, but only see a common man with bandaged eyes, holding a pretty banner and blowing his own trumpet. "Come," he cries, "come, good people, and listen to one who knows the laws of Nature. Follow my lead, join my school, enter my church, buy my nostrum and you will be wise in this world, and happy hereafter!" How many of these pretenders there have been, how they have imposed for a while upon the world; what meannesses and cruelties their devotees have done in their behalf; and how their shams and humbugs have ultimately been exposed, the pages of history show. There is but one truth, and that is to be sought for in the mystical world of man's interior nature, theosophically, and by the help of the "Occult Sciences."

If history has preserved for as the record of multitudinous failures of materialists to read the secret laws of Nature, it has also kept for our instruction the stories of many successes gained by Theosophists in this direction. There is no impenetrable mystery in Nature to the student who knows how to interrogate her. If physical facts can be observed by the eye of the body, so can spiritual laws be discovered by that interior perception of ours which we call the eye of the spirit. This perceptive power inheres in the nature of man; it is his godlike quality which makes him superior to brutes. What we call seers and prophets, and the Buddhists know as *rahats* and Aryans as true *sannyasis*, are only men who have emancipated their interior selves from physical bondage by meditation in secluded spots where the foulness of average humanity could not taint them, and where they were nearest to the threshold of Nature's temple; and by the gradual and persistent conquest of brutal desire after desire, taste after taste, weakness after

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weakness, sense after sense, they have moved forward to the ultimate victory of spirit. Jesus is said to have gone thus apart to be tempted; so did Mahomet who spent one day in every month alone in a mountain cave; so did Zoroaster, who emerged from the seclusion of his mountain retreat only at the age of 40; so did Buddha, whose knowledge of the cause of pain and discovery of the path to Nirvana, was obtained by solitary self-struggles in desert places. Turn over the leaves of the book of records and you will find that every man, who really did penetrate the mysteries of life and death, got the truth in solitude and in a mighty travail of body and spirit. These were all Theosophists — that is, original searchers after spiritual knowledge. What they did, what they achieved, any other man of equal qualities may attain to. And this is the lesson taught by the Theosophical Society. As they spurned churches, revelations and leaders, and wrested the secrets from the bosom of Nature, so do we. Buddha said that we should believe nothing upon authority, not even his own, but believe because our reason told us the assertion was true. He began by striding over even the sacred Vedas because they were used to prevent original theosophical research; castes he brushed aside as selfish monopolies. His desire was to fling wide open every door to the sanctuary of Truth. We organized our Society — as the very first section of our original by-laws expresses it — "for the discovery of all the laws of Nature, and the dissemination of knowledge of the same." The known laws of Nature why should we busy ourselves with? The unknown, or occult ones, were to be our special province of research. No one in America, none in Europe, now living, could help us, except in special branches, such as Magnetism, Crystal reading, Psychometry, and those most striking phenomena of so-called mediumship, grouped together under the generic name of modern spiritualism. Though the Vedas, the Puranas, the Zend Avesta, the Koran, and the Bible teemed with allusions to the sayings and doings of wonder-working theosophists, we were told by every one that the power had long since died out, and the adepts vanished from the sight of men. Did we mention the name Occult Science, the modern biologist curled his lip in fine scorn, and the lay fool gave way to senseless witticisms.

It was a discouraging prospect, no doubt; but in this, as in every other instance, the difficulties were more imaginary than real. We had a clue given us to the right road by one who had spent a long lifetime in travel, who had found the science to be still extant, with its proficients and masters still practising it as in ancient days. The tidings were most encouraging, as are those of help and succour to a party of castaways on an unfriendly shore. We learned to recognize the supreme value of the discoveries of Paracelsus, of Mesmer and of Von Reichenbach, as the stepping stones to the higher branches of Occultism. We turned again to study them, and, the more we studied, the clearer insight did we get into the meaning of Asiatic myth and fable, and the real object and methods of the ascetic theosophists of all ages. The words `body', `soul', `spirit', `Moksha' and `Nirvana', acquired each a definite and comprehensible meaning. We could understand what the Yogi wished to express by his uniting himself with Brahma, and becoming Brahma; why the biographer of Jesus made him say `I and the Father are one'; how Bankaracharya and others could display such phenomenal learning without having studied it in books, whence Zartushtra acquired his profound spiritual illumination, and how the Lord Bakya Muni, though but a man "born in the purple," might nevertheless become All-Wise and All-Powerful. Would my hearer learn this secret? Let him study Mesmerism and master its methods until he can plunge his subject into so deep a sleep that the body is made to seem dead, and the freed soul can be sent, wheresoever he wills, about the Earth or among the stars. Then he will see the separate reality of the body and its dweller. Or, let him read Professor Denton's "Soul of Things", and test the boundless resources of Psychometry; a strange yet simple science which enables us to trace back through the ages the history of any substance held in the sensitive psychometer's hand. Thus a fragment of stone from Cicero's house, or the Egyptian pyramids; or a bit of cloth from a mummy's shroud; or a faded parchment or letter or painting; or some garment or other article worn by a historic personage; or a fragment of an aerolite — give to the psychometer impressions, sometimes amounting to visions surpassingly vivid, of

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the building, monument, mummy, writer or painter, or the long-dead personage, or the meteoric orbit from which the last-named object fell. This splendid science, for whose discovery in the year 1840, the world is indebted to Professor Joseph K. Buchanan, now a Fellow of our Society, has but just begun to show its capabilities. But already it has shown us that in the *Akasa*, or Ether of science, are preserved the records of every human experience, deed and word. No matter how long forgotten and gone by, they are still a record, and, according to Buchanan's estimate, about four out of every ten persons have in greater or less degree the psychometrical power which can read those imperishable pages of the Book of Life. Taken by itself either Mesmerism, or Psychometry, or Baron Reichenbach's theory of Odyle, or Odic Force, is sufficiently wonderful. In Mesmerism a sensitive subject is put by magnetism into the magnetic sleep, during which his or her body is insensible to pain, noises or any other disturbing influences. The Psychometer, on the contrary, does not sleep, but only sits or lies passively, holds the letter, fragment of stone or other object, in the hand or against the centre of the forehead, and, without knowing at all what it is or whence it came, describes what he or she feels or sees. Of the two methods of looking into the invisible world, Psychometry is preferable, for it is not attended with the risks of the magnetic slumber, arising from inexperience in the operator, or low physical vitality in the somnambule. Baron Dupotet, M. Cahagnet, Professor William Gregory, and other authorities tell us of instances of this latter sort in which the sleeper was with difficulty brought back to earthly consciousness, so transcendently beautiful were the scenes that broke upon their spiritual vision. Reichenbach's discovery — the result of several years' experimental research with the most expensive apparatus and a great variety of subjects, by one of the most eminent chemists and physicists of modern times — was this. A hitherto unsuspected force exists in Nature, having, like electricity and magnetism, its positive and negative poles. It pervades everything in the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms. Our Earth is charged with it, it is in the stars, and there is a close interchange of polar influences between us and all the heavenly bodies. Here I hold in my hand a specimen of quartz crystal, sent me from the Gastein Mountains in Europe by the Baroness Von Vay. Before Reichenbach's discovery of the Odic Force — as he calls it — this would have had no special interest to the geologist, beyond its being a curious example of imperfect crystallization. But now it has a definite value beyond this. If I pass the apex, or positive pole, over the wrist and palm of a sensitive person — thus, he will feel a sensation of warmth, or cold, or the blowing of a thin, *very* thin pencil of air over the skin. Some feel one thing, some another, according to the Odic condition of their own bodies. Speaking of this latter phenomenon, viz., that the Odic polarity of our bodies is peculiar to ourselves, different from the bodies of each other, different in the right and left sides, and different at night and morning in the same body, let me ask you whether a phenomenon long noticed, supposed by the ignorant to be miraculous, and yet constantly denied by those who never saw it, may not be classed as a purely Odic one. I refer to the levitation of ascetics and saints, or the rising into the air of their bodies at moments when they were deeply entranced. Baron Reichenbach found that the Odic sensibility of his best patients greatly changed in health and disease. Professor Perty, of Geneva, and Dr. Justinus Kurner tells us that the bodies of certain hysterical patients rose into the air without visible cause, and floated as light as a feather. During the Salem Witchcraft-horrors one of the subjects, Margaret Rule, was similarly levitated. Mr. William Crookes recently published a list of no less than forty Catholic ecstasies whose levitation is regarded as proof of their peculiar sanctity. Now I myself, in common with many other modern observers of psychological phenomena, have seen a person, in the full enjoyment of consciousness, raised into the air by a mere exercise of the will. This person was an Asiatic by birth and had studied the occult sciences in Asia., and explains the remarkable phenomenon as a simple example of change of corporeal polarity. You all know the electrical law that oppositely electrified bodies attract and similarly electrized ones repel each other. We say that we stand upon the earth because of the force of gravitation, without stopping to think how much of the explanation is a mere patter of words conveying no accurate idea to the mind. Suppose we say that we cling to the earth's surface, because the polarity of our body is opposed to the polarity of the spot of earth upon which we stand. That would be scientifically correct. But how, if our polarity is reversed, whether by disease, or the mesmeric passes of a powerful

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magnetiser, or the constant effort of a trained self-will. To classify: — suppose that we were either a hysteric patient, an ecstatic, a somnambule, or an adept in Asiatic Occult Science. In either case it the polarity of the body should be changed to its opposite polarity, and so our electrical, magnetic or odic state be made identical with that of the ground beneath us, the long-known electropolaric law would assert itself and our body would rise into the air. It would float as long as these mutual polaric differences continued, and rise to a height exactly proportionate to their intensity. So much of light is let into the old domain of Church "miracles" by Mesmerism and the Od discovery.

But our mountain crystal has another and far more striking peculiarity than mere odic polarity. It is nothing apparently but a poor lump of glass, and yet in its heart can be seen strange mysteries. There are doubtless a score of persons in this great audience, who, if they would sit in an easy posture and a quiet place, and gaze into my crystal for a few minutes, would see and describe to me pictures of people, scenes and places in different countries as well as their own beautiful Ceylon. I gave the crystal into the hand of a lady, who is a natural clairvoyant, just after I had received it from Hungary. "I see," she said, "a large, handsome room in what appears to be a castle. Through an open window can be seen a park with smooth-broad walks, trimmed lawns, and trees. A noble-looking lady stands at a marble-topped table doing up something into a parcel. A servant man in rich livery stands as though waiting for his mistress's orders. It is this crystal that she is doing up, and she puts it into a brown box, something like a small musical box." The clairvoyant knew nothing about the crystal, but she had given an accurate description of the sender, of her residence, and of the box in which the crystal came to me. How? Can any of the self-conceited little people, who say smart little nothings about the absurdity of the Occult Sciences, answer?

Reichenbach's careful investigations prove that minerals have each their own peculiar odic polarity, and this lets us into an understanding of much that the Asiatic people have said about the magical properties of gems. You have all heard of the regard in which the sapphire has ever been held for its supposed magical property to assist somnambulic vision. "The sapphire," according to a Buddhist writer, "will open barred doors and dwellings (for the spirit of man) ; it produces a desire for prayer, and brings with it more peace than any other gem; but he, who would wear it, must lead a pure and holy life."

Now a series of investigations by Amoretti into the electrical polarity of precious stones (which we find reported in Kieser's *Archia*, Vol. IV., p. 62) resulted in proving that the diamond, the garnet, the amethyst, are $-E$ while the sapphire is $+E$. Orpheus tells how by means of a load-stone a whole audience may be affected. Pythagoras, whose knowledge was derived from India, pays a particular attention to the colour and nature of precious stones; and Apollonius of Tyana, one of the purest and grandest men who ever lived, accurately taught his disciples the various occult properties of gems.

Thus does scientific inquiry, agreeing with the researches of the greatest philosophers, the experiences of religious ecstatics, continually — though, as a rule, unintentionally — give us a solid basis for studying Occultism. The more of physical phenomena we observe and classify, the more helped is the student of occult sciences and of the ancient Asiatic sciences, philosophies and religion. The fact is, we, modern Europeans, have been so blinded by the fumes of our own conceit that we have not been able to look beyond our noses. We have been boasting of our glorious enlightenment, our scientific discoveries, our civilization, and our superiority to everybody with a dark skin, and to every nation, east of the Volga and the Red Sea or south of the Mediterranean, until we have come almost to believe that the world was built for the Anglo-Saxon race, and the stars to make our bit of sky pretty. We have even manufactured a religion to suit ourselves out of Asiatic materials, and think it better than any religion that was ever heard

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of before. It is time that this childish vanity were done away with. It is time that we should try to discover the sources of modern ideas; and compare what, we think, we know of the laws of Nature with what the Asiatic people really did know, thousands of years before Europe was inhabited by our barbarian ancestors, or a European foot was set upon the American continent. The crucibles of science are heated red-hot and we are melting in them everything out of which we think we can get a fact. Suppose that, for a change, we approach the Eastern people in a less presumptuous spirit, and honestly confessing that we know nothing at all of the beginning or end of Natural Law, ask them to help us to find out what their forefathers knew? This has been the policy of the Theosophical Society, and it has yielded valuable results already. Depend upon it, ladies and gentlemen, there are still "wise men in the East," and the Occult Sciences are better worth studying than has hitherto been popularly supposed.

(The lecture was loudly applauded and, at the close, a vote of thanks was, upon the motion of Mr. James, Science Master in the Colombo College, adopted.)