

In the Next World

(ACTUAL NARRATIVES OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCES BY SOME WHO
HAVE PASSED ON)

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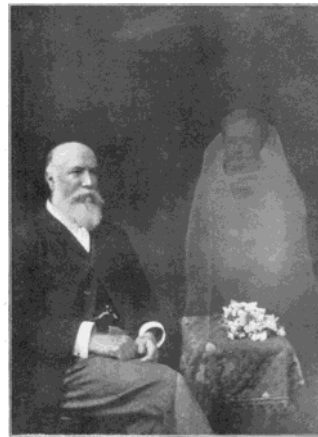
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Introduction

Whether from the point of view of ordinary religious belief or from that reached by theosophical teaching, most people look forward to some kind of life hereafter, but are rarely enabled to frame conceptions of that life with any degree of detail. And it not infrequently happens that when people who have passed over get an opportunity, by the methods of ordinary mediumship, of communicating back to friends in physical life, they seem mainly desirous of reaffirming the familiar truth that to be happy hereafter one must be decently well behaved in this life. The warning as a rule makes no deep impression on the hearers, because no particular novelty surrounds the idea; In so far as it fails with so many people to become a commanding motive of action, that is probably due to the [end of Page #7] vague mist of uncertainty that envelops all future conditions of existence. If people who pass over would devote their efforts to giving us minute descriptions of the new circumstances in which they find themselves, that would make a much deeper impression on their friends here than can be produced by ethical sermons however earnest, however inspired by new knowledge and genuine conviction.

I have been for some years past in the enjoyment of opportunities favourable for getting free speech with friends who have passed over into the astral life. For many reasons it is impossible for me to go into minute detail concerning the circumstances under which these opportunities have arisen. For those who do not know me, the narratives I am about to record may seem tainted by a fictitious colouring, I can only say, for the benefit of those who do know me, and may trust my word, that the stories in all cases are here passed on just as I have received them, and are published in perfect good faith to meet what I hold to be a very widespread desire for definite information concerning the actualities of astral life.

Of course we must always remember that such astral life is not to be regarded as a fulfilment of the karma in each case engendered on [8] the physical plane. In all earlier theosophical teaching it was so supremely important to establish, on a firm foundation, the great principle of reincarnation, with its attendant doctrine of karma, that the intervening phases of life on the astral and manasic planes were comparatively neglected, - with the result, indeed, of giving rise to some misapprehensions in regard both to the astral and devachanic conditions. Those of us who are the most earnest students of theosophical teaching and best situated for carrying on such study, are most fully appreciative of the insuperable difficulty of setting forth the whole volume of complex law governing human evolution all at once.

We need not regret the omissions that were inevitable in the beginning. We need not hesitate to welcome fresh information which fills up some of the gaps, even though in some cases this may dissipate impressions too hastily formed when information was incomplete.

As an introduction to the fragments of astral biography I propose now to give out, I must set before the reader in fairly intelligible shape the constitution of that vast region enveloping the earth that is referred to when we speak of the astral plane. Many of its characteristics have been vividly described in early theosophical [9] writings, but for the purpose I now have in view it is desirable to remind the reader of the very definite way in which it is divided into sub planes. (Sub-concentric spheres would be a more appropriate phrase, but the usual term "plane" is more convenient, though we should never forget that the whole astral region with all its subdivisions is a huge concentric sphere surrounding the physical globe, as much a definite appendage to it as the atmosphere, and carried with it in its movement round the Sun.) A part of the great sphere is actually immersed or submerged beneath the solid crust of the earth. That is a terrible region with which only the very worst specimens of humanity have any concern, after passing on from the physical life. Two sub-planes of the astral are thus under ground - the first and second, numbering the series from below upward. The third lies just above the surface of the earth,

and is still a region of varied discomfort, in which those whose personal characteristics are such as to require purification before they are qualified for existence on any of the superior regions, spend a time greatly varying in duration.

The fourth sub-plane is the first on which existence is altogether based upon the sensation [10] of happiness, though its experiences are themselves subject to very great variety. The higher regions again are all conditions in which happiness is the background of consciousness, but in which different mental and moral attributes find their appropriate expression. Thus people in whom intellectual activity is the predominant characteristic are naturally drawn to the fifth sub-plane, while the sixth, affords scope for genuine devotional feeling if that is the predominant element in any given character. And just because life on the higher levels of the astral plane involves the principle that people are drawn together by their real sympathies, - not as in physical life by karma, that often, down here, puts people into close relations with antipathetic entities, - the seventh sub-plane is a region to which those gravitate who have been in life rulers of men in one way or another, not merely by high social rank, but by virtue of characteristics that have given them sway over others either in industrial or political life.

Of course we must always remember that from the higher levels of the astral plane it is possible for those belonging there to descend, at will, to any of the lower. They do this constantly when desirous of observing what goes on here on the physical plane. There is [11] thus much freedom of intercourse among people on the higher levels of the astral world.

I must pause here to emphasise the idea that life on the higher levels of the astral world is very much more than a transitory condition of preparation for something higher on the manasic plane. That was the first notion we had about astral existence, and it was defective in more ways than one, - not so much an incorrect statement as an incomplete one. For large numbers of very good people the astral life is little more than a transitory condition, not because they are pre-eminently good, but because they may not combine with their goodness enough intellectual capacity to be able to make use of the higher regions of the astral world. Granting such intellectual capacity, people so endowed find it desirable to stay for very protracted periods on the higher levels in question. The devachanic state, in short, which at first was represented as the goal towards which all people should aspire on passing over from the physical life, is really a thoroughly happy state of dreamy inactivity, with intensely vivid sensations of blissful emotion, but not one of either usefulness to others or individual progress. There are large numbers, perhaps multitudes, of people at this [12] stage of human evolution who are good enough for the devachanic state and not advanced enough in other ways, for a useful or progressive career

on the higher levels of the astral. And to these large numbers the earlier teaching applied quite accurately.

Does this statement conflict with a long familiar teaching to the effect that all progress is accomplished in the earthly life; that the period intervening between two earth lives is a period of rest; that it is not an opportunity for further progress? That early teaching was not wrong, but was easily misunderstood, It included, the reader may remember, the idea that karma could still be made on the astral plane, though at first this idea was treated rather as a warning than as an encouragement. But, properly understood, it operates both ways. In truth, the complete view of the subject is that the life of causes includes the astral as well as the physical life. If the astral life for people of the (intellectually) humbler classes is just a period of waiting for idle devachanic bliss, then it is best that no fresh causes should be engendered on the astral plane. They might be detrimental. But consider for a moment the condition of a truly great man of science, for instance. With the new opportunities [13] afforded him in the astral world he has boundless scope for the prosecution of study far beyond the opportunities of physical life. Of course, he avails himself of these, and for more reasons than one. To begin with, the interest of his enlarged opportunities is intense. He could not endure the idea of turning away from them merely to steep himself in "slumber's holy balm." And again - for such a man could not fail to come into touch with the higher wisdom we call down here occult, - he would know that the increasing knowledge he would be gaining, even though it might not be specifically passed on to his next life, would engender enhanced capacity for acquiring knowledge in the next life, and would not be in any sense of the word thrown away.

This is how it comes to pass that, as a matter of fact, the higher levels of the astral world are still, the home of all the great scientific men whose names have decorated our intellectual history. They scorn the unprofitable enjoyments of the devachanic state. At some period in the future they will have to pass on to the manasic plane for the sake of effecting the complete union of all the spiritual elements in their permanent egos which must precede reincarnation. But there is no sort of hurry; [14] and again, their touch with higher wisdom will enable them to know the right time at which to "pass on" a second time, just as they unconsciously obeyed the impulse of an unseen law when they "passed on" from mere physical existence.

That very rough sketch will suffice for the moment to render intelligible the narratives of personal experience on the astral plane that I am in a position to deal with.

I will begin with one that has to do with the after-‘death’(?) experiences of a man with whom I had some touch in this life who had some tiresome characteristics to work off in

the beginning, but, as the reader will see, a magnificent volume of spiritual karma in the background which ultimately found complete expression. In this case I shall be able to give the story in his own words, or nearly so. The conventions by which we are troubled in this life are such that for public print one must exercise a certain reserve in describing conditions that are the outcome, on the astral plane, of strong sexual feeling. And here a word or two of preliminary explanation is perhaps desirable. Bad karma of the kind that is distinctly related to the relationships of this plane, can only, as a rule, be worked off or [15] find expression on the physical plane in a later life following that in which it is engendered; but where strong sexual feeling has been very imperfectly gratified, and has remained a powerful force in imagination up to the period of a comparatively early departure from this life, it is an impediment to upward progress towards higher astral levels. This will be better understood as my present work proceeds, and the subject may conveniently be reserved for later treatment, with some of the stories I have to tell as its text.

I will call the subject of my first narrative G. R. [16]

G. R.'s Story

I died at Hongkong a good many years ago, at about the age of thirty. I had contracted the fever common in that region, and had only been ill a short time. One evening in the dry hot weather, lying in bed heated and feverish, suddenly something seemed to snap like the snapping of a piece of thread. All feeling of malaise and general pain disappeared. I felt quite light. I tried to think what had happened. I couldn't. Something like sinking asleep came, and I knew no more. How long I remained so I do not know. Since then I have been told it was about three weeks.

I remember slowly waking up. I appeared to be in a house very beautifully furnished, situated near the sea. The climate was glorious. I came to myself lying on what appeared to be a couch. I remember asking myself, "Can I be dead?" Various ideas flitted into my mind. I turned my eyes round to look at the room, [17] and found someone seated by me, a man dressed in white, rather tall, with long hair, and eyes that seemed to shine like living centres of light. He said: "My brother, you have left the physical world; you are for the moment under my charge in my habitation." (The place, I afterwards learned, was on the

fifth sub-level of the astral plane.) He said, "You have now to leave me and descend into lower forms of matter. There you will remain for a time, after which you will be again restored to my charge until I pass you on to those above me."

I could not grasp what was meant; all seemed so extraordinary. More than once I thought I was dreaming. As he spoke, in a peculiar way the whole of the room, he himself, and the view appeared to undergo an extraordinary change. They appeared to become less and less clear in outline till at last they faded away. I was conscious of a wonderful effect of coloured streams of light, then as these faded away a strange feeling of dreariness came over me, of cold and drab surroundings. I was lying on the ground, around me nothing but desert and huge rocks. I was very miserable and lonely, and did not know what to do. The cold feeling seemed to focus my thoughts. I moved; found I could move with great freedom. I had no [18] sense of weight. I stood up and gazed around. The sense of dreariness became more marked, and I asked myself, "Where am I?" I saw no form, but I heard a voice reply, "You are under my charge on the third level of the region beyond the physical." I saw no form. The voice seemed to strike a chill through me.

Then of a sudden I seemed to be back in England, in London, drifting, floating through the streets. At last I found myself in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, in the midst of a crowd all jostling one another.

[It is necessary here to condense, rather than to set down in his own words, my friend's narrative. He describes himself as having been in life a man with a very ardent feeling for the other sex, though with refined tastes and habits. But he was now plunged in the midst of the coarsest manifestations of that feeling. Without seeking the experience, he was drawn, sucked as it were, into the consciousness of a man of very gross nature and habits, and shared, though with loathing and disgust, his emotions as he gratified his desires. My friend was irresistibly tied to this man for a long time, till at last, with a horrified cry for help, he was enabled to break away, with a sense of extraordinary relief. But he was still [19] floating over London. I resume his narrative in his own words.]

What a wonderful sense of relief seemed to thrill through me when free from that horrible embrace. I remember at that time floating over the Cafe Monico, attracted by a swirling movement that seemed like a whirlwind to draw me into it. I tried to resist the suction, but was drawn on down through what seemed a funnel of smoke. I had no idea where I should land, but all of a sudden I found myself in a clear atmosphere listening to the conversation of two men, one a young fellow of about twenty, the other a man of forty-five or fifty, talking in low tones. I could not hear exactly, but could feel an intense sensation of anguish that seemed to emanate from the younger man. This was very intense, and made me uncomfortable. Suddenly I heard the voice of the young man saying, "I cannot face it, I can't. It is impossible." I had no idea as to what this referred to, but could

see that it was the cause of his miserable condition. The young man rose hastily, put on his hat, took his coat over his arm, and quitted the long low room. I was compelled to follow, and floated on behind him. For some time he stood on the step hesitating; then made up his mind. I saw his aura, till [20] then a mass of grey, become dense, so that when I attempted to touch it, it was quite hard. I was compelled to follow.

He called a cab and drove to some rooms near the Marble Arch. He entered the house with a key, went upstairs, entered a back room, went straight to a drawer, which he opened, and took out a revolver. I knew what he was about to do, and horror ran through me. I could do nothing, but was rooted to the place. I saw him take the revolver and look at it. Then he sat down at a table where there were writing materials and began to write to his mother. When he had finished, he folded and addressed the letter, and then put his hand on the revolver. At this moment I was in a state difficult to describe. At all costs I must prevent him, and I did not know what to do. My agony caused me to cry, "For God's sake, stop!" At this moment he gave a start, crying out, "Who spoke?" He had heard me. I tried to speak, but could not. Again he asked, "Who spoke?" I was suffering in an extraordinary way, and said, "For God's sake, spare his life!" Then I was, aware of a form standing by him that I have since known to have been that of the Blessed Lord, the Holy Master. I shall never forget the calmness and peace that [21] came over me in presence of the glorious divine man. I thought it was an angel. I felt happy. All would be well. The Holy One turned His eyes on me, and I felt a thrill through my whole being.

The young man in the meantime looked very startled, and put down the revolver on the table again, and sat down, looking round. I felt rather than heard him say, "Why can't I do it? I must. I can't face it." Then he took up the revolver again, and a strange thing happened. The Master merely waved His hand in the direction of the young man and a stream of light seemed to flow from His fingers into the aura. Then I saw the astral form of the young man standing by the Master. I did not then understand it, but have since learned that the Master had drawn him out of the body.

The young man sobbed as if his heart would break, and then the Master put him back into his body, which had fallen on the floor. He got up in a dazed sort of way, and said, "Preserved by God Himself!" Then he put away the revolver, and the whole scene faded away. I was again alone.

For a little time after that experience I seemed to be surrounded by a peculiar cloud [22] which seemed to obscure my sense of sight, a cloud of a reddish tinge; and it seemed to be drifting upon me, as far as I could judge. I did not appear to be the origin of it myself, and became conscious of an extraordinary sense of damp heat and that I was slowly drifting I knew not whither. How long I drifted I know not, but at last I found myself in a dense kind of fog. I became conscious of voices, at first dim and far off. Also aware of an

acute, uncomfortable sensation of choking. All of a sudden the mist cleared away and I found myself in a room with a number of men and women.

[Now again I am constrained to condense the story. The scene was one of very degraded debauchery.]

I saw foul shapes of an extraordinary order floating round the room, one exactly like a large jellyfish. As it passed me it gave me an indescribable sensation of disgust and horror. I prayed to be delivered from this wretched condition, and then, to my astonishment, saw a figure approaching surrounded by an atmosphere of beautiful blue. It seemed to glide rather than walk. As it came near, my horror vanished. Then I was taken by the hand, and the voice said, "Come with me!" I could not [23] see the face of the figure, but willingly followed. We appeared to go an immense way, and at last arrived at what appeared to be a very rocky and desolate land. I was led upward along a small valley or ravine, and at last reached a small log house. My guide was behind, impelling me forward. The door of the hut opened, and I entered. I turned round to look at him who had saved me, and it was . . . (one whom he recognised as having known formerly in life). It was he who had brought me from that loathsome scene. Shall I ever forget the deep gratitude in my heart for what he had done for me! He smiled gently, and said: "My friend, I have been permitted by my Master to help you. You must rest in this place for some little time. Remain patient. Do not long for those scenes that I have relieved you from." I thought at the time that was a strange remark, as I felt a powerful loathing for the scenes I had just left. He read my thought, for he went on to say: "You do not realise for the moment what this means, but those conditions will again recur, and unless you put them from you your sufferings will continue. I must leave you now, but remember that you are being guarded. You will not be left alone. Farewell." [24]

He then vanished, and I was alone. So strange, so dreary were my surroundings that I almost wept, and finally began to long for the warmth of those horrible conditions in which I should not be so utterly alone. As my thought dwelt upon them I heard a voice saying "Remember!" This changed the current of my thoughts, and I realised very acutely that I must not think of those things. I was so overcome, however, that I sank to the ground, weeping violently. I know not how long this continued, but at last I felt someone touch my shoulder. I looked up. It was my friend again, smiling sweetly and sympathetically. All he said was "Come." I rose up, feeling strengthened, and followed him.

And thus the painful part of G. R.'s astral experiences came to an end. He, as I said before, had great volumes of spiritual karma behind the unsatisfied passions of his last life. Moreover, I am inclined to believe that the disagreeable period described must have been to some extent traceable to unfulfilled tendencies of earlier lives. When he was finally free of all this, he ascended into lofty realms and came by degrees to play an important part in

the mighty work of the [25] Great White Lodge. It is this development that has enabled him to survey the past experiences with a clear vision and to give me the deeply interesting story I have just reproduced. [26]

W. G.'s Experiences

I will now deal with another narrative of a very different order from the last. In this case I have not been able to get quite so much detail as G. R., from his present advanced point of view, was enabled to furnish. The person whose experiences I have to relate (let me here call him W. G.) was not at a stage of spiritual growth rendering possible, quite as yet, for him such definite occult advancement as that ultimately reached by G. R. But, on the other hand, he was a man of remarkably beautiful nature. He was an intimate friend of mine down here, and I do not think I have ever known, in this life, a man so utterly free as he was from any moral blemish. He was certainly one of the most unselfish men I ever knew, amiable, simple, and modest to an unusual degree, and of a warmly affectionate nature. He died at an advanced age; about seventy-seven, I think. His wife, to whom [27] he was devotedly attached, was with him at the last.

Two or three years had elapsed since his passing when I had the opportunity of getting into touch with him. I ought to explain that he had been in life cordially appreciative of theosophical teaching, though he would never claim to be a student, as his modesty of character made him rather inclined to underrate his intellectual qualifications - not perhaps absolutely of a first-rate order, but in no way defective. He was content to drift quietly through life doing his duty, whatever that might be, and more than doing it when circumstances gave him the opportunity of doing kindness to other people. The notes I have of my conversations with him in reference to his after-death experiences do not enable me to give the story actually in the first person, but, far from being embellished as I shall present it, it must lose a good deal in condensation.

He remembered his deathbed quite well. He had long been ill, and faded away at the end in utter weakness rather than in pain. He tells me he lay there very happy, feeling borne up by the "rosy clouds" of his wife's love, and . . . fell asleep. He woke, he does not know after what interval. It seemed to him [28] at once; but of course we know that in all such cases as this there is a period of unconscious rest on the astral plane before the person passing on really awakes. The interval varies within very wide limits, and may be estimated sometimes in hours of our time, sometimes in months.

My friend woke finding himself lying on a couch in a beautiful room. He saw his father and mother (who of course had passed over a great many years previously) and others of his people standing round. Bringing over from his last stage of consciousness the feeling that he was weak, he made an effort to get up, and found that he was weak no longer. He got up and greeted his people, and asked where was his wife? "Then, you

know," he told me, "the door opened and she came in;" [I have already said that his wife survived him, and of course the explanation of her appearance was that higher powers interested in his happiness arranged the moment of his waking to correspond with a period when his wife, on this plane, was asleep, so that in the astral body she could visit her husband.]. "All of a sudden she disappeared; but I have seen her frequently since, and am very happy." He himself, he explained, was constantly [29] "in her surroundings" on the physical plane, and sent her through me ardent messages of affection. It was a beautiful house, he told me, in which he was living, in company with many "very nice people," but not people whom he had known in life down here. [This condition illustrates a well-known fact connected with astral life on the higher levels, where people are drawn together by natural sympathies, not, as with us down below, by karmic ties that may not always represent harmonious relations. The house, he told me, was a very fine place, "smothered in pictures." But these puzzled him greatly, for as he looked at them the figures represented seemed living, moving about, and yet when he touched them they were the same as the surface of the wall. "I can't understand it," he said, using a phrase he had often, in his intellectual modesty, repeated in physical life. I asked if he had not seen any people he knew in life. "Oh, yes! I was out walking one time, or at least it was not walking exactly but I was gliding along somehow in a delicious way looking at things, all very interesting, when I saw someone coming that I thought I knew, and it was . . ." - mentioning the name of one we both knew in life who has passed on to very high levels of spiritual exaltation. "She had [30] come down to pay me a visit, and I have also been honoured by a visit from the Master."

At the time of this conversation my friend was simply reveling in the first exhilarating sensation of happiness which was the natural background of his new life, well up on the fourth sub-level of the astral plane. Even on that level there are many varieties of condition, and I take it that he for many reasons was in the enjoyment of some among the best. At a later date, about a year later, I had another conversation with him, and found that he was partly on the fifth sub-level, surrounded with books and "studying theosophy." He mentioned a well-known man of science whose acquaintance he had made there. He frequently came down on to the fourth sub-plane to visit old friends, and was beginning, I gathered, to be set to work, sharing in that enormous volume of work undertaken by all who are qualified, and not preoccupied by work of a still higher order, - the task of soothing and encouraging people who come over from this life in complete ignorance of all that appertains to the real truth of things, and are at first frightened and bewildered even if they are not required by circumstances to endure actual suffering. [31]

A Wonderful Recovery

I will now attempt to give some idea of after-death experiences differing as widely as the poles asunder from the case just described. Here again I myself was acquainted in life with the person in question, and knew him to be tainted with evil-doing of unusual intensity. Indeed, I had good reason to believe him definitely enlisted in the service of evil - nothing more or less than a black magician. He was about the last person I should have thought of as likely to be brought to speak to me through the channel which, during the last few years, has been made use of to keep me in relation with the occult world. But, to my immense surprise, he was so brought on one occasion under conditions that I must stop for a moment to explain.

The method of communication referred to was mainly designed in the first instance to keep me in touch with the great Master to [32] whom I am especially attached, and with others of the White Lodge; but it is used, as the stories I have already told will have shown, to provide for intercourse with friends who have passed on and other inhabitants of the astral world. For it is possible for certain persons belonging to the White Lodge, whom I may describe as lieutenants of the Masters, to bring any astral entity willing to come, for a talk with me; and more than this, to bring the Higher Self of a living person with whom I have been able this way in some cases to communicate, while the person concerned has actually been awake on the physical plane. In other cases, when the person concerned has been asleep and out of the body in the astral vehicle, it has been the personality itself that has been brought.

On the occasion referred to above, it was the actual personality of my dark acquaintance, still then living (M. N. let me call him), who spoke to me, to my no little amazement. And he spoke without the least disguise of his true character. I expressed my surprise as soon as he enabled me to identify him. He chuckled, if I may use that word to convey an idea of his mental attitude, and said he had come to "torture me for a bit." He knew, of course, that I knew how seriously he had injured some friends of [33] mine, and I gathered that he had plans in view for inflicting further injuries on one of them, and proposed to amuse himself by sketching out his plan. I scoffed at him, declaring that he could only have come by permission of my loftier friends, and that he was perfectly powerless to hurt me. He laughed in turn, and said he had come because he chose to come, to talk to me about her whom he supposed I should call his victim. To that term I agreed, as I looked upon him as altogether evil. This view he quite complacently accepted, claiming to represent "the Devil." I used very contemptuous language, calling him a fool for his pains, who was earning disastrous consequences for himself in the long-run. All

that he ridiculed as "Sunday-school prattle," and was going on to say something else when he suddenly broke off: "What was that I was going to say? It has all been wiped out of my mind!" He went on repeating this idea with increasing irritation. I told him the experience was clearly a lesson to show him that he was powerless in the hands of the Great Adepts. Immediately afterwards he was gone.

One of my occult friends (of the order I have described as "lieutenants" of the Masters) then told me that the black visitor had been brought [34] by him in accordance with the Master's direction, for the sake of the lesson he had just received, which might have a startling effect; and indeed the Master himself afterwards told me it might be the first step for him in an upward progress.

I thought no more about the matter for some long while, but about a year and a half later I learned that the man in question had died, at a date some four or five months later than that of the interview I have described. And he had died altogether in the odour of sanctity, so to speak! He had undertaken a work of a painfully self-sacrificial nature, had dazzled with admiration all who were cognisant of his doings, and had finally lost his life, though only in early middle age, in pursuance of his very ghastly, self-imposed duty. It was all utterly bewildering, and I need hardly say that I sought for an explanation of the mystery.

The development now reached was profoundly touching. *He* himself was brought to me again, and our conversation was indeed different from the last. He asked at first for a few moments to recover. I am unwilling to repeat the whole of the conversation in detail, as that would disclose his identity for some who may read these lines in a manner which is perhaps undesirable. What he told me was in substance [35] to this effect: After returning to the body from the previous interview he had with me, the influences that had then been brought to bear upon him had had the effect of evoking a mysterious change. He somehow seemed to realise the horror of the life he had been leading. He resolved to change its entire course; to devote himself thenceforward to the service of humanity instead of to that of the black powers with whom till then he had been working. He had been in that terrible service for a long series of lives. He now undertook a task of so desperately trying a nature that he knew it would involve the ultimate sacrifice of his own life under very painful conditions. He carried it through to the end, and then faced the after-death consequences of the long career of evil-doing in which he had been immersed. This meant a period of suffering on the second submerged plane of the astral world. He gave me an awful account of the torments he was undergoing. He was in the dim lurid light of the underworld, surrounded by horrible elemental shapes or creatures of the most loathsome aspect who were attacking him fiercely. He had lost all sense of time, but this seemed to have been going on for what seemed an eternity. But he realised his suffering to be an expiation that

[36] had to be borne. He was dauntless in the courage with which he faced it. The wonderful strength of his character that had made him, till then, so powerful a force on the black side, now took the shape of a tenacious resolution to bear whatever might befall him without flinching or turning aside from the determination that he would at last set his foot on the first rung of the ladder leading to the spiritual heights of the White Lodge. He rejoiced in the brief interlude that his present visit to me afforded, but was going back to the awful region he had described to me with unwavering bravery.

This interview took place, as far as I could make out, about a year and a half after his physical death, and I have since learned that it marked the moment of his actual release from the underworld. His stay there would not have wiped out the awful karma of his black magic lives if it had not been for the fact of his genuine repentance in physical life and his many months of painful self-sacrifice voluntarily incurred. The experience was abnormal in all ways. Leaving black magicians out of account, the karma that leads to any contact with the terrible "second" sub-plane of the astral is exceptional in its character. I have said already [37] in general terms that it is only the very worst specimens of humanity that have anything to do with this dreadful region after death, but that statement does not cover the whole ground. Human characters are often complicated in their constitution. A man may have a great deal of good in his nature blemished by some abominable characteristics, and one above all is calculated to give the person so affected a period of suffering on the second sub-level. The characteristic to which I refer is, cruelty, - cruelty during life on the physical plane. The principle will be readily intelligible. The most beautiful human emotion is love; the behaviour in life which that emotion prompts is benevolence, kindness to others, sympathy, and all the varieties of that characteristic. When the love principle is missing from the nature the result may be callous indifference to suffering in others, sometimes leading to acts of positive cruelty. Then just as active love is a force, leading to blissful conditions of astral existence, active cruelty leads to a glimpse of, or a more protracted sojourn on the terrible second sub-level. I shall have to amplify that explanation with examples later on, but for the moment it is enough to enunciate the idea in its broad aspects. [38]

As I indicated above, M. N. was much nearer release from the awful conditions of the submerged level at the time of his second interview with me than he imagined. Some time after I heard of his release, I was enabled to get touch with him again, so that I might hear from himself how he was getting on. He told me he was then on the fourth sub-plane, and had joined a sort of community - he described it as a monastery - the brothers of which were engaged in the effort to concentrate their thoughts into a force that could be used by higher powers for the benefit of humanity. He was happy now in performance of this task.

Before going on with the record of other experiences, this may be a suitable time for giving some explanation of the conditions under which the terrible regions of the underworld are governed. The wild caricature of these regions embodied in ecclesiastical theology assumes that "hell" is governed by the Devil, who takes a delight in torturing his victims. This is so grotesque a perversion of the truth that one cannot easily understand how even the moderate intelligence guiding ecclesiastical thought can have been content with the theory. Clearly if there is a region of existence designed to be a region of suffering, where suffering has [39] a purifying purpose, that region must be ruled by divine will, not by any diabolical agency reveling in cruelty for its own sake. In reality the regions of suffering are confided to the rule of a Being of infinite sublimity, goodness, mercy, and love. They constitute the mighty reformatory of the world, and the Being who rules them is spoken of by the great Masters of Wisdom themselves with deep reverence and admiration. For the stupendous duty in question would never have been imposed by divine will on any being qualified to undertake it. Its acceptance was a voluntary act of the most unparalleled self-sacrifice. He who undertook it is known in the occult world as "Melan." He belongs to an order of super-adepts spoken of by those who still use the beautiful old term "Brothers" for the Masters of the White Lodge, as "the Fathers." Incarnate imagination cannot go far in the direction of comprehending the conditions of existence, or the functions in nature of the Fathers, but we may assuredly assume it to be a condition of some supreme beatitude. It was from that condition, because it was necessary that some qualified being should perform the duty, that Melan descended to rule the regions of suffering. [40]

I do not suggest that even there he can in any way share the suffering, but, for a being filled by nature with love and sympathy to be the constant witness of it, in a certain sense the agent for its infliction, even though divine wisdom enables him to appreciate its purifying purpose, must mean a state of consciousness that cannot be far removed from pain.

Besides the two submerged levels, the third, immediately in contact with the earth's surface, is included in Melan's realm. The lower of the two submerged levels is hardly if at all connected with human experience. It is chiefly a region of strange elemental life of a kind that we should regard as horrible if we had any contact with it, but I have learned next to nothing more about it. Something has already been said above concerning the second level (in connection with the experiences of M. N.), but the third requires much fuller treatment. It is, of course, extremely varied in its aspects. Its worst conditions are very dark and wretched. I use the word "worst" in preference to "lowest" because the lowest in the spatial sense is that part immediately in touch with the physical earth's surface, and people who cannot get away from the physical surroundings to which they have been used in life are uncomfortable [41] certainly, but not so badly off as others also

entangled with the conditions of level number three. We shall get glimpses of what such entanglements mean as we go on with the records I have been enabled to collect. [42]

Experiences of H. S.

The beautiful "passing" of my friend W. G. might without doubt be paralleled by many other examples of similar experience. Happily, at the present stage of human evolution there must be large numbers of people who lead thoroughly good lives and wake up on delightful regions of the astral, where they may soon be eager to express the idea that W. G. conveyed to me in the course of his talk: - "I wouldn't be back in the body for anything." But I have been seeking, in the course of the inquiries I have been privileged to carry on, for examples of astral experience that convey some more varied lessons than the simple old truth that good lives here lead to happy conditions hereafter. Thus while there may be a good deal of shadow in some of the stories I am going on to tell, these need not have a discouraging effect on the minds of my readers generally. There will be more to say on that subject [43] later, but I have now to describe some astral lives involving a good deal of what may be called purgatorial experience. Let me reserve comment on this purgatorial aspect of astral life till I have an appropriate text in the shape of the story I now want to relate.

This has to do with the astral life of a man who was a close personal friend of my own in physical life. He was an older man than myself, and passed on more than twenty years ago from the time at which I am writing. He was a man of great personal charm, attractive in every way, mentally brilliant, and good-looking to correspond. Under those conditions, and filled with an intense interest in and desire for the opposite sex, the results were remarkable and striking, to say the least. Don Juan (of the poem), I used sometimes to think, with his two or three simple love adventures, had an almost ascetic record compared to that of my friend, "H. S." let me call him.

The consequences to him on the astral plane after he passed over were not such as to encourage us to think lightly of tendencies along the line referred to. H. S. woke after the usual interval, and found himself in what [44] seemed liked the lounge of a great hotel, or the entrance-hall of a large club. It was pervaded by a reddish-yellow light. At first he had no particular sense of discomfort, but presently he saw coming in and out of the room a number of nude female forms. These evoked passionate desire, but if he attempted to reach them they receded or disappeared. This went on for a terrible length of time. On one occasion he was endeavouring to pursue some female form down what seemed a long corridor. It narrowed and narrowed until it seemed like a pipe down which he was being propelled. It was a terrible nightmare feeling. Then he seemed shot out into space, and found himself in a room where there was a man, and a woman of the prostitute order. He was partially drawn into the vortex of their feeling, but the room seemed filled with red

fumes that gave him a strange sensation of reaction and disgust. Then he was back again in the lounge, and everything went on as before, crowds of unclothed figures all about. At one time a voice seemed to address him, saying: "Son, you will never get satisfaction that way; shut your soul's eye and you will get relief." But he could not do this. Years went on and he suffered acutely. [45]

His experience, illustrated in a remarkably vivid way the principle that the astral body is the real seat of those desires we are in the habit of thinking about as the desires of the flesh. The appreciation of this truth may indeed in some cases be carried to excess. During incarnate life certain desires are in harmony with Nature's design. They leave no indelible traces on the astral vehicle unless they are allowed to dominate life and thought to an excessive degree. As in so many other ways, moderation is the keynote of health. It is almost as definitely possible to overdo asceticism as to overdo self-indulgence. But the astral vehicle of H. S. was no doubt over-saturated with sexual desire, and it was by a very slow course of suffering that this unhealthy state of things was counteracted. Eventually one of those whom I may describe as lieutenants of the Masters got into touch with H. S., and helped him to escape from the tantalising torments to which he had been so long subject. Of course by that time he had become intensely desirous of escaping, or else the rescue could not have been accomplished. As it was, he was so dealt with that the room that had been so long the scene of his purgatory began to look shadowy. It was still filled with the [46] forms of women; but though they clutched at him and tried to keep him down, he shrank from them and felt himself floating upward. He seemed to hear a sound, something like a gong, and then! - all the previous conditions had disappeared and he found himself in a rocky desert alone. The first feeling was "awful," but presently he saw the one who had helped him, who told him to come along, that he was ready. "He held my hand," H. S. told me; and "life seemed to pour into me. We floated along. At the end of a valley we came out into a beautiful country." He had, in fact, been lifted out of the third level on to the fourth.

The new influence gradually worked on him and created a revulsion of feeling, a disgust for the emotions that had previously controlled him. He remembers having been alone for a time. Then he came more definitely into touch with former friends who had already become established on higher levels, and so by degrees into the companionship of entities belonging to the White Lodge. During life he had known something of occult teaching, and the effect of this blossomed forth when he had struggled through the embarrassments of sexual passion. Now, of course, for many years [47] he has been engaged in loftier pursuits, and on the usual task of helping other people coming up from the lower world, and needing such help as his own experiences enable him to give. [48]

The Story of R. W.

I now approach a very difficult task, that of describing the after-death experiences of a lady who was brought to talk to me in response to a wish on my part to get speech with someone whose story would be a feminine pendant to that of my friend H. S., a woman whose life had been in a pre-eminent degree coloured by strong sexual passion.

Let me again emphasise the idea that, exhaled within the limits of any reasonable, moderation, no bad karma whatever attaches to the exercise of natural functions, nor even to the intense enjoyment of these as associated with genuine love, of which indeed they are the almost inevitable expression on the physical plane of life. I might go even further than this if called upon to write an essay on the relations of the sexes, so grievously mismanaged under the influence of various delusive conventions, especially in this country. But some [49] fundamental laws may be recognised in connection with all problems of this nature; firstly, that selfish pleasure, sought at the expense of incidental suffering to another, engenders bad karma of an unequivocal character, the effects of which will colour the next physical life, while, independently of that, desires innocent in themselves, may be exaggerated in their intensity and allowed to dominate a whole life to such an extent that they are shed with very great difficulty on the astral plane after the death of the physical body. The process of shedding them may be so painful and protracted, as the story I have just been dealing with shows, that an account of it in any particular case reads like the description of a punishment; but that would not be a correct reading of it. The consequences of evil-doing on the physical plane, which have to be regarded, from one point of view, as its penalty, are worked out on the physical plane again in the next life. The intervening period is one the conditions of which ought to reflect the better side of the life just spent, rather than its worst. But for that better side to express itself the entity must not be weighed down by characteristics incompatible with existence on the higher levels of the astral world. It cannot [50] get up to those higher levels till free of the characteristics which belong exclusively to the earth-life. That is how it comes to pass that the entity is entangled with thought-forms on the third level, in the way H. S. was entangled, till that group of desires has been worn out.

I will go on now with the narrative I was enabled to obtain from the lady who, as I put it above, was a counterpart, on the feminine side, of my friend H. S.

She remembered her death, which she struggled against. Felt herself pushed out of her body, and saw it die. Sank into a state of unconsciousness, and afterwards woke feeling very unhappy. She found herself surrounded by a dull red light, and saw male forms around in all directions. This sight roused the old desires with intensity. She rushed towards them, but they receded. I must leave a good deal here to the imagination of the reader. Fiercely craving for satisfaction, she found herself drawn into an eddy or swirl which drew her into the neighbourhood of a soldier and girl in Hyde Park. She threw herself into the girl's aura. The girl had been somewhat reluctant, but now gave herself up to the man. . . .

Desire seemed to burn her like acid on the skin. I cannot follow the painful story in all [51] details. She was fearfully tormented by thought-forms of a horrible character, the creation of her imagination during life. These at last provoked a feeling of abhorrence. She found herself alone in a rocky desert, utterly miserable. Eventually she was addressed by a tall black figure who told her she was in his charge, but that it rested with her to determine how long she would remain on these levels of misery. He asked, did she wish to escape from these tormenting desires? She could only gasp out an entreaty to him to "get her out of this." He said: "It is well; follow me; the way is long, but if you obey you will find a path that will lead you away. As soon as I depart you will be again tormented by the personifications of your old desires. They will seem real; they will attempt to seduce you. Bear in mind that they cannot, if your desire for freedom remains.

Hold fast to that." Then she found herself surrounded by red flowers, red grass, red everything, and men were there saying "Come!" etc. But she resisted.

Melan again appeared, saying, "It is well. Rest and recover!" Then he touched her forehead, and a wave of peace seemed to flow over her. Then she saw a lovely woman in white, who smiled on her and took her in her arms. [52] She floated up, and attained some region of bliss; a lovely garden, where she was filled with a new sense of life and cleanliness.

This must, of course, have been some level of the fourth sub-plane, and thither she now returns at will; but she has devoted herself to work on the lower planes, where she endeavours to help those whom she misled in life.

I cannot ascertain exactly how long the suffering period lasted, but believe it must have been for several years of our time. [53]

J. P.'s Story

The astral life with which I will now proceed to deal was one which I sought to investigate because it was that of a man who led an utterly commonplace life, concerned merely with the ordinary amusements of a man-about-town, with racing, games, and club life generally. There was nothing that I knew of conspicuously wrong in his behaviour, but he was a man who probably never gave a thought to interests of a higher order than those of the physical plane, and my valued friend G. R. found him for me about a year after his passing over, and brought him along for a talk.

He was very glad to find himself in a position to talk freely with someone on the physical plane. He identified himself with joyful readiness, and addressed me by name, vividly remembering all about his life just spent. "I am not happy," he told me. I [54] will proceed to give his story, as far as I can, in his own words, hurriedly noted at the time of our interview, and freely interlarded with the harmless swear words he was wont to strew about his conversation with liberal abundance.

"I am still haunting that damned club, bored to death." I asked what were his first recollections. "I remember being awfully confused at first; couldn't realise that I was dead. You know I died rather suddenly; some sort of fit, I believe the doctors called it. Then I know I had a sort of sleep for a time, and when I woke I was in one of those big armchairs at the club. One of those near the fire, you know, in the smoking-room. Then, damned if some fellow did not sit down right on top of me, or through me! It was that beastly fat old colonel who used to play billiards. The old fool said, "What a draught; shut the door! " There wasn't any draught. I went to the billiard-room, and wanted to play, but if I tried to take up a cue it slipped through my fingers. I looked on sometimes at all of you having lunch or dinner. I wanted to join in, but it was no good. If I got hold of anything, it all went to nothing in my fingers, like one of those damned [55] pastry-cook's puffs with nothing inside. I wanted a cut off the joint."

In life, of course, he had been quite unable to take a serious view of the subjects with which he knew I was concerned, and now he felt how much better it might have been for him if he had been able. But he went on to explain how he had been just now addressed by someone he did not know. "Who the devil are you?" he asked, and the person asked him to come along and have a talk with me. "You're the first person I've met," he said, "who has given me an intelligible answer." He was then brought to me, and was utterly bewildered as to how it was that he found himself talking to me. I endeavoured to explain as far as it was possible to make him understand, giving him good advice as to how he could get clear

of the club and aspire towards superior conditions in the new world of which he had just touched the threshold, and recommended him to seek out a certain person whom we both knew in life, another member of our club, who had passed on two or three years before. This friend had a mind a good deal better open to serious ideas than J. P., as I will call him, but none the less was worried for a time at not being able to get away from the club, where he had spent much [56] of his waking life. J. P. did not know what to do in order to find R. N., as I will call him, but I told him to think of R. N. intently, and that would attract his attention.

Meanwhile he went on to tell me that some mysterious person had, on one occasion, shown him an awful sight - something that looked like a huge pit; and, looking down, he saw horrid reptiles, scorpions, and great octopuses, and he was told he had had the good luck to escape going down there "by a hairs breadth." He shuddered. "Ten minutes down there would have knocked me silly." Referring to his life on this plane, he said, "I was an empty sort of numskull, but I played the game; had some sense of honour; but when is this wheel going to stop? I'm about fed up with it; I don't want to go back to that damned club."

I again told him to look out for R. N., and suddenly he called out, "Why, there is R. N.," using a nickname by which he was known to his intimates.

Then R. N. spoke to me, telling me he was now on a happy level of the fourth sub-plane, and would look after J. P. He asked me to explain something that puzzled him. His memory, he thought, must be getting confused, [57] because he began to have vague thoughts about Rome, as though he were somebody else besides himself. I explained, of course, that he was probably getting some clairvoyant recollections of a former life, and he quite appreciated the idea. I asked about his present surroundings. They were very pleasant. He seemed to be living in a house that was just exactly the kind of house he used to picture in imagination as the ideal house he would like to have. Of course this was a pleasant kind of thought-form he had unconsciously created. He also said he was beginning to have a curious sort of feeling, as though he were getting lighter. It was quite a pleasant feeling, and he thought he had been told that it betokened some impending change that would involve his translation to some superior condition. His house was a country-house with gardens and flowers, grass and trees, though they did not seem to want any attending to. He spent a great deal of time in the garden, thinking pleasantly of bygone times, and visited by people he had known-his father and mother amongst them. The time just glided by. There was no night, no sense of being tired. He had no wants.

He wound up by again promising to look after J. P., who, I was glad to think, having [58] "played the game" and cultivated a sense of honour, would now be set free from the

boredom he had been so long enduring, and would find any level of the fourth sub-plane far more agreeable a region to inhabit than even Pall Mall. [59]

"Bill Smith"

I had been wishing to get an authentic account of the passing to the next state of existence of someone representing the humbler classes. This wish was met by one of my loftier friends, who contrived to bring along an ex-costermonger [1], whose account of himself was intensely amusing as well as instructive in its way. And it confirms a brief experience I had a good many years ago, when a highly gifted psychic of my acquaintance endeavoured, for my information, to get a glimpse of life on a low level of the astral, plane, and (so to speak) ran up against an ex-coalheaver, who was found still hanging about the poor dwelling in which he had lived, with the vague idea that he was still smoking his pipe there. He must have been a harmless creature, as he did not seem to be suffering in any way, simply passing a sleepy, idle existence for many years, after which no doubt he would have been helped up to the [60] lower levels of the fourth, and eventually to some rather colourless variety of the devachanic state, in preparation for a new birth.

My new acquaintance spoke with the same sort of phraseology that he was used to in life of the physical order. I wish I could give every word of his own as he told his story, but my notes do not enable me to do this completely. I shall endeavour to do so as nearly as I can.

He gave me his name as "Bill Smith." He had been a costermonger with a donkey-cart somewhere down Commercial Road way. "Small profits, you know, and quick returns." At about thirty he married - "to make an honest woman" of the girl. They led a respectable sort of life in a couple of rooms and had "ten kids." "I was a hardworking sort of chap, but fond of beer. I did not mess up things badly." Then he died of some fever that was prevalent in the Commercial Road at the time, and hardly seems now able to identify the actual period of his translation to another plane of life. He only knows that he had "a rotten time." He seemed more or less in the dark, but he could hear people talking. He had a great thirst upon him. It is impossible to make out how long this condition lasted, but eventually he was addressed "by some chap [61] who called him by name - Yes, Bill Smith, that's me!" His new acquaintance told him that he would be happier if he left off

wanting beer. "Can't do it, governor!" "I'll help you," he said; "you want to get clear of that thirst, don't you?" "All right, governor." "Then come along with me." Then he took Bill to some place where "S'help me bob, there were a lot of people sitting round a table singing hymns. Then they began praying. That wasn't much in my line, but there were a lot of people there like myself. There was one old chap at the table with white whiskers. He seemed a bit of all right. Someone told me to go up and stand behind him, and when I did that I felt just as if I was sucked down a drain-hole. Then I found I was talking through the old man and asking for beer. Then an old woman began talking to me like a Dutch clock. She did read me a lecture! She said, 'We'll pray, for you. We'll help you to get rid of that desire for drink. You say after me, "I don't want any drink."' I said it to oblige her, and somehow I began to feel better. Then she made me say it three times over, and S'help me bob, I didn't feel any more desire for the beer. Then I saw the man that brought me, and he said, 'Come along!' and we floated away right [62] over Canning Town, where I used to live, till we came to a nice little house like a country cottage with a garden. 'You stop here,' he said; but I said, 'I can't afford to live in a place like this.'"

I must finish the story in other words than those Bill employed, as my notes do not enable me to recover them exactly. He was soon enabled to realise the situation, saw his old father and mother, who came to visit him, themselves apparently a little further on; and later, one of his sons came, a boy who, at about the age of fourteen, had been killed in a motor-car accident, and in advance of his father had reached a somewhat higher level.

One thought in connection with this little story which the reader should not let slip, has to do with the humble spiritual seance held in the far eastern region of London by the good people exerting themselves for the benefit of the poor "spirits" who were attracted to their circle. In the realms of poverty it would seem that in more ways than one - on more planes than one - the poor are the most sympathetic and helpful friends of the poor. [63]

M. M.'s Wonderful Narrative

I must now go on to deal with a story replete with the utmost pathos, whether we pay attention to its physical plane beginnings or its astral conclusion. It is profoundly instructive, in my estimation, in more ways than one, for it is a life of utter degradation as regards its physical prelude, and of beautiful exaltation in the long-run. It was a female life on earth, and I will call my poor heroine M. M.

She was born the daughter of lower middle-class people in a country town, small shopkeepers; narrow-minded, devout Methodists. As a young girl she began to be troubled with intense sexual desire. The conventions of modern literature prevent me from going into minute detail concerning the way these feelings worked, but it is easy to understand how, under the circumstances, she became at a very early age the prey - the eager prey, so to [64] speak - of a young man in her own class. And the natural consequences followed. When her condition was discovered by her parents, the father actually and literally kicked her out of the house at night, telling her to go to the Devil, her master! The behaviour of this horrible wretch is a wonderful illustration of the brutality that can coexist with the stupid bigotry of a religious fanatic. That man's crime in so treating his unhappy daughter was responsible, by all commonplace reasoning, for the degradation she ultimately sank into. Nor indeed do the mysteries of karma, in this case, which inevitably condemned the poor girl to a life of suffering, relieve the father in the smallest degree from the guilt of his cruelty; but we may look into that matter later on.

The hapless outcast, after vainly battering for a time at the door in the hope of gaining readmittance, wandered vaguely on and sank down at last exhausted on a doorstep. There a policeman spoke to her, and took pity on her; took her to his own little home, where his wife gave her shelter, and next morning sent her off by train to London.

She had no money to speak of. After paying her railway fare she had three shillings left. Turned out on to the bleak hospitalities [65] of King's Cross, she wandered on at random up the Pentonville Road apparently, - and came to some place where there were market stalls in the street. Leaning up tired against one of these, the rough man in charge asked her what was the matter, and she told her pitiful tale. Here again we have an example of the touching way in which the poor help the poor. The man took her home to his wife, who actually befriended her to the extent of keeping her with them over her confinement. One can imagine how that good costermonger - doubtless fond of his beer, like "Bill Smith," and free with his language - would have been scorned by M. M.'s Methodist father, only worthy himself to lie in the mud under the other man's barrow.

M. M.'s child died, fortunately enough. She did what she could when she recovered to help the woman with her work, and tried to lead a straight life, but found no opening for earning money. Then she fell in with some man who took her to a Music Hall and afterwards to some place to have supper. She must have been drugged in some way, for she remembers no more than that she found herself on coming round in a strange house, in bed. . . .

Needless to explain the kind of house it was, [66] M. M. had been enlisted in the great army of white slavery. She was pretty, and still of course ridiculously young, about sixteen or seventeen, I make out - a valuable recruit for her captors. She was nicely dressed and sent out into the streets. After a while she had the good fortune, so to speak, of attracting the fancy of a gentleman she met, who took charge of her and gave her a little establishment of her own somewhere in St John's Wood. This interlude seems to have been the happiest period of her brief and troubled life on the physical plane. But it came to an end, as such arrangements always do. Her protector had to go abroad. He gave her a hundred pounds at parting, and with this little capital behind her she made desperate efforts to get some sort of honest work by which she could live. But all in vain. She had no "references" to give, no character, and so eventually in despair she plunged back again into the mad vortex of fast life.

By degrees she took to drink; found herself tainted with "the hidden plague"; was in hospital for a time. Then one night in Piccadilly she was spoken to by a lady, who asked her to come to a missionary meeting. She was not particularly eager, but went in a [67] spirit of curiosity. There she had a curious experience. A clergyman was speaking, and she saw a light round him and at the back of him a face looking at her with pitying tenderness. She believed it to be the face of Jesus, and she felt stabbed to the heart, but rushed away to her own room and took refuge in whisky.

Recovering in the morning from her drunken sleep, she felt her heart broken. That night, after wandering about, she found herself at the corner of Wellington Street and the Strand. An ungovernable impulse came over her to end it all. She went on to the middle of Waterloo Bridge and flung herself over.

She remembers well the bitter cold of the water, the suffocation of drowning, and the vain longing to be back again, even in the misery from which she had tried to escape. Then began an extraordinary and terrible experience. She had passed through the change called death, but found herself back again on the bridge. Again she went through the wild desperation of her suicide, repeated all its experiences. Again threw herself into the river, again went through the sensation of drowning, sank into brief unconsciousness and then repeated the whole ghastly cycle of suffering. [68] So it went on for what seemed an eternity. I am told the process went on for at least a year; she thought for five years. The

idea is too horrible. Such a record challenges one's faith in natural justice. There was nothing in M. M.'s dismal life to claim any penalty remotely resembling this awful period of expiation. From the first she was infinitely more sinned against than sinning, the victim in the first instance of hideous cruelty, the outcome of a bigoted superstition scarcely less loathsome, then the helpless prey of a social system almost equally stupid and pitiless. From the ordinary human point of view, what she needed was tender care and consolation on the other side of the great change!

Seeking some intelligible explanation of the actual course of events, what I am told is this. The awful suffering of the period described was not the outcome of the life just spent. It was the accumulated karma of several lives of degradation and infamy. Four thousand years ago, M. M., then in a male body, had been a student of occultism on the threshold of the path. Like many other students of that period, he strayed from the path, in this case with exceptionally disastrous results. He gave way to sexual passion regardless of all considerations [69] beyond the desires of the moment, and in his next life, in Greece, passed over into the female sex and again became absorbed in similar excess. The story was repeated in a later Roman life, and then, the higher self getting desperate, deliberately chose the M. M. life for the next incarnation, in order by extreme suffering and misery to expiate and at the same time extinguish the tendencies of the past. The expiation was terrible, but must not be thought of as the consequence of the one life immediately preceding it.

Nor, except for the intense sympathy one cannot but feel for the sufferer, is it to be thought of except as an awfully inevitable prelude to the beautiful results that followed. For there came a time when she heard a voice saying, "Poor soul, the time of release has arrived." Then she was borne away, and went through some fresh experiences of a trying order, though insignificant compared with those she had been so long enduring. She was still for a time in "Melan's domain," and was put into touch with scenes of human debauchery; but all passionate desire had been burnt out of her nature. She was alone for a while in some desert region, but a time came at last when the Great Lord of that region told her, "You are [70] free, farewell." Then she was borne away, and found herself in a beautiful country cottage where she had a sense of being at rest and at peace. In the distance she saw what seemed to be a mountain, and she became possessed with an eager desire to get to the top of it. A mighty effort of will carried her there, and there she saw the great Master of the White Lodge, to whom she properly belonged, and flew, so to speak, to his arms. Her restoration to the long forfeited place in the occult world was accomplished.

From that time on she has been a much beloved member of the great Master's variegated household, an industrious worker, as she descends from that happy condition at

will to the lower levels of the astral plane where she carries such help and consolation as may be permissible to those who are, in one way or another, going through the painful consequences of such lives as that she last led.

Viewed in a comprehensive survey, the whole story is highly instructive as well as touching. It may warn us not to jump to hasty conclusions in contemplating any one life. Few of us, had we chanced to meet M. M. during the last deplorable life she went through, would have been otherwise than shocked at the idea that [71] she was on the brink of becoming much more than a merely happy denizen or a high level in the next world - actually an intimate assistant, on the staff, so to speak, of the White Lodge!

Appearances from the worldly point of view are apt to be misleading, and this thought brings to my mind a story I heard many years ago in connection with the records of ordinary spiritualism. There was a certain young girl in a very comfortably circumstanced family, who was beloved and admired in every way by her belongings and regarded as quite of an angelic nature. She died young, and her friends assumed as a matter of course that she must have passed at once to the "seventh heaven," whatever that may be, welcomed by celestial hosts of the most exalted order. Many years elapsed before her mourning friends heard of her. Then at last she did communicate through a psychic acquaintance, and explained that she had been having a very bad time indeed, though at last it was getting better. I have no information of my own on the subject, but we may assume that the life, abruptly ended in youth, was one of a series not by any means angelic in all cases. Or again, that the curious and subtle operation of the karmic law reserved for the astral [72] conclusion of the life the development of characteristics which the short physical life had not brought into manifestation. Anyhow, if the facts were as I was told, the little story is again instructive as a pendant to the much more thrilling one I have been engaged in discussing. [73]

A Happy Passing

As the information required for my present purpose gradually accumulated on my hands, I became impressed with a feeling to the effect that my stories were rather too much coloured by the record of distressful conditions immediately following physical decease. It was important beyond question to understand these, and to realise what characteristics in life gave rise to distressful conditions; but at the same time I knew quite well that large numbers of people whose lives had been fairly meritorious, passed swiftly and undisturbed through the lower levels of the astral plane and only awoke to consciousness on the fourth sub-level. It occurred to me that one important type of humanity had not been represented by any of the next-life narratives collected so far. I wanted a case in which highly advanced intelligence should have been united with a fairly clean physical plane record. And, knowing [74] that most of the great scientific men of the past were still making use of the opportunities afforded by the high levels of the astral plane, I asked if anyone of them would be good enough to give me a detailed account of his early experiences on passing over. The response came from one who undeniably belonged to the category I indicated, and whose passing was of comparatively recent date.

I need not be too explicit in dealing with this interesting experience. Enough to say that though highly distinguished in the ordinary world of science, "A. R." was also a student, to a certain extent, of the higher occultism, and deeply concerned during life with spiritualistic research. So he had no surprises to encounter on getting free of the body at a very advanced age. He floated for a little while over his deathbed, enjoying a feeling of renewed vigour, peace, and joy. He fully understood the situation, and looked with some interest at the body he had quitted, and with sympathy at the friends around who were mourning his departure. Then he had a feeling of going up, and one which he found it difficult to describe, a feeling, as he put it, "of being drawn into himself." He lost consciousness for a time. He has since learned [75] that it was for about three days of our time. He awoke on some high level of the fourth, lying on what seemed a bank of some soft material in the midst of a lovely scene; flowers all around and a beautiful view with mountains in the distance, and a general sense of warmth, light, and colour. He realised that his astral body now bore the appearance it had in life some forty years previously.

He lay for a time in a very pleasant reverie. Then he got up feeling quite light. There was "no gravitational stress" to deal with. He saw some people he knew, and then, suddenly, his surroundings changed. He found himself in a room where he was received by a crowd of his former friends of the scientific world. As I have said already, he passed on at a very advanced age, so that most of those whom he had known in life were already

in the next state of existence. They had gathered together to welcome him, and he had a delightful talk with them.

He was now generally on the fifth sub-plane, but this and the higher fourth are very closely associated. Indeed, I have learned that men of science passing over - always assuming that they either have no 'disagreeables' to get over in the first instance, or have got through these - [76] spend a great deal of their time on the fourth, even after they are entirely free of the fifth. On the fifth they carry on their work and study in whatever department of research their bent leads them into, and descend into the fourth for what may be described as social intercourse with their friends.

A. R. recognises to the full how greatly he benefited, when coming into his inheritance in the next world, from his investigation during physical life of super-physical mysteries. Spiritualistic experience and belief, even of the ordinary type, is enormously better an introduction to the next world than blank ignorance of the agnostic order, or even than the shadowy suggestions of commonplace ecclesiastical teaching. This idea will be very clearly illustrated by the next story I have to tell, where the consequences of positive disbelief in any future are made apparent. [77]

X. Y.'s Enlightenment

The narrative which, as I have just said, illustrates the effect of going on with positive disbelief in any future life, was obtained for me in response to my desire to get touch with someone who had gone on in something like that attitude of mind, but without being hampered by any definitely evil characteristics. My friend (of the Master's entourage), who has been especially helpful to me in this series of investigations, brought along - of course with his own cordial consent - a man who in life (protracted to advanced age) had been conspicuous rather for his cynical worldly wit, coupled with brilliant intellectual gifts, than for interest in any variety of philosophical or religious thought. In fact, to put the matter more plainly, he was all but an atheist, disbelieving, I think, in any survival of the soul after death, invariably pouring ridicule on occult research of any sort, but none the less a kindly natured man in all the [78] ordinary relations of life. When I realised who it was I was speaking to, I was intensely interested in the prospect of hearing how he had encountered his unexpected resumption of consciousness out of the body.

He had been perfectly fearless, in the physical body, as the end approached. Fearlessness, indeed, had been one of the characteristics of the man all through life. But he was immensely puzzled when, after a change only associated with a sound as of something

"that went click," he found himself looking at his body as something external to himself. He saw some relatives gathered round apparently showing distress, but he could not succeed in attracting their attention, in making them hear the assurance he wanted to give, that he was still there. This failure made him furious. He felt better than he felt for years; wanted desperately to say so, but the effort was quite in vain. Then he found himself floating up and fell into a doze.

Naturally he does not know how long this lasted, but he woke up lying on a couch in a room, and sitting beside him he suddenly recognised an old friend who had been closely associated with him in some of his public work during life, but who had passed away many [79] years previously. "Here you are, my boy!" the friend said in the most natural way. "Come, get up!" and then he was up without any sort of effort. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Why, you're dead," said the other. "What rot!" he declared. "I was never more alive." His utter incredulity lasted for some time. Disbelief was so ingrained in the character of the man that the new experiences around him, so incompatible with physical life, merely left him dazed and bewildered. He was out in the open country in a little while and met another well-known friend who had been intimate with him down here. Then several others. But the muddled frame of mind was excessively distasteful to him. He had always been in the habit of thinking so clearly, of having all his ideas cut and dried.

The country scene was pleasant - undulating country, "something like the Sussex downs"; but after a while he was back again in his "bungalow cottage," as he called it, feeling a little less muddled. And, sitting there thinking, he became aware that there was someone else in the room who addressed him by his name. This was an Eastern-looking man - "looked like an Egyptian." X. Y. asked him who he was, and a name was given that did not [80] illuminate the situation. "Who are you?" "I am one of the workers under . . . So-and so" - mentioning another name. "And now I'm just as wise as I was before," replied X. V. The conversation went on, and the Egyptian said he would show him what his condition would have been, as a consequence of his disbelieving attitude of mind in life, if he had not been helped. The help had been given him by reason of claims deep down in his nature, of which he knew nothing.

Then X. Y. says he had the feeling of drifting down hill a long way, and of getting into a region of cold white fog. It was very comfortless and miserable. He could hear a sound of "jabbering" voices, but could not see anybody. And his Egyptian guide had disappeared. "It got on my nerves," he said to me. At the time he called out to the Egyptian by the name that had been given to him, and immediately the Egyptian was back again. X. V. frankly begged to be taken back, away from there. The Egyptian explained that his intensely negative attitude of mind in life had created an aura around him that would have kept him in that region for a long time if he had not been helped as above referred to. This

jarred upon one line of thought that had been habitual [81] with him. He did not want any vicarious atonement. He would rather bear his own burdens. But the objection was cleared away. He was entitled to the help, though he did not understand it.

Then he got back to his bungalow, and declared that he wanted something to do. He had been an active man all his life, and he did not want merely to laze away the time in dreamy enjoyment. The Egyptian told him that if he really wished for some sphere of activity the thought would give it him. With his long habit of scepticism, he made an attempt to desire opportunities for activity, but was aware all the time that at the back of his mind there was a certain sense of enjoying laziness. The result was curious. The conditions of the room seemed to get confused. Things that had before seemed real, became half broken up. Eventually, however, the desire for activity became more clearly formed, and then suddenly the scene changed. X. Y. found himself in a large room among a crowd of old journalistic friends, who welcomed him, and soon he found himself once more becoming interested in politics. Since then he has been more and more absorbed in watching the course of events in Parliament and in attempting to [82] influence men there along the lines of his own sympathies, which are so far but little changed from what they were in life down here. For he is very slow to change in any way, sceptical still about any information he gets concerning conditions of existence beyond those he has already come into touch with. He has, indeed, modified one view he formerly held. An ardent partisan while himself a member of the House of Commons, he sees now that the party system is bad; but I should be anticipating what I suspect may ultimately be the drift of his opinions if I venture to indicate any definite changes, along the lines of the distrust of the party system, as likely to command his future acceptance. [83]

The Troubles of S. O.

Circumstances have put me in touch with a series of astral experiences encountered by a man of very remarkably mixed character and mental attributes, including something not far removed from genius as a writer and poet, and, for the rest, tendencies, expressing themselves in habits of life, that could not but be a bar to rapid progress after passing into the next world. I regret that so many of the stories I have to tell embody, in this way, experiences that are painful for a time; but I must again emphasise the broad principle that all people who lead fairly good lives and are not intensely afflicted with unsatisfied desires of the kind that belong exclusively to the physical plane, pass on easily to pleasant conditions on the fourth sub-plane of the astral, and awake to agreeable surroundings at once. This applies, I may add, with increased emphasis, to all who have absorbed [84] theosophical teaching in addition to leading a good life.

But to deal with the case before me. S. O. passed away under somewhat dreary conditions at the close of very distressing experiences during the last few years of physical life. These did much to alleviate what would otherwise have been even more arduous trials attending his early years on the astral. He was received on the other side by a black-shrouded figure who told him to "Come with me." He felt that he had no option, and seemed to go upward for a time and then to be dropped down again into a sort of mist where, alone for a while, he went drearily over the leading events of his past life. They all seemed to stand out clearly, and he had the feeling of looking on at them, as it were, as though he were a spectator. Then he seemed to fall asleep, but awoke afterwards in a room at a hotel that he had known in life, one "given over to vice." After experiences that I cannot venture to relate in detail - they represented aggravated conditions resembling some already dealt with in other cases, - the shrouded figure reappeared and told him that he would have to remain there some time, but if he called upon the higher part of his [85] nature, which was strong, he would hasten his escape.

Eventually, though my story condenses many years of suffering, this assurance was vindicated; but at first the scene of tantalising temptation was merely changed. It was changed several times, till once, in Southern Italy, the growing sense of wearied disgust led S. O. to cry out, "For God's sake" to be relieved from the ordeal. This was the beginning of relief. The shrouded figure again took charge of him, led him far on along some sort of valley, then through what seemed a long tunnel, emerging at last into daylight.

I should explain that he had been in life a Roman Catholic. The person who now met him was a priest, who took him by the hand and said he had been given into his charge; He was now in a beautiful region plentifully furnished with spires and churches. He was told to rest, and recover from the strain of all he had gone through.

He was tired, and went into a house where he lay down and rested, rising after a while feeling much happier. He realised that his personal appearance had reverted to the period of his best time on the physical plane. He went out, met and talked with many people, all [86] members of the Roman Church. In the course of these talks he noticed repeatedly an appearance he found it difficult to describe. It was something like a soap bubble in a filmy human shape. Each such appearance seemed to burst; and to scatter abroad beautiful sparks of mauve and violet colour, that each time had the effect of brightening the scene. S. O. was told by one "very cultured man," whose acquaintance, he made, that these effects were due to prayers sent up from the earth plane for the repose of the souls of unnamed people. Their substance, so to speak, was derived from a far higher plane of Nature. I may add here that, since getting the information just passed on, I have been particularly asked by one (on the other side) who was an important member of the Roman Church when on earth, to be sure I duly record this interesting little item of other - world news. It is certainly an interesting illustration of the way benevolent effort and good thought may bear fruit even when the exact idea inspiring it is somewhat confused.

Roaming about the region in which he found himself, S. O. perceived that it was surrounded by great walls - for its protection, he was told, from evil influences raging outside. But these [87] walls disconcerted him. He wished to explore beyond, but was urged not to do so. He could go out if he liked, but would not be able to return. Eventually, however, he insisted on going out, and was permitted to do so, passing through a sort of gateway described as luminous, mother-of-pearl-like, beyond which he was for a short time alone, but was then greeted by an illustrious poet who had passed on a long time before, and who took him by the hand. All that had tainted his earth life had evaporated from him. He felt clean. He came now into touch with various writers whose works he had studied in earth life, and began to look upward, so to speak, towards the great White Lodge. These later developments, he told me, were but recently attained to, though it is now more than twenty years of our time since he left the earth body. [88]

A Devout Priest

I wished to bring my series of narratives to a close with an example of a happy passing, and this aspiration was met by a visit procured for me from one who in life had been a devout priest of the Roman Catholic Church, an earnest ascetic who died from the effects of illness contracted during ministrations in the humblest levels of poverty in London. He remembered looking in a dreamy way at his body when he left it, and, in the same dreamy fashion, reviewing the events of his past life, - a very innocent retrospect apparently. It has only been in this and the last case dealt with that mention has been made of this particular experience. I have inclined to believe that everyone had it on the threshold of the next world, but the records I have been dealing with seem to imply that it is not consciously associated with every passing. The explanation, I am told, is this: - Everyone, except in cases of very sudden [89] death, has this experience, but it accrues to them before the period of unconsciousness, which is generally the prelude to a full awakening on the other side, and thus is often forgotten afterwards.

My priestly friend was aware of having sunk after the review of his past life into a state of unconsciousness that lasted he did not know exactly how long, but he then awoke lying on a couch in a room surrounded by priests of his own church, who gave him a cordial welcome. He asked, "Was he in heaven?" but without, as it seems, getting a specific reply, he was told that he had passed unconsciously through the purgatorial region where nothing remaining from his earth life had detained him. He went out, after a while, and found himself in a beautiful country surrounded by protective walls, - evidently the same as that in which S. O. had emerged when set free from his long sufferings on lower levels. My priest friend, when he spoke to me, was still filled with the religious emotions of his earth life; described himself as frequently descending to lower levels to bring help to "souls in prison," and did his best to win me over to "the Holy Church," which he still regarded as the one avenue leading to supreme spiritual beatitude. At the [90] same time he was impressed with the belief that he would soon pass on to some higher spiritual condition in which his soul would broaden out in some way he did not yet understand. I endeavoured to assure him that he would then realise how it was that I was contented with my own spiritual prospects, and did not feel the necessity of seeking refuge in the region where he was, for the time being, at peace. [91]

Conclusion

The individual narratives I have been able to collect, though widely varied in their character, fall very far short of covering all the ground one seeks to explore in studying the conditions of the next world. Some of these conditions may better be dealt with in general terms. The fundamental idea to keep in mind is that people passing over do not all at once undergo any great change except so far as their surroundings have changed. As some of the stories I have been able to obtain show so clearly, occult knowledge acquired during life gives an enormous advantage to those who possess it as compared with people of quite ordinary type. It brings them rapidly into touch with representatives of the higher wisdom on the other side, and new horizons open out before them. But naturally there are multitudes who pass over without a trace of any such knowledge, and they consort, so to speak, with [92] others of their own kind, and get used after some interval of bewilderment to conditions of life curiously resembling in many ways those by which they have been surrounded during physical life. In one region of the fourth sub-plane - by no means its most exalted region - people of good, commonplace religious habits of thought will be much engaged, as "the devout priest" story shows, with religious exercises of the kind to which they have been accustomed down here. It must always be borne in mind that the matter of the astral world is plastic in a high degree to thought. Thought there is an actually creative power, and thus there are regions of the fourth where the sustained thought power of all dwelling there, has created churches and chapels in which they continue to carry on such services as they have been used to on the physical plane. As the Roman Catholic community on the other side is of course a very numerous body, the Roman Catholic cathedral in which they renew their worship is, I am assured, an enormous building far exceeding in magnitude any similar structure on the earth's surface. Going to the opposite end of the scale, the little community calling themselves Plymouth Brothers, entertaining the belief, as I understand their state of mind, that [93] they alone are destined to be saved, find their impressions duly realised, - as they think. They find themselves congregated together in something resembling a town beyond which they see nothing but an infinite waste. They continue, as in life, to hold meetings and preach each other dismal sermons, until, one by one, they get sufficiently bored, and so drift away and gradually acquire enlarged experience. Many of them may have been in ordinary life, no doubt, good and affectionate people, and then they would be exactly of the type suited to the devachanic condition, and would float off to that state of existence, when tired of their "Plymouth Brother" attitude of mind. The tardiness of their progress to loftier happiness would once more illustrate the fundamental principle that knowledge gained down here in advance, concerning the opportunities of the astral world, is enormously helpful in

enabling people passing on to attain at once desirable conditions for which, in the absence of such knowledge, they would have to wait.

Only one of the narratives with which I have been dealing in the course of this little volume has related to the after consequences of putting a violent end to one's own life down here. And the case of M. M. is crowded with [94] exceptional circumstances, I have refrained from reproducing detailed stories of the sufferings or discomfort endured by people who have committed suicide in any ordinary way, because these would have overburdened the book with experiences of a painful order. After all, people who commit suicide are a small minority among us, while for the majority, leading fairly creditable and respectable lives, an appropriately rapid translation to agreeable conditions is the rule. I want my present treatise as a whole to be encouraging rather than the reverse for the kind of people likely to be its readers for the most part. I have often noticed a tendency among those who become interested in theosophical teaching to overrate the importance of their minor peccadillos and suppose themselves incurring, on their account, more serious karma than nature really has in store for them. To judge oneself too severely may be to make a mistake on the right side, but it is a mistake none the less. Moreover, in contemplating astral possibilities one should always remember that the astral life is not the period appropriate, to the working out of karma. That is reserved for the next physical life, and when disagreeable or painful experiences are incurred on the astral they are to be thought of almost always as [95] purifying processes qualifying the personality to reach restful and happy conditions. If anyone passes over steeped in desires of a kind incompatible with life on any of the higher astral levels, he must wear out those desires, subdue them or realise their worthlessness, before he can ascend to the higher levels. The attainment of such an attitude of mind may, as we have seen, be sometimes retarded to a painful degree, but in that case the protraction of the painful state should not be regarded as a karmic penalty. It automatically comes to an end as soon as the person concerned is emancipated from the characteristics that hold him back. An appreciation of this idea elucidates a question, sometimes thought to be puzzling, when we hear of the "help" given by entities, far advanced themselves, to people on low astral levels. That is not interference with karma; it is simply so much persuasion aimed at showing the people in trouble that they can set themselves free if they will make the necessary interior effort.

Before concluding, it may be worth while to add a few explanations that might have been given already in connection with some of the astral experiences described, but have remained over and can perhaps better be dealt with now [96] in general terms. Frequent mention has been made of "houses" in which those released from physical life find themselves on awakening beyond. Such houses are the thought creations of the persons passing on, or of those who have passed on previously and stand ready to welcome new arrivals. This detail requires further elucidation. As A. R. said, there is no "gravitational

stress" on the astral plane. Anyone there can move about, upward or downward, by the mere effort of will. How about stairs in astral houses? Surely they cannot be needed! Nor are they needed, and yet the habits of mind brought over from physical life are so ingrained in the thinking of the newcomer in the next world, that he needlessly repeats conditions around him which resemble those he has been used to. And if a staircase seems to him a necessary adjunct to a comfortable home, his new home includes the staircase accordingly. Later on, if he works his way to higher levels than the fourth sub-plane, he will get altogether free of the physical life traditions. There are no houses, for instance, on the sixth sub-plane. There thought gives rise to flowery conditions. The denizens of that region have long since escaped from their early habits of thought. They have [97] grown used to a life exempt from all material wants. They need neither food, shelter, nor sleep. They can luxuriate at ease in scenes of natural beauty; although it is probable that people qualified to ascend to the sixth sub-plane will have been developed morally to the extent of desiring to work, in some way, for the good of their fellow-creatures, and will spend a large part of their time on lower levels, where they can render help to others.

An interesting question arises as to the relative durability of thought creations on the astral plane. This differs very widely. Where continuous and collective thought is concentrated on the same purpose, such creations may assume a very permanent character, as for example in the Roman Catholic region of the fourth. There the churches and houses and surrounding walls are, so to speak, very solidly built. And there are regions of the astral world which the great masters of the White Lodge reserve for their own uses, where ceremonies of initiation take place, where people passing on and already belonging to the occult world are received, if they need (as may sometimes be the case) rest and recuperation after trying experiences in physical life. Here the appropriate structures are rendered very [98] definitely permanent by Adept power, and are not infrequently visited during physical life by occult pupils able to get about freely on the astral plane during sleep. On the other hand, the dream-houses, or rather the dream-rooms, created for themselves by people of quite ordinary type in passing over (assuming that such persons have no disagreeables to encounter), would not be durable at all, would only serve a brief purpose, and would melt away when the inhabitant, as on the hypothesis he or she would be soon likely to do, float off into the unconscious rest preceding translation to the devachanic state.

I do not suggest for a moment that the astral experiences I have been recording, or the imperfect explanations just added to them, come near exhausting the manifold varieties of condition involved in the opportunities of astral life. Some of these, especially on the higher levels, are practically beyond physical plane comprehension. Thus on the fifth sub-plane - the intellectual region - it seems possible for the literary student to help

himself to copies of any book in existence down here, whether of ancient or of recent origin. And I believe that men of science on the fifth level can somehow make use of laboratories, though their new [99] methods of research no doubt involve the use of faculties that generally supersede the necessity for using such instruments of research as they have been used to in the lower life. I know that they acquire knowledge concerning the constitution of matter, the mysteries of force, gravitation, and electricity that no instruments of ordinary research would help them to. And the vast spaces of the solar system and beyond become accessible, in some way we cannot here understand, to the investigations of the occult astronomer. That does not mean that superlative wisdom is poured into their consciousness in a flood. The new knowledge is gradually acquired as here by study and continuous effort, but it is acquirable in new ways for the full comprehension of which we who are interested in such work will mostly have to wait.

Finally, it seems desirable to deal in a few words with an idea that may arise in the minds of some theosophical students concerning the investigations with which this little volume has been concerned. In the beginning of theosophical study an impression arose that it was wrong to get into communication with people on the astral plane, because it was assumed that in all cases the all-important idea [100] connected with them was that they should pass on without delay to the loftier existence described as devachan. To seek intercourse with them was to tie them down to earth, and so on. Our present fuller knowledge of the whole subject dissipates this notion altogether. It is true that there might be peculiar cases in which people incapable of profiting by the life of the higher astral levels might be just sinking into the sleep preceding translation to the devachanic state, and would thus be prejudiced if they could be awakened. But the mere opportunities of spiritual mediumship would not awaken them. The fear that by loving thoughts of departed dear ones we may "drag them down" to the earth plane is almost entirely delusive. It is only while they are wide awake that they could feel the attractive strain, and in such cases they would not be in the least degree prejudiced by responding to it. There are reasons why it is, as a rule, undesirable to attempt by means of commonplace spiritual mediumship to get into touch with departed friends, the liability to astral deception in connection with such efforts being very serious. The lower levels of the astral plane swarm with entities who find it amusing to personate anyone whom the sitters at a seance may seek to [101] get in touch with, and they can readily pick up from the thoughts of the persons sitting, enough information to make the personation plausible. The narratives I have been enabled to pass on in the preceding pages have been obtained under such peculiar conditions that they are exempt from this risk. For various reasons it is impossible for me to be more explicit, and I can only leave the records I have put before my readers to be taken or left as they may think fit, content to suggest that my long and loyal devotion to the task of interpreting the teachings of the great Adept Masters may afford my readers some ground for assuming that in the present case I am likely to

have been provided with abnormal facilities for carrying out this little piece of work, the importance of which is perhaps of an order of magnitude far greater than can be measured by the number of pages required for its fulfilment. [Page 102 - Final]

FOOT NOTE.

[1] Word Definition – ‘costermonger’: old English term for: a street seller of fruit and vegetables from a wheelbarrow or wheeled market stall - common in turn-of-the-century London, and considered of ‘low social class’ in Victorian England.

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