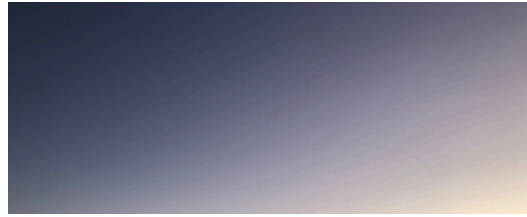


## The Akashic Records

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(Originally published in the magazine *Lucifer* – founded by H. P. Blavatsky, June and July 1897.)

Although it is well-known in Theosophical circles what is meant when we speak of Akashic records, the word is in truth somewhat of a misnomer, for though the records are undoubtedly read from the ākāsha, yet it is not to it that they really belong. Still worse is the alternative title, “records of the astral light,” which has sometimes been employed, for these records lie far beyond the astral plane, and all that can be obtained on it are only broken glimpses of a kind of double reflection of them, as will presently be explained.

Like so many others of our Theosophical terms, the word ākāsha has been very loosely used. In some of our earlier books it was considered as synonymous with astral light, and in others employed to signify any kind of invisible matter, from mūlaprakriti down to the physical ether. In later books its use has been restricted to the matter of the devachanic plane, and it is in that sense that the records may be spoken of as Akashic, for although they are not originally made on that plane any more than on the astral, yet it is there that we first come definitely into contact with them and find it possible to do reliable work with them.

This subject of the akashic records is by no means an easy one to deal with, for it is one of that numerous class which requires for its perfect comprehension faculties of a far higher order than any humanity has yet evolved. The real solution of its problems lies on planes far beyond any that we can possibly know at present and the view that we take of it must necessarily be of the most imperfect character since we cannot but look at it from below instead of from above. The idea which we form of it must therefore be only partial, yet need not mislead us unless we allow ourselves to think of the tiny fragment which is all that we can see as though it were the perfect whole. If we are careful that such conceptions as we may form shall be accurate as far as they go, we shall have nothing to unlearn, though much to add, when in the course of our further progress we gradually acquire the higher wisdom. Be it understood then at the commencement that a thorough grasp of our subject is an impossibility at the present stage of our evolution, and that many points will arise as to which no exact explanation is yet obtainable, though it may often be possible to suggest analogies and to indicate the lines along which an explanation must lie.

Let us then try to carry back our thoughts to the beginning of this solar system to which we belong. We are all familiar with the ordinary astronomical theory of its

origin – that which is commonly called the nebular hypothesis – according to which it first came into existence as a gigantic glowing nebula, of a diameter far exceeding that of the orbit of even the outermost of the planets, and then, as in the course of countless ages that enormous sphere gradually cooled and contracted, the system as we know it was formed. Occult science accepts that theory, in its broad outline, as correctly representing the purely physical side of the evolution of our system, but it would add that if we confine our attention to this physical side only we shall have a very incomplete and incoherent idea of what really happened. It would postulate, to begin with, that the exalted Being who undertakes the formation of a system (whom we sometimes call the Logos of the system) first of all forms in His mind a complete conception of the whole of it with all its successive chains. By the very fact of forming that conception He calls the whole into simultaneous objective existence on the plane of His thought – a plane of course far above those of which we know anything – from which the various globes descend when required into whatever state of further objectivity may be respectively destined for them. Unless we constantly bear in mind this fact of the real existence of the whole system, from the very beginning on a higher plane, we shall be perpetually misunderstanding the physical evolution which we see taking place down here.

But occultism has more than this to teach us on the subject. It tells us not only that all this wonderful system to which we belong is called into existence by the Logos, both on lower and on higher planes, but also that its relation to Him is closer even than that, for it is absolutely a part of Him – a partial expression of Him upon the physical plane – and that the movement and energy of the whole system is *His* energy, and is all carried on within the limits of His aura. Stupendous as this conception is, it will yet not be wholly unthinkable to those of us who have made any study of the subject of the aura.

We are familiar with the idea that as a person progresses on the upward path his causal body, which is the determining limit of his aura, distinctly increases in size as well as in luminosity and purity of colour. Many of us know from experience that the aura of a pupil who has already made considerable advance on the Path is very much larger than that of one who is but just setting his foot upon its first step, while in the case of an Adept the proportional increase is far greater still. We read in quite exoteric Oriental scriptures of the immense extension of the aura of the Buddha; I think that three miles is mentioned on one occasion as its limit, but whatever the exact measurement may be, it is obvious that we have here another record of this fact of the extremely rapid growth of the causal body as man passes on his upward way. There can be little doubt that the rate of this growth would itself increase in geometrical progression, so that it need not surprise us to hear of an Adept on a still higher level whose aura is capable of including the entire world at once; and from this we may gradually lead our minds up to the conception that there is a Being so exalted as to comprehend within Himself the whole of our solar system. And we should remember that, enormous as this seems to us, it is but as the tiniest drop in the vast ocean of space.

So of the Logos, who has in Him all the capacities and qualities with which we can possibly endow the highest God we can imagine, it is literally true, as was said of old, that “of him and through him, and to him are all things,” and “in him we live and move and have our being.”

Now if this be so, it is clear that whatever happens within our system happens absolutely within the consciousness of its Logos, and so we see at once that the true record must be His memory; and furthermore it is obvious that on whatever plane that memory exists, it cannot but be far above anything that we know, and consequently whatever records we may find ourselves able to read must be only a reflection of that great dominant fact, mirrored in the denser media of the lower planes.

On the astral plane it is at once evident that this is so – that what we are dealing with is only a reflection of a reflection, and an exceedingly imperfect one, for such records as can be reached there are fragmentary in the extreme, and often seriously distorted. We know how universally water is used as a symbol of the astral light, and in this particular case it is a remarkably apt one. From the surface of still water we may get a clear reflection of the surrounding objects, just as from a mirror; but at the best it is only a reflection – a representation in two dimensions of three-dimensional objects, and therefore differing in all its qualities, except colour, from that which it represents; and in addition to this, it is always reversed. But let the surface of the water be ruffled by the wind, and what do we find then? A reflection still, certainly, but so broken up and distorted as to be quite useless or even misleading as a guide to the shape and real appearance of the objects reflected. Here and there for a moment we might happen to get a clear reflection of some minute part of the scene – a single leaf from a tree, for example; but it would need long labour and considerable knowledge of natural laws to build up anything like a true conception of the object reflected by putting together even a large number of such isolated fragments of an image of it.

Now in the astral plane we can never have anything approaching to what we have imaged as a still surface, but on the contrary we have always to deal with one in rapid and bewildering motion; judge, therefore, how little we can depend upon getting a clear and definite reflection. Thus a clairvoyant who possesses the astral sight only can never rely upon any picture of the past that comes before him as being accurate and perfect; here and there some part of it *may* be so, but he has no means of knowing which it is. If he is under the care of a competent teacher he may, by long and careful training, be shown how to distinguish between unreliable impressions, and to construct from the broken reflections some kind of image of the object reflected; but usually long before he has mastered those difficulties he will have developed the devachanic sight which renders such labour unnecessary.

On the devachanic plane conditions are very different. There the record is full and accurate, and it would be impossible to make any mistake in the reading. That is to say, if three clairvoyants possessing the powers of the devachanic plane agreed to examine a certain record there, what would be presented to their vision would be absolutely the same reflection in each case, and each would acquire a correct impression from it in reading it. It does not however follow that when they all compared notes later on the physical plane their reports would agree exactly. It is well known that if three people who witness an occurrence down here on the physical plane set to work to describe it afterwards, their accounts will differ considerably, for each will have noticed especially those items which most appealed to him, and will insensibly have made them the prominent features of the event, sometimes ignoring other points which were in reality much more important.

Now in the case of an observation on the devachanic plane this personal equation would not appreciably affect the impressions received, for since each would thoroughly grasp the entire subject it would be impossible for him to see its parts out of due proportion; but, except in the case of carefully trained and experienced persons, this factor does come into play in transferring the impressions to the lower planes. It is in the nature of things impossible that any account given down here of a devachanic vision or experience can be complete, since nine-tenths of what is seen and felt there could not be expressed by physical words at all; and since all expression must therefore be partial there is obviously some possibility of selection as to the part expressed. It is for this reason that in all our Theosophical investigations of recent years so much stress has been laid upon the constant checking and verifying of clairvoyant testimony, nothing which rests upon the vision of one person only having been allowed to appear in our later books.

But even when the possibility of error from this factor of personal equation has been reduced to a minimum by a careful system of counterchecking, there still remains the serious difficulty which is inherent in the operation of bringing down impressions from a higher plane to a lower one. This is something analogous to the difficulty experienced by a painter in his endeavor to reproduce a three-dimensional landscape on a flat surface – that is, practically in two dimensions. Just as the artist needs long and careful training of eye and hand before he can produce a satisfactory representation of nature, so does the clairvoyant need long and careful training before he can describe accurately on a lower plane what he sees on a higher one; and the probability of getting an exact description from an untrained person is about equal to that of getting a perfectly-finished landscape from one who has never learnt how to draw.

It must be remembered, too, that the most perfect picture is in reality infinitely far from being a reproduction of the scene which it represents, for hardly a single line or angle in it can ever be the same as those in the object copied. It is simply a very ingenious attempt to make upon one only of our five senses, by means of lines and colours on a flat surface, an impression similar to that which would have been made if we had actually had before us the scene depicted. Except by a suggestion dependent entirely on our own previous experience, it can convey to us nothing of the roar of the sea, of the scent of the flowers, of the taste of the fruit, or of the softness or hardness of the surface drawn.

Of exactly similar nature, though greater in degree, are the difficulties experienced by a clairvoyant in his attempt to describe upon the physical plane what he has seen upon the astral and they are furthermore greatly enhanced by the fact that, instead of having merely to recall to the minds of his hearers conceptions with which they are already familiar, as the artist does when he paints men or animals, fields or trees, he has to endeavour by the very imperfect means at his disposal to suggest to them conceptions which in most cases are absolutely new to them. Small wonder then that, however vivid and striking his descriptions may seem to his audience, he himself should constantly be impressed with their total inadequacy and should feel that his best efforts have entirely failed to convey any idea of what he really sees. And we must remember that in the case of the report given down here of a record read on the devachanic plane, this difficult operation of transference from the higher to the lower has taken place not once but twice, since the memory has been brought through the intervening

astral plane. Even in a case where the investigator has the advantage of having developed his devachanic faculties so that he has the use of them while awake in the physical body, he is still hampered by absolute incapacity of physical language to express what he sees.

Try for a moment to realize what is called the fourth dimension. It is easy enough to think of our own three dimensions—to image in our minds the length, breadth and height of any object; and we see that each of these three dimensions is expressed by a line at right angles to both of the others. The idea of the fourth dimension is that it might be possible to draw a fourth line at right angles to all three of those already existing. Now the ordinary mind cannot grasp this idea in the least, though some few who have made a special grasp of the subject have gradually come to be able to realize one or two very simple four-dimensional figures. Still, no words that they can use on this plane can bring any image of these figures before the minds of others, and if any reader who has not specially trained himself along that line will make the effort to visualize such a shape he will find it quite impossible. Now to express such a form clearly in physical words would be, in effect, to describe accurately a single object on the astral plane; but in examining the records on the devachanic plane we should have to face the additional difficulties of a fifth dimension! So that the impossibility of fully explaining these records will be obvious to even the most superficial observation.

We have spoken of the records as the memory of the Logos, yet they are very much more than a memory in any ordinary sense of the word. Hopeless as it may be to imagine how these images appear from His point of view, we yet know that as we rise higher and higher we must be drawing nearer to the true memory—must be seeing more nearly as He sees; so that great interest attaches to the experience of the clairvoyant with reference to these records when he stands upon the buddhic plane—the highest which his consciousness can reach until he attains the level of the Arhats, here time space no longer limit him; he no longer needs, as in the devachanic plane, to pass a series of events in review, for past, present and future are all alike simultaneously present to him, meaningless as that sounds down here. Indeed, infinitely below the consciousness of the Logos as even that exalted plane is, it is yet abundantly clear the record must be far more than what we call a memory, for all that has happened in the past and all that will happen in the future *is happening now* before His eyes just as are the events of what we call the present time. Utterly incredible, wildly incomprehensible, of course, to our limited understanding; yet absolutely true for all that.

Naturally we could not expect to understand at our present stage of knowledge how so marvellous a result is produced, and an explanation would only be to involve ourselves in a mist of words from which we should gain no real information. Yet a line of thought recurs to my mind which perhaps suggests the direction in which it is possible that that explanation may lie; and whatever helps us to realize that so astounding a statement may after all not be wholly impossible will be of assistance in broadening our minds.

Some thirty years ago I remember reading a very curious little book called, I think, *The Stars and the Earth*, the object of which was to endeavour to show how it was scientifically possible that to the mind of God the past and the present might be absolutely simultaneous. Its arguments struck me at the time as decidedly ingenious,

and I will proceed to summarize them, as I think they will be found somewhat suggestive in connection with the subject which we have been considering.

When we see anything, whether it be the book which we hold in our hands or a star millions of miles away, we do so by means of a vibration in the ether, commonly called a ray of light, which passes from the object seen to our eyes. Now the speed with which this vibration passes is so great—about 186,000 miles in a second— that when we are considering any object in our own world we may regard it as practically instantaneous. When, however, we deal with interplanetary distances we have to take the light into consideration, for an appreciable period is traversing these vast spaces. For example, it takes eight minutes and a quarter for light to travel to us from the sun, so when we look at the solar orb we see it by means of a ray of light which left it more than eight minutes ago. From this follows a very curious result. The ray of light by which we see the sun can obviously report to us only the state of affairs in that luminary when it started on its journey and would not be in the least affected by anything that happened there after it left; so that we see the sun not as he *is*, but as he was eight minutes ago. That is to say that if anything important took place in the sun – the formation of a new sun-spot, for instance – an astronomer who was watching the orb through his telescope at the time would be quite unaware of the incident while it was happening, since the ray of light bearing the news would not reach him until more than eight minutes later.

The difference is more striking when we consider the fixed stars, because in their case the distances are so enormously greater. The pole star, for example, is so far off that light, travelling at the inconceivable speed above mentioned, takes a little more than fifty years to reach our eyes; and from that follows the strange but inevitable inference that we see the pole star not as and where it is at this moment, but as and where it was fifty years ago. Nay, if tomorrow some cosmic catastrophe were to shatter the pole star into fragments, we should still see it peacefully shining in the sky all the rest of our lives; our children would grow up to middle age and gather their children about them in turn before the news of that tremendous accident reached any human eye. In the same way there are other stars so far distant that light takes thousands of years to travel from them to us, and with reference to their condition our information is therefore thousands of years behind time.

Now carry the argument a step farther. Suppose that we were able to place a man at the distance of 186,000 miles from the earth, and yet to endow him with the wonderful faculty of being able from that distance to see what was happening here as clearly as though he were still close beside us. It is evident that a man so placed would see everything a second after the time when it really happened, and so at the present moment he would be seeing what happened a second ago. Double the distance, and he would be two seconds behind time, and so on; remove him to the distance of the sun (still allowing him to preserve the same mysterious power of sight) and he would look down and he would watch you doing not what you *are* now, but what you *were* doing eight minutes and a quarter ago. Carry him away to the pole star and he would see passing before his eyes the events of fifty years ago; he would be watching the childish gambols of those who at the very same moment were really middle-age men. Marvellous as this may sound, it is literally and scientifically true, and cannot be denied.

My little book went on to argue logically enough that God, being almighty, must possess the wonderful power of sight which we have been postulating for our observer;

and further, that being omnipresent, He must be at each of the stations which we mentioned, and also at every intermediate point, not successively but simultaneously. Granting these premises, the inevitable deduction follows that everything which has ever happened front the very beginning of the world *must* be at this very moment taking place before the eye of God—not a mere memory of it, but the actual occurrence itself being now under His observation.

All this is materialistic enough, and on the plane of purely physical science, and we may therefore be assured that it is *not* the way in which the memory of the Logos acts; yet, as I have said before, it is not without its use, since it gives us a glimpse of some possibilities which otherwise might not occur to us. But even if in a dim sort of way we feel ourselves able to grasp the idea that the whole of the past may be simultaneously and actively present in a sufficiently exalted consciousness, we are confronted by a far greater difficulty when we endeavour to realize how all the future may also be comprehended in that consciousness. If we could believe in the Mohammedan doctrine of kismet, or the Calvinistic theory of predestination, the conception would be easy enough, but knowing as we do that there is no truth in either of these we must look round for some more acceptable hypothesis.

There may still be some people who deny the possibility of prevision, but such denial simply shows their ignorance of the evidence on the subject. The large number of authenticated cases leave no room for doubt as to the fact, but many of them are of such as to render a reasonable explanation by no means easy to us. It is evident that the ego possesses a certain amount of faculty, and if the events foreseen were always of great importance one might suppose that an extraordinary stimulus had enabled him for that occasion only to make a clear impression upon his lower personality of what he saw. No doubt that is the explanation of many of the cases in which death or grave disaster is foreseen there are a large number of instances on record to which it does not seem to apply, since the events foretold are exceedingly trivial and unimportant.

A well-known story of second-sight in Scotland will illustrate what I mean. A man who had no belief in the occult was forewarned by a highland seer of the approaching death of a neighbour. The prophecy was given with considerable wealth of detail, including a full description of the funeral, with the names of the four pallbearers and others who would be present. The auditor seems to have laughed at the whole story and promptly forgotten it, but the death of his neighbour at the time foretold recalled the warning to his mind, and he determined to falsify part of the prediction at any rate by being one of the pall-bearers himself. He succeeded in getting matters arranged as he wished, but just as the funeral was about to start he was called away from his post by some small matter which detained him only a minute or two. As he came hurrying back he saw with surprise that the procession had started without him, and that the prediction had been exactly fulfilled, for the four pallbearers were those who had been indicated in the vision.

Now here is a very trifling matter, which could have been of no possible importance to anybody, definitely foreseen months beforehand; and although a man makes a determined effort to alter the arrangement indicated he fails entirely to affect it in the least. Certainly this looks very much like predestination, even down to the smallest detail, and it is only when we examine this question from higher planes that we are able to see our way to escape that theory. Of course, as I said before about

another branch of the subject, a full explanation eludes us as yet, and obviously must do so until our knowledge is infinitely greater than it is now; the most that we can hope to do now is to indicate the line along which an explanation may be found.

There is no doubt whatever that, just as what is happening now is the result of causes set in motion in the past, so what will happen in the future will be the result of causes already in operation. Even down here we can calculate that if certain actions are performed certain results will follow, but our reckoning is constantly liable to be disturbed by the interference of factors which we have not been able to take into account. But if we raise our consciousness to the devachanic plane we can see very much farther into the results of our actions. We can trace, for example, the effect of a casual word, not only upon the person to whom it was addressed, but through him on many others as it is passed on in widening circles, until it seems to have affected the whole country; and one glimpse of such a vision is far more efficient than any number of moral precepts in impressing upon us the necessity of extreme circumspection in thought, word and deed. Not only can we from that plane see thus fully the result of every action, but we can also see where and in what way the results of other actions apparently quite unconnected with it will interfere with and modify it. In fact, it may be said that the results of all causes at present in action are clearly visible – that the future as it would be if no entirely new causes should arise lies open before our gaze.

New causes of course do arise, because man's will is free; but in the case of all ordinary people the use which they will make of their freedom can be calculated beforehand with considerable accuracy. The average man has so little real will that he is very much the creature of circumstances; his previous karma places him amid certain surroundings, and their influence upon him is so much the most important factor in his life-story that his future course may be predicted with almost mathematical certainty. With the developed man the case is different; for him also the events of life are arranged by his past karma, but the way in which he will allow with them allow them to affect him and perhaps triumph over them—these are all his own, and they cannot be foreseen on the devachanic plane except as probabilities.

Looking down on man's life in this way from above, it seems as though his free will could be exercised only at certain crises in his career. He arrives at a point in his life where obviously there two or three alternative courses open before him; he is absolutely free to choose which of them he pleases, and although someone who knew his nature thoroughly well might feel almost certain what his choice would be, such knowledge on his friends' part is in no sense a compelling force. But when he *has* chosen he has to go through with it and take the consequences; having entered upon a particular path he may, in many cases, be forced to go on a long way before he has any opportunity to turn aside. His position is somewhat like that of the driver of a train; when he comes to a junction he may have the points set either this way or that and so can pass on to whichever line he pleases, but when he *has* passed on to one of them he is compelled to run on along the line which he has selected until he reaches another set of points, where again an opportunity of choice is offered to him.



Now looking down from the devachanic plane these points of new departure would be clearly visible, and all the results of each choice would lie open before us, certain to be worked out even to the smallest detail. The only point which would remain uncertain would be the all-important one as to which choice the man would make. We should, in fact, have not one but several futures mapped out before our eyes, without necessarily being able to determine which of them would materialize itself into accomplished fact. In most instances we should see so strong a probability that we should not hesitate to come to a decision, but the case which I have described is certainly theoretically possible. Still, even this much knowledge would enable us to do with safety a good deal of prediction; and it is not difficult for us to imagine that a far higher power than ours might always be able to foresee which way every choice would go, and consequently to prophesy with absolute certainty.

On the buddhic plane, however, no such elaborate process of conscious calculation seems to be necessary, for, as I said before, in some manner which down here is totally inexplicable, the past, the present, and the future, appear there all to be existing simultaneously. One can only accept this apparent fact, and suppose that the cause lies in a faculty of the plane which would be quite incomprehensible to our physical brains. At any rate, the evidence undoubtedly shows that, whether from the calm certainty of this plane, or the rapid reasoning of the one below it, occasional pictures of futurity are reflected even into astral levels, and are sometimes observed and recorded more or less correctly, just as are the pictures of the past.

But, it may be asked, how is it possible, amid this bewildering confusion of records of the past and previsions of the future, to find any particular picture when it is wanted? As a matter of fact, the untrained clairvoyant usually cannot do so without some special link to put him *en rapport* with the subject required. Psychometry is an instance in point, and it is quite probable that our ordinary memory is really only another presentment of the same idea. It seems as though there were a sort of magnetic attachment or affinity between any particle of matter and that record which contains its history – an affinity which enables it to act as a kind of conductor between that record and the faculties of anyone who can read it.

For example, I once brought from Stonehenge a tiny fragment of stone, not larger than a pin's head, and on putting this into an envelope and handing it to a psychometer who had no idea what it was, she at once began to describe that wonderful ruin and the desolate country surrounding it, and then went on to picture vividly what were evidently scenes from its early history, showing that that infinitesimal fragment had been sufficient to put her into communication with the records connected with the spot from which it came. The scenes through which we pass in the course of our life seem to act in the same manner upon the cells of our brain as did the history of Stonehenge upon that particle of stone; they establish a connection with those cells by means of which our mind is put *en rapport* with that particular portion of the records, and so we “remember” what we have seen.

Even a trained clairvoyant needs some link to enable him to find the record of an event of which he has no previous knowledge. If, for example, he wished to observe the landing of Julius Caesaron the shores of England, there are several ways in which he might approach the subject. If he happened to have visited the scene of the occurrence, the simplest way would probably be to call up the image of that spot, and

then run back through its records until he reached the period desired. If he had not seen the place, he might run back in time to the date of the event, and then search the Channel for a fleet of Roman galleys; or he might examine the records of Roman life at about that period, where he would have no difficulty in identifying so prominent a figure as Cesar, or in tracing him when found through all his Gallic wars until he set his foot upon British land.

People often enquire as to the aspect of these records – whether they appear near or far away from the eye, whether the figures in them are large or small, whether the pictures follow one another as in a panorama or melt into one another like dissolving views, and so on. One can only reply that their appearance varies to a certain extent according to the conditions under which they are seen. Upon the astral plane the reflection is most often a simple picture, though occasionally the figures seen would be endowed with motion; in this latter case, instead of a mere snapshot a rather longer and more perfect reflection has taken place.

On the devachanic plane they have two widely different aspects. When the visitor to that plane is not thinking specially of them in any way, the records simply form a background to whatever is going on, just as the reflections in a pier-glass at the end of a room might form a background to the life of the people in it. It must always be borne in mind that under these conditions they are really merely reflections from the ceaseless activity of a great Consciousness upon a far higher plane, and have very much the appearance of an endless succession of the recently-invented *cinematographe*, or living photographs. They do not melt into one another like dissolving views, nor do a series of ordinary pictures follow one another; but the action of the reflected figures constantly goes on, as though one were watching the actors on a distant stage.

But if the investigator turn his attention specially to any one scene, or wishes to call it up before him, an extraordinary change at once takes place, for this is the plane of thought, and to think of anything is to bring it instantaneously before you. For example, if a man wills to see the record of that event to which we before referred – the landing of Julius Cesar – he finds himself in a moment not looking at any picture, but standing on the shore among the legionaries, with the whole scene being enacted around him, precisely in every respect as he would have seen it if he had stood there in the flesh on that autumn morning in the year 55 B.C. Since what he sees is but a reflection, the actors are of course entirely unconscious of him, nor can any effort of his change the course of their action in the smallest degree, except only that he can control the rate at which the drama shall pass before him – can have the events of a whole year rehearsed before his eyes in a single hour, or can at any moment stop the movement altogether, and hold any particular scene in view as a picture as long as he chooses.

In truth he observes not only what he would have seen if he had been there at the time in the flesh, but much more. He hears and understands all that the people say, and he is conscious of all their thoughts and motives; and one of the most interesting of the many possibilities which open up before one who has learnt to read the records is the study of the thought of ages long past – the thought of the cave-men and the lake-dwellers as well as that which ruled the mighty civilizations of Atlantis, of Egypt, or Chaldea. How the vistas of the past open up before such a student – not only the story of all the vast achievements of man, but also of the processes of nature,

of the strange chaotic life of earlier rounds—we can indicate only slightly here; but the reader will readily realize that in these directions an almost limitless field lies waiting for the patient investigator.

In one especial case an even closer sympathy with the past is possible to the reader of the records. If in the course of his enquiries he has to look upon some scene in which he himself has in a former birth taken part, he may deal with it in two ways; he can either regard it in the usual manner as a spectator (though always, be it remembered, as a spectator whose insight and sympathy are perfect) or he may once more identify himself with that long-dead personality of his – may throw himself back for the time into that life of long ago, and absolutely experience over again the thoughts and the emotions, the pleasures and the pains of a prehistoric past. No wilder and more vivid adventures can be conceived than some of those through which he thus may pass; yet through it all he must never lose hold of the consciousness of his own individuality – must retain the power to return at will to his present personality.

The accurate reading of the records, whether of one's own past lives or those of others, must not, however, be thought of as an achievement possible to anyone without careful previous training. As has been already remarked, though occasional reflections may be had upon the astral plane, the power to use the devachanic sense is necessary before any reliable reading can be done. Indeed, to minimize the possibility of error, that sense ought to be fully at the command of the investigator while awake in the physical body; and to acquire that faculty needs years of ceaseless labour and rigid self-discipline. Many people seem to expect that as soon as they have signed their application and joined the Theosophical Society they will at once remember at least three or four of their past births; indeed, some of them promptly begin to imagine recollections. At the present moment there are, I think, four people who are all quite certain that in their last incarnation they were Mary Queen of Scots (why Mary Queen of Scots should be so frequently selected is not very clear, considering the character which history assigns to her, but she certainly is), two who were Cleopatra (another not very desirable progenitor, surely), and several who were Julius Caesar! Of course each extravagant claims simply bring discredit upon those who are so foolish as to make them but unfortunately some of that discredit is liable to be reflected, however unjustly, upon the Society to which they belong, so that a man who feels seething within him the conviction that he was Homer or Shakespeare would do well to pause and apply common-sense tests on the physical plane before publishing the news to the world.

It is quite true that some people have had glimpses of scenes from their past lives in dreams, but naturally these are usually fragmentary and unreliable. I had myself in earlier life an experience of this nature. Among my dreams I found that one was constantly recurring – a dream of a house with a portico overlooking a beautiful bay, not far from a hill on the top of which rose a graceful building. I knew that house perfectly, and was as familiar with the position of its rooms and the view from its door as I was with those of my home in this present life. In those days I knew nothing about reincarnation, so that it seemed to me simply a curious coincidence that this dream should repeat itself so often; and it was not until some time after I had joined the Society that, when one who knew was showing me some pictures of my last incarnation, I discovered that this persistent dream had been in reality a partial

recollection, and that the house which I knew so well was the one in which I was born more than two thousand years ago.

But although there are several cases on record in which some well-remembered scene has thus come through from one life to another, a considerable development of occult faculty is necessary before an investigator can definitely trace a line of incarnations, whether they be his own or another man's. This will be obvious if we remember the conditions of the problem which has to be worked out. To follow a person from this life to the one preceding it, it is necessary first of all to trace his present life backwards to his birth and then to follow up in reverse order the stages by which he descended into incarnation. This will obviously take us eventually to the condition of the ego upon its own plane – the ārupa level of Devachan; so it will be seen that to perform this task effectually the investigator must be able to use the sense corresponding to that exalted level while awake in his physical body – in other words, his consciousness must be centred in the reincarnating ego itself and no longer in the lower personality. In that case, memory of the ego being aroused, his own past incarnations spread out before him like an open book, and he would be able, if he wished, to examine the conditions of another ego upon that level and trace him backwards through the devachanic and astral lives which led up to it, until he came to the last physical death of that ego, and through it to his previous life. There is no other way but this in which the chain of lives can be followed through with absolute certainty; and consequently we may at once put aside as conscious or unconscious impostors those people who advertise that they are able to trace out anyone's past incarnations for so many shillings a head. Needless to say, the true occultist does not advertise, and never under any circumstances accepts money for any exhibition of his powers.

Assuredly the student who wishes to acquire the power of following up a line of incarnations can do so only by learning from a qualified teacher how the work is to be done. There have been those who persistently asserted that it was only necessary for a man to feel good and devotional and "brotherly," and all the wisdom of the ages would immediately flow in upon him; but a little common-sense will at once expose the absurdity of such a position. However good a child may be, if he wants to know the multiplication table he must set to work and learn it; and the case is precisely similar with the capacity to use spiritual faculties. The faculties themselves will no doubt manifest as the man evolves, but he can learn how to use them reliably and to the best advantage only by steady hard work and persevering effort.

Take the case of those who wish to help others while on the astral plane during sleep; it is obvious that the more knowledge they possess here, the more valuable will their services be on that higher plane. For example, the knowledge of languages would be useful to them, for though on the devachanic plane men can communicate directly by thought transference, whatever their languages may be, on the astral plane this is not so, and a thought must be definitely formulated in words before it is comprehensible. If, therefore, you wish to help a man on that plane, you must have some language in common by means of which you can communicate with him, and consequently the more languages you know the more widely useful you will be. In fact there is perhaps no kind of knowledge for which a use cannot be found in the work of the occultist.

It would be well for all students to bear in mind that occultism is the apotheosis of common-sense, that every vision which comes to them is not necessarily a picture from the akashic records, nor every experience a revelation from on high. It is better far to err on the side of healthy scepticism than of over-credulity; and it is an admirable rule never to hunt about for an occult explanation of anything when a plain and obvious physical one is available. Our duty is to endeavour to keep our balance always, and never to lose our self-control, but to take a reasonable, common-sense view of whatever may happen to us; so shall we be better Theosophists, wiser occultists, and more useful helpers than we have ever been before.