

A Word on Man, His Nature and His Powers by Annie Besant

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[Page 1] I PROPOSE to put before you what the esoteric philosophy teaches concerning man: man's nature and man's powers, his possibilities in the future, as well as his state in the present. May I say in opening what I have to put to you, that I am simply laying before you that which I have been taught, and which I have to a considerable extent verified by my own personal experiment, so that it has become to me a matter of knowledge ? I, however, only put it to you as a matter of reasonable hypothesis. I do not pretend to dictate to you your opinions; I do not pretend to formulate for you what you shall think, or what you shall reject. On each of you the responsibility of forming his own thought; on each of you the responsibility of accepting or rejecting, as your own reason, your conscience and your judgment may decide. All that the speaker can do, or has the right to do, is to put the truth as he sees it, leaving it to each individual to accept or to reject, the right and the duty being on each, and not on the one who speaks.

With regard to man, there is a fundamental difference in the conception of man as he is looked at [Page 2] in the East and the West. According to the esoteric philosophy man is regarded essentially as a soul. What he may have of instruments which that soul employs, what bodies he may clothe himself in, what special forms he may adopt — all that is matter which changes in time and space. As you may read in *The Brihad Aranyaka Upanishat* "As a goldsmith, taking a piece of gold, forms another shape ... so throwing off this body . . . the soul forms a shape". And so the man is the soul, the soul that lives to gather experience, that lives to subjugate external nature, that lives to unite itself with the Divine Spirit whence it sprang; and as regards the soul's bodies, those differ as evolution proceeds, and the soul moulds them century after century into the fuller and more perfect expression of itself. But in the West, man is far more identified with his outer form; he identifies himself with his body and with his mind. To us the soul stands above body and mind, using both as instruments, whereas in the West, people think of themselves as consisting of body and of mind; and the things that interest them are the things that affect the body, while the mind, they think, is practically their master, and they never dream of mastering their own thoughts and being ruler of their own intellectual as well as of their own physical domain.

In order that these distinctions may be understood, let us sketch the different "principles" as they are sometimes called — "states of consciousness" as they are called at other times — which make up man when, [Page 3] you take him completely, as man physical, man psychical, and man spiritual. Those are the three great divisions accepted, let me say in passing, by Christianity as much as by other religions. For you find St. Paul speaking of man "as body, soul and spirit". I know that in popular Christianity the distinction between soul and spirit has very largely been lost. But that is not so in Christian philosophy. If you take the writings of the great thinkers of Christendom, those who have dealt with religion scientifically and philosophically, you will find they follow the lines laid down by the great Christian Apostle, and regard man as a triple and not only as a dual entity. Now the body which belongs to the man, which is a physical garment as we say, is a very changing and a very illusory thing, as I said to you the other night, —

changing continually from moment to moment, and from year to year; so that if you turn to any modern book on Physiology you will find that every minute particle of your body changes absolutely and completely in the space of seven years, that not a fragment of it you had seven years ago is yours today. Not only so. In the later investigations of Physiology you will find it recognised in the West, that a great part, at least, of the body, is made up of minute lives, microbes as they are called; and whenever men of science are searching after the cause of disease, they are on the track of some particular microbe, and it has become one of their favourite recreations to cultivate the microbe and improve him, [Page 4] so that he may become less dangerous when he falls upon any particular body. In this, western science is on the track of a great truth, and as far as it goes it speaks rightly in the fact that these microbes enter into the composition of the human body. It might go further: it might say that the whole body is made up of nothing else but microbes and minuter creatures still, so that the whole body of man is composed of tiny lives, lives each with its own independent existence, coming into the body and going out of it, taking while in the body the stamp of the individual man, of which, for a time, it forms a part. So that our bodies are like hosts of these tiny visitors, and each of us stamps on those particles of the body his own physical, and, to a great extent, his mental, moral, and emotional characteristics. Out of the great reservoir of nature, there pour through us these streams of tiny lives; and each, while it remains in our keeping, receives our stamp and then passes on to form part of some other body — vegetable, mineral, animal, human, as the case may be. So that even physically we become the creators of the world in which we live. Even physically, the world, as it surrounds us, is made up of that which we contribute, and is modified and changed according/ to the character of these constant contributions that we make. Into our body flow the tiny lives. There we feed them, poison them or purify them, pollute them or cleanse them, as the case may be. By our food and by our drink, by our thinking and by our living, we modify [Page 5] these tiny particles which are a passing part of ourselves ; and then we send them out to affect others — to make part of the bodies of other people, to make part of the physical nature around us, modifying them according to the fashion in which we are living ourselves. This is the physical basis of human brotherhood, this the physical basis of the brotherhood of all that lives. And there is nothing that lives not. So that this constant interaction throws on each a responsibility, gives to each the responsibility of this creative power, of this transmuting and modifying influence. One by one we change each other's lives physically, day by day we affect each other's health mentally as well as morally. Sometimes it is said that the man who is evil in his living, as the drunkard, is only his own enemy. It is not so. He is the enemy of everything that surrounds him, of every life that comes in contact with his own. The terrible curse of the drunkard is that all these tiny lives are sent out from him, poisoned with alcohol, to fall on the bodies of other men, women and children, carrying with them the poison that he has infused into them, and making him a focus of curses to all among whom he lives. Thus, learning what the physical body is, the esoteric philosophy makes us careful in our physical life. It carries on this sense of responsibility into the common actions, common thoughts of everyday and ordinary life, so that self-restraint in the body as well as in the mind, should be the note of the life of every true Theosophist.[Page 6]

Let me pass from the body to the next stage in man, that astral body to which I alluded the other night. Really the astral body should come first in our thought, for it is the stable matrix or mould, into which all these tiny physical lives pass, and out of which they pass again, the stable part of man which preserves the form, only slowly and gradually modified, which is more directly acted upon by the mind than the physical molecules, which affects the physical molecules in their arrangement, in that as you alter the matrix these physical molecules must take on the form of the mould into which they run. This astral body of astral matter envelopes every physical molecule, and not only envelopes every physical molecule, but spreads out around the body, making a kind of atmosphere around each of us, extending some few feet away on every side, so that a clairvoyant looking at the body sees the physical body surrounded by what is called an aura, that is, a vibrating mass of delicate matter, visible to any one who is sensitive under

special conditions, but visible normally to the clairvoyant, and differing in appearance according to the state of health, physical, psychical or mental, of the person whom it concerns. Now, that aura, or atmosphere, surrounding the body, which is in a sense an expansion of astral matter, is very closely connected especially with the mind; it is very easily affected by the mind of the person to whom it belongs, and also by the minds of others. These magnetic atmospheres that surround us (for in [Page 7] astral matter all magnetic forces play) bring us into contact one with the other, so that we affect each other unconsciously, as we sometimes say. Have you never felt on meeting a person for the first time an attraction or a repulsion which had nothing in it of intellectual judgment, nothing in it of previous knowledge or experience? You like a person — you cannot tell why; you dislike another — you have no reason for your dislike. Esoteric philosophy explains to you the very simple reason that causes these strange antipathies and attractions. It is that every human being has his own rate of vibration, the vibration of this astral matter, so that it is always quivering backwards and forwards. It is one of the characteristics of this ethereal matter to be thrown easily into waves; and just as light is nothing more than waves of ether set in very rapid motion by a rapidly vibrating body, which we call luminous, because of the effect it has upon the eye, so this ethereal matter, which is part of our own bodies, is thrown into waves of definite length and definite frequency and these vibrate always in us and around us, and are part of ourselves, modified by our own characteristics. Just as striking two strings on a piano, you may have either harmony or discord, according to the length of the sound-waves set up by these vibrating strings — so you may have either harmony or discord between the vibrating auras of two different people; and if the vibrations fall into harmony — that is, if they bear a certain [Page 8] definite relation of wave length to each other — there is an attraction between the two: whereas, if they bear a different relation you get discord — that is, friction and jangle, and you are repelled without understanding the reason.

It is this astral body and astral atmosphere which is the medium for all magnetic phenomena. All the effects we produce upon each other are modified by this astral atmosphere. All the effects that deal with emotions and passions, with all those sides of the human character which are of the nature of emotions, come to us by means of these astral vibrations.

Have you ever tried to think what oratory is? It does not lie in the words that are spoken, it does not lie in the thought that is behind the words. You might take in cold blood the most eloquent passage of some great oration, and read it calmly without any movement of the emotions, without any sense of passion or of vibrating enthusiasm in you. If you hear it spoken, it is different. Why? It is because the thought of the speaker working on his own astral atmosphere throws that into vehement vibrations — vibrations of love or of hatred, passion or pity — vibrations of great enthusiasm; and then these vibrations of his, throwing the whole ether around him into wave motion, these waves strike person after person, making their own atmosphere vibrate, and then from one to another there flies the contagion until the whole crowd is moved as by a single impulse and a single will. [Page 9]

These are all results of this second part of man's nature, this astral atmosphere that penetrates and surrounds him, by means of which the mind works on physical matter. And not only in this fashion, but in many forms of nervous disease, in those strange crises of panic, in those often puzzling attacks of hysterical affection that rush through a whole hospital. There you have set up these vibrations in the astral atmosphere communicated from patient to patient, and bringing about nervous crises in the physical body which they control.

With regard to this astral body and atmosphere, many investigations are being made in modern science, and many of our acutest thinkers are beginning to realise that it is necessary to postulate such a nature in man in order to explain many of the obscurer phenomena to which so much of our modern thought is directed. Into this part of man's nature fall all the phenomena of trance, all the lower phenomena of mesmerism, and many of the phenomena of hypnotism. Although mind comes into mesmeric and hypnotic phenomena, it works on the astral body of the person who is subject to the influence, and by producing effects in the astral body brings about results in the physical. Psychologists in the West — men like Sidgwick, Sully, Bain, and many another of our leading writers on psychology — have found that they cannot understand the workings of consciousness if they only study it in its waking state; that is, if they only study the mind as we know it in our waking hours, they [Page 10] meet with phenomena that are quite inexplicable, and they have begun to study sleep-consciousness — a very bad name for it but apparently there is no better at present in the English tongue — in order the better to understand the phenomena shown by the mind in its waking state. This sleep-consciousness includes all conditions of trance. There is this advantage of the trance condition — you can produce it at will; and every scientist will tell you that if he wants to gain exact facts, he needs to control his experiments, and to shut out what he does not want, to include only the conditions which he desires in order that he may make his experiments. The moment he can produce these special conditions he can work out all the facts he is in search of with less liability to error than would otherwise occur. By artificially including trance, human consciousness can be studied in a fashion which is normally impossible: trance is produced sometime by drugs, sometimes by mesmeric passes (that is, by the action of the mind and the will upon another) sometimes by hypnotism (that is, by using a mechanical stimulus like a revolving mirror or electric light) — there are many ways of doing it — fatiguing the external sense, so that the fatigue leads to paralysis of the cells of the nerve, and that paralysis is propagated backwards to the brain, producing ultimately a state of brain fatigue, brain paralysis, in fact a state of coma. In these fashions, man may be thrown into these abnormal states of consciousness, and studied when [Page 11] consciousness is working in this particular state instead of in the normal condition. In hypnotism these results are brought about mechanically. Mr. Braid, who first started these hypnotic experiments, brought them about by producing what he called a convergent strabismus. That is only a six-syllabled way of saying "a squint"; but sometimes the scientific mind likes to speak in six syllables rather than in one, because it produces a certain sense of dignity which impresses the unscientific and thoughtless. Really, what he did was to make the patient squint upwards by putting an object slightly above the eyes so that they had to converge in looking at it. In that way he fatigued very seriously the nervous elements as well as the muscles of the eye; and so the patient passed into a state of sleep or trance, from which Mr. Braid was able to obtain what are known as hypnotic phenomena. The older phenomena of mesmerism were brought about in a different way, by a person who was able to concentrate his will and his own magnetic force, throwing that force with all the strength of concentrated will on the person he desired to affect. He worked directly on the astral body by means of mental action; whereas the hypnotist works on the astral body by way of the physical, and so produces the bad physical effect, that by making artificial paralysis he fatigues the nerve and sets up unhealthy vibrations which tend to repeat themselves. Charcot always preferred to work on hysterical people, people with a tendency to epilepsy, and other forms of mental disease: those were the [Page 12] people most easily affected. He did not so much try to cure them, as to find out what results he could obtain from them, and the results were a further shattering of the nervous system as well as some exceedingly interesting psychical facts; but these facts were largely obtained at the cost of the physical destruction of human beings, a thing utterly antagonistic to all morality, and which ought to be condemned as a kind of human vivisection, even more wicked and more cruel than the vivisection of the lower animals. The results thus obtained you may read in many books that have been published. I shall only take a few samples to show the way in which by means of the astral the mind may work upon the physical body, and so bring about results which will lead us to our next part, the working of mind in forming images, and so later in moulding physical matter at its own will.

Take an ordinary hypnotic or mesmeric experiment. I should prefer mesmerism. Personally, I do not now use any of these experiments (I used to do them in my early days of investigation, before I knew the harm I might work), as I think, on the whole, they are mischievous. A person is thrown into a trance, and in that state he is told, say, that on his hand at a certain hour in the day will appear symptoms of a burn, that the skin will get red, that pain will be felt, that a wound will appear like a wound formed by a red-hot poker, and that all the symptoms, inflammatory and other, of a burn will be present. He [Page 13] awakes out of the trance, and so far as you are able to discover he knows nothing of what has occurred during that time. The hour arrives which has been fixed for this appearance; the skin begins to redden and pain is felt. The patient does not understand what is happening, but he is conscious that he is suffering pain. The symptoms become more acute; the skin gradually assumes an appearance which it would assume if touched by a poker, and you have a burn produced, not by external lesion, but by the action of mind, the mind of the operator working through the astral body of the patient, setting up there the image of a burn which then reproduces itself on the physical molecules, which, as I explained before, are shaped and moulded by the astral matrix in which they are embedded. If, when in Paris, you go to the *Salpetriere*, you can see a number of photographs which have been taken of burns which have thus been produced on the bodies of patients, and you may examine the doctors who have produced these lesions, and without external means have caused external injury.

This throws strong light on some so-called miracles. Where you have the production of what have been called the sacred stigmata — that is, the appearance on the hands and feet of the wounds of the Passion of Jesus — you are not face to face with a fraud, as many Protestants are apt to think, dealing with a Roman Catholic miracle. You are not face to face with a case of deliberate self-deception any more than a [Page 14] wilful deception of others. You are simply face to face with hypnotic phenomena produced in highly nervous subjects, such, say, as secluded monks or nuns who have their minds fixed constantly on one idea, who very often remain for hours in a single position with eyes upturned towards the Crucifix — in that very position in which Braid used to bring on his hypnotic trance. So are really produced these marks upon the physical body, which by those who believe them to be miraculous are looked on as endorsing a particular form of faith, while by those who hold another form of Christianity, they are regarded as deliberate and wicked frauds. They are neither the one nor the other. Like all miracles they are reducible under law; for a miracle is only the working of a law unknown to the people amongst whom the phenomenon occurs, and they, because they do not understand it, at once jump to the "supernatural", forgetting that, as the Divine is the source of all, there can be nothing which is not natural — there can be nothing outside and beyond the Divine nature and the Divine will. Take, then, that class of phenomena as interesting physically — interesting as showing that you can produce physical results without what we call a physical cause — a thing which fifty years ago science would have said was impossible, which fifty years ago would have been denounced as fraud, as it was denounced when brought about a hundred years ago by a man like Mesmer. Orthodox science denounced him as a charlatan and a rogue. [Page 15] The century that followed has justified Mesmer, and has made some of us fairly indifferent when science calls out "fraud" about other phenomena which we know to be as real and as natural as those which were denounced as fraudulent by the science of the eighteenth century, and are boasted of as modern triumphs by the science of the nineteenth. These, however, are the least interesting of such phenomena. Far more interesting are the mental workings on the mind of the patient — sending before his thought images produced in the mind of the operator, and so enabling him to see as an image that which only exists as thought in the mind of the controller.

But before referring to some of these experiments, let me give you an explanation from the standpoint of

the philosophy I am trying to explain. I have spoken of the soul as the man. That soul when it works through astral matter on the brain is known as mind, for the mind is the lower manifestation of the soul — it is the soul embodied and active in the body, not the soul in its own nature, not the soul in its own sphere, not the soul which uses mind as well as body as instrument, but only the soul as it is seen and manifested in the brain — intellect, reason, judgment, memory: all those characteristics of the mind are qualities of the soul as the soul works through the brain. In its own sphere it works in matter of a much subtler kind, and there each thought is a thing. Every thought is a form; every thought has its shape [Page 16] in the subtle matter which is the matter of the soul-spheres. But when that shape is to make itself manifest to others who are living in the body, it must clothe itself in astral matter to begin with, and take a shape in which, in the trance or clairvoyant state, it can be seen as a form; then it may be projected further into physical manifestation. With that I will deal in a moment. Amongst those physical manifestations are some of the phenomena which have caused so much puzzlement in connection with the Theosophical Society in the minds of many both in the East and the West.

Let me take, then, with that brief explanation, the workings of the soul through the mind, the working of the mind on astral matter, and the proofs of it that you may obtain through mesmeric and hypnotic phenomena. Suppose you take a sheet of plain paper and throw your patient into a mesmeric trance. On that paper place a card smaller than the paper, and then trace round it with a little bit of wood an outline of the card. Say to the person who is in trance: "I will draw a line round the card, and you can see it". Then put the paper and the card away, and wake the person out of the trance. Apparently he will be quite normal, like you or me. Give him, then, half a dozen bits of blank paper, amongst which is the paper on which this imaginary line has been drawn round the edge of the card, and ask him if, on any of these bits of paper, he sees any figure. He will pass them over one by one, and when he comes to the [Page 17] paper on which this line has been drawn by the wood, he will say: "On this there is an oblong traced." In order to be sure that he sees it, ask him to fold the paper along the line he sees, and he will fold it along these "imaginary" lines that you cannot see. Then bring the card and place it on the folded paper, and you will find that he has folded along invisible lines so that he has the exact size of the card round which this "imaginary line" was traced, showing you that he sees this image that has been formed, and that it persists for him, his faculties having been thrown into this clairvoyant state.

Take another case rather more complicated. Here you want considerable concentration of will on the part of the operator. On a blank piece of paper throw an image. Take, for example, a watch. If you look at the watch it conveys a very definite image to your mind. Are you able in thought to project such an image on the piece of paper so that you can see it with the mind? That is what is called visualising it. Some have great power in doing it. Every artist has the power to some extent. Every person can obtain it if he chooses to train his will and concentrate it. You can thus produce to your own mind a clear image, so that if you shut your eyes you can see the watch in thought. That is the condition of success in an experiment of this kind. Suppose I have my patient: I throw in my thought an image of the watch on the paper; that is, I fix my mind on the paper, and I see on it in my [Page 18] own thought an image of the watch. I need not speak a word, I need not make any sign or touch the patient; there shall be no contact between him and me; I will remain silent, and affect him by nothing except my mind. He shall then be awakened out of the trance. Some one else shall give him the bits of paper, so that there may not even be contact between my touch of the paper and his touch. Presently, looking over the bits of paper, he will come to the one on which my thought has made the image of the watch, and will say: "Here is a watch", Ask him to describe it? and he will describe it. Take it away, remove it to a distance until the outline grows dim, and he will say: "I cannot see it clearly". Now give him an opera glass, and the image will be recovered. Give him finally a pencil and ask him to trace over the lines of the picture he sees, and he will draw on that

apparently blank paper the picture that you have made by your mind. What has happened ?

The mind has in astral matter made the image by the force of its own thought, and that is visible to the person in the clairvoyant state. His astral body, which is active, vibrates in answer to it, and so by an inner sense he is able to see it. That is then transmitted to his physical eye, and he sees that which to the eye, not thus influenced, does not exist. But what is thus seen must exist, or it could not be visible under any conditions. On these matters Professor Lodge is making some interesting investigations. He has convinced himself that thought [Page 19] can pass from brain to brain by means of an idea being conveyed without any word or written expression at all. In all these experiments, case after case may be found by which you may convince yourself of the reality that thought, ideation, gives birth to form. But this may carry us very far. I have said that concentrated thought is necessary for such exact experiments, but it is not necessary for affecting to some extent the minds of others, which are all in nature like our own. Very concentrated thought is necessary to produce an astral image that another can see: comparatively slight thought is wanted to produce an image that another may receive in the mind. And so you come to thought-transference — another of man's powers familiar to every student of Theosophy, and now being investigated by modern science.

Before taking that, let me take the last stage of this production of images, which, I said, was connected with some of the phenomena which have caused so much curiosity and wonder and accusations of fraud in connection, especially, with Madame Blavatsky, the greatest wonder-worker of our time. It is a simple enough thing, this production of external material forms by a person who has trained the mind and the will. That means, of course, that the soul is sufficiently developed to be able to use the mind as an instrument — that which is thought to be impossible, I am afraid, in the western world. What happens is this. The soul in its own sphere strongly thinks, and [Page 20] produces a mind-image. That mind image, generated by the soul, is thrown down into the ordinary mind working in connection with astral matter. Then, into that mind-image is built astral matter—the molecules of astral matter — so that, as in the former case, it would become visible to the clairvoyant. But a stage further is possible. Out of the atmosphere in which in minute division, as you know, exists physical matter, minute particles of carbon, for instance, in the carbonic acid around us — those particles taken up by the plant and built into its own tissues — those tiny particles of solid matter are precipitated by means of a magnetic current into the form which has thus been produced by the action of mind on the astral matter. And thus a physical object is produced. The commonest form of this is the precipitation of writing. All that is necessary is that you should be able to think strongly each letter that you want to produce. You must make an image of the letter; you must then produce an astral image of that letter, so that, say, your letter A would exist in an astral form, held together by strong concentrated will. Then into that astral mould by a magnetic current, as easy to manipulate as the magnetic and galvanic currents used by your electricians when they precipitate silver from a solution on to the article they desire to plate — by quite as simple a process there is cast down out of the atmosphere the minute material particles which, in their aggregation, become visible: and then your letter A appears as [Page 21] precipitated on the paper. That is a description, stage by stage, of the production of precipitated writing. There is nothing miraculous about it; it is a simple process, as simple as any electric message, which, as you know, may be produced by writing on a tape by alternating currents which produce, if you desire, a facsimile of the writing of the operator at the other end. The difference between the working of the adept and the working of the electrician, is that the electrician wants an apparatus — a battery and a wire — to produce his result; while the adept uses the brain as his battery and wire. For the human brain, as one of these adepts has told us, is a most marvellous generator of force, a most wonderful transmuter of mental into physical and physical into mental forces. There takes place the great alchemy of nature, and it can be governed by a purified and concentrated will. If you ask me: "Can I do it ?" I reply: "No, you cannot, because you have not trained yourself". Will you pardon me if I say what sounds very rude, that very few of you ever really

think at all?

You drift. You do not think. You allow other people's thoughts to drift into your minds from the mental and astral world. The minds of most of us are nothing more than hotels into which drift the visiting thoughts that are in the mental atmosphere around: they come in for a bit, stay for a time, and drift out again — drifting in and out. So, men and women scarcely ever really think. Some minds are [Page 22] more like dust-bins than even hotels, and they put up a sort of label, "Rubbish may be shot here", in the form of the most trivial and ridiculous novels, the most frivolous and childish newspapers. Yet men and women who spend hours in that fashion, wonder that they cannot manipulate the forces of the mind, or use the power of the will which needs years of training ere it becomes ductile and obedient to the soul.

If you want to see whether I am judging harshly, try and think for one minute of a single thing, and before you have thought of it for half a minute the mind will be off on some other subject. Try and think of a watch for a minute after I have stopped talking, and before you have thought of it a quarter of a minute you will find yourself thinking: "What was it she said about it? How did she look when she said it? What was my neighbour doing at that particular moment?" Everything except the one thing of which you are trying to think. Then, perhaps, you will convince yourself, as I convinced myself by that very experiment, how very little power you have over the mind, how much you are at the mercy of outside thoughts, instead of using them as you yourselves please.

Or take another case. You have some great and pressing anxiety. You can do nothing at the moment; it will keep you awake all night. Why? Because it is your master instead of your mastering it. If you knew the life of the soul, if you understood the powers of the soul, you would never think of anything [Page 23] save that which you desired to think, and which you are using for some purpose. If you had coming on, say, some great law suit, and could do nothing to influence the result, you would not think of it until the time came: you would give your whole mind to other thought that was useful and spare yourself needless worry, which ages and kills far more than anything else. Let me say in passing that the power to do it is one of the great experiences which have come to us in the knowledge of eastern thought. For, at least, we have among the Hindus not great numbers who can do it, but great numbers who put before themselves that as an ideal, who know that it can be done, who realise the possibility, and who are the standing witnesses of this reality of the higher life of the soul, and the possibility of rising above body and mind into the true life where all causes have their place.

But even our careless thinking gives rise to forms; and this is a practical point of importance to us. As we think we create forms, and those forms are according to the nature of our thought, good or bad according as the thought is evil and evil-working, or good and good-working. The motive which underlies the thought governs the nature of the form to which we give birth; and that form when it passes out from us, passes into the astral world as a living thing, exists in that astral world influencing other people and forming part of the common stock of thoughts in the world. On this subject one of the great Eastern teachers has said:[Page 24]

Every thought of man upon being evolved passes into the inner world, and becomes an active entity by associating itself, coalescing we might term it, with an elemental — that is to say, with one of the semi-intelligent forces of the kingdoms. It survives as an active intelligence — a creature of the mind's begetting — for a longer or shorter period proportionate with the original intensity of the cerebral action which generated it. Thus, a good thought is perpetuated as an

active beneficent power, an evil one as a maleficent demon. And so man is continually peopling his current in space with a world of his own, crowded with the offsprings of his fancies, desires impulses and passions; a current which re-acts upon any sensitive or nervous organisation which comes in contact with it, in proportion to its dynamic intensity. The Buddhist calls this his "Shandba"; the Hindu gives it the name of "Karma". [*The Occult World*, by A.P. Sinnett, Fifth Edition. pp 89-90]

That is what you and I are doing all day long, every day and week and year of our lives — sending out these currents of thoughts, peopling the mental atmosphere with our own thoughts, good, bad, and indifferent, thoughts of love and hate, thoughts of kindness and bitterness, thoughts that bless and thoughts that curse mankind. Here is the creative region, here the greatest responsibility. I spoke of our power of physical creation: far more important is our power of moral creation; for as we give out thoughts, good or evil, so we affect our own and others' lives, so we build our present and our future, so we make the world of today and of tomorrow. What is the criminal? You and I think we can separate ourselves from the criminal, that we are so much better than he, not responsible for his acts, and responsible [Page 25] for his crimes. Are you so sure? A criminal is a very receptive organism — passive, negative, with all the soil made by his own past thinking, that makes him easily attract and nourish every thought which is evil and cruel. But the soil will not bear bad fruit unless evil seed falls into it. How much of that evil seed do you and I contribute? Perhaps some passing thought of anger, conquered a moment after, comes into the mind. That thought has gone out into the mental atmosphere, becoming a living thing, a force for evil. That force of anger going into the mental atmosphere of the criminal, falling into the soil prepared for it, will germinate as a seed germinates, and there it may grow, nourished by his own evil, into an anger which is murder, and is then condemned by the criminal law of man. In the juster law of the universe the generator of the angry thought shares the fault of the crime. Everyone who helps thus to pollute his brother is guilty of his brother's sin. So, also, with good thought. Every noble thought that we think goes out into the world as force for good, and, passing into some mind, whose soil is full of all good impulses, is nourished there into heroic action, and so comes forth as noble deed. Our saints and martyrs, our heroes and our thinkers, are ours in mind as well as by virtue of our common humanity. Our best goes to their making; our noblest goes to their helping. They are ours as we have helped to form them, and every thought we think of good goes to the making of the saint.[Page 26]

Such then, is some of the teaching of esoteric philosophy as regard man's nature and man's powers. Every one of us has thus a share in the making of the world; every one of us has thus a share in the building of the future. Today all that surrounds us is the outcome of past thinking; tomorrow our environment shall be the resultant of our present thought. Law everywhere; law in the mental and moral world as in the physical; but man the creator of his own destiny — man the builder, the moulder, the master of the world.

That, then, is the message which tonight I have striven to bring to you; that, the fragment of esoteric truth that I have tried to put before you. For thus it is that morality worked out in contact with philosophy finds its embodiment in life. Thus life becomes beautiful, life becomes strong, life becomes dignified, noble and serene. You and I as living souls have the future in our hands to model; ours the power, ours, therefore, the responsibility; for where the power is, there also lies the duty; and with the increased knowledge of power the duty and the responsibility increase.