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THE GROWTH OF THE SOUL

A SEQUEL TO "ESOTERIC BUDDHISM"

BY

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PREFACE.

THE gulf which lies between the thinking of the ordinary world in reference to matters having to do with the destinies of the human soul, and the position occupied by those students of the school with which I am specially concerned is widening, year by year. "Current teaching," as Mr. Balfour has called it, stands still; knowledge concerning the conditions of existence in ultra-physical realms of Nature has expanded enormously for those who have sought it the right way during the last fifteen years, and is expanding with ever-increasing rapidity. With the first gush of Theosophic teaching we were told that knowledge concerning matters generally thought to be unknowable had not only been reached by a few philosophers holding themselves, for reasons of their own, aloof from contact with the world at large, but was acquirable also in the long run by all who took certain prescribed methods for its acquisition —much more rapidly, if appropriate qualifications were possessed at the outset. This idea has not lain unfruitful in the minds of those who were the first to appreciate the significance of the Theosophical opening. Many are those who have entered, as the phrase goes, on the path of Theosophical progress; several have already advanced

sufficiently to be themselves in a position to investigate mysteries hitherto regarded as lying beyond incarnate human ken. Much, therefore, that in earlier Theosophical books could only be treated as "ex cathedra" statement—forcibly appealing, perhaps, to reason, but not otherwise susceptible of verification—has come within range of personal observation for several students amongst ourselves. The sources of the earlier teaching have not by any means run dry, but we are now in a position to get corroborative testimony concerning the outlines of this teaching, together with an immense amplitude of detailed information from persons who have thus advanced a part of the way on the journey towards genuine spiritual development. Views of Nature which lie wholly beyond the range of ordinary perception have come within the domain of positive and experimental knowledge for those who have best profited by current opportunities.

There is something pathetic, for us who know better, in the attitude of mind of people who treat as matters of ribald incredulity, the existence of faculties in daily use amongst some of us in connection with the study, not merely of literary philosophy, but of special conditions of existence. That other world from which, in the old phrase, no traveller returns, has been found accessible to travellers who are going backwards and forwards constantly, and in saying this I am leaving entirely out of account communications from the "next world" purporting to come from those who have passed over to it finally.

The explanations given in the present volume concerning the principles on which the growth of the soul proceeds, have been rendered possible by the continual expansion in this way of the fundamental teaching put forward in "Esoteric Buddhism." But nothing in this later presentation of the subject has been the fruit of mere intellectual

speculation. Readers chiefly familiar with metaphysics in their non-theosophical aspect are used to regarding them as altogether speculative, but however slowly those outside the central nucleus of Theosophical activities may recognise the fact, the fact nevertheless is that metaphysical experiment and observation have now become possible for a good many people still in direct relations with ordinary humanity. The human body is not really the prison of consciousness it was once supposed to be; other senses may be developed besides the five faculties of physical perception, and the result is that a great deal may be known concerning aspects of Nature which the familiar five faculties are quite unable to deal with.

The information so attained is essentially necessary to a comprehension of the natural possibilities lying before man in connexion with that growth of his soul to which this volume relates. To introduce the subject and show it susceptible even of definite treatment, it will be necessary to build a bridge across the widening gulf of which I have spoken, so that, at all events, whoever endeavours to apprehend what I have to say may have before his mind, even if only in the form of a hypothesis, the knowledge concerning ultra-physical nature which has been accumulated by Theosophical students within the last few years. That which we have to recognise as actually going on in connection with the progress of the human race is a process of growth as regards individual souls not less protracted and elaborate than that evolutionary work going on *pari passu* on the physical plane of life and developing the simplest organic cells into the complicated bodies of the higher animals. The fundamental blunder concerning the inner nature of man which has saddled itself upon many religious systems (as true as they are beautiful in their spiritual essence) is the notion which represents the human soul

as going through two simple phases—the physical existenc of which we are cognisant on this earth, and the uniform unchangeable destiny of sorrow or joy that ensue hereafter as the consequence either of the brief physica life, according to one view, or of a pre-appointed destin according to another. That which we get at, since we hav begun to understand the actual working of Nature, is scheme in which we see vast amplitudes of time laid ou before consciousness as the field of its individualization and stupendous possibilities of growth and development extending as far beyond the heights which human civilizatior has yet reached as this has reared itself above the earlies humanity of which geology bears trace.

Occult teaching casts a light to almost immeasurable distances along this path of progress, recognising the continued individuality of every human being as extending through an infinite multiplicity of changes and varied states, the whole process moving in great cycles in which we return ever and anon to the physical plane of existence, and gather from each great sweep of the spiral evolution something which is contributed to the truly permanent entity constituting the individual soul. That is the one unchangeable centre of identity throughout the whole process. The expansion of its consciousness, faculties, and moral grandeur is the subject I have before me for elucidation, so far as the resources of our present knowledge extend. And their extent is already so vast—even though the horizon of the unknown lies ever in a widening circle beyond — that it is not possible even to describe the manner in which this growth is accomplished without paving the way for the main idea that has to be developed by a multiplicity of subordinate explanations. In this way it has been necessary to wander sometimes in the progress of this work into many fields of occult inquiry, which at the first glance may have

seemed out of touch with the main object in view; but such collateral surveys have not merely been necessary in themselves, but have been calculated to show that an inquiry into the nature of the soul's growth is really one of even more dazzling magnitude than the simple words would at first suggest.

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

INTRODUCTORY 1

The progress of Theosophic knowledge — Super-physical research—Expansion of Theosophic literature—Its bearing on the problems of life—Advanced evolution in some cases to be expected—Nature of effective testimony on occult matters—The volume of evidence now available—Witnesses to the truth amongst us—Earlier evidence now enlarged—The divinity latent in man—Its development as evolution proceeds.

CHAPTER II.

OCCULT SCIENCE AND RELIGION 33

Theosophy in harmony with essential religious ideas—The uncertainties of modern thought in spite of religious teaching—The exactitudes of Theosophic interpretation—The methods of research in spiritual science—True meanings of misunderstood dogmas.

CHAPTER III.

RE-INCARNATION 51

The root idea of evolution—The nature of the proof offered—The only theory that suits the facts—The true doctrine cleared of misrepresentation—The law of Karma—Heredity and assimilation—Necessary exhaustion of ordinary memory—Logical certainties of pre-existence — Inequalities of life accounted for—No "accidents of birth"—The world-wide acceptance of the doctrine — Buddhist teaching on the subject—Absurd misunderstanding thereof by many western writers—Some Buddhist symbolism explained—Re-incarnation recognized in Christianity—References to it in the Gospels—The certain knowledge concerning Re-incarnation of the occult disciple.

CHAPTER IV.

PAGE

THE HIGHER SELF 88

Crudity of conventional ideas concerning the soul—The spiritual part of the super-physical man—Gradual involvement of the spiritual soul in a child—The growth of the Higher Self the purpose of life—The working of the Higher Self in waking consciousness—Its identity through successive incarnations—Its disregard of minor experiences—The scope of its evolution—Perverted version of the teaching—Higher consciousness embraces lower—The rewards of lower self merit—Relations of Higher and Lower Self.

CHAPTER V.

FREE WILL AND KARMA 122

The theories of necessity and free will—Cleared up by Reincarnation and Karma—The pressure of Karma on action—Concurrent freedom of thought—Bearing of this on the Karma of the act—Thought forces in connection with good acts—Dangers of a half comprehension of the law—Progress of emancipation from necessity—Complications of inter-blended Karma—Re-adjustments—The Lords of Karma—Distribution of consciousness—The predestination idea.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES 154

The different vehicles of consciousness—Enumeration of the principles—Etheric matter—Jiva free and specialized—The true astral body—Reflection of consciousness in the higher vehicles—The true individual Man—The Karana Sharira—The Aura—Its various elements—The magnetic shell—Colouring of the Aura.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ASTRAL PLANE 174

The super-physical not necessarily spiritual—European and Sanscrit terms—Different aspects of the astral plane—The newly "dead"—Astral matter—Visibility of thoughts—Astral plane inhabitants—Their control—The sub-divisions of the Astral plane—As viewed after death—The matter of the sub-planes—The corresponding condition of the fourth principle—Consciousness on the sub-planes.

CHAPTER VIII.

PAGE

THE ELEMENTALS 195

Mediæval terms—Physical forces in their elemental aspect—Elemental forces subject to will—Beginnings of elemental evolution—The three kingdoms of elementals—Cross classifications — Elemental forms — Elementals of good and evil efficiency.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SPIRITUAL PLANE 214

Conceptions of Heaven—Infinite resources of spiritual planes —Responsive to soul growth—The self-centred Heaven of undeveloped souls—Necessity for the subjective vision—The response of Devachan to thirst for knowledge—The limitations of this world's Heaven—Progress in Heaven—Its loftiest aspect—Religious expectations; their subjective realization—Spiritual consciousness during earth life—The resources of Devachan for the initiate—The forces of the different planes—The work to be done on the spiritual plane—Influencing disincarnate souls—The sub-planes of Devachan—What Devachan "looks like"—Light and colour—The Arupa planes.

CHAPTER X.

THE SYSTEM TO WHICH WE BELONG 256

Planetary chains, rounds, and Manvantaras—Prospects of the second half of the Manvantara—Other schemes in the solar system besides ours—The system as a whole—The nebular theory confirmed—The origin of our nebula—Condensation of atomic ether—The various schemes—Planetary reconstructions—Influence of schemes on one another—The last Manvantara of our scheme—The various classes of Pitris — Corresponding divisions of our own humanity—Other evolutions connected with the solar system—The Deva evolution.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ELDER BRETHREN OF HUMANITY 293

Outstripping normal evolution—The necessity that some should do this—The magnitude of the achievement—The

PAGE

possibilities of selfish advancement—The range of the path of service—Its earliest disciples—The impulse of fifth race improvement—The motives for an upward struggle—Ordinary human suffering and adept sympathy—The Divine government of the world and its ministers.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ANCIENT MYSTERIES 322

Egyptian and Greek initiations—Current authorities on the subject—The evident reality of their purpose—The explanation of secrecy—Further motives for reserve in the Middle Ages.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE THEOSOPHY OF THE MIDDLE AGES 338

The Alchemical disguise—The spiritual purpose of Alchemy—The motives with which the real Alchemists wrote—Their sordid imitators—The real Alchemists aspirants for Adeptship—The powers they incidentally acquired—Their chemical symbology—Its Hermetic origin—Illustrations from Alchemical writers.

CHAPTER XIV.

INITIATION IN THE PRESENT DAY 361

The avenues of initiation still open—Visible Temples not necessary—Old secrecy broken down—Motives for a more open policy—Dangers of progress in knowledge unaccompanied by spiritual growth—Those who are ready—Understanding required as well as moral fitness—Mental powers and psychic gifts—The conservation of energy on the moral plane—Normal and abnormal re-incarnation—Immediate re-incarnation—Its sacrifices and advantages.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PROBATIONARY PATH 396

The door open to all who knock—Self preparation; the appeal required—The attributes and qualifications to be developed—The greater initiations.

CHAPTER XVI.

PAGE

IRREGULAR PSYCHIC PROGRESS 427

Natural born faculties—Mediumship—Psychic faculties unaccompanied by spiritual development—Their dangers—A blessing or a curse—Legitimately earned psychic faculty—The spiritualistic development—Its real promotors.

CHAPTER XVII.

INDIVIDUALITY 441

The genesis and destinies of individuality—The immensity of the task involved in its evolution—The preparation of monadic essence—Animal instinct—The focalisation of consciousness—The touch with Atma-Buddhi—The spiritual purpose of the whole system—The "Sacrifice" of the Logos.

THE GROWTH OF THE SOUL.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THEOSOPHIC teaching has expanded during the last twelve years till it now constitutes a vast coherent statement concerning human evolution, the conditions of existence that await humanity on supra physical planes of nature, and the methods by which it is possible to acquire faculties, knowledge, and oppor tunities of usefulness far exceeding those in possession of ordinary humanity at the present day. It presents itself as the most widely reaching system of philosophy with which the progress of thought has yet put us in contact.

Treated as a hypothesis it would claim attention by offering a reasonable explanation of many phenomena of life constituting painfully insoluble enigmas on any other theory; including an elucidation of the way in which it is built up on positive knowledge concerning the conditions under which human consciousness may function out of and independently of the body, it surely makes a startling appeal to advanced intelligence. No man of science worthy of

the name would exalt the pursuits in which he may be engaged to a level of importance comparable with that of spiritual research, provided he acknowledged that there were any means of really making sure of discoveries along that road. Unhappily most patient questioners of Nature in the western world are persuaded that definite answers are only to be obtained in reply to questions concerning the laws and properties of matter; but if it were satisfactorily established that questions concerning the laws and properties of consciousness could be answered as explicitly, eager explorers of that untrodden realm—untrodden as they imagine it—would surely endeavour to equip themselves for the new research.

No doubt it is a very delicate research. Matter, and even the subtlest forces that pervade matter, are uniform and reliable in their activities; once their secrets are wrung from them, the same answer will be given to the same question however often it may be put. The truth may be difficult to attain, but once attained its disguise can never again be assumed. Till recently, on the other hand—and some persons will still think the qualification unnecessary—there has been nothing indisputably established about the laws and properties of consciousness, considered as something apart from its physical vehicle. Metaphysics, in so far as vague speculation bearing that title has been cast in a scientific mould, has dealt with thought itself as an object of contemplation rather than with the thinking consciousness as an entity. We have no body of manageable facts or phenomena to deal with as a foundation on which

to build any certain conclusions in reference to extra-corporeal consciousness, or rather, those of us who have had such facts at our disposal have been unable to hand them out to the world at large for examination. A new chemical compound, however unstable or difficult to handle, is at all events on equal terms with every experimentalist. An abnormal human being, with spiritual faculties adapted to function independently of the bodily organism, is a human being, with rights as such, and generally with an extreme susceptibility to suffering. He or she may render priceless service to individuals by introducing them to laws of Nature concerning consciousness apart from the body, but cannot be used to break down the rocky barriers of incredulity in the world at large, any more than a violin could be used as a spade to dig up a clay soil. The best that can be done with the help of such persons towards educating the world at large is done when their capacities and testimony are reported upon by careful observers.

Nine people out of ten, or a larger proportion of larger numbers, habitually reject the second-hand evidence thus provided, but at the same time a small minority shows a better sagacity, and minorities gradually accumulate. In this way, by degrees, a body of enlightened opinion is formed, and so it comes to pass that people who are quite untouched by the growing belief that there is an unseen world around us, with which human consciousness is in some sort of relationship independently of the senses, are already left in the rear of anything that deserves to

be called advanced thought. Of course, there is a long interval between the recognition of the broad idea just described and the appreciation of theosophic teaching as the scientific outcome of knowledge concerning the laws which regulate the expansion, growth, and the progress of consciousness out of the body. But at all events, if there *is* an unseen world, in addition to that visible to eyesight, it is a part of Nature, and will be credited as such by every scientific mind, with being under the reign of law. There must be a science of unseen, unfelt phenomena lurking in the possibilities of the future, if there are such phenomena in existence. If for no better reason, theosophical writers might expect, therefore, to be commended for their attempt to arrange, with order and scientific method, the chaotic evidences relating to the unseen world which pour in upon us from so many quarters. Supposing their interpretation of Nature in her higher aspects were merely hypothetical, by what other process has any science been perfected? Incoherent facts, accumulated in the beginning at random, are pored over and studied, till hypotheses are framed in the attempt to reconcile and correlate them. The hypotheses are open to revision later on, if new experience challenges their applicability. The situation as regards theosophical teaching is not as though this represented a hypothesis in rivalry with others. It is the only comprehensive theory of superphysical Nature that has yet been presented to the world in a shape which can be regarded as scientific in its range and character. Supported as it is at every turn by superphysical

facts available for examination, it embraces an interpretation of the laws and conditions which regulate the growth of the Human Soul, the neglect of which by any thoughtful persons who rise above the contemplation of purely material objects, is so unreasonable as to be almost absurd.

What other knowledge can compare with that which enables us to form a right appreciation of the spiritual potentialities bearing on the permanent and imperishable elements of our own being? The future, looking beyond the limits of physical life, is moulded, according to theosophic teaching, in accordance with the causes brought into activity during the physical life; and though occult science is the last spiritual system in the world to suggest that finite blunders or neglect have infinite consequences, it is, nevertheless, profoundly earnest in assuring us that no great results in the future, either for evil or good, are possible without being provided for by adequate causation. Our will, our intelligently directed effort, need not be called into play to assist Nature in the regular development of her general design; but as regards the destinies of each individual, he himself must make choice with his eyes open in reference to the part he elects to play in the loftier regions, so to speak, of that general design, and the very first step he must take in that direction, if he is ever to move on at all, is the step involved in the effort to comprehend. He cannot afford to drift on for ever, or for very much longer, paying attention only to material things. His eyes can only be opened to the character of the loftier regions referred to by virtue, in the first

instance, of knowledge gained concerning the super-physical realms, spheres, or planes of Nature.

Esoteric teaching exhibits the fundamental truth of things in regard to these mighty departments of consciousness, as those know full well who, first taking the trouble to understand the esoteric statement, proceed then with whatever means may be within their reach, to check and verify it. But this is just what the intellectual world of our time, at large, has not yet attempted. Only a few, relatively, of its leading thinkers are even proclaiming the importance of psychic investigation. Still fewer have had the quick discernment to perceive that the esoteric teaching offered by theosophical literature reaches far ahead of such immature discoveries as unaided psychic investigation has yet brought out. Though embracing and interpreting these, it also embraces and interprets the most perplexing riddles of human existence, and the most embarrassing traditions of religious faith.

The "few," indeed, are pretty numerous, if we look at them apart from the rest. After all, the theosophical movement has struck its roots into almost every country all over the civilised world. Its literature has been translated into nearly every civilised language, and all over Europe and America we find considerable groups of people, including men of the highest culture, devotedly attached to theosophic study, ardently convinced that it opens out a pathway of research leading to positive knowledge concerning the spiritual future of mankind. But this fact only renders it the more unreasonable and

deplorable that such groups should even collectively remain a mere handful, compared with the hosts of the educated world at large.

However, whether fully or only partially comprehended, the teaching that has been offered to the world through theosophic agency does nothing less than offer a revelation from the spiritual plane of consciousness and knowledge, and one which must, in accordance with the infallible pressure of necessity in the future, be recognised as such, however many or however few may be those who in the present invest themselves with the great advantage of recognising it among the earliest.

The guidance under which I began to write on these subjects ten years ago has never been inactive in my life from that time till now, and the information on the basis of which "Esoteric Buddhism" was written has been expanded and deepened in a great variety of ways, one consequence of which is that I am now enabled to put forward the great and manifold additions to the earlier teaching which the present volume contains. And in the interval a flood of theosophical writing has emanated from other exponents of the spiritual science under elucidation. Some of these writings appear to be exactly parallel with the guidance I have received; in some cases subtle ideas are differently expressed; in others, again, there may be apparent discrepancies between the interpretations I have given and those which others have constructed. Such variations of conception, however, in regard to the meaning of occult teaching as bearing on remote problems of cosmology

and on departments of natural science beyond the range of physical exactitude, are of no consequence in reference to the general value of the theosophic revelation at large. Minor conflicts of opinion in respect to the manner in which ideas of a very obscure order can best be translated into the language of incarnate thinking ought rather to be welcomed than otherwise as stimulating the activity of minds addressed to such undertakings. In its bearings on the possibilities of individual spiritual evolution there is no ambiguity in the teaching of Theosophy, no room for differences of interpretation among honest exponents of the one great doctrine.

And it is mainly with the purpose of setting forth these essential principles clearly by themselves, with all such amplifications of the previously existing explanations as the later information supplied to me enables me to furnish, that the present work has been undertaken. From a complete account of the laws governing human evolution as a whole, from the first manifestations of spirit on the material plane, to the culmination of the all but deified human individuality, any students sufficiently in earnest will be able to discern the methods and principles that regulate individual progress.

But theosophic literature is not merely designed for the service of those whose already awakened intuitions render them quickly appreciative of the lines on which spiritual progress may be achieved. It should aim quite as much at leavening religious and scientific thought at large with the great ideas on which the ultimate progress of the race depends.

At some stage or other of his immortal career every human being who would not drop hopelessly into the rear of the advancing wave of evolution must make a beginning in the work of voluntarily uniting his own individuality with the forward movement. That beginning is only to be made by attaining a broad comprehension of the enterprise before him. But a great deal of preparatory culture is possible for the human mind, even before spiritual enthusiasm becomes a clearly defined motive for intelligent action. The views of life and Nature which Theosophy unfolds are precisely adapted to subserve that culture, and thus the explanations with which this book is concerned are subject to no narrow limitations as regards those to whom they are addressed.

There is no logical coherence in a scheme of things which regards the mankind round us as a worthy culmination of all the efforts Nature has made so far. Justice will never be fulfilled if the variegated panorama of existence, as passing now before our sight, is a point of departure from which each of us passes out, once for all, to be stereotyped for good or evil hereafter in some other spheres of unchanging beatitude or suffering. Vaguely it may be apprehended, there must be some unknown futurity in which moral cause and effect will still be operative with much finer exactitude than would be involved in a broad separation of all post mortem humanity into sheep and goats. With resolute striving after the realisation in life of whatever ideals of goodness may present themselves as best calculated to bring the soul into sympathetic relations with the Divine consciousness, many people

may be, without knowing what they are about, entering on the path of the higher evolution; and some students of the laws governing the higher life—knowing that it is easier to become intelligent than morally exalted—would prefer to see their fellow creatures animated by moral enthusiasm rather than by the thirst for spiritual knowledge as such. But none the less is it inevitably true that a beginning must be made sooner or later in the acquisition of the knowledge, and the response which Nature would make to the life of unselfish devotion to high ideals, unaccompanied by an intellectual appreciation of the reason why unselfishness and moral exaltation are conducive to great results hereafter, would be the gift at a future step of progress, of peculiarly favourable opportunities for acquiring the knowledge.

And while in this way moral exaltation to begin with, will bring such opportunities in its train in the long run, it is also true that for persons of a type of mind that I believe to be very widely diffused, nothing can be more conducive to the cultivation of the highest moral attributes than an intellectual appreciation of the truly symmetrical and reasonable laws really governing human evolution, which the esoteric doctrine brings to light. For it may surely be argued with some force that the spectacle of the world with its hideous entanglements of apparently unmerited suffering, with its rampant injustice, and wild carnival of cruelty and wrong always roaring in full activity around us, and interpreted by no other philosophy than an appeal to the inscrutability of the Divine will, is hardly calculated to convince the thoughtful

spectator that he belongs to a universe in which the principles of goodness and justice are triumphant, nor to encourage him in attempting to combat the apparent victories of the evil principle. We know that the spectacle leads some thoughtful spectators, at all events, to the sorrowful conclusion that all is for the worst in this worst of all possible worlds, and that non-existence would be distinctly preferable to existence on the terms offered us.

A new, a more enlarged and more enlightened view of human existence is the foremost necessity of the age, and that view is afforded by the Theosophic revelation. Leaving the enormous subject of esoteric cosmogony aside for the present therefore, it will be my task to trace out the bearing of that revelation on the problems of individual life as we stand now confronted by the phenomena of our own generation, and enabled for the first time in the history of metaphysical speculation to deal with the higher planes of Nature's activity, and the possibilities of spiritual consciousness, as with an open book.

And here at once I may as well grapple with questions that will arise in the reader's mind as to the grounds on which I speak of mysteries hitherto generally deemed insoluble, as coming within the range of positive knowledge. From the first, Theosophical teaching introduced those who studied it to the idea, that in some exceptional cases human evolution had far outstripped the stage exemplified by the ordinary humanity around us. Those who had advanced to a high degree along this path of development were spoken of as Adepts, and by other names. That one

will serve for the moment. Some of us came into more or less intimate relations with certain adepts, and out of such relationships all Theosophical teaching arose. Now that it has been developed to the extent with which advanced Theosophists are familiar, it constitutes, as I say, a coherent interpretation of life and Nature claiming attention and respect on its own merits. This volume, for instance, is offered to the non-Theosophical reader as a view of the spiritual constitution and destinies of man, which it will be worth his while to examine, independently of all authority on which it rests. It embodies its own authority, in one way, by affording the only available solution of many human problems to which no other system of philosophy or religion affords an answer. But it does really come to us under guarantees of immense importance for those who can understand them. So it is only fair to readers who may be able to appreciate these, to say something more about them at the outset.

Part of the teaching modern Theosophists have received shows us that, granting certain conditions of preparedness on the part of persons still on the ordinary level of evolution, well directed efforts to that end will lead to the awakenment of interior faculties, by means of which such persons are able to cognize and communicate with adept teachers, clairvoyantly. All such processes of development will be considered much more fully later on in this volume, but it is enough for the moment to refer to the position in general terms. As time elapsed a considerable number of Theosophic students became enabled to take advantage of the opportunities thus pointed out

to them. No one decently well informed concerning the progress of superphysical research during the century just coming to an end ought to find such a state of things surprising or difficult of intellectual acceptance. Nor, apart from modern experiences, should the existence of adepts—beings on a higher level of spiritual development than the common run of mankind—be regarded as otherwise than probable by rational thinkers. Once let us realise the fundamental fact of spiritual evolution, ill understood as yet by the world at large—the fact that the spiritual entity which is the permanent ego of each human being, itself evolves through successive physical lives, and the more rapid evolution of some as compared with the majority becomes a matter of practical certainty. Some great figures in the past, on spiritual heights far above those generally attained, show us examples of such pre-eminence, and reflection may enable us to feel sure that besides the pre-eminent spiritual leaders who have played a part before the world, others must have been evolved in connexion with less conspicuous destinies. For when we understand something of the manner in which spiritual influences operate on the higher planes of Nature, we are not surprised to find that the real work of those who attain great spiritual advancement, is mainly carried on in ways which do not bring them into direct physical relationship with the less developed masses of mankind. The seclusion of the adepts is a physical seclusion alone, favourable to greater activity on other planes than would be possible for them if they mixed in the turmoil of ordinary

life. It is no seclusion at all, from the point of view of those among their pupils and disciples, wherever these may be living, who also develope their consciousness on those other and higher planes of Nature.

The direct testimony of such pupils, available for many earnest students of Theosophic teaching, is now multiplied to such an extent that doubt about the existence of the adept fraternity has long been absurd, from the point of view many of us occupy. Testimony which rests on the use of abnormal faculties is just as easily susceptible of collateral checks and corroboration as any other sort. Certainly it stands more in need of check and corroboration, because a new factor,—liability to mistaken observation,—is introduced. But this can be neutralised. For example, suppose a friend whose personal honour you trust, tells you that at a certain time and place he met some common acquaintance. Thereupon you believe that at the time and place mentioned the acquaintance was actually present. But, if your friend tells you at such and such a time and place, being then himself "out of the body" and functioning on the "astral" plane of Nature he saw such and such a person—you do not necessarily feel sure the person named was there. It is possible your friend was subject to a delusion. However completely the statement may have been made in good faith, it wants corroboration. But suppose another friend whom you also have reason to credit with abnormal faculties says "Yes, I was there at the same time; what A says is true; I also saw so and so"—the united testimony of the two

observers is worth very much more than twice what each would have been worth singly. Now, suppose the two observers become three or four and that their testimony does not relate to one observation but to a continual familiarity with the person or persons and places described, then the actual existence of such persons becomes as assured to you as though the testimony related to the physical plane of facts altogether.

That is the state of the case for many modern Theosophists in Europe, not to speak of those in India, where pupils of the adepts in a position to visit them out of the body, are more often encountered. The whole subject, for them, has been lifted right out of the position in which it stood when it rested on the testimony of the first promoters of the Theosophical movement. The honesty of that testimony has been abundantly vindicated, but we can afford now to rest our assurances on evidence with which it has had nothing to do. It may be convenient for me to incorporate with this explanation the substance of a statement I put forward in a Transaction of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society in April, 1894. Referring back to the beginning of my own Theosophical studies in India, about the year 1880, I explained how, growing interested in the whole matter I became acquainted with other persons also interested. Two of these especially, natives of India, earnest spiritual-minded men, told me in course of time that they knew the "Masters" on the astral plane—*i.e.*, in that extra-physical state of consciousness of which millions of crass materialists know nothing, but of

which a large number of mystic students know a great deal.

A third Indian acquaintance, after acquiring astral plane knowledge of the Masters, determined to reach them personally—in the physical body—or perish in the attempt. He pushed across the Tibet frontier and, guided by astral perceptions, succeeded in his quest. He saw in the flesh those whom he and others had previously seen in vision, recognising them as such, and returning to tell of his success. Meanwhile I had been receiving a long series of letters, reaching me, apparently from certain Mahatmas, under peculiar circumstances described in my books, and conveying a mass of teaching which in due time I was enabled to publish, and in which great numbers of people have found a better clue to the comprehension of their own nature and of the world around them than any previously known religion or philosophy afforded.

One all-important fact thus revealed was that the avenues of initiation were still open for people who were qualified to advance along them; that the "Masters," though in seclusion, were not inaccessible for persons in whom certain interior faculties were ripe for development. Many persons, including some Europeans whom I know, were inspired by this revelation to make the necessary exertions, and have learned to transfer their consciousness to the astral plane, to get about freely on that level of Nature, to obtain access to the Mahatmas, and to recognise, as also astral pupils, friends whom they know in the flesh. One such person, a European, whose development has taken

place since the formation of the Theosophical Society, first came into conscious relation with the Mahatmas while working for Theosophy in India in connection with the headquarters of the Society at Adyar. Another gained the same privileges here in Europe, scarcely knowing the persons chiefly concerned with the Theosophical Society organisation in India. Within the last year or two, other Europeans and one person of Eastern parentage, among my own circle of intimate friends, have in varying degrees acquired the faculty of consciousness on the astral plane, and of clairvoyance in the ordinary state, to the extent of being able to hold converse, when permitted, with some of the Mahatmas, or to see them when they or some of their disciples have come astrally among us.

Thus I am dealing with a large group of witnesses to the truth, not with any one or two. Let me call them by letters of the alphabet, to show more definitely how their testimony hangs together.*

A. went in the flesh many years ago to Tibet. C., D., and E. have seen him with the Masters when themselves there in the astral.

B. is "dead" as regards the body in which I knew him. Being a regular disciple, his post-mortem adventures do not follow the normal course. C. knew him while living in India; and sees him still from time to time in an astral body with the Masters.

C. is an advanced disciple, as much at home on the astral plane, and as fully reminiscent of all

* As my witnesses have increased in number since 1894, the letters will not stand all through the series for the same persons they signified then.

that happens to him there, as though the matters dealt with were yesterday's doings in the flesh. On the astral plane he constantly sees D., E., F., and H., all of whom know him and know one another on this plane of life, discuss what takes place when with the Masters, after returning to their normal condition, and are in all respects *themselves* completely in their mutual relations on the higher plane.

D. has more recently attained to similar privileges, and is in the full exercise, not merely of the faculties just noticed, but also, as is indeed the case with C. likewise, of the astral and devachanic vision in the waking state *in* the body. A better appreciation of what this means will be acquired by the reader, to whom the terms used may be unfamiliar, when he has gone over some of the later chapters of this book.

E.—Everything just said of C. and D. applies also to E. in the fullest measure. C. and E. knew one another on the astral plane before they were acquainted in physical life. E. has been in free and unrestricted relations with the Masters for several years, though only coming into the inheritance of this privilege—earned in former lives—since the activities of the Theosophical Society began. Unlike C. and D., however, E., though also a European, reached the development described without having any touch with the Theosophical Society in the first instance. This is important with reference to preposterous hypotheses sometimes put forward with regard to "hypnotic influences." E. knows others of the Masters besides those of whom theosophic literature has treated, sees on the astral plane (as D. does

also) both in and out of the body; has friendly relations also with F., G., and H. on the other plane.

F. is not yet so far on, but knows the Masters on the astral plane; also sees D., E., and H. there constantly.

G. is but just beginning to exercise the faculty of astral consciousness, and need not be more minutely explained.

H. is in a position to be present frequently when astral meetings of pupils are held in the Masters' presence; recollects as yet imperfectly, but is sometimes able to corroborate C., D., E., and F. with respect to conversations at which all were present.

Concerning the reasons why the great "Masters of Wisdom" have remained in the deep seclusion that has shrouded their very existence, even during recent centuries of Western progress it would be premature to say much at this stage of my explanation. But for the sake of its direct bearing on the question, I may quote a few lines from an old alchemical treatise of the seventeenth century, by a writer who was truly an occult philosopher, though availing himself of the then favourite alchemical disguise. In his *Lumen de Lumine* Eugenius Philalethes, referring obviously to those whom we now speak of as the Adepts or Mahatmas, says: "Every sophister contemns them because they appear not to the world, and concludes there is no such society because he is not a member of it. There is scarce a reader so just as to consider upon what grounds they conceal themselves and come not to the stage when every fool cries—enter!

No man looks after them but for worldly ends. . . . How many are there in the world that study Nature to know God? Certainly they study a receipt for their purses, not for their souls, nor in any good sense for their bodies. It is fit that they should be left to their ignorance as to their cure. It may be the nullity of their expectations will reform them, but as long as they continue in this humour neither God nor good men will assist them."

The fact of the matter is, indeed not so much that the Mahatmas have withdrawn into seclusion as that mankind at large in the modern world has turned a deaf ear to their teaching, until in the end it has all but forgotten their existence. As Thomas Taylor—the indefatigable translator of the Neo-Platonists—writes in his preface to the Orphic Hymns, "Wisdom, the object of all true philosophy, considered as exploring the causes and principles of things, flourished in high perfection among the Egyptians first and afterwards in Greece. Polite literature was the pursuit of the Romans; and experimental enquiries, increased without end and accumulated without order, are the employment of modern philosophy. . . . . Modern enquiries never rise above sense, and everything is despised which does not in some respect or other contribute to the accumulation of wealth, the gratification of childish admiration, or the refinement of corporeal delight."

It is the prevalence of this characteristic in the modern world that has shut the higher spiritual teaching out of our lives to so great an extent. But happily the exclusion is not complete. For all who

can appreciate the height to which it may lead, the Mahatmas in this closing decade of the nineteenth century are just as accessible as in those bygone ages to which Thomas Taylor refers, when all men knew that the "Mysteries" were a portal through which it was possible for those prepared to make immediate temporal sacrifices, to pass on towards a loftier spiritual evolution. Though rarely approached in the western world of late, such portals are open still; and Theosophists who have gained access to them have learned before going far to be guided by the great law which governs all real occult progress,—that such progress is never to be attempted even by the neophyte with the single purpose of acquiring spiritual exaltation for himself alone. In its higher stages that progress must find its pre-eminent motives in the desire to help on the spiritual development of humanity at large; and so, in a humbler way, those who make their first steps on "the Path" with a clear sight of the destination to which it leads, cannot but be inspired to proclaim with all the earnestness at their command the importance of the discoveries they have attained to concerning the place occupied by the Mahatmas in the spiritual evolution of mankind.

Only by learning to appreciate in some measure the attributes and powers of these, our Elder Brethren, will humanity at large get some glimpse of the future that lies before them, of the possibilities connected with spiritual evolution that are associated with the rank in Nature to which they have now attained. The investigation of these possibilities is the foremost task of those who may fairly be

described as occult students. The effort to realise in daily work and thought and habits, the lofty ideals which theosophic teaching defines for our aspiration, is the next step in their upward progress Such efforts can only be made with the best effect when we comprehend the system to which we belong, and, in some measure, the design that it subserves. We cannot aim intelligently at the noblest objects, for the sake of which such efforts should be made, till we know something of the extent to which consciousness may be developed on those higher planes of Nature, as yet veiled from ordinary vision. And this cannot be appreciated even in imagination till those higher planes are described for us by persons who are already in a position to function there. Bewildering at first, as it may be, the vast cosmology of occult teaching must be apprehended in general outline, at all events, before the true character of the spiritual evolution available for us can be adequately grasped. But it is not necessary to plunge into this at the beginning of the whole study. We begin to appreciate the nature of the prospect before us when we get firm hold of the idea that Man is not merely a product of Nature adrift on the stream of evolution, but is eventually carried, so to speak, by that stream out into a vast ocean that he can only cross by virtue of conscious efforts put forward on his own account. And then, with some comprehension of its winds and currents—with some understanding, that is to say, of the higher planes of Nature that may be described for us by those familiar with them—we may know enough to appreciate the way in which it is

competent to man to help forward his own evolution towards the loftier levels.

Just as chemistry or astronomy may be largely comprehended now by people who would not have been equal, in the first instance, to the task of wresting their secrets from Nature, so with occult science. The comprehension of great realms of super-physical law and phenomena is relatively easy for any of us who will take advantage of the adequate guidance offered, now that the knowledge has been acquired by those who have been spiritually strong enough to lead the way. In the present day people quite unprovided with psychic gifts may invest themselves with a true and sufficient acquaintance with realms of nature which seemed almost hopelessly removed beyond the comprehension of all but the initiated few only a handful of years ago. Only by students of mediæval occult literature, almost maddening in its obscurity, can the bright light now thrown in our own time upon the subjects that literature dealt with be estimated at its true value.

In chaotic disarray, indeed, but in great abundance, facts have been lying before us for the last half century which have all along established for observers, whose common-sense has been unclouded by illogical prejudice, the broad truth that animated matter does not sum up or embrace the whole intelligent consciousness of the world. Mainly, it would seem, because these facts were not amenable to systematic experiment or correlation, the classes chiefly concerned with the interrogation of Nature have shunned them with something like irritation.

They had dropped from the clouds, as it were, in an unintelligible fashion, instead of growing in a reasonable and coherent manner out of previously existing knowledge. It was very doubtful, when first reported, whether they had really occurred. No one could make sense of them, and with the unacceptable hypotheses concerning their origin—generally put forward by those who testified to their occurrence—they were doubly offensive to a materialistic generation. Whether they had to do with the records of psychic mesmerism or were frankly associated with spiritualistic mediumship, they were equally out of gear with ordinary knowledge and were too hastily assumed to involve a denial of principles to which ordinary knowledge was devoted. But, inhospitably received as they were, evidences of incident and experience transcending those of familiar physical science continued to pour in very freely. The literature of spiritualism, mainly consisting of records of abnormal observation and experience, has expanded to enormous proportions. The accumulations of mesmeric record were very considerable before the new departure, which within the last few years has reconciled public opinion with mesmerism generally by restating some of its conclusions under a new name. Psychic research of an independent character, keeping both spiritualism and mesmerism, with all their hypotheses, at arm's length, has also accumulated its records, and the situation is now such that nothing but ignorance or stupidity of the densest sort can in the present day provoke a denial of the broad conclusions which

point to the existence of super-physical conditions of matter, force, and consciousness. These conclusions may not be sufficiently precise in themselves to constitute material from which to deduce any theory of extra corporeal life, but they ought to satisfy even the least thoughtful observer that there is a realm of some sort of extra corporeal life around us. And when we find—as we do find at the outset of any examination of the facts concerned—that different people are very differently endowed in respect to their capacity for cognising the phenomena of the super-physical planes, that ought to suggest the possibility that *some* persons may be able to cognise these completely enough to make sense of them, and fit their phenomena into a coherent scheme of Nature.

At this stage of the argument we get back to the theory that with adequate guidance it is possible for persons who are themselves quite without the gifts required for the personal observation of occult phenomena, to bring the whole subject within the area of intelligent study. We can listen first of all to a statement which may profess to formulate the various and bewildering phenomena of psychic, mesmeric, and spiritualistic investigations (together with many others besides). We may check the methods by which information of that kind is alleged to be attained, by the consideration of all accumulated experience of abnormal vision, and may then check the statement itself by a general consideration first of all of its inherent reasonableness; secondly, of its adaptation to the enigmas and requirements of life, and thirdly, of its symmetry as compared with the

working of Nature in departments within the range of easy observation. Finally we may consider its power of explaining the sporadic and, in themselves, unintelligible occurrences that lie around us in profusion.

Just such a statement as I have here imagined is embodied in the theosophical literature of recent years. Available for our acceptance if we find it satisfying the tests that we are entitled to apply, we now have before us a scheme of Nature, of the world, of human life and future existence, which has as it were drawn aside the veil from the symbolism of religion, and brought the region of faith within the area of exact apprehension.

And theosophic teaching in reference to spiritual progress should surely claim favourable consideration from modern thinkers, if for no other reason, for this: that it brings that transcendental process within the uniform operation of cause and effect. Perhaps, indeed, religious teaching has only *seemed* to disregard cause and effect in assigning the conditions of after-life to arbitrary favour or condemnation. Clear-sighted students may as readily discern true theosophy disguised in the symbolism of religion, as the most intelligent exponents of religious doctrine will discern the spirit of religion in the sublime teaching of occult science; but at all events popular corrupt religion is apt to regard the destinies of man after death as subject to treatment which, whether gracious or retributive, is influenced by considerations quite external to himself; and exact thinking must recognize such treatment as capricious—as outside

the law of cause and effect which operates so invariably in all realms of Nature, fairly open to observation. Theosophy, on the other hand, in regard to the progress of humanity, embodies an infinite exaltation of the doctrine of the conservation of energy. All future experiences of each of us in turn are the inevitable and logical outcome of our previous acts with their concurrent states of mind. The apparent irregularity and injustice of life is an appearance merely due to the fact that we take too short a view of life when we think that we perceive such irregularity and injustice. Spiritual science reveals the fact that each human life stretches both in front of and behind any given period of physical manifestation to an enormous extent. On the whole account the events and conditions of each life in turn are the effects of antecedent causes.

With this magnificent revelation, which is at the root of all truly scientific views of human existence, we shall be largely concerned later on; but there are some general principles concerning the potentialities of human progress which may be dealt with at once.

If we start from the safe point of departure to be found in the established fact that some persons have a much more highly perceptive organism than others, and if we keep touch with the idea that faculty itself is the product of causes, we are at all events within reach of a plausible hypothesis pointing to the theory that people may perhaps be able by appropriate effort to develope the aptitudes of their own organism for cognising a wider range of natural phenomena than those which are reflected in the five senses. And if so, do

we not come within range of the idea that human evolution may be the product of two lines of force, the one proceeding, so to speak, from Nature at large, and representing the normal impulse of evolution, the other generated by the spontaneous volition of the individual, and representing the previously dormant principle of Divinity within him?

This idea is really the keynote of the scientific view of human spiritual evolution. The will force of each human being who would rise in Nature must be united with the evolutionary tendencies of the race as a whole in order that his greatest possible development may be brought about. The plain common-sense of this should be obvious to any one who will dwell in thought on the deep significance of any among many conventional religious phrases that are constantly echoed and rarely appreciated. Take, for instance, the familiar idea that in God we live and move and have our being. The converse—spoken with all due reverence—is a corollary of that statement. God—the spirit or influence of God—lives *in us*, and in so far as we have consciousness of being very ungodlike in many respects, it should be obvious that the extent to which that condition of things may be destined to become a vital truth, depends on the degree to which we render ourselves, so to speak, habitable for God. But surely, if one human being has rendered himself very much more habitable for God than another, that human being is the one whose will has become a more potent force than the will of the other, for it is more largely infused with the Will which, in its perfection, is recognised as

the first cause of all things, and the guiding principle of Nature and evolution.

Who can fail to see what nonsense it must be to predicate the same immediate destiny in evolution for the God-inhabited man and the mere self-centred human animal? True, conventional religion, taking refuge in a meek faith that the worst sinner may be purified somehow in another world, is content to remain in ignorance of the way in which its paradox works,—of the device by which it is arranged that opposite causes should produce the same effect; but occult science, comprehending the patience of Nature, as well as its invariability, is well aware that the human animal will have other chances, besides any one in particular that we may see him wasting, for making the efforts which will render himself—in some future personality —the temple of spiritual consciousness. Opportunities may be wasted, and if so they may recur. The considerations governing that reflection will be examined later on. The all important point is that at some stage or other of his career a human being must undertake his own evolution—unite an adequately powerful ray of the Universal Spirit with his own consciousness—or he will not evolve up into those superior realms of evolution which the humanity of our own epoch merely exists to subserve. Nor is that the whole of the thought which this simple view of the subject suggests. It is a commonplace of all scientific thinking that there cannot be immobility in Nature; there must be progress or retrogression—change of some sort. Nothing really stands

still, either in the cycles of astronomy, or chemical change, or metaphysical condition. A man may live one life, perhaps, and appear to be neither higher or lower in the scale of Nature at the close of it than he was at the beginning; but one life is after all but a brief interval in eternity, or even in those very protracted cycles of time which occult science prefers to handle rather than to prattle, with the modern creeds, of conceptions so embarrassing to the finite mind as eternity and infinitude.

The man, as a continuous being, having a life history of which the one physical personality is but a single link, cannot stand still in evolution. It is an intellectual absurdity to imagine man doing that. He must either advance or recede; progress or retrogress like everything else—every being else—in Nature. Up to the rank in creation where most of us are standing now, such retrogression as has been possible need not for the moment be considered. The great automatic forces of evolution have driven each individual forward. There has been suffering perhaps, if during the process of such driving his will has been set against the Great Power behind him, but broadly speaking there has been no retrogression. From the humbler spheres of consciousness in the lower kingdoms of Nature the soul, in dim ages of the past, has risen upward. Through processes of ethereal existence antedating the humanity of the type now attained, the individuality has moved onward towards its higher destinies as a human being qualified to say with a full comprehension of what it is about—"now I will blend this consciousness and volition which is myself

with the superior divine consciousness of which I am the material mirror, and thus illuminated and inspired I will move forward again ever onward and upward." But just because he is now qualified to say this if he chooses to act upon such a declaration, a man is also qualified to determine that it is all too much trouble; too painful for the time-being, perhaps. And then if the election is so made, the human consciousness which is the product of natural evolution so far, chooses, in effect, to unite itself with matter and its limitations, instead of with spirit and its potentialities. It is not necessary to stop here and at full length attempt to define the characteristics of the descent that must then set in. It should be obvious to any rational understanding that such a descent is the inevitable alternative to the conscious self-directed ascent, at the turning point of evolution, wherever that may be, at which a higher progress to be achieved by the preparation of the interior self for the access of the Divine influx is offered to each man in turn as a potentiality of the consciousness he has attained. But looking upward and considering the prospects of humanity—so very ill comprehended as yet by the world at large—in their broadest aspects the truth just defined is one of pre-eminent significance. We have got half-way through the great evolutionary process on which the human faculty is launched. So far we have been lead and supported. For the rest of the way we must push on ourselves—seeing our way; understanding what is expected of us; resolute to fulfil the Divine purpose.

Nor from this moment onward need we be any longer in the dark concerning the road to be travelled,

the interior development, we have it in our power to reach nor the attributes of that rank in Nature which it is open to us to attain. The view of the whole evolutionary scheme that has been gradually set forth in Theosophical literature is now sufficiently complete to make the prospects of the future as intelligible as the history of the past. We are as I have said, half way through the whole "manvantara," or period within which the present chapter of spiritual evolution is designed to take place. The time spent up to now—on other planets besides this—has been counted in millions of ages. Millions of ages lie before the human family for the full and complete development of its evolution. Paying attention for the moment to that which may be described as normal evolution alone, occult science shows us that the stupendous task of harmonizing our wills completely with the Divine idea of the whole undertaking, and of mastering all the knowledge which it is possible for us to acquire when our natures are adequately exalted by that process, is one which may be protracted over the whole range of those millions of ages. We shall gather more as we go on concerning the circumstances under which it is so protracted, but taken as slowly as Nature allows for, or as rapidly as the process can be hastened, nothing can be achieved from the middle point of the manvantara onwards unless a comprehension of what is to be done animates each effort at every stage. That is the all essential idea to keep hold of in contemplating the prospects of humanity. The nature of the attainments possible eventually, will be considered more conveniently at a later stage of the inquiry.

CHAPTER II.

OCCULT SCIENCE AND RELIGION.

AT the outset of any serious attempt to comprehend Theosophic teaching concerning the growth of the soul, it is well worth while to dissipate the foolish delusion that such teaching is at war with religion, and based upon a Godless and Atheistic system of thought. Theosophy is so far from deserving that reproach that it even brings into sympathy with all essential religious ideas, those of its followers who, repelled in the first instance by the unsatisfactory creeds in which religion has so often been disguised by ecclesiastical systems, have approached it from the point of view of Agnostic or even Atheistic thinking.

Occult science enables us to define clearly before the mind's eye the goal at which humanity has to aim. Religious faith, it may be urged, does this also no matter with what varieties of creed it may be associated. It points to a happy spiritual life of a refined order as a reward for piety and blameless conduct. But that is not a "clearly defined" goal, because the conditions of such superior existence are never explained in sacred writings with exactitude. The Theosophic exposition of spiritual science, on the other hand, shows quite definitely the conditions of spiritual existence which ensue as a consequence of simple

piety and blameless life, and also the still higher conditions that may be attainable for those who *unite* with the utmost attainable blamelessness, adequate knowledge concerning the scope and possibilities of human existence, and who, guiding their conduct by the light of that knowledge, bring themselves so far into harmony with the loftiest principles governing the evolution of the world, as to rise in the scale of creation and take their places in that sphere of existence which, as compared with the kingdom of humanity, might be termed the kingdom of divinity.

Before going further let me expand this contrast a little. For one very common mistake made about Theosophic teaching by people who begin to appreciate its ethical tendencies, is that, after all, it only repeats familiar Christian exhortations in a new form of words, dropping out the ecclesiastical phraseology.

In spite of the painful pretences of precision which distinguish the anthropomorphic formulas of modern churches, the philosophical literature of modern thought is saturated with the conviction that the conditions of physical life hopelessly deny us exact knowledge in reference to the hereafter. "The bourne from which no traveller returns" is a region which Shakespeare, even though presenting us in the same breath with a traveller who does return from it, recognises as shrouded in impenetrable darkness. Tennyson cannot give, by the Voice of Faith, any more definite information concerning the future than is conveyed in the "notice faintly understood," which embodies the encouragement of "a hidden hope." The leading exponents of modern

knowledge concerning physical nature are bitter in their repudiation of the theory that it is possible to get touch with positive facts having to do with non-carnate conditions of consciousness. With eighteen centuries to work in, the Christian churches have finally produced, as the result of their teaching, the assured conviction on the part of their most intellectual pupils, that there is nothing to be *known*, however much to be hoped for, along that road. Reasonable conjectures, pointing to a superphysical intelligence and consciousness of some sort governing the world, there may be, but of real knowledge, such as that we have about the planetary movements or the molecular constitution of matter, there is none attainable.

Samuel Laing, summing up the conclusions of Modern Thought, writes: "As far as our experience and knowledge extend, this life of conscious personal identity is indissolubly connected with a material organ—the brain. . . . What will become of it when the brain is dissolved into its elements? No voice comes from beyond the grave to tell us. It is the mystery of mysteries."

And the authors of "The Unseen Universe," though their whole book presents itself as an attempt to argue that there may be an unseen universe and some avenue that may at last lead from the seen to the unseen, conceive that up to now this avenue "has unfortunately been walled up and ticketed with '*No road this way.*'" "In fine," they say elsewhere, "the unseen may have a very wide field of influence, but from its very nature its working is not discernible

and we are therefore led to consult the Christian records for otherwise unattainable information regarding the reality of a present influence exercised by the invisible universe upon ours." As for the fate of evil doers, "We greatly question whether any school of theologians have succeeded in throwing a single ray of real light into this mysterious region."

The whole body of Theosophic teaching on the contrary rests on the confident declaration that an immense volume of real knowledge, quite as precise and certain as that we possess about the movements of the planets or the behaviour of molecules, is attainable and has been attained in reference to superphysical conditions of human consciousness, the natural laws which govern the transition of human consciousness from one sphere or plane of Nature to another, and the conditions of existence which belong to other Beings, some higher than, some lower than the humanity of which we have cognisance on this earth. But when the practical bearing of this knowledge on human conduct during incarnate life is brought down to an everyday level, undoubtedly it is found that in many respects the ethics of exact spiritual science are identical with the ethics of the inexact, however ardent, aspirations of religion. That is in no way surprising for students of Theosophy who come to realise that all religion worthy of the name has grown out of spiritual science as existing in the world at the period of such growth. Religions prepared by the various great teachers and prophets of mankind for propagation in the world at large, are in all cases excerpts clothed in a more or less elaborate

symbolism, from the great body of definite scientific knowledge concerning the spiritual laws and purpose of the world possessed by the initiates for the time being of esoteric wisdom.

The identity, however, of ordinary religious and theosophic ethics up to a certain point in no way lessens the importance of the additional spiritual guidance to be derived from the knowledge of theosophic doctrine. The acquisition of that knowledge at one stage or another of human progress is an absolute condition, *sine quâ non*, for the attainment of the grander possibilities of that progress. The good life *per se* will lead to happiness hereafter, as the most popular forms of religious teaching very fairly declare. The ideas associated with religious piety, if welded with that good life, will colour the happiness to which it leads and determine its character and kind. But the good life *per se* leads to nothing more than happiness, and not even to an eternity of that. To rise in the scale of Nature and get above the conditions of transitoriness that beset all phases of consciousness of the merely human Kingdom, whether incarnate or disincarnate, we must make specific efforts of a kind that can only be made by virtue of knowledge concerning the higher spiritual laws of Nature.

These are vague phrases till they are brought to a focus by an exposition of the great and magnificent discoveries concerning the dormant spiritual faculties of humanity and the phases of Nature suitable to their expansion, which some advanced representatives of humanity in all ages of the world since the human epoch began, have been enabled to make.

When churches or sects—with their hundreds of divergent creeds—make definite statements of fact concerning the destinies of humanity which can be shown to have arisen from some unintelligent materialisation of an allegory, or from a grovelling, anthropomorphic conception of the principles on which the world is governed, theosophical teaching will naturally endeavour to break through such incrustations of error; but the religious instinct or sentiment itself is so fundamentally identical with the theosophical instinct or sentiment, that to suppose the one hostile to the other is to misunderstand the position entirely.

It is quite true, more's the pity, that much genuine religious sentiment is often blended with limited sectarian bigotry. Whether a man be a member of the Church of England, or a Roman Catholic, or a Baptist, or a Mussulman, if he conceives that his own creed sums up the actual truth of things and that the other creeds are false, he is in a state of mind which we must recognise, to say the least, as highly unintelligent. If he goes further, as many do, and believes that there is no salvation, outside the pale of his own creed, for the adherents of others, he stands before us as a *reductio ad absurdum* of sectarian folly. But however feeble may be his mental grasp of spiritual principles, even he—and, all the more, sectarians who are in various degrees less bigotted—may blend with their foolishness a great deal of genuine religious sentiment. They may set before their own interior sight a conception of Deity which they adore, a code of right and wrong which is, at all

events, something divorced from the immediate dictates of selfish interest, and they may govern their lives on the principle that the destinies of the soul after death are of more importance than the transitory enjoyments of physical life. With that much spirituality to begin with, advancing intelligence in progress of time may lead them into the path of real enlightenment.

In a very much higher degree may religious sentiment of a more refined and intense order be directly calculated to prepare the mind for the supreme illumination of theosophic teaching, and however little modern popular creeds may seem adapted to develope ardent spiritual enthusiasm of a pure and refined character, we have to recognise the curious fact that in the present age of the world great numbers of religious people are immeasurably better and more spiritually intelligent than their creeds would lead one to expect. In fact, the growth of intelligence has permeated European religions to an extent that has honeycombed them, really, without apparently disturbing their external form: in other words, the refinement of feeling that general culture evokes, and the earnestness of spiritual aspiration among multitudes of people still professing some orthodox faith, have woven so beautiful a drapery of vague sentiment around the original doctrines—which it has never occurred to them to dispense with—that the ugly deformities thus hidden from view are effectually forgotten. If the outsider complains, "Your doctrine *says* so and so," the answer is, "Not at all; nobody of cultivated mind takes it in that sense;

it really means this and that." And then the ignoble statement, whatever it may be, is sublimated into something too ethereal to be controverted.

This method of dealing with exoteric or popular religions may be supported or condemned along different lines of argument. Whether it hastens or retards the evolution of the popular religion into something higher is a question that cannot be easily decided. But at all events, the attitude of mind of people who in this way cling to and refine—for their own use, at least—the conventions of exoteric belief, may go hand in hand with a capacity to assimilate real spiritual knowledge. And the ardour of religious feeling which has in the first instance inspired their own interior development, must be distinctly favourable, in their case, to that practical application of the higher wisdom to the problems of human life and conduct which it is the great purpose of Theosophy to promote.

Indeed, it is impossible, from the theosophical point of view, to be too earnest in repudiating the miserable misrepresentation of Theosophy that leads people sometimes to imagine it an aggressive and iconoclastic philosophy essentially hostile to religion. It would be as wise to assert that mathematical teaching is hostile to astronomy. Mathematics may from time to time have upset some popular idea on the subject of astronomy, but that has simply been so much the better for astronomy; and in the same way any religious idea—any idea, that is to say, which has become encrusted on religion—which Theosophy may be in a position to discredit—will be got rid of by religion

greatly to its own advantage. Theosophy, in fact, stands to religion very much in the position of mathematics to astronomy; that last relationship is the relationship of the abstract to the concrete. The pure colourless truths of mathematical science lead us upwards to an appreciation of the sublime and soul-stirring panorama of the heavens. So does an understanding of theosophic truth, however stern, scientific, and abstract it may seem in the first instance, lead the spiritual consciousness upward towards realms of glowing emotion, and eventually into the actual contemplation of spiritual realities, the glories of which may easily account for the way in which the illuminated theosophic student regards all familiar objects of mundane desire as contemptible trivialities beside the experiences of his interior progress.

To repeat a phrase growing almost too hackneyed for use, but representing a truth that must never be forgotten, Theosophy is the essence of religion, and of all religions worthy of the name. Or in other words, it is the science of Divine things, as the word implies. Reverence for each specific religion felt by its adherents, may often blind them to the idea that there must be such an underlying science. The outer expression given to the views of exoteric religions concerning Deity and Divine relations with humanity must—for all but the most circumscribed intelligence—be recognised as at any rate falling far short of a complete explanation of those stupendous mysteries. There must be a prodigious complexity, so to speak, in the organisation of spiritual Nature, which very bald—however poetical—declarations concerning

omnipotence, omniscience, Heaven, and eternal life, fail to expound. Within the far narrower field of observation with which physical science deals, it will be seen on reflection that a great many broad generalisations are in the nature of an exoteric substitute for the declarations which more advanced knowledge might supply. The sun, for example, is for the popular western understanding—a vast globe in the centre of the system of planets to which we belong, which shines with a bright light and gives out heat, generating organic growth, and providing for the recurrence of seasons, and so on. Other popular conceptions of the sun, have anthropomorphised these ideas, more or less, and have imputed a self conscious Divinity to the orb on whose influence the life and health of the world so manifestly depended. But underlying both views, there are certainly immense realms of complex intermediation that the popular understanding does not trouble itself about in either case. *How* does the sun make a plant grow? It sends out light and heat, but that is a loose and ineffectual statement that takes us no forwarder. We can hunt down the physical elements concerned, and discern them, if not absolutely with the sight, with the eye of understanding—in their molecular simplicity. Heat may throw these molecules into motion, but that alone will not account for organic growth. Moreover, when we begin to examine into these things—how does the heat get here from the sun? The sun radiates it! That does not explain anything. By what intermediation is the influence conveyed? Science begins at this stage to be esoteric.

Popular knowledge—the popular religion of the matter so to speak—is content with the statement—the sun emits heat. Esoteric science finds it necessary to fortify and expand this crudity, and brings the luminiferous ether into the field of observation. Ether, that marvellous medium of physical influences that can neither be seen, felt, nor examined by any instrument, is discovered by advancing knowledge nevertheless, and science, in spite of its extremely cautious habits, begins to affirm certain definite propositions concerning it. Then does "emission" in the crude popular sense take place at all in connexion with the sun's heat and light? These phenomena are clearly states or conditions of the ether. That the sun does something to the ether, and that we feel effects in the ether round us, is undeniable; but while the exoteric statement about the emission of the light and heat is quite as true as all exoteric statement is required to be, conveying, that is to say, an idea as nearly like the truth as exoteric understanding can receive, it is a statement with which a more acute and knowledge-seeking mind is unable to remain content.

Assuming eventually that students of solar physics come to something resembling complete knowledge of the chain of cause and effect between the sun's influence and the organic life of the world, then solar physics would be to the broad popular statements on the subject, just what theosophical knowledge—in its perfection—is to popular religion.

The analogy just employed is all the more inviting, because it suits the idea to be illustrated in more ways than one. Just as esoteric solar physics require us to

investigate the properties of a medium imperceptible to exoteric senses, so in dealing with spiritual science we must range over fields of observation that lie altogether beyond exoteric understanding. Even without attempting this, a great deal of very instructive and suggestive information on the subject may, it is true, be picked up by those peculiarly qualified, from ancient oriental literature. Most of this is maddeningly obscure, though when you know what it ought to mean you can often see that this meaning must have been present to the writer's mind. But granting that in this way from one region or another of ancient oriental literature, it would be possible to compile an account of the great evolutionary processes of Nature, showing the origin of the solar system, the successive development of planets related to each other, the passage of the life influence through the vegetable and animal kingdoms, and the evolution of the human kingdom at last through a series of mighty races, and so on, after all the knowledge so preserved in the Eastern books, must in the first instance have been acquired by persons qualified to direct their observation to realms of Nature beyond those penetrated by the ordinary senses. Whether knowledge concerning the higher planes of Nature was obtained by ancient seers thousands of years ago, or by modern seers quite recently, its acquisition must of necessity depend on the exercise by some persons at one time or another of higher faculties, than those concerned with the ordinary objects of sense. We may frankly recognise that the knowledge concerning Nature on which the lofty moral purpose of Theo-

sophic teaching rests, could never have been acquired by the mere intellectual study of evidences lying within the range of mere scientific observation. The gifts of seership, including the highest spiritual clairvoyance, have been brought into play in the prolonged task of educating the human mind to understand the great scheme of Nature to which that mind belongs, and from this reflection it directly follows that the cultivation in ourselves of analogous faculties, is the great task on which it behoves us to enter if we would come fully into communion with the aspects of Nature from contact with which the seer's knowledge has been developed.

But not on that account need we assume that no progress in spiritual science is to be accomplished without first developing faculties that will bring us into conscious relations with higher planes of Nature. As well might we refuse to accept any knowledge concerning the stars unless we were in a position to build an observatory for ourselves, and arm ourselves with a complete comprehension of all sciences subsidiary to such knowledge. Through every department of human enlightenment through which culture ranges, most of us are daily in the habit of relying to a very large extent upon the original research of others. And for the great majority of mankind, for a long time to come, it will be inevitably necessary that they should rely, in dealing with the science of spiritual things, on the original research of others along those lines. But with reasonable precautions they may do this confidently in the one case as in the other. Of course,

the situation is embarrassing at the outset in the case of psychic inquiry. In the other case the multitude know that each expert is checked and watched by a number of other experts, and it is quickly known whether any new conclusions of independent research are accepted by contemporary science. If so, the multitude accepts that guarantee. Now, at present, as regards spiritual science, we have no Royal Society at hand to put its imprimatur on progressive discoveries. Some of us know, indeed, that there is, so to speak, a Royal Society of spiritual scientists in existence, and that if we reach it we gain access to a source of authority in such matters far better to be relied on than even the *élite* leaders of contemporary physical science in their department of knowledge. It is from that source of information, as repeatedly explained, that the theosophical revelation of our time has come. But for reasons which patient investigation makes very intelligible, the foci of spiritual initiation are not readily accessible to all inquirers at present, so their authority can never be invoked for the guidance of people who are merely beginning the investigation of occult teaching. Nothing is more helpful to earnest inquirers than a clear conviction as to the existence of such foci and the conditions under which their influence radiates out into the world, but it is possible to get a long way on the path of theosophic culture before the question is taken up for thorough examination.

Leaving it out of sight for the moment we have to decide how we are to investigate spiritual science without special faculties which enable us to cognise

other planes of Nature and without access to any body of established knowledge, in reference to which we have as yet entire confidence. My answer is that we all have the capacities of reason that enable us to consider the statements of occult science now lying before the world, to compare them with the familiar facts of life, to test them by reference to ideal conceptions as to justice and purpose in the spiritual government of the world, to make prudent and careful use of the wonderful analogies of Nature that visibly in so many ways, and inferentially in many more, bring her various phases into harmony with one another, and finally—this kind of test bringing me back to the special subject I have in hand for the moment—to apply the declarations of occult science to the great and fundamental conceptions of traditional religion, and see whether or not they offend, confirm, or illuminate the elements of those conceptions to which we may feel the deepest attachment.

In reality occult science not only shows itself in fundamental harmony with great religious ideas, but going far beyond this, reconciles itself, so to speak, with religion; and actually invests in a great many cases with a new and beautiful significance, dogmas of exoteric religion which have gradually forfeited their true spiritual significance for a materialistic generation, which have been for many centuries taken by churches and congregations merely at the foot of the letter, to be a stumbling block for some, unhealthy food for those who have swallowed them in blind faith, taking them literally and yet refusing to bring them out, for consideration, into the light of common

reason. Take for example—and merely as an example, for to go fully into the interpretation of religious dogma by the light of occultism would be to write a book on that branch of the subject alone—the Vicarious Atonement that has long taken its place as the leading doctrine of modern Christianity. The notion of a wrathful God, expending anger on an innocent being and ultimately forgiving guilty persons when his desire to take vengeance somehow has been satisfied, is a notion that blasphemes Deity, offends justice, and is generally grotesque—and refined modern theology sublimates it more or less vaguely into something different, while leaving it in that form for humbler understandings that do not rise in overt rebellion against its horrors. Occult science on the other hand, gives us the true reading of the mysterious dogma. The whole story of the crucifixion is enacted afresh in the case of every human soul that attains spiritual exaltation. It is the allegory of the soul's progress. It is the only process by which redemption can be accomplished—and it is vividly appreciated as soon as we understand the occult teaching concerning the lower and the higher self. The higher self—very roughly anticipating occult explanations that will be given more fully further on—is the truly spiritual, immortal, imperishable part of a man—the growth and expansion of which into full consciousness, is the purpose of physical life, and its protracted experiences. That is the Divinity which incarnates, welding its consciousness during each physical life with its lower self, the visible, sinful, fallible man of our every day observation—the

reflection of itself on the plane of matter. It can only exalt the personality to the plane of true spiritual evolution and redeem it from sin and suffering by crucifixion on the physical plane, by the painful sacrifice on the plane of its incarnate manifestation of physical desires and tendencies and personal selfishness—that is to say, by the subordination of the lower self—the ordinary waking consciousness — to the Divine teaching involved in the loftiest aspiration of the Christ within us—the higher self. Then the atonement is accomplished without an atom of injustice entering into the transaction.

In a similar way the whole story of Adam and Eve, the Garden of Eden, of the rib, the temptation, and the fall, can be shown, when illuminated by occult knowledge, to be a profound cryptograph embodying some of the most important facts in the evolution of the human race—in the evolution especially of humanity as we know it now, expressed in the two sexes, from that earlier humanity belonging more to the "astral" than to the physical plane of Nature, which preceded our present type in the great process of the descent of spirit into matter. But I need not go into the minutiæ of that interpretation here. The broad principle which I am specially concerned to lay down does not really depend on, however much it is fortified by, the precise correspondence between occult teaching and the dogmas of exoteric religion—as soon as these are raised above the level of nursery tales or Icelandic sagas—by an adequate translation into terms of spiritual thought. The harmony

between occultism and the essence of everything that is most exalted in religious aspiration or emotion is unmistakeable for everyone who gets on far enough in the study of occultism to realise how much more it signifies than that which it is sometimes supposed to be chiefly concerned with —the unveiling of a new set of natural mysteries, the exploration of a new realm of scientific wonder. It is, indeed, the science behind all sciences, without which none can be complete; but it is also the religion behind all religions, without which none can do more than prepare the soul of man for entrance on its loftiest inheritance.

CHAPTER III.

RE-INCARNATION.

NO purpose worth speaking of can be served by studying the teachings which constitute in their entirety the Esoteric Doctrine until the student is in the first instance completely saturated with the conception that the growth and development of the human soul is accomplished by means of successive returns to physical life (with intervening periods of spiritual rest) which, regarded in the aggregate as a process of Nature, make up what is generally called the theory of Re-incarnation. It is equally true, however, that the subject cannot be studied quite apart from other branches of the great body of knowledge to which it belongs. A general appreciation of the perfect harmony of the Esoteric Doctrine in its various ramifications is often required for the proper comprehension of its fundamental conceptions. Esoteric teaching is not in that respect quite like Euclid's geometry, of which one may learn a little and no more and yet have that little firmly established in the understanding. It *is* like Euclid's geometry in the sense that the later propositions cannot be accepted unless the earlier propositions have been realised and appreciated first; but to get at that realisation it may often be necessary to sweep on far ahead and realise how

necessary the earlier propositions are to an appreciation of the grander spiritual ideas with which its later exposition may be concerned. Then the student, recommencing the examination of the whole teaching, will begin, perhaps, to see the fundamental principles in a new light, and may finally get them embedded in his permanent convictions. Then he finds himself at last in possession of a foundation whereon he can build a structure of knowledge which it is possible to ascend with confidence.

In dealing at the outset with the question whether the doctrine of human evolution summed up in the term "Re-incarnation" can be "proved" or not, in the sense that you can prove a new discovery in physics we have to recognise that, of course, such proof is impossible. All we can do is to show that it would be profoundly unphilosophical to believe anything else—anything, that is to say, at variance with that doctrine; that Re-incarnation will satisfactorily account for all the phenomena of human life (which the idea can have any relations with), and that these would be chaotic and unintelligible otherwise; that without bringing in this all-important interpretation of its conditions the world around us would be a creation of malevolence and injustice, rather than one of wisdom and goodness; that only by recognising Re-incarnation can we account for one man being a Newton and another an ignorant blockhead; finally, that although the majority of human beings at the present stage of evolution—for reasons that esoteric teaching renders abundantly clear—do not remember their past lives, some people whose spiritual develop-

ment has passed certain limits, actually *do* remember theirs not merely in a vague and shadowy fashion, but with complete precision and even a fuller grasp of detail than untrained memory will afford in dealing with the earlier periods of a current life. I shall amplify these and other considerations directly, but what I want to emphasise for the moment is that in admitting the doctrine of Re-incarnation to be insusceptible of proof—in the absolute, physical sense of the word—I claim for it all the while that it can be so nearly proved by reasoning, that no intelligent man who correctly apprehends the idea, and who applies it with adequate patience to the experience of existence whether in or out of the body, can possibly fail to believe it as fully, for example, as the modern scientific world believes in the undulatory theory of light. That theory is not argued about any more in these days. It is the only theory that will explain all the facts. And so with Re-incarnation in the domain of spiritual science; it is the only theory which will explain all the facts, and it is luminous with a truly scientific aspect; that is to say, it is in harmony with the uniformities of Nature, affording indeed the only way out of supposing that the uniformities of Nature are rudely violated in the laws which govern the evolution of humanity. Thus, in progress of time, cultivated thinkers will certainly cease to argue about Re-incarnation, even before the development in ordinary mankind of those higher faculties to which the concatenation of successive lives will ultimately become as plainly perceptible, no doubt, as the identity of the sun is obvious to us, on his rising every day.

The first step towards realising the truth of the doctrine of Re-incarnation is to obtain a clear comprehension of the views really held by people who recognise that doctrine as explaining the actual process of the soul's evolution. We possess a considerable mass of writing on the subject now, which students of Oriental philosophy generally would recognise as setting forth the teaching of the most cultivated exponents of that philosophy, and we find, to begin with, that a good many popular notions on the subject which have floated about the world at various periods may be pared away from the central idea. The esoteric doctrine of Re-incarnation, for example, does *not* contemplate the descent of human souls, under any circumstances, into animal bodies. In the crudest presentation of the idea, that has been treated as part of the scheme, but I do not believe it has ever been suggested except as a symbol of moral deterioration following on bad lives, or as a disguise of the true teaching. The only theory that I am anxious to support is that according to which the drift of successive Re-incarnations must always be progressive. Never mind for the moment from what phases of existence in the remote past human beings may have ascended: once on the human level they remain on that level, or, at all events continue to advance on that level.

We may start, in order to explain the real teaching of occultists on the subject of Re-incarnation, at a point in human evolution when the human condition has already been fully attained and when life is going on under the circumstances with which we are familiar.

The doctrine is that when a man of our kind dies—as regards the physical manifestation of his consciousness—that consciousness passes first of all into spiritual or relatively spiritual conditions of existence, which are calculated to endure for a long time, and are immensely important. From some of these conditions it is undoubtedly possible that touch may be maintained with the consciousness of people still in the earth life. And though there are some spiritual conditions into which the soul may pass which are too exalted to permit anything resembling what is ordinarily meant by intercourse with friends still in earth life, I imagine that the experience of many Spiritualists would go far to confirm rather than to conflict with that view. Broadly, therefore, it will be seen that the theory of Re-incarnation does not enter into competition with any estimate of the probabilities of spirit life—except in so far as some of those estimates will be satisfied with nothing less than eternity as the duration of the conditions they predict. The theory of Re-incarnation contemplates, with the progress of ages, so great an advance and improvement in the type of humanity, both as regards earthly body and soul consciousness, that it would certainly shrink from supposing that any human being of an imperfect type should be doomed to preserve to all eternity any single personality which would perpetuate its imperfections. But that theory, let it always be remembered, is in no hurry to obliterate personalities. The spiritual existence following the release of the soul from any particular body may be prolonged, if the experiences of life in that body have been of a

peculiarly vivid and inspiring character, for prodigious periods. But the contention of esoteric philosophy is that finite causes must have finite effects. The earthly experience of any human being between birth and death is an accumulation of finite causes, summed up within the experience, the emotions, the thoughts of the life in question. Grant those subjective energies any range of amplification we please, a time will come, according to the doctrine I am now describing, when they are all distilled as it were into the essence of life. The soul has then absorbed into its permanent or truly spiritual nature all the capacities of emotion and knowledge, which its last life invested it with. It is once more a colourless, pure centre of abstract consciousness, and in that capacity, under the affinities of its nature, it once again seeks a vehicle for the activity of its latent capacities. It finds that vehicle — not consciously, but under the operation of a comprehensive natural law, just as the appropriate molecules of matter from the atmosphere are drawn into the composition of a plant—in a newly developing human form.

So far we have just a bare outline of the theory of Re-incarnation. We start with a soul in physical life—we follow it through the experiences of life which develope all those innumerable memories and affections and associations of thought which make up the person or personality in question (a something quite distinct, of course, from the body which is its vehicle). We perceive that personality proceeding next to enjoy a spiritual existence (for periods enormously outrunning the span of physical life), and then we find it

returning to a new earth life to gather in fresh experience, and develope fresh capacity for knowledge, and perhaps to make that all-important moral progress which can only be accomplished in the midst of the temptations, the struggles, and the internal victories of the physical plane.

But to understand the doctrine aright, it is above all things necessary to keep in view the law under which the soul, at the expiration of its spiritual rest, is drawn back into earth life. That law is known to Oriental philosophy as the law of Karma, and it is the essential complement of the doctrine of Re-incarnation. The bodily form to which the soul is drawn back is not selected at random—as in a certain sense the rain drops may be said to fall at random on the shore or the sea, on the desert or the fruitful plain. Governed by the all-sufficient discernment of Nature, the soul ripe for Re-incarnation finds its expression in a body which affords it the exact conditions of life which Karma—in this sense its desert—requires. The circumstances of life to which that body introduces its tenant, the destiny of happiness or suffering which its leading characteristics provide for, its intellectual capacities as an instrument on which the soul can play, are all determined (with an infinite variety of other conditions) by the Karma of the re-incarnating soul, or, to use what is, perhaps, a more scientific expression, of the re-incarnating Ego. No one need here for an instant be embarrassed by the familiar phenomena in human life of what is called heredity. Physical forms are transmitted on the plane of physical evolution from father to son with sometimes

remarkable resemblances; in such cases heredity is not the cause, but the concomitant of the attributes manifested by the son. His independent soul Karma has required such a vehicle as the man who becomes his father was physically qualified to engender. Many illustrations might be taken from Nature to show her various forces and powers playing in this way into one another's hands. Assimilation is the law by which Re-incarnation and Karma reconcile themselves with heredity.

Now this statement of the view really held by adherents of Oriental philosophy in respect to Re-incarnation should go far to answer by anticipation many objections to the idea often urged by people who acquire an inaccurate or incomplete notion of the teaching. The suggestion, for instance, that we cannot have passed former lives on earth because we do not remember them, might be an objection to some totally different theory, but it is no objection to the theory I have reviewed. For manifestly, by the hypothesis, it is impossible for any one returning to the incarnate life to remember that which he must wear out, completely distil, and forget, as regards its specific details, before he is qualified to re-incarnate. If it is alleged, as has, indeed, sometimes been alleged with great force in reference to particular cases, that some rarely organised persons have maintained recollections of a former life of no very remote period, all we need point out is that few of the standing rules of natural growth in any of the kingdoms of Nature are beyond the reach of occasional abnormal exceptions. It is the rule, for instance, that men of our race live to about

threescore years and ten, but there are many examples in which that rule is violated, and we may conceive in the same way that people sometimes die prematurely from the spiritual planes of Nature and return before their time to the earth life. Nor in venturing that guess need we assume that accidents like those which terminate life abruptly sometimes amongst us, are liable to befall the released souls of the higher levels. Premature returns to earth life in the rare cases where they occur, may be due to Karmic complications too elaborate to inquire into now. The important point is that the regular course of events must necessarily clear the Ego of all specific recollections of one life before it is ready for another.

It might be desirable that this should be done in the interest of the soul's progress, if for no other reason. Life would perhaps hardly be bearable for human beings still in a humble phase of evolution, if the long and weary procession of uninteresting existences through which they had passed lay within sight behind them, before an enlightened spirituality of consciousness had shown them the ultimate possibilities of progress in future. And each life in turn would not, perhaps, be fraught with its own lessons unless these were learned separately, as it were, and one by one. But above all the forgetfulness of each life is plainly due to that provision of Nature already referred to which ensures for each of us after death the maximum fruition of all our spiritual aspirations in the corresponding and appropriate realms of consciousness. It would be unjust to the soul that it should remember, before it is exalted enough to

exercise faculties far transcending those of the present average mankind. Memories are apt to be tinged either with sad longing or regret. For a man to remember some long vanished happiness of a former incarnation would mean one of two things: either he would have been unfairly deprived of the spiritual complement of that happiness, turned out too soon from the Heaven in which it would naturally be protracted, or supposing his new conditions of physical life owing to bad Karma—*i.e.*, to evil-doing on his part in the former life—to be the painful penalty of such misdoing, he would be doubly punished if allowed the tantalising memory of what he had lost. Finally, as regards this point, though I have here been endeavouring to justify the law of Nature in question, it is not always to be expected that we can do this completely, and even if some critics remain inclined to dispute the wisdom of Nature in providing a draught of Lethe, "on slipping through from state to state," I would answer that the first thing we have to do in studying these mysteries is to find out what *is*, leaving to a more advanced period of our knowledge the task of ascertaining *why* it is.

At all events, the fact that we do not remember former incarnations, taken in conjunction with the merciful arrangement that provides us after each physical life a long and, in most cases, highly enjoyable and refreshing expansion of our existence on the spiritual planes, is no impediment whatever to the acceptance of the Re-incarnation theory, if we find it recommended to acceptance on independent grounds.

Coming now to some of those independent grounds,

I would call attention to a somewhat recondite but extremely important argument, which is this. *Ex nihilo nihil fit.* That is a rule which commands our respect as much on the spiritual as on the physical plane of Nature. Now, independently of the broad teachings of religion, there is plenty of evidence around us, for inquirers who are not too much prejudiced to avail themselves of it, to show that the human soul is a real entity even when apart from and independent of the body with which it is associated during physical life. The experiences of spiritualism afford us this evidence. In spite of all the fraud and trickery with which the practice of spiritualism is surrounded, and in spite of the insufficiency of its most genuine experiences to establish the theories which many spiritualists have hastily built up, nothing but wilful ignorance of these experiences can blind the world at large to the proof it affords of one all important fact, viz., that intelligences, formerly those of living persons on earth, do in some cases show themselves still actively functioning on another plane of nature. To take that much as established by the investigations of spiritualists at large, is like taking from astronomy nothing more than an assurance that the earth is round. It is a simple and elementary assurance—to which, of course, I am aware many people do not help themselves—as indeed there are other persons, or some among these, who do not help themselves to the demonstrations of the earth's rotundity. There will come a time when disbelievers in the occasional reality of spiritualistic phenomena—persons who refer *all* such alleged

occurrences to fraud and delusion—will be to a future generation what the few surviving "flat earth men" are to our own. But this is not an opportunity which I need take for the full discussion of that matter with detailed reference to trustworthy observations and records. The argument I am concerned with is merely one among many converging on the doctrine of Re-incarnation, and is specially addressed to persons who recognise—either on religious grounds, or from the experience of spiritualism—that the human soul is an entity apart from the body.

Now, where has that soul come from when we first begin to see it flutter in a young child? It is a something independent of the body, therefore it has had an origin independently of the body. It has not come out of nothingness—it is essentially of the nature of the spiritual plane to which we find abundant reason for feeling sure it will flit off whenever the body is destroyed. Is it not obvious, therefore, that it has emerged from the spiritual plane —coming into manifestation on the physical? "But," someone may urge, "what we see in the young child in the nature of a soul is something very different from that which we can follow to a certain extent on its departure from the worn-out body of a person dying in mature life. It may be that we have to recognise it as coming into the child's body, an entity already, but it looks very much like a freshly created entity. It is merely a centre of potentialities, a consciousness that may be taught, may acquire experience, may become a man, clearly *not* the trained soul of a man from the first moment of birth." Let

me show how that objection is met. Firstly, for the purpose of the argument I am setting forth, all that matters is to establish that the soul is a continuous entity which was in existence before and remains in existence after the physical life. That which we see before us, in the physical life of a man, is a bead, so to speak, upon the thread of life. When we fully appreciate the fact that the thread stretches into darkness in both directions, we realise that the process of birth is, at all events, the coming of a soul into incarnation, an emergence into physical manifestation from a spiritual state; and when we once realise *that*, we are, at all events, a very long way on the road towards recognising the doctrine of Re-incarnation in its scientific completeness. But secondly, the vacuity of the child's mind, the emptiness of the soul on coming into incarnation, is exactly the condition of things which, on the doctrine of Re-incarnation, as I have explained it, we are bound to expect. All its specific states of consciousness, its definite possessions of knowledge and stores of emotional experience, have vibrated to their utmost capacity for vibration on the spiritual plane of being before Re-incarnation claimed it for earth once more. As a re-incarnating entity it can only be a centre of potentialities, a focus of consciousness replete with the power of acquiring knowledge and the power of developing thought, as soon as the new instrument, the new body, with which it is thrown into relations by its Karmic affinities, shall have grown into perfection sufficiently to give it free play.

To the mind's eye of the occult student the cycles of

human progress which are worked out in this way are as intelligible, as coherent, and as obviously fulfilling the natural idea in view, as the cycles of destiny governing the drops of water that fall on the earth from clouds—that flow over the land in streams and are lost for a time in the ocean, to be redrawn back into the atmosphere at last and so fall again on the earth—re-incarnated in the new raindrops of to-day after centuries or millenniums of existence, perhaps, in other conditions of nature.

But passing on now from subtle considerations which guide us to the discovery of the principle of Re-incarnation, let us consider for a moment the immensely powerful argument for its acceptance embodied in the condition of the world around us. On the hypothesis that each physical life is the only earth life of each soul in actual incarnation, could any cruelty and injustice be worse than that which the inequalities of life would exhibit in operation? We have not merely to consider the stupendous inequalities in the lot of the rich and the poor; we see these inequalities emphasied by all imaginable differences of health and physique, and by the terrible differences of moral surrounding. We see some members of the human family strong and robust, and gifted with brilliant faculties of intelligence; prosperous, carefully guarded in youth from evil, brought up in innocence and purity, drifted, as naturally as a river flows, into lives of benevolence and usefulness, and passing on into whatever spiritual existence may await them beyond the grave, with every advantage which the utmost development of

their loftier aspirations may bestow. Others we see crippled, deformed, miserable; steeped in poverty and, perhaps, painful disease; nurtured in crime, and fed on evil of every sort; living a curse to their companions, and destroyed at last perhaps by the human justice they have offended. With unfeeling foolishness some unintelligent defenders of the one life hypothesis will sometimes attempt to argue that beneath all the apparent inequalities of life, the relief the miserable and suffering may sometimes experience, during transitory moments, when their hard lot may be a little ameliorated, is so great that it may be set against their habitual misery, with the result that all may roughly be said to have the same share of happiness on the whole. Words would fail me if I sought to characterise the grovelling and ignoble nonsense of this theory. Earthly happiness varies with different people in the proportion in which lakes vary in size; in which streams vary in length. There are boundless differences in the well-being of different men and women on earth, and these differences are of a nature that could not be equalised on the spiritual plane of life, in the way sometimes suggested. For if the poor and suffering on earth were translated to a Heaven superior to that provided for those who had been happy in earth life, that would simply be translating the injustice of Providence to the realms in which its justice ought to be especially operative. The persons wronged would then be those who had been, without reference to themselves, cheated of a blissful eternity at the poor price of transitory delusions here.

It is only by realising the long succession of earth lives which make up the individuality of each soul that we can discern order, harmony, and justice reigning in the destinies of man. By this interpretation of the phenomena of life we not alone restore justice to the government of the world, but discover the working of natural law in human evolution to be precise and unerring in its exactitude. The good and bad deeds of men are of a mixed and complex character. Some are spiritual in their colouring; others appertain to the earth life. These last find their fruition in the earth life when the soul returns to it. They in their boundless variety account for the boundless diversities of human lot. Such diversities are not the sport of brainless chance—the outcome of what by an absurd phrase—the expression of the world's ignorance in these matters—is sometimes called the accident of birth. There is no "accident" in the supreme act of Divine justice guiding human evolution. With the same inevitable certainty that force on the physical plane governs the combination of the molecules of matter—though the bewildering complexity of even that aspect of force dazzles the mind as we attempt to follow out its workings—so does the far more exalted force which gives effect to the primary laws of nature in the moral world operate with an exactitude that no chemical reactions can eclipse. The outward circumstances of each life into which we may be born are the mathematical result of the causes we have ourselves set in motion in former lives. The causes we are setting in motion now—the effort of our own free will within the narrowest hedge

of circumstances we can possibly imagine as confining it—will be the all-powerful, determining influence in the creation of the conditions under which we shall live on earth next time.

And these conditions, let it be remembered, are not merely a response to the moral requirements of the situation; meting out happiness or suffering in accordance with the karma of the individual Ego at the time of each re-incarnation, they are the expression, as well, of his intellectual and psychic progress. No human effort is wasted and resultless in the regions of such progress any more than in those of the great moral law. If a man labours, for example, during a whole life at some branch of science, at some art, or at some special department of study, the *specific* acquirements he may possess at the end of his life are not passed over, it is true, to the next life exactly as he lays them down. They would probably be of very little use to him in the altered circumstances of the world when he comes back, if they were. But they are thrown into manifestation again at his re-incarnation in the appropriate form of highly developed aptitudes for the line of acquisition he has formerly been concerned with. Do we not observe, for instance, in such a very earthly matter as the power of learning languages, great gulfs of difference between the aptitudes of different people? Some will learn a dozen languages with less difficulty than others will learn one. "They have an inborn faculty," says the careless commonplace critic, content as usual to libel nature by setting down to the accident of birth the symmetrical outcome of exqui-

sitely adjusted law. So with the glaring examples of re-incarnating acquirements presented to us by the case of people who show extraordinary genius for music at an age when less "gifted" contemporaries can barely distinguish a tune. There is no gift in the matter—there is acquirement faithfully preserved in the karmic affinities of the Ego and in its true individuality.

Surely no one who appreciates, even imperfectly, the fulness with which the doctrines of Re-incarnation satisfy the problem of life and human evolution, will be surprised to remember that it has always, as far as philosophical history can look back, been accepted as the keynote of spiritual science by the vast majority of mankind. Buddhism finds it established as the corner-stone of Brahminical teaching and takes it over as a matter of course. This is a consideration which should not be too lightly put aside by European thinkers over prone to assume that their own age,—which has been glorified by an extraordinary advance in knowledge and intelligence relating to the physical plane of nature,—is entitled to a monopoly of our intellectual respect. Modern scholarship which is only now beginning to unlock the mysteries of Sanscrit literature may well stand aghast at its discoveries. Not for the moment to raise any question about the real age of this literature; it is established at all events, that far back behind the beginning of European philosophy, there lies a complete literature exhibiting profound sagacity and subtlety on the part of its authors in regard to the problems of the mind and the speculations of metaphysics. Take the Bhagavat

Gita for example—at all events an existent literary work—or, as occultists and native Indian scholars maintain already a work of profound antiquity when Britain was a savage island, and the race destined to commence its civilisation, only beginning its own struggle for existence among the warring tribes of Italy. Now that the boundlessly elaborate meaning of the allegory embodied in that poem is shining forth for us by degrees, it is plain at least that its authors were deep students already of the mysteries of human life and death, that they were filled with spiritual aspiration of the purest kind, that their conception of the relations between the finite embodied and the infinite consciousness have left nothing for later theologians to refine upon. And the stupendous epic in which the Bhagavat Gita is embedded, is no less remarkable for the finished delicacy of its poetic feeling, for the loftiness of its ethical code, for the intricate abundance of its symbology, for all the characteristics which mark the literary work of a highly cultured race. Europeans are children in metaphysical speculation beside the Hindus of old, and if we could imagine an impartial inquirer from another sphere, acquainted with the intellectual history of these two races, and informed that the Hindus of old believed in Re-incarnation while the modern Europeans rejected it, he would certainly smile at the anti-climax involved in such a statement. Modern theology should show some credentials more effective than its ignorance of ancient records, and its obliquity of vision in regard to the bearings of its own sacred writings—to which I will come directly—before it can justly claim to impose its

own negations on the minds of people who are now beginning to look around them in an inquiring spirit.

I have just said that Buddhism took over the Brahminical doctrines of Re-incarnation as a matter of course—and this is the case. But Buddha's teaching on all vital points connected with spiritual growth has been so wildly caricatured and distorted by commentators who have approached it without any interior illumination as to its meaning, that I may fairly ask the reader's attention for a little while to the true significance on this subject of the Buddhist scriptures.

The sacred books of Eastern religions are written, for the most part, in a style which is rather a disguise than an expression of the meaning they are intended to convey. Figurative phraseology and intricate symbols are, at all events, so little in harmony with Western habits of thought, that such vehicles of philosophic teaching may easily be mistaken by readers accustomed to a more lucid treatment of religious doctrine, for the wild conceptions of a crude superstition. And even when simpler topics than the avatars of Vishnu are under treatment, the the same habits of speech which veil cosmological theories with narratives of Divine incarnations in animal forms, lead Oriental writers to describe even such events as Buddha's death and cremation in the circuitous language of symbols, rather than in plain and matter-of-fact prose. Thus, in one of the Pali "Sutta's," or Buddhist Gospels — the Maha-parinibbana "Sutta"—for the English version of which we are indebted to the admirable scholarship of Dr.

Rhys David, we are told how "the Blessed One" died from an illness which supervened upon a meal of "dried boar's flesh," served to him by a certain Kunda, a worker in metals at Pava. A prosaic interpretation of this narrative has passed into all epitomes of Buddhism current in European literature. Mr. Alabaster, for instance, in his "Wheel of the Law," calmly quotes a missionary authority for the statement that Buddha died "of dysentery caused by eating roast pork;" and even Dr. Rhys David himself gives further currency of this ludicrous misconception in his well-known treatise on Buddhism, published by the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge. One might have supposed that students of the subject, even without a clue to the meaning of the "dried boar's flesh" in the legend, would have been startled at the notion of finding the simple diet of so confirmed a vegetarian as we must suppose any Indian religious teacher to have been, invaded by so gross an article of food as roast pork. But one after another European writers on Buddhism are content to echo this absurdly materialistic version of the figurative Eastern story. If they had sought to check their interpretation of it by reference to living exponents of the Buddhist faith, they would have fallen easily on the track of the right explanation. The boar is an Oriental symbol for esoteric knowledge, derived from the boar avatar, of Vishnu—that in which the incarnate god lifted up the earth out of the waters in which it was immersed. In other words, according to Wilson's translation of the Vishnu

Purana, the avatar in question "allegorically represents the extrication of the world from a deluge of iniquity by the rites of religion." In the Ramayana we may find another version of the same allegory, Brahma in this case assuming the form of a boar to hoist up the earth out of primal chaos. Boar's flesh thus comes to symbolise the secret doctrine of the esoteric initiates, those who possessed the inner science of Brahma, and dried boar's flesh would be such esoteric wisdom prepared for food; reduced, that is to say, to a form in which it could be taught to the multitude. It was through the too daring use of such dried boar's flesh—through his attempt to bring the multitude, to a greater degree than they were prepared for it, within the area of esoteric teaching—that Buddha died; that is to say, that his great enterprise came to an end. That is the meaning of the story so painfully debased by European writers; and that meaning once assigned to its central idea, will be followed through many variations in the details of the Pali narrative, even as translated by Dr. Rhys David, apparently without any suspicion on his part of its true intention. Buddha, for instance, before the feast, directs that he only should be served with the dried boar's flesh, while "the Brethren," his disciples, are to be served with cakes and rice; also, that whatever dried boar's flesh may be left over after he has done, shall be buried, for none but himself, he says, can digest such food—a strange remark for him to have made, according to the materialistic interpretation of the story, which represents him as *not*

able to digest such food. The meaning of the injunction plainly is that after him none of the Brethren shall attempt the task of giving out esoteric secrets to the world.

Buddhist doctrine has fared but little better than Buddhist gospel narrative in the hands of the distinguished scholars who have rendered the Western world the service of *translating* a good many of the writings in which it is enshrined, without conferring on us the additional benefit of elucidating the spiritual science which that doctrine cautiously sets forth. Indeed, the plain fact of the matter is that two leading ideas concerning Buddhist doctrine have been presented to the world by the principal writers on the subject, and that both these ideas are on a level with the roast pork theory. These ideas are that Buddhism does not recognise any future conscious life of the individual man beyond the grave, and that in exhorting us to tread the path which leads to Nirvana, it proceeds on the ultra-pessimistic view that all conscious life must be misery; so that the only wise course for us to pursue is to court its extinction in profound and dreamless slumber, in utter oblivion of all things, in that Nirvana which we are told to regard as identical with absolute annihilation. Spence Hardy, Max Muller, Rhys David, Alabaster, Bigandet, Bournouf, and others, might be shown by reference to unequivocal passages to entertain this idea, perhaps most grotesquely emphasised by an American caricaturist of Buddhist doctrine, Dr. S. H. Kellogg. The German commentator on Buddhism, Dr. Oldenberg, is honourably

distinguished by combatting the theory that the Buddhist Nirvana is equivalent to annihilation; but though he argues the question in an elaborate and painstaking way, he does not put his finger on available passages in Buddhist scriptures that would settle the matter decisively. Barth, also, in his "Religions of India," "takes leave to doubt" whether the intention of Buddhism was to preach that there is no survival of the individual consciousness from one incarnate existence to another, but even he thinks that "this vaguely apprehended and feebly postulated *ego*" cannot be compared with the "simple and imperishable soul of the Sankhya philosophy." And as a whole, European Buddhistic exegesis may be held to rest chiefly on the two ideas above referred to —no future life, and annihilation in Nirvana.

Now, the reconciliation of these two commanding misapprehensions has given critics of Buddhism no little trouble. For, on the face of things, if man's consciousness is merely a matter of this life, he need not go through the self denial and privations of the candidate for Nirvana to accomplish the annihilation that must await him anyhow. And again, Buddhist teaching is saturated with references to Karma, which, as the sum total of merit and demerit that determines the conditions of a man's next rebirth, seems to pre-suppose the persistence of the soul consciousness which those conditions are apparently designed either to reward or punish. But the embarrassment is got over by help of the theory—for the ingenuity of which Dr. Rhys David appears to deserve the credit—that Karma does not follow an individual soul from

one incarnation to the other, but causes the birth of an entirely new individuality, which becomes the independent heir, for good or evil, of its predecessor. The motive which each person thus has for making a sacrifice of himself to achieve Nirvana, is altogether altruistic. His Karma being extinguished in the total annihilation of Nirvana, no other being is born along that line of influence to suffer the pain and sorrow of existence. The inventor of this idea admits that the motive does not seem a strong one, as a fundamental rule of human conduct; but its insufficiency does not present itself to his mind as a ground for distrusting the former conclusions out of which it grows.

All this misdirection of thought appears to have been started by forgetfulness on the part of the first interpreters of Buddhism to the modern West—Burnouf and Spence Hardy especially—of the broad fact that Buddha was a religious reformer rather than a person who made any profession of re-codifying the whole body of religious truth from A to Z. Roughly speaking, he takes the entire block of Hindu faith, or Brahminical philosophy, for granted, and builds upon that, the higher teaching he has to offer from his store of "dried boar's flesh"—of esoteric wisdom, adapted to the understanding of the multitude. "The simple and imperishable soul of Sankhya philosophy" is the property of the Buddhist, just as fully as of the earlier Brahmin or later Hindu. Current religious instruction before Buddha took up his task had familiarised the people with the idea that good men went to Heaven and bad men to hell. But Buddha

did not put that fundamental idea in the forefront of his teaching. It was unnecessary to do so. Indian theology was already stocked to overflowing with ideas concerning the life after death in the numerous heavens and hells which its doctrines recognised. And it was also fully possessed with the conviction that in each case, after the appropriate period of spiritual enjoyment or suffering, the soul would return to earthly incarnation. Buddha's reform started from these assumptions. The fact is acknowledged by modern writers, but not its force. Professor Sir Monier Williams, in his treatise on Hinduism for the S. P. C. K., says: "About five centuries before our era, the reformer Buddha appeared, and about contemporaneously with him various Brahman sages, stimulated by his example and perhaps by that of others who preceded him, thought out what are called the orthodox systems of Hindu philosophy." What did such thought amount to? Sir Monier Williams sums it up as including these articles of faith, amongst others: The eternity of the soul, prospectively and retrospectively; the periodical removal of the soul to places of reward or punishment; the subsequent return of the soul to corporeal existence. Buddha, from the standpoint of these conceptions, addressed himself especially to the task of showing men that, *beyond* spiritual conditions and rebirth, there lay possibilities of human evolution which, in their transcendent excellence, rendered the familiar alternations of corporeal and ethereal existence relatively unworthy of acceptance. A state of blessedness which would come to a definite end was, for his exalted perceptions, no state of

blessedness at all. Human life on earth, though such as men might esteem as happy, was subject to manifold perils and to decay. It was a state for the wise man to avoid by making the stupendous effort that would emancipate his desires from all the objects of sense, and thus cut off the attractions that would otherwise inevitably bring him back again, after a period of heavenly existence, to physical incarnation.

Buddha's sermons and lessons became thus almost altogether concerned with the contemplation of that transcendent spiritual condition described by the term Nirvana, but never defined with any degree of precision, simply because its attributes were by the hypothesis insusceptible of exact definition in terms of the physical intellect. That which men in the flesh can imagine as attractive must necessarily be tainted with the limitations and sense of separateness inherent in the incarnate imagination. Nirvana could only be described by negatives which ruled it off from any state of being which individual aspirations for happiness would be capable of picturing in the mind. And while the attempt would have been fruitless, it was, at the same time, unnecessary for Buddha to define Nirvana, because the idea to be dealt with was no novelty for Hindu audiences. Referring again to Sir Monier Williams' epitome of Hindu faith, we find that system of thought, quite independently of Buddha's teaching to recognise that the supreme state of bliss involved an escape from all sense of individual personality—complete absorption into the Supreme and only existing Being who is wholly unfettered by action, without qualities of any kind—

pure life, pure thought, pure joy. No one, from the physical plain of existence, can *understand* such a condition; but this impossibility does not justify us in the absurdity of pretending on that account to understand it as equivalent to annihilation. We are not even called upon, for the purposes of the present argument to consider whether or not, Buddha himself understood it. It is enough to realise that undeniably Buddha treated it as a state of being which was supremely desirable by reason of its exaltation in the scale of Nature above all other states of being, and that in doing this he had no antagonistic opinion on that point to combat. Brahmanism already recognised Nirvana, under various names—the ultimate absorption into the Supreme—as the most glorious goal to which humanity could turn. The failure of modern Western thinkers to recognise the splendour of such an ideal is plainly due to our deeper immersion in material habits of thought, in which the sense of separateness that Oriental philosophy, at all events, already perceived to be a defect of the incarnate imagination, has been elevated into the *sine qua non* of all conditions to be desired. We may be able to conceive a high degree of spiritualisation in consciousness. We may contemplate an existence as free from all lower passions, and yet attractive; but we find it hard to realise that ultimate exemption from the fetters of Self, which finds its most glorious fulfilment in complete identification with the universal consciousness. However, without professing to realise this, we may, at any rate, intellectually comprehend that men of abnormal spirituality, who have declared

such a desire, are not on that account declaring a desire for extinction of consciousness. For them, at all events, the higher kind of consciousness embraces the lower, supersedes it, and triumphs over it.

If Buddha thus said nothing to break down existing beliefs in the normal progress of man through successive rebirths, intercalated with successive periods of heavenly enjoyment, and if Hindu philosophy had already acknowledged that the highest state of human evolution would carry men into Nirvana, what was it that he did teach? The answer will be readily substantiated by the sermons and teachings of Buddhist literature, as already translated for Western reference, and will in half-a-dozen words afford the clue to the comprehension of his whole position. He taught the way to Nirvana. This teaching had previously been esoteric. He sought to show all men the way to Nirvana, and the rules of life with which almost all his recorded utterances are thus concerned, did not constitute an every-day code of morality for ordinary people. They were the prescriptions laid down for those whose spiritual aspirations were already so highly awakened that they desired Nirvana ; or, at all events, were so near the threshold of that desire that a little stimulus to their spirituality might suffice to lead them across it. The proof of this view will be supplied most readily, not by quoting at length from the language which Buddha addressed to his monks, to "the brethren," who were avowedly candidates for Nirvana, but by showing that all the while he recognised a totally different sort of morality for men who were

still in the fetters of separateness, and whose highest aspirations were for individual spiritual happiness in Heaven. Let us take, for example, the following passage from the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, as translated by Dr. Rhys David (Sacred Books of the East, vol. xi., page 16), by no means the only one of the kind that could be produced, but sufficient in itself for our present purpose. The sentences quoted constitute a short address to certain "householders," followers of his teaching, but persons who were not engaged in the arduous struggles of arhatship,—that candidature for Nirvana of which we have already spoken. Here there are no ambiguous metaphysics to lead astray the minds of later readers out of sympathy with the subtle selflessness of Nirvanic aspirations. The passage runs :—

Then the Blessed one addressed the Pataligama disciples, and said :—Fivefold, oh householders, is the loss of the wrong-doer through his want of rectitude. In the first place, the wrong-doer, devoid of rectitude, falls into great poverty through sloth; in the next place, his evil repute gets noised abroad; thirdly, whatever society he enters, whether of Brahmans, nobles, heads of houses, or Samanas, he enters shyly and confused; fourthly, he is full of anxiety when he dies; and lastly, on the dissolution of the body after death, he is reborn into some unhappy state of suffering or woe.

Fivefold, oh householders, is the gain of the well-doer through the practice of rectitude. In the first place, the well-doer, strong in rectitude, acquires great wealth through his industry ; in the next place, good reports of him are spread abroad; thirdly, whatever society he enters, whether of nobles, Brahmans, heads of houses, or members of the order, he enters confident and self-possessed; fourthly, he dies without anxiety; and lastly, on the dissolution of the body after death, he is reborn into some happy state in Heaven.

Certainly it might be argued that this address does not contain a complete code of even worldly morality, but if the question were to judge the ethics of Buddha's teaching we may find plenty of other material to work with. The very simplicity of the appeal here made to selfishness as a motive for well doing gives the present quotation its value, as showing how fully Buddha recognised the persistent existence of the soul as an individual entity after the death of the body in regard to the great bulk of mankind at large, in regard to whom there might be no question of treading the path to Nirvana.

Coming now to the teaching of Christianity—in reference to which the Western world has so long denied itself the advantage of comparative theosophy—we find the later faith really taking Re-incarnation for granted, just as this was done by the earlier Buddhist reform.

One of the most striking of the passages in the New Testament that recognises Re-incarnation is that in which Jesus refers to the prophecy in Malachi that Elijah or Elias would return to earth. The prophecy itself occurs in the last verse but one of the Old Testament, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." Jesus refers to this, according to the eleventh chapter of Matthew, as follows: "But what went ye out for to see? a man clothed in soft raiment? . . . But wherefore went ye out? To see a prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall

prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist . . . And if ye are willing to receive it this is Elijah which is to come. He that hath ears to hear let him hear."

The same idea is expressed in the ninth chapter of Mark, as follows:—"And they asked him, saying, The scribes say that Elijah must first come. And he said unto them, Elijah indeed cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how is it written of the Son of Man, that he should suffer many things and be set at nought? But I say unto you, that Elijah is come, and they have also done unto him whatsoever they listed, even as it is written of him."

Again, in the seventeenth chapter of Matthew, we read:—"And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must come first? And he answered and said, Elijah indeed cometh, and shall restore all things; but I say unto you that Elijah is come already and they knew him not, but did unto him whatsoever they listed. Even so shall the Son of Man also suffer of them Then understood the disciples that he spake to them of John the Baptist."

In what sense these words can be taken except as meaning that John the Baptist was a Re-incarnation of Elijah it would be difficult to say. The remarkable words above quoted, "He that hath ears let him hear," show that the information was given out rather for the use of the enlightened than of the common multitude, who might be expected not to understand its full significance; but it is evident, from another passage, that Jesus assumed a widespread knowledge around

Him of the principle of Re-incarnation, for in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew we read:—

"Now, when Jesus came into the parts of Cæsarea Philippi he asked his disciples, saying: Who do men say that the Son of Man is? And they said, Some say John the Baptist; some Elijah; and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

Jesus then goes on to repudiate any such specific individuality for Himself, but none the less does the conversation show that the idea of Re-incarnation was a familiar and accepted principle with those whom he addressed; while far from rebuking that belief as a principle, He explicitly affirms it in the case of John the Baptist.

That the principle in question was a generally accepted belief among the disciples is plainly shown by the passage in John ix., relating to the man who was blind from his birth:

"And as he passed by he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

It would be a digression if I went into an analysis of the answer which Jesus here gives—"Neither did this man sin nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." The value of the passage for my present purpose lies in the significance of the question. The man had been blind from his birth, and yet the disciples asked did *he* earn that affliction by sin? The question was either nonsense, or it meant did he *sin in his last incarnation?*

The truth appears to be that it is only among the modern generations of the Western world, when the inner science of spiritual nature has been so deeply obscured by the acquirements of material civilisation, that people have lost touch with the all-important tenet that true Theosophists, students of Divine Wisdom, are at last struggling to restore. It has been forgotten so long that people who have constructed a fanciful scheme of human destinies for themselves, are sometimes in the present day inconquerably loth to welcome back the truth. They find it uncomfortable, and regard that as a sufficient ground for its rejection, unaware of the fact that the other alternative—the perpetuation *ad infinitum* of the miserable personalities that so many men are doomed to bear, or, as I should rather say, have built up for themselves by the sad misuse they have hitherto made of their opportunities —would be for the majority of the present race the most profoundly uncomfortable fate that could well be imagined. And it is but a short-sighted aspiration, indeed, which would lead even the most lofty-minded and cultivated members of that race to prefer the infinite perpetuation of their own personalities—to the infinite improvement of these which the principles of Re-incarnation hold out to them. I am not unaware of the hypothesis which some thinkers may vaguely cling to, according to which they hope for improvement along some unknown channels of progress in spiritual realms external to the life of this planet. Such unphilosophical expectations ought not to be maintained by a generation for whom it has been clearly shown—if they have eyes to see—that the

spiritual planes of Nature are closely linked with that on which humanity is manifest in the flesh.

Such hopes ought not to be the refuge of those whose experience, far transcending that of the common-place world at large, render them familiar with the idea just expressed. The simple creed that we shall go to Heaven if we are good, and there be taken care of and helped along somehow, may be a good working creed for men in an early stage of spiritual development who are drifting along from one unintelligent life to another, remitting to later opportunities the commencement of their higher evolution. But it is not a creed that can long suffice for people who begin to realise the intimate manner in which various states of existence in this highly complicated world around us are blended together. It converts the visible world—for one thing, as I have said—into a seething cauldron of injustice, and further than this, it degrades it into playing an almost useless part in the evolution of humanity—for by the hypothesis I speak of all that would be really important in that evolution would have to be performed elsewhere. We need not, however, disinherit the earth and deny it the fruition of its own suffering. As far as the human family, as manifested on earth, has already advanced beyond the condition of the lowliest savages—and further—will that family advance in the future. To question or doubt this would be an insult to the majesty of the Divine principle in Nature, with which most surely the human family must be in close relations. As we grow in moral stature and wisdom and in all the

higher capacities, as we work our way on through the sometimes painful schooling of physical life, our souls grow gradually fitted to inhabit the physical organisms of the future which the progressive forces of the material plane will evolve for us as we successively return to them. We shall all of us see the world again, under those greatly ameliorated conditions, and looking back then to this period will smile to think that it was ever possible for men to regard the present conditions of this now current race as a fitting platform from which to part company for ever from the sphere of incarnate experience.

So far I have dealt with a mass of reflections bearing on the *doctrine* of Re-incarnation. The subject, however, may be handled in a different way as soon as we get touch with the thought that at certain stages of advancement in occult study people whose faculties have undergone adequate development are enabled to recover a full and complete recollection of their former lives—a recollection far more complete indeed than that which enables ordinary people in mature life to remember the events of their youth. Clairvoyant faculties, indeed, that are susceptible of exercise on the spiritual plane as well as on the astral —of which more anon—will enable their possessor to do more than remember his own past lives. It will enable him to get into magnetic relations with the imperishable records of other lives as well, and to track back the previous existences on the physical plane of almost anyone with whom he may be acquainted. And in the same way the adepts of occult science know by their own personal observation, not

merely that Re-incarnation is the law of human evolution, but the exact way in which it works. I should be arranging my explanations, however, in the wrong order if I tried to elucidate the science of the matter before treating fully of the "higher self" of man, which is the true Re-incarnating Ego. So this department of the subject must be picked up again a little later on.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HIGHER SELF.

A FUNDAMENTAL error concerning the constitution of the human soul, which crude conceptions of spiritual science have imposed on modern thinking, has been that which leads many people to regard it as a simple entity, complete in itself, self-contained on the plane of Nature to which it belongs, as the incarnate man is, or appears to be, self-contained in reference to the other similar beings around him. People think of the soul—when so far acquiescent in conventional religious teaching as to put trust in the theory that there is such a thing—much as they think of the Djin, of the old fairy tale, imprisoned for a time in the bottle found by the fisherman of the Arabian Nights. Death is a process of letting it out of the bottle, and then it proceeds to live according to its nature—a complete entity set free, which was formerly imprisoned. But the more we study Nature, even on the physical plane, the more complex do we find her phenomena to be, and the same rule holds good on the higher planes of natural activity. Conceptions we form of super-physical processes, expand *ad infinitum* the longer the mind dwells on their wider significance. The first notion we may put together of any such process can rarely, indeed, in the beginning bear any closer

resemblance to the truth than the notion we form of a solid by examining one of its sides. The mind may ultimately be enabled to hold all the attributes of the solid in its grasp, but that achievement is only possible as the consequence of a large development of its first impressions. It may be unnecessary to discard those impressions. From the later standpoint they will seem to have afforded a very crude idea of the truth, but they will be valued still as having led up to more complex conceptions, which for that matter may in their turn be developed still further as our capacity for knowledge is expanded.

In this way the picture of the soul's growth through Re-incarnation under the guidance of the Karmic law, which is presented to the mind by the first broad analysis of esoteric teaching, is to begin with a stupendous advance on the happy-go-lucky theory of soul creation. Even the view of life which accepts the soul as a primary fact without seeking or offering any explanation of its genesis, which treats it as a new creation originating with the birth of each child, is no doubt an advance upon the blank unconsciousness of anything connected with life beyond sensation, which we may reasonably impute to the animal kingdom, but which even the savage feebly endeavours to rebel against when he constructs a vision of the happy hunting grounds, though modern materialism endeavours to cultivate the gloomy doctrine with much intellectual ingenuity. In doing this, by the bye, he is pleasantly unaware of the fact that he is illustrating in his own person one of the principles brought to light by esoteric science—that the culmination of the

physical intellect is the nadir point of spiritual enlightenment. He will eventually appreciate the further principle that in the progress of the cycle evolution will go on, even after that point is reached, illuminating the physical intellect with an influx of spiritual perception without requiring it to forfeit any portion of its own independent conquest. But, to go back to our comparison, just as blank ignorance of soul is well superseded by the illuminating conjecture which recognises it as at all events a something, even if created *ex nihilo;* and just as that idea in turn is enormously elevated in the philosophical scale when harmonised with the principles of Re-incarnation and Karma, so may the first conception of spiritual evolution, as proceeding along that path, be developed by a fuller examination of the highly complicated constitution of the soul, and of the methods by which the experiences, opportunities, and sufferings of each incarnate existence are made to react on the permanent immortal consciousness, and translated into so much cosmic growth.

In approaching such problems we may be coming into the neighbourhood of the boundaries beyond which precise language is inapplicable to spiritual research. In handling such topics it is well to remember that any attempt to pass beyond those boundaries will necessarily be futile. The attributes and modes of consciousness of Universal Spirit, for example, are beyond the reach of language because they are beyond the reach of thought functioning in a physical brain; and metaphysicians, who sometimes attempt, by the construction of

quaint phrases, to suggest the belief that their thoughts have outrun in subtlety the resources of expression, are probably, in most cases, as little qualified to apprehend, as their phrases to convey, ideas that are really entitled to be so described. But, on the other hand, as long as we find it possible to be precise, it is a fatal mistake for the student of spiritual science to be content with vague suggestions. Cloudiness of language is not depth of thought. Obscure, allegorical forms of expression are not superior, in occult dignity, to definite and exact phraseology—though in the past such forms have often been pardonable, either because the writers who used them were pledged to partial secrecy or precluded by the bigotry of their age from being quite explicit. That which we have now to aim at—now that spiritual research has been endowed with advantages it never possessed in the days of the alchemists and mediæval mystics —is the exact comprehension, as far as that is possible, of mysteries till now cloaked in an almost impenetrable obscurity. Of course, as we extend our conquests there will always at their confines be a region of thought and conjecture which baffles exposition. But it is of the utmost importance that we should push precision as far as possible, and with care and patience it will be found practicable to analyse some of the processes by which soul evolution is accomplished and realise them, unseen and intangible as they may be, even as it is possible to realise some of the intricate laws governing the no less intangible

and unseen molecules of matter in their chemical reactions.

The law which we have to bring under a higher microscopic power than that applied to it hitherto, is the law regulating the alternate physical and spiritual existence of the human entity. The human soul, we have seen, once launched on the stream of evolution as a human individuality, passes through alternate periods of physical and relatively spiritual existence. It passes from the one plane (or stratum, or condition) of Nature to the other, under the guidance of its karmic affinities, living, in incarnation, the life which its karma has preordained, modifying its progress within the limitations of circumstance, and developing fresh karma by the use or abuse of its opportunities. It returns to spiritual existence after each physical life—through the intervening region of astral experience — for rest and refreshment and for the gradual absorption into its essence—as so much cosmic progress—of the life's training passed through "on earth" or during physical existence.

This broad view of the subject, however, though it may suggest to a thoughtful mind, does not necessarily include an all-important conception which is required to invest the whole process with a truly Nature-like aspect.

It is clear that, even during physical existence, people who possess certain unusual faculties—psychic senses that open other avenues to their consciousness besides those of the physical plane—remain in connection in some way with the planes of super-

physical consciousness. All of us, indeed, as the experiences of sleep show, are capable of entering into conditions of consciousness with which the five ordinary senses have nothing to do. And the phenomena of somnambulism, as it is sometimes called (the somnambulism of the soul, not of the body), or of clairvoyance, whether of spontaneous occurrence or induced by mesmerism, point to the same conclusion with very much greater force. We—the souls within us—are not, as it were, altogether contained in the material envelope we actuate during life. We clearly retain some rights and interests in the ocean of spirit, so to speak, from which we have been stranded on the shores of incarnation. The process of incarnation is not fully described when we speak of an *alternate* existence on the physical and spiritual planes, and thus picture the soul as a complete entity, slipping entirely from the one state of existence to the other. A more correct definition of the process might represent incarnation as taking place on this physical plane of Nature by reason of an efflux emanating from the soul. The spiritual realm would all the while be the proper *habitat* of the soul, which would never entirely quit it; and that non-materialisable portion of the soul which abides permanently on the spiritual plane may fitly be spoken of as the Higher Self.

In some theosophical writings, the term here employed has been identified with a highly profound metaphysical idea, which we may consider later on, and which contemplates the spiritual unity, if we push

the conception back far enough, of all temporarily segregated centres of human consciousness. Between the explanation I am now endeavouring to give and that great conception there is no divergence of principle, but the term "Higher Self" seems to me most fitly assigned to the individual spiritual consciousness of each soul, and I will maintain the harmony of my own writings on this subject by continuing its employment in that sense.

One great comfort at once afforded by the appreciation of the nature of the Higher Self is that we escape from the embarrassment of having to think of the whole complete soul of a highly advanced human being, inhabiting the highly unsuitable tenement of a young child's body. However unsatisfactory the notion of such an arrangement would appear, it would be futile to try and escape from it by the hypothesis that the child could be born first and, so to speak, ensouled afterwards. From the earliest beginning, the child and the soul, to which it might be destined to give incarnation, must evidently be regarded as already in union. But the conception with which I am now dealing harmonises with the fitness of things and with the analogies of Nature. The soul on the spiritual plane and ripe for Re-incarnation takes note, as it were, of the newly germinating human being whose physical associations and destiny render it the most appropriate physical habitation that soul can find. Of course, there is no conscious, deliberate selection in the matter. The karmic affinities constitute a line of least resistance along which the soul throws out a

magnetic shoot into the objective world, just as a root germinating in the earth throws out through that portion of the ground which most readily gives way before it, the first slender blade of green growth which makes its appearance at the surface. A more recondite but still more exact illustration might be drawn from the behaviour of an electric current choosing among several available channels of approach those which, though not necessarily the shortest, conduct it under circumstances best suited to its own nature to its goal, the earth. Along the magnetic fibre thus established—itself no doubt growing in vigour simultaneously with the growth of the child—the psychic entity flows into the new body by degrees.

The same idea has sometimes been expressed in other terms. The growing child has been said to be destitute of a sixth principle—morally irresponsible and incapable of generating karma—till attaining the age of seven years. This amounts to the same thing. Before seven years, there is not enough of the soul passed down into the child's bodily consciousness to allow of the development of a moral sense. Conscience has not begun to assert itself. The Higher Self has not begun to brood over the impulses of the flesh. If the child dies, the soul has simply to sprout in another place. This reflection has an exceedingly important bearing on all problems concerning the death of young children and their states after death, but it will be most convenient to deal with them separately. Let us for the moment keep our attention fixed on the child, who advances

successfully towards mature life. As the body developes, more and more of the true soul consciousness passes into the new organism till at last in the grown-up man, all of the soul which is susceptible of expression in physical consciousness is once more re-established, or re-incarnated, on the earth plane.

But there is still an all-important something belonging to the soul remaining behind (if I may still for a while cling to a materialistic figure of speech quite inevitable if we are to have the idea clearly established in our minds) on the spiritual plane. This something is the most essentially spiritual element in the incarnating soul—its Higher Self—almost dormant and unconscious during the full activity of the incarnate being, but constantly, during the sleep of the body, recovering a more vivid sense of existence. Certainly, the extent to which such consciousness is revived, differs for different people, within very wide limits. The Higher Self is not merely the colourless, imperishable, spiritual monad but the growing spiritual individuality of the man, in each given case. As we shall realise more fully later on, the growth of the spiritual individuality is, in fact, the purpose of human life, and thus the Higher Self may in one case be backward in its development, in another very greatly progressed; but in any case where it may be advanced to any considerable degree, it must enjoy a certain degree of consciousness on the spiritual plane whenever the incarnate being, in which it is manifest on the earth plane, is plunged in profound slumber.

For most people, however, belonging to the normal

development of the present race, the physical brain is not organised finely enough to reflect the spiritual consciousness of the inner Ego during ordinary periods of waking. At the best, sleep will sometimes be found morally refreshing. Worries and temptations that may have been oppressive overnight will seem to have diminished in power or importance in the morning, and where such ameliorations of feeling are very marked, one may fairly assume that the influence of the Higher Self, restored during sleep to a fuller consciousness than usual, has had something to do with the sensation experienced. It is only in the case of persons psychically and spiritually advanced beyond the normal stage of progress that the Higher Self consciousness is remembered. That it is so remembered in some cases, is most assuredly the fact. At a stage of development considerably short of that which would take a human being out of the range of physical attraction altogether, people may lead, as it were, a double life, fully conscious of and remembering in daily life the spiritual life of their deep sleep or trances. This possibility it is which points to the sublimest achievements of mesmerism ; for a person so gifted may be able to converse, while in a *mesmeric* trance, with a waking incarnate friend, conversing from the point of view of the true spiritual consciousness. But some intermediate possibilities may also be considered. It may happen that a person with *some* psychic faculties—with the bodily consciousness of the spiritual plane partially but imperfectly developed, may perceive the Higher Self, as it were, but have the impression, in their waking remembrance,

that they have been conversing with some being external to themselves. They do not realise, so to speak, that they are beholding the other end of the curve through Nature, which constitutes in its entirety their own complete individuality. As the Higher Self would, by the hypothesis, be manifesting thoughts of a kind that had not fully passed into incarnation, there might seem to be a complete interchange of ideas between itself and its incarnate phase, as though two persons were concerned. In a still less distinctly understood relationship with the Higher Self, the incarnate man would regard its promptings as nothing more than what is generally called the voice of conscience.

The theory we are considering harmonises very well with the treatment of this world in which we live as a phenomenal world of illusion, though the meaning of that doctrine of oriental philosophy is often grotesquely misconceived. The intention of the doctrine is *not* that the earthly plane of existence, with all its countless attributes, has no existence, but that the idea of its permanence and self sufficing completeness which sometimes fills the incarnate consciousness, is a delusion. The spiritual world, of which it is the emanation, is *more* real—if the phrase may pass current—than the world of transitory material conditions, but that material world is not alleged to be a delusion in the sense of being a deception. The highest consciousness of Man embraces its phenomena—the manifestations of Nature which it embodies—as well as the phenomena of superior planes of existence; and in the vast and

perfectly balanced design of Nature the physical plane is as much a necessity of the whole scheme as any other. But a comprehension of the doctrine of the Higher Self shows the relations between the physical life and the plane of the spiritual consciousness in a way which may well teach us to forego the terrible mistake of living altogether for the sake of the lower consciousness. The region of Nature, in which the permanent Ego is thus seen to be rooted, is immeasurably more important to it than that in which its transitory blossoms appear for a brief space to wither and fall to pieces, while the plant recovers energy for sending forth a fresh flower. Supposing flowers only were perceptible to ordinary senses, and their roots existed in a state of Nature intangible and invisible to us, philosophers in such a world who divined that there were such things as roots in another plane of existence would be apt to say of the flowers, *These* are not the real plants; they are of no relative importance, merely illusive phenomena of the moment.

The Higher Self doctrine is also recommended by its correspondence with that inbreathing and outbreathing of Brahm, which symbolises natural phenomena on the macrocosmic scale, and therefore probably fits in likewise with the microcosmic scale. Physical incarnation is the outbreathing of the soul; the death of the body is associated with its inbreathing.

The karmic progress of the soul, as depicted by the first simple conception of its passage backwards and forwards between the planes of spirit and matter, is in no way interfered with by the permanent existence of

the Higher Self on the spiritual plane. No essential idea to which that broad statement of the case gives rise is discountenanced by the more advanced and elaborate theory. For instance, let us consider the case of an incarnate being regarding Nature from the point of view of the physical plane on which his consciousness seems to him to be altogether concentrated in his waking life, and clinging earnestly to the hope of retaining his present personal consciousness after death. This hope, unqualified by spiritual knowledge, has in a pre-eminent degree moulded the creeds of exoteric religions. People say, very reasonably as far as that one idea goes: "If I do not remember my present life in the next that I may lead, there is no 'I' left in the transaction at all—I do not obtain any immortality or survival." Nor does the esoteric doctrine put aside or rebuke this very natural aspiration. In its simplest form it certainly tells us: "You will eventually wear out, get tired of and be done with your present personality, as you have got rid of many others in the past, but you will not be violently torn from it. When you pass after death into the astral and then into the spiritual planes of existence you will still be your present self, remembering all that is essential in your present life, and finding, if all goes well, on the spiritual levels of Nature a much freer scope for the development of all that may be noblest and best in your present life than you can possibly hope for in the body. It is only when these phases of consciousness have vibrated to the last possible echo of the forces you have engendered during life, and when

the spiritual soul is once more colourless as regards definite recollections, that it will return through the Lethe of a fresh incarnation to the experiences of an altogether fresh personality." But now let us see how this view of the matter is affected by the doctrine of the Higher Self. Its essential idea is preserved, according to that doctrine, as completely as by means of the most materialistic statement of which the case is susceptible.

The Higher Self may be regarded as dominating the lower, or earthly personality with very different degrees of completeness in different people, and this consideration would show that personalities deeply attached to their own earthly consciousness would represent souls in which the kamic elements were largely in the ascendant. The reunion of higher and lower selves in such cases, after death, would probably mean the saturation of the higher by the lower in a commanding degree. But in truth, after a soul has just been going through a complete space of earthly life, the kamic elements can hardly fail, on reunion, to have so much to do with the completely restored consciousness as to determine the colour of the compound for the time being. And this infusion of the last personality through the Higher Self or saturation of the Higher Self therewith fully meets aspirations we may feel in the direction of a personal survival after death.

We need not regard that aspiration as either blameworthy or misleading. For all men below certain exalted levels of spiritual perfection, which we need not at present consider, a survival of the

personality is alike required on abstract grounds of justice and common sense; and as a part of our primary conception of the esoteric doctrine we shall be, in the spiritual condition, in no sense less ourselves for feeling our personality expanded by a large superaddition of spiritual consciousness. And it will be to the gradual reassertion of the supremacy of the spiritual consciousness that we must look forward as constituting the fading out of the personality which is either dreaded or longed for by people in the flesh, according to the degree of their psychic advancement, but which will, probably, be no more a source of regret to the Higher Self in its actual occurrence than —on the poor plane of our physical analogies—the digestion of the day's dinner is to a healthy man at night. That dinner may have played its part in the nutrition of the body. At the time of its consumption, perhaps, it may have been a source of some transitory pleasure in itself; but, absorbed into the body it is merely so much renewed strength and health. So with the personality and the Higher Self which digests it. We need not push the analogy too far; but it is quite clear that the conversion of the specific experiences of a life just past, which constitutes its personality, into so much cosmic progress for the Higher Self—which is the ultimate motive, so to speak, with which those experiences have been incurred—is a process which, while it goes on, constitutes a prolonged preservation of identity for the personality itself, and one which only yields to the conscious pre-eminence of the Higher Self's identity, which is inextricably blended with that of

the earthly personality during physical life, as soon as the two are united.

From the last phase of our conception, which shows us the Higher Self absorbing the experiences of each lifetime in turn, we can readily infer that all through the long ages of its existence it is going through a process of growth on that higher plane to which it belongs, just as a man's mind grows within the narrow limits of one physical life. And as we reflect upon all that is implied by such growth we shall find our conception of the whole process expanding readily in both directions. To go back on the past, in the first instance, it is clear that each Higher Self must have existed at one time in a very imperfectly developed state. As soon as any individuality is defined by the earliest process of human evolution in the beginning of a cosmic period, there must be associated with that individuality, throughout its incarnations, a focus of activity and consciousness on the spiritual plane of Nature, which constitutes from the beginning its Higher Self. But the Higher Self of the primitive savage and the Higher Self of the spiritualised man of later races are two very different entities. It is clearly by means of the experiences gathered by its successive manifestations of activity on the physical plane, that each Higher Self grows and advances to loftier perfection. Certainly, the quality of pure spirit can never vary, but the individualisation of spirit may be accomplished around different foci of activity with very different degrees of success. And as the process can rarely be a rapid one, we may easily comprehend that the growth of

Higher Selves on the appropriate plane of existence during a planetary manvantara, is going on all the while *pari passu* with the improvement of the races in incarnation.

The Higher Self must always exercise a consciousness of an elevated quality, though, in the beginning a consciousness deficient in vigour and intensity. But as it throws out one plant after another into incarnation, and successively draws back into itself such experiences of earthly life as may be susceptible of absorption into its own consciousness, its horizon widens, its knowledge expands, its individuality intensifies. The normal rule of its growth appears to be very slow and to be symbolised in this respect by some of the physical processes of Nature, like the accumulation of sand on ocean beds, or the accretion of particles on a coral reef. But in the course of time seas are filled up and islands of coral built on foundations in deep water. So the Higher Self selects its spiritual particles from the lives of its innumerable offspring, and the greatest Mahatma, or the greatest Dhyan chohan is a final consequence of processes that must have been carried on as slowly at one time, as those by which the Higher Self of any African savage is rising in the scale of Nature by virtue of its all but unprofitable manifestations on earth.

The theory of the Higher Self thus conceived seems to me to recommend itself to the mind as a scientific idea, that is to say, as a view in harmony with the pure and subtle dignity of natural operations, which often as they may be symbolised by theatrical or fantastic allegories, never betray the taint of such

a character when exhaustively understood. But none the less does a comprehension of the clear scientific verity enable us to select the element of truth running through various beliefs concerning the soul, thrown out by independent thinkers, endowed, perhaps, with psychic faculties, and receiving some true inspiration, but liable by reason of being untrained in the grammar of esoteric science to associate such inspiration with pre-established fancies, conventional or poetical, as the case may be. Thus one school of independent occultists has gathered round the teachings of a Seer who attaches very great importance to a view of the soul development known as the theory of counterparts. According to this idea every human being as known to us in incarnation, is but half a human being, the complementary half whereof—of the opposite sex—is supposed to be somewhere about the universe waiting for a perfect and celestial marriage at some future period. In the first form of this belief the counterpart was supposed to be another living being—a contemporary man or woman with whom it was theoretically possible that the person concerned might effect a union in life. Afterwards the theory was so far purified, I believe, as to include the condition that the counterpart of a living man or woman must always be in Heaven. Here we evidently reach an imperfect presentation of the doctrine of the Higher Self, minus the detail which our esoteric guidance has enabled us to accumulate around it.

It is only when the doctrine of the Higher Self fully takes possession of the mind that we can begin

to realise the purpose of earthly existence, and be in some measure reconciled to the strain of emotion and feeling with which that existence is often associated. Viewed as a complete thing in itself, the earthly existence but too often seems to justify the gloomy despair of the pessimist—and, indeed, if the earthly existence were *either* complete in itself, or a singular experience in a human career, to be followed either by good or bad conditions of existence hereafter—pessimism as a philosophy applied to the phenomena of life as we behold them would be an irresistible conclusion. But the development of the Higher Self as a purpose of existence is an aim which may reconcile us to life, and justify the fact of suffering. For the time being—for most of us—it is impossible to *feel* the identity of the higher and lower self from the incarnate point of view, but an intellectual perception of the truth may enable us to foresee the inevitably superior capacity of the Higher Self in this respect. And a full appreciation of all that lurks in that forecast will do a great deal to illuminate the pathway we have to travel, if we resolve to live in the lower self on conditions conducive to the interests of the higher. As a general rule—and by that I mean in all cases but those of people exquisitely spiritualised already in their earthly nature, and endowed with clairvoyant vision of a high order—the lower self must be content to regard itself as appointed to undergo the suffering phase of existence for the benefit—not really of *another* being, but for the benefit of a phase of itself, of which it can never have any direct

consciousness in the flesh. But on the other hand it may acquire a confident certainty that the consciousness of the Higher Self will ultimately be so adjusted as to provide for the enjoyment of the fruit of this suffering in a manner that will constitute a complete recompense to the true individuality of the lower self.

Is it necessary here to take note of the occult theory that calculations of recompense do not furnish the highest motives of human action? We may all be aware of that, but at the same time be interested, on all grounds, in studying the methods by which Nature provides a recompense for the suffering incurred through aspirations towards a higher life.

The comprehension of the problem before us turns on a realisation of the fact that while the lower is not conscious of the Higher Self, the higher *is* conscious of the lower, and will be increasingly conscious thereof in proportion to the extent that the lower applies itself deliberately to the task of living for the sake of the higher. Let us keep in view the theory or principle, or fact of Nature, that consciousness on the superior planes or spiritual realms of Nature is accompanied by a vivid sense of enjoyment. In proportion as the Higher Self is expanded and developed is that sense of enjoyment broadened and deepened. In such expansion, in such development, the reward of the efforts made by the lower self is realised. This appears to me to be an all-important point on which it is desirable for us to dwell with the closest attention.

The crude, guardian angel theory of the Higher Self, as well as that which looks *too* far ahead and seeks to identify the higher individual with the Universal Self, or God, both err in leading us to think, so to speak, too well of the Higher Self as a rule. There are, no doubt, as I have suggested, very far-advanced human beings still in the flesh for that matter, and far below the Mahatma level of advancement, with whom the Higher Self is a very exalted and highly conscious kind of guardian angel, highly gifted with the faculty of insight into truth, and with knowledge of the kind which, in its perfection, is omniscience. But with the vast majority of people it would be an immense mistake to regard the Higher Self as anything but higher in kind. It may not be nearly so much higher in degree—on the general scale of human progress, that is to say—than the lower self, as people are sometimes apt to imagine. Of course its affinities are all spiritual in their order. The Higher Self, such as it is, of the most grovelling sensualist is wholly indifferent to sensual things; and in touch, to some very limited extent, with the ocean of real knowledge, which is the same ocean on which a Planetary Spirit floats. But its consciousness on its own plane of existence is, to a corresponding extent, torpid and imperfect. For its growth, for its happiness, for its awakenment to the opportunities within its reach in the higher realms of Nature, it is altogether dependent—altogether, at all events, in the earlier stages of such growth—on its lower self; on its own material phase; on the earthly fulcrum which it leans upon to accomplish an upward movement.

Let us remember, indeed, that though thus dependent, it is not itself lethargic in the matter. The lower self *action* which conduces to such growth is necessarily, when accomplished, the result of promptings from the Higher Self *thought*, or suggestion. The growth we are considering may thus be said—by an enlargement of the view already expressed—to be dependent on the responsive action of the lower self; on the efforts and exertions made by the lower in response to the influence of the higher. The action and reaction, in short, by which progress is accomplished should always be thought of as started, in the first instance, by the Higher Self. But, keeping this in view, we may safely shut our eyes for the moment to the capacity said to be latent in every human soul of universal knowledge. "Your own soul," say some occult students, "is omniscient. You only have to get into union with it, to share its knowledge." The doctrine may not be false, but it is misleading. Your own soul, your own Higher Self, may grow into omniscience—or something approaching that—if you give it time and adequate help—through, certainly, more than one life, from the date at which that enterprise is first set on foot by "you" yourself—the earthly phase of the being we are considering. But the Higher Self of an ordinary man of the world is certainly not yet, in the perfection of its potential development. On the contrary, the fact that it is not, and cannot be, will be seen, on reflection, to square exactly with the information which has been formulated during the last few years (with the help of high authority

as well as of the investigations carried on by advancing students among ourselves), in respect to the Devachanic state. For the majority of those who attain to it, that state is not one of highly advanced insight into truth. It is a state of great happiness, the intensity of which is probably proportioned to the advancement of the soul which experiences it; but it is a state replete with illusion. And yet, undoubtedly, those are the Higher Selves of the human beings concerned who are enjoying the Devachanic happiness; and more than this, if they are capable of consciousness on the Devachanic plane at all, they must be already human beings who in the flesh have been animated with very well defined spiritual aspirations, or deeply moved by truly spiritual emotions.

Their gradual elevation into Higher Selves of the true guardian angel type may be looked upon—if for the moment we do not look further—as the purpose and justification for physical existence. This view of the situation, be it observed, is quite compatible with the view which in all cases assumes the best and noblest impulses of each man's life, be he higher or lower as an incarnate being on the scale of spirituality, as emanations, warnings, or guidance from his Higher Self. To the extent that they are active, the aspirations of the Higher Self must be all towards good. But except as regards its kind and affinities, it would be a mistake to consider the mental activity of the Higher Self as very greatly superior to that of the lower. Before the Higher Self can use the faculties latent in its nature, before it can be awakened from

its lethargy on the higher plane, which, in fact, has deepened in the course of ages as its periodical presentations on the plane of matter became more and more intense, it must be revived by the conscious effort of its own lower self—of itself on the lower plane—an effort which is analogous to the rebound of a ball dropped on the ground from a height.

This group of conceptions, I think, will prepare the mind for an appreciation of the manner in which the recompense for meritorious but painful action on this plane of life is worked out. The Higher Self, in proportion to the extent that its perceptions are awakened, can survey the whole process, embrace in one retrospective glance the suffering and the beneficial consequence, and thus feel that the efforts made were not thrown away. In the case of an undeveloped Higher Self, indeed, the fruits of the good deeds of the lower self are enjoyed without being analysed in the way just supposed. But by the hypothesis the correspondingly undeveloped lower self would never in such a case have been oppressed by metaphysical speculations concerning its own future. It would have been content to regard that future in the light of some exoteric religious fiction, and though its expectations might not be fulfilled to the letter, their essence would be fulfilled in the unreflective bliss of the Higher Self—the same individuality, really, though not yet inspired with an interest in the observation of the fact of its own identity with its physical phases. But by the time a long succession of physical lives and spiritual interludes have cultivated the consciousness of the Higher Self to

such a degree that it begins to approximate to the guardian angel type of Higher Self, its relations with the lower becomes sensibly modified. The true Ego begins not alone to feel, but to think, on the higher plane. It becomes more and more a conscious, directing power, watching and influencing the acts of its lower self, and alive to the advantages it may derive from the co-operation thereof. For metaphysical purposes one might, of course, throw the idea just expressed into other language, which would, perhaps, avoid some crudities involved in the more dramatic formula, but at the expense of vivid significance. It could be argued that the physical and spiritual aspects of the Ego act and react on each other, and that the soul as manifested in the phenomenal world is an illusory counterpart of the true Ego, whose absorption in the universal self is more or less retarded by the greater or less subjection of its physical consciousness to the plane of *maya*. But the processes of development we are examining will be rendered more intelligible, I think, for most observers—incarnate, for the time being, on this plane of *maya*—by language in harmony with the conditions of the physical consciousness.

It will be understod that I am not supposing the Higher Self to be standing sentinel over the lower at all moments of its existence, and in respect of all the acts of its daily life to be nervously watchful lest its *protégé* should take a false step. With persons of advanced development there is, perhaps, a greater approximation towards such a condition of things than a first glance at the situation would lead us to

suppose; for the spiritualisation of the lower self or aspect, renders the higher all the more continuously conscious; but I take it that in conditions of ordinary human life the Higher Self is always more or less asleep on the higher plane, when the lower is awake and only conscious of its place in Nature, of its relations with the lower self, and of the consequences to itself of the exertions its lower self, or its allied personality (to suggest an alternative phrase) may have been making—when that allied personality is asleep on the physical plane—plunged, that is to say, in a spontaneous or artificially induced trance as regards its lower consciousness. A proviso should be interpolated here, indeed. Sleeping and waking are the best terms we can use to describe the alternate states of the Higher Self during the life of the body, but we should remember that its sleep has reference only to its own Higher plane consciousness, and its influence is not extinct as regards the incarnate personality at any time. Thus the so-called voice of conscience, which asserts itself, and is heard from time to time, even in the most unspiritualised personalities, is neither more nor less than the influence of the Higher Self making itself felt. This influence is, of course, feeble and incomplete in cases where the lower self does not, by action responsive to this influence, increase and strengthen its power. But in endeavouring to realise the oscillation, as it were, of the centre of consciousness between the higher and the lower planes, it would be undesirable to lose sight of the fact that the Higher Self is always the source of the best impulses of the lower.

The Ego, as I have said, awake on the physical plane is normally quite unconscious of its periods of supra physical or spiritual consciousness—of the existence, in other words, of its Higher Self—even *though* that same Higher Self, on its side, is fully conscious when itself in its wakefulness on the higher plane, of the lower personality, and of its efforts or inaction, as the case may be. How far it may consciously deplore the failures of its lower self to achieve this or that specific rung on the ladder of progress—how far it may be distressed, so to speak, at observing its own lower self give way to temptation, is a point to be considered separately. The conditions of the existence of the Higher Self may not afford it scope for emotions of distress or regret; and a failure or surrender to temptation by the lower self may take the shape, as regards the higher, of so much retardation in its progress in regard to which, with its sublime capacity for patience, it may be quite unconscious of any irritation. But, on the other hand, every success and every victory of the lower self over temptation may none the less be translated at once into so much progress for the Higher Self, and so much definite consciousness of satisfaction and enjoyment arising from that progress.

Now it may seem, at first sight, to an imaginative mind, that these views are comfortless, as regards what may be called the interests of the Personality. All its struggles, and all its sufferings, are undergone for the benefit of a Being that it can hardly help feeling external to itself—an almost pitiless task-master and a thankless consumer of the fruits of its

physical slave's industry. Calm and impassive in the serene realms of spirit, the Higher Self lives for enjoyment only, luxuriating in the harvest of the toil carried on below—when there is a harvest to reap—but undisturbed by the disaster when the heavily-burdened labourer staggers or falls beneath his load! But though that would not be a satisfactory or equitable arrangement, all round, if the two phases of the Ego were really the separate entities they look like from the earthly point of view, the propriety of the whole situation is amply vindicated as soon as we can be quite sure that, from the celestial point of view, the personality and the Higher Self or Individuality are felt and seen to be one and the same centre of consciousness, though functioning first under one and then under the other set of conditions. How, it may be asked, are we to get proof of this vitally important theory? In such a region of thought as this we are exploring, it is almost superfluous to answer that proof must be sought for in the interior consciousness, which is the more or less obscured reflection in each of us of the Higher Self to which such personality may belong. But, meanwhile, I venture to think that, in the "sweet reasonableness" of the position, a provisional guarantee of its security may be found. We stand face to face with the perennial problem of life—the hardship of existence and the necessity of accounting for this in some way that shall be coherent with the general drift of humanity towards perfection, and the prevalence of Justice as a law of Nature in the long run. Around the leading ideas of the esoteric

doctrine, which we in this generation have been stimulated to reflect upon, theosophical study has enabled us to group a considerable mass of inevitably certain detail. The alternate manifestations of the Ego on the physical and spiritual planes of Nature lead by an indisputable train of conjecture to the doctrine here spoken of as that of the Higher Self, and this, in turn, brings us along a causeway of trustworthy reasoning, to the consideration of the still more elevated subject—the *evolution* of the Higher Self—with which we are at present engaged.

In the comprehension of the laws thus governing the evolution of the Higher Self, we attain the innermost goal of esoteric study, as this study may be regarded from the incarnate point of view. The practical value of such a comprehension in its bearing on life and conduct, and on any capacity to bear whatever trials of one sort or another we may have to bear in our "lower selves"—that is to say, in the incarnate phase of our existence—is something that cannot be exaggerated. The old vague religious hope that we shall somehow be rewarded after we die for any meritorious behaviour we may have contrived to carry on here below, in spite of our manifold embarrassments, is thus replaced by a specific, scientific perception of the way that process is worked out.

The method is altogether in harmony with all truths of spiritual science we have been able to reach, and the consequence is, that once thoroughly assimilated, it is calculated to soothe in a remarkable degree the strain of emotion and the great vacuity

of life which are among the well-known concomitants of any deliberate attempt to tread the upward path. It is not in human nature to be content—above all it is not in the highly speculative and introspective nature of an occult student to be content—with the attenuated promise of an ultimate absorption of his consciousness in the Infinite Consciousness, as a compensation for painful self-denial in this life, and as a readjustment, in accordance with infallible justice, of the long account of physical existence. Some exalted natures may be indifferent to compensations as far as they themselves are concerned, or may honestly imagine themselves so indifferent at all events, till some unforeseen turn of the screw, influencing them in an unexpected way, may betray their natural human weakness to their own inner consciousness. But at any rate even these will not be content to suppose that humanity at large is destined all along the line to the cheerless prospect of unremunerated labour. Let us each, leaving ourselves out of the calculation, and thinking only of our brother, admit that we have not made sense of the problem of Nature till we have distinctly provided, by our interpretation thereof, for the reward merit.

And up to the very threshold of the theory I have endeavoured to set forth, this reward is not adequately provided for in the sense of being specifically apprehended. If the Higher Self were in all cases an already omniscient being, as some occultists have seemed to imagine, and if progress merely represented the efforts of the lower self

in any given case to rise into conscious relations with it, the lower self or personality would go altogether unrewarded in the enormous number of cases where that conscious relationship is never established. The struggle to do right on this plane of existence would then indeed be a futile and miserable undertaking, at the very best rewarded only by the good karma, that would render the next physical life, which the impassive Higher Self or Individuality might overshadow, a less painful experience for the practically new entity which would have no recollection of its former struggle to give zest to its relative enjoyment in the new and altogether detached physical existence. Without the evolution of the Higher Self to express the consequences of that struggle, the situation would go far to justify the familiar objection to the doctrine of Re-incarnation, which rests upon the forgetfulness in each physical life of the circumstances of the last. But let us once realise the position as occultists of even a moderate degree of advancement know that it actually stands, and the incarnate man, however little he may himself, in his own incarnate consciousness, *feel* the reward of his good deeds or self-denial, is nevertheless assured of being himself, in his spiritual condition after release from the body, the recipient of the harvest that he has sown. He may not, in the flesh, be conscious of the emotions and exhilaration of the Higher Self due to his work, but the consciousness of his Higher Self embraces his consciousness as he looks back on his past career

from the point of view of the superior plane. We are not violently straining or materialising the facts; merely adapting them to the character of our present consciousness, if we imagine the Higher Self as reflecting: "If, in the physical environment from which I am now set free, I had not the strength of mind to do this or that," whatever the important achievement may have been, "I should not now be enjoying my present rich sense of spiritual blessedness." Indeed we may, in the attempt to realise the position in all its bearings, accept the service of illustrations drawn from commonplace life. A man, established from very early youth abroad to carve out his fortunes in some distant country, may have set his face during that undertaking against all kinds of wasteful and temporary self-indulgence. He may have been guided by the resolution to postpone the enjoyment of his earnings till circumstances should permit him to return to his own natural home, even though the ways and surroundings of life there should be unknown to him, and the lines along which it should be spent, left to be planned out later on. But assuming the programme to be fulfilled, the fruition of his efforts on his return home might be an ample compensation to him for the toil and self-denial of his earlier years. So, in a far more elevated and glorious degree, and unqualified by risks of disaster which may always dash any worldly cup of enjoyment from expectant lips, may we regard the programme of physical effort and fruition on the spiritual plane, as assuring us the reward which we must be able

to discern as awaiting the meritorious actor in this life's drama, if the whole proceeding is to be regarded as something better than a farce and a tragedy in one.

It is not necessary to this speculation to treat, as an essential part of the scheme of Nature, the possibility that, by the conscious direction of our efforts on this plane of life to the fulfilment of the idea thus conceived, we may actually, if all circumstances are propitious, obtain, even during this life, something more than an intellectual conviction of the spiritual reward that will be secured by our efforts here. But we should let slip a very important consideration connected with the whole transaction if we did not take note, in reviewing it, of the possibility to which I refer. There may be here and there, even among people who are not obtrusively elevated to any remarkable degree above their fellows of this race to which we belong, some who in the lower self-consciousness are invested with the beautiful characteristics of a spiritualised clairvoyance. Such persons will be able, from time to time, to ascend into the consciousness of the Higher Self, retaining in the physical brain a recollection of those experiences. They are in a position to be the pioneers of spiritual progress for their less gifted brethren, rendering transparently obvious, as a fact in Nature, the existence of that relationship between the lower and Higher Self which I have endeavoured to depict. And they may afford to any resolute explorer of the higher life good ground for hoping that others in turn, by earnest endeavours in that direction, may

anticipate the revelation—even while in this life—of that which has hitherto been regarded as the great and insoluble mystery of death.

In dealing with these problems I have endeavoured to avoid the comfortless dissipation of thought and conjecture apt to ensue if we endeavour to examine the conditions of our present existence by the light of metaphysical thinking which seeks to adapt itself to infinity. But if the subject has thus been kept upon a plane of thought below the level of some to which our speculations may occasionally soar, I would, nevertheless, suggest that, in dealing with the circumstances under which the lower self may be drawn towards the true individuality of the Ego, which is the Higher Self, we are really dealing also with the circumstances under which the true individuality—overshadowed by the spirit as it overshadows the incarnate man—is itself drawn towards the highest influence—the universal self or universal spirit. We may not, from our present standpoint, be able to divine very much concerning that process, but we can infer, with complete confidence, that the development and evolution of the Higher Self, which it is within the power of the lower self, or incarnate man, to promote, is none the less its response to that mysterious emanation from the supreme, that is the ultimate goal towards which the later efforts of a perfected humanity, in some remotely future epoch, may consciously and appreciatively turn.

CHAPTER V.

FREE WILL AND KARMA.

THE general purpose of this work is to interpret the opportunities for spiritual progress lying before humanity. The nature of these opportunities is the first great revelation of occult science, and the prospects before us, if we are resolute enough to explore them, are the subject of the occult student's most eager study. Every phase of emotion and faith embraced in religion, if rightly understood, is in harmony with the theosophical exposition of the evolutionary task provided for us by the design of the world. We have traced in the great law of Re-incarnation the method employed by Nature in working out that design up to a certain point, and have seen how the Higher Self of each human unit is the permanent centre of consciousness which *is* in fact the Ego, and the final expression of every effort which it puts forth during the successive periods of its long struggle in incarnate life. We shall go on ultimately to endeavour, as far as it is possible, to do this from the point of view of consciousness reflected in a material organism, to realise the kind of existence to which the Higher Self, strengthened and illuminated by accumulated knowledge and capacity, must strive if it would fulfil the loftiest potenti-

alities of its Nature. And the explanation will be fortified by a review of the traces in ancient and mediæval history which show us, now that we have the key to their real meaning, how earlier generations of men were already bent upon the supreme task. But many side lights have to be thrown on the explanations already given before the sufficing character of the theosophic revelation can be entirely appreciated. And at this stage it may be convenient to deal with some metaphysical embarrassments which thinkers, trained in European schools of philosophy, will be apt very likely to regard as stumbling blocks in the way of the all-important doctrine on which the whole argument turns—that which recognises in the spontaneous Will of each individual the force which may direct his evolution into the right channel.

Although few European thinkers adopt in its naked simplicity the doctrine of fatalism, we find the essential idea of that doctrine firmly established in the theories of "necessity," which stands in time honoured antagonism to the doctrine of "free will." The arguments which make for each of these theories considered separately, are often regarded as so irrefragable that the paradox in these days is accepted as such more often than discussed. The conflict of Free Will and Necessity is hardly any longer an academical—rather a schoolboy theme for the exercise of wit, just as perpetual motion and the quadrature of the circle are problems left now to amuse juvenile engineers and mathematicians.

Reason out the matter how we like, each man feels

within him that he has a liberty of choice between various courses of action at every step in his progress through life. Moreover, he not only feels this, but, as a reasonable being, if he has any faith in an ulterior destiny—whatever it may be—for the soul, he feels that human beings must have free-will, or the notion of any spiritual consequences befalling them as a sequel to this life, is incompatible with the operation of justice as a law of Nature. If rewards and punishments are meted out to saints and sinners in accordance, not with their independent responsible *acts* in life, but in accordance with the way they were *compelled* to act by an overruling power which dictated every thought and movement of which they fancied themselves the authors — then, of course, such an overruling power would represent the principles of mockery and malignity instead of justice and goodness.

On the other hand, the theory of Necessity is supported by an unbroken chain of logical reasoning. In its broadest aspects we all recognise it as a matter of course. We can all see that people born under conditions of extreme degradation, brought up in ignorance of all motives for right action and of all meritorious example, surrounded, as they grow, by every temptation, and educated in vice and crime must take to such pursuits, like ducks to the water. Their evil deeds in the main are the outcome of moral influences as powerful as the forces of the storm and tide on the floating driftwood of the sea. So with the self-denial, and actively benevolent lives of others. The persons who lead such lives must, of course, trace

their general character to the teaching and influences of their bringing up. They may *feel*—in accordance with the other view of the subject—that when they came to years of discretion, they exercised their own free-will in applying to the opportunities of existence, the principle of deliberate choice, but many of the best among them have, as a matter of intellectual conviction, declared on the whole for Necessity as the only logical theory of life. There is no line to be drawn in Nature between important things that it is worth while for her laws to pay attention to, and others which are insignificant and fit to be left to chance. The earth's attraction operates equally on a microbe and a mastadon; and the chemical affinity that holds together the elements of the ocean is not permitted to neglect those of the smallest drop of dew. So argues the metaphysician with regard to human conduct. He is withheld from shooting the man who offends him by the influences that have been poured into his mind by his education, his observation of others, by reading, and reflection. The minor acts and abstinences of his life are in just the same way the product of moral causes working in his interior consciousness. He takes such and such a journey, let us say, because he has read such and such a book. He read the book because he had acquired certain habits of study. These were the product of previous influences, and so on. This kind of reasoning has, at all events, grasped one efficient principle. Cause and effect rules on the moral as well as the physical plane of Nature, and if the recognition of this is plainly at variance with the theory that human beings are

responsible agents, the devotee of Necessity may sometimes say, "So much the worse for the general character of the Universe," or sometimes "the contradiction is a mystery which can only be elucidated, if at all, hereafter."

For some of us—yes—"hereafter"—a very distant hereafter—may be the only period at which we shall be qualified to fathom such mysteries. But the "hereafter" of one man may be the "now" of another, more advanced than himself in cosmic evolution. The conventional thinker is too apt to suppose that all human intelligence is waiting to bear him company in that progress which he may, perhaps, admit as a possibility of Nature, after he shall have passed on to other states of being. All phases of consciousness are co-existent if we take all planes of Nature into account together. Time and change are merely conducive to the advance of knowledge *qua* any given centre of consciousness localised at one point of space at the moment under consideration. If A, B—any man of our generation—is destined, in the lapse of ages, to attain a condition of consciousness in which any given mystery of this period shall be made plain, assuredly Y, Z, in the progress of past ages, has already accomplished that amount of development. We are not necessarily bound to wait so long as is sometimes imagined for revelations that we may rightly conceive to be outside the reach of mere intellectual cogitation of the kind with which we are familiar. That which is known may sometimes be communicated—in a world which has many more avenues to its consciousness than the general

multitude of its inhabitants are yet in the habit of using.

One of the most interesting among the many communications of such a nature that have enlarged the theosophical student's comprehension of spiritual science during the last few years, has related to the great metaphysical dead-lock represented by the conflict of free will and necessity, and I now approach the occult solution of that old difficulty, not merely for the sake of its value as such, but because it is pre-eminently necessary to understand it, in order that no misleading conceptions of the Necessitarian may stand in the way of a full acceptance of the all important truth that every human being holds the control of his own ultimate future in his own hands, however closely he may seem to the eye of exoteric reasoning bound down and hemmed in by the narrow limitations of circumstance.

To begin with the dead lock as a mere logical dilemma, is loosened as soon as we apply to the apparent contradiction, the law of Re-incarnation. As long as a human life is thought of as a complete operation of Nature, beginning at birth and ending at death, there will be no possible reconcilation for the opposing lines of argument which show first, that free-will must be exerted—to leave room for justice in the conception of human affairs; and, secondly, that necessity must be recognised, or we do violence to the uniformity of cause and effect. But when we remember that justice has more than one—a long series—of lives to work in, we see how it may operate, even though *acts* at each moment of existence may

be the product of predetermining influences. Each act may be—and necessarily is—surrounded, so to speak, with an interior atmosphere of consciousness, the cloud of thought by which it is accompanied. In other words, an act is not exclusively to be estimated by the dead letter of the thing done—this may be done in one spirit or another. The interior consciousness may follow and emphasize the act, or hang back from it and in a measure resist it. And it will be plain that this interior consciousness—the product of the voice of conscience or the promptings of the Higher Self, blending with the habits of thought engendered by the incarnate will or lower self—may be regarded as entirely within the control of free will, even though the law of cause and effect may determine, by overmastering influences, the actual deed performed. Now karma, the law of cause and effect on the spiritual plane in one of its aspects, assuredly does not leave out of account the spirit in which an act is performed. The act itself is a karmic *consequence* of the sum total of influences bearing on that point of the life concerned, from the previous life of which it is the sequel. And it is necessarily also a cause of further consequences to ensue in the future. But at the moment of its projection into objectivity as such a cause, it may be qualified to an enormous extent by the concurrent thought, state of mind, or spirit with which it is associated. And the effect it will have on the *next* life is thus modified to a corresponding degree. At every step of our progress, therefore, we are thus working out karma, the causes set in motion by our last life, and determining by the

spirit in which we realise them, by the free will we apply at every step to the Necessity under which we act—the Karmic effect of our acts on the conditions, welfare, happiness, and opportunities of our next life.

The law here defined may be illustrated by extreme cases. Let us assume first of all that some person under consideration is going through the current life under the influence of some terribly bad karma in the last, which is not only productive of sorrow and suffering but of renewed offences against the purpose of Nature. Say in this way, it is within the "necessity" of the situation that he should commit some serious offence, against not merely the exalted dictates of ethics, but the plainest principles of right and wrong, of course he will never feel that he is an automaton as regards that act, nor if the crime is a serious one, can it be truly affirmed from any point of view that he is. A qualification must come into play here which I will explain directly, for in truth though the broad law is that our acts are dictated by karma, there is room in the design of Nature for some lateral play of the forces concerned as regards action. But reserving the subject of this qualification let us for the moment assume the act to fall within the category of those which are karmically inevitable.

Now the man has at all events free will as regards the cultivation of internal states of consciousness. Will any reader wish to interrupt me here and argue that the interior states of consciousness are as much the product of education," training, heredity and

circumstance generally, as the acts performed? The answer would be very simple. That may be true as regards a man who has never come into contact with moral teaching, which is the first step towards theosophic enlightenment. But such a man is, indeed, far in the background of evolution, and even in his case the opportunities will come later—in later lives—which will bring him to the stage already reached by the man who *is* a moral agent. So we go back to the statement made above. The person in question is hurried by circumstance into the commission of his crime, but is a free agent in thinking about it. That is a part of his inalienable heritage as a human being with a higher self in the background and potentialities of Divine perfection. First, let us suppose he applies that free-will in the same direction in which his bad karma is operating. He commits his crime with ardour and fierce intensity of desire. He is glad he has done it, perhaps, and would do it again if the circumstances were placed before him again. He suffers no remorse; his karmic career is going on with its old momentum. The karmic effect, therefore, of his crime on the circumstances of his next life is appallingly intensified.

When that life comes on, the suffering attendant on his continued career of crime will probably force on his consciousness a distaste for all the experiences associated with that suffering—the crime included. So in the ultimate working of a penal karma, the interior repentance is engendered which will have its karmic effect in turn. And in this way we see how Nature tends back into the straight road, so to speak,

in any case, even while her (unenlightened) children are perpetually straying off it. But let us now imagine that the man with whom we started, after having committed his crime brings to play upon his reflections concerning it the free-will of his own interior consciousness. Let us suppose that he has taken the first step towards the expansion of his moral nature, that he has seen fit to take a new departure, to cultivate higher aspirations than were present to his former life, to give in that way freer play within the conciousness of his lower self or personality, to the promptings and reflections of his Higher Self, previously almost shut out from his cognition. Still, it may be the evil legacy of his last incarnation is realised in the criminal act which the modern metaphysician would then regard as the inevitable outcome of early training, circumstance, and so forth. He has no sooner committed the evil act than the rush of interior sensation, due to the fact that his lower consciousness is now partly open to the influence of the spiritual plane, is overwhelming. He is horror-stricken at what he has done, borne down with remorse. Every subsequent event in life may be coloured by this terrible emotion ; the suffering through which he passes during this period may be greater even than that through which he would have passed if he had for the moment been making worse karma, still on his old bad road. But bad as his momentary condition may be, he is all the while closing that formidable account, closing it in the tribulation that is inevitable under the circumstances one way or the other, but no doubt is less that way

than if it were propagated as a persistent force through the ages.

According to whether the crime is thus committed in the one spirit or the other, the next life is altogether different. Free-will is realised in the conditions and opportunities it presents to the being concerned, even though he may be bound perforce to the necessity inherited from the past.

In just the same way, *mutatis mutandis*, we can apply the law under examination to the karmic necessities of a good life, and the varying effect of a persistent spirit co-operating with their tendency, or on the other hand retarding and weakening them. It is in the karmic necessity of the case, with some given person let us assume, to accomplish some great work of charity and benevolence. The good karma of his previous life has drifted him into the pleasant and influential position in which he is enabled to design this and carry it out. Well, it may be that the charm and soft indulgence of circumstances have a good deal obscured the active sympathies which, in the former life, were productive of the good karma. The man performs his act of charity—little realising that it is simply the behest of his former personality—but performs it perhaps with some interior hesitation and grudging. He is not at all sure in his own mind afterwards that the objects of his beneficence deserved the good things he has secured for them. He feels as if he has been too good-natured, and so forth, and that after what he has done, no one can blame him for thinking of himself and his own enjoyment for a change. Here the stream of karmic

influence is stopped again. The man in question will not be troubled with having to accomplish noble deeds in his next life, nor embarrassed, it may be, with the power and influence required for their accomplishment. Whereas if, on the other hand, the life under notice had been as well filled with lofty emotions as its predecessor, if the seductive circumstances had been held in subordination to the continuous spiritual effort begun in the former life, the man would have been carried far on along the path to ulterior perfection, and the cumulative effort of good karma in successive lives might have given rise to some very far-reaching results.

Between the two extreme cases put forward, there is room, of course, for an infinitely varying operation of the same law on minor conditions of good and evil. Always, however, the same result will be seen emerging from all the complexities that might be imagined. We are—however little we can realise that state of the facts in our physical consciousness—the heirs of our last life's karma, the obedient progeny of its complicated impulses. But we have never parted company with the free-will, the use of which in the past has given rise to those impulses. We can apply it to the cultivation of beneficent or maleficent states of mind in the current life, and so accordingly will the karmic account of that life work out.

I can imagine an objection raised against this view of the subject on the ground that it is a dangerous doctrine. It will be held by some people to lend too powerful a support to the theory of Necessity, by

clearing away the apparent absurdities which, in spite of its logical character, stood in the way of its acceptance. People will say, if our *acts* are dictated by an irresistible force, it is useless to struggle against them. And perhaps a very imperfect grasp of the doctrine here defined might be demoralising rather than beneficial. But this is only one of the many cases in which the exposition of occult laws is more or less ethically dangerous. With enlarged wisdom and knowledge, comes enlarged responsibility, and an occult truth half understood may indeed be a perilous possession. But in the present case it is, at all events, easy to point out one consideration which militates against the notion that the doctrine of Necessity in Act, Free-will in Spirit, must tend to make people drift into evil and give way without an effort to temptation. Even though the *accomplished* act, whatever it may have been, may have been inevitable, no *contemplated* act can ever be assigned to that category up to the moment of its accomplishment, it may be that it belongs to the group of acts which we are destined to avoid! It would require a far greater degree of occult advancement than is embodied in an intellectual appreciation of the law under review, to help us in all cases beforehand to a knowledge as to what acts are decreed by the karma of the past, and which are empty suggestions of the imagination. When that sublime foresight shall have been attained, we shall probably with it have attained to other characteristics that may enable us to bear the weight of increased responsibility and power.

Of course, the only way in which we can deliberately apply the right spirit to the events of a current life in which we "will" to elevate our destinies—to extinguish bad karma in the past and accomplish spiritual progress—is by working on the hypothesis that we are free as to the acts. Nature has prescribed that hypothesis for our guidance by implanting so fixedly in our consciousness the feeling that we are free as to act. And here we revert to the "qualification" I spoke of a few pages back.

Within limits, we of the present stage of human evolution are not bound by karmic necessity to *acts* with such a rigid destiny as to deprive us altogether of free-will as regards them. Will any one suppose that there is going to be something loose here in the chain of occult reasoning, a flaw in the great system of cause and effect? On the contrary, there is merely a beautiful adaptation of minor to higher laws. Gradually, very gradually, the whole world, "and all that it inhabits," is moving on to higher conditions of being in which continued evolution *must* be blended with the exercise of their own spiritual will by all who share it. It is a law of karma—of the karma we are now talking about, that of physical life—that the perfected Arhat gets above its operation. This is no legal quibble like the saying that the sovereign can do no wrong, but is simply another way of saying that a man does not become an Arhat till the temptations of the ordinary physical life have quite ceased to be temptations for him. He has got beyond the hopes and fears of physical life. His existence in the body is merely an inconvenient

phase of his everyday existence out of the body. He keeps it going for duty's sake alone, and for no other conceivable or possible motive, and he is as likely—or shall we say less likely—to sin on the physical plane than a grown man with us is likely to cry and beat the table if he accidentally hurts his hand against it.

Very well; that being so as regards the extreme case of the Arhat, there is clearly *no* karma left binding him to physical acts. But Nature always shades her varieties of condition one into another like the rainbow's tints. The man partially developed in the direction of arhatship is already partially exempt from the tyranny of karma as regards his acts. His free-will is becoming a more potent force in his life than it is in the case of the man whom it can merely influence through his interior states of mind. And at the present stage of human evolution that we have reached as a body, we human beings of the "nineteenth century," or as the occultist would prefer to put it, of the fifth race, have *all of us*, broadly speaking, passed the stage at which we are mere automata in the hands of karma as regards our acts. It would not be true, for instance, to say at the present day that any man in a civilised country is under karmic obligations to commit a murder. He may be under karmic suggestion in that direction, but unless we can find a man whose education and training has been such that it has never been suggested to his mind that committing murder is wrong, then we may fairly deny that any one is under karmic pressure so unbending as to make him a mere instrument in respect to such an act as that. Observe, of course,

that in speaking here of "murder" I mean the wilful murder which really involves the intention, and am not noticing any crude distinctions made by legal enactments.

So with any of the very great crimes against duty, whether they come within the catalogue of human codes or not. The least enlightened of us are at least beginning to be responsible beings.

In most branches of science, and in occult science especially, the solution of one problem will often suggest others with which we may not previously have been in relation. So it may be well here at once to deal with a difficulty that will be sure to occur sooner or later to anyone who thinks over the limited free-will, even as regards acts, which is assigned by occult teaching to people of the present race.

All of us are in very close relations on this plane of life with one another. Perhaps, indeed, on all planes, and on others more even than here; but at all events the manner in which our acts influence one another is obvious. So obvious as to make loose thinkers recoil from the notion of anything resembling predetermination in the course of events. If A robs B he may alter the whole course of B's life. If A has free-will whether to rob B or not, how can B's karma be correctly worked out? And so on *ad infinitum*, with small acts and events as well as great ones. Indeed, the mightiest events in our lives often ensue from acts on the part of others that look quite insignificant at the time. Where are we to draw the line in any scientific spirit? Human affairs are so

intensely entangled that it looks as though we must say—all or nothing, either every act, to the smallest, must be automatic and inevitable, or there is no prearranged course of events and no regular working out of karma at all. But there is a way of drawing the line which becomes intelligible in the light of some further revelations. These are so subtle that I must approach them gradually.

When we talk about the laws of Nature being the will of God we use language with which few European thinkers will quarrel. Even materialism, if not absolutely atheistic, might let the phrase pass. Religious instinct will cling to it as a mode of bringing the incontrovertible facts of physical science into harmony with theological ideas. But those beautiful generalities are never completely satisfactory to the occult student. He wants some closer interpretation of the spiritual facts. When two chemical salts are mingled in solution, and thereupon the acids and bases change hands and group themselves into a new arrangement of molecules, is the will of God consciously ordaining that change? On the other hand, if a nebula of fire must come under the conditions that convert it into a system of planets teeming with life, with joy and suffering, with lofty human aspiration, and with evil tendencies, with love and hatred, and so on, can we suppose that the will of God, if producing *this* result, is unconscious of it? The double problem lies in the region respectfully put aside as inscrutable in most cases. But the inscrutability only ensues from the pestilential touch of modern thinking, which will only concern itself

with God in the cosmic sense if it transcends the narrowest observation of the physical facts of this world at all. It is only occult teaching that introduces us to the links between humanity and absolute universal spirit—the cosmic God.

We are coming into relations at this stage of the explanation with one of the sublimest mysteries of the spiritual plane, and I hope my readers will deal with the subject, and think of it, in an appropriate attitude of mind But the fact is as I have just foreshadowed. Just as there are, undoubtedly, men far more highly endowed or evolved, both as regards goodness and power and faculty, than the generality of those around us, so in Nature and in relation with this world there are spiritual beings of again far more exalted attributes. And the direct influence on the affairs of the world of some among these beings is a profound and wonderful truth. Of such beings we can obviously know but little beyond the fact that they exist, and beyond the obvious logical necessity for their existence in the great hierarchy of consciousness—of individualised spirit. But in the fact of their existence we may begin to discern the real truth at the bottom of the somewhat distorted popular conceptions concerning the providential government of the world.

How far these spiritual Lords of Creation are directly concerned with carrying out the cosmic will in regard to those great uniformities of Nature which constitute the laws of matter, is a question we need not here investigate, but it is at once intelligible that they should direct with conscious

intention the marvellous concatenation of events which constitute the laws of karma. Of course, the ordinary mind is aghast at the complexity of the problems to be dealt with, but physical science teaches us not to shrink from complexity as tantamount to improbability in our interpretations of Nature. The laws of the spiritual plane are not likely to be less complex than those of matter, and multiplex telegraphy—not to seek for still more powerful illustrations in the laws of optics—will suffice to warn us not to reject as inconceivable activities in Nature that the human mind cannot imagine itself as following consciously in detail.

At all events, the differences that exist between the laws of physical matter and the mysteries of human consciousness suggest, as an analogy, some different mode in which universal spirit should control the laws of matter and the incidents of life, which contribute to make up the justice of karma. Somehow we may think of the former as provided for by some stupendous exercise of Creation or Divine Will in advance, so to speak, of the human drama to be enacted on that stage. Then, when the human drama begins, we may think of that Divine Will as focussed in some sort of exalted individual consciousness or consciousnesses, but scarcely less omnipresent than the other or fundamental stratum of the Divine Will. The problem, as a metaphysical problem for the human mind contemplating it, is a problem in the distribution of consciousness. The terrible limitations of the physical organism as an instrument of thought are

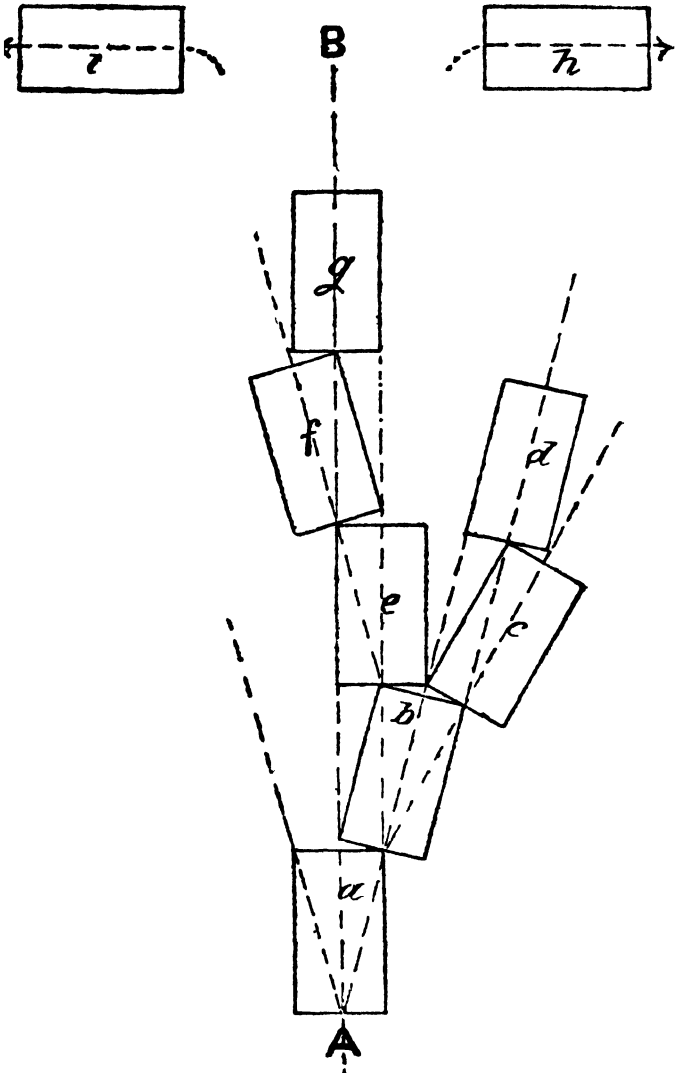
such that, broadly speaking, an incarnate man is only able to think of one thing at a time. With practice, indeed, I believe that on the very threshold of that great process of evolution, which occultists call initiation, it is found that these limitations are not so rigid as most people think, and that it is possible to keep up more than one continuous train of thought simultaneously—and by that, of course, I mean something more than the power of jumping rapidly backwards and forwards among various trains of thought and recollecting each in turn, after the manner of a chess-player engaged on several games of chess at once. The distribution of consciousness required for a being conscious, so to speak—in Divinity—and concerned with the control of karma, is, again, something as transcendently greater than this simplest distribution, in degree, as the rapidity, for example, of light waves counted by billions per second is greater than the rapidity of a pianoforte player's execution. But from the power of thinking of two things at once to the power of thinking of two million would only be a question of degree. To recognise the conceivability of the higher achievement is logically possible for the understanding.

And this is all we have to recognise, in order to bring within the range of imagination the karmic government of the world, as providing for the lateral play of individual free will. Any of us may now and then disturb the pre-existing karmic plan with which, so far, we had been entangled. Let it be assumed, for example, that it lay within the karma

of A and B that they should be ruined and made to suffer much material discomfort by the (probable) act of C. But C has developed a moral sense, outrunning that of his previous incarnation by the exercise of his spiritual free-will, and he misses his appointment with karma, to put it that way. Then other arrangements have to be made, and A and B are provided with the suffering due in some other manner, and a great number of minor adjustments have to be carried out accordingly. But this is only a question of adequate capacity on the part of the governing power and our hypothesis—or rather, the esoteric teaching concerning the actual state of the facts—recognises that adequate capacity as existing in the "Providences" of the world.

The principle I have been endeavouring to explain in regard to the lateral play of free-will during each physical life may be further elucidated with the help of a diagram.

In this figure the centre line A B represents the general direction of evolution for the race at large, and the small parallelograms represent a few individual lives. Taking the life *a* first, its place on the centre line shows that the Karmic impulses from the previous incarnation are in accordance with the normal tendency of the age. But the privilege of partial free-will, which the person whose life is in question enjoys, enables him to modify the tendency of his individual evolution either to the right or the left, to the extent shown by the dotted lines. He cannot modify that tendency more than is shown by the dotted lines, for he is hemmed in by the limitations of


i
B
h
g
f
d
e
c
b
a
A

karma and circumstance, in so far as the side lines of his parallelogram restrain the divergence. Let us assume that the direction to the right is towards spiritual good—that to the left, towards spiritual evil. If the individual concerned makes the necessary efforts during the life, represented by *a*, his next incarnation has a general karmic tendency in the direction of the centre line of the life *b*. Supposing, again, efforts in the direction of the better spirituality determine a further inclination of the centre line of life towards the right, then the third life of the series will be in the direction of *c*. And it will be obvious that a few more lives of similar effort will finally establish the centre line of the life at right angles to the original centre line—as in the case of the parallelogram *h*, which may be taken to represent complete adeptship in harmony with the Divine idea of absolute good.

But at every step of the process the free-will of the individual is an uncontrolled agency in the matter, and it will be always possible before the complete perfection of the *h* life is attained that the individual in question may swerve in the wrong direction. Thus the energies of the life *c* may be misdirected, and give rise to a subsequent incarnation in the direction *d*, and one more wrong swerve in that case would bring back the Ego into the original main current of commonplace evolution. At any stage of his progress along that centre line an evil swerve will take him in the left hand direction, and determine a new life with its predominant bent towards evil, as in the case marked *f*. And persistence in the evil tendency will,

in a few lives, establish the Ego on the horizontal centre line in the left hand direction, which may be taken to represent the course of absolute evil, which, like that of absolute good, disentangles an Ego from the main current of evolution altogether, under conditions dealt with in theosophical teaching.

It will be seen that the general probability in regard to a great majority of lives—considering the complex tendencies of human nature—will be such that most Egos will swerve now to the right and now to the left in such a way that they continue in the main current of evolution. But to make the diagram a little more significant, we may suppose that the main centre line, A B, is not a straight line, but the arc of an enormous circle bending towards the right, so that in the great procession of the ages the great majority will be slowly born round towards the direction of good—this tendency representing that general preponderance in the long run of the principle of good as compared with the principle of evil, nearly balanced as they often seem to be if we take short views of human affairs. And yet another modification might be introduced into the figure, with which I have not thought it worth while to embarrass the drawing, which should give a somewhat greater breadth to each parallelogram as it swerves from the main centre line in either direction, representing the increased efficiency of individual free-will as the Ego inclines more towards spirituality of either sort. This would hasten the possibility of attaining the completely horizontal position as compared with the rate of progress that would be available if the more

spiritualised lives were as narrowly hemmed in by the walls of karma and circumstance as those on the normal centre line.

I hope it will not be supposed that in the arbitrary length and breadth I have assigned to the parallelograms in the foregoing diagram I have been endeavouring to indicate the extent to which free-will is a potent factor in determining the events of our lives. Perhaps if we correlated the figure with events alone, the lateral dimensions would have to be much narrower. But reason about Necessity however much we please, even with the light of the present occult interpretation to fortify the conception, we shall always, when the strain of action comes on, proceed on the practical assumption that we have a liberty of choice before us. And there is not much danger for any one with intuitions sufficiently awake to take in the full significance of the occult interpretation, of his taking, as it were, an unfair advantage of his intellectual knowledge of the occult law. Should any one argue after any given surrender to temptation, "Now the thing is done, and therefore it could not have been left undone, and it is useless to make a fuss about it," then the answer would be that the application of such a feeling, state of consciousness, or spirit, to the karmic result just accomplished would be the very worst possible spirit in which it could be enveloped for its transmission through future ages as a new karmic force.

It must be remembered after all is said that can be said about the lateral play of free-will as regards acts that the law concerned is mainly related to thought

in reference to acts. For the last few pages I have been dealing with an all-important qualification of the main rule, but let us now revert to the consideration of the main rule, always keeping the qualification at the back of our minds, but treating the extent to which free-will can make the centre line of evolution swerve to the right or left as having chiefly to do with the manner in which we surround the acts of our lives with a karmic aura imposed on them by our thoughts.

Rightly appreciated, the whole doctrine laid down should tend to elevate and dignify life. It exalts, to begin with, the importance of *thought* regarded in itself as a force in Nature. Too often people imagine that thought is a casual and unimportant concomitant of acts. Take care of the acts, and the thoughts will take care of themselves, may be a view of the subject that many people will consider to embody a sufficiently heavy tax upon the good aspirations of a fallible humanity. That we may be somehow held responsible for what we *do*, may be admitted, but our thoughts, it may be argued, are beyond our own control. The lessons of esoteric philosophy are directly at variance with that popular delusion. Our thoughts are by no means beyond our own control, and for them, in a very high degree, we shall be "held responsible," to use a familiar phrase, which can easily be thrown into a more philosophical form.

A very crude and imperfect idea, which points the same way as the doctrine here laid down, is embodied in the frequently-expressed theory that after all "motive" is the great thing; that people may perform

the most mischievous acts and yet be blameless in the sight of Providence if they do whatever they do from a good motive. That notion is only to be recognised as sound, in so far as it contains the germ of the far more subtle idea that the karmic efficiency of acts is greatly qualified by the spirit in which they are performed. It is in its straightforward meaning both incomplete and false, as far as it goes. A good motive will not extinguish the karma of a bad act any more than a previous belief that a piece of iron you may touch is cold will prevent it from burning you if it is really hot. The act done will reverberate through time and produce its consequences, and if these are evil, they will sometimes, under the infallible operation of the karmic law, react on their author. Motive may qualify their karmic effect certainly, but if an act be evil, good motive may simply operate to blind the agent to its evil character, to prevent the development in his mind of the thoughts which bring with them remorse for the evil act, and hence the extinction of the karma of the act. The tendency to repeat such acts, on the contrary, would be established in the mind, and that line of karma would be intensified till in later lives it developed, perhaps, to a terrible degree the suffering which such a line of action would be calculated to produce. Moreover, when people talk about good motives excusing bad acts, they speak without regard to the complexities of old karma, which really produce the acts. They treat them as an altogether fresh departure, which a more philosophical comprehension of the matter shows us that they are not. Of course it is needless to grant that

a man who does a bad act from a bad motive is worse than another who does a bad act from a good motive, and up to a certain point the good motive doctrine may be better than none for unphilosophical thinkers. But it is a doctrine that will not carry any one very far on the road to a true conception of ethics, and, above all, it contributes nothing whatever to the elucidation of the mystery concerning Free-will and Necessity, which the corresponding occult doctrine so satisfactorily furnishes.

With that profound reflection before us, it may be worth while to look back at the pitiable shifts by which a corrupt theology and a conventional system of metaphysics—ignoring the sequence of continuous earth lives—have endeavoured to grapple with the plain contradictions of Free-will and Necessity, applied to the one life. The Articles of Religion, for instance, of the Church of England, inform us—in the interests of the necessitarian theory—that "Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation as vessels made to honour,"—certain other vessels in large number being accordingly made to dishonour, and provided for in a very different way. The chosen people "by grace obey the calling," and walk religiously in good works. This, of course, is a naked statement so far of the necessity which makes of men the automata of a Deity who would, by that

hopothesis, have decided before the foundations of the world were laid, to carry it on on principles revolting to the moral sense. But though the Articles may not hesitate to libel Divinity, they are quite ready to contradict themselves, and leave their disciples to take which meaning they prefer. So the article containing the words just quoted ends by saying that "we must," after all, "receive God's promises in such wise as they may be generally set forth to us in Holy Scriptures." Inasmuch as Holy Scriptures leave room for many readings, the adherents of free-will and justice, as a principle of Divine government, are thus empowered to accept the article set forth if they so please, not in the sense the words convey, but as meaning diametrically the reverse. A is B; that is the doctrine of the Church, but at the same time, if you think that A is not B, then you may work it out that way, and remain, nevertheless, a faithful believer of the Church's doctrine. This is as though one should teach geometry by saying the three angles of a triangle were made to equal four right angles before even the foundations of the earth were laid; but, nevertheless, these facts may be received if you are obstinate about them, subject to the general conclusions derived from the study of Euclid; and with this reflection to ease your mind, please go on saying, whenever you talk of such things, that four is the proper number for good people to put their faith in.

Metaphysicians hardly deal with the subject more logically than the church. Materialistic philosophy would, as a rule, plump for "uniformity," a pleasanter word than necessity or predestination, but

meaning exactly the same thing in this concatenation. Free-will then goes irretrievably overboard, and with it justice in the government of the world and all conjectures concerning consciousness prolonged beyond the grave. The Materialist and the Calvinist join hands in this matter, and there may not be much to choose between the view of the school which makes Divinity a myth and the soul an attribute of matter, on the one hand, and on the other that which recognises a God only to invest Him with moral attributes that would disgrace the most degraded manhood. However, both the Materialist and the Calvinist are so far logical; that may be granted to them. On the other hand, the reasoners who cling to free-will—never suspecting that it may exist, and exist with complete efficiency even if generally incapable of controlling acts—try to work it out by saying the emotions of mind have a uniform efficacy as motives; but independently of the attributes of mind, there is the substance thereof to be considered, the actual Self or Ego which is exempt from the conditions that attach to its attributes. This ultimate personality is free and independent, and a self-determining power of action, independent of external causes, resides therein. That is almost as much as saying that the *height* of a tree may be twenty feet, but that is the measure of its *height* and not the measure of the tree. Assuredly the Self or Ego is a very different thing from the attributes it manifests during any one earth life, but while it is in that earth life, you can no more deal with it for the purposes of its relations with earth—as

something apart from the sum total of its attributes—than you can deal, on the physical plane, with Berkeley's orange apart from the sum total of its size, colour, weight, shape, &c.

There is a something in the Ego which has touch with the physical plane, but is not of it, and which is exempt from the "Uniformities" spoken of by the old disputants concerning free-will and necessity. This something is the thought of the Ego, its own interior spiritual aspect which has direct relation to its acts, but does not constitute act, and therefore does not come—or, at all events, does not come entirely—within the operation of the karmic forces which make up the influences under which the doctrine of uniformity is supposed to operate. It is free at any time, and always to appeal to its own Divine fountain-head, to review the acts to which it has found itself driven, in the light of its own Divine consciousness; to reach out towards future acts that may better express the Divine purpose (which it may, if it so choose, become a co-operative agent in carrying out), and very often in so reaching it may discover as the future unrolls itself, that the karmic forces of the past are asserting themselves in the same direction, and that the free-will of its ennobled desire has a plain pathway before it, no longer encumbered by the obstacles that have hitherto created such terrible trouble—or it may find them, for that matter, strewn all the thicker in way, and may only realise that they *can* be passed, however painful the process.

The great point to emphasize is that the recognition of this interior freedom, which is in scientific and

complete harmony with the whole view of Nature prescribed by the Esoteric Teaching, has the effect, among others, of accomplishing what has hitherto been regarded as a problem no less insoluble than the squaring of the circle—the reconciliation of Free-will and Necessity.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES.

TO pave the way for an examination into which we must shortly enter concerning the actual conditions of those realms through which the soul must pass in the course of its progress from physical death to re-birth, it will be desirable to pause for a moment in order to get a clearer view of the complex constitution of man. This constitution includes within itself vehicles adapted to the expression of consciousness on every plane of Nature besides that with which, for the moment, we are chiefly concerned, and no adequate comprehension of the process through which the evolution of the central individual consciousness is accomplished, can be attained by any thinker who fails to grasp the true character of the various vehicles in which that consciousness may at different times be manifest. On the plane of physical incarnation the vehicles are all involved one within the other, and in higher realms of Nature, we are, from one point of view, simpler beings than on this level. The conditions of physical existence have necessitated the finer state of complexity we here encounter, but in passing on to the examination of those which occult teaching describes as the "seven principles of man" it is well to bear in mind that the septenary constitution

is a part of man's physical aspect, and that the true individuality must not be thought of as a bundle of souls separable one from the other, as occult science has sometimes been unjustly supposed to teach. The complete entity as we see him here is rather a bundle of vehicles, each of which is adapted to function on different planes of Nature, which for mankind at large are almost inseparably imbedded in the lowest and most developed vehicle, the physical body. These various vehicles are to some extent separable, even as regards mankind at large, and are readily and completely separable in the case of persons whose spiritual training has advanced to certain points, and in whose case evolution, likely to be a slow process for the bulk of humanity, has been abnormally hastened.

Coming now to detail, I may enumerate the seven principles in a way which will be seen by readers of "Esoteric Buddhism" to differ in no essential manner from the early statements on the subject there set forth, but which, so far as the language is concerned, may avoid misconceptions which the former terminology, perhaps, made possible. Arranged in numerical order, the seven principles may be described in the following way:—

1. Physical Body.
2. Etheric Double.
3. Jiva.
4. The Astral Vehicle.
5. Manas.
6. Buddhi.
7. Atma.

The first three principles taken in this order belong entirely to the physical manisfestation. In the earlier presentation of these ideas I put Jiva as the second principle, and the "Linga Sharira," or Etheric Double, as the third. The modification now adopted involves no variation in the essential teaching, but appears preferable from certain points of view. First of all, as regards the Linga Sharira, that term was imported from Oriental terminology into our theosophical literature in the beginning; but a fuller appreciation of the exact function of this element in our organism and of its own constitution considered separately shows that it is an Etheric rather than an Astral counterpart of the physical body, and, at the same time, the intermediate organism through which the Jiva, or life force, influences the whole system. Occult students can make a very clearly defined distinction in their own minds between the two words used above, which may not at first, to the ordinary reader, have a different signification. Etheric matter is still physical according to the most accurate classification that can be adopted, although it is already entirely beyond the reach of instrumental observation and can only be seen by the finer senses appertaining to the Astral vehicle. Each plane of Nature, as we ascend through the refinements of the Cosmos, is constituted of different orders of matter, each order being subject to various modifications on its own plane. For example, we have solid, liquid and gaseous matter, and beyond these, four varieties of etheric matter into which the molecules of elementary matter, as known to ordinary chemistry,

may gradually be broken up. The whole subject is one of very deep interest, but I should be turning too far aside from the main path of what I have to say if I stopped here to unravel its complexities even as far as these have at present been examined by occult students qualified to engage in such researches. It will be enough to make the leading idea of this occult development of chemical science intelligible in its broad outlines. The molecule of matter which possesses the characteristics of one of the known chemical elements must be thought of, in accordance with the actual truth of nature, as a complicated structure built up of numerous ultimate physical atoms. All these ultimate physical atoms are identical in their own composition and attributes, or approximately so; at all events for our present purposes whatever differences are latent within them have nothing to say to their physical plane aspects. Each molecule may be roughly thought of as a different building, but each building is constructed of similar bricks. A great many bricks are required for some molecular structures, and whereas the simplest known to ordinary chemistry, the hydrogen molecule, contains only eighteen atoms, the molecules of some gases include many hundreds, and these figures will probably be found to expand again in the case of molecules representing the metallic elements.

On the lowest etheric condition the gaseous molecules known to chemistry are broken up into sub-divisions, and in this condition appear at once to escape entirely beyond the reach of physical senses and instruments. Their effects are, of course,

manifest in all the various phenomena of Nature which have to do with etheric vibrations; and a time, of course, will come in the progress of physical plane knowledge when all this will be the A B C of the text books. In the higher varieties of etheric matter the sub-divisions get broken up again and again until finally, in the highest condition of etheric matter, we find the atoms entirely separated one from the other, and matter at that level to be perfectly uniform in its structure and homogeneous in its constitution.

It is of matter derived from the etheric sub-planes that the Etheric Double is composed under the guidance of extremely subtle laws, and as the expression indeed of the most exalted spiritual will with which the affairs of this planet are directly concerned. The Etheric Double guides the actual deposition of physical molecules as the body grows, growing with it indeed, but always one step in advance; and the force which circulates through the nerve system of the Etheric Double is that Jiva which constitutes the physical life principle, which as it becomes differentiated from the vast stores of Nature for the purpose of human requirements, itself comes within the field of vision of the astral senses, and can actually be seen by persons adequately qualified coursing through the nerve system of the Etheric Double as the blood flows through the veins of the physical body. The Jiva itself is primarily a force which pours into this planet from the sun. It has a multitude of tasks to perform connected with organic Nature, but keeping for the present to the question of

human growth, we find it undergoing, in healthy human organizations, a process of differentiation which adapts it for its peculiar task, just as organic food is converted into blood by the physical body. A strong and healthy human being specialises a good deal more Jiva than he requires for his own use, just as the bees make more honey than they really want for themselves. In such a case it is constantly radiating from him, supplying the deficiencies more or less completely of those who are too feeble to specialise enough Jiva for themselves.

A man in good health is thus constantly, even without intention, imparting some of his spare vitality to others, though he does this with far greater energy when he employs mesmeric passes to assist the process, and uses his will-power, in a greater or less degree according to the extent of its development, to render them effective. Conversely the man in bad health, who through inefficient action of the appropriate organs in his own system is unable to specialise for his own use an adequate volume of the solar Jiva all around us, acts unconsciously as a sponge, absorbing the specialised Jiva of others with whom he is in contact. To different degrees most people are conscious that some others weary and tire them by their contiguity, even though they may not be able to trace the nature of the process by which they are affected. Persons of a very robust temperament hardly experience this feeling, perhaps, because in most such persons the higher principles, including those subtle emanations belonging to the astral plane, are more inextricably entangled with their physical

molecules ; and the very materialistic nature which is extremely insensitive itself is generally as little disposed to part with its own influences. The sensitive very ready to feel the magnetic emanations of others is, on the other hand, generally the person who is most easily drained of whatever vitality he may himself possess. These considerations, however, must not be read as implying that perfect physical health and robust constitution are identical with materialistic self-involvment. The whole subject of sensitiveness is profoundly misunderstood when, as is too often the case, people imagine it to be in some way identified with states of health ; but the complete examination of that idea would take me too far away from the main part of the explanation I am now pursuing.

The fourth principle, or Astral Body, is the vehicle in which the soul may function on the astral plane of Nature, that immediately above the physical, the nature and characteristics of which we shall come to investigate presently.

Nothing is more difficult, in dealing with occult interpretations of Nature, than to decide in what order to take up their various sub-divisions. Nothing can properly be understood without the comprehension of something else. This matter that we are upon for the moment, the septenary constitution of man, requires, of course, for its full appreciation a comprehension of the whole planetary scheme to which we belong, but no treatise on this great subject can possibly be attempted without constant reference to the seven principles of man. However, if any

aspect of the present explanation seems for the moment unintelligible it will fall into its place later on. After a certain degree of progress in occult study, nothing is more impressive to the student than the beautiful coherence of the whole structure and the marvellous way in which each part, as it ramifies through the whole, fits into every detail of the other.

Just as the body, during the activity of our waking life, involves within itself the vehicles or bodies calculated for service on higher planes of Nature, so the astral body, set free from the physical and considered apart from these, involves within itself the higher vehicles which are adapted to function on the spiritual planes of Nature. It includes the whole man, minus the physical vehicle; and as regards the whole man's capacity for thinking and feeling, we may appreciate the extent to which he loses nothing by transfer to the astral plane, if we ask how much is left behind of his original consciousness in the dead body? Nothing whatever, to put the matter briefly; and nothing in this way is lost from the consciousness and feeling of the soul transferred from the physical to the astral plane, and beginning to function in the astral body.

The principles, however, may be thought of as something more than a mere envelope for a central entity of consciousness, because the finer vehicles, as they are capable of separation from the astral, in turn are incapable of giving expression to the lower emotions, desires, and sentiments of the man as we know him here, or as we may deal with him, if properly qualified, on the astral plane. The astral

body is not in any true sense of the term a soul, but it is the manifestation of soul in reference to certain aspects of Nature and certain possibilities of life. If we think of it as apart from the interior consciousness, and apart from the higher vehicles belonging to the spiritual planes on which that consciousness may ultimately function, we can then speak of it in the language which has been usual with occult writers as the principle of Kama or desire; the animal soul, giving expression to all the proclivities of life as engendered by the experiences of physical existence, and as constituting that part of the man which involves an opportunity of selfishness, and is thus the seat of almost all evil or criminal propensities which the strain and pressure of physical existence can engender. The spiritual soul escaping from its embrace, leaves it enfeebled, withered, and in process of disintegration, in all cases where the higher nature is at all favourably evolved, and in which the lower nature has been rather the inevitable consequence of physical existence than a commanding condition of consciousness. The circumstances under which this separation is accomplished will be considered when we come to deal with the astral plane more fully, and so we may pass for the moment to the consideration of the fifth principle.

The true individual man, his Higher Self, as evolving under the stimulus of the sixth principle, includes all the product of his thinking forces which have to do with phases of consciousness superior to those concerned with the animal desires and requirements of physical existence. From one point of view, the fifth principle itself may be thought of as the vehicle

of the Manas—as the Devachanic body—but by this time, in the marvellous attenuation of matter as we ascend to the higher realms, we find it so incomprehensibly blended with states of consciousness, that it would rather be misleading than helpful to the imagination to think of the Devachanic body as merely a vehicle of Buddhi. In one sense the sixth principle in man, to which this name is given, is itself the vehicle of that universal Atma, the all pervading Spirit of the Universe, with the attributes of which it would almost be folly to attempt to concern ourselves, while thought is still limited by the conditions of the physical intellect. Of Atma, except through its effects, through its manifestations, which are the whole universe around us, including all conscious beings in whatever gradation of existence, it would be futile to speak. We can know as yet nothing of its nature. We can only regard it as, in some incomprehensible manner, the potentiality of all things and all manifestations. The Ocean of Buddhi is the first manifestation of Atma, with which for the purposes of this explanation we need concern ourselves; and when it is sometimes declared in poetical language that every man has within him the spark of Divinity, the truth which this phrase embodies may be otherwise expressed by saying that he has touch or relationship with the ocean of Buddhi. If we may materialise the thought, so as to render it in one degree more tangible, he has established an individual focus within the Buddhi, or in other words, an individual focus within the Buddhi has become him —which focus or vortex is evermore a persistent fact.

During all the ages of his earlier evolution it is little more than a remote possibility of the future, involving nothing that can be thought of as an individual consciousness on the level of Nature to which it belongs. Still, it is the manifestation of this spark of Buddhi on the Devachanic plane, and clothed in the vehicle of Devachanic matter, which constitutes the true human individuality with which we are concerned, sometimes spoken of as the fifth principle, sometimes as the Higher Self, sometimes as the Higher Ego, sometimes as the Higher Manas. Occult science is a new study for modern writers, and its terminology is not yet thoroughly systematised, though the ideas with which it is concerned are very much more clearly defined in the minds of all advanced students than some surviving confusions of language would lead a hasty observer to imagine. On the Devachanic plane, on the highest levels of that plane itself, presenting various aspects on lower levels, as we shall see hereafter, the Buddhi principle actuates the vehicle which must now no longer be thought of as a vehicle, but as the permanent soul itself, though in its aspect as a vehicle it is spoken of in oriental philosophy as the Karana Sharira. This, whether we think of it as the soul itself, or the permanent vehicle of that individuality which is a facet of the universal soul, passes on from one manifestation to another, re-incarnating in different physical bodies, and gathering around itself with each descent into physical life the constituent elements of a new astral body.

In the case of all ordinary humanity belonging to this present race of ours, the Karana Sharira itself

is little more than the beginning of something which will ultimately become a true spiritual being. It is an imperishable germ from the first moment of its establishment as such in the ocean of Buddhi, but before its growth can be accomplished it has to manifest on lower and lower planes of Nature till it gets down to the physical plane. Then it can get no further and begins to expand and accrete self-consciousness and experience in the course of successive incarnations, bringing back something, however little, after each, to involve into its own permanent consciousness.

Amongst the humanity around us we already see this process of growth in progress at almost every possible stage. In some people the individual Higher Self, the Manas, the fifth principle, has become already a highly developed and magnificent entity. In others the corresponding principle of their being is perceptible for those whose vision can penetrate the Arupa levels of Devachan, as a film that has hardly as yet assumed a definite form, which is still less the vehicle of an exalted consciousness. But its progress is assured as regards the future. Those of us who may be best able now to function in the higher spiritual realm of Nature, have been filmy beginnings of Manasic manifestation in our time.

The study of the seven principles is really inseparately blended with the investigation of the Human Aura. The higher vehicles involved in the constitution of man—or in reference to which it may equally be said, and perhaps with greater accuracy, that man is involved within them—are actually visible

to the astral senses and devachanic perception of people whose clairvoyant powers are developed, and as so visible are habitually described as the aura. That aura, indeed, is blended with certain radiations from the three lower principles, which are in no sense vehicles of the soul, but which manifest themselves within the area to which the higher vehicles extend around the body, so that each aura, if we separate one from the other for the purpose of scientific treatment, must be thought of as conterminous with the others.

The aura extends to a distance of eighteen inches or two feet from the body in all directions, and is approximately oval in shape. In most cases it has no very definite outline, but its edges fade very gradually into invisibility. Closer study of this luminous cloud reveals the fact to which reference has already been made, that it has several distinct components. These components, indeed, consist of matter in different states ; each of them is, as it were, a distinct aura, and would, if the others were withdrawn, be seen to occupy the whole space covered by the entire mass. They are described as of obviously different degrees of attenuation, and each apparently penetrates the one next below, as the Etheric Double is seen to penetrate the physical body.

The first, beginning at the lowest and most material level, may be regarded as appertaining more especially to the physical body, and may conveniently be called the "Health Aura," from the fact that its condition is greatly affected by the health of the body to which it is attached. It is almost colourless, but becomes

perceptible by reason of possessing a curious system of radial striation—that is to say, it is marked by, or perhaps might be described as composed of, an enormous number of straight lines radiating evenly in all directions from the body. That, at least, is the normal condition of these lines when the body is in perfect health. They are each separated from one another, and as nearly parallel as their radiation allows; but wherever disease affects the body there the lines in the neighbourhood of the organs affected fall into confusion, cross one another in all directions, and present the appearance of being tangled together.

The second component of the aura consists of that vital energy, or specialised Jiva, discernible when circulating within the Etheric Double. It is then of a delicate rosy tint, but loses this and becomes of a faint bluish white hue as it radiates outwards. It seems to be the influence under which the lines of the health aura remain radial in their position when the body is in good health. I have known a case in which the clairvoyant has perceived the more or less crumpled lines in the health aura of a person suffering from some nervous prostration, straighten out under the influence of fresh Jivic energy poured into him by a mesmeric operator. The appearance of the Jivic aura, to persons who can discern it, has some resemblance to that appearance which heated air presents when seen in summer rising from ground exposed to the sun's rays. It may also be likened to the faint condensation of vapour due to the breath when perceived in an atmosphere barely cold enough to render it visible, but just below the point at which it would

be completely invisible. There is some curious resemblance to be further detected between the Jivic aura of a human being and the magnetic aura which Baron Reichenbach has studied. It is safe to conclude that there is a difference between these two phenomena, because the vital organism of a human being must specialise the general life principle of Nature in some way different from that in which it is specialised by magnetic and electric instruments. But the Jivic aura (which is itself by far the most visible element in the human aura, so that it will sometimes be seen by persons not clairvoyant enough to perceive any of the other components) is to all appearance identical in its nature with similar emanations which may, under some circumstances, be perceived as coming from magnets and electrical instruments which have been in activity.

One very important and interesting circumstance connected with the Jivic aura is, that to a certain extent it seems to be under the control of the will. At all events, people far advanced enough in psychic development to see it, and others even who cannot see it, but who are intellectually advanced enough to comprehend it, can control its radiation, prevent its dispersion beyond the limits of their own aura, and gather it on the external periphery of this, so to speak, in such a way that it forms a kind of wall or shell around them, that greatly enhances its protective effect, and may render it impervious to any kind of astral or elemental influence as long as the effort of the will is maintained. In this way an occultist may pass into the most infected atmosphere with perfect

impunity. And here, perhaps, I may venture to attempt a little practical recipe for the benefit of those intuitive enough to appreciate its significance, and thus qualified to profit by the hint. The phrase, "an effort of will," is, of course, very vague and indefinite. The difficulty is to translate the want or desire for a certain result into the operative energy of that mysterious power residing within the human being which we call the will; and the first thing to do is to help that closely allied faculty, loosely described as the imagination, to picture before itself clearly the object to be gained. This may be done by any one whose imagination at all transcends the limits of commonplace ignorance and incredulity concerning the unseen, in the following way. Let the person who desires to protect himself by a magnetic shell inhale a deep breath, and slowly breathe it out, picturing in his own imagination that he is—as indeed in very truth he is doing—throwing out a cloud of magnetic Jiva. Let him imagine this clinging to the external limits of the aura around him, spreading over it as water might spread in a thin film over a surface, and clinging more and more tenaciously with each exhalation of the breath. A person who does that with full belief in the efficacy of the process, whether such belief is derived from his own observation or from the intelligent appreciation of evidence on the subject, produces a definite result, and becomes protected for a time both from disease germs and from disagreeable influences on the astral plane. The protection, however, is likely to wear off in a little while—in ten minutes or a quarter of an hour—

unless sustained by renewed thought directed to its maintenance.

Coming now to the aura of the fourth principle we begin to approach the region of those appearances which have to do with something more than bodily conditions even of the finer order. Keeping to proper occult nomenclature, this aura would be called the Kamic aura—that which has to do with the animal phase of man's consciousness, and the appearance of which expresses to those who comprehend its significance the general state of the lower sensual nature in any individual observed. This aura is the field of manifestation, or the mirror in which every feeling, every desire, is reflected. From it, material, bodily form is given to the dark elementals which men create and set in motion by evil wishes and malicious feeling. It constitutes that astral body in which those who find themselves able to do so, travel about on another plane, while the physical body sleeps. As might naturally be expected, there is little permanency about its manifestations. Its colours, its brilliancy, are all changing from moment to moment. An outburst of anger will charge the whole aura with deep red flashes on a dark ground, while sudden terror will in a moment change everything to a mass of ghastly livid grey.

The highest component of the aura to which clairvoyance short of adeptship can penetrate, is the aura of the Higher Manas. It is not by any means around every person that such an aura would be seen at all. In some mysterious way, of course, its potentiality resides in every human being, but except in those

cases where the higher self is evolved to considerable activity, it would be vain to attempt to discern its emanation within the denser clouds of the lower principles. It is described by those who can see it as of almost inconceivable delicacy and beauty, perhaps less a cloud than a living light. But though rarely discernible in ordinary human beings, in those where the spiritual nature is very much the more powerful factor of the whole composition it simply outshines all the rest with startling brilliancy to observers qualified to perceive such phenomena.

This aura is, in fact, the Karana Sharira, the vehicle of the consciousness on the Arupa plane of Devachan —the Higher Self for all practical purposes—if we respectfully put aside for the present any attempt to examine the aspect of consciousness on the plane of Buddhi. The "Carrier Body" is a term applied to it in some Indian books, meaning that it is the vehicle which carries over the consciousness of the individual from life to life. As the human being advances in evolution the Karana Sharira becomes larger, as well as more defined in outline—always maintaining the ovoid form, and has thus in some theosophic writings been spoken of as the "auric egg." This multiplicity of terms is confusing to the beginner, but all confusion disappears when the ideas concerned are rightly apprehended.

When the physical body is seen set in the midst of its higher vehicles, these, overlapping it on all sides, present the appearance of an emanation, and from this point of view are spoken of as the aura; but in all consideration of that subject it is well to keep hold

of the fundamental thought that the aura is really made up of the higher vehicles extending over a larger volume of space than that occupied by the physical body. When people are closely massed together, the auras—the higher vehicles—mingle in a curious way and catch influences one from the other, unless they are specially managed with occult knowledge.

Some of the principles are separable from one another during life, but from the explanations already given it will be seen that this conception in reference to them must not be pushed too far. At the lower end of the scale that the third principle—the Jiva—could not be separated from the etheric double, of which it is the very life. And though the etheric double, plus its Jiva, may under abnormal conditions be separated for a time from the physical body, such separation would mean the death of the physical body if prolonged beyond brief periods and no such separation falls within the regular course of any occult exercise. Again, at the other end of the scale there is no possibility within the range of any conditions of spiritual elevation that we need talk about at present of separating the Buddhi principle from the Karana Sharira. But the fourth and fifth principles are readily separable from their lower envelopes; and the fourth (carrying with it the higher principles) does actually separate from the body, even of ordinary non-psychic people in sleep. The separation becomes possible for occultists advanced in training to a certain degree as an act of will, or again, in cases where the training is still further advanced, the fifth principle—

the true Ego or Higher Self—may be disentangled from the astral body (which in such cases would be left behind with the physical body). The soul is then said to be established in its Mayavi Rupa, the vehicle adapted to its manifestation on the lower levels of Devachan. The character on these manifestations on the astral and devachanic planes will be appreciated better when the regions of Nature in question have been more systematically examined.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ASTRAL PLANE.

WHILE tracing out the manifold considerations that support the doctrine of re-incarnation as the true explanation of the way Nature provides for the progress and growth of the soul, I refrained from complicating the argument by more than a slight reference to the varied conditions under which consciousness is qualified to function on the various planes of existence it may reach during the protracted period intervening between two physical lives. But before it is possible to understand the opportunities of spiritual evolution that lie before us, it will be necessary to obtain a thorough comprehension of the different planes of Nature which, though all super-physical, are by no means all equally refined, elevated or spiritual in their characteristics.

Indeed, that plane or region which is immediately in contact with the plane of physical matter, and of which the phenomena first become perceptible to the psychic senses of an ordinary clairvoyant, is not regarded as spiritual at all in the estimation of the occult student One of the earliest and most pardonable mistakes of people who in one way or another acquire the privilege, or through the faculties of others obtain the opportunity of investigating mysteries

of Nature invisible to the physical eye, is the mistake of assuming that the realm they are thus able to cognise is the whole spiritual realm—the "other world" of commonplace theological speculation. In this vast ante-chamber of the spiritual world the conditions of Nature are no less bewildering for those who first wake up in it, uninstructed, after death, than for those who may become qualified to observe its phenomena while still in physical incarnation. This region it will be convenient to speak of by the name long familiar to the literature of European mysticism and occultism, and to call it the Astral Plane. The term is not particularly well chosen, as the region in question has nothing whatever to do with the stars, but it has become so time-honoured an expression that it is not worth while to set it aside now. The corresponding term in oriental occultism is *Kama-loca*, the region of craving or desire, in which the conditions of existence are so imperfectly spiritualised that they have not yet been emancipated from the appetites of animal life. However, it will be better to speak here of the astral plane rather than of kama-loca because however deeply European occultism at the present day may stand indebted to the light from the East, an unnecessary stumbling block is put in the way of European students who wish to assimilate the *ideas* of oriental philosophy when they are disguised in phrases derived from a language with which they are unacquainted. There is nothing in the earlier teachings of Eastern Theosophy that will defy intelligible expression in Western tongues. There is much indeed which may perhaps defy translation into

speech at all. Probably for that matter Sanscrit, for those who can handle it as freely as we in this country handle English, is a better vehicle of metaphysical thinking than any European language as at present developed. But new words rise up to meet new necessities as thought itself develops, and at all events whoever truly understands the idea represented by any given term of oriental philosophy as expressed in Sanscrit will be able to find the means of embodying that idea in his own Western speech. After all, as applied to the astral plane, the term kama-loca merely fastens on one of the attributes of that natural region. For human beings whose consciousness after death may be entangled there, it may be a region of desire,—of unsatisfied desire if their affinities are still too much of the earlier earth to allow of their ascent to higher levels,—but it is also a region in which natural forces unknown to the physical life have free play and which for that reason we shall inadequately appreciate if we think of it merely by reference to its purgatorial aspect.

To begin with, we must always bear in mind that the astral plane—and this remark also applies to the more truly spiritual plane of which I shall have to speak later on—is a very different region for the departed souls of deceased humanity from that which it constitutes for the emancipated Higher Self of a soul, still incarnate, which by reason of occult development is capable of existing there during the temporary trances of the body to which it belongs. For the deceased personality, in all ordinary cases the will power which is an attribute of the spirit is inactive

on the astral plane. That is practically reserving itself for expansion in the realm of spirit, and if we think of the soul that has passed away from earth as occupied with the interests and aspirations which during life have been directed towards the idea of an incorporeal state, we are thinking of it as it will be when the spiritual plane is reached, and not as it is in the astral condition. For those who die, the astral plane is in most cases the first stage of the world of effects, and is no longer a sphere in which spiritual causes can be generated. The higher aspects of the entity are in abeyance, awaiting the awakening later on, on the spiritual plane, and meanwhile the lower aspects that may be functioning on the astral plane are merely reverberating there with impulses already set going during the earth life. Thus it ensues that although on the astral plane, the soul working out its natural destinies is really in presence of opportunities which, if it had all its wits about it, so to speak, would be full of interest, it is as a rule quite unqualified to make use of these.

For example, the astral plane, which is co-extensive with the material plane of this earth life, is infinitely more subtle, elastic, and ethereal than the physical plane, so that the astral body, which is the vehicle of human consciousness on that plane as the physical body is its vehicle during incarnation, is capable of an easy and rapid translation from place to place under the influence of forces which its own occupant is capable of directing. The higher Ego of a living person on the astral plane may be able to control those forces, and thus pass at will almost with the

rapidity of thought from one region of earth to another; but the spiritual will of the deceased personality on the astral plane in the ordinary course of things, is dormant as I have said, and consequently the astral consciousness does not know how to direct its own wanderings; it becomes the sport of magnetic currents, which it has nothing to do with setting in motion. *Immediately* after death, indeed, its movements may be the consequence of currents set in motion by the last thoughts or desires of affection of its expiring incarnate life, and this consideration has to be kept in mind to explain much that occurs in connexion with visions of people dying at a distance presented sometimes to their surviving friends. But the power of directing its own movements would very soon be lost by the astral personality in most cases, and then it would drift about in rather an aimless way unless riveted to certain persons or places by very strong ties of attachment or emotion, pleasurable or painful.

In reference to such attachments, and indeed with a view to the proper comprehension of the plane of Nature we are discussing, it must always be remembered that the astral region is not a remote, other world, far removed from our own either by characteristics or space. It is all about us, though invisible to common-place organs of sight. It is another aspect of the physical world, plus forces and inhabitants, of which the physical world knows nothing—material even in its nature, though its materiality is of a finer kind than that of the physical plane.

What is meant by refinement of matter? Nothing is of greater importance in connexion with the study

of the super-physical planes of Nature than a proper appreciation of the answer to that question. The habit of thinking of the liquid, solid, and gaseous states of such matter as the senses can cognise, is apt to be misleading here. In the occult significance of the term there is nothing more refined and ethereal in the lightest of the gases—hydrogen—than in the heaviest of the minerals. The atmosphere and the rocks are equally composed of matter on the physical plane, and to the senses qualified to apprehend the matter of the astral plane, that might appear as solid as gold or granite, though its presence would be unperceived in the most delicate balance, just as the balance itself, indeed, and the laboratory in which it might have a place, might be unperceived, by a being with none but senses adapted to the phenomena of the astral plane.

I have spoken already of the manner in which the matter of the astral plane is amenable to the influence of thought, sympathy, and will. It is in harmony with that condition of things that on the astral plane thought should be, as it is, much more naked and visible than with us, so that astral beings can see one another's thoughts in a way which is wholly outside the range of incarnate experience. This is the explanation of a great many wonderful observations of "spiritualism," and of the exaggerated estimation in which spiritualists hold that plane of existence—the astral—with which they come most readily into relation. A being who can read their thoughts, and even read long forgotten thoughts which occupied their minds at bygone periods, and thus show knowledge of incidents in their lives known only to themselves (as far as the

physical plane is concerned), is easily exalted in their imaginations, on that account to a place in nature not far removed from one of spiritual omniscience.

Meanwhile, a person who has passed on from the physical plane, and is still entangled in the astral region, or even the Higher Self of a clairvoyant or mesmeric sensitive, functioning in the astral body, may be subject to delusive impressions arising from this very transparency of thought all around him. Impressions that are merely the echo of other thoughts will seem objective realities, and beyond this, the human consciousness, transferred to the astral plane either after death or in trance, will be in presence of innumerable phenomena, which are objective realities of that plane but are of so strange and unfamiliar a kind as to be wholly unintelligible, for on the astral plane we are not only in presence of an order of matter peculiar to that phase of Nature, but of an order—or rather of many orders —of beings peculiar to that plane. Every region of Nature is teeming with life, and the experience of the ordinary world should prepare us to expect that on the astral plane, as here, the stage of Nature is peopled with others besides human beings. At least as voluminous and varied as the animal life of the earth is the psychic life of the astral plane. Swarming on that plane there are elemental beings of infinite variety which are sub-human, as measured on the scale of natural evolution, but are often endowed with *powers*—just as many of the animals with us are endowed with muscular powers—transcending those of ordinary mankind.

The control of these beings is one of the most momentous secrets of practical occultism, and the encouraging truth of the matter is that just because they are sub-human—if we take the spiritual potentialities of man's nature fully into account—they are all controllable for the human being who has completely evolved on the spiritual as well as on the astral plane. But it does not follow from this that every human being who passes after death on to the astral plane has either the power of dealing with them, or the knowledge that enables him to realise who and what they are. Their mere presence around him is calculated to bewilder the unprepared intruder into their wonderful domain. He has to learn the exercise on the astral plane of the strength of his *spiritual* soul —and very gruesome experiences may be encountered during this process—for just as some of the animals of this world are ferocious in their bearing towards humanity, so on the astral plane many of the elemental beings are hostile to the human intruder seeking to acquire mastership amongst them.

Further researches on that head need only concern persons who are coming within measurable distance of the mysteries of initiation, but meanwhile it is desirable that the reader should realise as much as possible of the structure, and general design of the astral plane, regarded as a region of Nature irrespective of the different conditions under which human consciousness may function there.

Hitherto I have spoken of it as though it were a homogeneous territory, but that is merely because it is impossible to deal with all its characteristics in the

same breath. Between the lower and the higher regions of the astral world there are enormous differences.

These have to be studied in two aspects, that which they present to the soul set free from the body at death, and that which they wear for the competent observer gradually acquiring some of the characteristics of adeptship, who is enabled, by his spiritual advancement, to penetrate at will to any of those various sub-divisions, to pass from one to the other freely, to make use, for purposes connected with his work in this world, of forces that he may find on any region of the astral. To make the whole situation intelligible it will be best to take a survey, first of all, of the various sub-divisions from the point of view of the normal entity after death. And here, at the outset, we have to face one embarrassment which often presents itself to the student's mind, the question namely, how far the various sub-divisions may be thought of as actual regions of space, and how far they interpenetrate one another, representing in that way varying aspects of conciousness rather than differences of locality. The more we study spiritual science the less will this notion, involving the interpenetration, so to speak, of one world by another present difficulties to the mind. The phenomenon is obviously going on all around us before we get entirely quit even of the physical plane. The ether itself, the medium of the vibrations of light and electricity, interpenetrates solid bodies as well as the atmosphere, and carries on its own functions without being in the least degree impeded by the surrounding molecules,

so it is quite certain that the matter of the astral plane, together with all the vehicles of conciousness that belong to it, may co-exist as regards the space they occupy, with the physical phenomena of the earth's surface. They certainly do so co-exist, and can be observed by a qualified occultist in intimate juxtaposition with our houses and landscapes. At the same time it is also true that the astral plane, thought of as a sphere or world, has a larger volume or at any rate a greater external diameter than the solid earth, so that we are not thinking incorrectly in imagining some regions of the astral plane as distinctly exalted above the earth's surface. Indeed, if we take care not to hold on to the thought too rigorously, we may not incorrectly work with the rough hypothesis, that the sub-divisions of the astral plane consist of a series of concentric shells, certainly interpenetrating one another wherever they are in contact, as the colours of the spectrum interpenetrate each other, but nevertheless presenting conditions in which the highest need not be thought of as interpenetrating the lowest.

Going back then to the lowest and examining it from the point of view of its relations with humanity after death, we find this to be the sphere in which are entangled the souls of the lowest and most degraded of our race, those whose thoughts and desires during life have been all but wholly concentrated on the selfish gratification of the senses, in whom emotions of the highest kind have played scarcely any part, and by whom, therefore, during life, the astral matter they have attracted around them has been of the lowest

order. The comprehension of what I have to say will, perhaps, be best facilitated by an explanation which belongs properly to a very recondite region of occultism, but will here help to dispel the notion that a person after death is arbitrarily assigned, by some superior power, to a specific realm of nature, in which he will meet with either reward or punishment. Occultism would be ridiculously misunderstood if it were supposed to ignore the existence of Divine Will operating through nature to determine just results in connection with the progress of humanity. What we are studying now, however, are the methods and laws through which that will operates, and when we only approach the comprehension of these we see cause and effect operating on the mental plane with the same regularity that is observable in the relations of the chemical elements. And just in the same way that we think it unnecessary to treat every union between molecules of hydrogen and oxygen as a separate act of the Divine Will, so, in occultism, we learn to recognise the working of good and evil as bound up in a concatenation of laws that can be comprehended up to a certain point, and can thus be dealt with far more reverently in the language of science than in that of a court of justice.

To go on with the explanation I am aiming at, we find that the sub-divisions of the astral plane represent distinctly defined orders of matter, though all falling in with some particular category of astral matter, just as matter of this plane is all physical, even though it may sometimes assume a solid, sometimes a liquid, and at others a gaseous ethereal state. Every

human being during life gathers from matter as he grows, not merely the physical particles which constitute the matter of his physical body, but other particles belonging to higher regions of nature which permeate the grosser vehicle and are ready in turn, when that is cast off, to become the vehicles of his consciousness on astral and ultimately on spiritual planes of nature. But these do not flow in spontaneously; they are attracted, however little the person setting up attractions is conscious of the process, by the character and colour of his daily thoughts and life. The material of the higher astral sub-divisions is drawn into the corresponding vehicle of consciousness in the case of people whose predominant mental condition is of an elevated type; the lower kinds of matter assimilating themselves with more degraded states of consciousness, and the ultimate progress after death of the soul which is then launched on an existence in the astral body it has itself been unconsciously forming during life, is determined entirely (keeping our attention on the immediate scientific working of natural law), by the quality of the matter his astral envelope contains. In truth the astral vehicle of every human being must contain astral matter belonging to each of the seven sub-divisions of the astral plane, but here a beautiful complication comes into play, the charm of which will be readily appreciated by any scientifically minded thinker. The matter of each sub-division is itself capable of existing in different states, roughly corresponding to the solid, liquid, gaseous, and so on. Now, if the matter of the lowest plane which is attracted to the astral body of any given person is of the high

ethereal kind, that person is no sooner launched upon the astral plane after death, coming in contact first with the lowest sub-division as a matter of inevitable necessity,—than such ethereal particles fly asunder almost instantaneously. The dispersion of such particles or atoms is a process of which the person concerned is unconscious, and the soul thus liberated from the body would in such a case pass through the lowest sub-division of the astral plane, to use the old familiar illustration, as an arrow passes through a cloud. So again, in reference to the second. If the matter of that plane drawn into the composition of the astral envelope is altogether of the higher kind, it disintegrates no less spontaneously as soon as the soul is on that plane, so that by an automatic working of natural law each soul finds itself immediately after death on precisely that sub-division of the astral plane to which its affinities naturally belong.

Going back now to the lowest plane, we realise the way in which the soul, whose astral body is largely composed of the lower orders of matter belonging to that subdivision, would be entangled there for appreciable periods of time, sometimes for very long periods. Existence on that level is, of course, of an eminently undesirable kind. We need not stop to discuss fantastic superstitions concerning physically painful states attaching to the after-life, but we may easily see that where the whole body of consciousness represented by a soul, has been absorbed in desires entirely connected with the physical plane of existence, a state of craving thus set up to which the after-life,

even on the lowest sub-division of the astral plane, can make no response, must give rise to an unsatisfied wretchedness, which can only be thought of as morally painful in a very high degree. There is, of course, a gloomy fitness of things in the spectacle that region of Nature presents to our observation, but I am more concerned at present with describing the conditions of the super-physical world than in moralising in reference to their propriety.

In the second, third and fourth divisions of the astral plane, counting from the bottom upwards, we have to recognise a greater relaxation of all the disagreeable characteristics attaching to existence on the lowest, without, up to that point, coming into contact with anything of a distinctly different character. Up to the fourth sub-division consciousness would always be revolving round the experiences of the life just quitted, but in the second, third and fourth subdivisions, it would not be exclusively bent upon the lowest aspects of earth life. Characteristics of the consciousness destined at a later period to a beautiful fruition on regions of Nature more exalted than any part of the astral plane, the emotions, that is to say, which have to do with love and affection, may begin to permeate the consciousness of the astral being, although for the moment he may be kept back from the realm of Nature in which these feelings would blossom forth most freely, by the continued operation of petty attractions. Of course, it must always be kept in mind that from the strictly scientific point of view, the question in every case has to do with getting rid, from the astral body, of the material

of any plane in which it is entangled, but in discussing so subtle a subject we naturally work back to the moral causes at the back of the material condition, and speak of them as determining the result. So that the lower levels of the astral region above the lowest would be the natural habitat of those whose lives are largely dominated by the pettier trivialities of existence,—for whom their *things* have been of very much greater moment than their *thoughts*,—for whom the work they may have had to do has not been merely performed as a necessary part of life's duty, but has itself become an end, as in the case of the miser whose wealth is not merely accumulated for the sake of the ease of mind it may procure for himself or others, but for its own sake.

As we ascend to the higher regions of the astral plane—keeping for the present to those of its aspects which concern the souls of people dying in the ordinary course of Nature—the conditions change very materially. Putting the same idea another way, we may say, as we come to consider the condition on the astral plane of those who are imbued with aspirations, emotions, and desires of a higher order, we find this region of existence a very different one for them as compared with what it is for humanity of a lower type. My great difficulty now is to do justice to the ethereal and graceful features of the higher astral existence without giving rise to conceptions of it which only belong properly to the spiritual plane. But let the clue to the mystery be sought for in the question, what would be the appropriate response of Nature to a state of mind, which, without being

degraded or sensual, had yet never risen above,—or had at least, been mainly dominated by,—conceptions of happiness and ideals having to do entirely with earthly pursuits, enjoyments and surroundings? We may even recognise these ideals as blended with the exercise of the affections; still, if the affections concerned are not altogether the main thing—if the craving of the soul is for the whole aggregation of circumstances constituting earth life—it cannot get entirely beyond the attraction of the astral counterparts of the earth life's scenery and decorations.

Instead of pressing onward to higher realms of thought and feeling—to that spiritual plane in which interior states of consciousness are the all important conditions—such a personality as I am now endeavouring to depict will be content to reproduce for himself on the astral plane a routine of life not very dissimilar from that he has quitted on earth.

As I have said already, the matter of the astral plane is much more plastic and obedient to imagination and desire than that of the gross earth; and the astral body is entirely exempt from those imperious cravings and necessities, and from those liabilities to fatigue, heat and cold, injury and suffering, which put so many obstacles in the way of attaining the ideals of well being on the physical plane. It follows, therefore, that for beings on the astral plane, free of distinctly *physical*, without being free of material, desires an ethereal counterpart of the earth life may gradually be constructed or thought out, which becomes a complete world in its way. A populous world, too, reproducing many of the companionships of earth life, and in

which such as are still missing from the circle of old acquaintanceship may be looked forward to as destined to be welcomed eventually.

These remarks especially apply to the three higher regions of the kama loka condition which we come now to consider in detail. The fifth is that phase in which the external characteristics of life, in regard to its more graceful, but still non-spiritual aspects, are most completely reproduced. Here we find in their fullest development the conditions which represent the realities at the back of that somewhat too idealistic conception of the astral plane existence, which gather round the notion some Spiritualists have formed of what they call the "summer land." In this condition of being people are well aware that they have quitted the earth life and have passed through the change spoken of here as death, but conceive themselves translated to another world filled with the same interests and occupations as those they have quitted, although these are divorced completely from the strained and painful aspects they have worn down here. The inhabitants of this region create for themselves dwellings, churches, entertainments, music and instruments, and social surroundings of all sorts, in the midst of which they pass their time in a state of placid contentment. Those to whom this mere purified reflection of physical life would be an unsatisfactory version of the after-state, would be carried on by interior forces to other regions of which we will speak hereafter; but by the hypothesis, this fifth level of astral life must necessarily fulfil the aspirations of those to whom it is appropriate, and a gentle self-sufficient incredulity on their part is

exhibited towards anyone whose higher evolution enables him to function on that plane of existence for a while, though still in incarnation, and who may endeavour to represent to those around him that loftier states of being are attainable. From the point of view, indeed, of those whose perceptions are more widely open, the scenery and decorations of summer land are woefully imperfect and unfinished, although so eminently satisfactory to their creators. These, by a curious misapprehension of the actual truth, regard with a certain sympathetic pity persons whose interior growth is tending to carry them higher; but who, through some characteristics in their astral vehicle, are entangled on this plane, and remain during their sojourn in a torpid and imperfectly conscious state.

The fully awakened inhabitants of the fifth plane look upon these persons as less developed than themselves rather than more so, and confidently anticipate a period when they will wake completely and appreciate the excellencies of the life around. Their complete awakening is really reserved for higher planes, perhaps for those truly spiritual regions to be dealt with hereafter, perhaps for those immediately superior conditions of astral life which we find in manifestation on the sixth and seventh subdivisions. On the sixth pre-eminently the predominant nature of the feeling in consciousness has to do with religious sentiment. In its finer and purer aspects, religious sentiment would seek its fruition on Devachanic levels. But intervening conditions of thought and religious emotion lying between the worldly temperament and the truly

spiritual aspiration which concerns itself pre-eminently with the externals of religious worship rather than with its essence, are those which delay the soul in the astral region we are considering. Thus the sixth level of the astral plane becomes the home of those who are devoted rather to what may be called the ecclesiastical side of religion rather than its spiritual aspect, who find their delight in rituals and services, for whom the material ceremonies of church-going and pious formality have taken the place of a more deeply-seated devotion. By a natural gravitation the representatives of each great faith gather together on this level of astral existence, and each great group constitutes a world for itself, altogether out of touch with that developed by adjacent groups. We must remember on the astral plane we are not by any means outside the range of time and space, so that we are not doing violence to the truth of things if we recognise the astral levels as involving some correspondence with the geographical distribution of the physical population on the earth's surface.

The predominant characteristic of the highest level of the astral plane is intellectual activity. This, as we see but too plainly around us, is often dissociated entirely from spiritual growth ; it may be compatible with the total neglect of all problems having to do with the unity of consciousness, or the possibilities connected with the enlargement of that consciousness beyond the limits assigned to it by the activity of the physical brain. Of course the physical brain of the most intellectual person during life is, after all, merely an instrument on which he plays ; those capacities which

guide its exercise reside really in the constitution of the Ego; but while they are unaccompanied by any true spiritual evolution they may seek for no other manifestation than that to which they are used during earth life. They do find themselves, however, in presence of a condition of things in which intellectual activity is emancipated from some of the restraints imposed upon it during physical life, and thus they have an exhilarating consciousness of enlarged capacity. This may be associated to a considerable degree with philanthropic instincts, and the inhabitants of the highest astral plane are strongly impressed with the idea that their influence may contribute largely to the growth and development of human intelligence, and with that end in view they are often on the alert to find persons amongst those still living on the physical plane, on whom they may impress their improved and brighter conceptions. They too construct for themselves quasi-material surroundings—libraries and laboratories in which they provide themselves with a semi-material expression of the new ideas engendered within their consciousness by the free exercises of their astral senses, and they are not by any means unfamiliar with the current progress of incarnate human thinking, nor indeed unprovided with the astral counterparts of new books and new instruments of research. The intensity of their intellectual life operates to fill up their existence in a way which they find highly agreeable, but at the same time it has a tendency to retard, to an even greater degree than the pettier avocations of the lower astral sub-divisions, the progress which they

might otherwise make towards loftier conditions of existence.

I have made some reference already to the vast varieties of non-human existence by which all the regions of the astral plane are more or less saturated. With these, however, the normal entity after death has not much to do, and this branch of the subject may be more conveniently considered by itself.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ELEMENTALS.

FEW subjects connected with occult research present greater embarrassment to the student than those which attend an inquiry into the nature of the Elementals. The term is vaguely understood to apply to spirits of an order related to the astral plane, and except for the broad statement that they are non-human, but subject to the control of human will, while varying in their nature over an enormous range of characteristics, the information available until a recent date—until the publication, indeed, of Mr. C. W. Leadbeater's wonderful treatise on "The Astral Plane"—has clouded, more perhaps than it has elucidated, the mysteries connected with their place and functions in evolution. In the beginning of that teaching out of which our present Theosophical knowledge has been developed, information concerning the elementals was avowedly withheld on the ground that it was all but impossible to be explicit on the subject without revealing secrets that related to the exercise of occult power. It was by the intermediation of the elementals, we were told, that the physical plane phenomena of occultism were brought about; as also those which in a sporadic and unscientific fashion took the shape of marvellous occurrences at

some Spiritualistic seances. In various Theosophical books reference was made to elementals of earth, air, fire and water, to gnomes, sylphs, salamanders, and undines,—following the nomenclature of some mediæval writers on occult mysteries,—but every statement of this kind darkened the whole subject instead of clearing it up, and left the mind of cultivated students disturbed by a feeling that the statements in question were not merely unintelligible, but designed rather to put a veil over, than to elucidate the subject.

Step by step, however, it has been possible for some of us to make a little progress in the comprehension of the deeply intricate mystery in question. As the number of modern Theosophical students qualified to transfer their consciousness to the astral plane, and to retain in their normal consciousness a recollection of what they learn there, gradually increases, it becomes possible for others to push their inquiries nearer and nearer to the impassable barriers that separate the knowledge of the outer world from that of initiated occultists. And we thus know something more about the elementals now, than at the outset of the Theosophical movement. We can at any rate begin to disentangle scientific truth from poetical imagery, and to formulate conceptions concerning elemental agency which harmonize, as far as they go, with definite physical knowledge, and suggest a line of thought calculated to link on that knowledge with the deeper mysteries of Nature.

Without plunging into the middle of the subject by endeavouring to comprehend the elemental agency to be observed in activity on the astral plane, a better

beginning may be made by the ordinary thinker if he starts with the consideration of the natural forces in observed action around us, realising that an inquiry into the nature of occult elemental agencies, is actually concerned with the tracing back these natural forces on to the other plane where they are presented to view in a more refined, or, in one sense, a more primitive manifestation.

Let us consider a lump of coal subject to heat to an extent that effects its combustion. If we endeavour to trace out the process fully, we shall not find theories of physical science entirely established even within their own domain. It may be argued that as heat increases the activity of the molecules of free oxygen hammering in their vibrations against the molecules of carbon (disregarding for a moment the other elements in the coal), their vibration becomes enhanced until they interlace, and thus engender molecules of carbonic oxide. If this view is held to be insufficient, as not accounting for the development of fresh heat, we may perhaps think of the initial heat as first of all breaking up the chemical union previously existing amongst the atoms of the various elements entering into the composition of the molecules of the coal. We may assume that by intensifying their vibration it causes these atoms to burst the bonds of attraction which held them in the organisation of the molecules, as the sun of the solar system on a larger scale holds together the planets in a definite scheme of organisation. Vibrating then in contact with atoms of free oxygen, the atoms of gas or carbon liberated from the coal find the same energy of movement which dissociated them from the former

molecular arrangement, conducive to their adoption of a new one. The adoption of the new one is in turn productive of a shock to the surrounding ether which sets up in that medium the phenomena of heat and light. This interpretation of what takes place is rough, but is probably defective rather in what it omits than in what it asserts.

At all events force has undergone a metamorphosis. The force that held the atoms of the coal molecule together has been converted into the force holding together the molecules of the new compounds, plus the sensible heat vibrations of the ether. For the moment let us pay attention to these last only. They constitute a force plainly called into being by the combustion of the coal. In a certain sense they were latent in the coal before it was burned.

But we know from the concurrent testimony of everyone who can intelligently observe the phenomena of the astral plane that all physical objects have their astral counterparts on that plane—the lump of coal as well as everything else. Then it is intelligible that there should be, as we are assured there is, an astral counterpart of any force inherent or latent in that lump of coal. Here we get to the humblest conception that can be formed of the elementals. The astral counterpart of the force in the coal capable of being, under certain circumstances, converted into sensible heat vibrations of the ether, is what in very loose and inappropriate phraseology might be spoken of as "an elemental,"—but somewhat more accurately as elemental essence.

Its individualisation as *an* elemental would be due

to a misconception of the matter. The elemental force in the astral lump of coal is as much part of an ocean of such force as the heat vibrations on this plane are merged in the ocean of ether. But the astral counterpart of the force—as soon as we are in a position to observe that—is found at once to present one characteristic which differentiates it widely from its manifestation on the physical plane. It is amenable—in a way which is not the case with its physical plane manifestation—to the influence of the human will. That is a force of a higher order by which it can be controlled.

On this plane it might be symbolised by an animal, say a horse, entirely without senses or nerves of sensation. You cannot get him to move either by speaking to him or by prodding him. But if you shove him forward forcibly enough he will begin to walk to avoid tumbling down and will even pull a cart if it is fastened to him. To stop him you must build a wall in his way strong enough to arrest his progress. How very different a creature does the same horse become as soon as we endow him with the usual senses! His consciousness, such as it is, is then capable of receiving impulses from the consciousness of a human master. We can set him in motion or stop him by a touch or a word. His strength becomes something we can direct, his volition, guided by an imperfect intelligence, something on which we can impress our will. The change illustrates the difference between the natural force cognised by science on the physical plane and the same force in its antecedent astral manifestation. In that manifestation, indeed, the

force must not be thought of as having the complete animal consciousness and volition, but it is in a measure *alive* and susceptible to the influence of a higher order of consciousness.

The degree to which the living elemental force can be controlled by a human will, will of course vary, within limits not alone as great but enormously greater than those within which the power of different human beings on this plane to control a horse will vary. The analogy must not be pushed too far but the relations on this plane of men and animals are helpful in suggesting the relation on the other plane of men, or superior spiritual beings, and elementals. Just as adequate courage and self confidence will enable some men to control savage beasts, though a failure of resolution or courage may lead to a reversal of the parts, so with the elemental agencies. These will turn against human interference if the person who meddles with them is not strong enough for the task he attempts, though to a large extent on the astral plane living elemental force is plastic to the influence of even a very moderately powerful human will—even to human desire hardly expressing itself in a conscious act of volition.

It is not to be expected at present that the conditions under which the astral elemental force is made to express on the physical plane the impulses of will imparted to it on the astral, should be rendered fully intelligible, but the experience of occult phenomena as well as the abstract assurances of occult teaching show that the transition is possible. It would be only when occultly trained that a will impulse impressed on the

elemental agency associated with the lump of coal in the above illustration, would be able to set its physical manifestation in activity, but, as I say, the transition would be possible. This is the explanation of well authenticated cases in which fires and lamps have been kindled in an abnormal way in the presence of some peculiar kinds of spiritual mediumship, and occult information leads to the belief that similar phenomena are familiar to the experience of advanced occultists.

Another illustration of the connection between physical plane forces and astral elemental agency may be taken from a department of natural phenomena of which we know even less than of those associated with combustion. Let us consider a heavy block of stone, which we wish to raise. The force which bears it down towards the centre of the earth is one which we can measure with great exactitude and call by a familiar name, but we do not know much about its mode of working. We can only control it on the physical plane by so arranging matters that a preponderating volume of itself or some other force counteracts the tendency we wish to overcome. Occult teaching about all physical force, however, is that it is the physical plane manifestation of some elemental force. There must thus be an astral counterpart of gravity and in its astral manifestation it must be in some measure alive and must come within the influence of a higher plane volition. Here we get a clue to the comprehension of the principle on which advanced occult power is known—not merely in former ages of the world but in the present day—to manipulate heavy masses of

matter by will power. The thing happens also in the experience of spiritualism continually. It is another illustration of the translation of force from one plane to another, which is merely a question of controlling elemental agency to an adequate degree.

But the mystery of such translation is something apart from the aspect of elemental agency on the astral plane. In reference to the process of translation we must be content for the present to know that the achievement is possible, and to realise in that way the continuity of natural forces—the coherence of the whole scheme of force on different planes and to foresee the direction in which man's control of matter on the physical plane may be expected one day to extend. Let us now pass in imagination on to the astral plane altogether and take note of such information as we can gather concerning elemental agency as manifesting there.

Every branch of occult teaching will always be found to gear in with others. The natural history of elemental agency in its first and broadest outlines recalls attention to the fundamental principles of planetary evolution. In the beginning of a planet's life, before the evolution of its mineral body—not to speak of its vegetation and animal life—the nucleus of cosmic activity which is going to be a planet, is the arena of certain elemental evolutions following one another in due order. Before the formation of the mineral kingdom we have been told, the scheme of things to which we belong provides for the successive evolution of three kingdoms of elementals. The statement at first carried no very definite meaning

for uninitiated hearers, but even at first it conveyed, in a grand faint outline, the idea that those kingdoms of nature of which we have cognisance were the outcome of mysterious forces acting on matter of a finer order than that into which it was ultimately kneaded. It now appears that the three kingdoms of elementals which preceded the mineral evolution are in no sense extinct. We are concerned with a later stage of the process but the earlier agencies are still in activity. Cognisable in fact in varying degrees there are three kingdoms of elementals still in touch with the evolution of the planetary chain,—force, that is to say, looking at the matter from another point of view, in three orders of manifestation. They do not all belong to the astral plane and the two higher must be thought of as belonging properly to more spiritual planes though interpenetrating the astral. Remember that the astral plane is a sphere of activity for higher faculties than those which properly belong to it; also that it is subdivisible into planes as described in the preceding chapter that differ one from another in a marked degree. Remember also that in speaking now of the two "higher" kingdoms of elementals we are looking back along the course pursued during the descent of spirit into matter. The higher elemental kingdoms were the earlier in the order of manifestation, the first to emerge from non-manifestation. The lowest of the three is most highly developed or organised, the nearest to the still more elaborately evolved, finished, or materially perfected physical plane.

The higher kingdoms can only be got at, so to speak,

by powers on a level spiritually with that to which they belong. In order to deal with them at all a human being must have passed up the cycle of evolution again till his consciousness and will are in activity once more (plus the experiences of physical incarnation) on the higher planes. The thought will present no difficulty to any one who has grasped the first principles of occult teaching in regard to cosmic evolution, and the bearing of it on the subject in hand tends to simplify rather than to embarrass the inquiry before us. For the present we may ignore the two higher or earlier elemental kingdoms. The third or that nearest to physical manifestation is the one with which human consciousness of the ordinary type is most nearly concerned. All varieties of elemental agency visible to explorers of the astral plane who are able to cognise its phenomena without being as yet on the more exalted levels of spiritual evolution, belong to the third kingdom which, however, is varied to an extent that renders its division into different orders and classes a task of considerable difficulty. Let us attempt to realise some of the principles on which that classification must proceed.

The elemental forces, to begin with,—I will endeavour later on to deal with the subject of elemental beings,—are divisible according to the states or conditions of matter with which they have to do in their manifestations on the physical plane. We all know of the solid, liquid, and gaseous states of matter, and occult students know something of four other states in an ascending series. The corresponding elemental forces are those described in

poetical language as gnomes, undines, sylphs, and salamanders. The gnome does not mean a sub-human dwarf inhabiting mines. This is the caricature of the idea developed by imperfect information grafted on an ill-trained imagination. The gnome or earth elemental is the astral force related to the phenomena of solid matter. So the undine, or water elemental, is not a fairy dancing in a fountain, but a natural force related to liquid matter; the sylph, or air elemental, is the similar force related to gaseous matter; and the salamander, or fire elemental, to the vibrations of the ether.

At this point, however, the classification may seem too crude to be scientific. There are common attributes in all three states of matter. Weight, for instance, is as much an attribute of hydrogen as of lead; molecular vibration is going on in the motionless rock as well as in the waves that dash against it. There is no force we can think of which belongs exclusively to either liquid, solid, or gaseous matter. In the same way, however, the various elemental agencies do not act singly and independently of each other, but in infinitely varied alliances. The important point is that whatever combination of forces may be recognised as operative in any given case on the physical plane, the counterpartal combination is operative on the astral, and assumes the relatively living aspect which renders it more directly than here amenable to the human will.

But the astral plane is divided, as we have seen, into seven subdivisions. Appropriate to each we find special varieties of elemental agency presenting

themselves for examination, and the distinction just noticed between the elementals of earth, water, air, and fire runs up through them all.

Again, there is a mysterious classification of attributes, tendencies or characteristics running through Nature—through all the planes of Nature, the physical included—which is too subtle to be very readily interpreted, but which may be dimly indicated by saying that every plant, animal, and man, as well as every mineral and every manifestation of elemental agency is "on" one or other of seven great "rays" proceeding in the first instance from exalted regions of spiritual influence, which imagination penetrates with difficulty. The ray classification has to be taken into account in grouping the elementals.

The habits of mind engendered by thinking of the three dimensions of space will enable us to construct in imagination not a *tabular* view of this triple classification, but a solid figure embracing the three categories. How shall we expand this, however, so as to make it significant of the fact that the same triple classification must be made to run all through the three *kingdoms* of elementals? For this we seem in need of a fourth dimension of space. But, at all events, without going beyond the experience of life around us, a living creature may at the same time be a mammal, a quadruped, a pachyderm, and a male, so the elemental varieties, though too complicated to be represented by a diagram or even by a solid figure, need not be altogether unmanageable in thought.

So far we have been considering the elemental agencies in their most general or indeterminate aspects

as forces rather than entities, and that is the most important idea concerning them, to establish in the mind as the foundation of all maturer conceptions. It is disastrous to run away with the first idea apt to invade the understanding on the subject, that the elementals are to the astral plane, what its beasts, birds, and reptiles are to the forest. But, none the less, early experience on the astral plane is very likely to support this notion. Forces on the physical plane are always abstract energies associated with matter, but forces on the astral plane, are not only, as has been already said, in some sense alive, they are ready to take shape under the influence of the will, whatever it may be, that directs them, and may be in the same way imbued with a benevolent or malevolent character for the time being, which has no resemblance, as far as any internal consciousness goes, to goodness or badness of disposition, but leads them to be of good or bad efficiency, just as physical plane forces may be of good or bad efficiency. The fire which cooks food directed to a useful end may, directed differently, inflict suffering on a living organism. Gravity which pulls down a clock weight usefully may kill a man standing below if the chain breaks. Electricity may carry good tidings or explode a parcel of dynamite without being in itself good or bad electricity; and the dynamite may usefully clear a rock out of the path of navigation or blow up a building and mutilate the inhabitants. *Per se* force is neither good nor evil, and the same idea has to be applied to the consideration of elemental beings, called into existence by will power and invested

with attributes by conscious intention. Undoubtedly, the astral plane teems with such beings of both good and evil efficiency, and at the first blush it might well be imagined that they constitute the animal life of that plane. But they are entities only in so far as a bucketful of water drawn up out of the sea is a specific volume of water, taking the shape of the interior of the bucket for the time being. If you break the bucket the water falls back into the ocean, neither the better nor the worse for having been detached for a while therefrom. Or it may have gone through various adventures in the meantime. It may have been converted into steam in a boiler, may have driven a ship on her course, or it may have burst from its confinement injuring living beings in the neighbourhood; it may even have entered into chemical combinations with other matter and have played an elaborate part on the stage of the earth's physical manifestation, but still it is so much water all the while, and will ultimately, by some road, return to the ocean from which it came. So with the detached and temporarily individualised elemental life or force. The will which moulds it, or the thought energy, operative, perhaps, without any conscious will being at work in the transaction at all, may invest it with a very considerable tenacity of separate life and tendency, easily mistaken for inherent purpose. Its very shape may be enduring, unless it comes in contact with some will force that breaks it up, and thus we are presented with all the external characteristics of a living astral creature. The horrible or repulsive shapes encountered on the astral plane by rash intruders are of this

nature. They may be the creatures of evil or malevolent thought, and though powerless to harm human beings collected enough to oppose a courageous will to their attack, may seriously torment or even injure invaders of their territory whose inherent forces are paralysed by terror. Just as real and definitely existing as entities for a time, other elemental shapes may be beautiful in appearance and beneficent in action if called into being by thoughts emanating from love and beneficence, but their tenacity of life will depend on the strength and persistence of the will that has called them into being, and when they have fulfilled their mission, or have lost coherence by the relaxation of the will that evoked them, they will resolve themselves again into the ocean of elemental agency to which they belong and be available for any new purpose, good, bad or indifferent.

This part of the explanation may help to supply an (occultly) scientific interpretation for stories connected with the presiding "gods" of some Indian temples—treated of course as empty superstitions by western intelligence alive to the incredibility of the local belief as crudely stated, and destitute of the occult knowledge which might discern the natural possibility in the background. Elemental agency clothed with form and inspired with purpose by some adequately powerful human will in the first instance, may persist in that shape for long periods of time and manifest potencies along the line of the original impulse which would easily be mistaken by an ignorant populace, in contact with them, for the supernatural power of a demi-god.

At the head of each great division of elemental

agencies, beings of a permanent, definite and very exalted character control or inspire all manifestations of elemental energy within that category. It is hopeless to inquire into the nature and constitution of these beings, except that they are cosmic—the agents of the Lipika. Not belonging to our evolution, they do not belong to our scheme of human evolution and could not, we may well imagine, be described in terms of ordinary human thinking. That such beings exist, however, is a fact which falls in with the great principle to which occult teaching introduces us in many ways, and according to which all laws of nature are the volition of conscious beings standing at some more or less exalted level in the general scheme of things, and exercising will in accordance with the Supreme Will in the background. From the occult point of view there is no such thing as blind force. In its lower manifestations natural force may seem blind—may be pressing along definite channels of activity regardless of impediments in the way; but the original existence of the force is due to an intelligent will.

A problem may arise in any mind to which the thoughts here set forth are present, which has to do with the nature of the matter which seems to form the vehicle of elementals having a definite shape and appearance. Is that a vehicle in any true sense of the term as the physical or the astral body under different conditions may be the vehicle of human consciousness, or is the apparent vehicle of the elemental force itself of the very nature of the elemental force? A marble statue or a cloud in still air may have a definite shape

but the outward surface is not of any matter different in its nature from that of the marble or the vapour concerned. In the same way the elemental we see in an animal or human or grotesque shape, may be of homogeneous constitution—so much living elemental force operative in that detached condition and taking external shape from the creative thought that has evoked it. That appears to be the more accurate conception of the two, though not without difficulties for the imagination. We have to remember that the order of evolution in the world around us is through the elemental kingdoms on to the mineral and then on to the higher kingdoms of organised beings. The elementals are not inhabitants of a ready-made world: they are the foundations or substance of the world. They may undergo mysterious transmutations but until we get into the higher regions of human consciousness in relations with spiritual essence, there is nothing in the world that is not elemental in its nature. The minute cells of which animal and human bodies are built up are evolutions of elemental agency. Matter and force on the physical plane are elementals condensed—materialised. Elementals as seen on the astral plane are matter and force etherialised. They are related to themselves in the lower manifestation as steam to ice—as carbonic acid gas to carbonic acid snow. They do not need a vehicle for their manifestation—as human consciousness needs a vehicle. They are vehicle and *life* (not consciousness) in one.

Clearly it cannot fall within the scope of this explanation to define the methods by which human will

functioning on the astral plane is enabled to specialise and direct the elemental agency around it; but we may approach as near to the confines of that mystery as circumstances will allow by realising how the non-specialised oceans of elemental agency perceptible on the astral plane pervade Nature from that point of view. They need not be sought for as a herbalist, for instance, might seek in a wood for the particular plant he required. They are all at hand, as the atmosphere is at hand in all parts of the world for the uses of a man who desires to blow a bellows; more so if that be possible, by reason of the fact that they are visible—to the astral sense, though not clouding or obscuring other objects of perception,—because vision with the astral senses differs so widely from vision with the eyes. Within limits one may say that nothing is *seen* on the astral plane except that to which attention is directed, so that if the astral voyager is not wanting to manipulate the elemental agencies he might hardly be conscious of their presence. Desiring to deal with them he would perceive them on every side.

I have referred to the manner in which elemental agency of more than one kind may play a part in physical phenomena. In the same way "an" elemental evoked or created by a human will may be compounded of more than one variety of elemental agency. One alone might not suffice for the purpose in view. Undoubtedly, however, the creation of a complex elemental is a more advanced achievement than that of one in which only a single variety is concerned.

Over and above elemental entities that may have been formed by human will from the ocean of

elemental essence, there are innumerable varieties that owe their existence as such, to natural evolutions going on side by side with, but quite independently of, that with which humanity is concerned. With these, however, it is hardly my business at present to deal. I am concerned with those teachings of occultism that directly relate to the evolution of man.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SPIRITUAL PLANE.

LET us turn now to the consideration of the truly spiritual realm of Nature to which the astral plane is but the anti-chamber. From the first, however, we must keep in mind the dual aspect of this realm which corresponds to the dual aspect of the astral plane. The spiritual plane is one condition from the point of view of those normal souls that are resting in its blissful emotions between two periods of incarnate life, and another for the purified Ego of the living initiate qualified to ascend to that level of consciousness while still in touch with the conditions of moral responsibility and activity that belong to the earth life.

The fetters of immature religious thinking are apt to prevent those of us who are not trained occultists from drawing that distinction properly. People are liable to imagine that Heaven, for those who pass away from the physical plane at death, is a condition of greater exaltation and progress than the possibilities of the situation really provide for. Though its scope may be almost infinite—in regard to knowledge and exaltation of consciousness,—it responds in every case with exactitude to the characteristics of spiritual evolution brought thither by the soul which attains to it. There is no plane of Nature in fact that is above the operation of cause

and effect. Transplant to Heaven a consciousness, a being, invested with no attributes transcending the best emotions of ordinary physical life, and Heaven does not for such persons contain more than the fruition of these emotions. You do not change an African savage's nature by bringing him over to a civilised country and planting him suddenly in the midst of art and science and literary culture. To use comparatively grovelling and familiar ideas in illustration of the principle before us, the savage can merely select from the resources of civilisation, supposing them offered to him in all their abundance, the food and drink and physical comforts which his experience of life enables him to crave for. So with the imperfectly developed souls of common humanity. Heaven is only Heaven for them insofar as the growth of their minds enables them to avail themselves of its resources. That which it does for all who have it in them to attain its confines at all, is to assure them complete happiness along the lines that their spiritual development has followed.

By spiritual development in this sense let me hasten to add, I do not mean, in any exclusive way at any rate, the development of the religious instinct. Where this instinct is very energetic that is undoubtedly one phase of spiritual development, but real unselfish love is no less spiritual in its character and is equally capable of a glorified expansion on the heavenly or spiritual plane of consciousness.

The artistic faculty again is deeply tinged with true spirituality and is thus capable of evoking a generous response from the spiritual plane whether it has to do with the beauty of form, colour or sound, and the love

of knowledge may be spiritual if it penetrates the essence of things, though it is possible that it may be bent so exclusively on physical detail as to be *sometimes* a force which may operate to keep a soul set free by death, earth bound in the higher astral condition, instead of acting as a stimulus to the spiritual awakening.

As I have said, the resources of the spiritual plane are all but infinite, for thought is there becoming a creative power in a far higher degree than on the astral plane, and independently of this, consciousness is there in direct relations with the all but infinite memory of Nature, which is preserved—*how* we cannot at present expect to understand exactly—with imperishable perfection, in the all embracing medium known to occult science as the "Akasa."

This marvellous medium is discernible in some of its manifestations on the astral plane, but its clear and unconfused records belong especially to the higher plane of spiritual consciousness. It is a natural mirror of all events, which recalls them for those who have the power of reading in it, in their minutest details. As nothing can alter the past when its events are once accomplished, so nothing can obliterate them from the memory of Nature. Our own individual memories in physical life are imperfect readings of so much in its records as we have personally had to do with—of as much as is connected by magnetic affinities, so to speak, with our own brain cells; but to the emancipated spiritual faculties on the spiritual plane all the records are accessible. We are in a position to remember everything that has ever occurred in the history of our

world, and to remember it not in that dim shadowy way which physical memory alone achieves, but in such a way that the past scene or chain of events on which we bend our attention, re-enacts itself before us in vivid perfection of detail.

But it does not so unroll itself unless the attention is bent upon it with the set purpose of evoking its records, so that in this immensely important matter it will be seen that the akasa is only panoramic in its character for those souls on the spiritual plane that are animated by the thought of applying to it. For a person dying in the ordinary way, and passing, after getting clear of the astral region, on to the spiritual plane, the records of Nature's memory will be a blank if the mind has not been stored with aspirations pointing to the use of such resources.

But, though the spiritual plane may be thus subject to limitations for people passing on to it in the ordinary way, it does not follow that its happiness-giving character is limited in a similar manner. Within its beneficent atmosphere there is simply no room for unhappiness of any sort or kind. For all who attain it there is necessarily an interior condition of complete, perfect, and unalloyed bliss and delight. The struggles and sorrows of incarnate life are for the time—and a long time is in question—entirely over and done with. Whatever—whoever—is needed to conduce to perfect happiness is there present to the consciousness of the enraptured soul, always, of course, assuming that the conditions of happiness for such a soul are susceptible of fulfilment in a spiritual state. If they have to do with delights of an absolutely earthly and physical

character, it will not be possible for the person so bowed down to ascend to the spiritual plane at all. But we are not dealing now with earth-bound astrals, but with souls that have ascended, however feeble, comparatively, may be the force that has carried them upward.

At first the student of spiritual science will be apt to resent as unsatisfactory the self-centred, and, as it will seem to him, delusive character of the spiritual happiness thus attained by the normal human being reaching the Heaven I describe. Take the case of a person, say A, whose happiness is essentially dependent on the companionship of B. On the spiritual plane he has that happiness. But suppose the happiness of B has to do entirely with the companionship of C. In B's thought-sphere A may have no place. So then it may be conceived A is self-deceived all the time—wrapped in a delusion which would be a cruel negation of happiness if he understood it. But this criticism is vitiated by the confusion it makes between externals and essentials. In thinking of companionship from the point of view of the earth life we are dealing with externals. We do not concern ourselves on this physical plane with the inner thought consciousness of the person beloved, nearly so much as with the external manifestation thereof; or, at all events, that is true of the common-place mortal. If it is not true of any one who may be reading these words, then the spiritual plane will shape itself to his higher spiritual evolution, as we shall see later on; but we must not criticise the scheme of Nature from one point of view only.

Heaven,—meaning thereby blissful rest in a consciousness of that order which the soul is capable of,—must somehow be provided for all, and not merely for persons of very highly refined intelligence; and assuming that A is a person on the humbler levels of humanity in this respect, how is he to be happy on the hypothesis we are dealing with except by means of an arrangement by which his aspirations take the shape of an apparent reality? Is A to be condemned to have no heavenly bliss because his affections have been directed towards an external manifestation on this plane of life which is not in true spiritual union with his own consciousness? He has not yet risen to a height of evolution in which spiritual existence *per se* constitutes the full fruition of happiness. A person is not essentially changed in his nature because he is translated to a new plane of being. Our friend A set himself up with a delusive theory of happiness *on earth* if he centred his dream of bliss in an affection that by the hypothesis was one-sided. Is that mistake to embitter his whole experience of Heaven? He has not made the realisation of spiritual truth the object of his life; he is denied nothing that he has sought in being left for the time without an exact appreciation of such spiritual truth; he has centred his aspirations in an earthly emotion, and he finds Heaven for him the entire and complete fruition of that emotion.

What, after all, is reality and what is unreality when we are handling the manifestations of things, and not their essential spiritual realities? Is the body of the beloved friend the reality? That will be dust

and nothingness in a few years. For ages after its decay, the spiritual counterpart which A's thought has evoked or created is there before him unchanged and unchangeable. Nor is it a mere unresponsive phantom to be gazed at. The creations of thought on the spiritual plane are alive. It will *never* be unresponsive to A, for his desire has invested it with the externals of the emotion he would have desired his friend to possess. The world in which he will live—in Heaven—is a subjective world, no doubt; from the point of view of supreme knowledge, a realm of self-centred rapture; but it will be a condition of things for him in which no disappointment is possible. The duration is merely determined by the eventual exhaustion of the force of the desire that has evoked it. If its character change, that will merely be because in the latent consciousness of A there are other aspirations to be fulfilled, capable of displacing the aspiration we have been dealing with, or requiring expansion simultaneously with that. There is room, so to speak, in the subjective world of the soul enjoying Heaven, for many affections, for many sources of delight. But though our own demands upon the infinite resources of the spiritual plane may be of an exalted order, let us not on that account require that Heaven shall be constructed, so to speak, to suit our case only, and leave plunged in forlorn unhappiness the myriads whose aspirations have not risen above the simple blessings suggested to the imagination by an unthoughtful experience of the earth life.

On first contact with this idea I know that it disconcerts many vague aspirations which imagination

associates with the idea of heavenly experiences, but if the actual provisions of Nature may in this way fail to realise certain expectations, the failure is due, not to the shortcomings of heaven, so to speak, but to the absolutely unreasonable and impracticable character of commonplace expectations concerning these. It is only on a higher level than that which is touched by the undeveloped majority, that it is possible for the soul to come into contact with those deeper realities of spiritual existence on which a true union of all spiritual individualities becomes possible. While the spiritual growth for any given individual is imperfect it could not find happiness in a premature emancipation from those limitations in which alone, up to that period, it had found scope for the play of its affections. Devachanic existence may therefore be thought of as partaking to some extent of the nature of a vision, but the vision is one as vivid—all assurances indeed lead us to believe, more vivid—than that illusion by which we are surrounded on the physical plane of life. From the most exalted point of view, indeed, all states short of that must partake in some measure of illusion, which is thus regarded as more and more completely separating itself from realities, as we carry our observation down through the phases of Nature, until the maximum degree of such separation is reached in the manifestations of life on the physical plane.

The difficulty I have touched on here is one which must be thoroughly cleared out of the way before any student of the inner verities of Nature, as related to after death conditions, can make any serious progress.

I grant that at the first blush of the facts, thinking that has been deeply saturated with vague and impracticable conceptions of the future is apt to rebel against true explanations of the devachanic vision. People for whom all regions of Nature beyond the physical world they see, are inaccessible except in imagination, get into the habit of using even imagination when dealing with ideas of Heaven in a terribly unintelligent way. They lose sight of the whole principle which in connection with every department of Nature they know anything about, they apply to all questions with so much determination; they ignore the fundamental idea of evolution. They claim that Heaven for all men shall realise all that can be imagined as heavenly by the most advanced representatives of the race; that it shall be an objective locality, where the things seen by one denizen are equally seen by all; the conditions enjoyed by one, equally by all. This idea is profoundly immoral in reality; but above all things it is foolish. The ultimate possibilities of evolution undoubtedly provide for all human beings who grow up to them, spiritual destinies immensely transcending the conditions of the devachanic plane as these present themselves to normal entities of the present period in evolution. I shall attempt to deal with some of these possibilities later on. But long before a human soul has grown to the development in which it will be capable of consciousness on Nirvanic levels, it is still in need of spiritual refreshment and desperately in want of some experiences *it can feel* as happiness, in the course of its weary pilgrimage

through the innumerable incarnations on which it is dependent—under the programme of the whole system—for its upward growth. "I myself am Heaven and Hell" answers the "Soul" of the Persian poet, when sent through the Invisible "that after life to spell." The line embodies a deeper truth than is suspected by many who quote it with an approval they are quick to withdraw from the same idea set forth with scientific precision. The soul makes its own Heaven by evoking from the infinitely responsive conditions of Nature by which it is confronted on the devachanic plane, the vision which exactly provides for its happiness. And in furnishing it with the necessary facilities for doing this, Nature does not find it necessary to make a sacrifice of other souls whose happiness might not be entirely provided for if they were called upon to play exactly the parts assigned to them in the visions of all their friends. Nor would it always be possible, however they might be sacrificed, that they should, in this way, play what might easily be incompatible parts. In short, any Heaven that was constructed to meet the objections of persons who find fault with the aspect of the devachanic plane which renders it, for our present humanity, the heaven of inter-incarnate periods,—would soon be reduced to a melancholy scene of conflicting jealousies and despair.

Illusive in one sense the devachanic vision may be,—though the enlightened consciousness which can roam still higher levels will regard the deeper illusions of the physical plane—where the mask of flesh and blood is mistaken for the true individuality, and none

but the things which are evanescent are thought of as real,—as a point of view from it is strangely inappropriate that the relatively durable illusions of the devachanic vision should be treated as deceptive.

Let us now take one step in advance in contemplating the possibilities of the spiritual plane for those who in due time awaken there after death in the usual way. Of course devachan for them is not a condition of active energy or work. If the persons we are now concerned with are so filled with philanthropic impulse that they might not—from the earth point of view—be able to conceive a state of happiness that did not involve doing good in some way to others, so beautiful an attribute in their natures will in due time assert itself, and may even tend to bring them back more quickly than would otherwise be the case to the incarnate life which is the only possible sphere of activity for them, until they attain heights of spiritual evolution to be considered later on. But though, if asked the question, it may be that they would have been willing to sacrifice the personal bliss of heaven in order to go on unintermittently being useful to their fellow creatures, Nature does not hurriedly accept that sacrifice. We are assuming that, though of a very elevated and generous character, they are still in the current of normal evolution, and for all such persons death is the introduction to a period of rest and happiness. Whether they demand it or not, the reward, or an instalment of the reward, of their good and meritorious lives is served out to them; and if from the earth point of view they would fancy, as I have said, that happiness would not be happiness unless associated

with continuous effort for others, that impression is merely due to their insufficient comprehension of the conditions of existence on the spiritual plane. It would be impossible but that such persons as we are now thinking of would have many capacities of emotion which Nature, working with the boundless resources, in that direction, of Heaven, would take advantage of, so to speak, to make them thoroughly happy during the period of their spiritual repose.

And now, still keeping to the aspect of the spiritual plane which presents itself to the normal soul getting into that state of consciousness after death, let us contemplate the *interest* of the Heavenly condition,—to fall back on that convenient and familiar phrase,—as related to the opportunities it affords to the soul thirsting for knowledge. Such a soul, to begin with, has all the resources of the astral light to draw upon. Just as the thought of the spiritual Ego directed towards a beloved friend in life evokes that friend as a living reality before the creative thinker, so does the attention turned towards any events or phenomena of the past evoke their living pictures from the all embracing memory of Nature. And this would apply not merely to historical scenes or remote periods of geological development, but to the essential truths which scientific research gropes after. It is true indeed that our aspirations towards knowledge often in life take daring flights, and we set ourselves problems which the resources even of the devachanic plane are inadequate to satisfy. We must always remember that the spiritual plane we are considering is the spiritual plane of *this world*. One

of the mistakes of uninstructed imagination dealing with the conception of Heaven is a mistake of incoherent thinking. From the earth life belonging to this present stage of human evolution, the soul is imagined as slipping at once into a Heaven which is thought of as a homogeneous Heaven for the whole cosmos, in which we are all to be in the presence of and sharing the omniscience of absolute Divinity. Occult science dealing with the facts of Nature, which it is in a position to probe, interprets for us the spiritual plane of *this world* into which most assuredly the souls of people dying on this world do actually pass, existing there for such and such periods and then as certainly returning to incarnation on earth. It perceives therefore the absurdity of the notion that the *immediate* Heaven of humanity is either co-extensive with the universe or designed for eternity. Within the limits of eternity who shall say what heights may not be reached, what realms of existence and consciousness touched? The real occultist is as careful to avoid dogmatic denials as the real scientist to steer clear of those intellectual pitfalls. But just as the real scientist avows that a great deal lies beyond his ken, and contents himself with affirmations concerning what knowledge he can reach, so exactly with occult science. The observer who is adequately gifted can actually get into relation with the spiritual plane of the earth and can there recognise the souls of men who have lived and died existing under the conditions I am in course of describing. He can understand and appreciate that plane as entering into the great scheme of human evolution, as con-

stituting the reality which is dimly reached after by those people who aspire to the joys of Heaven, and as most certainly responding with abundant success to the cravings for happiness which are associated with those aspirations. But so also does the real occultist know that many fancies concerning Heaven which have possessed the imagination of men are, to say the least, premature, while some others of course are grotesque and nonsensical.

The realities of human growth and evolution and of human experience, whether in or out of the body, are always concerned with gradual transitions, however infinite may be the horizon of possibility stretching on in the remote distance. Let it not be supposed that because the heaven which human beings of this present race enjoy when they rest for a while between two incarnations, is subject to limitations, spiritual progress beyond these limitations is for ever denied to mankind. The entanglements of modern thought on such subjects have largely arisen from the way modern culture has forgotten the great law of re-incarnation, which makes a long series of lives play the part in Nature erroneously assigned by popular notions to one such life. The spiritual plane of the world on which human beings, such as we are now, may exist, and on which they will in that case enjoy the most intense felicity their minds are capable of imagining for ten or twenty centuries between each incarnation, may be looked back upon as a mere resting-place from the point of view of a higher consciousness to be attained in some remote future, or indeed from the point of view which some exalted

souls, greatly hastening the normal process, have already attained. But the truth of the matter is that if, when the design of Nature is correctly described, people who are used to thinking that the heaven to which they will pass after death is co-extensive with the universe, are inclined to be discontented on that account with the prospect actually before them, their discontentment can only be due to an imperfect understanding of the relations between their own present consciousness and infinity. The child that puts out its hand to grasp at the moon is a feeble illustration of that miscalculation of their own spiritual range, which leads some incarnate thinkers to imagine that nothing will satisfy them after death but all the spiritual potentialities the cosmos contains.

And these reflections bring me back to the case of the soul who, even on the spiritual plane of which I have been speaking, may be aware of aspirations towards an even higher knowledge than its resources may provide for. Within the limits of the spiritual heaven, which is still no more than the spiritual aspect of this world, there are many widely differing ranges of condition. The state I have been endeavouring to describe, in which the resources of the spiritual plane respond to the ordinary human thirst for happiness by providing the vivid consciousness of all desired companionships and the opportunities of an almost boundless expansion of knowledge, is after all but the first stage of the spiritual life. It is a stage which so entirely suffices for the normal condition of human consciousness that great myriads of people can never be capable of an aspiration beyond it. But for

those whose latent aspirations have been highly spiritualised during the earth life the spiritual plane will gradually reveal possibilites beyond its own first stage. The soul may spend centuries bathed in the rapture of that first stage, but the latent craving for an even purer condition of spiritual consciousness may eventually assert itself. And the perception of the soul will then be wakened to the fact that in advance, as it were, of the bright light in which it exists, there is a brighter light shining, the mysteries of which may be explored.

In this way, although the spiritual plane is not a region of Nature with which effort or struggle is compatible, the old efforts and internal struggles of the earth life will have invested the soul with an onward impulse, which provides for a conscious progress within the spiritual realm. Language is all but paralysed in the attempt to suggest the nature of the results that such progress may then lead to, but this much can be said: the expansion of the soul's consciousness on the spiritual plane—provided the appropriate force making such progress possible has been engendered during life—will conduct it to a state of consciousness in which the appreciation of objective form is actually transcended. There is a spiritual condition possible for man in the intervals between incarnations, in which consciousness becomes so all embracing that it obliterates the distinction of objective forms and goes far even towards obliterating the separateness of objective individualities considered as distinct from itself. The teaching of those who have penetrated this state of consciousness is to

the effect that it cannot be realised in the imagination of any mind that has not actually touched it, but its sublimity, we are assured, eclipses the finite bliss of the earlier spiritual condition, just as that eclipses the purest happiness imagined by the incarnate thinker. We can only, from the earthly point of view, dwell in imagination on this lofty state of being with an expectant reverence, assured that if we reach it, the sense of exaltation it brings in its train will be something that transcends happiness. From that point of view neither happiness nor knowledge must be thought of as acquired by the individuality concerned. The individuality is identified with the essence of those ideas. The idea of companionship is lost or merged in the unity of all spiritual individualities, which, if not completely realised as yet in even the highest devachan, is foreshadowed by the state of consciousness on its "Arupa" level. The individual spirit has almost got behind the planes of manifestation to that of intense essential realities. I only avoid saying of "absolute realities" because nothing within the scheme of a human evolution as yet far from complete can touch "the absolute," in the proper signification of that phrase, which refers it to the absolute spirit of the whole Cosmos; but certainly no incarnate human understanding venturing to concern itself with these overmastering problems of infinity can reach in thought beyond such an approximation to the absolute as the higher conditions of spiritual consciousness in the formless region of actuality may furnish.

And now let us compare still further with the magni-

ficent realities of the spiritual plane, as initiated insight is enabled to unveil them for us, the conceptions which exoteric religion attaches to the idea of Heaven. And in doing this, let us *not* for a moment treat with any failure of respect the personal and anthropomorphic belief that exoteric forms of religious enthusiasm suggest to the devout though perhaps imperfectly instructed worshipper. Of course the teachings of real spiritual science sublimate and spiritualise the conceptions which represent Heaven as an extra cosmic abode of Divinity, and of those personifications of Divinity which are evolved by conventional religious thinking for the satisfaction of incarnate imaginations. But although pious emotions directed towards these personifications are not the only feelings that deserve the name of spiritual aspiration, they are undoubtedly included in that condition of mind. There are myriads of people so saturated with definite beliefs as to the personalities with which existence in Heaven must be associated, that Heaven for them would not be Heaven if it did not include such beings. But what if the notions they have formed of such beings are really unworthy of the true sublimities of the spiritual plane; what if the Truth is purer and more impersonal than their narrow and earthly imaginations have represented it? Is it to be supposed that, translated to the spiritual region, their expectations and aspirations will be at once harmonised with a more truly spiritualised stage of evolution? To imagine this would be to ignore the fundamental lesson of occult teaching—that the human creature grows upward in the scale of Nature gradually as

a consequence of efforts in the direction of growth accomplished during successive earth lives. The translation of the Ego's consciousness from one plane of Nature to another may bring latent capacities into operation, but it does not engender new capacities.

Therefore the soul which has never spiritualised the personifications of exoteric religion will not be suddenly enabled to spiritualise them by coming into consciousness on the spiritual plane. It will simply deal with them as it deals with the beloved companions of earth who may not—according to the first hypothesis put forward a few pages back—be in true spiritual relations with itself. Its thought and aspiration will have the usual creative force, and the devotee to whom the idea of God has been that of a sublime monarch on a throne, will behold and worship at the foot of that throne, within the subjective though apparently boundless sphere of its own spiritual life. If the Virgin or the saints have played a part in the religious imagination of the human Ego in question on earth, the Virgin and the saints will be visible to its enraptured gaze on the threshold of the spiritual plane. Nothing but a highly refined and purified body of religious beliefs will introduce the Ego on that plane to pure realities and the truth of things.

So far we have been chiefly considering the spiritual plane from the point of view of those who pass on to it in the ordinary course of events after death—a long time after death, perhaps, if the astral plane has, in the first instance, exacted a considerable delay. But now, to expand as far as possible our comprehension of the sublime aspect of Nature on which we are

engaged, let us turn to the question, how devachanic conditions of consciousness affect a soul or Higher Ego enabled to touch them during earth life.

In discussing the very different conditions of astral existence I had continually to emphasize the principle that the region presented one aspect to the soul after death, and another to the soul set free from the body temporarily. There will be much to say about such temporary freedom later on, as that has to do with the grand achievements of abnormal spiritual development, so I need not anticipate another branch of my subject by stopping here to explain how such freedom is procured and what lofty purposes it subserves. But for the moment let us deal with the results of occult progress,—with the experience gained in temporary flights to the spiritual plane undertaken by an Ego with a body still going on in the earth life. How would the spiritual plane, rich in the characteristics I have described, present itself to the consciousness of such an Ego?

The sense of rapture and intense felicity which the devachanic condition imparts would be the same in both cases. That is an inherent attribute of consciousness on the spiritual plane. Then the sense of companionship of whoever might be loved by the person ascending to that plane would be the same as in the other case. But assuming that such ascents became of frequent occurrence with a highly spiritualised soul, a condition of things would set in, in which the activity of mind of the incarnate being would assert itself through the passive receptiveness that the all sufficing character of

the spiritual consciousness would otherwise tend to engender. The Higher Ego would, as it were, be continually prompted, from the incarnate phase of its own being, to seek out the solution of mysteries, to unravel problems on which its speculation had been bent, to avail itself, in short, of the almost infinite resources of the akasic records. These would on that account be far more valuable to the Ego still in touch with earth than to the other, which would float undisturbed by any desire, for long periods of time in a mere bath of unalloyed and compete felicity.

Then the earth-attached Ego would be in a position to be making comparisons the whole time. Like the other, it would be bathed in felicity, but it would never lose sight of the complexities of the whole situation, nor of the earth life; so that its command of the resources of knowledge inherent in the spiritual condition would be applicable to earthly things in a way which would give it a marvellous power of insight in respect to the affairs of this world. A very important distinction must always be drawn in connection with consciousness, between consciousness pure and simple and self-consciousness—the condition in which the fact of consciousness becomes an object of consideration. Thus an animal may be as conscious as a man, but is not self-conscious—not qualified to turn its mental gaze inward and reflect upon the phenomena of its own mind. In the same way the soul on the spiritual plane after death, at all events while in the threshold state in which the sense of felicity and of complete satisfaction in regard to its aspirations swallows up everything else, may be regarded as

conscious; while the emancipated Ego, enabled to reach the spiritual plane during trances of the body, is self-conscious in the highest signification of the phrase.

Thus the opportunities afforded by devachanic consciousness to such an entity are stupendously greater than for one who is just qualified to exist there. The situation is but faintly hinted at if we consider the different meaning, for a highly educated man and for a savage, of books and philosophical instruments. A Bushman in the British Museum would not be so far from being able to avail himself of all the resources around him, as a human being after death just qualified to touch the spiritual plane, would be unable to take advantage of its infinite possibilities.

We have seen how on the astral plane itself, matter is already infinitely more plastic to the influence of thought and will than the grosser matter we have to deal with on the physical plane. It may seem somewhat strained language to speak of the matter of the astral plane when it is wholly beyond the reach of our present senses, nor capable, as far as we know, of affecting the most delicate instruments of the physical laboratory, but it is material, as truly as gold or iron are material, to the senses adapted to its perception. And on the devachanic plane again the thought of the universe has taken manifestation in matter, though this, in its turn will be beyond the range of the astral senses for those on intervening levels. Nor, indeed, are the various phases of material nature entirely disconnected the one from the other, they melt as it were, the one into the other like the colours of the

spectrum. The principle on which this transition is accomplished has even been discerned by those occult students who have advanced a certain distance on the upward path of evolution. The molecule of physical matter is utterly beyond microscopic reach in the direction of the infinitely little and constitutes the finest manifestation of physical matter whose characteristics can be discerned by physical means. But our molecule of physical matter is a congeries of ultimate physical atoms, and the ultimate atom itself constitutes the ether of the physical plane and is still of the physical plane, although already beyond the reach of any instrument of research designed up to the present time. That ultimate physical atom, however, is found to be itself a highly complicated structure, consisting of atoms of astral matter. These atoms in turn we may feel sure, from reasoning and the analogies of nature, are themselves constituted of similar aggregations of Devachanic matter. A great region of thought is opened out in connection with this branch of super-physical science, before we begin to get touch with the nature of force on each plane. Force, it is sometimes said, *is* matter, although the expression in that bald shape is not calculated to convey any acceptable idea to the mind, but the matter which it *is*, is in all cases the matter of a superior plane. Astral matter may become force on the physical plane, or to express the idea with greater precision, may become the vehicle of force on the physical plane, and Devachanic matter in the same way may become the vehicle of a force on the astral plane.

Vehicles of force on the Devachanic plane are of a potency in inverse ratio to their tenuity, because they become the souls, so to speak, of forces on the lower planes, and this thought may suggest one of the ways in which a capacity to exercise consciousness on the Devachanic plane becomes a priceless privilege for a human being still in life, who ascends to that plane not for the sake of bathing in its blissful sensations but for the purpose of accomplishing results that may benefit his fellow creatures. We are in contact here with ideas so far out of touch with commonplace thinking, that it is not easy to render such results as I am now referring to intelligible in everyday language. They would have to do largely with engendering states of mind on the part of the people towards whom the good intention might be directed. Conventional thinking is apt to confine its attention to external conditions of well-being or suffering. It leaves the internal condition to take care of itself through entire ignorance concerning the invisible influences for good and evil by which it may be assailed. The Adept will often be enabled to recognise these as by far more important than the relatively evanescent circumstances that make for good or evil physically. In that way by help rendered from the devachanic plane to people in this life, the whole current of their spiritual evolution, carrying with it innumerable Karmic developments that amongst other effects, will materially qualify even the physical plane well-being of future lives,—may be modified in an important degree. Foremost, therefore in endeavouring to form some notion of what the

opportunities of the Devachanic plane are like for advancing pupils of the Adepts who may be enabled to reach it in consciousness during life, we may set the opportunities of taking an early part in the spiritual *work* of that plane—with which the entities reaching it in the normal course of existence between two earth lives have nothing to do.

Nor is such spiritual work, however difficult itself to appreciate from the ordinary mundane standpoint, the subtlest in its nature of that which the enlightened occultist having access to the Devachanic plane is enabled to undertake. For those to whom the whole after life is at best a vague hypothesis enshrouded with doubt, we may seem to be venturing indeed beyond the limits of the knowable in discussing the question of beneficial influence that may be brought to bear on those who have actually passed through the gateway of death. But the modern theosophic student, vividly alive to the fact that death is but a change of state, is enabled to get a clear view of much that passes in the later state—as, for one thing, the account I have already given of the normal devachanic vision will have shown. And one thing he is enabled to see has reference to the curious bearing in some cases on the character of the devachanic vision of a possible condition of things I will now attempt to explain.

Suppose a deceased person has been attached during life to some one who has got on, along the path of occult development, sufficiently to assign him a part in his own subjectively created Devachanic vision. In ordinary cases the real individual con-

sciousness of the friend concerned would not be engaged in the process. But if that friend is capable of activity on the devachan plane, the situation is very different. He may then, at will, at any time, actually vivify and animate the living picture of himself in the vision, so that such picture becomes himself and is thus capable not merely of reflecting the thoughts concerning him evolved by its creator, but of conveying his own independent thoughts. Thus the deceased person in the midst of the bliss of his normal devachan derives the advantage of new spiritual teaching from his friend and may actually get on in this way, along the great highway of evolution beyond the degree to which the efforts of his previous life had directly conduced. And the progress so made becomes assimilated with his true Ego, never to be forfeited.

This condition of things, let me add for the benefit of any reader who may fancy it an infringement, in favour of the person so influenced, of the laws of Karma, is not such an infringement really. It is the karma of his attachment to and affection for a fellow being on a higher level of spiritual advancement than himself. And in some measure the law just described holds good in reference to people who, without being so highly developed as to be able to function freely on the devachanic plane during life, are nevertheless developed spiritually to a degree which enables them unconsciously to vitalise the ideal image of themselves which the devachanic thinker has evolved. The scientific explanation of this possibility has to be sought for

in very subtle explanations concerning the unity, on higher planes, of all truly spiritual natures, but into that obscure region of occult metaphysics it is hardly necessary to diverge just here. At all events, the occult student, who may not yet regard himself as "on the path" as a regular disciple—and thus provided for as regards the future on principles which differ from those regulating the devachanic life of the normal majority—may derive a good deal of satisfaction from the possibility just referred to. Supposing his spiritual fervour to gravitate strongly in the direction of some great Adept, of whom he knows by repute and in the exaltation of whose nature he has an appreciative trust; even though the time may not be ripe for him to enter distinctly on the path of initiation, his devachanic experiences will be glorified by the presence of that great Adept in his devachanic vision, under circumstances in the reality of which there is no conceivable flaw. From his teaching he may not be in a position to derive, so far, all that may come to him in that way at a later stage of his growth, but the relationship so established will be one which nothing but his own serious degeneration in later lives will ever again interrupt.

Meanwhile,—one cannot say everything, in endeavouring to explain occult mysteries, all at once,—I have not yet touched on a question that will naturally suggest itself,—in connection with the aspect of the devachan plane for those who penetrate it at will,—to everyone who attempts to picture their experiences in his own mind. What does the place look like?—or as there is no "place" to be considered

in the mundane sense of the term—what does Nature look like regarded from that point of view?

This brings me into relation with a very important branch of the subject,—the sub-divisional aspects of the devachan plane. Just as in the case of the astral plane, the devachanic is divided into regions the characteristics of which differ very widely among themselves, although it must be remembered that the "lowest" sub-plane of devachan is already of so glorified a nature that it seems like perfection and infinity itself, for those whose perceptions are first awakened there. But in truth it is but the first stage on a new septenary ladder of perfection. There are seven distinctly marked stages in devachanic progress, which for the convenience of description,—though all materialistic language begins to be embarrassing in dealing with such topics,—we must speak of as seven sub-planes. The first four are spoken of as the "Rupa" or form-planes of devachan, the other three as the "Arupa" or form-less regions.

These distinctions can only be appreciated and understood by the enlightened or initiated visitor, who has acquired the complete freedom, so to speak, of the devachanic plane. The departed entity established for his blissful rest in devachan, finds himself in the region to which his affinities have naturally drawn him, and is not in a position to study the circumstances of Nature above or below that region. He may pass upward, indeed, from one to the other. On first awakening in devachan, he finds himself established, —or rather, he *is* established, without knowing

anything about the matter scientifically,—on that subplane which has to do with the full development of the most commanding body of emotions in his own nature,—among those, of course, which are capable of expansion on a spiritual plane of consciousness. I must go back—at this point to the earlier part of the subject—but while first attempting to define the aspects of devachan as presented to the departed entities, it was inconvenient to handle the question of the subplanes. As I say, that division can only be *understood* by the enlightened visitor, so the explanation is properly taken up now.

On the first or lowest Rupa plane (some writers numbering these planes count from the top, but I prefer to follow the rule we always adopt in dealing with the Seven Principles)—the first or lowest plane has to do mainly with the development of the human affections. Of course, the rapturous and blissful atmosphere of feeling which belongs to the devachanic condition pervades all planes. The second and third have to do with the intense developments of religious devotion—in its purest and loftiest aspect which quite transcends the conventional ecclesiastical aspect which asserts itself on the sixth astral sub-plane. The fourth belongs pre-eminently to the loftiest kind of artistic genius, including the spiritual-intellectual development,—that which is concerned not merely with the pursuit of knowledge in its essential aspects—without excessive regard to material detail,—but which is infused with some zeal, for the benefit of mankind. There must be an altruistic touch in the intellectual fervour which

conduces to the development of consciousness on the fourth Rupa plane; and so with the artistic enthusiasm concerned. This must not be infected with the ambition of being recognised as a great artist, it must be an unself-regarding love of art, ennobled by the feeling that by means of the art pursued, the world is to be elevated and improved.

Whichever enthusiasm amongst those capable of carrying a soul to devachan, is the most commanding in its force,—the soul is carried to the appropriate plane, and first awakens there. But if the first awakening is thus on one of the higher planes, that does not mean that the development of the human love emotion specially belonging to the first, is in any way denied to the individuality concerned. The higher,—for such purposes,—includes the lower, and the devout religious enthusiast will find his loved companions around him in his beatific vision on the second or third plane, just as the sublime artist will be able to enrich his vision in the same way, and to find it glorified by the religious vision also, if that is required for the perfection of his happiness.

Supposing human love is distinctly the predominant need of any given Ego's nature, he will awake on the first devachan plane to begin with, and if his nature also includes, though in a secondary degree, the religious or artistic fervour, will pass on later, carrying his predominant vision with him. For many pages I might go on amplifying the idea of this gradual unfoldment of devachanic consciousness, but it will be seen to have almost infinite ramifications, which it would be impossible to follow out completely, while

the broad principle is easily grasped without going into details at all.

It would obviously be on the highest of the Rupa planes that the soul, entitled, so to speak, to such a privilege, would begin to avail itself freely of Nature's all but infinitely responsive power on devachanic levels. Whatever thirst for knowledge in any exalted direction has stirred its consciousness during earth life will, as time goes on, evolve itself from memory and instantaneously evoke its appropriate response. For the soul so situated there can be no more possibility of an unsatisfied feeling in regard to the desire for knowledge than for an unsatisfied aspiration that has to do with human love. In the normal course of progress the realisation in this way of higher knowledge, sought for by the early stirring of thought in that direction during earth life, constitutes the actual growth of the Ego for which the earlier stirring has provided. No new karma, to speak technically, is being engendered during the devachanic period, no fresh causes are being set in motion, but those which are already established as force within the consciousness are thus blossoming out into the maturity of effect. Adequate attention to this thought will reconcile two views in connection with occult teaching concerning the soul's growth which sometimes present embarrassment when ill-understood. All the work, so to speak, towards growth has been done during earth-life, and the moment that is over the qualifications of the next earthly vehicle of consciousness which the Ego will occupy have been already determined. His fitness, as it were, to occupy that

vehicle is provided for by the experiences he goes through during the devachanic period, themselves the fruit of the seed he has originally planted.

And now patiently endeavouring to pick up all our threads, though it is impossible to follow them up all at once, let us go back to the question what devachan "looks like." Every one must instinctively crave for some description of its external aspect, for however matter exists, no matter how refined it may be, the mind cannot escape from the conception that it must have an external aspect. By the very terms employed, it is recognised as having an objective existence. And this inference is in no way misleading in regard to the devachanic plane, but the aspect of nature in that region differs so widely from that with which we are familiar here, that the required conception can only be arrived at in the mind, and then but imperfectly, step by step as we begin to realise the various features of this very exalted Nature. To every consciousness first touching the devachanic plane, the predominant impression in the first instance, seems to be that of light; light of a brilliancy to which the experience of physical eyes in relation to bright light can hardly be truly related, because we have to think of that light as inconceivably brilliant, but in no sense dazzling. The very thought of being dazzled, is associated with the imperfections of the sense by which, on the physical plane, the phenomenon of light is appreciated. The light of the spiritual planes is attractive in proportion, so to speak, to its brilliancy. It must be thought of as associated in some hardly imaginable way with life. It is

described by those who can cognise it as "living light," and withal it is not a mere white brilliancy, but embodies an infinite and variegated play of colour, —colour running thus into a great variety of distinctions entirely beyond the range that can be appreciated by the physical senses. Even before getting on to devachanic levels, some persons in the waking state, whose astral senses are in activity are enabled to perceive, in what for most of us is the invisible margin of the spectrum, colours which are unlike any of those known to the painter. These in themselves are wholly indescribable, for no colour can be described except in terms of those already known. More colours than are discernible to astral sight become manifest in the marvellous iridescence of devachanic nature, and they are not alone manifestations of beauty; they have a significance which on some levels of the devachanic plane, become definitely perceptible to consciousness functioning there. As the vibrations of sound have acquired for ourselves, through the use of language, a definite intellectual signification, so the vibrations of colour on certain devachanic levels carry significance from mind to mind, and from the lowest to the highest region of that plane, constitute one of its foremost characteristics.

Next we have ever to remember that the plasticity of matter on the devachanic plane, and its obedience to impulse and will, is such that thought becomes a creative power there in an enormously higher degree than is the case on even the higher levels of the astral plane. We may recognise the distinc-

tion as having to do with some sense of intentional effort. On the astral plane objective results are sought for; on the devachanic plane, no such effort intervenes between thought and its realisation. We are there in very much more direct touch, moreover, with that memory of nature, the true medium of which, although it penetrates the lower planes, belongs in its nature to those which are definitely spiritual. So that the thought directed on the devachanic plane towards any period in the past, instantaneously evokes an absolutely accurate picture of that period, event or episode, whatever it may be, and in this way, taking the devachanic plane for the moment as a whole, and without regard to its sub-divisions, we may recognise a species of omniscience concerning matters coming within range of this world's affairs as a necessary attribute of full consciousness on devachanic levels.

However, throughout our study of this branch of the subject, we must constantly bear in mind the fact that nature, even on the exalted planes of consciousness that transcend physical life, can only respond to the nature or development of the consciousness she is dealing with. This will apply to the occult pupil first penetrating the devachanic planes as well as to the after death entities. It is only with difficulty and by degrees that the study of the circumstances concerning spiritual evolution and the growth of the soul emancipate us from the misconception embodied in the popular notion of the after state as a sudden exaltation, even of the most commonplace human beings into angels of light in presence of eternal mysteries, the moment

they are set free from the body. That sort of abrupt change is no more possible, than it would be for a newly born child suddenly entering on the physical plane of life, to write Newton's "Principia" or Humboldt's "Cosmos" the following day. And while the soul's growth during its normal stages of progress is only accomplished very slowly, during physical existence; so also, though enormously more hastened, the capacity of the occult disciple winning access to devachanic levels must also be thought of as developing by degrees.

Above the four sub-divisions of devachanic existence which have been dealt with so far,—the Rupa planes of devachan, those that is say in which the consciousness is still associated in some way with the idea of form,—there lie the three Arupa or formless planes, in reference to which it is exceedingly difficult if not impossible to give any coherent explanation in the language of physical life. Here the entity qualified to ascend to them in consciousness *begins* to realise that unity of all consciousness which is one of the most supremely important facts of nature to which occult study introduces us, but which transcends the state of consciousness of this waking life so immeasurably that it is hardly possible to deal with it in terms of the physical intellect. These higher planes are spoken of as formless rather, perhaps, because the soul rising to these levels is enabled to cognise Realities independently of any of their lower manifestations, than because on these levels we have yet lost touch entirely with form manifestation itself.

For each of us whose spiritual growth has been such as to render it possible for us at any time to have relations with the Arupa planes of devachan the vehicle in which alone we can enter into such relations is that described in occult terminology as the Karana Sharira. That so far as the present Manvantara is concerned, is the absolutely permanent vehicle of the true individuality of each man. It is the vehicle in which, divorced from all lower manifestations, he rises between the interval of death and re-birth to the highest phase of nature it is possible for him to touch, and in which he again descends through those intervening conditions, re-manifesting himself in vehicles appropriate thereto, until he reaches the physical body appertaining to his next manifestation on earth.

Entities functioning on the Arupa planes in the Karana Sharira are objectively realisable by others, and the real reason why these planes have been described as formless is, as already stated, that they are not concerned with other forms except those which are assumed by the beings appertaining to them. By those who are capable of existence on these planes in consciousness, and of bringing back to their own recollection in the physical state a recollection of their feelings and perceptions there, these regions are described as oceans of living light and sound and colour, in the midst of which existence to begin with, before we attempt to figure in our imagination its other characteristics, is a condition of the most intense delight. But the foremost, perhaps from the point of view of the explanation I am attempting now to

give, among the characteristics of the Arupa planes is that which distinguishes it even from those lower planes of devachanic consciousness, themselves so glorious and beautiful that the language in which they are described leaves no further superlatives at our command with which to invest the still loftier attributes of the Arupa condition. On the Rupa levels, it will have been seen, the world which surrounds each entity —leaving for a moment out of account those entities who may merely be functioning there temporarily, by virtue of a development which enables them to look on at their phenomena without being entirely involved therein—is an ideal world, representing in a perfection, which is unchangeable for him, the sum total of his loftiest aspirations and emotions. But if his spiritual growth has been such as to render it possible for him to pass upward eventually on to the Arupa planes, he will there be in no need of an ideal that shall in any way differ from the absolute reality of things. On the Arupa planes he sees all other beings there, exactly as they are, and yet this perception in no way interferes with the perfect beatitude of each, because by the hypothesis anyone capable of conscious existence on the Arupa planes at all has so transcended the limitations of life as we think of it down here, that happiness is in no way dependent upon any unreal illusion. The thought is very difficult to assimilate in a mind unused to attempts at transcending the present conditions of existence, but even the loves and affections of our incarnate existence are the outgrowth in a certain sense of the limitations of our consciousness. They will not be dissipated or annulled by an ascent to

regions of nature where the limitations, which in the first instance gave rise to them, are merged in a spiritual unity, but their character will be so completely modified in that almost unimaginable condition, that they will have lost touch with the circumstances of a transient character that constitute as it were the material out of which illusions and ideals of even the most beautiful nature are constructed. Words fail in connection with thought of this kind to do more than convey hints and suggestions, but at all events whoever would frame in his mind a conception of the Arupa condition must bring together the two thoughts, that on that plane there is no room for any misconception of actual reality, nor is there any room for the faintest trace of regret or discontent.

The form spoken of as representing an entity on any of the Arupa planes is the vehicle of the Higher Self called, as I have said, in the technical language of occultism, the Karana Sharira. And just because the growth of this Higher Self as functioning in the one vehicle which is permanent throughout the Manvantara and passes from one personality to another, is the whole purpose to be accomplished during the evolution on which we are launched, it stands to reason that at any relatively early stage of the process the Karana Sharira in each case is extremely undeveloped. For the vast majority of mankind at the present level of progress, the truth is that nothing like active self-consciousness on the Arupa levels is possible. The Karana Sharira is gradually evolving and gathering from successive lives whatever slight contributions to its permanent nature be made by

each experience. For the majority of mankind, if we think of the actual numbers on the earth's surface around us, it must be recognised that the Higher Self is hardly grown sufficiently to be a nucleus of consciousness even on the Rupa planes of devachan. It has only learnt, so to speak, to be fully conscious on the astral and physical manifestations. Even for the lowest examples of humanity it is in a certain sense established on the Arupa planes; but as consciousness is drawn back into it again after each physical existence, it fades into a feebler and feebler flame, until it may be thought of as a mere speck on the highest level to which it belongs. Thus it returns to incarnation, recovering in its passage through the lower strata of existence, as we have seen, the material vehicles required for that kind of consciousness which it has learned to exert. But for the purpose of endeavouring to comprehend the Arupa planes we must keep our attention fixed on those entities already sufficiently developed to be truly conscious there and to exercise the faculties and energies appropriate to that phase of nature.

Of course, on that level of existence all senses are merged in a single all-embracing capacity of appreciation, so that the organs of sense we think of as in association with the human being are entirely superseded. This, to begin with, is one of the most difficult ideas to realise from the point of view of ordinary thinking. People cannot emancipate their conception of existence from the conception of the human form, so that poets and painters have followed the guidance of anthropomorphic theology in all

their attempts to represent beings of a celestial nature. Their highest efforts are in this way little more than grotesque for those who, either with the help of imagination or experience, are enabled to realise in some degree the nature of consciousness in realms which transcend sense, and are wholly superior to the limitations of a differentiated organism. But it will be remembered that the Aura that surrounds the human being even on this plane of life is, if we omit those elements of its constitution which have to do with the magnetic conditions of the body, itself a congeries of the actual vehicles in which it is qualified to function on the higher planes of nature. The Aura itself has no limbs or features, and yet in a far truer sense than the limbs and features is the vehicle of our thoughts and emotions, of our knowledge and our will, so that anyone who desires to realise in some measure what the conditions of the Arupa levels are like, must begin by getting rid of the false association established by the habits of physical life between consciousness and the differentiated organism.

The lowest of the three Arupa planes is that on which the Karana Sharira of every human being may be thought of as already existing in some degree or other of early development. On the intermediate Arupa plane those Karana Shariras will be found, in connection with which a very considerable degree both of intellectual and spiritual development has been accomplished, while on the highest of all existence is only possible for those in whom such advancement has been supplemented by the actual acquisition of

knowledge and power incidental to that degree of progress marked by the first, at all events, of the great steps of initiation. That process of initiation represents the accelerated accomplishment of the evolution laid out as regards humanity at large, for the second half of the Manvantara. At a later stage of that period, evolution will have brought considerable numbers to the levels, with which at present those are concerned alone who have hastened with extraordinary rapidity along the path. Thus, whatever it may be possible for us at present to learn concerning the highest of the Arupa planes has to do rather with the attempt to appreciate abnormal than with a survey of normal evolution. We may come back to this subject further on, when the course of initiation has been more distinctly traced; for the moment the highest level of the Arupa planes need not be brought into the picture which concerns itself with an appreciation of the regular course pursued by the human entity in its progress from physical death to re-birth. In conclusion of this part of our subject, however, it may be hinted that the spiritual conditions of being attainable by the human soul still in relations with this earth are not exhausted by the resources of those planes of Nature described in the foregoing pages. Occult teaching is to the effect that even above the highest region of devachan which itself transcends the manifestations of form and objectivity, there is a spiritual state attainable by man which transcends even that. But it is useless to attempt any speculation which shall deal with the characteristics of that plane in words, and it is

outside the natural cycles of human existence, so that in the ordinary course of things the soul after death would not touch it, returning instead in due time to incarnation from the spiritual realm already dealt with. So we need not take cognisance of it for the present further than to say that it constitutes the state of unimaginable spiritual sublimity referred to in Eastern theosophy by the expression Nirvana.

CHAPTER X.

THE SYSTEM TO WHICH WE BELONG.

EVERY one who has touched the outskirts of theosophic teaching will be familiar with the idea that this planet we are actually inhabiting for the moment forms one of a connected series through which the human life-wave flows, manifesting in full activity on one only at any given period; that the course of the whole Manvantara involves a septenary journey round this chain of worlds; that each in turn is brought into full activity during this progress, and fades back into comparative obscuration as the life-wave passes on, and that the passage around the whole seven globes is spoken of for convenience as a "round" in evolution, seven of which make up a whole Manvantara. The strain and struggle of existence is not equally great on all these globes—in four of them, indeed, two of these being on the downward and two on the upward arc of the circle, humanity is not called upon to undergo the strain of physical existence at all. On the first globe of the series existence is altogether conditioned by surroundings corresponding with that which we call the devachanic plane of the earth, while the lowest point of materiality touched by the second globe of the series is on a level with that which we here call the

astral plane. Life on the third planet on the downward series has already the physical vehicle, and that third planet, therefore, becomes perceptible to our present senses, and is in fact the planet Mars. Passing onward from this earth, humanity again functions on a physical globe—the planet Mercury—and then passes to the sixth, the lowest materiality of which is astral, and to a seventh which, like the first, is altogether devachanic. Here on the earth we are at the middle point of our progress in each round, and this period of the earth's activity is the middle period of the whole Manvantara as the round on which we are engaged is the fourth, just a little more than half of which is already accomplished. If we concentrate our attention on the present world period alone we find evolution being carried out during the whole of the period through seven great races, with seven different configurations of land and water to harmonise with their needs, the race in the midst of which we Europeans and some other populations now find ourselves, being the fifth, while the fourth, the middle race, was the great Atlantean race which already began to decline from its culminating grandeur nearly a million years ago. The last remnant of land which belonged to the great continent it once occupied disappeared in the natural convulsion of which some faint records have been preserved in classical literature, and in the Mexican manuscript known as the Troana MS., lately deciphered by Dr. Le Plongeon. Periods of years expressed in figures simply bewilder the mind when we begin to talk of millions, and yet we know that the duration of a great root race must be counted in

millions, that a great many millions of years are thus represented by even the briefest of the world periods which are connected with the great course of planetary evolution. It will not be an exaggeration of the truth to say that if we think of the whole Manvantara as representing the individual life of a man, such a life-time as we are familiar with now, say one of seventy years, would stand in the same relation to the whole as one second of time would stand in relation to the seventy years. Illustrations of this nature may, to some extent, help the mind in realising the length of the evolutionary journey through which we have already passed and in realising the rate at which the soul grows while it is left, so to speak, to the single influence of what may be thought of as the evolutionary drift. In looking backward over the progress achieved in the past by any soul not yet emerged from ordinary conditions—and such retrospect is possible for those whose faculties have already begun to function on devachanic levels—there is something almost appalling in the tardiness in the growth observable. Each physical life has such infinitesimally minute contributions to make to the permanent individuality! Look back, if you are able, for a dozen lives, and you will probably find so little difference between the spiritual individuality at the remote period and the corresponding individuality at this moment, that you might be tempted to think the time and strain and effort of all that existence but thrown away and wasted. But it has not been wasted really, any more than the corresponding interval of time has been wasted by the stalactite, that wonderful monument to Nature's

patience, which is not without its significance for observers who can appreciate analogies. And though progress may have been slow along the immeasurable course of bygone ages, the final result attained, even if we look merely at the spiritual individuality of the human being of our own period, is a growth the accomplishment of which eclipses that of the stalactite in the estimation of those who can appreciate the difference between the plane of Nature on which it has been achieved and that to which the perishable, however ancient, mineral form belongs.

But what is the road to be travelled by the Ego in its development between this middle period of the Manvantara and the final culmination of its possibilities at a period in advance to be measured by the magnitude of that awful journey we have already taken, during which we have been shielded from a perception of its wearisome length by the torpor of our higher nature? The distance to be yet travelled, as measured on the scale of human condition, from the place at which the ordinary humanity now stands to that it should reach at the end of the Manvantara, is not less than that which separates a favourable example of modern civilisation—say a man of distinguished literary culture or scientific attainments, from the primitive savage of Tierra del Fuego. It is the design of Nature that the majority of the whole human family shall at the end of the seventh round of planetary experience attain to a condition in which existence, in reference to this planetary chain to which we belong, will be, to begin with, more free than our present incarnate existence in

as great a degree as the living man of to-day, so to speak, is freer than the stone. If we endeavour to invest the stone in our imagination with a consciousness, it must clearly be one of a very restricted character, and, amongst other conditions, it exists wherever it is put, not wherever it wills to go. Within limits the man can move about on the surface of this earth at his pleasure, but compared with the being he may become, he is as much in prison in his present vehicle, and as much chained down to one spot by the limitations of his capacity, as in comparison with him the stone itself is subject to restrictions. The final example of perfected humanity will use whatever body he then retains as a mere instrument of his convenience, to be worn or left aside at pleasure. The higher realms of Nature, of which I have been speaking in endeavouring to describe the course of human experience between death and re-birth, and others again immeasurably transcending these, will be accessible to him as readily as the various rooms in the house in which he lives may be accessible to him now. From any one globe of the chain to another he will be able to pass as freely as within the various phases of each. Forces of Nature as far transcending any with which modern science is acquainted as these transcend the resources of the African savage will lie within his reach and command, for his moral nature will have attained altitudes corresponding with the development of his power and knowledge, and by that time his Will will be so completely welded with that which controls the whole of Nature, and is represented to our ordinary thinking by the idea of Divinity, that no care on the part of

Nature for his own or others welfare will render it necessary to subject him to the disabilities of ignorance. Language entirely fails to do more than hint in the vaguest fashion at the kind of exaltation thus within the possibilities of human progress, but that progress may in some faint degree be appreciated with the help of the thought that it will amongst other things embrace all knowledge concerning this whole Manvantaric design—an absolute and complete understanding of every intricacy in Nature's stupendous mechanism, and will embrace the answer to every moral enigma which the experience of life may suggest, or to which in the weary efforts of our speculative thinking in the present day we may turn continually in despairing sorrow, holding on with what strength we may to the vague trust that in superior wisdom there resides, beyond our reach, a clue to the mysteries of evil.

That is the course along which human evolution has still to travel, but it ought to be manifest to any reasonable thinker that the scheme thus set forth, involving, as it does, the elevation of Man to levels which we are in the habit of thinking God-like, is not to be accomplished by any process of evolution pressing upon him from without. In a certain sense, though even this is, perhaps, a strained one, it may be said that up to the present period of evolution, primeval germs of human consciousness have been brought to the position in which we now stand under the influence of external forces or guidance, but before a man can be invested by nature with God-like attributes, he must engender within his own consciousness the will to be God-like, and he

must, as it were, put the whole force of his own intention into the undertaking. He must be actuated by an intelligent will as well as by vague aspiration towards progress; he must make the choice between good and evil with his eyes open; he must determine whether he would rather grasp whatever good things connected with progress it may be possible for him to monopolise for himself, or whether he would rather join his forces to those who are endeavouring to serve the purposes of God, and to promote the acceleration of the whole undertaking. It will only be by individual effort at each step of man's progress as he goes on through the ordinary course of Nature that he will really ascend along the gentle upward spiral, but at this point it is impossible to describe the course of normal evolution without making some reference to that kind which is abnormally hastened. If a man follows the normal course no great magnitude of effort, so to speak, will ever be required from him at any given moment, but his growth towards ultimate possibilities of his own development will be correspondingly slow. On the other hand, the extent to which, by emphasising that effort to an enormous degree of intensity, it is possible for him from this stage of human advancement onward to accelerate his own evolution, will be found to eclipse the boldest conjectures which any one might form from the point of view of comprehending the whole evolutionary scheme without actually knowing what have been the results of abnormal effort on the part of those who have gone in advance of the rest. But whether he concentrates his effort or distributes it, for the evolution of the latter half of the Manvantara he

must contribute his own effort to the evolutionary tendency or he will fall back into the rear. This will be better intelligible when we come to study the conditions of abnormal progress, but meanwhile explanations are still wanting to complete our picture of the whole evolutionary field, within the almost boundless range of which the growth of the soul proceeds.

The planetary series with which our present Manvantara is concerned, with all its marvellous intricacies as regards its physical manifestation alone, with all its unseen conditions of existence around it, with all its magnificent possibilities of consciousness having to do with the spiritual planes of Nature, is but one of a series of such with which this human family is concerned. Seven Manvantaras succeed each other in due order, this we are now going through being the fourth, and the worlds of each succeeding Manvantara are themselves evolved afresh each time, though each in turn must be thought of as a re-incarnation of its predecessor rather than as an entirely fresh creation. Meanwhile within the limits of the solar system of which we form a part, there are other chains of Manvantaras in progress connected with other planets, visible and invisible, and in all we are given to understand that there are thus seven schemes of planetary evolution, all having some touch with the physical plane, and deriving their vital energies from the sun. At certain very exalted stages of spiritual progress the foremost representatives of humanity in the very vanguard of our evolution are in a position to acquire definite knowledge concerning these other

schemes, and some information on the subject has filtered down to occult students of our level. We are thus enabled to form a comprehensive conception of the solar system as a whole, and even to appreciate to some extent the nature of the great design it represents.

Seven, as we have long recognised, is the root number of our system—in so far, at any rate, as that system is in any way concerned with physical manifestation—and the simple invariability of the law makes the great plan in question more easily intelligible than it would be otherwise. The solar system includes (we must take care not to fall into the arrogant mistake that might be involved in saying it consists of) seven great schemes of planetary evolution in each of which there are some worlds, one or more, on the physical plane. The schemes are not all designed to match one another, and in some more than in others the higher planes of Nature are engaged in their design. Theosophists are well used now to the conception that super-physical planes of Nature may be just as real and the manifestations thereon just as objective as those which affect the physical senses. The astral and devachanic planes are available as areas of manifestation within the solar system as completely as the physical plane, and indeed, over and above the seven planetary schemes, to which I have already referred, there are some others which are altogether established on the higher planes and have no physical planets connected with their evolution at any time. It will not be possible to say much of these at present, but the recognition of the fact that

they exist will help to bring order into our thinking at a later stage of this inquiry. Our own scheme makes a larger draught than any other but one on the resources of the physical plane, and at the period of our present Manvantara three planets of our own series are on this plane; but the constitution of the various chains is varied in this respect.

Each scheme of evolution is worked out by means of a series of seven manvantaras. Each manvantara includes an evolutionary process, such as that set forth in theosophic teaching in reference to the seven rounds of our planetary chain. As each round includes a world period of activity on each planet in turn, and as each of these world periods is divided into seven great racial cycles, we may get a view of the proportionate magnitude of a race period—itself extending over some millions of years—as compared with the whole system to which we belong, if we bear in mind the following progression:

Seven root race periods make up one world period.

Seven world periods (following each other on as many planets in succession), one round.

Seven rounds one manvantara.

Seven manvantaras, one scheme of evolution.

Seven schemes of evolution (more or less contemporaneous in their activity), the solar system.

Some of these schemes are much more advanced than others, but before going into a more minute account of the condition in which we find the whole stupendous undertaking at the present time, it will be desirable to go back in imagination to its beginning, and appreciate the beautiful intuition with which

modern science—not always entitled to as much credit—has divined with a very close approach to accuracy the condition in which our system existed before any of its planets were differentiated.

The nebular hypothesis is one of the grandest achievements of which the unassisted human intellect has ever shown itself capable. That hypothesis closely harmonises with theosophic teaching on this subject, even though that teaching expands and interprets it in a way that would not be possible from the narrow platform of thought which recognises only one order of matter.

The theory that solar systems were each, in the first instance, vast aggregations of highly heated and very attenuated matter—gaseous, or perhaps even more attenuated still—and that by degrees each such nebula was subjected to a cooling and contracting process which condensed its nucleus, and so forth, is generally attributed to the great astronomer Laplace. Some writers trace the genesis of the idea to Tycho Brahe, who suggested that stars were formed by the condensation of the ethereal substance of which he supposed the Milky Way to be composed. Kepler extended the idea by suggesting that the nebular substance may originally have pervaded all space, instead of being confined to the Milky Way, and other great thinkers in turn suggested further modifications of the original conception. It was immensely fortified when the researches of Sir William Herschell showed us over 2,000 separate nebulæ within range of the telescope, and then, in the last year of the eighteenth century, Laplace worked out the whole scheme far

more systematically than any of his precursors, and developed it into pretty much the shape in which the astronomical world generally accepts it now.

Laplace showed how the planets of a system could be successively formed by the rupture, from the central mass of the nebula, of great external rings of condensing matter. The whole nebula was assumed to have been originally in rotation, so the rings would themselves continue to rotate in the same way. By degrees the rings would themselves be somewhere ruptured, and then the matter of which they were composed would roll up and aggregate itself either into great globular planetary bodies, or into swarms of smaller meteoric masses.

Concurrently with the development of the whole idea, speculation has concerned itself with the question how the nebula in the first instance was probably formed. According to one view, sometimes spoken of as the vortex theory, matter is supposed to be drawn in with a whirling motion around some already existing nucleus. By another—the impact theory—the original nebula is supposed to be due to the collision in space between two cold and extinct suns moving in different directions with planetary velocities. The heat engendered by such an appalling catastrophe is recognised as sufficient to volatilise all the matter of which the two globes consisted, and to set up, in this way, a new nebula of glowing incandescent gas, which would be set in rotation by the nature of the collision which caused it, as the chances would be enormous against the exact encounter of the two bodies centre to centre. At present, I think, the impact theory of

nebular origins is most in favour, and it is profoundly interesting to learn from our exalted teachers that, though as a matter of fact it is not the method of development that was actually adopted in the case of our own solar system, it has been employed in the course of Nature with some other systems, and can be brought into harmony with those activities on higher planes than the physical, which our theosophic instincts will at once assure us must always be mainly instrumental in bringing a solar system into existence.

The method actually adopted at the inauguration of our own solar system was one concerned entirely, in the first instance, with higher planes of Nature. On some level of super-physical matter a force was set in action which had the effect of creating what we may think of—without claiming, in this respect, to think with exactitude—as a vast electric field extending over a region of space greater by far than the area included in the orbit of Neptune.

The region of space affected would, to begin with, be pervaded by matter of a certain order, or indeed of certain orders. The more we comprehend the spirit of occult teaching, the more clearly we realise the idea that space is nowhere empty and vacant. It may contain nothing that affects some given set of limited senses, but for all that it is a plenum rather than a vacuum. Something pervades all space with which we can concern ourselves in thought. Recognising this, and recognising also that matter on other planes than the physical is clearly subject to limitations—so that what we habitually talk of, for example, as the astral plane is not a homogeneous infinitude but is

the astral plane *of this earth*—Esoteric students sometimes puzzle over the question, What plane in the ascending series is common to the solar system, what plane common to the Cosmos? The answer to the riddle is to be found in the fact that each plane is represented by matter in several—the usual seven—stages of refinement. The lower sub-planes are in all cases specialised around each planet; but in each case the highest sub-plane is co-extensive with the solar system—with the universe itself, for all we know to the contrary. Thus in a certain sense even the physical plane is co-extensive with space, as represented by the highest, the atomic state of ether. So equally with the astral and Devachanic planes: these, in their highest states, are co-extensive with the ether; and *a fortiori* higher planes still are co-extensive.

From this it will be apparent that matter of every variety, *plus* all its potentialities, lay within the region in which the sublime power, directing the manifestation of our system, set up the activities already referred to. These activities had for one effect, we are told, that of drawing in from surrounding space, as into a vortex, immense additional supplies of the all-pervading ether. Some scientific difficulties present themselves to the mind in reference to this statement, but solar systems are sufficiently wide apart in their distribution through space to harmonise with the idea that even the ether, though we have to think of it as incompressible to accommodate our prevailing conceptions of matter with some of its attributes, may be attenuated in intersolar space, and relatively condensed in and around solar systems. At all events,

the esoteric interpretation of the beginning of our system seems to involve the idea of such condensation, and on the ether in this condition an influence coming down from some higher plane of Nature ultimately converted the condensed mass into a physical nebula —an immense volume of incandescent gas at some inconceivably high temperature.

From this condition of things the process imagined in connection with the nebular theory appears to have come into play. Rings of the nebular substance became detached from the parent mass, and continuing to revolve in obedience to the vortex motion of the whole mass, became aggregated into planets, although not into the actual planets with which we are now familiar, these being of later origin, by virtue of principles operative in the evolution of the system which ordinary astronomy does not as yet take into account.

The various planets originally formed were grouped by degrees into seven great schemes of evolution, and to comprehend these in some approximate measure, we must regard them from our present point of view. The survey we have to carry out would not be materially assisted by attempts to fathom the all but unfathomable past so far as to investigate the order in which the various schemes were launched. Meanwhile, however, we may take note of the fact already referred to that there are within the solar system three schemes of evolution to which no physical planets are attached, so that in truth there are not seven but ten schemes to be thought of; and probably if we possessed a sufficiently exhaustive knowledge of

Nature we should find septenary systems constantly merging themselves in a more embracing system of tens; but wherever the physical plane plays a part in any cosmic undertaking the septenary law appears to hold good. Thus our first task in attempting to understand the solar system has to do with seven schemes in each of which the physical plane is touched.

Beginning with that which is the outermost in space, we find that the planet Neptune is concerned with a scheme of a very different character from that which may be assigned to most of the others. In this world-series the evolutionary process is not destined to achieve results commensurate with those which it is the purpose of the other schemes to bring about. The life with which Neptune is concerned is not calculated to attain very high levels, but on the other hand this wonderful cosmic organism is especially interesting for an astronomical reason. Connected in evolution with Neptune there are in fact two other planets physically belonging to our system that have not yet fallen a prey to telescopic research. One of them may ultimately be discovered by ordinary means, the outermost lies far beyond the range of physical instruments, for not merely is its distance something appalling to the imagination, but the light it would throw back to us by reflection from the sun is exceedingly feeble. Viewed from Neptune itself the sun would appear a mere speck in the sky compared with the glowing disc we have to deal with, but the two outer planets are at distances from the centre of the system which continue to observe what is called in astronomy "Bode's

law." Thus without having yet discovered either of them we know that the radius of the orbit in which the outermost of all is moving is something over 10,000 million miles. (The distance of Neptune from the sun, it will be remembered, is about 2,700 millions.) At that distance the light of the sun would barely make darkness visible. And for any warmth the distant planet may require it must be dependent chiefly on influences with which physical science on this earth at present is ill acquainted. However, little as we can expect just yet to understand the Neptune scheme, we may formulate our thinking on the subject so far as to recognise that scheme as including—at its present stage of advancement—three physical planets.

All the other schemes, as we shall see by degrees —excepting our own—are at present represented on the physical plane by only one planet each. But all through this survey of the system it must be remembered that schemes are not equally represented on the physical plane at each of their manvantaric stages. Our own scheme had but one physical planet in its last manvantara, and will have but one in its next manvantara, though at present it has a triple manifestation on the physical plane. So other schemes which at present have only one physical planet may have more than one at later stages of their progress, may have had more than one at former stages.

The Uranus scheme—for thinking at this date we may as well call each scheme by the name of the visible planet of its present chain—is the next in order to be considered. I understand the Uranus scheme is fairly well advanced, and to be concerned with the

evolution of a high order of life, but of course the physical conditions of Uranus must be widely unlike any with which we have acquaintance. The sun can hardly seem a much larger object viewed from Uranus than Jupiter appears to us, but one of the lessons most strongly emphasised by the esoteric study of the whole system is that life is compatible with conditions of the most diverse character, and that we must never seek to determine the habitability of other globes in space by inquiring how far their meteorological or climatic conditions correspond with our own.

The Saturnian scheme is very much less advanced in its manvantaric development than our own, and the planet Saturn itself is in an early round of its present manvantara, so that it is not yet physically habitable at all. The family of beings with whose evolution it is concerned are still at an early stage of their descent into matter, even though it must not be supposed that the Saturn scheme, any more than other schemes connected with the outer planets are young in the order of their creation as compared with some of those nearer the sun. The rates of progress of the various schemes are very different. Saturn is slow in its evolution, with manvantaras of enormous length. We must be patient yet a while in regard to speculations which would attempt to correlate the rate of progress of the various schemes, though no doubt they are all designed to harmonise their results in some way towards the close of the mighty drama in which they play their several parts.

The Jupiter scheme is very interesting, for though it is still young—in advancement, if not in time—it is

destined, we understand, to bring forward its family of evolution to a very high level eventually. So far, however, the manvantara of the Jupiter scheme now in progress is only the third of the septenary series, corresponding to our lunar or last manvantara, which did not bring our family forward to a very mature stage of development. Moreover, at present the Jupiter family is only in the second round of its third manvantara, and its physical planet therefore is not yet fitted to be the abode of physical life. It is still hot from its relatively recent condensation, and this condition of things, recognised by ordinary astronomy, is *not* due, as ordinary astronomers suppose, to the fact that Jupiter is much larger than the inner planets, and has thus taken more time to cool since the original nebula consolidated. Jupiter is a later creation than the earth, but the view of the whole subject with which this fact is connected will more conveniently be dealt with when the general survey of the schemes is completed.

Coming inward from Jupiter, the next planetary orbit we reach is that at present occupied by the swarm of asteroids, merely so much raw planetary material to be used up in future chains. The next *planet* is Mars, but in reaching this interesting world we of the earth chain are comparatively at home, for the scheme to which we belong, at present in its fourth manvantara, is at the stage of its deepest immergence in matter, and is thus represented on the physical plane by three planets, Mars being one. Mars, the Earth, and Mercury are in evolutionary partnership, Mars being the planet behind the earth

in the order of progress round the entire chain, and Mercury in advance of us. A large portion of the present human family has actually lived on Mars—where, if we could but visit the planet now, as, indeed, some of our more advanced companions can and do, in the appropriate vehicle of consciousness while out of the physical body, we should still find archæological traces of our passage. As we know a little more about the planets of our own chain than of the others, I will return to this branch of the subject later on.

Next to the Earth as we move onwards towards the Sun, we come to the planet Venus. Of all the seven schemes of the system, that which Venus at present represents on the physical plane is the farthest advanced in evolution, not necessarily the oldest as judged by the period at which it began, but the quickest of the series as regards the rate of its progress or the duration of its manvantaras.

Our own scheme is now going through its fourth manvantara, but that to which Venus belongs is far advanced through the fifth. It is already in the seventh round of that manvantara, the family it is evolving being at present established like ourselves on the physical planet of its chain, although at such an immensely more forward stage of its progress, that the foremost of its beings, in great numbers represent, as compared with our humanity, a fairly god-like degree of exaltation. From Venus, as all students of esoteric teaching will be aware, the guardians of our infant humanity in the later third and early fourth race of this world period descended to stimulate in our family

the growth of the manasic principle, and to them we owe the fact that as we stand at present we are in truth somewhat further advanced in evolution than our actual place in our own scheme strictly entitles us to be. We have been helped onward by some of those who are in the loftiest sense of the term our Elder Brethren in the whole system, and among us there have been found some, at all events, who have proved apt pupils, and are already on levels of spiritual dignity commensurate with those previously attained by their sublime instructors.

Within the orbit of Venus lies the planet Mercury, belonging to our own chain, and thereon, as the middle point of our present world period has now been passed, a fresh morning of evolution is setting in in preparation for the advent of this human family, when the remainder of its great race periods shall have been worked through on this earth. And then again within the orbit of Mercury another planet is to be found, and probably will be found some day or other by ordinary astronomers, who already suspect its existence, and have been keenly on the look out for it when solar eclipses give them a chance of seeing it. Merged as it is in the blinding glare of the sun at other times, it is hopeless to seek for it in the unshielded sky. A name has been given in advance by some astronomers to the undiscovered planet, and it is sometimes referred to as Vulcan. It must certainly be a very hot little world, although Bode's law should give it a distance from the central orb of something like thirty millions of miles. However, it belongs to an independent scheme of evolution, not destined to bring

forward life to the high levels to be ultimately attained in connection with our own and the Venus scheme. It completes the series of seven schemes. Enumerating them once more, as under, we have :—

1. The Neptune scheme.
2. „ Uranus „
3. „ Saturn „
4. „ Jupiter „
5. „ Earth „
6. „ Venus „
7. „ Vulcan „

The first and fifth of this series have each three physical planets, the others one each.

Of the three schemes which have no touch with the physical plane there is very little to be said at present. They are concerned with high orders of evolution and in some way with the ultimate perfection of the life of the system at large when all the septenary schemes shall have completed their cycles.

It must not be supposed, however, that they are awaiting development till such time as the other schemes have completed their cycles. They are already in activity, and they each consist of seven planets occupying definite places in space, though composed of higher orders of matter than such as our physical senses can cognise. On the other hand we need not think of them as dealing with phases of existence entirely beyond the reach of our imagination. The highest plane of Nature to which they are directly related is the rupa plane of devachan.

From the general idea of the structure and design

of the system that has already been given, and particularly from many passages in recent theosophical literature, it will be apparent that the configuration of the solar system is no more unchangeable throughout the life of that system than the configuration of land and water on the earth's surface is unchangeable during the progress of a world period. In every scheme the chain of planets on which its evolution has been carried on, during any given manvantara is disintegrated at its close (subject to a qualification to be noticed directly) and a new chain of worlds is called into being. This does not mean that new matter is created out of non-manifested substance, but that planets, when their life cycle is completed, are broken up or resolved into dust which is dispersed through the solar system at large and is available to be drawn together into new forms, just as the elements of a dead human body, dissolved in the earth or air and absorbed in process of time into vegetable tissue, become in due season the nutriment of new animal or human forms.

Thus it will be seen that our earth, for instance, with its companion planets, is not alone a new creation as compared with the state of things that existed when the nebula was first condensed, but is in the fourth generation of such new creations having regard to our own scheme alone. I have no information as to the manner in which the planetary matter of the system was first distributed, but it is a matter of obvious certainty that from Uranus inwards not one of the existing planets belongs to the first born series of the nebula. It hardly concerns us to make close inquiry as to the actual course of events in this respect. Our

appreciation of Nature's design and of our own place therein would not be materially assisted by knowing for instance what planets existed in connection with the Uranus evolution before Uranus came into being. Nor in regard to the other chains would it profit us much to know by how many predecessors each of the now known planets have been heralded in past ages. But there are some aspects of the problem which do present features of peculiar interest as applied to our own chain, and without making any conjectures as to the extent to which the analogies of our own scheme apply to others, attention may usefully be turned at this stage of the inquiry to the plan on which our own planetary habitations are from time to time remodelled.

As the tide wave of life leaves each planet (in our scheme) during the seventh round of any manvantara, each planet in turn is disintegrated, and the matter of which it is composed returns to the general ocean of such matter within the solar system. Corresponding planets are evolved afresh for the next manvantara, becoming as it were re-incarnations of the higher principles inherent in the old planets. This arrangement, however, does not apply to the fourth planet of each chain—the most physical in its constitution. That loses a good deal of the matter forming it in a way that will be appreciated directly, and in its shrunken condition becomes the moon of its successor. Each new physical planet so called into being may be created—as new solar systems themselves are created in the first instance—according to different methods; but our earth appears to have been engendered on a plan closely resembling that by which our whole

system was developed. Within the appropriate area of space, a planetary nebula was evolved, the matter of which it was composed being drawn in from surrounding space, itself no doubt the disintegrated material of former planets that had been broken up, or to some extent no doubt meteoric matter belonging to the system at large that may not have been previously utilised in that way. The new earth nebula was developed round a centre bearing pretty much the same relation to the dying planet that the centres of the earth and moon bear to one another at present. But in the nebulous condition this aggregation of matter occupied an enormously greater volume than the solid matter of the earth now occupies. It stretched out in all directions so as to include the old planet in its fiery embrace. The temperature of a new nebula appears to be considerably higher than any temperatures we are acquainted with, and by this means the old planet was superficially heated afresh in such a manner that all atmosphere, water and volatilisable matter upon it was brought into the gaseous condition, and so became amenable to the new centre of attraction, set up at the centre of the new nebula. In this way the air and seas of the old planet were drawn over into the constitution of the new one, and thus it is that the moon in its present state is an arid, glaring mass, dry and cloudless, no longer habitable, and no longer required for the habitation of any physical beings. When the present manvantara is nearly over, during the seventh round, its disintegration will be completed, and the matter which it still holds together will resolve into meteoric dust, to be

made use of, mixed with the ocean of all such matter, in the formation of new planetary nebulæ hereafter.

The changes which thus take place from time to time within the interior economy of the solar system must, of course, produce perturbing effects on the movements of planets already in existence at any given period when an old planet is disintegrated, or a new one solidified, and probably such perturbations play a part in the cyclic processes going forward in the active worlds of the time. It sometimes happens that isolated statements cropping up in occult teaching point to astronomical events that we cannot easily refer to cosmic causes visibly in operation. They are very likely promoted by changes which are going on in what may be called the configuration of the system, at great intervals. It can never fall to the lot of any one generation of observant beings on any one planet to witness the evolution of a new world or the destruction of an old one. Such processes are protracted compared with the span of human life. But crises must come on some periods in the future when rational inhabitants of some planets will see new worlds in formation. The present manvantara, for instance, of the Venus scheme is so far advanced beyond our own, that mankind on earth in some future round of our present manvantara, may perhaps witness the preparations for the evolution of the planet which will succeed Venus, although by that time the majority of mankind will be so far advanced in evolution themselves that no celestial phenomena will any longer be unintelligible, unexpected.

The seven great schemes of planetary evolution proceed on independent lines, and there is no inter-

mingling of their activities during their normal course. But helpfulness is the law of life throughout the entire system, and in this way it comes to pass that the various schemes are not rigidly excluded from the possibility of receiving benefits from others. On this subject we need only concern ourselves with one example of such inter-communication, but it is important to comprehend this one example correctly if we are endeavouring to understand our own evolutionary history. The Venus scheme, as already stated, is in the seventh round of its fifth manvantara, we of the earth chain being at present in the course of our fourth round. This means that the humanity of the Venus chain was already on spiritual levels immensely higher than those of our humanity when we were still struggling on in the earlier phases of our evolution during this earth period. Thus it came to pass that some of the representatives of the Venus chain Adeptship, availing themselves of possibilities having to do with immensely exalted spiritual planes common to the whole solar system, transferred themselves to this earth for a time during part of the third and early fourth race, and took part in the teaching and guidance of our comparatively infant humanity.

Readers approaching these conceptions for the first time may be inclined to wonder how so great a gulf on the scale of evolution can have separated the earlier humanity of this world period from that inhabiting the earth to-day, and including masters of wisdom who have already scaled heights on a level, so far as we can understand, with those which our Venus teachers descended. The explanation lies in this

simple fact that until the midway point of any manvantara is reached the whole process of evolution must be thought of as a downward growth into the complexities of materiality. No one, however individually ripe for spiritual evolution, could begin to transcend his companions in any extraordinary degree until the middle point of the manvantara was turned. Then he had a clear course before him; it was possible for any one, assuming extraordinary aptitudes on his part, to achieve in a comparatively brief series of lives the whole development, for which, as regards the race at large, Nature liberally provides the whole second half of the manvantara. Before the midway point of our manvantara—that is to say, before the middle period of the great root race preceding our own—there were no Adepts belonging to our human family; thus no further back than at the beginning of the great Atlantean, or fourth root race, the earth chain was entirely dependent on external help for its loftier spiritual guidance.

The course of human progress through this world period, therefore—the history of the great root races—may be best studied in theosophical books devoted specially to the elucidation of that magnificent progress, but the general character of such progress must be borne in mind by all who would form that mental picture of the whole system to which we belong, which is required to give an intelligent significance to all that concerns individual progress for each representative of humanity. Moreover, the comprehension of the way the great race evolution has been, and is going on during this world period,

will connect itself in a peculiarly interesting way with the general comprehension of the whole structure of the system.

On the planet Mars, where humanity was last incarnated before the world period of the earth began, humanity already inhabited physical bodies, and was endowed with sufficient human intelligence to carry out architectural and engineering works under the guidance of teachers belonging to a superior evolution. On completing its cycle on that planet mankind began its existence on this, under conditions which can hardly be thought of as physical. The vehicles of their consciousness were of ethereal matter, insusceptible to heat or cold, not yet subject to laws connected with waste and replenishment, which operate in connection with the more compact organisms of our time. The first and second great root races were of this order; in the course of the third, the condensation of the physical vehicle of human consciousness was accomplished, in the fourth root race man was in the beginning considerably bulkier than at present, was already designed on the physical pattern we are acquainted with, and divided into two sexes. The course of evolution through preceding rounds was thus recapitulated in the course of the present world period in a way which bears some analogy to that curious recapitulation of physical existence which goes on at the present day in connection with the birth of every fresh physical creature, as students of embryology are well aware.

It must not be supposed, however, that the whole human family of this scheme evolved during the first

half of the present manvantara on precisely the same plan. Our last manvantara, the third or Lunar manvantara, so called because the present moon was then the physical planet of the chain, did not bring forward any entities to levels which correspond to what we think of as humanity to-day, but it afforded some scope for individual progress, and thus left the family at its close, on various levels of advancement.

The varied requirements of the situation were provided for in this way: the most developed entities did not come into incarnation in the earlier rounds of the present manvantara. These earlier rounds afforded an appropriate field of activity on lower levels of existence for the less developed entities, and while these were enjoying a fresh opportunity of accomplishing the evolution they failed to realise properly during their last manvantara, the highly developed entities of that manvantara were passing through periods of spiritual existence to which those on the lower levels had no access. These spiritual periods were in the nature of supplementary rounds. I do not mean that they followed the course of evolution round the various planets of the chain, but they occupied periods of time corresponding to the round periods. In all they were three in number, so that while the undeveloped entities of the last manvantara were, so to speak, bringing the next into a condition which once more would afford them an opportunity of making progress beyond even the possibility of the last manvantara, they were at the same time rendering it suitable for the occupation of their elder brethren who had not only attained to the maximum possi-

bilities of the previous manvantara, but had spent time corresponding to the three first rounds of the next, in conditions of existence involving definite spiritual progress. Thus only on the conclusion of the three spiritual periods did the most advanced entities of the last manvantara come into incarnation in this. In the technical language of modern occult study the most advanced entities are spoken of as the first class Lunar Pitris. The phrase is perfectly intelligible and significant, when we bear in mind the fact that Pitri comes from the same root as Father, and simply signifies ancestor.

As a physical planet the moon is now but the dead body of the planet which once bore the mighty life-wave of the human family. It has shrunk to relatively small proportions, for not only have its subtle principles been re-incarnated in the earth, but a good deal of its physical matter has actually been withdrawn from it to the body of its offspring. The process by which this result was accomplished has been already described.

So then, the most advanced representatives of the whole human family came into incarnation in this manvantara at the middle period, that is to say, during the present period of the world's activity, in a condition which represents the maximum development possible during the Lunar manvantara, plus the further progress accomplished during the three spiritual periods. Thus the two classes who have been in incarnation during the earlier rounds of this manvantara, have had an opportunity by this time of rising to nearly the same development of evolution, but are still in

the rear of the foremost class, which, as the whole body continues to progress, may be thought of as still leading the van, and representing in our own time all those who are the flower of our own age, who are the exponents of its most advanced intellectual capacity, and especially those who at the earliest possible moment in the life of the world show aptitudes for spiritual progress, and most readily assimilate such teaching concerning the higher destinies of man as are involved in the noblest religious conceptions—especially in the occult philosophy which unites these loftiest aspirations with definite knowledge concerning superphysical states of existence. Not only all those who at the earliest possible date emerge from the ruck of humanity, and taking full advantage of the guidance received from those of a superior evolution, pass upward into the ranks of Adeptship, but all those who are in any sense their pupils, besides all those whose intellectual and moral development is of a kind which will render them available as occult pupils in the course of a few more incarnations, may be thought of as belonging to the class spoken of as the first of the Lunar Pitri. This statement must not be taken as implying that it is impossible for entities belonging to the second class to attain spiritual exaltation, but at the present stage of evolution the great majority of those who get on to the high levels are of the first Pitri class. As the mighty force of evolution sweep upward during the successive rounds of the manvantara, great numbers of those belonging to the second class will gradually attain levels of spiritual growth, from which they also will be capable

of taking short cuts towards the summit levels possible in this manvantara, but the first class of the Lunar Pitris ought to attain these summit levels at periods far in advance of the manvantara's close. At that remote period in the future it will be theoretically impossible that all members of the human family, whose differentiation into specific entities had been accomplished during the Lunar manvantara, will be able to attain the summit level. Those only for whom this progress would be hardly practical in the time are those who have only emerged as definite entities from the animal kingdom during the earlier rounds of this manvantara. The probabilities are—and taking into account the enormous numbers with which we have to deal, probabilities in such a matter amount to something like certainty, over the whole area considered—the probabilities are, that of the whole number of entities constituting the human family at this time, including those who have emerged during the first half of the manvantara from the animal kingdom as well as those who have distinct Pitri ancestry, three-fifths will arrive in some degree of appropriate advancement at what I have called the summit levels of the manvantara. The other two-fifths will in the next manvantara play a part somewhat similar to that assigned at the beginning of our own to the lower classes of the Lunar Pitris, and will begin their work at the beginning of that stupendous undertaki

Of the three-fifths, something like half will actua have achieved the maximum progress this manvant is designed to effect. That progress will put eady such beings in a position so far transcending in

conditions of humanity around us at the present day, that if we compare them with the ordinary humanity they will seem fairly God-like in their knowledge and power and capacity for Cosmic service. They will have attained to a full and complete appreciation of all the powers and forces and Divine purposes of which this chain of worlds has been the stage. For them the whole chain of worlds, not merely in their most material manifestations, but in all their astral and spiritual aspects as well, will constitute an absolutely familiar field of operations. They will be functioning in full consciousness on planes of Nature which embrace all these worlds. Every globe of the chain will be as accessible to them as the different rooms of a house in which he lives may be accessible to a human being of the present ordinary type. Their moral evolution corresponding with the growth of their knowledge and power will have brought them into perfect harmony with the whole Divine design of which the manvantara has been the expression. They will be conscious and intelligent agents engaged in working out this design, and as regards their own ulterior progress they will themselves select from many various lines of ulterior evolution open to them, those along which they will best be able to conduce to the complete fulfilment of even loftier designs than that with which our manvantara is directly related, and may either continue to guide and direct the progress of the succeeding manvantaras associated with this chain of existences, or may pass away into other regions of cosmic activity, already representative, as it were, of the final achievement to which this chain of

manvantaras is subservient, in connection with still vaster processes lying within the immeasurable economy of Nature. Those who, while still belonging to the great three-fifths, have not at the close of this manvantara actually attained the maximum perfection which lies within its possibilities, but are nevertheless in sight, as it were, of that perfection, will be the vanguard of human life in the next manvantara when that has been prepared for their reception by the earlier activities of the less advanced two-fifths during the first three and a half of its rounds. As for the nature of the progress on which they will then set out it is hardly necessary for us at this stage of our development to attempt any definite conception.

One idea, however, should be borne in mind in connection with all attempts to realise, however imperfectly, the colossal proportion and constitution of this system to which we belong. We must not think of the worlds of the system as existing wholly and solely for the sake of the evolution of the human family, on which so far our attention has been chiefly concentrated. Just as the world around us is the theatre of a great many forms of physical life, destined perhaps in the progress of time to merge one into the other, but for the time being on widely different levels, so the whole chain of worlds is the theatre of many evolutions which, during this manvantara, are not destined to blend one into the other. There are more of such evolutions in progress around us, indeed, than Theosophical students can at present expect to know much about, but we know at all events something about some of them. There are

some processes of evolution going forward which have to do entirely with elemental consciousness, not yet, so to speak, projected from the infinite far down enough into the possibilities of manifestation to have shared the lessons derivable from the school of physical existence. At the other end of the scale, and transcending the conditions of our own life, we know something at all events of one great system of evolution which may distinctly be regarded as superior to that of humanity, although this earth is, to some extent, the fulcrum or a part of the fulcrum on which it rests. The great "Deva" evolution has to do with a vast field of consciousness that has, so to speak, got beyond the necessity of physical manifestation. On the whole scale of comparison the earlier elemental evolutions just referred to may be thought of as belonging to the downward limb of a vast cyclic scale or series of evolutions. Humanity is still largely dependent for its growth on a physical fulcrum that would be at the turning point of such a scale. The Deva evolution is on the upward limb beyond it. For this Deva evolution, so far as we are able to appreciate its constitution at present, the whole seven chains of the solar system are the field of its activities. To the Deva evolution our planetary chain thus plays the same part that one globe of that chain plays to the human evolution. It would be futile and unnecessary here to attempt a more exact appreciation of the mighty ulterior design with which this lofty evolution is concerned, but it has seemed desirable to refer to it for two reasons; firstly, because within the various alternatives lying before those members of the

human family who attain the summit levels of evolution during this manvantara, one of the choices open to them has to do with this great evolution of which we speak. From the summit level of our progress we shall be enabled, if we think fit, to pass into the Deva evolution, and thenceforward pursue its destinies. The second reason for mentioning it has to do with the great importance of always keeping before the mind the fact that humanity constitutes one wheel, as it were, in the stupendous mechanism of the whole Cosmos, and is not by any means the *raison d'être* of the undertaking. Crude conceptions concerning the place of humanity in the Cosmos are apt to render people at the same time too humble and too arrogant concerning their place in nature. Conventional teaching entirely underates the dignity and splendour of the altitude to which it is possible for a human being to ascend, and very often as ludicrously misconceives the stupendous proportions of the Cosmos, by regarding the interests of humanity as something like the sole concern of its presiding Divinity.

With this very general sketch of the system to which we belong it will now be convenient to pass on to an explanation of the methods open to us for the ascent to its summit levels at an earlier period than that contemplated by the design of the scheme as a whole, and when we have realised more exactly the phases of spiritual achievement constituting the steps on the great path that leads to the highest attainable Adeptship, we shall be in a better position to forecast with exactitude the ultimate stratification of the human family at the close of this manvantara.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ELDER BRETHREN OF HUMANITY.

WE should never have been in a position to acquire the knowledge we now possess of the great evolutionary schemes of this planetary system, had it not been possible for individual units of the human family, to outstrip the normal course of evolution, and attain at a relatively early period the spiritual faculties belonging to the higher levels of progress which the race, as a whole, can only ascend at a very remote period in the future. We must endeavour now to realise more clearly than before, what is meant by outstripping normal evolution, to work out in detail considerations which show that in doing this, those of us who may find it possible, are not setting the programme of normal evolution at defiance in any way, but, on the contrary, are endeavouring at the earliest possible moment to unite our individual efforts, however humble these may be in the beginning, with the purpose of nature on the grandest scale—to fulfil, so to speak, at the earliest possible moment as regards ourselves, the design which Providence has in view, and in doing this, to assist in the realisation of the whole programme as regards the majority in a way which really when properly understood, will be seen to enter into the normal

scheme. For the teaching which enables those, who are properly qualified to appreciate it, to accelerate the course of their evolution is really accessible to all alike, and though with each single item of humanity it is a matter of choice whether his forces are trained into the work of promoting the spiritual evolution of the whole, or exerted to put impediments in the way, it is mathematically certain that amongst the enormous multitude of individualities which constitute humanity, some will take the loftiest view of their destinies and opportunities, and will play that part in the whole undertaking which it is absolutely necessary that some should play in order that the undertaking may prosper.

For a long time now, looking back on the course which human history has taken for the last few hundred thousand years, some few have appreciated their opportunities, have availed themselves of the interior enlightenment which their own aspirations attracted, and have worked their way upward until they have come to occupy a place in nature from which the ordinary course of human evolution, as it has been traced in preceding chapters, may be looked down upon as from a height. The potentialities of human faculty are such that at certain stages of human progress, incarnate man becomes invested with a sight, with a prospective vision which ranges all through these planes of nature on which normal evolution is being accomplished, as the process has already been described, and, indeed, considerably beyond them to higher altitudes of spiritual condition, from which all the work that has been accomplished

so far, can be surveyed as the glance is extended backward, and from which the future course and ultimate goal of human progress are no less plainly visible. Nothing concerning the past history of this earth, for example, not to speak of other globes connected with the planetary chain to which we belong, is obscure to the vision of a soul, whether in or out of the body, which can function on the devachanic plane, not to speak even of those still more exalted realms to which reference has just been made. There are methods by which it is possible so to stimulate spiritual growth, that incarnate man is enabled to exercise vision even on these, and by degrees, as I have prepared the way for making the situation intelligible by other explanations, it will be possible to indicate with a considerable degree of exactitude, the manner in which such heights are reached, and to show some of the responsibilities which attach themselves to the abnormal advancement in nature thus accomplished. The situation could only be rendered intelligible with the help of such a comprehensive survey of the whole scheme of evolution on which we are launched, as that embodied in the statement already set forth. This enables us at the same time to realise the magnitude of the work already accomplished up to date, and the equal magnitude, in another direction, of that which is still before us. We cannot properly appreciate the nature of accelerated spiritual evolution, nor understand the place in nature occupied by the most advanced representatives of our humanity without keeping the outline of the whole manvantaric scheme in view.

There are men now living on earth who, belonging completely to our own human family, have already attained the maximum point of development and exaltation which I have just been endeavouring to describe as that belonging to the final culmination of the progress on which the whole family is launched. If one were merely to count, supposing that were possible, the number of lives which would have to be spent in the ordinary course of evolution between this and the close of the seventh round,—each of these lives separated from the other by long periods of spiritual rest, sometimes by intervening experiences that are not restful at all but sadly the reverse,—we should have to deal with numbers which again would hardly lie within the grasp of imagination, and yet already, though we have got on past the middle point of the whole manvantara by a period which is relatively a mere handful of years, we find some of the most determined climbers already on the topmost heights of the system to which we belong. That within a brief series of lives, even though each in turn is devoted with unremitting intensity to the great purpose in view, it may be possible to reach these heights, will be as I say a matter of marvel to those who really appreciate the magnitude of the task to be accomplished. Sometimes people who hear vaguely about abnormal capacities and powers possessed by those who have gone in advance of their kind are inclined, in their ignorance of what this advancement really implies, to expect that if they make an honest effort in that direction they ought to realise their aspirations at once; to take their degrees in occult

science with as little difficulty as they might accomplish a similar process in connection with the teaching of a university. The absurdity of this view will be appreciated by anyone who realises in his thinking the true meaning of high initiation, the true place occupied in nature by those whom we speak of as the great adepts. The evolutionary interval which separates ordinary humanity from them has to be measured, as I have described, by the whole of the second half of the manvantara. The processes of initiation leading up to high adeptship are in reality epitomes of the second half of the manvantara, in which the acquisition of knowledge, moral dignity and faculty, for which nature has assigned the immeasurable ages to come, will be condensed within the brief series of three or four or half a dozen lives. We shall come later on to examine more minutely the nature of the efforts by which the earlier progress along that road is accomplished; but we must have a general idea of the whole effort in mind before we can examine the details intelligently, and the foremost thought to be embraced in connection with the general idea I have been endeavouring to convey is, that the summit levels of evolution have to do with the complete identity between the whole progress of the individual and that at which, as he ascends to lofty altitudes, he is enabled to appreciate in all its completeness, the Will of which this whole world and all the other worlds around us are the manifestation.

There are possibilities of accelerated evolution, let us recognise frankly, that lie within the reach of men who set themselves to compass their progress on

purely selfish principles—whose spiritual aspirations have no infinite range, whose hope in connection with ulterior progress is that it may in some fashion redound to their own power, who sometimes vainly imagine that the great possibilities they feel germinating within them will enable them to rob Divinity itself of its treasures, whatever they may be, and accomplish triumphs which may gratify their personal pride through a range of the future, which is all they care to think of as infinity. Whoever sets out on the path of occult progress with such motives as his actuating principles will, in all probability, do no more than plunge himself in agonising failure, which will render existence in one way or other a misery for him for a long portion of the normal road on to which he will be hurled violently back. But if across a thousand indescribable perils the candidate for merely selfish spiritual advancement succeeds, so far as success is possible, in attaining his object, it will be a success qualified from the beginning with interior conditions that can only be described as the reverse of beatitude, and it is impossible in the nature of things that spiritual progress of this evil character can transcend the limits of the world-period in which it is undertaken. For those who prefer the path of service, the service of the Divine Ideal, to that of selfish aggrandizement the maximum heights of evolution even within this manvantara are attainable, and they, when attained, instead of representing a finality, are found to be but the avenues of approach to beatitudes of spiritual existence within the universe the very nature of

which it would be folly at this stage of our thinking to grapple with in thought. For to the vision of those who are already on the summit of the manvantara the horizon that extends beyond is infinite again, and something of what they see can be communicated to us, so that without being able to realise the conditions of consciousness which would transcend our own system, we may realise, even with some assurance, the possibility of ulterior progress for perfected humanity into conditions of existence in which the individuality of the human being is merged in the governing hierarchy of the Cosmos. But leaving considerations of that nature aside for the present, and also considerations in the other direction which have to do with the misdirection of great spiritual energies, let us concentrate our attention on the possibilities that lie before us in reference to that legitimately accelerated evolution to be accomplished by treading the path leading to adeptship.

That path, we should always bear in mind, is a short cut across the enormous spirals of the regular highway, leading humanity upward during the second half of the manvantara. It thus only became a possibility of nature after the first half of the manvantara was concluded ; for the complete undertaking included a double process—the involution of spirit in matter, and the evolution of spirit from matter. The first half of the manvantara is the descent into manifestation: the second half the re-ascent therefrom. One gets lost in an ocean of metaphysical speculation if we go into the question as to what spirit can gain from material manifestation. It is the potentiality of

all things, including material manifestation: how can it be enriched if it is everything to begin with? It will be worth while, perhaps, to deal with this problem when we are in a position to grapple with it from the point of view, let us say, of an exhaustive comprehension of the solar system. Then mysteries which have to do with that whole of which the solar system is an infinitesimal particle, will perhaps come within the range of our mental grasp. At present the attempts to work out schemes of thought relating to such mysteries are rather the outcome of ignorance concerning mysteries that are relatively near us than of aptitude for dealing with those still far off. The theory of our planetary system is, at all events, intelligible. Spiritual energies involve themselves in matter and evolve therefrom. They cannot begin to evolve slowly or rapidly till the process of involution is complete. Thus it is only after the middle point of the manvantara that accelerated evolution become possible, simply because evolution itself as far as the human family was concerned, only began then.

But even during the last manvantara the already differentiated entities of the human family were in a position to fulfil the purpose of their existence at that stage more or less satisfactorily. Thus we have seen that the entities who had derived most from the experiences of that manvantara were not required to make their appearance on this planetary chain till near the middle of this world period. They came into incarnation then as already the elder brethren of the race, and many of them at once began to fulfil the purpose of their existence in this manvantara in turn

in the most satisfactory manner. They kept thus ahead of the main body, and at once began to appreciate the teaching of those more advanced beings from another evolution who were the early guardians of this human family. They were ripe to enter on the path then opening before mankind, the course of which led them rapidly to the high levels of consciousness and capacity. There is nothing in their extraordinarily rapid progress to shock the understanding, if we pay attention to the simplicity of the predominant idea which is the all embracing motive of occult progress. The unity of spiritual consciousness is the primary thought to appreciate, the insignificance of differentiated sensation, the logical deduction. The first thought brings with it the anxiety to realise that unity in consciousness, which is equivalent to the anxiety to promote the Divine idea expressed in the system to which we belong: the second thought, if *fully absorbed*, extinguishes selfishness absolutely. With that characteristic abolished there is no room in the nature for evil; as soon as it is inaccessible to evil its capacity for infinite good, which embraces infinite knowledge, is established. The difficulty with most of us is that we fail to realise the unity of spiritual consciousness, and only dispel the contrary idea, which is selfishness to an imperfect degree. Let any one get himself absolutely saturated with those two ideas so that he feels his own individualised sensation to be just as important, and no more important to him, than any other individualised manifestation of the spirit working within him, and he will find himself on adept levels "to-morrow" as

compared with the duration of a manvantara—as soon, that is to say, as in a life or two he may have dissipated the evil forces he has engendered in past lives, leaving the whole account of good and evil, so to speak—none the worse for his individualisation—as a preliminary measure before he goes on to make it much the better. If he does really express our fundamental idea in his consciousness, he will not *want* to manifest adeptship in his own individuality till that preliminary work is accomplished.

Even from the midst of the stormy and ignoble period of the world's history represented by the civilisation of Atlantis, highly cultivated though it became in many ways, some of the best individualities of the race learned these lessons from their more advanced teachers, and began to supply the race with adept guardians of "its own blood," to use our physical plane phrase. A little occult knowledge is enough to give the phrase an almost comic flavour, in view of the relatively small part in human evolution played by the physical organism that is habitually dealt with in our language as though it constituted the race. And thus from the mid-period of the Atlantean race onward there has never been a time when the world has been unprovided with adept leaders, for remember there is no death out of such a condition of existence as that. There may be a transfer of activity to the higher planes of Nature, but these are a part of the world—or are partly of the world, to put the idea more correctly—just as much as its physical aspect. But on the other hand, re-incarnation itself, if voluntarily accepted by the adept, who no longer needs it for himself, is no

extinction of his adeptship; and whether their work was carried on in or out of the body—with or without that accessory—the elder brethren who first attained adeptship did not, we may be sure, pass on to other functions until others, coming up from mankind at large to join them, were ready to take their places at the head of human affairs. They, or their successors have, from a far remoter time than any which commonplace historical research has penetrated, even in imagination, been in the direction of the great occult "Lodges" of initiation, the existence of which—the accessibility of which for persons willing to undergo the necessary training, and inspired by the necessary ideas—has been better known to humanity at large at former epochs in the world's history than during the last few hundred years.

During the predominance of the Atlantean race on earth, it was hardly to be expected that the elder brethren would obtain any great number of recruits. Not only were the Atlanteans pre-eminently a selfish race—it might almost be argued that it was their business in the scheme of evolution to be so. They may not have been much more culpable in being so than a community of animals would be under similar circumstances. Individualised to perfection, but nothing more, it was their business to deliver the innumerable hordes of the human family on the threshold of the fifth race intelligent enough to learn the first new lesson of the upward curve of the great cycle, the lesson of fraternal sympathy. Intellectually, keeping that term strictly to its limitations, and altogether excluding from it everything that appertains to

spiritual intuition, the Atlanteans were giants of capacity. They possessed a great mass of knowledge, which the younger generations of the fifth race—ourselves and our immediate progenitors—have lost. They had even penetrated many of the secrets of Nature belonging to that Astral plane which transcends the more densely material realm of the physical senses. They could accomplish results which, to our own science, are as yet undreamed of. But be it remembered, that when we speak of the Atlanteans from the point of view of the information concerning them, which occult science enables us to procure, we are dealing with that race in its fullest maturity. Humanity has entered on the fifth of its present cycles, armed with all the intellectual *capacities* required for the recovery of the lost Atlantean knowledge, and that recovery is certain to be brought about in the progress of time. The re-incarnation of a race precisely follows the analogy of individual re-incarnation. Just as the fresh personality by the time it arrives at maturity is once more in possession of all the capacities engendered by its permanent Ego during the preceding life, so the race inherits capacity in a similar degree. Intellectual giants as the Atlanteans were, we are already not far short of their stature, and the rest will come to us in due course.

But with those gifts, something else will come to us if we are willing to receive it—the first beginnings of a general capacity to apprehend the spiritual possibilities of our Nature. The downward curve of the great cycle—considering the manvantaric evolution as one process for the moment—may be regarded as

the curve of preparation. The upward curve—from the nadir point of the fourth race in this round—the curve of fruition.

Now the nature of every evolutionary cycle—as understood by esoteric wisdom—involves, from one point of view, a return to the condition from which the circling procession set out. But that return does not mean a mere reversion to the *status quo ante*, without any result accomplished. It must always be a return freighted with something gained on the journey. And in the broad view of the whole evolutionary scheme that we are taking now, the all important distinction between the spiritual existence out of which the human race emerged in the beginning, and the spiritual existence to which it will ultimately return, is to be discerned in the individualisation of consciousness combined with spirituality.

In dealing with these transcendant mysteries, every incarnate writer must be profoundly impressed with the impossibility of thinking them out completely in terms of the physical intellect. One would gladly refrain from the audacity of writing about them at all if it were not absolutely necessary for the elucidation of the spiritual evolution on which the human race is now entering, to take cognisance of ultimate ideas which it is quite certain we shall formulate in the mind but dimly and inaccurately. But somehow, within and beyond the immeasurable profundities of the spiritual consciousness which crown the edifice of a perfected humanity, it is certain that the stupendous prize of individual consciousness which Nature has gone through such infinite pains to evoke

—will not be forfeited. A few misleading analogies,—and even the most graceful, about the dewdrop slipping into the shining sea, cannot but be misleading in this connexion,—are largely responsible for the comfortless belief so many people entertain, that the esoteric teaching of the East, at all events, preaches a kind of ecstatic annihilation as the supreme felicity to be struggled for through ages of suffering existence. It should be obvious that no epigrammatic phrase can sum up the unfathomable subtleties of a thought that reaches out towards a comprehension of the incomprehensible—of phases of consciousness utterly transcending the limitations of the brain that idly strives to define them. If we inverted the usual simile, and said that on attaining the condition of Nirvana, the dewdrop received into its bosom the whole shining sea, that would, perhaps, be a better way of presenting the figure to the mind, because it would not then suggest a falsehood, even if it failed to be explanatory in any high degree. Without attempting so absurd a task as to explain the nature of the spiritual consciousness indicated in oriental philosophy by the term Nirvana, I will be content to suggest a mode of approaching a conception rather less extravagantly imperfect than that generally entertained, by hinting, on the basis of the suggestion just made, that it may be much more like an absorption of all consciousness into the individuality, than an absorption of individuality into all consciousness.

However, this may be, in one conclusion we may safely rest; that the purpose of nature in evolving humanity is that of evoking individualities on the

levels of Nature, so to speak, from which the whole creative spiritual impulse stooped down at the commencement of the undertaking.

Is it necessary to insert an apology here for that last expression in dealing with a Nature that has no beginning and no end? Of all Nature we cannot assuredly predicate an end or a beginning; but one of the most narrow-minded blunders of exoteric thinking is that which carelessly identifies the human family to which we belong with the eternities generally of time and space. Esoteric science, in its coherent reasonableness, recognises this human family, its origin and fortunes as a definite episode within the eternities—however protracted may be its duration.

The climax of the episode is reached when the creative power, which in some unimaginable manner sufficed to launch the planetary system, returns to itself focalised in individualities. But what is the nature of such individualities? By the hypothesis they partake of the human nature in so far as they are individual; of the divine nature, in so far as they are once again identified with the creative power of the Spirit. They are no longer men—they are gods. Not God, which, as far as language can deal with such ideas, must be a designation assigned to Universal Omnipotent Spirit, but the agents of Divinity wielding its powers, pursuing its ideas. Esoteric teaching shows us in these perfected beings at once the purpose of humanity and the governing power of the next evolutionary undertaking in Nature which shall follow on after that out of which they themselves have arisen.

"The hosts of the Dhyan Chohans" is the expression by which oriental philosophy endeavours to describe these sublime fruitions of the human race; and it is theoretically possible that any of the myriads of ordinary men and women on whom we look around at this stage of the world's progress, may so cultivate and expand their nascent individualities as to reach the condition foreshadowed. But there are many intervening grades in the spiritual hierarchy that culminates in the godlike condition of the Dhyan Chohan. Long before the attainment of that pre-eminence the up-growing Ego struggling clear of the enthralments of material life, will begin to exercise powers and discharge responsibilities in Nature, in connexion with which they are already, in a measure, co-operative with the Divine purpose.

The hosts of ordinary humanity, let us bear in mind, are conscious only—in their physical intellects, —of the material plane of Nature whereon they are manifesting. But the spiritual consciousness dominant within them, is working all the while in the "Higher Self." The attraction to matter, to material life, with its gratifications and sympathies, is at war with this dormant aspiration. As long as it remains the more powerful, the Ego after death, and, after the devachanic period has expired, is drawn back to material manifestation by the karma of its last life. But whenever the spiritual aspiration has made itself heard in that life, there will be in the circumstances of the new existence some improved opportunities for the culture of the spiritual consciousness. If these are duly employed, they will rapidly be developed into contact

of some kind with the grand realities of the higher planes of being. The incarnate man will begin by finding new senses and powers of perception developing within him. Operating, as we shall see later on, as snares and false beacons sometimes when they have been acquired in a wrong way, these psychic faculties are none the less the avenues to sublime knowledge when rightly directed. For the genuine neophyte they constitute the first links of communication that consciously unite him with the adept world, with those of his elder brethren who are already advanced in the scale of Nature far beyond the normal characteristics of ordinary mankind.

Thus illuminated he may enter on the path that leads upward to these levels of existence. His initiation has commenced, and with the thirst for spiritual progress becoming a more powerful force in his nature than the animal clinging to material life, the attractions that drag him back to normal incarnation cease to assert themselves. For several lives probably those attractions will continue to operate, after he has begun his higher evolution: and failure of one kind or another may constantly throw him back. But if he is resolute and persevering, the spiritual attractions conquer in the end, and his incarnations if they are then continued at all, will be voluntarily undertaken as affording him facilities for the better accomplishment of the work to which he will have dedicated himself—the cultivation of the spirituality of the race at large. On the level he will have attained he will be already a co-worker with the Divine purpose, a conscious exponent of the Divine Will.

Keeping still, for the present, on the level of generalities, and postponing the more exact examination of the steps on the path of initiation, I may remark that for any one who can even dimly discern the attributes of such existence as is attained to by the fully spiritualised man, there is little need to look beyond that condition in search of motives for an upward struggle. But let me interpolate here a few observations concerning the most enobling of those motives before going on to speak of those which appeal to feelings of personal desire, however lofty in their character. It is not to be doubted that by the time the spiritual consciousness of a man on the upward path is fully developed he is already so far a participator in the Divine nature that the unselfish eagerness to acquire the power of benefiting others is really the most efficient motive for exertion that can appeal to him; and perhaps realising this great truth, more or less perfectly, in advance, there are many still incarnate human beings who proclaim this as already the only motive that really commands their zealous effort. We need not cast discredit on their early belief in their own interior nobility of purpose. But without claiming that men still on the normal levels of incarnation should be already infused by so lofty a sentiment, it is no degradation of their nature so far, if they recognise as the first motive that inspires them with the courage and physical self abnegation required for the cultivation of their spiritual natures, a longing to come into closer relations with beings so glorified as those who have broken the bondage of the flesh or have already taken their

place in superior realms of existence. No unworthy pandering to selfishness is involved in the representation of spiritual exaltation as in itself a goal befitting the most enthusiastic aspiration—as regarded from the lower standpoint of material existence. Emotions and motives may follow one another in due order, but it would be a great mistake to add needlessly to the ordeals of the first steps in occult progress by depriving them of the encouragement to be derived from the reflection that even the earlier achievements of such progress carry with them rewards of an extremely elevated order.

So then we work back to the position that the career of initiation—the path of occult progress—is an enterprise not only worthy of being the pursuit of the loftiest human virtue; there is no other career of philanthropy or benevolence that is comparable with it, for the more the community of those who attain adeptship is strengthened numerically and otherwise, the greater is the influence working on mankind at large for their spiritual advancement, and their elevation above the lamentable karmic conditions that give rise to the physical miseries and suffering to which ordinary philanthropy, unable to look beyond the one life, is limited in choosing its spheres of activity. But lest this reflection should be misunderstood, let me point out that the career of occult progress is not one which has to be selected in preference, or as an alternative to other benevolent activities. Whatever these may be, for good men impelled to engage in them from beautiful and generous sympathy with their fellow creatures, their

work in such directions instead of impeding their occult progress, must be directly subservient thereto if they do but blend with the immediate emotions of sympathy which dictate their practical philanthropy the desire for spiritual knowledge, and the efforts to attain it that may be compatible with their duties and assumed responsibilities in life. One of the most common mistakes concerning this subject made by those who pick up a few imperfect ideas from oriental literature and tales of eastern "yogeeism," is the motion that the occult path means withdrawal from all human companionship, and absorption in a spiritual selfishness that seeks a personal beatitude by means of solitary meditation and austere practices. That which occult training does undoubtedly demand is self-denial in the sense of entire abstinence from the fruitless indulgence of self, and some time devoted if possible compatibly with altruistic duties to the interior cultivation of the spiritual consciousness. But there is no life of philanthropic activity so full that it would not include the necessary opportunities for this. On the contrary it is, broadly speaking, most assuredly true that the active philanthropist is by virtue of being so, in far more favourable conditions for the attainment of spiritual advancement than the man who is merely bent upon his advancement, however blameless his relative inactivity.

Here we may pause to consider some of the commonest among the foolish criticisms that have been aimed at the state and methods of activity of the Adepts, since something has been promulgated in

reference to them in modern theosophic literature. It has been suggested that in living very secluded lives (as far as their existence on the physical plane is concerned) they are selfishly neglecting the poignant sufferings of unhappy humanity, which they might do much to soften if they came down from their lofty towers to mingle with the human race. To have power over material nature and disease and not at once devote that power to the relief of poverty and sickness seems to some of our shortsighted moralists to imply a want of sympathy with suffering, and a "selfish" neglect of opportunites for doing good. The criticism springs from a comprehensive ignorance of Nature and the whole design of the world—from a curiously complete disregard of the hypothesis that, in spite of appearances, the progress of the world may be going on, under the law of justice, and that very much more important ends may really be in view than those which have to do with the alleviation of the painful consequences which, in the progress of their successive lives most human beings may have brought upon themselves. Let me not be misunderstood. To the true Masters of Wisdom the spectacle of human suffering, however completely that suffering may have been earned by the sufferer's own action in the past, is one evoking acute and tender-hearted sympathy. But this sympathy cannot but, in their case, be associated with and qualified by the lofty powers of vision which may look back to the causes in the past, by which the suffering has been brought on, and forward to the results that may be hoped for as regards the future by the exhaustion of those causes.

To us, who see merely the suffering, it is perfectly clear that we have only one simple duty in regard to it—to relieve it if we can, by the exercise of such very limited powers in that direction as we may possess. If we succeed in doing this we are not upsetting the design of Nature. We are in all probability merely playing a part unconsciously in that design, and the karma of the sufferer whom we relieve, may be regarded as having been to that extent already fulfilled when the pressure of destiny brought us into contact with him. But the adept, who has come already into conscious relations with the design of Nature, who is no longer drifted blindly about by that pressure of destiny just referred to, is very differently situated. He is not wanted as an instrument of karma. The great law finds its own instruments ready to its hand among the humanity still on the same level of existence to which the sufferer belongs. If he intervenes, with a power and a knowledge on a level, so to speak, with that on which the design originates, he is distinctly upsetting the contemplated scheme of things. Such a violation of the appointed progress of events would quite possibly do no more than protract the suffering it might seem to relieve, for the unfulfilled law of karma would exact its own measure of justice later on, —in another life, perhaps, which might have been clear of the old debt if things had been allowed to take their normal course.

Then again, while philanthropists of the lowlier type may fitly enough concern themselves with palliatives in dealing with human suffering, their justification for

doing this is to be sought rather in the imperfection of their insight than in the merits of palliatives as such compared with remedies for evil which should go deeper than the surface, and attempt to grapple with fundamental causes. While the worldly philanthropist of the ordinary type seeks for the causes of misery and suffering in the external neglect of economical laws, and would endeavour to circumvent these evils by teaching thrift, temperance, and industry as habits dictated by an enlightened selfishness, we can readily appreciate the idea that a fuller comprehension of the laws of karma may enable Adept vision to realise that even the practice of economical virtues would not suffice to root out from human society the suffering which in one shape or another must overtake re-incarnating human creatures who have lived before for merely selfish objects, and have done evil, as judged by the spiritual standard, however enlightened, in the mere worldly sense, their selfishness may have been at the time. The karmic retribution for sins against humanity, for cruelty to others, and hardness of heart in presence of sorrow, can never be circumvented, and the cunningest devices for warding off poverty and crime will never be successful in guarding future generations from these calamities until the people, who in the present time are creating the conditions in which they will live again, are taught to live with an eye to that inevitable destiny, and to starve out the forces that make for wretchedness and disease, so that there shall be no karmic necessity for such penalties operative in the progress of the world any more.

The end, therefore, to which the Adept must primarily devote himself will always be the cultivation of spiritual knowledge and aspiration, which by weaning people from their supreme devotion to the objects of physical existence, will guide them into those paths of endeavour which will necessarily render them less likely to sacrifice the higher dictates of humanity on the altars of their individual worldly interests.

Of course, I am not professing to explain and account for the whole policy of the Adept Brotherhood in their dealings with uninitiated mankind. I am merely showing how, with the limited knowledge of their functions in Nature which we possess, it is easy to put aside the manifestly inapplicable criticisms suggested by an entire ignorance on that subject. It is with the spiritual interests of humanity almost exclusively that the Adepts must deal. And in dealing even with these it is obvious that at some periods of the world's history their influence may be much more restricted than at others. Human affairs advance through a great series of interlinked cycles, and each of these has its periods of spiritual and material ascendancy. Sometimes the exoteric religious ideas in vogue may favour, sometimes they may oppose the spread of true spiritual knowledge. Sometimes it may be possible for those who have outrun their contemporaries, and have attained to the power and beatitude of the Divine Kingdom, to do little more than concern themselves with the few who are toiling along after them across the dangers and ordeals of the upward path. Sometimes they may find it practicable to attempt the reform of popular religions,

so as to bring these more into harmony with the eternal natural laws that govern spiritual evolution. But whether at any given moment they can do much or little, there is one thing they can always do, and do always accordingly, they can—to fall into the symbolical language that the subject suggests—keep the sacred flame alight. They can take care that there shall always be an Adept community on earth, ready to instruct and bring forward increasing numbers of those who, as the cyclic law grows more favourable in the future, may be prepared to undertake the task of self-development, and thus to co-operate with Nature in working out her grandest design—to which all preliminary stages of evolution are, indeed, but subservient. To those who have long attained the exaltation of the Divine Kingdom, it may be that some mysterious condition of supreme rest and beatitude beckons them onward, and without knowing much on that subject, we may reasonably conjecture that one by one, as the aspect of the great duty that presses upon them all permits, they do pass on. But never, we may be assured, until their places are fully supplied by other victors in the great struggle.

In this way the Adept Brotherhood is much more than a mere organization of immensely advanced and spiritualised men. It is that of course, but it is a brotherhood so far advanced that it has grown up into being a part of the great hierarchy of superior beings constituting the spiritual government of the world. Some of those who become Adepts are, in turn, drawn up into this hierarchy, and may then be said to guide and direct the Will lying behind them again in its

detailed manifestations. Rightly apprehended this idea is no more in conflict with the vague religious conception that assigns the "creation" of the world to God, than the fact that human devices may direct electricity to specific purposes, is in conflict with the profound truth that electricity itself is a mighty and ever-present force of Nature. The deeply impressive truth that the Will of God works through agencies of a character intermediate between God and man, is the scientific interpretation of Nature, not the deposition of vaguer beliefs which only seem more reverential to the uninstructed mind because that mind has never even sought to work out its beliefs with precision.

That from the beginning of humanity on earth in this great World Period through which we are passing, there has been a Being consciously presiding over its evolution is, as I say, a perfectly reasonable idea, in harmony with the loftiest religious conceptions. That it is not merely an idea, but a fact, is ascertained by those who are themselves, in turn, intermediate between that Being and humanity at large. And from them some definite information on the subject filters down to those who from our own level are struggling upwards and already in contact with Adept instruction. Evidently it would be impossible to convey to incarnate intelligence—imprisoned in flesh and working within the limitations of consciousness as it functions on the material plane—very much concerning the attributes of such a Being. But the recognition of His existence is a step in the direction of a comprehension of the whole spiritual hierarchy.

People who make a hard and fast barrier in their

imaginations between God and man—treating humanity, as of a horde of final units, each with an eternal personality as limited in its scope, as compared with Deity, as the nine-pins a boy may play with compared to himself,—are not merely degrading the human personalities in question, but are making nonsense of the whole Natural design. It would have no ulterior purpose or meaning if the conventional view were in correspondence with the fact. On the other hand, when we not alone accept the principle that there must be higher destinies open to human creatures than those which are bounded by the mystery of physical death, but realise that those higher destinies may assimilate Man to God-like knowledge, wisdom and power, and elevate him at last—if he makes himself worthy—to play a part in the spiritual government of his race, then surely we must feel that we have grasped a really lofty conception of the design to which humanity belongs.

And in the light of that idea we may go considerably further, even, than the doctrine of Reincarnation takes us in appreciating correctly the pathetic mistake which in conscious or unconscious submission to the dictates of a narrow and incomplete theology many people make in contemplating the brevity of each individual physical life. Especially do those aspiring lovers of Nature, who most reverently study her laws,—true men of science,—fall a prey to the gloomy delusion that when the brain they have trained so carefully shall dissolve in the earth, there is an end of the futile labour they have gone through. Conventional religion gives them a hope

indeed of some sort of consciousness hereafter; but the heaven of crowns and harps and unintelligent rapture before "the throne"—the heaven of ignorant and empty-headed priests, good and good-hearted though they may sometimes be—affords a prospect of drivelling *ennui* to the man who is already in this life highly developed in knowledge and intellectual energy. Men of such a type turn from it with distaste if not with scorn, and forgetting that the priests may be echoing a great truth in promising future consciousness, though distorting it into nonsense by furnishing it forth with detail on a level with their own intelligence,—they, the true priests of Nature, her eager students and worshippers, fall back on a forlorn kind of altruism and try to take comfort in the thought that their successors will carry on the mighty quest when they themselves are dust and their thoughts as the light of yesterday that has faded into darkness and ceased to be.

The mere first steps in esoteric teaching should hold out a thrilling prospect in exchange for this dreary expectation. The persistence of individual consciousness—the re-incarnation of each transient personality with the knowledge and training of each life stored as so much potentiality of farther advancement, as so much intellectual faculty ready to spring once more into activity—that is the first great law of spiritual evolution which rebukes the insult to Nature involved in the idea that his science is extinct when the man of science "dies." But there is really a far loftier possibility before him in the progress of ages, if he wakes to a perception of the higher science

that may link his knowledge with that of Nature's great evolutionary plan, and summon him to the task of so exalting his own individuality that he may pass on into the ranks of those I have described as playing a ministerial part in the government of the world. He will not do this, of course, by the concentration of faculties on the phenomena of this one facet of many sided Nature that we call the physical plane. However ardent and intelligent that concentration may be, such an exercise of faculty can develop but one of the many potentialities of development which lurk in the nature of the Man who must be more than what we habitually mean by the phrase a man of science, before he can win a place in the Divine kingdom. Knowledge itself of the kind we chiefly deal with in this life, may be a splendid stimulant to spiritual evolution, but a diet consisting of stimulant entirely is not conducive to health. We must study other laws of Nature besides those that have to do with physics before we can utilise and control the forces of the spiritual plane. Man does not live by bread alone; the soul is not exalted by knowledge alone (in the sense in which knowledge is limited to the same natural plane as the bread). The man of science who would claim the inheritance that Nature has provided for him must appreciate her design before he can be appointed to assist in working it out, and must assimilate his aspirations to the spirit in which that design is conceived. When he has done this, though not till then, the Elder Brethren of humanity will be ready to receive him into their midst.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ANCIENT MYSTERIES.

I HAVE already endeavoured to show what is the distinction between theosophic and religious teaching, and why, though widely different in some respects, they are not in any real sense antagonistic. A further step along the same line of thought, leads us to the conclusion that till a recent period of the world's history, theosophic and religious teaching went hand in hand—that one was the complement and crown of the other. That the teachings of what used to be called Initiation in the era of the Egyptian and Grecian Mysteries were closely identified with what we now call theosophy, is a conclusion that reveals itself with something approaching certainty when the records that we possess, such as they are, concerning the ancient mysteries, are examined in the light of now current expositions of theosophic doctrine. Nor must we be misled in estimating the importance of this fact by the easily suggested idea that the mystery teaching may have been superseded by the Christian revelation—though all very well in its way, while the world at large had to be content with heathen polytheism. The mystery teaching was not superseded by the Christian revelation, for the author of that revelation constantly alludes to it as embodying a

higher instruction than that offered to the multitude even by Him.

The supersession of esoteric teaching by that of modern Christian doctrine was effected not by the original Teacher or His disciples—but by the Church when that became a State organization with worldly interests to serve, and arrogated to itself a spiritual despotism, by pretending to a monopoly of spiritual knowledge.

This pretence has been emphasised more and more in modern centuries in inverse proportion to the spiritual knowledge really possessed by the priesthood. And, indeed, in looking back on the claims to superior spiritual knowledge evidently advanced by the priesthood in early ages of the world, we are apt to measure those claims by reference to the painfully familiar fact that priests in modern centuries have not been at all remarkable for the possession of knowledge in advance of their lay contemporaries. On the contrary, the early European Church has been in the rear of intelligence in almost all respects, and the claims of its hierarchy on the reverence of the multitude have depended on appeals to a very crude superstition or on mundane tyranny. As our survey, however, is pushed back further and further into the past, we get well behind the records of an ignorant and worldly church to periods at which the priesthood was evidently regarded as actually invested with an insight into the mysteries of Nature far transcending that generally diffused throughout secular society. The priests of ancient Egypt were real spiritual teachers, and the inferences of those who study Egyptian antiquities by

the light of modern inquiries into occult science will surely tend in the direction of recognizing them as endowed with the spiritual enlightenment that carries with it an abnormal control over natural forces.

We do not know, or at all events we are not helped by literary and archaeological research, to know very much about the "mysteries" and initiations of Ancient Egypt, and Sir Gardner Wilkinson frankly concedes that our only clue to their character and significance is to be sought for in the somewhat fuller information we possess concerning the Greek mysteries of Eleusis, which were evidently copied from Egyptian practices. But it is quite plain that Egyptian initiations were so serious in their character—hedged round from profane intrusion with such jealous care, and approachable only through probations and ordeals of so formidable a description that the outer world must have been entirely sure of the broad principle that the Hierophants of the temples were on a truly superior level of knowledge and power, as compared with the multitude. If they had been merely the exponents of a pompous ecclesiastical ceremonial, candidates for their teaching would not have besieged their strongholds with the eagerness actually shown, and would not have been prepared to go through the trials they certainly underwent in their efforts to secure admission to the charmed circle of enlightenment. Even the mysteries of Eleusis, which were according to all reasonable conjecture a very degenerate re-production of the more ancient organisation of Egypt, were open, as far as we know anything of their details, to a highly philosophical interpretation.

Thomas Taylor, the indefatigable translator of so much Platonic and Neo-Platonic literature, says in his own dissertation on the Mysteries, that those of the "lesser" order "occultly signified this sublime truth, that the soul being merged in matter, resides among the dead both here and hereafter." And quoting Plotinus, he adds: "The soul therefore dies through vice as much as it is possible for the soul to die; and the death of the soul is, while merged or baptised as it were in the present body, to descend into matter and be filled with its impurity, and after departing from this body, to be absorbed in its filth till it returns to a superior condition, and elevates its eye from the overwhelming mire."

Later on, dealing with the subject of the greater mysteries, he says: "As the shows of the lesser mysteries occultly signified the miseries of the soul while in subjection to the body, so those of the greater obscurity intimated by mystic and splendid visions the felicity of the soul, both here and hereafter, when purified from the defilements of a material nature and constantly elevated to the realities of intellectual vision."

Dr. Warburton, who was Bishop of Gloucester in the middle of the last century, is sometimes referred to as a writer of authority on the ancient mysteries; but his views are too much entangled with conventional orthodoxy to have any real value. He labours, indeed, to show that the mysteries were designed to teach the Unity of God, as contrasted with the polytheism of popular theology in pre-Christian ages. But Thomas Taylor loftily rebukes the narrowness of this concep-

tion. After expanding the ideas above indicated, he goes on: "From hence the reader will easily perceive the extreme ridiculousness of Dr. Warburton's system —that the grand secret of the mysteries consisted in exposing the errors of polytheism, and in teaching the doctrine of the unity, or the existence of one Deity alone. . . . But it is by no means wonderful that men who have not the smallest conception of the true nature of the gods, who have persuaded themselves that they were only dead men deified, and who measure the understandings of the ancients by their own, should be led to fabricate a system so improbable and absurd."

As showing how very far the initiations went beyond being a mere theoretical repudiation of popular error, Taylor quotes two passages as follows. The first is from Apuleius, who says, describing his own experiences in the mysteries: "I approached the confines of death, and treading on the threshold of Proserpine, and being carried through all the elements, I came back to my pristine situation. In the depths of midnight I saw the sun glittering with a splendid light, together with the infernal and supernal gods, and to these divinities approaching nearer I paid the tribute of profound adoration." The second passage is from Plato, who in the "Phædrus" describes the felicity of the virtuous soul, prior to its descent, in a beautiful allusion to the arcane visions of the mysteries. He writes: "But it was then lawful to survey the most splendid beauty when we obtained, together with that blessed choir, this happy vision and contemplation. . . . And these Divine orgies were celebrated by us while we possessed the

proper integrity of our nature, and were freed from the molestations of evil, which availed us in a succeeding period of time. Likewise in consequence of this Divine initiation we became spectators of entire simple, immoveable, and blessed visions, resident in a pure light, and were ourselves pure and immaculate and liberated from this surrounding vestment which we denominate body, and to which we are now bound like an oyster to its shell."

The mysteries of Bacchus were held by Taylor to be of somewhat limited significance compared with those of Eleusis.

"And thus much for the mysteries of Bacchus, which as well as those of Ceres relate in one part to the descent of a partial intellect into matter, and its condition while united with the dark tenement of body; but there appears to be this difference between the two—that in the fable of Ceres and Proserpine the descent of the whole rational soul is considered, and in that of Bacchus the distribution and procession of that supreme part alone of our nature, which we properly characterise by the appellation of intellect. In the composition of each we may discern the same traces of exalted wisdom and recondite theology—of a theology the most venerable of all others for its antiquity, and the most admirable for its excellence and reality."

What we may also perceive from the evidence afforded by such passages as those quoted from Apuleius and Plato, is that the mysteries were associated with the exercise of what we should now call psychic powers and faculties. And with this clue, aided by

the growing knowledge in modern times of the extent and range that may be assigned to such faculties, we may begin to appreciate the whole situation more intelligently than has been possible till now.

From the Egyptian period downward, and in a greater degree in the Egyptian as compared with the Greek period, the mysteries and initiations connected with them were systems of teaching and graduation in that occult science which has been built up through the ages by the prolonged exercise of psychic faculties that are still available for those who know how to employ them as a means of verifying the knowledge thus accumulated in the world. To a very large extent during the development of modern civilisation those faculties have been stifled and forgotten in the activity imparted to others of a purely physical character; but now in all directions even western civilised nations are fermenting with a revival of psychic activity. Much of this energy is blindly and ignorantly misdirected, but it is working in all its manifestations to break down the dogged materialistic incredulity that has been in a supreme degree the discreditable characteristic of the last half century. That incredulity has pervaded secular science, giving its avowed agnosticism an almost Atheistic bias, and has dried up the life blood of religion, leaving the churches a structure of dry bones for all but enthusiasts, whose instincts of piety have adorned them with poetic rather spiritual attributes. Rituals may be preserved, but the creeds on which they profess to rest are no longer in touch with methods of spiritual research which might invest their priestly guardians

with authority to utter them. They are handed down now from generation to generation with a bigoted tenacity that is all the more querelous because it is conscious of its own inability to trace them back to their supposed sources in the invisible realms of Nature. A clergy rich in professions but poor in faith joins hands with scientific materialism to discountenance the theory that embodied human consciousness can have any touch with the spiritual world. A withered theology preserved like the petals of dried flowers may, it no doubt feels, do better service to a church with a complicated sociological structure to take care of, than a progressive and vitalised scheme of spiritual investigation.

Neither clerical interests nor materialism, however, can hold their own against the growing conviction that the human race is in possession of faculties capable of piercing the veil of matter. Once recognising this as a permanent fact in Nature, we are relieved from the necessity of trying to escape, by fantastic conjectures, from the plain evidence of contemporary writers that the mysteries of Greece, and, *a fortiori*, those of Egypt, were associated with a psychic revelation for those who were initiated.

This point is well sustained by a Russian writer, Ouvaroff, whose treatise on the Eleusinian mysteries has been translated into English by J. D. Price (1817).

The first edition of the original was published in 1812. In his preface the author says :—

" My object in this work is to show that not only were the ancient mysteries the very life of polytheism,

but still more that they proceeded from the sole and true source of all the light diffused over the globe."

He traces the mysteries to an Indian origin, relying on the identity of the words Κογξ, Ὀμ Παξ = Conx, Om, Pax, used at the conclusion of the mysteries of Eleusis, with the Sanscrit Cansha, Om, Pacsha, the first word signifying "object of desire," the second being the familiar sacred syllable of the East, and the third, Pacsha, identical with the Latin *vix* = change, course, or turn of duty.

After describing the division of the mysteries into lesser and greater, he goes on :—

"We must again acknowledge the impossibility of determining with precision the notions which the Epopts (the initiates of the greater mysteries) received ; but that connection which we have ascertained between the initiations and the true source of all our knowledge suffices to prove that they not only acquired from them just notions respecting the Divinity—the relations between man and the Divinity—the primitive dignity of human nature—its fall—the immortality of the soul—the means of its return towards God, and finally another order of things after death, but that traditions were imparted to them, oral and even written, precious remains of the great shipwreck of humanity."

He also contends with great force :—

"It is not in fact probable that the superior initiation was limited to the demonstration of the unity of God and the immortality of the soul by philosophical arguments. Clement, of Alexandria, expressly says, when speaking of the great mysteries,

'Here ends all instruction; we behold Nature and things.' Besides, moral notions were so widely diffused that the mysteries could not, merely on account of them, lay claim to the magnificent eulogiums bestowed by the most enlightened personages of antiquity. For if we suppose that the revelation of those truths had been the only object of the mysteries, would they not have ceased to exist from the moment when those truths were publicly taught? Would Pindar, Plato, Cicero, Epictetus have spoken of them with such admiration if the hierophant had satisfied himself with loudly proclaiming his own opinions, or those of his order, on truths with which they were themselves acquainted?"

It is often urged by writers who would disparage the mysteries that they were sometimes associated with licentious excesses. This objection has especial reference to the Orphic mysteries, and on this subject Ouvaroff writes:

"We have already mentioned that the mysteries of Bacchus bear a character altogether different from that of the Eleusinian. This opposition strikes us at once, and what conformity could in fact subsist between the savage licentiousness of the Bacchus worship and the severe character and high destination of the worship of Ceres? Yet after a serious examination we find that this opposition consists rather in the exterior than in the spirit of the two worships; nay, it entirely disappears when we raise ourselves to the parent idea, the true type of the two institutions. If we do not obstinately persuade ourselves that Ceres and Bacchus were historical

personages—if we consider them as originally two symbols of some power of the universe, we behold them so identified that no other difference exists but in the exterior form, that is in the part depending wholly on men, on local circumstances, and the political destinies of nations. The worship of Ceres and the worship of Bacchus must belong to one principle alone, and this principle is found in the active force of nature, viewed in the immense variety of its functions and its attributes."

A dignified treatise on the mysteries, by W. M. Ramsay, is to be found in the ninth edition of the "Encyclopedia Britannica." The author begins, it is true, by speaking with respect of Lobeck's great work, the "Aglaophamus" (1829), in which that author endeavours to destroy the theory that the mysteries "enshrined a primitive revelation of divine truth," but he recognises the weakness of some of Lobeck's arguments, and especially points out that additional evidence has been accumulated since his time, "making it certain that statements which Lobeck set aside as not referring to the Eleusinian religion do really relate to it."

The article is to be regarded as representing the severely erudite view of the subject brought up to date, and it is in no way inspired with any appreciation of the psychic aspect of the mysteries. But all the more on that account it may be useful as showing how much serious dignity and grandeur of thought is seen to be associated with them. Mr. Ramsay writes:

"The saving and healthy effect of the Eleusinian mysteries was believed in not only by the mass of the

people but by many of the most thoughtful and educated intellects — Pindar, Sophocles, Socrates, Plutarch, &c. Plato, who finds no language too strong to stigmatise the demoralising effect of the Orphic mysteries, speaks of the Eleusinian with great respect. . . . He that has been initiated has learned what will ensure his happiness hereafter. . . . According to Sopater, initiation establishes a kinship of the soul with the divine Nature; and Theon Smyrnæus says that the final stage of initiation is the state of bliss and divine favour which results from it. . . . There is overwhelming proof in ancient writers that the effect of the mysteries was not dependent on any dogmatic instruction. Even the doctrine of a future life, which is always associated in the old writers with the mysteries, was not expressly inculcated in them, but left to the spectators to gather for themselves from the spectacle presented to them."

The serious view of the Mysteries suggested by all these quotations brings them into line with what we now call Theosophic teaching, and with the help of that teaching we can fill up all gaps in the explanation. In the ancient world the priests were really qualified to impart religious teaching by reason of being themselves in true psychic relation with fountains of superior wisdom. But the state of evolution of the humanity around them made it impossible for them to proclaim their knowledge to the multitude. The spiritual civilisation of the people at large was not such as would have prepared them to accept and profit by the pure ethical severity of occult wisdom.

In saying that I brush the surface of a problem that might be dealt with more fully, but it is enough for the moment to indicate the motives for reserve which are easily intelligible as actuating the ancient custodians of spiritual science. By the operation of natural laws that are plainly referred to in many biblical passages not always apprehended correctly, knowledge concerning the possibilities of spiritual progress greatly augments responsibility. A human being who has never been enabled or compelled to realise that he has it in his own power, if he lives a sufficiently ennobled life, to rise in the scale of existence to conditions superior to that of the commonplace human life around him, does not incur great moral responsibility in leading a less noble life. If he does wrong natural laws will entail suffering upon him, if not in the life in which he sins, then in another; if he does right, he will be rewarded sooner or later with happiness; and this will happen whether he understands the law or not. But if in any way he acquires spiritual knowledge and appreciates the scope of his opportunities as a human being and the law which renders certain lines of conduct favourable to, and certain other lines antagonistic to, his higher development, then if he follows the lower path while really seeing the higher, it is much worse for him than if he had never seen it. So the wise priests of old—in the days when priests were really wise and studied the mysteries of Nature instead of fantastic rituals—forebore from pouring out their knowledge too recklessly into vessels ill-qualified to contain it. Modern objectors often fail to understand the motive of their

reticence, unfamiliar with the notion that religion can be a more powerful agency than we find it now. Our churches have forgotten all that religion once represented, except the glittering generalities that may lightly be scattered abroad because they tell so little. Those who believe may be the better, and those who do not, but may still assimilate some morsels of good precept, can hardly be the worse. The Masters of the Mysteries had a different kind of teaching to deal with. They had to put those who were qualified on the path of upward spiritual progress. It is the main purpose of this book to try and explain to what that progress may lead, but at all events if it is merely taken for granted that it may lead to something, then the otherwise unintelligible secrecy of the Mysteries will be seen to have had a comprehensible theory.

In Egypt—where most occult students will see reason to believe that the Mysteries meant more than in the Grecian reproduction—their secrets seem to have been even more closely kept. Sir Gardner, who has so patiently elaborated every scrap of evidence that could throw light on the manners and social and religious life of the early Egyptians, is very frank in avowing the great difficulty he experiences in working out any information bearing on the secrets of initiation. He bears his testimony, however, to the earnestness of the current feeling on the subject.

"The chief cause of the ascendency they (the priests) acquired over the minds of the people was the importance attached to the mysteries, to a thorough understanding of which the priests alone could arrive and so sacred did they hold those secrets that many

members of the sacerdotal order were not admitted to a participation of them, and those alone were selected for initiation who had proved themselves virtuous and deserving of the honour—a fact satisfactorily proved by the evidence of Clement of Alexandria, who says: 'The Egyptians neither entrusted their secrets to everyone nor degraded the secrets of divine matters by disclosing them to the profane, reserving them for the heir-apparent to the throne and for such of the priests as excelled in virtue and wisdom.'

"From all we can learn of the subject it appears that the mysteries consisted of degrees denominated the Greater and the Less, and in order to become qualified for admission into the higher class it was necessary to have passed through those of the inferior degrees, and each of them was probably divided into ten different grades. It was necessary that the character of the candidate for initiation should be pure and unsullied; and the novitiates were commanded to study those lessons which tended to purify the mind and to encourage morality. The honour of ascending from the less to the greater mysteries was as highly esteemed as it was difficult to obtain. No ordinary qualification recommended the aspirant to this important privilege; and independent of enjoying an acknowledged reputation for learning and morality, he was required to undergo the most severe ordeal and to show the greatest moral resignation; but the ceremony of passing under the knife of the hierophant was merely emblematic of the regeneration of the neophyte.

"That no one except the priests was privileged to

instruction into the greater mysteries is evident from the fact that a prince, even the heir-apparent and of the military order, not being made partaker of these important secrets nor instructed in them until his accession to the throne, when in virtue of his kingly office he became a member of the priesthood and the head of the religion. It is not, however, less certain that at a later period many besides the priests, and even some Greeks, were admitted into the lesser mysteries; yet in these cases also their advancement through the different grades must have depended on a strict conformance to prescribed rules."

The law which prescribed reticence in respect to exalted spiritual science in ancient times was fortified in the middle ages by an entirely new consideration. As the exoteric Christian Church grew into a more and more powerful engine of secular tyranny, the teacher who might too rashly proclaim the higher wisdom embodied in the secrets of initiation ran the risk not only of unduly augmenting the moral responsibility of those who might listen to him, but of being burned himself at the stake. With this peril in their way, it is not surprising that the mediæval occultists were careful in the extreme to veil any statements they ventured to make in the disguise of an almost impenetrable symbolism. But again with the light of modern Theosophic teaching to show us the solution of their riddle, we may easily recognise the philosophy of the ancient Mysteries reappearing in that of the much talked of and much misunderstood fraternity of the Rosicrucians.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE THEOSOPHY OF THE MIDDLE AGES.

STUDENTS of esoteric wisdom are familiar with the assertion that the principles of spiritual evolution, which it is their chief purpose to penetrate and comprehend, have been recognised by the illuminated mystics of all countries in all ages of the world. The great science which these principles constitute has not been the invention of modern Theosophists; nor has it been the peculiar inheritance of any small body of adepts, jealously kept back from the wider circle of philosophers at large. The manner in which a sudden outburst of information relating to the natural laws embraced by occult science seems to have been thrown forward into modern thought within the last few years, is calculated to suggest that idea at first, but the more we come to understand occult teachings, the more we are able to discern them cropping out at the surface of earlier philosophical and religious literature, disguised in one kind of symbolism or another, but evidently the same knowledge as regards the root ideas and the inner significance of the words in which they are expressed.

A good deal has already been written—though still probably a good deal more might be written

with advantage—to show the identity of gnostic Christianity with all points of esoteric science on which that presentation of the truth laid stress. And the manner in which the conceptions of gnostic Christianity were obscured by the harsher and narrower dogmas which it became the interest of state churches to endorse, is in itself an interesting study, throwing much light on the processes of degradation to which popular religious beliefs are subject. But in proportion as Christian esotericism became obscured by the development of the power of the Church in the Middle Ages, and perhaps because of that process of obscuration, the essential doctrines, which no persecution could shut out from the appreciation of enlightened minds, sought other channels of expression. In these they altogether withdrew themselves from popular observation. The genuine philosophy of religion separating itself entirely from the debased caricature assumed a disguise which was really impenetrable by all but the initiated few,—which the church itself was no less incapable of seeing through than the ignorant laity. This disguise was the much misunderstood research, science, or theory known as Alchemy, of which some of the Rosicrucian writers were leading exponents. Ignorantly derided to this day by a materialistic generation, that persists in falling again and again into the mistake of reading symbolical expositions of interior truth in their mere literal sense, alchemy was, nevertheless, the cryptographic expression of a profound spiritual wisdom.

This view of the subject is not a conjectural theory developed to suit any assumed necessity of finding

esoteric teaching somewhere in the literature of the Middle Ages, but one which is as certainly the correct view as the interpretation of an ordinary cryptogram is certainly the correct one when it makes sense. For example, if we see an apparently meaningless assemblage of groups of letters in one of the mysterious advertisements, by means of which some people, who find that system amusing, correspond with one another, and if we find that by reading *b* for *a* all through, and *c* for *b*, and so on, the message translates itself into straightforward English, we know with entire certainty that the original framer of the cryptogram had that intention in his mind. So with the seemingly nonsensical symbology of alchemy, when you try the right key in the attempt to unlock its meaning, it all resolves itself into perfectly coherent sense. We have now got the right key in the shape of that plain information given to the world at large of recent years in Theosophical teachings. The mist clears away from the otherwise hopelessly obscure verbiage of the alchemical books, as we read them with minds attuned to esoteric thinking and on the watch for meanings relating not to the physical transmutation of lead or antimony into gold, but to the process of cultivating the growth of the Higher Self, by the exaltation of the lower, which is occult progress. The transmutation, in fact, of the normal physical consciousness of man into the divine consciousness was the *magnum opus* on which the true alchemists were engaged, and much that is grotesque imbecility in the directions and recipes they have left behind, if we read it simply as nineteenth-century chemists,

becomes beautiful spiritual philosophy in strictest harmony with the laws governing human spiritual evolution, when we put a symbolical construction on the quaintly expressed formulæ relating to coctions and distillations and the mercury of the wise and fiery waters and ferments.

It will be easy to take from alchemical books a sufficient number of extracts to show that the writers evidently had a spiritual meaning in their minds as they wrote; it will be equally simple to indicate lines of reading which will enable anybody who likes to take the trouble to arrive at a thorough and exhaustive certainty on the subject, that will never again be disturbed by the silly sneers at alchemy so often met with in the pseudo-scientific literature of nineteenth century conceit. But before going on to make and elucidate a few quotations that may open up and define the proper method of the investigation it will be well to show in broad outline the indirect consequences of the discovery we are dealing with.

That which has been said so far is the main truth concerning alchemy. The real alchemists were spiritual philosophers concerned with the all important task of developing the Divine possibilities of their latent human nature. They were students of true religion in the highest sense of the term—men whose intelligence had emancipated them from the more or less fantastic creeds of the exoteric church, but who sought to go behind the blunders of a self-seeking, worldly-minded priesthood, and associate themselves with the will of God, in the best sense of that expression: that is to say, to identify themselves with the purpose of Nature,

with the law of spiritual evolution, with the principle of good in the universe. When the priests and officers of what was blasphemously proclaimed as religion were chiefly concerned with murdering, robbing, and torturing all who stood in the way of their profitable tyranny over popular belief, the alchemists were endeavouring to learn how by self-denial and purity of life, and loftiness of unworldly purpose, it might be possible to elevate that human nature, which for the most part wallowed around them in such ignoble debasement, and were struggling in their own way, which hardly seems to have differed in any essential characteristics from our way, to get upon what we call the path of occult progress, leading on to the goal—or perhaps only the intermediate goal—of Adeptship. But why, it may be asked, did they write books at all if the unfavourable conditions among which they lived were such as to make it impossible for them to write in a way any one less wise than themselves would understand? If they had taught their doctrine of salvation plainly they, and their books with them, would instantly have been burned by the authority of the Church. Was it worth while, then, to teach these doctrines in language that could not reach the intelligence of any one requiring the lesson?

The apparent reply to this question is twofold. First, they who knew what they meant, seem to have imagined that their meaning *would* become intelligible to persons spiritually ripe for profiting by occult teaching. Whether this expectation was often or ever realised we cannot now be sure. But secondly, it would be easy to see why the true alchemists should

write, even if they did not expect to be understood by any one in need of teaching. They may have written to introduce themselves to one another. Anybody who *could* write a book about alchemy, about the manipulation of lead, sulphur, and mercury, the red and white powder of projection, and so on with all the "gibberish" that would be used about crucibles and sublimations, about coagulating the fugitive tinctures, and so on, and who could at the same time weave into this the esoteric doctrine concerning the path of occult progress, which we in this day are privileged to discuss openly, would be recognised as a genuine occultist by any other occulist who might take up his treatise.

Bearing all this in mind, however, we must remember that besides the genuine occultists who wrote on spiritual progress under cover of alchemical symbology, a great host of sordid hunters for gold, altogether failing to understand the loftier purpose of real alchemy, took up the research in the hope of acquiring riches, and of actually manufacturing the precious metal. The real alchemists were constantly giving out warnings against this mistake in language as plain as it could be made compatibly with not betraying their secret in unequivocal terms, but none the less was the avaricious world always fermenting with the notion that alchemical processes might be a short and easy road to wealth. In this way a great many persons, entirely outside the range of the description already given of the real alchemists all through the Middle Ages, spent time and money on trying experiments with physical mercury, salt, and

sulphur, and all the chemical drugs and preparations they could get knowledge of, with the manufacture of tangible gold as their object and disappointment their only harvest. Some of these may have written some of the innumerable alchemical treatises which exist, recording the experiments they may have carried out, and setting forth their own conjectures as to the reason why such experiments may have failed; and such deluded and disappointed searchers after the philosopher's stone may here and there have stumbled on bits of chemical discovery so far vindicating the profoundly stupid view of alchemy at large, common to modern encyclopedias and conventional belief. This idea, of course, is that from A to Z all the alchemists were self-deluded gold hunters who failed to accomplish their object, *ex necessitate rei*, but in their futile struggles after it, laid the foundations of modern chemistry. They really did immeasurably less in that direction than they have been credited with; but the modern commentator who is foolish enough to suppose that a long procession of learned men, whose writings abundantly prove them in many cases,—alchemy apart,—to have been broad-minded, philosophical, and intelligent, were all the victims of an empty, avaricious dream, afford in themselves the saddest spectacle o self-delusion that the history of alchemy brings to light.

Before we come to closer quarters with the alchemical books themselves one more general conclusion on the subject may conveniently be set forth. Leaving out of account the host of alchemical

chemists—the deluded experimentalists who sought the philosopher's stone on the physical plane in order to get precious metal by its means and grow rich—and concentrating our attention entirely on the real alchemical philosophers who were on the path of spiritual progress and concerned with far higher objects than the transitory experiences of this life can afford, we have to consider by the light of what we now know concerning occult mysteries what would naturally have been, for the real alchemist, the consequence of discovering the real philosopher's stone, the secret that is to say of real spiritual attainment. Remember that while esoteric progress rests, as on a primary foundation, on the ethical principles which are taught, though often sadly mistaught, by exoteric religions also, it contemplates a very much larger result than the attainment of an unintelligent spiritual beatitude. Exoteric religion says in effect be good and devout on earth, then you will be taken to Heaven and be happy evermore. Esoteric teaching says be good and devout to begin with, to put yourself in tune with the higher planes of Nature, and then aim at the expansion of your knowledge faculties and states of consciousness in accordance with the latent possibilities of the divine principle within you. The world contains a kingdom of beings, so to speak, above the human kingdom into which men may rise if they set to work to climb in the right way. Now the real alchemists were aspirants for "adeptship," as we should express the idea in modern theosophic language, and it is quite obvious in various ways to the student of occultism,

that some of them attained that condition of being. But if any of them were adepts, then such persons would, by the assumption, have acquired powers over the obscurer laws of Nature, and knowledge concerning the forces lying beyond the physical plane, which would amongst other results have invested them with the power of influencing matter in a way that is entirely beyond the capacity of the physical plane chemist. Occult phenomena have taken place of recent years, within the knowledge not merely of some theosophical students, but also in great abundance in presence of spiritualistic wonder seekers. Many of these are not less bewilderingly unintelligible than the transmutation of one metal into another would be. Apart from all questions of evidence therefore, any occult student would recognise that the transmutation of one metal into another would be most likely well within the range of the occult phenomena, that anyone who could at all be called an adept, would be able to produce.

This reflection leads us up to the correct appreciation of one surprising discovery to which anybody who takes the trouble will be led to by the study of alchemical literature. The evidence to show that certain of the alchemists really did accomplish the much-talked of physical experiment and turn out metallic tangible gold, that could be coined into money in considerable quantities, is simply overwhelming. Modern obstinacy and prejudice in dealing with the subject of alchemy ignores this evidence, and all branches of the history of the alchemists which tell unfavourably on its own pig-headed and self-

sufficient view, but with as much confidence as we can speak of any historical transaction, we may say that Nicholas Flammel and Raymond Lully among others actually accomplished the physical transmutation.

Where they, it may be asked, as a consequence of their extraordinary power, people of great wealth and magnificent living? Not at all. Flammel certainly gave away enormous sums for the building and endowment of churches, and Lully supplied Edward II. with great quantities of gold to be spent on the crusades; but it invariably appears that the adept who *could* make gold, has been himself far too spiritualised a philosopher to live a mundane life of luxury or profusion. That ought to be readily comprehended, and the objection that alleged real alchemists sometimes lived in obscurity and apparent poverty, as an objection to the theory of their power, is no less vulgar-minded and gross than it is unintelligent. Moreover the alchemists, whether real adepts or fraudulent pretenders, were subject to very embarrassing treatment by the generations among which they lived —always liable to be imprisoned and tortured to extort confessions of their secret. One of the true philosophers of alchemy, Alexander Sethon, author of a remarkable treatise called "An Open Entrance to the Closed Palace of the King," writes: "As if driven by the furies, I am compelled to fly from place to place and from kingdom to kingdom. . . . And thus though I possess all things I have no rest or enjoyment of any except in the truth which is my whole satisfaction. . . . I am constrained even from the works of mercy, for fear of suspicion and

arrest. I have experienced this in foreign countries where, having ventured to administer the medicine to sufferers given over by physicians, the instant the cures became known, a report was spread about the elixir, and I have been obliged to disguise myself, shave my head and change my name, to avoid falling into the hands of wicked persons, who would try to wrest the secret from me in the hopes of making gold." The history of the persecution of the alchemists, in spite of the precautions they took to avoid confronting the hostility of the Church, would take long to tell ; but for the moment I am concerned with sketching the whole position in its general bearings, and will presently refer the reader to books in which the broad statements here put forward can be followed out in their details.

The common herd of materialistic critics have supposed that if the alchemists had been really successful, their secret would have been extorted from them, considering the treatment many of them received, and the modern tendency of thought has always been to disbelieve in the existence of any secret that is not disclosed. But already our partial familiarity with the conditions of occult knowledge gives us the clue to the mystery. When the first step to be taken towards acquiring the power to transmute lead into gold, was to transmute one's human into a semi-divine nature, it was obvious that the mere avaricious gold-seeker would be unable to take it,—unable probably to understand the idea, or to look upon such an explanation as other than a device for baulking his curiosity. A comprehension,

in short, of the elementary principles of occult science at once illuminates all the otherwise insoluble riddles of the alchemical problem.

But why was the dangerous system of symbology, which concerned itself with gold and silver, adopted by the alchemists at all, if they were really spiritual philosophers? Was not this directly calculated to stir up the greedy passions of ordinary people and confront them with perils as serious, in another way, as those of the inquisition which they sought to evade? The answer is, that they did not invent but found the system of symbology in use from a period of antiquity long preceding the era of Roman christianity and its persecuting priests. The alchemical version of spiritual philosophy dates back to the period of Hermes Trismegistus, by some authors considered a fabulous personage, by some an adept king of Egypt, who lived nearly 2,000 years before the Christian era. At all events the writings assigned to him are of great antiquity, and constitute the fountain-head of that Hermetic philosophy which in the middle ages becomes almost entirely merged in its alchemical developments, but which in very recent years, since the theosophical movement has been in progress, has presented especial attractions to some enquiring minds as constituting a relatively western stream of occult wisdom. And at all events, until very recent years, the Hermetic mystery summed up occult wisdom for all European enquirers, and its methods, its systems of exposition were the only methods and systems available for them.

Further than this we have always to keep in view the fact that the alchemical symbology must have been especially attractive to many of the mediæval students, because they were aware of its double significance. In the literal sense it referred to the possibility of an occult phenomenon, profoundly interesting, of course, to every student of Nature's obscurer mysteries, all the while that it equally described the sublime spiritual change from the lower human to the higher human or divine nature.

I pass on now to make some quotations from alchemical writings in support of the first position here taken up, that the alchemical philosophers had a transcendental purpose in view. Many of them, indeed, express this so plainly, that it is difficult to understand how their main purpose could have been misconstrued.

In "A New Light of Alchemy," ascribed to Michael Sendivogius, the author in his preface speaks of the many "adulterated books and false receipts" put forward by impostors, and of the "idle and ill-employed fellows who pretend that the soul may be extracted out of gold." Then he goes on:

"Yet let the sons of Hermes know for certain that such a kind of extraction of soul by what vulgar way of alchemy soever is but a meer fancy. On the contrary he which *in a philosophical way* can without any fraud and colourable deceit make it that it shall really tinge the basest metal with the colour of gold. . . I can justly aver hath the gates of Nature open to him for the inquiring into further and higher secrets, and with the blessing of God to obtain them. . . I

would have the courteous reader be here admonished that he understand my writings not so much from the outside of my words as from the possibility of Nature lest afterwards he bewail his time, pains, and costs all spent in vain. Let him consider that this art is for the wise, not for the ignorant, and that the sense or meaning of philosophers is of another nature than to be understood by vapouring letter-learned scoffers. . . For it is the gift of God, and truly it is not to be attained to but by the alone favour of God enlightening the understanding, together with a patient and devout humility, or by an ocular demonstration from some experienced master — wherefore God justly thrusts them far from his secrets that are strangers to him."

From the text of the book I will take one easily interpreted passage in which the alchemical symbology is employed.

"Sulphur"—clearly employed here to symbolise the conscience of Man—"is not the last among the principles because it is a part of the metal"—Man himself—"yea, and the principal part of the philosopher's stone, and many wise men have left in writing divers and very true things of sulphur. Yea, Geber himself in his first book of the highest perfection saith: 'Through the most high God it illuminates every body, because it is light from light and tincture.'"

It should be explained that directly we begin to read the alchemists we discover that they have no invariable and recognised code by which we can always recognise the same idea under the same symbol. The spirit of God manifesting as conscience

in Man is sometimes spoken of as sulphur, sometimes as mercury. The normal unregenerate Man—the subject of the art and the object of the transmutation is sometimes spoken of as lead, sometimes as antimony, or even by other of the baser metals, and with an anxious desire to guard all who were capable of appreciating an esoteric meaning the alchemists constantly warn their readers that "our" mercury and "our" sulphur are not the common mercury and sulphur. Then, again, the subject of the transmutation is sometimes written of as "Saturn," and astrological terms are employed to designate some of the other ideas handled—Sol, Luna, and Venus. Each writer is a law unto himself in such matters.

Sometimes, moreover, without any formal announcement that would be intelligible to the "ignorant" reader, the alchemists drop their symbols altogether, and as though making incidental remarks concerning the nature of the "artist" or seeker after the stone, discuss some of their deepest mysteries in plain language only guarded from the comprehension of the unworthy by not seeming to refer to their subject at all. Thus, in the "New Light of Alchemy," we read:

"Let, therefore, the searcher of this sacred science know that the soul in a man, the lesser world or microcosm substituting the place of its centre, is the king and is placed in the vital spirit in the purest blood. That governs the mind, and the mind the body. . . . Now the soul, by which man differs from other animals, operates in the body, but it hath

a greater operation out of the body. . . . So also God, the Maker of all things, works in this world those things which are necessary for the world, and in these he is included in the world, whence we believe that God is everywhere. But he is excluded from the body of the world by his infinite wisdom, by which he works out of the world and imagines much higher things. . . . The soul imagines, but executes not but in the mind, but God doth effect all things the same moment when he imagines them. . . . God, therefore, is not included in the world, but as the soul in the body. He hath his absolute power separated from the world. So also the soul of any body hath its absolute power separated from the body."

The writer of this passage evidently knew a good deal about the higher psychic phenomena now engaging the attention of the most advanced modern occultists. And his view of creation—of the material world as a manifestation of spirit on the physical plane — is on a level with the most profound theosophical conceptions. It is amusing to contrast such philosophical ideas with the gross caricatures thereof presented to the world as religion by the churches of that day, and to reflect upon the fact that to this day almost all representations of modern culture, except those illuminated by occult teaching would treat the theologian, even of the middle ages, with comparative respect, and the alchemist as a crazy fool, floundering in the silliest superstition. Nothing tends more forcibly than an appreciative study of the alchemists to make us also

appreciate at its true worth the blind conceit that has passed current for intelligence in the latter half of this expiring century.

I will now take an example of more obscure alchemical writing from Thomas Vaughan's "Aula Lucis." Vaughan wrote generally under the name Eugenius Philalethes in the middle of the seventeenth century. Some writers, he says, at the outset have rather buried the truth than drest it. He proposes to observe a mean way, neither too obscure nor too open, but modern readers will probably conceive that he was principally careful not to be too open. Of the philosopher's stone — the divine spirit required to transmute the lower nature of man, he says, "It is a subtile mineral moisture, a water so extremely thin and spiritual, with such a transcendant incredible brightness there is not in all nature any liquor like it, but itself. . . I say they called it a stone to the end that no man might know what it was they called so." Of the "first matter" which he says may be described by contraries without inconvenience—very weak and yet most strong, fire that burns not, water that wets not, and so on—he proceeds to discourse at length, calling it mercury, the laughter of fools and the wonder of the wise. This is here evidently intended to represent the conscience; spiritual aspiration in the incarnate man; the first influence of the Higher Self in the physical consciousness. Then varying the metaphor he calls the subject of which he is discoursing "our sealed fountain." "In the bottom of this well lies an old dragon stretched along and fast asleep. Awake her if you can and make her drink, for by this

means she will recover her youth and be serviceable to you for ever. In a word separate the eagle from the green lyon, then clip her wings and you have performed a miracle. . . The eagle is the water, for it is volatile and flies up in the clouds as an eagle doth; but I speak not of any common water whatsoever. The greene lion is the body or magicall earth with which you must clip the wings of the eagle, that is to say, you must fix her so that shee may fly no more." Most assuredly the constantly wavering and fluctuating allegories of the alchemists do not lend themselves readily to any direct translation into plain language but it is none the less obvious that Vaughan is speaking here of the higher psychic faculties which may be taught to acquire consciousness on some superior spiritual plane of Nature, while still keeping up their relations with the bodily consciousness.

In a very fantastic treatise of the eighteenth century, called "The Hermetical Triumph," the usual warning is given very emphatically in the course of a dialogue between "Gold" and "The Stone." Gold is persistently maintaining the materialistic view of the science, and The Stone is continually reiterating such ideas as these :—

"But when they—the true philosophers—plainly name gold and mercury as the principles of their art, they only make use of these terms thereby to hide the knowledge from the ignorant, and from those who are unworthy, for they very well know that such vulgar wits mind only the names of things, the receipts, and the processes which they find written, without examining whether there be any solid

foundation in what they put into practice. But the wise men consider all things with prudence, examine how consonant and how agreeing one thing is with another, and by these means they penetrate into the foundation of the art."

The extracts given so far I have selected myself from the various books referred to; but similar quotations in greater volume might be taken at second hand from either of two books of more recent date which are directed to an exposition of the true meaning and mystery of the Hermetic or alchemical art. To these books I would now refer all who are desirous of pursuing the subject further, and of obtaining a complete grasp of the principles I have roughly laid down. The first and most important is of great rarity, and has, I believe, been as far as possible withdrawn from circulation by the author, under the impression that its explanation sinned too much against the rule, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine." The full title of this work is "A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery; with a Dissertation on the more celebrated of the Alchemical Philosophers, being an attempt towards the recovery of the ancient experiment of Nature." The treatise was published anonymously in 1850. It contains a very interesting mass of testimony concerning the cases in which some of the true alchemists—those who by their own spiritual growth had first become adepts in the manipulation of the hidden forces of Nature—have actually accomplished the physical experiment of alchemy, so vainly attacked by all those who were not

adepts; and it also goes at great length into the more esoteric view of the subject, furnishing, in connection with a very extensive review of alchemical literature, abundant quotations bearing out the spiritual significance of the whole allegory.

Amongst other extracts it supplies us with a translation of the Tractatus Aureus, or golden treatise of Hermes, concerning the physical secret of the Philosopher's Stone, which it says "has been considered to be one of the most ancient and complete pieces of alchemical writing extant," and "an exposition in epitome of the whole art."

This is not what would be considered in the present day a luminous treatise. As for example, we read:—

"Know, then, that the division that was made upon the water by the ancient philosophers separates it into four substances: one into two and three into one, the third part of which is colour, as it were, a coagulated moisture; but the second and third waters are the weights of the Wise."

Still, however, even in the Tractatus Aureus we come constantly upon the usual warnings that we know how to interpret. Thus:

"Know that this matter I call the stone; but it is also named the feminine of magnesia, or the hen, or the volatile milk, or the incombustible oil, in order that it may be hidden from the inept and the ignorant."

Again:

"Ye sons of Wisdom, burn then the Brazen Body with an exceeding great fire, and it will yield gratefully

what you desire. And see that you make that which is volatile so that it cannot fly, and by means of that which flies not."

Here we have merely another version of Vaughan's Green Lion and Eagle—a veiled reference to the possibilities connected with the cultivation of the higher psychic faculties.

Apparently without having come across the Suggestive Inquiry, an American writer, named Hitchcock, published a little book in 1857—an amplification of a small pamphlet on the same subject, written two years previously, called "Remarks upon Alchemy and the Alchemists." The remainder of a somewhat old-fashioned title-page foreshadows the convictions which the author proceeds to set forth. He describes his book as "Indicating a method of discovering the true nature of Hermetic Philosophy, and showing that the search after the Philosopher's Stone had not for its object the discovery of an agent for the transmutation of metals. Being also an attempt to rescue from undeserved opprobrium the reputation of a class of extraordinary thinkers in past ages." At the outset of the book itself he says the object of his original pamphlet was to throw out an idea with which he had become strongly impressed, that the Philosopher's Stone was a mere symbol, and that the alchemists were not in pursuit of gold but wisdom, carefully and conscientiously leaving the latter word undefined. This pamphlet having been violently and stupidly attacked in the *Westminster Review*, in 1856 the author came forward with a renewed justification of his argument, and this expanded into the

book now before us. "I affirm," he says, "that the whole subject of Alchemy is Man. But each writer for the most part designates him by a word of his own choosing, hence one writes of *antimony*, another of *lead*, another of *zinc*, another of *arsenic*." And he quotes one of the alchemical writers as saying, "The work while yet crude is called our water permanent, our lead, our Saturn, our Jupiter; when better decocted, then it is argent, then magnesia and white sulphur; when it is red it is called auri-pigment coral, gold, ferment, or stone, a lucid water of celestial colour."

Mr. Hitchcock's pursuit of these intricate metaphors through the mazy wanderings of the two hundred separate alchemical books which he tells us he has accumulated, is very interesting and instructive. And I cannot understand how any reader of any reflective intelligence can follow him to the end and fail to be convinced that he is on the right track of interpretation. Mr. Hitchcock has not been occultist enough to divine all that resides in the alchemical philosophy, but although the Theosophist of the present generation, if he has taken advantage of all the opportunities held out to him, is in a position to see much more in alchemy than even Mr. Hitchcock saw, the admirable book he has produced will at least serve to open up the subject for those who may be sufficiently interested by what has been said here to feel inclined to venture further into an area of research which, to express myself in a paradoxical phrase congenial with the spirit of the authors I have been quoting, is at once forbidding and seductive. Alchemy, Mr. Hitchcock concedes, may have passed away, as his opponent had

been arguing, never to return. "This may be so; but the questions about which the alchemists employed themselves have not passed away, and never shall pass away while man wanders upon the surface of the earth. They are the most interesting questions which the heart can propose, and although they begin in man, the answer must compass both the microcosm and the macrocosm."

CHAPTER XIV.

INITIATION IN THE PRESENT DAY.

IT will be obvious on reflection, if we correctly interpret the meaning of ancient Egyptian initiation, and graft that in a reasonable manner upon the general view of natural evolution which the esoteric teaching gives us, that the opportunities of ancient initiation must be with us still. Still with us in a certain sense, moreover, are those of our predecessors who, at an earlier stage of the world's progress, passed beyond the action of the laws governing the periodic incarnations of ordinary humanity. They will have attained a higher condition of being in which life for one thing is very much more persistent, and their power of functioning on the higher planes of Nature even more persistent than that. But they are none the less within our reach at this day, certainly not amongst the crowds of busy modern cities, but in secluded retreats where the physical instruments they now employ to keep up their relations with this phase of being are beyond the reach of that magnetic pestilence which emanates from the more densely peopled portions of the earth, and would render them incapable of exercising the higher spiritual functions to which their progress in Nature has now appointed them. Of course, such beings are under conditions of existence

so widely unlike those of ordinary humanity that it would almost be true to say they are great spirits maintaining a physical body on earth for use in occasional emergencies, than physical men who have peculiar power of rising into spiritual conditions of nature; and of course in the long interval that has elapsed since the ancient initiations of the Egyptian period many new recruits, besides those who entered on the path in that remote period, have joined the stream of the higher evolution. Nor have the opportunities of initiation been extinguished merely because after their last public flicker in Greece the world at large has lost sight of them. Gradually, no doubt, their character has changed in some important respects in accordance with the cyclic necessities of the time which left the race to concern itself chiefly with the advancement of physical knowledge, even at the expense, for the generations so engaged, of a temporary forgetfulness concerning higher things. But there has never been a time in the world's history during which the channels of initiation have been altogether blocked, and for those whose spiritual ardour has itself, in the first instance, developed as a karmic consequence in successive lives, those higher faculties of vision and consciousness which are now spoken of as psychic, there has always been a possibility of access to the higher knowledge along the lines of those very faculties. It has ceased to be necessary that, in order to enter the path of occult progress, a man should present himself at some specific temple and become the acolyte of a Hierophant visible to all his fellows. There has been

for him an inner temple to which his own psychic faculties, on the hypothesis we are dealing with, have given him access. And in this way the body of initiated adepts has constantly been reinforced, although probably there has never been a time in the history of the present race at which this mere numerical strength would have been less than it is now. The cycle of great activity in the department of physical knowledge, the scientific era *par excellence*—assigning the word "science" to the limited meaning it has latterly enjoyed with ourselves—is necessarily a period of relative spiritual stagnation. The two phases of progress are by no means antagonistic to one another in reality; the highest scientific attainments may be, and in the end, before they reach their perfect efflorescence, must be united with great spiritual development also; but taken as a whole the forces of natural evolution press with greater intensity at one time than at another in the direction of physical knowledge, just as at other periods this impulse may be in abeyance and spiritual aspiration be a more powerful incentive.

Now finally we reach the all-important fact that at the present moment as much as ever, although less than ever now by old world methods, the possibilities of attaining higher spiritual perfection in the sense in which we have been employing the phrase, chiefly as connoting knowledge, power, and voluntary advancement, is open to all those who have the necessary qualifications, and the all-important intensity of desire. Initiation in the higher mysteries which have to do with that region of natural law in reference to which

all the little manifestations of abnormal wonder which attract attention at the present day in the departments of mesmerism, clairvoyance, thought-transference, and spiritualism, are but as the spray from a wave—those regions are still accessible to modern aspirants who strive to attain them in the right way.

In one sense I may say that they are more attainable than ever, because it has come to pass that the great authorities who direct the conditions of all such progress are fully alive to the necessity of making the whole situation more intelligible to the masses of mankind than they have been for the last dozen clouded centuries. A very great advance has been made without being so far in the least degree understood in this aspect by ordinary physical science in the direction of what may be called psychic mystery. Left to itself without any healthy guidance or encouragement, that progress may be quite likely to turn into channels in which it would be eminently injurious to the permanent welfare of the race. As I have indicated more than once, true occult progress is a dual achievement involving at the same time a development of a very exalted morality *parri passu* with the acquisition of a correspondingly penetrating knowledge. Nothing less than the two achievements would accomplish the evolution of the human being as we know him now into that higher kingdom of Nature, which, as compared with the human kingdom, may be spoken of as divine, and nothing short of such evolution brings with it a really complete development of the power and capacities for knowledge latent in mankind. But something very short of that may invest humanity

with powers transcending those familiar to the physical senses. Just as the rain of heaven falls on the just and the unjust, so in a certain sense and in a certain degree, knowledge is obtainable by the evil-minded as well as by the good; and very disastrous results both to themselves and to others are bound to ensue from its acquisition by people who are not adequately alive to the loftiness of the responsibilities which its possession entails. In this way, to put the matter roughly, the mere pursuit of knowledge along the paths of purely physical study may, by the time it is carried some distance beyond that as yet reached by the physical science of the nineteenth century, superinduce the condition of things in which the possessors of such knowledge would be what the mediæval world called Black Magicians. The name we give does not matter, but at all events the fact is that knowledge concerning the deeper mysteries of nature which have to do with spiritual and psychic forces may theoretically be attained by persons altogether without the exalted motives which govern those who attain it by what occultists call the right-hand path, and therefore a time comes in the progress of science when from all points of view the old policy of extreme reserve in regard to the mysteries with which initiation is concerned, becomes impossible of further maintenance. That is the state of things now coming on. For a long time it seemed best for the human race that during ages of very imperfect human development the tremendous forces which occult knowledge places within the reach of man should be kept back from him altogether. Now his advancing intelligence has

enabled him to grasp some conception of what those forces are, even without the help of initiated teaching. It becomes the policy, therefore, of those who represent this teaching in the present age of the world to anticipate, if possible, this unhealthy development of psychic discovery, and guide it beforehand into channels prepared for its reception by the theoretical development of spiritual science, in such a way as shall enable the races at large to comprehend the lofty purposes for which Nature holds this superior wisdom in reserve. To acquire knowledge concerning the forces operative on the higher planes of Nature, and then to apply this knowledge to the pursuit of merely selfish and transitory objects of mundane desire, is to degrade and insult the highest attributes of our humanity. The legitimate and progressive method in which that humanity can be expanded involves the subordination of the physical life and its conditions to the service of higher spiritual objects. If the forces and powers having to do with higher spiritual phases of existence are, by reversing the natural current, directed to the service of ends having to do with the gratifications of temporary physical life, that reversal of Nature's design constitutes a blasphemy against her highest intentions, which is not only evil and wrong, as minor sins altogether lying on the physical plane may be, but is in reality that supreme species of wickedness which early theological writers, little foreseeing the extent to which their words would be misunderstood, have called a sin against the Holy Ghost.

We may thus realise now the circumstances under which the methods and system of initiation, that

have for so many centuries been concealed from popular observation, are now once more slowly and by degrees becoming known to a generation which, at the first blush, may seem to be curiously little ready for such teaching. Curiously little ready for a long time to come most certainly the majority of this and many succeeding generations will continue to be; but, at the same time, it has never been the expectation of those directing the course of initiation, whether in the ancient world or now, that people of the ordinary type will flock to them and become candidates for their guidance in any very large numbers. If those in whom the spirit of ardent enthusiasm for spiritual knowledge and experience is already strong enough to bear down their eagerness for the pleasures or pursuits of ordinary life, are alone their regular pupils, that is all that can be expected or desired; but unless the possibilities of the situation are generally known, even the few who are inspired in the way just described will waste their ardour and readiness for self-sacrifice in empty dreaming or futile endeavour, and the great purpose of Nature will not be advanced at all. That great purpose, let us always remember, as earlier chapters of this book have already shown, has to do not merely with the perpetuation of the human race, but with its exaltation into the higher conditions of being. From one point of view the innumerable differentiated units of consciousness which we call men and women are cast by nature in enormous abundance on the surface of the earth, as so much seed from which spiritual beings of an immeasurably more important and dignified

character may ultimately be grown. But while in dealing with its lower organic manifestations Nature is extraordinarily profuse in providing germs, the human germ is one of a very different order from an acorn. The unused acorn may resolve itself into its original elements without suffering by reason of not becoming an oak. Nothing is wasted in this case but, so to speak, the trouble of Nature in producing the acorn. But in the human being, however truly that human being may be regarded in his or her highest aspect as the germ of something immeasurably higher, there is, nevertheless, already the focus of divine consciousness which must continue through an immeasurable futurity a vibrating nucleus of suffering or enjoyment, and whether it unites itself consciously with the highest design of Nature so as to work that out, or not, its destinies differ very widely in character from those of the vegetable seed which disintegrates and is done with if its loftiest purpose remains unfulfilled. It has been already shown that the fulfilment by any given human being of the loftiest purposes of his existence can only be accomplished by the conscious union of his will and intention with the powers and forces of Nature operating through him, and it is thus the simple truth of the matter, that having attained that rank in existence identified with the present stage of the earth's progress, his further advancement in the whole scheme of existence, which embraces so much more than what is sometimes called the scheme of creation, depends on his acquisition of correct knowledge concerning the nature of the efforts he has to make to bring his will into the harmony

spoken of; in other words, it depends on his attainment, sooner or later, of that initiation with which we are now concerned. This view of the matter, as apparently placing the destinies of man in the hands of other men, however far these other men may be advanced in knowledge and spiritual power, may seem at the first glance repugnant to the understanding of people who have been trained but too constantly in the belief that the wisest course to pursue concerning the future life is to regulate conduct in this with a reasonable regard to right and wrong, and for the rest, trust blindly in the gracious mercy of God. If the explanation just given, however, be analysed with reasonable intelligence, it will be seen to offend in no way against such trust, but on the contrary to bring the conclusions of experience in every department of life of which we have any knowledge to bear upon the great problem, as it is necessarily brought to bear on all of minor degree. No man who wants a crab apple tree to produce good fruit, sits down in apathetic contentment, with a pious platitude concerning the goodness of that power which rules the processes of vegetation as undeniably as those of human evolution. He knows that the powers of nature will work with him if he adapts his measures to their design. He learns all that he can learn of that design and of its requirements from other men who have studied the subject before him, and then applies his knowledge to the case with which he himself has to deal. Having thus united his will with the laws of vegetable growth, he acquires his improved fruit.

It seems to me there must be little difficulty in dispelling any distrust of the kind here referred to by the time the situation is appreciated with moderate precision. Clear thinkers will recognise that the existence within touch of the world of human beings immensely more advanced than their contemporaries along the paths of spiritual evolution is a metaphysical necessity of all thinking on the subject. A much graver difficulty and more serious embarrassment in the way of those who may get so far in the direction of realizing the possibilities before them, has to do with the question how any given aspirant may succeed in putting himself into touch with those more advanced contemporaries, those higher teachers or masters of esoteric wisdom. And I now approach the answer to that difficulty, although it is one which, from the nature of the case, cannot be given in half a dozen words. There certainly is not now, nor has there been at any other time any recognised official bureau at which people, however honestly desirous of efficient spiritual guidance, can obtain specific information; and though there is much talk in all mediæval occult writing of doors, in the symbolical sense, which are always opened to those who knock, such phrases are extremely exasperating to Western thinkers who have got out of touch with those highly symbolical methods of expression, and who, though sometimes but too content with being left in ignorance, will claim that if they are to be told anything of what they may want to know they shall be told it in a straightforward, comprehensible way. The fact is that access to the masters

of initiation is only to be attained in the first instance through the exercise of those higher faculties in man which it is the province of initiation to cultivate and expand. This will seem like reasoning in a circle. The candidate for spiritual knowledge will complain that it is just this he requires, in order that he may evoke from their mysterious recesses in his own nature the higher senses which constitute the channels of psychic perception, and that if he is told that he must employ those senses in order to get at the teachers, he is merely being mocked by a paradox, and left where he started. The elucidation of the paradox, however, merely claims that we should bear in mind that doctrine, already fully described in these pages, which describes the method which Nature employs in carrying on the evolution of the human soul. We must not forget that re-incarnation is the lot of every human being, and we must apply that principle to every thought, and above all to every mystery which has to do with the study of spiritual progress. And here it is necessary to interpolate a caveat even before completing the explanation in view for the moment, which is to this effect, that here and there peculiar influences arising from the karma of past lives may bring people within reach of the higher spiritual teachers, or rather which may enable them themselves to comprehend the fact that they are within the reach of such teaching without either extraordinary efforts on their part, or without the advantage of psychic gifts already developed. But let me first deal with the operation of what may be regarded as the normal rule before handling such exceptions with regard to

their details. And the normal rule certainly must be that the very first step in the direction of the higher initiation undertaken in that life, whichever it may be, of the long chain in which the person concerned first comprehends the matter intellectually, and sets himself to desire and earnestly to aim at the attainment of the higher spiritual wisdom, will have to deal with intellectual study and thought directed to the problem in hand. The would-be candidate for psychic evolution of the kind which may anticipate that higher evolution which alone can truly be called spiritual, must set himself to understand and appreciate the nature of the task on which he will be engaged, and the attributes, so far as these can be ascertained by any testimony open to him, of those who control the resources and opportunities of initiation.

In stating the case this way I may possibly seem to be diverging from the doctrines which have often been enforced with great enthusiasm in recent theosophic writing, and which would rather emphasise the importance of unselfishness, philanthropy, altruism, and moral purity as so much more important in their preparatory effect than any efforts of intellectual study, that it is hardly worth while to enjoin any other processes of effort on candidates for future initiation. In saying, however, that the matter must in the first instance be intellectually studied, I am including and not ignoring the preparatory effect of moral qualities. To understand that these constitute an essential factor in the conditions of interior feeling which lead up towards the realities of initiation, is an essential part of that understanding of the whole problem to which I refer.

But we must not let our enthusiasm for moral beauty and goodness in the abstract obscure our perception of the great truth that in the normal operation of all the laws which govern spiritual evolution the ultimate effect of goodness, as worked out in successive lives, be it understood, is happiness and not necessarily spiritual progress. The anterior causes of spiritual progress must be goodness united with a comprehension of the great design governing spiritual evolution, and of the purposes which Nature has in view as in the cultivation of humanity. Again I say, therefore, that the first step for any candidate setting out absolutely from the beginning in the direction of that initiation which alone of all the methods of training his soul can encounter in this life or others can put it in the way of mounting in the scheme of existence—must be study and intellectual effort up to the limits, whatever they may be, to which his intellectual capacity may at that period have been developed. And if on the basis of a fair general comprehension of the principles guiding spiritual evolution he unites a really ardent desire to come into contact with their realities, to brave their ordeals, and penetrate their mysteries, that condition of mind during any one given life will, with infallible certainty, engender as its karmic consequence in the next those psychic attributes which will enable him, if his desire persists and his efforts continue, to come into conscious relations with the higher teachers.

I do not know of any treatise on this subject, either in the literature of mediæval occultism, modern psychology, or Theosophy itself, which has dealt

adequately with the circumstances under which those mysterious and sometimes beautiful, sometimes rather terrible and painful developments of psychic faculty, which the experience of life exhibits, are actually developed. We all talk habitually of such faculties as psychic gifts, roughly adopting the phraseology of a very unenlightened theory concerning the attributes of man. The use of the phrase "gifts," whether applied to the faculties in question or to talents of any kind, seems to connote a reverential and grateful attitude of mind towards the unknown omnipotence from which our existence has been derived; but to a more enlightened observation it must really be regarded as involving a slur on that omnipotence, or at all events a reproach against that absolute justice with which the idea of omniscience should be united, if we assume that either class of faculties is given capriciously without having been earned fairly and honestly. One of the most illuminating conceptions connected with the study of spiritual evolution shows us, on the contrary, that mental powers and psychic gifts, together with all those talents which have to do with supremacy in art or in other departments of human activity, are in all cases the consequence of definite effort, definite action or in the brief and more technical phrase, of the Karma, engendered in former lives. Students of physical science talk with rapture of the beauty involved in the great law which exhibits to us the conservation of energy as operative throughout the various realms of force within the purview of our physical senses. They are strangely oblivious to the still higher beauty

of that same law in its association with the higher forces having to do with the cause and effect of spiritual action. So important is it to recognise the old familiar law in its bearing on such higher planes of existence, that one might almost adopt as a brief definition or motto associated with the study of Theosophy,—the conservation of energy on the moral plane. Whatever a man is at any given moment, intellectually, artistically, or in reference to his perceptions as to right and wrong, he is exactly what he has made himself in former lives, working, of course, at each stage with the advantages or disadvantages of surrounding opportunities which are themselves merely the physical and external consequences of still earlier action on his part,—themselves, that is to say, the karma of his still more remote existences. The always operative condition of his own free will enables him at every step of his progress to mould those conditions into a new shape for his own service at later stages of his long career through the ages; and as regards the faculties with which he will find himself endowed at later stages of his existence, these are, in the simplest and most direct fashion, the consequences of his own anterior efforts and aspirations. Illustrations have been already employed, in examining the doctrine of re-incarnation as a branch of this subject, which have to do with the growth, for example, of great musical or linguistic acquirements. The capacities of the interior Ego, stimulated by the exertions along any one particular line of evolution during one life, reappear with the return of the same individuality to re-incarnation next

time, and if continuously exerted expand and develop in almost unlimited degree. The child who is a musical genius at six is the karmic offspring of some great musician in a former age, or rather constitutes in his own person the re-incarnation of that great musician. The student of languages in a former age may have forgotten, when he returns to life, the specific vocabularies and grammatical rules with which he was once acquainted, but he has filled his nature with such ready affinity for knowledge of that kind that the application in his case of a scarcely perceptible effort enables him to accomplish more than another would succeed in gaining by the protracted labour of years. So with scientific aptitudes, so also with literary appreciation, so also with the evolution of psychic faculties. Let a man in one life be filled with a persistent longing to penetrate the mysteries of the psychic plane, with the sympathetic watchfulness of faculties enabling others to do this already, with the fruits of study relating to the whole subject as far as such study has been possible for him, and the result will blossom out as a karmic consequence in the shape of psychic faculties within his own control on his next appearance on this plane of existence—always supposing that no independent karmic causes are set up in an antagonistic direction. And this simple law, so obvious in view of what we know at present concerning the principles of karma and spiritual evolution, will be seen on reflection to cover the whole ground of the inquiry into all those diverse and incoherent varieties of psychic faculty which meet our observation. Sometimes these take the shape of

a beautiful spiritual clairvoyance, bringing their happy possessors into direct relations with superior planes of being and the inhabitants thereof. Sometimes they simply render some eyes perceptive of astral phenomena, belonging in no way to any exalted plane of Nature, but yet shut out from the observation of the perfectly commonplace physical sight. Sometimes they are united with great loftiness of character and nobility of aim ; sometimes they are associated with a grovelling and sordid nature, and again, in other cases—happily rarer than these last—they are associated with positive malevolence and tendencies of an altogether evil kind. But the faculties themselves have in all cases equally been the product of a desire to possess such faculties, and of efforts in that direction. The character with which they may be united is nothing more than on its plane the logical outcome of the efforts and tendencies having to do with the cultivation of character distinguishing the person in question during former lives. So surely as a bullet fired from a gun progresses through the air, so surely is desire or effort no abortive force. The effect of the bullet when it strikes its object has to do with the direction in which the gun was pointed, which is quite another matter. These reflections, if people will only follow them out fully, will be found to account for all the complex manifestations of what is called "mediumship" in connection with modern spiritualism. Whether the peculiarities of psychic constitution which such mediumship represents are held to be beautiful or pernicious gifts, they are effects which could not have been produced without a cause, and we have seen that whatever effects are

discernible in character or mental or moral qualifications are effects the causes of which are to be sought for in the efforts made by their possessors at an earlier stage of their career.

The conditions however of what may be called irregular psychic progress are sufficiently intimate and interesting to be studied by themselves independently of the general line of inquiry with which we are now consumed,—the conditions under which an approach is to be made in the present day to the portals of initiation.

To understand these rightly it will be well at this stage to review the normal course of re-incarnation, so as the better to appreciate the way in which at certain stages of the soul's growth the intervention of Adept help may hasten the process for those who are ready to make some sacrifices in the hope of getting on the faster.

Let us realise, first of all, the exact purpose in the economy of Nature of the usually protracted devachanic experiences intervening between two lives. The growth of the soul is the result to be accomplished and that growth arises from the experiences and activities of responsible life. In the case of those in whom the work is chiefly being done during physical life,—in the case of the ordinary humanity with which we are surrounded,—the doings of physical life may be thought of as accumulating a large mass of ill-digested material out of which that which is qualified to contribute to the growth of the permanent Ego must be distilled and sublimated. The entity plunges into the astral world with all his accumulated

aspirations, desires, habits of life and tendencies of character thickly gathered round him; he is altogether a being of the physical plane of life; the activities of his thought have not qualified him to take advantage, to anything like their full extent, of the opportunities afforded by astral existence, still less to pass into conditions of a more purely spiritual nature. He has, as it were, to grow accustomed to the higher planes of existence, and to expand his consciousness on these so far as the efforts he has been making up to that time in this direction render the achievement possible.

Perhaps this gradual indrawing into the permanent Ego of whatever experiences of life and fruit of endeavour may be susceptible of such indrawing, will be best comprehended if for a moment we look at the whole evolutionary progress from another point of view. The actual centre of consciousness, destined to grow and expand,—the Soul in the noblest and deepest sense of the term,—is of course engendered on a loftier spiritual plane, but at first it is a centre of consciousness wholly uncharacterised by specific attributes. It is an individuality, but an individuality without characteristics. It presses forward and outward, as it were, following the stream of manifestation through the various planes, but finding no resting place until it reaches the bottom of the great descent of spirit into matter, and opens its eyes to the consciousness of objective creation on the physical plane of life. Here for the first time it begins to experience the sensation of life. The whole objective universe lies around it, and its own first conception of things—an illusive plane from the point of view of the higher spiritual con-

sciousness—leads it to commence its long and gradual development by working with an idea which is often spoken of as the fundamental heresy of metaphysics,—the sense of separateness. The awakening soul on the physical plane of life feels itself one thing and the universe another, and however this idea may be destined to qualification at a much later date, it is the first aspect of individuality which necessarily presents itself to the germinating Ego. In the language of the nursery, so applicable in many ways to the lower earth-life as compared with the higher, the first thing the Ego does, in beginning to feel its capacities of reflection, is to "take notice." It takes notice of the physical world around it, of the other creatures therein on its own level, of the opportunities it may enjoy for acquiring sensations,—the pleasurable character of some, the painful character of others.

We may picture the soul to ourselves at this stage as consisting of an all but formless germ on the higher spiritual plane, the Arupa plane of devachan, connected by a fine colourless thread with the lower earth-life, and beginning to throw out roots and expand in contact with that lowest stratum it can touch. Of all the knowledge, experiences, emotions, constituting this expansion on the physical plane, how much is capable of being withdrawn along the thread passing through the various intervening planes of Nature into the spiritual germ above? Very little for the most part, but that little is drawn back by the contraction of the thread, so to speak, after the life is spent, drawn back through the various intervening planes of Nature, slowly enough, by reason of

the fact that the accumulation, however much or little it may be, till it has been cleansed and purified of all which only belongs to and is only capable of existence on the lowest plane. By the time the thread is entirely contracted, by the time the whole astral experience following the life has been worked out, and the minute fragments of thought and feeling capable of being drawn higher up through the spiritual planes into the true Ego—by the time all these processes have been accomplished, the permanent spiritual germ is fed with very little, but with something. It is a little more capable of consciousness on its own region, or rather as it is always theoretically conscious and capable there, it is a little more capable of endowing that consciousness with varigated aspects than it was at first. To that extent, however little that extent may be, the thread, when it again extends itself downwards from the planes of Nature, seeking re-manifestation in the region where the sensations of life are most possible for it, is a little thicker, so to speak, than it was before; it is a somewhat better channel for the withdrawal inward of whatever it may come in contact with in the course of its second batch of experiences. And its previous expression, the first personality, which has itself disintegrated and disappeared long ago during the upward movement of consciousness from the indrawing spirit after the last life, is in a great measure recreated as the root fibre descends through the planes of Nature, by its re-absorption on these various planes of matter appropriate to the expression of such characteristics as it developed before. There is no

recovery, as some imperfectly expressed description of this process may have lead earlier students to imagine, of the actual astral or lower manasic principles which belong to the previous life, but the Ego gathers similar principles around it afresh from the appropriate material of the various planes through which it passes, or through which it sends its root. All similes of this kind must necessarily be inapplicable at some point; but at all events, when the physical plane of life is again reached, the personality is, so to speak, once more built up of materials resembling the materials which its own activities in the former life engendered.

Here, to make the whole process more intelligible, we may study the esoteric teaching which relates to the methods, so to speak, by means of which the returning soul is brought into renewed relations with its old karma. All the causes which it had set in motion in the former life, all the karma which it had engendered, was built—if we may so contemplate the idea (under the guidance of lofty spiritual agencies controlling these great developments of the world's affairs) into an image appropriate to express that personality in another life. This was done at the conclusion of the earth-life, when the karmic causes set in motion were complete, and the astral image awaits the returning personality and the activities of the powers in Nature concerned with the guidance of its re-birth. In the process of re-birth the etheric double is actually created in advance of the physical body; it is the etheric double which is in turn the agency guiding the deposition of physical molecules as the body grows,

and which thus ensures the production of a form which shall accurately express the necessities of the personality, and accurately involve the rewards or penalties which may be due to his past doings. The explanation of this point is difficult because it involves so much that it has not been necessary in this volume to deal with in detail, but a fuller knowledge concerning the place in Nature occupied by the stupendous beings known in occult writings as the Lipika, coupled with an appreciation of the instrumental resources available for their use in the elemental kingdom, renders the aspect of the whole process clear, symmetrical and scientific. The Lipika are sometimes described as the Lords of Karma, and in the minute delicacy with which they govern the destinies of man, they realise, with reference to his merit or desert as he returns to earth, life after life, the popular conception of Providence. Many popular conceptions in this way connected with religion will often be found, as the occult student advances, vindicated rather than refuted all the more accurate knowledge he may be able to acquire—vindicated not as regards their materialistic outlines, but as to the inner significance of the idea. It is in this way then that the entity is launched at re-birth on the physical plane of existence in very much the same condition as regards his attributes, character, desires, tendencies, that he was when he left the earth plane last.

It is said truly that the personalities of each existence are impermanent and transient manifestations of the Ego, vanishing into nothingness with the physical body and the astral material of which they

were composed; but in the way just described each new personality in turn is built so exactly on the lines of its predecessor, that except for the varying external circumstances of its life, determined by karma, it is to all intents and purposes a repetition of the previous personality, not the same but inspired by the same individual centre of consciousness, and in regard to its attributes and characteristics, created afresh from the storehouses of Nature and standing on the plane of earth once more very much the same being as on its last appearance there. These recurrent processes continue, the personality blundering about rather wildly at first, impressed very imperfectly, with the voice of conscience, which is the expression on the physical plane of its own Higher Self, hardly even feeling this voice of conscience at all at the earlier stages of its career, except in regard to such departments of activity as have given rise during former existences to some permanent attribute absorbed into the Higher Self. But as we have been looking at the process we have been looking at it at a very early stage of human advancement. Long before humanity has attained the limits on which our contemporaries for the most part stand, many hundred successive lives have each contributed their little gift to the permanent consciousness of the true Ego, and in this way the area over which its influence is extended in later lives has been expanded to a corresponding degree. The voice of conscience and the inner intuition, which may sometimes be a guide to action, even in matters where no definite problems of right and wrong are concerned, may have become active within the personality which represents the Ego

on the physical plane of life, and in many ways its physical life is thus guided in a manner which contributes more and more abundantly to the development of the Ego,—to the growth of the soul. By this time a much more traversible channel, to use that metaphor, extends from the physical life to the spiritual plane in which the consciousness of the permanent Ego is seated, and through this more and more experience of life can be drawn when the indrawing process recommences. As before, the personality may be born with much which it shed as it moved backward to itself through the higher planes of Nature, but there is more and more of it qualified to exist on the higher planes, and to express on the lower the characteristics of the individual Ego.

In the very beginning, as I endeavoured to describe, the Ego has little or nothing to say to the doings of the permanent personality on this plane of life. A time comes when the two influences, those of the objective world around, and the interior consciousness within, are in equilibrium. A time comes beyond that when the interior consciousness is distinctly predominant, and when the relations of its personality with the external world become in this way coloured by the interests and loftier purposes for which it exists. Then the indrawing of itself after death is a far grander undertaking. Accumulations gathered round the personality in physical life are readily shed on the astral planes, the real entity feels itself to be that which is capable of activity on the spiritual regions of nature. It eagerly returns to these and feels its true existence to be centred there. This

condition of things is the case of the growing soul which has attained that period of its evolution when abnormal possibilities of more rapid growth begin to set in.

What shape does this abnormal possibility take? That is a view of things I have now to endeavour to make intelligible. The Ego, assuming his progress along the steps of the path leading to initiation to have been sufficiently successful to bring him into direct personal relations with one of the more exalted adepts qualified to surround his ulterior progress with new conditions, may be regarded as a candidate for that treatment which is known to the occultist as immediate re-incarnation. Supposing his last life to have been sufficiently dignified and blameless in its character to have left him tolerably free of unhappy responsibilities in his great account with the Lords of Karma, it is possible that the Master, in his case, may be permitted to fulfil, as regards him, for the next great stage of his career, the functions, if the phrase may be permitted, of Providence. The Master has, by the hypothesis, become so entirely blended with the Divine idea ruling the world, as regards his own will, that the union has brought with it powers which are, in their nature, divine. It is possible for the Master to guide the soul of the neophyte into his next incarnation, and it is possible for him to do this without waiting for the neophyte to pass through the usual devachanic interlude. The soul can be arrested on the astral plane, where, of course, it has but little to shed, and turned back at once into renewed manifestation in the physical world, so that it may continue the unbroken

series of efforts in the direction of its own purification which have been the leading characteristics of the life just spent. When it has attained the second life, which may follow at the interval of a few years—conceivably, if circumstances happen to be favourable, of a few weeks after the close of the last—this second life is thus a complete continuation of the last, as regards all phases of interior consciousness, and the person so artificially re-incarnated will, as soon as the new body with which he is associated has grown to be a mature instrument, be able within his waking consciousness to remember every detail of his former life. In the intervening period, before the new body has acquired maturity, he continues to function on the astral plane in complete consciousness in the appropriate vehicle bequeathed to him from his last life. The two existences are blended in a very wonderful way, but there is no solution of continuity in the process. The old astral vehicle is not discarded until the new body has been sufficiently developed to have grown, so to speak, or gathered around it a new astral vehicle, which the entity can then make use of. The occult relationships he will have established remain unbroken. His intercourse with the Masters and with those surrounding him will never have been intermitted, and he will recover touch in the course of the new life on which he may be launched with others on his own level of progress, themselves the subjects, like himself, of abnormal evolution. And thus it may ensue that in a period of time covering by a few centuries, if more than one immediate re-incarnation takes place in connection with his advancement, he may condense

a progress which would otherwise have been protracted over twice as many milleniums. The mere economy of time, indeed, is not a matter of so much importance, from one point of view. If we leave certain considerations out of account, it might be argued that the normal course of evolution would suit the neophyte just as well, and be in many respects more agreeable. He would then enjoy the intensely blissful and refreshing conditions of existence in very full consciousness on the higher spiritual planes; each life as he came back to it would be one in which he would, by virtue of the normal process of evolution, pick up again the tendency to make further progress, with which he was animated at the close of the preceding life.

What then after all—at the first glance an enquirer might ask—does the Neophyte gain by immediate re-incarnation?

The answer is two-fold, intelligible enough in one of its aspects, highly recondite in another. In the intelligible aspect, the main point turns upon the relationship between the neophyte and the Master to whom he is attached. Words derived from the ordinary friendships and relations of life fail to define the ardour of affection with which the pupil, arrived at the condition in which he is able to have personal touch with a Being so exalted in nature as one of the higher Adepts, will come to regard this Being as the supreme influence in his life. One of his most intense aspirations in connection with occult progress at these earlier stages—and before an even loftier feeling, connected with the unification of his own will with that which rules all Nature,

has come into play — will be his aspiration in the direction of freer intercourse, and, so to speak, companionship, with the Master. He wishes with an intense longing for the time when his own advance may enable him to stand at something like the level of Nature on which the guiding light of his destiny resides, and if he were to await for the progress of normal evolution and spend many thousands of years in devachanic felicity, that lapse of time might have operated in regard to the Master, towards whom he aspires, in some way which would have removed him to still loftier functions in Nature, where he would then again be inaccessible to his slowly advancing pupil. Though the foremost motive, however, with which the pupil who understands the whole situation desires immediate re-incarnation, has to do with his easily intelligible love for the Master, a very much more intricate consideration must also be taken into account. The surrender of devachanic existence between the two lives may not be one which presents itself from the point of view of the unenlightened physical intelligence as of such very great significance. While the necessities of progress attach themselves in a large measure to ideas connected with the present life, the person who is imbued with the thought of immediate re-incarnation, with the idea that it would be possible to forego the devachanic period, and so get on faster, will suppose that an eminently desirable thing to do from all possible points of view. He may even speak with contempt, arising from ignorance, of the useless waste of time which would be involved in going through the said

devachanic period. It is easy to be grandly indifferent to privileges which we do not appreciate. The conditions of existence for a fairly awakened soul on devachanic planes are, however, so enriched, sublime, and blissful, that no one who once tastes them can resign them by an act of will without a very vivid sense of the reality involved in such a renunciation. And no disciple will be allowed to choose immediate re-incarnation,—a gift that would never be allotted to him, without his choice constituting one of the features in the arrangement, — unless he is previously put in a position to appreciate with exactitude the nature of the sacrifice he was making. Before the expiration of his previous physical life, he would have been enabled, while out of the body, to pass on to the level of devanchanic existence. He would thus come to know all that it meant, and if he made the choice for immediate re-incarnation, would be making it with his eyes open. So much for the countervailing consideration against the choice, but now let me turn to what I spoke of as the second aspect in favour of it, which cannot be very completely defined, but may still be partially appreciated.

The renunciation of devachan by the neophyte—when made in the only way in which it can be made, with eyes fully open to the true character of the sacrifice—is in the nature of an offering of immediate personal beatitude on the altar of Duty. The disciple is surrendering individual happiness to which he has a claim in order to be the sooner able to take his place among those whose energies are wholly spent in the promotion of the well being of the race at large.

In doing this he is doubly loyal to the Great Cause, for the sacrifice he makes has a complicated reaction in a way that can only be fully understood at the stages of progress when it becomes possible. But at that stage the altruistic desire to accomplish the sacrifice becomes a more potent motive than any which appeal even to the most purified and exalted considerations related entirely to self. At some future date, when the world is more widely peopled with persons qualified to tread the path of occult progress, and appreciate its loftier mysteries, the force of such considerations as these will be more readily apprehended. Meanwhile we all feel in a general way that selfishness is ignoble and altruism beautiful, and that perception is a mere imperfect forecast of a mighty moral law which arms the disciple, by virtue of every sacrifice he is enabled, as he advances, to make, with an ever increasing power to fulfil the ever expanding tasks of unselfish usefulness as they devolve upon him in constantly augmenting volume.

For the more from any individual centre of consciousness a good influence is radiated, the more abundantly does this well up in the interior of such an individuality. Such phrases can hardly be recast into more specific and exact language. We are trying to handle in thought a condition of things analogous to the bewildering mathematical enigma described as a fourth dimension. How can a perpetual well-spring, ever flowing with new material, emerge, as it were, from an interior centre in any given individuality? And yet to the astral sight of persons who are enabled to dive more

deeply than the most powerful microscope will carry us, into minute nature, and to discern the constitution of the atoms of physical matter, it is directly perceptible that each of these atoms—itself a complicated organism, constructed of matter belonging to a higher plane—is continually bubbling up with forces which emerge from an interior centre unconnected, as far as such observation goes, with anything external to itself. Each atom is within its own enclosing surface a well-spring of energy which never fails. Comparison with the atom does not explain the mystery connected with that spiritual fountain of ever-flowing force within the individuality, which must be ever giving out from itself in order that its flow may proceed unchecked, but at the same time the analogy is a little helpful towards the comprehension of the idea.

There are some qualifications, moreover, which have to be recognised as mitigating for the disciple the severity of the sacrifice he makes in foregoing devachanic existence. Immediate re-incarnation will link his consciousness, not merely with the life which he last spent, but with the intervening conditions of existence, spent in the partial companionship of his Master and of other advanced companions, and, further than this, puts him in a position to exercise consciously on the physical plane of life when he returns to incarnation the senses belonging to the higher regions, so that his nature will have been unified all the way up to the devachanic region, which it is not his privilege to inhabit continuously, but which is nevertheless accessible to him whenever the

circumstances of physical life enable him to quit the body for a time. All the links which connect the different planes have been fully developed. For the person so immediately re-incarnated, as indeed for some others who attain in a different way the corresponding pitch of development, the act of quitting the body is as easy and simple as that of putting off your hat. Consciousness is in no way broken by the process, either as the true entity leaves or as he returns to his body. For that matter, most human beings leave the body, without knowing it, when they are asleep, and their emergence therefrom can be seen by observers who are sufficiently clairvoyant, but the outward passage is so confusedly accomplished that it is separated from whatever experiences are incurred out of the body by a non-conducting interval of unconsciousness, and in the same way the return to the body is again broken by the non-conducting interval, so that the activities of the brain are enabled to reflect in only a very imperfect degree the experiences which such persons may encounter out of the body. And the probabilities are their experiences in such conditions are of very little moment. They may not be sufficiently developed to have any real activity of consciousness even on the astral plane, not to speak of those above. But the non-conducting interval has been suppressed in the case of the occult pupil. He has arrived at the stage at which he may be entitled to the help of a Master, which is given him in this way. The whole life to which immediate re-incarnation is a prelude, is qualified by full consciousness concerning

the other planes of Nature, and by ability to reach the Master, whoever He may be. For, remember, while the most important work of any great adept is performed on lofty spiritual planes of Nature, it is a necessity connected with his work that he should keep in touch with humanity by virtue of occupying a part of his time, at all events, in the physical body, so that the master must also have a physical existence, however secluded it may be, or however remote the country in which it is to be found. To this the pupil in his astral body has ready access, he may be there at any time that the master can receive him a second after he has put his body to sleep and quitted it. He is there for all purposes of consciousness, of thought, of study, of activity, of objectivity to others equally qualified with himself, as though he were there in the physical body itself, so that the life he leads as soon as the physical instrument is mature in his immediate re-incarnation is one which is glorified in a hundred ways, which only those who are saturated with occult teaching can be in a position even dimly to appreciate.

The curious stage, indeed, has now been reached in which the activities of the physical life of the disciple, though still full of importance, and of more significance than could have attached to those of any former existences, are nevertheless dropping back to a subordinate place as compared with spiritual activities. These he is now in a position to carry on on higher planes of Nature independently of the physical body and physical existence altogether. The physical consciousness, in the case I am imagining, will reflect

his progress; he will know while he is awake all that he has been doing on loftier regions; he will be realising, so far as that is possible, within the physical brain, an infinitude of new states of consciousness on the devachanic plane and others to which he has now free access. Free access in spite of that renunciation of which I speak, because once re-established on the physical plane of life he can pass into the devachanic state of consciousness and pass out of it again in obedience to the call of duty elsewhere.

Now let us turn to a consideration of the first steps which have to be taken practically by the occult student seeking for the first time to emerge from the normal evolution of ordinary humanity, and put himself in touch with these glorious possibilities.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PROBATIONARY PATH.

AT the first blush of the matter students of modern occult literature, assuming them to have grasped and accepted its broad and grand ideas, are sometimes impressed with the belief that the next thing to do is to get introduced somehow to an occult fraternity and be initiated in some inaugural mysteries, or be confronted with some imposing ordeals at once. The door is open to all who knock—according to the familiar aphorism. The Kingdom of Heaven must be taken by storm, as the thought is expressed in another symbolical phrase, which people in want of intelligible guidance sometimes find to be very irritating. Where is the portal to be knocked at? Where is the breach to be stormed? The true answer may legitimately be distilled from all that has gone before, but the time has now come for putting it in plain and straightforward language, though in truth no such explanation can be comprehended until students thoroughly grasp the whole preliminary view of human progress opened up to the mind by theosophical teaching.

It is not possible for an aspirant who contemplates effective progress on the path that leads to the higher initiations to get on more than a few stages on his

way during the life in which he first addresses himself to the great undertaking. This is the foremost reason why it is premature for the candidate to expect to be put, from the very beginning of his effort, in direct personal relations with the masters from whom he wishes to obtain guidance. The task before him, in the first instance, is the development of his own character along the lines that lead in the direction of the remote perfection aimed at. Eager beginners may find the prospect discouraging, but there is no short cut to the acquisition of the interior characteristics which constitute the only recognised claim to participation in the wisdom and power of the adepts of the White Law. A fundamental mistake is made by anyone who imagines that the all-important qualifications have to do with the cultivation of psychic faculties. The custodians of the knowledge of which the occult student is in search, are engaged in the magnificent task of stimulating and promoting the *spiritual* growth of humanity, not its mere capacity to handle the finer forces of Nature without regard to the ultimate purpose to which they are to be applied. The disciples they are in search of are such persons as may be qualified not merely to exercise power on the superior planes of Nature, but to join in the great unselfish work of raising humanity to a loftier level of thought and feeling than that on which the majority of mankind still move. Eagerness to penetrate the fascinating mysteries of the super-physical world, however well fortified by courage and strength, is no adequate qualification for the true occult initiation. The attributes which must belong to the accepted

pupil, not to speak of the person fit to be presented by his own master to the occult hierarchy, and thus to be received into the community of those who have definitely entered on the path, must be such as promise to render him in process of time a co-worker with those whose duty it is in the scheme of the world's government, to foster and provide for the moral growth of all mankind. The impatience that would set a neophyte in antagonism with—as he might imagine it—this too exclusive programme would have no effect whatever in helping him to get on faster. Some of the powers and faculties, the charm of which may have inflamed his imagination, may have been acquired by some persons in whose possession he may see them, by irregular methods ill-calculated to promote real ulterior growth, but they will only be conferred by hierophants of the great White Brotherhood in the wake of those moral attributes on the part of a candidate which can alone afford those who are already masters in the school of supreme benevolence no less than in that of wisdom, the assurance that he will not misuse the power and enlarged senses of perception, of which he is in search.

Where would be the motive for endowing the public at large with information enabling anyone who desires to do so, with whatever motive, to enter into personal relations with the higher Masters? The fact that there is a path which the spiritual student may tread is made abundantly obvious for everyone who has common intelligence to apply to the matter by the recent revival of occult literature. The teaching, which in the course of that revival has been explicitly

communicated to the world at large by Adept Masters —for the first time in coherent, intelligible language— will show new candidates for occult progress the principles on which such progress is alone possible. If they do the preliminary work of self-preparation Karma must infallibly, in their next lives at furthest, give them an opportunity of taking the next steps under the direct help of the Master to whom, in the very act of that self-preparation, they will have made an unconscious appeal. He may not have been cognisable in the first instance by them, but they will assuredly, by the occult reactions of their endeavour, have made themselves perceptible to him.

And now let us examine more closely into the nature of that self-preparation that would operate in the way described. There is no mystery or secret about the matter. The interior moral change required as a qualification for actual initiation, whether eastern or western neophytes are in question, is analysed as it were by accepted custom into its component attributes, and the acquisition of these, constitute so many stages in what may be called probationary pupilage. On a hardly accurate principle they have been described by some writers as though they constituted early stages of initiation, and they are thus sometimes reckoned in with the true stages of initiation leading up to adeptship. But though the attainment of these attributes may invest the aura of an aspirant with some definite characteristics that an adept would recognise, there are inconveniences in treating them as though they were so many examinations passed in a regular order. In the beginning, they may be achieved

in varying degrees of perfection. In fact it is hardly expected that they will all be realised completely while the aspirant is still outside definite degrees of initiation. In the aggregate, if fully realised, they would constitute an ideal character which would at once qualify their possessor for high initiation. That which is alone necessary for the beginner is that he should manifest an honest, healthy tendency in the direction of the various achievements specified, or at all events if some of the qualifications to be described are fairly well defined in his character an imperfect attainment of others will suffice for the immediate object in view. With this comforting assurance in the foreground to guard the aspirant from the discouragement he might feel if he supposed that from the outset occult authorities claimed a complete realisation in his consciousness of principles that seemed at the first glance compatible only with an almost superhuman degree of moral exaltation, we may pass on to a review of the attributes towards which his efforts must be directed.

significance, in its bearing on himself, of the occult teaching which shows us how the imperishable element in our consciousness is that "Higher Self" which grows and develops as it manifests in physical life through successive incarnations. Each descent into incarnation gives rise to the temporary aggregation round the Higher Self of emotions, desires, characteristics of various kinds which make up the personality or physical mask of the immortal soul—the earthly man as known to other earthly men. These do not constitute the permanent or true being—the "real" being, as some writers call it in contradistinction to the "unreal" personality. Correctly apprehended, the distinction is a just one, though there is a flavour of absurdity in applying the term "unreal" to the earthly personality—so very solid and definite a manifestation while it lasts—which is irritating to people who endeavour to use language with nicety. Anyhow it can be seen that the personality is impermanent as an aggregate of characteristics, though of course it is all the while infused with and animated by the permanent Higher Self. If the conception is found embarrassing it may be approached by dwelling first of all on the obvious truth that the physical body

enabled to recover recollections of former lives will give us the assurance that in looking back on these such persons feel that their earlier incarnations were undoubtedly themselves, in spite of the wide differences of bodily condition and environment they may have represented. From the stage of mental growth in which each bodily manifestation of the permanent self is appreciated as a temporary phase of being, no long step has to be made to the realisation of the subtle truth that some conditions of consciousness attached to the personality are transitory and impermanent, as well as the outward shape and appearance of the body. With that conception fairly grasped the student has got a good way on towards the acquisition of the first attribute of the probationary path. To acquire it in sufficient completeness for that step of his progress he need only apply it to the practicalities of life. That is to say, he has *only* (!) to appreciate the real insignificance of those objects of pursuit in life which relate to the impermanent personality as compared with those which tend towards the growth and invigoration of the Higher Self—the real being whose progress, once achieved, is never lost in the course of future evolution. No doubt the complete appreciation of this great truth would make the incarnate man so sublime a philosopher that it seems almost extravagant to claim the attribute from the aspirant just setting out on the path of spiritual progress. But throughout this exposition the reader may bear one important reservation in mind. There will come a time in the course of the disciple's progress when the qualifications under consideration must be realised in his consciousness

with absolute perfection; but in the beginning this is hardly expected as a preliminary preparation for acceptance. That which is required is a sound appreciation of the ideal condition of feeling aimed at, an honest endeavour to realise it as nearly as possible, and a fair approximation to success. Total indifference to the usual objects of worldly ambition and desire seems hardly possible for a person actually living in the world, and as yet unconscious in his waking state of the higher spiritual world beyond. On the other hand, we can see that complete absorption in objects of worldly ambition and desire is on the face of things incompatible with even the first beginnings of aspiration in the direction of occult progress. No one to whom the thirst for ease and luxury, for wealth, or for the applause or consideration of competitors in the worldly race, is the mainspring of activity in this existence, is even planted with his foot on the first rung of the occult ladder, even if a certain intellectual appreciation of esoteric teaching as probably true may colour his thinking in leisure moments. From the very outset of any serious anxiety to ascend in the scale of creation, and approximate towards communion with those who represent its altitudes, there must come about a considerable loosening of the old ties to worldly objects. These may not fade away into entire insignificance, but they begin to be coloured by a sickly aspect of instability, and gradually the interior consciousness that conditions of existence relating to planes of Nature quite divorced from all physical necessities or enjoyments are the only objects worth energetic endeavour, will take hold of the mind. The

change may be worked out by different aspirants with very different degrees of completeness, but it must set in, for the neophyte even, or for him the slow course of unhastened evolution will roll on through the ages, passing him through an all but interminable succession of lives, each at the best but a very little better than its predecessor, many of them involving bitter retrogression, as measured on the scale of worldly welfare, most of them gloomily vindicating the pessimist philosophy, that would indeed be justified by human experience if consciousness on the physical plane of life, with all the penalties of that condition in constant operation, were the only kind to which the human family had excess. While loftier motives are the allurement to occult endeavour, this thought should be its spur. The path may be hard to travel, but in the sufferings it can hardly fail to entail in the long run, the only alternative road—that which carries us through the tedious course of secular evolution—is a good deal more deterrent to the imagination.

And what is the next attribute to be incorporated with the character of the occult student? He is aiming, be it remembered, at communion with those who have achieved a level of individual exaltation, which would enable them, if they thought fit, to enjoy an existence of beatitude which cannot be comprehended by persons on a far inferior level of spiritual development, but is supremely attractive for those by whom it can be approached. In foregoing this and remaining attached by incarnation to the plane of physical life, they are governed by no motive referring in any way to themselves. They are solely prompted

by the desire to do good to others irrespective of any possible advantage ensuing to themselves. In a minor degree, therefore, the aspirant who proposes to follow in their footsteps must cultivate the habit of mind which they exemplify in perfection. He has, that is to say, to aim at spiritual exaltation not for the sake of its beatitude, but for that of its opportunities, in order that he may put himself in a position to join in the work of elevating the condition of humanity *en masse*. As in the case of the characteristics concerned with rendering allegiance to the Higher Self, it would be extravagant to contend that the mere aspirant *must* definitely attain the moral condition in which the efforts he makes in the path of spiritual progress are wholly prompted by desire to benefit others, and completely exempt from even that lofty kind of spiritual ambition that impels him to seek the beatitudes of the spiritual planes of being; but there must be even in his case a recognition of the nobler motive, and an application of it to the immediate problem of existence. He must wean himself from the notion that the attainment of spiritual beatitude for himself is the object of endeavour. In doing right he must not allow the idea that he will ultimately be rewarded, in some way, on another plane of existence for so doing, to take hold of his imagination. Perhaps a good many right thinking people may habitually do right without paying much attention to the idea of any consequent reward. They do the right thing because that is the right thing to do, and in so far as they really act on that principle are perhaps further advanced on the road leading to fitness for definite

initiation than they are actually aware of. But at the same time the ethics of Western civilization, when resting on religious sanctions of any sort, are deeply infused with the expectation of spiritual beatitude in a life to come. Occult teaching concerning the motives that should operate with the enlightened aspirant for advancement in the hierarchy of Nature, combines a loftier ideal with a comprehension of the laws regulating such advancement, as derived from the unity of all consciousness on certain exalted planes of being. The gain of one is in a certain sense the gain of all; the advancing welfare of all in a certain sense necessary to the advancement of the one. The grasp of this idea invests unselfishness itself with the character of a scientific force, while at the same time showing that it can only become a force when the genuine outcome of true human sympathy.

Some reasonably sufficient assimilation of these ideas and the feelings to which they give rise, constitutes the second attribute of the aspirant to initiation. It has sometimes been described as indifference to the fruits of good action, but that is rather a cold and colourless definition. It is rather indifference to personal reward as a fruit of good action, and might be summed up as devotion to right in the abstract. If the attainment of this attribute seems, as it probably will to many European readers, a lesser achievement than indifference to the usual objects of worldly desire, that will only be because of the extent to which so many of us are saturated with the conditional belief that if there is another state of

existence beyond this, devotion to right here will give happiness there. Probably there is an application of this doctrine—taking sufficiently long views of the future—in which it is true, but a future far beyond the space of the existence first tinged by devotion to right, may claim from the occult aspirant continued effort and continued sacrifice. He has to face that possibility with cheerful courage and to feel that it imposes no check upon his enthusiasm, before he can be entitled to consider that in the occult sense of the phrase he has attained devotion to right.

We may pass on now—in our survey of the interior growth which must precede initiation—to the consideration of a group of six qualifications or mental habits which the aspirant is called on to acquire.

The first of these is sometimes described as Regulation of Thought. Sometimes the qualification has been described as purity of thought or mastery over thought. Of course absolute mastery over thought would make a man a magician at once; while, with thought so habitually purified that no impulse of an evil, ignoble or unsaintly order should ever cross the mind even to be hunted out, the personality so exalted would be almost ready for Nirvana on the strength of that condition of things alone. But however unlikely it may be that any mere aspirant to occult progress should realise the qualification entirely, no one can persevere in the effort to make progress if his thinking should remain entirely undisciplined, the sport of any breeze of circumstance that might eddy round him.

The control and regulation of thought is an enormous task on which the energies of the occult student will be bent, in many various ways, for a long time, but he must make a beginning on it from the outset of his self preparation. In doing this he is beginning in a very subtle way that training of the will which is an all-important process as he advances further. Thought is under the control of the will to an extent that exoteric psychology does not always recognise, and there are manifold reasons why the aspirant to initiation must be able to hold his thoughts fairly well in hand before he is in a position to claim admittance to a fellowship in which thought is apt to be as manifest to those around, as the colour of the clothes a man might wear would be manifest to ordinary observation.

And independently of this, regulation of thought in the aspirant is regarded from the occult point of view as the prelude to the second qualification of the series before us—regulation of conduct. Taken thus, the first and second qualifications will perhaps seem to some readers presented in the wrong order. It may look like putting the cart before the horse to postpone the reform of one's action till after the reform of one's thinking on the subject. And as applied to the grosser vices of common life—if *these* were the matters the occultist had to regulate, self-restraint in action would certainly have to be accomplished before any one could talk seriously about regulating thought in such a way as to eliminate from his nature the desires that would have to be self-restrained. But the student who has already rendered allegiance to his higher self

and attained devotion to right, even in a degree that may be far from perfection in either respect, need hardly be thought of as a person under the dominion of the grosser vices. The conduct to be regulated is that which has to do with the finer problems of life and the subtler temptations. *Noblesse oblige.* The conduct of an aspirant to initiations which will bring him into conscious relations with beings so exalted as those on the higher levels of the occult hierarchy, should clearly bear some fair correspondence with the character of his aspirations. Here there is no question of rank weeds to be pulled up, but of influences to be brought to bear on the aspirant's nature of such an order that conduct may not only be negatively but positively in creditable harmony with his ideals. With that idea to explain the arrangement it will seem reasonable enough that regulation of thought is treated as the first, and regulation of conduct us the second of the qualifications.

The third has to do with a change of feeling in regard to religious matters which has very different significance for different people. So many beautiful emotions are often interwoven around religious formulas and creeds, even after these have diverged a good deal from the pure teaching out of which they may have sprung, that the disentanglement of the truth from unfortunate accretions of thought gathered round it, is sometimes in such cases an almost painful process. And yet it must be recognised that the aspirant in search of real knowledge concerning the profound inner verities of spiritual science cannot expect to carry to the end of his undertaking the

whole burden of the crude popular beliefs which make up the exoteric religion, whatever it may be, in which his devotional instincts have first been nurtured. For the tendernesses of thought, so to speak, to which that nurture may have given rise, occult teaching in its turn is profoundly tender. Genuine theosophy is far more interested in tracing the underlying truth through its various disguises in all the great religions of the world, than in dissecting their several errors; and back through the symbology that he has been used to, until he reaches the fundamental truth, each student directed by a teacher who correctly gives effect to the spirit in which the Higher Masters of wisdom deal with religious attachments, would be encouraged to choose his course. But it is plain enough that advanced spiritual culture must eventually enable the initiate in occult knowledge to look on all external forms of religious belief with a grand and tolerant impartiality. That Higher Self to which the neophyte in occultism renders an allegiance belongs of its nature to a realm of consciousness far exalted above ecclesiastical systems, whether of Europe or Asia. The personality even of the occult student shares that exaltation as he advances in no inconsiderable degree. The acquisition of this sublime sort of tolerance, which is something more than the mere converse of persecution, constitutes the third qualification of the series we are considering. It is that attitude of mind in which a man clings to the essence of spiritual truth, and is no longer in the mental fetters of any hard and fast dogma or creed. Of course, there are some among the candidates for occult initiation who have

this qualification in pretty complete development to start with. The most intense agnosticism may be compatible with readiness to accept spiritual teaching which approaches us with adequate guarantees, and in such cases the growth of the mind, which is required at the stage of progress we are dealing with, is one which will rather invest the student with a newly developed respect for external religions, for the sake of the inner truths they embody, than oppose itself to a bigotry which, by the hypothesis, has no hold upon his thinking. But for others the old religious forms, phrases and terminology are not only dear for the sake of the spiritual truth they may endeavour to set forth; they are dear for their own sake, for that of innumerable associations bound up with them, and thus for some persons they may be a stumbling block rather than an aid to progress. No one whose mind is cast in a religious mould can ever have been asked by a truly qualified occult teacher to break away from the religion to which he is naturally attached. But he will purify it for himself as he proceeds, and find himself less and less enslaved to its outer husk, whether of form or doctrine, and the advance he may make in the direction of this manifestly higher view of the subject is the measure of the extent to which he invests himself with the third qualification, which may thus be described as freedom from bigotry—freedom from any exaggerated attachment to any one body of doctrinal belief, whether it has its origin in the East or the West.

The fourth qualification towards which the candidate has to aspire, is that state of mind in which a man feels

no resentment in respect of worldly wrong or ill-usage from which he may suffer. On the face of things, this qualification, in perfection, would be a very sublime attribute, and I need hardly stop to repeat that as regards the occult candidate attempting a preparatory self-culture, so divine a characteristic in entire perfection would hardly be expected. But, on the other hand, nothing can be more fatally incompatible with the aspirations of a person aiming at initiation than a tendency of character which would be the opposite of the qualification in question. For one thing it will be obvious that the guardians of humanity, who are themselves, above all things, the exponents of compassion and unselfishness, can hardly be expected to extend a welcome to pupils who, however well qualified in other respects, might be capable of that worst of all selfishness—revenge. Before the powers that accrue to an initiate from the knowledge to which he is admitted, can safely be placed in his hands, it must be reasonably certain that he is not the kind of person to use them as the weapons of mundane anger. From the beginning he must lean towards the frame of mind in which he will not even *feel* the resentment to which he must, at all events, train himself not to give way. And for that matter, an honest development in the direction of the *first* qualification will go far towards simplifying the acquisition of that under notice. In proportion to the extent to which we really fix our aspirations on the things which concern the Higher Self, and dissociate our longings from the common objects of worldly ambition, we shall be less liable to brood over resentful

feelings against those who may have come in the way of our attainment thereof. I need not expand the hint into a moral essay, but concentrating the thought instead of enlarging it, may suggest as a conveniently concise description of the fourth qualification—Forbearance.

The fifth qualification, like the third, is a characteristic almost instinctive with some natures, extremely difficult of acquisition by others. It has been described as incapability of being turned aside from one's path by temptation. With persons of constitutionally resolved and steadfast temperament, the motives for entering on the occult path, once appreciated, could never lose their weight. Others of more enthusiastic and impulsive character might be turned aside more easily without having been less sincere at the outset. But for all who have made any decided progress in the acquisition of the tendencies already reviewed, it must, to say the least, be growing probable that faithfulness to the lofty purpose in view will be strengthened into something like a constitutional attribute. It must clearly be assumed to have thus established itself as a predominant feature of the candidate's interior nature before the preparatory stage of the great process is over. The one word "Steadfastness" will sufficiently denote the phase of character in question.

And now we come to the last of the qualifications in the probationary series—confidence in the power of the occult Master to teach the truth; in that of the candidate himself to grasp it in all its vast complexity, and to wield the powers knowledge may bring in

its train, as others have been able to do this before him.

The final qualification thus treated as among the preparatory attributes to be acquired by the mere aspirant to initiation, is very significant. How does it come to pass that a "Master" appears suddenly on the scene? Up to this moment all the efforts contemplated are in the nature of self-preparation, and by the whole hypothesis the process is one that the neophyte must undertake for himself, before undertaking which it is not to be expected that he will be in conscious relations with any of the higher teachers. But, as already explained, it is quite certain that at a very early stage of the beginner's loyal effort to accomplish the interior development which must precede his conscious introduction to higher knowledge and fellowship, he will attract the attention of some one among the higher teachers. For a long while he himself may remain entirely unaware of this, but if he fairly well realises the two great inaugural attributes and trains himself with the earlier qualifications, he will make the acquaintance of the Master, to whom he naturally gravitates, before the time comes at which the sixth assumes practical importance for him.

Of course it must always be remembered that nothing in connection with such a work as this is done in a hurry. The earlier attributes will not be acquired even in the degree sufficient for the beginner under the sudden impulse of a new emotion. Such interior changes ensue from long habits of thought by degrees, or even if some natures are so constituted that a

suddenly acquired conviction or enthusiasm may also be held fast, the Master whose attention was engaged would let time elapse, if only for the sake of testing its persistence, before he took any steps that would illuminate the understanding of the pupil concerning his own identity.

Indeed, there would be another motive for delaying that illumination. By the time the habits of thought, the interior growth, manifest to the Master's observation, which were giving rise to the acquisition of the earlier attributes, were fairly developed, a state of things would have set in bringing the aspirant into new and very important relations with the mighty powers in the background of the world's affairs, by whose conscious agency the law of Karma is applied to each individual of the human family. The desire to tread the Path of Holiness which is expressed by progress in initiation, must necessarily include, if it is intelligently entertained, a desire to close once for all the account of evil doing in the past which may stand as an impediment in the way. It is practically an appeal to the Lords of Karma that they may hasten the process by which the aspirant is—slowly in the ordinary course of things—expiating the mistakes or misdoings of past lives. As such an appeal might be made in ignorance of all it might mean, we may assume as probable that it would not be fully answered if the account of the past were so heavy a one that it could hardly be disposed of in one life. But the greater likelihood lies in the opposite direction. The aspirant for spiritual progress may, perhaps, have a good deal to answer for as regards Karma engendered in past lives, but still

he is not likely to be among the most deeply besmirched of his race. So it is probable that some rearrangement of the programme of his life's destiny may enable him to go through at once whatever inevitable suffering awaits him, to the end that in the next following incarnation there may be no impediment in the way of his progress. So this is generally the result of a serious attempt to get upon the path of occult development. In one way or another the aspirant finds it unexpectedly thorny. The trouble he encounters may not necessarily seem a direct consequence of his spiritual efforts. More probably it takes the shape of mundane distress or suffering of some kind or another, loss of fortune, friends, or health, as the case may be. And such misfortunes then become the automatically established ordeals which constitute the real trials of the aspirant's steadfastness. The imperfect accounts of initiation as carried out in more primitive ages of the world that have come down to our time, describe artificial ordeals and temptations put in the neophyte's way, and something of this kind may have actually been arranged for in ancient Egypt, but even there the natural Karmic tests and trials of perseverance must have been the more important, and at all events it is to their by no means tender mercies that the modern aspirant must look forward to being confided. If the irritation and impatience to which they may give rise have the effect of turning aside his thoughts and anxieties from the path of progress on which he has sought to enter, then he will have failed for that life, at all events, in accomplishing the fifth qualification, and his responsibility will not be unduly aggravated by

such disclosures or interior illumination as would bring the sixth into question.

The fourth attribute of the probationary path,—the acquisition of the six qualifications constituting the third according to the classification here and generally adopted,—is recognised as a natural sequence of these. It takes the shape of a clearly defined desire for spiritual existence and union with the highest ideals on that plane of thought which the aspirant can set before his mind. And the fifth attribute is rather a stage of progress than a distinct achievement in itself. It is described as readiness for initiation and comes on as a consequence of the previous acquirements.

Then in the fulness of time the aspirant—no longer to be described by that word alone—is conducted by the Master by whom his earlier progress has been watched over and guided, to a great result. He passes a threshold beyond which he finds himself in a certain sense a member of the great Fraternity of Holiness. It is true that from one point of view he has but then for the first time begun to tread the path of true occult development. Many lives may be spent in the efforts and acquirements which lead to adeptship. From that level the horizons before him, when he ultimately gains perception of them, will widen in a manner which no one can expect to realise with exactitude beforehand; but at all events the aspirant who crosses the boundary of the first great initiation has gained something that can never be lost, whatever may happen to him in the future, whatever difficulties he may encounter as he proceeds. He can

never in the nature of things slip back to be what he was before the all-important change was wrought in his nature first by his own persistent effort, and at last fixed by his acceptance at the hands of the governing hierarchy of the world.

The initiation which thus carries the aspirant once for all across the chasm dividing ordinary humanity from the occult world, is called the " Sohan " initiation. The attainment is not a question of psychic characteristics. It is even theoretically possible (though this is an unusual possibility) that it may be taken on the higher planes of consciousness without the incarnate personality remembering or knowing anything about the matter. But at all events it is altogether a question of moral and ethical development and will not be hastened one day, in the absence of such development, by the possession of psychic senses which may be the karmic fruit of efforts to penetrate the mysteries of nature, undertaken (perhaps in past lives) from motives quite out of harmony with the lofty altruism of the genuine disciple of the Masters. Psychic faculties grown in this unhealthy way are far more likely to entangle their possessor with evil relationships on the occult planes of existence than to help him on the real upward path.

Not even on the attainment of the Sohan initiation does the development of psychic faculties, such as will put the waking incarnate man into possession of those keys of knowledge confided to him at his initiation, become the foremost object of his appointed training. His work as regards his own training—though he will now, when actively functioning in the Higher Self,

have plenty of other work to do under proper direction, the nature of which cannot easily be comprehended from the point of view of ordinary mundane thinking —will still be primarily concerned with the perfection of his moral attributes. For one thing, now he is on the true path of initiation, he will be required to attain with absolute completeness the characteristics which are but imperfectly realised during the probationary period. The result to be attained, indeed, is now approached in a somewhat different way. In the course of his progress through the various stages of initiation leading up to adeptship, the disciple is not spoken of as acquiring such and such attributes, but is called on to cast off various "fetters" which attach him to the lower levels of existence. In some Eastern books these fetters are enumerated in a definite order, but I do not think the purposes of this explanation would be served by an examination of the series. From the point of view of ordinary life their exact significance in the occult world would probably be misapprehended. The claims of the probationary qualifications we can all analyse and appreciate to the full. Higher knowledge must be required to interpret those of the higher path. But it is none the less interesting to survey the stages of this higher path, which are better understood even in the outer world by those who are in any true sense occult students, than many theosophists may be aware of.

Without suspecting what he is unconsciously dealing with, Prof. Max Müller mentions the steps of initiation in one of his translations. In a note to Chapter xii. of his "Dammapada" he writes: ". . . . Arhat

being the highest degree of the four orders of Ariyas, viz., Srotaapanna, Sakadagamin, Anagamin and Arhat." Those are the four actual names of the four initiations culminating in adeptship, the first being a synonym of the "Sohan" stage and meaning, I believe, "one who has entered on the stream."

Long intervals of time may separate the passage from one of these degrees to the next. Provided the Karma of the past is entirely favourable to rapid progress, and has fully prepared the neophyte before his entrance on the Sohan stage, it is possible that he may attain the second stage in the same life as the first, but although it is manifestly impossible to speak with assurance as to the usual course of events in reference to progress at these altitudes, the exoteric Eastern books relating to initiation declare that *seven lives* may not unreasonably be spent after the first great initiation has been taken, in the attainment of the second degree. I suspect this statement to be an exaggeration, but on such questions it is obviously impossible to be precise.

At all events, on attaining the second degree, it then becomes essential that the advancing disciple should begin the acquirement in his physical consciousness of the manifold powers and faculties which belong to the Adept. For this purpose it is almost certain that he would in the life in which he was ripe to take the second initiation, be either incarnated from birth among Adepts, or be guided by destiny to enter into their companionship in physical life. "Fetters," however, have still to be cast off by the "Sakurtagami," as the degree is designated according to a spelling with

which I am more familiar than that employed by Max Müller; and it is not until the third stage is accomplished that the disciple has entered on the life in which he is *expected* to be able to take the great initiation which constitutes him an Arhat.

To guard against a misunderstanding that would be fatal to the proper appreciation of the system I am describing, it is necessary here to remind readers familiar with certain frequently repeated statements in occult literature concerning the duration of the intervals between incarnate lives, that such statements relate to the normal progress of humanity along the majestic course of ordinary evolution. Once "entered on the stream" new conditions come into play, and the physical lives required for the training of the disciple may follow in rapid and unbroken succession. Again, in order that the whole position may be properly apprehended, it is necessary to explain that the course of initiation described so far is that which leads the aspirant directly up into the great "White Lodge," as it is sometimes called—into close and immediate relations with those spiritual beings more exalted in nature than even the full Adepts, who constitute what may be thought of as the governing hierarchy of this planet. There are other paths of occult initiation by which neophytes may be enabled to progress some distance along the avenues of advancement leading to power and knowledge. Concerning some of these the less said the better, except for the consideration that to comprehend good aright it may be necessary to bear in mind the existence of evil. A resolute and sufficiently reckless determination may enable the aspirant to

knowledge concerning, and power over, the occult forces of nature, even to acquire considerable control of them, without fitting himself by moral development to use them for the good of humanity at large. Under the guidance of purely selfish motives, the neophyte who is unfortunate enough to be able to purchase help from corresponding masters may get on to levels of knowledge and power corresponding to some of the stages of progress described above as the four steps on the true path. This paper is not concerned to trace the ultimate spiritual consequences of that sort of progress in what is technically called Black Magic; but the point to remember in this connection is that a good deal of psychic and astral development going on in the world under the guidance of various old schools, or relatively modern societies, of occultism, is not necessarily black magic, though it may lie apart from the path of initiation leading directly upward to the White Lodge. There was a time when the White Lodge itself claimed progress in psychic development from its candidates as the first qualification for entrance on the path. That system prevailed during the Atlantean period. But with the great spiritual impulse imparted to the Fifth Race by its naturally appointed Teacher when his time came, a change was introduced under his direction in the rules of initiation, and the ethical or moral qualifications were taken first, in accordance with the scheme set forth in the earlier part of the present statement. *But*, though the main, pre-eminent lodge of occultism which is welded with the spiritual hierarchy of Nature—the great White Lodge—was then reformed in its procedure, the various

minor groups of occult initiates remained in attachment to the earlier method. Thus it does happen that persons may sometimes be encountered who are distinguished by very considerable acquirements as regards psychic knowledge and power, without being equally remarkable exponents of the exalted moral attributes aimed at by the mere probationary disciple of the White Lodge.

All that need be said about such persons is that until they acquire the moral attributes in question, and cast off the "fetters" which impede the progress of the disciple through the final steps of initiation leading to Arhatship, they will not be able to take the higher degrees, nor to put themselves on a level from which they are no longer in danger of falling away into the paths of Black Magic, with all its ultimate horrors.

The precise nature of the acquirements which lead to actual adeptship cannot, as I have already said, be dealt with on the physical plane of consciousness alone. It would be as reasonable to attempt a treatise on metaphysics in words of one syllable. Splendid as the modern achievements of the human mind in many directions may seem when they are compared with its conditions at ruder periods, they are merely concerned with one aspect of Nature, with one plane of consciousness, and the adept has to concern himself with several. In terms of one plane it is impossible to describe the tasks of another. And this difficulty standing in our way before we even reach in imagination the Arhat level of progress, we are all the more debarred from attempting to

analyse the functions and attributes ultimately exercised and acquired by some of the great adepts who eventually enter into mysterious union with the fundamental laws of the cosmos, and become in a certain sense their expression—their radiant point, so to speak, through which the divine idea thenceforth actually flows. Appreciating nothing more in this connection than the broad principle that there is *no* limit to the upward progress of humanity towards perfection and the infinitudes of wisdom, we may leave the subject at the threshold of mysteries it would be irreverent to handle at this stage of the world's progress in a treatise designed for publication. Of one spiritual rank, higher even than that of the Arhat, it may, however, be possible to speak definitely, because it represents a condition of evolution which, stupendous as its significance may be, is nevertheless the theoretical goal of the whole human race in this Manvantara. All will certainly not attain it, and those who do so in the ordinary course of evolution will only reach it in the course of millions of ages and beyond an immeasurable vista of lives, in reference to which on their own merits the doctrines of pessimistic philosophy would but too generally apply, but for everyone who may read these pages it is theoretically attainable.

The rank in the hierarchy of adeptship above that of the Arhat, which we may now endeavour in some measure to comprehend, is attained by the Arhat, after what periods of effort and delay we need not now attempt to account for, when he casts

off the final "fetter" which impedes him at that stage. The fetter in question is simply "avidya" —ignorance—and the use of the word in such a connection may help to show how easily the terminology of the higher "Path" may be misunderstood. "Ignorance" for most of us has a meaning derived from comparison of certain states of mind with ordinary nineteenth-century culture, taken as the standard of wisdom and knowledge. The "ignorance" of the adept is measured against absolute knowledge of all that concerns the system of evolution and the chain of planets to which he belongs. When he has at last—probably through many protracted incarnations taken by his own will and choice—attained a complete mastery of all the wisdom and knowledge this scheme of evolution can afford, he is ready to pass on. When he is in a position to survey the whole process on which the human family is launched, from its beginning in the remote past to its conclusion in the almost immeasurably distant future; when all the natural laws and forces which play round it lie within his comprehension and grasp, whether they are operative on the physical plane with its wonderful complexity of molecules and forces, or on those other planes invisible to ordinary sight which interpenetrate it or surround it and are more bewildering in their complexity still; when all the myriad enigmas of good and evil, of sin and sorrow, and hope, are resolved into intelligible meaning, and neither the earth below, nor the heavens above, nor life, nor death, hold any riddles from his understanding, the adept is qualified to attain the final

rank in the vast concatenation of progress we have been surveying, and is then known to initiates as "Aseka." It is by virtue of some appreciation, as far as it goes, of the place in Nature which the Aseka adepts occupy, that their pupils, whether in a humble or advanced degree, entertain the assurance they always feel in reference to occult teachings definitely received from such a source.

CHAPTER XVI.

IRREGULAR PSYCHIC PROGRESS.

NATURAL psychic faculties have been for a long time under observation one way or another, in the ordinary world, but this observation has been carried on in such an irregular, spasmodic, unscientific fashion that none of the many writers who have been concerned in the investigation have arrived at any satisfactory conclusion. Very often psychic faculties have been found in persons afflicted with various physical maladies, and lookers-on have jumped to the entirely erroneous conclusion that in their nature such faculties are associated with diseased conditions of the body. The remarkable case of the Seerest of Prevorst, described by Dr. Kerner, may serve as a typical instance. Frederica Hauffe, the Seerest in question, was born in the first year of the present century, at the little village of Prevorst in Wurtemburg. Her wonderful clairvoyance and remarkable visions connected with other planes of nature were associated with conditions of extreme bodily suffering, culminating in early death. The strange and little understood nervous condition, vaguely described as hysteria, is again so frequently found in association with the sensitiveness which renders some people available for mesmeric ex-

periments, that such capacity is again set down by virtue of a too hasty generalisation to some obscure disease of the nervous system, and recent medical enquirers in France, out of whose researches has arisen the commonplace view of what is called hypnotism, have been themselves concerned so generally with experiments in hospitals that they have communicated to the world at large the ever current delusion that psychic faculty is a pathological condition. Again, looking at the subject in another way, commonplace impressions connected with the matter are largely coloured by the estimation in which the world at large holds the ordinary spiritualistic medium. The most entirely ignorant section of the world at large simply regards the medium as an impostor, who practises by conjuring tricks on the credulity of his companions. Those who go a little further into the subject know that however largely imposition is mixed up with the mediumship which is purchaseable, so to speak, in the market, even behind much of this, some abnormal faculty or susceptibility is to be found. Many people have the experience of mediumship in private life under conditions which preclude any suspicions of imposture, and thus afford satisfactory evidence that somehow or other, under some ill-comprehended circumstances, communication is possible between beings on this plane of life and those on others which are intangible and invisible.

Mediumship itself is manifested, wherever it is genuine, under so many different aspects that it seems to defy scientific analysis, and where psychic faculty takes the shape of sensitiveness to mesmeric influence,

that again runs into all manner of different manifestations, clearly showing for experimentalists along this line that the human creature is psychically a far more complicated organism than it is supposed to be from the physical point of view, though we are left without any clue to a comprehension of the reasons why one sensitive will be able to read in a closed book put at the back of his head, while another quite unable to do this, will have visions of other states of existence, or be enabled to cognise events on the physical plane at a distance. Then it seems quite a matter of chance, as regards individual sensitives, whether their faculties come into play in the waking state or only in the mesmeric trance. Some who develop the so-called psychometric faculty in a high degree, and appear to become acquainted with places, people or circumstances that formerly surrounded any object they may hold, will often be quite insusceptible to mesmeric influence. Then as regards mesmeric influence itself, few experimentalists have been able to do more than record facts out of their own observation, and these, however plainly they may show that a potent influence is at work, are so divergent in their character that they help us very little towards a scientific appreciation of that influence. But difficult as the whole empirical jungle of psychological enquiry may be, all these capricious and irregular workings of the astral senses are intelligible enough from the point of view of students who get above them, so to speak, and contemplate them from a still higher plane of observation. Anyone whom we might imagine seated in the middle of a huge

crystal would not be able, from that point of view, to discern its contour, however transparent its substance might be. It is only when we get outside that we can look down on the mass as a whole, and so it is only when psychic faculty, trained to the degree of being enabled to function on the devachanic plane, looks down from that altitude on to the phenomena of the astral world, that it becomes capable of unravelling all mysteries connected therewith, and of perceiving how very largely, how almost entirely, the miscellaneous faculties which are described as those of the naturally born psychic, are concerned with Astral plane phenomena.

But in their nature to begin with, the astral senses which may be partially awakened in the case of the naturally born psychic are not different from the senses which may be cultivated in the case of the regularly taught occultist. Indeed, it may almost be said that every person who may be thought of as available for systematic occult teaching independent of moral development, must have been in the first instance a naturally born psychic, even though his faculties may have existed in the beginning as a potentiality rather than as an actual accomplishment. The etheric double must have certain characteristics before the senses of the astral vehicle can connect themselves with the consciousness of the physical brain, and the attributes of the etheric double are so largely dependent on the karma of previous lives, that without something having been done in previous lives towards the growth of psychic faculties, no mere intellectual comprehension of the whole

subject, nor even a genuine spiritual aspiration in the direction of higher development, will give rise to these faculties or set them in a condition in which they can function with freedom in the life during which the attempt is first made. The astral senses, like everything else about a man, are his own creation, however little he may be aware of it, or even however little he may have consciously in the beginning set out with the intention of creating them. The aspirations and desires in one life, as we have seen in dealing especially with the problem of free-will and necessity, determine the capacity of the next, and if aspirations and desires set strongly in the direction at any given period of a human being's progress of penetrating those mysteries of Nature which can only be observed by means of the psychic senses, then these aspirations, acting as a karmic force, set up capacity for astral development in the astral body of the person in question on his next return, always supposing that they are not counteracted by karma of other kinds.

Now I have shown in the whole course of this treatise that the loftiest kind of spiritual development is attained along the surest road by virtue of aspirations which, in the first instance, set out with a nobler purpose than that of merely penetrating the mysteries of Nature for the sake of knowledge, and that the growth of moral qualities engendered by the desire to take part in the service of the Divine Idea governing the evolution of the world is provocative in the long run of far higher achievements even on the psychic plane than those which can be attained directly by

specific effort in that direction. The spiritual occultist, who seeks to assimilate himself with the elder brethren of mankind that he may the better perform his part in connection with the mighty task of helping on the race at large, will at the fitting time be guided by those into whose companionship his aspirations will have drawn him, to take the necessary steps which will engender the psychic faculties he will then require to fulfil the purposes of his loftier nature. But at the same time causes produce results, whether they are set in motion with lofty or ignoble purpose, and people who are filled with an ardent curiosity concerning the mysteries of Nature as such, and are constantly making whatever efforts lie within their range to penetrate these mysteries, will karmically engender an improved capacity to do this in the future, and will find themselves endowed in some life or other with the abnormal characteristics we may loosely describe as psychic faculty. They will begin to see visions that are invisible to those around them, and by thus bringing the astral plane to a certain extent within the range of their own cognisance, they will bring themselves within the cognisance of beings natural to the astral plane, and so will perhaps become mediums through which these beings exert forces on the Physical plane, the effects of which become obvious to all bystanders in the shape of spiritualistic phenomena. Assuming these dawning attributes to be quite unaccompanied by moral or ethical development, to be animated solely by a thirst of knowledge as a personal acquisition to be highly enjoyed, then such an unhappy psychic may become serviceable to

mischievous agencies functioning on the astral plane, who may be simply persons like himself, a good deal further advanced, who may have acquired the power not merely of cognising the astral plane with the astral senses, but of getting clear of the body and functioning on that plane in the appropriate vehicle, gathering there whatever they think they require for themselves. Such persons, commonly spoken of in occult writings as Black Magicians, are ever on the look-out for those whom they may impress into their service, and the wholly ignorant, untrained psychic, unprotected by affinity with spiritual influences from above, becomes their ready prey, with results, very often as regards the karma of the person so entangled, that reach over terrible periods of time, and may entangle the victim for a long series of lives in succession, with grievous miseries of a complicated sort.

Just as often indeed the naturally born psychic faculty may be due to aspirations which have been largely mingled with genuine, though often uncultivated spiritual longings. Then the possessor is, by the very purity of his or her nature, shielded from the black magician's attack, and ready, with a little help, even though up to that time such help may not have been earned, to get on to the right path of true occult development. It is necessary to be thus as much on our guard against under-rating as against over-rating the naturally born psychic capacity. It may be a blessing or a curse entirely in accordance with the circumstances just referred to; or if it may be regarded as in equilibrium between the two influences, then above all things it becomes desirable to shield its

exercise by the earnest cultivation of a lofty purpose and by a specific intellectual appreciation of the course of evolution leading to the sublime heights of spiritual development.

I take it that cases are extremely rare in which the naturally born psychic faculty can be thought of as functioning on any region above the astral plane. Of course the Higher Self of every human being is akin in its nature to the Arupa level of devachan, and in the infinite variety of human characteristics that we have to deal with, cases may arise in which by the continued feeding of the Higher Self with the essence, as it were, of many good and spiritually inspired lives, the Higher Self may have become so individually conscious on its own natural plane as to be able in some measure to reflect that consciousness back to its physical manifestation during sleep, or rather, when it has returned to the body after sleep. Such a person may thus have true touch with the devachanic planes of consciousness, and even in this way in some cases with devachanic opportunities for acquiring knowledge. Such an unusual condition of development might account for some of the more important prophetic dreams which sometimes constitute so curious an enigma for the psychic inquirer, but it could not often happen that such development as I am here thinking of would be unaccompanied altogether by occult knowledge, for no one who is qualified to assimilate that knowledge in a useful way is left by karma wholly without any hints which may set him on the true path. The hints or opportunities may come in one shape or another, but they come, we are assured, for every one

who is qualified to avail themselves of them, and though they may sometimes be uncultivated through a failure to appreciate their meaning correctly and thus quite blamelessly, it is not likely that they would be repeated in many successive lives without giving rise to the required enlightenment of the whole thinking soul. Leaving unusual possibilities out of account, however, the most interesting variety of psychic facility we have to deal with is that which is engendered as the fruit of some anterior attempts at occult development. In some past life the person in question may have had an opportunity of the particular kind I have just been referring to. He may have availed himself of that opportunity up to the limitations of his development, as it then stood, which may have been associated with such aspirations as would engender the growth of the astral senses, and then he gets launched on a life the karma of which is probably favourable to his further progress, although in the beginning he fails to appreciate its significance. His dawning faculties are full of interest for him; there are spiritual forces in his nature which render such visions as he may have far more attractive than alarming. As soon as opportunity serves he assimilates on the intellectual side with marvellous facility all teaching pointing in the true direction of occult progress, and such a man may become, not merely a psychic, not merely an earnest devotee of Theosophical philosophy, but one of those open-eyed disciples whose consciousness has been trained to work freely on the spiritual levels above the astral, and whose beautiful privilege it is to inaugurate their long career of higher usefulness in subsequent lives

by constituting themselves a link between the great Masters and the awakening enthusiasm of the many students still on the ordinary plane of life, who are thus enabled, in advance of their own development, to acquire such specific knowledge concerning the occult world that their own evolution in the next life as open-eyed disciples in their turn becomes surely guaranteed.

For the correct appreciation, meanwhile, of the whole entangled problem which has to do with natural born psychic faculty it is necessary to consider the vast stratum of intervening cases lying between those by which some inquisitive explorer of the astral plane falls into the clutches of the Black Magician, and those, on the other hand, where the loftily inspired aspirant gains, through the expansion of his psychic powers, conscious touch with those who may lead him to the sublimest heights. Ever since the human race has come of age, so to speak, since the middle period, that is to say, of the Atlantean Race during this present world period, there have been people governed by the desire for occult knowledge and progress in all possible varieties, so to speak, of purity, as regards their motives. I suppose it may be assumed that karmic influences, in the very loftiest examples of such aspiration, would guide the inquirer into the path leading directly to the supreme Adept organisation which merges, as regards its higher levels, as I endeavoured to show in the chapter on the Path of Initiation, in the governing hierarchy of this stupendous system, and so in the immeasurable spiritual grandeur of the cosmic hierarchy. But at the same

time it has come to pass, at various periods, that other associations or lodges of occult inquirers have been founded, the character and purpose of which has been very admirable indeed, and with which great numbers of people have been associated, greatly to their own advantage and to that of others. The fact appears to be that all such subordinate lodges of occultism merge themselves sooner or later into the main stream, but following the bent of their own individual characteristics some people, gravitating upwards, may move for a long time in the almost exclusive companionship of their own original associates, and may in this way attain to positions of influence on the super-physical planes of Nature, from which they will be doing their best to help on the spiritual progress of others by the light of their own convictions. Now the movement which is known as modern spiritualism has been largely fostered and was practically set on foot in the beginning, by just an independent lodge of occult initiates of the kind I have been describing. Eventually the whole system acquired such momentum that it entirely outran the original design in one way, though in another — in reference to the effort to show mankind at large that forces independent of the physical plane are at work around us—it has attained a very imperfect success. There is much in the actual condition of the movement at present to discountenance the idea that good and intelligent beings of a high order are at the back of all that goes on. But persons who are familiar with some developments in spiritualism will feel sure that the powers concerned have been, in definite cases, good and intelligent, and

highly advanced in spiritual knowledge. No doubt in such instances the lofty occult influences I speak of have been at work. In the Allan Kardec development, for instance, instruction was given that directly points to that conclusion. Re-incarnation is the leading idea of the Allan Kardec development. As I have already said, information concerning that all-important law of Nature never comes spontaneously from beings on the astral plane. It is impossible that it should, but advanced occult teachers, guiding and controlling astral entities, might very naturally make an attempt with this doctrine to see if western communities were yet ripe for it.

The very limited extent to which the doctrine has laid hold of the spiritualist world at large may help to fortify our conclusion that the method of teaching thus adopted was not the best that could have been chosen. So with physical phenomena. Twenty or thirty years ago these were in full activity, under mediumistic conditions that lent themselves very favourably to scientific research. Science failed to take advantage of the opportunities except to a very limited extent, and the inference to be derived from the present condition of phenomenal spiritualism is that the powerful and intelligent impulse in the background has ceased to operate except in a few cases of which the public generally knows little or nothing. The physical phenomena of most latter-day spiritualism looks like the dying out impulse of the former period. In America we may gather from current writings there is a great deal of spirit materialization going on, but this is not directly conducive to an en-

larged knowledge of the laws of Nature, and, of all manifestations that can be made, is perhaps most contaminated with fraud and imposture.

The broad significance of all this points of course to the conclusion that true spiritual progress is not to be sought for along the lines of what is commonly called spiritualism. All who have made a study of the methods by which Theosophical enlightenment is to be attained, will certainly take care to engage, if at all, with very cautious footsteps in the pursuits of the spiritualist, very interesting as undoubtedly these may often be found. But, at the same time, the spiritualist is an inquirer with whom, it seems to me, the true Theosophist must necessarily sympathise to a very considerable degree. Both classes share many important beliefs in common and are differentiated together, by these beliefs, from the commonplace materialistic crowd, as also from the large number of persons who are precluded, by their own ignorance of all but the physical plane, from even comprehending the dogmas of their own religion. There ought to be a better feeling than that which at present exists between the two bodies, and this may spring up by degrees, if misunderstandings are cleared away on both sides. The Theosophist must be very far advanced as an occult student if the experiences of spiritualism do not give him abundant food for reflection, and admirable exercises in Theosophical thinking concerning the conditions of human progress after death are to be found in attempts to explain spiritualistic phenomena, as bearing on the life after death, in all their complicated varieties.

Meanwhile the spiritualist will be enabled to realise from the explanation I have given as to the origin of modern spiritualism, that true Theosophists cannot look with hostility, or with the contempt they have sometimes been supposed to entertain, on a movement that has been supported—even if later experience has shown it productive of collateral harm to an extent that forbids its encouragement—by advanced initiates who, in setting it on foot, were undoubtedly actuated by sincere devotion to the spiritual welfare of mankind.

CHAPTER XVII.

INDIVIDUALITY.

SOME problems of consciousness that seem at the first glance to lie on the threshold of philosophical inquiry into the nature and destinies of man are so intricate in reality that they can only be considered in the light of an extensive knowledge. This is emphatically the case with reference to the state of consciousness we call Individuality. One might suppose it would be reasonable to treat that first in endeavouring to trace the course of human evolution, but the subject cannot be handled without cross references to all phases of evolution. We must keep the manifold planes of Nature in view and lower states of consciousness that do not present the phenomenon of individuality and the system to which we belong as a whole, in the attempt to appreciate correctly the genesis and destinies of individuality. The utter nonsense made of the subject by conventional speculation shows how impossible it is to deal with it intelligently without a tolerably complete grasp of theosophic teaching at large.

Simple ignorance of the most primitive type—disguised in scholarship and intoxicated with erudition—is accountable for the notion that the creation of a human soul is a single simple act of Divine Will,

accomplishable at any moment when it pleases two already existent human beings to furnish certain conditions. That line of thought does not exalt Divine omnipotence; it merely excludes all perceptions of Divine methods and exhibits a ludicrously inadequate notion concerning the magnitude of the task under consideration Higher knowledge shows us that the creation of human souls—the development of individuality in universal consciousness—is the purpose of the whole system to which we belong, or one of its great concurrent purposes, and typical of them all. If it was a simple task for Omnipotence, the organisation of systems and chains of planets with all their kingdoms of nature and so forth, would be the most deplorable waste of energy the mind could conceive. Supreme wisdom cannot be wasteful in that manner, —or it would not be supreme wisdom,—so that by the time we acquire knowledge of the way human individuality is tended and cultivated from its earliest stages of growth, and by the time we come to combine that knowledge with some appreciation of the destinies to which it may ultimately be conducted, we are led to appreciate this idea—that the evolution of an Individuality would be a stupendous task even for Omnipotence.

Apparently it can only be accomplished by this tremendously circuitous and elaborate process that we call the descent of spirit into matter,—a process which divides itself into three great stages, the preparation of the material planes, the growth of consciousness thereon into individualisation and the training of the individuality towards the complete realization of its

potentialities,—without which after all it is the mere beginning of an individuality.

In some way that it is easier to talk about than to understand, the earliest manifestations of matter represent the consciousness or some part of the consciousness of the spirit by which they have been engendered. But neither in the fluctuating aspects of the elemental kingdoms nor in the condensed manifestations of the mineral world as it emerges from nebulous beginnings do we trace any consciousness of the individualised order. When we advance a step and observe in the beginning of the vegetable kingdom the first pulsations we can recognise as life, we still find spiritual energy vaguely diffused through great orders of manifestation. We may talk now of the monadic essence that animates the vegetable world as something distinct from the monadic essence that animates the mineral creation; but the development of individuality is still far from having been accomplished. Across immeasurable ages of effort the animal manifestation of spirit emerges from the vegetable; but still the achievement falls short of the object in view. The animal kingdom is an immensely higher form of consciousness than its immediate predecessor in evolution, but it is still a collective manifestation. Monadic essence is converging towards specific foci, but it has not yet converged.

By what process in the beginning of the whole system—in the earliest manvantaras of its earliest schemes—the concentration of consciousness into single individualities was accomplished, we need not pause to enquire. For the purpose of understanding

individuality it is enough to trace its genesis at such periods of evolution as we can handle in thought more conveniently than those belonging to the initial periods of Nature's activity. Slowly, slowly the monadic essence animating the superior subdivisions of the animal kingdom gathers in the experience of consciousness that such life as it inspires can afford. Then at last comes the touch of a more advanced consciousness affecting it in some one of its incarnate manifestations. In plainer language, and looking at the process as it works after the human kingdom has been evolved, an animal on the physical plane of the world becomes personally attached to a superior being—one already an individualized human creature. And to convey the idea first of all in what may be rather its poetical than its scientific presentation—but not the less a truthful presentation on that account—the result of this attachment, the result of this first movement within the consciousness of the animal of the great love principle in its upward aspiring aspect, focalises the spiritual force within its nature and engenders individuality.

From that moment there is a definite something—a film, a centre, a point, call it what we like—on the spiritual plane that is a re-incarnating individuality. It is marvellously, almost inconceivably, faint in its outlines, so to speak, but it is a something that has separated itself from the general volume of monadic essence that inspired the animal when it entered on the critical life. It is an independent spiritual energy which is now competent in itself to find expression in

a new physical form. But just because that is so, it can no longer find expression in an animal form. By the act of individualisation it has passed into a new kingdom of Nature, and belongs henceforward to the human species.

A correct appreciation of this turning point in evolution is not only necessary as a factor in the appreciation of the growth of the soul from the beginning, but is at the same time illuminating in a high degree with reference to all the problems of animal instinct so blindly blundered about as a rule. At any given moment of its life an animal of any given species has as much wisdom and no more than the other animals of its class. The *same* intelligence, the same soul, so to speak, is behind them all. The experience of all previous animals of that class is equally at the service of each, but there is no other experience available, and the physical brain of no one animal in the series is equal to the task of seeking out new experience differing very widely from that with which it has been used to deal. It assimilates in some measure that which comes in its way, and thus a process of growth is going on, so to speak, within the common soul of the whole family. The monadic essence is in process of development. A familiar though a painful illustration of this may be found in the well-known fact that in new previously undiscovered countries the animals and birds will, at first, be found to show no timidity in presence of man. But when man, the undeveloped savage man, comes amongst them either with a club or a breechloader, they quickly learn that he is a terrible enemy. It is

not merely the unfortunate victims of his ferocity who learn this; their conscious soul becomes aware of the fact, and the new apprehension thrills through every one of its subsequent manifestations.

We must not make the mistake of thinking of the common soul of an animal family as invested with spiritual wisdom. It represents consciousness on the upward path but at an early stage of its upward growth. It is not greater and wiser than the animals it ensouls; it is accurately represented by them as regards its mental evolution. But each animal it ensouls draws equally on the common stock of knowledge and experiences; one consciousness shares the fresh experience of each. When one animal of a given family, for example, suffers, the common soul suffers. Just as in the case of a human being, if the right hand is injured, the *man* suffers though his left hand or his foot may not be suffering.

Language breaks down, because physical brain conceptions break down, when we try to interpret the relations of the various common souls of the animal kingdom with each other. The volume of spirit, if that clumsy expression may be employed, which for a time is ensouling some low order of animal life, undoubtedly achieves progression as a whole, and at a later period must come to ensoul a higher order; but it would be premature for us to attempt an exact interpretation of the changes through which that progression is accomplished. It is more important to comprehend the later progress of the differentiated animal towards true human individuality when, from some one of the high orders of animal

life, a specific animal engenders a re-incarnating individuality, and thus passes, in due time, and after a protracted interlude of non-physical blissful rest, into the human kingdom.

An important distinction has here to be drawn between a re-incarnating entity and an imperishable Ego. The mere partial development of the manasic principle, which is an inseparable accompaniment of individualisation in its first stage, does not involve the acquisition of that attribute of fully developed humanity that has been spoken of sometimes as the Divine spark. That is the consequence of a union between the Atma-Buddhic principle, which is in a manner latent in every form of life and therefore in the newly developed re-incarnating entity, and the ocean of Atma-Buddhi, brooding, so to speak, over the whole of creation. This union is stimulated by the growth of manas, and when accomplished the entity —to be thought of thenceforward as an imperishable Ego—is definitely represented on the Arupa plane of devachan by a vehicle of consciousness appropriate to that condition—the Karana Sharira—as it has generally been called by European theosophists. Thenceforth that permanent vehicle of consciousness, the same through all successive incarnations, is the individuality of the entity concerned, clothing itself afresh each time it descends to the plane of matter in new garments of circumstance, but never losing any attributes that have once been absorbed into its own nature.

The aggregation of fresh attributes by the Ego thus developed proceeds very slowly in the beginning. It

is divine in its nature, but is not divine in its development. Great confusion of thinking on occult matters has sometimes ensued from a neglect to make this last distinction. There is a great difference between knowledge and the capacity to learn. Without the imperishable Ego, the being, even though differentiated and no longer merely an expression of a common soul shared by other similar manifestations, is incapable of the least touch with the higher Manasic consciousness. With the touch once established, the Karana Sharira once in existence, that capacity sets in, but the new entity does not derive knowledge directly from the ocean of Atma-Buddhi with which it is now connected by what may be thought of as a fine though indestructible thread. It derives its knowledge up to a point far in advance of the state of things we are talking about—through the experiences of lower plane embodiments. Many such embodiments may contribute but little to the result. The wholesale drift of evolution is slow, as the scale on which the manvantaras are planned out should teach us. But none the less is it equally true that at a certain stage the slow process of growth is succeeded by a progress of marvellous rapidity. We may look upon the turning point from the one rate of progress to the other as a stage in evolution hardly less definite as such than the original union with the Atma-Buddhi or the original differentiation from the common soul system of the animal kingdom. The turning point is that at which the Ego concerned in some one or other of its embodiments, at last comprehends manasically its own nature, and dedicates its will

force to the realisation of its divine potentialities, the fulfilment of the purpose with which it has been called into being. That achievement is generally described in the language of occultism as getting on the Path; and from that time on, though progress may be in some cases retarded by specific deficiencies in the attributes of the Ego, which have not prepared it equally all round for higher progress, the onward movement is accomplished by leaps and bounds, compared to the previous gradual drift.

While our thoughts are still subject to the limitations of physical incarnation, it is not possible to follow that progress in imagination to the ultimate development it may bring about, but we may hold on meanwhile confidently to the conviction that whatever enlargement of consciousness becomes possible for the imperishable individuality in its progress through the higher realms of nature, that individuality is imperishable. It is never lost in the wonderful spiritual union with other aspects of the universal consciousness which takes place even on planes of spiritual existence, which can be touched by the consciousness of advanced individualities still animating a human body. Nothing has contributed more to repel untrained minds from the sublime avenues of thought opened up by occult teaching than the glowing language that has sometimes been used about the mergence of the soul ultimately in the Divine consciousness—its re-union with God, or its absorption in Parabrahm—whatever phrase may be used. This seems to the finite understanding to convey the idea of individual extinction, and for those

to whom no blank negation of suffering, but life and more life is what they crave, the much talked of union is looked upon as tantamount to *their own* annihilation. This is an altogether baseless and deplorable delusion. The real union is an infinite expansion of the individual consciousness, and not a surrender thereof, and while it begins to be a reality, even for those who have ascended the great path but relatively a little way, the individual consciousness does not cease to be a reality as deep and profound, even if we reach in imagination to heights which can only as yet be dimly apprehended.

In illustration of that thought, let us turn back to the very broadest view we can take of the Soul's growth, and contemplate once again the whole system to which we belong in its spiritual rather than in its scientific aspect. Never mind for a moment the marvellous and intricate beauty of the mechanism through which the great purpose of the system is worked out. Let us think rather of the intention with which the Logos of the system sets the whole undertaking on foot. Let us, in conclusion, approach the loftiest phase of our great theme, and endeavour, in so far as that may be possible for human minds functioning under our present limitations, to comprehend the spiritual purpose of the stupendous system to which we belong, the underlying Divine idea of which that system, with all its astounding complexity of concurrent evolutionary schemes and of infinitely diversified life, is the visible manifestation.

Sometimes we may be enabled, in a certain measure, to comprehend a mighty achievement in Nature as

regards the collective design, even when the resources of power by which the result is brought about baffle our closest scrutiny. Remember that from the point of view of the Theosophist, there are no blind forces in the Cosmos super-inducing worlds and systems by their accidental conflux. Whatever happens on the levels concerned with the inauguration of a solar system is the direct expression of the Will of a Being sufficiently exalted in attributes to be able to render that will objective,—to *become* the manifestation He has created, in the first instance, by thought. By a term familiar to us all as associated with the idea of Divinity, we are enabled reverentially to refer to the Being whose Will engenders and whose Life is merged in our solar system as the Logos of the system. We can even go further. We can conceive of Him as emanating in some unfathomable manner from the Supreme Infinite Consciousness, and undertaking the creation of the system as a stupendous act of self-devotion. Within His nature there resides the potentiality of an all but boundless multiplication of His own individuality. Without the appropriate effort on His part, these innumerable possibilities would lie dormant in the Supreme Consciousness. He accomplishes in the creation of the system which He becomes, the first great act of what is sometimes called Sacrifice. His sacrifice—His submission for the whole duration of the system to limitations—is not made, like the sacrifice of lesser beings, one for another or for others, but for those who are as yet non-existent. He gives out His life to the unborn—to those who, but for His self-devotion, would not have individual

consciousness at all; in order that the whole volume of Divine consciousness may be richer by countless additional centres of appreciative consciousness.

It is for *our* sake this great act has been accomplished; for our sake and for that of all others like us or unlike us who are rising through the various gradations of spiritual evolution towards the level of Nature from which the impulse was first given which launched every globe of the planetary system we see, and all that as yet we do not see, on the cosmos of objective life.

The first great outbreathing of the life of the Logos which calls our system into being is the primary manifestation of a law which runs through all the worlds of which we have knowledge—the law which prescribes at every stage of existence that life and energy shall be given out for the benefit of some consciousness other than that of the giver, though ultimately to be identified even with that, the law which is the pulse of the whole system—a law of giving out which involves no absolute and ultimate sacrifice, but is the only law by which progress and exaltation in Nature can be achieved.

The outpouring is shown to us in its sublimest aspect in the manifestation of the system itself; in some of its humblest workings it is a law of love and generosity on the physical plane of life; in intermediate degrees it is consciously guided by those who promote, from higher levels of existence than those around us, the spiritual growth and welfare of mankind. The more we know of true occultism, and of the intelligent exercise of power on superior planes

of being, the more we come into appreciative relations with this great principle, which is equally, though in different measure, inspiring the ceaseless beneficence of the adept and the unselfish benevolence of all good men and women still working more or less blindly in obedience to the hardly, as yet, articulate impulses of their awakening spiritual natures. The end we cannot, from our present point of view, discern distinctly, but we may grasp with unhesitating assurance the conception that all who lend themselves in willing sympathy for others to the fulfilment of the mighty principle, are helping on the great enterprise that our system represents, and at a later date, if they persevere, will help that enterprise with a fuller and clearer recognition of its whole design to guide them, and will thus be giving back their response to the Divine sympathy of which their own consciousness as living individual beings is one of the innumerable fruits.

Some—we do not know how many, and for exact knowledge on such a subject as that we may well be content to wait—will, by the entire identification of their own life force with the energy of the breath which permeates the whole system, rise up from stage to stage of spiritual exaltation through the various schemes of evolution of which the system consists, until at its final culmination they stand on a level

the new channels of spiritual energy, through the new Logoi who constitute His own reflection on the manifold planes of Nature towards which His influence has been projected. The universe is wide, and sublime activities analogous to His own will doubtless await them in turn. In what way the countless individualities, which will fall in some way short of achieving the maximum possibilities of evolution within the system will be drawn back into His all but illimitable consciousness when the season of effort is past,—when the night time of pralaya affords rest alike for humble as well as for exalted forms of consciousness,—we cannot foresee as yet. Nor even can we clearly realise the latest chapters in the appointed history of the system, in respect to the gathering in of all the marvellously diversified energies of life which must still be present on the stage of manifestation as long as any planets continue to circle round the source of all life energy we call the sun. But we are told, and even from some knowledge of spiritual conditions attainable already, can partly understand, that the individuality we think of as the Logos is at all times a host of individualities in one, and will still be a host, how far multiplied it would be vain to inquire, when the harvest of achievement has been gathered, and the purpose of the great Mahamanvantara shall have been fulfilled.