I have said that I wish to write of Theosophy in no strain of unreasoning hostility or spirit of vulgar ridicule; yet these essays will be found to be much occupied with criticisms and often unsparing criticisms of the spirit and methods of Theosophists. There is, however, this difference between my criticisms and much that I have seen written in dispraise of the movement, that I censure not as an enemy but as an impartial critic, not as a hostile and incredulous outsider but as an earnest and careful inquirer and practical experimentalist in those fields which Theosophy seeks to make her own. Theosophy was not born with Madame Blavatsky, nor invented by the Mahatmas in the latter end of the nineteenth century. It is an ancient and venerable branch of knowledge, which unfortunately has never, in historical times, been brought out into the open and subjected to clear, firm and luminous tests. The imaginations of the cultured and the superstitions of the vulgar played havoc with its truths and vitiated its practice. It degenerated into the extravagances of the Gnostics & Rosicrucians and the charlatanism of magic and sorcery. The Theosophical Society was the first body of inquirers which started with the set & clear profession of bringing out this great mass of ancient truth into public notice and establishing it in public belief. The profession has not been sustained in practice. Instead of bringing them out into public notice they have withdrawn them into the shrouded secrecy of the Eoteric society; instead of establishing them to public belief, they have hampered the true development of Theosophy & injured its credit by allowing promise to dwarf performance and by a readiness to assert which was far beyond their power to verify. I do not deny that the Theosophical Society increases in its numbers, but it increases as a mystic sect and not in the strength of its true calling. I do not deny that it has done valuable service
in appealing to the imaginations of men both in India & Europe; but it has appealed to their imaginations & has not convinced their reason. When there is so serious a failure in a strong and earnest endeavour, we must look for the cause in some defect which lies at the very roots of its action. And it is just there at the very roots of its active life that we find the vital defect of modern Theosophy. We find a speculative confusion which fatally ignores the true objects and the proper field of such a movement and a practical confusion which fatally ignores the right and necessary conditions of its success. They have failed to see what Theosophy rightly is and what it is not; they have failed to understand that error and the sources of error must be weeded out before the good corn of truth can grow. They have fallen into the snare of Gnostic jargon and Rosicrucian mummery and have been busy with a nebulous chase after Mahatmas, White Lodges and Lords of the Flame when they should have been experimenting earnestly and patiently, testing their results severely and arriving at sound and incontestable conclusions which they could present, rationally founded, first to all enquirers and then to the world at large.

Mrs. Besant would have us believe that Theosophy is Brahmandiva. The Greek Theosophia and the Sanskrit Brahmandiva, she tells us in all good faith, are identical words and identical things. Even with Mrs. Besant’s authority, I cannot accept this extraordinary identification. It can only have arisen either from her ignorance of Sanscrit or from that pervading confusion of thought and inability to perceive clear and trenchant distinctions which is the bane of Theosophical inquiry & Theosophical pronouncements. Vidya may be represented, though not perfectly represented by sophia; but Brahman is not Theos and cannot be Theos, as even the veriest tyro in philosophy, one would think, ought to know. We all know what Brahmandiva is,—the knowledge of the One both in Itself and in its ultimate and fundamental relations to the world which appears in It whether as illusion or as manifestation, whether as Maya or as Lila. Does Theosophy answer to this description? Everyone knows that it does not and cannot. The modern Theosophist tells us
much about Mahatmas, Kamaloka, Devachan, people on Mars, people on the Moon, astral bodies, precipitated letters, Akashic records and a deal of other matters, of high value if true and of great interest whether true or not. But what on earth, I should like to know, has all this to do with Brahmavidya? One might just as well describe botany, zoology & entomology or for that matter, music or painting or the binomial theory or quadratic equations as Brahmavidya. In a sense they are so since everything is Brahman, — sarvam khalvidam Brahma. But language has its distinctions on which clear thinking depends, & we must insist on their being observed. All this matter of Theosophy is not Brahmavidya, but Devavidya. Devavidya is the true equivalent, so far as there can be an equivalent, of Theosophy.

I am aware that Theosophy speaks of the Logos or of several Logoi and the government of the world — not so much by any Logos as by the Mahatmas. Still, I say, that all this does not constitute Theosophy into Brahmavidya, but leaves it what it was, Devavidya. It is still not the knowledge of the One, not the knowledge that leads to salvation, but the knowledge of the Many, — of our bondage & not of our freedom, Avidya & not Vidya. I do not decry it for that reason, but it is necessary that it should be put in its right place and not blot out for us the diviner knowledge of our forefathers. Theosophy is or should be a wider & profounder Science, a knowledge that deals with other levels & movements of consciousness, planes if you like so to call them, phenomena depending on the activity of consciousness on those levels, worlds & beings formed by the activity of consciousness on those levels, — for what is a world but the synthesis in Space & Time of a particular level of consciousness, — forming a field of consciousness with which material Science, the Science of this immediately visible world, cannot yet deal, and for the most part, not believing in it as fact, refuses to deal. Theosophy is, therefore, properly speaking, a high scientific enquiry. It is not or ought not to be a system of metaphysics or a new religion.