

The Necessity for Reincarnation

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[Page 1] THIS question of Reincarnation is so large a one that in the title I have chosen I have limited the scope of our thought tonight. I do not pretend to deal with the whole of the doctrine, but with that special aspect of it: 'The Necessity for Reincarnation.' There are many questions that will arise in the mind of the listener, many questions that in one brief lecture I cannot hope to answer: why we do not all remember the past; why we do not find, in looking back, clear mental illumination on the way in which our characters have grown, our thought-powers, our moral powers have developed. Many questions of that sort will arise, but if tonight I can succeed in showing you that there is at least a good case for Reincarnation as a rational explanation of life, of human progress, of human character; if I can show you that it enables us to understand many of the problems of life; if I can show you, as I shall try to do, that science demands it now in order to complete its theory of evolution; if I can show you that it is a necessity from the moral standpoint, if we would keep our belief in divine justice and divine love in facing many of the terrible facts of human life and of human pain; if I can show you that it is a necessity for human perfection; and then if, lastly, I can show you that, with [Page 2] all this pressing necessity to accept it, it is not a doctrine which belongs to Eastern religions alone; if I can show you that it is a doctrine that belongs to primitive Christianity as much as to other great religions of the world; if I can show you that in Christian antiquity it took its place unchallenged for five centuries among the doctrines taught by the great doctors and bishops of the Christian Church; if I can show you that it has never quite fallen out of Christian thought, that it has never quite lost its place in Christian literature, and that its revival today is the revival of a truth partially forgotten, and not an effort to graft into the Christian faith a doctrine from an alien creed; then perhaps, having shown the necessity, I may clear away something of the confusion in the mind of the ordinary Christian, which almost makes him shrink from considering the doctrine, and in this way may do all I hope to do, stimulate your own minds to think and to judge, stimulate your own powers of thought to accept or to reject as seems to you good. For I do not hold that it is the duty of the lecturer to dogmatise, to lay down the law as to what another should think. I do not hold that it is the duty of the lecturer to do the thinking work, and then demand that the conclusion shall be accepted. The duty of the lecturer is only to put forth the truth as the truth is seen by him, leaving it to the individual reason and the individual conscience to reject or accept as seems to it good. That, then, is what I have to do, to put the case before you; you are the judges, not I.

First, then, as to the scientific necessity for Reincarnation. Now, there are two great doctrines of evolution which may be said to divide the scientific [Page 3] world. One of them is falling rather into the background, the other coming more and more to the front. The first is the evolutionary teaching of Charles Darwin, the second, the later teaching of Weissmann. Now, these two doctrines are both important to us; both, in order to complete them, need this teaching of Reincarnation. For under both arise certain questions to which Reincarnation gives the only answer, certain problems which remain unsolved save in the light of this ancient and universal teaching. I do not say that because the problems are unsolved by science, therefore this teaching is necessarily true; but I do say that when you find a doctrine put forward which explains problems, which explains that which science does not explain, answers difficulties that science does not answer, that then, that doctrine deserves at least a hearing in the minds of thoughtful men, in order that they may see whether there is not a possible explanation of the otherwise apparently

inexplicable facts.

Darwin's Theory

Take for a moment Charles Darwin's evolutionary teaching in the broadest possible light. Two great points come out as dealing with the progress of intelligence and of morality. First, the idea that qualities are transmitted from parent to offspring, and that by the accumulated force of that transmission intelligence and morality develop. As step after step is taken by human-kind, the results of the climbing are transmitted to the offspring, who, starting as it were from the platform built up by the past, are able to climb further in the present, and transmit enriched, to their posterity, the legacy that they [Page 4] receive. Along that line human progress seems possible and full of hope. Secondly, side by side with that stands the doctrine of conflict, of what is called "survival of the fittest"; of qualities which enable some to survive, and by the survival to hand down to their progeny those qualities that gave them an advantage in the struggle for existence.

Now, those two chief points - transmission of quality from parent to offspring, survival of the fittest, in the struggle for existence - are two of the problems that are very, very difficult to deal with from the ordinary Darwinian standpoint. Transmission of qualities I will deal with at the same time as I speak of Weissmann; but on the second point, the question that we are obliged to ask the Darwinian with regard to the growth of the higher intelligence, and especially of moral qualities, is this: It is admitted that the qualities that are the most purely human - compassion, love, sympathy, the sacrifice of the strong for the protection of the weak, the willingness to give life for the benefit of others - these are the qualities that we recognise as human over against the qualities that we share with the brute. The more of these qualities show out in man, the more human is man considered to be, and so much is that recognised that the late Prof. Huxley, declared, in trying to deal with this problem, that you had to recognise that man, a fragment of the cosmos, set himself against the law of the cosmos; that he advanced by self-surrender, and not by the survival of the fittest; that he developed by self-sacrifice, and not by the trampling of the strong upon the weak, which was the law of growth in the lower kingdoms of nature. And he [Page 5] asked the question: How is it that the fragment can set itself against the whole and evolve by a law which is against the law by which all the lower kingdoms developed? And he answered it in a tentative way: Is it because in man there is the same consciousness as that which underlies the universe? Whether he was prepared or not to answer the question in the affirmative we cannot say, but this remains from the mouth of the great preacher of evolution, that the law of progress for the man is the law of sacrifice and not the law of struggle. But then, what does that mean? When you are face to face with the survival of the fittest, what does this mean? For, those who sacrifice, themselves die out. How does mother-love arise and grow, even in the brute creation, among those we call the social animals, and even among the fiercest, the beasts of prey? How does that quality develop? How does it increase? Clearly we see that among the animals the mother sacrifices herself for her helpless offspring, conquering the law of self-preservation, the preservation of her own life, victorious over the fear of man which is interwoven in the nature of the brute that is wild. The mother bird, the mother animal, will sacrifice her own life in order to draw away her enemy, man, from the cave or the hiding-place where her young ones are hidden, mother-love triumphing over even the love of life. But she dies in the sacrifice. Those who show it most, perish - sacrifices to maternal affection; and if, as we must see when we look at it, the social virtues, the human virtues, tend to kill out their possessors and to leave the more selfish and more brutal alive, then how can you explain in man the growth of the spirit of [Page 6] self-sacrifice, how explain this continuing growth in the most divine qualities which incapacitate the man for the struggle of existence?

Now Darwinism does not really answer that question. Attempts are made to answer it. Those who have studied Darwinian writings know that the question is not fully faced, is rather evaded than answered. Reincarnation gives the answer, that, in the continuing life, whether of the animal or of the man, that self-sacrifice stirs up on the side of character a new power, a new life, a compelling strength, which comes back over and over again to the world in ever higher and higher manifestations; that though the form of the mother perishes, the mother-soul survives, and comes back time after time; those who are such mother-souls are trained onward, first in the brute kingdom and then in the human kingdom, so that that which is gained by the soul at the sacrifice of the body comes back in the reincarnating soul to bless and to lift the world. The persistence of the soul it is that makes that growth in moral character possible.

Transmission of Qualities

We come to the question of transmission of qualities that, as I said, leads us into the view of Weissmann. Weissmann has established two fundamental facts: first, the continuity of physical life - fairly clear to ordinary vision, but proved by him in a way that goes further than any scientific thought went before him - on the one side continuity of physical life, and we shall see that we need, to complete it, continuity of intellectual and moral life. And the reason we need it along the [Page 7] Weissmann line is his second fundamental fact. Weissmann declares - and ever more and more is that view being accepted - that mental and moral and other acquired qualities are not transmitted to offspring, that they can only be transmitted when they have worked themselves slowly and by degrees into the very fabric of the physical body of the people concerned. Mental and moral qualities not being transmitted - and the evidence for this is becoming overwhelming - where will you have the reason for human progress, unless, side by side with the continuity of protoplasm, you have the continuity of an evolving, of a developing soul? Not only is that necessary, but along with this same theory, backed up as it is by facts of observation, we find that the higher the organism the greater the tendency towards sterility, or towards a very great limiting of the number of the offspring produced. Genius - it is becoming almost a commonplace in science - genius is sterile, and by that it is meant that the genius does not tend in the first place largely to increase the number of the race, and secondly, that even where a genius has a child, the child does not show the qualities of the genius, but for the most part is commonplace, tending even to be below the average of the time. Now that is a subject of enormous importance for the future. For the genius of today ought to mark the normal level of hundreds of years hence. The genius of today, whether the genius of intellect or of virtue, the high-water mark of present human progress, should show the place to which the ocean will rise presently, as the generations go on. If he is only a mere sport of nature, if he is only the result of some fortunate accident, if he is only the outcome of [Page 8] some unknown cause, then he brings us no message of hope, no promise for the future; but if it be that in that individual genius you are to find a soul who by long experience has gathered the qualities with which he was this time born; if it be that, side by side with the continuity of protoplasm, there is also a continuity of soul, growing, developing, evolving, as forms grow, develop and evolve, ah! then the genius is only the forerunner of a greater humanity, and the lowest child of earth may hope in future to climb to the height of intelligence or of virtue on which he stands. And this view of genius is strengthened by investigation; for we notice that genius is to be found along two special lines - that of the genius of pure intellect or virtue, and that of the artist that demands a peculiar co-operation of the body. The first asks little or nothing from physical heredity, but you cannot have the great genius in music unless you have with it a specialised body, a delicacy of nervous organisation; a fineness of touch, a keenness of ear. These physical things are required in order that musical genius may show itself forth at its highest. There the co-operation of physical heredity is demanded, and what do you find when you study the stories of musical genius? That he is generally born in a musical family; that for two or three generations before the great genius, some amount of musical

talent has been marked in the family in which he appears; and that when he, the genius, appears, then that musical talent dies out, and the family goes back into the ordinary run of average people. The family flowers in the genius; he does not hand on his genius to his posterity. [Page 9]

How Reincarnation Explains

Now those problems and puzzles of heredity find their rational explanation in the teaching of Reincarnation; for what is it? It is the teaching that breathed into the form is a portion of the life of God. Like a seed, a germ, the germinal spirit comes forth into the world of matter, with all divine possibilities hidden within it, as within the seed the possibilities of the plant that gave it birth are hidden; in that germinal spirit are all divine powers, that man may become perfect as his Father in heaven is perfect. But in order that that perfection may be attained, there must be growth, experience, evolution; in each life on earth experience must be gathered; in the long interval between death and rebirth the experience gathered on the earth is woven in the invisible worlds into the fabric of the soul; when that germinal spirit comes back to earth, it comes with this soul-clothing of qualities woven out of the experience gathered in its previous life on earth, and the innate ideas of the child are the result of the weaving - during the heavenly life - into quality of the experience of the earth-life that lies behind. When that experience is transmuted into quality, then spirit and soul come back to earth, start on the platform already gained by experience and by struggle, and carry on the evolution with the advantage of the innate qualities which are the result of the previous life. During the new life more experience, more struggle, material for further growth; the weaving of that again into higher qualities during the renewed interval between death and rebirth. And so, on and on, rung after rung of the ladder of progress; at the bottom of that human ladder the lowest savage; at [Page 10] the top of that human ladder, the greatest saint and the noblest intellect, genius built up by slow degrees, built up by countless struggles, built up by failure as well as victory, by evil as well as good, the evils of the past the steps whereon man rises into virtue, so that even in the lowest criminal we see the promise of divinity. He, too, shall rise where the saint is standing, and in all the children of men God shall at last be seen. That is the theory of Reincarnation.

Now, let us see if it does not fit the facts from the scientific standpoint. We see now how the genius will have grown. He does not come suddenly into the world with nothing behind him, suddenly God-created. He comes with the qualities he has gradually developed by struggle in his past. We can understand, as we look at him, why the children of today, born of civilised parents, respond quickly to moral teaching, answer to moral appeal; and why a child of the savage, a young soul, a child-soul, cannot respond to those teachings, no matter how carefully you may try to instruct him. The answer of the children of the civilised man of today to the moral ideal, to moral precepts, is almost immediate. The child responds to it by nature; the child of the savage does not so. You cannot take the savage child and lift him to the point at which your own children are to be found whilst still in the nursery. They have not the power to respond. But the moment you admit the continuing spirit, the moment you admit the weaving into quality of experiences, that in the character of the new-born child you can see the results of his past, then you begin to understand why man should have progressed, even though Weissmann be right when he [Page 11] says that acquired qualities are not transmitted; for those mental and moral qualities are not the gift of the parent, they are the hard-won spoils of victory of the individual soul; and each soul comes to his birth into the new body with the results of his past lives in his hand to work with in the present. Thus this theory fills up the gaps in the scientific one, answers the problems that science cannot answer, and more and more it appears, as we notice the lines of evolution of modern science, that this theory of Reincarnation is wanted in order to complete the theory and to make intelligible the progress of character

and intelligence side by side with the evolution of the form.

Soul-Age

Moreover, the marks of growth that we see among men are clear signs of a past, of difference of soul-age, if I may use the word. Wherever you go through nature, looking at things of the same kind, you find them at different stages of growth; and you constantly find in the more developed creature marks of the past up which he has evolved. Now, this is not only true of bodies; it is equally true of the soul in man, for you see, when you look at man, all stages of intelligence, all stages of moral growth. At the present moment in this one country, in this one town, you could bring together thousands of men at different stages of evolution in intelligence and in moral capacity. How are they to be explained? I am not now thinking of the moral point, to which I shall come in a moment. How are they to be explained scientifically? Why these great differences? Or why even the small differences? If you say 'growth', [Page 12] you are on sound scientific ground, because everywhere in nature you see growth, differences of size, differences of development, and these are stages of the growth of the living creature. Why only in intelligence and morality is this principle of growth to be thrown on one side, as explaining differences of state, and the principle - thrown out everywhere by science - the theory of sudden creation, of a sudden appearance without cause, without antecedents, without anything to explain it, be held to explain (if the word may be used) the differences in the growth of intelligence and of morality in different human beings? Moreover, you find in human intelligence marks of its past, similar to the marks of the past in human bodies; intelligence in a new body swiftly runs over its past evolution, as all careful observers of the unfolding of intelligence in the child know well.

Depravity and Genius

But that brings me to the moral question. I said that Reincarnation is a necessity morally, if we are to keep our belief in the divine justice and the divine love face to face with the facts of life. Now let me take two cases, the reality of which will be very plain to everyone of you. I choose extreme cases in order to make the illustration very clear. Go down into one of the worst slums of London. Children are born into those slums of vilest parentage; looked at from the point of view of physical heredity, looked at from the moral and intellectual status of father and mother. Now you can tell one of the children of whom I am thinking, a child-criminal, when you see it in the cradle; you know, as [Page 13] you look at that baby form, that that child is doomed to a life of misery and crime. You can tell it by the shape of the head, you can tell by the whole type of the features that that child is a criminal child. And it is true. They are the despair of the educator, as I know who have had to deal with them, as all know who are brought into touch with them. They will not respond to moral appeal, but only to fear, most brutalising of instructors. There is no moral answer at all; there is no answer such as anyone of you would find from a child in your own nursery. The child comes into the world with the criminal taint upon him. How is he brought up? He is brought up in that miserable surrounding that some of you may know, where the teachers of the child are blows and curses, where the child is taught to steal as you teach your child to be honest, where he is flogged for not lying, where vice is rewarded, where any attempt at right-doing is punished. That is the atmosphere in which he is brought up. He is taught to look upon society as his enemy, the law as his tyrant, the policeman as his foe - to have his hand turned against society. What is the inevitable result? That he falls into the hands of the law. The law nowadays tries to be more merciful than it was twenty or thirty years ago, and tries reform. But reform is only possible where there is something within the brain and heart to respond to it. And I am taking the case - there are only too many of them - where this power

of response is not found. He goes on from one crime to another, from one imprisonment to another, gradually developing into that shame of our civilization - a habitual criminal. From one stage of vice to another he proceeds, none to help him, none to [Page 14] rescue him, none to uplift him, until at last, in some mad moment of despair, or drunkenness, or passion, he strikes an angry blow that takes a human life, and then human justice takes from him the life which has slain another, and he ends his miserable career in the quicklime of the prison-yard. His fault? He never had a chance. He came into the world a criminal; he has left it a criminal. That is his life's story.

Another child is born, and as you look on that child in the cradle you see the stamp of genius upon him from the birth hour; you see in the shape of head and type of feature the splendour of the human soul that resides within that baby form. He is born of noble parents, who surround him with all gentleness, and kindness, and tenderness. He is petted and caressed into nobility of living, as the other was beaten into crime. Every effort he makes is encouraged; he hears around him all words of cheer and inspiration where the other had naught but curses and derision. His splendid qualities grow and expand: he becomes greater and greater as year after year passes over his head. He is given the very best education the land can give; his countrymen salute his genius as the glory of their race. On, year after year, he goes, ever brighter and brighter, climbing higher and higher, until at last, amid a nation's sorrow, Westminster Abbey receives the remains of his mortal body, and his name shines, a star in history, which all men admire and revere. His merit? He was born into the world a genius.

Who sent those two souls on their life's journeys? If you say that the criminal came newly into the world God-created, and the genius came also newly into the [Page 15] world God-created, ah! then what becomes of the divine justice upon which the hopes of humanity must rest? For if the one could be made straight from his Creator's hands, why should the other be made? If the genius in intellect can be created, why then the idiot? If the saint can be created, why then the criminal? I know you may say: "These are not questions that we can answer." But it is these questions that drive hundreds of noble hearts into infidelity, into a scepticism which is really more reverent than belief. I speak of what I know. These are the things that made me an unbeliever for many, many years. It was human pain and, worse than human pain, human degradation - for human sin is worse than human misery - it was those facts that made me an unbeliever; for I preferred not to believe in God rather than to believe in a supreme injustice and the lack of love at the world's heart. And these questions are not the questions of the thoughtless, the indifferent and the profligate; they are the questions of ripe intelligences and of noble hearts. And religion must find an answer to these questions if she is to keep the noblest of the children of men within her pale. There is one reason why I ask for discussion of this question, and why it seems to me that it is the religious teachers of the people who are most concerned in such problems of human life.

One Life and Many Lives

Now look at this same thing still from the standpoint of justice and of love. Some religious people believe that this one human life decides the whole course of the future. Others do not accept that view, but think that on [Page 16] the other side of the grave progress, or happiness for all, is possible. Now if progress be admitted, then the whole principle of Reincarnation is granted. For, whether it be in this or in other worlds, if progress be admitted as the law of life, the growth of the spirit and the soul is granted. But suppose, with the great majority in Christendom, that men believe either that this life decides the whole fate of the soul hereafter, or believe that though all will pass into bliss, this life is but one, one single life, then how very difficult to reconcile the facts with that. For a human soul is born into the world in a baby's body and

dies in a few days. Another goes through a long life of sixty or seventy years. If the first idea be accepted, that this life decides the whole future, then it becomes very hard for the man who lives out his life to run the risk of eternal loss, from which the baby, by the mere fact of his early death, is secured. A terrible injustice that, when you come to think of it; because none would say that the child who dies a few hours old runs any risk of misery hereafter. Then why should he reap the fruit of bliss which may be forfeited by the older man in his struggles in the world in the course of his long life? This difference of the length of human life becomes inseparable from the question of justice, if you are going to admit only this one life. And if you say that, of what use is the life if the child, who has only had two or three hours of it, reaches the same everlastingness of bliss as the man who, through a life of struggle, has won virtue and triumphed over temptation? Does this life matter or not? That is the problem to be solved. If it does not matter, and the newborn babe dying finds eternal happiness, then it is very [Page 17] hard that so many should have to go through a life of pain and suffering and have nothing to show for it at the end. What avails that experience if this theory of life be true? And when the old man dies full of wisdom, full of the fruits of experience, full of tender sympathy and compassion, where are those fruits that he has won by life's experience to be utilised? In a life of ceaseless bliss? They are of no use in such a life. But this world has need of them. This world wants them. And if he can bring them back here to the service of humanity, after the growth on the other side has woven them into his very nature, ah! then that long life will indeed have its fruit in human service, and we can realise the value of the physical life as one of the factors in the universe. And if it be admitted that human life has its use on the other side, then what of the babe who is shut out from the one chance of valuable experience, and goes through everlastingness with a perpetual want, the want of that one human life which others have possessed?

“Be Ye Perfect”

And pass again to another question, which has always seemed to me even more important from the standpoint of the divine life - a life of degradation, the life of the drunkard, of the undeveloped human soul, who simply slouches through the world with his eyes down, with his mind unawake, with no power to appreciate the beauty of this wonderful world, and all the marvelous things that are to be found within its limits. Compare such a creature as that, whose life is nothing more than a few bodily sensations, a few passions, and an occasional crude thought - compare that, his only experience of [Page 18] human life, with the life of the cultured, thoughtful, well-developed intelligence, who takes joy in an beauty, in all that is gracious and fair in the world; and ask why one should have as his only experience of life that miserable crawling through the slime of earth, while the other, born, just as the first was born, with nothing behind him, is to soar into visions of beauty and delight, and find in his experience of the earth so much that makes it fun and beautiful and helpful? It is not fair, it is not right, if we all have but the one experience. How does Reincarnation deal with that? It tells us that out from the bosom of the eternal Father come an these germinal spirits that He sends into the world of matter for their growth and development; that all begin ignorant, helpless; that an gradually grow upwards, developing their inherent powers; that man is born into the world to become perfect. Has it ever struck you to ask what mean those wondrous words of the Christ: “Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect”? Think how magnificent that ideal. And how is it to be done? Why even we, who, according to this teaching of Reincarnation, have climbed so high from our earliest beginnings in this spirit life, can we say, with our weaknesses and our follies, with the limitations of our knowledge and of our power, that in this one life, even starting with all the advantages we have, we can become perfect as God in heaven is perfect? And yet nothing less than that is man's destiny; that, and nothing less than that, is the word of the Christ to His disciples. Surely He who is called “The Truth” would not have given a command which cannot be fulfilled. But we have this divine perfection within us, as within the seed is the [Page 19] power of the tree.

And we need but time for the fulfilling of the command, for the growth into the splendour of the Image in which we are made. So that from that standpoint also this seems to be necessary. You may say: "Yes, in other worlds"; but, then, why? What is the sense of sending people at every stage of growth into this one particular world? Where did the higher ones earn their powers? In other worlds before birth? If so, why come for one lesson into this world, and then go on into other worlds again? For all the varieties are here, lowest and highest, and every step between. And if you admit growth on the other side, then you must explain the differences of growth in this world - why one is dowered with so much more than another. Is it not more likely, more reasonable, more in accordance with all we know of nature, that this world is a school into which come souls, beginning in the infant class, going on stage after stage, which is life after life, until they reach the highest class in the school, and then going on in the other worlds, where other lessons are to be learned, a vast progress of unending evolution? But in this world certain classes have to be passed through which cannot be passed through in the limits of a single life. So that from that standpoint also Reincarnation seems to be a necessity, to say nothing of the glory and the inspiration that it gives to human life. For if I know, in this life of mine, that every effort I am making, every aspiration in which I lift my heart to God, every hope that I strive to realise, every service that imperfectly I try to do, is the seed of a harvest that shall have its reaping, is the building of a faculty that hereafter I may use in divine and human service; if I [Page 20] know that, however weak, however failing, however ignorant, everything that I learn is mine for everlasting, and that I shall come back again and again until all life's lessons are learned; ah! then I shall not break my heart because I am still ignorant, because I am still foolish, because I am still sinful; I shall know that although I am weak today I shall be strong tomorrow, and that there is not one height reached by the highest saint which shall not also be mine in time to come, who am climbing the same ladder that he has climbed so long. There is the hope of evolution brought into the life of the individual; there the glory that Reincarnation sheds on human life; for when I now see the downcast, the miserable, the lowest of human kind, I can feel: You are only my younger brother, a baby in the school of life, where I have been for a longer period than you; the same God lives in you that lives in me; and I have for him the tenderness, the compassion, that the elder brother feels for the baby struggling on the floor. It is with no hatred, no contempt, no derision, that I regard him, but with the recognition of a common life which will be unfolded in him tomorrow, as I in years gone by struggled also where he struggles now. There is the secret for the uplifting of the degraded, which it seems to me that nothing else can give; for if they do not catch this idea, there is a sense of injustice, of unfairness, of being flung into a world into which they did not ask to come, into misery and into degradation. But if it is only the beginning of the experience of the divine life within them, the learning of the alphabet of life, then there is no feeling of despair nor of anger, but perfect justice as well as perfect love is at the heart of the world. For there [Page 21] is only one explanation, it seems to me, of love side by side with human misery, and it is that this education is *necessary* for the unfolding of the divine powers in man. If it is not necessary, it is not born of love. And if it be necessary, then it cannot be escaped by any; all must go through it or else remain forever imperfect, because they have not had that experience in human life.

Reincarnation in Christian Teaching

Pass from the view of the necessity, and let us ask whether this, which seems so necessary, is a doctrine which does not belong to Christendom as much as to any other people, to any other faith. Now every student knows that this doctrine was common amongst the Jews. You may read in their books that it was the common faith of the time. You can see it in the questions that in the Gospels are sometimes put to the disciples and to the Christ. Remember the words spoken, by the Christ Himself to the disciples when they questioned Him of John the Baptist: "If you can receive it, this is Elijah." Remember His answer when they brought to Him the challenge of the people outside "How say the scribes the Elijah must first

come?" His answer was: "He has come already; and they understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist." This is simply one case showing the familiarity of the idea among the Jews, just as you may find it in the writings I refer to, that they said that all imperfect souls had to return to the earth. Then take, still within the limits of the Gospels themselves, that remarkable statement about the man born blind. "Which did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Ante-natal sin. [Page 22] Now the answer that was given: "Neither did this man sin nor his parents that he was born blind", and another reason being given, is very significant. For if the knowledge of the Christ had been the same as the ordinary belief nowadays, that ante-natal sin is impossible, the only answer would have been: "Why ask me the foolish question whether a man is born blind because of his sin? How could he sin before birth?" A different reason was given for the blindness, but not a natural rebuke of the folly which ascribed a defect at birth to the sin of the individual who was born. Come away from those authoritative records of Christianity to the writings and teachings of those who lived in the early centuries after Christ, and see how often in the writings of the great Fathers of the Church this doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul is taught. One of the plainest teachings of it is found in the writings of that noblest of the Fathers, Origen. He lays it down distinctly that each person born into the world receives a body according to his deserts and his former actions; a very, very clear statement. And Origen, remember, was one of the grandest minds of which the early Church could boast, one of the noblest and purest characters, and he taught that doctrine definitely and clearly. Take other great bishops, and you will find them speaking along the same line; for five-and-a-half centuries after the death of Christ that was a current doctrine of the Christian Church. And when, in the middle of the sixth century, it was condemned by a council, it was not condemned as a general doctrine, but only in the form in which Origen had put it, so that you have absolutely no Christian authority against it. The Roman Catholic may object to [Page 23] the form into which Origen threw it, and say that that form was condemned by a council of the Church, but he cannot say that the whole doctrine of Reincarnation was condemned, for there is no such condemnation of the doctrine known in Christian history. On the other hand, you have it taught over and over again by the men who received the original deposit of the Faith. And it never quite disappeared. Granted that it disappeared from the authorised, the official, teachings of the Church, it survived in many of the so-called heretical bodies. The Albigenses taught it. Many other bodies, through the Middle Ages and onwards, claimed a truer tradition than that of the Roman Church, and carried this doctrine on as part of the primitive tradition. And when you come down through the various Christian writers, how often does this doctrine come to the front, especially amongst the philosophers and poets - the poets because of their intuitions; the philosophers because, as Hume said, the only doctrine of the immortality of the soul at which the philosopher can look is a doctrine that affirms its pre-existence. And that necessarily; for once the philosopher allows it is necessary for the existence of a soul that it should be provided with a human body at birth, there follows the probability that when death strikes away that body, the soul will no longer be able to exist. And one of the roots of modern scepticism lies in this most illogical doctrine - that a soul which is to last for ever after death did not exist for ever before birth. Then later, you find it appearing in a very interesting manner in the Church of England. I came across, some three years ago, a pamphlet written by a clergymen of the Church of [Page 24] England of the seventeenth century, in which he laid it down as an essential doctrine of Christianity that the soul existed before birth, and he quoted in that pamphlet a number of other pamphlets, - written about the same time, putting forward the same teaching, giving quotations from them, as well as tracing it back through the early Fathers and through the great Churches of Christendom. And he, though putting forward that view, apparently had no condemnation from his Bishop, nor from anyone who objected to his view as being really Christian teachings. Take the German philosophers; you find it among them necessarily. Take Goethe, one of those great intuitional minds who see the truth that lies behind the appearance of things. Or have you forgotten that most Christian of poets, Wordsworth, and his declaration, long before the Theosophical Society came to disturb people's minds in this country?

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar.
Not in entire forgetfulness
And not in utter nakedness
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God who is our home.

There you have his view: "Hath had elsewhere its setting." Poet after poet teaches the same, poet after poet who by the light of genius sees through the veil of matter and realises by the poetic intuition the truth about the human soul. Now surely if we find this [Page 25] doctrine taught by the early Fathers, strongly hinted at, if nothing more - I should say asserted - by the Christ, existing in Christendom through its whole history, even though thrown aside by the official Church, reappearing again in England in the very bosom of the English Church in the seventeenth century, reaffirmed by English poets and German philosophers, is it not better to look at it as a part of the great heritage of Christendom rather than as an alien doctrine coming from other religions? It is perfectly true, of course, that every great religion of the past has taught this doctrine. It is true you find it in the Book of the Dead; that you find it in Chaldea; that you find it in the ancient teachings in China; that you find in all the Indian scriptures, and in the Buddhist scriptures; that you find it in Greece and in Rome. But it is not because of that that I am putting it forward here, in an audience gathered in a Christian land. I say to you, it is yours as much as theirs, and if you accept the doctrine of Reincarnation, do not accept it as an alien doctrine that comes from some other faith; take it as part of the great Christian revelation; take it as part of the great Christian teaching. Admit that it fell out of sight for a while under the blackness of ignorance that swept over Europe. Admit that it dropped below the surface, in times when men were not thinking of these great problems that face you today. But as you value the work that this Faith is to do in the West, the one religion which is possible in the West, for to the West it was given, do not, as you prize that Faith, put aside as alien, as heretical, a doctrine which is coming back into the Christian Church by some of its best thinkers, by some [Page 26] of its best teachers. Clergyman after clergyman in the Church of England has accepted it, and is beginning to teach it. Writer after writer is seeing in this the safety of Christianity from the shafts of scepticism arising from the conscience as well as from intellect. And I put it to you today for your consideration - not for your *acceptance*, because the belief that can be gained by listening to one brief lecture would be worthless as an intellectual conviction and useless in its bearing upon life - I ask you to think, to consider, to clear away the prejudice which looks on it as unchristian and as alien, to recognise that, if it be true, then inevitably it is part of the truth of Christianity, and that history will justify you in that statement, showing it to be part of the Faith once delivered to the Saints.

Reincarnation, Doctrine of Hope and Strength

Friends, if I speak to you on this tonight, it is because I know what the doctrine has of hope, of strength, of encouragement, in the face of the difficulties in the world. I know what it means for the heart-broken, who fall in despair before the puzzles of life, to have the light thrown upon it which makes life intelligible; for the misery of intellectual unrest is one of the worst miseries that we face in the modern world. To be able to understand what we are, to be able to understand whence we have come and whither we are going, to see all through the world one law as there is one life, to realise that there is no partiality, no injustice, no unfair treatment of one human soul, no unfair treatment of one human life; that all are growing; that all are evolving; that our elders are only elders and not [Page 27] different in kind from

ourselves; that the youngest shall be as the oldest; that man has within him the developing spirit of his Father and shall therefore be perfect as God is perfect; that is the hope - nay, not the hope, the certainty - that this doctrine gives to the human soul. And when we have grasped it we can face the miseries, the sorrows, the despairs of life, and know that in the end, looking back upon this sorrowful world, we shall say: "It was from God, it came from God, and to God it returns."