

CHAPTER X.

THE SYSTEM TO WHICH WE BELONG.

EVERYONE who has touched the outskirts of Theosophic teaching will be familiar with the idea that this planet we are actually inhabiting for the moment forms one of a connected series through which the human life-wave flows, manifesting in full activity on one only at any given period; that the course of the whole Manvantara involves a septenary journey round this chain of worlds; that each in turn is brought into full activity during this progress, and fades back into comparative obscurity as the life-wave passes on, and that the passage around the whole seven globes is spoken of for convenience as a "round" in evolution, seven of which make up a whole Manvantara. The strain and struggle of existence is not equally great on all these globes—in four of them, indeed, two of these being on the downward and two on the upward arc of the circle, humanity is not called upon to undergo the strain of physical existence at all. On the first globe of the series existence is altogether conditioned by surroundings corresponding with that which we call the Devachanic plane of the earth, while the lowest point of materiality touched by the second globe of the series is on a level with that which we here call

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the astral plane. Life on the third planet on the downward series has already the physical vehicle, and that third planet, therefore, becomes perceptible to our present senses, and is in fact the planet Mars. Passing onward from this earth, humanity again functions on a physical globe—the planet Mercury—and then passes to the sixth, the lowest materiality of which is astral, and to a seventh which, like the first, is altogether Devachanic. Here on the earth we are at the middle point of our progress in each round, and this period of the earth's activity is the middle period of the whole Manvantara as the round on which we are engaged is the fourth, just a little more than half of which is already accomplished. If we concentrate our attention on the present world period alone we find evolution being carried out during the whole of the period through seven great races, with seven different configurations of land and water to harmonise with their needs, the race in the midst of which we Europeans and some other populations now find ourselves, being the fifth, while the fourth, the middle race, was the great Atlantean race which already began to decline from its culminating grandeur nearly a million years ago. The last remnant of land which belonged to the great continent it once occupied disappeared in the natural convulsion of which some faint records have been preserved in classical literature, and in the Mexican manuscript known as the Troana MS., lately deciphered by Dr. Le Plongeon. Periods of years expressed in figures simply bewilder the mind when we begin to talk of millions, and yet we know that

the duration of a great root race must be counted in millions, that a great many millions of years are thus represented by even the briefest of the world periods which are connected with the great course of planetary evolution. It will not be an exaggeration of the truth to say that if we think of the whole Manvantara as representing the individual life of a man, such a lifetime as we are familiar with now, say one of seventy years, would stand in the same relation to the whole as one second of time would stand in relation to the seventy years. Illustrations of this nature may, to some extent, help the mind in realising the length of the evolutionary journey through which we have already passed, and in realising the rate at which the soul grows while it is left, so to speak, to the single influence of what may be thought of as the evolutionary drift. In looking backward over the progress achieved in the past by any soul not yet emerged from ordinary conditions — and such retrospect is possible for those whose faculties have already begun to function on Devachanic levels — there is something almost appalling in the tardiness in the growth observable. Each physical life has such infinitesimally minute contributions to make to the permanent individuality! Look back, if you are able, for a dozen lives, and you will probably find so little difference between the spiritual individuality at the remote period and the corresponding individuality at this moment, that you might be tempted to think the time and strain and effort of all that existence but thrown away and wasted. But it has not been wasted really, any more than the corresponding in-

terval of time has been wasted by the stalactite, that wonderful monument to Nature's patience, which is not without its significance for observers who can appreciate analogies. And though progress may have been slow along the immeasurable course of by-gone ages, the final result attained, even if we look merely at the spiritual individuality of the human being of our own period, is a growth the accomplishment of which eclipses that of the stalactite in the estimation of those who can appreciate the difference between the plane of Nature on which it has been achieved and that to which the perishable, however ancient, mineral form belongs.

But what is the road to be travelled by the Ego in its development between this middle period of the Manvantara and the final culmination of its possibilities at a period in advance to be measured by the magnitude of that awful journey we have already taken, during which we have been shielded from a perception of its wearisome length by the torpor of our higher nature? The distance to be yet travelled, as measured on the scale of human condition, from the place at which the ordinary humanity now stands to that it should reach at the end of the Manvantara, is not less than that which separates a favourable example of modern civilisation — say a man of distinguished literary culture or scientific attainments, from the primitive savage of Tierra del Fuego. It is the design of Nature that the majority of the whole human family shall at the end of the seventh round of planetary experience attain to a condition in which existence, in reference to this

planetary chain to which we belong, will be, to begin with, more free than our present incarnate existence in as great a degree as the living man of to-day, so to speak, is freer than the stone. If we endeavour to invest the stone in our imagination with a consciousness, it must clearly be one of a very restricted character, and, amongst other conditions, it exists wherever it is put, not wherever it wills to go. Within limits the man can move about on the surface of this earth at his pleasure, but compared with the being he may become, he is as much in prison in his present vehicle, and as much chained down to one spot by the limitations of his capacity, as in comparison with him the stone itself is subject to restrictions. The final example of perfected humanity will use whatever body he then retains as a mere instrument of his convenience, to be worn or left aside at pleasure. The higher realms of Nature, of which I have been speaking in endeavouring to describe the course of human experience between death and re-birth, and others again immeasurably transcending these, will be accessible to him as readily as the various rooms in the house in which he lives may be accessible to him now. From any one globe of the chain to another he will be able to pass as freely as within the various phases of each. Forces of Nature as far transcending any with which modern science is acquainted as these transcend the resources of the African savage will lie within his reach and command, for his moral nature will have attained altitudes corresponding with the development of his power and knowledge, and by that time

his Will will be so completely welded with that which controls the whole of Nature, and is represented to our ordinary thinking by the idea of Divinity, that no care on the part of Nature for his own or others' welfare will render it necessary to subject him to the disabilities of ignorance. Language entirely fails to do more than hint in the vaguest fashion at the kind of exaltation thus within the possibilities of human progress, but that progress may in some faint degree be appreciated with the help of the thought that it will amongst other things embrace all knowledge concerning this whole Manvantaric design — an absolute and complete understanding of every intricacy in Nature's stupendous mechanism, and will embrace the answer to every moral enigma which the experience of life may suggest, or to which in the weary efforts of our speculative thinking in the present day we may turn continually in despairing sorrow, holding on with what strength we may to the vague trust that in superior wisdom there resides, beyond our reach, a clue to the mysteries of evil.

That is the course along which human evolution has still to travel, but it ought to be manifest to any reasonable thinker that the scheme thus set forth, involving, as it does, the elevation of Man to levels which we are in the habit of thinking God-like, is not to be accomplished by any process of evolution pressing upon him from without. In a certain sense, though even this is, perhaps, a strained one, it may be said that up to the present period of evolution, primeval germs of human consciousness have been

brought to the position in which we now stand under the influence of external forces or guidance, but before a man can be invested by nature with God-like attributes, he must engender within his own consciousness the will to be God-like, and he must, as it were, put the whole force of his own intention into the undertaking. He must be actuated by an intelligent will as well as by vague aspiration towards progress; he must make the choice between good and evil with his eyes open; he must determine whether he would rather grasp whatever good things connected with progress it may be possible for him to monopolise for himself, or whether he would rather join his forces to those who are endeavouring to serve the purposes of God, and to promote the acceleration of the whole undertaking. It will only be by individual effort at each step of man's progress as he goes on through the ordinary course of Nature that he will really ascend along the gentle upward spiral, but at this point it is impossible to describe the course of normal evolution without making some reference to that kind which is abnormally hastened. If a man follows the normal course no great magnitude of effort, so to speak, will ever be required from him at any given moment, but his growth towards ultimate possibilities of his own development will be correspondingly slow. On the other hand, the extent to which, by emphasising that effort to an enormous degree of intensity, it is possible for him from this stage of human advancement onward to accelerate his own evolution, will be found to eclipse the boldest conjectures which

any one might form from the point of view of comprehending the whole evolutionary scheme without actually knowing what have been the results of abnormal effort on the part of those who have gone in advance of the rest. But whether he concentrates his effort or distributes it, for the evolution of the latter half of the Manvantara he must contribute his own effort to the evolutionary tendency or he will fall back into the rear. This will be better intelligible when we come to study the conditions of abnormal progress, .but meanwhile explanations are still wanting to complete our picture of the whole evolutionary field, within the almost boundless range of which the growth of the soul proceeds.

The planetary series with which our present Manvantara is concerned, with all its marvellous intricacies as regards its physical manifestation alone, with all its unseen conditions of existence around it, with all its magnificent possibilities of consciousness having to do with the spiritual planes of Nature, is but one of a series of such with which this human family is concerned. Seven Manvantaras succeed each other in due order, this we are now going through being the fourth, and the worlds of each succeeding Manvantara are themselves evolved afresh each time, though each in turn must be thought of as a Re-incarnation of its predecessor rather than as an entirely fresh creation. Meanwhile within the limits of the solar system of which we form a part, there are other chains of Manvantaras in progress connected with other planets, visible and invisible, and in all we are given to understand

that there are thus seven schemes of planetary evolution, all having some touch with the physical plane, and deriving their vital energies from the sun. At certain very exalted stages of spiritual progress the foremost representatives of humanity in the very vanguard of our evolution are in a position to acquire definite knowledge concerning these other schemes, and some information on the subject has filtered down to occult students of our level. We are thus enabled to form a comprehensive conception of the solar system as a whole, and even to appreciate to some extent the nature of the great design it represents.

Seven, as we have long recognised, is the root number of our system — in so far, at any rate, as that system is in any way concerned with physical manifestation — and the simple invariability of the law makes the great plan in question more easily intelligible than it would be otherwise. The solar system includes (we must take care not to fall into the arrogant mistake that might be involved in saying it consists of) seven great schemes of planetary evolution, in each of which there are some worlds, one or more, on the physical plane. The schemes are not all designed to match one another, and in some more than in others the higher planes of Nature are engaged in their design. Theosophists are well used now to the conception that super-physical planes of Nature may be just as real and the manifestations thereon just as objective as those which affect the physical senses. The astral and Devachanic planes are available as areas of manifes-

tation within the solar system as completely as the physical plane, and indeed, over and above the seven planetary schemes, to which I have already referred, there are some others which are altogether established on the higher planes and have no physical planets connected with their evolution at any time. It will not be possible to say much of these at present, but the recognition of the fact that they exist will help to bring order into our thinking at a later stage of this inquiry. Our own scheme makes a larger draught than any other but one on the resources of the physical plane, and at the period of our present Manvantara three planets of our own series are on this plane; but the constitution of the various chains is varied in this respect.

Each scheme of evolution is worked out by means of a series of seven Manvantaras. Each Manvantara includes an evolutionary process, such as that set forth in Theosophic teaching in reference to the seven rounds of our planetary chain. As each round includes a world period of activity on each planet in turn, and as each of these world periods is divided into seven great racial cycles, we may get a view of the proportionate magnitude of a race period — itself extending over some millions of years — as compared with the whole system to which we belong, if we bear in mind the following progression:

Seven root race periods make up one world period.

Seven world periods (following each other on as many planets in succession), one round.

Seven rounds one Manvantara.

Seven Manvantaras, one scheme of evolution.

Seven schemes of evolution (more or less contemporaneous in their activity), the solar system.

Some of these schemes are much more advanced than others, but before going into a more minute account of the condition in which we find the whole stupendous undertaking at the present time, it will be desirable to go back in imagination to its beginning, and appreciate the beautiful intuition with which modern science — not always entitled to as much credit — has divined with a very close approach to accuracy the condition in which our system existed before any of its planets were differentiated.

The nebular hypothesis is one of the grandest achievements of which the unassisted human intellect has ever shown itself capable. That hypothesis closely harmonises with Theosophic teaching on this subject, even though that teaching expands and interprets it in a way that would not be possible from the narrow platform of thought which recognises only one order of matter.

The theory that solar systems were each, in the first instance, vast aggregations of highly heated and very attenuated matter — gaseous, or perhaps even more attenuated still — and that by degrees each such nebula was subjected to a cooling and contracting process which condensed its nucleus, and so forth, is generally attributed to the great astronomer Laplace. Some writers trace the genesis of the idea to Tycho Brahe, who suggested that stars were formed by the condensation of the ethereal substance of which he supposed the Milky Way to be composed. Kepler extended the idea by suggest-

ing that the nebular substance may originally have pervaded all space, instead of being confined to the Milky Way, and other great thinkers in turn suggested further modifications of the original conception. It was immensely fortified when the researches of Sir William Herschell showed us over 2,000 separate nebulae within range of the telescope, and then, in the last year of the eighteenth century, Laplace worked out the whole scheme far more systematically than any of his precursors, and developed it into pretty much the shape in which the astronomical world generally accepts it now.

Laplace showed how the planets of a system could be successively formed by the rupture, from the central mass of the nebula, of great external rings of condensing matter. The whole nebula was assumed to have been originally in rotation, so the rings would themselves continue to rotate in the same way. By degrees the rings would themselves be somewhere ruptured, and then the matter of which they were composed would roll up and aggregate itself either into great globular planetary bodies, or into swarms of smaller meteoric masses.

Concurrently with the development of the whole idea, speculation has concerned itself with the question how the nebula in the first instance was probably formed. According to one view, sometimes spoken of as the vortex theory, matter is supposed to be drawn in with a whirling motion around some already existing nucleus. By another — the impact theory — the original nebula is supposed to be due to the collision in space between two cold and ex-

tinct suns moving in different directions with planetary velocities. The heat engendered by such an appalling catastrophe is recognised as sufficient to volatilise all the matter of which the two globes consisted, and to set up, in this way, a new nebula of glowing incandescent gas, which would be set in rotation by the nature of the collision which caused it, as the chances would be enormous against the exact encounter of the two bodies centre to centre. At present, I think, the impact theory of nebular origins is most in favour, and it is profoundly interesting to learn from our exalted teachers that, though as a matter of fact it is not the method of development that was actually adopted in the case of our own solar system, it has been employed in the course of Nature with some other systems, and can be brought into harmony with those activities on higher planes than the physical, which our Theosophic instincts will at once assure us must always be mainly instrumental in bringing a solar system into existence.

The method actually adopted at the inauguration of our own solar system was one concerned entirely, in the first instance, with higher planes of Nature. On some level of superphysical matter a force was set in action which had the effect of creating what we may think of — without claiming, in this respect, to think with exactitude — as a vast electric field extending over a region of space greater by far than the area included in the orbit of Neptune.

The region of space affected would, to begin with, be pervaded by matter of a certain order, or indeed

of certain orders. The more we comprehend the spirit of occult teaching, the more clearly we realise the idea that space is nowhere empty and vacant. It may contain nothing that affects some given set of limited senses, but for all that it is a plenum rather than a vacuum. Something pervades all space with which we can concern ourselves in thought. Recognising this, and recognising also that matter on other planes than the physical is clearly subject to limitations — so that what we habitually talk of, for example, as the astral plane is not a homogeneous infinitude but is the astral plane *of this earth* — Esoteric students sometimes puzzle over the question, What plane in the ascending series is common to the solar system, what plane common to the cosmos? The answer to the riddle is to be found in the fact that each plane is represented by matter in several — the usual seven — stages of refinement. The lower sub-planes are in all cases specialised around each planet; but in each case the highest sub-plane is co-extensive with the solar system — with the universe itself, for all we know to the contrary. Thus in a certain sense even the physical plane is co-extensive with space, as represented by the highest, the atomic state of ether. So equally with the astral and Devachanic planes: these, in their highest states, are co-extensive with the ether; and *a fortiori* higher planes still are co-extensive.

From this it will be apparent that matter of every variety, *plus* all its potentialities, lay within the region in which the sublime power, directing the mani-

festation of our system, set up the activities already referred to. These activities had for one effect, we are told, that of drawing in from surrounding space, as into a vortex, immense additional supplies of the all-pervading ether. Some scientific difficulties present themselves to the mind in reference to this statement, but solar systems are sufficiently wide apart in their distribution through space to harmonise with the idea that even the ether, though we have to think of it as incompressible to accommodate our prevailing conceptions of matter with some of its attributes, may be attenuated in intersolar space, and relatively condensed in and around solar systems. At all events, the esoteric interpretation of the beginning of our system seems to involve the idea of such condensation, and on the ether in this condition an influence coming down from some higher plane of Nature ultimately converted the condensed mass into a physical nebula — an immense volume of incandescent gas at some inconceivably high temperature.

From this condition of things the process imagined in connexion with the nebular theory appears to have come into play. Rings of the nebular substance became detached from the parent mass, and continuing to revolve in obedience to the vortex motion of the whole mass, became aggregated into planets, although not into the actual planets with which we are now familiar, these being of later origin, by virtue of principles operative in the evolution of the system which ordinary astronomy does not as yet take into account.

The various planets originally formed were grouped by degrees into seven great schemes of evolution, and to comprehend these in some approximate measure, we must regard them from our present point of view. The survey we have to carry out would not be materially assisted by attempts to fathom the all but unfathomable past so far as to investigate the order in which the various schemes were launched. Meanwhile, however, we may take note of the fact already referred to that there are within the solar system three schemes of evolution to which no physical planets are attached, so that in truth there are not seven but ten schemes to be thought of; and probably if we possessed a sufficiently exhaustive knowledge of Nature we should find septenary systems constantly merging themselves in a more embracing system of tens; but wherever the physical plane plays a part in any cosmic undertaking the septenary law appears to hold good. Thus our first task in attempting to understand the solar system has to do with seven schemes in each of which the physical plane is touched.

Beginning with that which is the outermost in space, we find that the planet Neptune is concerned with a scheme of a very different character from that which may be assigned to most of the others. In this world-series the evolutionary process is not destined to achieve results commensurate with those which it is the purpose of the other schemes to bring about. The life with which Neptune is concerned is not calculated to attain very high levels, but on the other hand this wonderful cosmic organism is

especially interesting for an astronomical reason. Connected in evolution with Neptune there are in fact two other planets physically belonging to our system that have not yet fallen a prey to telescopic research. One of them may ultimately be discovered by ordinary means, the outermost lies far beyond the range of physical instruments, for not merely is its distance something appalling to the imagination, but the light it would throw back to us by reflection from the sun is exceedingly feeble. Viewed from Neptune itself the sun would appear a mere speck in the sky compared with the glowing disc we have to deal with, but the two outer planets are at distances from the centre of the system which continue to observe what is called in astronomy "Bode's law." Thus without having yet discovered either of them we know that the radius of the orbit in which the outermost of all is moving is something over 10,000 million miles. (The distance of Neptune from the sun, it will be remembered, is about 2,700 millions.) At that distance the light of the sun would barely make darkness visible. And for any warmth the distant planet may require it must be dependent chiefly on influences with which physical science on this earth at present is ill acquainted. However, little as we can expect just yet to understand the Neptune scheme, we may formulate our thinking on the subject so far as to recognise that scheme as including — at its present stage of advancement — three physical planets.

All the other schemes, as we shall see by degrees — excepting our own — are at present represented

on the physical plane by only one planet each. But all through this survey of the system it must be remembered that schemes are not equally represented on the physical plane at each of their Manvantaric stages. Our own scheme had but one physical planet in its last Manvantara, and will have but one in its next Manvantara, though at present it has a triple manifestation on the physical plane. So other schemes which at present have only one physical planet may have more than one at later stages of their progress, may have had more than one at former stages.

The Uranus scheme — for thinking at this date we may as well call each scheme by the name of the visible planet of its present chain — is the next in order to be considered. I understand the Uranus scheme is fairly well advanced, and to be concerned with the evolution of a high order of life, but of course the physical conditions of Uranus must be widely unlike any with which we have acquaintance. The sun can hardly seem a much larger object viewed from Uranus than Jupiter appears to us, but one of the lessons most strongly emphasised by the esoteric study of the whole system is that life is compatible with conditions of the most diverse character, and that we must never seek to determine the habitability of other globes in space by inquiring how far their meteorological or climatic conditions correspond with our own.

The Saturnian scheme is very much less advanced in its Manvantaric development than our own, and the planet Saturn itself is in an early round of its

present Manvantara, so that it is not yet physically habitable at all. The family of beings with whose evolution it is concerned are still at an early stage of their descent into matter, even though it must not be supposed that the Saturn scheme, any more than other schemes connected with the outer planets are young in the order of their creation as compared with some of those nearer the sun. The rates of progress of the various schemes are very different. Saturn is slow in its evolution, with Manvantaras of enormous length. We must be patient yet a while in regard to speculations which would attempt to correlate the rate of progress of the various schemes, though no doubt they are all designed to harmonise their results in some way towards the close of the mighty drama in which they play their several parts.

The Jupiter scheme is very interesting, for though it is still young — in advancement, if not in time — it is destined, we understand, to bring forward its family of evolution to a very high level eventually. So far, however, the Manvantara of the Jupiter scheme now in progress is only the third of the septenary series, corresponding to our lunar or last Manvantara, which did not bring our family forward to a very mature stage of development. Moreover, at present the Jupiter family is only in the second round of its third Manvantara, and its physical planet therefore is not yet fitted to be the abode of physical life. It is still hot from its relatively recent condensation, and this condition of things, recognised by ordinary astronomy, is *not* due, as ordinary astronomers suppose, to the fact that Ju-

Jupiter is much larger than the inner planets, and has thus taken more time to cool since the original nebula consolidated. Jupiter is a later creation than the earth, but the view of the whole subject with which this fact is connected will more conveniently be dealt with when the general survey of the schemes is completed.

Coming inward from Jupiter, the next planetary orbit we reach is that at present occupied by the swarm of asteroids, merely so much raw planetary material to be used up in future chains. The next *planet* is Mars, but in reaching this interesting world we of the earth chain are comparatively at home, for the scheme to which we belong, at present in its fourth Manvantara, is at the stage of its deepest immersion in matter, and is thus represented on the physical plane by three planets, Mars being one. Mars, the Earth, and Mercury are in evolutionary partnership, Mars being the planet behind the earth in the order of progress round the entire chain, and Mercury in advance of us. A large portion of the present human family has actually lived on Mars — where, if we could but visit the planet now, as, indeed, some of our more advanced companions can and do, in the appropriate vehicle of consciousness while out of the physical body, we should still find archæological traces of our passage. As we know a little more about the planets of our own chain than of the others, I will return to this branch of the subject later on.

Next to the Earth as we move onwards towards the Sun, we come to the planet Venus. Of all the seven

schemes of the system, that which Venus at present represents on the physical plane is the farthest advanced in evolution, not necessarily the oldest as judged by the period at which it began, but the quickest of the series as regards the rate of its progress or the duration of its Manvantaras.

Our own scheme is now going through its fourth Manvantara, but that to which Venus belongs is far advanced through the fifth. It is already in the seventh round of that Manvantara, the family it is evolving being at present established like ourselves on the physical planet of its chain, although at such an immensely more forward stage of its progress, that the foremost of its beings, in great numbers represent, as compared with our humanity, a fairly god-like degree of exaltation. From Venus, as all students of esoteric teaching will be aware, the guardians of our infant humanity in the later third and early fourth race of this world period descended to stimulate in our family the growth of the manasic principle, and to them we owe the fact that as we stand at present we are in truth somewhat further advanced in evolution than our actual place in our own scheme strictly entitles us to be. We have been helped onward by some of those who are in the loftiest sense of the term our Elder Brethren in the whole system, and among us there have been found some, at all events, who have proved apt pupils, and are already on levels of spiritual dignity commensurate with those previously attained by their sublime instructors.

Within the orbit of Venus lies the planet Mercury,

belonging to our own chain, and thereon, as the middle point of our present world period has now been passed, a fresh morning of evolution is setting in in preparation for the advent of this human family, when the remainder of its great race periods shall have been worked through on this earth. And then again within the orbit of Mercury another planet is to be found, and probably will be found some day or other by ordinary astronomers, who already suspect its existence, and have been keenly on the look out for it when solar eclipses give them a chance of seeing it. Merged as it is in the blinding glare of the sun at other times, it is hopeless to seek for it in the unshielded sky. A name has been given in advance by some astronomers to the undiscovered planet, and it is sometimes referred to as Vulcan. It must certainly be a very hot little world, although Bode's law should give it a distance from the central orb of something like thirty millions of miles. However, it belongs to an independent scheme of evolution, not destined to bring forward life to the high levels to be ultimately attained in connexion with our own and the Venus scheme. It completes the series of seven schemes. Enumerating them once more, as under, we have : —

1. The Neptune scheme.
2. " Uranus "
3. " Saturn "
4. " Jupiter "
5. " Earth "
6. " Venus "
7. " Vulcan "

The first and fifth of this series have each three physical planets, the others one each.

Of the three schemes which have no touch with the physical plane there is very little to be said at present. They are concerned with high orders of evolution and in some way with the ultimate perfection of the life of the system at large when all the septenary schemes shall have completed their cycles.

It must not be supposed, however, that they are awaiting development till such time as the other schemes have completed their cycles. They are already in activity, and they each consist of seven planets occupying definite places in space, though composed of higher orders of matter than such as our physical senses can cognise. On the other hand we need not think of them as dealing with phases of existence entirely beyond the reach of our imagination. The highest plane of Nature to which they are directly related is the Rupa plane of Devachan.

From the general idea of the structure and design of the system that has already been given, and particularly from many passages in recent Theosophical literature, it will be apparent that the configuration of the solar system is no more unchangeable throughout the life of that system than the configuration of land and water on the earth's surface is unchangeable during the progress of a world period. In every scheme the chain of planets on which its evolution has been carried on, during any given Manvantara is disintegrated at its close (subject to a qualification to be noticed directly) and a new chain of worlds is called into being. This does not mean that new

matter is created out of non-manifested substance, but that planets, when their life cycle is completed, are broken up or resolved into dust which is dispersed through the solar system at large and is available to be drawn together into new forms, just as the elements of a dead human body, dissolved in the earth or air and absorbed in process of time into vegetable tissue, become in due season the nutriment of new animal or human forms.

Thus it will be seen that our earth, for instance, with its companion planets, is not alone a new creation as compared with the state of things that existed when the nebula was first condensed, but is in the fourth generation of such new creations having regard to our own scheme alone. I have no information as to the manner in which the planetary matter of the system was first distributed, but it is a matter of obvious certainty that from Uranus inwards not one of the existing planets belongs to the first born series of the nebula. It hardly concerns us to make close inquiry as to the actual course of events in this respect. Our appreciation of Nature's design and of our own place therein would not be materially assisted by knowing for instance what planets existed in connexion with the Uranus evolution before Uranus came into being. Nor in regard to the other chains would it profit us much to know by how many predecessors each of the now known planets have been heralded in past ages. But there are some aspects of the problem which do present features of peculiar interest as applied to our own chain, and without making any conjectures as to the extent

to which the analogies of our own scheme apply to others, attention may usefully be turned at this stage of the inquiry to the plan on which our own planetary habitations are from time to time remodelled.

As the tide wave of life leaves each planet (in our scheme) during the seventh round of any Manvantara, each planet in turn is disintegrated, and the matter of which it is composed returns to the general ocean of such matter within the solar system. Corresponding planets are evolved afresh for the next Manvantara, becoming as it were Re-incarnations of the higher principles inherent in the old planets. This arrangement, however, does not apply to the fourth planet of each chain — the most physical in its constitution. That loses a good deal of the matter forming it in a way that will be appreciated directly, and in its shrunken condition becomes the moon of its successor. Each new physical planet so called into being may be created — as new solar systems themselves are created in the first instance — according to different methods; but our earth appears to have been engendered on a plan closely resembling that by which our whole system was developed. Within the appropriate area of space, a planetary nebula was evolved, the matter of which it was composed being drawn in from surrounding space, itself no doubt the disintegrated material of former planets that had been broken up, or to some extent no doubt meteoric matter belonging to the system at large that may not have been previously utilised in that way. The new earth nebula was developed round a centre bearing pretty much the same relation to the dying planet

that the centres of the earth and moon bear to one another at present. But in the nebulous condition this aggregation of matter occupied an enormously greater volume than the solid matter of the earth now occupies. It stretched out in all directions so as to include the old planet in its fiery embrace. The temperature of a new nebula appears to be considerably higher than any temperatures we are acquainted with, and by this means the old planet was superficially heated afresh in such a manner that all atmosphere, water and volatilisable matter upon it was brought into the gaseous condition, and so became amenable to the new centre of attraction, set up at the centre of the new nebula. In this way the air and seas of the old planet were drawn over into the constitution of the new one, and thus it is that the moon in its present state is an arid, glaring mass, dry and cloudless, no longer habitable, and no longer required for the habitation of any physical beings. When the present Manvantara is nearly over, during the seventh round, its disintegration will be completed, and the matter which it still holds together will resolve into meteoric dust, to be made use of, mixed with the ocean of all such matter, in the formation of new planetary nebulæ hereafter.

The changes which thus take place from time to time within the interior economy of the solar system must, of course, produce perturbing effects on the movements of planets already in existence at any given period when an old planet is disintegrated, or a new one solidified, and probably such perturbations play a part in the cyclic processes going forward in

the active worlds of the time. It sometimes happens that isolated statements cropping up in occult teaching point to astronomical events that we cannot easily refer to cosmic causes visibly in operation. They are very likely promoted by changes which are going on in what may be called the configuration of the system, at great intervals. It can never fall to the lot of any one generation of observant beings on any one planet to witness the evolution of a new world or the destruction of an old one. Such processes are protracted compared with the span of human life. But crises must come on some periods in the future when rational inhabitants of some planets will see new worlds in formation. The present Manvantara, for instance, of the Venus scheme is so far advanced beyond our own, that mankind on earth in some future round of our present Manvantara, may perhaps witness the preparations for the evolution of the planet which will succeed Venus, although by that time the majority of mankind will be so far advanced in evolution themselves that no celestial phenomena will any longer be unintelligible, unexpected.

The seven great schemes of planetary evolution proceed on independent lines, and there is no intermingling of their activities during their normal course. But helpfulness is the law of life throughout the entire system, and in this way it comes to pass that the various schemes are not rigidly excluded from the possibility of receiving benefits from others. On this subject we need only concern ourselves with one example of such inter-communication, but it is

important to comprehend this one example correctly if we are endeavouring to understand our own evolutionary history. The Venus scheme, as already stated, is in the seventh round of its fifth Manvantara, we of the earth chain being at present in the course of our fourth round. This means that the humanity of the Venus chain was already on spiritual levels immensely higher than those of our humanity when we were still struggling on in the earlier phases of our evolution during this earth period. Thus it came to pass that some of the representatives of the Venus chain Adeptship, availing themselves of possibilities having to do with immensely exalted spiritual planes common to the whole solar system, transferred themselves to this earth for a time during part of the third and early fourth race, and took part in the teaching and guidance of our comparatively infant humanity.

Readers approaching these conceptions for the first time may be inclined to wonder how so great a gulf on the scale of evolution can have separated the earlier humanity of this world period from that inhabiting the earth to-day, and including masters of wisdom who have already scaled heights on a level, so far as we can understand, with those which our Venus teachers descended. The explanation lies in this simple fact that until the midway point of any Manvantara is reached the whole process of evolution must be thought of as a downward growth into the complexities of materiality. No one, however individually ripe for spiritual evolution, could begin to transcend his companions in any extraordinary de-

gree until the middle point of the Manvantara was turned. Then he had a clear course before him; it was possible for any one, assuming extraordinary aptitudes on his part, to achieve in a comparatively brief series of lives the whole development, for which, as regards the race at large, Nature liberally provides the whole second half of the Manvantara. Before the midway point of our Manvantara — that is to say, before the middle period of the great root race preceding our own — there were no Adepts belonging to our human family; thus no further back than at the beginning of the great Atlantean, or fourth root race, the earth chain was entirely dependent on external help for its loftier spiritual guidance.

The course of human progress through this world period, therefore — the history of the great root races — may be best studied in Theosophical books devoted specially to the elucidation of that magnificent progress, but the general character of such progress must be borne in mind by all who would form that mental picture of the whole system to which we belong, which is required to give an intelligent significance to all that concerns individual progress for each representative of humanity. Moreover, the comprehension of the way the great race evolution has been, and is going on during this world period, will connect itself in a peculiarly interesting way with the general comprehension of the whole structure of the system.

On the planet Mars, where humanity was last incarnated before the world period of the earth began,

humanity already inhabited physical bodies, and was endowed with sufficient human intelligence to carry out architectural and engineering works under the guidance of teachers belonging to a superior evolution. On completing its cycle on that planet mankind began its existence on this, under conditions which can hardly be thought of as physical. The vehicles of their consciousness were of ethereal matter, insusceptible to heat or cold, not yet subject to laws connected with waste and replenishment, which operate in connexion with the more compact organisms of our time. The first and second great root races were of this order; in the course of the third, the condensation of the physical vehicle of human consciousness was accomplished, in the fourth root race man was in the beginning considerably bulkier than at present, was already designed on the physical pattern we are acquainted with, and divided into two sexes. The course of evolution through preceding rounds was thus recapitulated in the course of the present world period in a way which bears some analogy to that curious recapitulation of physical existence which goes on at the present day in connexion with the birth of every fresh physical creature, as students of embryology are well aware.

It must not be supposed, however, that the whole human family of this scheme evolved during the first half of the present Manvantara on precisely the same plan. Our last Manvantara, the third or Lunar Manvantara, so called because the present moon was then the physical planet of the chain, did not bring

forward any entities to levels which correspond to what we think of as humanity to-day, but it afforded some scope for individual progress, and thus left the family at its close, on various levels of advancement.

The varied requirements of the situation were provided for in this way: the most developed entities did not come into incarnation in the earlier rounds of the present Manvantara. These earlier rounds afforded an appropriate field of activity on lower levels of existence for the less developed entities, and while these were enjoying a fresh opportunity of accomplishing the evolution they failed to realise properly during their last Manvantara, the highly developed entities of that Manvantara were passing through periods of spiritual existence to which those on the lower levels had no access. These spiritual periods were in the nature of supplementary rounds. I do not mean that they followed the course of evolution round the various planets of the chain, but they occupied periods of time corresponding to the round periods. In all they were three in number, so that while the undeveloped entities of the last Manvantara were, so to speak, bringing the next into a condition which once more would afford them an opportunity of making progress beyond even the possibility of the last Manvantara, they were at the same time rendering it suitable for the occupation of their elder brethren who had not only attained to the maximum possibilities of the previous Manvantara, but had spent time corresponding to the three first rounds of the next, in conditions of existence involving definite spiritual progress. Thus only on

the conclusion of the three spiritual periods did the most advanced entities of the last Manvantara come into incarnation in this. In the technical language of modern occult study the most advanced entities are spoken of as the first class Lunar Pitris. The phrase is perfectly intelligible and significant, when we bear in mind the fact that Pitri comes from the same root as Father, and simply signifies ancestor.

As a physical planet the moon is now but the dead body of the planet which once bore the mighty life-wave of the human family. It has shrunk to relatively small proportions, for not only have its subtle principles been Re-incarnated in the earth, but a good deal of its physical matter has actually been withdrawn from it to the body of its offspring. The process by which this result was accomplished has been already described.

So then, the most advanced representatives of the whole human family came into incarnation in this Manvantara at the middle period, that is to say, during the present period of the world's activity, in a condition which represents the maximum development possible during the Lunar Manvantara, plus the further progress accomplished during the three spiritual periods. Thus the two classes who have been in incarnation during the earlier rounds of this Manvantara, have had an opportunity by this time of rising to nearly the same development of evolution, but are still in the rear of the foremost class, which, as the whole body continues to progress, may be thought of as still leading the van, and representing in our own time all those who are the flower of our

own age, who are the exponents of its most advanced intellectual capacity, and especially those who at the earliest possible moment in the life of the world show aptitudes for spiritual progress, and most readily assimilate such teaching concerning the higher destinies of man as are involved in the noblest religious conceptions — especially in the occult philosophy which unites these loftiest aspirations with definite knowledge concerning superphysical states of existence. Not only all those who at the earliest possible date emerge from the ruck of humanity, and taking full advantage of the guidance received from those of a superior evolution, pass upward into the ranks of Adeptship, but all those who are in any sense their pupils, besides all those whose intellectual and moral development is of a kind which will render them available as occult pupils in the course of a few more incarnations, may be thought of as belonging to the class spoken of as the first of the Lunar Pitri. This statement must not be taken as implying that it is impossible for entities belonging to the second class to attain spiritual exaltation, but at the present stage of evolution the great majority of those who get on to the high levels are of the first Pitri class. As the mighty force of evolution sweeps upward during the successive rounds of the Manvantara, great numbers of those belonging to the second class will gradually attain levels of spiritual growth, from which they also will be capable of taking short cuts towards the summit levels possible in this Manvantara, but the first class of the Lunar Pitris ought to attain these summit levels at periods far in advance of the Man-

vantara's close. At that remote period in the future it will be theoretically impossible that all members of the human family, whose differentiation into specific entities had been accomplished during the Lunar Manvantara, will be able to attain the summit level. Those only for whom this progress would be hardly practical in the time are those who have only emerged as definite entities from the animal kingdom during the earlier rounds of this Manvantara. The probabilities are — and taking into account the enormous numbers with which we have to deal, probabilities in such a matter amount to something like certainty, over the whole area considered — the probabilities are, that of the whole number of entities constituting the human family at this time, including those who have emerged during the first half of the Manvantara from the animal kingdom as well as those who have distinct Pitri ancestry, three-fifths will arrive in some degree of appropriate advancement at what I have called the summit levels of the Manvantara. The other two-fifths will in the next Manvantara play a part somewhat similar to that assigned at the beginning of our own to the lower classes of the Lunar Pitris, and will begin their work at the beginning of that stupendous undertaking.

Of the three-fifths, something like half will actually have achieved the maximum progress this Manvantara is designed to effect. That progress will put each of such beings in a position so far transcending the conditions of humanity around us at the present day, that if we compare them with the ordinary humanity they will seem fairly God-like in their

knowledge and power and capacity for cosmic service. They will have attained to a full and complete appreciation of all the powers and forces and Divine purposes of which this chain of worlds has been the stage. For them the whole chain of worlds, not merely in their most material manifestations, but in all their astral and spiritual aspects as well, will constitute an absolutely familiar field of operations. They will be functioning in full consciousness on planes of Nature which embrace all these worlds. Every globe of the chain will be as accessible to them as the different rooms of a house in which he lives may be accessible to a human being of the present ordinary type. Their moral evolution corresponding with the growth of their knowledge and power will have brought them into perfect harmony with the whole Divine design of which the Manvantara has been the expression. They will be conscious and intelligent agents engaged in working out this design, and as regards their own ulterior progress they will themselves select from many various lines of ulterior evolution open to them, those along which they will best be able to conduce to the complete fulfilment of even loftier designs than that with which our Manvantara is directly related, and may either continue to guide and direct the progress of the succeeding Manvantaras associated with this chain of existences, or may pass away into other regions of cosmic activity, already representative, as it were, of the final achievement to which this chain of Manvantaras is subservient, in connexion with still vaster processes lying within the immeasurable economy of Nature.

Those who, while still belonging to the great three-fifths, have not at the close of this Manvantara actually attained the maximum perfection which lies within its possibilities, but are nevertheless in sight, as it were, of that perfection, will be the vanguard of human life in the next Manvantara when that has been prepared for their reception by the earlier activities of the less advanced two-fifths during the first three and a half of its rounds. As for the nature of the progress on which they will then set out it is hardly necessary for us at this stage of our development to attempt any definite conception.

One idea, however, should be borne in mind in connexion with all attempts to realise, however imperfectly, the colossal proportion and constitution of this system to which we belong. We must not think of the worlds of the system as existing wholly and solely for the sake of the evolution of the human family, on which so far our attention has been chiefly concentrated. Just as the world around us is the theatre of a great many forms of physical life, destined perhaps in the progress of time to merge one into the other, but for the time being on widely different levels, so the whole chain of worlds is the theatre of many evolutions which, during this Manvantara, are not destined to blend one into the other. There are more of such evolutions in progress around us, indeed, than Theosophical students can at present expect to know much about, but we know at all events something about some of them. There are some processes of evolution going forward which have to do entirely with elemental consciousness, not

yet, so to speak, projected from the infinite far down enough into the possibilities of manifestation to have shared the lessons derivable from the school of physical existence. At the other end of the scale, and transcending the conditions of our own life, we know something at all events of one great system of evolution which may distinctly be regarded as superior to that of humanity, although this earth is, to some extent, the fulcrum or a part of the fulcrum on which it rests. The great "Deva" evolution has to do with a vast field of consciousness that has, so to speak, got beyond the necessity of physical manifestation. On the whole scale of comparison the earlier elemental evolutions just referred to may be thought of as belonging to the downward limb of a vast cyclic scale or series of evolutions. Humanity is still largely dependent for its growth on a physical fulcrum that would be at the turning point of such a scale. The Deva evolution is on the upward limb beyond it. For this Deva evolution, so far as we are able to appreciate its constitution at present, the whole seven chains of the solar system are the field of its activities. To the Deva evolution our planetary chain thus plays the same part that one globe of that chain plays to the human evolution. It would be futile and unnecessary here to attempt a more exact appreciation of the mighty ulterior design with which this lofty evolution is concerned, but it has seemed desirable to refer to it for two reasons; firstly, because within the various alternatives lying before those members of the human family who attain the summit levels of evolution during this

Manvantara, one of the choices open to them has to do with this great evolution of which we speak. From the summit level of our progress we shall be enabled, if we think fit, to pass into the Deva evolution, and thenceforward pursue its destinies. The second reason for mentioning it has to do with the great importance of always keeping before the mind the fact that humanity constitutes one wheel, as it were, in the stupendous mechanism of the whole cosmos, and is not by any means the *raison d'etre* of the undertaking. Crude conceptions concerning the place of humanity in the cosmos are apt to render people at the same time too humble and too arrogant concerning their place in Nature. Conventional teaching entirely underrates the dignity and splendour of the altitude to which it is possible for a human being to ascend, and very often as ludicrously misconceives the stupendous proportions of the cosmos, by regarding the interests of humanity as something like the sole concern of its presiding Divinity.

With this very general sketch of the system to which we belong it will now be convenient to pass on to an explanation of the methods open to us for the ascent to its summit levels at an earlier period than that contemplated by the design of the scheme as a whole, and when we have realised more exactly the phases of spiritual achievement constituting the steps on the great path that leads to the highest attainable Adeptship, we shall be in a better position to forecast with exactitude the ultimate stratification of the human family at the close of this Manvantara.