

# The Secret Doctrine Symposium

## Part II

Compiled and Edited by David P. Bruce

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN AMERICA  
P.O. Box 270, Wheaton, IL 60187-0270  
[www.theosophical.org](http://www.theosophical.org)  
© 2012

## Introduction

In choosing articles for Part Two of *The Secret Doctrine Symposium*, I have featured authors and topics not included in Part One. Since the articles are not arranged sequentially, it is not necessary to have taken part one of the *Symposium* in order to benefit from this collection of articles.

I have added discussion or study questions to each of the articles. When referring to a specific quote or passage within the article, the page number and paragraph are referenced in the following manner: (1.5) would indicate the fifth paragraph on page one, while (4.2) indicates the second paragraph on page four. A page number followed by a zero, *i.e.*, (25.0) would indicate that something is being discussed in the paragraph carried over from the previous page, in this case, page 24.

If the original article contained footnotes, they were retained. In some cases I have added my own comments in the form of endnotes, which are identified as “Compiler’s Notes.”

A few words on the editing process are in order: British spelling and punctuation have been changed to the American style; citations from various editions of *The Secret Doctrine* now refer to the 3-volume 1979 edition by the Theosophical Publishing House; in keeping with modern standards, the language has been edited, where possible, to be more gender neutral, but not at the sacrifice of good prose; and minor emendations have been made throughout as necessary. The compiler alone is responsible for any errors of judgment in the editing of these articles.

—David P. Bruce  
September 2012

# Contents

- Introduction   iii
- 1 *The Secret Doctrine*   1  
—Henry Steel Olcott
- 2 Methods of Approach to the Study of *The Secret Doctrine*   7  
—Geoffrey A. Barborka
- 3 *The Secret Doctrine*   13  
—Ernest Wood
- 4 An Outline of *The Secret Doctrine* , Part I   21  
—C. Jinarajadasa
- 5 An Outline of *The Secret Doctrine* , Part II   27  
— C. Jinarajadasa
- 6 An Outline of *The Secret Doctrine* , Part III   31  
— C. Jinarajadasa
- 7 The Three Fundamental Propositions in Practice   37  
—Mary Anderson
- 8 Secret Doctrine Questions & Answers, Part I   43  
—Geoffrey A. Barborka
- 9 Secret Doctrine Questions & Answers, Part II   47  
— Geoffrey A. Barborka
- 10 Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge   51  
—H. P. Blavatsky
- 11 The Pattern of *The Secret Doctrine*   59  
—Ianthe Hoskins
- 12 *The Secret Doctrine*   63  
—Annie Besant

*THE SECRET DOCTRINE*

A Review by Henry Steel Olcott

*The Secret Doctrine* was published in October 1888. This book review appeared in the January 1889 issue of *The Theosophist*, only three months after its publication.

The personal relations existing between the author of this splendid production—one of the towering pinnacles of modern literature—and this magazine, make it more seemly that we should copy the criticisms of third parties rather than put forth our own. But we may at least say that however opinions may differ with respect to the philosophical and metaphysical value of the ancient esotericism, the unanimous verdict of our age must be that *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* are works of a phenomenal character. Whether we consider the advanced years of the author, the comparative rapidity of their composition, the varied erudition, and the boldness and originality of thought they display, the sparkling of their literary style, the strong light thrown upon some of the most recondite problems of symbology, mythology, and comparative theology, biological and psychological science, and evolution, the reader is struck with amazement at the several features of this intellectual “efflorescence” of our times.

To the intimate friends of Madame Blavatsky, who have been near her at the time when the two books were being written (1876-77 and 1886-88), their production has been clothed with all the interest of psychic phenomena of a class infinitely higher than the vulgar wonders of physical thaumaturgy.<sup>1</sup> Enfeebled by disease, and on several occasions pronounced moribund by the physicians, forced by them to leave India under warnings of probably sudden death by apoplexy, she has yet worked at her desk on *The Secret Doctrine* an average of about twelve hours daily, from 6:30 or 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and while the work was passing through the press, often read fifty pages of proof a day.<sup>2</sup>

To see the hundreds of references to other authors, one might naturally suppose her possessed of a very extensive library, whereas, in point of fact, neither for *Isis Unveiled* nor *The Secret Doctrine* had she access to more than comparative handfuls. Her quotations<sup>3</sup> have often been called into question by friends who had been permitted to read her MSS., but when they searched in the British Museum and American Libraries, her accuracy was vindicated.

A case in point: for a title-heading in one of her essays<sup>4</sup> she wrote a certain verse and credited it to Tennyson. Two persons—one an author of repute—who thought themselves familiar with every line that Tennyson had published, vehemently protested against her committing such a blunder, one sure to be detected at once. On Madame Blavatsky’s persisting that it had so come into her mind and must be right, a gentleman of great literary

experience—Dr. C. Carter-Blake—made a long search in the British Museum, which resulted in finding the verse *verbatim et literatim*<sup>5</sup> in a magazine of the year 1831, “The Gem,” long since dead and forgotten. For some reason or other, the poet had not cared to include it in any edition of his works.<sup>6</sup>

Opponents of a *calumnious diathesis*<sup>7</sup> have not scrupled to charge Madame Blavatsky with interested motives<sup>8</sup> in her Theosophical work. To such, the following circumstances should be interesting. The first edition of *Isis Unveiled* was, to the pleased surprise of its publisher, Mr. J. W. Bouton of New York, exhausted within ten days or a fortnight of appearance, and a second edition was demanded. Mr. Bouton came to Madame Blavatsky’s house and, in the presence of the present writer, made her the following liberal offer. If she would write another book, in a single volume, which should unveil *Isis* a little more, just enough to satisfy the mystical class of minds, he would bring out an edition of one hundred copies, sell them at \$100 each,<sup>9</sup> and give her \$50 per copy as author’s copyright. In short, he would pay her a splendid literary fee<sup>10</sup> of \$5,000 for a work which she could easily finish within a year. She refused on the ground that it was not permitted at that time to reveal more of the esoteric philosophy than had been given out in *Isis Unveiled*. Yet, just then she had not the money to pay her passage out to India!

There are some who say that the Book of Dzyan, upon whose majestic stanzas her work under notice is based, has no existence: that it is a literary fraud. Well, whether so or not, it is at least one of the most striking compositions in literature; its tone solemn and grandiose, like the organ peals through a cathedral, or the rhythmic tone of Nature upon which ancient music is said to be founded. If it was written by her indeed, then a Hindu might be inclined to suspect that she is a reincarnation of some such sage as bequeathed to an admiring world the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Ramayana*, or other archaic classical works. It is not of the least consequence *per se* whether there is or is not a Book of Dzyan preserved in the hidden libraries of the Sages, whether or not there be any such libraries (though the writer has personal knowledge of the latter fact, and could, if he chose, point out the very spot of one of them from a railway carriage in passing). The book stands upon its own merits, and so solidly that it will take a mighty adversary to upset it. If there is one thing more hateful than another to the independent thinker, it is to have a book put forth as specially entitled to reverence because of its alleged infallible parentage, and apart from its intrinsic merits. A book is good or bad, sound or unsound, instructive or silly, *as a book*; and all the gods of Olympus, and Recluses of all the Holy Mountains or Deserts, cannot make falsehood truth or imbecilic nonsense Divine revelation. This is clearly Madame Blavatsky’s opinion also, as the special disclaimers of authority in her *Secret Doctrine* amply show.

The value of this book is so great to would-be Theosophists that if a single chapter or portion of a chapter were read at each meeting of a Branch<sup>11</sup> by someone who can read well and understand the text, they need seek no further for teachings or teachers in theoretical Occultism. It is a library in itself, unique, in the sense of a dictionary or an encyclopedia;

and if the Theosophical movement had produced only the two books of this author, it would, in the eyes of posterity, be regarded as an epoch-marking phase of human thought.

As no stress is sought to be laid upon the supposed primal source of Madame Blavatsky's inspiration—the school of Eastern Sages—so her friends are not disposed to excuse her for any of the literary faults of her books: her discursiveness, the unmethodical jumbling together of various topics, a plethora of proofs adduced in support of a given proposition after her ground has been covered, so to say, three layers thick; her frequent lack of exactness in presentation of scientific theories and conclusions, and her sometimes contradictory language. Conceding all these, it is still most certain that she is one of the most brilliant conversation-alists, most graceful and interesting writers of modern times, whether in her own Russian vernacular or in French or English—in which all three languages her pen seems equally facile.

The critics of 1877 have said that the prototype of *Isis* was the *Anacalypsis* of Godfrey Higgins,<sup>12</sup> but while the *magnum opus* of that erudite yet neglected author never reached its complete second edition,<sup>13</sup> and Mr. Bouton and Mr. Quaritch have still many unsold copies in stock—fifty years after its appearance in 1836—the first edition of *Isis Unveiled* was sold within a fortnight, and the first of *The Secret Doctrine* (of 500 copies) sold actually in advance of publication. The times are certainly changed for the better, and the number of minds capable of grasping these high themes much larger than in the generation that not only mis-understood but socially persecuted Godfrey Higgins.

---

**Henry Steel Olcott** (1832-1907) was a co-founder of the Theosophical Society along with Madame Blavatsky and William Quan Judge. Olcott's administrative skills helped to shape the organizational structure of the TS in its early years. He was a tireless and devoted worker for the Theosophical Society, for which he faithfully served as president until his death in 1907.

### Compiler's Notes

1. Thaumaturgy: the performance of miracles; from the Greek, *thaûma* (miracle) and *érgon* (work).
2. Proofreading is a skill that requires sustained concentration and the ability to see what is actually on the printed page as opposed to what the mind thinks or assumes is on the document.
3. In his book *H. P. Blavatsky, the Light-Bringer*, Geoffrey Barboroka calculates that *Isis Unveiled* contains 1139 citations, while *The Secret Doctrine* includes 1147.
4. See "Karmic Visions" in the *Collected Writings*, Volume IX.
5. *Verbatim et literatim*: Latin, meaning "word for word and letter for letter."

6. Tennyson's short poem reads as follows:

Oh sad *No More!* O sweet *No More!*  
Oh strange *No More!*  
By a mossed brookband on a stone  
I smelt a wildweed-flower alone;  
There was a ringing in my ears,  
And both my eyes gushed out with tears.  
Surely all pleasant things had gone before,  
Lowburied fathomdeep beneath with thee, NO MORE!  
"The Gem," 1831

7. *Calumnious diathesis*: a colorful term coined by Olcott, which is formed from "calumnious" (slandorous or defamatory) and "diathesis" (having a constitutional predisposition toward a particular state or condition, especially one that is abnormal or diseased).
8. Olcott's use of the word *interested* is archaic; "self-serving motives" would be the current translation.
9. When adjusted for inflation, \$100 in 1889 dollars would be equivalent to \$2522 in 2012 dollars. Obviously, anybody who could afford to pay that price was financially well off.
10. Adjusted for inflation, a literary fee of \$5000 in 1889 dollars translates to \$126,214 in 2012 dollars.
11. The term "Branch" is synonymous with a Lodge of the Theosophical Society.
12. The full title of Godfrey Higgins's work is a mouthful: *Anacalypsis: an attempt to draw aside the veil of the Saitic Isis; or, An inquiry into the origin of languages, nations, and religion.*
13. Only 200 copies of *Anacalypsis* were published in the original 1836 edition; a limited edition of 350 copies was later published in 1927.

—David P. Bruce

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: (References to article are by page and paragraph.)

1. In what way does Olcott's review of *The Secret Doctrine* diverge from the normal parameters of a book review?
2. *The Secret Doctrine* was published three months before Henry Olcott's review appeared in the January 1889 issue of *The Theosophist*. Realistically, do you think Olcott had time to read the entire work before writing this review? And is it really necessary that a critic read every page of a book in order to write a proper review?
3. Do you think Olcott's high praise for *The Secret Doctrine* is warranted?