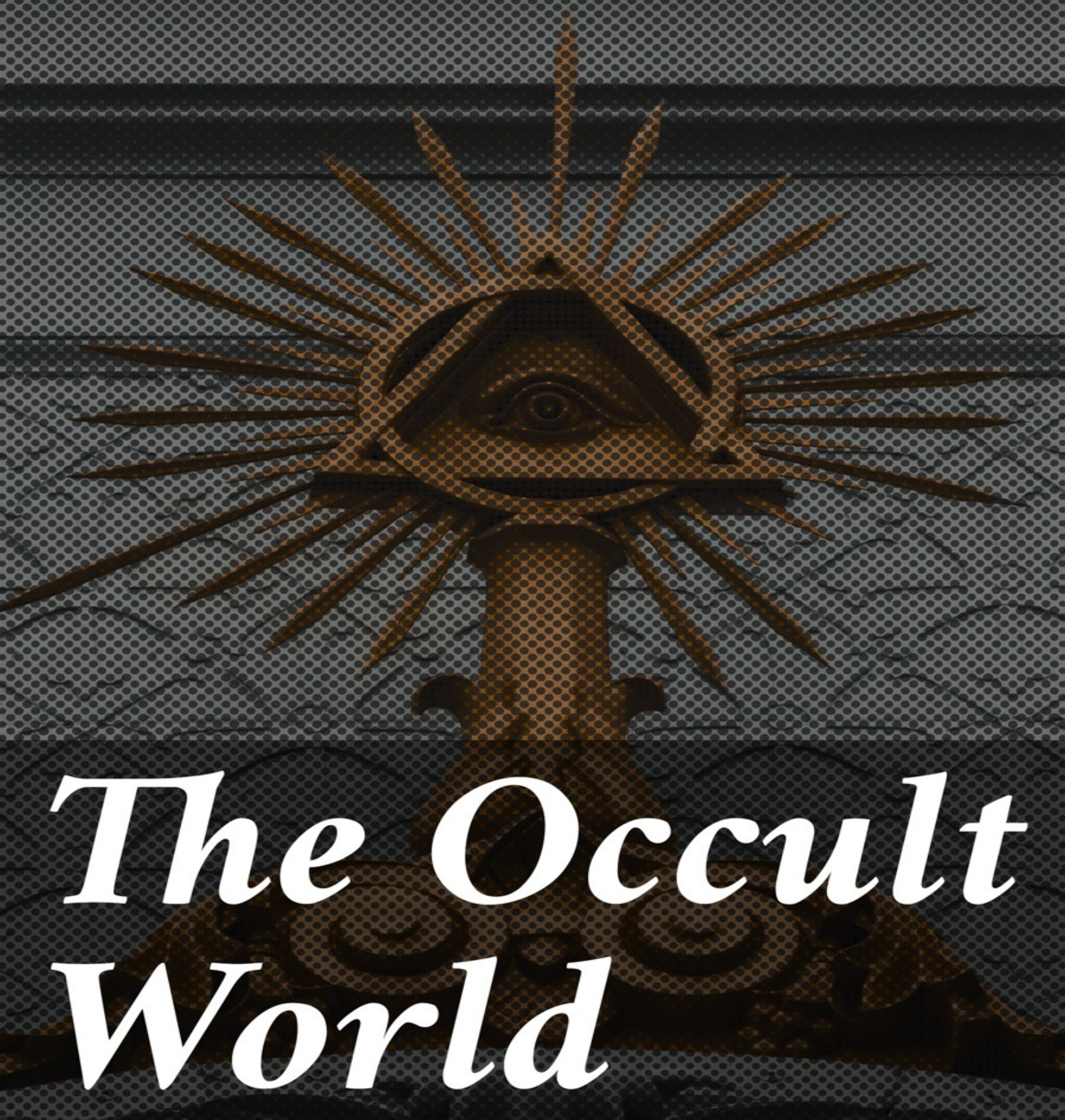


Alfred Percy Sinnett



*The Occult
World*

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To one whose comprehension of Nature and Humanity ranges so far beyond the science and philosophy of Europe, that only the broadest-minded representatives of either will be able to realise the existence of such powers in Man as those he constantly exercises, — to

Koot Hoomi Lal Singh,

whose gracious friendship has given the present writer his title to claim the attention of the European world, this little volume, with permission sought and obtained, is affectionately dedicated.

A P Sinnett.

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Introduction

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There is a school of Philosophy still in existence of which modern culture has lost sight. Glimpses of it are discernible in the ancient philosophies with which all educated men are familiar, but these are hardly more intelligible than fragments of forgotten sculpture, — less so, for we comprehend the human form, and can give imaginary limbs to a torso; but we can give no imaginary meaning to the truth coming down to us from Plato or Pythagoras, pointing, for those who hold the clue to their significance, to the secret knowledge of the ancient world. Side lights, nevertheless, may enable us to decipher such language, and a very rich intellectual reward offers itself to persons who are willing to attempt the investigation.

For, strange as the statement will appear at first sight, modern metaphysics, and to a large extent modern physical science, have been groping for centuries blindly after knowledge which occult philosophy has enjoyed in full measure all the while. Owing to a train of fortunate circumstances, I have

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come to know that this is the case; I have come into some contact with persons who are heirs of a greater knowledge concerning the mysteries of Nature and humanity than modern culture has yet evolved; and my present wish is to sketch the outlines of this knowledge, to record with exactitude the experimental proofs I have obtained that occult science invests its adepts with a control of natural forces superior to that enjoyed by physicists of the ordinary type, and the grounds there are for bestowing the most respectful consideration on the theories entertained by occult science concerning the constitution and destinies of the human soul. Of course people in the present day will be slow to believe that any knowledge worth considering can be found outside the bright focus of European culture. Modern science has accomplished grand results by the open method of investigation, and is very impatient of the theory that persons who ever attained to real knowledge, either in sciences or metaphysics, could have been content to hide their light under a bushel. So the tendency has been to conceive that occult philosophers of old — Egyptian priests, Chaldean Magi, Essenes, Gnostics, theurgic Neo-Platonists, and the rest — who kept their knowledge secret, must have adopted that policy to conceal the fact that they knew very little. Mystery can only have been loved by charlatans who wished to mystify. The conclusion is pardonable from the modern point of view, but it has given rise to an impression in the popular mind that the ancient mystics have actually been turned inside out, and found to know very little. This

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impression is absolutely erroneous. Men of science in former ages worked in secret, and instead of publishing their discoveries, taught them in secret to carefully selected pupils. Their motives for adopting that policy are readily intelligible, even if the merits of the policy may seem still open to discussion. At all events, their teaching has not been forgotten; it has been transmitted by secret initiation to men of our own time, and while its methods and its practical achievements remain secrets in their hands, it is open to any patient and earnest student of the question to satisfy himself that these methods are of supreme efficacy, and these achievements far more admirable than any yet standing to the credit of modern science.

For the secrecy in which these operations have been shrouded has never disguised their existence, and it is only in our own time that this has been forgotten. Formerly at great public ceremonies, the initiates displayed the powers with which their knowledge of natural laws invested them. We carelessly assume that the narratives of such displays describe performances of magic: we have decided that there is no such thing as magic, therefore the narratives must have been false, the persons whom they refer to, imposters. But supposing that magic, of old, was simply the science of magi, of learned men, there is no magic, in the modern sense, left in the matter. And supposing that such science — even in ancient times already the product of long ages of study — had gone in some directions further than

our much younger modern science has yet reached, it is reasonable to conclude that some

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displays in connection with ancient mysteries may have been strictly scientific experiments, though they sound like displays of magic, and would look like display of magic for us now if they could be repeated.

On that hypothesis modern sagacity applying modern knowledge to the subject of ancient mysteries, may be merely modern folly evolving erroneous conclusions from modern ignorance.

But there is no need to construct hypotheses in the matter. The facts are accessible if they are sought for in the right way, and the facts are these: The wisdom of the ancient world — science and religion commingled, physics and metaphysics combined — was a reality, and it still survives. It is that which will be spoken of in these pages as Occult Philosophy. It was already a complete system of knowledge that had been cultivated in secret, and handed down to initiates for ages, before its professors performed experiments in public to impress the popular mind in Egypt and Greece. Adepts of occultism in the present day are capable of performing similar experiments, and of exhibiting results that prove them immeasurably further advanced than ordinary modern science in a comprehension of the forces of Nature. Furthermore, they inherit from their great predecessors a science which deals not merely with physics, but with the constitution and capacities of the human soul

and spirit. Modern science has discovered the circulation of the blood; occult science understands the circulation of the life-principle. Modern physiology deals with the body only; occultism with the soul

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as well — not as the subject of vague, religious rhapsodies; but it is an actual entity, with properties that can be examined in combination with, or apart from, those of the body.

It is chiefly in the East that occultism is still kept up — in India and in adjacent countries. It is in India that I have encountered it; and this little volume is written to describe the experiences I have enjoyed, and to retail the knowledge I have acquired.

My narrative of events must be preceded by some further general explanations, or it would be unintelligible. The identity of occultism as practised in all ages, must be kept in view, to account for the magnitude of its organization, and for the astounding discovery that secluded Orientals may understand more about electricity than Faraday, more about physics than Tyndall. The culture of Europe has been developed by Europeans for themselves within the last few hundred years. The culture of occultists is the growth of vast periods long anterior to these, when civilization inhabited the East. And during a career which has carried occultism in the domain of physical science far beyond the point we have reached, physical science has merely been an object for occultism of secondary

importance. Its main strength has been devoted to metaphysical inquiry, and to the latent psychological faculties in man, faculties which, in their development, enable the occultist to obtain

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actual experimental knowledge concerning the soul's condition of extra-corporeal existence. There is thus something more than a mere archaeological interest in the identification of the occult system with the doctrines of the initiated organization in all ages of the world's history, and we are presented by this identification with the key to the philosophy of religious development. Occultism is not merely an isolated discovery showing humanity to be possessed of certain powers over Nature, which the narrower study of Nature from the merely materialistic standpoint has failed to develop; it is an illumination cast over all previous spiritual speculation worth anything, of a kind which knits together some apparently divergent systems. It is to spiritual philosophy much what Sanscrit was found to be to comparative philology; it is a common stock of philosophical roots. Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism and the Egyptian theology are thus brought into one family of ideas. Occultism, as it is no new invention, is no specific sect, but the professors of no sect can afford to dispense with the sidelights it throws upon the conception of Nature and Man's destinies which they may have been induced by their own specific faith to form; occultism, in fact, must be recognized by any one who will take the trouble to put before his mind

clearly the problems with which it deals, as a study of the most sublime importance to every man who cares to live a life worthy of his human rank in creation, and who can realize the bearing on ethics of certain knowledge concerning his own survival after death. It is one thing to follow the lead of a hazy impression

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that a life beyond the grave, if there is one, may be somehow benefited by abstinence from wrong-doing on this side; it will clearly be another to realize, if that can be shown to be the case, that the life beyond the grave must, with the certainty of a sum total built up of a series of plus and minus quantities, be the final expression of the use made of opportunities in this.

I have said that the startling importance of occult knowledge turns on the manner in which it affords exact and experimental knowledge concerning spiritual things which under all other systems must remain the subject of speculation or blind religious faith. It may be further asserted that occultism shows that the harmony and smooth continuity of Nature observable in physics extend to those operations of Nature that are concerned with the phenomena of metaphysical existence.

Before approaching an exposition of the conclusions concerning the nature of man that occult philosophy has reached, it may be worth while to meet an objection that may perhaps be raised by the reader on the threshold of the subject. How is it that conclusions of such great weight have

been kept the secret property of a jealous body of initiates? Is it not a law of progress that truth asserts itself and courts the free air and light? Is it reasonable to suppose that the greatest of all truths — the fundamental basis of truth concerning man and Nature — should be afraid to show itself? With what object could the ancient professors of, or proficient in, occult philosophy keep the priceless treasures of their researches to themselves?

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Now, it is no business of mine to defend the extreme tenacity with which the proficient in occultism have hitherto not only shut out the world from the knowledge of their knowledge, but have almost left it in ignorance that such knowledge exists. It is enough here to point out that it would be foolish to shut our eyes to a revelation that may now be partially conceded, merely because we are piqued at the behaviour of those who have been in a position to make it before, but have not chosen to do so. Nor would it be wiser to say that the reticence of the occultists so far discredits anything we may now be told about their acquirements. When the sun is actually shining it is no use to say that its light is discredited by the behaviour of the barometer yesterday. I have to deal, in discussing the acquirements of occultism, with facts that have actually taken place, and nothing can discredit what is known to be true. No doubt it will be worth while later on to examine the motives which have rendered the occultists of all ages so profoundly reserved. And there may be more to say in

justification of the course that has been pursued than is visible at the first glance. Indeed, the reader will not go far in an examination of the nature of the powers which proficient in occultism actually possess, without seeing that it is supremely desirable to keep back the practical exercise of such powers from the world at large. But it is one thing to deny mankind generally the key which unlocks the mystery of occult power; it is another to withhold the fact that there is a mystery to unlock. However, the further discussion of that question here would be

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premature. Enough for the present to take note of the fact that secrecy after all is not complete if external students of the subject are enabled to learn as much about the mysteries as I shall have to tell. Manifestly, there is a great deal more behind, but, at all events, a great deal is to be learned by inquirers who will set to work in the right way, and that which may now be learned is no new revelation at last capriciously extended to the outer world for the first time.

In former periods of history , a great deal more has been known about the nature of occultism by the world at large than is known at this moment to the modern West. The bigotry of modern civilization, and not the jealousy of the occultist, is to blame if the European races are at this moment more generally ignorant of the extent to which psychological research has been carried, than the Egyptian populace in the past, or the people of India in the present

day. As regards the latter, amongst whom the truth of the theory just suggested can easily be put to the test, you will find the great majority of Hindoos perfectly convinced of the truth of the main statements which I am about to put forward. They do not generally or readily talk about such subjects with Europeans, because these are so prone to stupid derision of views they do not understand or believe in already. The Indian native is very timid in presence of such ridicule. But it does not affect in the slightest degree the beliefs which rest in his own mind on the fundamental teaching he will always have received, and in many cases on odds and ends of experiences

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he may himself have had. The Hindoos are thus well aware, as a body, of the fact that there are persons who by entire devotion to certain modes of life acquire unusual powers in the nature of such as Europeans would very erroneously call supernatural. They are quite familiar with the notion that such persons live secluded lives, and are inaccessible to ordinary curiosity, and that they are none the less approachable by fit and determined candidates for admission to occult training. Ask any cultivated Hindoo if he has ever heard of Mahatmas and Yog Vidya or occult science, and it is a hundred to one that you will find he has — and, unless he happens to be one of the hybrid products of Anglo-Indian Universities, that he fully believes in the reality of the powers ascribed to Yoga. It does not follow that he will at once say "Yes" to a European asking the question.

He will probably say just the reverse from the apprehension I have spoken of above, but push your questions home and you will discover the truth, as I did, for example, in the case of a very intelligent English-speaking native vakeel in an influential position and in constant relations with high European officials, last year. At first my new acquaintance met my inquiries as to whether he knew anything about these subjects with a wooden look of complete ignorance, and an explicit denial of any knowledge as to what I meant at all. It was not till the second time I saw him in private, at my own house, that by degrees it grew upon him that I was in earnest, and knew something about Yoga myself, and then he quietly opened out his real thoughts on the subject, and showed me

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that he knew not only perfectly well what I meant all along, but was stocked with information concerning occurrences and phenomena of an occult or apparently supernatural order, many of which had been observed in his own family and some by himself.

The point of all this is that Europeans are not justified in attributing to the jealousy of the occultists the absolute and entire ignorance of all that concerns them which pervades the modern society of the West. The West has been occupied with the business of material progress to the exclusion of psychological development. Perhaps it has done best for the world in confining itself to its specialty, but however this may be, it has only itself to blame if its

concentration of purpose has led to something like retrogression in another branch of development.

Jaccoliot, a French writer, who has dealt at great length with various phases of Spiritism in the East, was told by one who must have been an adept to judge by the language used: "You have studied physical Nature, and you have obtained through the laws of Nature marvellous results — steam, electricity, &c. &c. For twenty thousand years or more we have studied the intellectual forces; we have discovered their laws, and we obtain, by making them act alone or in concert with matter, phenomena still more astonishing than your own." Jaccoliot adds: "We have seen things such as one does not describe for fear of making his readers doubt his intelligence but still we have seen them."

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Occult phenomena must not be confused with the phenomena of spiritualism. The latter, whatever they may be, are manifestations which mediums can neither control nor understand. The former are achievements of a conscious, living operator comprehending the laws with which he works. If these achievements appear miraculous that is the fault of the observer's ignorance. The spiritualist knows perfectly well, in spite of ignorant mockery on the part of outsiders content to laugh without knowing what they are laughing at, that all kinds of apparently supernatural occurrences do constantly take place for inquirers who hunt them with sufficient diligence. But he has

never been able to get a clue to any other than a supernatural explanation of the causes at work. He has taken up a certain hypothesis 'faute de mieux' in the first instance, and working always on this idea, has constructed such an elaborate edifice of theory round the facts that he is very reluctant to tolerate the interposition of a new hypothesis which will oblige him to reconstruct his views almost from the beginning. There will be no help for this, however, if he belongs to the order of inquirers who care rather to be sure they have laid hold of the truth than to fortify a doctrine they have espoused for better or for worse.

Broadly speaking, there is scarcely one of the phenomena of spiritualism that adepts in occultism cannot reproduce by the force of their own will,

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supplemented by a comprehension of the resources of Nature. As will be seen when I come to a direct narrative of my own experiences, I have seen some of the most familiar phenomena of spiritualism produced by purely human agency. The old original spirit-rap which introduced the mightier phenomena of spiritualism has been manifested for my edification in a countless variety of ways, and under conditions which render the hypothesis of any spiritual agency in the matter wholly preposterous. I have seen flowers fall from the blank ceiling of a room under circumstances that gave me a practical assurance that no spiritual agency was at work, though in a manner as absolutely "supernatural" in the sense of being produced

without the aid of any material appliances, as any of the floral showers by which some spiritual mediums are attended. I have over and over again received "direct writing," produced on paper in sealed envelopes of my own, which was created or precipitated by a living human correspondent. I have information, which, though second-hand, is very trustworthy, of a great variety of other familiar spiritual phenomena produced in the same way by human adepts in occultism. But it is not my present task to make war on spiritualism. The announcements I have to make will, indeed, be probably received more readily among spiritualists than in the outer circles of the ordinary world, for the spiritualists are at all events aware, from their own experience, that the orthodox science of the day does not know the last word concerning mind and matter, while the orthodox outsider stupidly clings to a denial of facts when these are of a

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nature which he foresees himself unable to explain. As the facts of spiritualism, though accessible to any honest man who goes in search of them, are not of a kind which anyone can carry about and fling in the faces of pragmatic "sceptics," these latter are enabled to keep up their professions of incredulity without the foolishness of their position being obvious to each other, plain as it is to "the initiated." However, although in this way the ordinary scientific mind will be reluctant to admit either the honesty of my testimony or the conceivability of my explanations, it

may allay some hostile prejudices to make clear at the onset that occultism has nothing whatever to do with spiritualism — that "the spirits" count for nothing at all in any of the abnormal experiences I shall have to relate.