

The True Occult Path by P.G. Bowen

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The matter contained in this little book was originally given in the form of a lecture to the Dublin Lodge of the Adyar Theosophical Society. Later, at the request of the editor, it was recast and published in its present form in the magazine - THEOSOPHY IN IRELAND. The Author, Capt. P.G.Bowen, who was then an independent student of the Ancient Wisdom, has since become president of THE HERMETIC SOCIETY, Dublin, having been appointed to that office by the founder of the Society, the late Dr. George Russell ("A.E.") Capt. Bowen has given his assent to the publication of his article in book form.

From THE TRUE OCCULT PATH the writer of this Foreword has gleaned many grains of spiritual help, and sends the booklet forth into the world, trusting and believing that others will gain as much, or more from its study. Its true value may not discover itself to the superficial reader; but the real seeker, who knows that nothing of worth is gained without effort will not begrudge it the concentrated study it needs and merits. To such a seeker, the writers is assured, will accrue an abundant harvest.

The booklet goes forth in a spirit of true fraternity, and is the mite which the writer of these words contributes towards the sustenance of those who seek to tread the way of the spirit.

E.A. Ansell.

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SEEK OUT THE WISDOM WHICH ABIDES IN SECRET,
AND ALL ELSE SHALL BE YOURS WHEN YOU HAVE FOUND IT.

Theosophy, or True Occultism, is the pursuit of True WISDOM. True Wisdom is Divine Wisdom, because nothing that is not Divine can be wholly true.

Men give many different meanings to the word THEOSOPHY, to suit their own particular purposes; but the meaning which I give to it is its only true meaning.

Occultism is a much less definite term, and therefore may with more justice be used in a promiscuous way to indicate the pursuit of secret knowledge of any kind. But TRUE, or Divine Occultism means but one thing, and that is THE PURSUIT OF DIVINE WISDOM BY SECRET PATHS.

Other forms of Occultism may lead to knowledge and power of one kind or another; but knowledge and power are not WISDOM. [Page 3]

WISDOM is a state of poise and balance. Only from an immovably poised and balanced viewpoint can true wisdom be exercised. Its exercise implies a condition in the individual of complete non-attachment to anything whatsoever. If attachment to, or attraction towards anything exists, then the man will favour that thing; and will therefore exhibit repulsion from, and separation from other things; he will fail to hold that even balance between all things, without which wisdom cannot be exercised. True Wisdom means a condition of absolute non-attachment to EVERYTHING in Life, and this means equally absolute ATTACHMENT to Life as an indivisible whole.

The pursuit of, or practice of any other secret art or science precludes the exercise of wisdom, because it entails attachment to one particular aspect of life, and therefore separation from others.

The would-be Neophyte must have understanding of what I have said before he becomes ready to move a step on the Path of True Occultism. [Page 4]

To every man who sets himself to seek for Truth two Paths will appear. The first lies outside himself, stretching towards the centre of the boundless universe, on the edge of which he appears to stand, an insignificant atom. The second, beginning where the first begins, runs inward towards the unknown centre of the man's own being.

Ignorant man who founds all his judgments on appearances invariably turns towards the first. He sees that he is helpless and ignorant, and thinks therefore that whatever truth there may be must be found outside himself. He begins accordingly by worshipping and adoring whatever being or beings he may find who appear to possess wisdom, thus hoping to gain their favour, and to share in that which they possess. His belief sets him running, now to this person, now to that, who may claim to be nearest the source of truth, begging a few crumbs from the other's store. But he gains nothing by his efforts, as any student of

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Life can see for himself.

The Outer Path is the Path humanity in general has followed throughout the ages. That it does not lead to the Divine can be [Page 5] clearly seen by comparing the state of a Stone-age savage, like the Bushman, with that of civilized man. In material and intellectual achievements there is an immense gulf between them; but Spiritually, if there is any gulf at all it is not wide. Remove the laws and customs, civilized man has established to further his material interests, and will he show himself to be more imbued with the spirit of Universal Brotherhood than the savage: Let common History, which is the History of War, Conquest and exploitation of the weak, give answer.

The Outer Path does not lead to the Divine. It does not indeed lead anywhere. We can see on all hands that those who have followed it long enough, find it fading out and leaving them in a void of unbelief in anything Divine. Yet those who have reached that state of unbelief are nearer the Divine than those still traveling outward in pursuit of it. This I will make more clear before I conclude.

Turn now and look at the Inner Way - the Way that leads from man's outer, worldly self, back into the deeps of his being. Man may look at long without seeing more promise [Page 6] of Truth along it than along the Outer Path. But if he looks long enough, and intelligently enough, he will sooner or later begin to perceive that this is the Path which all who show any approach to Wisdom are traveling upon. When this perception arises in him he is at the parting of the Ways.

Few, however, ever get beyond the cross-ways in the life in which they get their first glimpse of a distant ray of the Truth. They have grown so accustomed to dependence upon external aid, that they fear to venture a step upon the Inner Path; because it is a Way which the Pilgrim must walk alone. Those who do venture a few hesitating steps along it almost always turn back again, terrified at standing alone. They rush back to the Crossways where many GUIDES stand, fashioning crutches for the feeble and selling maps and plans of The Way to the ignorant. But those Guides are not helpers, but hinderers; their charts are false, for they themselves have never trodden the Inner Way; their crutches are useless to the Pilgrim, because there is no room on the Inner Path for anything but his own feet. [Page 7]

And yet the man may see the Truth, and usually does see it; but notwithstanding, he will waste a lifetime at the Crossways trembling and hesitating, fearing to venture inward. He may even close his ears to the low voice, and his eyes to the faint distance light of Truth, and accepting the aid of one of the Guides, wander blindly back into the profitless Outer Path.

But there are others, besides those Guides, standing at the Crossways. They do not fashion crutches, nor offer charts; but silently, and with infinite patience, they POINT TOWARDS the Inner Way. Why do they persist when not one in millions heeds or notices them? They know they have a royal reward if but one in ten millions walks where they point.

How often has it not been taught, and realised by many through independent thought, that knowledge cannot be bestowed upon a man, but must arise within himself before he can truly be said to possess it? Men talk of Teachers, yet no Teacher ever bestows knowledge, in the sense of placing something within

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a mind where nothing was before. Before one [Page 8] can say one has learned anything, that thing must have existence in the mind.

Not long ago in a philosophical discussion with a young friend, I had occasion to use a mathematical calculation, in the solution of which I used as an axiom the well-known algebraical formula, that X plus Y, multiplied by X minus Y equals X sq. minus Y sq.

At the conclusion I said to my friend, " You accepted as an axiom the formula above mentioned. Are you satisfied of its truth?"

" Certainly, it is true," he replied.

" But how do you come to KNOW that it is true?" I persisted.

" How — well of course I learned it at school."

" You mean that some teacher told you it was true, and you accepted his word for it, is that so?"

" Yes," was the reply.

" But do you really KNOW that he informed you correctly? Would you, for instance, stake our life on his word?" [Page 9]

My friend hesitated. Doubt appeared on his face. Clearly he did not know whether the equation was true or not. "That is strange", he said. "I believe I don't really know whether the rule is correct or not".

"Why not find out the truth for yourself", I said. "X and Y are unknown, abstract quantities — say those three match sticks for X and those two for Y".

He did as directed, and quickly proved the statement to be correct as anyone may do.

Now not until he had demonstrated the rule thus for himself did my young friend KNOW it. Therefore, not until that moment had he really learned anything about it from his teacher. Previously he had been simply accepting another's assurance blindly, and imaging it to be knowledge. More than this, one can see if one examines the matter closely that it was only AFTER true knowledge had come into existence in his own mind that he could say he really had learned from his teacher

The simple fact is, though for the many to appreciate it will take much thinking on [Page 10] their part,

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that all real knowledge is pre-existent within oneself; and that that which appears to come from outside is but the inner knowledge objectified. Before one truly knows anything, that thing has taken shape within oneself

From this it will appear how useless it is to expect to receive help, or wisdom from any person, or from anything whatsoever without oneself. The instant that you KNOW that the Teacher or his words are TRUTH, he has ceased to teach you. Before that he is not teaching you but giving you something which you either accept blindly, and which therefore remains outside yourself; or which you translate into an objective form commensurate with the little knowledge already developed within yourself.

Those who understand this much must consequently understand also that all the fog and confusion they perceive in the objective world is the product of that department of their own nature in which their consciousness dwells.

The World — The Universe is each man's [Page 11] own self, objectified. From this understanding; again, one must see that the DIVINE which one pictures as dwelling in the central depths of Space, does not dwell there, but in the centre of one's own being.

No Teacher can ENTER one's being and lead one back towards its centre. Each man must tread that path alone. All that he has been relying upon outside himself must be let go, because it is but holding him back from his inward march: he cannot take it with him. Yet as he moves inward he will find other teachers arising, some from whom he will know he has learned, others whom he must not stay to heed lest they hold him back. The Teacher of Teachers stands at the far end of the Path, not counseling, nor yet pointing, but beckoning onward. But these last words are not yet to be understood.

When once a man sees into, and through and through anything which is to him objective — that means when he truly KNOWS it — that thing ceases to matter to him. He has sucked it dry; and whatever of value it contained has become part of himself; he lets the empty husk go without regret. But so [Page 12] long as an external object seems important to a man, so that he clings to it, afraid to let it go, just so long is he ignorant of it, and held at a standstill by it.

All men cling to one thing, or to another, fondly imagining that such things are helping them; whereas all they do is to give him the sense of security which comes from being firmly anchored.

The world of men are anchored to the world, because to them it seems a necessary thing; yet all that is necessary in it is the truth which its appearances conceal. When men perceive this it has no longer a use for them, and they let it all go. Then they know that all that is real in it is part of themselves; the rest is a husk — an appearance not real.

Man begins his true progress by realising that the more important does any external object appear to him, the more certain it is that he knows it not.

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What I say is not any new thing, but old, so old that there never was a time when it was not. From age to age it has been [Page 13] repeated, and will be repeated from age to age. Yet few who have heard it strive to act upon it, deeming it too difficult a thing. While of the few who try to follow it, for the most part they do so without knowledge; it is a thing which has not become a part of themselves. Thus are found those who accept the word without understanding it, fleeing from the world and its forms into deserts and cloisters and thinking that thus they are practicing the teaching. Not thus is it practised.

To flee into desert or cell is not to escape the ignorance and confusion of one's own nature, of which the busy world is the objective image. Flinging away any outward form whatsoever helps in no way, but rather hinders. One may close his consciousness to its existence, as the ostrich hides his head in the sand; but doing that only anchors the man more firmly — the world of confusion holds him, and because he does not perceive it he has ceased to strive to know it, and is a sleeping instead of a waking, struggling captive to it.

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Let the Man free himself from that state of ignorance which exists in himself which bids him regard as important any form whatsoever of this objective world — home, country, society, church. Let him see the truth within those things, of which they are each and all narrowed and distorted forms. If knowledge of that truth springs awake within him, the forms become objects of indifference to him.

Being indifferent to them, he will not seek to run away from them, or to concern himself with destroying them. Let him think that if he finds it necessary to flee from a form of this world, or to try to destroy it that form must be an important thing for him. I have said, and showed that that which seems important to the man is so only because he does not know it.

It has been said to me by one of our younger brothers that much thinking of this kind will lead many into a state of blank negation, or agnosticism. This is true. It is a necessary state, and one all pass, or will pass before true advance begins. In this state the man recognises his own ignorance, [Page 15] and such recognition is the necessary prelude to true learning. All anchors to outer authority must be slipped before one begins to move inward. Therefore a time must come — it may last a moment, or many lifetimes — when the man stands alone in a void — when nothing external holds or supports him, and nothing he can grasp has as yet arisen within himself. It is the fear, conscious or unconscious, of this lost and lonely state which keeps so many clinging to external support. Time after time the man may slip into, or be driven into this state, only to rush back again and grasp a now anchorage. But he gains nothing till at last he takes his courage in both hands and steps alone into the void.

Until that courage comes, or until he seizes it with determined will, the man is not a Theosophist. Membership of any Church, or of any society, or of any circle calling itself Theosophical does not make a man a Theosophist. It may indeed be preventing him from becoming one; though as I have shown it need not do so. But when any human institution proclaims itself to be the instrument of Truth, or the form in which Truth [Page 16] manifests, is it not likely that a man may think that by becoming a member of it, he himself must become a recipient of the Truth? But of course he becomes nothing of the kind.

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Whatever Truth may be held by his fellows is theirs, not his, because it remains external to him. He does not become a co-sharer in the knowledge which his brethren may possess by his association with them, any more than did my young friend by his membership of the college become a sharer of his Teacher's knowledge until it arose within him through his own effort and experience. Therefore enrolling himself as member of a Church, or of any other association cannot in any way help a man, or relieve him from the necessity for individual effort. In most cases it means nothing for him but a shifting of anchors from a spot which has grown insecure to a firmer one.

But do not think because of this that a man should cut himself off from his Church, or from any association of which he is a member. If he has not emptied the form of its Truth and made it his own, then the [Page 17] form remains a thing of importance to him; and whether he is, or is not a member of it in name he remains dependent upon it. Likewise, if he has drained the form of its truth, and sees it but as an empty husk, where is the meaning in cutting himself off from a thing which has no significance for him? Let no man attach himself to any form with the idea of finding help from it; and let no man sever himself from any form, thinking thus to secure liberation from it. If he is helped, the help has been found within himself, and the form only objectifies it. If he is held the form is also only the objective image of a binding aspect of his own nature from which fleeing will not release him.

Whether the man stands alone, or is one of a select body of millions of members, his position is the same. If he is a medium of Truth, Truth will shine through him. If he is not, no association with others will make it do so. Suppose that his Church or Order be represented by a vast window made up of a million panes, some of which are clear and let the pure light shine through them; [Page 18] while others are dull, and of varying degrees of opacity down to blank blackness. Now if any one of those panes be removed from the window, and fitted into an isolated aperture by itself, is its nature altered? The sunlight still penetrates it exactly in accordance with its quality whether it stands alone, or in association with others.

If the Wise Ones, or The Teachers be clear panes in some vast mosaic in which a man is a dull, clouded pane, does the Truth which shines through them make any difference to his nature? It does not. He can reflect some of the light which shines through others — that means he can repeat it. But repeating it alters in no way his own nature.

Bearing in mind all I have said and illustrated concerning true KNOWING, what is it that brings Truth to the man? It is that thing within the man — The KNOWER, The One TRUE SELF which alone gives Truth. This KNOWER which knows Truth and which gives Truth, is Truth itself. To the extent to which this True Self is awake in a man — to that extent, and that only will [Page 19] he recognise the existence of external Truth. He will not know a true disciple of Wisdom until he becomes one himself. The Wise Ones and the Teachers will pass him by in the street, and he will not know them until he himself is growing to be one of their company.

Many, or most of you who listen to these words have thought and meditated upon many aspects of the Philosophy which we call Theosophy; but few seem to hold in mind the central doctrine, without which all else must fall to the ground. That central doctrine is THE FUNDAMENTAL UNITY OF ALL EXISTENCE. Existence is a UNITY — One and INDIVISIBLE. If a man then be conscious of existence he must himself be that Unity and nothing less. If he were less he could not be conscious, because the whole is indivisible and has no parts.

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Or again, we hear and repeat constantly that Man is the Microcosm. What is a man's conception when he repeats this doctrine ? Will it not be something like this: he will conceive the Kosmos as a vast sphere of [Page 20] infinite aspects. Man, the Microcosm, he will conceive as a tiny sphere, with attributes which are miniature Copies of the great sphere. If he considers the relationship between the great and the little, will he not inevitably conceive himself as the tiny sphere occupying an infinitesimal point within the great sphere, the Macrocosm? He will therefore be picturing two separable things, one infinitely greater and superior to the other.

That conception does not represent the Truth. The Truth lies in the axiom of Hermes, Thrice Great Master:

"As is the Inner, so is the Outer; as is the Great, so is the Small; as above, so below; there is but ONE LIFE AND LAW: nothing is Inner, nothing is Outer; nothing is Great, nothing is Small; nothing is High, nothing is Low, in the DIVINE economy."

Man, the Microcosm is not a sphere infinitely small, and the Kosmos is not a sphere infinitely great. There are not two spheres, but only one thing, as it might be when viewed through the different ends of a gigantic telescope. Through one end man sees existence [Page 21] infinitely magnified. Through the other he sees it infinitely reduced. Yet he is looking at one thing, not two. He will see its reality only when he puts away his glass. The ONE EXISTENCE appears as two, one great and one small only as viewed through the different ends of the glass of a limited consciousness.

The Wise Ones and The Teachers exist, and are to be found within the man himself. Until he finds them there he will never know them in any objective form. To the extent that the man KNOWS with certainty within himself that another's words and ways are truth, to that extent, and to that only the other becomes Master or Teacher for him. But having recognised an aspect of Truth in any man, let no man on that account accept all else he may say and do, blindly, and without knowledge. If he does that he will have anchored himself again, and will have become the mere adorer of a form which once objectified for him a ray of Truth.

All the religions of the world which have arisen around the name of a teacher owe their existence to this error. A few disciples, or others, recognised in some words or actions [Page 22] of the Teacher the objective form of a ray of Truth just risen in their own being. From that flash of knowing they leapt to blind acceptance of the Teacher as the embodiment of absolute truth, and forgot that as far as they had any true knowledge he was but the embodiment of a single spark of it.

FAITH, which is so constantly enjoined, is a word the true meaning of which has become almost wholly forgotten. The world accepts it as meaning blind, or unreasoning belief. Its real meaning is very different. It is true that it implies belief that is not founded on reason, but far from being blind this belief depends upon that certain knowledge which comes to the man when The KNOWER, the True, Inner Self, wakes within him. The injunction so often laid upon man, to have Faith, is not a command to bind himself in ignorant devotion to another, or to his words. It is on the contrary a command to release himself from bondage — the bondage of that comparatively low, and very limited aspect of the Mind which is called Reason. The KNOWER dwells beyond reason, and beyond all that common man knows as Thought. [Page 23]

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When the man has this real Faith in the Teacher, it means that the KNOWER, the One Teacher is awake within him; the form in which the Teacher appears is simply the objective image of that which has stirred to wakefulness within the man.

"Why do the Wise Ones remain hidden, when they may come out and light the world with their wisdom?" is the constant cry, spoken or unspoken, of questing man. How does common man know that they do not come out? How does he know that these very words which I speak are not spoken by a Wise One? If I assured you that it is indeed so, some among you might believe, and some would not. But none would know whether I spoke truth or not, because in none is the KNOWER yet awake. If I caused those ornaments to fly from the walls all would believe in my superhuman power, and perhaps accept me as a Wise One; yet in doing so they would be but binding themselves to their senses, and be no nearer to the freedom of true knowledge that they were before.

The Wise Ones, and the Teachers, and their lesser selves, The Messengers, have [Page 24] appeared, and do still appear in the world of men. Yet all they can do is to point the way to man, and tell him to travel it for himself. Their message is ever the same — the simple message I am giving to you. All the books on the Philosophy of Life which have been written in their names; all the systems and sciences of Living which they taught, what were they? Nothing but simple sign-posts pointing to the Way which man must walk by his own strength. The Philosophies indicate the WHY of man's efforts; the systems and sciences indicate the HOW, and that is the end. Man, each one of you who hear me, must do the work, for which the Philosophy supplies the reason, and the systems and sciences show the means; no one can do it for him. "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life", said the Teacher; but he spoke of that eternal "I" which is the centre of all being, and of every being. Let man identify himself with that "I" by retreating towards it along the Inner Path, and at last he will become that KNOWER which is TRUTH.