

The Secret Doctrine Symposium

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Introduction

In creating this course, it was the compiler's intention to feature some of the most compelling and insightful articles on *The Secret Doctrine* published in Theosophical journals over the past several decades. Admittedly, the process of selecting a limited few from the large number available is to some extent a subjective decision. One of the criteria used for making this selection was the desire to provide the reader with a colorful pastiche of commentary by respected students of Theosophy, in order to show the various avenues of approach to Mme. Blavatsky's most famous work.

The sequence of the articles in the Symposium was arranged, not chronologically, nor alphabetically by author, but thematically and with an eye to a sense of balance. While some of the articles are informational, there are also those that are inspirational, historical, and instructional. It is hoped that the Symposium will encourage, inspire, and motivate the student to begin a serious and sustained exploration of this most unusual and important Theosophical work.

Questions have been added to each of the articles. When referring to a specific quote or passage within the article, the page number and paragraph are referenced. For instance, (1.5) indicates the fifth paragraph on page one; (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.

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 2011

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The Magic of *The Secret Doctrine*

By George Arundale

Adapted from a lecture given at the 1934 Summer Convention at Olcott and later published in the December 1934 and January 1935 issues of *The American Theosophist*.

Being at the present moment an officer of the Theosophical Society, naturally I have had to plumb down into the depths of that movement, at the heart of which is the book called *The Secret Doctrine*. It is my personal belief that no one can be truly effective in the Theosophical Society unless they have had an acquaintance at least with the spirit of *The Secret Doctrine*. It is quite idle for an individual to think that they can give the very soul of our Theosophical science unless they have performed that Yoga which brings them into touch with the most remarkable book of our age.

I encourage you to enter into the spirit of this book far more than into the letter of it, because unless you have the higher consciousness very considerably developed along very many different lines, it is impossible to enter into a realization of all that *The Secret Doctrine* conveys.

But if you will endeavor to sense it, to contact it—not with the emotions, not with the mind, but with the will (since *The Secret Doctrine* is a First Ray book), you will be able to gain immense wisdom from it, which should be able to change the whole of your attitude toward life and your understanding of it.

In setting forth the dominant values of *The Secret Doctrine*, there are certain ones that stand out. In the first place, it sets forth in non-dogmatic and non-rigid language the fundamental principles of existence, which are at the root of all religions, philosophies, and sciences throughout the world.

Secondly, *The Secret Doctrine* does not claim to be revolutionary. It denies specifically that it is a religion or some new truth given out for the first time. It is a transmission from above and not a groping or discovery from below; that is the wonder about this book, which makes it entirely unique. There is hardly any book written which does not give you a sense of a groping from below, of an endeavor of something small to reach after something large. But when you come into contact with *The Secret Doctrine* you see at once that there is a transmission from above, not a revelation. There is quite a distinction to be drawn between the two, and in the case of *The Secret Doctrine* you feel that in every page there is a breathing down of something which comes from above.

One of the supremely arresting intimations of *The Secret Doctrine* is the spirit of mountains which scintillates from every page. As we read it, we know we are in the midst of Himalayan splendors; we perceive overwhelming heights and distances round about us, of structure and substance altogether incomprehensible to us, yet strangely akin. We have the

sense of being infinitely small, yet we somehow perceive that the infinitely great is the inevitable extension of ourselves.

In the preface of *The Secret Doctrine*, HPB says that she now transmits that which she has received, and finally adds, as to those who reject her testimony: they will be as right in their way in denying, as she is right in hers in affirming, since they look at Truth from two entirely different standpoints. How can Western scholars accept on hearsay that which they know nothing about?

You are right to deny whatever you like, and I know that these fundamental principles are largely obscure even to the eager reader, endowed though he may be with the pomp and circumstance of modern wisdom. Thus the student must of necessity discover for himself at every stage of his study. There is not a single page or a single statement in *The Secret Doctrine* which can be understood as it is, but if you will take that page and examine it with your will, examine it with an open mind and a desire to discover what it means, you will find that you are able to contact an aspect of your individuality which probably has escaped you heretofore.

The study of *The Secret Doctrine* is an experiment in Yoga. I have read it fairly thoroughly, but not for the purpose of understanding what she is saying by following sentence after sentence, page after page. It is impossible to do that because *The Secret Doctrine* is not sequential in any sense of the term. On every page you will find a darting about from one subject to another and a use of the same terms in entirely different senses, so that from the standpoint of the lower mind you may become annoyed and feel impelled to say: "I wish that HPB would write clearly so that I might understand." But the fact is that she does not wish to write clearly. She wants to write obscurely, so that the individual, who is trying to find out, does try to find out, and asks: "What does it mean? Where are we going with such a phrase? What is she really trying to say?"

People often talk about how they would like to develop higher consciousness. This can be achieved but only through long and persistent effort. One of the very best methods of gaining higher consciousness is to study *The Secret Doctrine*, and to try to understand that which is expressly intended, so to speak, to be un-understandable.

The Secret Doctrine is a challenge to effort and never an imposition of authority. Every page is a call to a voyage of discovery; only those who embark upon this voyage can hope to begin to understand the book. In many books, in many teachings, things are put down dogmatically—"Do this, do that, do the other," with a cut and dried science of life. There is nothing cut and dried about the science of life as depicted in *The Secret Doctrine*. There is nothing said about this book being the only book, or about these teachings being true and other teachings being false. This is a book which demands a pioneering spirit, an adventurous spirit, a spirit of indifference to the persecution of the small-minded. It demands the spirit of those who have left behind them all attachment to numbers, to crowds, to

orthodoxies, and seek beyond all these the companionship of the few and the compelling call of the unknown.

In other words, *The Secret Doctrine* set is a *vade mecum* for the larger consciousness of each one of us, and this is one of the reasons why so many have no use for it—their higher faculties are asleep and in no condition to awaken.

As a Theosophist, you must be able to make your plans for yourself, and make those plans far beyond the gateway of death. Death comes to you merely as an incident through which you must pass, for it leads you into a newer and, let us hope, fuller life. So let us plan not for today, not for tomorrow, not for any particular period of years, not even for any particular time, but for eternity, and then face life from that point of view.

Another aspect of *The Secret Doctrine* is this—there is no *consummatum est* to be spoken. There is no end. You apparently go on and on. People sometimes think, “How fatiguing to go on and on.” But it is not fatiguing when you realize the end in the means. For every means, however, is no less an end in itself, and so you live for the moment and combine such living with living in the eternal.

As you become acquainted with *The Secret Doctrine*, you begin to realize that you cannot really understand it unless you have left behind your personal attachments to the things of this world—things that may be necessary for each one of us at a particular stage of evolution, but which must eventually be outgrown. If you can learn to identify far more to the eternal and far less to time, then *The Secret Doctrine* becomes indeed a revelation, a great lighthouse upon your way.

One subtle aspect of *The Secret Doctrine* is the extraordinary way in which the pendulum swings on every page between the most emphatic personality and the most aloof impersonality. There is a supreme scope for the individual as a separate, unique person. But there is simultaneously with that, at every step of the enfoldment of that definite personality, an extraordinary sense of refuge in an all-powerful impersonality in which, as it were, that personality upon which you have been so rightly insisting loses itself in the immensities of the Real.

And so the swing of the pendulum alternates between the individual person and the greater whole of which we are all a part, so that you never lay too much stress upon yourself, since there is always the recurring movement into the vastness of which each one of us, at the present moment, is but a faint expression.

What we have to do is to try to sense the reality behind the words or phrases. I do not think HPB always knew what she was writing when she was working on this book, but she wrote, as it were, in a condition of Yoga, just as the Bhagavad Gita was given forth in a condition of Yoga. We have to make that higher Yoga an assured fact, to meet it by lower Yoga, in order to make the essential contact which will overcome the limitations of language.

Speaking for myself, there is any amount of *The Secret Doctrine* which is truly incomprehensible to me, but at the same time there are passages which correspond to my own experience and to my own understanding, and so I say to myself: "Well, those things I do not understand at all, but this, yes, this I do, and perhaps I shall some day understand a little more, and so I am going on for that!"

HPB must needs be obscure, but in that obscurity lies much of her power and much of our own freedom. A book which is perfectly clear is generally a book which, at best, tells us where we are and not whither we must go. And just now, perhaps at all times, the whither matters far more than the where. *The Secret Doctrine* is like a lighthouse far away, sending forth beams of light into the darkness. We see the light, and it inspires us to tread the way. But we must move ourselves, for we are the travelers.

It is for that reason that I am sometimes just a little bit nervous about classes in *The Secret Doctrine*, because I am always afraid of a purely intellectual point of view being taken, so that the whole spirit and soul and larger reality of the book escapes attention. It is not a book intended for classes, but a book more for spiritual enlightenment and individual study. Those who have studied it from the higher standpoint are certainly more competent to give Theosophy to the world than those who have not, because their higher consciousness has been developed.

Most of us want to understand at every stage, want to be able to pass judgment at every point and to say, "Yes, I see but I am not prepared to follow what I do not see." What we need are more Theosophists in the world who are not particularly interested in following what they see, but who are eager to follow what they do not see; who are adventurous, who can voyage forth on the discovery of life, as Colonel Olcott voyaged forth, not knowing whether he would get anywhere.

Finally, I should like to make it clear that you can take up the study of *The Secret Doctrine*, and study it quite profitably, without feeling that you have understood it. It stretches and expands your consciousness so that you are able to approach various problems of your own life, and of others, with a consciousness that has been widened through contact with this very great work, the greatest work which has been given to the world for centuries, and yet a book which is largely ignored even by earnest Theosophists at the present time.

The Secret Doctrine gives us a very wonderful sense of purpose, taking us out of time and giving us part of its essential mystery; one begins to realize that one incarnates with a purpose, and then nothing whatever can take away our abiding sense of happiness.

George S. Arundale was the international president of the Theosophical Society from 1934 – 1945.

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

1. What is the difference between a revelation and “a transmission from above”? (1.5)
2. Arundale suggests that some readers may become frustrated or annoyed (2.3) when they attempt to read *The Secret Doctrine*. Have you ever had this experience? Did Arundale make any statements or offer any suggestions that might help you to overcome these very common reactions to a most difficult work?
3. How do you feel about the Theosophical idea that there is no end to life? (3.3) Does it give you hope? Does it make you weary? Consider why you have either of those reactions.
4. Ponder the curious statement that much of HPB’s power lies in her obscurity, while at the same time that obscurity can be the source of our freedom. (4.2)

EXCERPTS FROM *THE SECRET DOCTRINE* —

These truths are in no sense put forward as *a revelation*; nor does the author claim the position of a revealer of mystic lore, now made public for the first time in the world’s history. —Preface [vol. 1, p. vii]

To my judges, past and future, therefore—whether they are serious literary critics, or those howling dervishes in literature who judge a book according to the popularity or unpopularity of the author’s name, who, hardly glancing at its contents, fasten like lethal *bacilli* on the weakest points of the body—I have nothing to say. Nor shall I condescend to notice those crack-brained slanderers—fortunately very few in number—who, hoping to attract public attention by throwing discredit on every writer whose name is better known than their own, foam and bark at their very shadows. —Introductory [vol. 1, p. xlvi]

But to the public in general and the readers of *The Secret Doctrine* I may repeat what I have stated all along, and which I now clothe in the words of Montaigne: Gentlemen, “I HAVE HERE MADE ONLY A NOSEGAY OF CULLED FLOWERS, AND HAVE BROUGHT NOTHING OF MY OWN BUT THE STRING THAT TIES THEM.” Pull the “string” to pieces and cut it up in shreds, if you will. As for the nosegay of FACTS—you will never be able to make away with these. You can only ignore them, and no more.” —Introductory [vol. 1, p. xlvi]

“Every reader will inevitably judge the statements made from the standpoint of his own knowledge, experience, and consciousness based on what he has already learnt. . . . Thus, the Past shall help to realize the PRESENT, and the latter to better appreciate the PAST. The errors of the day must be explained and swept away, yet it is more than probable—and in the present case it amounts to certitude—that once more the testimony of long ages and of history will fail to impress anyone but the very intuition—which is equal to saying the very few. —Ibid.