

# **OCCULTISM**

by **ANNIE BESANT**

Adyar Pamphlets No.97

[Reprinted from The Theosophist, Vol. XXXV.]

Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, India

January 1919

[Page 1 ] H. P. BLAVATSKY defined Occultism as “the study of the Divine Mind in Nature”. and it would be difficult to find a nobler definition. All life, all energies, are hidden, and only their effects are patent. The forces by which a jewel is crystallized in the womb of the earth, by which a plant develops from a seed, by which an animal is evolved from a germ, by which a man feels and thinks — all these are occult, hidden from the eyes of men, to be studied by scientists only in the phenomena of growth, of evolution, as these present themselves, while the impelling forces, the nature of *vitality*, the invisible, intangible, secret springs of all activities, these remain ever hidden.

Moreover, this admirable definition posits Mind behind all the manifestations which we totalize as *Nature*. It is these manifestations which are woven into that garment by which we see God (“and weave for God the garment thou see'st Him by”). His Mind is revealed in natural phenomena, and by the visible”, the invisible things . . . are clearly seen”. Bruno spoke of natural objects as the divine language; they are the Self-expressions of God. In the [Page 2] divine Mind exist the Ideas which are to be embodied in a future universe; the world of mind, the *Intelligible World* precedes the material world. So taught the Hebrews; so taught the Greeks; and the teaching is confirmed by our everyday experience. We think, before we embody our thought in an action. Ere a man creates a great picture, he must have the idea of the picture in his mind; he *thinks it out* before he paints it on the canvas. It is the world of Ideas, the Intelligible World, which is the realm explored by the Occultist.

He seeks to understand this hidden world whence flow all outer manifestations; to grasp the Ideas which embody themselves in varied forms; to seek the hidden sources of life and to trace their outflow, as the physical scientist seeks and traces physical types and their evolution. He is the scientist of the invisible, as the ordinary scientist is the scientist of the visible, and his methods are scientific; he observes, he experiments, he verifies, he compares, and he is continually enlarging the boundaries of the known.

The Occultist and the Mystic differ in their methods as well as in their object. The Occultist seeks knowledge of God; the Mystic seeks union with God. The Occultist uses Intellect; the Mystic Emotion. The Occultist watches Ideas embodying themselves in phenomena; the Mystic unfolds the Divine within him that it may expand into the Divinity whose Body is a universe. These sharp-cut definitions are, of course, true only of abstract types; the concrete [Page 3] individuals shade off into each other, and the perfected Occultist finally includes the Mystic, the perfected Mystic finally includes the Occultist. But on the way to perfection, the Occultist must evolve, *pari passu*, his consciousness and the successive vehicles in which that consciousness works; while the Mystic sinks into the depths of his consciousness, and cares naught for the bodies, which he disregards and abandons. To borrow two well known terms: the Occultist tends to become the *Jīvanmukta*, the liberated Spirit residing in material bodies; the Mystic tends to become the *Jīvanmukta*, the liberated Bodiless One. The Occultists rise, grade by grade, through the Hierarchy; the Mystics become the *Nirmānakāyas*, the Reservoir of Spirituality, from which are drawn the streams which irrigate the worlds. Blessed, holy and necessary are both types, the two Hands of the One LOGOS in His helping of His universe.

Bearing in mind H. P. Blavatsky's definition, we can readily see how the more ordinary view of Occultism, that it merely means the study of the hidden — without

defining the hidden — inevitably grows up. The Occultist is to study the Divine *Mind in Nature* then he must not only expand his consciousness, so as to enter into the Divine Mind, but must also evolve his subtle bodies and their senses, in order to contact Nature in all the grades of subtlety of her manifestations. This evolution of the subtle senses and the knowledge gained through them of the phenomena of the subtle, or superphysical, worlds of matter — loom [Page 4] large in the eyes of the superficial observer, and he comes to identify Occultism with clairvoyance, clairaudience, traveling in the subtle bodies, and the like. It would be as sensible if this same good gentleman identified physical science with its apparatus — its microscopes, telescopes, spectroscopes. The subtle senses are merely the apparatus of the Occultist, they are not Occultism. They are the instruments by which he observes the objects which escape the normal physical eye. As the ordinary instruments of science may have flaws in them, and so may distort the physical objects observed, so may the super-physical instruments have flaws in them, and distort the superphysical objects observed. Mal-observation with a defective instrument does not vitiate the scientific method, though it may for the moment vitiate particular scientific conclusions. The same is true as regards mal-observations with ill-evolved superphysical senses; the occult method is scientific and sound, but for the moment the particular conclusions drawn by the Occultist are erroneous. Where then is safety ? In repeated observations by many observers — just as in physical science.

Let us examine this a little more closely. A scientific observer finds his observations through his microscope yield him a certain picture; he draws what he sees. Then he puts a higher power on his microscope, and again observes the object; he obtains another picture. He compares the two. He finds that certain parts of the object that he thought were isolated from each other are connected with threads [Page 5] so fine that they were invisible under the lower power. His first observations were accurate, but incomplete. One result of such incompleteness is that every scientific man, in giving pictures of objects as seen through the microscope, notes on them the power of the lens through which he observed them. Again, if a young observer, on comparing his drawings with those made by experts and inserted in the text-books, finds that he has inserted something not seen in the others, he will test his lens and repeat his observation, taking another object, indetical with the first, lest some dust, or hair, or other accidental intruder should have presented itself unbidden for his inspection. Let us apply this to the student of Occultism. He has evolved a power of sight beyond the normal; he observes some etheric object, and puts down his observations; a few years later, having evolved a higher power of sight, he observes the object again, and finds that the two parts of it he thought successive are divided by some intermediate process. I will take an exact instance. Mr. Leadbeater and myself in 1895 observed that the ultimate physical atom, being disintegrated, broke up into the coarsest form of astral matter. In 1908, observing the same process again, with a higher power of sight evolved during the intervening years, we saw that the physical atom, on disintegration, ran through a series of further disintegrations, and re-integrated finally into the coarsest form of astral matter. The parallel with the lower and higher powers of the microscope is complete. [Page 6]

Once more; a young observer sees some astral form; he compares it, if he is wise — he is not always wise — with previous observations of older observers, or with statements by great seers in world-scriptures. He finds his observation unlike theirs. If he is a serious student he tries again, making repeated and careful observations,

and finds out his mistake. If he is foolish, he proclaims his mal-observation as a new discovery.

But, it may be said, people respect the physical scientist, and accept his observations, while they mock at those of the Occultist. All the discoveries of new facts were mocked at before the public was ready for them; was not Bruno burned and Galileo imprisoned for declaring that the earth moved round the sun ? Was not Galvani called *the frogs dancing-master* when he laid his finger on the hidden force now called by his name ? What matters the mockery of ignorant men to those whose steadfast eyes are seeking to pierce through the veils in which Nature shrouds her secrets ?

So far as the methods of observation of the material side of Nature are concerned, observations carried on by means of improved apparatus — externally manufactured or internally evolved — the methods of physical and of superphysical science are identical. Knowledge is gained by study of the results obtained by predecessors in the same field, and by observations directed to similar phenomena, with a view to verifying or correcting the results.

The evolution of the consciousness which observes through the senses is another matter, and this plays [Page 7] a greater part in occult than in physical science; for consciousness must unfold as higher senses evolve, else would the better tools be useless in the hands of the inefficient workman. But the object of physical and superphysical science alike is the extension of the boundaries of knowledge.

Is this extension desirable or not ? If the knowledge be turned to human service, yes; if to the increase of human misery, no. The application of physical science to the destruction of human life is most evil; yet not for that can we seek to block the advance of chemistry. The Occultist who knows how to liberate the forces imprisoned in the atom will not place within the hands of the competing nations of the world this means of wholesale destruction. Yet he knows that chemistry is advancing in this direction, and that it must not be hindered in its advance.

As regards the Occultists themselves they are useful or dangerous according to their motives. If they are devoted to the welfare of the worlds, then their rapid evolution is beneficial. If they seek power for their own aggrandizement, then they are dangerous. The evolution of consciousness is all to the good, for, as that unfolds, the wider view brings the man gradually more and more into unison with the Divine Will in evolution, and, at a certain point in this expansion, he inevitably recognizes the all-compelling claims of the larger Self. But in the lower stages, in the astral and mental worlds, while his self-discipline must be rigid as regards his bodies, pride and selfishness may make him a danger to his [Page 8] fellow men. The discipline of the senses and the control of the mind are equally necessary, whether the man is aiming at development for service or for individual aggrandizement. He must lead a life of rigid temperance in all things, and he must become master of his thoughts. But if personal ambition rule him, if he seek to gain in order that he may hold, not in order that he may give, then every added power becomes a menace to the world, and he enters the ranks of the Adversary. The Occultist must evolve into a Christ or into a Satan — to borrow the Christian terms. For him there is no half-way house. Safer are the green pastures where the flock may feed at peace than the arid heights, with their crevasses and their precipices, with their shrouding mists and their crashing

avalanches. None who has trodden part of the rugged way would seek to induce others to enter on it. But there are some whom an imperious inner force compels; some who cannot rest by the still waters, but must seek to climb the heights. For such the way is open, and for them there is no other way which is possible. Only, that they may not add their shattered lives to the "wrecks which strew the path of Occultism", let them gird their loins with strength, let them don the armor of purity and the helmet of unselfishness, and then let them go forward, in the Name of the World's Redeemers, with their eyes fixed on the Star which shines above them, careless of the stones which gash their bleeding feet.