

*Spiritual progress is not aided  
by watching the Astral Light*



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**P**ERHAPS THOSE WHO HAVE ENGAGED IN DISCUSSIONS about whether it is more advisable to become acquainted with the Astral Plane and to see therein than to study the metaphysics and ethics of theosophy, may be aided by the experience of a fellow student. For several years I studied about and experimented on the Astral Light to the end that I might, if possible, develop the power to look therein and see those marvellous pictures of that place which tempt the observer. But although in some degrees success followed my efforts so far as seeing these strange things was concerned, I found no increase of knowledge as to the manner in which the pictures were made visible, nor as to the sources from which they arose. A great many facts were in my possession, but the more I accumulated the farther away from perception seemed the law governing them. I turned to a teacher and he said:

“Beware of the illusions of matter.”

“But,” said I, “is this matter into which I gaze?”

“Yes; and of grosser sort than that which composes your body; full of illusions, swarming with beings inimical to progress, and crowded with the thoughts of all the wicked who have lived.”

“How,” replied I, “am I to know aught about it unless I investigate it?”

“It will be time enough to do that when you shall have been equipped properly for the exploration. He who ventures into a strange country unprovided with needful supplies, without a compass and unfamiliar with the habits of the people, is in danger. Examine and see.”

Left thus to myself, I sought those who had dabbled in the Astral Light, who were accustomed to seeing the pictures therein every day, and asked them to explain. Not one had any theory, any philosophical basis. All were confused and at variance each with the other. Nearly all, too, were in hopeless ignorance as to other and vital questions. None were self-contained or dispassionate; moved by contrary winds of desire, each one appeared abnormal; for, while in possession of the power to see or hear in the Astral Light, there were unregulated in all other departments of their being. Still more, they seemed to be in a degree intoxicated with the strangeness of the power, for it placed them in that respect above other persons, yet in practical affairs left them without any ability.

Examining more closely, I found that all these “seers” were but half-seers-and hardly even that. One could hear astral sounds but could not see astral sights; another saw pictures, but no sound or smell was there; still others saw symbols only, and each derided the special power of the other. Turning even to the great Emanuel Swedenborg, I found a seer of wonderful power, but whose constitution made him see in the Astral world a series of pictures which were solely an extension of his own inherited beliefs. And although he had had a few visions of actual everyday affairs occurring at a distance, there were so few as only to be remarkable.

One danger warned against by the teacher was then plainly evident. It was the danger of becoming confused and clouded in mind by the recurrence of pictures which had no salutary effect so far as experience went. So again I sought the teacher and asked:

“Has the Astral Light no power to teach, and, if not, why is it thus? And are there other dangers than what I have discovered?”

“No power whatever has the astral plane, in itself, to teach you. It contains the impressions made by men in their ignorance and folly. Unable to arouse the true thoughts, they continue to infect that light with the virus of their unguided lives. And you, or any other seer, looking therein will warp and distort all that you find there. It will present to you pictures that partake largely of your own constitutional habits, weaknesses, and peculiarities. Thus you only see a distorted or exaggerated copy of yourself. It will never teach you the reason of things, for it knows them not.

“But stranger dangers than any you have met are there when one goes further on. The dweller of the threshold is there, made up of all the evil that man has done. None can escape its approach, and he who is not prepared is in danger of death, of despair, or of moral ruin. Devote yourself, therefore, to spiritual aspiration and to true devotion, which will be a means for you to learn the causes that operate in nature, how they work, and what each one works upon.”

I then devoted myself as he had directed, and discovered that a philosophical basis, once acquired, showed clearly how to arrive at *dispassion* and made *exercise* therein easy. It even enables me to clear up the thousand doubts that assail those others who are peering into the Astral Light. They compelled the disciple to abjure all occult practices until such time as he had laid a sure foundation of logic, philosophy, and ethics; and only then was he permitted to go further in that strange country from which many an unprepared explorer has returned bereft of truth and sometimes despoiled of reason. Further, I know that the Masters of the Theosophical Society have written these words: “Let the Theosophical Society flourish through moral worth and philosophy, and give up the pursuit of phenomena.” Shall we be greater than They, and ignorantly set the pace upon the path that leads to ruin?

