MR. NARRAINASWAMY IYER delivered a lecture at the Annual Convention at Adyar on the morning of the 29th December on "Occult Physiology," as follows: —

My lecture is upon a very mystical subject. I am myself a lover of the mystical lore contained in the Upanishads, and I wanted practically to go into the path and find out whether the statements made in the Upanishads are correct or not. Having gone myself into this path, I find that what is contained in the Upanishads is strictly true so far as my experience goes. Now the object with which I take up this mystical subject, that is, Occult physiology, is of a twofold character. Firstly, the Kumbakonam Theosophical Society, which has been translating the Upanishads, has been all along giving out, with one or two exceptions, Upanishads of a Vedantic nature; now they mean to translate the occult ones, that is, the Upanishads treating of the occult mysteries in man. These Upanishads by themselves do not convey clear and correct information or a comprehensive view of the whole system, each Upanishad by itself giving only a scrap of information bearing upon the subject; and unless all the Upanishads are read and thought over and properly understood, a consecutive and clear view cannot be had of the whole. My second object is to give an outline of the work and to assist students who wish to read these occult subjects for themselves. We have not only our Upanishads in Sanscrit literature, which treat of occult subjects, but also works in our Tamil literature written by the Siddhas (sages), which books abound in thousands. These books, I have also to state, contain only scraps of information in each book that we take up, and unless we have a comprehensive or a general view, though not a critical view, of the subject, I do not think we shall grasp or appreciate the things contained therein. Now, the subject I have taken is one that is very comprehensive, and unless I devote my attention to it for a number of days together, I do not think I shall do justice to it. However, as I have told you already, I shall try to give you a mere rough outline showing the scientific character of what is contained in our Upanishads, as well as in the works of the Siddhas. Moreover, I have also to state that in no other religious literature of the whole world can we find these occult subjects treated.

Let me first state to you the divisions of our body before I go to the main subject on hand, in order to clear my way for it. I mean in this lecture to adopt the threefold classification of the body as given in our Hindu books, leaving aside the highest one which belongs to the unmanifested region, not because I do not like the septenary classification, or consider it in any way inferior to the threefold classification, as adopted in our books; but what I mean to say is, that if we go through the threefold classification of our books, we shall be better able to convince the outside public, and to understand the subject ourselves from the standpoint of our books. Myself I am of opinion, the more I go into our occult books, that the septenary classification is the more scientific one. I also hold that this septenary classification is broadly hinted at in them, but that a clear theory is never worked out upon that
classification. I think our Rishis of old were certainly quite wise in having refrained from giving out the septenary classification, because if that were given out indiscriminately to the world, the powers of nature would be understood, and unscrupulous persons would abuse the powers which could be exercised by the true understanding of the septenary classification. Now, as regards the threefold classification our Hindu books divide our body thus: (1) Sthula or gross body, (2) Sukshma or subtle body, and (3) Karana or causal body. We may call them in other words (i) the body of action, (2) the body of desire, and (3) the body of thought. Now, the body of action is clearly known to embrace the first three principles as enunciated in our Esoteric Buddhism. The second — the subtle body — consists of the fourth and the lower portion of the fifth principle, the impure Manas, which, in our Theosophical literature, goes by the name of Kama Manas. The third body is the higher or pure Manas, or what, in our Theosophical literature, we call the higher Ego. Now, I shall first explain how this highest body of ours, the karana body, is composed. It is stated in all our books that Prakriti (matter) is of threefold Gunas (qualities) viz., (i) Satwa, (2) Rajás, and (3) Tamas. It is also stated in our books that the higher spirit, Daiviprakriti (or Fohat), acting on these three Gunas, produces threefold functions. The spirit acting on Satwa produces the macrocosm and macrocosmic spirit in it, or what we call in our language the Eswara. The Satwa matter goes by the name of Maya, in our Hindu writings, whereas Rajás goes by the name of Avidya.

Now, this karana body is Rajás, acted upon by the spirit above named. Rajás, we know, produces activity in man. This Rajás principle originally being of an active nature in its descent in matter, grips all things that come across it. That is, this karana body of man, when it is exposed to the passions of this world, tries to get hold of and enjoy them at first. It is also stated that this Rajás has itself a sub-division of Satwa, Rajás and Tamas. This Rajás having exposed itself to temptation, assumes first a subtle body and then a gross body, and then progresses up to pure Satwa itself, that is to the macrocosmic spirit envelope by Satwa itself, after having cast off these two bodies. In order to do it, this Karana body of man has to lay aside the Rajás and Tamas through the accumulated experience of several births, and to become Satwa itself.

Now going to the second body, which the Karana body makes as an envelope around itself on account of its descent, I shall now give the composition of its body before I begin to expatiate upon its several organs and functions. I have already spoken of Satwa and Rajás; let me now pass on to Tamo Guna, which produces or is the origin of matter in a lower stage. This has two aspects, Avarana Sakti (centripetal force) and Vikshepa Sakti (centrifugal force). The books say that in its evolution the last named force becomes Ahankara, and that from this Ahankara are produced the five elements. I think the books that treat the subject in this way are the exoteric books. Myself, I hold that there are seven elements; but taking the views as enunciated in our exoteric books, I go on according to that classification. These five elements are, as you know, Akás, Vayu or fire, Ap or water, and Prithivi or earth. These are the elements in their primordial state. In that primordial state each of these has got its Satwa, Rajás and Tamas. Of these, the Satwa of the five elements alone is taken, and each is divided into four parts, three parts going to form what they call Antahkarana (Kama or lower Manas), which Madame Blavatsky in her "Voice of the Silence" calls Antaskarana. Our books say that it is Antahkarana, which forms the path or bridge which connects the personality with the higher Manas. This is the bridge which is said in the Ramayana to have been built by Hanuman and his fellow monkeys in crossing over to Ceylon. This Antahkarana in its five-fold aspects of Satwa of the five elements has five divisions, viz., Ulla, Manas, Buddhhi, Chitta and Ahankara, differentiated through Akas, Váyu, Agni, water and earth respectively. Nearly all our books, except some, do not give the first division, as it is the lowest form of Kama-Manas, to be found more in animals now than in man. It is that state of mind in which man was in his incipient stage of evolution, when he was like an idiot, as stated in the "Secret Doctrine". The
remaining four have got their respective centres in the body of man, where they respectively function. Their seats are respectively the middle of the eyebrows, throat, navel and the heart. They produce respectively uncertainty of knowledge, certainty of knowledge, fluctuation of thought and egoism. In the ordinary state of man, the Manas of ordinary individuals, which, as the Upanishads say, is of the size of a thumb, is in the centre of the two eyebrows, and is verified to be there by Yogis as they advance on their path by conquering that seat. They conquer the seat of the throat or permanently reside in that seat, when they wish to produce or do produce Buddhi, which arises through the Satwa of Agni. Likewise they go to the heart for putting down egoism, and to the navel to control Chitta, which flits hither and thither through the law of the association of ideas. These will be better understood [Page 4] when the plexuses are explained. Again the remaining one part of Satwa of the five elements, as mentioned before, goes to make the astral ear, skin, eye, mouth, and nose. So much for organs of sense and Anthahkarana. Now to the astral organs of action and the astral pranas in it. These pranas are formed in this way. The Rajás element of each of the five elements is divided into four parts, three of which go to make up the Pranas differentiated as five through the five elements as stated in our books. Of the rest, one part of the Rajás Amsa (essence) of each of the five elements goes to make up one of the five organs of action. Now, therefore, the astral body on its formation is thus composed of the five organs of action, the five organs of sense, antahkarana and the five pranas.

Thus has been created a material astral body. Now the question is, how does the prana act with reference to the Antahkarana and the Karana body in the Antahkarana? To elucidate this, I have to ask you to refer to a passage in the Varaha Upanishad translated by our Society. On page 609 of The Theosophist of August, 1890, which treats of the mystical Yoga, it is thus said: — "To the nadis the body is the support; to prana, the nadis are the support. Prana is the seat of Jiva; Jiva is dependent upon Hamsa; and Hamsa is the seat of Sakti, the locomotive and fixed universe. This, I think, requires a good deal of explanation as to the interaction of Prana and Jiva; as also the nadis and so on". Now this sentence ought to be construed with reference to the astral formation. I mean this is not to be applied to the gross physical plane. Here I may tell you that none of our Upanishads treat of this gross physical body. They only treat of the astral body, and therefore any interpretation put upon any passage from the Upanishads should be with reference to the subtle body. The seven principles as given out in our Theosophical literature give, no doubt, the principles by them, selves, but in Theosophical literature the interaction of these and their mysteries have not been sufficiently explained, and I think this sentence from the Varaha Upanishad needs further explanation. It is known to us all, taking it in a physical sense, that wherever there is a body there are nadis or nerves. In plants there are nerves or fibres technically: so in the astral body there are nadis or astral nerves. I give this physical analogy simply to make you understand it, and I think this first part of the sentence from the Upanishad does not require much explanation. What we have to explain are the nadis or astral wires. These wires act as conductors of pranas or vital airs — what we would call magnetic currents in our body.

These magnetic currents in order to manifest themselves in the astral body, want some medium through which they may manifest themselves. We find that electricity, in order that it may manifest itself upon this plane, [Page 5] wants some wire or medium; so pranas or magnetic currents require wires which we call nadis, in order that they may manifest themselves in the astral body. These nadis are 14 in number; I mean these are the principal ones, there are other nadis branching or ramifying from these 14. It is said in our books that there are 75,000; of course these are all ramifications of these 14 nadis. Let me point out to you that here there is the septenary classification, that is, 7 for the organs of sense, and 7 for the organs of action; but in many of our Upanishads, as also in the Tamil books, we find only 10 of them mentioned. In some Upanishads 12 are mentioned, according to the context in which they wanted them
to be presented. These 14 nadis, Varaha Upanishad clearly says, begin from the navel. There is a place called Kantha in the navel which is mentioned in the Varaha Upanishad, in the midst of which is the epigastric plexus. From this Kantha these 14 nadis arise. Here I may tell you that in the Upanishad quoted above, though 12 are mentioned in the text in figures, 14 will be the number by counting the names of the nadis. Three of these are specially important, of which one is the most important, as the books have it. These three are Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna. The salvation-giving nadi, as they would say, is the Sushumna. These three nadis go from the sacral plexus or muladhara to the highest top of the head — Sahasrara or the pineal gland — and then return from these down to the medulla oblongata, going through the spinal cord and joining again in the muladhara, I think I may rather begin from the navel itself, from which these three start and about which I spoke before. These three nadis begin from the Manipuraka, which is in the centre of Kantha in the navel, go higher up to the pineal gland, passing through the different plexuses of the body, and then go down to the medulla oblongata, passing through the spinal column. Then descending, they go to muladhara, or the sacral plexus in the anus, and then return to kantham itself.

It may also be stated that the Ida and Pingala, after going along with Sushumna to the middle of the eyebrows, branch off left and right below the eyebrows, while Sushumna goes straight up to the pineal gland, and then rejoins Sushumna on the hind part of the head. In this connection I shall explain what those plexuses are which are most important to be known, and about which modern physiology knows nothing truly. As our books state, the vital centres of life are lodged in six plexuses, the seventh being the acme of all. I shall begin from the arms with muladhara (sacral plexus) as the first one, instead of beginning with the navel, as we can thus have a regular view of all the elements, and as it is the lowest of the six. The books state that it is a four-petalled lotus. You must first understand what is meant by lotus. Lotus is the form it no doubt takes in the astral region; but the word lotus is kamala in Sanskrit, and kamala is esoterically akas, the four petals themselves being composed of akas. In its interior formation it corresponds to the prithivi, or earth element. On the astral plane, prithivi has the form of a parallelogram. This figure is therein to be found. Beyond this astral formation of the plexus, our books state that forces, male and female, or positive and negative, are located in each and every respective plexus, except in the sacral plexus, where there is only a male force. This male has no corresponding female in the plexus, since the former, the son of Siva, is said to have determined according to the Puranas to lead for ever a bachelor's life. But there is a female just above who has no husband herself and has her seat between this plexus and the one next to it. Her name is Ichcha Sakti or Desire Sakti. She will be explained further on along with Saktis. But I may here say it is these Saktis that give powers to man, and it is only when these male forces and thereby the plexuses are conquered, and nature finds we are safe custodians of those powers, that all the Saktis yield their powers to us.

Now the male force or god located in muladhara is Muladharaganapathy or, as it is called, Mahaganapathy. There is an Upanishad which treats of this, called Mahaganapathy Upanishad. This is differentiated from several other Ganapathis located in our body. It is represented as a siddhi-giving power. We are not to confound Ganapathy, from its form that we see in the temples, with one of the anthropomorphic gods; for these gods are forces on the astral plane which each and every man has to conquer. This remark also applies to the several other gods I shall speak of, when I mention the other plexuses of the body. In the Upanishad itself the form of this Muladharaganapathy and the Manthra by which that force can be conquered is also given. Then again, for a proper conquering of that force, not only is the Manthra necessary, but also its adjuncts, viz., figure and beejums. These adjuncts are to be found not in the Upanishad itself, but in the Manthrásstra. We have first to know the chackrams, viz., the figures upon which those forces rest — the Beeja aksharas (letters) which mean the several minor
forces, spiral or otherwise, that are in those figures and the mantras themselves; but we find in all our books that not all the information is given in one and the same book. We have to wade through a mass of materials before we can find out one manthra fully; and in many cases we utterly fail, unless we have the help of a guru. The colours, etc., that are given out in our books are not the proper ones. They are such as would, if known, lead us to the proper manipulation of the astral forces, but the colour of prithivi is yellow, according to our exoteric classification. The petals have also different tints, and I am sorry that I have not got with me here charts, which I have caused to be framed, and which give a notion of the plexuses of the body. The colours given in our books are merely those which may be said to resemble the true ones. The second is the Swadhishtana or prostatic plexus, as it is called. *** This plexus is composed of six petals. The force located therein is Brahma. The third plexus is situated in the navel, and goes by the name of Manipuraka or epigastric plexus. This is the region of fire, while the Swadhishtana plexus is, that of water; water being represented in the astral plane by a semi-lunar figure, while Agni is represented by a triangle. The third plexus is of ten petals. There is a difference in the Upanishads as regards the number of petals of this and the next plexus. Here the force Vishnu is located. The fourth plexus is situated in the heart, and goes by the name of Anahata or cardiac plexus. Rudra is the presiding force in it, and it represents the Vayu region. It is hexagonal in form within. Our Upanishads deal largely with this plexus, as it is a chief one. The fifth plexus is Visuddhi — the laryngeal or pharyngeal plexus situated in the throat. It is of sixteen petals, while the heart plexus is of twelve. This represents the sphere of Akas, which is spherical in form. The sixth is situated between the two eyebrows, and is called Agnya — cavernous plexus. It represents the sixth element, which is not to be found in our books, and has two petals. The force presiding over the throat-plexus is called Maheswara in our books, while that over the sixth is Sadasiva. The seventh is Sahasara, the pineal gland in the head, which has 1,000 lotuses.

There is also above the sixth plexus another series of six, which Raja yogis try to conquer instead of going to the plexus down below; but there is a great difficulty in conquering those plexuses. They are all huddled up into small space, while the plexuses I have mentioned here are situated at comparatively great distances and may be conquered easily. I have also to tell you that there is a gate just above the cavernous plexus, that is, the sixth plexus, in the middle of the head, which is the gate of the third eye, this third eye being situated in the pineal gland. In the Upanishads the forms of these six gods are given, as well as the ways by which they are to be contemplated upon with the Jiva or mind, and Prana controlled and taken to each plexus. Mitrayani Upanishad says they should be contemplated upon merely as the several aspects of Parabrahm. So much for the plexuses.

Now, coming to the third — pranas, these are, as I said, magnetic currents which run along the nadis. These are stated even in our Dasoupanishads to be five in number, on account of the modification of the Pranas with the five elements; but we find that there are seven pranas in reality, because it is stated in Taititiya Aranyak (page 801), edited by Rajendrala'Ila Mitra, that there are Sapta or seven pranas. Here I cannot refrain from quoting the passage itself which proves that everything is sevenfold in this world. The text when translated runs thus (Xth Prapataka, Xth Anuvaka, 2nd verse): From Him originate the seven Pranas, the seven Archis (the Spiritual light or fire), the seven Samith (lit., objects burnt), the seven tongues (of fire, etc.), these seven worlds and the seven sevens. I am aware that the commentator Sankaracharya twists the meaning of Pranas into Indryas. But there is a difficulty in that interpretation, and the word prana need not be distorted so. It is also stated in our books that when prana or astral current commingles with the prithivi or earth element, it is Udana. In conjunction with the second element or water, it is samana; with Agni, apana; with Vayu prana, and with Akas, vyana. The others are not given, since they are too subtle for us to understand. These five have got different functions to
perform, but it is sufficient for our purpose here to know merely that prana exists. Then, coming to the statement in the Varaha Upanishad that to Jiva, prana is the seat, I may say that herein lies the solution to the question. How are we to obtain mastery over Jiva? Jiva is the Lower and Higher manas combined. It may be represented to be the rider, and prana the horse, as prana's horse was nadi. Now, wherever the rider, Jiva, goes, there the prana goes. Wherever the prana goes, there Jiva goes. They are so commingled with each other that it is impossible to separate one from the other.

Now Hata yogis control the prana and thereby the Jiva, Raja yogis control the Jiva, and thereby the prana. Now we find as a matter of fact that when the mind is controlled, the outward breath, which is nothing but a physical manifestation of Prana, is also controlled. When we concentrate our attention on a book, we find that our breath subsides; but when we begin to gasp, we find we are unable to concentrate our attention. So Raja yogis try to control the mind, and thereby the prana; but we find that swift progress is not made if both are not controlled. In the Yoga Tatwa Upanishad, it is stated that Yoga and Gyana (wisdom) should go hand in hand and thereby prana and jiva should both be controlled; therefore, in order to ensure a speedy progress, the check of both is adopted, according to our books; but, no doubt, it will be dangerous to check prana, and unless a person is of an iron frame of mind, he had better not attempt the task at all. In the case of the generality of persons it is better to go in the Raja yogi way and control the mind alone through the three methods as stated in the Vedantic books — Sravanam, Mananam and Nidhityasanam. In the theosophical literature there is a confusion between Prana and Jiva. The alias of prana is said to be Jiva, but in the Upanishad this mistake never occurs. We should take Jiva to be the Kama manas and the higher manas conjointly. It becomes the Higher manas when freed from the lower one.

Next comes Hamsa. It is the vehicle of Jiva in its progress higher up to non-self. It is the great, bird or Om spoken of in the "Voice of Silence". Next comes the Saktis. They are six in number. Of these five preside over the plexuses from the Prostatic one upwards. The [Page 9] remaining one termed Ichcha Sakti, which produces desires, is in a seat between the sacral plexus and the one above it. The five go by the names of Krya, Kundilini, Guana, Para and Matrika. The first, if conquered, produces all-will, the third-all-wisdom, and the fourth is the source of light and heat and produces clairvoyance, etc. The fifth is merely an adjuster of the nadis in the middle of the eyebrows. Unlike the male forces which serve for the conquering of the plexuses, etc., these five Saktis yield their powers to him who conquers them. But Ichcha Sakti has to be crushed along with its retinue since it produces desires. Here I may also tell you that there is another set of the same Saktis in the head above. Of these Kundilini is important. Besides the one at the navel, some books say that there is another between the two eyebrows. But it is not important. This Kundilini is situated stretching itself from the sacral plexus to the plexus in the navel. It is of a special form, extending itself, like a serpent biting its own tail up, to the navel. It is able to create as well as undo the things of the world, that is, it will either kill man or will give him power if properly controlled. Here I shall also bring in the Agnis, or fires in the body. It is stated in our Puranas that Agni had three issues, each of whom produced fifteen issues in turn, amounting in all to forty-nine. In this instance I shall treat of the three Agnis only. They go in the body by the name of Koshtagni, Gyanagni and Darisanagni. Their counterparts in the universe and in this Sun-world are Garhyapathy, Ahavaneya and Anvaharya as stated in the Dasopanishads or Pavaka, Pavama and Suchi as stated in some Brahmanam and others. These mean earth fire, electric fire and heaven fire. So in the body the three fires mentioned above are situated in the sacral plexus (which corresponds to earth), heart and eyes. The first fire performs not only the function of digesting the food taken into the stomach, but also makes the position of Ichcha Sakti and her brood, who are just above that fire, uncomfortable through the heat generated by that fire. This fire is kindled when food is taken, but a yogi kindles this fire through
Pranayama and keeps up a perpetual flame. Then the desires are no longer latent, but rise up to the middle of the eyebrows and disturb his manas there. Then he has always to exert his will for their extinction, and thus he develops his will. The second fire is produced through gnana Sakti or the cultivation of wisdom. This fire kills egoism and its retinue stationed in the heart. The third fire is situated in the eyes, which create what is called Drishti — good or bad influence emitted through the eyes.

Now let me tell you that the obstacle that lies in the progress to a higher salvation of Jiva is not only this prana, which is the horse of the Jiva and which serves to unsteady the Jiva, but there is also another which we call Kama or Ichcha Sakti, as mentioned before. Therefore the two obstacles that produce the fluctuation of thought are prana and desires, and this is [Page 10] the rationale of the extinction of desires in the body. When a person through gnana, and through pranayama purifies the Ida, Pingala and Sushumna nadis, he is able to see that these desires, which are astral entities, rise up through these wires from the base of the spine to the manas and disturb its equilibrium. If once we try through our will to conquer these desires, they do not come in as obstacles to the manas. When once these desires are subjugated, the second obstacle, which is prana, has also to be conquered. What persons who go through pranayama do, is that they go through the several plexuses to conquer the forces in those plexuses, and also to control their breath through cessation of breath or Kumbaka. In ordinary moments, breath is passed through the right or left nostril breath passing from one nostril to the other in some minutes less than two hours. What should be done in order to produce the state of trance is, that breath should be controlled and should be made to go through the Sushumna, the central nadi.

Now Kundilini is the seat or origin of Prana. It contains the latent quantity of magnetic oxygen which preserves the body even when the prana or breath is stopped. It is in the navel that chitta, or fluctuation of thought, exists. Now when a person controls the breath, and thereby the mind, or Jiva, both go to the mouth of this Kundilini, which is in the navel, and then get into the Kundilini, through which prana and Jiva get into the Sushumna; and when these three get into the Sushumna, they rise up to the heart and thence to the eyebrows, and thence to Sahasrara or the pineal gland. This Kundilini is mentioned by Madame Blavatsky in "The Voice of Silence". The process is not given there, but this is the process that our books give us. Now when the plexuses have been conquered, when the prana has been stopped and made to get into the Kundilini, and thence into the Sushumna, one’s desires vanish, and he is able to destroy his subtle body at his will and then to reproduce it if he likes. This is the process given out in the Yoga Kundilini Upanishad, which will shortly appear. As I have said, when the plexuses have been conquered, and the ties between the subtle body and the physical body have also been severed, the adept is then able to get out of his gross body and pass in the double. These six plexuses form, as it were, the spots at which the subtle body is tacked on to the gross body. Therefore, when prana and all the desires are checked, this leads to the higher karana body developing itself, that is, consciousness of the higher ego in man arises, which leads him thereupon to the higher goal. Thus, the karana body, in order to find its salvation, has not only to destroy its intermediate subtle body, but also to attract to itself Gyana Sakti, Para Sakti, Kyra Sakti, and make them merge in it before it can merge into that ocean of Consciousness, Light and Will, which is nothing but pure Satwa.

OM. TATSA