

The Astral Plane:  
Its Scenery, Inhabitants and Phenomena  
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CHAPTER I: A GENERAL SURVEY

Though for the most part entirely unconscious of it, man passes the whole of his life in the midst of a vast and populous unseen world. During sleep or in trance, when the insistent physical senses are for the time in abeyance, this other world is to some extent open to him, and he will sometimes bring back from those conditions more or less vague memories of what he has seen and heard there.

When, at the change which men call death, he lays aside his physical body altogether, it is into this unseen world that he passes, and in it he lives through the long centuries that intervene between his incarnation into this existence that we know. By far the greater part of these long periods is spent in the heaven-world, to which the sixth of these manuals is devoted; but what we have now to consider is the lower part of this unseen world, the state into which man enters immediately after death - like Hades or underworld of the Greeks, the purgatory or intermediate state of Christianity, which was called by mediaeval alchemists the astral plane.

The object of this manual is to collect and arrange the information with regard to this interesting region which is scattered through Theosophical literature, and also to supplement it slightly in cases where new facts have come to our knowledge. It must be understood that any such additions are only the result of the investigations of a few explorers, and must not, therefore, be taken as in any way authoritative, but are given simply for what they are worth.

On the other hand, every precaution in our power has been taken to ensure accuracy; no fact, old or new, being admitted to this manual unless it has been confirmed by the testimony of at least two independent trained investigators among ourselves, and has also been passed as correct by older students whose knowledge on these points is necessarily much greater than ours. It is hoped, therefore, that this account of the astral plane, though it cannot be considered as quite complete, may yet be found reliable as far as it goes.

[Thus I wrote some forty years ago in the first edition of this book; now I may add that daily experience during the whole of that time has but confirmed the accuracy of last century's investigations. Much that was then still somewhat strange and novel has now become familiar through constant and intimate acquaintance, and a mass of additional evidence has been accumulated; here and there there may be a few words to add; there is practically nothing to alter.]

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

I know how difficult it is for the average mind to grasp the reality of that which we cannot see with our physical eyes. It is hard for us to realize how partial our sight is - to understand that we are all the time living in a vast world of which we see only a tiny part. Yet science tells us with no uncertain voice that this is so, for it describes to us whole worlds of minute life of whose existence we are entirely ignorant as far as our senses are concerned. Nor are the creatures of these worlds unimportant because minute, for upon a knowledge of the habits and condition of some of those microbes depends our ability to preserve health, and in many cases life itself.

In another direction also our senses are limited. We cannot see the very air that surrounds us; our senses give us no indication of its existence, except that when it is in motion we are aware of it by the sense of touch. Yet in it there is a force that can wreck our mightiest vessels and throw down our strongest buildings. Clearly all about us there are potent forces which yet elude our poor and partial senses; so obviously we must beware of falling into the fatally common error of supposing that what we see is all there is to see.

We are, as it were, shut up in a tower, and our senses are tiny windows opening out in certain directions. In many other directions we are entirely shut in, but clairvoyance or astral sight opens for us one or two additional windows, and so enlarges our prospect, and spreads before us a new and wider world, which is yet part of the old world, though before we did not know it.

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

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

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

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

Any errors in his answers are then corrected and their reasons explained, until by degrees the neophyte acquires a certainty and confidence in dealing with the phenomena of the astral plane which far exceeds anything possible in physical life. He has to learn not only to see correctly but to translate accurately, from one plane to the other, the memory of what he has seen. To assist him in this he has eventually to learn to carry his consciousness without break from the physical plane to the astral or mental and back again, for until that can be done there is always a possibility that his recollections may be partially lost or distorted during the blank interval which separates his periods of consciousness on the various planes.

When the power of bringing over the consciousness is perfectly acquired the pupil will have the advantage of the use of all the astral faculties, not only while out of his body during sleep or trance, but also while fully awake in ordinary physical life. It has been the custom of some Theosophists to speak with scorn of the astral plane, and treat it as entirely unworthy of attention; but that seems to me a mistaken view. Assuredly, that at which we have to aim is the life of the spirit, and it would be disastrous for any student to neglect that higher development and rest satisfied with the attainment of astral consciousness. There have been some whose karma was such as to enable them to develop the higher mental faculties first of all - to overleap the astral plane for the time, as it were; but this is not the ordinary method adopted by the Masters of the Wisdom with their pupils. Where it is possible it no doubt saves trouble, for the higher usually includes the lower; but for most of us such progress by leaps and bounds has been forbidden by our own faults or follies in the past; all that we can hope for is to win our way slowly step by step, and since this astral plane lies next to our world of denser matter, it is generally in connection with it that our earliest super-physical experiences take place. It is therefore of deep interest to those of us who are but beginners in these studies, and a clear comprehension of its mysteries may often be of great importance to us, by enabling us not only to understand many of the phenomena of the seance-room, of haunted houses, etc., which would otherwise be inexplicable, but also to guard ourselves and others from possible dangers.

The first conscious introduction to this remarkable region comes to people in various ways. Some only once in their whole lives under some unusual influence become sensitive enough to recognize the presence of one of its inhabitants, and perhaps, because the experience does not repeat itself, they may come in time to believe that on that occasion they must have been the victims of hallucination. Others find themselves with increasing frequency seeing and hearing something to which those around them are blind and deaf; others again - and perhaps this is the commonest experience of all - begin to recollect with greater and greater clearness that which they have seen or heard on that other plane during sleep. It must be understood that the power of objective perception upon all the planes undoubtedly lies latent in every man, but for most of us it will be a matter of long and slow evolution before our consciousness can fully function in those higher vehicles.

With regard to the astral body the matter is, however, somewhat different, for in the case of all the cultured people belonging to the more advanced races of the world, the consciousness is already perfectly capable not only of responding to all vibrations communicated to it through astral matter, but also of using its astral body definitely as a vehicle and instrument. Most of us, then, are awake on the astral plane during the sleep of the physical body, and yet we are generally very little awake to the plane, and are consequently conscious of our surroundings there only vaguely, if at all. We are still wrapped up in our waking thoughts and our physical-plane affairs, and we pay scarcely any attention to the world of intensely active life that surrounds us. Our first step, then, is to shake off this habit of thought, and learn to see that new and beautiful world, so that we may be able intelligently to work in it. Even when that is achieved, it does not necessarily follow that we shall be able to bring over into our waking consciousness any recollection of those astral experiences. But that question of physical-plane remembrance is an entirely different matter, and does not in any way affect our power to do excellent astral work.

Among those who make a study of these subjects, some try to develop the astral sight by crystal-gazing or other methods, while those who have the inestimable advantage of the direct guidance of a qualified teacher will probably be aroused to full consciousness upon that plane for the first time under his special protection, which will be continued until, by the application of various tests, he has satisfied himself that each pupil is proof against any danger or terror that he is likely to encounter. But however it may occur, the first actual realization that we are all the while in the midst of a great world full of active life, of which most of us are nevertheless entirely unconscious, cannot but be a memorable epoch in a man's existence. So abundant and so manifold is this life of the astral plane that at first it is absolutely bewildering to the neophyte; and even for the more practised investigator it is no easy task to attempt to classify and to catalogue it. If the explorer of some unknown tropical forest were asked not only to give a full account of the country through which he has passed, with accurate details of its vegetable and mineral productions, but also to state the genus and species of every one of the myriad insects, birds, beasts, and reptiles which he had seen, he might well shrink appalled at the magnitude of the undertaking. Yet even this affords no parallel to the embarrassments of the psychic investigator, for in his case matters are further complicated, first by the difficulty of correctly translating from that plane to this the recollection of what he has seen, and secondly by the utter inadequacy of ordinary language to express much of what he has to report.

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

elaborate the description may be, there is no certainty that the idea presented before the hearer's mind be an adequate representation of the truth.

## CHAPTER II: SCENERY

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

So when we speak of a man as rising from one plane or subplane to another, we do not think of him as necessarily moving in space at all, but rather as transferring his consciousness from one level to another - gradually becoming unresponsive to the vibrations of one order of matter, and beginning instead to answer to those of a higher and more refined order; so that one world with its scenery and inhabitants seems to fade slowly away from his view, while another world of a more elevated character dawns upon him in its stead. Yet there is a point of view from which there is a certain justification for the use of the terms "higher" and "lower", and for the comparison of the planes and subplanes to concentric shells.

Matter of all the subplanes is to be found here on the surface of the earth, but the astral plane is much larger than the physical, and extends some thousands of miles above its surface. The law of gravitation operates on astral matter, and if it were possible for it to be left entirely undisturbed it would probably settle into concentric shells. But the earth is in perpetual motion, both of rotation and revolution, and all kinds of influences and forces are continually rushing about, so this ideal condition of rest is never attained, and there is much intermingling. Nevertheless it remains true that the higher we rise the less of the denser matter do we find. We have a fair analogy on the physical plane.

Earth, water and air - the solid, the liquid and the gaseous - all exist here on the surface but broadly speaking it is true to say the solid matter lies lowest, the liquid next to it, and the gaseous matter higher still. Water and air interpenetrate the earth to a small extent; water also rises in the air in the shape of clouds, but only to a limited height; solid matter may be thrown up into the air by violent convulsions, as in the great eruption of Krakatoa in 1883, when the volcanic dust reached the height of seventeen miles, and took three years to settle down again; but it does settle down eventually, just as the water drawn

up into the air by evaporation returns to us as rain. The higher we rise the more rarefied does the air become; and the same is true with regard to astral matter. The dimensions of our astral world are considerable, and we are able to determine them with some approach to accuracy from the fact that our astral world touches that of the moon at perigee, but does not reach it at apogee; but naturally the contact is confined to the highest type of astral matter.

Returning to the consideration of these subplanes, and numbering them from the highest and least material downwards, we find that they naturally fall into three classes, divisions 1, 2 and 3 forming one such class, and 4, 5 and 6 another, while the seventh and lowest of all stands alone. The difference between the matter of one of these classes and the next would be commensurable with that between a solid and a liquid, while the difference between the matter of the subdivisions of a class would rather resemble that between two kinds of solid, such as, say, steel and sand. Putting aside for the moment the seventh, we may say that divisions 4, 5 and 6 of the astral plane have for their background the physical world in which we live, and all its familiar accessories. Life on the sixth division is not unlike our ordinary life on this earth, minus the physical body and its necessities; while as it ascends through the fifth and fourth divisions it becomes less and less material, and is more and more withdrawn from our lower world and its interests.

The scenery of these lower divisions, then, is that of the earth as we know it; but in reality it is also much more: for when we look at it from this different standpoint, with the assistance of the astral senses, even purely physical objects present quite a different appearance. As has already been mentioned, one whose eyes are fully opened sees them, not as usual from one point of view, but from all sides at once - an idea in itself sufficiently confusing. When we add to this that every particle in the interior of a solid body is as fully and clearly visible as those on the outside, it will be comprehended that under such conditions even the most familiar objects may at first be totally unrecognizable. Yet a moment's consideration will show that such vision approximates much more closely to true perception than does physical sight. Looked at on the astral plane, for example, the sides of a glass cube would all appear equal, as they really are, while on the physical plane we see the further side in perspective - that is, it appears smaller than the nearer side, which is a mere illusion. It is this characteristic of astral vision which has led some writers to describe it as sight in the fourth dimension - a suggestive and expressive phrase.

In addition to these possible sources of error, matters are further complicated by the fact that this higher sight cognizes forms of matter which, while still purely physical, are nevertheless invisible under ordinary conditions. Such, for example, are the particles composing the atmosphere, all the various emanations which are always being given out by everything that has life, and also four grades of a still finer order of physical matter which, for want of more distinctive names, are usually described as etheric. The latter form a kind of system by themselves, freely interpenetrating all other physical matter;

and the investigation of their vibrations and the manner in which various higher forces affect them would in itself constitute a vast field of deeply interesting study for any man of science who possessed the requisite sight for its examination. Even when our imagination has fully grasped all that is comprehended in what has already been said, we do not yet understand half the complexity of the problem; for besides all these new forms of physical matter we have to deal with the still more numerous and perplexing subdivisions of astral matter. We must note first that every material object, every particle even, has its astral counterpart; and this counterpart is itself not a simple body, but is usually extremely complex, being composed of various kinds of astral matter. In addition to this each living creature is surrounded with an atmosphere of its own, usually called its aura, and in the case of human beings this aura forms of itself a fascinating branch of study. It is seen as an oval [ovoid] mass of luminous mist of highly complex structure, and from its shape has sometimes been called the auric egg.

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

Most brilliant and most easily seen of all, perhaps, though belonging to a more refined order of matter - the astral - is that part of the aura which expresses by its vivid and everchanging flashes of colour the different desires which sweep across the man's mind from moment to moment. This is the true astral body. Behind that, and consisting of a finer grade of matter again - that of the form-levels of the mental plane - lies the mental body or aura of the lower mind, whose colours, changing only by slow degrees as the man lives his life, show the trend of his thoughts and the disposition and character of his personality. Still higher and infinitely more beautiful, where at all clearly developed, is the living light of the causal body, the vehicle of the higher self, which shows the stage of development of the real ego in its passage from birth to birth. But to see these the pupil must have developed the vision of the levels to which they belong. It will save the student much trouble if he learns at once to regard these auras not as mere emanations, but as the actual manifestation of the ego on their respective planes - if he understands that this is that ego which is the real man, not the various bodies which on the lower planes represent him.

So long as the reincarnating ego remains upon the plane which is his true home in the formless levels, the vehicle which he inhabits is the causal body, but when he descends into the form-level he must, in order to be able to function upon them, clothe himself in their matter; and the matter that he thus

attracts to himself furnishes his mind-body. Similarly, descending into the astral plane he forms his astral or desire-body out of its matter, though still retaining all the other bodies, and on his still further descent to this lowest plane of all the physical body is formed according to the etheric mould supplied by the Lords of Karma. Fuller accounts of these auras will be found in my book *Man, Visible and Invisible*, but enough has been said here to show that as they all occupy the same space, the finer interpenetrating the grosser, it needs careful study and much practice to enable the neophyte to distinguish clearly at a glance the one from the other. Nevertheless the human aura, or more usually some one part of it only, is not infrequently one of the first purely astral objects seen by the untrained, though in such a case its indications are naturally likely to be misunderstood.

Though the astral aura from the brilliancy of its flashes of colour may often be more conspicuous, the nerve-ether and the etheric double are really of a much denser order of matter, being within the limits of the physical plane, though invisible to ordinary sight. If we examine with psychic faculty the body of a newly-born child, we shall find it permeated not only by astral matter of every degree of density, but also by the several grades of etheric matter. If we take the trouble to trace these inner bodies backwards to their origin, we find that it is of the latter that the etheric double - the mould upon which the physical body is built up - is formed by the agents of the Lords of Karma; while the astral matter has been gathered together by the descending ego, not consciously, but automatically, as he passes through the astral plane. (See *Manual No. IV*, p44) Into the composition of the etheric double must enter something of all the different grades of etheric matter; but the proportions may vary greatly, and are determined by several factors, such as the race, sub-race, and type of a man, as well as by his individual karma. When it is remembered that these four subdivisions of matter are made up of numerous combinations, which, in their turn, form aggregations that enter into the composition of the "atom" of the so-called "element" of the chemist, it will be seen that this second principle of man is highly complex, and the number of its possible variations practically infinite. So that, however complicated and unusual a man's karma may be, those in whose province such work falls are able to give a mould in accordance with which a body exactly suiting it can be formed. But for information upon this vast subject of karma the previous manual should be consulted. One other point deserves mention in connection with the appearance of physical matter when looked at from the astral plane, and that is that the higher vision, when fully developed, possesses the power of magnifying at will the minutest physical particle to any desired size, as though by a microscope, though its magnifying power is enormously greater than that of any microscope ever made or ever likely to be made. The hypothetical molecules and atoms postulated by science are visible realities to the occult student, though the latter recognizes them as much more complex in their nature than the scientific man has yet discovered them to be. Here again is a vast field of study of absorbing interest to which a whole volume might readily be devoted; and a scientific investigator who should acquire this astral sight in perfection, would not only find his experiments with ordinary and known phenomena immensely facilitated, but would also see stretching before him entirely new vistas of knowledge needing more than a lifetime for their thorough examination.

For example, one curious and beautiful novelty brought to his notice by the development of this vision would be the existence of other and entirely different colours beyond the limits of the ordinarily visible spectrum, the infra-red and ultra-violet rays which science has discovered by other means being plainly perceptible to astral sight. We must not, however, allow ourselves to follow these fascinating bye-paths, but must resume our endeavour to give a general idea of the appearance of the astral plane. It will by this time be obvious that though, as above stated, the ordinary objects of the physical world form the background to life on certain levels of the astral plane, yet so much more is seen of their real appearance and characteristics that the general effect differs widely from that with which we are familiar. For the sake of illustration take a rock as an example of the simpler class of objects.

When regarded with trained sight it is no mere inert mass of stone. First of all, the whole of the physical matter of the rock is seen, instead of a small part of it; secondly, the vibrations of its physical particles are perceptible; thirdly, it is seen to possess an astral counterpart composed of various grades of astral matter, whose particles are also in constant motion; fourthly, the Universal Divine Life is clearly to be seen working in it as it works in the whole creation, though naturally its manifestations differ greatly at successive stages of its descent into matter, and for the sake of convenience each stage has its own name. We recognize it first in the three elemental kingdoms; when it enters the mineral kingdom we call it the mineral monad; in the vegetable kingdom it is described as the vegetable monad, and so on. So far as we know, there is no such thing as "dead" matter.

In addition to all this an aura will be seen surrounding it, though this is much less extended and varied than in the case of the higher kingdoms; and its appropriate elemental inhabitants may be seen - though these should more properly be described as gnomes, a variety of nature-spirit. This is not the place to treat fully the subject of the Indwelling Life; further explanations will be found in *Man, Visible and Invisible* and other Theosophical works. Also see a later chapter of this book. In the case of the vegetable, animal, and human kingdoms, the complications are naturally much more numerous. It may be objected by some readers that no such complexities as these are described by most of the psychics who occasionally catch glimpses of the astral world, nor are they reported at seances by the entities that manifest there; but we can readily account for this. Few untrained persons on that plane, whether living or dead, see things as they really are until after long experience; even those who do see fully are often too dazed and confused to understand or remember; and among the small minority who both see and remember there are hardly any who can translate the recollection into language on our lower plane. Many untrained psychics never examine their visions scientifically at all; they just obtain an impression which may be quite correct, but may also be half false, or even wholly misleading.

All the more probable does the latter hypothesis become when we take into consideration the frequent tricks played by sportive denizens of the other world, against which the untrained person is usually absolutely defenceless. It must also be remembered that the regular inhabitant of the astral plane is

under ordinary circumstances conscious only of the objects of that plane, physical matter being to him as entirely invisible as is astral matter to the majority of mankind. Since, as before remarked, every physical object has its astral counterpart, which is visible to him, it may be thought that the distinction is trivial, yet it is an essential part of the symmetrical conception of the subject. If, however, an astral entity constantly works through a medium, these finer astral senses may gradually be so coarsened as to become insensible to the higher grades of matter on their own plane, and to include in their purview the physical world as we see it instead; but only the trained visitor from this life, who is fully conscious on both planes, can depend upon seeing both clearly and simultaneously. Be it understood, then, that the complexity exists, and that only when it is fully perceived and scientifically unravelled is there perfect security against deception or mistake.

For the seventh or lowest subdivision of the astral plane also, this physical world of ours may be said to be the background, though what is seen is only a distorted and partial view of it, since all that is light and good and beautiful seems invisible. It was thus described four thousand years ago in the Egyptian papyrus of the Scribe Ani: "What manner of place is this unto which I have come? It hath no water, it hath no air; it is deep, unfathomable; it is black as the blackest night, and men wander helplessly about therein; in it a man may not live in quietness of heart." [In Budge's translation: "The Osiris, the scribe Ani, whose word is truth, saith:- Hail, Temu! What manner of land is this unto which I have come? It hath not water, it hath not air; it is depth unfathomable, it is black as the blackest night, and men wander helplessly therein. In it a man cannot live in quietness of heart; nor may the longings of love be satisfied therein. But let the state of the Spirit-souls be given unto me instead of water and air, and the satisfying of the longings of love, and let quietness of heart be given unto me instead of cakes and ale."] For the unfortunate human being on that level it is indeed true that "all the earth is full of darkness and cruel habitations", but it is darkness which radiates from within himself and causes his existence to be passed in a perpetual night of evil and horror - a real hell; though, like all other hells, entirely of man's own creation.

I do not mean by this that the subplane is wholly imaginary - that it has no objective existence. It lies partly on the surface of the earth, and partly -- perhaps mostly -- beneath that surface, interpenetrating the solid crust. But I do mean that no man who lives an ordinarily pure and decent life need ever touch this eminently undesirable region, or even become conscious of its existence. If he does contact it, it is entirely due to his own coarse and evil action, speech and thought. Most students find the investigation of this section an extremely unpleasant task, for there appears to be a sense of density and gross materiality about it which is indescribably loathsome to the liberated astral body, causing it the feeling of pushing its way through some black, viscous fluid, while the inhabitants and influences encountered there are also usually exceedingly objectionable.

The first, second and third subdivisions, though occupying the same space, yet give the impression of being much further removed from this physical world, and correspondingly less material. Entities inhabiting these levels lose sight of the earth and its belongings; they are usually deeply self-absorbed, and to a large extent create their own surroundings, though these are sufficiently objective to be perceptible to other entities and also to clairvoyant vision. This region is the "summerland" of which we hear so much at spiritualistic seances, and those who descend from and describe it no doubt speak the truth as far as their knowledge extends. It is on these planes - that "spirits" call into temporary existence their houses, schools, and cities, for these objects are often real enough for the time, though to a clearer sight they may sometimes be pitifully unlike what their delighted creators suppose them to be. Nevertheless, many of the imaginations which take form there are of real though temporary beauty, and a visitor who knew of nothing higher might wander contentedly enough there among forests and mountains, lovely lakes and pleasant flower-gardens, which are at any rate much superior to anything in the physical world; or he might even construct such surroundings to suit his own fancies. The details of the differences between these three higher subplanes will perhaps be more readily explicable when we come to deal with their human inhabitants.

An account of the scenery of the astral plane would be incomplete without some mention of what have often, though I think mistakenly, been called the Records of the Astral Light. These records (which are in truth a sort of materialization of the Divine memory - a living photographic representation of all that has ever happened) are really and permanently impressed upon a much higher level, and are only reflected in a more or less spasmodic manner on the astral plane; so that one whose power of vision does not rise above this will be likely to obtain only occasional and disconnected pictures of the past instead of a coherent narrative. But nevertheless these reflected pictures of all kinds of past events are constantly being reproduced in the astral world, and form an important part of the surroundings of the investigator there. I have not space to do more than just mention them here, but a fuller account of them will be found in Chapter vii of my little book on Clairvoyance.