

Memories of Past Lives by Annie Besant

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THERE is probably no man now living in the scientific world who does not regard the theory of physical evolution as beyond dispute; there may be many varieties of opinion with regard to details and methods of evolution, but on the fundamental fact, that forms have proceeded from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous, there is complete harmony of educated opinion. Moreover, the evolutionary idea dominates all departments of thought, and is applied to society as much as to the individual. In history it is used as the master-key wherewith to unlock the problems of the growth of nations, and, in sociology, of the progress of civilisations. The rise, the decay, the fall of races are illuminated by this all-pervading idea, and it is difficult now for anyone to throw himself in thought back into the time when law gave way to miracle, and order was replaced by fortuitous irregularity.

In working up to the hypothesis of evolution small indications were searched for, as much as long successions were observed. Things apparently trifling were placed on record, and phenomena apparently trivial were noted with meticulous care. Above all, any incident which seemed to conflict with a recognised law of nature was minutely observed and repeatedly scrutinised, since it might be the indication of some force as yet undiscovered, of some hidden law working along lines as yet unknown. Every fact was observed and recorded, challenged and discussed, and each contributed something to the great pyramid of reasons which pointed to evolution as the best hypothesis for explanation of the phenomena of nature. Your dog turned round and round on the hearthrug before composing himself to sleep; was he not governed by an unconscious memory from the times when his ancestors thus prepared a comfortable depression in the jungle for their repose? Your cat pressed her fore-paws on the ground, pushing outwards repeatedly; was it not an unconscious memory which dominated her from the need of her larger predecessors encircled by the tall grass of the forest hiding-place, to flatten out a sufficient bed for luxurious rest? Slight, in truth, are such indications, and yet withal they make up, in their accumulation, a massive argument in favour of unconscious memories of past lives being wrought into the very fabric of the animal body.

But there is one line of questions, provocative of thought, that has not yet been pursued with industry equal to that bestowed on the investigation of bodily movements and habits. The questions remain unanswered, either by biologist or psychologist. Evolution has traced for us the gradual building of our now complex and highly organised bodies; it has shown them to us evolving, in the long course of millions of years, from a fragment of protoplasm, from a simple cell, through form after form, until their present condition has been reached, thus demonstrating a continuity of forms, advancing into greater perfection as organisms! But so far science has not traced a correlative continuity of consciousness - a golden thread on which the innumerable separated bodies might be threaded — a consciousness inhabiting and functioning through this succession of forms. It has not been able to prove — nay, it has

not even recognised' the likelihood of the possibility - that consciousness passes on unbroken from body to body, carrying with it an ever-increasing content, the accumulated harvest of innumerable experiences, transmuted into capacities, into powers.

Scientists have directed our attention to the splendid inheritance that has come down to us from the past. They have shown us how generation after generation has contributed something to the sum of human knowledge, and how cycle after cycle manifests a growth of average humanity in intellectual power, in extent of consciousness, in fineness and beauty of emotion. But if we ask them to explain the conditions of this growth, to describe the passing on of the content of one consciousness to another ; if we ask for some method, comparable to the methods observed in the physical world, whereby we may trace this transmission of the treasures of consciousness, may explain how it made its habits and accumulates experiences which it transforms into mental and moral capacities, then science returns us no answers, but fails to show us the means and the methods of the evolution of consciousness in man.

When, in dealing with animals, science points to the so-called inherited instincts, it does not offer any explanation of the means whereby an intangible self-preserving instinct can be transmitted by an animal to its offspring. That there is some purposive and effective action, apart from any possibility of physical experience having been gained as its instigator, performed by the young of an animal, we can observe over and over again. Of the fact there can be no question. The young of animals, immediately after coming into the world, are seen to play some trick whereby they save themselves from some threatening danger. But science does not tell us how this intangible consciousness of danger can be transmitted by the parent, who has not experienced it, to the offspring who has never known it. If the life-preserving instinct is transmissible through the physical body of the parent, how did the parent come to possess it ? If the chicken just out of the shell runs for protection to the mother-hen when the shadow of a hawk hovering above it is seen, science tells us that it is prompted by the life-preserving instinct, the result of the experience of the danger of the hovering hawk, so many having thus perished that the seeking of protection from the bird of prey is transmitted as an instinct. But the difficulty of accepting this explanation lies in the fact that the experience necessary to evolve the instinct can only have been gained by the cocks and hens who were killed by birds of prey; these had no chance thereafter of producing eggs, and so could not transmit their valuable experience, while all the chicks come from eggs belonging to parents who had not experienced the danger, and hence could not have developed the instinct. (I am assuming that the result of such experiences is transmissible as an instinct an assumption which is quite unwarranted.) The only way of making the experiences of slaughtered animals reappear later as a life-preserving instinct is for the record of the experience to be preserved by some means, and transmitted as an instinct to those belonging to the same type. The Theosophist points to the existence of matter finer than the physical, which vibrates in correspondence with any mood of consciousness — in this case the shock of sudden death. That vibration tends to repeat itself, and that tendency remains, and is reinforced by similar experiences of other slaughtered poultry; this, recorded in the "group-soul", passes as a tendency into all the poultry race, and shows itself in the newly hatched chick the moment the danger threatens the new form. Instinct is " unconscious memory", "inherited experience", but, each one who possesses it takes it from a continuing consciousness, from which his separate lower consciousness is derived. How else can it have originated, how else have been transmitted ?

Can it be said that animals learn of danger by the observation of others who perish ? That would not explain the unconscious memory in our newly-hatched chicken, who can have observed nothing. But apart from this, it is clear that animals are curiously slow either to observe, or to learn the application to

themselves of the actions, the perils, of others. How often do we see a motherly hen running along the side of a pond, clucking desperately to her brood of ducklings that have plunged into the water to the manifest discomposure of the non-swimming hen; but she does the same thing brood after brood; she never learns that the ducklings are able to swim and that there is no danger to be apprehended when they plunge into the water. She calls them as vigorously after ten years of experience as she did after the first brood, so that it does not look as if instinct originated in careful observation of petty movements by animals who then transmit the results of their observations to their offspring.

The whole question of the continuity of consciousness — a continuity necessary to explain the evolution of instinct as much as that of intelligence — is insoluble by science, but has been readily solved by religion. All the great religions of the past and present have realised the eternity of the Spirit: " God," it is written in a Hebrew Scripture, " created man to be the image of His own Eternity", and in that eternal nature of the Spirit lies the explanation alike of instinct and of intelligence. In the intellect-aspect of this Spirit all the harvests of the experiences of successive lives are stored, and from the treasures of the spiritual memory are sent down assimilated experiences, appearing as instincts, as unconscious memories of past lives, in the new-born form. Every improved form receives as instincts and as innate ideas this wealth of reminiscence: every intellectual and moral faculty is a store of reminiscences, and education is but the awakening of memory.

Thus religion illuminate that which science leaves obscure, and gives us a rational, an intelligible theory of the growth of instinct and of intellect; it shows us a continuity of a consciousness ever increasing in content, embodying itself in forms ever increasing in complexity. The view . that man consists not only of bodies in which the working of the law of heredity may be traced, but also is a living consciousness, growing, unfolding, evolving, by the assimilation of the food of experience — this theory is an inevitable pendant to the theory of physical evolution, for the latter remains unintelligible without the former. Special creation, rejected from the physical world, cannot much longer be accepted in the psychical, nor be held to explain satisfactorily the differences between the genius and the dolt, between the congenital saint and the congenital criminal. Unvarying law, the knowledge of which is making man the master of the physical world, must be recognised as prevailing equally in the psychical. The improving bodies must be recognised as instruments to be used for the gaining of further experiences by the ever-unfolding consciousness.

A definite opinion on this, matter can only be gained by personal study, investigation and research. Knowledge of the great truths of nature is not a gift, but a prize to be won by merit. Every human being must form his own opinions by his own strenuous efforts to discover truth, by the exercise of his own reasoning faculties, by the experiences of his own consciousness. Writers who garb their readers in second-hand opinions, as a dealer in second-hand clothes dresses his customers, will never turn out a decently costumed set of thinkers; they will be clad in misfits. But there are lines of research to be followed, experiences to be gone through and analysed, by those who would arrive at truth — research which has led others to knowledge, experiences which have been found fruitful in results. To these a writer may point his readers, and they, if they will, may follow along such lines for themselves.

I think we may find in our consciousness — in our intelligence and our emotional nature — distinct traces from the past which point to the evolution of our consciousness, as the recurrent laryngeal nerve and the embryonic reptilian heart point to the ancestral line of evolution of our body. I think there are memories forming part of our consciousness which justify belief in previous existences, and point the way to a more

intelligent understanding of human life. I think that, by careful observation, we may find memories in ourselves, not only of past events, but of the past training and discipline which have made us what we are, memories which are embedded in, which form even the very fabric of our consciousness, which emerge more clearly as we study them, and become more intelligible the more carefully we observe and analyse them.

But for a moment we must pause on the theory of Reincarnation, on the broad principle of consciousness in evolution.

This theory posits a Spirit, a seed or germ of consciousness planted in matter, and ultimately, after long ages of growth, becoming ready to enter an undeveloped human body, connected by its material with three worlds, the worlds of mind, of desire and of action, otherwise called the heavenly, intermediate and physical worlds. In the physical world this growing Spirit gathers experiences of varied kinds, feels pleasures and pains, joys and sorrows, health and illness, successes and disappointments, the many changing conditions which make up our mortal life. He carries these on with him through death, and in the intermediate world experiences the inevitable results of desires which clashed with the laws of nature, reaping in suffering the harvest of his blundering ignorance. Thus he shapes the beginnings of a conscience, the recognition of an external law of conduct. Passing on to the heavenly world, he builds his mental experiences into mental faculties until, all the food of experience being assimilated, he begins again to hunger, and so returns to earth with the elements of a character, still enveloped in many-folded ignorance, but starting with a little more content of consciousness than he had in his previous life. Such is his cycle of growth, the passing through the three worlds over and over again, ever accumulating experience, ever transmuting it into power. That cycle is repeated over and over again, until the savage grows into the average man of our time, from the average man, to the man of talent, of noble character; then onwards to the genius, to the saint, to the hero; onwards still to the Perfect Man; onwards yet, through ever-increasing, unimaginable splendours, vanishing into blinding radiance which veils his further progress from our dazzled eyes. Thus every man builds himself, shapes his own destiny, is verily self-created ; no one of us is what we are save as we have wrought out our own being ; our future is not imposed on us by an arbitrary will or a soulless necessity, but is ours to fashion, to create. There is nothing we cannot accomplish if we are given time, and time is endless. We, the living consciousnesses, we pass from body to body, and each new body takes the impress made upon it by its tenant, the ever-young and immortal Spirit.

I have spoken of the three stages of the life-cycle, each belonging to a definite world; it must be noted that in the physical stage of the life-period, we are living in all the three worlds, for we are thinking and desiring as well as acting, and our body, the vehicle of consciousness, is triple. We lose the physical part of the body at death, and the desire-part at a later period, and live in the mental body — in which all good thoughts and pure emotions have their habitat — while in the heavenly world. When the heaven life is over, the mental body also disintegrates, and there remains but the spiritual body whereof S. Paul speaks, "eternal in the heavens".. Into that, the lasting clothing of the Spirit, are woven all the pure results of experiences gathered in the lower worlds. In the building of the new triple body for the new life-cycle in the lower worlds, a new apparatus comes into existence for the use of the spiritual consciousness and the spiritual body; and the latter, retaining within itself the conscious memory of past events, imprints on the lower — its instruments for gathering fresh experience — only the results of the past, as faculties, mental and emotional, with many traces of past experiences which have been outgrown and remain normally in the sub-consciousness. The conscious memory of past events being present only in the spiritual body, the consciousness must be functioning in that in order to "remember"; and such functioning is possible through a system of training and discipline — yoga — which may be studied by

anyone who has perseverance, and a certain amount of innate ability for this special kind of work.

But in addition to this there are many unconscious memories, manifesting in faculty, in emotion, in power, traces of the past imprinted on the present, and discoverable by observations on our-selves and others. Hence, memories of the past may be clear and definite, obtained by the practice of yoga, or unconscious but shown by results, and closely allied in many ways to what are called instincts, by which you do certain things, think along certain lines, exercise certain functions, and possess certain knowledge without having consciously acquired it. Among the Greeks, and the ancients generally, much stress was laid upon this form of memory. Plato's phrase: "All knowledge is reminiscence", will be remembered. In the researches of psychology today, many surges of feeling, driving a man to hasty, unpremeditated action, are ascribed to the sub-consciousness, i.e., the consciousness which shows itself in involuntary thoughts, feelings and actions; these come to us out of the far-off past, without our volition or our conscious creation. How do these come, unless there be continuity of consciousness? Any who study modern psychology will see how great a part unconscious memory plays in our lives, how it is said to be stronger than our reason, how it conjures up pathetic scenes uncalled-for, how at night it throws us into causeless panics. These, we are told, are due to memories of dangers surrounding savages, who must ever be on the alert to guard themselves against sudden attacks, whether of man or beast, breaking into the hours of repose, killing the men and women as they slept. These past experiences are said to have left records in consciousness, records which lie below the threshold of waking consciousness but are ever present within us. And some say that this is the most important part of our consciousness, though out of sight for the ordinary mind.

We cannot deny to these the name of memory, these experiences out of the past that assert themselves in the present. Study these traces, and see whether they are explicable save by the continuity of consciousness, making the Self of the savage the Self which is yourself today, seeing the persistence of the Individual throughout human evolution, growing, expanding, developing, but a fragment of the eternal "I am".

May we not regard instincts as memories buried in the sub-conscious, influencing our actions, determining our "choices"? Is not the moral instinct Conscience, a mass of interwoven memories of past experiences, speaking with the authoritative utterance of all instincts, and deciding on "right" and "wrong" without argument, without reasoning? It speaks clearly when we are walking on well-trodden ways, warning us of dangers experienced in the past, and we shun them at sight as the chicken shuns the down rush of the hawk hovering above it. But as that same chicken has no instinct as regards the rush of a motor-car, so have we no "voice of Conscience" to warn us of the pitfalls in ways hitherto unknown.

Again, innate faculty — what is it but an unconscious memory of subjects mastered in the past? A subject, literary, scientific, artistic, what we will, is taken up by one person and mastered with extraordinary ease; he seizes at sight the main points in the study, taking it up as new, apparently, but so rapidly grasping it that it is obviously an old subject remembered, not a new subject mastered. A second person, by no means intellectually inferior, is observed to be quite dense along this particular line of study; reads a book on it, but keeps little trace of it in his mind; addresses himself to its understanding, but it evades his grasp. He stumbles along feebly, where the other ran unshackled and at ease. To what can such difference be due save to the unconscious memory which science is beginning to recognise? One student has known the subject and is merely remembering it; the other takes it up for the first time, and finds it difficult and obscure.

As an example, we may take H. P. Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*, a difficult book; it is said to be obscure, diffuse, the style to be often unattractive, the matter very difficult to follow. I have known some of my friends take up these volumes and study them year after year, men and women, intelligent, quite alert in mind ; yet after years of study they cannot grasp its main points nor very often follow its obscure arguments. Let me put against that my own experience of that book. I had not read anything of the subject with which it deals from the standpoint of the Theosophist; it was the first Theosophical book I had read — except *The Occult World* — and it came into my hands, apparently by chance, given to me to review by Mr. Stead, then Editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. When I began to read that book, I read it right through day after day, and the whole of it was so familiar as I read, that I sat down and wrote a review which anyone may read in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of, I think, February or March, 1889; and anyone who reads that review will find that I had taken the heart out of the book and presented it intelligently to the ordinary newspaper reader. That certainly was not from any special genius on my part. If I had been given a book of some other kind, I might have stumbled over it and made nothing of it at all; but as I read *I remembered*, and the whole philosophy fell into order before me, although to this brain and in this body it came before me for the first time. I allege that in cases like that we have a proof of the accuracy of Plato's idea, mentioned already, that all knowledge is reminiscence; where we have known before we do really remember, and so master without any effort that which another, without a similar experience, may find abstruse, difficult and obscure. We may apply this to any new subject that anyone may take up. If he has learned it before, he will remember and master the subject easily; if not, taken as a new thing, he must learn step by step, and gradually understand the relation between the phenomena studied, working it out laboriously because unknown.

Let us now apply that same idea of memory to genius, say to musical genius. How can we explain, except by previous knowledge existing as memory, the mystery of a little child who sits down to a piano and with little teaching, or with none, outstrips many who have given years of labour to the art ? It is not only that we marvel over children like the child Mozart in the past, but in our own day we have seen a number of these infant prodigies, the limit of whose power was the smallness of the child hand, and even with that deficient instrument, they showed a mastery of the instrument that left behind those who had studied music for many years. Do we not see in such child genius the mark of past knowledge, of past power of memory, rather than of learning ?

Or let us take the Cherniowsky family; three brothers in it have been before the public for eleven years, drawing huge audiences by their wonderful music; the youngest is now only eighteen, the oldest twenty-two; they have not been taught, but have taught themselves, i.e., they have unconsciously remembered. A little sister of theirs, now five years old, already plays the violin, and since she was a baby the violin has been the one instrument she has loved. Why, if she has no memory ?

This precocious genius, this faculty which accomplishes with ease that which others perform with toil and difficulty, is found not only in music. We recall the boy Giotto, on the hill-side with his sheep. Nor is it found only in art. Let us take that marvelous genius, Dr. Brown, who as a little child, when he was only five or six years old, had been able to master dead languages; who, as he grew older, picked up science after science, as other children pick up toys with which they are amused; who carried an ever-increasing burden of knowledge "lightly as a flower" and became one of the most splendid of scientific geniuses, dealing with problems that baffled others but that he easily solved, and standing as a monument of vast constructive scientific power. We find him, according to his father's account, learning at the age when

others are but babies, and using those extraordinary powers — memories of the past persisting into the present.

But let us take an altogether other class of memory. We meet someone for the first time. We feel strongly attracted. There is no outward reason for the attraction ; we know nothing of his character, of his past; nothing of his ability, of his worth; but an overpowering attraction draws us together, and a life-long, intimate friendship dates from the first meeting, an instantaneous attraction, a recognition of one supremely worthy to be a friend. Many of us have had experiences of that kind. Whence come they ? We may have had an equally strong repulsion, perhaps quite as much outside reason, quite as much apart from experience. One attracts and we love; the other repels and we shrink away. We have no reason for either love or repulsion. Whence comes it save as a memory from the past?

A moment's thought shows how such cases are explained from the standpoint of reincarnation. We have met before, have known each other before. In the case of a sudden attraction, it is the soul recognising an ancient friend and comrade across the veil of flesh, the veil of the new body. In the case of repulsion it is the same soul recognising an ancient enemy, one who wronged us bitterly, or whom we have wronged; the soul warns us of danger, the soul warns us of peril, in contact with that ancient foe, and tries to drag away the unconscious body that does not recognise its enemy, the one whom the soul knows from past experience to be a peril in the present. "Instinct" we say; yes, for, as we have seen, instinct is unconscious, or sub-conscious, memory. A wise man obeys such attractions and such repulsions; he does not laugh at them as irrational, nor cast them aside as superstition, as folly; he realises that it is far better for him to keep out of the way of the man concerning whom the inner warning has arisen, to obey the repulsion that drives him away from him. For that repulsion indicates the memory of an ancient wrong, and he is safer out of touch of that man against whom he feels the repulsion.

Do we want to eradicate the past wrong, to get rid of the danger? We can do it better apart than together. If to that man against whom we feel repulsion we send day after day thoughts of pardon and of goodwill; if deliberately, consciously, we send messages of love to the ancient enemy, wishing him good, wishing him well, in spite of the repulsion that we feel, slowly and gradually the pardon and love of the present will erase the memory of the ancient wrong, and later we may meet with indifference, or even may become friends, when, by using the power of thought, we have wiped out the ancient injury and have made instead a bond of brotherhood by thoughts and wishes of good. That is one of the ways we may utilise the unconscious memories coming to us out of our past.

Again, sometimes we find in such a first meeting with an ancient friend that we talk more intimately to the stranger of an hour ago than we talk to brothers or sisters with whom we have been brought up during all our life.

There must be some explanation of those strange psychological happenings, traces — I put it no more strongly than that — worthy of our observation, worthy of our study; for it is these small things in psychology that point the way to discoveries of the problems that confront us in that science. Many of us might add to psychological science by carefully observing, carefully recording, carefully working out, all these instinctive impulses, trying to trace out afterwards the results in the present and in the future, and thus gather together a mass of evidence which may help us to a great extent to understand ourselves.

What is the real explanation of the law of memory of events, and this persistence in consciousness of attraction or repulsion? The explanation lies in that fact of our constitution; the bodies are new, and can only act in conformity with past experiences by receiving an impulse from the indwelling soul in which the memory of those experiences resides. Just as our children are born with a certain developed conscience, which is a moral instinct, just as the child of the savage has not the conscience that our children possess previous to experience in this life, previous to moral instruction, so is it with these instincts, or memories, of the intelligence, which, like the innate moral instinct that we call conscience, are based on experience in the past, and hence are different in people at different stages of evolution.

A conscience with a long past behind it is far more evolved, far more ready to understand moral differences, than the conscience of a less well evolved neighbour. Conscience is not a miraculous implanting; it is the slow growth of moral instinct, growing out of experience, built by experience, and becoming more and more highly evolved as more and more experience lies behind. And on this all true theories of education must be based. We often deal with children as though they came into our hands to be moulded at our will. Our lack of realisation of the fact that the intelligence of the child, the consciousness of the child, is bringing with it the results of past knowledge, both along intellectual and moral lines, is a fatal blunder in the education of today. It is not a "drawing-out", as the name implies — for the name was given by the wiser people of the past. Education in these modern days is entirely a pouring in, and therefore it largely fails in its object. When our teachers realise the fact of reincarnation, when they see in a child an entity with memories to be aroused and faculties to be drawn out, then we shall deal with the child as an individual, and not as though children were turned out by the dozen or the score from some mould into which they are supposed to have been poured. Then our education will begin to be individual; we shall study the child before we begin to educate it, instead of educating it without any study of its faculties. It is only by the recognition of its past that we shall realise that we have in the child a soul full of experience, traveling along his own line. Only when we recognise that, and instead of the class of thirty or forty, we have the small class, where each child is treated individually, only then will education become a reality among us, and the men of the future will grow out of the wiser education thus given to the children. For the subject is profoundly practical when you realise the potencies of daily life. .

Much light may be thrown on the question of unconscious memories by the study of memory under trance conditions. All people remember something of their childhood, but all do not know that in the mesmeric trance a person remembers much more than he does in the waking consciousness. Memories of events have sunk below the threshold of the waking consciousness, but they have not been annihilated, when the consciousness of the external world is stilled, that of the internal world can assert itself, as low music, drowned in the rattle of the streets, becomes audible in the stillness of the night. In the depths of our consciousness, the music of the past is ever playing, and when surface agitations are smoothed away, the notes reach our ears. And so in trance we know that which escapes us when awake. But with regard to childhood there is a thread of memory sufficient to enable anyone to feel that he, the mature individual, is identical with the playing and studying child. That thread is lacking where past lives are concerned, and the feeling of identity, which depends on memory, does not arise.

Colonel de Rochas once told me how he had succeeded, with mesmerised patients, in recovering the memory of babyhood, and gave me a number of instances in which he had thus pursued memory back into infantile recesses. Nor is the memory only that of events, for a mesmerised woman, thrown back in

memory into childhood and asked to write, wrote her old childish hand. Interested in this investigation, I asked Colonel de Rochas to see if he could pass backward through birth to the previous death, and evoke memory across the gulf which separates life-period from life-period. Some months later he sent me a number of experiments, since published by him, which had convinced him of the fact of reincarnation. It seems possible that, along this line, proofs may be gradually accumulated, but much testing and repetition will be needed, and a careful shutting out of all external influences.

There are also cases in which, without the inducing of trance, memories of the past survive, and these are found in the cases of children more often than among grown-up people. The brain of the child, being more plastic and impressionable, is more easily affected by the soul than when it is mature. Let us take a few cases of such memories. There was a little lad who showed considerable talent in drawing and modeling, though otherwise a somewhat dull child. He was taken one day by his mother to the Crystal Palace, and saw the statues ranged along the central avenue. He looked at them very earnestly for a while, and then said to his mother: "O mother, those are the things I used to make". She laughed at him, of course, as foolish people laugh at children, not realising that the unusual should be studied and not ridiculed. I do not mean when you were my mother," he answered. "It was when I had another mother". This was but a sudden flash of memory, awakened by an outside stimulus; but still it has its value.

We may take an instance from India, where memories of the past are more frequently found than in the West, probably because there is not the same predisposition to regard them as ridiculous. This, like the preceding, came to me from the elder person concerned. He had a little nephew, some five or six years of age, and one day, sitting on his uncle's knee, the child began to prattle about his mother in the village, and told of a little stream at the end of his garden, and how, one day when he had been playing and made himself dirty, his mother sent him to wash in the stream; he went in too far and — woke up elsewhere. The uncle's curiosity was aroused, and he coaxed details about the village from the child, and thought he recognised it. One day he drove with the child through this village, not telling the child anything, but the little boy jumped up excitedly and cried out: "Oh I this is my village where I lived, and where I tumbled into the water, and where my mother lived." He told his uncle where to drive to his cottage, and running in, cried to a woman therein as his mother. The woman naturally knew nothing of the child, but asked by the uncle if she had lost a child, she told him that her little son had been drowned in the stream running by the garden. There we have a more definite memory, verified by the elder people concerned.

Not long ago, one of the members of the Theosophical Society, Minister in an Indian State, and a mature man of ability and good judgment, set to work to collect and investigate cases of memory of the past in persons living in his own neighbourhood. He found and recorded several cases, investigating each carefully, and satisfying himself that the memories were real memories which could be tested. One of them I will mention here because it was curious, and came into a court of law. It was a case of a man who had been killed by a neighbour who was still living in the village. The accusation of murder was brought by the murdered man in his new body! It actually went to trial, and so the thing was investigated, and finally the murder was proved to the satisfaction of the judge. But judgment was reserved on the ground that the man could not bring an action for being murdered, as he was still alive, and the case depended upon his testimony alone; so the whole thing fell through.

Memory of the past can be evolved by gradually sinking down into the depths of consciousness by a process deliberately and patiently practised. Our mind working in our physical brain is constantly active,

and is engaged in observing the world outside the body. On these observations it reflects and reasons, and the whole of our normal mental processes have to do with these daily activities which fill our lives. It is not in this busy region that the memories of the past can be evoked. Anyone who would unveil these must learn so to control his mind as to be able, at will, to withdraw it from outer objects and from thoughts connected with them, so as to be able to hold the mind still and empty. It must be wide awake, alert, and yet utterly quiet and unoccupied. Then, slowly and gradually, within that mind, emptied of present thought, there arises a fuller, stronger, deeper consciousness, more vivid, more intensely alive, and this is realised as oneself; the mind is seen to be only an instrument of this, a tool to be used at will. When the mind is thus mastered, when it is made subservient to the higher consciousness, then we feel that this new consciousness is the permanent one, in which our past remains as a memory of events and not only as results in faculty. We find that being quiet in the presence of that higher consciousness, asking it of its past, it will gradually unroll before us the panorama through which it has itself passed, life after life, and thus enable us to review that past and to realise it as our own. We find ourselves to be that consciousness; we rise out of the passing into the permanent, and look back upon our own long past, as before upon the memory of our childhood. We do not keep its memories always in mind, but can recover them at will. It is not an ever-present memory, but on turning our attention to it we can always find it, and we find in that past others who are the friends of today. If we find, as people invariably do find, that the people most closely knit to us today have been most closely knit to us in the far-off past also, then one after another we may gather our memories, we may compare them side by side, we may test them by each other's rememberings, as men of mature age remember their school-fellows and the incidents of their boyhood and compare those memories which are common to them both; in that way we gradually learn how we built up our character, how we have moulded the later lives through which we have passed. That is within the reach of any one of us who will take the trouble. I grant that it takes years, but it can be done. There is, so far as I know, no other way to the definite recovery of memory. A person may have flashes of memory from time to time, like the boy with the statues; he may get significant dreams occasionally, in which some trace of the past may emerge; but to have it under control, to be able to turn our attention to the past at will and to remember — that needs effort, long, prolonged, patient, persevering; but inasmuch as every one is a living soul, that memory is within every one, and it is within our power to awaken it.

No one need fear that the above practice will weaken the mind, or cause the student to become dreamy or less useful in the "practical world". On the contrary, such mastery of the mind much strengthens mental grasp and mental power, and makes one more effective in the ordinary life of the world. It is not only that strength is gained, but the waste of strength is prevented. The mind does not "race," as does a machine which continues to go without the resistance of the material on which it should work; for when it has nothing useful to do, it stops its activity. Worry is to the mind what racing is to the machine, and it wears the mind out where work does not. To control the mind is to have a keen instrument in good condition, always ready for work. Note how slow many people are in grasping an idea, how confused, how uncertain. An average man who has trained his mind to obedience is more effective than a comparatively clever one who knows naught of such control.

Further, the conviction, which will gradually arise in the student who studies these memories of the past, of the truth of his permanent Self, will revolutionise the whole life, both individual and social. If we know ourselves to be permanent living beings, we become strong where now we are weak, wise where now we are foolish, patient where now we are discontented. Not only does it make us strong as individuals, but when we come to deal with social problems we find ourselves able to solve them. We know how to deal with our criminals, who are only young souls, and instead of degrading them when they come into

the grasp of the law, we treat them as children needing education, needing training — not needing the liberty they do not know how to use, but as children to be patiently educated — helping them to evolve more rapidly because they have come into our hands. We shall treat them with sympathy and not with anger, with gentleness and not with harshness. I do not mean with a foolish sentimentality which would give them a liberty they would only abuse to the harming of society ; I mean a steady discipline which will evolve and strengthen, but has in it nothing brutal, nothing needlessly painful, an education for the child souls which will help them to grow. I have said how this knowledge would affect the education of children. It would also change our politics and sociology, by giving us time to build on a foundation so that the building will be secure. There is nothing which so changes our view of life as a knowledge of the past of which the present is the outcome, a knowledge how to build so that the building may endure in the future. Because things are dark around us and the prospects of society are gloomy ; because there is war where social prosperity demands peace, and hatred where mutual assistance ought to be found; because society is a chaos and not an organism; I find the necessity for pressing this truth of past lives on the attention of the thoughtful, of those willing to study, willing to investigate. Realising reincarnation as a fact, we can work for brotherhood, work for improvement. We realise that every living human being has a right to an environment where he can develop his abilities and grow to the utmost of the faculties he has brought with him. We understand that society as a whole should be as a father and a mother to all those whom it embrace? as its children; that the most advanced have duties, have responsibilities, which to a great extent they are neglecting today; and that only by understanding, by brotherly love, by willing sacrifice, can we emerge from struggle into peace, from poverty into well-being, from misery and hatred into love and prosperity.