

CHAPTER XI.

WRECKS AND CATASTROPHES.

SOMETIMES it is possible for members of the band of helpers to avert impending catastrophes of a somewhat larger order. In more than one case when the captain of a vessel has been carried unsuspecting far out of his course by some unknown current or through some mistaken reckoning, and has thereby run into serious danger, it has been possible to prevent shipwreck by repeatedly impressing upon his mind a feeling that something was wrong; and although this generally comes through into the captain's brain merely as a vaguely warning intuition, yet if it occurs again and again he is almost certain to give it some attention and take such precautions as suggest themselves to him.

In one case, for example, in which the master of a barque was much nearer in to the land than he supposed, he was again and again pressed to heave the lead, and though he resisted this suggestion for some time as being unnecessary and absurd, he at last gave the order in a somewhat hesitating way. The result

astounded him, and he at once put his vessel about and stood off from the coast, though it was not until morning came that he realized how very close he had been to an appalling disaster.

Often, however, a catastrophe is kârmic in its nature, and consequently cannot be averted; but it must not therefore be supposed that in such cases no help can be given. It may be that the people concerned are destined to die, and therefore cannot be saved from death; but in many cases they may still be to some extent prepared for it, and may certainly be helped upon the other side after it is over. Indeed, it may be definitely stated that wherever a great catastrophe of any kind takes place, there is also a special sending of help.

Two recent cases in which such help was given were the sinking of the *Drummond Castle* off Cape Ushant, and the terrible cyclone which devastated the city of St. Louis in America. On both these occasions a few minutes' notice was given, and the helpers did their best to calm and raise men's minds, so that when the shock came upon them it would be less disturbing than it might otherwise have been. Naturally, however, the greater part of the work done with the victims in both these calamities was done upon the astral plane after they had left their physical bodies; but of this we shall speak later.

It is sad to relate how often when some catastrophe is impending the helpers are hindered in their kindly offices by wild panic among those whom the danger threatens—or sometimes, worse still, by a mad outburst of drunkenness among those whom they are trying to assist. Many a ship has gone to her doom with almost every soul on board mad with drink, and therefore utterly incapable of profiting by any assistance offered either before death or for a very long time afterwards.

If it should ever happen to any of us to find ourselves in a position of imminent danger which we can do nothing to avert, we should try to remember that help is certainly near us, and that it rests entirely with ourselves to make the helper's work easy or difficult. If we face the danger calmly and bravely, recognizing that the true ego can in no way be affected by it, our minds will then be open to receive the guidance which the helpers are trying to give, and this cannot but be best for us, whether its object be to save us from death or, when that is impossible, to conduct us safely through it.

Assistance of this latter kind has not infrequently been given in cases of accidents to individuals, as well as of more general catastrophes. It will be sufficient to mention one example as an illustration of what is meant. In one of the great storms which did so much

damage around our coasts a few years ago, it happened that a fishing boat was capsized far out at sea. The only people on board were an old fisherman and a boy, and the former contrived to cling for a few minutes to the overturned boat. There was no physical help at hand, and even if there had been in such a raging storm it would have been impossible for anything to be done, so that the fisherman knew well enough that there was no hope of escape, and that death could only be a question of a few moments. He felt great terror at the prospect, being especially impressed by the awful loneliness of that vast waste of waters, and he was also much troubled with thoughts of his wife and family, and the difficulties in which they would be left by his sudden decease.

A passing helper seeing all this endeavoured to comfort him, but finding his mind too much disturbed to be impressionable, she thought it advisable to show herself to him in order to assist him the better. In relating the story afterwards she said that the change which came over the fisherman's face at sight of her was wonderful and beautiful to see; with the shining form standing upon the boat above him he could not but think that an angel had been sent to comfort him in his trouble, and therefore he felt that not only would he himself be carried safely through the gates of death, but his family would assuredly be

looked after also. So, when death came to him a few moments later, he was in a frame of mind very different from the terror and perplexity which had previously overcome him; and naturally when he recovered consciousness upon the astral plane and found the "angel" still beside him he felt himself at home with her, and was prepared to accept her advice as regards the new life upon which he had entered.

Some time later the same helper was engaged in another piece of work of very similar character, the story of which she has since told as follows:

"You remember that steamer that went down in the cyclone at the end of last November; I betook myself to the cabin where about a dozen women had been shut in, and found them wailing in the most pitiful manner, sobbing and moaning with fear. The ship had to founder—no aid was possible—and to go out of the world in this state of frantic terror is the worst possible way to enter the next. So in order to calm them I materialized myself, and of course they thought I was an angel, poor souls; they all fell on their knees and prayed me to save them, and one poor mother pushed her baby into my arms imploring me to save that at least. They soon grew quiet and composed as we talked, and the wee baby went to sleep smiling, and presently they all fell asleep peacefully, and I filled their minds with

thoughts of the heaven-world, so that they did not wake up when the ship made her final plunge downwards. I went down with them to ensure their sleeping through the last moments, and they never stirred as their sleep became death."

Evidently in this case, too, those who were thus helped had not only the enormous advantage of being enabled to meet death calmly and reasonably, but also the still greater one of being received on its farther shore by one whom they were already disposed to love and trust—one who thoroughly understood the new world in which they found themselves, and could not only reassure them as to their safety, but advise them how to order their lives under these much altered circumstances. And this brings us to the consideration of one of the largest and most important departments of the work of invisible helpers—the guidance and assistance which they are able to give to the dead.

CHAPTER XII.

WORK AMONG THE DEAD.

It is one of the many evils resulting from the absurdly erroneous teaching as to conditions after death which is unfortunately current in our western world, that those who have recently shaken off this mortal coil are usually much puzzled and often very seriously frightened at finding everything so different from what their religion had led them to expect. The mental attitude of a large number of such people was pithily voiced the other day by an English general, who three days after his death met one of the band of helpers whom he had known in physical life. After expressing his great relief that he had at last found someone with whom he was able to communicate, his first remark was: "But if I am dead, where am I? For if this is heaven I don't think much of it; and if it is hell, it is better than I expected."

But unfortunately a far greater number take things less philosophically. They have been taught that all men are destined to eternal flames except a favoured few who are superhumanly good; and since a very

small amount of self-examination convinces them that they do not belong to *that* category, they are but too often in a condition of panic terror, dreading every moment that the new world in which they find themselves may dissolve and drop them into the clutches of the devil, in whom they have been sedulously taught to believe. In many cases they spend long periods of acute mental suffering before they can free themselves from the fatal influence of this blasphemous doctrine of everlasting punishment—before they can realize that the world is governed, not according to the caprice of a hideous demon who gloats over human anguish, but according to a benevolent and wonderfully patient law of evolution, which is absolutely just indeed, but yet again and again offers to man opportunities of progress, if he will but take them, at every stage of his career.

It ought in fairness to be mentioned that it is only among what are called protestant communities that this terrible evil assumes its most aggravated form. The great Roman Catholic Church, with its doctrine of purgatory, approaches much more nearly to a conception of the astral plane, and its devout members at any rate realize that the state in which they find themselves shortly after death is merely a temporary one, and that it is their business to endeavour to raise themselves out of it as soon as may be by

intense spiritual aspiration, while they accept any suffering which may come to them as necessary for the wearing away of the imperfections in their character before they can pass to higher and brighter regions.

It will thus be seen that there is plenty of work for the helpers to do among the newly dead, for in the vast majority of cases they need to be calmed and reassured, to be comforted and instructed. In the astral, just as in the physical world, there are many who are but little disposed to take advice from those who know better than they; yet the very strangeness of the conditions surrounding them renders many of the dead willing to accept the guidance of those to whom these conditions are obviously familiar; and many a man's stay on that plane has been considerably shortened by the earnest efforts of this band of energetic workers.

Not, be it understood, that the karma of the dead man can in any way be interfered with; he has built for himself during life an astral body of a certain degree of density, and until that body is sufficiently dissolved he cannot pass on into the heaven-world beyond; but he need not lengthen the period necessary for that process by adopting an improper attitude.

All students ought clearly to grasp the truth that

the length of a man's astral life after he has put off his physical body depends mainly upon two factors—the nature of his past physical life, and his attitude of mind after what we call death. During his earth-life he is constantly influencing the building of matter into his astral body. He affects it directly by the passions, emotions, and desires which he allows to hold sway over him; he affects it indirectly by the action upon it of his thoughts from above, and of the details of his physical life—his continence or his debauchery, his cleanliness or his uncleanness, his food and his drink—from below.

If by persistence in perversity along any of these lines he is so stupid as to build for himself a coarse and gross astral vehicle, habituated to responding only to the lower vibrations of the plane, he will find himself after death bound to that plane during and long and slow process of that body's disintegration. On the other hand if by decent and careful living he gives himself a vehicle mainly composed of finer material, he will have very much less *post-mortem* trouble and discomfort, and his evolution will proceed much more rapidly and easily.

This much is generally understood, but the second great factor—his attitude of mind after death—seems often to be forgotten. The desirable thing is for him to realize his position on this particular

little arc of his evolution—to learn that he is at this stage withdrawing steadily inward towards the plane of the true ego, and that consequently it is his business to disengage his thoughts as far as may be from things physical, and to fix his attention more and more upon those spiritual matters which will occupy him during his life in the heaven-world. By doing this he will greatly facilitate the natural astral disintegration, and will avoid the sadly common mistake of unnecessarily delaying himself upon the lower levels of what should be so temporary a residence.

But many of the dead very considerably retard the process of dissolution by clinging passionately to the earth which they have left; they simply will not turn their thoughts and desires upward, but spend their time in struggling with all their might to keep in full touch with the physical plane, thus causing great trouble to any one who may be trying to help them. Earthly matters are the only ones in which they have ever had any living interest, and they cling to them with desperate tenacity even after death. Naturally as time passes on they find it increasingly difficult to keep hold of things down here, but instead of welcoming and encouraging this process of gradual refinement and spiritualization they resist it vigorously by every means in their power.

Of course the mighty force of evolution is event-

ually too strong for them, and they are swept on in its beneficent current, yet they fight every step of the way, thereby not only causing themselves a vast amount of entirely unnecessary pain and sorrow, but also very seriously delaying their upward progress and prolonging their stay in astral regions to an almost indefinite extent. In convincing them that this ignorant and disastrous opposition to the cosmic will is contrary to the laws of nature, and persuading them to adopt an attitude of mind which is the exact reversal of it, lies a great part of the work of those who are trying to help.

It happens occasionally that the dead are earth-bound by anxiety—anxiety sometimes about duties unperformed or debts undischarged, but more often on account of wife or children left unprovided for. In such cases as this it has more than once been necessary, before the dead man was satisfied to pursue his upward path in peace, that the helper should to some extent act as his representative upon the physical plane, and attend on his behalf to the settlement of the business which was troubling him. An illustration taken from our recent experience will perhaps make this clearer.

One of the band of pupils was trying to assist a poor man who had died in one of our western cities, but found it impossible to withdraw his mind from

earthly things because of his anxiety about two young children whom his death had left without means of support. He had been a working man of some sort, and had been unable to lay by any money for them; his wife had died some two years previously and his landlady, though exceedingly kind-hearted and very willing to do anything in her power for them, was herself far too poor to be able to adopt them, and very reluctantly came to the conclusion that she would be obliged to hand them over to the parish authorities. This was a great grief to the dead father, though he could not blame the landlady, and was himself unable to suggest any other course.

Our friend asked him whether he had no relative to whom he could entrust them, but the father knew of none. He had a younger brother, he said, who would certainly have done something for him in this extremity, but he had lost sight of him for fifteen years, and did not even know whether he was living or dead. When last heard of he had been apprenticed to a carpenter in the north, and he was then described as a steady young fellow who, if he lived, would surely get on.

The clues at hand were certainly very slight, but since there seemed no other prospect of help for the children, our friend thought it worth while to make a special effort to follow them up. Taking the dead

man with him he commenced a patient search after the brother in the town indicated; and after a great deal of trouble they were actually successful in finding him. He was now a master carpenter in a fairly flourishing way of business—married, but without children though earnestly desiring them, and therefore apparently just the man for the emergency.

The question now was how the information could best be conveyed to this brother. Fortunately he was found to be so far impressionable that the circumstances of his brother's death and the destitution of his children could be put vividly before him in a dream, and this was repeated three times, the place and even the name of the landlady being clearly indicated to him. He was immensely impressed by this recurring vision, and discussed it earnestly with his wife, who advised him to write to the address given. This he did not like to do, but was strongly inclined to travel down into the west country, find out whether there was such a house as that which he had seen, and if so make some excuse to call there. He was a busy man, however, and he finally decided that he could not afford to lose a day's work for what after all might well prove to be nothing but the baseless fabric of a dream.

The attempt along these lines having apparently failed, it was determined to try another method, so

one of the helpers wrote a letter to the man detailing the circumstances of his brother's death and the position of the children, exactly as he had seen them in his dream. On receipt of this confirmation he no longer hesitated, but set off the very next day for the town indicated, and was received with open arms by the kind-hearted landlady. It had been easy enough for the helpers to persuade her, good soul that she was, to keep the children with her for a few days on the chance that something or other would turn up for them, and she has ever since congratulated herself that she did so. The carpenter of course took the children back with him and provided them with a happy home, and the dead father, now no longer anxious, passed rejoicing on his upward way.

Since some Theosophical writers have felt it their duty to insist in vigorous terms upon the evils so frequently attendant upon the holding of spiritualistic séances, it is only fair to admit that on several occasions good work similar to that of the helper in the case just described has been done through the agency of a medium or of some one present at a circle. Thus, though spiritualism has too often detained souls who but for it would have attained speedier liberation, it must be set to the credit of its account that it has also furnished the means of

escape to others, and thus opened up the path of advancement for them. There have been instances in which the defunct has been able to appear unassisted to his relatives or friends and explain his wishes to them; but these are naturally rare, and most souls who are earth-bound by anxieties of the kind indicated can satisfy themselves only by means of the services of the medium or the conscious helper.

Another case very frequently encountered on the astral plane is that of the man who cannot believe that he is dead at all. Indeed, most people consider the very fact that they are still conscious to be an absolute proof that they have not passed through the portals of death; somewhat of a satire this, if one thinks of it, on the practical value of our much-vaunted belief in the immortality of the soul! However they may have labelled themselves during life, the great majority of those who die, in this country at any rate, show themselves by their subsequent attitude to have been to all intents and purposes materialists at heart; and those who on earth have honestly called themselves so are often no more difficult to deal with than others who would have been shocked at the very name.

A very recent instance was that of a scientific man who, finding himself fully conscious, and yet under

conditions differing radically from any that he had ever experienced before, had persuaded himself that he was still alive, and merely the victim of a prolonged and unpleasant dream. Fortunately for him there happened to be among the band of those able to function upon the astral plane a son of an old friend of his, a young man whose father had commissioned him to search for the departed scientist and endeavour to render him some assistance. When after some trouble the youth found and accosted him, he frankly admitted that he was in a condition of great bewilderment and discomfort, but still clung desperately to his dream hypothesis as on the whole the most probable explanation of what he saw, and even went so far as to suggest that his visitor was nothing but a dream-figure himself!

At last, however, he so far gave way as to propose a kind of test, and said to the young man, "If you are, as you assert, a living person, and the son of my old friend, bring me from him some message that shall prove to me your objective reality." Now although under all ordinary conditions of the physical plane the giving of any kind of phenomenal proof is strictly forbidden to the pupils of the Masters, it seemed as though a case of this kind hardly came under the rules; and therefore, when it had been ascertained that there was no objection

on the part of higher authorities, an application was made to the father, who at once sent a message referring to a series of events which had occurred before the son's birth. This convinced the dead man of the real existence of his young friend, and therefore of the plane upon which they were both functioning; and as soon as he felt this established, his scientific training at once reasserted itself, and he became exceeding eager to acquire all possible information about this new region.

Of course the message which he so readily accepted as evidence was in reality no proof at all, since the facts to which it referred might have been read from his own mind or from the records of the past by any creature possessed of astral senses! But his ignorance of these possibilities enabled this definite impression to be made upon him, and the Theosophical instruction which his young friend is now nightly giving to him will undoubtedly have a stupendous effect upon his future, for it cannot but greatly modify not only the heaven-state which lies immediately before him, but also his next incarnation upon earth.

The main work, then, done for the newly dead by our helpers is that of soothing and comforting them—of delivering them when possible from the terrible though unreasoning fear which but too often

seizes them, and not only causes them much unnecessary suffering, but retards their progress to higher spheres—and of enabling them as far as may be to comprehend the future that lies before them.

Others who have been longer on the astral plane may also receive much help, if they will but accept it, from explanations and advice as to their course through its different stages. They may, for example, be warned of the danger and delay caused by attempting to communicate with the living through a medium, and sometimes (though rarely) an entity already drawn into a spiritualistic circle may be guided into higher and healthier life. Teaching thus given to persons on this plane is by no means lost, for though the memory of it cannot of course be directly carried over to the next incarnation, there always remains the real inner knowledge, and therefore the strong predisposition to accept it immediately when heard again in the new life.

A rather remarkable instance of service rendered to the dead was the first achievement of a very recent recruit to the band of helpers—one who is hardly as yet a fully-fledged member. This young aspirant had not long before lost an aged relation, for whom he had felt an especially warm affection; and his earliest request was to be taken by a more experienced friend to visit her in the hope that he might

be of some service to her. This was done and the effect of the meeting of the living and the dead was very beautiful and touching. The older person's astral life was already approaching its end, but a condition of apathy, dullness and uncertainty prevented her from making any immediate progress.

But when the boy, who had been so much to her in earth-life, stood once more before her and dissolved by the sunlight of his love the grey mist of depression which had gathered around her, she was aroused from her stupor; and soon she understood that he had come in order to explain to her her situation, and to tell her of the glories of the higher life toward which her thoughts and aspirations ought now to be directed. But when this was fully realized, there was such an awakening of dormant feeling in her and such an outrush of devoted affection towards her earnest young helper, that the last fetters which bound her to the astral life were broken, and that one great outburst of love and gratitude swept her forthwith into the higher consciousness of the heaven-world. Truly there is no greater and more beneficent power in the universe than that of pure, unselfish love.

CHAPTER XIII.

OTHER BRANCHES OF THE WORK.

BUT turning back again now from the all-important work among the dead to the consideration of the work among the living, we must briefly indicate a great branch of it, without a notice of which our account of the labours of our invisible helpers would indeed be incomplete, and that is the immense amount which is done by suggestion—by simply putting good thoughts into the minds of those who are ready to receive them.

Let there be no mistake as to what is meant here. It would be perfectly easy—easy to a degree which would be quite incredible to those who do not understand the subject practically—for a helper to dominate the mind of any average man, and make him think just as he pleased, and that without arousing the faintest suspicion of any outside influence in the mind of the subject. But, however admirable the result might be, such a proceeding would be entirely inadmissible. All that may be done is to throw the good thought into the person's mind as

one among the hundreds that are constantly sweeping through it; whether the man takes it up, makes it his own, and acts upon it, depends upon himself entirely. Were it otherwise, it is obvious that all the good karma of the action would accrue to the helper only, for the subject would have been a mere tool, and not an actor—which is not what is desired.

The assistance given in this way is exceedingly varied in character. The consolation of those who are suffering or in sorrow at once suggests itself, as does also the endeavour to guide toward the truth those who are earnestly seeking it. When a person is spending much anxious thought upon some spiritual or metaphysical problem, it is often possible to put the solution into his mind without his being at all aware that it comes from external agency.

A pupil too may often be employed as an agent in what can hardly be described otherwise than as the answering of prayer; for though it is true that any earnest spiritual desire, such as might be supposed to find its expression in prayer, is itself a force which automatically brings about certain results, it is also a fact that such a spiritual effort offers an opportunity of influence to the Powers of Good, of which they are not slow to take advantage; and it is sometimes the privilege of a willing helper to be made the channel through which their energy is

poured forth. What is said of prayers is true to an even greater extent of meditation, for those to whom this higher exercise is a possibility.

Besides these more general methods of help there are also special lines open only to the few. Again and again such pupils as are fitted for the work have been employed to suggest true and beautiful thoughts to authors, poets, artists and musicians; but obviously it is not every helper who is capable of being used in this way.

Sometimes, though more rarely, it is possible to warn persons of the danger to their moral development of some course which they are pursuing, to clear away evil influences from about some person or place, or to counteract the machinations of black magicians. It is not often that direct instruction in the great truths of nature can be given to people outside the circle of occult students, but occasionally it is possible to do something in that way by putting before the minds of preachers and teachers a wider range of thought or a more liberal view of some question than they would otherwise have taken.

Naturally as an occult student progresses on the Path he attains a wider sphere of usefulness. Instead of assisting individuals only, he learns how classes, nations and races are dealt with, and he is entrusted with a gradually increasing share of the

higher and more important work done by the adepts themselves. As he acquires the requisite power and knowledge he begins to wield the greater forces of the mental and the astral planes and is shown how to make the utmost possible use of each favourable cyclic influence. He is brought into relation with those great Nirmânakâyas who are sometimes symbolized as the Stones of the Guardian Wall, and he becomes—at first of course in the very humblest capacity—one of the band of their almoners, and learns how those forces are dispersed which are the fruit of their sublime self-sacrifice. Thus he rises gradually higher and higher until, blossoming at length into adeptship, he is able to take his full share of the responsibility which lies upon the Masters of Wisdom, and to help others along the road which he has trodden.

On the mental plane the work differs somewhat, since teaching can be both given and received in a much more direct, rapid and perfect manner, while the influences set in motion are infinitely more powerful, because acting on so much higher a level. But (though it is useless to speak of it in detail at present, since so few of us are yet able to function consciously upon this plane during life) here also—and even higher still—there is always plenty of work to be done, as soon as ever we can make ourselves

capable of doing it; and there is certainly no fear that for countless æons we shall ever find ourselves without a career of unselfish usefulness open before us.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED.

How, it may be asked, are we to make ourselves capable of sharing in this great work? Well, there is no mystery as to the qualifications which are needed by one who aspires to be a helper; the difficulty is not in learning what they are, but in developing them in oneself. To some extent they have been already incidentally described, but it is nevertheless as well that they should be set out fully and categorically.

1. *Single-mindedness.* The first requisite is that we shall have recognized the great work which the Masters would have us do, and that it shall be for us the one great interest of our lives. We must learn to distinguish not only between useful and useless work, but between the different kinds of useful work, so that we may each devote ourselves to the very highest of which we are capable, and not fritter away our time in labouring at something which, however good it may be for the man who cannot yet do anything better, is unworthy of the know-

ledge and capacity which should be ours as Theosophists. A man who wishes to be considered eligible for employment on higher planes must begin by doing the utmost that lies in his power in the way of definite work for Theosophy down here.

Of course I do not for a moment mean that we are to neglect the ordinary duties of life. We should certainly do well to undertake no new worldly duties of any sort, but those which we have already bound upon our shoulders have become a kârmic obligation which we have no right to neglect. Unless we have done to the full the duties which karma has laid upon us we are not free for the higher work. But this higher work must nevertheless be to us the one thing really worth living for—the constant background of a life which is consecrated to the service of the Masters of Compassion.

2. *Perfect self-control.* Before we can be safely trusted with the wider powers of the astral life, we must have ourselves perfectly in hand. Our temper, for example, must be thoroughly under control, so that nothing that we may see or hear can cause real irritation in us, for the consequences of such irritation would be far more serious on that plane than on this. The force of thought is always an enormous power, but down here it is reduced and deadened by the heavy physical brain-particles which

it has to set in motion. In the astral world it is far freer and more potent, and for a man with fully-awakened faculty to feel anger against a person there would be to do him serious and perhaps even fatal injury.

Not only do we need control of temper, but control of nerve, so that none of the fantastic or terrible sights that we may encounter may be able to shake our dauntless courage. It must be remembered that the pupil who awakens a man upon the astral plane incurs thereby a certain amount of responsibility for his actions and for his safety, so that unless his neophyte had courage to stand alone the whole of the older worker's time would be wasted in hovering round to protect him, which it would be manifestly unreasonable to expect.

It is to make sure of this control of nerve, and to fit them for the work that has to be done, that candidates are always made, now as in days of old, to pass what are called the tests of earth, water, air and fire.

In other words, they have to learn with that absolute certainty that comes not by theory, but by practical experience, that in their astral bodies none of these elements can by any possibility be hurtful to them—that none can oppose any obstacle in the way of the work which they have to do.

In this physical body we are fully convinced that fire will burn us, that water will drown us, that the solid rock forms an impassable barrier to our progress, that we cannot with safety launch ourselves unsupported into the ambient air. So deeply is this conviction engrained in us that it costs most men a good deal of effort to overcome the instinctive action which follows from it, and to realize that in the astral body the densest rock offers no impediment to their freedom of motion, that they may leap with impunity from the highest cliff, and plunge with the most absolute confidence into the heart of the raging volcano or the deepest abysses of the fathomless ocean.

Yet until a man *knows* this—knows it sufficiently to act upon his knowledge instinctively and confidently—he is comparatively useless for astral work, since in emergencies that are constantly arising he would be perpetually paralyzed by imaginary disabilities. So he has to go through his tests, and through many another strange experience—to meet face to face with calm courage the most terrifying apparitions amid the most loathsome surroundings—to show in fact that his nerve may be thoroughly trusted under any and all of the varied groups of circumstances in which he may at any moment find himself.

Further, we need control of mind and of desire; of mind, because without the power of concentration it would be impossible to do good work amid all the distracting currents of the astral plane; of desire, because in that strange world to desire is very often to have, and unless this part of our nature were well controlled we might perchance find ourselves face to face with creations of our own of which we should be heartily ashamed.

3. *Calmness.* This is another most important point—the absence of all worry and depression. Much of the work consists in soothing those who are disturbed, and cheering those who are in sorrow; and how can a helper do that work if his own aura is vibrating with constant fuss and worry, or grey with the deadly gloom that comes from perpetual depression? Nothing is more hopelessly fatal to occult progress or usefulness than our nineteenth century habit of ceaselessly worrying over trifles—of eternally making mountains out of mole-hills. Many of us simply spend our lives in magnifying the most absurd trivialities—in solemnly and elaborately going to work to make ourselves miserable about nothing.

Surely we who are Theosophists ought, at any rate, to have got beyond this stage of irrational worry and causeless depression; surely we, who are

trying to acquire some definite knowledge of the cosmic order, ought by this time to have realized that the optimistic view of everything is always nearest to the divine view, and therefore to the truth, because only that in any person which is good and beautiful can by any possibility be permanent, while the evil must by its very nature be temporary. In fact, as Browning said, "the evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound," while above and beyond it all "the soul of things is sweet, the Heart of Being is celestial rest." So They who know maintain unruffled calm, and with Their perfect sympathy combine the joyous serenity which comes from the certainty that all will at last be well; and those who wish to help must learn to follow Their example.

4. *Knowledge.* To be of use the man must at least have some knowledge of the nature of the plane on which he has to work, and the more knowledge he has in any and every direction the more useful he will be. He must fit himself for this task by carefully studying Theosophical literature; for he cannot expect those whose time is already so fully occupied to waste some of it in explaining to him what he might have learnt down here by taking the trouble to read the books. No one who is not already as earnest a student as his capacities and

opportunities permit, need begin to think of himself as a candidate for astral work.

5. *Unselfishness.* It would seem scarcely needful to insist upon this as a qualification, for surely everyone who has made the least study of Theosophy must know that while the slightest taint of selfishness remains in a man, he is not yet fit to be entrusted with higher powers, not yet fit to enter upon a work of whose very essence it is that the worker should forget himself but to remember the good of others. He who is still capable of selfish thought, whose personality is still so strong in him that he can allow himself to be turned aside from his work by feelings of petty pride or suggestions of wounded dignity—that man is not yet ready to show the selfless devotion of the helper.

6. *Love.* This, the last and greatest of the qualifications, is also the most misunderstood. Most emphatically it is *not* the cheap, namby-pamby backboneless sentimentalism which is always overflowing into vague platitudes and gushing generalities, yet fears to stand firm for the right lest it should be branded by the ignorant as “unbrotherly.” What is wanted is the love which is strong enough *not* to boast itself, but to act without talking about it—the intense desire for service which is ever on the watch for an opportunity to render it, even

though it prefers to do so anonymously—the feeling which springs up in the heart of him who has realized the great work of the Logos, and, having once seen it, knows that for him there can be in the three worlds no other course but to identify himself with it to the utmost limit of his power—to become, in however humble a way, and at however great a distance, a tiny channel of that wondrous love of God which, like the peace of God, passeth man's understanding.

These are the qualities toward the possession of which the helper must ceaselessly strive, and of which some considerable measure at least must be his before he can hope that the Great Ones who stand behind will deem him fit for full awakening. The ideal is in truth a high one, yet none need therefore turn away disheartened, nor think that while he is still but struggling toward it he must necessarily remain entirely useless on the astral plane, for short of the responsibilities and dangers of that full awakening there is much that may safely and usefully be done.

There is hardly one among us who would not be capable of performing at least one definite act of mercy and good will each night while we are away from our bodies. Our condition when asleep is usually one of absorption in thought, be it remem-

bered—a carrying on of the thoughts that have principally occupied us during the day, and especially of the last thought in the mind when sinking into sleep. Now if we make that last thought a strong intention to go and give help to some one whom we know to be in need of it, the soul when freed from the body will undoubtedly carry out that intention, and the help will be given. There are several cases on record in which, when this attempt has been made, the person thought of has been fully conscious of the effort of the would-be helper, and has even seen his astral body in the act of carrying out the instructions impressed upon it.

Indeed, no one need sadden himself with the thought that he can have no part nor lot in this glorious work. Such a feeling would be entirely untrue, for every one who can think can help. Nor need such useful action be confined to our hours of sleep. If you know (and who does not?) of some one who is in sorrow or suffering, though you may not be able consciously to stand in astral form by their bedside, you can nevertheless send them loving thoughts and earnest good wishes; and be well assured that such thoughts and wishes are real and living and strong—that when you so send them they do actually go and work your will in proportion to the strength which you have put into them.

Thoughts are things, intensely real things, visible enough to those whose eyes have been opened to see, and by their means the poorest man may bear his part in the good work of the world as fully as the richest. In this way at least, whether we can yet function consciously upon the astral plane or not, we all can join, and we all ought to join, the army of invisible helpers.

But the aspirant, who definitely desires to become one of the band of astral helpers who are working under the direction of the great Masters of Wisdom, will make his preparation part of a far wider scheme of development. Instead of merely endeavouring to fit himself for this particular branch of their service, he will undertake with high resolution the far greater task of training himself to follow in their footsteps, of bending all the energies of his soul to attain even as they have attained, so that his power of helping the world may not be confined to the astral plane, but may extend to those higher levels which are the true home of the divine self of man.

For him the path has been marked out long ago by the wisdom of those who have trodden it in days of old—a path of self-development which sooner or later all must follow, whether they choose to adopt it of their own free will, or to wait until, after many lives and an infinity of suffering, the

slow, resistless force of evolution drives them along it among the laggards of the human family. But the wise man is he who eagerly enters upon it immediately, setting his face resolutely toward the goal of adeptship, in order that, being safe for ever from all doubt and fear and sorrow himself, he may help others into safety and happiness also. What are the steps of this Path of Holiness, as the Buddhists call it, and in what order they are arranged, let us see in our next chapter.