

HOW WE REMEMBER OUR PAST LIVES

By C. Jinarajadasa

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Among the many ideas which have lightened the burden of men, one of the most serviceable has been that of Reincarnation. It not only explains why one man is born in the lap of luxury and another in poverty, why one is a genius and another an idiot, but it also holds out the hope that, as men now reap what they have sown in the past, so in future lives the poor and the wretched of today shall have what they lack, if so they work for it, and that the idiot may, life after life, build up a mentality which in far-off days may flower as the genius.

When the idea of reincarnation is heard of for the first time, the student naturally supposes that it is a Hindu doctrine, for it is known to be a fundamental part of both Hinduism and Buddhism. But the strange fact is that reincarnation is found everywhere as a belief, and its origin cannot be traced to Indian sources. We hear of it in far-off Australia,¹ and there is a story on record of an Australian aborigine who went cheerfully to the gallows, and replied on being questioned as to his levity: "Tumble down black-fellow, jump up white-fellow, and have lots of sixpences to spend! "It was taught by the Druids of ancient Gaul, and Julius Caesar tells us how young Gauls were taught reincarnation, and that as a consequence they had no fear of death. Greek philosophers knew of it; we have Pythagoras telling his pupils that in his past lives he had been a warrior at the siege of Troy, and later was the philosopher Hermotimus of Glazomenae. It is not utterly unknown to Christian teaching, if we take the simple statement of Christ, when questioned whether John the Baptist was Elijah or Elias reborn: "If ye will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come," and He follows up the statement with the significant words: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." In later Jewish tradition, the idea is known, and the Talmud mentions several cases of reincarnation.

There are many to whom reincarnation appeals most forcibly, and Schopenhauer does but little exaggerate when he says: "I have also remarked that it is at once obvious to everyone who hears of it for the first time." Some believe in the idea immediately; it comes to them like a flash of light in thick darkness, and the problem of life is clearly seen with reincarnation as the solution. Others there are who grow into belief, as each doubt is solved and each question answered.

There is one, and only one, objection which can logically be brought against reincarnation, if correctly understood as Theosophy teaches it. It lies in the question: "If, as you say, I have lived on earth in other bodies, why don't I remember the past?"

¹ See *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, by Baldwin Spencer & F. G. Gillen, 1904, p. 175, *et seq.*

Now, if reincarnation is a fact in Nature, there surely will be enough other facts which will point to its existence. No one fact in Nature stands isolated, and it is possible in diverse ways to discover that fact. Similarly it is with reincarnation; there are indeed enough facts of a psychological kind to prove to a thinker that reincarnation must be a fact of Nature and not a theory.

In answering the question why we do not remember our past lives, surely the first necessary point is to ask of ourselves what we mean by "memory." If we have some clear ideas as to the mechanism of memory, perhaps we may be able to understand why we do not (or do) "remember" our past days or lives. Now, briefly speaking, what we usually mean by memory is a summing up. If I remember today the incidents of my cutting my finger yesterday, there will be two elements in my memory: first the series of events which went to produce the pain—the misadventure in handling the knife, the cut, the bleeding, the sensorial reaction in the brain, the gesture, and so on; and second, the sense of pain. As days pass, the causes of the pain recede into the periphery of consciousness, while the effects, as pain, still hold the center. Presently, we shall find that even the memory of the pain itself recedes into the background, leaving behind with us not a direct memory as an event, but an indirect memory as a tendency—a tendency to be careful in the handling of all cutting implements. This process is continually taking place; the cause is forgotten (though recoverable under hypnosis from the subconscious mind), while the effect, transmuted into tendency, remains.

It is here that we are specially aided by the brain. We are apt to think of the brain as a recorder of memory, without realizing that one of its most useful functions is to wipe out memories. The brain plays the dual function of remembering and forgetting. But for our ability to forget, life would be impossible. If each time we tried to move a limb, we were to remember all our infantile efforts at movement, with the hesitation and doubt and perhaps even pain involved, our consciousness would be so overwhelmed by memories that the necessary movement of the limb would certainly be delayed, or not made at all. Similarly it is with every function now performed automatically, which was once consciously acquired; it is because we do forget the process of acquiring, that we can utilize the faculty resulting therefrom.

This is what is continuously taking place in consciousness with each one of us. There is a process of exchange, similar to copper coins of one denomination being changed to silver coins of smaller bulk representing them, then into gold coins of smaller weight still, and later to bank notes representing their value, and last of all to a piece of paper, a check, whose intrinsic worth is nil. Yet we have but to write our signature on the check, to put into operation the whole medium of exchange. It is a similar process which takes place with all our memories of sensations, feelings and thoughts. These are severally grouped into categories, and transmuted into likes and dislikes, and finally into talents and faculties.

Now we know that as we manifest a like or dislike, or exhibit any capacity, we are remembering our past, though we cannot remember one by one in detail the memories

which contributed to originate the emotions or the faculty. As I write these words in English on this page, I must be remembering the first time I saw each word in a reading book, and looked up its meaning in a dictionary as I prepared my home lessons; but it is a kind of transmuted memory. Nevertheless, I do remember, and but for those memories being somewhere in my consciousness (whether in touch with some brain cells or not is not now the point), I should not be able to think of the right word to express my thought, nor shape it on this paper so that the printer will recognize the letters to set them up in print. Furthermore, we know as a fact that we do forget these causative memories one by one; it would be foolish if, as I write a particular word, I were to try to call up the memory of the first time I saw it. The brain is a recording instrument of such a kind that, though it registers, it does not obey the consciousness when it desires to unroll the record, except in certain abnormal cases. The desire to remember is not necessarily followed by remembrance, and we have to take this fact as it is.

Here it is that Bergson has very luminously pointed out that “we think with only a small part of the past; but it is with our entire past, including the original bent of our soul, that we desire, will, and act.” Clearly then it would be useless to try to remember our past lives by the mere exercise of the mind; though thought can recall something of the past, it is only a fraction of the whole. But on the other hand, let us but *feel* or *act*, and then at once our feeling or action is the resultant of all the forces, of the past which have converged on our individuality. If, therefore, we are to trace the memories of our past lives in our present normal consciousness, we must note how we feel and act, expecting to recover little of such memories in a mere mental effort to remember.

Every feeling and act, then, can be slowly traced to its component parts of impressions from without and reactions from within. So much is this the case with each one of us, that we can construct for ourselves what has been another’s past, as we watch that other feel and act, provided he does both in an average fashion. But if he manifests a mode that is not the average mode of thought or feeling, then he becomes incomprehensible to us and needs explanation. Since, then, average feelings and actions can be readily explained as the result of average experiences, unusual feelings and actions must be explained as having an unusual causation. If the present writer were to deliver a lecture in English in India, where so many can speak English, each of his listeners would take for granted that he had been to school and college, without perhaps inquiring further when and where. But were he, instead of speaking in English, to speak in Italian, then at once each listener would be curious to know how and when that faculty of speaking in Italian had been grown. Furthermore, if an Italian were present in the audience, then judging from the speaker’s phrasing and intonation, he would know that the speaker must have lived in Italy, or must have spent a considerable time among Italians. Wherever there is any manifestation of feeling or action—as indeed, too, of some expressions of thought—which has something of the quality of the *expert*, then we must postulate for that faculty a slow growth through experiences, which are the result of experiments along that particular line.

Now each one of us has many qualities of an average kind, as also a few of an expert kind. The former we can account for by experiences common to all. Let us examine some of the latter, and see if we can account for them on any other hypothesis than that of reincarnation.

Now one of the principal things which characterizes men is their likes and dislikes. Sometimes these might be called rational, that is, they are such likes and dislikes as an average individual of a particular type might be said normally to possess at his stage in evolution. We can account for these normal likes and dislikes, because they are such as we ourselves manifest under similar conditions. But suppose we take the case of an extraordinary liking, such as is termed "love at first sight." Two people meet in the seeming fortuitous concourse of human events, sometimes, it may be, coming from the ends of the earth. They know nothing of each other, and yet ensues the curious phenomenon that as a matter of fact they do know a great deal of each other. Life would be a happy thing if we could go out with deep affection to all whom we meet; but we know we cannot, for it is not in our nature. Why then should it be in our nature to "fall in love" with a particular individual? Why should we be ready to sacrifice all for this person whom, in this life at least, we have met but a few times? How is it that we seem to know the inner working of his heart and brain from the little which he reveals at our conventional intercourse at the beginning? "Falling in love" is indeed a mysterious psychological phenomenon, but the process is far better described as being dragged into love, since the individual is forced to obey and may not refrain.

Now there are two logical explanations possible: one is the ribald one of the scoffer, that it is some form of hysteria or incipient insanity, due it may be to "complexes"; the other is that, in this profound going forth of one individual as an expert in feeling towards another, we have not a first meeting but the last of many, many meetings which took place in past lives. Where or when were these meetings is of little consequence to the lovers; indeed Rudyard Kipling has suggested in his "Finest Story in the World" that it is only in order that we might not miss the delicious sensation of falling in love with our beloved, that the kindly Gods have made us drink of the river of forgetfulness before we returned to life on earth again. The principal thing to note, in this emotional mood of being in love, is that the friendship is not as one that begins, but as one that is continued; and in that psychological attitude of the two lovers we have the remembrance of past lives, when they met and loved and sacrificed for each other.

Not dissimilar to this unusual liking which constitutes falling in love, is the unusual disliking which is not so very rare in human experience. Certain normal dislikes we can readily account for; but take the case of two individuals meeting for the *first* time, it may be knowing nothing even by hearsay of each other, and then we have sometimes the striking phenomenon of one of the two *drawing back* from the other, not outwardly by gesture, but inwardly by a feeling or an intuition. In all such cases of drawing back, the curious thing is that there is no personal feeling; it is not a violent feeling of "I do not like you," but far more an impersonal state of mind where almost no feeling manifests, and which may be paraphrased into "It is wise to have little to do with you."

Sometimes we follow this intuition, but usually we brush it aside as unjust, and then turn to understanding our acquaintance with the mind. Not infrequently, it then follows that we begin to like him, perhaps even to love him. We forget our "first impression," or we put it aside as mere irrational impulse. Now there are many such revulsions that are purely irrational impulses, but there is a residue of cases where after-events show that the dislike was not an impulse but an intuition. For it may happen after years have passed of intercourse with our friend, that suddenly without any warning he, as it were, stabs us in the back and deals us a mortal blow; and then in our grief and humiliation we remember that first impression of ours, and wish that we had followed it.

Whence came this first impression? Reincarnation offers a solution, which is that the injured had suffered in past lives at the hands of his injurer, and that it is the memory of that suffering which flashes into the mind as an intuition.

More striking still are those cases where there exist at the same time both like and dislike, both love and resentment. I well remember a lady describing her attitude to a friend to whom she was profoundly attached in the following words: "I love him, but I despise him!" I wonder how many wives say this daily of their husbands, or husbands of their wives. Why should there be this incomprehensible jumble of contradictory feelings?

The clue is strikingly given by W. E. Henley in his well-known poem:

Or ever the knightly years were gone
With the old world to the grave,
I was a king in Babylon,
And you were a Christian slave.

The poet goes on to tell us how the king "saw and took," and toyed with the maid and, as is a man's way, finally cast her aside. Yet she loved him well, but, heart-broken at his treatment, committed suicide. Now it is obvious that the girl dies full of both love and resentment, and since what we sow we reap, each of the two in the rebirth reaps in emotional attitude the result of past causes. For, this time the man loves again, and desires to possess her; she too loves him in return, and yet does not permit him to have his heart's desire. So the lover cries out:

The pride I trampled is now my scathe,
For it tramples me again;
The old resentment lasts like death,
For you love, and yet you refrain;
I break my heart on your hard unfaith,
And I break my heart in vain.

Henley sees with his poetic vision that the present situation between the two cannot remain the same throughout eternity; there must be a true loving and understanding of each other at the long last; and so the poem ends with the man's pride in his past, and

resignation in the present, with a hint of some good from a past which need not be “undone” as of no worth at all.

Yet not for an hour do I wish undone
The deed beyond the grave,
When I was a king in Baylon
And you were a virgin slave.

There can only be one ending, that of the fairy tale, since it needs must be in a universe where there is but One who loves, that,

Journeys end in lovers’ meeting,
Every wise man’s son doth know.

We have so far been considering the manifestations of an individual’s emotional nature, and it is obvious that, because of his own experiences, he will be able to understand the emotions of others, so long as such emotions are in the main like what he has known. But what of those individuals who thoroughly understand such experiences as have *not* come to them? Shakespeare understands the working of a woman’s heart and mind, and, too, all the intricate mental and emotional processes of the traitor; Dickens knows how the murderer feels after committing the crime.

Furthermore, some gifted men and women, when experiencing emotions, generalize from them to what is experienced by all, while one not so gifted, though “once bitten,” is not “twice shy,” nor is made appreciably wiser by the same experience coming to him over and over again. The gifted few, on the other hand, will fathom the universal quality in a single experience, and they will anticipate from it many experiences of like nature; for themselves, and sometimes for others too, they will state their experiences, reducing them as it were to algebraical formulae, each formula including in one general statement all particular cases. Their thoughts and feelings are like aphorisms, with the transmutation of many experiences into one Experience.

Now, to generalize from our individual emotions is as rare a gift as to originate a philosophy from the particular thoughts which we gain about things. Yet it is this generalization from particular emotions that is characteristic of a poet, and the more universal are his generalizations the greater is he as poet. Why then should an individual here and there have this wonderful ability of seeing particular men as representatives of types, and particular emotions as expressions of universal emotions? We say that such a man is a genius, but the word genius merely describes and does not explain. There are geniuses in every department of life—religion, poetry, art, music, statesmanship, the drama, in war and in commerce, and in many other phases of life. These geniuses are characterized by many abnormal qualities; they are always men of the future and not of their day and each genius is a lawgiver to future generations in his own department of activity; and above all, they live emotionally or mentally in wide generalizations. Whence comes this wonderful ability?

One explanation offered is heredity. But how far does heredity really explain genius? According to the ordinarily accepted theory of heredity, each generation adds a little to a quality brought from the generation before, and then transmits it to the next; this in turn adds a little, and passes on the total of what it has received, plus its own contribution; and so on generation after generation, till we arrive at a particular generation, and to one individual of it, in whom the special quality in some mysterious way gets concentrated, and that individual is thereby a genius. According to this popular theory, some remote ancestor of Shakespeare had a fraction of Shakespeare's genius, which he transmitted through heredity to his offspring; this offspring then, keeping intact what was given him by his parent, added to the stock from his own experiences, and then passed on both to his child; and so on in successive generations, each generation treasuring what was given to it from all previous generations, and adding something of its own before transmitting it to the next. Shakespeare, then, is as the torrent from a reservoir which has slowly been dammed up, but which bursts its sides when the pressure has passed beyond a certain point.

Such a conception of heredity is based upon the assumption that what an individual acquires of faculty, as the result of adaptability to his environment, is passed on to his offspring. Such is indeed the conclusion that the Darwinian school of biologists came to, from their analysis of what happens in Nature. But biological research during the last twenty-five years has been largely directed to testing the validity of the theory of the transmission of acquired characteristics. Not only has not one indisputable instance yet been found, but all experiments in breeding and crossing, on the other hand, accumulate proofs to the contrary.

The new school of biologists known as the Mendelians have therefore come to theories about heredity which are not only novel but startling. According to them, structural characteristics, upon which must depend the mental and moral capacities of an individual, exist in *every* ancestor in their fullness; and further, they must all have been in the first speck of living matter. Nothing has been *added* by evolution to this original stock of capacities in protoplasm. Every genius whom the world has known or will know existed potentially in it, though he had to wait millions of years before there arose the appropriate arrangement of the "genetic factors" to enable him to appear as a genius on the evolutionary stage. Nature has not evolved the complex brain structure of Shakespeare out of the rudimentary brains of the mammals; that complexity existed "in a pin-head of protoplasm." Nature has not evolved the genius; she has merely *released* him from the fetters which bound him in the primordial protoplasm, by eliminating, generation after generation, such genetic factors as inhibited his manifestation. Bateson sums up these modern theories when he says:

I have confidence that the artistic gifts of mankind will prove to be due not to something added to the make-up of an ordinary man, but to the absence of factors which in the normal person inhibit the development of these gifts. They

are almost beyond doubt to be looked upon as *releases* of powers normally suppressed. The instrument is there, but it is “stopped down.”²

Time alone will show how far the Mendelian conception will need to be modified by later discoveries; but it is fairly certain already that the older Darwinian conception of heredity is untenable, and that if a man is a genius he owes very little to the intellectual and emotional achievements of his ancestors. If, however, we admit with the Mendelians that a genius is “released” merely by the removal of inhibiting factors, and is not the result of slow accumulations, we still leave the original mystery unsolved, and that is to explain the synthetic ability of the genius. We are therefore no nearer really explaining the nature of genius along Mendelian lines than along the Darwinian; the theories of science merely tell us under what conditions genius will or will not manifest, but nothing more.

The only rational theory of genius, which accepts scientific facts as to heredity and also explains what genius is, comes from the conception of reincarnation. If we hold that an individual is a soul, that is, an imperishable and evolving Ego, and manifests through a body appropriate to his stage of growth and to a work which he is to do in that body, then we see that his emotional and mental attributes are the results of experiences which he has gained in past lives. But since he can express them only through a suitable body and brain, these must be of such a kind as Nature has by heredity selected for such use. The manifestation of any capacity, then, depends on two indispensable factors: first, an Ego or consciousness who has developed that capacity by repeated experiments in past lives; and second, a suitable instrument, a physical body, of such a nature structurally as makes possible the expression of that capacity. When therefore we consider the quality of genius, if on the one hand the genius has not a body fashioned out of such genetic factors as do not inhibit his genius, he is “stopped down,” to use Bateson’s simile, and his genius is unreleased. But on the other hand, if Nature were to produce a thousand bodies that were not “stopped down,” we should not *ipso facto* have a thousand geniuses. Two lines of evolution must therefore converge, before there can manifest any quality that is not purely functional. The first is that of the evolution of an indestructible Consciousness, which continually experiments with life and slowly becomes expert thereby; and the second is the evolution of a physical structure, which is selected by heredity to respond to a given stimulus from within.

If, with this clue as to what is happening in Nature, we examine the various geniuses whom the world has produced, we shall see that they are remembering their past lives as they exhibit their genius. Take, for instance, such a genius as the young violinist, Mischa Elman, who a few years ago began his musical career; he was then but a lad, and yet even at that age he manifested marvelous technical ability. Now we may perhaps legitimately account for this technical ability along Mendelian lines, as being due to a rare confluence of genetic factors; but by no theory of physical heredity can we explain what surprised the most exacting of musical critics—Mischa Elman’s

² Presidential Address, British Association, 1914.

interpretation of music. For it is just in this interpretation that a music lover can see the soul of the performer, whether that soul is a big one or a little, whether the performer has known of life superficially or has touched life's core. Now Mischa Elman's interpretation, absolutely spontaneous as it was, and unimitated from a teacher, was that of a man and not that of a boy. Little wonder that many a critic was puzzled, or that the musical critic of the London *Daily Telegraph* should write as follows:

Rain beat noisily upon the roof and thunder roared and rattled, but Mischa Elman went calmly on with his prescribed Paganini and Bach and Wieniawski. Calmly is the word, be it noted, not stolidly. We have had stolid wonder-children on our musical platforms; Mischa is not of them. Upon his face, as he plies the bow, rests a great peace, and only now and then, with a more decided expression, does he lower his cheek upon the instrument, as though he would receive from it the impulse of its vibrations and to it communicate his own soul-beats. The marvel of this boy does not lie in his-execution of difficult passages. If it did, perhaps we should award it but perfunctory notice, seeing that among the children of our generation there are so many who play with difficult passages much as their predecessors did with marbles. We have gone beyond mere dexterity in bowing and fingering, and can say, in the spirit of one of old time, that from the babe and suckling comes now the perfection of such praise as lies within the compass of a violin.

Asked to account for this—to explain why Mischa Elman, laying cheek to wood, reveals the insight and feeling of a man who has risen to the heights and plumbed the depths of human life—we simply acknowledge that the matter is beyond us. We can do no more than speculate, and, perhaps, hope for a day in which the all-embracing science of an age more advanced than our own shall discover the particular brain formation, or adjustment, to which infants owe the powers that men and women vainly seek. Those powers may be the Wordsworthian “clouds of glory,” brought from another world. If so, what a brilliant birth must that of Mischa Elman have been! The boy was heard in a work by Paganini and another by Wieniawski, both good things of their meretricious kind, and both irradiated, as we could not but fancy, by the unconscious genius which shines alike on the evil and the good, making the best of both. Upon the mere execution of these works we do not dwell, preferring the charm of the moments in which the music lent itself to the mysterious emotion of the youthful player, and showed, not the painted visage of a mountebank, but the face of an angel!

If along lines of reincarnation we suppose that Mischa Elman *is* a soul who in his past lives has in truth “risen to the heights and plumbed the depths of human life,” then we have a reasonable explanation for his genius. There is reflected in each interpretation the summing up of his past experiences, and he can through his music tell us of a man's sorrow or a man's joy, because as a man in past lives he has experienced both, and retains their memory in emotional and intellectual generalizations. This explana-

tion further joins hands with science, because the reincarnation theory of genius implies the need by the musical soul of a body with a musical heredity, which has been "selected" by evolution and built up by appropriate genetic factors.

Reincarnation alone explains another genius who must remain a puzzle according to all other theories. Keats is known in English poetry as the most "Greek" of all England's poets; he possessed by nature that unique feeling for life which was the treasure of the Greek temperament. If he had been a Greek scholar and steeped in the traditions of Greek culture, we might account for this "*anima naturaliter Graeca* of the Greekless Keats." But when we consider that Keats had "little Latin and less Greek," and began life as a surgeon's apprentice and a medical student, we may well wonder why he sings not as a Christian poet should, but as some Greek shepherd born on the slopes of Mount Etna. The wonder, however, at once ceases if we presume that Keats is the reincarnation of a Greek poet, and that he is remembering his past lives as he reverts to Greek ways of thought and feeling.

With reincarnation as a clue, it is interesting to see how a little analysis enables us to say where in the past an individual must have lived. In the culture of Europe and America, there are three main types of "reversion": to Rome, to Greece, and to India. Anyone who has studied Roman institutions and the Roman conception of life finds little difficulty in noting how the English temperament is largely that of ancient Rome in a modern garb; the values, for instance in writing history, of such historians as Gibbon, Macaulay, Hume, are practically the same as those of Roman historians, Sallust, Tacitus, Livy, and the rest; whereas if we take the French historians we shall find them scarcely at all Roman in temperament, and far more akin to the Greek. The equation Tennyson = Virgil is certainly not far-fetched to those who know the quality of both poets.

We find the reversion to Greece very clearly in such writers as Goethe, Schiller and Lessing. Why should these writers have proclaimed to Germany with unbounded enthusiasm the message of "back to Greece," except that they knew from their own experience in past lives what Greek culture had still for men? For what is enthusiasm but the springing forward of the soul to experience a freshness and a delight in life which it has known elsewhere, and whose call it recognizes again? These men of enthusiasm, these pioneers of the future, are otherwise than sports or freaks in Nature; let us but think of them as reincarnated souls remembering in their enthusiasm their past lives, and they become not sports but the first fruits of a glorious humanity that is to be.

Who that has studied Platonism has not been reminded of Platonic conceptions when reading Emerson? Though Emerson has not the originality nor the daring of Plato, yet is he truly "Greek"; it does not require such a great flight of the imagination to see him as some Alexandrian follower of Plato. How natural then, too, that Emerson, after entering the Christian ministry to give his message, should find himself unable to do it as a *Christian* minister, and should strike out a path for himself as an essayist to

speak of the World-Soul! And who that has studied Indian philosophies does not recognize old Vedantin philosophers in Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and a Buddhist philosopher in Schopenhauer, all reverting to their philosophic interests of past lives, and uttering their ancient convictions more brilliantly than ever before?

Wherever the deeper layers of a man's being are offered to the world in some creation through philosophy, literature, art or science, there may we no tendencies started in past lives. For the pageant of a man's life is not planned and achieved in the few brief years which begin with his birth, and he that knows of reincarnation may note readily enough where the parts of that pageant were composed.

Reincarnation, as it affects large groups of individuals, is a fascinating study to one with an historical bent of mind. I have mentioned that the English race as a whole is largely a reincarnation of the ancient Roman; but here and there we find a sprinkling of Greeks in men like Byron, Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, and in those English men and women who have the Greek feel for life, and hemmed in by English tradition are as strangers in a strange land. Let such a return Greek, wherever he be born this life, but go to South Italy or to Greece, and he will begin to remember his past life in the instinctive familiarity which he will feel with the hidden spirit of tree and lake and hill. As none but a Greek can, he will find a joy in the sunshine, in the lemon groves and vineyards and waterfalls, which in a Greek land give the message of Nature as in no other land.

Others there are who, born last life in the Middle Ages somewhere in Europe, perhaps in Italy or Spain or Germany, when they revisit the land of their former birth, will have a strange familiarity with the things that pass before them. In striking ways, they read into the life of the people, and understand the why of things. To some, this mysterious sense of recollection may be strongest in Egypt, or India, or Japan; but wherever we have the intuitive understanding of a foreign people, we have one mode of remembering our past lives.

It is in the characteristic intellectual attitude of the French that we see the reincarnation of much that was developed in later Greece. The French intellectual clarity and dispassionate keenness to see things "as they are" (whether they bring material benefits or not) are typically Greek. And perhaps, could we know more fully of the life of the Phoenicians, we should see them reborn in the Germans of today. Then the commercial rivalry between England and Germany for the capture of the markets of the East would be but the rebirth of the ancient rivalry between Rome and Carthage for the markets of the Mediterranean.

An eruption of Greek egos is fairly evident in the United States of America. On the Pacific coast especially, there are many men and women of the simple Greek temperament of the pre-Periclean age, and yet their ancestors were not infrequently New England Puritans. It is in America, too, that we have the Sophists of Greece in full strength in the "New Thought" writers who spring up in that land month after month. In them we have the same characteristics as had the Sophists of Greece whom Plato

denounced—much sound sense and many a useful wrinkle, an independence of landmarks and traditions, an unbounded confidence in their own panacea, and a giving of their message of the Spirit “for a consideration.” The lack of distinction in their minds, when in Greece, between Sophism and Wisdom returns in the twentieth century as a confusion between the New Thought ideas of the Divine Life and the real life of the Spirit. Let us hope that as the Sophists helped to bring in the Golden Age of Greece, so the “New Thought-ers” are the forerunners of that True Thought that is to dawn, which is neither old nor new.

Here and there in India we find one who is distinctly not Hindu. For the most part, the modern Hindus seem scarce to have been in other lands in their late incarnations; but now and then a man or woman is met with for whom the sacrosanct institutions of orthodoxy have no meaning, and who takes up Western ideas of progress with avidity. Some of these are “England-returned,” in this present incarnation, and we can thus account for their mentality. But when we find a man who has never left India, who was reared in strict orthodoxy, and yet fights with enthusiasm for foreign ways of thought, surely we have here a “Europe-returned” ego, from Greece or Rome or from some other of the many lands of the West.

We must not forget to draw attention to the egos from Greece who have returned to Europe to usher in the age of art. To one familiar with Greek sculpture and architecture, it is not difficult to see the Greek artists reborn in the Italian masters of painting and architecture. The cult is no longer that of Pallas Athene and the Gods; there is now the Virgin Mary and the saints to give them their heavenly crowns. Whence did the Italian masters gain their surety of touch, if not from a past birth in Greece? It is striking, too, how the Romans, who excelled in portraiture, should be reborn in the English school of portrait painters, Gainsborough, Reynolds, Lawrence, and the rest.

Nor must we forget the band of Greeks who like an inundation swept over the Elizabethan stage. Marlowe, Beaumont, Fletcher, Peele, Johnson, and the rest—are they not pagans thinly veiled in English garb? They felt life in un-English modes; they felt first and then thought out the feeling. The Greek, is ever the Greek, whatsoever the language which is given him to speak, and his touch in literature and art is not easily veiled.

Strong impressions made on the consciousness in a past life often appear in the present in some curious mood or feeling. Sometimes, fears of creeping things, fire, cutting implements, etc., are thus to be accounted for, though sometimes these “phobias” may only be subconscious reminders of this life. In the cases where we have no subconsciousness of the present body appearing, there is sure to have been some shock, resulting it may be in a violent death, in a past life. The after effects appear now in an uncontrollable fear, or in discomfort in the presence of the object which caused the shock. More strange is the attitude of one individual towards another which is brought over from a past life. Sometimes one sees the strange sight of a girl of ten or twelve taking care of her mother in a maternal way, as though the positions were reversed, and

almost as if she had the onerous duty of bringing up her mother in the way she should go. Of a deeper psychological nature is it when, as sometimes happens, a wife mated to a husband who causes her suffering, finds charity towards him possible only when she looks on him not as her husband but as her son. Here we have a reminiscence of a life when he was indeed her child, and his better nature came out towards her in the relation which he bore to her then.

A rather humorous instance of past recollection is found when there has been between the last life and this a change of sex of the body. In the West especially, where there is a more marked differentiation temperamentally between the sexes than in the East, not infrequently the girl who dislikes playing with dolls, who delights in boys' games, and is a pronounced tomboy, is really an ego who has just taken up a body of the sex opposite to that with which he has been familiar for many lives. Many a girl has resented her skirts, and it takes such a girl several years before she finally resigns herself to them. Some women there are on whose face and mode of carriage the last male incarnation seems still fairly visibly portrayed. A similar thing is to be seen in some men, who bring into this life traces of their habits of thought and feeling when last they had women's bodies.

A consideration of the many psychological puzzles I have enumerated will show us that, as a matter of fact, people do remember something of their past lives. Truly the memory is indirect, only as a habit or a mood, but it is nevertheless memory of the past. Now most people who are willing to accept reincarnation as a fact in life naturally ask the question: "But why don't we remember *fully*?" To this there are two answers, the first of which is: "It is best for us not to remember directly and fully, till we are ready for the memories."

We are not ready for remembrance so long as we are influenced by the memories of the past. Where, for instance, the memory is of a painful event, up to a certain point the past not only influences our present but also our future, and both in a harmful way; and therefore, so long as we have not gone beyond the sphere of influence of the past, our characters are weakened and not strengthened by remembrance. Let us take an extreme case, but one typical nevertheless. Suppose that in the last life a man has committed suicide as the easiest way out of his difficulties. As he dies, there will be in his mind much mental suffering, and especially he will lack confidence in his ability to weather the storm. The suicide does not put an end to his suffering, for after death it will continue for some time more acutely still, till it slowly exhausts itself. There will be a purification through his great suffering, and when it ends there will be in him a keener vision and a fuller response to the promptings of his higher nature. When, then, he is reborn, he will be born with a stronger conscience, as the result of his sufferings. But he will still retain the lack of confidence in his ability, because nothing has happened after his death to alter that. Confidence can be gained only by mastering circumstance, and it is for that very purpose that he has returned. Now, sooner or later, he will be confronted with a situation similar to that before which he failed in the last life. As difficulties crowd round him in the new life, once more there will be the old struggle.

The fact of having committed suicide will now come in as a tendency to suicide once again, as a resignation to suicide as the easiest way. But on the other hand, the memory of the suffering after the last suicide will also return in a stronger urge of conscience that this time the solution must not be through suicide. In this condition of mental strain, when the man is being pulled on one side by his past and on the other by his future, if he were to know, with vivid memory, how he had committed suicide in the past in a like situation, the probabilities are that he would be influenced by his past action, and that his lack of confidence would be intensified, with suicide as a result once again. Forgetfulness of the nerve-racking details of the past enables him to fight now more manfully. We little realize how we are being domineered over by our past. It is indeed a blessing for most of us that the kindly Gods draw a veil over a record which, at our present stage of evolution, cannot be anything but deplorable in many ways.

Only so long as we identify ourselves with our past, that past is hidden from us, except in indirect modes as faculties and dispositions. But the direct memory will come, if we learn to dissociate our present selves from our past selves. We are ever the Future, not the past: and when we can look at our past—of this life first, and after, of that of other lives—without heat, impersonally, in perspective as it were, like a judge who has no sense of identity with the facts before him for judgment, then we shall begin to remember, directly, the past in detail but till then, as Tennyson truly says,

We ranging down this lower track,
The path we came by, thorn and flower,
Is shadow'd by the growing hour.
Lest life should fail in looking back.

The second reason for our not directly remembering our past lives is this: the "I" who asks the question, "Why don't I remember?" has *not* lived in the past. It is the Soul who has lived, not this "I" with all its limitations. But is not this "I" that Soul? With most people not at all, and this fact will be evident if we think over the matter.

The average man or woman is scarcely so much a Soul as a bundle of attributes of sex, creed, and nationality. But the Soul is immortal, that is, it has no sense of diminution or death; it has no idea of time, which deludes it to think that it is young, wastes away, and grows old; it is neither man nor woman, because it is developing in itself the best qualities of both sexes; it is neither Hindu, nor Buddhist, nor Christian, nor Muslim, because it lives in One Divine Life and assimilates that Life according to its temperament; it is not Indian, nor English, nor American, for it belongs to no country, even though its outermost sheath, the physical body, belongs to a particular race; it has no caste nor class, for it knows that all partake of One Life, and that before God there is neither Brahmin nor Shudra, Jew nor Gentile, aristocrat nor plebeian.

It is this Soul which puts out a part of itself, a Personality, for the period of a life, "as a mere subject for grave experiment and experience." Through a *persona*, a "mask," of a babe, child, youth or maid, man or woman, bachelor, spinster or householder, old man or old woman, it looks out into life, and, as it observes, eliminates the distorting

bias which its outer sheath gives. Its personalities in the past have been Lemurian or Atlantean, Hindu or Roman or Greek, and it selects the best out of them all and discards the rest. All literatures, sciences, arts, religions and civilizations are its school and playground, its workshop and study. Its patriotism is for an indivisible Humanity, and its creed is to co-operate with "God's plan, which is Evolution."

It is this Soul who has had past lives. How much of this Soul are we, the men and women who ask the question, "Why don't we remember our past lives?" The questioner is but the personality. The body of that personality has a brain on whose cells the memories of a past life have not been impressed; those memories are in the Divine Man who is of no time, of no creed, and of no land. To remember the Soul's past lives, the brain of the personality must be made a mirror on to which can be reflected the memories of the Soul. But before those memories can come into the brain, one by one the various biases must be removed—of mortality, of time, of sex, of creed, of color, of caste.

So long as we are wrapped up in petty thoughts of an exclusive nationalism, and in narrow beliefs of creeds, so long do we retain the barriers which exist between our higher selves and our lower. An intellectual breadth and a larger sympathy, "without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or color," must first be achieved, before there breaks, as through clouds, flashes of our true consciousness as Souls. There is no swifter way to discover what we are as Immortals out of time than by discovering what is our Work in time.

Let but a man or woman find that Work for whose sake sacrifice and immolation are serenest contentment, then slowly the larger consciousness of the Soul descends into the brain of the personality. With that descent begins the direct memory of past lives. As more and more the personality presses forward, desiring no light but what is sufficient for the next step on his path to his goal of work, slowly one bias after another is burnt away in a fire of purification. Like as the sun dissipates more clouds the higher it rises, so is it for the life of the personality; it knows then, with such conviction as the sun has about its own nature when it shines, that "the soul of man is immortal, and its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendor have no limit."

Then come back the memories of past lives. How they come those who live the life know. There are many kinds of knowledge useful for a man, but none greater than the knowledge "that evolution is a fact, and that the method of evolution is the constant dipping down into matter under the law of adjustment." This knowledge is for all who seek, if they will but seek rightly; and the right way is to be a Brother to all men, "without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or color."