

EMERSON AND OCCULTISM

By Charles Johnston

“’Tis thus at the roaring Loom of Time I ply,
And weave for God the garment thou seest Him by.”
—Erd. Geist, Faust

The sunset, to the boor a mere mass of evening vapors, presaging rain for his fields or heat for his harvest, expands for the poet, standing beside him and beholding the selfsame firmament, into a splendid picture, rich in crimson and purple, in golden light and gleaming color, mingled in harmonious purity.

Whence so great a difference?

The poet has finer eyes; and within the mere material forms perceives a subtle essence, which flows everywhere through nature, adding to all it touches a new wealth of joy and power. The poet’s eyes have opened to a new reality; he no longer values things for themselves; but in proportion as they contain this quality, they become dear to him.

But beyond the poet, there is yet a third rank. The poet, it is true, rejoices in nature, and perceives its beauty and symbolic character. But he rests in the beauty of the symbol, and does not pass to the reality symbolized. Rapt in adoration of the beauty of the garment, he does not pierce through to Him who wears the garment. This remains for the philosopher—the sage. Yet the boor has his place in Nature. He has tilled and subdued the soil, has brought its latent powers into action; in command of nature, he is far in advance of the mere nomad savage, for whom nature is a maze of uncertain and unconquered forces.

The savage, the boor, the poet: these types have their parallels in mental life.

When the crude conceptions of nature, which mark dawning civilization, give place to those fair and truer, because more harmonious, views which bear the name of Science; when the principle of Continuity, the reign of Universal Law, have displaced the first notions of Chance and Discord, the work of the physical scientist is done; he must stand aside, and make way for the philosopher, the transcendentalist. Modern Science has replaced the crudities of medieval theology by the idea of an orderly universe permeated by Law, binding alike the galaxy and the atom, as the tillage of the farmer has replaced the nomadism of the savage.

But within the world of the boor nestles the poet's world, and within the world of the physical scientist lies an ethereal, spiritual universe with its own powers, its own prophets. The great trilogy of friends at the beginning of this century, who rose like three mountain peaks above their contemporaries, Goethe, Carlyle, and Emerson, were chosen by Destiny as prophets of this nature within nature.

Their gleanings have been rich enough to tempt many to enter the same field, though they have no more exhausted its wealth than Homer and Shakespeare have exhausted poetry.

The new world they have explored is the land of hope of the future, for which we must leave the impoverished soil of theology and the arid deserts of materialism.

What these three masters taught, Occultism teaches; and we propose to show them as great natural masters in the mystic knowledge.

To do this with any completeness in the space at our disposal is necessarily impossible; for the present, we must content ourselves with showing from the writings of one of the masters—Emerson—that he recognized some of the chief laws announced by Occultism.

The first truth to be insisted on, concerning this nature within nature, the spiritual universe, is that it exists for its own ends, and not as an adjunct to the material world; in other words, the end of morals is to make archangels rather than good citizens.

Spirit is the reality; matter, the secondary; or, as Goethe says, the *Garment* of God.

No occultist could insist on the subordinate character of matter more vehemently than Emerson—he writes:

Nature is a mutable cloud, which is always and never the same. Through the bruteness and toughness of matter, a subtle spirit bends all things to its own will. The world proceeds from the same spirit as the body of man. It is *a remoter and inferior incarnation of God*, a projection of God into the unconscious.

The Occultist sees in this world of spirit the home of that true joy of which all earthly happiness is the shadow, and whispered intimation. There all ideals find their realization, all highest hopes their fulfillment; there flow abundant fountains of celestial bliss, whose least presence makes earthly things radiant.

Of spirit, Emerson writes:

But when following the invisible steps of thought, we come to enquire, Whence is matter? and where to? Many truths arise to us out of the recesses of consciousness. We learn that the highest is present to the soul of man; that the dread universal essence which is not wisdom, or love, or beauty, or power, but all in one, and each entirely, is that for which all things exist, and that by which they

are; that spirit creates; that behind nature, throughout nature spirit is present. As a plant upon the earth, so a man rests upon the bosom of God; he is nourished by unfailing fountains, and draws, at his need, inexhaustible power.

But to obtain a footing in this world of essential being is to be emancipated from the domination of Time and Space, to enter a universe where they do not exist; for Space and Time are no realities, but as Carlyle says, the “deepest of all *illusory appearances*.” Emancipation from Space and Time; how much more this implies than is at first sight apparent. The first fruit of this freedom is a feeling of eternalness, the real basis of the doctrine of immortality. It is an attainable reality, this sense of eternalness; let the skeptic and materialist say what they will.

Of this truth, also, we may bring Emerson as witness. He writes:

To truth, justice, love, the attributes of the soul, the idea of *immutableness* is essentially associated. In the flowing of love, in the adoration of humility, there is no question of continuance.”

Once recognize the truth that we can gain a footing in a world free from the tyranny of time, that the soul exists in such a world, and a new philosophy is at once required. Freedom from Time implies the eternity of the soul, and the facts of life and death take a new position and significance. If the soul be eternal, death must be an illusion, a garment in which Nature wraps some hidden law.

In the following words of Emerson on this subject we have an accurate exposition of the occult doctrine of Reincarnation—the progressive discipline of the soul through many lives—which has been parodied in the popular fable of metempsychosis.

It is the secret of the world that *all things subsist and do not die*, but only retire a little from sight, and afterwards return again. Whatever does not concern us, is concealed from us. As soon as a person is no longer related to our present well-being, he is concealed or dies, as we say. When the man has exhausted for the time the nourishment to be drawn from any one person or thing, that object is withdrawn from his observation, and though still in his immediate neighborhood, he does not suspect its presence. Nothing is dead; men feign themselves dead, and endure mock funerals and mournful obituaries, and there they stand looking out of the window, sound and well, in some new disguise. Jesus is not dead; he is very well alive; nor John, nor Paul, nor Mahomet, nor Aristotle.

The true occult doctrine does not picture a series of bodies in each of which the soul makes a temporary sojourn. In this, as in all else, it begins with spirit and then descends to matter. It depicts that vital energy which we call a soul, alternately exuding from itself and reabsorbing into its own nature an environment or physical encasement, whose character varies with the increasing stature of the soul. According to the teaching

of occultism, the successive formations of this objective shell—whose purpose is to provide for the development of the animal nature—alternate with periods of subjective life, which give expansion to the powers of the soul.

As corollary to this doctrine, occultism postulates a second: That the incidents of each objective environment or physical life are not fortuitous and isolated, but that they are bound to all that precede and follow them, and moreover that “the future is not arbitrarily formed by any separate acts of the present, but that the whole future is in unbroken continuity with the present, as the present is with the past.”

To the various developments of this law, Eastern philosophy has given the name of Karma; the West has as yet no name for it. But though unnamed, its leading ideas have not been unperceived by those western minds which have penetrated into the world of super-nature.

Thus we find Emerson writing:

Every secret is told, every crime is punished, every virtue rewarded, every wrong redressed, in silence and certainty. Crime and punishment grow on one stem; punishment is a fruit that unsuspected ripens within the flower of pleasure which concealed it. You cannot do wrong without suffering wrong. The thief steals from himself; the swindler swindles himself. Everything in nature, even motes and feathers, goes by law and not by luck. *What a man sows, he reaps.*

The picture of an orderly universe, where matter is the garment of spirit—spirit visualized—where souls march onward in orderly procession to boundless perfection; where the life of each permeates and flows through the life of all; where the wrong of each is turned to the benefit of all by the firm hand of an invisible and ever active law, incessantly disciplining and correcting, till the last dross of self and sin is purged away, and instead of man there remains God only, working through the powers that were man's: such is the conception Occultism holds.

Says Emerson,

I know not whether there be, as is alleged, in the upper region of our atmosphere a permanent westerly current, which carries with it all atoms which rise to that height, but I see that when souls reach a certain clearness of perfection, they accept a knowledge and motive above selfishness. A breath of Will blows eternally through the universe of souls in the direction of the Right and Necessary. It is the air which all intellects inhale and exhale, and it is the wind which blows the world into order and orbit.

Let us build altars to the Beautiful Necessity which rudely or softly educates men to the perception that there are no contingencies, that Law rules through existence, a Law which is not intelligent but intelligence, not personal nor

impersonal—it disdains words, and passes understanding; it dissolves persons; it vivifies nature, yet solicits the pure in heart to draw on its all, its omnipotence.

Discipline always and everywhere throughout the universe; to discipline, development, all other facts are subordinate; for their sake, all laws are enunciated, all spiritual facts are insisted on, all truths which tend not to the melioration of human life—if any such there be—are worthless. Discipline, development. What development does Occultism predict for man? Man's future destiny, in the view of Occultism, is so stupendous that we prefer merely to erect a finger-post pointing out the direction of the path, using the words of Emerson:

The youth puts off the illusions of the child, the man puts off the ignorance and tumultuous passions of the youth; proceeding thence, puts off the egotism of manhood, and becomes at last a public and universal soul. He is rising to greater height, but also to realities; the outer relations and circumstances dying out, he is entering deeper into God, God into him, until the last garment of egotism falls, and he is with God, shares the will and the immensity of the First Cause.

From first to last, Occultism has preached no doctrine more emphatically than the necessity of dependence on the intuitions, and the reality of interior illumination. "Seek out the way by making the profound obeisance of the soul to the dim star that burns within; within you is the light of the world," writes the Occultist.

And this doctrine is repeated again and again in the writings of the philosopher we have been quoting from. He writes:

A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the luster of the firmament of bards and sages. From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things, and makes us aware that we are nothing, but that the light is all. The consciousness in each man is a sliding scale, which identifies him now with the First Cause, and now with the flesh of his body; life above life, in infinite degrees. There is for each a Best Counsel, which enjoins the fit word and the fit act for every moment. There is no bar or wall in the soul where man, the effect, ceases, and God, the cause, begins. The walls are taken away, we lie open on one side to the deeps of spiritual nature, to the attributes of God. The simplest person who, in his integrity, worships God, becomes God; yet for ever and ever the influx of this better and universal self is new and unsearchable.

The life of one is the life of all. The good of one reacts on all. The walls by which selfishness conceives itself enclosed and isolated, are unreal, have no existence. Spirit is fluid and all-pervading; its beneficent power flows unchecked from soul to soul, energizing, harmonizing, purifying. To resist all discordant tendencies which check this salutary flow, this all-permeating love, is to come under the reign of Universal Brother-

hood; and to the honor of Occultism be it said that Universal Brotherhood is blazoned highest on its standard.

Thus, writes Emerson,

Are we put in training for a love which knows not sex nor person, nor partiality, but which seeks virtue and wisdom everywhere. One day all men will be lovers, and every calamity will be dissolved in universal sunshine. An acceptance of the sentiment of love throughout Christendom for a season would bring the felon and the outcast to our side in tears, with the devotion of his faculties to our service.

But to the axiom "Kill out the sense of separateness" Occultism adds another, "Yet stand alone." Before the lesson of life can be learned, the soul must in some sort detach itself from its environment, and view all things impersonally, in solitude and stillness. There is an oracle in the lonely recess of the soul to which all things must be brought for trial. Here all laws are tested, all appearances weighed.

About this truth always hangs a certain solemnity, and Emerson has given it a fitting expression in the following words:

The soul gives itself alone, original, and pure, to the Lonely, Original, and Pure, who, on that condition, gladly inhabits, leads and speaks through it. Then it is glad, young, and nimble. Behold, it saith, I am born into the great, the universal mind. I, the imperfect, adore my own Perfect. I am somehow receptive of the great soul, and thereby I do overlook the sun and the stars, and feel them to be the fair accidents and effects which change and pass. More and more the surges of everlasting nature enter into me, and I become public and human in my regards and actions. So I come to live in thoughts, and act with energies, which are immortal.

The last words of this sentence lead us to the occult idea of *Mahatmahood*, which conceives a perfected soul as "living in thoughts, and acting with energies which are immortal."

The *Mahatma* is a soul of higher rank in the realms of life, conceived to drink in the wealth of spiritual power closer to the fountainhead, and to distill its essence into the interior of receptive souls.

In harmony with this idea, Emerson writes:

Truth is the summit of being; justice is the application of it to affairs. All individual natures stand in a scale, according to the purity of this element in them. The will of the pure runs down from them into other natures, as water runs down from a higher into a lower vessel; this natural force is no more to be withstood than any other natural force. A healthy soul stands united with the

Just and the True, as the magnet arranges itself with the pole, so that he stands to all beholders like a transparent object betwixt them and the sun, and whoso journeys towards the sun, journeys towards that person.

Occultism conceives the outer world and all its accidents to be so many veils, shrouding the splendor of essential nature, and tempering the fiery purity of spirit to the imperfect powers of the understanding soul. This illusory power Occultism considers to be the “active will of God,” a means to the ends of eternal spirit.

There is no chance, and no anarchy, in the universe. All is system and gradation. Every god is there sitting in his sphere. The young mortal enters the hall of the firmament; there is he alone with them alone, they pouring on him benedictions and gifts, and beckoning him up to their thrones. On an instant, and incessantly, fall snowstorms and illusions. He fancies himself in a vast crowd which sways this way and that, and whose movement and doings he must obey: he fancies himself poor, orphaned, insignificant. The mad crowd drives hither and thither, now furiously commanding this thing to be done, now that. What is he that he should resist their will, and think or act for himself? Every moment new changes and new showers of deceptions to baffle and distract him. And when, by-and-bye, for an instant, the air clears, and the cloud lifts a little, there are the gods still sitting around him on their thrones—they alone with him alone.
