

Electricity & Magnetism

selections from Isis and the SD

Introduction

The topics of Electricity and Magnetism are discussed at length in the Theosophical literature. We can read in “Isis Unveiled”, in Chapter V under the heading “The Impossibility of Miracle”, p 115

“Magnetism is a word for the derivation of which we have to look to an incredible early epoch. The stone called *magnet* is believed by many to owe its name to Magnesia, a city or district of Thessaly, where these stones were found in quantity. We believe, however, the opinion of the Hermetists to be the correct one. The word *Magh, magus*, is derived from the Sanskrit *Mahaji*, the *great* or *wise* (the anointed by the divine wisdom). (...) As the Magi derived their name from it, so the Magnesian stone or Magnet was called in their honor, for they were the first to discover its wonderful properties”.

This etymological link with *Mahaji* cannot be therefore accidental, and therein must lay an important knowledge to apprehend.

For example, in “The Ocean of Theosophy”, (Astral Body section), W.Q.J explains

“The astral body is made of matter of very fine texture as compared with the visible body, and has a great tensile strength, so that it changes but little during a lifetime, while the physical alters every moment. And not only has it this immense strength, but at the same time possesses an elasticity permitting its extension to a considerable distance. It is flexible, plastic, extensible, and strong. The matter of which it is composed is electrical and magnetic in its essence, and is just what the whole world was composed of in the dim past when the processes of evolution had not yet arrived at the point of producing the material body for man.”

The subsequent selections – as the topics are discussed at length in both Isis and SD – have as a focus the more intimate nature of electricity and magnetism in the microcosm, rather than more abstract or generic macrocosmic principles. They also portray a very interesting effort by H.P. Blavatsky to bridge the science of her day – very proud and materialistic, particularly after Darwin – with the Occult, since Theosophy, defined in “The Key” by her, is “Divine Knowledge or Science.”

a student

Electricity

“The Chaos of the ancients; the Zoroastrian sacred fire, or the *Atash-Behram* of the Parsees; the Hermes-fire, the Elmes-fire of the ancient Germans; the lightning of Cybele; the burning torch of Apollo; the flame on the altar of Pan; the inextinguishable fire in the

temple on the Acropolis, and in that of Vesta; the fire-flame of Pluto's helm; the brilliant sparks on the hats of the Dioscuri, on the Gorgon head, the helm of Pallas, and the staff of Mercury; the Egyptian Phtha-Ra; the Grecian *Zeus Cataibates* (the descending) of Pausanias; the pentacostal fire-tongues; the burning bush of Moses; the pillar of fire of the *Exodus*, and the "burning lamp" of Abram, the eternal fire of the "bottomless pit"; the Delphic oracular vapours; the Sidereal light of the Rosicrucians; the Akasa of the Hindu adepts; the Astral Light of Eliphas Lévi; the nerve-aura and the fluid of the magnetists; the *od* of the Reichenbach; the *Psychod* and ectenic force of Thury; the psychic force of Sergeant Cox, and the atmospheric magnetism of some naturalists; galvanism; and finally, electricity — all these are but various names for many different manifestations or effects of the same mysterious, all-pervading cause, the Greek *Archeus*." We now add — it is all this and much more.

SD i 338 footnote referring to "Isis Unveiled", Chapter V

STANZA III. — *Continued.*

9. LIGHT IS COLD FLAME, AND FLAME IS FIRE, AND THE FIRE PRODUCES HEAT, WHICH YIELDS WATER, THE WATER OF LIFE IN THE GREAT MOTHER (*Chaos*) (*a*).

(*a*) It must be remembered that the words "Light," "Fire," and "Flame" used in the Stanzas have been adopted by the translators thereof from the vocabulary of the old "Fire philosophers," in order to render better the meaning of the archaic terms and symbols employed in the original. Otherwise they would have remained entirely unintelligible to a European reader. But to a student of the Occult the terms used will be sufficiently clear.

All these — "Light," "Flame," "Hot," "Cold," "Fire," "Heat," "Water," and the "water of life" are all, on our plane, the progeny; or as a modern physicist would say, the correlations of ELECTRICITY. Mighty word, and a still mightier symbol! Sacred generator of a no less sacred progeny; of fire — the creator, the preserver and the destroyer; of light — the essence of our divine ancestors; of flame — the Soul of things. Electricity, the one Life at the upper rung of Being, and Astral Fluid, the Athanor of the Alchemists, at its lowest; GOD and DEVIL, GOOD and EVIL. . . . Now, why is Light called in the Stanzas "cold flame"?

Because in the order of Cosmic evolution (as taught by the Occultist), the energy that actuates matter after its first formation into atoms is generated on our plane by Cosmic heat; and because Kosmos, in the sense of dissociated matter, was not, before that period. The first primordial matter, eternal and coeval with Space, "which has neither a beginning nor an end," is "neither hot nor cold, but is of its own special nature," says the Commentary (Book II). Heat and cold are relative qualities and pertain to the realms of the manifested worlds, which all proceed from the manifested *Hyle*, which, in its absolutely latent aspect, is referred to as the "cold Virgin," and when awakened to life, as the "Mother."

SD i 81-82

Shall we say that Force is “moving matter,” or “matter in motion,” and a manifestation of energy; or that matter and force are the phenomenal differentiated aspects of the one primary, undifferentiated Cosmic Substance? This query is made with regard to that Stanza which treats of FOHAT and his “Seven brothers or Sons,” in other words, of the cause and the effects of Cosmic Electricity, the latter called, in Occult parlance, the seven primary forces of Electricity, whose purely phenomenal, and hence grossest effects are alone cognizable by physicists on the cosmic and especially on the terrestrial plane. These include, among other things, Sound, Light, Colour, etc., etc. SD i 554

Let us see what an eminent Academician, Butlerof, the chemist, had to say about these two abstractions. “What is Force?” argues this great man of Science, “what is it from a strictly scientific stand-point, and as warranted by the law of conservation of energy? Conceptions of Force are resumed by our conceptions of this, that, or another mode of motion.” Force is thus simply the passage of *one state of motion into another state of the same*: of electricity, into heat and light, of heat into sound or some mechanical function, and so on.

The first time electric fluid was produced by man on earth it must have been by friction; hence, as well-known, it is heat that produces it by disturbing its *laya* state, and electricity exists no more on earth *per se* than heat or light, or any other force. They are all correlations, as science says. “When a given quantity of heat, assisted by a steam engine, is transformed into mechanical work, we speak of steam power (or force). When a falling body strikes an obstacle in its way, thereby generating heat and sound — we call it the power of collision.

When electricity decomposes water or heats a platinum wire, we speak of the force of the electric fluid. When the rays of the sun are intercepted by the thermometer bulb and its quicksilver expands, we speak of the calorific energy of the sun. In short, when one state of a determined quantity of motion ceases, another state of motion equivalent to the preceding takes its place, and the result of such a transformation or correlation is — force. In all cases where such a transformation, or the passage of one state of motion into another, is entirely absent, there no force is possible. Let us admit for a moment an absolutely homogeneous state of the Universe, and our conception of force falls down to nought.” SD i 517

Hence Cupid or Love in his primitive sense is Eros, the Divine Will, or *Desire of manifesting itself through visible creation*. Thence Fohat, the prototype of Eros, becomes on Earth the great power “Life-electricity.” SD ii 65

Magnetism

The Occultists, who do not say — if they would express themselves correctly — that *matter*, but only the *substance* or *essence* of matter, is indestructible and eternal, (*i.e.*, the Root of all, *Mulaprakriti*) assert that all the so-called Forces of Nature, Electricity, Magnetism, Light, Heat, etc., etc., far from being modes of motion of material particles, are *in esse*, *i.e.*, in their ultimate constitution, the differentiated aspects of that Universal Motion which is discussed and explained in the first pages of this volume (*See Proem*).

When Fohat is said to produce “Seven Laya Centres,” it means that for formative or creative purposes, the Great Law (Theists may call it God) stops, or rather modifies its perpetual motion on seven invisible points within the area of the manifested Universe. “*The great Breath digs through Space seven holes into Laya to cause them to circumgyrate during Manvantara*” (Occult Catechism). We have said that Laya is what Science may call the Zero-point or line; the realm of absolute negativeness, or the one real absolute Force, the noumenon of the Seventh State of that which we ignorantly call and recognise as “Force”; or again the Noumenon of Undifferentiated Cosmic Substance which is itself an unreachable and unknowable object to finite perception; the root and basis of all states of objectivity and subjectivity too; the neutral axis, not one of the many aspects, but its centre. SD i 147

Thus, supposing attraction or gravitation should be given up in favour of the Sun being a *huge magnet* — which is a theory already accepted by some physicists — a magnet that acts on the planets as attraction is now supposed to do, whereto, or how much farther would it lead the astronomers from where they are now? Not an inch farther. Kepler came to this “curious hypothesis” nearly 300 years ago. He had not discovered the theory of attraction and repulsion in Kosmos, for it was known from the days of Empedocles, the two opposite forces being called by him “hate” and “love” — which comes to the same thing. But Kepler gave a pretty fair description of cosmic magnetism. That such magnetism exists in nature, is as certain as that gravitation does not; not at any rate, in the way in which it is taught by Science, which never took into consideration the different modes in which the dual Force — that Occultism calls attraction and repulsion — may act within our solar system, the earth’s atmosphere, and *beyond* in the Kosmos.

This was proven by Newton himself; for there are many phenomena in our Solar system, which he confessed his inability to explain by the law of gravitation. “Such were the uniformity in the directions of planetary movements, the nearly circular forms of the orbits, and their remarkable conformity to one plane” (*Prof. Winchell*). And if there is one single exception, then the law of gravitation has no right to be referred to as an *universal law*. “These adjustments,” we are told, “Newton, in his general Scholium, pronounces to be ‘the work of an intelligent and all-powerful Being.’” Intelligent that

“Being” may be; as to “all-powerful” there would be every reason to doubt the claim. A poor “God” he, who would work upon minor details and leave the most important to secondary forces! The poverty of the argument and logic in this case, is surpassed only by that of Laplace, who, seeking very correctly to substitute motion for Newton’s “all-powerful Being,” and ignorant of the true nature of that eternal motion, saw in it a blind physical law. “Might not those arrangements be an effect of the laws of motion?” he asks, forgetting, as all our modern Scientists do, that this *law* and this motion are a vicious circle, so long as the *nature of both* remains unexplained. His famous answer to Napoleon: “*Dieu est devenu une hypothese inutile,*” would be correctly stated only by one who adhered to the philosophy of the Vedantins. It becomes a pure fallacy, if we exclude the interference of operating, intelligent, powerful (never “all-powerful”) Beings, who are called “gods.”

But we would ask the critics of the medieval astronomers why should Kepler be denounced as *most unscientific*, for offering just the same solution as Newton did — only showing himself more sincere, more consistent and even more logical. Where may be the difference between Newton’s “all-powerful Being” and Kepler’s *Rectores*, his sidereal and Cosmic Forces, or Angels? Kepler is again criticised for his “curious hypothesis which made use of a vortical movement within the solar system;” for his theories in general, for his favouring Empedocles’ idea of attraction and repulsion, and “Solar magnetism” in particular. Yet several modern men of Science, as will be shown — Hunt (if Metcalfe is to be excluded), Dr. Richardson, etc. — favour the idea very seriously. He is half excused, however, on the plea that “to the time of Kepler no interaction between masses of matter had been distinctly recognized which was *generically* different from magnetism” (*World-Life*). Is it *distinctly* recognised now? Does Prof. Winchell claim for Science any serious knowledge whatever of the natures of either electricity or magnetism — except that *both seem to be the effects of some result arising from an undetermined cause*.

The ideas of Kepler, weeded from their theological tendencies, are purely occult. He saw that:

(I.) The Sun is a great Magnet. This is what some eminent modern scientists and also the Occultists believe in.

(II.) The Solar substance is immaterial. (See “*Isis Unveiled,*” Vol. I. pp. 270 to 271.)

(III.) He provided, for the constant motion and restoration of the Sun’s energy and planetary motion, the perpetual care of a spirit, or spirits. The whole of Antiquity believed in this idea. The Occultists do not use the word Spirit, but say *Creative Forces*, which they *endow with intelligence*. But we may call them spirits also.

SD i 497-9

(5.) Kundalini Sakti. The power or Force which moves in a curved path. It is the Universal life-Principle manifesting everywhere in nature. This force includes the two

great forces of attraction and repulsion. Electricity and magnetism are but manifestations of it. This is the power which brings about that “continuous adjustment of *internal relations to external relations*” which is the essence of life according to Herbert Spencer, and that “*continuous adjustment of external relations to internal relations*” which is the basis of transmigration of souls, *punar janman* (re-birth) in the doctrines of the ancient Hindu philosophers. A Yogi must thoroughly subjugate this power before he can attain Moksham. . . .

SD i 293

For truly the astral light of the derided Kabalists has strange and weird secrets for him who can see in it; and the mysteries concealed within its incessantly disturbed waves *are there*, the whole body of Materialists and scoffers notwithstanding. These secrets, along with many other mysteries, will remain non-existent to the materialists of our age, in the same way as America was a non-existent myth for Europeans during the early part of the medieval ages, whereas Scandinavians and Norwegians had actually reached and settled in that very old “New World” several centuries before. But, as a Columbus was born to re-discover, and to force the Old World to believe in Antipodal countries, so will there be born scientists who will discover the marvels now claimed by Occultists to exist in the regions of Ether, with their varied and multiform denizens and conscious Entities.

Then, *nolens volens*, Science will have to accept the old “Superstition,” as it has several others. And having been once forced to accept it — judging from past experience — its learned professors will, in all probability, as in the case of Mesmerism and Magnetism, now re-baptised Hypnotism, father the thing and reject its name. The choice of the new appellation will depend, in its turn, on the “modes of motion,” the new name for the older “automatic physical processes among the nerve fibrils of the (Scientific) brain” of Moleschott; as also, very likely, upon the last meal of the namer; since, according to the Founder of the new Hylo-Idealistic Scheme, “Cerebration is generically the same as chylication.” Thus, were one to believe this preposterous proposition, the new name of the archaic thing would have to take its chance, on the inspiration of the namer’s liver, and then only would these truths have a chance of becoming scientific!

But truth, however distasteful to the generally blind majorities, has always had her champions, ready to die for her, and it is not the Occultists who will protest against its adoption by Science under whatever new name. But, until absolutely forced on the notice and acceptance of Scientists, many an Occult truth will be tabooed, as the phenomena of the Spiritualists and other psychic manifestations were, to be finally appropriated by its ex-traducers without the least acknowledgment or thanks.

SD i 296-7

