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Reincarnation

Do We Live on Earth Again?



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REINCARNATION

Do We Live on Earth Again?

The popular religious doctrine is that every soul is newly created; but when the soul is born on earth it brings a character with it. Where did it get it? If newly created, then the character of the new-born child is imprinted upon it by its Creator, from that position there is no escape. Now, many children are born criminals, and cannot be anything else through the whole of their life; many are born diseased, and disease distorts their thought and dwarfs their powers; many are born deformed, miserable, while other people are born just the opposite—clever, healthy, with everything in their favor. Are they also newly created souls? And if one can be created noble and pure in character, where lies the justice in regard to those who are born criminal, vicious and diseased? Who is going to make it even between those two souls? Where is justice if neither deserved his fate, if the one was branded criminal without desert, and the other has genius without desert?

Those are the problems that men and women have to face. It is not enough to tell us: "Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?" For God gave the reason which demands the question, and God gave the conscience which is not satisfied with the injustice of life, and I challenge thoughtful men and women to accept that view when once they think it out; they accept it because they do not think, not because they do.

Precocious Children

On what ground save that of Reincarnation can the "infant prodigy" be accounted for? As a child of two, Young, the discoverer of the un-

dulatory theory of light, could read with fluency, at four he had read through the Bible twice, and a few years later mastered mathematics, numerous languages and abstruse sciences. Sir Wm. Hamilton when a boy was proficient in at least thirteen languages and at 18 years was pronounced "the greatest mathematician of his age." At 11 years of age William James Sidis, of Brookline, Mass., entered Harvard University, having completed Grammar and High School courses. At an age when most boys are learning the alphabet he could recite pages of Shakespeare from memory. We are constantly reading of infants with marvellous intellectual capacity. Why are they superior? Mozart composed classical music at four years of age. How explain this unusual talent?

Not Hereditary

Let us consider the genius. What is he? He is the soul which has gone through life after life, and has gradually gathered together and accumulated all the results of life's experience until at last he has reached the splendor we call genius. He has earned it. It is no gift to him, which would imply injustice. It is the fairly earned wages of lives of toil and struggle. That is what reincarnation means—fair payment all around. Genius is not transmitted from parent to child; on the contrary, instead of the child of a genius being a genius, he tends to show a mentality rather below the average, not above it. The genius marks the high water mark of the family, after which the family goes down again. Think for a moment; how many men of genius can you remember whose children and grandchildren are still rising higher and higher in the humanity of our time? None. That is one of the problems that science found so difficult, when talking about man evolving by the transmission of mental capacity from parent to child. Moreover, children are born during the younger time of their parents' life, and the accumulated mental and moral qualities, the wisdom of the old man, the learning acquired during a long life—those are attained after the time for parentage has almost passed.

The Scientific View

For these, and many other reasons, Darwin's theory has been given up. Science goes further than giving up the theory by declaring that genius tends to be sterile; and the lower the mental type the more rapid the reproduction and multiplication. The theory which Darwin put to the scientific world tried to connect with the continuity of matter a certain transmission of mental and moral qualities, so that the evolution of consciousness might also be explained. But science has traveled far since Darwin published the "Origin of Species," and it has arrived at a conclusion which has knocked to pieces the splendid ethical appeal which was founded on the transmission of mental and moral capacity. No leading scientific man now ventures to declare that mental and moral qualities, acquired during life, can be transmitted to the offspring. The voice of science is clear and definite against it.

Rebirth of the Soul

But now let us ask whether there is any other view of life which will make these things intelligible. I can tell you in a few sentences the theory of reincarnation: That every man is a living spirit; he is part of the life of the Supreme, he is the offspring of Deity; as sparks come forth from a fire, so comes he forth from the Divine Spirit. He comes to earth to learn. All are equally ignorant when plunged into human life. Ignorance is the only original sin, and it is not criminal but inevitable. As the powers of the Deity within him are unfolded, he grows into the stature of the perfect man.

Thus we realize that a less evolved soul is simply a child in a lower class, and is not to be regarded as wicked when it makes mistakes. At the end of the first human life, ignorant, helpless, having committed what we should call crimes—but which were no crimes to that new soul, without knowledge to distinguish between good and evil, but were only experiences—the man passes into the intermediate world where he learns that these things are not the best to do,

because they bring trouble on the other side. He takes his cravings and his passions with him; he is tormented by them on the other side until they are worn out—starved out—and then he passes on to a higher world where everything in him of good is nourished and increased, then back to earth he comes again with the gained experience and the added knowledge to learn other lessons here, to pass on again and reap the fruit of this learning. He passes on into the heavenly world and weaves experience into faculty, and with that added faculty comes back once more; and so on and on, life after life, in this great cycle of births and deaths.

Every life adds some necessary experience, every rebirth bringing with it larger and wider powers, learning righteousness by the suffering that treads on the heels of evil, learning compassion by the sorrow which is endured under the yoke of oppression, learning all lessons by experience and transmuting them into character until perfection is reached. Then will the perfect man shine out in all the splendor of man become divine. Then compulsory reincarnation is over and he passes on, all earth's lessons learned, into a wider life and more splendid opportunities.

A Logical Basis of Brotherhood

The worst criminal, the highest saint have one life, one spirit, equal possibilities, the only difference being that the criminal came into the world more recently and has still to tread the same long road the saint has already trodden in ages past. The criminal and immature classes should be regarded only as younger brothers. A child in the kindergarten is not set at once at advanced study because at that stage he could not understand it and such teaching would be useless and injurious to him. The same is true with regard to a soul; by slow degrees and through many lives it climbs to higher levels of understanding. No single life could evolve the savage into an Emerson, a Plato or a Shakespeare; the genius is the ripened fruit of hundreds of human lives.

The Perfecting of Man

Reincarnation means that you can become exactly what you like. You may have a small talent today, a little talent, say, for music. You know you cannot be a musical genius in this life. Never mind; go on practising steadily, do your best; you will have time after time to come back greater and greater, until the talent becomes genius and you reach the zenith of your aspirations. Work on, hope on, aspire on. Those aspirations and those efforts will come back to you in the heavenly world, to be changed into power and capacity and ability to serve. This is the teaching of eternal hope. Chance after chance is given you in life. You have failed? Never mind; it is only one day out of many days. The failure now means conquest tomorrow, and the wisdom learned by mistakes is yours forever. It would be very hard if you had only one experience and your life were a failure. But what does it matter when life after life is yours, when in the end of all your grandest hopes will be inevitably realized? The sooner, if you work; the more quickly, if you throw all your thought, heart and soul into your life. You can be whatever you determine to be, for you are Divine.

Intuitive Grasp of Truth

A new truth is presented to two people of equal education and intellectual power. One grasps it immediately, the other cannot see it. Another new truth is presented to the same two people, and this time the positions are reversed—the first cannot understand, the second is inspired. Is there any more logical explanation than that an immediate understanding of a truth, no matter how incompletely it may have been presented, shows that that truth had been met with before and understood during a previous incarnation? There is much to support the statement that we never accept an absolutely new truth and that when one appeals to us at sight it is evidence that we have encountered it before.

Some people are able, especially those who are intuitive, to formulate a universal law of expe-

rience upon the basis of a single episode. That single experience, which leaves other people no wiser than before, seems to call up in them whole vistas of moral understanding and a most mature power of judgment. Why should some people be gifted in this way? How is it possible for a woman of the greatest refinement, who knows little of the darker side of life, to be able to advise her children so wisely? Not all mothers are able to do this, but some can and do. From what well of experience do they draw the water of knowledge of good and evil? Intuition it is sometimes called, but surely what is such intuition but the voice of past experience? Surely, also, the wide understanding which occasionally comes to one who has passed through some sorrow or some trial, and whose heart opens out to realize the sorrows and trials of all men, is not due to an inexplicable gift but is the result of an uprush of memory-summaries of the past.

Memory of Past Lives

One of the difficulties with many people in the reception of the teaching of reincarnation is their own absence of memory of their past.

Just as the memory of some of the present life is indrawn beyond the reach of this waking consciousness, and makes itself known again only when the brain is hypersensitive and thus able to respond to vibrations that usually beat against it unheeded, so is the memory of the past lives stored up out of reach of the physical consciousness. It is all with the Ego, who alone persists from life to life; he has the whole book of memory within his reach, for he is the only "I" that has passed through all the experiences recorded therein.

The memory of past events remains, as we have seen, with the Ego only, but the results of those events embodied in faculties are at the service of the lower man. Nature leaves to the Ego the memory of the events and provides a long period of heaven life during which all the experiences are tabulated and compared and their results classified; then these results are embodied as faculties which form the next mental body of

the Ego. The clear, quick insight and prompt judgment are nothing else than the outcome of past experiences, moulded into an effective form for use in daily life.

Some Locations Vaguely Familiar

This is an experience so common that it is often one of the first arguments advanced in favor of reincarnation. A man goes to a strange city, but, upon walking the streets, feels curiously at home, and at times is even able to anticipate what will be seen upon the next turning of the road. There may be a sense of unfamiliarity about many of the new structures, but the old buildings have all the feeling about them of familiar landmarks.

Another variation of this same sort of memory is the vivid sensation which sweeps over a man, upon reaching a country for the first time, of having "come home." It is just as if one were returning to one's own country after a long absence. Some have felt this upon visiting England, Italy, Greece, Egypt, or India. The sensation is not due to the amount of reading they have done about these countries, for in a number of cases very little reading had been done, yet the feeling was most intense. Is this all "nerves," or may it not be due to dimly recalled memories of other lives lived in one or other of these countries?

In all essential ways these curious phases of consciousness, which we have just reviewed, agree exactly in character with the memory-summaries of this life. Applying to them the same tests that we would apply to the memories of our present incarnation, are we not justified in regarding them as memories of past lives? In doing so no new principle of memory is involved, it should be noted, for memory works in precisely the same manner whether it extends over years or lives.

Some Do Remember

Memory of their own past lives, however, is possessed by a considerable number of people who have achieved the necessary sensitiveness of the physical organism, and to these, of course, reincarnation is no longer a theory, but has become a matter of personal knowledge.

Searching the Events of Past Lives

When one has reached what is called Initiation, and has undergone the long and arduous training in physical, moral, and mental development which that implies, there is the possibility, by awakening a certain set of psychic faculties, of investigating directly every detail of a whole series of past lives either of oneself or of another. There exists in the mental world what may be called the great memory of Nature, in which every physical event, every desire, every least thought of man and every other living thing is registered with photographic exactness. From these records of the past complete information about any series of incarnations may be obtained by the properly trained investigator in the form of living pictures. There are several other ways also by which this same information may be gained, but perhaps the best method is this one of letting the living pictures of the past roll before the trained vision. There are a few experts who can do this, and to them reincarnation is no longer a logical and convincing theory, it is a fact.

Reincarnation Explains the Rise and Fall of Nations

To the student of history there is something very suggestive in the extraordinary way in which nations rise to world-power, enjoy a period of prosperity, and then sink to obscurity. The external conditions alone are not sufficient cause for the rapid decay which sometimes takes place, as in the case of Spain. When only mediocre leaders appear, when the populace no longer responds to heroic ideals, when the

birth-rate begins to decline, nothing, seemingly, can be done to stop the swift descent. Why is this?

The greatness of a nation depends upon the opportunities offered by it to incoming souls. If the physical heredity of a nation is comparatively free from social diseases, if the educational facilities and the religious instruction provided are good, if the acts of the Government are based more upon moral ideals than upon selfish ends, then the most advanced human Egos are born in that nation and it speedily becomes a world-power. In short, the achievements of a nation depend upon the development of the souls taking incarnation in it, which in turn depends upon what is offered those souls. National righteousness and wholesome educational facilities form the greatest attractions.

A nation begins to decay when the most advanced Egos are attracted elsewhere, for, when greatness is no longer available, perforce younger and therefore less experienced souls must take the reins of Government and uphold the national standards. Each nation, like a class in a school, teaches certain lessons and qualities by means of its social, moral, and political standards, and hence the lowering of these standards means a change in the quality of the pupils. The higher the national standards, the mightier becomes the nation. When Rome became morally rotten and politically corrupt the Egos who had made Rome great began to be born among the less civilized but physically purer Teutonic people, with the inevitable result that Rome decayed while the younger nations flourished.

When we study the temperamental characteristics of different nations in the mass they seem in a most singular way to reflect the spirit of certain ancient civilizations. There is a closer resemblance, for example, between the British Empire and that of ancient Rome. In the English people particularly we can notice the same tendency toward colonization, the same law-making instinct, the same thoroughness in every undertaking, the same massive style of architecture, the same sacrificing of beauty to utility and strength, and, it must be confessed, the same

lack of imagination in art, religion, and philosophy.

In France, on the contrary, the racial characteristics in the mass remind one very much more of ancient Greece.

Masculine Women and Feminine Men

A not uncommon feature of our modern civilization is a type of human being in whom the character and mentality do not seem to fit the sex of the physical body. Some women are thoroughly masculine in their reasoning, attitude towards life, and even in their dress, while some men are emotional, intuitive, and effeminate in dress. An acceptable explanation is that supplied by reincarnation, which is that the soul is born now in a body of one sex and now in a body of the other, for the purpose of gaining a rounded-out education. After a series of lives in masculine bodies with the accompanying experience which is the portion of men, it is obvious that when a change of sex occurs decided masculine traits will remain even though the physical body be feminine. In the same way, a soul who had been learning the lessons of a woman for several incarnations could not suddenly adopt the masculine point of view merely because of a change of physical body. In brief, our temperament is largely a summation of the memories of the past.

Sudden Friendships

Another interesting form of memory is that revealed in sudden friendships. Two people meet for the first time, and the moment they clasp hands or even catch sight of one another, a swift intuitive friendship springs up which time can neither diminish nor improve. It is not all a matter of temperament, as some have claimed, for in many cases the two people are very different in their personal habits and other characteristics.

In the light of reincarnation such friendships mean that two dear friends of a previous incarnation have met one another for the first time in

this life. The mutual trust, the quick sympathy and ready understanding, the loving sacrifice which distinguish such friendships, are the results of many lives of friendship in the past, during which the tie of affection grew ever stronger and more perfect.

Two people who have loved one another in the past cannot be kept apart. They are drawn together life after life, and the relationship continually becomes more beautiful. Each life, as they meet for the first time, there is a sudden leaping up of that flame of love and trust, which tells of many a meeting in the past. When a friendship like this comes into one's life it truly compensates for many of the hardships with which physical existence is associated.

Sad Effect of Wasted Opportunity

How frequently the aspiration of a man is greater than his ability. He tries eagerly to achieve some end but fails pitifully. His mind outruns the capacity of his brain, his longings outstrip his powers. If physical heredity were the only factor to be considered this would hardly be the case, for the mind, brought into existence by the brain, could not be greater than the brain. Surely, in this case, the aspirations are due to actual achievements in past lives, made impossible in this life because of limitations imposed by neglect of opportunities. In other words, a faculty to be kept in working order must be used; if we neglect it in one life and let our opportunities slip by, then in the next life we are handicapped by physical inability though still possessed of the inner faculty.

Propensity to Vice or Virtue

In many children the best of parents and the most careful training are unable to prevent the emergence of vicious tendencies, while in other children criminal parents and vile surroundings cannot stop the unfolding of virtuous tendencies. The propensity to vice or virtue is most logically explained as a memory-summary carried over from the last life and aroused again to activity in

the new environment with the awakening of consciousness. The voice of conscience itself is really the memory of past decisions regarding right and wrong, and so it is that a savage has little conscience because his past experience has been so slight.

Reincarnation in Religion

Reincarnation is a basic tenet in every great religion except Christianity and Mohammedanism. In the beginning, Christianity, like all other religions, contained the doctrine of rebirth as its inner, philosophical teaching which was given only to those who had proved themselves worthy. An outer ethical system was taught to the unlearned.

Origen, one of the most learned of the early Church Fathers, declared that every man received a body according to his deserts and his former actions. This inner teaching was lost to the church when an ignorant majority voted out the great Gnostic Doctors.

The Christian Bible is not without unmistakable references to it.

In Palestine, on the slopes of Mount Hermon, about forty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee, are scattered the ruins of an ancient city, Caesarea Philippi by name. One day, while approaching the outskirts of this city the Christian Master asked His disciples a question of such far-reaching importance that, had its full meaning been understood by later generations, the whole religious history of Western civilization would have been changed.

"Whom say the people that I am?" He asked.

To us the question is almost unintelligible, but the disciples apparently understood His meaning, for one answered that some people thought that Jesus was John the Baptist returned, for John had been beheaded some time before, while others of the disciples said that He was regarded as the reincarnation either of Elias or of Jeremias, both of whom had been dead for centuries. In short, the rumor was current that in the person of Jesus "one of the old prophets is risen again," which indicates how widespread was the idea of reincarnation at the time.

The Hope of the World

In the opinion of many, Christianity can only regain its hold upon the minds and hearts of thoughtful people who have left the churches, by commencing to teach again its long-forgotten truth of reincarnation. Ever since about the middle of the sixth century the Christian teaching of the pre-existence and reincarnation of the soul has been lost sight of, primarily because of the intellectual and moral darkness which swept over Europe with the coming of the barbarians from the north. Those barbarians have now become civilized and constitute the leading nations of the world, and it is high time that the lost truth of reincarnation be placed again among the priceless treasures of Christendom.

Ancient and Modern Authorities

Josephus implies, in his history of the wars of the Jews, that the idea of the rebirth of the soul was common among the people, and, judging from several striking passages in the Gospels in addition to those quoted, there is some evidence in support of this implication.

Reincarnation was also well known to the Romans, for it is referred to by a number of the poets, while among the Greeks it was taught by several of the philosophers, chief among them Plato. Traces of the idea in a modified form are to be found in the ancient Egyptian religion, while in later Alexandria this teaching received much attention from the Neo-Platonists and Gnostics. It was sung in the Sagas of the Northmen, and spread with the legends of the Gauls. It formed part of the mystic lore of the Druids, and even today a belief in the return of the soul still lingers among the Celtic peasantry of Ireland and of Brittany.

Strangely enough the idea of reincarnation was also current among the now fast-disappearing tribes of Red Indians on the American Continent. From Alaska to Peru, among the Esquimaux, the Sioux, the Zunis and the Incas particularly, the idea was taught by the priests and held by the tribesmen. Even among the natives of the Ha-

waiian Group, of Australia and of the Islands of the South Seas, the idea is not unknown.

As Max Muller truly remarked, "The greatest minds humanity has produced have accepted Reincarnation." Pythagoras spoke of his past births, and Plato included it in his writings. Homer and Virgil took reincarnation for granted.

In after times we find it mentioned by Goethe, Fichte, Schelling and Lessing, Wordsworth, Browning and Rossetti. Hume declared that it was the only doctrine of immortality that a philosopher could look at.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox, in "Cosmopolitan" for May, 1918, writes on the prenatal influences that affect a soul returning to rebirth.

Kipling and Masefield, among other modern writers, pay tribute to the doctrine of rebirth.

It is in the Orient, however, that the teaching of reincarnation has spread most widely and exerted the greatest influence. It is the basic teaching of most of the religious and philosophical systems in India, and today some 650 millions of human beings accept the truth of reincarnation in about the same way that we accept the truth of gravity—as a great natural and inevitable law which it is foolish to question.

Reincarnation a Fundamental Concept

Obviously, then, reincarnation is one of the fundamental religious ideas of mankind—quite irrespective of its truth. Its universality is almost equal to the belief in the existence of a divine Power. The origin of the idea is unknown, for its roots strike so deep into the many layers of human thought deposited through the ages, that it is impossible to trace them to their beginnings. It is surmised that the belief in reincarnation antedates all known history, and certainly traces of it are to be found in all religions and in the myths of nearly all primitive peoples.

Unfortunately, as the idea of reincarnation has come to us from the past, it is nearly always associated with misconceptions and superstitions. No doubt this is due to its very antiquity, but, whatever may be the cause, the superstitions are so repellent to Western ways of thinking, and the

misconceptions so illogical, that great discredit has been cast on the philosophical value of the central idea itself.

Yet back of all the fancies clustering round the belief in the rebirth of the soul there must surely be a vital truth, else the idea of reincarnation could not have endured for so many thousands of years, nor could it have attracted so many able thinkers.

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