

The Case for Reincarnation

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"Nature exists for the purposes of soul" -

Patanjali

[Page 1] THE conquest of old-world ideas by modern Science, momentous an achievement as it is justly held to be, has only served to throw the problem of the universe into yet deeper relief. The more fully the physical order of Nature has revealed itself to our gaze, the more vividly has the "Why and Wherefore?" of conscious life forced itself upon our attention. We contemplate the stupendous drama of Evolution, and the inevitable cry *Cui Bono?* rises unbidden to our lips. It is, indeed, only for a time amid the maelstrom of new physical discoveries that the thinker can lose sight of this great issue, compared with which all others sink into insignificance. Metaphysic is slain only to revive. Despite the assumption of Comte, the "metaphysical stage" not only thrives side by side with enfranchised empirical research, but has recently manifested unexpected activity in connection with that revival of Mysticism now colouring the best German thought. Man cannot live by bread alone. The greatest triumphs of Science — that is to say of the positive method — will never satisfy the ideal-seeking instinct. Hence we find that advanced negationists are wont to relieve the bleakness of their systems by working up the veriest rags of religious philosophy. Witness Comte's *Vrai Grand Être*. Witness the "Unknowable" which Mr. Herbert Spencer [Page 2] throws as a sop to the Cerberus of human emotion. Let us consider for a moment the alleged adequacy of the latter to satisfy our hunger.

Mr. Spencer yields to no one in his desire to keep alive the vestal fire of religion on the altar of the human heart. His aim has been to reconcile the negations of Science with the affirmations of Theology. Abjuring the narrower agnosticism of Stuart Mill and Dr. Huxley, he transcends phenomena. so far as to posit an "Unknown and Unknowable Power" as the *fons et origo* of being. But the foundation is too frail to support the emotional superstructure. The vicegerent of this Unknown X is an iron, mechanical causality which excludes all participation of mind — as an active factor — in the world-process. The Unknown X itself is an empty negation superadded to as rigidly materialistic an explanation of nature as that favoured by Dr. Büchner. Spencerianism, therefore, is in the last degree unsatisfactory. Its Ultimate has no real point of contact with the soul, for the indeterminate consciousness of the Unknowable with which Mr. Spencer accredits us, is only competent to testify to its "Thatness", never to its "Whatness". To enable any such Ultimate to serve as an object of religion as distinguished from one of mere speculative interest, the latter element must be at least symbolically specified.

The "Unconscious" — or as it ought properly to be termed Superconscious Spirit — of E. von Hartmann

does fulfil this condition. It represents the pure, native essence of the same subjective reality which we experience as "self". This depersonalised concept of Deity constitutes the key to German and Oriental pantheism. It is, moreover, equally applicable to a system of "Natural Dualism", and may thus be regarded as the apex of all religious thinking. [Page 3]

It would, however, be erroneous to suppose that the human mind could ever rest with the contemplation of this ideal, or even with the farther consideration that in ultimate analysis all conscious units are but its manifestation. Granted that the soul is thus fundamentally rooted in Deity, the purpose of evolution, the travail of a universe in labour, the origin of evil, and many other kindred riddles of life, still remain over and clamour for some sort of solution. It is of scant interest to the individual what philosophers or theologians set up as the figurehead of a system or object of worship, so long as the *crux* of his own place in the "eternal order of things" is shelved. Religion in the larger sense has a wider sphere than the investigation and the recognition of "First Causes" — it has to deal with the problem of the human soul, and, if possible, to unravel the mystery environing its origin, evolution and destiny. Experience shows that it is the discussion of this subject alone which fires the interest of the modern indifferentist, weary alike of the reign of dogma and of the subtleties of the scientific taxinomist. Consequently it is this subject which deserves to evoke the concentrated effort of the religious philosophy of the future. In the words of Dr. Carl du Prel: "It is not always the business of philosophy to split hairs and devise subtle problems. The weightiest problems are just those which are hidden by their everyday character". Now in the category referred to, the Soul question is indubitably comprised. Nevertheless, it is ignored to an extent which the cultured Oriental thinker would deem scandalous. It is true that Europe has its psychologists and its clerical authorities in plenty. But its psychology is either avowedly agnostic or confines itself to the analysis of familiar mental phenomena without [Page 4] seeking to raise the veil of Isis, The Church, questioned on the matter of pre-natal and post-mortem possibilities, answers a hundred inquiries in a hundred conflicting voices. Not only is it utterly ignorant in the matter, but its representatives have no longer any weight with the majority of men of letters.

Altogether the Western races appear to have speculated on these and kindred subjects to no more purpose than did the Paleolithic cave-men of 50,000 years ago. Notwithstanding this ominous fact, some further attempt must be made to penetrate the mystery, if our civilisation is to weather the rocks of Pessimism. Humanity, scourged with suffering and discontent, is beginning to ask why it was called into being at all, and whether the drama of modern social evolution is a game that is really worth the candle. The prime *desideratum* of our time is a system of thought competent to read a meaning and a purpose into that struggle for existence, the intensity of which biology, sociology, and the "testimony of the rocks" proclaim aloud to heaven. And this system must, at least in its general outlines, prove as comprehensible to the man of the market-place as to the man of the study. It must not, like Hegel-ianism, find a niche in the intellect of the thinker alone — it must stir the heart of the masses and furnish that great ideal in which Lange vaguely saw the means of inspiring society with the glow of a revived optimism. This ideal is, in the opinion of many distinguished thinkers in this country and in Germany, discoverable in the vista opened up by the doctrine of Reincarnation. Speculations of this sort, so long tabooed by the empirical schools of psychology, have, since the publication of Carl du Prel's *Philosophy of Mysticism*, acquired a wholly new importance. They have infused new life into the dry bones of metaphysic, [Page 5] which is thus indirectly rendered attractive to the general reader, a gain of quite an unprecedented nature. It is to a survey of the case for Reincarnation — the doctrine of Soul-evolution through successive births — that I propose to devote the present paper.

Let me preface the argument by assuming with Kant the immortality of the Soul as a "postulate of the practical reason", as an intuition superior to any determination of the intellect. Similarly I must take for granted a belief in what Mr. F. W. H. Myers has termed "the essential spirituality of the universe"; [This is, of course, the basic postulate of all attempts at framing a spiritual conception of the Universe.] the inquiry as to whether the attribute of personality is attachable to Deity need not, however, delay us. The agnostic will not, of course, concede even so much as is embraced in our second postulate. It may not, in view of this fact, be superfluous to refer thinkers of this school to the admirable defence of Spirit which characterises the works of Hartmann. That the root of things is spiritual is a thesis which he supports with overwhelming ability, impressing into his service the evidence of physiology and pathology as well as that of language, sociology, organic evolution and psychological science. The "Philosophy of the Unconscious" relies perhaps too exclusively on the argument from teleology. The strongest inferential proof of Deity appears rather to lie in the necessity of assuming a Spiritual Noumenon *to account for the phenomenon "consciousness"*, just as Mr. Herbert Spencer assumes an objective world to account for the phenomenon "matter". But to develop this line of thought would lead us too far astray.

The modern mechanical systems have no sympathy with the doctrine of a "future life". Why, then, [Page 6] this afterglow of Optimism which distinguishes the majority ? For this spurious enthusiasm bears about the same relation to the enthusiasm of the true thinker as the phosphorescent gleam on a mouldering coffin does to the sunlight. The world is, indeed, a shambles, if the evils which buttress Evolution merely usher in consciousness at birth in order to blot it out at death. Dr. Büchner's conception of Nature, as, in fact, that of Mr. Spencer, is only calculated to wrap the mind in a "horror of great darkness". Man is a cypher in the presence of this eternal mechanism, the Evolution phase of which hurries him into the martyrdom of being, only to plunge him once again into nothingness.

A moment's halt, a momentary taste
Of Being from the well within the Waste,
And then the ghostly caravan has reached
The Nothing it set out from.

Well may we ask: Of what avail is it to perpetuate, and labour for, a Humanity which possibly the next Glacial period, and at any rate a waning Sun, will sweep for ever into the eternal silence ? Why store up knowledge for the mind — as raindrops for a pitcher only filled to be emptied — unless with Helvetius we cultivate intellect simply under the spur of *ennui* ? Why hold to the "Ethics of Inwardness" instead of Lamettrie's "L'Art de Jouir" ? The Ego is, after all, only what M. Taine terms it, a rocket shooting up in the dark void and sputtering awhile before it goes out. It has no call to assist the work of a Nature which has treated it so scurvily. Rather will it incline out of intense sympathy for its fellow Egos to contribute its mite towards bringing conscious existence to a close.

We hear much of Pessimism just now. Nothing, however, is more inevitable than the prevalence of such [Page 7] a mode of thinking during transition periods such as the present. It is not merely that the error of regarding Life as an end in itself dominates the majority of men and women. This is indeed a *vera causa*. If we confine our purview to this narrow horizon, the world-process certainly does appear to justify Hartmann's language when he dubs it — with certain reservations — an "unfathomable folly". So far, so good. But an additional factor serves to swell the effect thus produced. The Western nations are rapidly attaining that reflective stage of their sociological evolution, at which the misery of life becomes *continually present to thought* in addition to being the main constituent of emotional experience.

Pleasures and pains are no longer experienced and then casually laid aside in the pigeon-holes of Memory — they are coldly analysed and compared, greatly to the detriment of the former. It has been said that nothing is really evil; "Thinking makes it so". Even allowing for the marked indefiniteness of this statement, we must not fail to note the important fact which it throws into relief. It is the change from the "direct" to the "reflective" mode of thinking which is mainly responsible for the phenomenon of Socrates miserable, while the pig is happy. With the march of civilisation and the disintegration of old Faiths, an accentuation of the world-problem is inevitable. Nature appears in her true light and subjects the most cherished illusions of optimism to revision. She is seen to furnish us, in Cardinal Newman's words, with "a vision to appal".

The average man of culture is becoming keenly alive to this riddle, so mockingly propounded by the Sphinx of Life. He casts his eyes around him and usually finds Ahriman enthroned where Ormuzd ought to be. He discovers the hideous fact that:

“The appetites, passions, and other propensities by which Nature works her human puppet, are in keeping [Page 8] with the predatory scheme according to which she has constructed the animal kingdom. They make men predatory, not only on other animals, but on each other.”

He studies current sociology and derives from it the conviction that Evolution, the fruit of aeons of agony and suffering, is conducting us into a *cul de sac*, that it is, in fact, a purposeless process with annihilation of conscious being as its final term. It accordingly appears to him that the preferable policy is to make the best of an unsatisfactory universe and live like the Positivist, without care for the metaphysical morrow. Unfortunately, to confine his attentions to concerns — immediate or remote — of "practical life" is only to court a sense of pessimistic *ennui*. It is assuredly not by renouncing the consolation of so-called "transcendentalism" that the millennium is to be inaugurated. There remain the grim demonstrations of Schopenhauer to be taken into account. The Great German thinker faithfully echoed the teaching of the Buddha when he penned the following passage:

“All willing arises from desire, that is from want, that is from suffering. Satisfaction makes an end of this, but nevertheless, for every wish that is gratified, there remain at least ten unfulfilled . . . Lasting, unfading satisfaction, no desired object of the will can afford; it is like the alms thrown to the beggar, which prolong his life for the day, only to postpone his suffering till the morrow ... So long as we are the subject of will, lasting happiness or rest will never be our lot. Whether we pursue or flee, dread evil, or strive after pleasure, it is essentially the same: the care for an ever onward-urging will, it matters not what be its shape, ceaselessly moves and fills the consciousness..... Thus is the subject of the will bound eternally on the revolving wheel of Ixion; thus does it ceaselessly gather in the sieve of the Danaids; thus, like Tantalus, is it ever languishing”. [Page 9]

Schopenhauer even went so far as to regard pain alone as positive. In making this assertion he is unquestionably in error — a fact which his emendator and successor, Hartmann, has fully recognised. But his indictment as a whole is brilliant and incisive. It summarily disposes of the shallow optimism which reverences life as an enjoyable boon. Now this result the modernised doctrine of Reincarnation accepts as final, though it claims at the same time to reconcile optimism and pessimism by merging them in a deeper synthesis. The nature of this reconciliation will subsequently be apparent.

Oriental philosophy is, of course, saturated with the idea of soul-evolution through successive rebirths. But of late years the Western world has begun to catch the infection of this hoary system. It will suffice to refer to the Theosophists, to M. Figuiet's popular *Day after Death*, to *The Secret Doctrine*, and the lucid exposition of *Esoteric Buddhism*; to the revival of Hermetism by the late Dr. Anna Kingsford and Mr. Maitland. Mr. Norman Pearson and Mr. Francis Peek have also defended the doctrine in the columns of *The Nineteenth Century* and *The Contemporary Review* respectively. Last, but not least, one of the foremost thinkers in Germany and the earnest disciple of Kant, Baron Carl du Prel, has in his *Philosophy of Mysticism*, warmly espoused it. This important contribution to modern thought has created no small stir in the land of its birth, having received careful attention from von Hartmann, Dr. Schleiden and other distinguished writers. The gist of Dr. du Prel's contentions will be presented later on in the course of our inquiry. I now propose without further ado to furnish a general *précis* of the arguments tending to show that Metempsychosis, or, as it is usually termed, "Reincarnation", [Page 10] is a fact. The relation of this great truth to the world-problem will admit of subsequent treatment. It is proverbially unwise to build upon sand, and for this reason, the actuality of the process itself must, if possible, be first proved up to the hilt. If Mystics prefer to rely on intuitions and occasional memories, which, like the famous experience of Pythagoras, recall incidents of a former embodiment, the average sceptic most decidedly does not. In order to satisfy this individual it will be necessary to shelve all subtle distinctions and envisage the main issue, freed from the many accessories which cluster so thickly around it.

1. *The Argument from Justice*. — Having posited with Kant a World-Spirit, as a postulate of the moral intuition, we cannot to refuse to regard this Ideal as the fountain-head and archetype of those sublime moral qualities found in connection with a Buddha or Jesus. Among such attributes, if the postulate is in any sense valid, must be accounted that of absolute justice; a justice which allots to the individual Ego the most equitable treatment *consonant with the maintenance of the scheme of Evolution* in its entirety. Turning from this certitude of the inner consciousness to the world of everyday experience, we are confronted with a standing enigma.

Virtue in rags and vice in a palace is a familiar incident in the martyrdom of man. It puzzled Kant, it made Stuart Mill wonder at the decay of Manichaeism — a theory, however, which Mr. Samuel Laing has restated in a more scientific form in his *Modern Zoroastrian*. Inequalities differentiate society in every direction — inequalities of rank, of wealth, of intellect, of health, and of opportunity. Disease and mental distress appear to fasten arbitrarily on their victims, like leeches on the first horse [Page 11] driven into the pond. Accidents occur in a seemingly haphazard fashion, so that the world-process at first sight suggests nothing more than the ruthless reign of a blind and indiscriminating Force. Nature distributes her *billets* of misery with the apparent indifferentism of a column of infantry firing into a crowd.

Is it possible to reconcile hard facts such as these with our original presupposition? Nothing is more simple when the hypothesis of Reincarnation is introduced. When we recognise in the gradations of individual intellect, rank, opportunity, pleasure, pain, etc., the inevitable outcome of the "Karma" of a previous embodiment, the enigmas of Human Life soften their hard outlines. The hereditary cripple, the victim of agonising disease, the passenger burnt to death in a wrecked train, are all, perhaps, reaping the harvest the seeds of which were sown in former lives. I say "perhaps", because the suffering of one incarnation does not necessarily imply a previous commission of corresponding "vices" in the dark, mysterious past. Many cases must occur where unmerited pain, *unavoidably bound up with the carrying out of the world-plan*, simply goes to evoke a compensatory Karma in the future. That the individual is

systematically immolated for the time being on the altar of the species, the evidence of biology conclusively shows.

For this necessary sacrifice, only a blissful Devachan, followed by a fair environment in a future incarnation, can atone. Allowance has also to be made for the "failures of Nature" and torture incidental to organic evolution — matters of redress and nothing more. The important aspects of Pain as an educative factor and as Nature's device to ensure the integrity of the organism, must not be lost sight of. [Page 12]

The anomalies characteristic of the dogma of Monogenesis entirely disappear when the hypothesis of rebirth is adopted. Men, for instance, have some cause to envy the intellectual or moral grandeur of a favoured few when Nature is supposed to bestow her gifts at random. But it is otherwise when the mental "make-up" of the present is regarded as the heritage of the past! The victorious intellect of today may have walked with Plato in the groves of Academe, while in the chattering idiot at Earlswood may be seen the erst abandoned associate of Lais or Phryne. What we honour as *genius* in the prowess of the poet, politician or philosopher, may but represent compound Kârmic interest supervening on the plodding perseverance of an obscure scholar in ancient Rome. What we respect as the moral beauty of a friend may date from a painful war against the passions waged by him in forgotten days among the Pharaohs. All we now envisage is — Result. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap".

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In a very suggestive article in the July number of *The Contemporary Review* for 1878, Mr. Francis Peek upholds Reincarnation as the interior meaning of the New Testament. Writing as he did from the standpoint of Theology, his remarks are most instructive. Certain of my readers may, also, recall the fact that in the late Dr. Anna Kingsford's works an identical interpretation is given of the esoteric teachings of Jesus, who is invested by her with the character of an Initiate unveiling great truths through, the medium of metaphor and allegory. *Isis Unveiled* has also dealt with the subject in a most exhaustive and forcible manner. There is, in fact, a mass of evidence in favour of the view that the basis of primitive Christianity was the secret mystery-religion. [Page 13] of the East, access to which was ordinarily only possible through the portal of Initiation. It deserves note in this connection that the great Founder expressly states the division of his teaching into two portions, the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" for his disciples, and "parables" for the multitude. But let us hear Mr. Peek:

"How often must every thoughtful mind have felt almost crushed at the apparent inconsistency of the existence of such a world as this under the dominion of such a God as the New Testament discloses . . . Pass through the lanes and alleys of our great cities and see the wretched children of profligate parents, half-clad, half-starved, covered with sores, foul both in body and mind. Wander through the wards of such an asylum as Earlswood, and contemplate the forms of the drivelling idiots sitting through life listlessly in chairs, from which they may never rise till their day of doom, and presenting faces from which humanity is absent . . . Viewing such sights as these, we cannot but speculate and conjecture as the disciples of old did when, looking upon the man who was born blind and remembering that their divine law declared that the sins of the fathers were visited on their children, they asked: "Master who did sin, this *man* or his parents, that he was born blind ? " The reply of Christ to this question is not a little remarkable. He does not say: "Your question is foolish; how could the man have sinned before his birth ? " but he replies: "Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him". This is a form of words which certainly permits the conjecture that, as some cases of suffering were

undoubtedly caused by the parents sin, so in reference to some others there might be such a thing as sin before birth, visited by suffering from and after birth”.

Interesting, however, as are all such attempts to exploit metaphor, the tendency of the age is to rely [Page 14] on less pliable sources of evidence. Mr. Peek's example ought, nevertheless, to serve as a stimulus to those orthodox minds which regard resort to such an idea as Reincarnation as heretical.

Before taking leave of this phase of the argument, I should like to direct attention to the conformity of the doctrine of Karma with that revised conception of Moral Freedom now in vogue. The "guarded liberty" which steers midway between the extreme dogmas of Free Will and Determination, harmonises entirely with the requirements of our system. The Ego starts at birth handicapped or favoured, as the case may be, by the tendencies carried over from its last embodiment. It is competent to *mould* its mental "make-up", but not to revolutionise it off-hand. Professor Clifford himself admitted that we really are responsible for those "modes of thinking (and he might have added feeling) into which we knowingly and deliberately work ourselves", and the all-denying Dr. Büchner has conceded man the possession of a modified metaphysical liberty. This is quite enough for our purpose. Life is a blend of freedom and necessity. Now Reincarnation excludes the possibility that any Ego can wreck itself by the shortcomings of one transitory existence. It may sow the wind and reap the whirlwind, but a definite quantitative and qualitative relation must subsist, between an evil deed and its "karmic" consequence. Rome was not built in a day, neither is the fabric of the soul. Nevertheless, just as

Little drops of water,
Little grains of sand,
Make the mighty ocean
And the pleasant land,

so the accumulation of experiences through many lives must surely tend to stereotype a character and mould a destiny for weal or woe, Responsibility may be [Page 15] termed a shifting factor, the amount of which varies with the evolutionary status of the Ego. Thus the volition of the lowest savage suggests a physical basis of little more than reflex action. He is, like the tiger, the child of circumstance. But acts, which are normal to a Fuegian, may constitute "crimes" when perpetrated by a Caesar Borgia or a Tiberius. This sliding scale of responsibility is, doubtless, in the case of a fully "adult Ego" influenced by the historical associations of any of its enforced reincarnations.

2. *The Argument from Precocity.* — The extraordinary precocity exhibited by certain children affords a striking illustration of the working of Karma. An Ego carrying over from its last incarnation a very marked mental or moral "tendency", will prematurely force the manifestation of this "tendency" [In order to prevent misconception, let me clearly signify the sense in which this seeming abstraction is employed. By "mental tendency" I understand a *potential bias* of ideation which stands in the same relation to *actual* ideation as *potential energy* does to *kinetic* energy in physics] as soon as it has attuned the plastic neuroses of the child-brain to its requirements. Inasmuch as heredity contributes its quota towards facilitating this process, the Ego will gravitate to that foetus which promises most fully to satisfy its equation. By the utilisation of the inherited bias an important economy of force is thus effected.

How frequently we note the precocity of certain young children as regards "virtue" and "vice", compared

with the colourless negativity exhibited by their brothers and sisters. A premature appetite for knowledge in some juvenile scion of a stupid stock, who pores over books, while the other inmates of the nursery, play havoc and let loose the dogs of war, [Page 16] is also an instructive phenomenon. But those rare and fascinating cases of "infant geniuses" — the child musician and composer, such as Mozart, and the urchin who "lisps in numbers" — which the annals of Music and Literature record, appeal with singular force to the votary of Mysticism.

3. *The Argument from Heredity and Variation*, — Heredity is, as I am well aware, regarded as the reef on which the doctrine of Reincarnation is wrecked. But attempts to invalidate it on these lines are for the most part based on a radical misconception of the point at issue. It is equally true that the characteristics of parents are transmissible to offspring, and that the Ego on rebirth picks up the threads of its mental and moral "make-up" pretty much where it dropped them, say fifteen or twenty centuries ago. The parents provide an organism with a definite hereditary impress — so far, so good. But they cannot endow the senseless mechanism with consciousness. "*Neurosis*" cannot evolve "*psychosis*". This latter is the contribution of the Ego, which, by *overshadowing* a nascent organism, *supplies the potentiality of perception under specific neural conditions*. Now no Ego will incarnate in a form which does not promise to afford full scope for the manifestation of the leading points of its Karma. In other words, no embryo can mature into a perfectly organised infant — by no possibility into a conscious one — in the absence of a soul pressing forward into incarnation. Consequently, as Mr. A. P. Sinnett aptly puts it, the child is the "potentiality not the product" of heredity and atavism; for the Ego will not inform any foetus at random, but only that one which is most easily attuned to its own nature and which will offer the further requisite of an appropriate environment. It is, therefore, inevitable that [Page 17] diversion of the stream of incarnating Egos from any particular group of organisms would result in a *racial sterility*. I shall adduce evidence later on, tending to confirm the truth of this supposition.

The principle of assimilation by the Ego of an appropriate organism, covers much of the ground. But when we come to consider the "variations" on parental and ancestral types, the advantage is wholly on the side of the advocate of Reincarnation.

It is just those facts which appear to break with a general law from which we learn most. From the perturbations of the orbit of Uranus, Neptune was first inferred, finally discovered. Now just as the departure of that planet from its normal course indicated the presence of some undiscovered cause, so the variations on the rigid hereditary type demand a similar explanation. Evolutionists assume the "law of variation" with unhesitating zeal, but they fail to recognise that this merely empirical law itself calls for elucidation. In the domain of the higher mental phenomena, the need of such a solution is unmistakably apparent. Professor Ribot acknowledges that there are exceptions of a puzzling nature to the law of Heredity. Mr. Galton's case of the twins who, with the same nurture and education, developed into utterly dissimilar young men, will not be readily forgotten. Take the case of those large families which so often exhibit this differentiation in a very high degree. Take the case of the genius, the "black sheep", the book-worm, *etc.*, who turn up in utterly hostile mental and moral *milieux*. How simply all these are explained on the hypothesis of reincarnation.

The stationary, progressive or retrograde phases in the intellectual, moral and political history of Nations may be similarly accounted for. The maxim "History repeats itself" has more significance than [Page 18] is obvious at first sight. It indicates the re-incarnation *en masse* of Egos stamped with the impress of a past epoch, and driven on to action by the irresistible might of their Karma. The appearance of the "right man

in the right place" in the crisis of national evolution — an event which Buckle has ascribed to "causes yet unknown", and Mr. Gladstone to Divine providence — is another testimony to the operation of this Kârmic Necessity.

4. *The Argument from Memory.* — The brain being only competent to register the *neuroses* answering to the experience of one life, it is not to be expected that memories of a former incarnation should ordinarily emerge into consciousness. It is, however, notorious that there exist persons of a high order of intellectual power, who believe that they enjoy the privilege of such occasional glimpses of their pre-natal past. Evidence of this description is, of course, most cogent to the individual, but too sporadic and too much bound up with the "personal equation" to be of any solid value to the scientific psychologist. But it has claim to mention, and, indeed, might assume a position of commanding importance in the eyes of a more gifted race yet to be evolved.

.... if through lower lives I came —
Tho' all experience past became
Consolidate in mind and frame —

I might forget my weaker lot;
For is not our first year forgot ?
The haunts of memory echo not.

Some draught of Lethe doth await,
As old mythologists relate,
The slipping through from state to state.

Moreover, something is or seems,
That touches me with mystic gleams,
Like glimpses of forgotten dreams — [Page 19]

TENNYSON.

5. *The Argument from the Conservation of Energy.* — It has been urged that the reincarnation of a Karma laden Ego is deducible from the law of Conservation; mental tendencies representing so much "energy" which finds its equivalent in a future birth or births. Expressed in this form, the inference is faulty. The principle expounded by Sir W. Grove and Professor Balfour Stewart is a physical truth applicable to physical things, and we are here dealing primarily with the realm of Mind. There is, however, every reason to postulate a complementary doctrine as valid of mental *data*. Analogy is in favour of it; the Association of Ideas and the phenomena of Attention are its expression. Proceeding to speculate on the manner in which the "Karma" of a past incarnation reacts on and modifies the infant organism, there is clearly no need for us to posit here any *creation* of new physical energy. The direction of the so-called "potential energy" stored up in the tissues is most probably the means employed.

6. *The Argument from the Life of Nations and Species.* — Nations all pass through the phases of birth, maturity, decline, death or suspended animation; The Assyrians, Egyptians, and Romans have never discovered the elixir of life. Even where disruption and disintegration are not the closing scene of the cycle, a vegetative apathy invariably supervenes. To what cause are these remarkable uniformities due ? We may here speculate with Dr. Romanes ["*The world as an Eject*"] anent the possibility of a Nation-soul distinct from individual consciousness. Or we may, with the author of *First Principles*, arbitrarily narrow

the phenomena into an outcome of the rhythm of motion. But a far more pregnant and comprehensive solution is that which sees in the stages of national life, indications [Page 20] of the various grades of Egos at any time seeking incarnation. Thus, to take a concrete instance, the recent unexampled burst of Scientific and Economic progress in nineteenth-century Europe serves to assure us of the quarter in which the *élite* of human souls have tended to gather.

Any great diversion of Egos from incarnation in a given race would necessarily involve its progressive extinction. It is a noteworthy fact in this connection that Ethnology is able to confront us with such examples of a *racial sterility*, for which no satisfactory explanation has yet been found. The cases of the Tasmanians, Maoris, Central American aborigines and Hawaiians, are especially suggestive. The disappearance of the Tasmanians — a problem which exercised Darwin to little or no purpose — is, of course, a *fait accompli*; that of the others is in progress. The extraordinary character of the phenomenon among the really "philo-progenitive" Hawaiians will be thoroughly appreciated by all who peruse the account given in Dr. Brown's *Countries of the World*. That various local causes of one sort and another have greatly accelerated this process in most cases, is not to be denied. It is the comparative immunity of the Hawaiians from these, that lends such interest to their case. [It is said that the ratio of male births to female is always abnormally high after bloody wars. This generalisation, if valid, makes strongly for Reincarnation.]

7. *The Argument from Mental Evolution*. — Nothing is more unsatisfactory than the crude habit of regarding the human soul as a "constant". Theologians, and even liberal thinkers of the traditional Spiritualist school, seem to imagine that all human Egos, as such, stand on the same evolutionary level. But observation acquaints us with various strata of [Page 21] soul-development; with Buddhas, Shakespeares, and Mills, as well as with Bushmen and Mincopies. It reveals to us the gulf which divides the mathematical genius of a Leverrier from the coarse-grained reason of a savage who cannot count beyond five. Differences such as these inevitably attend the pilgrimage of Egos through a multiplicity of births — a process in which Merit and Experience count for everything.

Needless to dwell upon the importance of a well organised brain to the incarnating soul. But the helplessness of an Ego tethered to an undeveloped brain is paralleled by the uselessness of a large and developed brain dominated by an *undeveloped Ego*. Mr. A. R. Wallace has pointed out that the cerebral endowment of certain Asiatic stocks is excellent, but the intelligence which they exercise is little superior to that of apes. The Peruvians and Mexicans, who drove before them the rude Indian tribes, had smaller brains than their victims. The cranial capacity of the Cro-Magnon men of the Stone Age, of the Esquimaux, and of some rude Polynesian tribes, compares favourably with that of the average modern Parisian. So much for the skull and brains. What of the tenants ?

Reincarnation, in denying the possibility that one transitory life can serve as the antechamber to immortality, is enabled to solve some standing enigmas. That the *crétin*, the idiot, the one-year-old baby, the bestial savage, and other such immature and *irresponsible* creatures, attain at dissolution the *entrée* to an "eternal Heaven" or Hell, is an idle conception. Such Egos are both undeveloped and neutral in point of merit. But they cannot remain stereotyped as such under the sway of the "Power that makes for righteousness". Reborn, therefore, [Page 22] must they be, one and all, in order to work out their salvation from the curse of terrestrial life by the exercise of a matured moral freedom.

We have now completed our bird's-eye view of the case for Reincarnation. But before taking leave of the subject, it remains to throw out a tentative suggestion as to the relations of this great truth to the world-problem.

According to Hegel, the World-Spirit would never have undertaken the labour of creation except in the hope of attaining to clear self-consciousness. But it is impossible to regard the evolution of conscious units, *in connection with organism*, as the final expression of that purpose. Nor, indeed, would the Hegelian dialectic admit of such a view. It justly disallows finality to any cut-and-dried exposition of the *raison d'être* of the Universe. Philosophers must confine themselves to formulating the problem a little more clearly than their predecessors. "The truth is in the whole" — not in the aspect.

Now the preponderance of pain over pleasure, which reaches its consummation in Man, excludes the possibility that consciousness *as known to us* constitutes an end in itself. But the World-Spirit does not build only to destroy; the millstones of evolution do not grind to no account; the world-factory does not resound with a vain activity which turns out no finished product. To what ulterior end does the consciousness of the terrestrial organism serve as a stepping-stone? The temptation to hazard some sort of answer is irresistible.

The ultimate dissipation of our Solar system into fire-mist will not simply restore the *status quo ante*. Physically speaking it may, and probably will: but [Page 23] with the physical side of things it is not our immediate province to deal. A further consideration is forthcoming. The vast material mechanism, before running down, will have done its work — it will have served as the theatre of processes which are now growing a crop of human souls. The harvest of Evolution will be a legion of Egos, perfected through, suffering and rich with the experience gleaned in the course of infinitely varied rebirths. For on the unity of the Transcendental Subject the worthier memories of all lives are strung as pearls upon a string. What a range of ideation is suggested! First, the animal ego, educated by tardy processes into the grade of a human soul; then, the human soul, warring against its inherited animal bias — until it recognises the God within it and, the bondage of Karma being renounced,

The dewdrop slips into the shining sea.

EDWIN ARNOLD.

As all Egos primarily emerge from the impersonal unity of Spirit, to that unity they must eventually return. Soaked with experience, each ray is reflected back to its source. Nirvāna is thus the "goal to which the whole creation moves". Needless to say it is no annihilation, but the absolute culmination of spiritual being. Represent individual consciousness as a bounded circle, and imagine that circle, not vanishing, but expanding to infinity, and you will have a symbolic conception of the glorified existence of Nirvāna — that state in which

the Universe grows "I",

and phenomenally sundered Egos are fused into unity. Consciousness is necessarily permanent in Nirvāna, though not, as with us, in the form of a "self" radically contrasted with other "selves". Nevertheless, intimate as must be the coalescence of [Page 24] any given Ego with its fellows, the experience which it has accumulated during its long planetary pilgrimage serves in a measure to

differentiate it from the rest. In the unity of Nirvāna Spirit attains to complete self-realisation through the perfected Egos now restored to It, Perchance the drama of Evolution has this end as its justification, and tends, in consequence, as M. Renan [“L’Oeuvre universelle de tout ce qui vit est de faire Dieu parfait, de contribuer à la grande résultante définitive qui clora le cercle des choses par l’unité”. (Dialogues)] has suggested, to the perfection of Deity. Hegel’s profoundly significant teaching, to the effect that the Absolute is "*essentially result*", cannot in this connection be too strongly insisted upon. Finality, however, in speculations such as these, is beside the question.