ANDRE LUIZ AND CHICO XAVIER

ASTRAL CITY

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Astral City

by Andre Luiz and Chico Xavier

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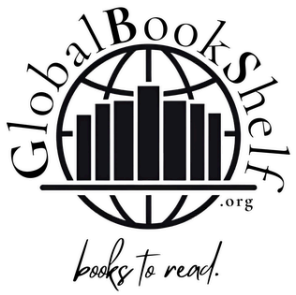

Astral City by Andre Luiz and Chico Xavier

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Contents

A New Friend
A Message From Andre Luiz
1. In The Lower Zones
2. Clarence
3. Collective Prayer
4. The Spirit Doctor
5. Under Treatment
6. Precious Advice
7. Lysias Explains
8. Administrative Organization
9. The Problem Of Nutrition
10. The Water Park
11. Learning About The Astral City
12. The Lower Zone
13. With The Minister Of Assistance
14. Clarence Explains
15. My Mother's Visit
16. A Confidential Talk
17. Lysias Home
18. Love, The Food Of Souls
19. The Newcomer
20. Notions About The Home
21. Interesting Conversation
22. The Hour-Bonus
23. The Art Of Listening
24. A Soul-Stirring Appeal
25. A Generous Initiative
26. New Perspectives
27. Work At Last
28. On Duty
29. Francis Vision
30. Inheritance And Euthanasia

31. The Vampire
32. Learning About Veneranda
33. Curious Observations
34. Newcomers From The Lower Zone
35. An Unexpected Meeting
36. The Dream
37. Veneranda’s Lecture
38. Tobias Home
39. Consulting Laura
40. As You Sow, So Shall You Reap
41. A Call To The Struggle
42. The Governor S Address
43. An Informal Conversation
44. The Dark Regions
45. The Music Fields
46. A Woman’s Sacrifice
47. Laura’s Return
48. The Home Prayer Meeting
49. Returning Home
50. A Citizen Of The Astral City

A New Friend

Prefaces generally introduce authors, extolling their virtues and enlarging on their personalities. Here, however, the situation is different. There are no social records for a physician named Andre Luiz.

Often real understanding and true love come to us hidden under the cloak of anonymity. In order to redeem a disgraceful past in the process of reincarnation, old names are wiped away and new ones take their places. All bygone happening sink into temporary oblivion a blessing of Divine Mercy.

In this way, a curtain has been drawn over Andre Luiz's former self. Thus, we cannot introduce an earthly doctor and human writer, but instead present a new friend and brother in eternity.

In order to bring his valuable impressions to his earthly companions, it was necessary for him to forego all conventions, including the use of his name. He did so to avoid hurting loved ones still wrapped in the mist of illusion. He acted with the same generosity as a reaper of corn, who avoids giving offense to those tilling in the distance and does not trample on the green fields still in bloom.

We realize that this book is not the only one of its kind. Others have already described the conditions of life beyond the grave. Nevertheless, we are glad to have drawn to our spiritual circles one who might transmit an account of his own experiences. He gives as much detail as possible to clarify the laws that preside over the efforts of diligent Spirits of good will in spheres which are invisible to human eyes, although intimately connected with the planet.

Many will surely smile on reading certain passages in this narrative. Let me remind you, however, that the unusual has always caused surprise.

Who on the Earth did not smile tolerantly upon hearing about aviation, electricity, or the radio before their development some decades ago?

Surprise, perplexity and doubt are common to students who have not yet gone over their lessons. It is natural and most just. Yet we would not think of criticizing our neighbor's point of view, although we might disagree with it. Every reader must analyze for himself what he reads.

We will refer here to the essential aim of this work. The Spiritist Doctrine is rapidly increasing the number of its adepts. Thousands of people are taking interest in its work, methods and experiments. Yet, faced with a world of novelties, man must not neglect his most important goal his own spiritual growth.

It is not sufficient to investigate phenomena, adhere verbally to any doctrine, collect and improve statistics, exhort the conscience of others, gain converts or win public approval, however commendable all this may be on the physical plane. It is essential to acquire the knowledge about our infinite potential, and to use it in the service of good.

Man is not forsaken on Earth. He is a child of God engaged in constructive work, temporarily clothed in flesh. He is a student in a meritorious school, where he must learn to raise himself up. The human struggle is his opportunity, his set of tools, and his textbook.

Interchange with the invisible is a sacred movement, functioning to restore pure Christianity. Let no one neglect his own obligations in the place he occupies by the Lord's design.

Andre Luiz come to tell us, dear reader, that the greatest surprise of bodily death is that it places us face-to-face with our own conscience, where we build our heaven, remain in purgatory, or plunge ourselves into the infernal abysses. He reminds us that the Earth is our sacred school which no one could desecrate without knowing the price of this terrible mistake.

Keep his lessons in the book of your soul. They remind us that it is not enough for man to cling to his human existence. It is necessary to know how to use that existence worthy. The steps of a Christian, whatever his religious affiliation, should move truly towards Christ. To this end we have great need of Spiritism and Spiritualism, but most of all spirituality.

Emmanuel[1],

Pedro Leopoldo, October 3, 1943

[1] Emmanuel is F C Xavier's spirit guide.

A Message From Andre Luiz

Life never ceases. Life is an overflowing source, and death is only an obscure effect of illusions.

The great river follows its own course before joining the vast sea. Likewise, the soul follows equally varied routes and passes through different stages, receiving here and there tributaries of knowledge, strengthening its personality and perfecting its qualities before reaching the Ocean of Eternal Wisdom.

The closing of our earthly eyes is such a simple event.

The shedding of the physical body does not solve the fundamental problems of enlightenment, just as changing one's clothes has nothing to do with the deep questions of life and destiny.

Ah, paths of the soul, mysterious ways of the heart! One must walk their full lengths before facing the supreme equation of Eternal Life. It is essential for you to live all their conflicts and to know them fully in the long process of spiritual ascension.

How childish to imagine that the mere "ringing down of the curtain" would settle transcendental questions of the Infinite.

One life is but a single act.

One body - a garment.

One century - a day.

One task - an experience.

One triumph - an acquisition.

One death - a breath of renovation.

How many lives, how many bodies, how many centuries, how many tasks, how many triumphs, how many deaths are still allotted to us?

And yet religious philosophers will speak of final decisions and immutable situations!

Alas, everywhere we find scholars in doctrine who are spiritual illiterates!

It takes great effort for man to enter the School of the Gospel, and his admission thereto nearly always comes to pass in a strange manner - he finds himself alone with the Master, struggling through a difficult course, learning lessons in an invisible classroom, and attending long lectures of unspoken words.

Long, very long therefore, is our arduous journey. Here our humble efforts can bring you only a glimpse of this fundamental truth.

I speak to you as an anonymous friend, in this anonymity which stems from brotherly love. The great majority of mankind is like a fragile vessel which cannot yet contain the whole truth. Therefore, we restrict ourselves here to conveying only the profound experience itself in its collective values. We will not torment anyone with the idea of Eternity. Let the vessels first become stronger. Thus, we dedicate this brief record to the eager spirits of our brothers struggling for their spiritual ascent, who understand, as we do, that the wind blows where it wills. (John, 3:8)

And now, my friend, let my thanks fall upon this paper, and thence rise and merge into a great silence of sympathy and gratitude. Attraction, appreciation, love and joy live in the soul. Be sure that in the depths of mine I hold these sentiments toward us.

May the Lord bless us.

Andre Luiz.

1. In The Lower Zones

I was under the impression that I had lost all notion of time and space.

I was convinced that I no longer belonged to the world of the living, yet I continued to inhale deep breaths of air.

Since when had I become the puppet of irresistible forces? I could not say. I felt like a prisoner, trapped in the dark cage of horror. With my hair on end, my heart thumping uncontrollably, a prey to terrible fear, many times I shouted like a raving lunatic. I begged for mercy and clamored against the bitter despondency which had taken hold of my spirit. But my cries fell only on silence; or were answered by lamenting voices still more moving than my own. At other times, sinister roars of laughter rent the stillness, as if some unknown companion must be close-by me, a prisoner of insanity. Diabolical forms, ghastly faces, bestial countenances crossed my way from time to time, increasing my panic. The scenery, when it was not pitch dark, was bathed in a lurid light, as if shrouded in a thick fog warmed by the sun's rays.

Thus, I proceeded on that strange journey. To what end? Who could say? I only knew that I kept fleeing. Fright drove me on blindly Where were my home, my wife and children? I had lost all sense of direction. The fear of the unknown and my dread of darkness had annulled all my powers of reasoning from the very moment I had broken free of my physical body in the grave.

My conscience tormented me. I would have preferred the total absence of reason, or non-existence. Copious tears ran constantly down my cheeks, and only rarely was I blessed with a few minutes of sleep. What rest I had was often interrupted as monstrous beings awoke me and mocked me, and I was obliged to go on fleeing.

I saw now that I was on a different plane of life, which rose from the emanations of the Earth. But it was too late. Anguish weighed heavily on my mind, and when I started making plans for action, numerous incidents would lead me on to bewildering avenues of thought. Never had the religious question loomed so large before my eyes. Principles, purely political, philosophical and scientific, now seemed to me of secondary importance to human life. Although they were valuable acquisitions on Earth, I had to admit that mankind was not made of transitory generations, but of immortal Spirits on their ascension to a glorious destination. I was beginning to realize the existence of one thing that stands above all that is material or intellectual: Faith a divine manifestation to man. Such an analysis, however, came too late. It is true that I was familiar with the Old Testament and had often read through the Gospels. But I was forced to recognize that I had never searched the sacred writings with the light of my heart. I had embraced the interpretation of writers who were not inclined to sentiments and conscience, and who were, at times, even in open disagreement with the fundamental truths. On other occasions, I had taken an ecclesiastical point of view, entering voluntarily into a circle of contradictions.

In truth, I did not believe that I was a criminal in my life, though my philosophy of living for the immediate present had absorbed me fully. My earthly life, now transformed by death, had been no different from the life of so many others.

Born of perhaps excessively generous parents, I had graduated from the University without much effort, and shared the dissipation and vices of the youth of my time. Later, when I married and started a family, I was blessed with children, gained a stable and lucrative

position, and was spared all financial worries. Yet on self-examination I feel deeply that I had wasted time and I now hear the silent pangs of my conscience. I had lived on Earth, enjoyed its benefits, reaped the good things of life, and yet never contributed anything towards the repayment of my heavy debt. I had completely ignored my parent's generosity and sacrifices, just as I had ignored those of my wife and children. I had selfishly kept my family only to myself. I had been given a happy home and had closed my doors to those seeking help. I had delighted in the joys of my family circle, yet never shared that precious gift with my greater human family. I had neglected to undertake even the most elementary duties of fraternal solidarity.

Now that my life was over, I was like a hothouse plant, unable to withstand the weather of eternal realities. I had not cultivated the divine seeds the Father of Life had sown in my soul. They were choked by the weeds of my insatiable desire for comfort and enjoyment. I had not trained my faculties for this new life. It was only right, then, that I should enter it like a cripple, thrown into the infinite river of eternity, unable to swim, or like a wretched beggar at the end of his strength, wandering about in the middle of a stormy desert.

Oh, dear friends on Earth! How many of you may still avoid the bitter road of sorrow by cultivating the inner fields of your heart? Light up your lamp before crossing the threshold of the shadows. Search for Truth, lest the truth find you unprepared. Sweat and toil now, lest you weep afterwards.

2. Clarence

Suicidal criminal! Infamous wretch! I heard insults from all directions. But where were they coming from? At times I caught glimpses of them as they slipped in and out of the darkness. Through my despair, mustering all my strength, I threw myself against them. In vain I beat the air in my show of rage. I heard laughter as they vanished again into the shadows.

Whom could I turn to for help? I was tortured by hunger and parched with thirst. The demands of my physical existence on Earth continued here: my beard kept growing, my garments were beginning to show the signs of my struggles. Yet the most painful part of my trial was not the pitiful abandon in which I found myself, but the incessant attacks of the evil forces which surrounded me in the darkness. I was unnerved and utterly unable to coordinate my situation, to weigh its causes and establish new currents of thought. But those accusing voices bewildered me beyond my imagination.

What are you seeking, you miserable fool? Where are you going, suicidal wretch? Such accusations, ceaselessly repeated, threw my mind into absolute confusion. I might well be miserable, but suicidal? Never! Those charges were wrong, as far as I could see. I had left my body most unwillingly, after a desperate struggle with death. I could still hear the last medical diagnosis at the hospital. I remembered clearly the efficient care and the painful dressings during those weary days that followed my intestinal operation. The recollection of the closing scenes of my earthly days was so vivid that I could even feel the touch of the thermometer and the disagreeable prick of the hypodermic needle. Finally, my last recollection before my great sleep: my wife, still young, and my three children gazing at me in anguish at the prospect of eternal separation. Then, afterwards, my awakening to dreary and damp surroundings, to a never-ending nightmare flight.

Why was I being accused of suicide when I had been forced to give up my hope, my family and all that I held dear?

Even the strongest man must come to the end of his emotional powers of resistance. So it was with me. Firm and resolute at the start, I gradually began to fall into long lapses of depression, and in my total ignorance of the fate in store for me, my usual fortitude yielded to despondency. More and more frequently tears welled in my eyes, long pent-up in heavy heart.

To whom could I appeal? With all of the sophisticated intellectual culture I had brought from the world, I could do nothing to alter my present situation. Before the Infinite, my knowledge was like a tiny soap bubble, blown about by the impetuous winds of the transformation. Surely I was not out of my senses! I did not feel different. I felt that my conscience was alert and that I was essentially the same man with the same feelings and culture as before. My physiological needs continued unchanged. A gnawing hunger preyed on my every fiber; yet in my ever-increasing weakness I never reached the point of complete exhaustion. Now and then I came across some wild herbs growing along mere trickles of water.

I devoured the unfamiliar leaves and drank the water avidly. I could stop only a few seconds at a time, for those irresistible forces were ever spurring me on. Oftentimes I tasted the mud by the roadside, recalling with burning tears the daily bread of olden days. Frequently I was obliged to hide from enormous herds of monstrous beings which trampled past me like a band of insatiable beasts. Those were blood-curdling sights! When my despair had almost reached its climax, it began to dawn on me that somewhere a Creator of Life must exist. The

thought seemed to comfort me. I, who in the world had hated all religious creeds, was now feeling the need for spiritual consolation. As a physician who prided himself on his ultra-modern principles of skepticism, so much in vogue in my time, I had to admit I was a perfect failure. Gone was all the self-importance which had seemed so real to my eyes. I saw now that I had to change my mental attitude.

When at last I came to the end of my strength and lay helpless in the mire, unable to rise, I implored that Creator of All Things to take pity on me and come to my aid in my desperate plight.

How long did my pleading last? How many hours did I spend praying like a frightened child? It was impossible to say. I only knew that copious tears ran down my cheeks and my whole being seemed to merge into one anguished plea. Had I been utterly abandoned? Was I not also a child of God, although in the whirl of earthly vanities I had never given a thought to His divine works? I knew the Eternal Father would surely forgive me. Did He not extend His loving care to the birds of the air and flowers of the field?

Ah, one must suffer a great deal in order to understand the mysterious beauty of prayer. One must know remorse, humiliation and utter misery to fully appreciate the sublime sweetness of Hope! It was at that moment that the dense mist all around cleared away, and a person came forward. An envoy from Heaven! He was a fatherly old man, who bent over me and gazed intently into my face with his large, clear eyes. With a benevolent smile he said to me:

Courage, my son! The Lord has not forsaken you. Heart-felt tears seemed to flood my very soul. I tried to express my grateful relief, to thank him for the consolation he had brought, yet I only had the strength to ask: Who are you, generous messenger of God?

My unexpected benefactor smiled kindly and replied: My name is Clarence. I am only a brother.

And, noticing my exhaustion, he added: You must keep quiet and calm. It is necessary for you to rest to restore your strength.

Then we called two persons who were waiting attentively and ordered: Let us provide our friend with first aid.

They spread a white sheet on the ground and using it as an emergency stretcher, prepared to transport me. They lifted me gently. Then Clarence spoke to his assistants: Let us start without delay. I must reach the Astral City as soon as possible.

3. Collective Prayer

As we advanced, I saw from my stretcher the pleasant surroundings which slowly unfolded to my view. Clarence, leaning on a staff made of some luminous substance, stopped before a heavy gate built into a great wall which was covered with a flowery wine. He touched a certain spot in the wall, the gate opened wide, and we entered in a silent procession.

A warm glow bathed everything there. The graceful play of lights in the distance reminded me of a beautiful sunset in springtime. As we proceeded, I saw before me charming buildings and beautiful gardens. At a sign from Clarence my stretcher was laid down and in front of us there stood an entrance to a great white building similar to an earthly hospital. Two young men in white tunics ran eagerly to my stretcher, moved me into an emergency bed, and carried me in. Before he left, I heard Clarence say: Take him to the pavilion to the right. I am expected elsewhere now, but I will come to see him in the morning. I gave that generous old man a parting smile of gratitude as I was taken away to a large, pleasant, richly furnished room and laid on a comfortable bed.

My heart was overflowing with gratitude towards my kind attendants. I tried to address them but only managed to ask: Friends, I beg you, what is this new world I find myself in? From what star does this bright invigorating light emanate? One of them laid a tender hand on my forehead as if I were an old friend, and explained: We are located in the spiritual spheres close to the Earth, and the Sun that is shining on us at this moment is the same one that warmed you on Earth. However, our visual perception is far keener here. We can see that the star the Lord lighted to guide our activities is far more beautiful than we ever realized while on Earth. Our Sun is a divine source of life which has its light's source in the Creator of All Things.

I felt a profound sense of veneration and awe as I gazed at the soft light streaming through my window. I realized that on Earth I had never looked up at the Sun and raised my thoughts to the One, in His infinite mercy, had given it to us to shine on our journey. I was like a blind man who, after living so long in darkness, is blessed with the ability to see the splendor of nature.

Just then they brought me some stimulating broth and a glass of cool water, refreshing water. The water seemed infused with some divine fluid[2], for just a little of it quickly produced a reviving effect. The food, whether a soothing nourishment or extraordinary medicine, revived me beyond my expectations; new energies pervade my entire being and profound emotions stirred in the depths of my spirit. I ate, unaware of the experience which was soon to follow.

I had scarcely finished when heavenly music soft waves of sound rising to higher spheres floated into my room. That wonderful melody went straight to my heart. I looked to my attendant for some explanation, and he said: This is the eventide service of the Astral City. Every department of this colony of service, dedicated to Christ, is attuned with the prayers at the Government House. Now stay here in peace. I will return as soon as the service is over. As he prepared to leave, I was suddenly filled with anxiety. May I go with you? I pleaded. You are still weak, he explained, but if you feel that you can.

That music had filled me with renewed energies, yet I was barely able to rise from my bed. Aided by my attendant and with faltering steps I reached the enormous hall where a great

[2] In Spiritist terminology, fluid and fluids designate a substance of magnetic nature that can be manipulated by both spiritual beings and man on Earth.

assembly was praying in deep, silent concentration. The delicate garlands of flowers which hung from a brilliantly lit dome seemed to form a symbol of higher spirituality. I could hardly contain my feelings of overwhelming surprise. No one seemed to notice my presence they all looked as if they were waiting for something. I had to work to hold back all of the questions forming in my mind. I quickly noticed in the background an intensely bright light reflected on a giant screen. By some process of advanced television, a marvelous temple appeared on the screen a moment later. In it was the image of a venerable old man, dressed in white, sitting in prayer. Around his head shone a halo of brilliant light. Slightly below him, seventy-two figures accompanied him in silent prayer. I was surprised to see that Clarence was among them.

I was unable to restrain my curiosity. I pulled at my attendant's arm, and he responded, whispering so softly his words resembled the murmuring of a light breeze: Keep quiet. All the residences and institutions of the Astral City are praying, with the Governor through long distance projection of sound and light. Let us praise the invisible Heart of Heaven. He had scarcely finished speaking when the seventy-two figures began singing a sweet and exquisitely beautiful hymn. As I looked at Clarence, his countenance seemed to shine with an intense high light. The celestial voices rose in melodious cadences, in a most beautiful hymn of gratitude. Mysterious vibrations of peace and joy floated in the atmosphere, and as the silvery notes died away, a wonderful heart, blue with golden rays[3], became visible above us in the same distance. Soft music began, seeming to arise perhaps from distant spheres, and suddenly we were showered with beautiful flue flowers.

Although I could easily seem them, I could not grasp those tiny flowers with my hands. On touching our foreheads, they melted away, and at one touch of their fluidical petals I felt an extraordinary surge of energy, as if some soothing balm had been applied to my heart.

As soon as the impressive service was over, I returned to the chamber, tenderly aided by my assistant. I was no longer the ailing patient of a few hours before. The first collective prayer I had attended at the Astral City had worked a radical change in me. An unexpected peace filled my soul for the first time in many years of suffering, and my heart, so long empty, was once again filled with hope.

[3] Note by the spiritual author: A symbolic image created by the mental vibrations of the Colony.

4. The Spirit Doctor

I awoke the following day after a deep, refreshing sleep. A comforting light poured through my window, bathing everything in the room with radiance and felling my heart with hope. I felt like a new man, filled with renewed energy and the joy of living. Only one thing clouded my soul I longed for my home and for my family so far away.

Numerous questions troubled my mind, but my feeling of relief was so great that it calmed my spirit and kept me from further contemplation. I wanted to get up and enjoy the beauty of my surroundings, but I could not. I realized that without the magnetic cooperation of my attendant I would not be able to leave my bed.

I had scarcely gotten over the many experiences when the door opened and Clarence entered, accompanied by a friendly stranger. They greeted me cordially, wishing me peace. My rescuer from the Lower Zones[4] asked about my general health, and my attendant quickly came to inform him.

Clarence smiled and introduced his companion, brother Henry de Luna of the medical staff of the spiritual colony. Brother Henry was dressed in white and his face radiated benevolence. He examined me at length, then smiled and spoke:

It is a pity that you've come here by way of suicide.

Clarence remained calm but I felt a surge of revolt within me. Suicide? I remembered the accusations of those perverse beings in the Lower Zones. Even though I was grateful to my benefactors, I couldn't accept this accusation.

I believe you are mistaken, I said, distressed, my departure from the world had other causes. I fought over forty days trying to overcome death. I suffered through two serious operations because of an intestinal occlusion.

Quite so, the doctor continued, calm and perfectly composed, but the occlusion was the result of very serious causes. Perhaps you haven't thought it over enough. The spirit body presents within it a complete history of the actions practiced on Earth.

Leaning over me, he went on, pointing to different parts of my body. Let's look at the intestinal zone, he said, the occlusion was due to cancerous elements, which in turn arose from some indiscretions of yours, in which you contracted syphilis. The disease might not have assumed such grave characteristics had your mental attitudes been firmly based on the principles of moderation and brotherly love. Instead, you chose a dark, exasperating way of life which attracted destructive vibrations from those around you. You never imagined that anger attracts negative forces, did you? Your lack of self-control and your thoughtlessness in dealing with others, whom you so often unthinkingly offended, frequently left you under the influence of sickly and inferior beings. These circumstances greatly aggravated your physical state.

After a long pause, in which he went on examining me attentively, he continued: Have you observed, my friend, that your liver was damaged through your action? That your kidneys were also mistreated in your reckless disregard for the divine gift of physical existence?

[4] Lower Zones are the shadowy regions where excessively self-centered souls or those with a guilty ridden conscience find themselves after death. (Translator's note.)

I felt deeply disappointed, but the doctor, seemingly unaware of my anguish, continued to clarify: The bodily organs possess incalculable reserves in accordance with the Lord's designs. You, my friend, evaded many excellent opportunities and wasted the precious blessing of physical existence. The long-term assignment which you had been given by those of greater spiritual accomplishment was reduced to half-hearted attempts at work which you never completed. Your entire gastronomical system was destroyed as a direct result of your harmless excesses in food and drink, and your essential energies were devoured by the syphilis you contracted through still other excesses. As we see, the diagnosis is incontestable.

I thought about problems of human life and reflected on the many opportunities I had lost. In my life on Earth I had own many masks, tailoring them to the situation at hand. I had never imagined I would be asked to account for those seemingly unimportant episodes. I had at that time conceived of human error according to human laws everything not prohibited by those laws was natural and acceptable. Here, however, I found another system of judging those errors. I was not confronted by stern judges pronouncing harsh verdicts or facing torture or the infernal abyss. Instead, smiling benefactors commented on my weaknesses as if they were dealing with a wayward child. Their superior compassion struck a blow to my human pride. If only I had been tormented by diabolic beings, I would have found my failure less bitter. Clarence's sympathetic kindness, the doctor's warm tone and the attendant's good-natured patience all served to turn my pride to shame. I covered my face with my hands and sobbed brokenheartedly, realizing that Henry de Luna's conclusions were irrefutable. I admitted the full extent of my faults. Only one torturing truth now remained before me: I had truly committed suicide. I had wasted the precious opportunity of human life and was nothing more than a castaway rescued by charity.

It was then that Clarence, stroking my hair in a fatherly manner, spoke: Stop lamenting, my son. I went in search of you in answer to the intercessions of those who love you in the higher spheres. Your tears will grieve their hearts. Surely you would rather show your gratitude by remaining calm during the examination of your faults, wouldn't you? True, your diagnosis points clearly to suicide, but I assure you that hundreds of others leave the Earth daily in exactly the same way you did. Therefore, still your heart. Use the treasure of repentance well; keep the blessing of remorse in your soul, however late it has arrived. Don't forget that worrying doesn't solve our problems. Put your trust in the Lord and in our brotherly devotion. Rest your troubled heart; for many of us have already gone the same way as you. At these generous words I rested my head against his shoulder and wept.

5. Under Treatment

Are you Clarence's ward?

The question was put to me by a young man with a singularly kind expression. He smiled as he entered, carrying what looked like a large medical bag. I nodded that I was, and he introduced himself:

I am Lysias, your brother. My director, Assistant Doctor Henry de Luna, has placed you under my care as long as you need treatment.

Are you a medical assistant? I asked.

I am a visiting attendant in Health Service. As such, I not only help with the nursing but also go on rounds, alerting the doctors when help is needed, and attending to the needs of newly arrived patients.

Noting my interest, he went on:

There are many such assistants here in the Astral City. Naturally, as a newcomer, you are still unaware of the extent of our activities. Just to give you an idea, there are over one thousand patients in this ward alone, and this is one of the smallest buildings in our hospital.

This is truly wonderful! I exclaimed.

Lysias, perceiving that I was about to continue repeating my praises, rose quickly from his chair and carefully began his examination.

Your intestinal zone shows serious lesions and unmistakable signs of cancer, your liver is ruptured in several areas, and your kidneys evidence signs of premature failure. Do you know what that means?

Yes, the doctor explained it to me yesterday. These disturbances are all of my own doing.

Noting my obvious embarrassment at this confession, he continued:

In the group of eighty patients under my care, fifty-seven are in the same condition as you. Did you know that other patients arrive mutilated? Those who have misused their sight arrive without eyes? Others who have used the gift of agility in crime come to us paralyzed or legless. Still others who have lived sexually depraved lives enter spirit life totally insane.

The Astral City is not a settlement of triumphant spirits, in the common sense of the word. We are happy because we have constructive work to do, and there is job in every corner of our Colony because the Lord blessed us with the opportunity to serve.

He paused briefly, and I exclaimed: Please go on with your explanation, Lysias. I feel so peaceful and relieved. Isn't this a heavenly abode for the spiritual elect?

Lysias smiled and answered: Let's keep in mind the old teaching many are called but few are chosen.

Gazing at the distant horizon, flooded with memories from his own past, he continued: Many religions on Earth summon us to the Celestial Feast. No one who has once felt the existence of God can deny that in good conscience. Yes, many are called but few answer the call. Most of mankind accepts a different invitation instead. We waste our opportunities, straying from our chosen path, allowing our whims to rule our lives and thoughtlessly destroying our bodies. The ultimate result is that thousands of us leave the world in a state of confusion

countless multitudes of insane, diseased and ignorant spirits wander as you did in the spirit spheres close to the Earth.

Seeing my astonishment, he inquired: Did you believe that physical death brings us to miraculous places? We must work hard and perform difficult services to achieve spiritual growth. If we have debts on the planet, we must inevitably return to repay them, regardless of the progress we have made, breaking the chains of hatred and replacing them with the sacred bonds of love. It wouldn't be fair to ask others to clear the field in which we ourselves have sown thorns. That is what is meant, my friend, by the saying many are called but few are chosen. The Lord forgets no one, yet so few of us remember Him.

Confronted with the idea of individual responsibility, and remembering my own errors, I could not help but decry my perversity. But before I had time to vent my remorse my kind attendant lifted up his hand and spoke:

Stop. Let us concentrate on the work to be done. Those who are sincerely repentant must learn to be silent and start anew.

He carefully proceeded with a magnetic treatment, and then, while treating the area around my lower intestines, he continued his explanation:

Have you noticed the specialized treatment of your cancerous zones? You see, all honest work in the field of medicine is based on loving care, but the actual healing is left to the patient. You will be treated with great care and will fell as fit as you did as a youth on Earth. You will work hard, and I believe you will become one of the best assistants in The Astral City.

However, the case of your infirmities will stay with you until you have eliminated all traces of your indiscretions and misuse of your health which still remain in your spirit-body. Our earthly body, so often misused, is given to us as a blessed instrument through which we can cure our spirit, if we dedicate ourselves to the task.

I meditate deeply on what I had just heard, thinking on the infinite mercy of God, and was moved to tears. Lysias calmly finished the day's treatment and the spoke:

Tears are purifying medicine when they aren't caused by feelings of revolt. So cry, my friend, and ease your heart. Let us bless our physical body with its countless microscopic cells, so humble and precious, so detested yet so sublime for the service they render us. Without them, how many thousands of years we would spend wrapped up in the mists of ignorance.

Thus speaking, Lysias laid a gentle hand on my head and took his leave.

6. Precious Advice

The following day, after the evening prayer, Clarence came to see me accompanied by my attendant. Radiating kindness, he asked affectionately:

How are you? A little better, I hope?

Like any patient on Earth who suddenly finds himself the center of attention, I was moved to self-pity. Reverting to my old habit of abusing brotherly love, I began to complain:

I do feel a little better, but I am still suffering a great deal. I hurt below my stomach and I feel a strange sense of anguish in my heart. My cross has been heavy, my friends; I never knew I could withstand so much suffering. Now that I can think clearly again, I feel sure that these trials have sapped all of my remaining strength.

Clarence listened attentively, not showing the least sign of impatience. He even seemed interested, and his attitude encouraged me to continue.

Not only that, my moral sufferings are really indescribable! Now that the outside storm has subsided thanks to the assistance I have received here I've had to face a storm within my soul. What has become of my wife and children? I wonder whether my eldest child, my only son, has followed the plans I made for him. And what about my dear daughters? And my wife, who was sure she would die of loneliness if we were ever parted, what of my wonderful wife? I can still feel her tears from my last moments on Earth.

I can't say how long I've been living this nightmarish separation my continuous suffering has robbed me of all sense of time. Where is my poor wife? Weeping besides cold ashes? Or at the gates of death herself? What bitter sorrow! What a terrible fate for a man devoted to his family! Very few have gone through as much as I, I'm sure. Why, even on Earth I suffered years of vicissitudes, bitter disappointments and infirmities, and was granted only a few hours of happiness in return. Then I was subjected to painful physical death, followed by unceasing torture in spirit, and a never-ending succession of miseries and tears! Is there no meaning of attaining peace? As much as I may wish to adopt an optimistic attitude, I can't help feeling heavy-hearted and full of grief. What an unfortunate fate, generous benefactor.

By that time my feelings of self-pity had reached such proportions that my words gave way to tears. Clarence, however, rose calmly and asked simply:

My dear friend, do you really seek your spiritual cure?

I nodded in assent and he went on: Then learn not to speak so much of yourself and your sufferings. Self-pity is a symptom of mental illness, which is time consuming and difficult to cure. It is imperative that you create new trains of thought and control your words. The only way to spiritual balance is to open your heart to de Divine Light. If you consider the necessary effort to be an oppressive burden or see the struggle for redemption as an imposition, it is a sure sign of spiritual blindness. The more you dwell on your own painful experiences, the more you bind yourself to them. You can be sure that the same Father whom shelters and watches over you will also care for your loved ones on Earth. We should certainly regard the family as a sacred institution, but always keep in mind that it is just a small branch of the Universal Family under the loving guidance of one Divine Father. You can count on us to resolve your present problems and sketch plans for your future, but neither you nor we have the time to waste on your complaints. We in this colony accept the hardest toil as a welcome opportunity for ascent, remembering while we plod along, weighted down

with debts, that Providence is unsurpassing in its love. If you, too, wish to stay with us you must learn to think properly.

Meanwhile my tears had dried. His words had brought me back to my senses. I was ashamed of my own weakness and I adopted a different attitude. While in the flesh, continued Clarence, didn't you compete for lucrative positions, knowing their advantages? Didn't you appreciate the legitimate means of increasing the welfare of your loved ones? Weren't you engaged in obtaining just fees in the interest of adding to the comfort and stability of your family? Here the program is the same; only the details differ. On Earth conventionalities and monetary gains are the ruling forces, whereas here we aim at constructive work with lasting benefits to the immortal spirit. We look on suffering as a means to enrich the soul, and on each suffering as a step towards our divine goal. Can you see the difference? Weak souls resist service and remain inactive, venting their complaints to all. Strong ones, though, accept the task given them as constructive steps on the path towards perfection. Mind you, no one will blame you for missing your earthly family or would ever think of extinguishing your source of sublime feelings. Nevertheless, you must remember that tears of despair help nothing. If you really love your Earthly family and wish to be useful to them, you must first accept your present condition cheerfully.

A long pause ensued. Clarence's advice has changed the current of my thoughts and I began to ponder on his wisdom. While I was still immersed in deep reflection, my benefactor, like a father who forgets the waywardness of his child and recommences a lesson with the same serenity, asked again with a bright smile:

Well, how are you now? A little better?

Pleased and comforted to feel I was forgiven, like a little boy anxious to learn, I replied:

I am better now, to better understand the Divine Will.

7. Lysias Explains

Lysias came daily for my treatment and Clarence continued to visit me regularly. I began to feel at ease as I endeavored to adapt myself to my new situation. I noticed, though, that I would quickly relapse any time I began to dwell on my problems. The anguish, the fear of the unknown, and the discomfort of maladjustment would all return. Yet, in spite of everything, I felt a certain inner stability.

I derived great pleasure from leaning out of my window and gazing at the vast horizon. I was impressed by the difference between my surroundings here and on Earth. Nearly everything seemed to be an improved copy of Earth: the colors were more harmoniously blended, and the very substance of things to be more delicate. The ground was carpeted with greenery and I could see large trees, rich orchards and delightful gardens everywhere. A range of hills with light-crowned summits stood beyond the plain on which the Astral City was situated, and graceful buildings appeared at regular intervals a short distance away. These buildings, of various styles, had one thing in common: a profusion of flowers at their entrances. I noticed some charming little bungalows among them, surrounded by colorful roses springing up from among the ivy that covered the walls in contrasting colors. Birds with brilliant plumage flew about, alighting in groups from time to time on the tall, bright white steeples that reached for the sky. As I continued to watch curiously from my window, I was surprised to find some domestic animals among the trees some distance away. During these periods of deep musing, my mind was filled with countless speculations. Considering that I found myself on an astral plane, I could not understand the similarity of things here to those on Earth. Lysias, my obliging and constant companion, was always ready to explain:

Death of the physical body does not take man instantly to miraculous spheres. Every evolutionary process progresses trough graduation. There are countless planes for discarnate Spirits, just as there are many wondrous regions for those still in flesh. All souls, feelings, forms and things are governed by the principles of natural evolution and hierarchy.

Only the fact that I had stayed under treatment for so many weeks without a single visit from someone I had known on Earth worried me somewhat. Surely I was not the only one in my circle of friends and relatives to be struggling with the enigma of death. My parents had departed before me, as had various friends. Why, then, had none of them come to see me during my recovery, to bring a little cheer to my aching heart? I would have been satisfied with even a few moments of consolation. One day, when I could no longer silence my doubts, I asked my attendant: Tell me, dear Lysias, is it possible to meet those who left the Earth before us?

Why, do you imagine yourself forgotten?

Yes, in fact, I do. Why has no one come to see me? On Earth I always relied implicitly on my mother’s devotion. Yet to this day I have heard nothing from her, or from my father, who died three years before me.

Well, you are mistaken about your mother. She has been helping you night and day since the crisis you passed through before you arrived here. She doubled he assistance when you fell ill for the last time. You aren’t aware yet, are you, that your stay in the lower spheres lasted over eight years? In all that time she never lost hope, and often came to the Astral City to intercede on your behalf. She enlisted the services of Clarence, who began visiting you frequently until

the moment when you, the conceited earthly doctor, remembered that you were also a child of God. Do you see now?

I felt my eyes well with tears. I had not known that I had been away from the Earth for so long. I wanted to speak, to find out about those unperceived efforts, but my vocal cords seemed numb. My heart was too full to allow me to speak.

On the day you prayed with all your heart, continued Lysias, when you realized that everything in the Universe belongs to our Almighty Father, even your tears were different. As you know, rain can at times be creative, at other times destructive. The Lord doesn't wait for our prayers to love us. Yet, just as a dirty mirror cannot reflect the light, it is indispensable for us to cleanse ourselves and build a receptive attitude in order to understand His infinite goodness. Thus, it is not the Father who needs our penance, it is we who need it for the inestimable service it renders us. Do you see? Clarence, in answer to your devoted mother's pleas, had no trouble finding you it was you who took so long to find Clarence. I was told that when your mother heard you had broken through the shadows into the light, she wept for joy.

And where is my mother now? I cried at last. If possible, I should like to see and embrace her, to fall on my knees at her feet.

She doesn't live in the Astral City, he informed me, she inhabits higher spheres where she works, not exclusively for you, but for the good of many.

Noting my disappointment, he added:

She is sure to come and see you. When one earnestly wishes for something, it is already half obtained. Here we have your own example. For years you wandered at random, a prey to fear, distress and disillusionment. Yet as soon as you felt the necessity for divine assistance you expanded the range of your mental vibrations and obtained vision and help.

Encouraged by the explanation I had just received, I exclaimed resolutely:

Then I wished it with all my heart, and she shall come.

Lysias smiled knowingly, and as he took his leave he added this friendly advice:

Right, but keep in mind that all deserving petitions should contain three basic prerequisites: an active will, persevering work, and merit. In other words, one must first wish, then work towards that wish, and finally be deserving of what he requested.

He departed smiling, while I fell into deep meditation, wondering how such a vast program could have been expressed in so few words.

8. Administrative Organization

For the first time after some weeks under intense treatment I ventured out in Lysias company. The sight of the streets impressed me. The wide avenues, bordered with shady streets, which stretched out before us, were filled with pure air and an atmosphere of profound spiritual tranquility. Yet I saw no signs of inactivity or idleness anywhere. Instead, the city streets were crowded. I watched as the crowds passed by me. Some seemed absorbed in thought, while others smiled cordially as they passed. Lysias, seeing my surprise, quickly began to explain.

We are now in the district of the Ministry of Assistance. Everything you see here, all of the buildings and houses, are either institutions where the activities of our jurisdiction are carried out or home for our working staff and instructors. In the Ministry, patients are assisted, prayers are heard and sorted, earthly reincarnations planned and rescue groups promoted on behalf of those inhabiting the lower spirit zones or suffering on Earth. Here all problems related to human suffering are examined and solutions studied.

So there is a Ministry of Assistance in the Astral City? I asked.

And why not? All of our activities here are controlled by an organization which is constantly improving under the efficient supervision of those watching over our destinies. During our collective prayers, didn't you notice our Governor, surrounded by his seventy-two assistants? They are the Ministers of the Astral City. The colony, whose purpose is essentially work and accomplishment, is divided into six Ministries, each under the direction of twelve Ministers. The six Ministers are named: Regeneration, Assistance, Communication, Elucidation, Elevation, and Divine Union. The first four connect us with the Earth; the other two link us to the higher spheres. So you see our spiritual city is really a transition zone. The coarsest, most material activities are carried out by the Ministry of Regeneration. The most sublime is the Ministry of Divine Union. Clarence, our friendly instructor, is one of the Ministers of Assistance.

I never imagined the possibility of finding such a complete organization after the death of the physical body.

Yes , Lysias continued, the evil of illusion is very dense in the spheres of the flesh. The average man is unaware that all manifestations of order around him proceed from higher planes. Just as Nature becomes a garden when tended by man, so the mind, dull in primitive creatures, is transformed into a creative force when inspired by consciousness functioning in higher spheres. Every useful organization on the material plane has its first roots in higher spiritual worlds. But those the Astral City have a history like the great cities of Earth?

Certainly. All of the planes near the Earth possess their own specific nature and unique history. The Astral City is an old settlement, founded by a group of distinguished Portuguese pioneers who, after passing on, settled in the spirits planes over Brazil in the sixteenth century. According to the annals of our Colony, these settlers at first encountered tremendous and exhausting difficulties here. There are obstacles in the invisible zones close to the Earth, just as there are on the Earth itself. Enormous areas with undeveloped potential here are comparable to the great tracts of forbidden terrain on Earth.

The pioneers work was indeed hard and discouraging, even for the stronger spirits. The area where delicate vibrations and majestic buildings now abound was also peopled with other more primitive inhabitants whose architecture reflected their elementary minds and who

filled the atmosphere with their undeveloped thoughts. Still the founders did not lose heart. They proceeded with their efforts, following the example of the Old World settlers on the physical plane. Only they substituted persevering work, brotherly solidarity and spiritual love for violence, war and slavery.

By this time we had reached a large, artistically designed square, filled with beautiful gardens. In its center stood a magnificent palace crowned with majestic and lofty towers whose tips reached so high they disappeared from sight.

Here, where the Government House now stands, the settlers placed the cornerstone of the Colony.

Pointing to the palace, he went on:

This square is the converging point of the six Ministries I told you about. They start at the Government House and stretch out in a triangular shape. Our devoted Governor lives here. A staff of three thousand individuals assist him in his administrative duties. He is the most earnest and untiring worker in the Colony. The Ministers travel at times to other spheres to renew their energies and acquire new knowledge, and we, too, have our habitual amusements. Only the Governor has no leisure time whatsoever. While he insists that we take periodic vacations to rest, he himself works ceaselessly, sacrificing even his sleeping hours. It seems he finds his reward in never-ending service. I have been here for forty years, and except for the collective prayers, I have never seen the Governor at any public entertainment. Yet the radiation of his powerful mind reaches every branch of activity and his fatherly assistance involves everybody and everything here.

After a long pause, the friendly attendant continued:

Only a short time ago, we celebrated the one hundred fourteenth anniversary of his magnanimous administration.

Lysias went on walking in reverent silence, while I, keeping pace with him, gazed in awe at the marvelous steeples which seemed to pierce the skies.

9. The Problem Of Nutrition

Captivated by the sight of the magnificent gardens, I asked Lysias to rest with me for a while on a bench nearby, and he willingly greed. I was filled with a pleasant feeling of peace, watching the graceful sprays of colored water rising in the air, forming intricate patterns.

Whoever observes this immense colony of work, I said thoughtfully, is led to inquire about all sorts of possible problems. For instance, the problem of supply. There is no Ministry of Economy here, is there?

That branch of ser ice, answered Lysias, used to assume much greater importance here. Then our Governor decided to reduce, as much as possible, the number of practices which might remind us of purely physical phenomena. Therefore the activities of the Department of Supply were reduced to mere distribution, under the direct control of the Central Administration. As a matter of fact, this was a very important decision. Our records show that a century ago the Colony underwent great trouble to adapt its inhabitants to the principle of simplicity. Many newcomers to the Astral City, still imbued with earthly vices, insisted on the most extravagant accommodations, including sumptuous meals and stimulating drinks. Only the Ministry of Divine Union, owing to its inherent characteristics, shunned such abuses; the others spent their time overburdened with problems of this sort. Our Governor, however, spared no efforts to put an end to the deplorable situation, introducing decisive measures against it the moment he assumed his administrative duties at the Astral City.

Some of our older missionaries have told me about that time. They say that the Governor’s request two hundred instructors came to us from a very high sphere in order to propagate new theories about respiration and the absorption of life-giving elements from the atmosphere. Numerous lectures were given on the subject. Many of our own experts were against those innovations on the grounds that, because the Colony serves as a transition zone, it would be unjust and dangerous to submit newly-arrived spirits to such drastic changes. They believed that such changes could cause serious damage to our patients spirit-bodies. But the Governor did not give in.

For thirty years the lectures, illustrative examples, and technical explanations proceeded without interruption. Various eminent spirits went so far as to formulate public protests against the Governor’s actions. They repeatedly crowded the Ministry of Assistance with patients who declared themselves victims of the deficient new diet. During such crises, those who were against the change intensified their attack. Yet the Governor never resorted to punishment. Instead, he would summon his critics to the Government House in a fatherly manner, expounding on the aims and benefits of the new program, emphasizing its superiority as an efficient means of spiritualization. For the most obstinate he would arrange instructive excursions to higher spheres, winning over a great number of them.

After a long pause, I said:

Please go on, Lysias. How did that edifying struggle end?

After twenty-one years of persevering efforts on the Governor’s part, the Ministry of Elevation gave in and cut its supplies to the strictly necessary. The Ministry of Elucidation, however, took a long time to follow this good example, owing to the greater number of statistics-minded spirits working there. They were the most obstinate adversaries, still entrenched in their earthly ideas that the ingestion of protein and carbohydrates is indispensable to the human frame. They insisted on maintaining their ideas here, and every

week they sent the Governor lengthy reports, full of warnings and observations, tests and numerical data, supporting their claims. Such impertinence even reached the point of arrogance, yet the Governor's patience never failed.

Having decided not to act alone, he obtained the assistance of the highly evolved entities who guide us through the Ministry of Divine Union, and together they examined every one of those documents thoroughly. While the scientists multiplied their arguments and the government stalled for time, dangerous disturbances were brewing in the Department of Regeneration, now known as the Ministry of Regeneration. Some of the less developed spirits there were caught up in the spirit of rebellion of those in the Ministry of Elucidation and acted simply deplorably. The atmosphere of unrest divided the Colony, exposing the Astral City to dangerous attacks from inhabitants of the lower zones. Such entities endeavored to invade our city availing themselves of the breach of services of the Department of Regeneration, where many workers had been carrying on clandestine dealings in order to satisfy their undesirable addictions to food.

The alarm was given, and though the crisis posed a serious threat to us all, the Governor maintained his usual serenity. He asked the Ministry of Divine Union for a meeting, and, after listening to our highest council, had the Ministry of Communication temporarily closed. He ordered the dungeons of the Department of Regeneration prepared for the isolation of the more stubborn rebels. He admonished the Ministry of Education, whose impertinence he had withstood for thirty years, and decreed that any further assistance whatsoever to the lower regions should be suspended until further notice. For the first time in his administration he had the electric weapons in the city walls turned on, so as to emit magnetic darts as a measure of defense. There were neither battles nor attacks on the Colony's side only resolute defense. For over six months the diet of the Astral City was reduced to the life-supporting principles in the atmosphere and the electrical, magnetic and solar elements in the water. Thus for the first time the Colony felt the indignation of a kind and just spirit.

The Crisis was finally over the government had won. The Ministry of Elucidation itself admitted its error and lent a hand in it is said that during the festivities the Governor was moved to tears, declaring that the general, good understanding of his fellow citizens was the dearest reward to his heart. The Department of Regeneration was promoted to Ministry, and the city returned to its usual routine.

Since that time only the Ministries of Regeneration and Assistance are allowed greater supplies of nutritive substances, owing to the low spirituality of many of their patients. In all other Ministries the diet is limited to the essentials, according to the rules of the strictest sobriety. Nowadays everyone agrees that the Governor's apparently arbitrary imposition was a most valuable measure towards our assent. Our contact with material things was reduced, giving rise to a greater spirituality.

Lysias fell into silence, while I pondered deeply over the great lesson I'd just receive.

10. The Water Park

Noting my growing interest in the processes of nutrition, Lysias invited me to accompany him on an instructive excursion.

Let's go, he suggested, and see the Colony's great reservoir. There you will have the opportunity to see some things that will interest you and to learn the importance of water in our transition settlement.

My curiosity roused, I gladly accepted the invitation. When we arrived at the corner of the public square, my kind friend stopped.

Here we wait for the airbus[5]. He said.

I had scarcely gotten over my surprise when a large vehicle approached, floating about fifteen feet above the ground, filled with passengers. It descended like an elevator. I looked at it closely it was very long, like no vehicle I had ever seen on Earth. It seemed to be made of a very flexible material, and, judging from the number of antennae on its roof, I guessed that it was connected to invisible wires. Later, when visiting the large working plants of the Colony's Department of Traffic and Transportation, I found that my suppositions had been right.

Lysias gave me no time for my customary questioning. We climbed in, settled into comfortable seats, and the air-bus started in silence. I felt uneasy in this unusual environment, among so many strangers. We traveled at such a speed that I found it impossible to discern the details of any of the constructions that we passed. We covered a good distance, stopping briefly every three kilometers, until forty minutes later Lysias informed me that we had arrived.

The scenery before my eyes was of exquisite beauty. The woods were in bloom and the fresh air was filled with a gentle aroma. It was all a miracle of colors and lights. A great river wound its way leisurely between green banks sprinkled with blue flowers. The slow-moving waters, shimmering in the sun, reflected, like a crystal mirror, the many shades of blue in the sky. Wide paths cut through the woods in different directions, and at regular intervals large trees spread their friendly branches offering areas of shade in the sunbathed landscape. Here and there, fancifully shaped benches invited one to rest. I was simply charmed, and Lysias noticed by enthusiasm.

This place is called the Water Park. It is one of the finest regions of the Astral City, and a favorite meeting place for lovers. They come here to exchange sweet vows of love and fidelity for their future experiences on Earth.

These remarks brought a series of interesting questions to my mind, but Lysias gave me no chance to vent my eager curiosity. Pointing to a large and imposing building, he explained:

That is the Colony's water works. The waters of the Blue River that you see over there are drawn into huge compartments from which they are distributed to every district in the Colony. Beyond the grounds of the Ministry of Regeneration, the waters converge again. The river then flows along its ordinary course towards the great ocean of substances, invisible to the Earth. As a matter of fact, water here has quite a different density than that on Earth. It is much lighter and purer here, almost fluidical.

[5] An aerial vehicle similar to our large cable cars.

Noticing the magnificent building in front of us, I asked:

Which Ministry controls the distribution of water?

It is one of the rare material activities under the Ministry of Divine Union.

Really! I exclaimed, at a loss for how to reconcile the two. Lysias smiled and continued with his explanation:

On Earth, very few people recognize the importance of water. Here in the Astral City our attitude is different and our knowledge of the subject is far greater. It is obvious that all services that are created need energy and attention to remain in good order. In this spiritual city we learn to be grateful to the Father and His divine laborers for such a gift. Being more deeply acquainted with the properties of water, we know that it is one of the most powerful vehicles for all fluids, whatever their nature. Here, water is used especially for nutritive and medicinal purposes.

In the Ministry of Assistance, you will find several departments entirely devoted to mixing pure water with certain elements drawn from solar rays and from spiritual magnetism. In most districts of our extensive Colony, the water thus prepared is the basis of our diet. It happens, though, that, of all of us, the Ministers of Divine Union have reached the highest degree of spiritualization.

Consequently they were allotted the task of the general magnetization of the water of the Blue River, to purify it enough so that it might be used by all of the inhabitants of the Astral City. After the Ministers of Divine Union cleanse the water, various institutions carry out the specialized work of endowing it with nutritive and medicinal substances. When the different ducts join again at a distant point opposite these woods, the river flows away from our area, bearing some of our spiritual qualities.

I was completely astonished in the face of these explanations.

On Earth, I remarked, I never heard of anything like this.

Man is inattentive. Lysias continued. For many centuries the sea has kept his environment in balance, rain has supplied him with food, and the rivers have been vital in the formation of his cities. Water is a blessing in his home and work, and is the principal and most important element in his physical body. Yet man goes on thinking himself the absolute master of his world, forgetting that he is, before any other consideration, a child of the Most High.

The time will come, though, when he will follow our example and recognize the value of this divine and precious gift. He will understand that the water in every home absorbs the mental characteristics of its inhabitants.

In the physical world, my friend, not only does water carry away the residues of material bodies, but it also becomes impregnated with our mental vibrations. It can be harmful in wicked hands, useful in generous ones. When in motion, its current spreads the blessing of life and acts as a vehicle of Divine Providence, absorbing man’s bitterness, hatred and worries, cleansing his physical home and purifying his inner atmosphere.

Lysias fell into reverent silence, while I gazed at the tranquil waters that had aroused in my mind so many sublime thoughts.

11. Learning About The Astral City

My generous friend was anxious to show me around the numerous districts of the Colony, but pressing duties called him back.

You will soon get a chance to visit the different departments of our activities, he said, encouragingly. You see, the Ministries of the city are vast centers of intense work. A thorough inspection of any one of them would take several days. However, you will not lack opportunities. Even if I find it impossible to accompany you, through Clarence's mediation you will be granted a permit to visit any department you like.

By this time we were back at the airbus and in a few minutes we were on our way home. I did not feel again the sensation of uneasiness I had at first experienced, nor was I constrained by the presence of the numerous passengers in the airbus. I was almost at ease and fell to pondering over some of the questions I was anxious to solve. I took the opportunity to question Lysias further:

Lysias, my friend, can you tell me whether all spirit colonies are like this one? Do they adopt the same characteristics?

By no means. If, on the physical sphere, each region, each town presents its own peculiar features, you can imagine the diversity of conditions existing on our planes. Here, as on Earth, creatures are grouped according to the common sources of their origin and the goal in view. But it must be remembered that each colony, as well as each of us, stands on a different step of the great stairway to perfection. Collective experiences vary among one another. We are only one example of such colonies. According to our chronicles, our predecessors often sought inspiration in the work of the devoted workers of other spheres, just as settlements in formation now seek our help. Nevertheless, each organization possess essentially unique characteristics.

As a longer pause in the conversation ensued, I inquired:

And did the idea of the division into Ministries originate here?

Yes, it did. The pioneers of the Astral City visited New Dawn, one of the most important spirit colonies near us where activities are distributed into departments. Our founder adopted the system, but substituted the word ministry for department, except in the case of the Ministry of Regeneration, which only obtained its promotion under our present Governor. Their idea was that the organization into Ministries is more meaningful in a spiritual sense.

I quite agree. I assented.

It is important, Lysias continued, that you realize that our Colony strongly stresses the principles of order and hierarchy. Merit is the only standard used to evaluate those who may be assigned to prominent positions. In ten years, only four spirit entities have been granted missions of responsibility in the Ministry of Divine Union. As a rule, after long periods of apprenticeship and service, we reincarnate to continue our struggle towards perfection.

I was completely absorbed in Lysias words, and he went on:

When newcomers arrive showing response to brotherly cooperation, they are lodged in a district of the Ministry of Assistance. If, however, they are recalcitrant, they are taken to the Ministry of Regeneration. As they begin, in time, to improve, they are then admitted as

helpers in the services of Assistance, Communication, and Elucidation, in order to prepare themselves for their future tasks on Earth.

Only a few spirits are allowed the privilege of long stay in the Ministry of Elevation, and very rare indeed are those who are raised to the staff of the Ministry of Divine Union when positions become available every ten years. Let me tell you, the acquisitions required are no mere expressions of idealistic activity. We are no longer on the physical plane, where discarnate entities are obliged to become ghosts. Our time here is spent in a round of active work. The work in the Ministry of Assistance is difficult and complex; in Regeneration it requires strenuous efforts; in Communication it demands a high standard of individual responsibility; in Elucidation it calls for a great working capacity and a well-trained mind, while in Elevation, abnegation and spiritual enlightenment are indispensable. As to the missions of the Ministry of Divine Union, profound wisdom and sincere universal love are essential requisites. The Government, in its turn, is the busy center of all administrative activities, and numerous services are under its direct control, including nutrition, distribution of electrical energies, traffic and transportation. In truth, my friend, labor regulations are always fulfilled here. Rest, on the other hand, is also rigorously observed. This is necessary in order to ensure that tasks are fairly distributed. The only exception is the Governor himself, who works ceaselessly, even during leisure hours.

But does he never leave the Government House? I inquired.

Only when truly necessary for the public welfare. The one exception is his Sunday visit to the Ministry of Regeneration, the zone which contains the largest number of deranged entities because so many of the spirits there are still attuned with their unhappy brothers in the lower zones. Vast multitudes of transgressor spirits are lodged there. Thus, on Sundays, after the collective prayer in the Great Temple of the Government House, our Governor spends the afternoon working with the Ministries of Regeneration on many difficult cases. He sacrifices much to assist our distraught and suffering brothers. We left the airbus near the Hospital where, I thought gratefully, I would soon find my comfortable room. As we walked, I noticed beautiful music floating through the air. I had first heard the melodies on leaving, and now as we returned, I looked to Lysias for an explanation.

That music comes from our workshops. After long observation, the Government came to the conclusion that music stimulates labor. Since then, that inspiring incentive has become an established custom in all of our activities.

Meanwhile, we had reached the hospital entrance hall. An attendant came forward and addressed my companion:

Brother Lysias, you are urgently needed in the pavilion on my right.

My friend left with his usual efficient calmness, while I retired to the privacy of my room, once more to return to endless speculations.

12. The Lower Zone

After having received such precious elucidations, I felt most anxious to improve my knowledge of some of the facts he had told me about. His references to spirits in the shadowy Lower Zones aroused my curiosity. The lack of religious instruction on Earth is very often the cause of a serious state of confusion over here. What could the Lower Zone be? I had heard Hell and Purgatory mentioned in the Roman Catholic sermons I had attended out of social obligation, but I never had the slightest notion of the Lower Zone. The next time I met my amiable attendant, I had all of my questions at my fingertips. He listened carefully, then replied:

Well now, how can you be unaware of that region when you were kept there for so long?

With a shudder of horror, I recalled my past sufferings. Lysias continued:

The Lower Zone begins on the Earth's crust. It is the shadowy zone for those who, in the world, turned a deaf ear to the call of their sacred duties, which they failed to fulfill, languishing instead in indecision or dragging themselves into the mire of wrong-doings. You see, on reincarnating, a spirit promises to carry out the mission assigned to him in the Father's work. Yet, when he recommences his experiences, he finds it very difficult to keep his word. Instead, he blindly follows the dictates of his own selfishness. Thus, he continues to cultivate old hates and passions, forgetting that hatred is not justice, just as passion is not love. All that is superfluous and useless unbalances the harmony of life.

After Physical death, great multitudes of obsessed entities remain in that misty region adjacent to the Earth's physical sphere. A well accomplished duty serves as a gateway through which we enter the Infinite. It brings us closer towards our goal the sacred union with the Lord. It is natural, then, that one who neglects the tasks allotted to him should have that blessing indefinitely postponed.

Lysias perceived my difficulty in grasping the full meaning of the lesson, owing to my almost total ignorance of spiritual principles, and tried to make it more objective:

Now, suppose that each of us returns to the Earth wearing filthy clothing in order to wash it in the waters of human life. Our dirty garment is our spirit-body, molded by our own hands in past lives. Although we are granted the blessing of a new opportunity on Earth, we generally forget our essential aim. Instead of cleansing ourselves through constructive efforts, we acquire even more stains we incur heavier debts and imprison ourselves through our own actions. We return to the world to rid ourselves of our impurities, knowing that they are utterly inconsistent with the higher spheres. How, then, can we expect to enter those luminous spheres in an even worse condition? The Lower Zone is a place where negative mental residues are destroyed. It is a sort of purgatory, where the refuse of the illusions acquired by neglecting the sublime opportunity of an earthly life is gradually burned away.

The image could not have been clearer or more convincing. I was simply lost in amazement. Lysias, perceiving how useful these explanations could be to me, went on:

The Lower Zone should be a region of great interest to those still on the physical plane, for it contains everything which is out of tune with a higher plane. Consider how wise Divine Providence was in allowing the creation of such a plane around Earth. There we find compact legions of irresolute and ignorant souls, not wicked enough to be relegated to colonies of harder expiation, nor sufficiently virtuous to be admitted to higher planes. Those countless

inhabitants of the Lower Zone are close companions to incarnate men, separated from them only by vibratory laws. It is no wonder, then, that such places are characterized by serious disturbances. There, rebellious spirits of all kinds are grouped together, forming invisible nuclei of extraordinary power, owing to the concentration of their common tendencies and desires.

Many people on Earth become desperate when the postman doesn't turn up, or when the train is late. The Lower Zone is full of such desperate creatures, who, after physical death, are disappointed at not finding the Lord ready to satisfy their every whim. When they realize that the crown of glory and eternal life are awarded only to those who have worked with the Father, they show themselves as they truly are, wasting precious time on petty deeds in the Lower Zone. Just as in the Astral City, entities in the Lower Zone form a spiritual community, but their community is peopled with many different types of frustrated, idle and perverse entities. It is the Threshold, a Zone of tyranny and bondage, of exploiters and exploited.

Lysias stopped, but I, greatly impressed, went on questioning:

But how do you account for this state of things? Do these spirits have no defense, no organization?

Organization, Lysias proceeded with a smile, is an attribute of organized spirits. You see, the Lower Zone to which we are referring is like a home where there is no bread everybody complains and no one is right. The absent minded traveler will miss his train; the farmer who does not sow cannot reap. However, of one thing you can be sure: even in the shadows and ordeals of the Lower Zone, divine protection never fails its inhabitants. Each spirit remains there just the necessary time, no more, no less. An in order to carry out the work of spirit care in the Lower Zones, the Lord has permitted the establishment of several settlements such as ours.

I suppose then, I remarked, that the Lower Zone must be in close connection with the incarnate plane even a kind of continuation of it?

So it is, he agreed, and you will see there the net of invisible wires connecting it to human minds. It is peopled with disincarnated entities and the thought forms of those still on Earth. Every spirit, wherever it may be, is a nucleus of radiating forces which can create, transform or destroy, manifesting as vibrations that Earth science cannot yet understand. Thus, whoever is thinking is emitting positive or negative forces, and is, consequently, constructing or destroying something somewhere. It is by means of those mental currents that men establish connection with entities in the Lower Zone whose tendencies are in accordance with their own, because every soul is a powerful magnet. You see, then, that an invisible army is at work behind the invisible one.

The most strenuous missions in the Lower Zone are assigned to devoted helpers of the Ministry of Assistance. If a fireman's work in the great cities of Earth is exhausting and dangerous because of the blazing flames and clouds of smoke he has to fight, no lighter ins the missionary's task in the Lower Zone. These missionaries have to withstand heavy fluids emitted by thousands of minds obsessed in the practice of evil, or terribly chastised by redeeming ordeals. I tell you, my friend, a great deal of courage and a superior capacity for self-sacrifice are necessary to be able to help those who are still unable to understand and appreciate the assistance offered them.

As Lysias paused once more, I exclaimed:

Oh, how would I like to work to help those unhappy creatures; to offer them the spiritual bread of enlightenment.

My friendly attendant looked at me kindly, and after a few moments of reflection, took his leave with this parting remark:

I wonder whether you feel duly prepared for such a mission.

13. With The Minister Of Assistance

As I gradually became stronger, I began to feel again the need for activity and work. Now that those difficult years of distress were over, I longed to begin again the round of occupations which, in the world, generally comprise a regular working day. I fully realized that I had missed excellent opportunities on Earth and that my physical life had been spent along the wrong path. But, on recalling my fifteen years of medical practice, I experienced a sense of emptiness in my heart. I saw myself as a strong farmer standing in the middle of a field, hands tide, unable to work. Here I was, surrounded by patients, yet not allowed, as before, to approach their beds as their friend, doctor and scientist. Incessant m0oaning from neighboring rooms reached my ears, but I could not lend a hand not even as a humble member of the nursing or first-aid staff.

On the physical plane it was a matter of studying the regular books plus some necessary training and one could acquire the rights of a qualified physician. But here, in my new surroundings, spirit doctors employed different methods, their chief textbooks being their own hearts, and their basic treatment, brotherly care and love. Even the humblest of nursing attendants in the Astral City possessed far greater knowledge and possibilities than I, with all my science. Consequently, much as I longed for some occupation, I feared that, at least for the time being, any attempt on my part to apply for work would amount to an encroachment upon the rights of others. Faced with such difficulties, I turned to Lysias as a brother. In reply to my doubts and hesitations, he suggested:

Why not asking Clarence? He never fails to ask about you and is sure to do his best on your behalf. Go and ask him for advice and assistance.

I took the necessary steps to obtain an appointment with my generous benefactor and was told that he would not be able to see me until the next morning, when I was to go to his private office. I waited anxiously for the coming interview, and very early the following day I made my way to the appointed place. To my great surprise, I found three other people already waiting for him. The kind Minister had arrived early, long before us, and was seeing to matters even more important than attending to visitors and petitioners. After finishing his most urgent work, the Minister had us shown in, two by two. I was surprised at this manner of holding an audience, but was told later that the measure was adopted so that the solution of one case might profit not only the party involved, but also the others present, thus serving the common wellbeing as well as saving time.

After several minutes had passed, I was admitted along with an elderly lady who was to be heard first. The Minister welcomed us cordially, putting us at ease to present our requests.

Worthy Clarence began my unknown companion, I have come to beg your intercession on behalf of my two sons. I can’t bear to be separated from them any longer! Moreover, I have been informed that they are leading difficult lives on Earth, with no end to their tribulations. I realize that our Father’s designs are loving and just, yet as a mother I can’t help worrying and being anxious.

The poor creature broke down and wept bitterly. Clarence looked at her with sympathy and kindness, but replied firmly:

But sister, if you agree that our Father’s designs are holy and just, what is left for me to do?

I should like to be granted the means of protecting my sons on Earth myself. Replied the afflicted mother.

Alas, my friend, exclaimed Clarence, in order to protect others, one must have grown in the spirit of humility and service. What would you think of a man who anxious to provide for his little children remained comfortably at home? Service and cooperation are laws created by the Father, and no one may break them without causing himself serious damage. Has your conscience nothing to say on this point? How many-bonuses[6] can you present to justify your demand?

The anxious mother, thus addressed, answered hesitantly: Three hundred and four.

It is a pity, continued Clarence, smiling, that you should have been lodged here for over six years and should have given the Colony only three hundred and four hours of work. Yet, as soon as you recovered from your trials in the lower regions, I offered you a meritorious occupation in the Vigilance Patrols of the Ministry of Communication.

But that was intolerable work, she interrupted, an incessant struggle against malevolent entities! You couldn't expect me to adapt to it.

Clarence went on, unperturbed:

After that I found you a place with the Brothers of Support, for redeeming service.

Worse still! She protested. Those chambers are always crowded with filthy creatures. I couldn't stand their swearing, their immorality, the squalor.

Realizing your difficulties, continued the Minister, I sent you to cooperate in the Ward of Mentally Disturbed entities.

But can anybody but saints put up with them? Inquired the rebellious petitioner. I really did my best, but the multitude of raving souls is enough to scare anybody.

My efforts did not stop there. Proceeded our patient benefactor calmly. I then placed you in the Investigation and Research Department of the Ministry of Elucidation. But, you, sister, probably impatient at my unwelcome interest, deliberately retired to the Park of Repose.

I found that place unbearable. Explained the querulous matron. I couldn't possibly endure the atmosphere of strange fluids, exhausting experiments and harsh supervisors.

Remember, my friend, resumed the devoted and enlightened Minister, that assistance has two inseparable companions: service and humility. In order to help others we must first obtain the collaboration of benefactors, friends and servants. Before being able to render assistance to those we love, it is essential that we establish currents of sympathy, without which no efficient aid is possible. The peasant who tills the soil earns the gratitude of those who enjoy the harvest. The workman who satisfies exacting superintendents, carrying out their orders scrupulously, is providing nourishment for his family. The servant who obeys in the spirit of cooperation, wins the goodwill of his master, his companions, and all those interested in his work. So you see, no average administrator can ever be useful to his loved ones if he has not yet learned how to obey and serve worthily. Let everybody keep in mind that all useful service belongs, above all, to the Universal Giver, and that it must be carried out no matter what difficulties or suffering it may cost.

After a short pause, he resumed:

[6] Note by Andro Luiz: An hour-bonus is a convention created to account for each hour of service performed on behalf of the community.

What, then, would you do on Earth, if you have not yet learned how to withstand here? I do not doubt your devotion to your sons, but as it is, you would arrive there as a paralytic mother, incapable of rendering any efficient assistance. To deserve the joy of helping love ones we must enlist the goodwill of many of our brothers, whom we, in turn, have helped. If you give no cooperation, you cannot expect to receive any. That is the Law. And if you, my sister, possess nothing of your own to give, you will have to turn to others for voluntary contribution. But how will you obtain it, when you have not sown anything, not even good feelings? Go back, then, to the Park of Repose, where you have been lodging lately, and give the subject serious attention. We shall take it up again.

The disappointed woman sat down, drying her tears. The Minister then looked at me and said, kindly:

Your turn, my friend.

I rose hesitantly and approached him to present my request.

14. Clarence Explains

As I stood there, my heart pounding, I felt like a diffident student about to face a strict examining board. Disconcerted by the sight of that woman in tears, and awed by the Minister's serene authority, I trembled in my shoes, regretting having sought the interview. Would it have been better to have held my peace and waited patiently for superior deliberations? Would it be presuming too much to apply for medical duties in a hospital where I was a patient? I wished that I could retreat hurriedly to my room and forget all about yesterday's aspirations. But that was quite out of the question now. The Minister of Assistance, sensing my innermost intentions, addressed me in a firm tone of voice:

I am ready to hear you, my friend.

Although a prey to indecision, I was about to instinctively solicit any medical activity in the colony, when my conscience prompted a warning: why ask for special work? Would that not be falling again into human error, reverting to that old vanity which does not tolerate any occupation but the one befitting one's special status and schooling? These thoughts restored my equilibrium, and, rather confused, I began:

I took the liberty to come to you today to ask your assistance in procuring some sort of work for me. Now that the treatment received here has restored my health, I am beginning to miss my old occupations. Any task will be welcomed, as long as it keeps me from inactivity.

Clarence looked at me long and intently, as if trying to gauge my innermost thoughts.

I see. With your lips you ask for any kind of work, but deep in your heart what you really miss is your consulting room, your patients, and all the atmosphere of medical service with which the Lord deigned to honor you on Earth.

So far his words were most encouraging, and with my heart filled with hope, I nodded in assent. After a long pause, the minister proceeded:

You must not forget, however, that very often our Father honors us with his confidence, and that we often betray his trust by underestimating the dignity of the call. Your, for instance, went through your medical courses on Earth surrounded by every facility. You never knew the price of a single book, as your parent's generosity saw to all your needs. As soon as you graduated, lucrative positions were already waiting for you. Thus, you were spared the poor doctor's hard struggle to build a practice. You prospered most rapidly in your career. Unfortunately, you transformed the advantages you obtained into a means of bringing about the premature death of your physical body. While young and strong, you committed numerous abuses in the exercise of the profession which Jesus granted you.

At that firm but kind lecture, I felt strangely disturbed, but managed to reply respectfully:

I recognize the justice of your observations, but I should be grateful if you would grant me the means of repaying my debts by devoting myself, heart and soul, to the patients in this hospital.

A very noble impulse, said Clarence without severity. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the exercise of a profession on Earth is a call from our Father summoning his creatures to come into the divine temples of service. For us here a degree is a mere identification card, but on Earth it usually means an open door to all sorts of abuse. The person who receives such a card is given the opportunity to study and cooperate with the Lord in His divine work on the planet. This principle is applicable to all earthly activities, regardless of their nature and class

conventions. You, my brother, were granted a medical card, and consequently were admitted into the temple of Medicine. However, your line of conduct does not justify my endorsing your present wish. How could I appoint you to treat spirit patients, when on Earth you insisted on limiting your professional observations to the physical body? I do not deny your capacity as an excellent physiologist, but the field of life is much wider. What would you think of a botanist who based his definitions on the mere examination of the dry bark of a few trees? A great number of earthly physicians prefer mathematical conclusions in their anatomical work. Now, I quite agree that Mathematics is a most respectable science, but it is not the only one in the Universe. As you are already aware, a doctor cannot draw the line at diagnoses and terminologies he must go deeper, and scrutinize the innermost recesses of the soul. On Earth, many of your colleagues become true slaves to academic conventionalism because of their professional life. Very few succeed in crossing prejudices. The rare exceptions are scoffed at by society, and looked down upon by their colleagues.

I was lost in amazement. I had never dreamed of such lofty notions of professional responsibility. I was staggered by the idea of a college degree being merely a ticket giving admittance into zones of work and collaboration with the Lord. Speechless, I waited for the Minister of Assistance to resume his elucidations.

As you see, he went on, you have not prepared yourself for our activities.

Generous benefactor, I ventured to say, I understand the lessons and submit myself to the obvious.

Trying to keep back my tears, I begged humbly:

I am willing to accept any kind of occupation in this colony of work and peace.

Clarence, showing me a deep look of approval, answered:

My friend, you have listened to a few bitter truths. Now let me add a little word of encouragement. You cannot, as yet, become a doctor in the Astral City, but in due time you will be admitted as an apprentice. Your present situation is not the best. Nevertheless, it is a promising one, owing to the intercessional petitions sent to the Ministry of Assistance on your behalf.

My mother? I inquired, transported with bliss.

Yes, assented the Minister, your mother, and other friends in whose heart you planted the seed of gratitude. Soon after your arrival here, I requested that the Ministry of Elucidation have your records sent to me. I have already examined them most carefully, and found much rashness and thoughtlessness, and many abuses. I also found that, in your fifteen years of medical practice, six thousand poor patients received free medical attendance in your clinic. Most often you went through those meritorious deeds quite heedlessly. Still, you can see now that, even if carelessly done, a good deed attracts blessings to the one who carries it out. Of six thousand, fifteen have not forgotten you, and have been sending incessant appeals on your behalf. I must explain, also, that even the forgotten benefit of your work weighs in your favor.

Putting a stop to those surprising elucidations, Clarence added with a smile:

You will learn new lessons here, and after instructive experiences, you will cooperate efficiently with us, preparing at the same time for your own progress towards the Infinite.

I was overjoyed. For the first time since my arrival at the Colony, I cried out of pure happiness. Who on Earth would understand such emotions? Still, I felt it necessary to quiet my heart to enter the sublimity of divine silence.

15. My Mother’s Visit

Following Clarence’s advice, I tried hard to restore my strength in order to start my apprenticeship as soon as possible. In the old days, I might have taken offense at the Minister’s seemingly harsh remarks, but under the circumstances, recollecting my past errors, I could only feel comforted. As a prisoner of the flesh, the soul is almost always wrapped in thick mists of illusion. Only now did I realize that an earthly life cannot be lived thoughtlessly. The real importance of an incarnation loomed clearly before my eyes. Remembering all the opportunities I had wasted, I recognized that Clarence had plenty of reason to have spoken to me as he had.

I spent many days immersed in contemplation. Although I refrained from asking for any more concessions, deep in my heart I longed to visit my earthly home. The benefactors of the Ministry of Assistance had been extremely generous to me and seemed to follow all of my thoughts. Therefore if they did not spontaneously grant such a wish, it must be because the time had not yet come for it. Thus I held my peace, resigned, though somewhat wistful. Lysias did his best to cheer me up with his lively conversation and encouraging remarks, but I was going through that phase of spiritual retreat when a man retires within himself to face his innermost conscience.

One day, however, my attendant came into my room and exclaimed:

Guess who has come to see you!

Lysias, smiling face and sparkling eyes gave him away.

My mother! I exclaimed confidently. Stunned with joy, I saw my mother approaching with outstretched arms.

My child, my child! Come into my arms, my dear one.

I cannot describe what happened then. All of a sudden, I felt like the little boy who used to play in the rain, barefoot in the sandy soil of our garden. In that sacred and joyful moment I held her tenderly in my arms, until even our tears blended. I cannot say how long we remained that way, but at last she broke the enchantment:

Now, now, my boy, don’t give free rein to your emotions. You know that even excessive happiness taxes the heart. You are still weak, do not waste your energy.

Instead of carrying my dear old mother in my arms, as I had done in the last weeks of her passage on Earth, it was she who dried my tears and led me to the couch. I sat down beside her and laid my head tenderly on her knees. She stroked my hair gently, recounting precious memories. I felt at that moment that I was the happiest of men I had the impression of being anchored in the safest of harbors after a hard struggle on the stormy seas.

My mother’s presence was a great comfort to my heart, and those moments seemed like a blissful dream. Like a little boy looking for comfort in familiar objects, I attentively observed her clothes, a perfecto copy of those se used to wear at home. I recognized the dark dress, the blue shawl, the woolen stockings. I gazed at her small head crowned with snow-white hair, at the wrinkles on her face, at her invariably sweet and calm expression. Speechless and trembling with joy, I stroked her hands, while she, stronger that I, spoke serenely:

The Lord never forgets us, my child. We shall never be able to thank Him for all of His kindness. How long our separation has been but you mustn't think that I had forgotten you. Sometimes Providence parts us temporarily so that we may learn Divine Love.

Feeling that her affection was the same as ever, I began to recall again the sting of old grievances. Oh, how difficult it is to get rid of earthly residues. How heavy is the burden of centuries of imperfections! Clarence had often exhorted me to refrain from lamenting. Lysias, too, had spared me his warnings. Yet now, resting in my mother's arms, all my old wounds seemed to bleed again. I started to bitterly recall my past sufferings, and my tears of joy gave away to those of self-pity. I did not realize then that her visit was not to be taken simply for the gratification of my whims, but as one more blessing from Divine Mercy. Relapsing into my old habit of making my mother the patient victim of my endless grievances, I now began to painfully recount all of my past tribulations. On Earth mothers are often merely slaves in their children's eyes. Very rare are those who realize the value of their mother's devotion before being deprived of it. I had been no exception.

My mother listened in silence; her face clouded by an expression of indescribable sadness. Holding me tight to her heart, her eyes full of tears, she spoke tenderly:

Oh, my son, don't complain. Didn't our generous Clarence give you sound advice on that subject? Let's be thankful to our Father for this blessed meeting. Let's never forget we are now in a different school, learning to become true children of God.

As a mother on Earth, I didn't always succeed in guiding you in the best way. Therefore I, too, am working to control my feelings by readjusting my heart. Bu your tears are stirring my old earthly feelings, drawing me back into a path I have already trodden. I should like to believe your complaints justified, to set you up as the most virtuous creature in the Universe, but it would be out of accordance with the new lessons we are learning. In the world one might make allowances for such behavior; here it is quite impossible. We must consider the Lord before everything else. You aren't the only discarnate man redeeming his errors, nor am I the only mother parted from her loved ones. The merit of our suffering, my son, doesn't lie in the tears it makes us shed, nor in the bleeding wounds it inflicts on us, but in the gateway of light it opens up to us. Tears and wounds are only a blessed means of helping us to purify our soul.

After a prolonged pause, during which my conscience addressed me firmly, she resumed:

Why not enjoy these fleeting moments in the sunshine of love, instead of wasting them in the shadows of unhappiness? Let's serve, my child, and serve cheerfully, while at the same time constantly rejoicing in the Lord. Change your mental attitude, I beg you.

Your confidence in my love and your affection for me, bring me sublime happiness, but I can't return to experiences which have passed. We must love each other now with the great and sacred Divine Love.

Those inspiring words awakened me, and I had the impression that my mother's love radiated invigorating fluids which lifted my heart. She gazed at me contentedly, transfigured by a radiant smile, and as I rose and respectfully kissed her forehead, it struck me that I had never before seen her so beautiful and so loving.

16. A Confidential Talk

My mother's words comforted and encouraged me considerably. She prescribed work as a lenitive to my suffering and tribulations, which she regarded as blessings and valuable lessons. An ineffable contentment unexpectedly filled my spirit. In a strange way, those maternal admonitions seemed to give me new strength. I felt a different man more cheerful, lively and happy.

Oh, mother! I said, how wonderful the plane where you live must be! What sublime spiritual thoughts, what bliss!

She smiled knowingly and explained:

A higher sphere, my child, always requires more work and greater devotion. You mustn't imagine that your mother spends her time in spiritual ecstasy, exempt from all meritorious tasks. I don't mean to convey the least shadow of sadness or discontent about the situation in which I find myself, but rather to reveal my new responsibility to you. Since I returned from Earth, I have been working incessantly for our spiritual regeneration. Many entities, on leaving their physical bodies, remain bound to their earthly home, unable to break away from their loved ones. Here, however, I have learned that one who truly loves must work constantly in order to be able to serve. Therefore, since my arrival here, I have been trying hard to obtain the privilege of helping those we so dearly cherish.

And my father, I asked, Where is he? Why hasn't he come with you? My mother's face bore a strange expression as she replied.

Alas, your father. For twelve years he has been caught in a dense section of the shadows of the Lower Zone. On Earth he always gave us the impression of being faithful to family traditions and meticulous in the observance of the ethical code of the upper business circles he belonged to until the end of his days. Outwardly he seemed to possess a strong religious faith, but in reality he was weak, and maintained clandestine liaisons outside our home. Two of his connections were women who were mentally tied with a vast band of evil entities.

When Laertes passed over, his stay in the Lower Zones became extremely painful. The unfortunate creatures to whom he had made vain promises were waiting eagerly to involve him in dark shrouds of illusion. At first he tried to resist, to find me. He couldn't understand that the soul, after parting from its bodily form, will live the life of its essential nature, without false appearances. Laertes, therefore, was unable to sense my spiritual presence or perceive the devoted assistance of some of our friends. Having spent so many years pretending, he had damaged his psychic vision and restricted his vibratory range. Consequently, he found himself alone with those to whom he had thoughtlessly attuned his heart and mind.

For some time the family principles and the pride of our name stirred in the depths of his spirit and he tried to fight against temptation, but finally gave in and was once again attracted into the shadows through his lack of perseverance and of a righteous and proper mental attitude.

But is there no means of snatching him away from such degradation?

I inquired, painfully impressed.

Alas, my child, my mother continued, I visit him frequently, but he doesn't even notice my presence his vibratory potential is still too low. I do my best to attract him to the right path

through inspiration, but the only result I have obtained so far is make him shed a few contrite tears from time to time, without any serious resolutions. The wretched creatures who keep him prisoner intercept all my suggestions. I have been working intensely for many years, and have enlisted the assistance of friends in five different colonies of spiritual activities, including the Astral City. Once, Clarence almost succeeded in attracting him to the Ministry of Regeneration, but failed in the end. One cannot light a lamp that has neither wick nor oil. To raise Laertes and strengthen his spiritual vision, we must count on his mental willingness. Meanwhile the poor thing remains inactive within himself, divided between indifference and rebellion.

After a long pause, she sighed and went on:

Perhaps you don't know yet that your sisters Clara and Priscilla are still bound to the Earth, living in the Lower Zones. You see, I am compelled to attend to everyone's needs. My only direct help has been the affectionate cooperation of your sister Louisa, who passed over when you were still a baby. She waited for me here for many years, and was my right hand in the strenuous tasks of assistance to our earthly family. She fought bravely by my side on behalf of your father, your sisters, and yourself. Lately, however, the spiritual perturbation of our family members still on Earth has been so great that she went back to Earth in a sublime gesture of abnegation, to reincarnate among them. I hope that you will soon be well, so that we may cooperate efficiently in the work of our Lord.

I was staggered by the information about my father. What sort of struggles could he be facing? He had seemed to be a faithful observer of his religious obligations, he went to communion every Sunday Lost in admiration at my mother's devotion, I inquired:

But you are doing everything in your power to help father, in spite of his connections with those disreputable women?

No, son, you mustn't call them that. They are also children of our Almighty Father. Say they are our sisters who are unsound, ignorant and unhappy. I am not interceding on Laertes behalf alone, but also for them, and I think I have found the means of attracting them all to my heart.

I was filled with awe and surprise at such a great manifestation of self-denial. Then I remembered my own family and felt again the old yearning for my dear wife and children. In Clarence's and Lysias presence I had always managed to restrain my feelings and silence all of my questions, but my mother's kind glance gave me courage to speak. Her visit might not last much, so I availed myself of the opportunity, asking:

Couldn't you, who have been assisting father so devoutly, give me some news of Zelia and the children? I long for the moment I can return home to help them, and I'm certain they must miss me as much as I miss them. How my poor wife must be suffering from this separation!

I go and see my grandchildren from time to time, and they are well, she said, smiling sadly. After a few moments reflection, she said:

Don't worry over the assistance to your family. Prepare yourself instead to successfully carry out your mission. There are questions that we must entrust to the Lord by raising our thoughts confidently to Him. Then and only then can we start working to solve them.

Anxious as I was to gather any possible information, I tried to keep my mother on the subject, but she gently changed it. We talked for quite a long time, and her voice seemed to involve me in an atmosphere of sublime comfort. I was curious to know how she lived, so when she took her leave I asked permission to accompany her.

You mustn’t come, my son. I am urgently expected at the transformation chambers in the Ministry of Communication, where I shall be provided with the fluidical means for the return journey. Besides, I must go and thank Minister Celius for the opportunity of paying you this visit.

She kissed me and departed, leaving a lasting sensation of happiness in my heart.

17. Lysias Home

A few days after my mother's unexpected visit, I was summoned to Clarence's office. Surprised, I followed Lysias, who had come to fetch me. I was kindly received by the generous minister, and awaited his orders with pleasant expectation.

My friend, he said amiably, you are henceforth allowed to pay visits of observation to all sections of our activities, except for the Ministries of higher spirituality. Henry de Luna has informed me that your treatment was completed last week, so it is only right that you should now employ your time observing and learning.

I turned to Lysias, eager to share my happiness and was met with an exultant glance. I was simply overjoyed. It was the beginning of a new life. I would be able to join different schools and to do meaningful work. Clarence, judging my happiness, added:

As your stay in the Hospital Park is no longer necessary, I will study the question of your transfer to new lodgings. I will consult some of our institutions.

If possible, Lysias interrupted eagerly, I should very much like him to share our home during his period of observation. My mother would welcome him as another son.

I looked gratefully at my generous companion. Clarence, in his turn, also gave him a look of approval, saying:

Very well, Lysias. Jesus rejoices with us whenever we open our hearts to a new friend.

Unable to express my gratitude in words, I embraced my companion. Great joy can sometimes render us speechless.

Keep this document, Clarence continued, handling me a small folder, it will serve as a permit to admittance to the Ministries of Regeneration, Assistance, Communication and Elucidation for the period of one year. After that, we shall see what else can be done. Don't waste your time, my friend learn all you can. Remember that the intervals between earthly sojourns must be worthily filled.

I left the minister's office elated, arm in arm with Lysias. After a few minutes walk, we arrived at a graceful cottage surrounded by a colorful garden.

Here we are, he announced. He rang a small bell, adding: this is our home within the Astral City. A soft ringing was heard inside the house and pleasant lady opened the door.

Mother, Lysias called out, introducing me, here is the brother I promised you.

Welcome, my friend, she exclaimed hospitably, please consider this house your home.

Embracing me as if I were a true son, she added: I understand that your mother doesn't live here. Therefore, you will have in me a sister, involved in maternal duties.

I did not know how to thank her for her generous welcome. I was about to try, when she quickly interjected:

You are forbidden to mention thanks. Please don't, or you would force me to remember some long-forgotten conventional Earthly phrase for the sake of etiquette.

We all laughed, and I added:

May the Lord receive my gratefulness and pour it on this house as renewed blessings of peace and joy.

We walked in. Everything was simple and comfortable. The furniture and objects were, on the whole, much like those on Earth. There were pictures of deep spiritual significance, an unusually large piano, and resting on it a harp of delicate design. Lysias, ready as usual to satisfy my curiosity, spoke:

As you know, you were not met by harpist angels when you left Earth instead, the harp before you awaits our own abilities.

Now Lysias, stop joking, his mother interrupted affectionately, Do you remember that last year the Ministry of Divine Union invited some of the residents of the Ministry of Elevation to hear some master musicians who passed through our city?

Indeed I do, mother. I only meant to say that harpists really exist, but in order to hear them we must develop our sense of spiritual hearing by striving for the knowledge of divine things.

Later on, after giving some introductory information about myself, I learned that Lysias family came from an old town in the state of Rio de Janeiro, that his mother's name was Laura, and that his two sisters, Yolanda and Judith, lived with him as well. I was delighted at my first experience of domesticity in the Colony. The home atmosphere encouraged a sweet and heart-warming intimacy, and the family's gracious welcome stirred deep emotions in my spirit. As I was filled with questions, my kind hostess showed me some wonderful books. Perceiving my interest, she informed: As for literature, we have an enormous advantage here in the Astral city; All insidious writers, those who use their art to instill psychological poison, go straight to the Lower Zones, and as long as they persist in such a state they cannot stay here, not even in the Ministry of Regeneration.

I could not help smiling as I marveled at the beautiful specimens of photographic art in the books she showed me. Afterwards, Lysias took me around the house, calling my attention to the bathing chamber, which was filled with interesting fixtures everything was so simple, yet so comfortable.

I had hardly gotten over my amazement, when Laura summoned us to prayer. We sat in silence around a big table. As she switched on a large screen, I heard soft music it was the evening service. I saw the familiar image of the Government House, which had captured my attention so often in the Hospital Park. Now, however, a deep and mysterious happiness filled me as the blue heart appeared in the background, and my soul was filled with joy and gratefulness.

18. Love, The Food Of Souls

As soon as the prayer was over, Laura invited me to the evening meal, which consisted of invigorating broth and flagrant fruits which tasted more like a delicious blend of concentrated fluids. I heard Laura remark genially.

After all, our meals here are far more agreeable than they were on Earth. We have some districts which dispense with them together, but in the zone of the Ministry of Assistance we can't do so. Here the heavy tasks we perform consume a great deal of our energy. Hence, we are obligated to be continually making provisions of energy.

That, however, added one of the young ladies, doesn't mean that we who work at the Ministries of Assistance and Regeneration are the only ones to depend on food. The other Ministries, including Divine Union, don't dispense with it. The only difference in the food is the nature of its substance. In Communication and Elucidation, fruit is widely used, while in Elevation, juices and concentrated fluids are more common. As for the Ministry of Divine Union, the process of nutrition goes beyond the imagination.

Eager for immediate explanations, I shifted my gaze from Lysias to his mother. Everybody smiled at my natural perplexity, but Laura satisfied my curiosity:

You may not be aware, my friend, that love is the major sustaining element for all creatures. From time to time, large delegations of instructors come to visit our city in order to convey the principles of spiritual nutrition. Love is the fundamental basis of all systems of nourishment in the different spheres of life. Physical diet, properly considered, is always a question of transitory materiality even here, as in the case of the earthly machines that need grease and oil. Love, and only love, is the source of sustenance for the soul. The more we ascend along the evolutionary plan of Creation, the more thoroughly we understand that great truth. Don't you think that Divine Love is the mainspring of the Universe?

Those explanations comforted me considerably, and Lysias added:

God's infinite love is the center is the center of equilibrium of all Creation; the more evolved the created beings, the subtler their processes of nutrition. The worm in the ground feeds mainly on earth. Larger animals find the necessary elements for nourishment in plants. Man gathers the fruits of these plants and prepares them according to his taste. We, who are already free of our physical bodies, need fluidical, juicy substances. The process becomes even more delicate as we advance in our ascent.

But we mustn't forget the question of vehicles, Laura added, for after all, worms, animals, man and ourselves depend exclusively on love. We all move about in it and no existence would be possible without it. Don't you remember the Gospel lesson which says: Love one another? When Jesus taught this principle, he didn't refer only to charity in its strictest sense, for we shall all have to learn, sooner or later, that the practice of good is simply a duty. He meant us to understand His words in a broader sense, that is, to sustain one another through brotherly love and sympathy. Sometime in the future, man on Earth will discover that friendly words, mutual kindness and trust, understanding and fraternal interest all fruits of deep love are stimulating nourishment to life itself. When on Earth, burdened by a physical body, we are under great limitation. But on returning here we realize that lasting and harmonious happiness is a question of purely spiritual sustenance. Homes, villages, towns and nations are formed in obedience to such principles.

Instinctively I remembered the sex theories so widespread in the physical world, but Laura, recognizing my thoughts, remarked:

You mustn't imagine that it is merely a sexual phenomenon. Sex is a sacred manifestation of universal and divine love, but it is only one of the many expressions of its infinite potential. With the more spiritualized couples, tenderness and trust, mutual devotion and understanding count far more than physical union, which is reduced to merely a transitory activity between them. It is magnetic exchange that establishes the necessary rhythm for the manifestation of harmony. The mere presence of the loved one, and sometimes a simple understanding is sufficient to nourish a feeling of joy.

Availing herself of a lull in the conversation, Judith added:

We learn here in the Astral City that love is the hub of life on Earth; yet most people never realize that important truth. Twin souls, kindred souls, and sympathetic souls form numerous pairs and groups. By gathering together and assisting one another, they succeed in advancing along the road to redemption. When, however, help is lacking, a weaker person usually fails before completing the journey.

As you see, my friend, remarked Lysias, even here we are reminded of the Gospel lesson: Man shall not live by bread alone.

At that point, the conversation was interrupted by the ringing of a bell. Lysias got up and answered the door. Two courteous young men came into the room. He greeted them cordially, introducing them as Polydor and Estacius, from the Ministry of Elucidation. Greetings and handshakes followed, and after a few minutes, Laura said with a smile:

You have all worked hard today. You mustn't, therefore, alter your program on our account. It is time for you to set out on your planned excursion to the Music Park.

Noticing Lysias perturbed look, she added:

Go along, son. Don't keep Lascinia waiting. Our brother Andre will stay with me until he can accompany you on these excursions.

Please don't let me keep you at home! I exclaimed.

I can't yet enjoy the pleasure of going to the Music Park. My granddaughter returned from Earth a few days ago, and is still too weak to go out.

They left, chatting joyfully. Laura shut the door, then turned to me and said:

They are going in search of the food we were talking about just now. The ties of love are stronger and more beautiful here. Love, my friend, is the divine bread of the soul, the sustenance of the heart.

19. The Newcomer

Doesn’t your grand daughter come for meals? I asked Laura, leading the conversation to more intimate channels.

For the present, she takes her meals alone, she answered, the poor thing is still nervous and run-down, and no one in that condition is supposed to partake of collective meals. Neurasthenia and anxiety emit dense, poisonous fluids, which blend immediately with the food. My granddaughter spent a fortnight in the Lower Zones, in heavy slumber, closely assisted by us. She should have been lodged in a hospital pavilion when she came here, but it was decided that she would be placed under my direct care instead.

I told Laura that I would be glad to visit the newcomer, and she willingly agreed. She led me to a spacious and comfortable room where a pale girl was lying in an easy chair. She was extremely surprised to see me as she looked up.

Heloisa, Laura said, introducing me, here is a friend who arrived from Earth a short time ago.

The young lady gazed at me curiously, and her tired, deeply shadowed eyes reflected her effort to concentrate. She greeted me with a wan smile as I introduced myself.

I asked if she was tired, but before she could answer, her grandmother, anxious to spare her any strain, explained:

Heloisa has been restless and worried, and her fear is justified to a certain degree. Tuberculosis, which put an end to her earthly days after long suffering, has left deep traces on her astral body. Still, we must always be optimistic and courageous.

At this, the young lady opened wide her deep, black eyes as if to hold back her tears, but unsuccessfully. Then she covered her face with her handkerchief and began to sob.

Poor little thing! said the kindly grandmother, putting her arms around the tearful girl, you simply must control yourself. These impressions are due to a deficient religious education, that’s all. You know that your mother won’t be long in coming, and that you can’t count on your fiancée’s fidelity. He is by no means prepared to offer you sincere spiritual devotion on Earth, for he is still very far from possessing that sublime spirit of illuminated love. He is sure to marry someone else, and it is better that you become accustomed to this idea. It wouldn’t be fair to insist on his coming here prematurely.

Suppose he did come, forcing the law. Wouldn’t your suffering be greater? Wouldn’t you have to pay a heavy price for any share you might have had in bringing about his passing? You won’t lack devoted friendship and brotherly cooperation to help you acquire your spiritual balance here, and if you really love the boy, you must try to adopt a harmonious attitude to be able to help him later. Besides, as I have already said, your mother will soon be here.

The girl’s tears filled me with pity. I tried to draw her attention to a different topic, leading the conversation away from this painful subject:

Where do you come from? I asked.

Laura, now silent, also seemed anxious to see her join in the conversation. After a long pause, during which she dried her tears, she replied:

From Rio de Janeiro.

You shouldn’t cry so. I advised, You don’t know how lucky you have been. You passed over only a few days ago, and are already with your family. You didn’t have to face any storms on the great journey.

The girl seemed a little better, and said:

You can’t imagine how much I’ve suffered. Eight months struggling with tuberculosis, in spite of all the treatments. The sorrow of having infected my devoted mother All that my poor fiancé went through on my account, it’s really indescribable.

Now, dear, don’t say that, Laura said, smiling, On Earth we always seem to labor under the illusion that no suffering is greater than our own. It is mere blindness there are millions of creatures facing situations much harsher and more cruel than our little experiences.

But grandmother, Arnold was so heart-broken and desperate she answered, It’s all so hard to understand.

Do you really believe in your impressions? Laura asked in a tender voice, I observed your ex-fiancée several times during your infirmity. It was only natural that he should be so deeply affected at seeing the ruin of your physical body. But once more let me tell you, he can’t understand pure sentiment, and will soon get over his sorrow. Remember, dear, that illuminated love is still above most creatures. Therefore, you must try to be of good cheer. No doubt you will be able to help him, but his being faithful to your memory is out of the question. When you are in a condition to visit the spheres of the planet, you will find him married to somebody else.

Wondering myself, I noted Heloisa’s painful surprise. The poor girl did not know what attitude to adopt before her grandmother’s serenity and common sense.

Could that be possible? she blurted out.

Lysias mother, tenderly stroking the girl’s hair, continued:

Now, child, you mustn’t be obstinate or try to contradict me.

Seeing that her granddaughter seemed to expect her to justify her words, she went on, speaking gently:

Do you remember Maria da Luz, the college friend who brought you flowers every Sunday? Well, when the doctor declared confidentially that your physical cure could not be expected, Arnold, though deeply grieved, began to involve her in different mental vibrations. And now that you are here, they won’t take long before coming to an agreement.

Oh, grandmother! How Awful!

Why awful? You must become accustomed to considering other people’s needs. Your ex-fiancée is an ordinary man, still unable to appreciate the sublime beauty of spiritual love. However great your love may be, you can’t work miracles in him. Every creature holds the exclusive privilege of discovering his own self. Arnold will, one day, know the beauty of your idealism, but for the present he must be left to live through these necessary experiences.

I simply can’t get over it! Maria da Luz, whom I always considered a most faithful friend.

Laura smiled and advised wisely:

Won’t it be better to entrust him to a friend? Maria da Luz will always be your spiritual friend, whereas another woman might, later, render the entrance to his heart difficult for you.

Heloisa started sobbing again. I felt greatly puzzled. The kind lady, sensing my perplexity, and eager to help me as well as her granddaughter, explained:

I know the cause of your tears, little one, they are the result of centuries of selfishness and undying vanity. But remember that Grandma's words aren't meant to hurt you, but to open your eyes.

While Heloisa continued weeping, Laura invited me to go back to the living room, remarking that the patient needed her rest. We sat down to await the others return, and Laura confided in a soft voice:

My granddaughter arrived here extremely tired. She let her heart get entangled in the web of self-esteem. In fact, she should have been sent to one of our hospitals, but Assistant Couceiro thought that the home atmosphere and our loving care would be advisable in her case. I must say I was pleased at his decision, as my dear Thereza, her mother, will soon be here. A little patience and everything will come out right. It's just a question of time and serenity.

20. Notions About The Home

Eager to learn as much as possible from my well-informed hostess, I asked curiously:

With so much to do at home, do you still go out to work?

I certainly do. We live in a colony of transition, which has as its main purpose apprenticeship and work. Here feminine souls are assigned numerous tasks, in preparation for their return to the planet or their ascent to higher spheres.

But is domestic organization in the Astral City similar to that on Earth?

It's the Earthly home which has, for so long, been trying to imitate our domestic institution. Married couples there, with rare exceptions, are still weeding the soil of their feelings, overrun with the bitter herbs of pride and infested with the parasites of jealousy and selfishness. The last time I returned from the planet I arrived here, as is natural, beset by deep illusions. But it happened that during my crisis of wounded pride, I was taken to a lecture given by a great instructor from the Ministry of Elucidation. Since that day, a new current of ideas has penetrated my mind.

Could you tell me something of the lessons you received?

The lecturer, she continued, a great mathematician, made us realize that, on the plane of spiritual evolution, the home may be compared to a right angle. The vertical line is the feminine sentiment, always gravitating towards the creative inspirations of life. The horizontal line is the masculine mentality, always striving for achievements towards the common progress. The home is the sacred summit, the converging point where man and woman meet to bring about an essential understanding. It is the temple where creatures should reach for a spiritual communion, rather than bodily union.

At present there are a great many people on Earth versed in social questions, who advocate various measures and call for a regeneration of domestic life. Some go so far as to state that the family institution is threatened. We must remember that the home is a sublime conquest which mankind is slowly achieving. But can one find, on Earth, the real family structure where all rights and duties are legitimately shared?

Most earthly couples pass these sacred hours together in an environment of indifference and cruel selfishness. When the husband appears calm, the wife gives herself up to crises of despair; When the wife keeps humbly silent, her husband tyrannizes her. Neither does the wife attempt to encourage her husband along the horizontal line of his temporal fulfillment, nor does he try to follow his companion in her divine flights of tenderness and sentiment towards the higher planes o Creation. In their social contacts, both wear masks, but in the privacy of their home they strip them off, sadly exposing their lack of mutual understanding.

"As a rule, when one of them comments on his or her respective activities, the other's attention promptly strays far from the subject. When the wife discusses the children, the husband mentally turns his thoughts to his work. When the latter relates some business difficulty, the former's thoughts drift to the dressmaker's fitting room. In these circumstances, it's obvious that the divine angle is far from being properly traced. Two diverging lines are endeavoring in vain to form the sublime vertex, to ascend one more step up the glorious stairway leading to eternal life."

This new aspect of the responsibility of marriage ties struck deep into my spirit. Highly impressed, I exclaimed:

“What a multitude of thoughts this explanation is arousing in me! If we only knew all this while still on Earth!”

“A mere question of experience, my friend,” she replied, “suffering and tribulations will slowly teach mankind these unavoidable lessons. At present, few realize that the home is a divine institution, within which one must live with all one’s heart and soul. It’s often said that all creatures are beautiful when truly in love. Indeed, this is true. During the enchanting period of betrothal, plain creatures display their most charming traits. Any subject seems enchanting even in the most frivolous conversation. Man and woman meet, radiating the full measure of their sublime forces. But when they enter wedlock, many rend the veil of desire and fall back under the influence of the old monsters that tyrannize weak hearts. Gone is all tolerance, and sometimes even brotherly cooperation. The luminous beauty of love gradually dies out, and the couple begins to drift apart, avoiding each other’s company, losing the joy of friendly conversation. Henceforth, the well-educated ones respect each other, while the ill-bred ones outwardly manifest their mutual animosity. They don’t try to come to a conciliatory understanding; questions and answers are formulated in dry phrases. Physical intercourse may still be carried on, but the minds are already divorced and following opposite directions.”

“How true your words are!” I cried out with feeling.

“But what can we do, my friend?” my kind hostess continued, “In the present phase of the planet’s evolution, unions between twin souls are rare, and marriages of kindred or even sympathetic souls are tremendously outweighed by a remarkable percentage of ‘probation ties’. Most human couples are made up, so to speak, of handcuffed prisoners.” Endeavoring to follow the trend of ideas suggested by my initial question, Lysias’ mother continued:

“Feminine souls do not remain inactive here. They are trained to become worthy mothers, wives, sisters, missionaries. The woman’s task in the home cannot be confined to a few idle tears of pity and many years of servitude. Of course, today’s rash feminist movement is a grievous offense to the true attributes of the feminine spirit. Women aren’t meant to set themselves up as rivals to men in offices, an in the different professions and business departments, which are adequate fields for masculine activities. Nevertheless, we are taught here in our colony that there are many dignifying tasks outside the home which are compatible with the feminine sensibility, including nursing, teaching, textile manufacturing, communications, and all kinds of occupations which require patience. Man should learn to endow the domestic circle with the fruit of his experiences, while woman should lighten the burden of man’s hard work giving the home her sweetness and an inspiring atmosphere. Within the family circle, inspiration, outside it, activity. You can’t have one without the other. How could a river feed its flow if it were not for the source? On the other hand, how could the water of the source flow on without the river bed?”

I couldn’t help smiling at that question. After a prolonged pause, Laura resumed the conversation:

“Whenever the Ministry of Assistance entrusts children to my care here in my house, my working hours are counted as doubled. That will give you an idea of the importance of the task of motherhood on Earth. However, when I am not thus occupied at home, I have my daily tasks in the Nursing Department. Apart from my granddaughter, who is still recovering, there are no members of our family at leisure; they are all engaged in worthy activities. Eight hours of work per day is an easy program for anyone. I should feel ashamed if I didn’t do my part.”

As she fell silent for a few moments, my thoughts ran on the same interesting topic....

21. Interesting Conversation

“Your words, Laura, arouse many questions. If you will pardon my curiosity....”

“Please don’t say that,” she answered kindly, “go on asking. Although I am not in a condition to teach, I can always inform....”

We both laughed at her remark, and then I inquired: “What about the problem of private property in the Colony? Does this house, for instance, belong to you?”

She smiled as she answered:

Private property is relative here just as it is on Earth. Our acquisitions are made on the basis of working hours. The hour-bonus is, so to speak, our money. It is earned by our own effort and devotion, and may be exchanged for any commodity. The buildings, in general, represent common patrimony under government control. However, each spirit family may obtain a dwelling house (never more than one) on the presentation of thirty thousand hour-bonus, which may be obtained during a certain period of work.

My husband, who arrived here long before me, acquired our house through his persevering efforts. We were physically separated for eighteen years, though we remained united spiritually. Richard, however, didn’t remain inactive. As soon as he was brought to the Astral City, after a period of extreme perturbation, he realized the necessity of active work, and set out to prepare our future home. When I arrived, we settled together in the house for which he had so lovingly labored, and we were truly happy. My husband then set out to teach me all that he had learned.

On Earth I was left a widow when I was still very young. With the heavy responsibility of several children to raise, my struggle was intense. Working incessantly, I gave my little ones the best education I could, although they, too, had to become accustomed to hard work at an early age. I understood later that strenuous life had sheltered me against many dangerous temptations, sparing me much suffering and anguish in the Lower Zone. Physical fatigue and a healthy occupation on the material plane are valuable means of protection and ascension for the soul.

Meeting Richard again and resuming our loving union in a new home made me feel as if I were in heaven. For many years we led a life on undisturbed bliss, growing closer and closer to each other, and working, not only for our own evolution, but also cooperating constructively for the progress of others. After some time Lysias, Yolanda and Judith came to join us, thus increasing our happiness.

After a short pause, during which she seemed wrapped in thought, she proceeded in a more serious tone:

The Earth awaits us, however. Though the present is joyful, the past demands restitution in order for the future to be in harmony with the Eternal Law. We can’t pay our debts to the Earth with hour-bonus; we have to do it with the sweat of our brow in the fulfillment of its work. Because of our good will, our psychic visions are becoming clearer about our grievous past. The Eternal Law with its unfailing rhythm renders our return to the planet an absolute necessity.

These elucidations impressed me deeply. It was the first time since my arrival in the Colony that I had heard such forceful references to the subject of former lives.

Laura, I exclaimed; pardon me for interrupting, but I really am curious to know why, to this point, I haven't found out anything about my spiritual past. Am I free from physical bonds? Haven't I crossed the river of death? Did you remember your former existences soon after your arrival here, or did you have to wait for the action of time?

I certainly had to wait. She replied with a smile. First you must rid yourself of all physical impressions. The scales of inferiority are extremely thick, and you must have a good mental balance to be able to recollect constructively. As a rule, we all have made clamorous errors in the cycles of eternal life. He who keeps the memory of a crime committed considers himself the unhappiest creature of the universe. On the other hand, he who remembers having been a victim thinks his misfortune is the greatest. So only souls who are sure of themselves are endowed with such a gift as the power of spontaneous recollection. Others are duly limited in their reminiscences, and if they attempt to break this rule, they may incur spiritual imbalance and insanity.

But did you remember your past in the natural course of things?

I'll tell you, she went on patiently, As my inner vision became gradually clearer, vague recollections began stirring in the depths of my mind, causing me great mental anguish. It happened that my husband also shared my spiritual condition, so we decided to consult Assistant Longbard. After having examined our impressions thoroughly, he sent us to the magnetizers in the Ministry of Elucidation. We were kindly received, and were taken to the Recording Department, where we all have our private files. Specialists of that Ministry advised us to spend all the time we could spare from our work for two years there, reading our own memoirs which spanned three centuries. The director of the Recollection Service wouldn't allow us to go back beyond that time because the remembrance of those distant epochs would be too much for us.

And were the memoirs enough to help you remember your past?

No, the reading gave us only facts. After a long period of meditation meant to arouse our own inner realization, we were submitted, to our great surprise, to a series of psychic treatments geared at penetrating deeply into the emotional field of our recollections. Specialists in the subject applied magnetic passes[7] over our brains, arousing certain latent forces in us. Only then could Richard and I fully remember over three hundred years and realize how heavy our debts to earthly organizations still were.

[7] Magnetic passes is a method by which an operator using both hands, rhythmically applies stroking movements, slightly away from the body, to manipulate the subject's magnetic field. (Translator's note).

22. The Hour-Bonus

Perceiving that a sad expression had veiled Laura's face at the mention of her husband, I changed the course of our conversation by inquiring: What about the hour-bonus? Is it some kind of currency? My hostess vague expression vanished, and she replied graciously:

It isn't exactly money it's more of an individual service coupon with acquisitive value.

Acquisitive? I asked wonderingly.

Why not? she continued, Here in the Astral City the production of food and clothing belongs to the community. The Government House runs distribution departments from which these commodities are sent to the different Ministries. The central storehouse is common property.

Everyone cooperates for the prosperity of the public welfare, as we all depend on it for our sustenance. However, those who work are granted certain privileges according to their merits. Each of the City's inhabitants receives the strictly essential provision of food and clothing, but those who earn hour-bonus are entitled to certain prerogatives in the community.

The entity who cannot work may find shelter here, but only those who cooperate for the Colony's welfare may own their own private home. The idle will be provided with the essential clothing, but devoted workers will be able to satisfy their taste in dress. You see, inactive entities may, through the influence of friends, be lodged in our rest-homes or hospital-parks; however, only hard-working spirits who strive to gain hour-bonuses may enjoy the company of those they love, and attend places of entertainment and the different schools existing in all the ministries where precious teachings are delivered by wise instructors.

It is necessary for us to learn the price of each improvement in the scale of spiritual ascent. All of us on the working staff of the colony must contribute at least eight hours of useful service per day. But there is so much to be done in the different sectors that the Government House allows those who are really willing to cooperate to put in four extra hours a day. Thus, many people earn as much as seventy two hour-bonuses a week, not counting those earned in sacrificial missions when remuneration is doubled and sometimes tripled.

But is the hour-bonus the only standard of remuneration?

Yes, it is the only one we have here, and it is applied to all workers in the Astral City, in both high and low positions.

Recalling earthly organizations, I inquired curiously:

But how can you reconcile the payment with the nature of the work? If a minister, for instance, receives eight hour-bonuses in an ordinary day, what will a driver receive? The same compensation? Isn't the former work of a higher nature than the latter s?

My hostess smiled at my question and explained:

It all depends. In positions of responsibility as well as in humble ones, if the work requires self-sacrifice and abnegation, the corresponding remuneration is properly calculated. However, to give a more thoughtful answer to your question, it's first necessary to discard certain earthly prejudices altogether. The nature of work is a problem of the utmost importance, but only on Earth does its solution present such great difficulties.

Most incarnate men are still trying their first steps in the spirit of service and learning simple, elementary lessons in the performance of their missions in the different walks of life. It's essential that earthly remunerations be fixed with scrupulous care. All material earnings are but transitory acquisitions. Yet we often see people obsessed by profit, who, on passing over, leave enormous fortunes to be recklessly dissipated by their heirs. Others accumulate bank accounts that become the cause of endless worries to themselves and a source of discord in their families.

On the other hand, we must keep in view the fact that seventy percent of the earthly executives are still far from being conscious of the moral responsibilities inherent to their positions, and that the same may be said of an approximately equal percentage of those toiling under their direction. The majority of them spend their lives pleading lack of professional enthusiasm, yet it would never enter their heads to doubt their right to the remunerations corresponding to the positions they so inadequately hold.

Governments and firms employ doctors, who neglect their sacred duty, turning to other channels of activity instead. Workmen pride themselves in wasting the time for which they are paid. Where is the quality of work? In all sectors of public life, in both high and low positions, one finds experts who have never fully realized the responsibility of their obligations, and who, like poisonous flies on bread, avail themselves of magnanimous laws to claim all sorts of facilities, bonuses, and pensions. You may be sure, however, that they will pay a bitter price for their carelessness. The time seems to be still distant when the Earth's social institutions will be able to evaluate the quality of man's work, but in the higher spirit plane, work is never assessed without taking into consideration the moral effort exerted.

These words awakened a new train of thoughts in my mind. Seeing how interested I was in the subject, Laura continued to speak:

The real profit must be of a spiritual nature, and in our organization the actual value of the hour-bonus varies according to the nature of the work performed. Thus, in the Ministry of Regeneration we have the Regeneration hour-bonus, in the Ministry of Elucidation we have the Elucidation hour bonus, and so on. Spiritual merit is always taken into account, so our individual service files specify the essence of our work.

Fundamental acquisitions include experience and education, an increase in divine blessing, and the extension of opportunities. According to that point of view, assiduity and abnegation are by far the most important factors. As a rule, most of us in this Colony of transition go through a time of preparation for our return to the Earth. Hence, it's obvious that a man who devoted five thousand hours to redeeming tasks should have achieved a great measure of sublime effort on his own behalf; one who worked six thousand hours in the Ministry of Elucidation will have become wiser. We may spend our bonuses as we please; however, our individual file with its record of the time we spend in useful service, is still a more valuable asset to us, as it entitles us to all sorts of privileges.

My curiosity seemed to know no bounds as I continued to ask questions on the subject:

May we spend hour-bonuses on behalf of friends?

Certainly, she answered, we may share the fruit of our efforts with whomever we please. It's every faithful worker's inalienable right. Thousands and thousands of people here in the Astral City have benefited from the fruits of friendship and brotherly devotion.

Lysias mother smiled as she continued her observations:

The longer our period of useful service, the greater the number of intercessions we are allowed. Here, we cannot help realizing that everything has its price, and that in order to

receive we must give. Asking, therefore, is a most significant thread in the fabric of our lives, for only those who have attained a certain spiritual status are in the position to ask favors and dispense help.

And what about inheritance? I inquired abruptly.

It's a simple matter here, she replied with a smile, For instance, in my own case, the time is drawing near when I shall have to return to the physical sphere. Well, I possess at the present moment in my service account, three thousand Assistance hour-bonuses. I may not leave them to my daughter who is about to arrive, as they will have to revert to the community. The only thing my family will inherit is the home. However, my service record entitles me to intercede on her behalf, procuring work and friendly cooperation for her, and precious assistance for myself from our colony's organizations during my stay on the physical sphere. Besides, I shall return to Earth endowed with a higher degree of experience, acquired during my years of cooperation in the Ministry of Assistance, which should contribute to the hoped-for success of my new human existence.

I was about to express my admiration for the simple process of earning, profiting, cooperating and serving, in comparison with the prevailing principles on Earth, when I heard the low murmur of voices approaching the house. Before I could make my remark, Laura declared:

Here are our dear ones back.

And she went to welcome them.

23. The Art Of Listening

I could not help feeling sorry that our talk was interrupted, for Laura's elucidations were most stimulating. Lysias had come back in evident good spirits:

Hello! Haven't you retired yet? He asked with a smile. While the two young men took their leave, he invited me cordially to come down to the garden.

You haven't seen the moonlight from this side of town. He said.

While Laura talked with her daughters, I followed Lysias into the garden. It was really a magnificent sight. Accustomed as I was to the hospital grounds, which were secluded among large trees, I had not yet hat the opportunity to contemplate the wonderful spectacle of a moonlit night from the spacious quarters gloxinias of the Ministry of Assistance. Exquisitely colored gloxinias enhanced the beauty of the scenery and provided a vivid background for fragrant, snow-white lilies, which were slightly tinged with blue at the base of their cups.

I drew in deep breaths feeling a wave of new energy fill my whole being. In the distance rose the towers of the Government House, bathed in a beautiful display of lights. I was hushed into admiration and only after some time did I manage to speak at all:

"What a night! I have never experienced such peace!"

Lysias smiled and explained:

"All the well-balanced inhabitants of the Colony have pledged to avoid emitting negative currents of thought. Thus the effort of the majority merges into an almost continual prayer, hence the atmosphere of peace all around us."

For some time we gazed in wonder at the soul-stirring scenery, trying to absorb the night's opalescent light and soothing calm. Then we returned to the living room, where Lysias approached a small, radio-like apparatus. My curiosity was instantly aroused, and I wondered what we were going to hear. Messages from the Earth? My kind friend, reading my thoughts, explained:

"We aren't going to hear any voices from the planet. Our broadcasts here are based on vibratory currents far more subtle than those on Earth."

"But are there no means," I inquired, "of picking up broadcasts from Earth?"

"Of course there are, and they do it in all the Ministries. But in our homes we must concern ourselves only with our present condition and activities. After all, the work programs in the different departments, the tidings from higher spheres, and lofty teachings are much more important to us than any earthly problems."

The remark was just, but, still bound by domestic ties, I insisted:

"Do you really think so? What about our relatives left behind? Our parents? Our children?"

"I was expecting that question. You see, my friend, on the material plane, we often misinterpret situations. Most of us suffer from emotional hypertrophy. There on Earth we are slaves to exclusivism and inclined to limit our family to those bound to us by blood ties. We go through life heedless of the true principles of brotherhood, and although we preach them to everyone, when it comes to putting our beliefs into practice, nothing counts but our own flesh and blood. Here, however, life presents a different aspect. We have to conquer our old weaknesses and rectify injustices.

“We are told that in the early days of the Colony, every home possessed the necessary equipment to pick up broadcasts from the physical sphere. Everybody insisted on hearing news of his earthly relations, so that, from the Ministry of Regeneration to that of Elevation, the city’s inhabitants lived with their nerves on edge. Disturbing rumors interfered with the good order of activities in general. Sometimes whole families were thrown into a state of utter confusion because of bad tidings from their dear ones still on Earth. When collective catastrophes on Earth in any way affected those lodged in the Colony, they assumed the proportion of public calamities. According to our records, the city was more like a purgatorial zone than the place of rest and instruction it was meant to be.”

The late Governor was perhaps a little too tolerant, and, as you know, indiscriminate kindness engenders indiscipline and failure. But two centuries ago one of the devoted Ministers of the Divine Union urged the Governor to change that deplorable situation. Supported by the Ministry, the Governor forbade the widespread communications with Earth. There was great opposition, but the generous Minister who had introduced the measure called to witness Jesus’ teaching - let the dead bury their dead, and in a short time the innovation was successfully implemented.”

“Still,” I insisted, “It would be most comforting to have news of our dear ones on Earth. Wouldn’t we feel more at rest?’

Lyaisias, who had been standing by the receiver without turning it on, continued his explanation:

“Now, take yourself as an example to see whether that would be wise. Would you be prepared, for instance, to hear that a beloved son was maligning another, or being maligned himself? Would you maintain the necessary serenity, waiting with faith and acting in accordance with the divine precepts? If someone informed you that one of your brothers had just been imprisoned as a criminal, would you be strong enough to keep calm?”

I smiled disappointedly.

“We shouldn’t try to look for news from lower spheres,” Lysias continued obligingly, “except when we are able to render a just service. We must always keep in mind that no one can help justly and efficiently when under emotional or mental stress. So we have to go through suitable preparation before risking any new contacts with our earthly relations. If they offered an adequate field for spiritual love, the exchange would be worthwhile. But unfortunately the overwhelming majority of incarnate people has not yet attained even a moderate degree of self-control. Most of them lead haphazard lives, drifting with the high and low tides of their material conditions. In spite of our sentiments, we must avoid being drawn into low vibratory spheres.”

Giving evidence of my stubbornness, I still argued the point:

But Lysias, your father is back on Earth. Wouldn’t you like to communicate with him?

“Of course,” he answered kindly, “whenever we deserve the joy, and the contact between us is considered opportune, we visit him in his new physical body. But we mustn’t forget that we are fallible creatures, and as such should refer to the competent departments and let them decide about the opportunity and merit of such visits.

“That specialized work is done by the Ministry of Communication. Besides, it’s well remember that although it is easier to descend from a higher to a lower sphere than the other way around, there are certain principles regulating communication between the different spheres that must be taken into consideration. They tell us that a through understanding of those sill in the lower zones is essential to render them adequate help. It’s just as important to

know how to speak as to know how to listen. This Colony was in a constant state of unrest because its inhabitants, not knowing how to listen, were unable to help efficiently. Thus, the spiritual atmosphere here was often sadly impaired."

At hose irrefutable arguments, I lapsed into a brooding silence, while Lysias turned on the receiver under my watchful eye.

24. A Soul-Stirring Appeal

Soft music floated into the room, soothing us with its melodious cadence, while on the screen we saw the announcer in his studio. In a few moments, he began to speak:

“This is Station Two, ‘Residence’. Our colony continues to broadcast its appeal for peace on Earth. We urge all workers of good will to muster their energy to help maintain the moral balance on the Earth. Please, all who can spare a few hours to cooperate in the border zones that connect the dark forces of the Lower Zone to the human mind, help us. Dark bands of ignorant entities, after having left a bloody trail of war in Asia, are laying siege to the European nations, urging them on to new crimes. Our colony, together with all those dedicated to the work of spiritual hygiene in the spheres nearest to the Earth, denounce this onset of the concentrated powers of evil, and request brotherly collaboration and all possible help. Remember that the cause of peace needs defenders! Join in and cooperate with us to the best of your abilities. There is work for everyone, from the regions of the Earth to our very gates! May the Lord bless us!”

The voice silenced and again I heard the celestial melody. The impressive tones of that call stirred my very soul. Lysias hastened to my aid with his usual explanations:

“We are listening to ‘Residence’, an old colony closely connected with the Lower Zones. As you know, it is August, 1939. All the suffering you have gone through lately has left you little time to ponder the grave situation on Earth. But you can see that the Earth’s nations are facing the eminent threat of a tremendous war.”

“Really?” I asked, awed, “But wasn’t there enough bloodshed in the last World War?”

Lysias smiled and looked at me in silence as if lamenting the gravity of the problem. It was the first time that he did not respond to my question. His silence was strange. The immensity of the spiritual services in my new plane of life overwhelmed me. Were there, cities of generous spirits asking for assistance and cooperation? The voice of the speaker was presented in the tone of an S.O.S. His run-down appearance showed on our screen, and his disquieted eyes betrayed his deep anxiety. And the language? I distinctly heard him speak in clear and correct Portuguese. I had thought that all the spiritual colonies communicated through thought vibrations. Were there, then, such great difficulties in the interchange? Seeing my bewilderment, Lysias explained:

“We are still far from the ideal regions of the mind. As on Earth, those who are in perfect harmony with each other may communicate through thoughts, without any of the barriers of speech; but generally, we cannot dispense with the linguistic form in a broad sense. Our area of battle is immeasurable. Earthly humanity, made up of millions of beings, is united with the invisible humanity of the planet, which numbers in the billions. It would be impossible to reach the more perfect zones, right after physical death. Our national and linguistic heritage remain with us, and our thoughts are restricted within our psychic borders. In different sectors or our activities there are a great number of spirits free from all limitations, but we mustn’t forget that nothing escapes the principles of sequence at work in the laws of evolution.”

Meanwhile, the music stopped and the speaker returned:

“This is ‘Residence’, Station Two. The colony continues to broadcast its appeal on behalf of peace on Earth. Dark clouds are gathering over the skies of Europe. Forces of darkness from the Lower Zone, attracted by the base tendencies of mankind are spreading in all directions.

Devoted benefactors are stationed in political offices, struggling and making great sacrifices on behalf of international harmony. Some governments, however, are too centralized, and offer few possibilities for spiritual collaboration. These countries, deprived of serene and dispassionate counsel, are moving towards a great and terrible war. Oh, beloved brothers of the higher spheres, let us help to preserve peace on Earth. Let us help to defend centuries of experience of the numerous centers of Western Civilization! May the Lord bless us."

After a short silent, and I did not dare speak. After five minutes of the shooting music, the voice continued:

"This is 'Residence', Station Two. The colony continues to broadcast its appeal on behalf of peace on Earth. Fellow workers and brothers, let us invoke the protection of the powerful Fraternities of Light which preside over the destinies of America! Help us in the preservation of ancient rescue of the defenseless communities - let us sustain the anguished hearts of countless mothers. All our forces are concentrated on the tremendous fight against the legions of ignorance. Give us all the help you can! We are the invisible part of Earthly mankind, and many of us will soon return to the physical sphere to make restitution for past errors. Incarnate humanity is also our family. Let us all unite in one single vibration. We must check the advance of darkness with floods of light, and ward off the blows of Evil with the shield of Good. Rivers of blood and tears are threatening to flow over the fields of Europe. Let us proclaim the necessity of constructive work and expand our faith... May the Lord bless us!"

The broadcast was over, and Lysias turned off the receiver. I saw him discreetly away a tear which he could not hold back. With an expressive gesture, he exclaimed:

"What devoted workers our brothers of 'Residence' are. However," he added sadly with a pause, "everything will be useless. Soon Earthly humanity will be facing tremendous suffering."

"But is there no possibility of averting this catastrophe?" I asked, greatly moved.

"Unfortunately, replied Lysias in a grave tone of voice, "the general state of affairs is exceedingly critical. In answer to the appeals of 'Residence' and other colonies working in the neighborhood of the Lower Zone, several meetings were held here. But the Ministry of Divine Union has already warned us that war is unavoidable because incarnate humanity, taken collectively, is like an insatiable person who has overeaten at a banquet - the organic crisis which follows is inevitable. Various nations have had an orgy of criminal pride, boastfulness and ferocious selfishness. Now they are experiencing the urgent need to expel these lethal poisons."

Anxious to drop the painful subject, Lysias invite me to retire.

25. A Generous Initiative

Early the following morning we shared a light meal in Lysias home. As her children were about to take their leave and go off to their jobs, Laura announced to me cheerfully:

I have arranged company for you today. Raphael, an old friend of ours who works at the Ministry of Regeneration, will call for you at my request. You may accompany him to the Ministry, and there he will introduce you to Minister Genesius in my name.

I could find no words to express my gratitude. I was radiant. Lysias was also pleased, and embraced me warmly on leaving. On kissing her son goodbye, Laura recommended that Lysias tell Minister Clarence that she would be along as soon as Raphael came for me. Her generosity touched me deeply, leaving me tongue-tied with emotion. When we were alone, my devoted hostess addressed me kindly:

My brother, new paths are opening to you today. Since your mother doesn't live with us here in the Astral City, I hope you won't mind my taking her place in this moment to offer you a little motherly advice.

Indeed, I am most grateful. I exclaimed, moved, I shall never be able to express the extent of my appreciation for your kindness.

Laura smiled and added:

I heard that you asked for work some time ago.

Yes, yes, I did I agreed, remembering Clarence's words on the subject.

I also know that you didn't obtain it then, but instead were given permission to visit different Ministries which connect us more with the Earth.

It is in this regard that, pleading my greater experience, I would like to offer you a few suggestions. Now that you are finally allowed to frequent different departments of work as a preliminary stage of apprenticeship, try to curb, as much as possible, all impulses of mere curiosity. Don't be like a moth, fluttering about from light to light.

I realize that the sense of intellectual search is very strong in you. As a studious physician, always in quest of new discoveries and problems, it wouldn't be difficult in your present position to drift along undesirable channels. Remember that there are many lessons to be learned far more precious and beneficial than mere analysis of things. Even a healthy curiosity, may, at times, be dangerous. Resolute, loyal spirits may overcome these obstacles and accomplish edifying tasks, but the timid and inexperienced ones may encounter pain and bitterness.

Clarence has offered you a permit to visit the Ministries, beginning with Regeneration. Instead of giving vent to your curiosity, study the different lines of activities with searching attention, and lend a willing hand at the first opportunity should you be offered a chance to render a service, however humble, in this Ministry. Don't worry about acquainting yourself with the routine of the other Ministries. Try to gain the goodwill of all those around you, bearing in mind that the spirit of investigation should always be second to the spirit of service. To pry into one's neighbors occupations without possessing the due credentials of good service might be considered a great impertinence. Numerous failures in material achievements have their roots in such anomalies. Everyone is ready to be a spectator, yet rare

are those willing to accomplish something. Nothing but edifying work endows the spirit with the indispensable merit to claim any new prerogatives.

There is plenty of hard work in the Ministry of Regeneration, because the lowest region of our spiritual colony is located there. All groups of generous entities entrusted with the most arduous missions are recruited from its working staff. But those lowly tasks are in no way humiliating. Remember that in all our planes, from the Earth to the highest spheres in the most spiritually evolved zones, in relation to the planet Earth, the greatest worker is the Master Jesus Himself, and He wasn't ashamed to wield a heavy saw in a carpenter's shop. Minister Clarence has kindly allowed you to learn, analyze and appreciate these values, but you may, as a wise worker, convert this period of observation into a stage of useful service. Those in authority may justly refuse a request for some special line of work whose practice is legitimately reserved for those who are duly qualified for it through great efforts and much suffering, but they will most certainly accept cooperation of the spirit of goodwill, from those anxious to serve in any capacity.

These words, spoken in an affectionate motherly voice, sank into my heart like soothing balm. Seldom in my life had I met such a deep, brotherly interest for my fate. Deeply affected by this wise exhortation, I listened with moist eyes. As if anxious to temper the seriousness of her warning, Laura added encouragingly:

The ability to begin anew is one of the most sublime lessons we may learn. Very few indeed are those who fully understand it and extremely rare are the incarnate men who distinguish themselves in that line. We must remember, however, the name of Paul of Tarsus. A learned member of the Sanhedrin, and the hope of his people and enjoying an enviable position in Jerusalem, one day retired into the desert to begin his human experience again as a humble weaver.

I could no longer contain myself and took both her hands in mine like a son, and covered them with my grateful tears. Lysias mother, gazing into the distance spoke softly:

I am also grateful, my brother. I believe you weren't brought into this house by a blind stroke of fate. We are all bound by secular ties of affection. I shall soon return to the physical sphere, but we shall continue united by the bonds of our hearts. I hope to see you busy and happy before my departure.

Please remember that this house is your home. Work with good cheer and put your trust in God.

I raised my eyes to her kind face and experienced the joy that is born of a pure spiritual friendship. I had the impression of having known her as a devoted friend for a long time, although I tried in vain to place her among my earliest recollections. Grateful, I felt like kissing her again and again, but just then there was a knock at the door. With a look of maternal affection, Laura said:

It must be Raphael coming for you. Go now, my friend, and think of Jesus. Work hard for the good of others. It is the only way of finding your own.

26. New Perspectives

Turning over the wise suggestions of Lysias mother in my mind, I left with Raphael certain that I was about to begin, not the prospective visits of observation, but a term of apprenticeship and useful service.

I noted with surprise the imposing beauty of the new district we passed through on our way to where I was to be introduced to Minister Genesius. I was not in my usual inquisitive mood I experienced instead a form of mental activity which was new to me and I followed Raphael in silence.

Rapt in fervent prayer, I besought Jesus to assist me in these new ways, so that I might not lack work and the strength to accomplish it. Adverse as I had formerly been to the practice of prayer, I now turned to it as a valuable sentimental mainstay to my determination to serve. From time to time, Raphael cast a curious look at me, as if he did not expect such an attitude on my part.

The airbus stopped in front of a large building and we descended in silence. In a few minutes we were shown into the Minister's office. Genesius was an affable old man, whose countenance revealed uncommon energy. Raphael introduced me kindly.

"Oh, yes!" said the gracious minister, "So, this is our brother Andre?"

"At your service." I answered.

"Laura has told me about your coming. Please, don't stand upon ceremony."

Meanwhile, Raphael respectfully took his leave and gave me an encouraging handshake. He left hurriedly, as he was urgently expected at his work. Genesius then turned his clear eyes to me and said:

"Clarence has already mentioned you with interest. The Ministry of Assistance frequently sends us groups of its residents on visits of observation, which, as a rule, are transformed into periods of service."

I understood his subtle allusion, and replied:

"That's exactly what I greatly desire. I have prayed for the Divine Forces to assist my feeble spirit, so that my stay in this Ministry might also be converted into a period of apprenticeship."

My words seemed to have touched Genesius; therefore, availing myself of the moment, I begged them:

"Worthy Minister, I realize now that my passage through the Ministry of Assistance was due exclusively to God's mercy, perhaps in answer to my devoted mother's constant intercessions. But I also realize that up to the present moment I have received innumerable benefits without offering the least useful retribution. Surely my place is here amidst the redeeming activities. Please, if possible, let my permission to visit be transformed into the possibility to serve. Now I understand as never before the urgent necessity of redeeming myself. I have wasted too much time in useless vanities and misspent a tremendous amount of energy in ridiculous self-worship."

He noticed that I was speaking sincerely. When I had asked Clarence for work, I was not yet clear on what I wanted. I had certainly wanted to work, but perhaps not to serve. I had not yet

realized the value of time, or learned to appreciate the sublime blessing of opportunity. I suppose the truth of it was that I really wished to continue being what I had been until then the proud and respected physician, a slave to my preposterous claims of self, imprisoned within my own opinions. Now, after all I had seen and heard, and realizing the responsibility of each child of God in the infinite scheme of Creation, I gave utterance to the best there was in me. At last I was sincere; I was not in the least worried about the kind of work I was to do, but really anxious to carry it out in the sublime spirit of service. He looked at me with questioning eyes.

“Are you really the former doctor?”

“Yes, I am.” I answered timidly.

Genesius was silent for some time before speaking, as if adjusting himself to my unexpected attitude.

“Your resolutions are most praiseworthy.” He said at last, “May the lord help you to adhere to them.”

And, as if anxious to raise my spirit with new hope, he continued:

“When the disciple is ready, the Father sends the master. The same occurs with work. When one is willing to serve, he never lacks opportunities. In your case, my friend, Divine Providence has been extremely generous. You are eager to serve, you understand your responsibility and accept your duty. Such attitude is undoubtedly leading you to the accomplishment of your wishes. On the physical plane many applaud the person who attains financial prosperity or an outstanding position. Here, however, the case is different. To us, comprehension, effort and sincere humility are the things that really matter.”

Sensing my anxious expectation, he added:

“It’s quite possible for you to obtain work. However, for the time being, it would be wiser for you to frequent our numerous departments, and to observe and study their different activities.”

Then he contacted the next office saying aloud: “I should like to see Tobias before he goes down to the Chambers of Rectification.”

In a few minutes, a gentleman with pleasant manners came into the room.

“Tobias,” exclaimed Genesius courteously, “here is a friend who came from the Ministry of Assistance for a period of observation. I believe a visit to the Chambers of Rectification would be greatly beneficial to him.”

I offered the newcomer my hand, which he grasped firmly, saying affably:

“At your service.”

“Take him with you,” continued the Minister kindly, “Andre must become thoroughly acquainted with our different activities. Please see that he is granted every available opportunity.”

“I am on my way there now,” Tobias added obligingly, “if you wish to accompany me...”

“Certainly.” I answered eagerly.

I took my leave of the Minister, who addressed me with further inspiring words of encouragement. Then I resolutely followed Tobias, and together we walked along great city blocks, whose numerous building gave me the impression of busy centers of work. Perceiving my silent questions, my new friend informed:

“These are the great plants of the Astral City. Here, over one hundred thousand spirits are employed in the preparation of juices and in the manufacture of woven goods and all kinds of commodities, while working at the same time at their own rehabilitation and enlightenment.”

I a few minutes we entered an imposing building. After crossing long galleries where numerous workers hurried to and from, we came to a monumental stairway leading to the lower floors.

“Let’s descend.” Said Tobias gravely. Noting my surprise, he added solicitously:

“The Chambers of Rectification are located closer to the Lower Zone. On first arriving in the Astral City, the unfortunate entities who are lodged here cannot bear either light or open air.

27. Work At Last

Never could I have pictured the scene now before my eyes. It was neither hospital nor a conventional nursing home, but a series of vast intercommunicating wards crowded with carcass-like human forms. A strange clamoring filled the air - groans, sobs and plaintive phrases uttered at random. Ghastly faces, bony hands and monstrous bore witness to their terrible spiritual misery. So upsetting were my first impressions that I had to resort to prayer to keep my strength. Tobias called an old nurse:

“There are so few assistants today.” He asked, surprised, “What has happened?’

“Minister Flacus sent word that most of them were to accompany the Samaritans[8] on their rounds in the regions of the Lower Zone.”

“Well, the,” Tobias decided calmly, “We must fill the gaps. There is no time to waste.”

“Brother Tobias, Brother Tobias! Have mercy.” Cried out an old man, clutching the bed and gesticulating like a madman, “I am suffocating! This is a thousand times worse than death on Earth. Help! I want to leave this place, to get out....I must have air, more air!”

Tobias approached and examined him carefully, and inquired:

“Why is Ribeiro so much worse?”

“He was had one of his worst crises.” Informed the nurse, “Assistant Goncalves attributes it chiefly to the heavy charge of dense thoughts emitted by his incarnate relations. As he is still very weak and lacks the mental strength to break away from his Earthly ties, the poor creature has not been able to resist their influence.”

While Tobias gently stroked the patient’s forehead, the nurse continued:

“Early this morning, he rushed out of the ward, crying loudly that he was needed at home; that he couldn’t forget his wife and children; that it was cruel to keep him here away from them. Lawrence and Hermes tried in vain to bring him back to bed. Therefore, I thought that it would be in his best interests to take away his energy and mobility, which I did by applying some prostrating magnetic passes to him.”

“You did well,” agreed Tobias thought fully, “I will see that measures are taken against the influence of his family’s attitude. They must be given a greater share of worries so that they may leave Ribeiro in peace.”

I looked intensely at the patient, trying to determine his emotional state. He wore the typical expression of the mentally deranged and seemed utterly unconscious of what was being said about him. He called Tobias automatically, as do children who know their benefactor. My new instructor, noting my amazement, explained:

The poor thing is still in a nightmarish phase, during which the soul is wrapped up in its own afflictions, with little perception of anything else. Man, my friend, reaps exactly what he has sown. Our poor Ribeiro has been a prey to numerous illusions.

I wanted to ask about his history and the source of his sufferings, but remembering Laura’s advice on curiosity, I kept my peace. Tobias addressed the patient with kind words of encouragement and hope, and promised he would see to the means of improving his

[8] Organization of spirit benefactors in the Astral City (A note by the spirit author.)

condition, that for his own good he should calm down and take his confinement in bed patiently. Ribeiro, trembling pitiably and ghastly pale, smiled sadly and thanked him with tears in his eyes.

We walked slowly along, between numerous rows of well-kept beds. Unwholesome exhalations filled the place, caused, I later learned, by the mental emanations of those who were still under the painful impression of physical death, or dominated by the low vibrations of inferior thoughts. These wards are used exclusively for male entities.

Tobias, Tobias, I am parched and starving! shouted a patient.

Help me, brother! yelled another.

For the love of God, I can't stand this any longer! cried out a third.

My heart was heavy before so much suffering, and I could not help asking:

My friend, how sad it is to see all these sufferings and tormented spirits. Why must there exist such a dismal place?

Tobias replied with perfect composure:

In observing this scene, you must try to see beyond the pain and isolation. Remember, brother, that these patients have already left the Lower Zones, where so many pitfalls lie in wait for those who have heedlessly neglected their spirit selves. In these chambers patients are not only cared for, they are also prepared for their future redemption. We must bear in mind that their suffering is of their own doing. Man's life is always centered wherever his heart is.

And, after a pause during which he seemed deaf to the clamoring around us, he added:

They are smugglers of eternal life.

What do you mean? I asked.

They expected mere earthly acquisitions to have the same value in the Spirit spheres. They believed that criminal pleasures, the power of money, infringement of the law and the imposition of self would cross the frontiers of the sepulcher and still be in force here, offering them new opportunities for further follies. They were thoughtless businessmen who forgot to exchange their material acquisitions for spiritual currency. When in the flesh, they travel to a foreign city, they always took care to provide themselves with the currency of the country which they visit. Yet, while certain of the inevitability of the final trip to the spiritual regions, they neglected to acquire spiritual values. Thus the millionaire of the physical sphere becomes the spiritual pauper.

How true! Tobias words could not have been more logical. After distributing comfort and hope, he leaded me to the next ward. Narcisa, the nurse, followed us and deferentially opened the door.

As I entered, I nearly staggered with heart-sickening surprise. It was a chamber of vast proportions where thirty-two men, with sinister countenances, lay quite still on very low beds. Their almost unnoticeable breath was the only sign of life they presented.

These unhappy entities are in a sleep much heavier than that of most of our ignorant brothers. We call them the negative believers, for instead of accepting the Lord, they were unconditional slaves of self; instead of believing in life, action and work, they admitted only the victory of crime, immobility and eternal nothing. They transformed their earthly experience into the constant preparation for a long slumber; and as they had no notion of

good, of brotherly cooperation, there is nothing left for them now but to sleep on for years and years as helpless victims of ghastly nightmares.

I was horrified at these explanations and stared at Tobias, who began to carefully apply strengthening passes on the patients. When the treatment on the first two was over, they both began vomiting a black substance, a dark and viscous matter with cadaverous emanations.

They are expelling poisonous fluids. Explained Tobias calmly.

Narcisa was doing her best to keep up with the cleaning, but in vain; for by this time a great number of them had begun expelling the same dark and fetid matter. It was then that I instinctively got hold of the cleaning implements and set myself to work. The nurse seemed thankful for my help, and Tobias threw me a glance that well expressed his satisfaction and gratitude.

The work continued throughout the day, bringing with it a blessed fatigue. No friend in the physical world could possibly appreciate the sublime joy of the physician recommencing his self-education from the humblest of nursing tasks.

28. On Duty

After the collective prayer in the evening, Tobias turned on the receiver to listen to the Samaritans at work in the Lower Zones. I learned that the patrols of workers on such missions communicated with their headquarters at set hours. I felt somewhat tired from my strenuous efforts, but my heart was singing with joy. At last I had work to do and was experiencing the mysteriously invigorating tonic of service. A few minutes after the set had been tuned in, I heard a strange voice:

Samaritans to the Ministry of Regenerations Samaritans to the Ministry of Regeneration Heavy labor in the abysses of darkness. We have succeeded in dislodging a great number of unfortunate entities and have rescued twenty-nine brothers from spirit shadows. Twenty-two are mentally deranged and seven in utter psychic exhaustion. Our patrols are preparing transportation. Will arrive soon after midnight. Please see to the necessary arrangements.

I noticed that Narcisa and Tobias exchanged significant glances, and when the broadcast ended I asked:

What do they mean? Why this collective transportation? Aren't they all spirits?

Tobias smiled and replied,

You forget, brother, that you yourself arrived at the Ministry of Assistance in such a manner. I know all about your coming. We must bear in mind that in the Lower Zone, just as on Earth, we are clothed in heavy fluids. The ostrich and the swallow are both birds and have wings, yet the former can't rise into the air unless transported, whereas the latter will rise to the sky in swift flight.

As if to make it known that there was no time for digressions, he turned to Narcisa and said:

Tonight's group is a large one. We must take immediate measures.

We will need more beds! She exclaimed somewhat anxiously.

Don't worry, answered Tobias resolutely, the mentally deranged patients will be lodged in Pavilion Seven and the weak ones in Ward Thirty-three.

Raising his right hand to his forehead as if trying to make an important decision, he remarked:

The problem of lodging will be easily settled; but the ones concerning assistance won't be so quickly solved. Because of the dark clouds obscuring the world of the incarnate, our strongest workers have been detailed to reinforce the services of the Ministry of Communication. We need helpers for night duty, because those working with the Samaritans will return extremely tired.

I would be happy to lend a hand to the best of my ability, I exclaimed spontaneously.

Tobias gave me a look of appreciative gratitude which filled my heart with gladness.

But have you really made up your mind to stay in the Chambers during the night? he asked, surprised.

Aren't others doing the same? I inquired in turn, I am feeling strong and fit, and must make up for lost time.

My new friend patted me on the back, saying:

Well then, I accept your cooperation. Narcisa and the others will also stay on duty. Moreover, I'll send you Venantius and Salustius, two of our most dependable brothers. I myself can't remain here tonight, because of a previous engagement, but I will leave a careful plan of the work to be done. If anything unexpected should turn up, you or any of the assistants can get in touch with me.

We all set about making the most urgent arrangements. While Narcisa, aided by five attendants, prepared the linen and nursing equipment, Tobias and I moved heavy pieces of furniture into Pavilion Seven and Wart Thirty-three. I would be at loss to explain what was happening to me. Although physically tired, I felt exultantly happy.

In the office or workshop, where most are anxious to undertake their tasks to the best of their ability, to serve is the highest privilege, In truth, the hour-bonus and any other immediate reward I might gain for my efforts was far from my mind. Yet I was deeply satisfied at the thought that in my new position as a humble but worthy worker, I would no longer be ashamed to face my mother or my benefactors in the Ministry of Assistance. On leaving, Tobias again embraced me, saying:

May the peace of Jesus abide with you all. I wish you a good night of profitable work. Tomorrow morning at 8:00 a.m. you may rest. In ordinary times, twelve hours of work is the most we may put in, but these are unusual circumstances.

I replied that I was extremely content with his decision. Later, along with a great number of nurses and attendants, I began to take a more kindly interest in the patients. Among my co-workers, Narcisa, with her spontaneous kindness and maternal solicitude, greatly impressed me. I was attracted by her generosity and tried to come into closer contact with her. It was easy, and I soon found myself enjoying the pleasure of her simple but edifying conversation. The dear old woman was like a living book whose every page breathed devotion and wisdom.

But sister, have you been working here for long? I inquired after a few minutes of friendly conversation.

Yes, I have been in active service in the Chambers of Rectification for six years and a few months, and must continue here for over three more years being able to fulfill my purpose.

At my questioning look, she continued:

I need a serious endorsement.

Endorsement? What do you mean? I asked, interested.

You see, I must meet some beloved spirits who are reincarnated on the Earth, so that together we may work out our advancement. Because of my past errors, I begged for a long time in vain for the opportunity to carry out my plans. I was living in an anxious and perturbed condition. One day I was advised to speak with Minister Veneranda. She agreed to endorse my plans, on the condition that I work here for ten years to correct certain unbalanced emotional attitudes. I considered the imposition too hard at first, and felt like refusing, but I gradually realized that she was right. After all, that corrective measure was meant to benefit me, not her. I can't tell you how much I have profited by having accepted Veneranda's advice. I feel more balanced and understanding now and I believe I shall live my next experience on the physical sphere with spiritual dignity.

I was about to express my astonishment, when a patient near us called out:

Narcisa, Narcisa!

I had no right to keep that devoted sister from her duties just to satisfy my curiosity.

29. Francis Vision

While Narcisa, was busy comforting the afflicted patient, I was called to a city communications device, similar to a telephone. It was Laura, asking for news. I realized that I had forgotten to tell her about my decision to remain in the Chambers for night duty. I apologized and informed her of the situation. Even over the wire I could sense her joy at the news. At the end of our short conversation she said:

That's wonderful, my child! Love your work and fill your heart with the joy of useful. Only in this way can we bring about our everlasting edification. Now, just one more word. Remember, too, that this house is also yours.

These words encouraged me and brought me joy. Returning to the chambers, I found Narcisa struggling heroically to calm a young man who seemed to be suffering from a serious mental disorder. I tried to help her. The poor boy, staring out into space, cried out in agony:

Help me, for God's sake! I'm frightened, frightened

With a panic-stricken look on his face, he went on:

Sister Narcisa, he is coming the monster! I can feel the worms again! Here he is, right there! Save me from him. Send him away!

Calm down, Francis, answered the devoted nurse, you will be free of him and will be left in peace, but it depends on your own efforts. Just pretend that your mind is a sponge, soaked in vinegar. You must wring out the sour substance. I will help you to do this, but the hardest part you must do yourself.

At Narcisa's tender, encouraging words, the patient became calm and showed himself willing to cooperate. But in a few minutes he turned ghastly pale again, and began to cry out:

But sister, listen to me! He won't go away. He is back again to torment me! Look! Look!

Yes, Francis, I can see him, she agreed patiently, but it is essential for you to help me drive him away.

Oh, what a diabolical ghost! He exclaimed, weeping like a child and inspiring my compassion.

Put your trust in Jesus and forget the monster. She advised in a soothing voice, And now, let me apply a magnetic pass, and the ghost will go away.

She gave him a magnetic treatment, filling him with invigorating, comforting fluids. He thanked her, looking greatly relieved. After the treatment was over he spoke again:

Now I feel much better.

After kneading his pillows and making him comfortable, Narcisa asked an attendant to bring him a glass of magnetized water. Her example was edifying her goodwill was contagious. Perceiving my earnest wish to learn, she seemed willing to initiate me in the sublime secrets of service.

To whom was he referring? I asked, greatly impressed, Is he, perhaps, pursued by some shadow, invisible to my eyes?

Oh, no. She replied, He meant his own corpse.

You don't say so. I replied, taken aback.

The poor boy entered the spirit sphere after an accident due only to his own carelessness. He was excessively attached to his physical body, and for days he wouldn't leave his grave, refusing to conform to his new state. So deep were his delusions that he spent a long time desperately trying to raise his stiff body. He was terrified at the idea of facing the unknown, and utterly unable to muster even the slightest detachment from his physical sensations. Aid from higher spheres was of no avail he had closed his mental zone against all thoughts of eternal life. At last, the worms made him experience such atrocious pain that the unfortunate creature ran away from his tomb horrified, only to begin a dismal wandering in the darker regions of the Lower Zone. However, those who had been his parents on Earth enjoy considerable credit over here, and through their intercession he was rescued by the Samaritans who brought him, almost by force, to our Colony. His condition is so serious that he won't be able to leave the Chambers of Rectification for a long while. The friend who had been his physical father is now engaged in a difficult mission far from the Astral City.

Does he come to see the patient?

Yes, he has already come twice, and each time I was deeply moved by his silent grief. The boy's mental disorder is so great that he didn't even recognized his generous and devoted father. He kept crying pitifully, under painful delusions. His father, who had come to visit him accompanied by Minister Padua of Communication, showed emotional fortitude while in the presence of the Minister to whom he owed his unfortunate son's hospitalization. They spent some time commenting on the spiritual condition of the newcomer. But when Minister Padua was called away unexpectedly, apologizing to me for his human gesture, he knelt by his son's bed, taking the boy's hands into his own, holding them tightly as if to transmit some invigorating vital fluids, kissed the boy's forehead, and wept. I couldn't keep back my tears, so I felt the room. I don't know what happened, but I noticed that from that day, Francis has been steadily improving. His condition of total insanity has been reduced to occasional crises, which are gradually diminishing.

How touching this is. I exclaimed, deeply impressed, But how can his corpse pursue him?

Francis visions, she explained, are nothing but hallucinations. Many spirits suffer from them after physical death. Those who are excessively attached to their material body, who make it the center of their existence, living only through it and for it, cannot abandon their corpses when called to the real life. They do not accept the idea of spirituality, and struggle desperately to retain their physical bodies. In time, however, voracious worms drive them away. Then, horrified, they fall to the opposite extreme. The sight of their own corpse, a strong creation of their own minds, torments them to the innermost recesses of their souls. They live in crisis for more or less lengthy periods of time and many suffer acutely until the ghost corpse they have created totally disintegrates.

Noting how deeply affected I was, Narcisa continued:

Thanks to our Heavenly Father, I have learned a great deal in these years of service. How profound the spiritual slumber of most of our incarnate brothers is! Still, we mustn't worry to the point of letting it hurt us. The chrysalis adheres to inert matter, but the butterfly will rise from it in easy flight. The seed is almost imperceptible, although it is to become the giant oak. The withered flower returns to the earth, but its perfume abides in the air. All embryonic life appears to sleep. We must never forget these lessons.

Narcisa fell into a silence which I dared not interrupt.

30. Inheritance And Euthanasia

I had not yet recovered from my astonishment when Salustius came up to Narcisa and said:

Our sister Pauline wishes to see her father in Pavilion Five. Before complying I thought I had better consult with you, as the patient is still experiencing a deep crisis.

In her usual gentle manner, she replied:

Show her in at once. Pauline is devoting all her leisure time to the delicate task of reconciling the different members of her family, so she has Veneranda's permission to see her father whenever necessary.

The messenger left hastily, and Narcisa informed me:

You'll see what a devoted daughter she is.

Less than one minute later we saw Pauline coming towards us. She was slim and lovely, reflecting angelical beauty, dressed in a light tunic of luminous silk. Her eyes reflected deep concern. The nurse introduced us politely. Probably feeling I could be trusted, she inquired anxiously:

How is father, my friend?

A little better, Narcisa answered, but still considerably unbalanced.

It's a pity. Pauline continued. Neither he nor the others will give up the mental attitude in which they obstinately persist. Always the same hate, the same lack of understanding.

Narcisa invited us to follow her, and in a few moments we were standing by the bedside of what looked like a disagreeable old man. With his bitter, scowling look, disheveled hair, deep wrinkles and retracted lips, he inspired more pity than sympathy. However, I endeavored to control my inferior vibrations and to see in this unfortunate sufferer only a spirit brother. My feelings of repulsion disappeared and my mind felt clearer. I applied the lesson to myself how had I arrived at the Ministry of Assistance?

How repelling my own appearance must have been, with utter desperation written all over my face. When we consider other people's misfortune in the light of our own imperfections, there is always room for brotherly love in our heart. The old patient had no words of affection for his daughter, who greeted him tenderly. He looked like a caged beast as he frowned at her, eyes glowering with harshness and rebellion.

Are you feeling better, father? asked Pauline with loving respect.

Oh! No! The patient bellowed, I can't forget the villain. I have no peace of mind. I can still see him by my bedside administering deadly poison!

Please, father, do try to forget all that. She earnestly entreated, Remember that Edelbert entered our home as a son, sent by God.

My son? Never! shouted the unfortunate old man, He is a loathsome criminal, unworthy of pardon. He is the devil's own son, that's what he is.

Pauline, eyes brimming with tears, spoke persuasively:

Father, let us learn from Jesus to love one another. On Earth our family experiences are the means of teaching us real spiritual love. We must bear in mind that there is only one Father who is truly eternal, God. But the Lord of Life grants us the blessed opportunity of

fatherhood and motherhood on Earth so that we may learn perfect brotherly love. They are the temples of sublime union, a preparation for universal solidarity. We have to struggle and suffer a great deal before acquiring the title of brother in the real sense of the word. The whole Creation is but one family under the loving care of only one Father.

Hearing his daughter's sweet voice, the patient broke into convulsive weeping.

Father, forgive Edelbert! Try to see in him not only the reckless son but the brother badly in need of enlightenment. I have just come from our earthly home, where I observed serious disturbances. From your sick bed here you are constantly projecting poisonous fluids of bitterness and incomprehension to them. They, in turn, are doing the same to you. Thought, as subtle waves, never misses its target, however distant it may be. The exchange of hate and suspicion causes ruin and suffering to the soul. Broken down by continual sorrow, mother was unable to resist the atmosphere at home, and was taken to a mental hospital a few days ago. Amalia and Cacilda have brought a lawsuit against Edelbert and Agenor because of serious disagreements about the large fortune you amassed on the physical plane. A sad situation indeed, but one which might gradually improve, were it not for your vigorous mind steeped in plans of revenge. Here, in the spirit sphere, I find you distressed. On Earth, mother is insane and your children greatly disturbed, hating one another bitterly. Amidst all those unbalanced minds, a fortune in banknotes. What is the use of all that money, if it doesn't buy one moment's happiness?

But I left my family ample means. Retorted the unhappy old man, I was anxious for their welfare.

Pauline continued, interrupting him:

In the question of transitory riches, we don't always know what is the best thing to do. If you had assured your family's future by maintaining and atmosphere of moral tranquility in your home, and prepared your children to earn an honest living, your efforts might have been a great help. Sometimes, father, we accumulate money through pride and ambition. We are anxious to live above others, and while centering our attention on the external aspects of life we forget the more important, lasting side. Few are those who see to acquire worthwhile knowledge, and the precious qualities of tolerance, humility and understanding. Instead, we insist on bending others to our will, neglecting the tasks assigned to us by our Father and altogether forgetting to cultivate our spirits. No one is born on the planet merely to hoard money in safes and banks. Of course, during our sojourn we may, as faithful stewards who know how to manage wisely what is entrusted to them, claim our legitimate share. But it is impossible to be our Father's faithful stewards if we are greedy and overbearing.

It was that false understanding of divine stewardship that ruined our home. I tried in vain to render spiritual help to the family, while you and mother sacrificed yourselves to increase your worldly goods. Amalia and Cacilda, disdaining any useful work, trifled away precious time, finally marrying idlers like themselves, who only married them for their money. Agenor, influenced by his worthless companions, wasted all opportunities of serious study. Edelbert graduated as physician, but was indifferent to the profession. He approached its noble activities only rarely, and even then only out of sheer curiosity. Spoiled by easily obtained money, and with minds fixed on the coming inheritance, they all ruined their fine spiritual possibilities.

The patient, terror-stricken, cried out:

Cursed Edelbert! Criminal and ungrateful son! He murdered me pitilessly when I still needed to review the terms of my will. Malicious felon!

Please father, don’t say that. Have mercy on your son. Forgive and forget.

But he went on cursing and swearing. Pauline was about to resume when Narcisa gave her a warning glance and called Salustius to help the patient, by this time aroused to a dangerous condition of emotional excitement. Pauline became silent, trying hard to keep back her tears. She continued by the bedside, stroking her father’s forehead with a gentle hand.

Painfully impressed by the scene I had just witnessed, I followed Narcisa and Pauline out of the ward. The two friends talked for some time, and then Pauline took her leave with kind words of thanks. Her eyes showed sadness and worry. When we were again alone, Narcisa remarked:

As a rule, inheritance cases are extremely delicate. With few exceptions, they cause great trouble for both testators and legatees. This case, however, is far more serious because of the euthanasia. Ambition for wealth created all kinds of complexes and misunderstandings in Pauline’s family. Avaricious parents generally have extravagant children. I had accompanied her to her earthly home when her brother Edelbert, a gentlemanly doctor, used so called easy death on his dying father. We did our best to prevent him from carrying out this plan, but it was all in vain. For financial reasons, the distressed son was anxious to accelerate his fathers passing, and now you see the result hatred and infirmity. God created beings and celestial regions, but we insist on transforming ourselves into diabolical spirits, creating our own individual hell.

31. The Vampire

It was nine o clock in the evening, and we had not yet had a moment's rest except for the short consultations necessary for the solution of spiritual problems. Here I saw a patient begging for help, over there another in need of magnetic passes. On our way to assist two patients in Pavilion Eleven, I heard screams in a nearby ward. I would have run in that direction, if Narcisa had not held me back.

Please don't go, she warned, the sexually unbalanced patients are lodged there. The picture would be too painful to your eyes. Wait until you are better prepared.

I did not insist, but thousands of questions rushed to my mind. A new world was unfolding itself and my curiosity was great. I had to concentrate on Lysias mother's advice so as not to become distracted from my legitimate duties. Soon after nine, a quaint little man, to all appearances a humble worker emerged from amidst the trees of the enormous park. I later learned that he belonged to the sentinel corps of the Chambers of Rectification. Narcisa greeted him and asked:

What is the matter, Justin? What is your message?

I've come to inform you that an unfortunate woman is begging for help at the large gate that leads to the tilling fields. I believe she must have escaped the attention of the front line sentinels. He answered, anxiously.

And why don't you help her? Asked the nurse.

The guard gestured and hastened to explain:

According to our regulations, we are forbidden to. The poor creature is surrounded by black spots.

Really! She exclaimed, taken aback.

Yes, nurse. It's just as I tell you.

Then it's a very serious cause.

I was filled with curiosity, and followed her for a considerable distance across the moonlit fields. We were surrounded by the silent park its shady trees rustling gently in the soft breeze. After walking for well over a mile, we came to the gate. There stood the pitiful figure of a woman begging for mercy from the other side. I saw nothing but a squalid creature dressed in rags with a hideous face, and legs covered with raw sores, but, judging from her startled expression, I realized that Narcisa saw many more details, still imperceptible to me.

Children of God, she cried on seeing us, please give shelter to my wary soul! Where is the paradise of the elect, that I may enjoy the peace I long for?

I was filled with compassion at her tearful voice. Narcisa, though also sorry for the unfortunate beggar, whispered to me:

Can't you see the black spots?

No, I can t.

Your spirit vision isn't sufficiently trained. If it depended on me, I would let her in at once, but on dealing with creatures in this condition, I can't decide for myself. I must apply to the Chief Warden on duty.

She approached the poor woman, and said kindly:

Please, just wait a few minutes.

We hurried back to the house, where for the first time I came into contact with the Chief of Sentinels of the Chambers of Rectification. Narcisa introduced us and then rapidly reported the occurrence.

You were right to have come to me. He replied, Let's go see her.

We were soon back at the gate. The Chief Warden carefully examined the newcomer from the Lower Zone and declared:

For the time being, this woman can't receive our assistance. She is one of the strongest vampires[9]**.** I have ever come across. She must be left to herself.

I could not help but shocked at those words. Wouldn't it be neglecting our Christian duty to abandon this unhappy sister to her fate? Narcisa seemed to think likewise, and tried to plead with the Chief Warden:

But, Brother Paul, wouldn't it be possible to shelter this poor creature in the Chambers? Pointing to the beggar who was impatient at the delay and complaining loudly, he addressed the nurse.

To allow her to enter would be to neglect my responsibility as a warden. Narcisa, have you noticed anything else besides the black spots: Narcisa had not, and he continued.

Well, I have. Count the black spots.

Narcisa looked intently at the woman, and, after a few moments, replied that there were fifty-eight. Brother Paul continued, patiently:

Those fifty-eight dark spots represent so many children killed at birth. On each of these spots I can perceive the mental image of one of the little children whose life she extinguished, some by crushing blows, others by suffocation. This unhappy creature was a gynecologist who exploited inexperienced young women, committing heinous crimes under the pretext of easing the conscience of others. She is in a worse position than cases of suicide or murders who may, at times, show mitigating circumstances.

I recalled the numerous cases in my practice when, to save the mother's life, the unborn child had to be sacrificed. But, reading my thoughts, Brother Paul added:

Of course, I'm not referring to legitimate measures which are forms of redeeming trials, but to the crime of killing those who have obtained the sublime right to live and are about to begin their sojourn on the physical plane.

Yielding to the feelings of compassion inherent in noble souls, Narcisa again attempted to intercede on her behalf:

Brother Paul, I was also a great sinner in the past. Please, let's take in this unhappy woman. I promise to make her my special concern.

My friend, he answered, I know we are all greatly indebted spirits. However, we have improved enough to acknowledge our own weaknesses and work to redeem our errors. All this woman wants, for the time being, is to create disturbance and confusion among our workers of good will. Those who haven't yet freed themselves from the bonds of hypocrisy

[9] By vampire the spirit author refers to one who extinguishes life for personal advantage. (Translator's note.)

emit destructive forces. Now, what would be the use of our vigilance if it were not to keep out dangerous influences?

Let's prove what I have said. He added, with a meaningful smile. He then approached the beggar and asked her:

Sister, what do you ask of our brotherly cooperation?

Help, help. She replied, dolefully.

But, my friend, he reasoned, we must learn to accept expiatory suffering. Why did you so often cut the life thread of helpless little infants, who, with God's permission, were about to begin their redeeming struggle on Earth?

At these words she looked around apprehensively, assumed a hateful expression and shouted:

Who is accusing me of this infamy? My conscience is at peace! I spent my whole life on Earth working on behalf of motherhood. I was charitable and pious, good and pure!

I am sorry, but the record of your thoughts and actions tell a different story. I believe, sister, that you haven't yet received the benefit of remorse. When you open your soul to the blessings of God, acknowledging your own needs, then you may come to us.

Devil, Wizard! She yelled furiously at him, Satan's own follower! I'll never come here again! I am waiting for the promised heaven, which I hope to find.

Then please go your own way. Your heaven isn't here. This is a place of work, where patients are aware of their infirmity and are assisted by brothers and sisters of good will to struggle back to health.

I haven't asked for any remedy of assistance. She retorted angrily. All I want is the Paradise my good works entitle me to enter.

Shooting us a parting look of hatred, she discarded the assumed appearance of a wandering beggar and walked away defiantly, with firm steps and a haughty gait. Brother Paul gazed at the retreating figure for quite a while, then turned to us and added:

Did you observe the vampire? She has crime written all over her and pleads innocence. She is obviously wicked and yet declares herself good and pure. She suffers desperately and feigns tranquility. She has created a hell for herself, yet pretends to be looking for heaven.

We listened respectfully to the Chief Warden, who closed his valuable lesson by saying:

We must always be aware of appearances, either good or bad. Divine Providence never forsakes anybody. Therefore, that unfortunate creature will find aid elsewhere. But for the sake of legitimate charity, in the position I hold here, I couldn't possibly open our doors to her.

32. Learning About Veneranda

Returning across the moonlit park, I experienced a strange sense of fascination. Those big, shady trees and flourishing patches of greenery held my admiring attention. As we walked, I questioned her about the surroundings:

This great park, she said, not only contains the paths to the Lower Zone and the plants we cultivate for nutricious juices, but Minister Veneranda has also created delightful areas used for educational purposes.

Noting my curiosity she continued:

They are known as the green halls, and are situated in the midst of the trees. They are perfectly suited for the lectures given by the Ministers of Regeneration. The most beautiful is reserved for the Governor's lectures when he visits us. Others are used for visiting Ministers and students in general. Their elegant trees blossom periodically, looking like small, colorful towers of natural charm. The sky is our sheltering roof, allowing us to enjoy the blessings of the sun and of distant stars.

How marvelous these natural places must be! I exclaimed.

They certainly are. She continued, Forty years ago Minister Veneranda's idea aroused great enthusiasm all over the Colony, and a campaign was begun to build a natural hall. Every Ministry, including the Ministry of Divine Union, worked, with Veneranda's cooperation, to build delightful arbors all over the Water Park. I think the ones they built in the schools are the most interesting. They vary greatly in size and shape. One of them, which Veneranda built in the Educational Park of the Ministry of Elucidation, is star shaped, contains prodigious vegetation, and is ample enough for five large classes taught by five different instructors. In its center is an enormous apparatus, similar to a projector, which can simultaneously show five different projections. Their initiative improved the city, providing areas which unite useful service, practicality, and spiritual beauty.

How are the halls furnished? I inquired as she paused, In the same style as earthly ones?

Narcisa smiled and continued:

No, it's different. Thinking of Gospel scenes of Jesus passage on Earth, Veneranda suggested that all building materials be taken directly from nature. Each hall has benches and chairs carved out of the ground and covered with soft, sweet smelling grass, lending it a restful and distinctive beauty. Declaring that it would be fitting to recall the Master's sermons on the open beach during his travels along the Sea of Tiberias, she introduced the idea of natural furnishings. The halls require constant care, but they return so much in the way of beauty and lovely scenery.

The kind nurse fell silent for a moment, and then continued again:

As I have already told you, most beautiful hall in our Ministry is reserved for the Governor's talks. Veneranda learned that he had always ancient Hellenic landscapes, and decorated it accordingly, shady bowers and seats composed of the interlaced branches of trees. Every thirty days the flowers change in species, and each month presents a new color scheme. The loveliest one is reserved for December, in honor of Jesus birth when our Colony receives beautiful thoughts and earnest promises from our incarnate brothers, and we, in turn, send our hopes and service to the higher spheres in homage to the Master of masters.

Perhaps you already know that the Governor visits us nearly every week, on Sundays. He stays for hours, conferring with the Ministers of Regeneration and talking to workers, offering valuable suggestions, examining our border lines with the Lower Zone, receiving our visits and good wishes, and comforting convalescents. Sometimes, when he has time in the evenings, he stays to listen to music and to attend shows staged by the youth of our schools. Most visitors in the Astral City come to our Ministry just to see that natural place which comfortably seats over thirty thousand people.

Listening to Narcisa, I experienced a pleasant sensation, half joy, half curiosity.

Minister Veneranda's hall, she added, enthusiastically, is also magnificent. We give its upkeep special care and attention. All we can do in recognition of her great devotion is nothing compared to the outstanding service she has given us. This servant of the Lord has introduced numerous beneficial measures on behalf of the city's most unfortunate inhabitants. Her service record at the Astral City is considered by the Government as one of the most praiseworthy. She has the greatest number of working hours in our Colony, and is the oldest officer in the Government and in the Ministry. She has been in active service here for over two hundred years.

How venerable she must be! I exclaimed.

You are right. She answered. She is one of the most highly evolved beings in our Spirit Colony. The eleven ministers who share the direction of the Ministry of Regeneration with her always seek her advice before making any important decision. Even the Governor himself often consults her for her enlightened opinion. Only she and the Governor have seen the Master Jesus in the Resplendent Spheres. Yet she never mentions that distinction of her spirit life she avoids all reference to it.

I can tell you of another significant incident. One day, four years ago, the Astral City prepared to entertain the Fraternities of Light who rule the Christian destinies of America. They were coming to pay their respects to Veneranda and to bestow the Service Merit medal on her for having completed one million consecutive hours of useful service with admirable devotion, perseverance and self-effacement. She is the first in the Colony to be awarded with such an honor. When presented with the medal, she only wept in silence. Afterwards, she donated it to the town archives, and transferred the honor to the Colony as a collective group, saying that she was unworthy of it. Despite the Governor's protests, she requested that all the celebrations be cancelled. She never again alluded to this incident.

What an extraordinary woman! I said, I wonder why she doesn't inhabit some higher sphere.

Spiritually, she lives in planes far superior to ours, and only remains in the Astral City out of a great spirit of love and abnegation. I have heard that our sublime benefactress has been working for a thousand years to help a group of loved ones still on Earth. Meanwhile, she waits for them with untiring patience.

How might I come to know her? I asked earnestly.

Pleased at my interest, she answered:

Tomorrow evening, after the prayers, Minister Veneranda is coming to her hall to give some apprentices a lecture on thought.

33. Curious Observations

Just before midnight, with Narcisa's permission, I went to the gates of the Chambers. The Samaritans were expected at any moment. It was necessary, therefore, to watch out for their arrival, so that the last minute measures necessary might be taken in time.

With emotion, I walked down the pathway, here and there, among the shady trees, I saw tree trunks suggesting the Earth's hoary oak, and other leaves that bring to mind the acacia tree and the pine. In the open air I experienced a sensation of well being such as I had never felt in the Chambers, in spite of their ample windows. While advancing silently under the sheltering branches gently stirring in the breeze, I felt a profound peace fall upon me. I began to reminisce about events in my life after my first meeting with Minister Clarence. I wondered where the dream region was situated was it on Earth, or in this spirit colony? I wondered what had happened to Zelia and the children. Although I had received so many explanations about the most varied aspects of life, my earthly home was never mentioned. My own mother had advised silence and had only addressed this matter vaguely. It all implied that I should forget the problems of the flesh in order to achieve my inner renewal. Yet, probing deeply, I discovered that my longing for my family was still alive and strong. I yearned to see my beloved wife, to feel my children's caresses once again. Why should fate keep us apart, as if I were a castaway on some unknown shore. These questions perplexed me, but I was also comforted by the thought that I could not consider myself forsaken. If my earthly experiences might be classified as a wreck, it was all my own doing. Now that I had the opportunity to observe the vibrations of intense and constructive work at the Astral City, I could not help wondering how I, when on Earth, could have wasted so much time on trifles.

True, I had loved my wife dearly, and had tenderly cherished our children, yet on examining my conduct as a husband and father, I realized that I had failed to build up anything solid and useful within the spirit of my family. I realized it only now, now that it was too late. Whoever advances along a road and neglects to sow the seed for a future harvest along the way, and fails to protect the fountain that quenches his thirst, cannot turn back expecting to find all he needs. These thoughts kept recurring in my mind with an irritating insistence. On leaving the physical sphere, I had been faced with the torture of incomprehension. I did not know what had happened to my wife and children, who were suddenly deprived of the accustomed domestic stability and confronted with the inevitable struggles of widowhood and orphan hood, but I saw no pint in asking.

A light breeze seemed to whisper lofty ideas, as if attempting to lift my mind to higher thoughts. Although tormented with these inner questions, I had to attend to the mission on which I had been sent. I approached the gate and scrutinized the distance beyond the tilling fields. All was moonlight and serenity, glorious heavens and peaceful beauty. I spent some minutes absorbed in awed prayer to the Creator of all things in contemplation of the lovely scenery before me.

A few moments later I saw two enormous shapes. They puzzled me they looked like men of some indefinable semi-luminous substance. Strange filaments hung from their arms and feet, and there was a thread connected to their heads. They gave me the impression of two ghosts, and I could not bear their sight. My hair standing on end, I ran back to the Chambers. As I anxiously explained to Narcisa the cause of my terrors, she could hardly keep from laughing.

Well, now, she said, good-humoredly, didn't you recognize those forms?

I was considerably abashed and did not know what to say. Narcisa smiled and explained:

I had the same experience, and was just as surprised as you. The explanation is simple, though. The forms you saw belong to our brothers from Earth. They are highly evolved spirits on some redeeming mission on the physical plane, who, as worthy initiates of Eternal Wisdom, may temporarily abandon their fleshly bodies and travel freely through our spheres. The filaments and threads you observed are the characteristics which distinguish them from us. Therefore, you needn't fear. Incarnate men who succeed in reaching these regions are highly evolved spirits, though they may appear humble or obscure on Earth.

In an encouraging voice she added, Let's go out and see. It's 12:40. The Samaritans can't be long in coming.

Satisfied with Narcisa's explanation, I followed her to the great gate. I could still see the two forms in the distance, calmly walking away from the Astral City. Narcisa gazed at them, and remarked:

They are surrounded by blue light. They must be two advanced messengers from the physical plane on some mission we cannot know.

We stood at the gate for some time, lost in the contemplation of the silent fields. Finally, my kind friend pointed out a dark spot traveling across the moonlit horizon. They had arrived. Looking intently in the direction Narcisa was pointing, I saw that the caravan was moving slowly towards us under the clear sky. All of a sudden I heard dogs barking in the far distance.

What's that? I asked, startled.

Why, dogs. Said the nurse. They are precious helpers in the obscure regions of the Lower Zone, which is inhabited not only by discarnate men, but also by real monsters. This, however, is not the proper time to describe them.

Then, raising her voice, she called to the other servants in the distance, and sent one of them back to the Chambers with the news of the Samaritans arrival. I gazed curiously at the strange group approaching slowly. I counted six big carts or stagecoaches, each drawn by animals which, even from a distance, looked like mules and preceded by a lively pack of dogs. What caught my attention most were the bands of large birds flying close to the carts and making strange sounds. At this sight I turned to Narcisa and inquired:

Where is the airbus? Couldn't they use it in the Lower Zones?

As Narcisa shook her head, I asked for an explanation. As usual, she was willing to oblige, and answered:

It's a problem of the density of matter. Water and air are a good example. An airplane which flies through the air cannot do the same in water. We can build machines such as submarines, for instance, which can carry us through denser matter, but in deference to the suffering inhabitants of the region, communities of higher planes prefer to use this simple means of transportation. Besides, we often can't do without animal collaboration.

Why is that? I asked with astonishment.

Dogs simplify the work, and mules carry weight patiently and supply warmth when necessary. Those birds, she added, pointing to them in the air, which we call traveling ibises, are the Samaritans great allies. They eat hateful and wicked thought forms, helping to fight against the dark shapes of the Lower Zone.

The caravan was growing nearer. Narcisa, gazing at me kindly, continued:

There is no time now for further details. You can find valuable lessons on animals not here, but in the Ministry of Elucidation, where the parks of instruction and experiments are located.

Busily supervising the last-minute arrangements, the devoted nurse prepared to receive the new patients.

34. Newcomers From The Lower Zone

The packs of dogs, led by strong workers, halted as they approached us. Within minutes, we were all crossing the broad galleries leading into the Chambers of Rectification. Many attendants were hurrying about. Some of the weaker patients were being helped indoors. Not only Narcisa, Salustius and the others were working; the Samaritans were also doing their utmost, eager to aid the newcomers, some of whom waiting humbly for their turn while others complained loudly.

As I also lent a hand, I noticed an old lady, trying with great difficulty to get down from the last carriage. When she saw me nearby she began to beg:

Please, son, for God's sake, help me to get down.

I approached, interested.

Good heavens, she went on, forming the sign of the cross, thanks to Divine Providence I have escaped purgatory. Oh, the wicked devils which tormented me there. What a hellish place. At last, heavenly angels have come to my rescue.

I helped her down, again curious. For the first time I heard references to hell and purgatory from someone who seemed calm and reasonable to me. Prompted by my curiosity, I inquired:

So, have you come far?

Thus speaking, oblivious of Laura's advice, I affected great concern, as I had on Earth. The poor woman perceived my interest and began telling her story.

Very far indeed. On Earth, my son, I was a lady of great virtues, charitable and pious, sincere in my beliefs. What can one do against Satan's wiles? On leaving the world, I found myself surrounded by monstrous beings which dragged me with them in a veritable whirlwind. At first I implored the protection of the Celestial Archangels, but the hellish spirits kept me prisoner. However, I never lost hope of being rescued at any moment, because I had left some money to have monthly masses celebrated for my eternal rest.

Yielding to my pernicious habit of meddling into matters which were none of my business, I insisted:

How interesting your observations are. Didn't you try to find out the reason you were kept so long in those regions?

Absolutely not. She replied, crossing herself again, As I have already told you, I did my best to be good and pious while on Earth. But you know that nobody is completely free from sin. As a rich woman, I might have led a peaceful life if it hadn't been for my slaves. They were always full of mischief and kept quarreling. Of course, punishment was often necessary. I had to be firm in giving my orders, always scrupulously carried out by my overseers. It wasn't rare for a Negro to die at the whipping post as a warning to others. Sometimes, to avoid trouble, I was obliged to sell slave-mothers, separating them from their children. I felt the sting of my conscience on those occasions, but every month when Father Amancius visited the plantation I went to confession. After having received absolution in the confessional, I was free from all those venial sins and again in peace with God and the world in general.

Shocked at these words, I began to reason with her:

But sister, that kind of peace is false. The slaves are also our brothers, and to the Almighty Father, their children are just as good as their masters.

She stamped her foot angrily in protest:

God forbid! That could never be! Slaves are slaves, or the Church would teach us otherwise. If there were slaves at the bishop's house, why shouldn't there be on our plantation? Who would work the land if not the Negroes? Believe me, it was an honor for them to live in my slave quarters.

On my plantation, Negroes never came to the guests courtyard except to carry out my orders. Father Amancius, our virtuous priest, once told me at confession that Africans are the worst creatures in the world, born exclusively to serve God in bondage. Do you imagine, then, that I would have scruples in dealing with them? You can be sure that slaves are wicked beings, the devil's own children! I sometimes admire my own patience in tolerating them on Earth. Let me tell you, I passed over most unexpectedly from shock over the Princess decree abolishing slavery[10]. Just imagine, setting those scoundrels free. It all happened many years ago, but I can still remember it perfectly. I had been feeling poorly for a few days, when Father Amancius came from town with the disastrous news. The blow was terrible, and I began to get worse. How could we go on living with those ruffians at large? Of course, they would want us to pay them back by making us serve them. Wouldn't it be preferable to die, than to serve them? I remember I made my confession with difficulty. When it was over Father Amancius gave me absolution and comforted me with encouraging words. It seems that all devils are African, spying on me all the time, and I have been obliged to suffer their presence until today.

And when did you pass over?

In May, 1888.

I experienced a strange sense of amazement. The poor slave mistress, gazing with dim eyes at the horizon, remarked:

It's possible that my nephews forgot to pay the masses, although I left It clearly specified in my will.

I was about to answer her with new ideas on fraternity and faith, when Narcisa approached and said kindly:

Listen, Andre, you seem to have forgotten that we are rendering assistance to patients and mentally deranged entities. What good will all this information be to you? Unbalanced people will talk incessantly and whoever listens wastes spiritual attention, and may be no more balanced than they.

She said those words in such sympathetic tones that I flushed with shame and was unable to offer an apology.

Don't worry, my friend, she went on encouragingly, let's see to the perturbed brothers.

Are you including me in their numbers? Asked the old lady, looking hurt. Narcisa, displaying her excellent expression of sympathy:

Of course not, my dear, I didn't mean you. However, I think you must be tired after your long stay in the purgatorial zones.

[10] Slavery was abolished in Brazil on May 13, 1888 by a law signed by Princess Isabel, acting as a substitute for her father, Emperor Pedro II, who was traveling abroad. (Translator's note.)

Yes, indeed I am. The newcomer agreed, You can’t imagine my suffering and how I was tormented by those devils.

The poor thing was about to begin the whole story again, but Narcisa cut her short:

Do not dwell on evil. I know all about the bitter suffering you had to endure. Now, just relax here while I see to your needs.

Turning to an attendant, she said:

You, Zenobio, would you please go to the women’s department and ask Nemesia to prepare a bed for our new sister awaiting treatment?

35. An Unexpected Meeting

We were busy putting away the patrolling equipment and seeing to the animals, when I heard a friendly voice beside me:

Hello, Andre. Fancy meeting you here! What a pleasant surprise.

I turned around and was surprised to recognize the Samaritan he was a former acquaintance of ours on Earth. Yes, it was old Silveira, whom my father, the inflexible businessman, had reduced to utter ruin. I felt acutely embarrassed. I wanted to acknowledge his greeting, to respond to his friendly approach, but my memories made me speechless. In this new environment, where countenances faithfully reflect one's true feelings, pretending was out of the question. Finally, Silveira himself noticed my discomfort and came to my help, saying:

I didn't know you had come here. I had no idea I'd meet you here in the Astral City.

After this spontaneous kindness I was able to shake his hand and murmur a few words of thanks. I wanted to offer an explanation for our past attitudes but couldn't find the right words. I truly wished to apologize for my father's actions, which had forced him into disastrous insolvency. Standing there, it all came back into my mind. It was like seeing a film. I could hear his wife's tearful voice, trying to explain her husband's plight he had been ill for a long time and, to make matters worse, two of their children had also fallen sick. Their expenses had risen, and medical attention cost so much money. I remember how the poor thing wept, begging for a respite. She spoke humbly, gazing pitifully at my mother as if attempting to find some sympathy and help in another woman. I remember how earnestly my mother pleaded with my father to forget the documents he had signed, to refrain from any legal action. Father, accustomed to successful transactions on a large scale, could not understand the retailer's difficulties and was adamant.

He declared that, although he was sorry about his client's bad luck and would help him in different ways, there was nothing he could do but carry out the legal proceedings. He explained that he could not think of breaking the long established regulations of his firm. All he had to offer his wife in consolation was the thought that some of his other clients were in an even worse position.

I recalled mother's helpless sympathy as Silveira's wife tearfully took her leave, and how father, indifferent to the suffering before him, scolded her severely and forbade her to interfere in business matters in the future. Thus, there was nothing left for the poor family but to face utter financial ruin. I could still see the Silveira's piano being carried away to satisfy the implacable creditor's claims.

Humbled and penniless, Silveira moved with his wife and children to a small town, where they had probably led a life of hard work and poverty. I never again heard mention of the family.

I was anxious to apologize, but did not know what to say. I had, at that time, encouraged father in his merciless attitude towards the Silveira and had considered mother too sentimental in her views. Being still very young, I was dominated by feelings of selfishness and vanity. Impervious to the needs and suffering of others, I was unyielding in my attitude in spite of my mother's wise exhortations.

These memories flashed throughout my mind with incredible speed. In one short moment I had crossed the shadows of the past. I could hardly disguise my embarrassment. Silveira smiled, and called me back into reality:

Have you already visited the old man?

The question, so filled with spontaneous caring, only increased my confusion. I answered that, although anxious to do so, I had not yet had the chance. Silveira sensed my constraint and prepared to leave. He patted me affectionately on the back and went on his way. Disconcerted, I went to Narcisa and told her of our unexpected meeting and the circumstances of our parting on Earth. I anxiously awaited her advice. After listening carefully, she replied:

Don't be surprised at meeting old acquaintances here. Some time ago I found myself in a similar situation. I have already had the satisfaction of meeting most of the people here whom I had offended on Earth. I realize now that it's a great blessing granted us by the Lord, so that we may have new opportunities to take up friendships which have been interrupted, repairing the broken spirit links between us. Did you avail yourself of the chance offered you?

What do you mean? I asked.

Did you ask Silveira to forgive you? Remember, it's satisfying to be able to recognize our own faults. You have, by now, acquired enough understanding to be your own judge. You have acknowledged yourself as the offender. Don't miss the opportunity to gain a friend. Go to Silveira, my dear, and speak to him frankly. He is a busy person, and you may not get another chance soon.

As I hesitated, she added:

Don't be afraid. Whenever we follow our head and heart in the practice of good, Jesus grants us the help necessary to succeed. The accomplishment of worthy actions, whatever they may be, constitutes a privilege to the soul. Keep the Master's Gospel in mind and go seek the treasure of reconciliation.

I no longer hesitated, but ran after Silveira, opening my heart to him and begging him to forgive both me and my father for our past errors.

You see, I explained earnestly, we were both blind to everything but self interest. Whenever money and vanity go together, few avoid taking the wrong path.

Silveira, greatly touched, cut me short.

Listen, Andre, is anybody exempt from fault? Do you imagine that I led a blameless life? Besides, your father was a real teacher to me. My children and I are indebted to him for his valuable lessons in individual effort. Would we have made any spiritual progress, were it not for this firm defense of his rights? Over here, we renew all our old concepts of life and realize that our supposed enemies are really our benefactors. Don't brood over these sad memories. Let's look ahead to infinite life and work with the Lord.

Noticing my moist eyes, he patted me on the back in a fatherly way, and added:

Don't waste your time over this. I hope I'll soon have the pleasure of accompanying you in visiting your father.

I shook his hand in silence, feeling a new joy in my soul. It seemed that a dark little corner of my heart had been suddenly flooded with a divine light forever.

36. The Dream

Work went on without interruption. Many sick patients needed urgent care, and other perturbed entities required devoted attention. By evening I had mastered the technique of magnetic passes, which I applied to many of the patients. Tobias returned to the Chambers in the morning, and more through generosity than any merit of mine, he encouraged me through his words of praise:

Well done, Andre! He exclaimed. I'm going to mention you specifically to Minister Genesius, so you may receive your hour-bonuses in double for your first efforts.

As I was about to express my thanks, I was surprised to see Laura and Lysias coming towards us. After affectionate greetings, Laura said to me with a smile:

We simply had to come to tell you personally how happy we all are. I followed you in spirit the entire night, and your first steps on the road of brotherly cooperation are a great joy to our family. I had the pleasure of giving the good news to Minister Clarence, who sends you his best wishes.

We talked for a while, and they asked to hear my impressions. I was happy to oblige. Although Laura and Lysias invited me to return home with them to rest, Tobias had offered me a room in the Chambers, where I could retire without delay. I felt an urgent need to sleep. Unbeknownst to me, the greatest joy of the day was still to come.

Alone in the spacious and comfortable room where Narcisa had made me a bed, I offered up a prayer to the Lord of all Creation, thanking him for the joy of having been useful. Then the blessed fatigue of those who have fulfilled their duties left me no time for further musings. Within a few minutes I felt a sensation of lightness throughout my body. I had the impression of being carried away in a small boat, sailing towards unknown regions. Where was I being taken? It was impossible to tell. A silent man sat beside me at the helm. I felt like a child, unable to describe the wonders before me. Ecstatic at the magnificence of the scenery, I let myself be carried along without a word. The little craft seemed to be sailing rapidly, and at the same time gradually ascending. After a short time I found myself in a marvelous harbor, and heard a voice calling me lovingly from the pier.

Andre, Andre. I could tell that voice from a thousand others. Overwhelmed with joy, I disembarked with childlike zeal, and a moment later I was in my mother's arms. She led me to a beautiful forest, where flowers seemed to retain light, offering a permanent feast of perfume and color. Luminous golden carpets stretched out under the rustling foliage of the great trees. I felt an ineffable sensation of peace and happiness, different from the dream states I had experienced on Earth. I was well aware that I had left my heavier body in my room in the Chambers of Rectification, and was conscious of being in higher sphere. My notions of time and space were accurate, and I felt the wealth of emotions I was experiencing grow more and more intense. After inspiring me with words of appreciation, my mother explained:

I prayed fervently to Jesus that I might be granted the sublime satisfaction of your visit on your first day of useful service. As you already know, my son, work is a divine tonic for the heart. Many of our companions, on leaving the Earth, linger unproductively, awaiting miracles that never occur, their fine possibilities reduced to expressions of parasitism. Some plead discouragement from loneliness, others declare themselves maladjusted to the way in which they were called to serve the Lord. It is indispensable, Andre, to convert every

opportunity in life into a reason to remember and serve God. Just as in the lower spheres the bowl of soup given to the hungry, the balm offered to the leper, and the gesture of sympathy towards one stricken by adversity, are sublime deeds forever remembered in the House of the Father. Here a look of understanding cast to the sinner, the promise of the Gospel brought to those in despair, and hope imparted to the afflicted are blessings of spiritual work which also weigh greatly in our favor.

I had never before seen my mother's face so beautiful. Her eyes seemed to shine with a spiritual radiance and her tender hands transmitted invigorating fluids and an indescribable sensation of bliss to me.

Jesus Gospel, Andre, she continued, teaches us that there is greater joy in giving than in receiving. For our own happiness, let's learn to put this principle into practice in our daily efforts. Always give, my child, but above all never forget to give of yourself, in constructive tolerance, brotherly love and divine understanding. External charity is only a lesson, and a means to lead us to the more difficult practice of charity from within. Jesus gave more of Himself to redeem mankind than all the Earth's millionaires congregated in the fulfillment of material charity, however sublime their efforts may have been. Don't be ashamed to offer aid to our sickly brothers or clear the minds of the disturbed entities that come to the Chambers of Rectification, where I spiritually followed your work last night.

Work, my child, doing all the good you can. In all our spirit colonies, as on Earth, live restless souls anxious for novelty and distraction. As often as possible, try to avoid those amusements and devote yourself to useful service. Just as I, insignificant as I am, can see in spirit your efforts in the Astral City, while following your father's suffering in the Lower Zone, God sees and accompanies us all, from the most evolved messenger to the lowest beings in the scale of Creation.

My mother paused briefly, and I tried in vain to speak. Although tears of emotion had rendered me speechless, she understood my feelings. Looking at me with deep affection, she went on:

In most spirit colonies, services are remunerated with the hour-bonus which unites two essential factors. The bonus represents the possibility of receiving something from our brothers and co-workers, or of recompensing someone sharing our efforts. However, the determination of the hour's value, just as on Earth, belongs exclusively to God. Because of our fallibility as evolving beings, errors may occur in awarding hour-bonuses. The real computation of the spirit hour is a private question between the worker and the Divine Forces of Creation. That's why our experimental activities on the road to progress, starting at the physical sphere, undergo continuous, daily modifications. The administrator to whom the Lord has granted the opportunity of cooperating in the Divine Plan of Life, experiment with tables, registers, and remuneration. He grants them this opportunity just as He grants His creatures the temporary privilege of being fathers or mothers on Earth or in other worlds, and all sincere administrators do their utmost to carry out the tasks assigned them to the best of their abilities.

Every Father, conscious of his responsibilities, is full of devoted love; God also, my child is a careful Administrator and most loving Father. He never forgets any of His children and reserves His right to a direct understanding with His workers about real merit of the use of their time. All outward reward affects the personality undergoing the test, but the value of time concerns the eternal personality, the one that will always be present in our circles of life, on its upward march towards the Glory of God. This is why the Most High gives wisdom to

those who spend time learning and a longer life and greater joy to those who know how to forget themselves in serving others.

Mother became silent. As I dried my eyes, she put her arms around me. Like a boy who falls asleep after a lesson, I lost consciousness of everything until I awoke in my room near the Chambers of Rectification with an invigorating sense of joy.

37. Veneranda's Lecture

All through my work the following day, I looked forward to Veneranda's lecture, which was scheduled to take place after the evening prayers. Knowing that I needed permission to attend, I sought out Tobias.

These talks, he said, are only attended by truly earnest spirits. The instructors here can't afford to waste time. You may go along with the hundreds of workers and patients of the Ministries of Regeneration and Assistance.

I trust you will profit by it. He added, encouragingly.

My new day was spent in intense activity. The visit to my mother and her enlightening words on the practice of good had filled my spirit with sublime contentment. At first her explanation of the hour-bonus had raised certain doubts in my mind how could compensation be granted by God? Wasn't the reckoning of time a task of the spirit or human administrator? Tobias explained that the task of recording the period of service was generally assigned to administrators, as was that of fixing standards of wages and privileges according to a worker's merit, but only the Divine Forces could accurately calculate the essential value of time. There are workers who, after devoting forty years to some activity, end up just as inefficient as they began, a sure sign that they accomplished their task without the least spiritual interest. Likewise there are people who after a hundred years of earthly life will depart just as ignorant as they arrived.

To understand how precious your mothers concept is, Tobias said, it is enough to compare the hours spent by good men to those wasted by bad ones. The former become fountains of divine blessings, while the latter are instruments of torture and remorse. Each living being must settle accounts with the Father for opportunities received and work accomplished.

At the hour appointed for the lecture, following the evening prayer, Narcisa, Salustius and I made our way to a large natural hall. The hall was a wonder of shades of green, and we sat on comfortable benches formed from the vegetation. Various flowers glittered under the light of the chandeliers and scented the air with ineffable perfume.

I looked around curiously. I noticed twenty of them sitting decidedly apart from the crowd, between us and the flowery mound which supported the lecturer's chair. I inquired, and Narcisa explained:

We are seated with the regular audience. The brothers in the special seats are the most advanced students on the subject to be covered this evening. They are the only ones allowed to ask the instructor questions or present arguments. They have acquired this privilege through their applying themselves to that particular line of study. We may also attaint such a privilege, in time.

Aren't you allowed to sit with them? I asked.

Not this evening. As yet, I may sit there only when the lecture deals with the treatment of disturbed entities. However, some may stay for lectures on more than one topic, according to the degree of the knowledge they have already acquired.

A curious procedure. I remarked.

The Governor, she continued, established the procedure in all classes and lectures in the different ministries to keep them from being converted into futile discussions of unfounded

personal beliefs. Any worthy doubts or differing viewpoints may be duly considered and elucidated, but only at the proper moment.

She had hardly finished speaking when Veneranda entered the hall, accompanied by two women of distinguished bearing, who, Narcisa informed me, were Ministers of Communication. Every face lit up with joy at the sight of Veneranda, who looked nothing like the old lady her name seemed to imply. She appeared to me to be noble, simple, and unaffected. After a brief exchange of words with the brothers in the special seating, she began by saying:

As usual, our short meeting does not allow for long bursts of eloquence. I am here to talk to you about certain thought processes. Among us tonight are a few hundred listeners who are still surprised about the similarity of forms on the physical plane and in our spirit sphere. They have learned that thought is the universal language, and have been told that mental creation is the most important factor in spirit life. Numerous brothers are asking themselves questions, such as why they find earthly dwellings, utensils, and even the same forms of speech here. Yet this fact should not be a motive of surprise to anyone. We must not forget that, up to now, while in the physical body, we have lived in circles of antagonistic vibrations. Thought is the basis of all spiritual relations, but we must keep in mind that we are millions of souls in the Universe still far from perfect obedience to universal laws. We cannot, as yet, be compared with our older and wiser brothers nearer to the Divine Spheres. We are millions of entities living in the undisciplined inferior worlds of our Ego. The great instructors of physical mankind teach divine principles and expound eternal truths, but in our earthly life we generally learn these laws without obeying them; we acknowledge these truths without consecrating our lives to them.

Now then, do you imagine that by just admitting the power of thought, man can be purged of his inferior condition? Certainly not, it would be impossible. A hundred years on the planet represent much too short a period of training for us to become divine cooperators. During our earthly apprenticeship, we learn the principles of mental force, but forget that, for thousands of years, we have used our thought energies to form destructive mental creations, or at best creations harmful to ourselves.

We follow courses of spiritualization in the various religious schools of the world, yet, with most of us, it is frequently a question of mere verbal adherence, of lip service and nothing else. No one, however, can attend to his duty through words alone. The Bible teaches us that the Lord of Life Himself did not stop with the Word, but put His creative work into Action.

We all know that though is an essential force, but we overlook the fact that we have misused that force over centuries. We all know that it is man’s duty to provide for his own children; likewise each spirit is compelled to maintain and nourish his own creations. A criminal idea will produce mental creations of the same nature; a lofty principle will observer the same laws. Let me illustrate the fact with a more objective example. After rising to great heights, water is purified and carries vigorous vital fluids, returning as the vivifying dew and generous rains. Keep it on Earth, mixed with the impurities on the soil, and it will become a foul mire, a habitat for destructive micro-organisms.

Thought is a living force everywhere. It is the creative atmosphere involving the Father and His children, the Cause and Effects in the Universal Home. Through it men become either angels on their way to heaven or devilish fiends on the road to hell. Have you grasped the importance of this? Of course, evolved minds, both discarnate and incarnate, may communicate mentally without any need for form. Thought is, in itself, the basis of all of the mind’s silent messages within the marvelous planes of intuition shared by beings of all kinds.

Within this principle, a spirit who has lived only in France can communicate, mind-to-mind, with one in Brazil, regardless of language barriers. The language will always be that of the receiver. This, of course, depends on perfect attunement. However, we are not yet in the spheres of mental purity where all creatures are perfectly attuned to one another. Here we attune to one another in isolated groups and are compelled to carry on the transitory tasks of the planet so that we may return to it with a higher degree of efficiency.

Therefore, the Astral City as a transitory spirit colony is a great blessing granted us as an additional mercy in order that a few may prepare themselves to rise to higher spheres, and the majority may return to Earth on redeeming missions. I beg you, my friends, let us all realize the importance of the processes of the mind and live up to them from now on.

Who is willing to try? She said as she smiled to the audience after a long pause.

Soft music filled the air with melodious strains. The instructor continued to speak, radiating love, comprehension, sympathy and wisdom. Then, without any preparatory phrases or gestures, she closed her talk with a question.

What? Is the lecture over already? I asked, surprised to see the audience rising to leave.

That’s Veneranda’s way. The nurse answered with a smile. She always finishes her talks when the listeners are the most enthusiastic. She likes to say that the lessons of the Gospel began with Jesus, but no one knows when and how they will end.

38. Tobias Home

On my third day in the Chambers of Rectification, Tobias delighted me with a pleasant surprise. After work, when the night attendants had taken over, I was taken to his home, where moments of instructive entertainment awaited me.

When we arrived he introduced me to two women, one already elderly and the other approaching middle age. He explained that the first was his sister, the second his wife. Lucian and Hilda, both gracious and affable, welcomed me cordially.

We gathered in library, where I noticed beautifully bound books, all works of great spiritual value. Hilda invited me into the garden to see some delicately shaded arbors. Each residence in the Astral City seemed to specialize in raising certain flowers. Lysias home contained gloxinias and hundreds of lilies, while numerous hydrangea banks rose luxuriantly from a carpet of violets at Tobias home. Here and there rose clusters of slender trees, reminding me of young bamboo, whose upper branches were joined by enormous flowery bows of a curious climbing plant, forming a graceful canopy.

An intoxicating fragrance floated in the air. I couldn't put my admiration fully into words. We were speaking of the beauty of the landscape in general, as seen from that angle of the Ministry of Regeneration, when Luciana called us back to the house for a light meal.

Enchanted with the simple and cordial family atmosphere, I could find no words to give thanks to my host. After some friendly talk, Tobias said, smiling:

My friend Andre here is a newcomer to out Ministry, and probably doesn't know my family background yet.

They all smiled at me, and, noticing my silent interest, the head of the household continued:

In fact, there are several families similar to outs here. You see, I was married twice. He added, pointing to both ladies good humouredly.

Yes, indeed. I stammered, extremely confused, You mean that both Hilda and Luciana shared your experiences on Earth.

Exactly. He answered calmly.

Hilda turned to me and said apologetically:

You must excuse our Tobias, brother Andre. Whenever we entertain newcomers from Earth he always starts talking about the past.

And why not? Tobias asked, good humouredly. Shouldn't it be a motive of legitimate joy to conquer the monster of jealousy, acquiring at least a small degree of true brotherly love?

The problem really does concern us all. I remarked. There are millions of people on Earth who have twice made sacred marriage vows. How would we resolve such a delicate sentimental problem in the face of spiritual survival? We know that physical death merely transforms without destroying, and that spirit ties continue unbroken throughout infinity. How to proceed, then? Condemn the man or woman for marrying more than once? We would find millions of creatures in the same circumstances. I have often wondered at the passage in the Gospel in which the Master, referring to marriage in Eternity, promises us the life of angels.

We must remember, however, added the kind host, with all due respect to our Lord, that we aren't yet in the sphere of angels, but that of discarnate people.

But how can we cope with such a problem here? I asked.

Very simply. We know that between the irrational animal and rational man there are a series of gradational positions. Likewise, between ourselves and the angels there is a great distance to travel. Therefore, how could we aspire to the company of such angelic beings if we aren't even fraternal with each other? Of course, there are strong hearted travelers who, in a supreme effort of the will, face and surpass each obstacle they meet. The majority, however, can't do without bridges or the charitable help of devoted guides. Because of this truth, cases of this nature are settled through genuine brotherhood, keeping in mind that true marriage, a union of souls, can never be broken.

Luciana, who had kept silent, joined in.

However, it's only fair to add that we owe our present condition of happiness and comprehension to Hilda's spirit of love and self-denial.

But Tobias wife protested with humble dignity:

Oh, please. Don't bestow virtues on me which I don't possess. But, so that our guest might learn from my painful apprenticeship, I'll try to summarize our story.

With an introductory gesture, she began her touching story:

Tobias and I were married while still very young, in deference to the sacred spirit affinity we felt. I don't think it necessary to describe the happiness of two souls who, united by real love, are joined in the holy vows of matrimony. Death, however, seemed jealous of our great bliss, and ended my physical life when our second child was born. Our grief was indescribable. Tobias wept hopelessly while I felt incapable of controlling my own despair.

Oh, the sad days I spent in the Lower Zone, stubbornly clutching to my husband and two children, deaf to all exhortations sent me by my spirit friends. I wanted to fight, like a mother hen defending her nest, yet I realized that Tobias had to reorganize the home and that the children were badly in need of maternal care. My sister-in-law, who was single, couldn't stand the children, and the cook only feigned dedication to them. The two young nurses were unreliable girls, incapable of assuming any serious responsibilities.

Faced with that unbearable situation, Tobias could no longer put off an urgent decision, and one year after my death he married Luciana. If you only knew how I fought against it, I was like a wounded tiger! In my ignorance, I went as far as to struggle against the poor girl, trying to kill her. It was then that Jesus, in His great mercy, granted me the providential visit of my maternal grandmother, who had passed over so many years before. I was greatly surprised to see her arriving somewhat casually, as if for no special purpose. She sat down and drew me to her lap, just as she used to when I was a child. She asked, tearfully, well now, my grandchild. What is your role in life are you a lioness or a soul conscious of God? Don't you see that our sister Luciana acts as a mother to your children, keeps your house, tends to your garden, and puts up with your husband's moods? Do you think she isn't good enough to become his temporary companion in the struggles of life? Is this the way to show your gratitude for divine benevolence and reward those who serve you? Do you want to accept Luciana as a slave, but despise her as a sister? Hilda, have you forgotten the teachings of the Crucified? My poor, misguided grandchild.

Throwing my arms around my grandmother's neck I cried my heart out. I abandoned my old home in her company and came to serve in this blessed spirit colony. Luciana became as one

of my daughters, and I began to devote all my energies to serious studies and to the moral improvement of my inner self. Tobias raised another family, which also became mine by sacred spirit bonds. I tried to help everyone in my old home, without exception. In time Tobias came to join me here, and finally, to our great joy, Luciana also arrived. This, my friend, is our story.

But Hilda didn't tell you how much she had to go through to teach me with her example. Added Luciana.

Now no objected Tobias wife, stroking Luciana's hand. Luciana continued with a smile:

Thanks to Jesus and to Hilda I learned that there are different kinds of marriages: those of love, of fraternal motives, of tests, and of duty. The day Hilda granted me forgiveness with a fraternal kiss I felt that my heart broke away from the monster of jealousy. Spiritual matrimony forges a bond of souls, while others, even though sacred, are merely covenants of duty needed for the readjustment of past errors of fulfillment of redeeming processes.

And so we organized our new home based on true brotherhood Tobias added.

How are marriages made here? I asked, availing myself of a pause.

Through vibratory combination, Tobias explained kindly, or to make it clearer, by perfect attunement.

Unable to control my curiosity, and forgetting my manners, I went on:

But what is Luciana's position, exactly?

When a married Tobias, a widower, I should have known that our union would probably be fraternal. Yet it cost me much suffering to understand that. In fact, it is only logical co conclude that when a couple suffers from restlessness, incomprehension and sadness their marriage is only a physical union, not a spiritual bond.

I still had another question, but could find no words to express it without seeming unduly indiscreet. Hilda sensed my thoughts, however:

Don't worry, Luciana is already spiritually betrothed. Her companion of many earthly existences returned to the physical sphere a few years ago and she'll follow him next year. I think the happy meeting will be in Sao Paulo.

We all smiled joyfully. At that moment Tobias was called to the Chambers of Rectification to attend to a serious case. Thus our pleasant talk came to an abrupt end.

39. Consulting Laura

Tobias case made a deep impression on me. The memory of his home organized according to new principles of brotherly union, haunted my mind. After all, I also still considered myself the head of an earthly household and could well imagine how difficult it would be if I had found myself in a similar position. Would I have the courage to follow Tobias example? I thought not. I could not see myself as capable of worrying my dear Zelia so much, nor would I accept such an imposition on her part.

My observations of Tobias household tortured my mind, and I could find no satisfactory answer to my questions. I felt so perplexed that the following day I decided to pay Lysias a visit in my leisure time, in order to consult Laura, whom I trusted as a mother.

I was welcomed with great joy and had to wait for an opportunity to talk calmly with my friend's mother. When the young people left for their usual evening entertainment, I found myself alone with my generous friend. Although embarrassed, I told her what was troubling me. She listened attentively and responded with a knowing smile:

You were right in coming to discuss this question with me. The solution of any soul-searching problem requires friendly cooperation.

After a brief pause, she went on:

Tobias case is but one example of countless similar arrangements here and in other spiritually evolved communities.

But it does shock our feelings, doesn't it? I remarked earnestly.

From a merely human point of view, those things are even scandalous; however, my dear friend, we must now consider, above all, principles of a spiritual nature. So, Andre, we have to try to understand the evolutionary phases of life. Since we have to undergo a long period of animal existence, we cannot expect to get rid of it all of a sudden. We take centuries to emerge from the lower stratum. Sex is one of the most misunderstood of divine faculties. Thus, for the present, it won't be easy for you to grasp the evolved aspect of the domestic organization you visited yesterday. Still, you may be sure that great happiness reigns there, through the atmosphere of comprehension between the performers of the earthly drama. It isn't everyone who succeeds in substituting bonds of light for chains of darkness in such a short time.

But is that a general rule? I asked, Do all men and women married more than once reorganize their home here to include all those with whom they may have formed affectionate ties?

Don't jump to conclusions, continued Laura, patiently, Go slowly. Many may feel affection but have no affinity. You must bear in mind that vibratory conditions are far more important here than on Earth. Tobias case is an example of the victory of true fraternity, won by three souls struggling for the acquisition of an evolved understanding. Whoever does not conform to the law of fraternity and mutual respect will automatically be barred from crossing those frontiers. The somber regions of the Shadowy Zone are crowded with entities that failed in similar trials. As long as they go on hating, they remain as unsteady compass needles, moved by every antagonistic influence. Likewise, if they don't understand the truth, they succumb to the domination of falsehoods and are unable to enter the zones of superior spiritual activities. Countless are those who suffer for long years without spiritual relief, only because they will not conform to the laws of legitimate fraternity.

What happens then? I asked as Laura paused briefly, Since the poor souls on such trials aren't admitted to the spirit communities of evolved apprenticeship, where do they live?

After truly infernal torments of their own inferior creation, she continued, they return to the physical sphere to begin again the lesson they wouldn't learn in the spirit plane. Divine Mercy grants them new bodies and complete oblivion of the past. They will then receive through blood ties those they deliberately shunned out of hate or incomprehension. We can thus realize and appreciate more the transcendental significance of Jesus exhortations when He advises us to seek immediate reconciliation with our adversaries. We should follow this advice for our own good. Those who know how to use their time wisely can, on closing their earthly career, attain lofty spirit conditions with an untroubled conscience. Even though they may have to return to the flesh, their burden of trials and tribulations will be considerably lighter. Many spirits will spend centuries trying to overcome bitter feelings of hatred and resentment during their earthly sojourn, only to revert to them again on reentering the spirit world. The problem of forgiveness, according to Jesus, is extremely serious, and cannot be accomplished merely with lip service, for while a superficial pardon is but a question of words, those who would really forgive must dig deep into themselves and cast off the venomous dregs of former times.

Laura fell silent, as if pondering the far-reaching import of the profound concepts she had just voiced. Availing myself on the pause, I remarked:

The experience of marriage is very sacred to me. My friends was not surprised at my observation, and replied:

To spirits still undergoing simple animal experiences, our conversation must be devoid of all interest, but we, who have already learned the importance of illumination with Christ, must take into due consideration not only the experience of matrimony but also all sexual experience, as it greatly affects the life of the soul.

My wife has always occupied a sacred place in my heart, above all other affections. Nevertheless, at these words, remembering my past as an ordinary man, I could not help blushing. On hearing Lysias mother now, I recalled the time-honored words of the Old Testament: Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house nor his wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ass, nor his ox, nor anything that is thy neighbors. Suddenly, faced with Tobias case, I felt unable to continue. Laura sensed my inner embarrassment and continued:

Wherever the task of readjusting wrongs is common to all, there must be room for a great brotherly understanding and a deep respect for the Divine Mercy that offers us so many opportunities to work out our amends. For the creature who has already acquired some spiritual enlightenment, every sexual experience assumes an unsuspected significance. This is why no truly redeeming mission can be fulfilled without legitimate brotherly understanding. Just a short time ago I heard a highly-evolved instructor in the Ministry of Elevation declare that were he able he would materialize himself on the physical plane to teach the representatives of religious denominations in general, that, to be divine, all charity must be based on human brotherhood.

My hostess then closed our talk by inviting me to see Heloisa, who was still confined to her room. After a short visit to the young newcomer from the physical plane and noticing with pleasure her marked improvement, I returned to the Chambers of Rectification immersed in deep thought. I was no longer concerned with Tobias conduct nor Hilda's or Luciana's attitude. I was filled with a profound awe at the all-embracing issue of human fraternity.

40. As You Sow, So Shall You Reap

I didn't know how to explain my wish to visit the Women's Department of the Chambers of Rectification. Nevertheless, I spoke to Narcisa about it, and she immediately offered to take me there.

When the Father summons us to a certain place, she said kindly, surely there is some work awaiting us there. Each situation in life has a desired end. Remember to watch for this principle in apparently causal visits. As long as our thoughts are turned to the practice of good, it won't be difficult to identify divine suggestions.

That same day, she and I went to find Nemesia, the prestigious superintendent of the Women's Department. It wasn't hard to find her. In the ward I saw rows of women in immaculately well-kept beds, all of them pitiable human wrecks. Here and there I heard heart-rending cries and agonizing exclamations. Nemesia, radiating the same kindness as Narcisa, welcomed me cordially.

I suppose you must be accustomed to these scenes by now. The situation is about the same in the Men's Department.

And, with an expressive gesture to her companion, she went on:

Narcisa, will you please show our brother all the different sections that you think may be educational for him? The ward is open to you.

On our way, we began discussing human vanity, always inclined to physical pleasures, and recalling observations and teachings on the subject. We reached Pavilion Seven, where I saw rows of women lying in a long line of beds each set equally distant from the others. I was studying their faces when one caught my eye. Who could the woman with that particular embittered face be? She looked prematurely old and worn, her lips twitching with a frustrated expression of irony and resignation. Her eyes were dim and sorrowful, and her sight seemed to be defective. With a heavy heart, I restlessly searched my memory. In a few moments I remembered her from my past it was Elisa, the same Elisa I had known in my youth. Suffering had changed her, but there was no doubt in my mind.

I perfectly remembered the day an old friend of my mother's brought the poor girl to our house to enter our service. At first there was nothing unusual in our relationship, but gradually we forgot ourselves. Abusing the relationship between one who orders and one who serves, we grew more and more intimate. Elisa seemed to be frivolous and thoughtless, and when we were alone she often referred to her earlier irresponsible adventures, breaking down the last barriers of self-restraint between us.

One day, my mother called me to account. Such intimacy, she exhorted, was not good. It was quite right to be kind and generous to the maid, but our relationship should stay within wise limits. It was too late, though. We had already gone beyond those limits, and soon Elisa, lacking the courage to accuse me to my face, left our home.

Time passed, and the episode receded in my memory to a mere incident in my life. But, as everything else, it was not blotted out of my mind, and here was Elisa before me, downtrodden and humbled. Where had that wretched creature lived, who so early in life had experienced such sufferings? Where had she come from? This case was not like Silveira's in which I had shared responsibility with my father. Here, the debt was all mine. I was nervous

and put to shame by the accusing reminiscences and, like a child anxious to be forgiven for wrongdoing, I turned to Narcisa for guidance.

At times I admired the trust those saintly women inspired in me. I might never have had the courage to ask Minister Clarence for the explanations I had asked of Lysias mother. I probably would have acted otherwise had I been in Tobias company at that moment. Considering that a generous and Christian woman is always a mother, I opened my heart to the kindly nurse, who seemed, by the way she looked at me, to understand everything. As I began to talk, I could hardly keep back my tears. I was only halfway through my painful confession when she interrupted me:

You needn't go on, Andre. I can already guess the end of your story. I fully realize your moral torture from my own personal experience. However, you mustn't indulge in destructive thoughts. Since the Lord has granted you the opportunity of meeting this sister, it must be because He thinks it's time to repay your debt.

Don't be afraid. She said, sensing my indecision, Go to her and try to comfort her. Remember, brother that we always find the fruits of the good or evil we have sown. This statement isn't a mere doctrinal phrase it's a universal reality. I have learned a great deal from similar situations. Blessed are the debtors who are ready to pay.

Seeing that I had already made up my mind to atone for the wrong committed, she added:

Go on, but don't tell her who you are for the moment. Leave that for later, when you have already managed to help her. It won't be difficult, as she will continue to be almost blind for some time yet. By her aura, I can classify the poor thing as one of those unfortunate fallen women and defeated mothers.

We approached Elisa's bed and I began to speak comfortingly to her. She told us her name, and that she had been brought to the Chambers three months ago. Determined to humble myself before Narcisa so that the lesson should be indelibly written on my soul, I inquired:

You must have suffered a great deal, Elisa. Was yours an unhappy life?

Sensing the affectionate tone of my question, she smiled at me resignedly and said:

Painful experiences are always eloquent examples. I replied.

The patient, who had undergone a deep moral transformation, reflected for a while, as if conjuring up the past, and began her story:

I wasted my life as do all those reckless women who exchange the blessed bread of work for the venomous gall of illusion. Born in an extremely poor home, I was still very young when I went into service in the home of a well-to-do businessman. He has a son who was as young as I. There my life underwent a great change. An undue intimacy gradually developed between his son and myself until at last all reaction on my part would have been useless. I forgot that God never denies work to those who wish to live worthily, and gave myself up to a series of painful experiences, which I needn't relate. I tasted the good things of life material comfort, luxury, pleasures and gay company. But they were soon followed by self-hatred, venereal diseases, hospitalization, abandonment and disillusion. In the end came blindness and physical death. In great despair I wandered for a long time, until one day I prayed so fervently to the Blessed Virgin that, for her sake, some heavenly messengers rescued me and brought me here to this generous house of assistance.

And who was that man that made you so unhappy I asked, moved to tears.

I heard my name and that of my parents, and anxiously asked her whether she hated him:

All through my past suffering, I cursed him with mortal hatred; but Sister Nemesia has changed me. I realize now that to hate him I should have to hate myself, for in my case, the blame must be shared between us. So, I mustn't reproach anyone.

Touched by her humility, I took her hand. A tear of remorseful repentance fell on it.

Listen, my friend, I said with strong emotion, my name is also Andre, and I want to help you. From now on you may count on me. I'll do all I can for you.

And your voice, she remarked, ingenuously, is like his.

Up to now, I went on, I haven't had a family, so to speak, here in The Astral City. So you will be my dear sister, and can rely on my devoted friendship.

Oh, how grateful I am to you! She exclaimed, drying her eyes which lit up with a radiant smile, It's such a long time since I heard a kind voice comfort me with affectionate words. May Jesus bless you.

At that moment, as my tears fell abundantly, Narcisa, in a motherly gesture, took both my hands and repeated Elisa's words:

May Jesus Bless you.

41. A Call To The Struggle

In the first days of September in 1939, the Astral City, like several other spirit colonies connected with American civilization, suffered the impact of the conflicting currents in the world of the incarnate. The Second World War was about to begin, and would be just as disturbing in the spirit spheres as it was destructive on the physical plane. Amongst us, there was considerable talk about the war in perspective. Many of us could hardly disguise our horror at the imminent social upheaval.

It had long been known that the great brotherhoods of the East had been enduring the antagonistic vibrations of Japan and experiencing great difficulties. But now, curious facts of marked educational significance could be observed. Just as the noble spirit circles of old Asia were acting in silence, the Astral City started preparing itself for the same kind of work. The Governor issued valuable exhortations bearing on fraternity and sympathy, particularly emphasizing the need to exercise special care in our thoughts, and in curbing our negative sentimental impulses. I saw that evolved spirits in these circumstances look on the aggressors not as enemies, but as trespassers, violating the universal order, whose criminal activities must be restrained.

How unhappy are the peoples who become intoxicated with the wine of evil. Salustius said to me, The temporary victories they may win will be so many steps down to their ruin, and the instruments of their final defeat. When a nation provokes a war, that nation is introducing disorder into the House of the Father, and will pay dearly for it.

I observed that the higher zones of life rise in justifiable defense against the assaults of the forces of ignorance and darkness, gathered to spread anarchy and destruction. I was informed by my fellow workers that such an aggressive country naturally converts into a powerful nucleus, centralizing the forces of evil. Disregarding the immense dangers they are incurring, their peoples, except for the noble and wise spirits in their midst, are intoxicated by their contact with the elements of perversion they themselves have summoned from the dark regions. Large working communities become instruments of crime. Infernal legions descend upon the great centers of collective progress, transforming them into places of cruelty and horror. But, while the forces of darkness lay siege to the aggressors minds, spirit groups from evolved spheres hasten to the aid of the victims. If we should feel sorry for an individual who acts in opposition to the low of goodness, even more should we pity a nation that forsakes justice.

One afternoon, a few days after the first bombs had exploded on Polish territory, I was in the Chambers of Rectification with Tobias and Narcisa when an unforgettable clarion was heard for over fifteen minutes. Deep emotion pervaded us all.

It is a summons from a very high sphere to the services of assistance to the Earth. Narcisa kindly explained.

It is the signal that war couldn’t be avoided it will be waged with terrible consequences to mankind. Tobias exclaimed, disquieted, Distance notwithstanding, all psychic life in America had its origin in Europe. We will have a difficult task preserving the New World.

The clarion call continued, with strange, soul-stirring modulations. I noticed that a profound silence had fallen over the Ministry of Regeneration. Noticing my anxious expression, Tobias explained:

When the clarion call of alarm sounds in the name of the Lord, we must silence all noise down here, so we may hear its appeal in the depths of our hearts.

When the last notes of the mysterious instrument had died away, we went out to the great park, to watch the sky. Deeply touched, I saw countless luminous points, which looked like splendid little globes, shining in the sky.

The clarion, Tobias added, equally moved, is sounded by vigilant entities of a very high plane.

Returning to the Chambers the loud noises from the streets in the higher zones of the colony attracted my attention. Tobias left Narcisa in charge of certain important measures for the patients, and invited me to come watch the busy streets with him. On passing through the upper stories, on our way to Government House Square, we noted intense activity in all departments. Seeing my curiosity, Tobias explained:

These crowds are going to the Ministry of Communication for news. The clarion we have just heard is only sounded on extremely serious occasions. We know that it announced war, but it's possible that the Ministry of Communication may give us some particulars. Look at that group going by.

Two men and four women were walking along beside us, talking animatedly:

Can you imagine what will become of us in the Ministry of Assistance? asked one woman, For many months the number of petitions we have received has been extraordinary. It has been difficult to keep up with the work.

And what about us in Regeneration? The older of the two gentlemen exclaimed, All our activities have been considerably increased. In my department vigilance against vibrations of the Dark Realms requires incessant effort. I am wondering what will surprise us next.

Tobias touched my arm lightly, whispering:

Let's go and hear what some of the other groups are saying:

Is it possible that European war will affect us all?

The other, who seemed remarkably poised, replied serenely:

I see no reason for jumping to hasty conclusion. For the present, there is nothing new but an increase in work, which, in reality, is a blessing. As to the rest, things appear to be following their course. Sickness teaches us to value health, and adversity gives us food for thought. Chine has been under fire for some time now, and yet you haven't shown any signs of apprehension.

But now, explained his rather embarrassed companion, it seems that I shall have to modify my plan of work.

Helvetius, Helvetiuns, the other smiled and replied, let's now forget about my plan of work and think in terms of our plans of work I turned to Tobias, who was calling my attention to three women to our left who were going in the same direction. The scene was picturesque even here, on an evening of anxious expectation.

I am terribly worried about it, said the youngest of the three ladies, because Everard mustn't return from the planet just now.

But it seems, one of her friends answered, that the war won't reach the Peninsula. Portugal is a long way from the seat of the war.

But, inquired the third, why worry about Everard's arrival? What could happen if he came here?

I'm afraid he would ask for me as his wife. Explained the youngest, I couldn't bear it. He is so ignorant and I couldn't withstand his cruelty again.

Don't be silly. Answered the second, Have you forgotten that he would be kept in the Lower Zone, or someplace worse?

Poor thing! Tobias said, smiling, She fears the liberation of a thoughtless and cruel husband.

After a good while, which we spent observing the spiritual multitude, we reached the Ministry of Communication. We waited in front of the vast buildings used for information services. Thousands of entities were anxiously jostling each other. They all wanted information and clarification, and it was impossible to satisfy them. Extremely surprised by the loud clamor, I saw someone on the balcony high up in one of the buildings, asking for their attention. It was an old man of imposing appearance. He announced that the Governor would make an appeal within ten minutes.

It's Minister Espiridian. Tobias informed me.

The noise and confusion subsided, and we heard the Governor's voice through numerous loudspeakers:

Brothers of the Astral City, do not give yourselves up to agitation in thought and word. Affliction isn't constructive; anxiety won't uplift us. We must know how to be worthy of the Lord's call. Let us obey the Divine Will by working silently at our posts.

That clear and compelling voice, which spoke with authority and love, had a singular effect on the crowds. In the short space of an hour, the entire colony had returned to its habitual serenity.

42. The Governor S Address

On the Sunday following the sounding of the clarion, the governor had promised to participate in the regular prayer meeting at the Ministry of Regeneration. The main reason for the visit, Narcisa explained, was the preparation of new schools of aid in the Ministry of Assistance, and of training centers in the Ministry of Regeneration.

Even though the conflict is so far away, said Narcisa, we must organize certain specialized first-aid services, as well as appropriate training against fear.

Against fear? I asked, surprised.

Yes. You may not know the high percentage of human lives extinguished simply by the destructive vibrations of terror, which are as contagious as any dangerous epidemic disease. We classify fear as one of mankind's worst enemies, because it settles in the innermost recesses of the soul undermining its deepest resources of strength.

Noting my astonishment, she continued:

Rest assured. In emergencies such as this the Government values training against fear far above even the nursing courses. Serenity guarantees success. Later, you'll realize the tremendous significance of these measures.

I found nothing to say in answer to her. On the eve of the suspicious day, I had the honor of being chosen, along with a great many others, to clean and decorate the large hall which was set aside for the use of the Colony's greatest leader. I was understandably apprehensive, as I was about to meet the noble mentor for the first time. I wasn't alone in my feelings, however. A great many of my companions were in the same condition as I.

It seemed that the social life of our Ministry had begun to center around the great natural hall since dawn that Sunday, when caravans from all departments within the Ministry of Regeneration began to arrive. The Great Choir of the Government House Temple, together with the choir boys of the Ministry of Elucidation schools began the ceremony with a wonderful hymn entitled Always with Thee, Lord Jesus , sung by two thousand voices. Other singularly beautiful hymns followed, filling the hall with their heavenly music. The gentle murmuring of the perfumed breeze seemed to respond to the soft strains.

The entire Regeneration staff had received entrance privileges to the enormous green hall, because the prayer meeting was dedicated to them. The other ministries were represented by delegations. For the first time, I had the opportunity to see workers of the Ministries of Elevation, and Divine Union, who appeared to be clothed in a bright luminous glow. The beauty of the festivities exceeded anything I could possibly have imagined. Musical instruments of sublime vibratory power filled the atmosphere with soft melodies.

At ten o clock the Governor made his entrance, accompanied by the twelve Ministers of Regeneration. I shall never forget the noble and imposing figure of that old man, with snow white hair and remarkably lucid eyes, whose countenance seemed to reflect both the wisdom of age and the energy of youth; the tenderness of the saint and the serenity of the conscientious and just administrator. Tall and slim in his gleaming white tunic, he leaned of a staff despite his youthful gait.

Satisfying my curiosity, Salustius told me:

The Governor has always favored patriarchal attitudes, because he believes that one should always administer with fatherly love.

As he took his seat in the place of honor, the children's voices sang the hymn To You, Lord, Our Lives, accompanied by the melodious strains of harps. The energetic and loving old man glanced at the thousands packed before him, then opened a luminous book, The Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, my friend told me. Having carefully selected a page, he read slowly:

And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. (The Master's words, Matthew, 24, verse 6).

With his voice greatly amplified by electric vibrations, the Governor invoked the blessings of Christ. Then, after greeting the representatives of Divine Union, Elevation, Elucidation, Communication and Assistance, he addressed himself to all the workers of our ministry. It is impossible to describe the gentle but firm intonation of that unforgettable voice, at the same time loving and compelling, or to express on paper the exalted purpose of those divinely inspired comments of the Gospel, inspired by a profound veneration for sacred matters. Ending his speech, the Governor turned to the workers of Regeneration and said:

Brothers whose labors are more closely connected with earthly activities, it is to you that I address my personal appeal, expecting much of your noble dedication. Let us give the best of ourselves in courage and service. Now that the legions of darkness intensify the difficulties of the lower spheres, it is imperative that we kindle new lights to dissipate the dense shadows obscuring the Earth. It is to you, workers of the Ministry, that I have dedicated this meeting with my heart-felt trust. At his moment, therefore, it is not our brothers whose minds already function in the higher planes of life whom I ask to shoulder this gigantic task, but you, who still carry some of the world's dust on your sandals.

The Astral City needs thirty thousand workers trained in defense service, thirty thousand cooperators willing to forego all demands of rest and personal considerations, while our battle is waged against the unleashed forces of ignorance and crime. There will be plenty of work for all in the vibratory border regions between ourselves and the lower planes; for we cannot await the enemy at our gates. In collective organizations, prevention must be considered and essential measure for the preservation of internal peace. We, in the Astral City, are over one million people devoted to superior designs and to our own moral improvement. Would it be charitable to allow our colony to be invaded by millions of rebellious spirits? So there must be no hesitation in the defense of the common good. I know that many of you have the Great Crucified One in mind at this moment. Yes, Jesus gave himself up to a mob of rioters and criminals for the sake of redemption, but He did not hand over the world to disorder and ruin. We should all be ready for individual sacrifices, but we cannot give up our dwelling place to evildoers. Of course, our essential task is of confraternity and peace, love and assistance. It is obvious that we consider all evil as a waste of energy and all crime as a disease of the soul. Yet, we must bear in mind that the Astral City is a divine patrimony, which we must protect with the best energies of our hearts and souls. That which we cannot preserve, we are not worthy to enjoy. Therefore, let us prepare legions of workers to go on missions of fraternal love to Earth and to the Lower Zones and the Regions of Darkness, teaching, helping and comforting. But, we must above all organize, here in this ministry, a special legion of defense to safeguard our spiritual attainments within our vibratory frontiers.

He went on in this way for a long time, stressing the importance of certain essential measures to be carried out, expounding deep considerations, which I would never be able to reproduce here. He finally closed his address by repeating the verse from Matthew which he had used to

begin with, and again invoked Jesus blessings on all his listeners, so that none of us should receive the divine benefits in vain.

Moved and fascinated, I listened to a hymn, which Minister Veneranda had named The Great Jerusalem, sung by the children. As the Governor stepped down from the lectern in an atmosphere of renewed hope, a gentle breeze, perhaps from distant spheres, showered wonderful, blue rose petals on us all, which melted away as they touched our foreheads, filling our hearts with intense joy.

43. An Informal Conversation

The festive atmosphere still prevailed at the Ministry of Regeneration despite the departure of the Governor and his closest advisors. There was much talk about the ceremony just over, and hundreds, in response to the appeal of our spiritual leader, were volunteering for the strenuous work of defense. I sought Tobias to consult him about the possibility of my following their example, but my generous brother smiled at my innocence and said:

Andre, you are just beginning a new job. Don't be in a hurry to ask for more responsibilities. The Governor has just told us that there will be work for everybody. Don't forget that our Chambers of Rectification are centers of active work both day and night, and that as thirty thousand workers will be detailed for permanent vigilance, there will be great gaps in the rear guard which will have to be filled somehow.

Perceiving my disappointment, my kindly companion added, good-humoredly, after a short pause:

Cheer up. You can always enroll yourself in a course against fear. Believe me, it will do you a lot of good.

Meanwhile, Lysias, who had come to the festival in the delegation from the Ministry of Assistance, sought me and with Tobias permission I followed him for a quiet talk.

Have you met Minister Benevenutus, of Regeneration? He inquired, The one who has just arrived from Poland?

I'm afraid I haven't had the pleasure.

Let's go to find him, then. I'll introduce you to him. Lysias continued, sharing with me the vibrations of his great brotherly heart. I've had the honor of counting him among my personal friends for a long time.

In a few minutes we found ourselves in a large green park where Benevenutus usually worked. Several groups of visitors were talking here and there under the wide-spreading trees. Leading me to the largest gathering where the minister was exchanging impressions with several friends, Lysias introduced me with kind references. Benevenutus welcomed me amiably and cordially included me in his circle. As the conversation proceeded, I noticed that the topic under discussion was the situation on Earth.

So painful, the scenes we witnessed. Accustomed as we are to peace in America, none of us had imagined the tremendous difficulties in the work of spiritual aid on the battlefields of Poland. All is darkness and difficulty there. One cannot expect sparks of faith either from aggressors or from the majority of victims, who give themselves up entirely to hideous impressions. Our incarnate brothers offer us no help whatsoever, but merely consume our strength. I must say that, since the beginning of my work, I have never seen such terrible mass suffering.

And did the delegation remain there for long? One of those present asked with interest.

As long as we could. Replied the minister, The head of the expedition, our colleague from Assistance thought it advisable that we apply ourselves solely to the task so that we might take full advantage of the opportunity. I'm afraid we are far from possessing the extraordinary capacity of resistance of those devoted spirit workers on duty there. All the first-aid service are working efficiently there, in spite of the suffocating atmosphere, saturated

with destructive vibrations. The battlefield, invisible to our Earthly brothers, is a real hell of indescribable proportions. Never does the human spirit show so ostensibly the conditions of a fallen soul, with all its diabolic features, as in war. I saw intelligent and cultured men apply themselves with the utmost care to localizing districts of peaceful activity to carry out what they call direct hits. Bombs of high explosive power destroy the patient labors of years. The pestilent emanations of hatred mingled with the poisonous fluids of guns render any service of aid almost impossible. However, what distressed us most was the pitiful conditions of the military aggressors. As they were cut off from their fleshly forms, most of them passed over under the influence of the forces of darkness, and ran away from missionary spirits, calling them all ghosts of the cross.

And weren't any rescued? Someone interrupted. The minister answered significantly:

It will always be possible to help peaceful lunatics in their home, but what can we do with the furiously insane but shut them up in an asylum? There was nothing to be done with such entities but leave them to the abysses of darkness, where they will, in due course, be compelled to change their mental attitude, and open their minds to a new trend of thought. So it's only just that the assistance patrols limit their rescue to those with some probability of assimilating help from above. Thus, my dear friends, you see that on every account our observations were sad indeed.

Availing himself of the pause in the conversation, one member of the group remarked:

Lack of religious preparation, my friends. Declared Benevenutus, A cultivated intelligence is not enough. Man must, above all, enlighten his spirit in things eternal. All creeds are holy in their fundamentals and their representatives only carry out a divine mission when they teach the Truth of God. They'll never be able to quench the spiritual thirst of civilization if they drift into political or worldly channels. Without the divine breath, religious personalities may inspire respect and admiration, but never faith and trust.

But what about spirit communication? Someone asked abruptly, Didn't its first manifestations take place in America and Europe over fifty years ago? Isn't that new movement continuing to spread the eternal truths?

Benevenutus smiled, and gestured, and went on explaining:

The Spiritist Doctrine is our great hope, and in every respect the Comforter for incarnate man, but its progress is still very slow. It is a divine gift, which most men haven't eyes to see, as yet. An overwhelming percentage of new adepts approach the divine source still under the influence of old religious vices. They want to reap its benefits, but are unwilling to give anything of themselves. They invoke the truth, but don't go in search of it. While the studious ones reduce mediums to mere human guinea pig, numerous believers act like certain patients who, though completely healed, believe more in sickness than in heath, and never come to stand on their own feet. In a word, over there, they're after materialized spirits for the performance of transitory phenomena, whereas here we spend our time looking for spiritualized men to carry out serious work.

The minister's play on words brought a good-humored response from his listeners.

Our task is really astronomical, he resumed gravely, however, we must bear in mind that every man is a divine seed. Let's undertake our mission with hope and optimism, for if we do our share to the best of our power, we may rest assured that God will do the rest.

44. The Dark Regions

Adding to the happiness of this reunion, Lysias surprised me with his great culture and sensitivity. He played some old songs expertly on his zither, reminding me of music on Earth. What a wonderful day! More spiritual joys followed in succession, as if we were in heaven. When at last I found myself alone with my kind friend from Assistance, I tried to tell him of my impressions.

Have no doubt, he said, smiling, that when we are in the company of those we love, something comforting and constructive goes on inside us. It's the nourishment of love, Andre. When souls join in the pursuit of some common interest, their thoughts mingle, forming centers of living forces through which, from the general vibration, each member of the group will receive his share of joy or suffering. That's why, on the planet, environment is such an important factor in every man's life. We shall always feed on what we cultivate. If we give in to feelings of sadness, we shall become slaves of them. If we are unduly absorbed by the ideas of sickness, we shall suffer their consequences. There's no mystery. It's a law of life which works for good or evil. Wherever an atmosphere of brotherhood, hope, love or joy prevails, we shall carry with us a share of those feelings. On the other hand, when we shall leave a gathering where inferior tendencies of selfishness, vanity or crime predominate, we carry the destructive vibration of those feelings.

You're right! I exclaimed. I can see that life in earthly homes is equally ruled by these principles. Whenever there is mutual understanding, life becomes a fore state of heavenly bliss, but if misunderstandings and unkindness prevail, home becomes a real hell on Earth.

Lysias agreed with a smile. I then took the opportunity to ask about something which had been puzzling me. The Governor, in his address, had mentioned the spheres of Earth, the Shadowy Zone, and Darkness. I had never heard any mention of Darkness previously. I wondered whether that Dark Region could be the Shadowy Zone itself, where I myself had spent several wandering in dense shadows. Weren't there numerous deranged entities and patients of all sorts from the Shadowy Zone in the Chambers? Remembering that Lysias had given me some valuable information about my own condition on my arrival in the Astral City, I told him of my doubts and questions. With a noteworthy expression on his face, my friend explained:

We call the lowest regions we know Darkness. Let's consider all the creatures as travelers in life: a few of them advance resolutely on the way towards the essential object of the journey. These are already spiritually evolved and, conscious of the divine essence within themselves, they progress without hesitating towards their sublime goal. Most, however, linger along the road. Numberless souls spend centuries repeating the same experience. While the former advance along straight lines, the latter travel along the same circular path. Thus failing, recommencing, and failing again, they are exposed to endless vicissitudes. Many will go astray in the forest of life bewildered by the labyrinth they have themselves traced. To that class belong the millions of beings wandering in the Shadowy Zones. Others, because of their selfish thoughts, walk in the dark and will often fall into precipices where they will remain for an indefinite time. Do you see now?

The explanation could not have been clearer. Impressed by the length and complexity of the subject, I went on with my questions:

But what about those falls? Do they only happen on the Earth? Are only the incarnate likely to be hurled into abysses?

After a moment's reflection, Lysias replied:

That is a good observation. Wherever he is, the spirit may hurl himself into the abysses of evil. However, in the higher spheres the defenses are stronger. Therefore the responsibility of the fault committed is also greater.

Yet, I insisted, I thought that a fall wouldn't be possible except on Earth. It seemed to me that the divine atmosphere, the knowledge of truth and of higher aid would be infallible protection against the poison of vanity and temptation.

My friend smiled and went on:

The problem of temptation is more complex. The Earth itself is filled with divine atmosphere, knowledge of the truth, and heavenly assistance. Yet so many fight destructive battles while surrounded by sheltering trees and flowering fields. Many others commit murders by moonlight, insensible to the soothing language of the stars. Others oppress the weaker fellow while hearing around them sublime revelations of truth. Indeed, the Earth doesn't lack expressions of divine presence.

Lysias words sank deeply into my spirit. It is true that, in general, battles are fought in Spring and Summer when Nature displays its treasures of color, perfume and light on the ground and in the sky, while burglary and murder are preferably committed at night, when the moon and stars involve the Earth in an atmosphere of celestial poetry. Most earthly tyrants are men of great culture who have turned their backs on divine inspiration. Although my conception about the spiritual fall had changed, my curiosity was not yet satisfied:

Now, Lysias, could you give me an idea where the region of Darkness is located? If the Lower Zone is connected with the human mind, where is this place of suffering and horror?

There are sphere of life everywhere. My friend resumed, The void is merely a literary image. Everywhere there are living forces and each species of beings moves in a special zone of life.

After a short pause, during which he seemed to reflect deeply, he went on:

Of course, as happens to most of us, you placed the sphere of life after the death of the physical body in the zones right above the surface of the globe, unaware of those below it. Yet life pulsates in the depths of the ocean and the bowels of the Earth. Besides, the spirit obeys the principles of gravity, just as do material bodies. The Earth isn't only a field of action which we may disregard and misuse at our will. It is a live organization, with certain laws which will either enslave us or set us free, according to our actions. It's obvious that the soul overburdened with faults won't be able to ascend to the surface of the wonderful lake of Life. We must bear in mind that free birds may rise to great heights; those encircled in dense thickets of reeds will find great difficulty in taking flight, and those tied to great weights become mere slaves of the unknown. Do you grasp my point?

Lysias didn't need to ask that question. All of a sudden, the immense field of the redeeming struggles in the lowermost zones of life seemed to flash before my spiritual eyes. As if in need of carefully weighting his next words, Lysias thought and thought, and then began again:

Just as we carry in the recesses of our beings the potential for good and evil, so the planet possesses both high and low expressions, with which to correct the guilty and open the passages to life eternal to those who triumph. As a doctor on Earth, you learned that a man's brain contain certain elements which control his sense of direction. Now you realize that

those elements aren’t really physical, but spiritual in essence. If you live exclusively in the dark, you will dim your divine sense of direction and end by hurling yourself into the shadows, for abysses attract abysses. Each of us shall reach the goal towards which he directs his steps.

45. The Music Fields

Towards evening, Lysias invited me to accompany him to the Music Fields.

You must relax a little, Andre. he said kindly. Seeing my reluctance, he added:

I'll speak to Tobias. Narcisa herself has taken the day off to rest. Come on.

By now I noticed a singular change in myself. Despite the short time I had been working there, I felt greatly attached to the Chambers of Rectification. Minister Genesius daily visits, Narcisa's company, Tobias's inspiring example and my fellow workers companionship had touched me deeply. Narcisa, Salustius and I spent all our leisure time trying to make little improvements in the place, to make it more cheerful and comfortable for the patients, whom we loved with all our hearts. Considering my relatively new position in the Chambers, I needed Tobias permission to go out, so we both went in search of him. With respectful familiarity, Lysias talked to my instructor, who readily agreed:

Good idea. Andre must get acquainted with the Music Fields.

Patting me affectionately on the back, he added:

Go and enjoy yourself. Come back late in the evening, whenever you like. All our different branches of service are well attended.

I followed Lysias to his home in the Ministry of Assistance. It was a true pleasure to see Laura again, and to learn that Heloisa's devoted mother would be returning from the Earth the following week. The house was filled with joy. Both the area indoors and the garden were more beautiful than ever. As we left, Lysias mother took my hand and said playfully:

So, from now on the Music Fields will have one more regular attendant. Watch your heart! As for me, I'll stay home today. It won't be long before I find food for my soul on Earth...

We departed cheerfully. Young women accompanied Polydor and Estacius, who were talking amiably. Lysias and I took the airbus, and soon disembarked in one of the squares of the Ministry of Elevation. Lysias, walking beside me, said affectionally:

You are going to meet my fiancée. I've told you a lot about you.

It's funny, I observed intrigued. that one would find engagements here as well.

Why not? Does love dwell in the mortal body or the eternal soul? On Earth, my friend, love is like a gold nugget hidden among rough stones. It is so often mixed in with people's needs, desires and lower tendencies that people rarely distinguish it from an ordinary pebble.

The explanation was logical. Seeing that I agreed, Lysias continued:

the betrothal is far more beautiful here in the spirit sphere because our senses aren't obscured by the veil of illusion. We show ourselves as we really are. Lascinia and I have failed many times in past earthly experiences. I must confess that most of the falls were due to my thoughtlessness and lack of control. When males on Earth still do not fully comprehend the liberty that social laws grant us. Seldom do we use it to help our spiritualization. Instead, we often abuse that freedom in a slippery descent towards animality. Women, on the other hand, have had, up to now, the advantage of being submitted to much sterner discipline. In transitory earthly life, they are oppressed by our tyranny and made to bear our impositions. Here, however, we go through a readjustment of values and learn that we are never really free until we learn to obey. It seems paradoxical, but it's the perfect truth.

Tell me Lysias, have you any plans for a future earthly experience?

Why, of course. I must increase my spiritual accomplishments and pay off my debts to the Earth, which are still considerable. I believe Lascinia and I will return to the physical plane in about thirty year's time. Meanwhile, we intend to settle down very soon in a happy little home of our own.

We then arrived at the Music Fields. Lights of exquisite beauty bathed the park. It was like a scene from a fairy tale. Luminous fountains spouted out their waters, forming wonderful designs. The sight was quite new to me. I was about to express my admiration when Lysias spoke:

Lascinia always comes here with her two sisters. I hope you will make them a pleasant escort.

But Lysias, I returned, doubtfully, considering my old marital status. you know I am still bound to Zelia...

My friend burst out laughing, and added:

Well I never! No one is trying to encroach on your sense of fidelity. Yet I don't thing marriage should make you oblivious of social life. Have you forgotten how to act as a brother, Andre?

Rather embarrassed, I also laughed. We were now at the entrance. Lysias approached the gate and bought our tickets. On entering the park, I noticed a great number of people around a graceful stand where a small orchestra was playing some light music. Flower-bordered paths extended before us in several directions, leading to the park's interior. Noticing my appreciation of the songs I heard, Lysias explained:

At the outer edges of the fields, several styles of music are played to please the personal taste of each group of those who cannot yet understand the sublime art. In the center, though, there is universal and divine music, the higher and sanctified art.

Indeed, after walking along pleasant lanes, where each flower seemed to rule in its own kingdom, I began to hear an exquisite melody. On Earth there are small groups that favor fine music, while the multitudes prefer their own regional music. Here, however, it was the opposite. The center of the park was crowded. I had already seen numerous gatherings in the colony, such as the festival held in our Ministry in honor of the Governor, but what I saw in this park exceeded everything that had previously filled me with awe. Yet the brilliance of the scene was not due to superfluity of excess of any kind, but rather to the artistic blending of simplicity and beauty. The women there exhibited refined elegance and good taste, without any excess which could detract from the divine simplicity.

Boughs of great trees, different from those on Earth, adorned the lovely, softly-lit arbors. Loving couples lingered along the flowery lanes, while groups of ladies and gentlemen animatedly discussed lofty and constructive topics. Although I felt insignificant before that selected assembly, I also felt a silence sympathy from those who glanced at me. I heard parts of discussions concerning the physical sphere, didn't detect even the slightest trace of malice or reproach of incarnate men. They discussed love, intellectual culture, scientific research and constructive philosophy in an atmosphere of understanding and good will, without any clash of opinions. I observed that those of greater enlightenment lowered the vibration of their intellectual power while the less endowed tried to raise theirs. In numerous groups I could heard reference to Jesus and the Gospel, but what impressed me most was the prevailing feeling of joy in all the conversations. Nobody referred to the Master with negative vibrations of useless sorrow or unjustified discouragement they remembered Him instead as the supreme Instructor of visible and invisible earthly organizations, full of understanding and

kindness, but also conscious of the energy and vigilance necessary to preserve order and justice. I was charmed by that optimistic community, which seemed to be the fulfillment of the hopes of many a noble earthly thinker. Although enraptured by the music, I heard Lysias explain:

Our harmony instructors absorb rays of inspiration in the higher spheres, just as earthly composers are sometimes brought to spiritual planes such as ours, where they receive melodic expressions. They, in turn, transmit those impressions to human ears, after adapting and adorning the themes with their own genius. The universe, Andre, is fraught with beauty and sublimity. The eternal and shining rays of Life have their origins in God.

At that moment, a graceful group approached us. It was Lascinia and her sisters. Lysias put an end to his explanations so that we might welcome them.

46. A Woman’s Sacrifice

A year had passed in constructive work, which had been a great solace to my heart. As I gradually learned how to make myself useful and find pleasure in serving, I became more confident and happy.

Although I yearned to return to my earthly home, I had not yet been given the opportunity. When, on several occasions, I had meant to ask permission, something seemed to hold me back. Had I not received the kindest help from everyone? Wasn’t I surrounded by the friendship and esteem of all my companions? I recognized that my wish would have been granted if it had been useful to me, and I decided to wait patiently. Although I was working at Regeneration, Laura and Tobias constantly reminded me that Minister Clarence was still the person responsible for my stay in the colony. I often met the generous Minister of Assistance, but he never mentioned the subject. Clarence never changed his reserved attitude in the exercise of the authority inherent in his obligations. Once, during the Christmas festivities in the Ministry of Elevation, probably sensing how deeply I missed my wife and children, he touched lightly on the subject, telling me that the day was not very far when he would accompany me to the old home. Joyous hope had filled my heart, and I thanked him emotionally. Still, it was now September, 1940, and I still had not seem my dream realized.

The knowledge that I had spent my time in useful service in the Chambers comforted me. Our work went on uninterruptly and I worked tirelessly. I had become familiar with nursing in the different wards, and had learned how to read patients thoughts. I kept in touch with poor Elisa and tried my best to assist her indirectly through her struggle for spiritual recovery. But as I gradually reached emotional balance, the desire to visit my loved ones became more and more intense. My home-sickness hurt me deeply.

The only solace I had were my mother’s occasional visits. Although she lived in a higher sphere, she never abandoned me to my fate. The last time we had met she said she had some new plans in mind, which she would soon tell me. Her attitude of resignation had deeply impressed me, and I awaited her next visit, anxious to know those plans.

At last, in early September of 1940, she came to the Chambers. After her usual loving greetings, she informed me that she intended to return to the physical plane. In a gentle voice, she unfolded her plan. I was surprised and upset by the idea, and protested:

I really disagree. Why should you return to the flesh? Why begin the weary wandering again without the immediate need to?

In dignified serenity, my mother replied:

Have you forgotten your father afflicting condition, my son? For many years I have worked to lift him up, but all my efforts have been in vain. Laertes has become a skeptic with a poisoned heart. Should he persist in such an attitude, he might be drawn into deeper abysses. What should we do, then? Do you have the heart to see your father in such a condition, and yet refrain from doing everything in our power to help him?

Of course not. I answered, greatly affected. I would work hard to help him. But mother, you could find the means of assisting him here.

No doubt I could. However, spirits who really love aren’t satisfied with lending a helping hand from a distance. What good are all the riches in the world if we can’t share them with our loved one? Would you be content to live in a palace from which your children were

excluded? No, I can't maintain my distance. Now that I can count on you on this side, I'll join Luiza, and help your father find his way to redemption.

After a few minutes of deep thought, I insisted:

But mother, are you sure there is no other way to do it?

No, it wouldn't be possible. I have thoroughly examined the subject, and all my superiors have agreed with my decision. I can't raise the inferior to the superior, but I can do the opposite. There is nothing else I can do, and there mustn't be a minute's hesitation on my part. I have, in you, support for the future. Don't lose your way, my son, and when you are able to go through the spheres that separate us from the Earth, give your mother all the assistance in your power. Meanwhile, don't forget your sisters, who may still be in the dark zones undergoing active purification. In a very short time, I'll be back in the physical world, where I'll met Laertes to carry out the task the Father will assign us.

But, I asked, how are you going to meet him? In spirit?

No. Replied my mother, her face assuming a significant expression, With the help of some friends, I started preparing his immediate reincarnation, and last week I settled him on Earth. He was never aware of any direct help from us, because we availed ourselves of a time when he was trying to escape the women who still subjugated him. This mental attitude was very helpful, and we succeeded in binding him to his new physical body.

Is this possible? What about our individual liberty? I asked.

Mother smiled rather sadly and explained:

There are some reincarnations that are carried out rather drastically, and if the patient lacks the courage to accept the sacred but bitter medicine, his friends help him to swallow it down. The soul can't claim unlimited freedom unless it fully understands its duty and performs it. Besides, we must bear in mind that the debtor is a slave to his debts. God created free will; man created fatality. We have to break the chains we ourselves have forged.

While I lost myself in deep thought, Mother continued her observations:

The poor girls who persecuted him won't give up their intent. Were it not for our spirit guards, he might have been deprived of this opportunity for reincarnation.

Good Lord! I exclaimed. Can't it be possible? Are we at the mercy of evil forces to that extent? Are we mere puppets in our enemies hands?

These questions, my child, declared my mother with great serenity, should come from our heart and lips before contracting any moral debt and transforming our brothers into adversaries. Never take any loans from iniquity...

And what of these women? I asked. What will become of them?

They will be my daughters. Mother answered with a smile. You mustn't forget that I am returning to the world to help your father. No one is able to assist efficiently by intensifying the enemy's forces, just as on Earth you can't extinguish a fire with gasoline. Love is indispensable, Andre. Those who disregard this truth go astray and become wanders in the desert. Those who err leave the highway and gradually sink into the mire. Your father is now a skeptic, and those unhappy women, wading in the mud of ignorance and delusion, carry heavy burdens. In the near future, I'll gather them in my motherly arms, thus accomplishing my new mission.

Her eyes shining with unshed tears, gazing at the future horizons, she remarked:

And later on, who knows? I may come back to the Astral City, bringing along other sacred affections for a great festival of joy, love and union!

Full of awed respect for her sublime abnegation, I knelt down and kissed her hands. From that moment my mother was no longer simply my mother to me, but much more. She was also a messenger of divine goodness who could transform her most cruel enemies into children of her heart in order to give them the opportunity to retrace their steps and start anew as true children of God.

47. Laura’s Return

My mother was not the only one preparing to return to the physical sphere. Laura also found herself confronted with this commitment. I learned that many workers in the colony, especially those in the Ministries of Assistance and Regeneration, were planning a farewell party, which was to be held on the evening when the Accounting Department presented her with her complete service card.

It is impossible to express in ordinary words the spiritual significance of that little party. The family’s charming residence wall music and light. Even the flowers seemed more beautiful. Many families had come to salute their friend who was about to depart. Most of the visitors left shortly after presenting their farewell wishes. Laura’s more intimate friends, however, remained until late that night. Thus I had the opportunity to hear many wise and curious observations.

Laura seemed circumspect and grave. I saw that she was making a great effort to join in the general optimism. In the crowded living room she talked with the Accounting Department representative:

I don’t believe I’ll be staying form more than two days. I have finished my conditioning at the Preparation Service and at the Ministry of Elucidation.

With a wistful look, she resumed:

As you see, I am ready.

The official, in a fraternal tone, spoke encouragingly: wonderful to return to the physical world in your circumstances. In a community of over a million people, you have thousands and thousands of hours of useful service in your favor. Besides, the children you are leaving here will continue to be your greatest incentive.

All that is indeed most comforting. She answered, unable to hide her deep concern. Yet we mustn’t forget that a reincarnation is always an undertaking of the utmost importance. I know that my husband has preceded me and my beloved children will be my constant friends, yet...

Come now, don’t get caught up in conjecture! Minister Genesius interrupted, We must put up our trust in Divine Protection and in ourselves. Providence resources are unlimited. We must break the dark glasses through which we see the physical plane as a bitter exile. Don’t think of possibilities of weakness; visualize only the probability of success. Besides, it’s only fair for you to count on us, your friends, a little. As far as vibratory distance is concerned, we won’t be far away. Think of the joy of helping old friends and of the sublime glory of being useful.

Laura smiled, and apparently more cheerful, remarked:

I have enlisted the spiritual assistance of all my companions, so that I may remain mindful of the lessons I have learned here. I realized that the Earth is full of divine beauty. It’s enough to remember that our Sun here is the same one which shines on incarnate people. But, my dear Minister, I fear the temporary oblivion that involves us like a dark matter. Although they no longer hurt, the scars remain the slightest scratch would be enough to make them bleed again.

The Minister nodded understandingly and resumed:

I am not ignoring what the shadows of the lower sphere represent, but we must gather our courage and go on resolutely. We’ll help you to work hard for the good of others rather than

for self satisfaction. Remember that the greatest obstacle, now and always, is being caught up in the insidious temptations of selfishness.

Here, Laura continued wisely, we can count on the spiritual vibration of most of the colony's inhabitants, who live according to the teaching of the Redeeming Gospel. Even though our weakness may creep up to the surface, we find our defense in the very atmosphere that surround us. On Earth, however, our good resolutions are like a flickering flame in an immense see of aggressive forces.

Don't say that. Answered the generous Minister. You mustn't attach so much importance to the influence of the lower zones it would be the same as arming the enemy against ourselves. The field of ideas is also a battlefield. Any really constructive light we may kindle on Earth will shine forever, for the hurricane of human passions can never blow out a single one of God's lights.

Our hostess seemed deeply impressed by the Minister's words. She radically changed her mental attitude and spoke cheerfully:

I am sure that your visit was providential. I need your exhortation to help me summon up all my energies. You are right, our mental zone is a constant battlefield. We must chase evil and darkness out of ourselves, dislodging them and not letting them assume the importance they always claim. Yes, I see it clearly now.

With a pleased smile, Genesius added:

Remember that, within our own individual world, each idea works as if it were a separate entity. When we nourish the elements of good, we work for our own happiness, because they will develop into our defense. On the other hand, when we cultivate any element of evil, we work to construct a secure base for our enemies.

As the Minister stopped speaking, the Accounting Department official remarked:

We must remember that Laura is returning to the Earth endowed with extraordinary spiritual credit. This very morning the Governor's secretary sent a note to the Ministry of Assistance recommending that the reincarnation experts should take the utmost care in dealing with the genetic background selected to shape our sister's new body.

Oh yes, she said, I asked for it so that I might not be too much affected by the laws of heredity. I have been rather concerned about the blood.

And notice, continued the official, that your merit here is great indeed. The Governor himself saw to the measures to be taken in your case.

So don't worry, my dear friend, Genesius exclaimed with a smile. You'll be assisted by numerous friends and companions, all working for your welfare.

Thank God. Laura exclaimed, comforted, Your words have done me so much good. Now I know I needed to hear you.

Lysias and his sisters, now including the kind and generous Thereza, showed their sincere joy at their mother's change in attitude.

My mother needs to forget her preoccupations. Remarked the devoted medical attendant. After all, we aren't going to stay here doing nothing.

You are right. She agreed. I'll cherish hope, and will trust in the Lord and in all of you.

For the rest of the evening, the conversation generated confidence and optimism, and the return to Earth was discussed as a blessed opportunity to redeem old debts and learn new lessons. As I took my leave late in the evening, Laura said:

I hope to see you again tomorrow evening, Andre. We are holding a little intimate gathering. The Ministry of Communication has promised us a visit from my husband. Although he is already bound by physical ties, he'll be brought here with the aid of some good friends. Furthermore, I'll be saying goodbye to you all. Please be sure to come.

I thanked her with emotion, and tried hard to keep back the premature tears at the departure of my kind friend.

48. The Home Prayer Meeting

A Spiritist would not be surprised at what I saw in Lysias home, but to me it was a new and interesting experience. Over thirty people were gathered in the spacious living room. The arrangement of furniture was simple. Comfortable arm chair were placed in rows of twelve in front of a platform, where Minister Clarence, who presided over the ceremony, and Laura and her children all sat. About twelve feet away stood a large crystal globe approximately six feet tall. Its lower part was wrapped in wires connecting it to a small apparatus, identical to our loudspeakers.

Many questions whirled through my mind as I looked around that big room. The visitors had already taken their seats, but I could still hear friendly conversation going on in the different groups. I was sitting besides Nicholas, an old worker at Assistance, so I thought I might ask him for some information. He willingly complied:

We are now ready, just waiting for the order from Communication. Our brother Richard is still in his physical childhood, so it won't be difficult for him to leave his material form for a short time.

Will he come here? I inquired.

Why not? He answered. Not all incarnate men are chained to the Earth. Like homing pigeons which often spend their time flying back and forth between places, there are some incarnate spirits who actually live between two worlds. That, he added, pointing to the equipment, is the cabinet which will show him to us.

But, why inside the crystal globe? Couldn't he present himself outside it? I asked curiously.

We must remember continue Nicholas, that our emotions can transmit disturbing vibrations. The crystal cabinet is made of insulating material and will protect Richard from our mental energies.

Just then, Lysias answered a phone call from Communication. It was time for the meeting to begin. It was forty minutes past midnight. In answer to my questioning look, Nicholas whispered:

Only now is there enough quiet in Richard's new earthly home. The whole house must be in silence and his parents asleep. At this early stage of his life, his spirit is still fairly free, not totally confined to the cradle.

Nicholas couldn't continue. Clarence rose and asked for perfect unity of thought and a real fusion of feelings. In the silence that followed, Clarence offered a simple but moving prayer. Then Lysias played beautifully on the flute, filling the room with intense vibrations of peace and enchantment. When the last melodious strains died away, Clarence spoke again:

Brothers, he said, let us all send Richard our message of love.

I saw Laura's daughters and one granddaughter leave the platform and place themselves near the musical instruments. Lysias followed them. Judith, Yolanda and Lysias respectively approached the piano, harp and zither, while Theresa and Heloisa stood by them composing the family choir. I heard melodious sounds, soft in the beginning, which rose gradually to a rapturous and divine harmony. I felt myself carried to sublime spheres of exalted thought. In a few minutes, mellifluous voices joined in. It was Lysias and his sisters singing a marvelous

song of their own composition. It is difficult for me to put those evocative verses, full of spirituality and beauty, into human words[11].

I shall try to reproduced them just to show how beautiful and sublime love is in the spheres of life beyond the shadows of death:

Dear father, when the night at last
Brings the blessings of sweet rest,
Remember, kindly father well
How much we love and care.
While the stars are twinkling
The melody they softly sing,
Bring your heart with us awhile.
Come to join us in our prayer.
Let no trials cause you stress
In your brief forgetfulness,
Not let suffering bring you sorrow.
Stay away from evil's pain.
Fear no earthly agony.
Think of our alliance, and you'll be
Strong in the knowledge that tomorrow
Will bring joy's eternal reign.
While you are sleeping in the world,
In our memories now unfurl
Heavenly dawns without compare
Here in this life above.
Look to the future happily,
Wait for us; one day we'll be
Together once again to share
The joys of the garden of your love.
Come to us, o father dear,
To the beauty of our sphere.
Come again to this, our nest,
Even though you come in dreams,
For a while forget the flesh.
Come to drink our water fresh,
Full of hope and tenderness,
From this Astral City's streams.
Our home has not forgotten you,
Your sacrifices, your kindness too,
And the clarity sublime
Of your lessons on The Way.
Come across the shadows great,
Free yourself from matter's weight,
Over the mountain you will climb.
Come and join us as we pray.

As they reached the last words of the song, I noticed that a greyish, milky substance was filling the globe before us. Soon there stood the handsome figure of a middle aged man. It

[11] No less difficult was its translation, where we were only able to convey an approximation of the original Portuguese verse. (translator's note)

was Richard. It is difficult for me to describe the sacred emotions of the family as they greeted him.

The visitor first addressed himself to his wife and children for a while. Then, casting a friendly look toward us, he requested that we sing the same lovely song once more for him. As he listened to it was moved to tears. He then turned to us and said:

Oh, my children, how great Jesus mercy is, for He has crowned our home circle with tonight's supreme joys! In this very room we have together endeavored to find the way to the higher spheres. We have often received the spiritual bread of life here, and now we have gathered here again to receive this sacred incentive. How happy I am!

Laura wept discreetly; Lysias's and his sisters eyes brimmed with tears. I noticed that the visitor could not speak with ease and apparently had only a short time to stay with us. Probably all the people in the room had a similar impression, because Judith, putting her arms around the crystal globe, exclaimed in loving tones:

Father dear, say what you want us to do; let us know how we can help your devoted heart.

Richard looked lovingly at his wife and said in a low voice;

Your mother will soon come and join me, my child. So will you all, in time. What else could I wish for to make me happy? Let's ask the Master to bless us forever!

We were all moved to tears. When the grayish substance began to form in the globe again, I heard Richard exclaim with emotion:

Listen, my children. I have something to ask you from the bottom of my heart! Pray to the Lord that I may never, on Earth, have an easy life, so that the light of gratitude and comprehension may keep always bright in my spirit.

The unexpected petition touched and surprised me at the same time. Richard said farewell to all while the grayish curtain gradually enveloped the whole globe. After a few minutes, the globe returned to its ordinary appearance. Minister Clarence closed the ceremony with a prayer, leaving us all with an indescribable feeling of happiness.

Our hostess stood on the platform, surrounded by her visitors, all anxious to present their congratulations and farewell wishes. As I approached the group to say goodbye to my kind friend and tell her of my deep impression and gratitude, someone touched me lightly on the shoulder. It was Clarence, who said affably:

Listen, Andre. Tomorrow I will go with our sister Laura to the physical sphere. If you like, you may come with us to visit your family.

I was taken back, but while my heart leaped with joy, I instantly remembered my work at the Chambers. The generous minister, sensing my thoughts, resumed:

You have a fair number of extra service hours to your credit. Therefore Genesius will easily grant you a one week leave of absence after your first year of active collaboration.

Overwhelmed with joy, I thanked him, weeping and laughing at the same time. At last, I was going to see my beloved wife and children again.

49. Returning Home

Like a child led by his benefactors, I arrived in my hometown with the indescribable sensation of a traveler returning home after a long absence. The countryside hadn't changed noticeably, the neighborhood's old trees were still there, as were the sea and sky and that same indefinite scent. Full of excitement and joy, I no longer noticed Laura's anxious and preoccupied expression. I took my leave of the small caravan which went on ahead. Clarence embraced me and said:

You have a whole week at your disposal. I'll come to see you daily, since I have to return regularly to take care of some problems regarding Laura's reincarnation. If you wish to return to the Astral City, you can do so in my company. Be well, Andre.

After a last goodbye to Lysias's devoted mother, I found myself alone, inhaling deeply the air of times past. I didn't waste time examining my surroundings, but quickly made my way through the streets towards my home. My heart beating fast, I approached the large entrance gate. As in the past, the wind whispered softly through the small park. Azaleas and roses bloomed there, greeting the spring. Opposite the front door gracefully rose the palm tree with Zelia and I had planted on our first wedding anniversary.

Intoxicated with joy, I entered the house. I noticed that it was greatly changed. Where was the old jacaranda[12] wood furniture? And the large picture of our family, where Zelia, myself and the children had formed such a gracious group? What had happed? Afflicted and anxious, I began to stagger with emotion. I went into the living room, where I saw my youngest daughter, now quite a young lady. Almost at the same moment, Zelia came out of our bedroom with a gentleman who, at first sight, appeared to be a doctor.

I shouted my joy with the full strength of my lungs, but the words echoed through the house unheeded. Suddenly I understood the situation and, disappointed, fell silent. I held Zelia in my arms with all the tenderness I had held for so long, but she seemed absolutely insensitive to my caresses. Looking extremely anxious, she asked the gentleman something I could not quite catch. Lowering his voice, he answered:

I won't be able to make sure diagnosis until tomorrow. The pneumonia is presenting serious complications, owing to his high blood pressure. Dr. Ernest will need the utmost care and absolute rest.

Who could Dr. Ernest be? I was lost in a sea of questions, until I heard my wife plead in anguished tones:

Oh, Doctor! For the Lord's sake, save him! I couldn't bear a second widowhood!

Zelia wept and wrung her hands showing acute nervous distress. A thunderbolt couldn't have struck me with greater violence. Another man had taken possessions of my home, and my wife had forgotten me! The house was no longer mine. Had it been worthwhile to wait so long to be met with such disillusionment? I ran to my room only to find the spacious chamber completely changed. On the bed lay a middle-aged man, clearly in a poor state of health. Three dark entities walked to and fro beside him, doing their utmost to aggravate his sufferings.

[12] High quality Brazilian wood. (Transl. Note)

My first instinct was to despise the intruder with all my strength, but I was no longer the same man. The Lord had summoned me to the practice of his doctrine of brotherly love and forgiveness. Although I knew he was surrounded by inferior entities, devoted to evil, I wasn't able to help him immediately.

I sat down, bewildered and disappointed, watching Zelia walk in and out of the room several times and caress the patient with the loving tenderness that had been all mine. After a few hours of bitter observation and meditation, I returned to the living room, where my two daughters sat talking. New surprises followed. The elder had married and carried a little baby in her arms. But, what about my son? Where could he be?

After giving the necessary instructions to an old nurse, Zelia, apparently calmer, joined the girls:

I came to see you today, mother , said my eldest child, not only to pay Dr. Ernest a little visit, but also because, all morning, the thought of father hasn't left my mind, and my heart seems to feel his presence. It's a feeling I can't define...

She couldn't finish, and her eyes filled with tears. To my great surprise, Zelia answered her with sharp authority:

Nonsense! This is the last straw. Worried as I am, I still have to put up with your silly attitudes. You must control that old-fashioned sentimentality, my child. I have strictly forbidden any mention to your father in this house. Don't you know how it annoys Ernest? I sold everything that reminded me of the dead past, even had the wall redecorated. Can't you help me with my efforts?

Since my sister became involved with this darned Spiritism, the younger girl added, she has kept her head full of nonsense. Such foolishness! The idea of the dead coming back is the height of absurdity.

I am not expressing religious convictions. She answered, still crying, Is it a crime to remember and miss our father? Don't you have any love in your hearts? Have you no feelings? If father were here, mother, his only son wouldn't be out acting so crazily.

Nonsense. Zelia retorted irritably. Each of us must follow the fate assigned by God. Andre is dead. Remember that and please stop lamenting the irremediable past.

I approached my weeping child and dried her tears, murmuring words of comfort and encouragement, which she registered subjectively as consoling thoughts. Well now. Here was I in quite an unexpected situation. I finally understood why my friends had for so long delayed my visit to my earthly home.

Sorrows and disappointments followed in rapid succession. I felt as if my home had been transformed by burglars and ruined by voracious worms. Belongings, positions, affection, nothing was left but the faithful heart of one daughter. All the long years of suffering and torment in the dark regions beyond the tomb, even the bewildering agony of the first days after death, had not made me shed such heart-breaking tears. The night came and went, and a new day dawned, finding me in the same perplexing condition, hearing words and witnessing attitudes I could never had imagined. In the evening Clarence came to see me as he had promised. Seeing how desperate I was, he tried to comfort me with friendly and wise words:

I understand your sorrow, but I can't help rejoicing at this splendid opportunity. I have no new instructions for you, as any advice now would be inopportune. However, my dear friend, I can't forget the recommendations of Jesus to love God above all things and our neighbor as

ourselves. This, when followed, works real miracles of happiness and understanding in our lives.

I thanked him with emotion, and asked for his continued support. Clarence smiled and left. Then, facing bitter reality, absolutely alone in this hour of trial, I began to meditate on the meaning of the Gospel's command. Gradually my thoughts became calmer. After all, why condemn Zelia's actions? Had I been the spouse left alone on Earth, would I, perhaps, have borne the prolonged solitude? Wouldn't I have found a thousand excuses to justify a second marriage? And why hate the poor, sick man? Wasn't he also my brother, in the House of Our Lord? Our home might be in even worse conditions if Zelia hadn't accepted his support.

It was necessary for me to fight and conquer my ruthless selfishness. Jesus had led me to new sources of enlightenment, and I could no longer act as a simple man on Earth. My family no longer consisted of only a wife and three children, but was made up of hundreds of patients in the Chamber of Rectification. It expanded to include the whole universal community. As I gave myself up to this new trend of thoughts, I felt that true love was beginning to flow from the blessed wounds which had been inflicted on my heart.

50. A Citizen Of The Astral City

I felt terribly tired the second night. I was beginning to realize the value of spiritual nourishment through mutual love and understanding. In the Astral City I could go for several days of active work without ordinary food. The presence of our dear friends, their affection, the absorption of pure elements through the air and water had been enough to refresh me. Here, however, in my earthly home, there was nothing except a battlefield where my loved ones had ceased to be my friends.

I thought about Clarence's inspiring words, and they brought some peace and comfort to my heart. For the first time I began to understand human needs. I was not Zelia's keeper, but her brother and friend. Likewise, I was not my children's master, but their companion along the road to spiritual enlightenment.

I recalled Laura telling me that we should all act like the bees, approaching the flowers of life, the memories of the noble souls we have met along the path, and extracting from each the substance of good examples, to acquire the honey of wisdom.

I decided to take her advice and began by remembering my mother, who had sacrificed herself to return to the Earth and adopt those unhappy women as beloved daughters. Similar edifying examples abound in the Astral City. Minister Veneranda had been working for centuries for the benefits of the spiritual group closely related to her. Narcisa was serving in the Chambers to obtain spiritual endorsement of a return to the physical world to help her loved ones. Hilda had overcome the dragon of inferior jealousy. And what about the countless gestures of fraternity I had received from my friends in the colony? Clarence had welcomed me with the devotion of a father, Lysias mother had received me as a son, and Tobias had made me his brother. Each of my new friends had offered me something useful to help me build up a new mental attitude.

I tried to distance myself from the apparent ingratitude I found in my old home. With divine love above all, I put the needs of my fellow man before my own personal sentiments. Though extremely tired, I entered the room of the sick man, whose condition worsened from moment to moment. Zelia was standing by the bed holding his head in her arms. In tears, she pleaded:

Ernest, Ernest, have pity on me. Don't leave me, my darling. What will become of me if you die?

The sick man caressed her hands and managed to answer with intense affection, in spite of the strong dyspnea that affected him. I prayed to the Lord to grant me the strength necessary to be understandable, and to consider this couple as my brother and sister. I could see that Zelia and Ernest loved each other deeply, and if I truly wanted to be their brother, I must certainly do everything in my power to help them. I set to work. I began by trying to enlighten the ignorant entities who kept a close link with the patient. My difficulties were enormous, and I felt exhausted.

In this emergency, I remembered that Tobias had once told me that not all the inhabitants of the Astral City needed an airbus for transportation those more evolved could use volitation as a more convenient means. They could also communicate over long distances mind-to-mind, using thought language. Those who are attuned use the process of mental communication at will, regardless of distance.

I remember how useful Narcisa's help would be, and made up my mind to try. I concentrated, and in the vibrations of a fervent prayer to God I addressed Narcisa, asking for her help. I told her mentally of my painful experience and my great desire to help, and pleaded urgently with her not to abandon me.

Then the unexpected happened. After some twenty minutes, while I was still concentrated in my prayer, I felt a light touch on my shoulder. It was Narcisa, who had answered my call.

I've heard your call, my friend, she said, smiling, and here I am. I couldn't have been more happy. The devoted nurse looked around and immediately understood the gravity of the circumstances.

We don't have time to waste. She said. She immediately began applying strengthening passes to the patient, raising a barrier between him and the dark entities, who disappeared as if by magic. Then she turned to me and said firmly:

We must resort to Nature.

I followed her promptly. Sensing my curiosity, she explained:

Man is not the only one to receive and emit fluids. All Nature does the same. In our patient's case, we need the trees. They will be a great help to us.

Wondering at this new lesson, I followed her in silence. After arriving at a place filled with enormous trees, Narcisa called out to someone with words I couldn't understand. In a few moments eight spirit entities responded. To my great surprise, I saw Narcisa ask them whether there were mango and eucalyptus trees in the neighborhood. Having received the required information from her friends, who were unknown to me, Narcisa turned to me and explained:

The brothers who have just come to our aid are ordinary workers in the vegetable kingdom.

Said Narcisa. Seeing my wonder, she continued:

You see, there is nothing useless in Our Father's House. Wherever there are those needing instruction, there will also be those willing to teach. Whenever a difficulty arises, Providence comes in. The only unfortunate being in the Divine Creation is the improvident spirit who condemns himself to the abysses of evil.

With the emanations of the eucalyptus and mango trees, Narcisa quickly manipulated a certain substance, which we applied to the patient through his ordinary breathing and by absorption through his skin. Ernest improved visibly. Early the next morning the doctor observed, extremely surprised: What an extraordinary reaction! A real miracle of Nature!

Zelia was happy, and the house was full of life again. As for myself, I felt great joy in my heart. Deep courage and beautiful hopes reinvigorated me. I recognized that, deep down within me, the strong chains of inferiority had been broken forever, and true brotherly love and a sincere wish to serve had taken their place.

That same day I followed Narcisa back to the Astral City. For the first time, I tried volitation. In a moment's time we had covered great distances. The banner of happiness unfurled in my soul. I told the generous nurse about the lightness I was feeling, and she explained:

In the Astral City, a great number of our friends could easily do without the airbus and go about on their own within the areas of our vibratory range, but as the majority have not yet acquired that faculty, we all abstain from using it in public places. This abstention, however, doesn't impede us from using it outside of town, when it is necessary to cover long distances and save time.

A higher comprehension and new joy enriched my spirit. Instructed by Narcisa, I went to and from between the earthly house and the spiritual city without any great difficulty. I was thus able to intensify the treatment of Ernest, who improved rapidly. Clarence visited me daily and showed himself satisfied with my work.

At the end of the week, my first leave of absence from the Chambers of Rectification had come to an end. Ernest's health was restored and the couple, whom I now loved as my dear brother and sister, were happy again. It was time, now, to return to my duties. In the peaceful light of a gorgeous sunset, I left for the Astral City totally changed. In those seven short days I had learned precious practical lessons in understanding and brotherly love. The sublime beauty of the evening filled my mind with lofty thoughts.

How great is Divine Providence! I said to myself. How wisely the Almighty plans our work and life situations. How He attends to His Creation with such love!

All of a sudden something broke my meditation. Over two hundred of my companions were coming in my direction. They greeted me joyously, giving me a generous welcome. Lysias, Lascinia, Narcisa, Silveira, Tobias, Salustius and many other workers from the Chambers were there. Taken by surprise, I was at a loss and did not know what to do. It was then that Minister Clarence came forward, holding out his hand:

Andre, until now you have been my pupil in this city. Today, in the name of the Governor, I declare you a citizen of the Astral City!

Why such magnanimity when my triumph was so small? I couldn't hold back the tears of emotion which choked my voice. Thinking about the wisdom of Divine Mercy, I threw myself into Clarence's fatherly arms, crying out of gratitude and joy.

THE END