

THEOSOPHICAL MANUALS

X

THE ASTRAL LIGHT

BY

A STUDENT

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PREFACE

THE remarks under this head are intended to be introductory to each of the Manuals.

First, as to the spirit in which they are offered. These Manuals are not written in a controversial spirit, nor as an addition to the stock of theories awaiting public approval. The writers have no time to waste in arguing with people who do not wish to be convinced, or who ridicule everything which is new to their limited outlook. Their message is for those who desire to know—those who are seeking for something that will solve their doubts and remove their difficulties. For such, all that is needed is a clear exposition of the Theosophical teachings; for they will judge of the truth of a teaching by its power to answer the questions they ask. People realize, much more now than in the early days of the Theosophical Society, the value of Theosophy;

for the ever-increasing difficulties engendered by selfishness and materialism, by doubt and the multiplicity of theories, have created an urgent demand which it alone can satisfy.

Again, it is necessary to state clearly and emphatically the genuine teachings of Theosophy, as given by the Founder of the Theosophical Society, H. P. Blavatsky, and her successors, William Q. Judge, and Katherine Tingley. For, as H. P. Blavatsky predicted, there are persons who have sought to pervert these teachings and turn them into a source of profit to themselves and their own selfish and ambitious schemes. The true teachings do not lend themselves to such purposes; their ideals are of the purest and most unselfish. Hence these persons have sought to promulgate under the name of Theosophy a perverted form of the teachings, from which Brotherliness and other pure motives are omitted, and which contains doctrines which H. P. Blavatsky showed to be maleficent and destructive. As these pseudo-Theosophists have gained a certain amount of notoriety by using the names of the Theosophical Society and its Leaders, it is necessary to warn the public against them

and their misrepresentations. Their teachings can easily be shown, by comparison, to be directly contrary to those of H. P. Blavatsky, whom they nevertheless profess to follow. Instead of having for their basis self-sacrifice, self-purification, and the elevation of the human race, these teachings too often pander to ambition, vanity, and curiosity. In many cases they are altogether ridiculous, and only calculated to make people laugh. Nevertheless, as these travesties have served to discredit the name of Theosophy and to keep earnest inquirers away from the truth, it is well that the public should know their nature and origin. They are the work of people who were at one time members of the Theosophical Society, but who did not find in it that food for their own personalities of which they were really in search. So they turned against their teachers in wounded pride and vanity, and started little societies of their own — with themselves at the head.

The writers of these Manuals have no personal grievance against any such calumniators. Inspired by a profound love of the sublime teachings of Theosophy, they have made it

their life-work to bring the benefits which they have thereby received within the reach of as many people as possible. And they feel that they will have the hearty sympathy and co-operation of the public in exposing folly and bringing the truth to light.

Theosophy strikes unfamiliar ground in modern civilization, because it does not come under any particular one of the familiar headings of Religion, Science, Philosophy, etc., into which our age has divided its speculative activities. It dates back to a period in the history of mankind when such distinctions did not exist, but there was one Gnosis or Knowledge embracing all. Religion and Science, as we have them today, are but imperfect growths springing from the remnants of that great ancient system, the Wisdom-Religion, which included all that we now know as religion and science, and much more. Hence Theosophy will not appeal to the same motives as religion and science. It will not offer any cheap and easy salvation or put a premium upon mental inactivity and spiritual selfishness. Neither can it accommodate itself to the rules laid down by various schools of modern thought as to

what constitutes proof and what does not. But it can and does appeal to the Reason. The truth of doctrines such as Theosophy maintains, can only be estimated by their ability to solve problems and by their harmony with other truths which we know to be true. But in addition to this we have the testimony of the ages, which has been too long neglected by modern scholarship, but which is now being revealed by archaeologists and scholars, as H. P. Blavatsky prophesied that it would in this century.

It may perhaps be as well also to remind those who would criticise, that the state of modern opinion is scarcely such as to warrant anybody in assuming the attitude of a judge. It would be quite proper for a Theosophist, instead of answering questions or attempting to give proofs, to demand that his questioners should first state their own case, and to be himself the questioner. The result would certainly show that Theosophy, to say the very least, stands on an equal footing with any other view, since there is no certain knowledge, no satisfying explanation, to be found anywhere.

Since the days when the wave of materialism swept over the world, obliterating the traces of the ancient Wisdom-Religion and replacing it by theological dogmatism, our religions have had nothing to offer us in the way of a philosophical explanation of the laws of Being as revealed in Man and in Nature. Instead we have only had bare statements and dogmatic assertions. The higher nature of man is represented by such vague words as Spirit and Soul, which have little or no meaning for the majority. The laws of the universe are briefly summed up under the term "God," and all further consideration of them shut off. Then came a reaction against the dogmatism of religion, and man pinned his faith to knowledge gained by study and reflection, limiting his researches, however, to the outer world as presented by the senses, and fearing to trench upon the ground which dogmatic theology had rendered the field of so much contention. The result of this has been that neither in religions nor sciences, have we any teaching about the higher nature of man or the deeper mysteries of the universe. This is a field which is left entirely unexplored,

or is at best the subject of tentative and unguided conjectures.

Until, therefore, religious teachers have something definite, consistent, and satisfactory to offer, and until science can give us something better than mere confessions of nescience or impudent denials with regard to everything beyond its own domain, Theosophy can afford to assume the rôle of questioner rather than that of questioned, and does not *owe* anybody any explanations whatever. It is sufficient to state its tenets and let them vindicate themselves by their greater reasonableness; and any further explanation that may be offered is offered rather from good will than from any obligation.

Theosophy undertakes to explain that which other systems leave unexplained, and is, on its own special ground, without a competitor. It can issue a challenge to theology, science, and other modern systems, to surpass it in giving a rational explanation of the facts of life.

Again, there are some questions which it is beyond the reach of the human mind, in *its present stage of development*, to answer; and

it would scarcely be just to arraign Theosophy for not answering these.

Judgment should in all cases be preceded by careful study. There are always those who will impatiently rush to questions which a further study would have rendered unnecessary; and it is safe to say that the majority of "objections" raised to Theosophical teachings are such as could have been solved by the objector himself, had he been a genuine student. In the ordinary courses of education, scholars are required and are content, to accept provisionally many of the teachers' statements, in full confidence that further study will explain what in the beginning cannot be made clear. In the same spirit an earnest student of Theosophy will be wise enough to hold many of his difficulties in reserve, until, by further investigation, he has gained better acquaintance with his subject. In the case of those who are not willing to adopt these wise and patient methods of study, it may be reasonably questioned whether they are the more anxious to learn or to disprove.

Above all it is sought to make these Man-

uals such that they shall appeal to the heart and not *merely* to the head; that they shall be of practical service to the reader in the problems of his daily life, and not mere intellectual exercises. For there have been in past days books written by persons more distinguished for a certain grade of mental nimbleness than for heartfelt devotion to the cause of truth; and these have appealed only to those people who love intricate philosophical problems better than practical work. But as H. P. Blavatsky so frequently urged, the message of Theosophy is for suffering humanity; and the great Teachers, whose sole purpose is to bring to mankind the Light of Truth and the saving grace of real Brotherhood can have no interest in catering for the mental curiosity of merely a few well-to-do individuals. Even soulless men, said H. P. Blavatsky, can be brilliantly intellectual; but for those who are in earnest in their desire to reach the higher life intellectual fireworks alone will have little attraction. We intend, therefore, to keep the practical aspect of the teachings always to the front, and to show, as far as possible, that they are what

they claim to be — the gospel of a new hope and salvation for humanity.

These Booklets are not all the product of a single pen, but are written by different Students at the International Headquarters of the UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD AND THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY at Point Loma, California. Each writer has contributed his own quota to the series.

For further explanations on Theosophy generally, the reader is referred to the Book List published elsewhere in this volume and to the other Manuals of this series, which treat of Theosophy and the various Theosophical teachings.

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INTRODUCTORY

IN this Manual the Astral Light will be treated, not as a subject of curious study to minister to intellectual enjoyment or personal ambition, but as a topic of vital importance to every human being and the human race generally. The subject belongs to that vast region of knowledge which has been left unexplored by both religion and science, yet which is so necessary for all who wish to live aright. It is surely essential that man should understand his own nature; yet concerning the nature of the Soul, the real man, we have nothing but maxims and dogmas from religion, and from science only confession of ignorance. From Theosophy alone do we get definite teachings about the inner nature of man and about the higher planes of Nature.

In view of this ignorance, it is obvious that it will be impossible to write an accurate treatise on the Astral Light. Current notions on the range of ideas involved are far too vague. We must be content with a somewhat shadowy outline. Nevertheless even this outline will suffice to open up a new world to those for whom the subject has been hitherto unfamiliar.

It may as well be stated here that the term "Astral Light" is used vaguely and loosely in this Manual; for the range of subjects herein considered is so unfamiliar to modern thought that any attempt at accuracy or detail would be confusing at this introductory stage of the inquiry. In *The Secret Doctrine* H. P. Blavatsky gives the term a restricted meaning, and distinguishes the Astral Light proper from other things that have been confused with it. Those desirous of fuller information are therefore referred to that source. It may briefly be stated that the Universal Substance is called *Prakriti*. *Ākāśa* is *Prakriti* in its primary state. The Astral Light is only the seventh plane, the plane immediately above physical

matter. *Ākāśa* may be called the Soul of the Astral Light, and the Astral Light the body of *Ākāśa*. The Astral Light is connected with the lower mind and its psychic activities; the *Ākāśa* with spiritual activities. Yet in some introductory writings *Ākāśa* and Astral Light are confused, the whole being loosely denominated "Astral Light."

A ROUGH IDEA OF THE ASTRAL LIGHT

We may get a rough idea by comparing the Astral Light with the scientific conception of Ether. This Ether is (hypothetically) an omnipresent and all-permeating fluid or medium, which is the vehicle for the manifestation of various forms of energy, such as light and electricity. It is supposed to be matter, yet can have none of the properties of ordinary matter; indeed ordinary matter is by many believed to be a particular condition of the Ether. Thus we get from science a notion of a substance that is all-permeating, without weight

or other perceptible quality, and yet the basis of all manifestations of energy, if not of all materiality. Though the Astral Light is not the Ether (indeed the Ether is only hypothetical), yet to some extent the two overlap.

Again, we *may* speak of the Astral Light as "thought-substance." Taking thoughts to be things, we say they are made on the lowest plane of this thought substance, just as material objects are made of physical matter.

Still again, we *may* call it the Soul of the World, though, as explained farther on, that term includes vastly more than the term Astral Light properly includes; the Astral Light being strictly only the *lowest* plane of the World-Soul. But, using the phrase roughly, we may say that it is the soul of which the *material* world is the body. In this soul are the ideas which in the physical world becomes manifest as forms. From this point of view it can be seen that the Astral Light corresponds to the Astral Double or *Linga Sarira* in Man, being the model-form of Nature, on which the atoms of her outer crust are shaped.

It may be asked : why *Astral Light*? Because it manifests itself visibly to the inner eye of the clairvoyant. The power of exhibiting its stored impressions as pictures is one of its salient properties, and it has often been described by this property, though it has many others.

Having thus given a preliminary notion of the subject, we shall proceed to discuss and elaborate it from various points of view.

II

THE ASTRAL LIGHT AND RELIGION

FOR want of such a conception, religion has left us wandering in darkness, feeding on the empty husks of dogma when we should have definite knowledge. For want of it the word Soul is a mere abstraction. For want of it we can not trace the workings of Divine Law and are obliged to regard them as supernatural and contrary to science. With a knowledge of it we shall find many of our religious beliefs authenticated and confirmed scientifically; the theories of religion will become facts in life; righteousness will cease to be a mere state of mind and become a dynamic power; Man will be a responsible worker and former instead of a helpless suppliant.

As the Astral Light forms the bridge between matter and mind, so it forms the bridge between science and religion. It raises science

to the plane of thought and feeling, and it brings religion down into the affairs of daily life. In this realm of study, the accuracy of science and the reverence of religion are blended into one. It is Theosophy, which is neither religion nor science, but both.

Under the teachings of religion and science, Man has imagined that he lives a separate private life, all shut up in his own thoughts. Consequently he has not troubled to guard those thoughts or to learn to direct them. True, we are taught that hatred and lust committed in thought are as good as already done. But this is a mere assertion and does not convince us sufficiently for practical purposes. The Astral Light supplies the missing link. Every thought that we think stamps its impress on the Astral Light and passes away from our ken to be launched on the ocean of thought-substance, where it will influence other minds, for good, for ill. For we live in the Astral Light, as we live in the atmosphere. All breathe it; it is private to no one. Our so-called privacy is not so private as we think.

It may be private in so far as other people are not able to recognize which of their own thoughts have proceeded from us and which not, and cannot tell what we may be thinking. But it is not private in the sense of exclusive property. We interchange thoughts, sentiments, etc., from mind to mind. When a thought or an emotion floats into our mental sphere, we absorb it and attribute to it a quality of originality, whereas it may have come from another mind. Perhaps we may just look at it and pass it away again, perhaps we may take it in and digest it, perhaps we may reject it altogether. Marconi has shown us how a tube of iron filings can be mounted on a tall pole and receive messages from the ends of the earth, copying the vibrations to which it has been attuned. How is this explained? The brain is a far more wonderful mechanism than the wireless telegraph instruments.

This thought-life that we lead is more important than our outer life. The mental life makes more for weal or woe than the circumstantial life. This is universally admitted.

How foolish then to have no science of this thought-life! How necessary to know as much as possible about it!

The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.
Man who man would be
Must keep the empire of himself, in it
Ruling the changes.

Every human being carries about with him, wherever he goes, an atmosphere of a certain quality, which influences all with whom he comes in contact; and which, by its action on the finer forces and substances of Nature, determines to a great extent his fate and fortune. This atmosphere he has spun around himself by his thoughts. No matter how well-intentioned and amiable he may be at the time of his intercourse with others, the atmosphere which he has generated in his private thoughts will, if it is a noxious one, be felt by them and will influence them against him. Here then is the explanation of instinctive antipathies and sympathies. Again, our influence upon the weak, upon women, or upon children, may be

injurious, despite our outward behavior or even our excellent intentions; for we may carry with us an atmosphere of impurity generated by our covert acts and private thoughts, which may harm those whom we desire to protect.

This topic could be enlarged upon indefinitely, and has been so by writers on the power of thought. But it should not have been left for the dabblers in "occultism" and "New-Thoughtists"; our religious teachers should have instructed us in it. This huge domain of moral hygiene has been neglected, and preachers are battling with conditions much as a doctor in the old days might have battled with the plague amid filth and reckless living. We allow our children to mix with all sorts of people, and many of these people must, according to the law of probabilities, be moral lepers. What sort of guarantee do parents ever demand of the worthiness of a person's inner life, before entrusting him with the care of their children? Again, what supervision do they exercise over the minds of their children,

over what they read and see and hear and ponder over?

The Astral Light is the great agent of Karma, which is the Divine Law of Justice. For our acts and thoughts create impresses on its substance which afterwards react upon us. Thus are we makers of our own destiny and our own rewarders or executioners. When we remember that the Astral Light, using the term in its widest sense, includes grades of cosmic substance extending up through finer and finer gradations to the very vesture of Deity, we shall realize that this retributive action is not merely mechanical; for these higher grades of substance are better described by the word "Soul," being conscious and endowed with intelligence and wisdom. Thus, in the wider sense, the Astral Light is a veritable God, and as such is represented in the old mythologies.

The events of our life are determined by causes for which science has no explanation, and which theology attributes to the will of God. Of course every thing that happens is

under the will of Being, so this explanation is not sufficient. Our actions are determined by various emotions, ideas and caprices—our own or other people's—and these again are determined by the latent or stored up proclivities in our minds and those of others. It is in the Astral Light that these proclivities are stored up. Hence it forms the link between our doings and their fruit. We set a pendulum in motion and it swings back on us. So the Astral Light may appear as guardian angel or avenging demon, according to circumstances. And, though it is of course an agent of the Supreme Deity, we are not forbidden to use our own God-given intelligence in trying to understand and control its action. Heaven helps those who help themselves. Our duty, then, in this respect, is to recognize our fate as the equitable outcome of our merits, and to avoid, as far as we can, generating any more of the undesired kind.

III

THE ASTRAL LIGHT AND SCIENCE

IS the Astral Light matter, or a kind of space, or a force? The answer must be that none of these words is sufficiently well defined to admit of a definite reply.

The words "matter" and "force (or motion)," as used by modern science, stand for abstractions — that is, for *concepts* having no real existence except as attributes of something else. All that we can discover in the physical world is Life — matter in motion. Everywhere is matter in motion; nowhere is matter without motion, or motion without matter. The Ether itself cannot be thought of except as vibrant with energy, nor can any form of motion be imagined otherwise than as taking place in some medium or form of matter. It has been demonstrated that the terms atom, force, motion, and the like, have no meaning

in themselves. Abstract matter is utterly unthinkable, as is also abstract motion or force. The only real entity in the world of our observations is a mysterious something which we can only call "life," or "matter in motion"; once try to analyse this into component parts, and those component parts cease to be independent entities and become abstractions, — much as if we should try to analyse a red cow into a compound of redness and bovinity.

Hence it is absurd to try to denominate the "Astral Light" by such vague terms. We can only, for present purposes at least, speak of the familiar physical world as a "plane" of existence, or a "plane" of manifestation; and then call the Astral Light another "plane."

What is meant by the word "plane"? It is a question of sensory cognition. The physical plane is that much of the universe which is perceptible to our physical senses. There is no physical world apart; no separate independent physical world. This is a common error. We take the physical world to be something separate, with a real existence of its own;

and then we imagine the Astral world, or perhaps the "soul," to be something superadded, something separate from the physical world, or interpenetrating it, or hovering over it. But the universe is all one, and the limitations of our senses and minds alone divide it into departments. The limits of the physical world are more or less arbitrary limits imposed by the sense and imaginations of mankind collectively. Nature is a vast, fathomless, prolific mystery; we see but her outermost veils; but to the discerning eye of the Seer those veils are penetrable as by the x -rays of a higher science.

The point, then, is that in order to reach another plane, we have to develop other faculties of perception, and see more of Nature. The whole is present, but we see only parts. To speak of anything as being on the Astral Plane would mean that it was in a condition in which it could not be perceived by the ordinary senses.

As taught in Theosophy, the universe is analysable into three hypostases: Spirit, Sub-

stance, and Life; the last being the result of the interaction of the first two. What the ultimate Universal Spirit—the All-Father, or Divine Fire, etc.—is, we cannot know. Only its manifestations are knowable. And it has many manifestations. Through Eternal Substance does it manifest itself, in endless forms and degrees. And Eternal Substance is capable of many grades, from the finest to the grossest. Even in the physical world, we see the Eternal Spirit manifesting itself through the outermost layers of Eternal Substance and kindling the fire of life and growth in every atom. We may study its endless effects and manifestations, its own essential nature ever eludes us. In our minds the same Spirit manifests itself, giving rise to the countless feelings, emotions, incentives, thoughts, etc. As said more fully in the Manual on *The Seven Principles of Man*, the highest vehicle in Man through which the Spirit acts is *Buddhi*—the Spiritual Soul; and it also acts through other and lower vehicles, giving rise to our mental life, our physical life, etc.

Philosophically, things are analysed into a duality, variously called Subjective and Objective, Spirit and Substance, masculine and feminine, Action and Potentiality, etc. In the physical world there is the same duality, Energy (manifested as heat, chemical action, etc.) and Substance — the active side and the formative or receptive side. The interaction of the two produces the objects of the physical world, or what science calls "matter." The final substantial basis of our physical matter escapes us; so does the ultimate energy that animates it. In the world of our ideas, in the thought-life, there is the same plan and process. Our thoughts are entities produced by the dynamic molding power of Spirit upon Substance. This is a fact not sufficiently realized, though some philosophers have recognized the duality of thought.

There is a thought-substance, and a mental energy which actuates it; and the two together constitute Thought. This must be borne clearly in mind. Thoughts are things, indeed.

Now these thoughts are the objects which

exist on the Astral Plane (more strictly on several planes, of which the Astral is one). The Astral Light is the space or theater of their existence. So the Astral Light may be compared to an atmosphere in which float thought-forms. We live in this atmosphere like a fish in water ; and, like a fish, we breathe it in and out through mental gills, taking from it and adding to it. Truly every one will admit that this thought-life of ours is at least as important as our life in the physical world ; yet how little have we studied it. Science and religion cannot or will not tell us anything about it. But this plane is as real and as complex as the physical plane. There should be a full and luminous science of it, if mankind is to be able to rule his life intelligently and not be an irresponsible animal or a blunderer.

Clearly a scientific study of the Astral Light or thought-world would demand new conceptions of space, force and kindred subjects. When we speak of space, we usually have in mind the ordinary threefold extension which

is characteristic of the physical plane; and consciously we infer that extension is an essential property of space. But this is an error. If we abstract from space every property belonging to matter, the idea of extension vanishes. Emptiness has no dimensions, no size, no boundaries. Most people, when they think of space, imagine only a mass of points or a very large room with walls. So the space in which thoughts exist has nothing in common with a threefold extension. Some help may be derived from the familiar transcendental idea of the "Fourth Dimension," if one is clear-minded enough to use it *only* as mathematical symbolism. It may enable us to understand better how distance may be annihilated, and how much more complicated and various may be the interrelations possible among objects pertaining to such a space, than is the case with objects limited by the exigencies of ordinary matter.

Our thoughts evidently do not obey the laws of ordinary physics. The thought-world is fluidic, protean, infinitely capacious and flex-

ible. The memory is a store-house, with a capacity and convenience of access such as no filing cabinet can boast.

The physical body is the mere shell of the man within. Anatomy reveals nothing but structure. There are cells, the walls of which are again cells. It is only a question of high-power microscopy, and we find that all apparent solidity seems made up of spaces. In the spaces are liquids which move about and change in chemical composition. We suspect the presence of an intelligent being somewhere behind all this machinery; but we see him not. The gap would be filled, could we perceive the Astral man within; for, though even the Astral man is (in his turn) but the instrument of what is still more interior, yet he stands in a causal relation to the physical body. Hence we may regard our physical organism as the creation of our thoughts, the Astral plane as more real than the physical, and the Astral Light as the actual material out of which atoms are built, from which vital substances are born, into which they vanish again.

It is scarcely realized how very much science stands in need of a conception like that of the Astral Light, to complete its thoughts. For want of this link, all sorts of absurd hypotheses have to be formulated. The essential properties of manifested Nature are traced back through the chain of their effects until we reach the limits of observation, and then we are obliged to postulate some "atom" or "ether" to account for them. These hypothetical elements necessarily fill the positions which should be occupied by the Astral Light and other things which science does not know of. Under the head of the *Linga Sarîra*, in the Manual on the "Seven Principles," something has been said as to the position occupied by the Astral Double as the link between mind and matter. It is impossible to account for the preservation of the integrity of our physical form and of our memory, unless we postulate the existence of something that remains intact throughout the continual death and birth of the physical atoms; nor can any explanation be given of the reproduction from a seed

of the original tree in all its identity of perfection. To account for this, in scientific lights, we have to suppose that the physical matter of the seed contains in some way all the potentiality of the future growth; a supposition which stretches our conceptions of the possibilities of the atoms beyond reasonable limits. But, once admit that the whole tree is ready beforehand as a fully-formed tree on the astral plane, and that the growing is merely a material weaving of physical atoms upon a ready-formed pattern, and we have a comprehensible explanation. The difficulty is to conceive of the possibility of a kind of matter so different from that with which we are familiar. We cannot eliminate from our mind the notion of three-dimensioned extension, and those other limitations of space (which we call properties of space). We think that space occupied by physical matter is quite full and can contain no more; but space is of indefinite capacity. The thoughts and pictures in our mind exist in total disregard of the geometry of physical space.

We must bear in mind, then, that physical matter and the geometrical spaces between it do not by any means fill the capacity of the universe; and that there is plenty of room for other things.

In ordinary waking consciousness the Astral plane is not objective to our perceptions. Our attention is centered in the physical sense-organs, and these are out of relation with the Astral World, which consequently is not perceived. But if the physical senses should become inactive and the astral senses awaken, then the Astral World would become objective to our perceptions.

We also get a glimpse of this state of affairs when we cross the borderland between waking and dreaming. In dreaming however, we exist rather in a little world of our own, peopled with the images of our own brain; hence it is regarded as less real than the waking life which we share in common with other people. But there is a thought-world that is as real and as common (more so) to all as is the waking life. In it, however, we should

be like a new-fledged bird, flapping about amid dangers, unable to guide or protect ourselves.

Many scientific experiments and speculations favor the idea that every form in Nature is continually throwing off atoms and receiving new ones; so that the material is constantly changing, while the shape remains the same. In fact solid bodies would be rather of the nature of eddies in a stream or lantern pictures on a moving screen. It has been shown by physicists that solidity, rigidity and the other properties characteristic of solids, can be given by a fluid in rapid motion. For instance, a long flexible chain, made of very small brass links, is passed over the rim of a wheel, so as to hang from the wheel in a long loop. The wheel is then rotated with great velocity, and it can be shown that the chain will behave like a rigid body; any dent made in its catenary will stay in the same place, while the links of the chain flow around the dent. There is also the "vortex theory" of atoms, which supposes atoms to be eddies in a perfect fluid.

But if integrity of form and persistence of

qualities inhere, not in the atoms which pass in and out, but in the form—then what is the form? Clearly it will not do to make it a mere attribute of the atoms themselves. If the flowing atoms, when they reach a certain place, take on a certain shape, there must be something in that place to make them take that shape. What is it? Referring to our illustrations, we find that in the case of the eddy in the stream, that which makes the particles of water follow each other around the whirl is “momentum” or the laws of equilibrium in fluids. But this is merely a mathematical expression of the observed *results*. Inertia and gravitation are at the bottom of the matter, and what these are in themselves—we do not know. The actual state of the case is that the physical particles are following a pattern, and are actuated and guided by forces which, though manifest in physical matter, do not originate there. The eddy cannot be both cause and effect of the movement of the particles. In the case of the pictures on the moving screen, we know that the pictures originate

in the lantern and have an independent existence apart from the screen, though the screen brings them into another degree of manifestation.

The idea that such an abstraction as a pattern or a certain arrangement of particles can have any existence as such, apart from the material exhibiting it, is a logical fallacy to which some physicists and biologists seem liable. A *memory*, for instance, cannot be a mere *arrangement* of particles; for what is an arrangement? Theosophy puts realities in place of the abstractions with which science fills the gaps in its reasoning.

IV

THE ASTRAL LIGHT AS THE WORLD-SOUL

IN the broad sense the Astral Light is the Soul of the World, containing all the invisible forms of life, astral, psychic, mental, spiritual. In the more limited and correct sense it is only the lowest plane of this World-Soul, the one immediately above the physical plane.

It constitutes a kind of mental atmosphere that broods over the earth and envelops mankind. It acts upon man, and man acts upon it; it acts upon all life. The condition of the Astral Light determines the character of the thought-atmosphere in which we live; it constitutes the "spirit of the times," the mass of prejudices, habits of thought, and tendencies. We little know what slaves we are to this power; how we suffer it to direct our ideas and desires, molding them to the con-

ventional pattern; how what we think to be original conceptions are simply impressions derived from the mental atmosphere that envelops us. We talk of freedom from visible powers, but think little of the question of freedom from mental and psychic habits and enthrallments.

As the impure thoughts of men continue for a long time, the Astral Light gradually gets more and more contaminated, and hangs like a pall over humanity. If this process were continued indefinitely, it would result in a poisoning of the human race by its own emanations. But the forces of good which are ever at work on the higher planes — those Great Souls that watch over humanity — by their presence and effort tend to purify the Astral Light. Nevertheless, despite all they can do, the evil is precipitated, in accordance with cyclic law, in the form of cataclysms. From the Astral Light also come epidemics of crime, epidemics of disease, animal and plant epidemics, earthquakes and floods. These are the final result of the impurity of men's thoughts,

and in them the evil vents itself and a purification is the result.

It has often been observed how diseases follow man. For instance a certain new epidemic attacks the grapes in a place, shortly after the settlement of that place. The potatoes in one country all mysteriously rot in a particular year; in another the wheat is attacked. The plants live on the Astral Light, which we poison; hence we poison ourselves. So we are responsible for the health of animals and for their character. These inferior beings use up the products that man generates; their psychic nature is derived from man's cast-off psychic clothes, so to say. We all know how the character of a dog depends on that of his master. The ferocity of the tiger, the voracity and sloth of the hog, the treachery of the serpent, all depend upon man. Man is the responsible being in Nature, with power to govern himself, and these lowlier creatures look to him for guidance. If our thoughts were pure, their natures would change. We talk of the faults of Nature, not realizing the extent

of our responsibility for them; and wonder why "God" does not remedy them, when we ourselves are his own negligent ministers.

Man cannot sin alone. His thoughts pollute the Astral Light, and injure others. But there is a power to counterbalance this evil; for man has the power to rise to the higher levels and think pure thoughts, thus becoming a sharer in the beneficent work of Nature. By so aspiring he comes in contact with the minds of those Great Helpers of humanity, and forms a link between them and the world of men. He thus becomes what man was meant to be — a Former, a shadow of Deity. Escaping from the dream of personality, which is but a sorry illusion with the mockery of freedom, he enters the larger life and becomes a disposer and director of all those emotional forces which before enslaved him. Thus he realizes his destiny and becomes a true Man. This is the end to which we are all tending, to free ourselves from the attachments which impede action and knowledge and to control the lower laws by our observance of a higher Law.

OTHER NAMES FOR THE ASTRAL LIGHT

ATTENTION must be called to a certain peculiarity of the human mind, by which it confounds the unusual with the miraculous. When we come across any unusual phenomena, such as thought-transference, astral vision, or spiritualistic phenomena, we are struck with awe, and think it necessary to invent some new theory to explain them. But we forget that the familiar facts of life are equally in want of explanation. We cannot explain how we are able to crook our finger, what is the bridge between mind and matter, what is life, and many other things; but we are so accustomed to them that we have ceased to wonder. But what is more important — we allow ourselves to think that these familiar facts have all been explained! But they have not been explained, and they are as miraculous as the more unusual phenomena. Therefore there is no special need of a new theory to account for occult phenomena, as they are no more inexplicable or wonderful than ordinary happenings.

Reichenbach propounded a theory of "Odic Force to account for certain phenomena which he was able to study by means of his sensitives"; but he might just as well have propounded it to account for ordinary facts, without doing any experiments with sensitives at all. The existence of a conception like the Astral Light is absolutely necessary as an explanation of the phenomena of ordinary life; and there is no need, in discussing it, to open up the question of occult phenomena at all.

Nevertheless the human mind is so constituted that it needs the unusual to arouse it to thinking; and so we find that the theories about the Astral Light have generally centered about some form of occult phenomena. A few of these speculations may be mentioned.

Reichenbach, in 1845, announced a so-called "imponderable," or influence, developed by certain crystals, by magnets, and by the human body, and associated with heat, chemical action, and electricity, which he called *odyl* or *odid force*. This influence was visible to his hypnotic subjects as rays of light streaming

from the ends of magnets, crystals and fingers. It was dual, having a positive and a negative aspect, which he called *ob* and *od*. A third or equilibrating force was called *aur*.

The ancient alchemists spoke of *Azoth*, *Anima Mundi*, etc. "Éliphas Lévi" (the Abbé Alphonse Louis Constant), a French Kabalist of the last century, writes a good deal about the Astral Light, but confuses it with *Akâsa* and makes other mistakes, as H. P. Blavatsky points out in *The Secret Doctrine*.

If we had time to go through the history of magic, we should find that the Astral Light has been conjectured and described under a great variety of names in all times. Much will be found on this head in *The Secret Doctrine*.

THE ART OF SELF-CONTROL

THE Astral Light is a great magic agent, by means of which man is able to use his will upon Nature, thus moving it and molding it and fulfilling his function of Former. By the word "Nature" is meant everything which is subject to that Will, whether outward Nature or our own interior Nature. All our actions are accomplished through the power of our will acting upon the Astral Light; the link between our volition and the mechanism of our body is the *Linga Sarîra* or Astral Double, which is that principle in man which corresponds (in a sense) to the Astral Light in the world. But, though we thus use the Astral Light in our ordinary life, our power over it is very limited in comparison with what is possible for us.

The reason why we are unable to avail our-

selves of the fuller extent of our powers is because we allow ourselves to be controlled by the currents of the Astral Light, instead of controlling them. In order to command a force, we must first disentangle ourselves from that force and become independent of it. But what are the facts?

We find the ordinary man a constant victim of the currents of the Astral Light in the shape of thoughts, emotions, tendencies, and fancies, which he neither resists nor controls. He is a slave to his likes and dislikes.

The subtle power by which this great Serpent of the Astral Light is able to ensnare us is the force of attraction and repulsion — one force, though dual in its manifestation. By this force we are pulled to and fro and kept involved in an endless chain. To become master of the Astral Light, therefore, it is necessary to render oneself independent of this force of attraction and repulsion. Hence the familiar religious injunction of dispassion. But, whereas religion teaches us to become dispassionate as a sacred duty, Theosophy goes

further and gives us also a scientific reason for it. For we see that unless we do become dispassionate, we must remain bound and can never become free in the true sense.

At this point it is advisable to allude again to the subject of Black Magic. As elsewhere stated, it is possible to study magic with an evil motive and to acquire a certain amount of power. In this pursuit, the lesser desires are subjected to some greater desire, such as ambition or lust, and the operator, while becoming more powerful in some things, binds himself in servitude to these greater desires. And in magic, no half-measures are possible; the operator has to decide one way or the other; for, if his intentions are uncertain, he will be too weak to control the forces he has evoked, and will succumb to the manifold perils of his enterprise. So, to become a Black Magician, one makes up his mind to devote himself whole-souledly to the cause of evil, and to kill out all such feelings as compassion and compunction. Then he may, at the cost of ultimate loss of the Soul, obtain for a limited period

a certain amount of power, subject to the dictation of those who stand above him in the hierarchy of evil powers. Anything short of this — any mere dabbling in Black Magic, will be dangerous on account of its insincerity; and, if we are not prepared to join the ranks of evil (!) we had better at once enrol ourselves with the good. It is our only safeguard.

It is assumed, then, that the reader is one who wishes to study Nature in the noble cause of light and progress, and who is not actuated by selfish ambition or idle curiosity.

The Astral Light has always been symbolized by a Serpent — a symbol with a curious double meaning, for sometimes it represents evil and at other times good. In theology the Serpent or Devil is always represented as evil and the enemy of mankind. Milton, in his *Paradise Lost*, allows his poetic intuition to get the better of his theological training, and perforce gives his Satan a nobility that compels our admiration and enlists our sympathy. The truth is, as pointed out by H. P. Blavat-

sky, who emphasized the point by calling her magazine *Lucifer*, that Satan is the intelligent freewill of man, and is therefore either an enemy or his best friend, according as it is against, or under the control of, his Higher Nature. In the old allegory, Satan rebels against God, is driven out of Paradise, and endows man with freewill and independent choice; man loses his powers and has to go through a long pilgrimage in the world until the day when his redemption is accomplished by the "Son of God"—his Higher Self. Then the Serpent is subdued and becomes his servant. Theology depreciates Satan; and how often Theology has been found disparaging intellectual aspirations and withstanding the advance of science and art, history can tell. But, according to the true teachings, these things ought to be cultivated as means of progress. In other words the Serpent is not to be feared and shunned, but studied and mastered.

The Astral Light manifests the dual quality attributed to this Serpent, for it is the great

Ensnarer. It possesses the quality attributed by some people to Woman and by others to Nature, of loving to dominate and ensnare man, and yet always cherishing a secret desire to be mastered and being ready to become the eternal devoted servant of the man who can show himself strong enough to master it against its own will. There is a fine poem in which a man is represented as fighting with Satan, who throws him again and again, hundreds of times, until at last the man gets so strong that he throws Satan. And then Satan embraces him, calls him his dear son, and says he has been waiting for this glad day. Even so with our lower nature; cringe before it, and it worsts us; grasp it firmly, and it is our friend. This therefore is the attitude we are called on to assume before the Astral Light. We must be prepared for allurements of the strongest and subtlest kind; but we must resist them. What did Jesus say to the Devil?

The devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him,

All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

Then Jesus said unto him, Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

And so with many similar allegories. We have to take our stand firmly on the basis of our Divinity, and from that rock tell the tempter that he cannot give us what is already ours, and that what we want we are able to take without his leave.

The slavery of man is due to this everlasting weakness in letting himself be seduced by the charms of Nature. Again and again he succumbs; and, when he finds himself tied up tight in the flowery chains now hardened to hardest steel, he complains to heaven.

The mental delusion of personality, called in Occultism "The Great Heresy," is what binds us to the wheel of earth-life. We have to learn the illusiveness of personality and step out into Deity's free Life which is "Peace that passeth all understanding."

Man has lost many powers which he had in the past, through his lapse into selfishness and materialism; and through his re-emergence from these clouds will he regain those powers. Is it not written in the Allegories of Paradise Lost and Regained, where the Serpent is the tempting lower nature, and the Son of God is the Divine Spirit incarnate in Man? By yielding to personal ambition and voluptuousness, Man has put himself into subjection to the powers he should control. The will is limited in power in proportion as it is selfish, for the selfish will opposes itself to the Universal Will. Thus power is proportioned to purity of purpose. Of the perils that await the rash adventurer into the unseen realms, we have a graphic description in *Zanoni*:

In space there are millions of beings, not literally spiritual, for they have all, like the animacula unseen by the naked eye, certain forms of matter, though matter so delicate, air-drawn, and subtle, that it is, as it were, but a film, a gossamer, that clothes the spirit. . . . These races and tribes differ more widely, each from each, than the Calmuck from the Greek — differ in attributes and powers . . .

some of surpassing wisdom, some of horrible malignity, some hostile as fiends to men, others gentle as messengers between earth and heaven. He who would establish intercourse between these varying beings, resembles the traveler who would penetrate into unknown lands. He is exposed to strange dangers and un conjectured terrors. That intercourse once gained, I cannot secure thee from the chances to which thy journey is exposed. I cannot direct thee to paths free from the wanderings of the deadliest foes. Thou must alone, and of thyself, face and hazard all. . . . The very elixir that pours a more glorious life into the frame, so sharpens the senses that those larvae of the air become to thee audible and apparent; so that, unless trained by degrees to endure the phantoms and subdue their malice, a life thus gifted would be the most awful doom that man could bring upon himself.

And the sequel shows how Glyndon did thus open the invisible world to his own undoing, though he afterwards escapes through unselfish love and self-sacrifice. It is well that we should learn to "subdue the malice" of these "larvae of the air" in their ordinary manifestation as lusts and passions, before we take the step that renders them visible and tangible.

The history of occult research is full of cases of people who have realized for themselves the truth of the above warnings. Most of us have failings which we with difficulty keep within bounds; and to have these greatly intensified would certainly upset us. And besides these failings, there are sure to be other faults still latent, whose existence is not suspected, but which would spring into life under the vivifying influence of the elixir.

Zanoni advises the young aspirant to let occultism alone and devote himself to art. Art, he says, will lead the spirit away from ambition and personal schemings, into an atmosphere of impersonal contemplation of the beautiful and creation of beautiful forms. Thus the nature will be purified so that one day it may blossom forth into power and knowledge normally and naturally. But Glyndon enters upon the Quest with his heart full of ambition and desire, and fails. So it should be our first endeavor to adjust our lives into harmony with the fellow-lives around us, and to establish health—physical, mental and spir-

itual. Nor indeed will any one with a sense of the real problems of life wish otherwise. It is the delusion of separateness that causes our unrest; and we have to seek the true center of our Being and study the relation of our Self to other Selves, as illustrated in conduct and action. Thus shall we, in due time, attain to such knowledge of the unseen as it is necessary and wise for us to have, without unduly forcing our growth and wasting time in dangerous *détours*.

A recognition of the existence of the Astral Light will help anybody who is desirous of leading the life of service to humanity, so long as he is not bitten by the desire rashly to develop his astral senses. There is so much that can be learned and practised in the ordinary course of living, without exposing oneself to such risks. In the conquest of our desires, the mastery of our weaknesses, the subduing of our minds, we can gain so much help from an understanding of the Astral Light. It makes the work more real, renders our responsibilities more clear.

VI

DENIZENS OF THE ASTRAL LIGHT

THERE are beings that have no physical body and hence can not manifest themselves on the physical plane, but which have an astral body and so can manifest themselves on the Astral Plane. These beings are of various grades and kinds. Some are the astral remnants of deceased persons, in process of dying out, but sometimes kept alive by vampirism, sometimes by the aid of spiritualistic circles, etc. Again there are orders of beings to which has been given the name of "Elementals." We are conscious of the influence of these Elements when we feel the impulse to perform any habitual act. Habit, and the tendency to repeat familiar acts, are explained by science in the usual scientific way of giving a mere summary of the effects instead of an explanation of the cause. The physical cells,

or whatever it may be, have a tendency to repeat acts—so we are told; and there we are left. Now this impulse to repeat is due to the existence of the Elemental, a being whose whole life and purpose is summed up in the performance of that one act. We created him by our creative powers of will and idea; and now he continues to exist and to go on doing indefinitely the thing for which he was created. He is, as it were, an atom of our mind, an energized thought. Normally we ought to be able to turn him off when we do not need him, like a stop in an organ, and turn him on again when we do. But sometimes he gets out of hand and takes the bit in his teeth. Here, then, is the explanation of tyrannous habits, tricks of manner, and all those undesirable propensities that range all the way from harmless mannerisms to complete loss of control. Habits are familiar facts of experience; science shows us some of the mechanism of them; here we have a complete explanation. Every mechanical explanation must have a psychic explanation to complete it; no action

can take place in Nature without there being a mind at the back of it somewhere. No cell or nerve can act unless there is a being in it. Thus every cell is the body of some little "sprite," a little intelligence.

The vast importance of understanding the rationale of instinctive actions will be seen. It enables us to understand more about our own nature and how to control it. Many of our actions are simply the result of these tendencies we have set up, and we go on repeating them after they have ceased to be useful, merely because we do not take the trouble to change them. Obviously it is practicable to get rid of one set of habits and create another. But the process may take time. It will be necessary gradually to cut off from one set of habits their supply of life until they die, and as gradually to create the new set.

This might be called an atomic theory of the mind; the mind being made up of countless separate parts, each having an independent existence and at the same time being subject to the whole. The mistake we make is to attrib-

ute *self* to these mere stupid elementals. They float into our mind and set up their activities, and we say, "I want to do this," or "I am angry"; whereas the impulse may be only an elemental from some other mind or from the back of our own mind. Our emotions and projects often have no worthier origin than this—mere currents flowing our way and sucked in instead of resisted. Think of the importance of knowing what they are and of being able to dismiss them!

Now the Astral Light is of course full of these little "action-souls," as we might call them; and they go about seeking human organisms through which they may enact their parts; impelling people to all kinds of action and thought. Some of us keep loose tongues all ready wagging in our mouths, ready to babble out any idle thought that may happen to lodge on the idly-flapping cilia of our brains; and, when we have allowed this elemental to express itself, we wonder why on earth we said that, and protest that "we didn't mean it," and then we do it again. And in many

other ways besides speech we allow ourselves to be the passive instrument of these forces; so that we may do anything from winking an eyelid to falling in love (!) on the strength of a thought current from the Astral Light.

And to talk about freedom and servitude! "Oh give me a vote and get out of my way; I want to stand on the top of a hill and exercise my freedom." Clearly, the wise man will see the real way to freedom; and verily, if he can but pursue it successfully, men will give him all the votes he wants and more power than he can use. All the world is ready to obey the elemental forces of the Astral Light; and he who rules these rules the world. The way to freedom is within thyself.

A magician is one who does not allow himself to be played upon. As a consequence he makes servants of all these beings. Read the stories of the magicians; they always have a train of spirits at command. What is it but the elemental forces which they have learned to control?

We will not enter into an inquiry as to the

exact structure of the elementals, as that would but lead us off the useful track. What we need to do and can do is to learn to control them as we find them in our minds; the other knowledge will come soon enough without seeking.

In the Astral Light are also "Monads" or elementary souls that inform the lower kingdoms of Nature; and other beings too numerous to describe here.

A source of misunderstanding arises here from the fact that our unphilosophical habits of thought lead us to make an artificial distinction between beings whom we call living and beings which we call dead. But philosophically all organisms must be classed as living beings, whether they be human, animal, vegetable or mineral. Hence, when we speak of living beings inhabiting the Astral Light, we do not necessarily mean beings endowed with a high degree of intelligence. Though they are intelligent in a degree, their intelligence may be more of the nature of that which animates the vegetable and mineral kingdoms than

of that which animates man. The elemental forces of the Astral Light may range all the way from what is virtually little more than an automatism to a comparatively complex intelligence.

Some of the denizens of the Astral Light have been recognized in antiquity as the little souls that animate Nature, under the name of nymphs, fairies, etc.; and though we may now in our ignorance and vanity laugh at what we call the superstitions of "primitive man," these beliefs do really represent a well understood science and knowledge of Nature's laws. Doubtless our scepticism is favored by the circumstance that the echoes of this ancient knowledge are often largely mixed up with mere superstition and popular belief, and that we have not the key to the *symbolic and figurative language* used by the ancients in speaking of such matters.

More dangerous than these non-human beings, are certain human remains that exist in the Astral Light. For, as is explained in the Manual on the *Seven Principles of Man*, af-

ter the decease of the body, an entity called the *Kâma Rûpa*, or spook, or shade, is formed, which contains the lowest elements of the carnal nature, embodied in the *Linga Sarîra*, and is soulless, for the Soul has gone to *Devachan*. This shade would normally gradually fade out, surviving the body for a shorter or longer time, according to the strength of the desires by which it is kept alive; but in the case of very evil characters, it may last a long time and haunt the Astral Light, doing harm to living people by its contact with them on the thought-plane. Hence the danger of executing criminals, thereby turning them loose in the full tide of evil passion, to obsess weak natures and thus repeat their crimes. Hence too the advisability of cremation, which helps to destroy this spook.

CONCLUSION

THOUGH the above cannot be called more than a collection of hints, yet enough has been said to show the thoughtful mind that behind the public teachings of Theosophy there lies a practically fathomless ocean of knowledge as to the mysteries of Nature. The obtaining of this knowledge has, partly by inherent conditions and partly by the wise guardianship of Those who guard it, been rendered conditional on worthiness of conduct; even as through unworthiness it was formerly lost. We have seen, in some measure, how it can illuminate the dark places in religion and in science. We have seen how the attempt to gain it without the passport of a worthy motive will land the adventurer in trouble, and how helpful it can be to one who pursues knowledge as a means to noble service only. And finally one of the chief purposes of this Manual is to counteract the false notions

spread by those people who have misused Theosophical teachings and terminology to further their own ambitious schemes. For these teachings are most sacred and were originally given out by H. P. Blavatsky in the spirit of an earnest love for humanity.

This misuse has caused the words to become associated with a class of ideas that do not appeal to serious minds, and it is necessary to rescue the Theosophical teachings from this unworthy association. They appealed to her for instructions and she gave them. Some have tried to found schools for private study on these teachings; others have rejected them because they would not adapt themselves to current religions or scientific authority; the wise have profited by them.

