

The Story of Occult Chemistry

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Wisser Hirsch, near Dresden, Germany, circa 1900 (Wikipedia)

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The Objects of the Theosophical Society include the study of science and of the unexplained laws of Nature and, as Theosophists, it is useful to survey our contribution to the knowledge of science against the background of world progress.

The authors of *Occult Chemistry*, Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, were born in 1847 just over a hundred years ago. In that century there was a great increase in the knowledge of the physical world and in the application of science to daily life.

In 1862, Mendeleéf put forward the Periodic Law, stating that if the elements are arranged in order of their weights, the eighth element is similar to the first, as the octave repeats the keynote in music. In those days only about 60 elements were known, and it was noticed that there were gaps in this table, as there would be in a piano with some blank notes.

It was at this period also that the idea of the evolution of form in *time* was put forward by Darwin, who backed his theory with a mass of factual observations. It was inevitable that chemists should speculate as to whether this theory could be applied to physical matter. Did the Periodic Law indicate how matter itself was produced and evolved?

In some of the *Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* there are references to the nature of matter but no definite teaching concerning the chemical elements. It so happened, however, that a leading scientist, Sir William Crookes, was a member of the senior inner group of the London Lodge. On February 18, 1877, he delivered an address to the Royal Institution, London, on the *Genesis of the Elements* and, later, suggested another form of the Periodic Law as a pendulum or figure of eight. He said: "If we can show how the so-called chemical elements might have been generated we shall be able to fill up a formidable gap in our knowledge of the universe." To explain the

formation of the elements he suggested a universal substance which he called *protyle* or “the stuff of which things are made”. This *protyle* is not the Aether of Space but more akin to our “Anu,” the Sanskrit name for the ultimate particle of matter. Crookes thought that *protyle* condensed into atomic matter, the action being represented by a pendulum swinging and at the same time moving through space. Of this he said: “The more I ponder over the arrangement of this zig-zag curve, the more I become convinced that he who fully grasps its meaning holds the key to unlock some of the deepest mysteries of creation.”

In 1888 *The Secret Doctrine* was published and in it we find a number of references to Crookes’ work. Madame Blavatsky supported his theory and likened the pendulum diagram to a caduceus. We are reminded by it of Fohat who “digs holes in space,” “runs circular errands,” “hardens the atoms,” and “moves in a zig-zag path”. Madame Blavatsky also contributed to *Occult Chemistry, i.e.*, to the Chemistry as known to the Occultists, when she spoke of the force within the atom which would some day be liberated.

Until about 1890, chemists tended to visualize the atom as a solid ball, homogeneous and uncuttable. The spontaneous disintegration of Uranium was discovered in 1896 and Radium in 1898. It was just at that period, actually in 1895, that descriptions were given by Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, by clairvoyant observations, of the atoms of Hydrogen, Oxygen and Nitrogen. They stated that the atoms were by no means homogeneous but consisted of a complex body, made up of smaller particles, surrounded by a sphere of influence. By an action of will, sufficiently remarkable when we think of the enormous energy required to split the atom, these investigators were able to disintegrate the atom into its components and to break it up successively into four stages, which they called, rather unfortunately, the “etheric” states. They observed that all atoms were made atomic weight of the atom being proportionate to the the observations on the elements were continued, this homogeneous but consisted of a complex body, made up of up of a number of similar particles, now called Anu, the atomic weight of the atom being proportionate to the number of Anu present.

So we enter our own century. It was in 1907 that the observations on the elements were continued, time near Dresden in Germany. Mr. Jinarajadasa has described how he helped in the work. They visited the Dresden museum to observe specimens and they worked in the forest. Mr. Jinarajadasa speaks of Dr. Besant Dresden sitting in the forest at Weisser Hirsch and drawing with a pencil on a pad in her lap. Dr. Besant drew the diagrams of the disintegrations of the elements while the diagrams of the elements themselves are chiefly by Mr. Leadbeater or Mr. Jinarajadasa. All these are in the archives at Adyar, together with a letter from Sir William Crookes in response to a request for specimens of chemicals containing the rarer elements. During this period 59 elements were observed as well as some isotopes, and some unknown elements.

For details the reader should refer to the Introduction to the 1951 edition of *Occult Chemistry*.

It was in 1908 that the remarkable article on “Koilon” was published. Matter was shown to be *not Koilon* or Aether of Space but the *absence* of Koilon. Much of this information was published in THE THEOSOPHIST. The first edition of *Occult Chemistry*, which contains details of 62 elements, was published in 1908. The article on Koilon was printed at the end. When I was re-arranging the material I felt it was so fundamentally important that it ought to come near the beginning, and I therefore placed it there. I was pleased to find later, in a letter written by Mr. Leadbeater in 1908, that he “thought it ought to go in the chapter dealing with the Anu”.

During the period from 1907 to 1920 a number of people were interested in the work. Mr. Fritz Kunz helped with a model of the Periodic Law. In 1919 Mr. Sinnett published a second edition. This was a repetition of the first and contained no new material. I became interested in Occult Chemistry almost as soon as I joined the Theosophical Society in 1910. I was at that time also impressed by Mr. Jinarajadasa’s contribution to this aspect of nature as expressed in *What We Shall Teach*. For there he speaks of the life-side of the mineral kingdom, of the “Beauty that is joy—yea, truly, here is joy for whoso seeks in the atom and in the element, in the solution and in the stone.”

In those days chemists knew that some atoms spontaneously disintegrated but thought that man could not control this action. Rutherford put forward the idea of the solar system atom, a hard uncuttable core surrounded by planetary electrons. Chemical theory then postulated that there could be only 92 elements, no more and no less, while occult investigations had found more elements and also isotopes of the known ones, ideas now confirmed by science.

The first compounds were investigated between 1919 and 1922 and descriptions of these appeared in THE THEOSOPHIST, 1924-26. These included Carbon compounds of the chain and ring series and the diamond. In 1926 Hafnium was described. Masurium had been drawn in 1909 but was not published until now.

In the period 1920-45 I was in England and, together with members of the Research Centre, did much study of Occult Chemistry.

In 1928 occurred an event which was of importance to me personally. Mr. Jinarajadasa was in England and, in a lecture, spoke on the value of these clairvoyant observations, saying that some day he hoped for help in preparing a new edition. Emboldened by this I wrote to him offering my services in any capacity. He replied, much to my discouragement, that “it would be years before a new edition could be considered”. Time has proved him correct, but I felt then that his opinion need not prevent me making an attempt at rearrangement for myself. During his absence in South America I got two copies of the book, cut out and mounted the 62 elements there described, and arranged them in the order of the Periodic Law. Then I found that they fitted into the pendulum diagram and that the seven fundamental forms were retained. With Dr. Corona Trew I worked out algebraic formulae by which to represent the constitution of the elements and soon found that if they were arranged in the periodic groups the likenesses could be studied.

On Mr. Jinarajadasa’s return to England he came to visit Stamford House, where I was then living. Mr. E. L. Gardner persuaded him to look at the diagrams which I had

displayed in order on a table. I shall never forget his walking round the table to look at the material and then saying "I have waited twenty years for this!"

From that time onwards the work went forward whenever opportunity permitted. Mr. Leadbeater was in Adyar or Sydney from 1930 to 1933 and observations continued with Mr. C. Jinarajadasa's help. It was quite a thrilling time for me and must have been more so at Adyar, Almost every week, by the Indian mail, I received letters, notes or diagrams of the newly examined elements or compounds. Rhenium was observed in 1931, also Nos. 85, 87 and 91 and the element Adyarium. Many of these were described in THE THEOSOPHIST, and in addition there remained diagrams of 30 compounds of which sketches were made but not published. Letters to me and the records at Adyar contain not only the facts but fascinating accounts of the progress of the work: Mr. Leadbeater investigating while being massaged, Mr. Leadbeater hunting for elements in the water of the Adyar river, Mr. Leadbeater being helped by Tritons in the sea and, at the end, by Sir William Crookes.

Mr. Leadbeater needed only a very tiny amount for his observations of a substance; enough to go on a pin's head contains many atoms and was quite sufficient. During this period, on Mr. Jinarajadasa's instructions, I obtained for him specimens of the rarer elements. These I got from a firm in London that specialized in pure chemicals. As the material was often very expensive I asked for the smallest quantity that they would sell, one-tenth of a gram. One day I was rung up by Hilgers and the man asked solemnly, was I aware that the quantity I had ordered for this Indian scientist was not enough to perform any experiments? I assured him it *was* sufficient.

When I retired in 1945 I offered my services to the Theosophical Society. Mr. Jinarajadasa asked me to come to Adyar at once, as he hoped to be free to edit the book.

I had much difficulty in getting a passage but reached India in a troop-ship in December 1945. On my arrival at Adyar Jinarajadasa took me to a room above the flat he now occupies at the top of Raja House and said: "There are the boxes of material. You can get on with the work. I shall be too busy for a long time." Again he was right. It was six years before the work was completed. So then began a remarkable experience for me working alone in that top room looking out to the Adyar River and the Bay of Bengal.

Being now able to consult the original material, my first task was to check everything and also to construct clear drawings of the 30 unpublished compounds. All the original sketches and notes as well as many verbatim stenographic reports are in the archives at Adyar; the last done in 1933 just before Mr. Leadbeater died, when he was 86. The originals are pasted in two large volumes, some by Dr. Besant with her annotations and corrections, some written on tiny scraps of paper in the beautiful handwriting of Mr. Leadbeater, many by the hand of Mr. Jinarajadasa. As we turn over the pages the pictures "come alive" and, even if the drawing is indistinct or deficient, with the eye of vision the truth can be glimpsed.

The book as it now stands includes details of the internal structure of all the elements and diagrams showing the formation of a number of compounds. It is fully and beautifully illustrated and can be understood without a knowledge of chemistry.

As the President said in his Presidential Address, *Occult Chemistry* will be one of the three works that two centuries hence “will remain as our outstanding contribution to the world’s knowledge.”

In 1932 at the conclusion of the main part of the work Mr. Leadbeater wrote:

“The work on Occult Chemistry is finished at last: that is to say, one small section of it is finished—the special piece of work that the President (Dr. Besant) and I set ourselves to achieve when we began our investigations in 1895. Thirty-seven years it has taken, though we have been able to work at it only spasmodically, and what has been done during the last two years I have had to do with Raja's (C. Jinarajadasa's) help. Raja from almost the very beginning has been our recorder, our calculator and draftsman, and without him we should never have succeeded even so far as we have. We have catalogued all known elements, and added half a dozen or so which are still undiscovered by science. We have classified them, and drawn the shapes of their chemical atoms; now it will be for our successors to make the deductions and try to formulate more definitely the great laws under which the Third Aspect of the Logos chooses to work. No one who has seen the orderly lines among which evolution progresses and the wonderful skill with which the combinations are made could possibly doubt the existence of a Great Plan and of the Great Architect of the Universe who is patiently working it all out.”

Throughout the task I have kept in mind that it is not mine or even Mr. Jinarajadasa's, but Dr. Besant's and Mr. Leadbeater's work. Speculations and correlations are for the scientific members and readers. That has not been our immediate task, but simply that of making a clear record. Mr. Jinarajadasa expressed this in his instruction to me: “This book is not for the scientists of the present but for the Theosophists of the future.”