

The Lectures of Rudolf Steiner

The Plant World and the Elemental Spirits

These lectures are Part Three in the cycle of lectures given in 1923: [Lecture VII](#), [Lecture VIII](#) and [Lecture IX](#)

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Lecture VII

2 November 1923, Dornach

To the outwardly perceptible, visible world there belongs the invisible world, and these, taken together, form a whole. The marked degree to which this is the case first appears in its full clarity when we turn our attention away from the animals to the plants.

Plant-life, as it sprouts and springs forth from the earth, immediately arouses our delight, but it also provides access to something which we must feel as full of mystery. In the case of the animal, though certainly its will and whole inner activity have something of the mysterious, we nevertheless recognize that this will is actually there, and is the cause of the animal's form and outer characteristics. But in the case of the plants, which appear on the face of the earth in such magnificent variety of form, which develop in such a mysterious way out of the seed with the help of the earth and the encircling air — in the case of the plant we feel that some other factor must be present in order that this plant-world may arise in the form it does.

When spiritual vision is directed to the plant-world, we are immediately led to a whole host of beings, which were known and recognized in the old times of instinctive clairvoyance, but which were afterwards forgotten and today remain only as names used by the poet, names to which modern man ascribes no reality. To the same degree, however, in which we deny reality to the beings which whirl and weave around the plants, to that degree do we lose the understanding of the plant-world. This understanding of the plant-world, which, for instance, would be so necessary for the art of healing, has been entirely lost to present-day humanity.

We have already recognized a very significant connection between the world of the plants and the world of the butterflies; but this too will only come rightly before our souls when we look yet more deeply into the whole weaving and working of plant-life.

Plants send down their roots into the ground. Anyone who can observe what they really send down and can perceive the roots with spiritual vision (for this he must have) sees how the root-nature is everywhere surrounded, woven around, by elemental nature spirits. And these elemental spirits, with an old clairvoyant perception designated as gnomes and which we may call the root-spirits, can actually be studied by an imaginative and inspirational world-conception, just as human life and animal life can be studied in the sphere of the physical. We can look into the soul-nature of these elemental spirits, into this world of the spirits of the roots.

These root-spirits, are, so to say, a quite special earth-folk, invisible at first to outer view, but in their effects so much the more visible; for no root could develop if it were not for what is mediated between the root and the earth-realm by these remarkable root-spirits, which bring the mineral element of the earth into flux in order to conduct it to the roots of the plants. Naturally I refer to the underlying spiritual process.

These root-spirits, which are everywhere present in the earth, get a quite particular sense of well-being from rocks and from ores (which may be more or less transparent). But they enjoy their greatest sense of well-being, because here they are really at home, when they are conveying what is mineral to the roots of the plants. And they are completely enfilled with an inner element of spirituality which we can only compare with the inner element of spirituality in the human eye, in the human ear. For these root-spirits are in their spirit-nature entirely *sense*. Apart from this they are nothing at all; they consist only of sense. They are entirely sense, and it is a sense which is at the same time *understanding*, which does not only see and hear, but immediately understands what is seen and heard, which in receiving impressions, receives also ideas.

We can even indicate the way in which these root-spirits receive their ideas. We see a plant sprouting out of the earth. The plant comes, as I shall presently show you, into connection with the extraterrestrial universe; and, particularly at certain seasons of the year, spirit-currents flow from above, from the blossom and the fruit of the plant down into the roots below, streaming into the earth. And just as we turn our eyes towards the light and see, so do the root-spirits turn their faculty of perception towards what seeps downwards from above, through the plant into the earth. What seeps down towards the root-spirits, that is something which the light has sent into the blossoms, which the sun's warmth has sent into the plants, which the air has produced in the leaves, which the distant stars have brought about in the plant's structures. The plant gathers the secrets of the universe, sinks them into the ground, and the gnomes take these secrets into themselves from what seeps down spiritually to them through the plants. And because the gnomes, particularly from autumn on and through the winter, in their wanderings through ore and rock bear with them what has filtered down to them through the plants, they become those beings within the earth which, as they wander, carry the ideas of the whole universe streaming throughout the earth. We look forth into the wide world. The world is built from universal spirit; it is an embodiment of universal ideas, of universal spirit. The gnomes receive through the plants, which to them are the same as rays of light are to us, the ideas of the universe, and within the earth carry them in full consciousness from metal to metal, from rock to rock.

We gaze down into the depths of the earth not to seek there below for abstract ideas about some kind of mechanical laws of nature, but to behold the roving, wandering gnomes, which are the light-filled preservers of world-understanding within the earth.

Because these gnomes have immediate understanding of what they see, their knowledge is actually of a similar nature to that of man. They are the compendium of understanding, they are entirely understanding. Everything about them is understanding, an understanding however, which is universal, and which really looks down upon human understanding as something incomplete. The gnomes laugh us to scorn on account of the groping, struggling understanding with which we manage to grasp one thing or another, whereas they have no need at all to make use of thought. They have direct perception of what is comprehensible in the world; and they are particularly ironical when they notice the efforts people have to make to come to this or that conclusion. Why should they do this? say the gnomes — why ever should people give themselves so much trouble to think things over? We know everything we look at. People are so stupid — say the gnomes — for they must first think things over.

And I must say that the gnomes become ironical to the point of ill manners if one speaks to them of logic. For why ever should people need such a superfluous thing — a training in thinking? The thoughts are already there. The ideas flow through the plants. Why don't people stick their noses as deep into the earth as the plant's roots, and let what the sun says to the plants trickle down into their noses? Then they would know something! But with logic — so say the gnomes — there one can only have odd bits and pieces of knowledge.

Thus the gnomes, inside the earth, are actually the bearers of the ideas of the universe, of the world-all. But for the earth itself they have no liking at all. They bustle about in the earth with ideas of the universe, but they actually hate what is earthly. This is something from which the gnomes would best like to tear themselves free. Nevertheless they remain with the earthly — you will soon see why this is — but they hate it, for the earthly threatens them with a continual danger. The earth continually holds over them the threat of forcing them to take on a particular form, the form of those creatures I described to you in the last lecture, the amphibians, and in particular of the frogs and the toads. The feeling of the gnomes within the earth is really this: If we grow too strongly together with the earth, we shall assume the form of frogs or toads. They are continually on the alert to avoid being caught in a too strong connection with the earth, to avoid taking on earthly form. They are always on the defensive against this earthly form, which threatens them as it does because of the element in which they exist. They have their home in the earthly-moist element; there they live under the constant threat of being forced into amphibian forms. From this they continually tear themselves free, by filling themselves entirely with ideas of the extra-terrestrial universe. The gnomes are really that element within the earth which represents the extra-terrestrial, because they must continually reject a growing together with the earthly; otherwise, as single beings, they would take on the forms of the amphibian world. And it is just from what I may call this feeling of hatred, this feeling of antipathy towards the earthly, that the gnomes gain the power of driving the plants up out of the earth. With the fundamental force of their being they unceasingly thrust away the earthly, and it is this thrusting that determines the upward direction of the plant's growth; they push the plants up with them. It accords with the nature of the gnomes in regard to the earthly to allow the plant to have only its roots in the earth, and then to grow upwards out of the earth-sphere; so that it is actually out of the force of their own original nature that the gnomes push the plants out of the earth and make them grow upwards.

Once the plant has grown upwards, once it has left the domain of the gnomes and has passed out of the sphere of the moist-earthly element into the sphere of the moist-airy, the plant develops what comes to outer physical formation in the leaves. But in all that is now active in the leaves other beings are at work, water-spirits, elemental spirits of the watery element, to which an earlier instinctive clairvoyance gave among others the name of undines. Just as we find the roots busied about, woven-about by the gnome-beings in the vicinity of the ground, and observe with pleasure the upward-striving direction which they give, we now see these water-beings, these elemental beings of the water, these undines in their connection with the leaves.

These undine beings differ in their inner nature from the gnomes. They cannot turn like a spiritual sense-organ outwards towards the universe. They can only yield themselves up to the weaving and working of the whole cosmos in the airy-moist element, and therefore they are not beings of such clarity as the gnomes. They dream incessantly, these undines, but their dream is at the same time their own form. They do not hate the earth as intensely as do the gnomes, but they have a sensitivity to what is earthly. They live in the etheric element of water, swimming and swaying through it, and in a very sensitive way they recoil from everything in the nature of a fish; for the fish-form is a threat to them, even if they do assume it from time to time, though only to forsake it immediately in order to take on another metamorphosis. They dream their own existence. And in dreaming their own existence they bind and release, they bind and disperse the substances of the air, which in a

mysterious way they introduce into the leaves, as these are pushed upwards by the gnomes. For at this point the plants would wither if it were not for the undines, who approach from all sides, and show themselves, as they weave around the plants in their dream-like existence, to be what we can only call the world-chemists. The undines dream the uniting and dispersing of substances. And this dream, in which the plant has its existence, into which it grows when, developing upwards, it forsakes the ground, this undine-dream is the world-chemist which brings about in the plant-world the mysterious combining and separation of the substances which emanate from the leaf. We can therefore say that the undines are the chemists of plant-life. They dream of chemistry. They possess an exceptionally delicate spirituality which is really in its element just where water and air come into contact with each other. The undines live entirely in the element of moisture, but they develop their actual inner function when they come to the surface of something watery, be it only to the surface of a water-drop or something else of a watery nature. For their whole endeavour lies in preserving themselves from getting the form of a fish, the permanent form of a fish. They wish to remain in a condition of metamorphosis, in a condition of eternal, endlessly changing transformation. But in this state of transformation in which they dream of the stars and of the sun, of light and of warmth, they become the chemists who now, starting from the leaf, carry the plant further in its formation, after it has been pushed upwards by the power of the gnomes. So the plant develops its leaf-growth, and this mystery is now revealed as the dream of the undines into which the plants grow.

To the same degree, however, in which the plant grows into the dream of the undines, does it now come into another domain, into the domain of those spirits which live in the airy-warmth element, just as the gnomes live in the moist-earthly, and the undines in the moist-airy element. Thus it is in the element which is of the nature of air and warmth that those beings live which an earlier clairvoyant art designated as the sylphs. Because air is everywhere imbued with light, these sylphs, which live in the airy-warmth element, press towards the light, relate themselves to it. They are particularly susceptible to the finer but larger movements within the atmosphere.

When in spring or autumn you see a flock of swallows, which produce as they fly vibrations in a body of air, setting an air-current in motion, then this moving air-current — and this holds good for every bird — is for the sylphs something audible. Cosmic music sounds from it to the sylphs. If, let us say, you are travelling somewhere by ship and the seagulls are flying around it, then in what is set in motion by the seagulls' flight there is a spiritual sounding, a spiritual music which accompanies the ship.

Again it is the sylphs which unfold and develop their being within this sounding music, finding their dwelling-place in the moving current of air. It is in this spiritually sounding, moving element of air that they find themselves at home; and at the same time they absorb what the power of light sends into these vibrations of the air. Because of this the sylphs, which experience their existence more or less in a state of sleep, feel most in their element, most at home, where birds are winging through the air. If a sylph is obliged to move and weave through air devoid of birds, it feels as though it had lost itself. But at the sight of a bird in the air something quite special comes over the sylph. I have often had to describe a certain event in man's life, that event which leads the human soul to address itself as "I". And I have always drawn attention to a saying of Jean Paul, that, when for the first time a human being arrives at the conception of his "I", it is as though he looks into the most deeply veiled Holy of Holies of his soul. A sylph does not look into any such veiled Holy of Holies of its own soul, but when it sees a bird an ego-feeling comes over it. It is in what the bird sets in motion as it flies through the air that the sylph feels its ego. And because this is so, because its ego is kindled in it from outside, the sylph becomes the bearer of cosmic love through the atmosphere. It is because the sylph embodies something like a human wish, but does not have its ego within itself but in the bird-kingdom, that it is at the same time the bearer of wishes of love through the universe.

Thus we behold the deepest sympathy between the sylphs and the bird-world. Whereas the gnome hates the amphibian world, whereas the undine is unpleasantly sensitive to fishes, is unwilling to approach them, tries to avoid them, feels a kind of horror for them, the sylph, on the other hand, is attracted towards birds, and has a sense of well-being when it can waft towards their plumage the swaying, love-filled waves of the air. And were you to ask a bird from whom it learns to sing, you would hear that its inspirer is the sylph. Sylphs feel a sense of pleasure in the bird's form. They are, however, prevented by the cosmic ordering from becoming birds, for they have another task. Their task is lovingly to convey light to the plant. And just as the undine is the chemist for the plant, so is the sylph the light-bearer. The sylph imbues the plant with light; it bears light into the plant.

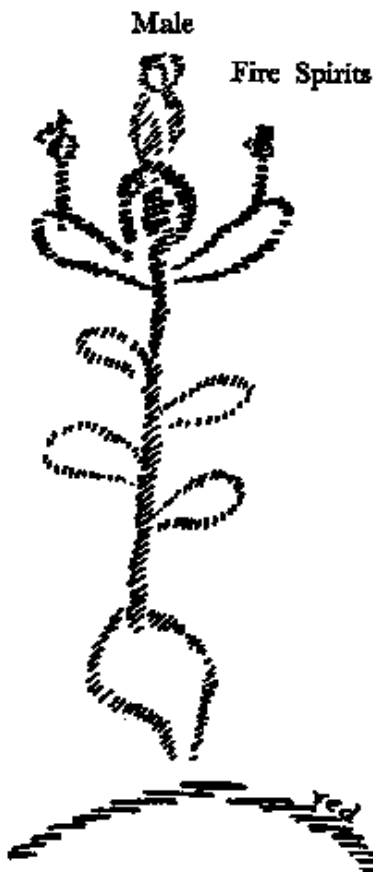
Through the fact that the sylphs bear light into the plant, something quite remarkable is brought about in it. You see, the sylph is continually carrying light into the plant. The light, that is to say the power of the sylphs in the plant, works upon the chemical forces which were induced into the plant by the undines. Here occurs the inter-working of sylph-light and undine-chemistry. This is a remarkable plastic activity. With the help of the upstreaming substances which are worked upon by the undines, the sylphs weave out of the light an ideal plant-form. They actually weave the Archetypal Plant within the plant from light, and from the chemical working of the undines. And when towards autumn the plant withers and everything of physical substance disintegrates, then these plant-forms begin to seep downwards, and now the gnomes perceive them, perceive what the world — the sun through the sylphs, the air through the undines — has brought to pass in the plant. This the gnomes perceive, so that throughout the entire winter they are engaged in perceiving below what has seeped into the ground through the plants. Down there they grasp world-ideas in the plant-forms which have been plastically developed with the help of the sylphs, and which now in their spiritual ideal form enter into the ground.

Naturally those people who regard the plant as something purely material know nothing of this spiritual ideal form. Thus at this point something appears which in the materialistic observation of the plant gives rise to what is nothing other than a colossal error, a terrible error. I will sketch this error for you.

Everywhere you will find that materialistic science describes matters as follows: The plant takes root in the ground, above the ground it develops its leaves, finally unfolding its blossoms, within the blossoms the stamens, then the seed-bud. Now — usually from another plant — the pollen from the anthers, from the pollen vessels, is carried over to the germ which is then fructified, and through this the seed of the new plant is produced. The germ is regarded as the female element and what comes from the stamens as the male — indeed matters cannot be regarded otherwise as long as people remain fixed in materialism, for then this process really does look like a fructification. This, however, it is not. In order to gain insight into the process of fructification, that is to say the process of reproduction, in the plant-world, we must be conscious that in the first place it is from what the great chemists, the undines, bring about in the plants, and from what the sylphs bring about, that the plant-form arises, the ideal plant-form which sinks into the ground and is preserved by the gnomes. It is there below, this plant-form. And there within the earth it is now guarded by the gnomes after they have seen it, after they have looked upon it. The earth becomes the mother-womb for what thus seeps downwards. This is something quite different from what is described by materialistic science.

After it has passed through the sphere of the sylphs, the plant comes into the sphere of the elemental fire-spirits. These fire-spirits are the inhabitants of the warmth-light element. When the warmth of the earth is at its height, or is otherwise suitable, they gather the warmth together. Just as the sylphs gather up the light, so do the fire-spirits gather up the warmth and carry it into the blossoms of the plants.

Undines carry the action of the chemical ether into the plants, sylphs the action of the light-ether into the plant's blossoms. And the pollen now provides what may be called little air-ships, to enable the fire-spirits to carry the warmth into the seed. Everywhere warmth is collected with the help of the stamens, and is carried by means of the pollen from the anthers to the seeds and the seed vessels. And what is formed here in the seed-bud is entirely the male element which comes from the cosmos. It is not a case of the seed-vessel being female and the anthers of the stamens being male. In no way does fructification occur in the blossom, but only the pre-forming of the male seed. The fructifying force is what the fire-spirits in the blossom take from the warmth of the world—all as the cosmic male seed, which is united with the female element. This element, drawn from the forming of the plant has, as I told you, already earlier seeped down into the ground as ideal form, and is resting there below. *For plants the earth is the mother, the heavens the father.* And all that takes place outside the domain of the earth is not the mother-womb for the plant. It is a colossal error to believe that the mother-principle of the plant is in the seed-bud. The fact is that this is the male-principle, which is drawn forth from the universe with the aid of the fire-spirits. The mother comes from the cambium, which spreads from the bark to the wood, and is carried down from above as ideal form. And what now results from the combined working of gnome-activity and fire-spirit activity — this is fructification. The gnomes are, in fact, the spiritual midwives of plant-reproduction. Fructification takes place below in the earth during the winter, when the seed comes into the earth and meets with the forms which the gnomes have received from the activities of the sylphs and undines and now carry to where these forms can meet with the fructifying seeds.



You see, because people do not recognize what is spiritual, do not know how gnomes, undines, sylphs and fire-spirits — which were formerly called salamanders — weave and live together with plant-growth, there is complete lack of clarity about the process of fructification in the plant world. There, outside the earth nothing of fructification takes place, but the earth is the mother of the plant-

world, the heavens the father. This is the case in a quite literal sense. Plant-fructification takes place through the fact that the gnomes take from the fire-spirits what the fire-spirits have carried into the seed bud as concentrated cosmic warmth on the little airships of the anther-pollen. Thus the fire-spirits are the bearers of warmth.

And now you will easily gain insight into the whole process of plant-growth. First, with the help of what comes from the fire-spirits, the gnomes down below instill life into the plant and push it upwards. They are the fosterers of life. They carry the life-ether to the root — the same life-ether in which they themselves live. The undines foster the chemical ether, the sylphs the light-ether, the fire-spirits the warmth ether. And then the fruit of the warmth-ether again unites with what is present below as life. Thus the plants can only be understood when they are considered in connection with all that is circling, weaving and living around them. And one only reaches the right interpretation of the most important process in the plant when one penetrates into these things in a spiritual way.

When once this has been understood, it is interesting to look again at that memorandum of Goethe's where, referring to another botanist, he is so terribly annoyed because people speak of the eternal marriage in the case of the plants above the earth. Goethe is affronted by the idea that marriages should be taking place over every meadow. This seemed to him something unnatural. In this Goethe had an instinctive but very true feeling. He could not as yet know the real facts of the matter, nevertheless he instinctively felt that fructification should not take place above in the blossom. Only he did not as yet know what goes on down below under the ground, he did not know that the earth is the mother-womb of the plants. But, that the process which takes place above in the blossom is not what all botanists hold it to be, this is something which Goethe instinctively felt.

You are now aware of the inner connection between plant and earth. But there is something else which you must take into account.

You see, when up above the fire-spirits are circling around the plant and transmitting the anther-pollen, then they have only one feeling, which they have in an enhanced degree, compared to the feeling of the sylphs. The sylphs experience their self, their ego, when they see the birds flying about. The fire-spirits have this experience, but to an intensified degree, in regard to the butterfly-world, and indeed the insect-world as a whole. And it is these fire-spirits which take the utmost delight in following in the tracks of the insects' flight so that they may bring about the distribution of warmth for the seed buds. In order to carry the concentrated warmth, which must descend into the earth so that it may be united with the ideal form, in order to do this the fire-spirits feel themselves inwardly related to the butterfly-world, and to the insect-creation in general. Everywhere they follow in the tracks of the insects as they buzz from blossom to blossom. And so one really has the feeling, when following the flight of insects, that each of these insects as it buzzes from blossom to blossom, has a quite special aura which cannot be entirely explained from the insect itself. Particularly the luminous, wonderfully radiant, shimmering, aura of bees, as they buzz from blossom to blossom, is unusually difficult to explain. And why? It is because the bee is everywhere accompanied by a fire-spirit which feels so closely related to it that, for spiritual vision, the bee is surrounded by an aura which is actually a fire-spirit. When a bee flies through the air from plant to plant, from tree to tree, it flies with an aura which is actually given to it by a fire-spirit. The fire-spirit does not only gain a feeling of its ego in the presence of the insect, but it wishes to be completely united with the insect.

Through this, however, insects also obtain that power about which I have spoken to you, and which shows itself in a shimmering forth of light into the cosmos. They obtain the power completely to spiritualize the physical matter which unites itself with them, and to allow the spiritualized physical substance to ray out into cosmic space. But just as with a flame it is the warmth in the first place which causes the light to shine, so, above the surface of the earth, when the insects shimmer forth

into cosmic space what attracts the human being to descend again into physical incarnation, it is the fire spirits which inspire the insects to this activity, the fire-spirits which are circling and weaving around them. But if the fire-spirits are active in promoting the outstreaming of spiritualized matter into the cosmos, they are no less actively engaged in seeing to it that the concentrated fiery element, the concentrated warmth, goes into the interior of the earth, so that, with the help of the gnomes, the spirit-form, which sylphs and undines cause to seep down into the earth, may be awakened.

This, you see, is the spiritual process of plant-growth. And it is because the subconscious in man divines something of a special nature in the blossoming, sprouting plant that he experiences the being of the plant as full of mystery. The wonder is not spoiled, the magic is not brushed from the dust on the butterfly's wing. Rather is the instinctive delight in the plant raised to a higher level when not only the physical plant is seen, but also that wonderful working of the gnome-world below, with its immediate understanding and formative intelligence, the gnome-world which first pushes the plant upwards. Thus, just as human understanding is not subjected to gravity, just as the head is carried without our feeling its weight, so the gnomes with their light-imbued intellectuality overcome what is of the earth and push the plant upwards. Down below they prepare the life. But the life would die away were it not formed by chemical activity. This is brought to it by the undines. And this again must be imbued with light. And so we picture, from below upwards, in bluish, blackish shades the force of gravity, to which the impulse upwards is given by the gnomes; and weaving around the plant — indicated by the leaves — the undine-force blending and dispersing substances as the plant grows upwards. From above downwards, from the sylphs, light falls into the plants and shapes an idealized plastic form which descends, and is taken up by the mother-womb of the earth; moreover this form is circled around by the fire-spirits which concentrate the cosmic warmth into the tiny seed-points. This warmth is also sent downwards to the gnomes, so that from out of fire and life, they can cause the plants to arise.

And further we now see that essentially the earth is indebted for its power of resistance and its density to the antipathy of the gnomes and undines towards amphibians and fishes. If the earth is dense, this density is due to the antipathy by means of which the gnomes and undines maintain their form. When light and warmth sink down on to the earth, this is first due to that power of sympathy, that sustaining power of sylph-love, which is carried through the air, and then to the sustaining sacrificial power of the fire-spirits, which causes them to incline downwards to what is below themselves. So we may say that, over the face of the earth, earth-density, earth-magnetism and earth-gravity, in their upward-striving aspect, unite with the downward-striving power of love and sacrifice. And in this inter-working of the downwards streaming force of love and sacrifice and the upwards streaming force of density, gravity and magnetism, in this inter-working, where the two streams meet, plant-life develops over the earth's surface. Plant-life is an outer expression of the inter-working of world-love and world-sacrifice with world-gravity and world-magnetism.

From this you have seen with what we have to do when we direct our gaze to the plant-world, which so enchants, uplifts and inspires us. Here real insight can only be gained when our vision embraces the spiritual, the super-sensible, as well as what is accessible to the physical senses. This enables us to correct the capital error of materialistic botany, that fructification occurs above the earth. What occurs there is not the process of fructification, but the preparation of the male heavenly seed for what is being made ready as the future Plant in the mother-womb of the earth.

Lecture VIII

3 November 1923, Dornach

Yesterday I spoke to you about the other side of nature-existence, about those super-sensible and invisible beings which accompany the beings and processes visible to the senses. An earlier, instinctive vision beheld these beings of the super-sensible world as clearly as we behold the world of the senses. Today, these beings have withdrawn from human view. It is only because this company of gnomes, undines, sylphs and fire-beings is not perceptible in the same way as animals, plants and so on, only to this is it due that man, in the present epoch of his earth-evolution, is not in a position to unfold his soul-spiritual being without the help of his physical and etheric bodies. In the present situation of earth evolution man is obliged to depend upon the etheric body when making use of his soul, and upon the physical body when making use of his spirit. The physical body, which provides the instrument for the spirit, the sense-apparatus, is not adapted to entering into connection with the beings which exist behind the physical world. It is the same with the etheric body, which man must use to develop his soul-being. Through this, if I may put it so, half of his earthly environment escapes him. He passes over everything connected with these elemental beings about which I spoke yesterday. To this world the etheric and physical bodies have no access. We gain an idea of what actually escapes the man of today when we realize what such gnomes, undines, and so on, actually are.

We have, you see, a whole host of lower creatures — lower at the present time — those beings which consist only of a soft mass, which live in the fluid element, and have nothing in the way of an articulated skeleton to give them inner support.

They are creatures which belong to the latest phase of earth-development; creatures which only now, when the earth has already evolved, develop what man — the oldest earth-being — already developed in his head-structure during the time of ancient Saturn. These creatures have not progressed so far as to form within themselves that hardening of the substance which can become the supporting skeleton.

It is the gnomes which, in a spiritual way, make good in the world what the lower orders of the animals up to the amphibians lack. This applies also to the fishes, which have only indications of the skeleton. These lower animal orders only become complete, as it were, through the fact that gnomes exist.

And just because the conditions of the beings in the world are very different, something arises between these lower creatures and the gnomes which I yesterday called antipathy. The gnomes do not wish to become like these lower creatures. They are continually on the watch to protect themselves from assuming their form. As I described to you, the gnomes are extraordinarily clever, intelligent beings. With them intelligence is already implicit in perception; they are in every respect the antithesis of the lower animal world. And whereas they have the significance for plant-growth which I described yesterday, in the case of the lower animal world they actually provide its completion. They supply what this lower animal world does not possess. This lower animal world has a dull consciousness; the gnomes have a consciousness of the utmost clarity. The lower creatures have no bony skeleton, no bony support; the gnomes bind together what works as the force of gravity and make their bodies from this volatile, invisible force, bodies which are, moreover, in constant danger of disintegrating, of losing their substance. The gnomes must ever and again create themselves anew out of gravity, because they continually stand in danger of losing their substance. Because of this, in order to retain their own existence, the gnomes are constantly attentive to what is

going on around them. As far as earth-observation goes no being is more attentive than a gnome. It takes note of everything, for it must know everything, grasp everything, in order to preserve its life. A gnome must always be wide awake; if it were to become sleepy, as men often do, this sleepiness would immediately cause its death.

There is a German saying of very early origin which aptly expresses this characteristic of the gnomes, in having always to remain attentive. People say: Pay heed like a goblin. And goblins are in fact the gnomes. So, if one wishes to make someone attentive, one says to him: Pay heed like a gnome. A gnome is really an attentive being. If one could place a gnome as an object lesson on a front desk in every school classroom, where all could see it, it would be a splendid example for the children to imitate.

The gnomes have yet another characteristic. They are filled with an absolutely unconquerable lust for independence. They trouble themselves little about one another and give their attention only to the world of their own surroundings. One gnome takes little interest in another. But everything else in this world around them, in which they live, this interests them exceedingly.

Now I told you that the human body forms a hindrance to our perceiving such folk as these. The moment this hindrance is removed, these beings are there, just as are the other beings of nature for ordinary vision. Anyone who comes so far as to experience in full consciousness his dreams on falling asleep is well acquainted with these gnomes. You need only recall what I recently published in the "Goetheanum" on the subject of dreams. I said that a dream in no way appears to ordinary consciousness in its true form, but wears a mask. Such a mask is worn by the dream when we fall asleep. We do not immediately escape from the experience of our ordinary day consciousness. Reminiscences well up, memory-pictures from life; we perceive symbols, sense-pictures of the inner organs — the heart as a stove, the lungs as wings — all in symbolic form. These are masks. If someone were to see a dream unmasked, if he were actually to pass into the world of sleep without the beings existing there being masked, then, at the moment of falling asleep, he would behold a whole host of goblins coming towards him.

In ordinary consciousness man is protected from seeing these things unprepared, for they would terrify him. The form in which they would appear would actually be copy images of all those qualities in the man which work as forces of destruction. He would perceive all the destructive forces within him, all that continually destroys. These gnomes, if perceived unprepared, would be nothing but symbols of death. Man would be terribly alarmed by them, if in ordinary consciousness he knew nothing about them, and was now confronted by them on falling asleep. He would feel entombed by them — for this is how it would appear — entombed by them over yonder in the astral world. For it is a kind of entombment by the gnomes which, seen from the other side, takes place on falling asleep.

This holds good only for the moment of falling asleep. A further complement to the physical sense-world is supplied by the undines, the water-beings, which continually transform themselves, and which live in connection with the water just as the gnomes live in connection with the earth. These undines — we have learned to know the role they play in plant-growth — also exist as complementary beings to those animals which stand at a somewhat higher stage, which have assumed a more differentiated earthly body. These animals, which have developed into the more evolved fishes, or also into the more evolved amphibians, require scales, require some sort of hard external shell. The forces needed to provide certain creatures with this outer support, this outer skeleton — for these forces the world is indebted to the activity of the undines. The gnomes support spiritually those creatures which are at a quite low stage. Those creatures which must be supported externally, which must be clad in a kind of armour, they owe their protective sheath to the activity of the undines. Thus it is the undines which impart to these somewhat higher animals in a primitive way

what we have in the covering of our skull. They make them, as it were, into heads. All these beings which are invisibly present behind the visible world have their great task in the economy of existence. You will always notice that, where materialistic science wishes to explain something of the kind I have just developed, there it breaks down. It is not in a position, for instance, to explain how the lower creatures manage to propel themselves forward in an element which is scarcely harder than they are themselves, because it does not know about the presence of this spiritual support from the gnomes which I have just described. Equally, the formation of an armour-like sheath will always create a difficulty for purely materialistic science, because it does not know that the undines, in their sensitivity to, their avoidance of their own tendency to become lower animals, thrust off from themselves what then appears upon the somewhat higher animals as scales or some other armour-like covering.

Again, in the case of these beings, it is only the body which hinders the ordinary consciousness of today from seeing them just as, for example, it sees the leaves of plants, or the higher animals.

When, however, man falls into a state of deep, dreamless sleep, and yet his sleep is not dreamless, because through the gift of inspiration it has become transparent, then his spiritual gaze perceives the undines rising up out of that astral sea in which, on falling asleep, he was engulfed, submerged by the gnomes. In deep sleep the undines become visible. Sleep extinguishes ordinary consciousness, but the sleep which is illumined by clear consciousness has as its content the wonderful world of ever-changing fluidity, a fluidity which lends itself in every possible way to the metamorphoses of the undines. Just as for day consciousness we have around us beings with firm contours, a clear night consciousness would present to us these ever-changing beings, which themselves well upwards and sink down again like the waves of the sea. All deep sleep in the environment of man is filled with a moving sea of living beings, a moving sea of undines.

Matters are otherwise with the sylphs. They, too, provide a completing element to the being of certain animals, but now in the other direction. The gnomes and undines add what is of the nature of the head to those animals where this is lacking. Birds, however, as I described to you, are actually pure head; they are entirely head-organization. The sylphs add to the birds in a spiritual way what they lack as the bodily complement of their head-organization. They complement the bird-kingdom in regard to what corresponds to the metabolic limb-system in man. If the birds fly about in the air with under-developed legs, so much the more powerfully developed is the limb-system of the sylphs. They may be said to represent in the air, in a spiritual way, what the cow represents below in physical matter. This is why I could say yesterday that it is in connection with the birds that the sylphs have their ego, have what connects them with the earth. Man acquires his ego on the earth. What connects the sylphs with the earth, that is the bird-kingdom. The sylphs are indebted to the bird-kingdom for their ego, or at least for the consciousness of their ego.

Now when someone has slept through the night, has had around him the astral sea, consisting as it does of the most manifold undine-forms, and then wakes up with an awakening dream, then again, if this dream on awakening were not masked in reminiscences of life or sense-pictures of the organs, if he were to see the unmasked dream, he would be confronted by the world of the sylphs. But these sylphs would assume for him a remarkable form; they would appear much as the sun might if it wished to send to men something which would affect them adversely, something which would lull them spiritually to sleep. We shall hear shortly why this is the case. Nevertheless, if someone were to perceive his dream on awakening unmasked, he would see in it an inflowing, an actual inflowing of light. He would also experience this as unpleasant, because the limb-system of these sylphs would, as it were, spin and weave around him. He would feel as though the light were attacking him from all sides, as if the light were something overwhelming, something to which he was extraordinarily

sensitive. Here and there, perhaps, he might also feel this as a caress of the light. But in all these things I only wish to indicate to you how the light, with its upholding, gently touching quality, actually appears in the sylph-form.

And when we come to the fire-beings, we find that they provide the completing element to the fleeting nature of the butterflies. A butterfly itself develops as little as possible of its actual physical body; it lets this be as tenuous as possible. It is, on the contrary, a creature of light. The fire-spirits appear as beings which complement the butterfly's body, so that we can get the following impression. If, on the one hand, we had a physical butterfly before us, and pictured it greatly enlarged, and on the other side a fire-being — they are, it is true, rarely together, except in the circumstances which I mentioned to you yesterday — then, if these two were welded together, we would get something resembling a winged man, actually a winged man. We need only increase the size of the butterfly, and adapt the size of the fire-spirit to human proportions, and from this we would get something like a winged man.

This shows you again how the fire-spirits are in fact the complement to those creatures which are nearest to what is spiritual; they complement them, so to say, in a downward direction. Gnomes and undines complement in an upward direction, towards the head; sylphs and fire-beings complement the birds and butterflies in a downwards direction. Thus the fire-beings must be brought together with the butterflies.

Now in the same way that man can, as it were, penetrate through the sleeping-dream, so can he also penetrate through waking-day life. But here he makes use of his physical body in quite a robust way. This, too, I have described in articles in the "Goetheanum". Here also man is totally unable to perceive how, in his waking life, he could continually see the fire-beings, in that the fire-beings are inwardly related to his thoughts, to everything which proceeds from the head-organization. But when a man has progressed so far that he can remain completely in waking consciousness, but nevertheless stand in a certain sense outside himself, viewing himself from outside as a thinking being, while standing firmly on the earth, then he will become aware how the fire-beings form that element in the world which, when we perceive it, makes our thoughts perceptible from the other side.

Thus the perceiving of the fire-beings can enable man to *see* himself as thinker, not merely to *be* the thinker and, as such, call up the thoughts, but actually to behold how the thoughts run their course. Only then do the thoughts cease to be bound to the human being; then they reveal themselves as *world-thoughts*; they work and weave as impulses in the world. Then one notices that the human head only calls forth the illusion that thoughts are enclosed inside the skull. There they are only reflected; their mirrored images are there. What underlies these thoughts belongs to the sphere of the fire-beings, one sees in these thoughts not only the thoughts themselves, but the thought-content of the world, which, at the same time, is actually an imaginative content. This is the force which enables us to arrive at the realization that thoughts are world-thoughts.

I venture to add: When we behold what is to be seen upon the earth, not from the human bodily nature, but from the sphere of the fire-beings — that is, from the Saturn-nature which has been carried into the Earth — then we gain exactly the picture of the evolution of the earth which I have described in "Occult Science — an Outline". This book is actually so composed that the thoughts appear as the thought-content of the world, seen from the perspective of the fire-beings.

You see, these things have in themselves a deep and real significance. But they also have a deep and real significance for man. Take the gnomes and undines: they are, so to say, in the world which borders on human consciousness; they are already beyond the threshold. Ordinary consciousness is

protected from seeing these beings, for the fact is that these beings are not all benevolent. The benevolent beings are, for instance, those which I described yesterday as working in the most varied ways upon plant-growth. But these beings are not all well-disposed. And in the moment when man breaks through into the world wherein they live and are active, he finds there not only the well-disposed beings but the malevolent ones as well. And so one must first form a conception as to which of them are well-disposed and which of them malevolent. This is not so easy, as you will see from the way I must describe the malevolent ones. The main difference between the ill-disposed beings and the well-disposed is that the latter are always drawn more to the plant and mineral kingdoms, whereas the ill-disposed are drawn to the animal and human kingdoms. Some, which are even more malevolent, also desire to approach the kingdoms of the plants and the minerals. But one can gain quite a fair idea of the malevolence which the beings of this realm can have, when one turns to those which are drawn to human beings and animals, wishing in particular to consummate in man what is allotted by the higher hierarchies to the well-disposed beings for the plant and mineral world.

You see, there exist ill-disposed beings from the realm of the gnomes and undines, which make for human beings and animals and bring it about that what they should really impart only to the lower animals appears physically in human beings. Certainly, these things are already present in man, but their aim is that this element should be manifested physically in human beings as well as in animals. Through the presence of these malevolent gnomes and undine-beings, animal and plant life of a low order — parasites — exist in human beings as well as in animals. These malevolent beings are the begetters of parasites. The moment man crosses the threshold of the spiritual world, he at once meets the subtleties of this world. Snares are everywhere, and he must first learn something from the goblins — namely, to be attentive. The spiritualists can never manage this! Everywhere there are snares. Now someone might say: Why then are these malevolent gnome and undine-beings there, if they engender parasites? Well, if they were not there, man would never be able to develop within himself the force to evolve the structure of his brain. And here we meet something of extraordinary significance.

I will sketch this for you in a diagram. If you think of the human being as consisting of the metabolic-limb-man, of the breast-man, that is, the rhythmic system, and then of the head-man, that is the system of nerves and senses, there are certain things about which you must be quite clear. Here below processes are taking place — let us leave out the rhythmic man — and here above processes are again taking place. If you look at the processes taking place below as a whole, you find that in ordinary life their essential function is usually disregarded. These processes are those of excretion — through the intestines, through the kidneys, and so on — all of them having their outlet in a downwards direction. They are mostly regarded simply as excretory processes. But this is a misinterpretation. Excretion does not take place merely for the purpose of elimination, but to the same degree in which the products of excretion appear, something appears spiritually in the lower man which resembles what the brain is physically above. What occurs in the lower man is a process which is arrested halfway in regard to its physical development. Excretion takes place because the process passes over into the spiritual. In the upper man the process is completed. What below is only spiritual, there assumes physical form. Above we have the physical brain, below a spiritual brain. And if what is eliminated below were to be subjected to a further process, if the changes in its condition were to be continued, then its final metamorphosis would be preliminary to the human brain.

The human brain-mass is the further evolved product of excretion. This is something which is of immense importance, in regard to medicine for instance, and it is something of which doctors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were still fully aware. Of course today people speak in a very derogatory manner — and rightly in many respects — of the old "quack-apothecaries". But this is because they do not know that their potions still contained "mummies" of the spirit.

Naturally this is not intended as a glorification of what has figured as "quackery" in the past centuries, but I am drawing attention to many truths which have connections as deep as those which I have just cited.

It is a fact that the brain is a higher metamorphosis of the products of excretion. Hence the connection between brain illnesses and intestinal illnesses, and their cure.

You see, because gnomes and undines exist, because there is a real world in which they live, the forces are present, which, proceeding from the lower man, do indeed give rise to parasites, but yet, at the same time, bring about in the upper man the metamorphosis of the products of excretion into the brain. It would be absolutely impossible for us to have a brain, if the world were not so ordered that gnomes and undines can exist.

What holds good for gnomes and undines in regard to the destructive forces — for destruction, disintegration, also proceed in their turn from the brain — this holds good for sylphs and fire-beings, in regard to the constructive forces. Here again the well-disposed sylphs and fire-beings hold themselves aloof from men and animals, and busy themselves with plant-growth in the way I have described; but there are also those which are malevolent. These ill-disposed beings are above all concerned in carrying what should only have its place up above in the regions of air and warmth down into the watery and earthy regions.

Now if you wish to study what happens when these sylph-beings carry what belongs up above down into the watery and earthy regions, look at the belladonna. The belladonna is the plant, which, if I may put it so, has been kissed in its blossoms by the sylphs, and in it what could be beneficent juices have been changed into juices which are poisonous.

Here you have what may be called a displacement of spheres. It is right when the sylphs develop their enveloping forces up above, as I have already described, where the light touches the surface in a formative way — for the bird-world needs this. But if the sylph descends, and makes use below of what it should employ up above in the plant-world, a potent vegetable poison is engendered. Parasitic beings arise through gnomes and undines; through sylphs the poisons which are in fact a heavenly element which has streamed down too deeply on to the earth. When men or certain animals eat the belladonna, which looks like a cherry, except that it conceals itself in the calyx (in the very way it is pressed down you can see what I have just described) — when men or certain animals eat the belladonna, it is fatal to them. But just look at the thrushes and blackbirds; they perch on the belladonna and get from it the best food in the world. It is to their region that what is present in the belladonna belongs.

It is a remarkable thing that animals and man, who in their lower organs are in fact earth-bound, should experience as poison what has become corrupted on the earth in the belladonna, whereas birds such as thrushes and blackbirds, which should really get this in a spiritual way from the sylphs — and indeed through the benevolent sylphs do so obtain it — should be able to assimilate it, even when what belongs up above in their region has been carried downwards to the earth. They find nourishment in what is poison for beings more bound to the earth.

Thus you get a conception of how, on the one side, through gnomes and undines what is of a parasitic nature strives upwards from the earth towards other beings, and of how the poisons filter downwards from above.

When, on the other hand, the fire-beings imbue themselves with those impulses which belong in the region of the butterflies, and are of great use to them in their development — when the fire-beings carry those impulses down into the fruits, there arises within the species of the almonds, for instance — what appears as the poisonous almonds. This poison is carried into the fruit of the almond trees through the activity of the fire-beings. And yet the fruit of the almond could not come into existence at all if beings from this same world of the fire-beings did not in a beneficial way burn up, as it were, what is the edible part in other fruits. Only look at the almond. With other fruits you have the white core in the centre and around it the flesh of the fruit. With the almond you have the kernel there in the centre, and around it the flesh of the fruit is quite burnt up. That is the action of the fire-beings. And if this activity miscarries, if what the fire-beings are bringing about is not confined to the brown burnt-up shell, where it can still be beneficial, but something of what should be engaged in developing the almond-shell penetrates into the white kernel, then the almond becomes poisonous.

And so you have gained a picture of those beings which are just on the boundary of the world lying immediately beyond the threshold, and of how, if they carry their impulses to their final issue, they become the bearers of parasites, of poisons, and therewith of illnesses. Now it becomes clear how far man in health raises himself above the forces that take hold of him in illness. For illness springs from the malevolence of these beings who are necessary for the upbuilding of the whole structure of nature, but also for its fading and decay.

These are the things which, arising from instinctive clairvoyance, underlie such intuitions as those of the Indian Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Brahma represented the active Being in world-spheres which may legitimately approach man. Vishnu represented those world-spheres which may only approach man in so far as what has been built up must again be broken down, in so far as it must be continually transformed. Shiva represented everything connected with the forces of destruction. And in the earlier stages of the flower of Indian civilization it was said that Brahma is intimately related to all that is of the nature of the fire-beings, and the sylphs; Vishnu with all that is of the nature of sylphs and undines; Shiva with all that is of the nature of undines and gnomes. Generally speaking, when we go back to these more ancient conceptions, we find everywhere the pictorial expressions for what must be sought today as lying behind the secrets of nature.

Yesterday we studied the connection of this invisible folk with the plant-world; today we have added their connection with the world of the animals. Everywhere beings on this side of the threshold are interlocked with those from beyond it; and beings from beyond the threshold with those on this side. Only when one knows the living inter-working of both these kinds of beings does one really understand how the visible world unfolds. Knowledge of the super-sensible world is indeed very, very necessary for man, because in the moment when he passes through the gate of death he no longer has the sense-world around him, but now the other world begins to be *his* world. At his present stage of evolution man cannot find right access into the other world unless he has recognized, in physical manifestations the written characters which direct him over into this other world; if he has not learned to read in the creatures of the earth, in the creatures of the water, in the creatures of the air, and, indeed, in the creatures of the light, the butterflies, what leads him to the elemental beings which are our companions between death and a new birth. What we see of these beings here between birth and death is, so to speak, their crude, dense part. We only learn to recognize what belongs to them as their super-sensible nature when, with insight and understanding, we transfer ourselves into this super-sensible world.

Lecture IX

4 November 1923, Dornach

We only learn to know the beings of the sense-world when we observe them in the way they live and act, and it is the same with those beings about which I have been speaking and shall continue to speak in these lectures, the elemental beings of nature. Invisibly and super-sensibly present behind what is physical and sense-perceptible, they participate in all the happenings of the world just as, or rather in a higher sense than do the physical, sense-perceptible beings.

Now you will readily be able to imagine that to these beings the world appears somewhat other than to the beings of the sense-world, for they do not possess a physical body such as is possessed by these latter. Everything which they grasp or perceive in the world must be different from what enters the human eye. This is indeed the case. The human being experiences the earth, for instance, as the cosmic body upon which he moves about. He even finds it slightly unpleasant when through some atmospheric condition or other, as occasionally occurs, this cosmic body becomes softened and he sinks into it even in a slight degree. He likes to feel the earth as something hard, as something into which he does not sink.

This whole way of experiencing things, this whole attitude towards the earth, is, however, completely alien to the gnomes; they sink down everywhere, because for them the whole earth-body is primarily a hollow space through which they can pass. They can penetrate everywhere; the rocks, the metals, present no hindrance to their — shall I say swimming around. There are no words in our language which really express this wandering about of the gnomes inside the body of the earth. It is just that they have an inner experience, an inner perception, of the different ingredients of the earth; when they wander along a vein of metal they have a different experience from when they take their way along a layer of chalk. All this, however, the gnomes feel inwardly, for through all such things they penetrate unhindered. They have not the least idea that the earth exists. Their idea is that there is a space within which they perceive certain experiences; the experience of gold, the experience of mercury, of tin, of silica, and so on. This is to express it in human language, not in the language of the gnomes. Their language is far more perceptive; and it is just because their whole life is spent in journeying along all the veins and seams — ever and again journeying along them — that they acquire the very pronounced intellectuality about which I have spoken to you. Through this they acquire their all-comprehensive knowledge, for in the metals and in the earth everything outside in the universe is revealed to them; as though in a mirror they experience everything which is outside in the universe. But for the earth itself the gnomes have no perception, only for its different constituents, and for the different kinds of inner experience which they offer.

Because of this the gnomes have a quite particular gift for receiving the impressions which come from the moon. It is towards the moon that they continually direct their attentive listening, and in this respect they are — I cannot say the born — it is so difficult to find the appropriate words — but the inherent neurasthenics. Of course, what for us is an illness is for these gnome-beings their actual life-element. For them this is no illness; it is simply a matter of course. It is what gives them that inner sensibility towards all those things of which I have spoken. But it also gives them their inner sensitivity towards the phenomena connected with the phases of the moon.

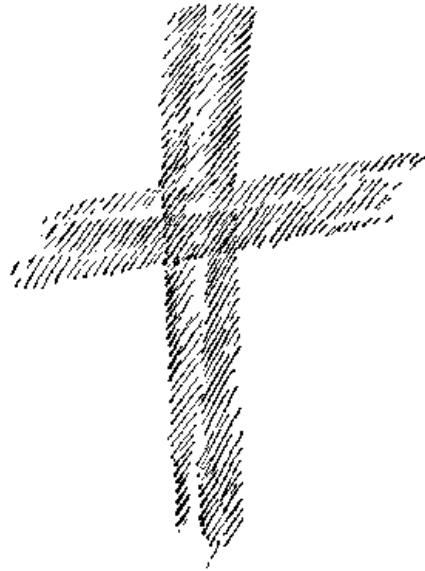
They follow the changes in the moon-phenomena with such close attention — I have already described their power of attention to you — that it actually alters their form. When, therefore, one follows the existence of a gnome, one receives quite a different impression at full moon from that one receives at new moon, and again at the intermediate phases.

At full moon the gnomes are ill at ease. Physical moonlight does not suit them, and at that time they thrust the whole feeling of their being outwards. They circumscribe themselves, as it were, with a spiritual skin. At full moon they press the feeling of their existence towards the boundary of their body. And in full moonlight, if one has imaginative perception for such things, they really appear like little shining, mail-clad knights. They are clad in a kind of spiritual armour and this it is which presses outwards in their skin to arm them against the moonlight which so displeases them. But when the time of new moon approaches the gnome becomes transparent, wonderful to see, inwardly irradiated with a glittering play of colours. One sees within him, as it were, the processes of a whole world. It is as though one were to look into the human brain, not as an anatomist investigating the fabric of the cells, but as one who perceives inside the brain the shimmering and sparkling of the thoughts. That is how these transparent little folk, the gnomes, appear to one, its though the play of thoughts is revealed within them. It is just at new moon that the gnomes are so particularly interesting, for each of them bears a whole world within himself; and one can say that within this world there actually lies the mystery of the moon.

If one unveils it, this moon-mystery, one comes upon truly remarkable discoveries, for one reaches the conclusion that at the present time the moon is continually approaching nearer — naturally you must not take this in a crude way, as though the moon would collide with the earth — but each year it does in fact come somewhat nearer. Each year the moon is actually nearer the earth. One recognises this from the ever more vigorous play of the moon-forces in the gnome-world during the time of the new moon. And to this coming nearer of the moon the attentiveness of these goblins is quite specially directed; for it is in producing results from the way in which the moon affects them that they see their chief mission in the universe. They await with intense expectation the epoch when the moon will again unite with the earth; and they assemble all their forces in order to be armed in readiness for the epoch when the moon will have united with the earth, for they will then use the moon substance gradually to disperse the earth, as far as its outer substance is concerned, into the universe. Its substance must pass away.

Because they hold this task in view these kobolds or gnomes feel themselves to be of quite special importance, for they gather together the most varied experiences from the whole of earth-existence, and they hold themselves in readiness, when all earthly substance will have been dispersed into the universe, — after the transition to the Jupiter-evolution — to preserve what is good in the structure of the earth in order to incorporate this in Jupiter as a kind of bony support.

You see, when one looks at this process from the aspect of the gnomes, one gains a first stimulus, a first capacity, to picture how our earth would appear if all the water were taken away from it. Just consider how, in the western hemisphere, everything is orientated from north to south, and how, in the eastern hemisphere, everything is orientated from east to west. Thus, if you were to do away with all the water, you would get in America, with its mountains and what lies under the sea, something which proceeds from north to south; and looking at Europe you would correspondingly find that, in the eastern hemisphere, the chain of the Alps, the Carpathians and so on, runs in the east-west direction. You would get something like the structure of the cross in the earth.



When one gains insight into this, one receives the impression that this is really the united gnome-world of the old Moon. The predecessors of our Earth-gnomes, the Moon-gnomes, gathered together their Moon-experiences and from them fashioned this structure, this firm structure of the solid fabric of the Earth, so that our solid Earth-structure actually arose from the experiences of the gnomes of the old Moon.

These are the things which reveal themselves in regard to the gnome-world. Through them the gnomes acquire an interesting, an extraordinarily interesting relationship to the whole evolution of the universe. They always carry over the firm element of a preceding stage into the stage which follows. They are the preservers in evolution of the continuity of the firm structure, and thus they preserve the firm structure from one world-body to another. It belongs to the most interesting of studies to approach the super-sensible world from the aspect of these spiritual beings and to observe their special task, for it is through this that one first gains an impression of how every kind of being existing in the world shares in the task of working upon the whole formation of the world.

Now let us pass over from the gnomes to the undines, the water-beings. Here a very remarkable picture presents itself. These beings have not the need for life that human beings have, neither have they the need for life that the animals have even though instinctively, but one could almost say that the undines, as also the sylphs, have rather a need for death. In a cosmic way they are really like the flying creature which casts itself into the flame. They only feel their life to be truly theirs when they die. This is extraordinarily interesting. Here on the physical earth everything desires to live, for all that has life-force in it is prized. It is the living, sprouting life that is valued. But once we have crossed the threshold, all these beings say to us that it is death which is really the true beginning of life. This can be felt by these beings. Let us take the undines. You know, perhaps, that sailors who travel a great deal on the sea find that in July, August and September — further to the west this is already the case in June — the Baltic Sea makes a peculiar impression, and they say that the sea is beginning to blossom. It becomes, as it were, productive; but it produces just those things which decay in the sea. The process of decay in the sea makes itself felt; it imparts to the sea a peculiar putrefactive smell.

All this, however, is different for the undines. It causes them no unpleasant sensations; but when the millions and millions of water-creatures which perish in the sea enter into the state of decomposition the sea becomes for the undines the most wonderful phosphorescent play of colours.

It shines and glitters with every possible colour. Especially does the sea glitter for them, inwardly and outwardly, in every shade of blue, violet and green. The whole process of decomposition in the sea becomes a glimmering and gleaming of the darker colours up to the green. But these colours are realities for the undines, and one can see how, in this play of colours in the sea, they absorb the colours into themselves. They draw these colours into their own bodily nature. They become like them, they themselves become phosphorescent. And as they absorb the play of colours, as they themselves become phosphorescent, there arises in the undines something like a longing, an immense longing to rise upwards, to soar upwards. Upwards they soar, led by this longing, and with this longing they offer themselves to the beings of the higher hierarchies — to the angels, archangels and so on — as earthly sustenance; and in this sacrifice they find their bliss. Then within the higher hierarchies they live on further.

And thus we see the remarkable fact that each year with the return of early spring these beings evolve upwards from unfathomable depths. There they take part in the life of the earth by working on the plant-kingdom in the way I have described. Then, however, they pour themselves, as it were, into the water, and take up by means of their own bodily nature the phosphorescence of the water, the element of decomposition, and bear it upwards with an intensity of longing. Then in a vast, in a magnificent cosmic picture, one sees how, emanating from earthly water, the colours which are carried upwards by the undines and which have spiritual substantiality, provide the higher hierarchies with their sustenance, how the earth becomes the source of nourishment in that the very essence of the undines' longing is to let themselves be consumed by the higher beings. There they live on further; there they enter into their eternity. Thus every year there is a continual upstreaming of these undines, whose inner nature is formed out of the earthly sphere, and who radiate upwards, filled with the longing to offer themselves as nourishment to the higher beings.

And now let us proceed to the sylphs. In the course of the year we find the dying birds. I described to you how these dying birds possess spiritualized substance, and how they desire to give this spiritualized substance over to the higher worlds in order to release it from the earth. But here an intermediary is needed. And these intermediaries are the sylphs. It is a fact that through the dying bird-world the air is continually being filled with astrality. This astrality is of a lower order, but it is nevertheless astrality; it is astral substance. In this astrality flutter — or hover might be a better word — in this astrality hover the sylphs. They take up what comes from the dying bird-world, and carry it, again with a feeling of longing, up into the heights, only desiring to be inhaled by the beings of the higher hierarchies. They offer themselves as that which supplies breathing-existence to the higher hierarchies. Again a magnificent spectacle. With the dying bird-world, this astral, inwardly radiant substance is seen to pass over into the air. The sylphs flash like blue lightning through the air, and into their blue lightning, which assumes first greener, then redder tones, they absorb this astrality which comes from the bird-world, and dart upwards like upward-flashing lightning. And if one follows this beyond the boundaries of space, it becomes what is inhaled by the beings of the higher hierarchies.

Thus one can say: The gnomes carry one world over into another in regard to its structure. They progress, as it were in a direction — the expression is only used as a comparison — which is horizontal with evolution. The other beings — the undines, the sylphs — carry upwards what they experience as bliss in yielding themselves up to death, in being consumed, in being inhaled. There they continue to live within the higher hierarchies; within them they experience their eternity.

And when we pass over to the fire-beings, only think how the dust on the butterfly's wings seems to dissolve into nothing with the death of the butterfly. But it does not really dissolve into nothing. What is shed as dust from the butterfly's wings is the most highly spiritualized matter. And all this passes over like microscopic comets into the warmth-ether which surrounds the earth, each single

particle of dust passes like a microscopic comet into the warmth-ether of the earth. When in the course of the year the butterfly-world approaches its end, all this becomes glittering and shimmering, an inner glittering and shimmering. And into this glittering and shimmering the fire-beings pour themselves; they absorb it. There it continues to glitter and shimmer, and they, too, get a feeling of longing. They bear what they have thus absorbed up into the heights. And now one sees — I have already described this to you from another aspect — how what the fire-beings carry outwards from the butterfly's wings shines forth into world-space. But it does not only shine forth; it streams forth. And it is this which provides the particular view of the earth, which is perceived by the higher hierarchies. The beings of the higher hierarchies gaze upon the earth, and what they principally see is this butterfly-and-insect-existence which has been carried outwards by the fire-beings; and the fire-beings find their highest ecstasy in the realization that it is they who present themselves before the spiritual eyes of the higher hierarchies. They find their highest bliss in being beheld by the gaze, by the spiritual eyes, of the higher hierarchies, in being absorbed into them. They strive upwards towards these beings and carry to them the knowledge of the earth.

Thus we see how these elemental beings are the intermediaries between the earth and the spirit-cosmos. We see this drama of the phosphorescent uprising of the undines, which pass away in the sea of light and flame of the higher hierarchies as their sustenance; we see the up-flashing of the greenish-reddish lightning, which is in-breathed there where the earth continually passes over into the eternal, the eternal survival of the fire-beings, whose activity never ceases. For whereas, here on earth, it is particularly at a certain time of the year that butterflies die, the fire-beings see to it that what it is their task to look to is poured out into the universe throughout the entire year. Thus the earth is as though cloaked in a mantle of fire. Seen from outside the earth appears fiery. But everything is brought about by beings who see the things of the earth quite differently from how man sees them. As already mentioned, man's experience of the earth is of a hard substance upon which he walks about and stands. For the gnomes it is a transparent globe, a hollow body. For the undines water is something in which they perceive the phosphorizing process, which they can take into themselves and feel as their life-element. Sylphs see in the astrality of the air, which emanates from dying birds, that which makes their lightning flashes more vivid than they would otherwise be, for in itself the lightning of these sylphs is dull and bluish. And then again the disintegration of butterfly existence is something which continually envelops the earth as though with a sheath of fire. When this is beheld it is as though the earth were surrounded by a wonderful fiery painting; and, on the other side, when one looks upwards from the earth, one beholds these lightning flashes, these phosphorescent and evanescent undines. All this makes us say: Here on earth the elemental nature-spirits live and weave; they strive upwards and pass away in the fire-mantle of the earth. In reality, however, they do not pass away, but there they find their eternal existence by passing over into the beings of the higher hierarchies.

All this, however, which at first appears like a wonderful world-picture is the expression of what happens on earth, for initially it is all played out upon the earth. We human beings are always present in what is there taking place; and the fact is — even if in his ordinary consciousness man is at first incapable of grasping what surrounds him — that every night we are involved in the weaving and working of these beings, that we ourselves take part as ego and as astral body in what these beings are carrying out.

But it is the gnomes especially which really find it quite an entertainment to observe a person who is asleep, not the physical body in bed, but the person who is outside his physical body in his astral body and ego, for what the gnome sees is someone who thinks in the spirit but does not know it. He does not know that his thoughts live in the spiritual. And again for the undines it is inexplicable that man knows himself so little; likewise with the sylphs, and likewise with the fire-beings.

On the physical plane, you see, it is certainly often unpleasant to have gnats and the like buzzing around one at night. But the spiritual man, the ego and astral body — at night these are surrounded and woven about by elemental beings; and this being surrounded and woven about is a constant admonition to man to give an impetus to his consciousness in order to know more about the world.

Now, therefore, I can try to give you an idea of what these beings — gnomes, undines, sylphs and fire-beings — mean with their buzzing about, of what happens when we begin to hear what amuses them in us, and of what they would have us do when they admonish us to give a forward impetus to our consciousness. Yes, you see, here come the gnomes and speak somewhat as follows:

*You dream your self,
And shun awakening.*

The gnomes know that man possesses his ego as though in a dream, that he must first awaken in order to arrive at his true ego. They see this quite clearly, and call to him in his sleep:

You dream your self

— they mean during the day —

And shun awakening.

Then there sounds forth from the undines:

You think the deeds of angels

Man does not know that his thoughts are really with the angels

*You think the deeds of Angels
And know it not.*

And from the sylphs there sounds to sleeping man:

*Creative Might shines to you,
You divine it not.
You feel its strength*

— the strength of Creative Might —

And live it not.

Such approximately are the words of the sylphs, the words of the undines, the words of the gnomes.

The words of the fire-beings:

*Divine Will offers you strength,
You accept it not.
With its strength you will,*

— with the strength of Divine Will —

Yet thrust it from you.

The aim of all these admonitions is to give man a forward impetus in regard to his consciousness. These beings, which do not enter into physical existence, wish man to make a move onward with his consciousness, so that he, too, may participate in their world.

And when one has thus entered into what these beings have to say to man, one also gradually understands how they give expression to their own nature, somewhat in this way:

The gnomes:

*I maintain the life-force in the root,
It creates for me my body's form.*

The undines:

*I bestir the water's power of growth,
It forms for me substance of life.*

The sylphs:

*I quaff the airy force of life,
It fills me with the power of being.*

And the fire-beings — there it is very difficult to find any kind of earthly words for what they do, because their sphere is far removed from earthly life and earthly activity.

Fire-beings:

*I consume the striving power of fire,
Into soul-spirit it releases me.*

You see, I have endeavoured to the best of my ability to give you an idea of how these beings of the elemental kingdom characterize themselves; and of the admonitions which they impart to man. But they are not so unfriendly to man as only to suggest to him what is negative in its nature, but pithy and positive sayings also proceed from them. And man experiences these sayings as being of immense, of gigantic import. In such matters as these you must acquire a sense for whether a saying is uttered merely in human words, however beautiful they may be, or whether it sounds forth as though cosmically from the whole mighty chorus of the gnomes. It is the whole manner of its arising which brings about the difference. And when man hearkens to the gnomes after the admonitions which I have written down have been imparted to him, then there sounds towards him from the massed chorus of the gnomes:

Strive to awaken.

Here the significance is the mighty moral impression created by such words when they stream through the universe, arising from the massed chorus of infinitely many single voices.

And from the undine chorus resounds:

Think in the spirit.

With the chorus of sylphs things are not so simple. When the gnomes appear like shining armoured knights in full moonlight there resounds from them as though from earth-depths:

Strive to awaken.

When the undines soar upwards filled with the longing to be consumed, then in this upsoaring there sounds back to the earth:

Think in the Spirit.

But for the sylphs, in that, up above, they allow themselves to be inhaled, disappearing in bluish-reddish-greenish lightning into the world-light, then, as they flash into the light and therein disappear, from the heights there sounds down from them:

Live creatively breathing existence.

And as in fiery anger — but anger which is not felt to be annihilating, but rather as something which man must receive from the cosmos — as in fiery but at the same time enthusiastic anger, the fire-beings carry what is theirs into the fire-mantle of the earth, their words resound. Here the sound is not like that of single voices massed together, but from the whole circumference there resounds as with a mighty voice of thunder:

Receive in love the Will-Force of the Gods.

Naturally, one can turn one's attention away from all this; then one does not perceive it. Whether or no man does perceive such things depends upon his own free decision. But when man does perceive them he knows that they are an integral part of cosmic existence, that something actually occurs in that gnomes, undines, sylphs and fire-beings unfold their evolution in the way described. And the gnomes are not only present for man in the way I have already portrayed, but they are there to let their world-words sound forth from the earth, the undines to let their world-words soar upwards, the sylphs theirs from above, the fire-beings theirs like a chorus, like the massing of a mighty uplifting of voices.

Yes, this is how it could appear when transposed into words. But these words belong to the Word of worlds, and even though we do not hear them with ordinary consciousness, these words are yet not without significance for mankind. For the primeval idea which had its source in instinctive clairvoyance, that the world was born out of the Word, is indeed a profound truth, but the world-word is not some collection of syllables gathered from here or there; the world-word is what sounds forth from countless, countless beings. Countless, countless beings have something to say in the totality of the world, and the world-word sounds forth from the concordance of these countless beings. It is not the general abstract truth that the world is born out of the Word that can bring this to us in its fullness. One thing alone can do this, namely that we gradually arrive at a concrete understanding of how the world-word in all its different nuances is composed of the voices of individual beings, so that these different nuances contribute their sound, their utterance, to the great world-harmony, the mighty world-melody, in the Word's act of *creation*.

When the gnome-chorus allows its "Strive to awaken" to sound forth, this — only transformed into gnome-language — is the force which is active in bringing about the human bony system, the system of movement in general.

When the undines utter "Think in the spirit", they utter — transposed into the undine-sphere — what pours itself as world-word into man in order to give form to the organs of digestion.

When the sylphs, as they are breathed in, allow their "Live creatively breathing existence" to stream downwards, there penetrates into man, weaving and pulsating through him, the force which endows him with the organs of the rhythmic system.

And if one attends to what sounds inwardly — in the manner of the fire-beings — from the fire-mantle of the world, then one finds that this sounding manifests as image or reflection. It streams in from the fire-mantle — this sounding force of the word. And every nerve system of every man, every head I would add, is a miniature image of what-translated into the language of the fire-beings — rings out as: "Receive in love the Will-Power of the Gods". This saying, "Receive in love the Will-Power of the Gods", this is what is active in the highest substance of the world. And when man is

experiencing his development in the life between death and a new birth, this it is which transforms what he brought with him through the gate of death into what will later become the human organs of the nerves and senses. So we have:

System of movement

Chorus of gnomes: Strive to awaken

Metabolic organization

Undines: Think in the Spirit

Rhythmic system

Sylphs: Live creatively breathing existence.

Nerve-senses system

Fire-beings: Receive in love the Will-Power of the Gods.

Thus you see that what lies beyond the threshold is akin to our own nature, you see how it leads us into the creative divine forces, into what lives and works in all forms of existence. And when one calls to mind what an earlier epoch divined, and is expressed in the words:

*The power of life, the seeds behold;
Turn thee away from words' cramped mould.*

— one is impelled to say that all this must become actuality in the further course of the development of mankind. We cramp all knowledge into words if we have no insight into the germinating forces which build up the human being in the most varied ways.

We can therefore say that the system of movement, the metabolic system, the rhythmic system, the system of nerves and senses merge into a unity in that they resound in harmony. For there sounds upwards from below: "Strive to awaken"; "Think in the Spirit" — and from above downwards, mingling with the upward-striving words, "Live creatively breathing existence"; "Receive in love the Will-Power of the Gods".

This "Receive in love the Will-Power of the Gods" is the calm creative element in the head. Then what strives from below upwards in "Think in the Spirit", from above downwards in "Live creatively breathing existence", in their combined activity is what so works and weaves that it creates an image of the way in which human breathing passes over in a rhythmical way into the activity of the blood. And what implants into us the instruments of the senses, this is what streams from above downwards in "Receive in love the Will-Power of the Gods". But what works in our walking, in our standing, in our moving of the arms and hands, everything in fact which brings man into the manifestation of his element of will, this sounds forth in "Strive to awaken".

Thus you see how man is a symphony of that world-word which can be interpreted on its lowest level in the way I have presented it to you. Then this world-word ascends to the higher hierarchies, whose task it is to unfold other aspects of this world-word in order that the cosmos may arise and develop. But that which has, as it were, been uttered as a call into the world by these elemental beings is the final reverberation of that creative, upbuilding, form-giving world-word which lies at the base of all activity and all existence.

Gnomes:

*You dream your Self,
And shun awakening.*

*I maintain the life-force in the root,
It creates for me my body's form.*

Undines:

*You think the deeds of Angels
And know it not.*

*I bestir the water's power of growth,
It forms for me substance of life.*

Sylphs:

*Creative might shines to you,
You divine it not;
You feel its strength
And live it not.*

*I quaff the airy force of life,
It fills me with the power of being.*

Fire-beings:

*Divine Will offers you strength,
You accept it not.
With its strength you will,
Yet thrust it off from you.*

*I consume the striving power of fire,
Into soul-spirit it releases me.*

Chorus of gnomes: Strive to awaken!

Undines: Think in the Spirit!

Sylphs: Live creatively breathing existence!

Fire-beings: Receive in love the Will-Power of the Gods!

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