

THEOSOPHICAL MANUALS NO. 5

THE ASTRAL PLANE

ITS SCENERY, INHABITANTS, AND
PHENOMENA

BY

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PREFACE.

Few words are needed in sending this little book out into the world. It is the fifth of a series of Manuals designed to meet the public demand for a simple exposition of Theosophical teachings. Some have complained that our literature is at once too abstruse, too technical, and too expensive for the ordinary reader, and it is our hope that the present series may succeed in supplying what is a very real want. Theosophy is not only for the learned; it is for all. Perhaps among those who in these little books catch their first glimpse of its teachings, there may be a few who will be led by them to penetrate more deeply into its philosophy, its science, and its religion, facing its abstruser problems with the student's zeal and the neophyte's ardour. But these Manuals are not written only for the eager student, whom no initial difficulties can daunt; they are written for the busy men and women of the work-a-day world, and seek to make plain some of the great truths that render life easier to bear and death easier to face. Written by servants of the Masters who are the Elder Brothers of our race, they can have no other object than to serve our fellow-men.

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THE ASTRAL PLANE.

INTRODUCTION.

THOUGH for the most part entirely unconscious of it, man passes the whole of his life in the midst of a vast and populous unseen world. During sleep or in trance, when the insistent physical senses are for the time in abeyance, this other world is to some extent open to him, and he will sometimes bring back from those conditions more or less vague memories of what he has seen and heard there. When, at the change which men call death, he lays aside his physical body altogether, it is into this unseen world that he passes, and in it he lives through the long centuries that intervene between his incarnations into this existence that we know. By far the greater part of these long periods is spent in the heaven-world, to which the sixth of these manuals is devoted; but what we have now to consider is the lower part of this unseen world, the state into which man enters immediately after death—the Hades or under world of the Greeks, the purgatory or intermediate state of Christianity which was called by mediaeval alchemists the astral plane. The object of this manual is to collect and arrange the information with regard to this interesting

region which is scattered through Theosophical literature, and also to supplement it slightly in cases where new facts have come to our knowledge. It must be understood that any such additions are only the result of the investigations of a few explorers, and must not, therefore, be taken as in any way authoritative, but are given simply for what they are worth. On the other hand every precaution in our power has been taken to ensure accuracy, no fact, old or new, being admitted to this manual unless it has been confirmed by the testimony of at least two independent trained investigators among ourselves, and has also been passed as correct by older students whose knowledge on these points is necessarily much greater than ours. It is hoped, therefore, that this account of the astral plane, though it cannot be considered as quite complete, may yet be found reliable as far as it goes.

The first point which it is necessary to make clear in describing this astral plane is its absolute reality. Of course in using that word I am not speaking from that metaphysical standpoint from which all but the One Unmanifested is unreal because impermanent. I am using the word in its plain, every-day sense, and I mean by it that the objects and inhabitants of the astral plane are real in exactly the same way as our own bodies, our furniture, our houses or monuments are real—as real as Charing Cross, to quote an expressive remark from one of the earliest Theosophical works. They will no more endure for ever than will objects on the physical plane, but they are nevertheless realities from our point of view while they last—realities which we cannot afford to ignore merely because the majority of mankind is as yet unconscious, or but vaguely conscious, of their existence.

No one can get a clear conception of the teachings of the Wisdom-Religion until he has at any rate an intellectual grasp of the fact that in our solar system there exist perfectly definite planes, each with its own matter of different degrees of density, and that some of these planes can be visited and observed by persons who have qualified themselves for the work, exactly as a foreign country might be visited and observed; and that, by comparison of the observations of those who are constantly working on these planes, evidence can be obtained of their existence and nature at least as satisfactory as that which most of us have for the existence of Greenland or Spitzbergen. Furthermore, just as any man who has the means and chooses to take the trouble can go and see Greenland or Spitzbergen for himself, so any man who chooses to take the trouble to qualify himself by living the necessary life, can in time come to see these higher planes on his own account.

The names usually given to these planes, taking them in order of materiality, rising from the denser to the finer, are the physical, the astral, the mental or devachanic, the buddhic, and the nirvanic. Higher than this last are two others, but they are so far above our present power of conception that for the moment they may be left out of consideration. It should be understood that the matter of each of these planes differs from that of the one below it in the same way as, though to a much greater degree than, vapour differs from solid matter; in fact, the states of matter which we call solid, liquid, and gaseous are merely the three lowest subdivisions of the matter belonging to this one physical plane.

The astral region which I am to attempt to describe is

the second of these great planes of nature—the next above (or within) that physical world with which we are all familiar. It has often been called the realm of illusion—not that it is itself any more illusory than the physical world, but, because of the extreme unreliability of the impressions brought back from it by the untrained seer. This is to be accounted for mainly by two remarkable characteristics of the astral world—first, that many of its inhabitants have a marvellous power of changing their forms with Protean rapidity, and also of casting practically unlimited glamour over those with whom they choose to sport; and secondly, that sight on that plane is a faculty very different from and much more extended than physical vision. An object is seen, as it were, from all sides at once, the inside of a solid being as plainly open to the view as the outside; it is therefore obvious that an inexperienced visitor to this new world may well find considerable difficulty in understanding what he really does see, and still more in translating his vision into the very inadequate language of ordinary speech.

A good example of the sort of mistake that is likely to occur is the frequent reversal of any number which the seer has to read from the astral light, so that he would be liable to render, say, 139 as 931, and so on. In the case of a student of occultism trained by a capable Master such a mistake would be impossible except through great hurry or carelessness, since such a pupil has to go through a long and varied course of instruction in this art of seeing correctly, the Master, or perhaps some more advanced pupil, bringing before him again and again all possible forms of illusion, and asking him "What do you see?" Any errors in his answers are then corrected and their

reasons explained, until by degrees the neophyte acquires a certainty and confidence in dealing with the phenomena of the astral plane which far exceeds anything possible in physical life.

But he has to learn not only to see correctly but to translate the memory of what he has seen accurately from one plane to the other; and to assist him in this he is trained to carry his consciousness without break from the physical plane to the astral or devachanic and back again, for until that can be done there is always a possibility that his recollections may be partially lost or distorted during the blank interval which separates his periods of consciousness on the various planes. When the power of bringing over the consciousness is perfectly acquired the pupil will have the advantage of the use of all the astral faculties, not only while out of his body during sleep or trance, but also while fully awake in ordinary physical life.

It has been the custom of some Theosophists to speak with scorn of the astral plane, and treat it as entirely unworthy of attention; but that seems to me a mistaken view. Most assuredly that at which we have to aim is the life of the spirit, and it would be most disastrous for any student to neglect that higher development and rest satisfied with the attainment of astral consciousness. There have been some whose karma was such as to enable them to develop the higher mental faculties first of all—to overleap the astral plane for the time, as it were; but this is not the ordinary method adopted by the Masters of Wisdom with their pupils. Where it is possible it no doubt saves trouble, but for most of us such progress by leaps and bounds has been forbidden by our own faults or follies in the past: all that we can hope for is to win our way slowly step by step,

and since this astral plane lies next to our world of denser matter, it is usually in connection with it that our earliest super-physical experiences take place. It is therefore of deep interest to those of us who are but beginners in these studies, and a clear comprehension of its mysteries may often be of the greatest importance to us, by enabling us not only to understand many of the phenomena of the *seance*-room, of haunted houses, etc., which would otherwise be inexplicable, but also to guard ourselves and others from possible dangers.

The first introduction to this remarkable region comes to people in various ways. Some only once in their whole lives under some unusual influence become sensitive enough to recognize the presence of one of its inhabitants, and perhaps, because the experience does not repeat itself, they may come in time to believe that on that occasion they must have been the victims of hallucination: others find themselves with increasing frequency seeing and hearing something to which those around them are blind and deaf; others again—and perhaps this is the commonest experience of all—begin to recollect with greater and greater clearness that which they have seen or heard on that other plane during sleep.

Among those who make a study of these subjects, some try to develop the astral sight by crystal-gazing, or other methods, while those who have the inestimable advantage of the direct guidance of a qualified teacher will probably be placed upon that plane for the first time under his special protection, which will be continued until, by the application of various tests, he has satisfied himself that each pupil is proof against any danger or terror that he is likely to encounter. But, however it may occur, the first actual

realization that we are all the while in the midst of a great world full of active life, of which most of us are nevertheless entirely unconscious, cannot but be a memorable epoch in a man's existence.

So abundant and so manifold is this life of the astral plane that at first it is absolutely bewildering to the neophyte; and even for the more practised investigator it is no easy task to attempt to classify and to catalogue it. If the explorer of some unknown tropical forest were asked not only to give a full account of the country through which he had passed, with accurate details of its vegetable and mineral productions, but also to state the genus and species of every one of the myriad insects, birds, beasts, and reptiles which he had seen, he might well shrink appalled at the magnitude of the undertaking: yet even this affords no parallel to the embarrassments of the psychic investigator, for in his case matters are further complicated, first by the difficulty of correctly translating from that plane to this the recollection of what he has seen, and secondly by the utter inadequacy of ordinary language to express much of what he has to report.

However, just as the explorer on the physical plane would probably commence his account of a country by some sort of general description of its scenery and characteristics, so it will be well to begin this slight sketch of the astral plane by endeavouring to give some idea of the scenery which forms the background of its marvellous and ever-changing activities. Yet here at the outset an almost insuperable difficulty confronts us in the extreme complexity of the matter. All who see fully on that plane agree that to attempt to call up a vivid picture of this astral before those whose eyes are as yet unopened is like

speaking to a blind man of the exquisite variety of tints in a sunset sky—however detailed and elaborate the description may be, there is no certainty that the idea presented before the hearer's mind will be an adequate representation of the truth.

SCENERY.

FIRST of all, then, it must be understood that the astral plane has seven subdivisions, each of which has its corresponding degree of materiality and its corresponding condition of matter. Although the poverty of physical language forces us to speak of these subplanes as higher and lower, we must not fall into the mistake of thinking of them (or indeed of the greater planes of which they are only subdivisions) as separate localities in space—as lying above one another like the shelves of a book-case or outside one another like the coats of an onion. It must be understood that the matter of each plane or subplane interpenetrates that of the plane or subplane below it, so that here at the surface of the earth all exist together in the same space, although it is true that the higher varieties of matter extend further away from the physical earth than the lower.

So when we speak of a man as rising from one plane or subplane to another, we do not think of him as necessarily moving in space at all, but rather as transferring his consciousness from one level to another—gradually becoming unresponsive to the vibrations of one order of matter, and beginning instead to answer to those of a higher and more refined order; so that one world with its scenery and

inhabitants would seem to fade slowly away from his view, while another world of a more elevated character would dawn upon him in its stead.

Numbering these subdivisions from the highest and least material downwards, we find that they naturally fall into three classes, divisions 1, 2, and 3 forming one such class, and 4, 5, and 6 another, while the seventh and lowest of all stands alone. The difference between the matter of one of these classes and the next would be commensurable with that between a solid and a liquid, while the difference between the matter of the subdivisions of a class would rather resemble that between two kinds of solid, such as, say, steel and sand. Putting aside for the moment the seventh, we may say that divisions 4, 5, and 6 of the astral plane have for their background the physical world in which we live, and all its familiar accessories. Life on the sixth division is simply like our ordinary life on this earth, minus the physical body and its necessities; while as it ascends through the fifth and fourth divisions it becomes less and less material, and is more and more withdrawn from our lower world and its interests.

The scenery of these lower divisions, then, is that of the earth as we know it; but in reality it is also very much more; for when looked at from this different standpoint, with the assistance of the astral senses, even purely physical objects present a very different appearance. As has already been mentioned, they are seen by one whose eyes are fully opened, not as usual from one point of view, but from all sides at once—an idea in itself sufficiently confusing; and when we add to this that every particle in the interior of a solid body is as fully and clearly visible as those on the outside, it will be comprehended that under such conditions

even the most familiar objects may at first be totally unrecognizable.

Yet a moment's consideration will show that such vision approximates much more closely to true perception than does physical sight. Looked at on the astral plane, for example, the sides of a glass cube would all appear equal, as they really are, while on the physical plane we see the further side in perspective—that is, it appears smaller than the nearer side, which is of course, a mere illusion. It is this characteristic of astral vision which has led to its sometimes being spoken of as sight in the fourth dimension—a very suggestive and expressive phrase.

But in addition to these possible sources of error matters are further complicated by the fact that this higher sight cognizes forms of matter which, while still purely physical, are nevertheless invisible under ordinary conditions. Such, for example, are the particles composing the atmosphere, all the various emanations which are always being given out by everything that has life, and also four grades of a still finer order of physical matter which, for want of more distinctive names, must all be described as etheric. The latter form a kind of system by themselves, freely interpenetrating all other physical matter; and the investigation of their vibrations and the manner in which various higher forces affect them would in itself constitute a vast field of deeply interesting study for any man of science who possessed the requisite sight for its examination.

Even when our imagination has fully grasped all that is comprehended in what has already been said, we do not yet understand half the complexity of the problem for besides all these new forms of physical matter we have to deal with the still more numerous and perplexing subdivisions

of astral matter. We must note first that every material object, every particle even, has its astral counterpart; and this counterpart is itself not a simple body, but is usually extremely complex, being composed of various kinds of astral matter. In addition to this each living creature is surrounded with an atmosphere of its own, usually called its aura, and in the case of human beings this aura forms of itself a very fascinating branch of study. It is seen as an oval mass of luminous mist of highly complex structure, and from its shape has sometimes been called the auric egg.

Theosophical readers will hear with pleasure that even at the early stage of his development at which the pupil begins to acquire this fuller sight, he is able to assure himself by direct observation of the accuracy of the teaching given through our great founder, Madame Blavatsky, on the subject of some at least of the "seven principles of man." In regarding his fellow-man—he no longer sees only his outer appearance; almost exactly coextensive with that physical body he clearly distinguishes the etheric double; while the universal life-fluid as it is absorbed and specialized, as it circulates in rosy light throughout the body, as it eventually radiates from the healthy person in its altered form, is also perfectly obvious.

Most brilliant and most easily seen of all, perhaps, though belonging to a more refined order of matter—the astral—is that aura which expresses by its vivid and ever-changing flashes of colour the different desires which sweep across the man's mind from moment to moment. This is the true astral body. Behind that, and consisting of a finer grade of matter again—that of the form-levels of

the devachanic plane—lies the mental body or aura of the lower mind, whose colours, changing only by slow degrees as the man lives his life, show the trend of his thoughts and the disposition and character of his personality while still higher and infinitely more beautiful, where at all clearly developed, is the living light of the causal body, the vehicle of the higher self, which shows the stage of development of the real ego its passage from birth to birth. But to see these the pupil must, of course, have developed the vision of the levels to which they belong.

It will save the student much trouble if he learns at once to regard these auras not as mere emanations, but as the actual manifestation of the ego on their respective planes—if he understands that it is the auric egg which is the real man, not the physical body which on this plane crystallizes in the middle of it. So long as the reincarnating ego remains upon the plane which is his true home in the formless levels, the vehicle which he inhabits is the causal body, but when he descends into the form-levels he must, in order to be able to function upon them, clothe himself in their matter; and the matter that he thus attracts to himself furnishes his devachanic or mind-body.

Similarly, descending into the astral plane he forms his astral or desire-body out of its matter, though of course, still retaining all the other bodies, and on his still further descent to this lowest plane of all the physical body is formed in the midst of the auric egg, which thus contains the entire man. Fuller accounts of these auras will be found in *Transaction* No. 18 of the London Lodge, and in a small pamphlet on *The Aura* which I have published, but enough has been said here to show that as they still occupy the same space, the finer interpenetrating

the grosser, it needs careful study and much practice to enable the neophyte to distinguish clearly at a glance the one from the other. Nevertheless the human aura, or more usually some one part of it only, is not infrequently one of the first purely astral objects seen by the untrained, though in such a case its indications are naturally very likely to be misunderstood.

Though the astral aura from the brilliancy of its flashes of colour may often be more conspicuous, the nerve-ether and the etheric double are really of a much denser order of matter, being within the limits of the physical plane, though invisible to ordinary sight. If we examine with psychic faculty the body of a newly-born child, we shall find it permeated not only by astral matter of every degree of density, but also by the several grades of etheric matter; and if we take the trouble to trace these inner bodies backwards to their origin, we find that it is of the latter that the etheric double—the mould upon which the physical body is built up—is formed by the agents of the Lords of karma; while the astral matter has been gathered together by the descending ego—not of course consciously, but automatically—as he passes through the astral plane. (See Manual No. IV., p. 44.)

Into the composition of the etheric double must enter something of all the different grades of etheric matter; but the proportions may vary greatly, and are determined by several factors, such as the race, sub-race, and type of a man, as well as by his individual karma. When it is remembered that these four subdivisions of matter are made up of numerous combinations, which, in their turn, form aggregations that enter into the composition of the "atom" of the so-called "element" of the chemist, it will be seen

that this second principle of man is highly complex, and the number of its possible variations practically infinite, so that, however complicated and unusual a man's karma may be, those in whose province such work falls are able to give a mould in accordance with which a body exactly suiting it can be formed. But for information upon this vast subject of karma the previous manual should be consulted.

One other point deserves mention in connection with the appearance of physical matter when looked at from the astral plane, and that is that the higher vision when fully developed possesses the power of magnifying at will the minutest physical particle to any desired size, as though by a microscope, though its magnifying power is enormously greater than that of any microscope ever made or ever likely to be made. The hypothetical molecule and atom postulated by science are visible realities to the occult student, though the latter recognizes them as much more complex in their nature than the scientific man has yet discovered them to be. Here again is a vast field of study of absorbing interest to which a whole volume might readily be devoted; and a scientific investigator who should acquire this astral sight in perfection, would not only find his experiments with ordinary and known phenomena immensely facilitated, but would also see stretching before him entirely new vistas of knowledge needing more than a lifetime for their thorough examination.

For example, one curious and very beautiful novelty brought to his notice by the development of this vision would be the existence of other and entirely different colours beyond the limits of the ordinarily visible spectrum, the ultra-red and ultra-violet rays which science has discovered

by other means being plainly perceptible to astral sight. We must not, however, allow ourselves to follow these fascinating bye-paths, but must resume our endeavour to give a general idea of the appearance of the astral plane.

It will by this time be obvious that though, as above stated, the ordinary objects of the physical world form the background to life on certain levels of the astral plane, yet so much more is seen of their real appearance and characteristics that the general effect differs widely from that with which we are familiar. For the sake of illustration take a rock as an example of the simpler class of objects. When regarded with trained sight it is no mere inert mass of stone. First of all, the whole of the physical matter of the rock is seen instead of a very, small part of it; secondly, the vibrations of its physical particles are perceptible; thirdly, it is seen to possess an astral counterpart composed of various grades of astral matter, whose particles are also in constant motion; fourthly, the universal life is seen to be circulating through it and radiating from it; fifthly, an aura will be seen surrounding it, though this is of course much less extended and varied than in the case of the higher kingdoms; sixthly, its appropriate elemental essence is seen permeating it, ever active but ever fluctuating. In the case of the vegetable, animal, and human kingdoms, the complications are naturally much more numerous.

It may be objected by some readers that no such complexities as these are described by most of the psychics who occasionally get glimpses of the astral world, nor are they reported at *seances* by the entities that manifest there ; but this is readily accounted for. Few untrained persons on that plane, whether living or "dead" see things as they really

are until after very long experience; even those who do see fully are often too dazed and confused to understand or remember; and among the very small minority who both see and remember there are hardly any who can translate the recollection into language on our lower plane. Many untrained psychics never examine their visions scientifically at all; they simply obtain an impression which may be quite correct, but may also be half false, or even wholly misleading.

All the more probable does the latter hypothesis become when we take into consideration the frequent tricks played by sportive denizens of the other world, against which the untrained person is usually absolutely defenceless. It must also be remembered that the regular inhabitant of the astral plane, whether he be human or elemental, is under ordinary circumstances conscious only of the objects of that plane, physical matter being to him as entirely invisible as is astral matter to the majority of mankind. Since, as before remarked, every physical object has its astral counterpart, which *would* be visible to him, it may be thought that the distinction is a trivial one, yet it is an essential part of the symmetrical conception of the subject.

If, however, an astral entity constantly works through a medium, these finer astral senses may gradually be so coarsened as to become insensible to the higher grades of matter on their own plane, and to include in their purview the physical world as we see it instead; but only the trained visitor from this life, who is fully conscious on both planes, can depend upon seeing both clearly and simultaneously. Be it understood, then, that the complexity exists, and that only when it is fully perceived and

scientifically unravelled is there perfect security against deception or mistake.

For the seventh or lowest subdivision of the astral plane also this physical world of ours may be said to be the background, though what is seen is only a distorted and partial view of it, since all that is light and good and beautiful seems invisible. It was thus described four thousand years ago in the Egyptian papyrus of the Scribe Ani: "What manner of place is this unto which I have come? It hath no water, it hath no air; it is deep, unfathomable; it is black as the blackest night, and men wander helplessly about therein; in it a man may not live in quietness of heart." For the unfortunate human being on that level it is indeed true that "all the earth is full of darkness and cruel habitations," but it is darkness which radiates from within himself and causes his existence to be passed in a perpetual night of evil and horror—a very real hell, though, like all other hells, entirely of man's own creation.

Most students find the investigation of this section an extremely unpleasant task, for there appears to be a sense of density and gross materiality about it which is indescribably loathsome to the liberated astral body, causing it the sense of pushing its way through some black, viscous fluid, while the inhabitants and influences encountered there are also usually exceedingly undesirable.

The first, second and third subdivisions, though occupying the same space, yet give the impression of being much further removed from this physical world, and correspondingly less material. Entities inhabiting these levels lose sight of the earth and its belongings; they are usually deeply self-absorbed, and to a large extent create their own surroundings, though these are sufficiently

objective to be perceptible to other entities and also to clairvoyant vision. This region is beyond doubt the "summerland" of which we hear so much at spiritualistic *seances*, and those who descend from and describe it no doubt speak the truth as far as their knowledge extends. It is on these planes that "spirits" call into temporary existence their houses, schools, and cities, for these objects are often real enough for the time, though to a clearer sight they may sometimes be pitifully unlike what their delighted creators suppose them to be. Nevertheless, many of the imaginations which take form there are of real though temporary beauty, and a visitor who knew of nothing higher might wander contentedly enough there among forests and mountains, lovely lakes and pleasant flower-gardens, which are at any rate much superior to anything in the physical world; or he might even construct such surroundings to suit his own fancies. The details of the differences between these three higher sub-planes will perhaps be more readily explicable when we come to deal with their human inhabitants.

An account of the scenery of the astral plane would be incomplete without some mention of what have often, though mistakenly, been called the Records of the Astral Light. These records (which are in truth a sort of materialization of the Divine memory—a living photographic representation of all that has ever happened) are really and permanently impressed upon a very much higher level, and are only reflected in a more or less spasmodic manner on the astral plane, so that one whose power of vision does not rise above this will be likely to obtain only occasional and disconnected pictures of the past instead of a coherent narrative. But nevertheless these reflected pictures of all

kinds of past events are constantly being reproduced in the astral world, and form an important part of the surroundings of the investigator there. I have not space to do more than just mention them here, but a fuller account of them will be found in chapter vii of my little book on *Clairvoyance*.

INHABITANTS

HAVING sketched in, however slightly, the background of our picture, we must now attempt to fill in the figures—to describe the inhabitants of the astral plane. The immense variety of these beings makes it exceedingly difficult to arrange and tabulate them. Perhaps the most convenient method will be to divide them into three great classes, the human, the non-human, and the artificial.

I. HUMAN.

The human denizens of the astral plane fall naturally into two groups, the living and the dead, or, to speak more accurately, those who have still a physical body, and those who have not.

1. LIVING

The men who manifest themselves on the astral plane during physical life may be subdivided into four classes:—

1. *The Adept and his Pupils.* Those belonging to this class usually employ as a vehicle not the astral body at all, but the mind-body, which is composed of the matter of the four lower or rupa levels of the plane next above. The advantage of this vehicle is that it permits of instant passage from the mental plane to the astral and back, and

allows of the use at all times of the greater power and keener sense of its own plane.

The mind-body is not naturally visible to astral sight at all, and consequently the pupil who works in it learns to gather round himself a temporary veil of astral matter when in the course of his work he wishes to become perceptible to the inhabitants of the lower plane in order to help them more efficiently. This temporary body is usually formed for the pupil by his Master on the first occasion, and he is then instructed and assisted until he can form it for himself easily and expeditiously. Such a vehicle, though an exact reproduction of the man in appearance, contains none of the matter of his own astral body, but corresponds to it in the same way as a materialization corresponds to a physical body.

At an earlier stage of his development the pupil may be found functioning in the astral body like any one else; but whichever vehicle he is employing, the man who is introduced to the astral plane under the guidance of a competent teacher has always the fullest possible consciousness there, and is able to function perfectly easily upon all its subdivisions. He is in fact himself, exactly as his friends know him on earth, minus only the four lower principles in the one case and the three lower in the other, and plus the additional powers and faculties of this higher condition, which enable him to carry on far more easily and far more efficiently on that plane during sleep the Theosophical work which occupies so much of his thought in his waking hours. Whether he will remember fully and accurately on the physical plane what he has done or learnt on the other depends largely upon whether he is able to carry his consciousness without intermission from the one state to the other.

The investigator will occasionally meet on the astral

plane students of occultism from all parts of the world (belonging to lodges quite unconnected with the Masters of whom Theosophists know most) who are in many cases most earnest and self-sacrificing seekers after truth. It is noteworthy, however, that all such lodges are at least aware of the existence of the great Himalayan Brotherhood, and acknowledge it as containing among its members the highest Adepts now known on earth.

2. *The Psychically-developed Person who is not under the guidance of a Master.* Such a person may or may not be spiritually developed, for the two forms of advancement do not necessarily go together. When a man is born with psychic powers it is simply the result of efforts made during a previous incarnation, which may have been of the noblest and most unselfish character, or on the other hand may have been ignorant and ill-directed or even entirely unworthy.

Such an one will usually be perfectly conscious when out of the body, but for want of proper training is liable to be greatly deceived as to what he sees. He will often be able to range through the different subdivisions of the astral plane almost as fully as persons belonging to the last class; but sometimes he is especially attracted to some one division and rarely travels beyond its influences. His recollection of what he has seen may vary according to the degree of his development through all the stages from perfect clearness to utter distortion or blank oblivion. He will appear always in this astral body, since he does not know how to function in the mental vehicle.

3. *The Ordinary Person*—that is, the person without any psychic development—who floats about in his astral body during sleep in a more or less unconscious condition. In

deep slumber the higher principles in their astral vehicle almost invariably withdraw from the body, and hover in its immediate neighbourhood, though in quite undeveloped persons they are practically almost as much asleep as the body is.

In some cases, however, this astral vehicle is less lethargic, and floats dreamily about on the various astral currents, occasionally recognizing other people in a similar condition, and meeting with experiences of all sorts, pleasant and unpleasant, the memory of which, hopelessly confused and often travestied into a grotesque caricature of what really happened, will cause the man to think next morning what a remarkable dream he has had.

All cultured people, belonging to the higher races of the world, have at the present time their astral senses very fairly developed, so that, if they were sufficiently aroused to examine the realities which surround them during sleep, they would be able to observe them and learn much from them. But, in the vast majority of cases, they are not so aroused, and they spend most of their nights in a kind of brown study, pondering deeply over whatever thought may have been uppermost in their minds when they fell asleep. They have the astral faculties, but they scarcely use them; they are certainly awake on the astral plane, and yet they are not in the least awake to the plane, and are consequently conscious of their surroundings only very vaguely, if at all.

When such a man becomes a pupil of one of the Masters of Wisdom, he is usually at once shaken out of this somnolent condition, fully awakened to the realities around him on that plane, and set to learn from them and to work among them, so that his hours of sleep are no longer a blank, but are filled with active and useful occupation,

without in the least interfering with the healthy, repose of the tired physical body. (See *Invisible Helpers*. Chap. v.)

These extruded astral bodies are almost shapeless and very indefinite in outline in the case of the more backward races and individuals, but as the man develops in intellect and spirituality his floating astral becomes better defined, and more closely resembles his physical encasement. It is often asked how—since the undeveloped astral is so vague in outline, and since the great majority of mankind come under the head of the undeveloped—how it is ever possible to recognise the ordinary man at all when he is in his astral body. In trying to answer that question we must endeavour to realize that, to the clairvoyant eye, the physical body of man appears surrounded by what we call the aura—a luminous coloured mist, roughly ovoid in shape, and extending to a distance of some eighteen inches from the body in all directions. All students are aware that this aura is exceedingly complex, and contains matter of all the different planes on which man is at present provided with vehicles; but for the moment let us think of it as it would appear to one who possessed no higher power of vision than the astral.

For such a spectator the aura would of course contain only astral matter, and would therefore be a simpler object of study. He would see, however, that this astral matter not only surrounded the physical body, but interpenetrated it, and that within the periphery of that body it was much more densely aggregated than in that part of the aura which lay outside it. Possibly this may be due to the attraction of the large amount of dense astral matter which is gathered together there as the counterpart of the cells of the physical body, but however that may be, the fact is undoubted that

the matter of the astral body which lies within the limits of the physical is many times denser than that outside it.

When during sleep the astral body is withdrawn from the physical this arrangement still persists, and any one looking at such an astral body with clairvoyant vision would still see, just as before, a form resembling the physical body surrounded by an aura. That form would now be composed only of astral matter, but still the difference in density between it and its surrounding mist would be quite sufficient to make it clearly distinguishable, even though it is itself only a form of denser mist.

Now as to the difference in appearance between the evolved and the unevolved man. Even in the case of the latter the features and shape of the inner form would be recognizable always, though blurred and indistinct, but the surrounding egg would scarcely deserve the name, for it would be in fact a mere shapeless wreath of mist, having neither regularity nor permanence of outline.

In the more developed man the change would be very marked, both in the aura and the form within it. This latter would be far more distinct and definite—a closer reproduction of the man's physical appearance; while instead of the floating mist-wreath we should see a sharply defined ovoid form, preserving its shape unaffected amidst all the varied currents which are always swirling around it on the astral plane.

Since the psychical faculties of mankind are in course of evolution, and individuals are at all stages of their development, this class naturally melts by imperceptible gradations into the former one.

4. *The Black Magician or his pupil.* This class corresponds somewhat to the first, except that the

development has been for evil instead of good, and the powers acquired are used for purely selfish purposes instead of for the benefit of humanity. Among its lower ranks come members of the negro race who practise the ghastly rites of the Obeah or Voodoo schools, and the medicine-men of many a savage tribe; while higher in intellect, and therefore the more blameworthy, stand the Tibetan black magicians, who are often, though incorrectly, called by Europeans Dugpas—a title properly belonging, as is quite correctly explained by Surgeon-Major Waddell in his book on *The Buddhism of Tibet*, only to the Bhotanese subdivision of the great Kargyu sect, which is part of what may be called the semi-reformed school of Tibetan Buddhism.

The Dugpas no doubt deal in Tantrik magic to a considerable extent, but the real red-hatted entirely unreformed sect is that of the Nin-ma-pa, though far beyond them still lower depth be the Bonpa—the votaries of the aboriginal religion, who have never accepted any form of Buddhism at all. It must not, however, be supposed that all Tibetan sects except the Gelugpa are necessarily and altogether evil; a truer view would be that as the rules of other sects permit considerably greater laxity of life and practice, the proportion of self-seekers among them is likely to be much larger than among the stricter reformers.

DEAD.

To begin with, of course this very word "dead" is all absurd misnomer, as most of the entities classified under this heading are as fully alive as we are ourselves—often distinctly more so; so the term must be understood simply as meaning those who are for the time unattached to a

physical body. They may be subdivided into nine principal classes, as follows:—

1. *The Nirmanakaya*. This class is just mentioned in order to make the catalogue complete, but it is of course very rarely indeed that so exalted a being manifests himself upon so low a plane as this. When for any reason connected with his sublime work he found it desirable to do so, he would probably create a temporary astral body for the purpose from the atomic matter of the plane, just as the Adept in the mind-body would do, simply because his more refined vesture would be invisible to astral sight. In order to be able to function without a moment's hesitation on any plane, he retains always within himself some atoms belonging to each, round which as a nucleus he can instantly aggregate other matter, and so provide himself with whatever vehicle he desires. Further information about the position and work of the Nirmanakaya may be found in Madame Blavatsky's *Voice of the Silence*, and in my own little book on *Invisible Helpers*.

2. *The Pupil awaiting reincarnation*. It has frequently been stated in Theosophical literature that when the pupil reaches a certain stage he is able with the assistance of his Master to escape from the action of what is in ordinary cases the law of nature which carries a human being into the heaven-world after death, there to receive the due result of the full working out of all the spiritual forces which his highest aspirations, have set in motion while on earth.

As the pupil must by the hypothesis be a man of pure life and high thought, it is probable that in his case these spiritual forces will be of abnormal strength, and therefore if he, to use the technical expression, "takes his devachan,"

it is likely to be an extremely long one; but if instead of taking it he chooses the Path of Renunciation (thus even at his low level and in his humble way beginning to follow in the footsteps of the Great Master of Renunciation, GAUTAMA BUDDHA Himself), he is able to expend that reserve of force in quite another direction—to use it for the benefit of mankind, and so, infinitesimal though his offering may be, to take his tiny part in the great work of the Nirmanakayas. By taking this course he no doubt sacrifices centuries of intense bliss, but on the other hand he gains the enormous advantage of being able to continue his life of work and progress without a break.

When a pupil who has decided to do this dies, he simply steps out of his body, as he has often done before, and waits upon the astral plane until a suitable reincarnation can be arranged for him by his Master. This being a marked departure from the usual course of procedure, the permission of a very high authority has to be obtained before the attempt can be made; yet, even when this is granted, so strong is the force of natural law, that it is said the pupil must be careful to confine himself strictly to the astral level while the matter is being arranged, lest if he once, even for a moment, touched the devachanic plane, he might be swept as by an irresistible current into the line of normal evolution again.

In some cases, though these are rare, he is enabled to avoid the trouble of a new birth by being placed directly in all adult body whose previous tenant has no further use for it, but naturally it is not often that a suitable body is available. Far more frequently he has to wait on the astral plane, as mentioned before, until the opportunity of a fitting birth presents itself. In the meantime, however, he is

losing no time, for he is just as fully himself as ever he was, and is able to go on with the work given him by his Master even more quickly and efficiently than when in the physical body, since he is no longer hampered by the possibility of fatigue. His consciousness is of course quite complete, and he roams at will through all the divisions of the plane with equal facility.

The pupil awaiting reincarnation is by no means one of the common objects of the astral plane, but still he may be met with occasionally, and therefore he forms one of our classes. No doubt as the evolution of humanity proceeds, and an ever-increasing proportion enters upon the Path of Holiness, this class will become more numerous.

3. The Ordinary Person after death. Needless to say this class is millions of times larger than those of which we have spoken, and the character and condition of its members vary within extremely wide limits. Within similarly wide limits may vary also the length of their lives upon the astral plane, for while there are those who pass only a few days or hours there, others remain upon this level for many years and even centuries.

A man who has led a good and pure life, whose strongest feelings and aspirations have been unselfish and spiritual, will have no attraction to this plane, and will, if entirely left alone, find little to keep him upon it, or to awaken him into activity even during the comparatively short period of his stay. For it must be understood that after death the true man is withdrawing into himself, and just as at the first step of that process he casts off the physical body, and almost directly afterwards the etheric double, so it is intended that he should as soon as possible cast off also the astral or desire body, and pass into the

heaven-world, where alone his spiritual aspirations can bear their perfect fruit.

The noble and pure-minded man will be able to do this, for he has subdued all earthly passions during life; the force of his will has been directed into higher channels, and there is therefore but little energy of lower desire to be worked out on the astral plane. His stay there will consequently be very short, and most probably he will have little more than a dreamy half-consciousness of existence until he sinks into the sleep during which his higher principles finally free themselves from the astral envelope and enter upon the blissful life of the heaven-world.

For the person who has not as yet entered upon the path of occult development, what has been described is the ideal state of affairs, but naturally it not attained by all, or even by the majority. The average man has by no means freed himself from all lower desires before death, and it takes a long period of more or less fully conscious life on the various subdivisions of the astral plane to allow the forces which he has generated to work themselves out, and thus release the higher ego.

Every one after death has to pass through all the subdivisions of the astral plane on his way to the heaven-world, though it must not be inferred that he will be conscious upon all of them. Precisely as it is necessary that the physical body should contain within its constitution physical matter in all its conditions, solid, liquid, gaseous, and etheric; so it is indispensable that the astral vehicle should contain particles belonging to all the corresponding subdivisions of astral matter, though, of course, the proportions may vary very greatly in different cases.

Now it must be remembered that along with the matter

of his astral body a man picks up the corresponding elemental essence, and that during his life this essence is segregated from the ocean of similar matter around, and practically becomes for that time what may be described as a kind of artificial elemental. This has temporarily a definite separate existence of its own, and follows the course of its own evolution downwards into matter without any reference to (or indeed any knowledge of) the convenience or interest of the ego to whom it happens to be attached—thus causing that perpetual struggle between the will of the flesh and the will of the spirit to which religious writers so often refer. Yet though it is "a law of the members warring against the law of the mind," though if the man obeys it instead of controlling it his evolution will be seriously hindered, it must not be thought of as in any way evil in itself, for it is still a Law—still an outpouring of the Divine power going on its orderly course, though that course in this instance happens to be downwards into matter instead of upwards and away from it, as ours is.

When the man passes away at death from the physical plane the disintegrating forces of nature begin to operate upon his astral body, and this elemental thus finds his existence as a separate entity endangered. He sets to work therefore to defend himself, and to hold the astral body together as long as possible; and his method of doing this is to rearrange the matter of which it is composed in a sort of stratified series of shells, leaving that of the lowest (and therefore coarsest and grossest) sub-plane on the outside, since that will offer the greatest resistance to disintegration.

Now a man has to stay upon this lowest subdivision until he has disentangled so much as is possible of his true

self from the matter of that sub-plane; and when that is done his consciousness is focussed in the next of these concentric shells (that formed of the matter of the sixth subdivision), or, to put the same idea in other words, he passes on to the next sub-plane. We might say that when the astral body has exhausted its attractions to one level, the greater part of its grosser particles fall away, and it finds itself in affinity with a somewhat higher state of existence. Its specific gravity, as it were, is constantly decreasing, and so it steadily rises from the denser to the lighter stratas pausing only when it is exactly balanced for a time. This is evidently the explanation of a remark frequently made by the departed who appear at *seances* to the effect that they are about to rise to a higher sphere, from which it will be impossible, or not so easy, to communicate through a medium; and it is as a matter of fact true that a person upon the highest subdivision of this plane would find it almost impossible to deal with any ordinary medium.

Thus we see that the length of a man's detention upon any level of the astral plane will be precisely in proportion to the amount of its matter which is found in his astral body, and that in turn depends upon the life he has lived, the desires he has indulged, and the class of matter which by so doing he has attracted towards him and built into himself. It is, therefore, possible for a man, by pure living and high thinking, to minimize the quantity of matter belonging to the lower astral levels which he attaches to himself, and to raise it in each case to what may be called its critical point, so that the first touch of disintegrating force should shatter its cohesion and resolve it into its original condition, leaving him free at once to pass on to the next sub-plane.

In the ease of a thoroughly spiritually-minded person

this condition would have been attained with reference to all the subdivisions of astral matter, and the result would be a practically instantaneous passage through that plane, so that consciousness would be recovered for the first time in the heaven-world. Of course, as was explained before, the sub-planes must never be thought of as divided from one another in space, but rather as interpenetrating one another; so that when we say that a person passes from one subdivision to another, we do not mean that he moves in space at all, but simply that the focus of his consciousness shifts from the outer shell to the one next within it.

The only persons who would normally awake to consciousness on the lowest level of the astral plane are those whose desires are gross and brutal drunkards, sensualists, and such like. There they would remain for a period proportioned to the strength of their desires, often suffering terribly from the fact that while these earthly lusts are still as strong as ever, they now find it impossible to gratify them, except occasionally in a vicarious manner when they are able to seize upon some like-minded person, and obsess him.

The ordinarily decent man would probably have little to detain him on that seventh sub-plane; but if his chief desires and thoughts had centred in mere worldly affairs, he would be likely to find himself in the sixth subdivision, still hovering about the places and persons with which he was most closely connected while on earth. The fifth and the fourth sub-planes are of similar character, except that as we rise through them mere earthly associations appear to become of less and less importance, and the departed tends more and more to mould his surroundings into agreement with the more persistent of his thoughts.

By the time we get to the third sub-division we find that this characteristic has entirely superseded the vision of the realities of the plane; for here the people are living in imaginary cities of their own—not, of course, each evolved entirely by his own thought, as in the heaven-world, but inheriting and adding to the structures erected by the thoughts of their predecessors. Here it is that the churches and schools and "dwellings in the summerland," so often described at spiritualistic *seances*, are to be found; though they would often seem much less real and much less magnificent to an unprejudiced living observer than they are to their delighted creators.

The second sub-plane seems especially the habitat of the selfish or unspiritual religionist; here he wears his golden crown and worships his own grossly material representation of the particular deity of his country and time. The highest subdivision appears to be specially appropriated to those who during life have devoted themselves to materialistic but intellectual pursuits, following them not for the sake of benefiting their fellow-men thereby, but either from motives of selfish ambition or for the sake of intellectual exercise. Such persons will often remain upon this level for many long years happy enough indeed in working out their intellectual problems, but doing no good to anyone, and making but little progress on their way towards the heaven-world.

It must be clearly understood, as before explained, that the idea of space is not in any way to be associated with these sub-planes. A departed entity functioning upon any one of them might drift with equal ease from here to Australia, or wherever a passing thought might take him; but he would not be able to transfer his consciousness from

that sub-plane to the one next above it until the process of detachment described had been completed.

To this rule there is no kind of exception, so far as we are yet aware, although naturally a man's actions when he finds himself conscious upon any sub-plane may within certain limits either shorten or prolong his connection with it.

But the amount of consciousness that a person will have upon a given sub-plane does not invariably follow precisely the same law. Let us consider an extreme example of possible variation in order that we may grasp its method. Suppose a man who has brought over from his past incarnation tendencies requiring for their manifestation a very large amount of the matter of the seventh or lowest sub-plane, but has in his present life been fortunate enough to learn in his very earliest years the possibility and necessity of controlling these tendencies. It is scarcely probable that such a man's efforts at control should be entirely and uniformly successful; but if they were, the substitution of finer for grosser particles in his astral body would progress steadily, though slowly.

This process is at best a very gradual one, and it might well happen that the man died before it was half completed. In that case there would undoubtedly be enough matter of the lowest sub-plane left in his astral body to ensure him no inconsiderable residence there but it would be matter through which in this incarnation his consciousness had never been in the habit of functioning, and as it could not suddenly acquire this habit the result would be that the man would rest upon that sub-plane until his share of its matter was disintegrated, but would be all the while in a condition of unconsciousness that is to say,

he would practically sleep through the period of his sojourn there, and so would be entirely unaffected by its many disagreeables.

It may be said in passing that communication is limited on the astral plane by the knowledge of the entity, just as it is here. While a pupil able to use the mind-body can communicate his thoughts to the human entities there present more readily and rapidly than on earth, by means of mental impressions, the inhabitants of the plane are not usually able to exercise this power, but appear to be restricted by limitations similar to those that prevail on earth, though perhaps less rigid. The result of this is that they are found associating there as here, in groups drawn together by common sympathies, belief, and language.

The poetic idea of death as a universal leveller is a mere absurdity born of ignorance, for, as a matter of fact, in the vast majority of cases the loss of the physical body makes no difference whatever in the character or intellect of the person, and there are therefore as many different varieties of intelligence among, those whom we usually call the dead as among the living.

The popular religious teaching of the West as to man's post-mortem adventures has long been so wildly inaccurate that even intelligent people are often terribly puzzled when they recover consciousness in the astral world after death. The condition in which the new arrival finds himself differs so radically from what he has been led to expect that it is no uncommon case for him to refuse at first to believe that he has passed through the portals of death at all; indeed, of so little practical value is our much-vaunted belief in the immortality of the soul that most people consider the very fact that they are still conscious an absolute proof that they have not died.

The horrible doctrine of eternal punishment, too, is responsible for a vast amount of most pitiable and entirely groundless terror among those newly arrived in this higher life. In many cases they spend long periods of acute mental suffering before they can free themselves from the fatal influence of that hideous blasphemy, and realize that the world is governed not according to the caprice of some demon who gloats over human anguish, but according to a benevolent and wonderfully patient law of evolution. Many members of the class we are considering do not really attain an intelligent appreciation of this fact of evolution at all, but drift through their astral interlude in the same aimless manner in which they have spent the physical portion of their lives. Thus after death, exactly as before it, there are the few who comprehend something of their position and know how to make the best of it, and the many who have not yet acquired that knowledge; and then, just as now, the ignorant are rarely ready to profit by the advice or example of the wise.

But of whatever grade the entity's intellect may be, it is always a fluctuating and on the whole a gradually diminishing quantity, for the lower mind of the man is being drawn in opposite directions by the higher spiritual nature which acts on it from above its level and the strong desire-forces which operate from below; and therefore it oscillates between the two attractions, with an ever-increasing tendency towards the former as the forces of lower desire wear themselves out.

Here comes in one of the objections to the spiritualistic *seance*. An exceedingly ignorant or degraded man may no doubt learn much by coming into contact after his death with a circle of earnest sitters under the control of some reliable person, and so may be really helped and raised.

But in the ordinary man the consciousness is steadily rising from the lower part of the nature towards the higher; and obviously it cannot be helpful to his evolution that this lower part should be reawakened from the natural and desirable unconsciousness into which it is passing, and dragged back into touch with earth in order to communicate through a medium.

The peculiar danger of this will be seen when it is recollected that since the real man is all the while steadily withdrawing into himself, he is as time goes on less and less able to influence or guide this lower portion, which nevertheless, until the separation is complete, has the power to generate karma, and under the circumstances is evidently far more likely to add evil than good to its record.

Apart altogether from any question of development through a medium, there is another and much more frequently exercised influence which may seriously retard a disembodied entity on his way to the heaven-world, and that is the intense and uncontrolled grief of his surviving friends or relatives. It is one among many melancholy results of the terribly inaccurate and even irreligious view that we in the West have for centuries been taking of death, that we not only cause ourselves an immense amount of wholly unnecessary pain over this temporary parting from our loved ones, but we often also do serious injury to those for whom we bear so deep an affection by means of this very regret which we feel so acutely.

When our departed brother is sinking peacefully and naturally into the unconsciousness which precedes his awakening amid the glories of the heaven-world, he is too frequently aroused from his dreamy happiness into vivid remembrance of the earth-life which he has lately left,

solely by the action of the passionate sorrows and desires of his friends on earth, which awaken corresponding vibrations in his own desire-body, and so cause him acute discomfort.

It would be well if those whose loved ones have passed on before them would learn from these undoubted facts the duty of restraining for the sake of those dear ones a grief which, however natural, it may be, is yet in its essence selfish. Not that occult teaching counsels forgetfulness of the dead—far from it; but it does suggest that a man's affectionate remembrance of his departed friend is a force which, if properly directed into the channel of earnest good wishes for his progress towards the heaven-world and his quiet passage through the intermediate state, might be of real value to him, whereas when he is wasted in mourning for him and longing to have him back again it is not only useless but harmful. It is with a true instinct that the Hindu religion prescribes its Shraddha ceremonies and the Catholic Church its prayers for the dead.

It sometimes happens, however, that the desire for communication is from the, other side, and that the dead man has something which he specially desires to say to those whom he has left behind. Occasionally this message is an important one, such as, for example, an indication of the place where a missing will is concealed; but more often it seems to us quite trivial. Still, whatever it may be, if it is firmly impressed upon the mind of the dead person, it is undoubtedly desirable that he should be enabled to deliver it, as otherwise the anxiety to do so would perpetually draw his consciousness back into the earth-life, and prevent him from passing to higher spheres. In such a case a psychic who can understand him, or a medium through whom he can write or speak, is of real service to him.

Why cannot he write or speak without a medium? it may be asked. The reason is that one state of matter can ordinarily act only upon the state next below it, and, as he has now no denser matter in his organism than that of which the astral body is composed, he finds it impossible to set up vibrations in the physical substance of the air or to move the physical pencil without borrowing living matter of the intermediate order contained in the etheric double, by means of which an impulse can readily be transferred from the one plane to the other. He would be unable to borrow this material from an ordinary person, because such a man's principles would be too closely linked together to be separated by any means likely to be at his command, but the very essence of mediumship is the ready separability of the principles, so from a medium he can draw without difficulty the matter he needs for his manifestation, whatever it may be.

When he cannot find a medium or does not understand how to use one he sometimes makes clumsy and blundering endeavours to communicate on his own account, and by the strength of his will he sets elemental forces blindly working, perhaps producing such apparently aimless manifestations as stone-throwing, bell-ringing, etc. It consequently frequently happens that a psychic or medium going to a house where such manifestations are taking place may be able to discover what the entity who produces them is attempting to say or do, and may thus put an end to the disturbance. This would not, however, invariably be the case, as these elemental forces are occasionally set in motion by entirely different causes.

4. *The Shade.* When the separation of the principles is complete, the astral life of the person is over, and, as

before stated, he passes into the devachanic condition. Put just as when he dies to this plane he leaves his physical body behind him, so when he dies to the astral plane he leaves a disintegrating astral body behind him. If he has purged himself from all earthly desires during life, and directed all his energies into the channels of unselfish spiritual aspiration, his higher ego will be able to draw back into itself the whole of the lower mind which it put forth into incarnation; in that case the body left behind on the astral plane will be a mere corpse like the abandoned physical body, and it will then come not into this class but into the next.

Even in the case of a man of somewhat less perfect life almost the same result may be attained if the forces of lower desire are allowed to work themselves out undisturbed in the astral plane. But the majority of mankind make but very trifling and perfunctory efforts while on earth to rid themselves of the less elevated impulses of their nature, and consequently doom themselves not only to a greatly prolonged sojourn in the intermediate world, but also to what cannot be described otherwise than as a loss of a portion of the lower mind.

This is, no doubt, a material method of expressing the reflection of the higher mind in the lower, but a very fairly accurate idea of what actually takes place will be obtained by adopting the hypothesis that the manasic principle sends down a portion of itself into the lower world of physical life at each incarnation, and expects to be able to withdraw it again at the end of the life, enriched by all its varied experiences. The ordinary man, however, usually allows himself to be so pitifully enslaved by all sorts of base desire, that a certain portion of this lower mind becomes very

closely interwoven with the desire-body, and when the separation takes place at the close of his astral life the mental principle has, as it were, to be torn apart, the degraded portion remaining within the disintegrating astral body.

This body then consists of the particles of astral matter from which the lower mind has not been able to disengage itself, and which therefore retain it captive; for when the man passes into the heaven-world these clinging fragments adhere to a portion of his mind, and as it were wrench it away. The proportion of the matter of each level present in the decaying astral vehicle will therefore depend on the extent to which the mind has become inextricably entangled with the lower passions. It will be obvious that as the mind in passing from level to level is unable to free itself completely from the matter of each, the astral remnant will show the presence of each grosser kind which has succeeded in retaining its connection with it.

Thus comes into existence the class of entity which has been called "The Shade"—an entity, be it observed, which is not in any sense the real individual at all, for he has passed away into the heaven-world; but nevertheless, it not only bears his exact personal appearance, but possesses his memory and all his little idiosyncrasies, and may, therefore, very readily be mistaken for him, as indeed it frequently is at *seances*. It is not, of course, conscious of any act of impersonation, for as far as its intellect goes it must necessarily suppose itself to be the individual, but one can imagine the horror and disgust of the friends of the departed, if they could only realize that they had been deceived into accepting as their loved one a mere soulless bundle of all his lowest qualities.

The length of life of a shade varies according to the

amount of the lower mind which animates it, but as this is all the while in process of fading out, its intellect is a steadily diminishing quantity though it may possess a great deal of a certain sort of animal cunning; and even quite towards the end of its career it is still able to communicate by borrowing temporary intelligence from the medium. From its very nature it is exceedingly liable to be swayed by all kinds of evil influences, and, having separated from its higher ego, it has nothing in its constitution capable of responding to good ones. It therefore lends itself readily to various minor purposes of some of the baser sort of black magicians. So much of mental matter as it possesses gradually disintegrates and returns to its own plane, though not to any individual mind, and thus the shade fades by almost imperceptible gradations into a member of our next class.

5. *The Shell.* This is absolutely the mere astral corpse in the later stages of its disintegration, every particle of the mind having left it. It is entirely without any kind of consciousness or intelligence, and is drifted passively about upon the astral currents just as a cloud might be swept in any direction by a passing breeze; but even yet it may be galvanized for a few moments into a ghastly burlesque of life if it happens to come within reach of a medium's aura. Under such circumstances it will still exactly resemble its departed personality in appearance, and may even reproduce to some extent his familiar expressions or handwriting, but it does so merely by the automatic action of the cells of which it is composed, which tend under stimulation to repeat the form of action to which they are most accustomed, and whatever amount of intelligence may be behind any such manifestation has most assuredly no connection

with the original man, but is lent by the medium or his "guides" for the occasion.

It is, however, more frequently temporarily vitalized in quite another manner, which will be described under the next head. It has also the quality of being still blindly responsive to such vibrations—usually of the lowest order as were frequently set up in it during its last stage of existence as a shade, and consequently persons in whom evil desires or passions are predominant will be very likely, if they attend physical *seances*, to find these intensified and as it were thrown back upon them by the unconscious shells.

There is also another variety of corpse which it is necessary to mention under this head, though belongs to a much earlier stage of man's *post-mortem* history. It has been stated above that after the death of the physical body the astral vehicle is comparatively quickly rearranged, and the etheric double cast off—this latter body being destined to slow disintegration, precisely as is the astral shell at a later stage of the proceedings.

This etheric shell, however, is not to be met with drifting aimlessly about, as is the variety with which we have hitherto been dealing; on the contrary, it remains within a few yards of the decaying physical body, and since it is readily visible to any one even slightly sensitive, it is accountable for many of the commonly current stories of churchyard ghosts. A psychically developed person passing one of our great cemeteries will see hundreds of these bluish-white, misty forms hovering over the graves where are laid the physical vestures which they have recently left; and as they, like their lower counterparts, are in stages of disintegration, the sight is by no means a pleasant one.

This also, like the other kind, of shell, is entirely devoid of consciousness and intelligence; and though it may under certain circumstances be galvanized into a very horrible form of temporary life, this is possible only by means of some of the most loathsome rites of one of the worst forms of black magic, about which the less said the better. It will thus be seen that in the successive stages of his progress from earth-life to the heaven-world, man casts off and leaves to slow disintegration no less than three corpses—the dense physical body, the etheric double, and the astral vehicle—all of which are by degrees resolved into their constituent elements and their matter utilized anew on their respective planes by the wonderful chemistry of nature.

6. *The Vitalized Shell.* This entity ought not, strictly speaking, to be classified under the head "human" at all, since it is only its outer vesture, the passive, senseless shell, that was once an appanage of humanity; such life, intelligence, desire, and will as it may possess are those of the artificial- elemental animating it, and that, though in terrible truth a creation of man's evil thought is not itself human. It will therefore perhaps be better to deal with it more fully under its appropriate class among the artificial entities, as its nature and genesis will be more readily comprehensible by the time that part of our subject is reached.

Let it suffice here to mention that it is always a malevolent being—a true tempting demon, whose evil influence is limited only by the extent of its power. Like the shade, it is frequently used to further the horrible purposes of the Voodoo and Obeah forms of magic. Some writers have spoken of it under the name "elementary," but as that title has at one time or another been used for almost

every variety of *post-mortem* entity, it has become so vague and meaningless that it is perhaps better to avoid it.

7. *The Suicide and the victim of sudden death.* It will be readily understood that a man who is torn from physical life hurriedly while in full health and strength, whether by accident or suicide, finds himself upon the astral plane under conditions differing considerably from those which surround one who dies either from old age or from disease. In the latter case the hold of earthly desires upon the entity is sure to be more or less weakened, and probably the very grossest particles are already got rid of, so that the man will most likely find himself on the sixth or fifth subdivision of the astral world, or perhaps even higher; the principles have been gradually prepared for separation, and the shock is therefore not so great.

In the case of the accidental death or suicide none of these preparations have taken place, and the withdrawal of the principles from their physical encasement has been very aptly compared to the tearing of the stone out of an unripe fruit; a great deal of the grossest kind of astral matter still clings around the personality, which is consequently held in the seventh or lowest subdivision of the plane. This has already been described as anything but a pleasant abiding place, yet it is by no means the same for all those who are compelled for a time to inhabit it. Those victims of sudden death whose earth-lives have been pure and noble have no affinity for this plane, and so the time of their sojourn upon it is passed, to quote from an early letter on this subject, either in "happy ignorance and full oblivion, or in a state of quiet slumber, a sleep full of rosy dreams."

On the other hand, if men's earth-lives have been low and brutal, selfish and sensual, they will, like the suicides,

be conscious to the fullest extent in this undesirable region and they are liable to develop into terribly evil entities. Inflamed with all kinds of horrible appetites which they call no longer satisfy directly now they are without a physical body, they gratify their loathsome passions vicariously through a medium or any sensitive person whom they can obsess; and they take a devilish delight in using all the arts of delusion which the astral plane puts in their power in order to lead others into the same excesses which have proved so fatal to themselves.

Quoting again from the same letter:—"These are the Pisachas, the incubi and succubae of mediaeval writers—demons of thirst and gluttony, of lust and avarice, of intensified craft, wickedness, and cruelty, provoking their victims to horrible crimes, and revelling in their commission." From this class and the last are drawn the tempters the devils of ecclesiastical literature; but their power falls utterly before purity of mind and purpose; they can do nothing with a man unless he has first encouraged in himself the vices into which they seek to draw him.

One whose psychic sight has been opened will often see crowds of these unfortunate creatures hanging round butchers' shops, public-houses, or other even more disreputable places—wherever the gross influences in which they delight are to be found, and where they encounter men and women still in the flesh who are like-minded with themselves. For such an entity as one of these to meet with a medium with whom he is in affinity is indeed a terrible misfortune not only does it enable him to prolong enormously his dreadful astral life, but it renews for perhaps all indefinite period his power to generate evil karma, and so prepare for himself a future incarnation of the most

degraded character, besides running the risk of losing a large portion of such mind-power as he may happen to possess. If he is fortunate enough not to meet with a sensitive through whom his passions can be vicariously gratified, the unfulfilled desires will gradually burn themselves out, and the suffering caused in the process will probably go far towards working off the evil karma of the past life.

The position of the suicide is further complicated by the fact that his rash act has enormously diminished the power of the higher ego to withdraw its lower portion into itself, and therefore has exposed him to manifold and great additional dangers; but it must be remembered that the guilt of suicide differs considerably according to its circumstances, from the morally blameless act of Seneca or Socrates through all degrees down to the heinous crime of the wretch who takes his own life in order to escape from the entanglements into which his villainy has brought him and of course the position after death varies accordingly.

It should be noted that this class, as well as the shades and the vitalized shells, are all what may be called minor vampires; that is to say, whenever they have the opportunity they prolong their existence by draining away the vitality from human beings whom they find themselves able to influence. This is why both medium and sitters are often so weak and exhausted after a physical *seance*. A student of occultism is taught how to guard himself from their attempts, but without that knowledge it is difficult for one who puts himself in their way to avoid being more or less laid under contribution by them.

8. *The Vampire and Werewolf*. There remain two even more awful but happily very rare possibilities to be

mentioned before this part of our subject is completed, and though they differ very widely in many ways we may yet perhaps group them together, since they have in common the qualities of unearthly horror and of extreme rarity—the latter arising from the fact that they are really legacies from earlier races—hideous anachronisms, appalling relics of a time when man and his surroundings were in many ways not what they are now.

We of the fifth root race ought to have evolved beyond the possibility of meeting such a ghastly fate as is indicated by either of the two headings of this sub-section, and we have so nearly done it that these creatures are commonly regarded as mere mediaeval fables; yet there are examples to be found occasionally even now, though chiefly in countries where there is a considerable strain of fourth-race blood, such as Russia or Hungary. The popular legends about them are probably often considerably exaggerated, but there is nevertheless a terribly serious substratum of truth beneath the eerie stories which pass from mouth to mouth among the peasantry of Central Europe. The general characteristics of such tales are too well known to need more than a passing reference; a fairly typical specimen of the vampire story, though it does not profess to be more than the merest fiction, is Sheridan le Fanu's *Carmilla*, while a very remarkable account of an unusual form of this creature is to be found in *Isis Unveiled* vol. i., p. 454.

Readers of Theosophical literature will be aware that it is just possible for a man to live a life so absolutely degraded and selfish, so utterly wicked and brutal, that the whole of his lower mind may become entirely immeshed in his desires, and finally separated from its spiritual source in the higher ego. Some students even seem

to have supposed that such an occurrence is quite a common one, and that we may meet scores of such "soulless men," as they have been called, in the street every day of our lives; but this, happily, is untrue. To attain the appalling pre-eminence in evil which thus involves the entire loss of a personality and the weakening of the developing individuality behind, a man must stifle every gleam of unselfishness or spirituality, and must have absolutely no redeeming point whatever; and when we remember how often, even in the worst of villains, there is to be found something not wholly bad, we shall realize that the abandoned personalities must always be a very small minority. Still, comparatively few though they be, they do exist, and it is from their ranks that the still rarer vampire is drawn.

The lost entity would very soon after death find himself unable to stay in the astral world, and would be irresistibly drawn in full consciousness into "his own place," the mysterious eighth sphere, there slowly to disintegrate after experiences best left undescribed. If, however, he perishes by suicide or sudden death, he may under certain circumstances, especially if he knows something of black magic, hold himself back from that awful fate by a death in life scarcely less awful—the ghastly existence of the vampire.

Since the eighth sphere cannot claim him until after the death of the body, he preserves it in a kind of cataleptic trance by the horrible expedient of the transfusion into it of blood drawn from other human beings by his semi-materialized astral, and thus postpones his final destiny by the commission of wholesale murder. As popular "superstition" again quite rightly supposes, the easiest and most effectual remedy in such a case is to exhume and burn the body, thus depriving the creature of his

point d'appui. When the grave is opened the body usually appears quite fresh and healthy, and the coffin is not infrequently filled with blood. In countries where cremation is the custom, vampirism of this sort is naturally impossible.

The Werewolf, though equally horrible, is the product of a somewhat different karma, and indeed ought perhaps to have found a place under the first instead of the second division of the human inhabitants of this plane, since it is always during a man's lifetime that he first manifests under this form. It invariably implies some knowledge of magical arts sufficient at any rate to be able to project the astral body.

When a perfectly cruel and brutal man does this, there are certain circumstances under which the body may be seized upon by other astral entities and materialized, not into the human form, but into that of some wild animal usually the wolf; and in that condition it will range the surrounding country killing other animals, and even human beings, thus satisfying not only its own craving for blood, but that of the fiends who drive it on.

In this case, as so often with ordinary materialization, any wound inflicted upon that animal form will be reproduced upon the human physical body by the extraordinary phenomenon of repercussion; though after the death of that physical body, the astral (which will probably continue to appear in the same form) will be less vulnerable. It will then, however, be also less dangerous, as unless it can find a suitable medium it will be unable to materialize fully. In such manifestations there is probably a great deal of the matter of the etheric double, and perhaps also a toll is levied upon the gaseous and liquid constituents of the physical

body as in the case of some materializations. In both cases this fluidic body appears able to pass to much greater distances from the physical than is ever otherwise possible, so far as is yet known for a vehicle which contains at least a certain amount of etheric matter.

It has been the fashion of this century to scoff at what are called the foolish superstitions of the ignorant peasantry but, as in the above cases, so in many others, the occult student finds on careful examination that obscure or forgotten truths of nature be behind what at first sight appears mere nonsense, and he learns to be cautious in rejecting as well as cautious in accepting. Intending explorers of the astral plane need have little fear of encountering the very unpleasant creatures described under this head, for, as before stated, they are even now extremely rare, and as time aces on their number will happily steadily diminish. In any case their manifestations are usually restricted to the immediate neighbourhood of their physical bodies, as might be supposed from their extremely material nature.

9. *The Black Magician or his pupil.* This person corresponds at the other extremity of the scale to our second class of departed entities, the pupil awaiting reincarnation, but in this case, instead of obtaining permission to adopt an unusual method of progress, the man is defying the natural process of evolution by maintaining himself in astral life by magical arts sometimes of the most horrible nature.

It would be easy to make various subdivisions of this class, according to their objects, their methods, and the possible duration of their existence on this plane, but as they are by no means fascinating objects of study, and all that in occult student wishes to know about them is how to avoid them, it will probably be more interesting to pass on

to the examination of another part of our subject. It may, however, be just mentioned that every such human entity which prolongs its life thus on the astral plane beyond its natural limit invariably does so at the expense of others, and by the absorption of their life in some form or another.

II. NON-HUMAN.

Though it might have been thought fairly obvious even to the most casual glance that many of the terrestrial arrangements of nature which affect us most nearly have not been designed exclusively with a view to our comfort or even our ultimate advantage, it was yet probably unavoidable that the human race, at least in its childhood, should imagine that this world and everything it contains existed solely for its own use and benefit; but undoubtedly we ought by this time to have grown out of that infantile delusion and realized our proper position and the duties that attach to it.

That most of us have not yet done so is shown in a dozen ways in our daily life—notably by the atrocious cruelty habitually displayed towards the animal kingdom under the name of sport by many who probably consider themselves highly civilized people. Of course the veriest tyro in the holy science of occultism knows that all life is sacred, and that without universal compassion there is no true progress; but it is only as he advances in his studies that he discovers how manifold evolution is, and how comparatively small a place humanity really fills in the economy of nature.

It becomes clear to him that just as earth, air, and

water support myriads of forms of life which, though invisible to the ordinary eye, are revealed to us by the microscope, so the higher planes connected with our earth have an equally dense population of whose existence we are ordinarily completely unconscious. As his knowledge increases he becomes more and more certain that in one way or another the utmost use is being made of every possibility of evolution, and that wherever it seems to us that in nature force is being wasted or opportunity neglected, it is not the scheme of the universe that is in fault, but our ignorance of its method and intention.

For the purposes of our present consideration of the non-human inhabitants of the astral plane it will be best to leave altogether out of consideration those very early forms of the universal life which are evolving in a manner of which we can have little comprehension, through the successive encasement of atoms, molecules, and cells; for if we commence at the lowest of what are usually called the elemental kingdoms, we shall even then have to group together under this general heading an enormous number of inhabitants of the astral plane upon whom it will be possible to touch only very slightly, as anything like a detailed account of them would swell this manual to the dimensions of an encyclopaedia.

The most convenient method of arranging the nonhuman entities will perhaps be in four classes—it being understood that in this case the class is not, as previously, a comparatively small subdivision, but usually a great kingdom of nature at least as large and varied as, say, the animal or vegetable kingdom. Some of these classes rank considerably below humanity, some are our equals, and others again rise far above us in goodness and power. Some belong to our

scheme of evolution—that is to say, they either have been or will be men like ourselves; others are evolving on entirely distinct lines of their own.

Before proceeding to consider them it is necessary, in order to avoid the charge of incompleteness, to mention that in this branch of the subject two reservations have been made. First, no reference is made to the occasional appearances of very high Adepts from other planets of the solar system and of even more august Visitors from a still greater distance, since such matters cannot fitly be described in an essay for general reading and besides it is practically inconceivable, though of course theoretically possible, that such glorified Beings should ever need to manifest themselves on a plane so low as the astral. If for any reason they should wish to do so, the body appropriate to the plane would be temporarily created out of astral matter belonging to this planet, just as in the case of the Nirmanakaya.

Secondly, quite outside of and entirely unconnected with the four classes into which we are dividing this section, there are two other great evolutions which at present share the use of this planet with humanity; but about them it is forbidden to give any particulars at this stage of the proceedings, as it is not apparently intended under ordinary circumstances either that they should be conscious of man's existence or man of theirs. If we ever do come into contact with them it will most probably be on the purely physical plane, for in any case their connection with our astral plane is of the slightest, since the only possibility of their appearance there depends upon an extremely improbable accident in an act of ceremonial magic, which fortunately only a few of the most advanced sorcerers know how to perform. Nevertheless, that improbable accident

has happened at least once, and may happen again, so that but for the prohibition above mentioned it would have been necessary to include them in our list.

1. The Elemental Essence belonging to our own evolution. Just as the name "elementary" has been given indiscriminately by various writers to any or all of man's possible *post-mortem* conditions, so this word "elemental" has been used at different times to mean any or all nonhuman spirits, from the most godlike of the Devas down through every variety of nature-spirit to the formless essence which pervades the kingdoms lying behind the mineral, until after reading several books the student becomes absolutely bewildered by the contradictory statements made on the subject. For the purposes of this treatise let it be understood that elemental essence is merely a name applied during certain stages of its evolution to monadic essence, which in its turn may be defined as the outpouring of spirit or divine force into matter.

We are all familiar with the idea that before this outpouring arrives at the stage of individualization at which it ensouls man, it has passed through and ensouled in turn six lower phases of evolution—the animal, vegetable, mineral, and three elemental kingdoms. When energizing through those respective stages it has sometimes been called the animal, vegetable, or mineral monad—though this term is distinctly misleading, since long before it arrives at any of these kingdoms it has become not one, but many monads. The name was, however, adopted to convey the idea that, though differentiation in the monadic essence had already long ago set in, it had not yet been carried to the extent of individualization.

When this monadic essence is energizing through the