

## Investigations Into the Super-Physical by Annie Besant

Published in 1913

Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai [Madras] India  
The Theosophist Office, Adyar, Madras. India

[Page 1] As evolution steadily carries on the mass of humanity, the crest of its wave must ever be advancing towards new and hitherto unexplored — or only partially explored — regions. Great religious teachers have laid down certain doctrines, far-reaching in their consequences, drawn from a knowledge of super-physical worlds, and their followers have accepted these doctrines on faith, since they were incapable of acquiring for themselves the knowledge of the facts on which they were based. The doctrines of reincarnation and karma, of man's immortality, of the existence of super-physical worlds and their inhabitants — all these recommended themselves to the reason; any one of fair intelligence could grasp them, but their claim to acceptance rested more on authority than on proof. Reincarnation, for instance, may be shown to be the [Page 2] most reasonable hypothesis for man's continual life, but it cannot be demonstrated as a fact — any more than can evolution itself. Karma may be shown to be in harmony with law as we know it, but we can only see in our world a fragment of its huge sweep, insufficient for clear and definite proof. Reason demands data on which to found its judgments, and data in the non-physical worlds are useless to a mind limited to the workings of the brain and nervous system.

Intuition is sufficient for the person in whom its light is burning, but that light is useful only to its possessor; intuition in A cannot satisfy the demand of the reason in B for proofs, and no firm edifice can be built on the foundation of another's intuition. Hence in an age when the concrete mind has grown powerful and little willing to yield to authority Religion has found itself in parlous case. But the progress of evolution is beginning to come to its aid by unfolding in many the powers latent in all, powers which belong to the super-physical worlds and find therein their appropriate field of exercise. An ever-increasing number of people occupies the crest of the evolutionary wave pouring onwards into the *Borderland* and across it. Where a century ago there was a single seer, there are now dozens. Seers trained, half-trained, untrained, are numerous. Sensitives impressed by influences from the super-physical worlds are on the increase. For seventy years discarnate entities have been offering [Page 3] information through mediums. The *other-world* is pressing into this world. Under these circumstances it is surely desirable that all students should understand something about investigations into the super-physical, in order that they may avoid the blind credulity which accepts all, on the one side, and the equally blind incredulity which rejects all, on the other.

Before dealing with investigations, let me make clear my own position with regard to all questions of opinion and belief within the Theosophical Society itself. Some of our members echo the statements of one seer or another, and seem to consider that such a statement ought to preclude further discussion. But no one in the T.S. has any authority to lay down what people shall think, or not think, on any subject. We are not in the position of an orthodox Church, which has certain definite articles of faith, which imposes certain definite creeds in which all faithful members are bound to believe. The only point which we must accept is Universal Brotherhood, and even as to that we may differ in our definition of it. Outside that, we are at perfect liberty to form our own opinions on every subject; and the reason of that policy is clear and an exceedingly good one. No intellectual opinion is worth the holding unless it is obtained by the individual effort of the person who holds that opinion. It is far healthier to exercise our intelligence,

even if we come to a wrong conclusion [Page 4] and form an inaccurate opinion, than simply, like parrots, to echo what other people say, and so put out of all possibility intellectual development.

In fact, differences of opinion among the members ought to be regarded as safeguards to the Society rather than as menaces, for our one great danger, as H. P. B. recognized, is the danger of getting into a groove, and so becoming fossilized in the forms of belief that many of us hold today; this will make it difficult for people in the future to shake off these forms, and thus will involve posterity in the same troubles which so many of us have experienced with regard to the teachings among which we were born. The Society is intended, always has been intended, to be a living body and not a fossil, and a living body grows and develops, adapting itself to new conditions; and if it be a body which is spiritually alive, it should be gaining continually a deeper and fuller view of truth. It is absurd for us to pretend, at our present stage of evolution, that we have arrived at the limit of the knowledge which it is possible for men to obtain. It is absurd for us to say that the particular form into which we throw our beliefs at this moment is the form which is to continue for ever after us, and to be accepted by those who follow us in time. All of us who study deeply must be fully aware that our conceptions of truth are continually deepening and widening, that, as we might reasonably expect, we find new avenues opening [Page 5] up before us; and nothing could be more fatal to a Society like ours than to hallmark as true special forms of belief, and then look askance at any one challenging them, trying to impose these upon those who will come after us. If the Society is to live far into the future, as I believe it will, then we must be prepared to recognize now, quite frankly and freely, that our knowledge is fragmentary, that it is partial, that it is liable to very great modifications as we learn more and understand better; and especially is this true of everything which goes under the name of investigation.

Even if we take a broad truth, like that of reincarnation, which is perennial, even then it is unwise to insist upon putting it into one particular form, and to treat it as though it could have no other. We ought to recognize that this vital doctrine has been taught in many forms in the past, and is likely to be taught in many other forms in the future. The one important thing to recognize is the evolution of man, the inner Man who has continually grown and is capable of attaining perfection; but it is certain that in the course of time we shall gain much knowledge on all subjects that at present we do not possess, and that even with regard to fundamental truths, there ought to be the fullest discussion, the freest pointing out of weak places in the arguments with which they are supported; there ought to be a continual attempt to add to the amount of the truth which we already [Page 6] possess, for if one thing becomes clearer than another to those who are opening up in themselves the finer faculties of man, it is that all our conceptions are so immensely below the truth, so much narrower than the truth, that they seem like the mere prattlings of children compared with the arguments of philosophers. Hence it is wise to be humble as well as studious, and always to be willing to hold the form with a comparatively loose hand, while clinging to the essence of that which is inspiring and really nutritious to the spiritual life.

Looking back into the history of the past, no longer blinded by the dust of its conflicts and the whirl of its passions, we can see that the most serious divisions in Christendom arose out of matters beyond human ken, which did not touch the inner realities of the spiritual life, but only the forms into which the various disputants threw their conceptions of matters incomprehensible to them all. Arians and non-Arians disputed furiously as to whether the second Person in the Christian Trinity was of *the same substance as* or of *like substance with* the Father, and the Arians were hunted out of the Church, and persecutions slew their thousands. The Catholic Church was split in twain, and became the Eastern and Western Churches, the Greek and the Roman, on the question whether the Third Person, the Holy Spirit,

proceeded from the Father, or from the Father and the Son. It is fairly obvious that neither side was in the position [Page 7] to *know* anything about the matter, and that it could make no difference which statement was the nearer to the truth. All that really mattered was that the influence represented under the name of the Holy Spirit should enter the human heart, sanctify and illumine the human life. Whether it came from one Person or from two was unessential to the growth of the spiritual life, yet for this that which Christians loved to call *the seamless robe of Christ* was rent in twain. Among us of the Theosophical Society today there are very many different opinions as to the nature of the Christ, as to His place in history, as to the proper name to be assigned to Him, as to His position in the Hierarchy, as to the particular body He used in the past, or may use in the future. Again it is obvious that these questions are beyond the range of the knowledge possessed by most of those inclined to dispute over them. But the only thing which is of vital importance, which really touches the spiritual life, is the existence of a Being who affords us a glimpse of a little more of the Divine Nature than we should otherwise see, who is to us the Supreme Teacher, whom we regard with the profoundest reverence, even, perhaps, as an Object of worship. None of the differences of opinion touch this intimate, this sacred side, the side which concerns the relation between the disciple and his Lord; the Holy of Holies wherein these meet is far from the tumult and the battle-cries of theological strife, and no clash of tongues may penetrate into the silence of that secret sanctuary. [Page 8]

It is vital for each of us that we should realize the Ideal of a divine Man, that we should see in Him an example of what humanity may become, that we should draw from Him all the inspiring power of a great Ideal, of a perfect Example; that we should have an Object to which our love and devotion may flow out — that is the important part of the Ideal of the Christ. But whether we label Him with one name or another, whether we know or do not know His exact nature and His exact place in the great Hierarchy of Supreme Men, Divine Men, in Divinity itself — that is not really so important as some people are inclined to think, when they rush into vehement controversy in support of some half-understood teaching of a favorite leader. If in his heart a man recognizes the Supreme Teacher, let him give to him the name which to him seems best as expressing what He is to that man's own heart and life. Before these great manifestations of spiritual power to us who are so far below Them all, it is scarcely seemly for us to quarrel as to the special name or special nature of any one of Them. To the heart that loves and worships, the name of the Object matters but little, for the aspiration of the heart goes upward and brings response, where no response will come in answer to disputes about His nature. The atmosphere of dispute is not one which illumination can pierce. Shall we not learn the lesson contained in the [Page 9] story of the past, and separate our spiritual ideals from the husks of theological definitions? The ideals belong to the Eternal, the definitions to Time.

Superior-physical investigations may be divided into different classes, according to the vision which is used. The power of perception may be exercised by the consciousness working in the emotional (astral), mental, causal, intuitional (buddhic), or spiritual (atmic) vehicle. If the seer is studying phenomena connected with the astral or mental worlds — the inhabitants of these worlds, the conditions of purgatory and heaven and the dwellers therein respectively, thought or desire-forms, lower auras, and the like — he will use astral and mental vision, as is convenient; if he can only use his astral body, he cannot see outside that world, and can only study astral phenomena; if he can use the *illusory body* [The Mâyāvi Rûpa] i.e., the mental body with a temporarily created astral materialization, he will use mental vision, and as much astral as he needs. If he is studying the past, he will work through the causal for though glimpses of past incarnations may be caught on the astral and mental planes — stray pictures thrown or drawn down by special causes — consecutive and voluntary study of the past can only be carried out by the consciousness working in the causal body. The student must not confuse such study with the special

activity of the consciousness in the causal [Page 10] body working by abstract thought, with attention turned inwards not outwards, any more than he must confuse the special activity of the consciousness in the mental body, creating thought-images and reasoning on them, with the observation of the external phenomena of the mental world, taking place outside his own mental body. We perceive through the causal body the full picture of the past, and can observe as much detail as we choose; that picture contains a perfect reproduction of the whole past scene, and can be passed quickly or slowly before our gaze, and can be repeated at will; we see not only the causal body, say, of a man, but also his mental, emotional and physical bodies, and the *causal vision* of the trained seer includes all, and more than all the powers of sight exercised on lower levels. [Without senses, enjoying sense objects. Without eyes, He sees, without ears He hears, etc. He is the Seer, the Hearer, the Knower]

Observations on globes of our Chain other than the earth are made by going to them in the intuitional vehicle, and shaping any organs there required out of the material of those globes.

There are many passages in the Upanishats implying these ideas. It seems to me that we come down into the physical world in order to make our power of perception definite and precise, by its subdivision into senses through the organs of the senses, and that we then carry the precision and accuracy thus [Page 11] gained back with us to be used by our power of perception when exercised in any of our subtler bodies. It is a fact of experience to every seer who is able to use his causal body freely, with outward-turned attention, that he sees things belonging to all the lower planes, i.e., concrete phenomena; I think the explanation of this lies in the experiences which he has gone through on the lower planes.

Previous Rounds may also be studied in this way. Observations on the two earlier Chains must be made with the spiritual vision. These higher powers of vision, again, include all, and more than all, the powers of sight exercised on lower planes; they do not see vaguely, indefinitely, mistily, but with a clarity and an accuracy beyond all words. As each new power of sight unfolds, the seer is inclined to exclaim: "I never saw before". It is as though the words of the Apostle were reversed: "Then I saw through a glass darkly, but now face to face. Then I knew in part, but now I know even as I am known".

It is evident, then, that in considering investigations into the super-physical we have to deal with various powers of vision, and with an immense range of very varied phenomena. Moreover, as we ascend, the number of seers diminishes, and the reason of the non-seer will be deprived of even the few data for forming a judgment that he could use on lower levels; with regard to those, there being a large [Page 12] number of witnesses, he can compare their testimonies, note where they agree and where they differ. But with regard to such subjects as past Races, Rounds and Chains, it seems impossible for those who lack the power to investigate for themselves to exercise any reasonable judgment as to the statements made, for they are thrown back on a mere handful of investigators. We have available: The wonderful series of letters from the Master K. H., systematized by Mr. A. P. Sinnett and published in his invaluable book, *Esoteric Buddhism*, the first in point of time that deals sequentially with these subjects; then we have H. P. Blavatsky's splendid work, *The Secret Doctrine*, unrivaled in its range; there are the books on *Lemuria* and *Atlantis*, issued by Mr. Scott Elliot; there is a little book on *Atlantis*, issued by Mr. Kingsland; there are the researches of Dr. Rudolf Steiner; and there are the records of observations by Mr. Leadbeater and myself, now collected in the book, *Man: Whence, How and Whither*. There may, of course, be others which I do not know. There is, with minor differences, a fair consensus of opinion among all these, with the exception of researches made by Dr. Rudolf Steiner; and the differences in those may be largely due to the fact that he deals with the subject rather from the psychological

standpoint than from that of the observation of the succession of external phenomena. Reasoning on ordinary possibilities in the physical world known to all is of [Page 13] very little use in this case. We are in a region where we have all described things that are facts or not facts; either they exist or they do not exist. We are not dealing with theories, but with records of observations, or flights of fancy, or a mixture of the two. Hence the need of caution, both in accepting or rejecting — for the time being — the statements made. The value of W. Kingdon Clifford's arguments on the fourth dimension, based on the higher mathematics, can only be estimated by his mathematical peers; the rest of us cannot judge them, and any opinion we may form is worthless. It is much the same when the non-seer is confronted with the records above-named; many accept for the time the seer who appeals to them on other grounds, and they accept him, on those grounds, as an *authority*, not being able to judge for themselves; by the exercise of their intuition, or otherwise, they regard one particular person as their teacher, and where reason stops, they believe him or her. That is all right enough, but none of these has any right to impose his own belief in his teacher on anybody else, and it seems fitting that all such should be careful to be moderate in their language, as they are only putting forward opinions which are repetitions of the views of their own respective favorite authorities, and these they are themselves unable to justify by any first hand knowledge. Whoever the authority may be, he or she is only an individual, who cannot rightly [Page 14] formulate beliefs for others, though fully justified in recording his own. I am well aware that, in the past, the differences of opinions which have caused great schisms have been — as above pointed out — just those on which the combatants on both sides could have no personal knowledge. But mistakes in the past are signals warning us of pitfalls in the present, and we should profit by them rather than repeat them. It is inevitable that each should form an opinion on the value of the researches made, but none should force his opinion on others; to proclaim one person as an infallible authority on a subject unknown to the proclaimer is to show fanaticism rather than reason. I would ask my own friends not to do this with me.

I do not argue that because, in the higher research, all the students but one agree in the main outlines, therefore the one is wrong. *Athanasius contra mundem* is sometimes right. But let me put a case which suggests caution. Dr. Steiner says in his *Lemuria and Atlantis* [See p.159] that at a certain time the history of our earth — at what we call the periods of the early middle third Race — when that earth was already largely inhabited, the sun and moon drew gradually away from the earth; we had then three globes where "till now there had been no material separation", there was a "common globe" composed of what are now sun, earth and moon. Man's advance [Page 15] from generation by cleavage to generation by sex was accomplished through "the cosmic happenings". Thus the statement appears to refer to matters physical, not allegorical nor mystical. My own astronomical knowledge is of the smallest, and is entirely secondhand, for I have never made a single astronomical investigation; but my occult research, as well as the teachings of the White Lodge, given through H. P. Blavatsky and A. P. Sinnett, make me deny the above statement, if it be intended to convey a physical fact, and is not merely a symbolical indication of some mental happening; the surface meaning is, in fact, so incredible, that one's instinct is to look for another in the case of a writer so justly respected. Moreover, the physical meaning would contradict the whole of the teaching on evolution hitherto put forward in the Society as to Chains, Rounds, and Races, the relation of the lunar to the terrene Chain and so on. This must all be rewritten, and the statements made by the Masters originally, and confirmed by the researches of Their disciples afterwards, must be thrown aside. Hence caution is necessary before believing the above statement, though the making of it is quite within the right of any member of the T.S.

It is interesting to notice that the matters on which considerable differences of opinion arise are — with the exception of the views of Christ, noted above — matters which do not bear on life and conduct, but

on [Page 16] those which, however interesting as knowledge, are outside that which is needed for the guiding of human life. Life and conduct are immensely influenced by a knowledge of the astral and mental worlds — which include purgatory and heaven — of thought and desire-forms, of the lower auras, and other matters of that ilk. This great class of super-physical investigations is the class most useful to the ordinary man; the yet more vital teachings of brotherhood, reincarnation and karma can be taught on intellectual and moral grounds, apart from super-physical research, though they may be aided and reinforced thereby. The class of super-physical phenomena, then, which is most useful is the one which is most within reach, which a fair number of people can investigate, and on which students are fairly agreed. The differences which arise are differences common to all forms of scientific research, and to these we now turn.

In dealing with super-physical researches — we are in the world of science and not of revelation. There are great truths known to the Masters that none of us are able to reach and to investigate. If any of these are given out by the Masters, people can accept them or not, according to the view they take as to the authority of the source, and the reliability of the transmitter. But when we are dealing with investigations into other worlds, into the past of our globe, into the various evolutions that have gone on in our [Page 17] solar system; when we are dealing with investigations into races and sub-races; when we are concerned in reading the story of the past, whether as applied to the history of humanity or not; on the whole of these things we are not in the region of revelation, we are in the region of research; exactly the same canons that we apply to research of the ordinary scientific kind, exactly the same caution in accepting results, exactly the same readiness to repeat experiments that have been made, to revive opinions, to recast conclusions that may have been arrived at on insufficient data — the whole of these things which are commonplaces when we are reading about botany or electricity, that we take for granted in all our ordinary scientific studies, the whole of these apply when anyone begins studying the investigations of those who are carrying on researches in a region subtler than that dealt with in the ordinary sciences; they are making experiments; they are relying as much on their own observations, and on comparing those observations with those of others, as must any scientist in the obscurer regions of investigation; they put forward what they have observed, but they do not ask that their statements shall be regarded as part of some great sacred literature, to be looked upon with the utmost reverence and not to be challenged. Students must get out of this atmosphere altogether, when dealing with people whose senses are merely a little better [Page 18] developed than their own, senses that everybody will be having some time hence, it may be fifty, one hundred or two hundred years hence, but senses that are in the course of evolution, that all men have to some extent, that many have to a considerable extent. Research becomes mischievous and harmful in its results when the senses used in it are looked upon as some sort of divine gift, instead of as the result of a strenuous forcing process, so that a person possessing them is placed on a pedestal, or treated like a sibyl of ancient days through whom some God was speaking. They are merely senses of a finer and keener kind than the physical, but belonging to the phenomenal world just as much as the physical belong to it; observations made through them depend for their value on careful attention to the objects observed, and rigid accuracy in reporting that which has been perceived. Some people may consider that this is a very cold and prosaic way of approaching a subject which is enwrapped to them in glamour and mystery. But when glamour and mystery only mean that they do not understand the question and the methods of investigating it, is it not better to get rid of them? Is it not safer and saner to realize that there is no more mystery and glamour in examining the after-death state with the astral vision, than in examining the Tyrol with the physical? — no more, but *also just as much*. For to see a daisy is a thing as wonderful and mysterious as to see an angel, and [Page 19] the dawn and the sunset are as full of glamour to the seeing eye as the shimmer of colors in an aura.

I have said that there is a large class of super-physical phenomena a knowledge of which affects human life and human conduct. To know something of these not only immensely widens our view of life, but the possession of such knowledge is very important in the guidance of our life now. If we understand after-death conditions and their relations to our conduct here, we can so think, desire, and act now, as to ensure favorable conditions then. Ours is a continuous life, and a knowledge of that which is *beyond the veil* is of vital importance in the sane and rational guidance of our life in this world. Moreover, we are living in these worlds all the time, and an increasingly large number of people are more or less susceptible to the vibrations of the finer matter composing these worlds. It is very satisfactory to find that on these matters there is a consensus of opinion among observers as to the main points, and variations are confined to details. The literature on these is voluminous, both inside and outside the Theosophical Society, and many small variations will be found in statements concerning these phenomena. It will be useful to understand how variations must arise even among fairly developed seers.

There is one great difference between physical and super-physical research — the apparatus used in them respectively. The physical plane scientist, [Page 20] investigating that which escapes his vision by its distance or its minuteness, uses an instrument outside himself, a telescope, a spectroscope, a microscope. The super-physical scientist, under similar conditions, evolves within himself the necessary apparatus. Intelligence, as M. Bergson points out, works on inorganic matter by means of arrangements of inorganic matter, while instinct modifies organic matter into the organ it requires within its own body. In this, occult investigation resembles instinct, in seeking its instruments from the life of the organism, from the consciousness as a whole; desiring to see, the man creates out of his appropriated matter the organ of vision; he must evolve, by a steady and well-directed exercise of the will, organs which are practically new and only then can he call on his intelligence to use them as organs of observation in the world from which has been taken the materials for their fabrication. The Occultist has, however, this advantage over his fellow-scientist of the physical plane, that the latter must work with instruments which he cannot carry beyond a certain limit of delicacy; whereas the Occultist can continue to create subtler and subtler instruments, right up to the level of the subtlest phenomenon in his solar system; and when he goes beyond the solar system he can again create instruments suitable to the new conditions.

We must remember that while the senses are being used, it is the man himself who is using them, and he [Page 21] is using them from the higher planes; the higher the vehicle in which he is working, the better can he control the observation of the senses going on on the planes below his own. It is the spiritual ego, brooded over by the Spirit himself, who is the observer, and he puts down his power of perception as senses into the lower bodies, and this power works in their organs of sense; those organs of senses which work on the lower planes, astral and mental, will be subject to conditions very similar to these working on the physical plane, and these are not difficult to understand.

Let us consider how we see. We say: 'I see' or: 'I observe', but I am inclined to think that very few people analyze the complexity of what seems to them to be the very simple act of sight. In most acts of vision there is a little real sight and a great deal of memory. What we call *sight* is a complex, compacted of the translation of the impression just made on the retina and the memory of the whole of the past impressions made by the same or by similar objects. We are not simply seeing the object with the eye; we have laid up in our memory the images of a number of similar perceptions, and we weld the whole of these into our present perception, and then say: 'I see' It is useful to realize this. If we look at the photograph of a friend, we recognize it; a baby or a dog looks at it, and does not relate the flat image on the card to the living father or master whom he [Page 22] knows and loves. We see, for the first time in this

life, a number of Spaniards, or Indians; we say: "How alike they all are". We confuse them together. They do exactly the same with us. The first thing we see in a number of similar objects is that which they have in common, i.e., their likeness to each other. As we multiply the sense-impressions, we gradually notice the differences, their unlikenesses to each other. We distinguish by differences. First, we perceive the common type; then we see the minor distinctions. A shepherd is said to know each of his sheep; we only see a flock. We really at first see very little of the object of observation, and only as we see it over and over again do we begin to make our perception approximate to the object perceived. As the past experiences of each of us differ widely, we each see each thing differently to a considerable extent; we bring to each new observation a different mass of memories, and these modify the present perception thereof. Hence, apart from mere carelessness, people really see physical objects differently, the greater part of each act of perception being memory, and this being different in each.

Apply all this to observations on the astral plane. The length of time during which the seer has been able to see astrally is an important factor in his accuracy. As he grows more and more accustomed to that world he will perceive differences more clearly, and be less deceived by likenesses. When [Page 23] he meets a new object, he will at once distinguish it from many other objects of a similar type, whereas the new observer will see the likeness and ignore the differences. Accurate observation there, as here, will depend on experience and memory. An account of early observations will err on the side of likeness, and the beginner will note similarities where the more experienced seer observes difference. His view of the astral world will only gradually become more and more detailed and exact.

Next, we must consider the differences between people in this world, as to accuracy, alike of observation and report, differences which largely arise from differences in the power of paying attention to a thing. The attention of some people is constantly wandering, fluttering like a butterfly from flower to flower and such people cannot be accurate, either in observing or in recording what they have seen. Not only is accuracy of observation one of the rarest things in the world, but the power of memory, which records exactly what has been seen, varies much in different observers. Inaccuracies are sure to creep into descriptions, unless the observations made are immediately written down. In fact, inaccuracy is best avoided by having present a second person to write down the record of the observation, while the observation is going on; then the seer can very carefully observe the objects before him, while the scribe can write down the words of description [Page 24] exactly as they fall from his lips; in this way a mistake in memory will not confuse details, and thus blur the accuracy of the record. For instance, in making the observations now embodied in *Man Whence, How and Whither*, the two seers observed at the same time, stopping and re-examining any obscure point, discussing with each other — while the objects were being looked at — any difficult matter, while two scribes took down, independently, everything that was said, even to the most ejaculatory sentence.

The higher the vision that is being used, the more useful is it that the seer and scribe should be two different persons; the experienced observer does not need this aid when he is observing the lower planes, which are familiar to him by reiterated observation; he normally lives consciously in the three worlds, and is thoroughly at home in them all. But observations of unfamiliar scenes demand more concentrated attention, and then the aid of a friendly scribe is invaluable.

Another thing which leads to many superficial differences of observation is the difference of interest in the different observers. If an artist, a politician, a student of religion, an artisan and an idler should visit the same country, hitherto unknown to them, and should send home descriptions of it to their friends, how

different would those descriptions be. The artist's reports would lead one to think that the cities consisted of art-galleries, studios, concert-rooms, [Page 25] and museums, and that art was the chief interest of the nation. The politician would tell of debates, of the strife of parties, of the intrigues of statesmen. The student of religion would draw a picture of church dignitaries discussing theological questions, of conflicting doctrines, of rival sects. The artisan would report conditions of labor, the state of trade, the various crafts practiced, and would show the nation as one huge workshop. The idler would write of theatres and music-halls, of dances and dinner-parties, of society gossip and dress. Their respective correspondents, if the country were quite new to them, would gain very different ideas about it. So is it with the many descriptions given by seers of the astral and mental worlds. The personal equation largely colors the observations; the man sees the aspects of life in which he personally feels the keenest interest, and only the thoroughly trained seer gives a fairly unbiased, full, and well-proportioned account.

Again, many descriptions given of the astral world are merely local. People talk of the astral world as though it were about the size of Birmingham or Glasgow, instead of being a world considerably larger than the physical, with an immense variety of peoples and other creatures. Many speak of it as though it could be run over in a few hours, whereas few know a tithe of its varied aspects. Observers look at certain types of people, mostly ordinary [Page 26] discarnate entities, as though nothing else were of interest there, and so gain but a very restricted view. Suppose that a dweller in a far-off planet were brought here and plunged into a London slum, were taken through its courts and alleys, and shown the lives of its inhabitants: suppose that having studied this, he was whisked back again to his distant home, and gave there an account of the *world* which he had seen; his report might be very accurate — as to the slum; but it might give a very false impression of our world. An instance similar to this may be found in a very interesting little book, entitled *The Grey World*; it describes various very dismal conditions, and describes them well, but comparatively few people will go through these on the other side of death. They belong to the experiences of those only who, clinging strongly to physical life, remain in the etheric double for a considerable time after death, instead of quickly shaking it off and going on into the astral world.

Another difficulty is connected with the nature of astral sight itself. Astral vision not only differs from the physical in that any part of the astral body can be used for seeing with, but also that the observer sees through everything and round everything, so that objects take on a very different aspect from those of the physical plane, and backs and fronts, insides and outsides are at first much confused. A man's own thought-forms appear to him as independent and [Page 27] celestial entities; astral matter moulds itself to his thinking, and he sees a beautiful landscape stretching in front of him, unwitting that it is his own creation: he sees what he expects, for expectation has made images, and these present themselves to him as objects; recollections of earth picture themselves as astral surroundings, and people with similar ideas live together in scenes collectively constructed. The astral world to the uninstructed newcomer is as queer and unlike the reality as is the physical world to the eyes of a new-born baby. Each has to learn the conditions into which he has been plunged.

Here comes in the question of training, which, in the case of those who seek to be taught, differs much with what is called the type, or ray, of the teacher and the pupil. I may be permitted to take, as contrasting examples, Mr. C. W. Leadbeater and myself. Mr. Leadbeater, from the opening of his astral vision, was carefully trained in its use; an older disciple took him in hand, asked him constantly: "What do you see?" corrected mistakes, explained difficulties, until his observations were accurate and reliable. I was tossed out into the astral world, left to make mistakes, to find them out and correct them, to learn by experience.

It is obvious that where training is so different, results will be different. Which is the better way ? Neither, or both. The first way is the better for the training of a teacher; the second is the better for the training for my kind of work. In the long run, each [Page 28] will acquire the powers of the other; these powers are merely obtained in a different order. And if people instead of quarreling with each other over their differences would learn to utilize them by co-operating with and supplementing each other, great profit would ensue. One will be best in ascertaining details, the other in discovering broad outlines. More may be done together than either could do independently.

Things change in appearance as the power of vision increases. A globe is seen, and one calls it a globe. Later on, one finds that it is not a globe, but the physical end of a form composed of higher kinds of matter. Down here the solar system consists of globes rolling in their orbits round a central sun. From a high plane the solar system looks like a lotus flower, its petals spread in space, its golden center the sun, and the tip of each petal a world. Was one wrong to speak of a world as a globe ? No; it is true on the physical plane. But later, one sees things differently. We see things down here as we might see a picture through holes in a veil which covers it; through the holes we see patches of color; remove the veil, and the patches are part of a garment, of a hand, of a face. Alas ! our senses shut out more than they reveal; they are holes in the wall which imprisons our perceptive power. They often deceive us but such as they are, with all their defects, we must make the best of them. Even talc windows in a wall are better than none. [Page 29]

Moreover, observers, like other people, grow and develop, and observations of today will be much fuller than those of twenty years ago, unless they have stood still during that period; if they have grown, then they will be using much improved powers which will enable them to be much more minute and accurate than before. Unless students realize that researches are being made by people who are still growing, they will be upset by all new discoveries. Super-physical investigations are like the gropings of scientists on the physical plane. The higher senses grow more delicate, just as the scientist manufactures for himself finer apparatus. The records of research should be taken as the work of investigators who have made them as accurate as they can, and who hope to make them fuller and more accurate by and by. We are evolving persons, studying an infinite universe. The worst thing anyone can do is to take our imperfect studies as a "Thus saith the Lord" . There are no authorities, absolute and infallible, in the Theosophical Society.

Let me take as an example the investigations made into the atoms by Mr. Leadbeater and myself, in 1895 and in 1907-8. In 1895 we said that the ultimate physical atom disintegrated into astral matter. That was what we saw. In 1907-8, using other sight, we found that between the ultimate physical atom and its appearance as astral matter a whole series of changes intervened, a series of disintegrations into [Page 30] ultimate bubbles in aether, and of integrations back to astral matter. The case is analogous to the study of an object under the lower and higher powers of a microscope. You look at it through a low power and describe it; say, that you see little separate particles, and that you so describe them in your record of your observation. You put on a higher power; you discover that little threads of matter, too fine to be visible under the lower power, link the particles together into a chain. The first record can hardly be said to be wrong; it recorded accurately what was seen under the low power, the *appearance* presented by the object. All vision can only tell of appearances, and we may always be sure that its records are imperfect. We enlarge our perceptions as we ascend from one plane to another, and gain a completer view of each object.

Only well-trained and experienced seers will avoid the errors which result from looking at facts through a veil of their own thought-forms, and this causes further differences. A Roman Catholic untrained seer will find in heaven the Madonna and child, the Christ and the Saints; the Hindû will find Shrî Krshna and Mahâdeva; the Buddhist will sit in rapt contemplation before the Buddha; angels and devas will be seen crowding round; the *mise-en-scène* belongs to and varies with the prepossessions of the seer. What are the facts, without the setting ? That each man in heaven sees and worships his own [Page 31] Object of devotion, and into each such form the One Lord pours something of His Life, His Love, meeting and welcoming the outpouring of the love of His devotee, for all worship *Him*, though He be wrought into many forms by many hands. Beautiful indeed is it that each man should see in heaven the Divine in the form which attracted his heart while he was on earth, for thus does no man feel a stranger in his Father's house; he is met on the very threshold by the welcoming smile of his Beloved. The untrained seer of any religion is drawn to those of his own faith, sees their Objects of devotion, and thinks that this is all there is of heaven. The trained seer sees them all, and realizes that each makes his own image and that the image is vivified for him by the one divine Life; when he reads the descriptions of heaven in Christian, Buddhist, Hindû books, he recognizes the objects they describe; so he recognizes that which Swedenborg saw, and that which many discarnate entities describe. The differences do not make him feel that nothing can be known accurately — the effect produced on some by the great diversity of detail; on the contrary, he sees how much of truth there is amid differences of detail, and even that the detail apparently the most incongruous may give a hint of an overlooked fact to add to his store of knowledge, just as we often learn the most from things with which we the least agree. The things which do not appeal to us, the fact, or the aspect of a fact, which we have [Page 32] not observed, very often supply some particular factor which is distinctly valuable in our intellectual life.

Finally: surely we ought to be strong enough and sensible enough to agree to differ where our minds are made up on any point, and to be ready to listen to views with which we disagree. I disagree on many things with Dr. Rudolf Steiner, but I was the first to draw the attention of the English-reading public to his books, and I opened THE THEOSOPHIST to his articles when it came into my hands. I advised people to read his views, *because* they were different from mine. But difference of view does not imply that we wish to ostracize each other, nor that either should drive the other out of the T.S. We have broken the yokes from our own necks; we must not make new ones, for our descendants to break hereafter.

No one of us possesses the whole truth; very far are we from the all-round view of Those *who have nothing more to learn* in our system. Generations far in the future, ourselves in new bodies, will still be extending the limits of the known, and pressing on into the unknown; we do not want our limbs to be fettered then by appeals to our present researches, exalted into scriptures, nor to find our opinions canonized into fossils, used as walls to bar our onward progress then.

And do not be too quick to believe. Intuition is a higher faculty than observation, and the intuition of many spiritually-minded people clung [Page 33] to the great truths of religion when the facts discovered by science seemed to prove them false. The facts of nature have not altered, but new aspects of them have been discovered by further observations, and values have been revised, so that intuition is being justified by the progress of the very science which it opposed. If the intuition of any reader sets itself against any discovery of any investigator, let the former be patient and suspend his judgment. He may be wrong, and may be mistaking prejudice for intuition; if so, he will presently find it out. But *he may be right*, and while the fact, if it be a fact, must remain true, the view taken of it and of its meaning may be wrong; if so, further knowledge will presently correct the error.

The Theosophical Society cannot be injured by any researches carried on by its members; its third Object justifies them in their work. But it may be injured by the blind zeal of those who pin their faith to any one investigator, and denounce all the rest. *Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.* Let us study as strenuously as we can, sift all statements according to our ability, *follow peace with all men*, and willingly extend to all the same liberty that we claim for ourselves.