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ADYAR PAMPHLETS

No. 102

The History of Reincarnation

BY

C. JINARĀJADĀSA, M.A.

Theosophical Publishing House

Adyar, Madras, India

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The History of Reincarnation

THE belief in reincarnation—that man after death returns to birth again in a human form—is found in many parts of the world, and practically in all periods of human history. This belief is well known as an integral part of Hinduism and Buddhism, but it is erroneous to suppose it is an exclusively Hindu or Buddhist doctrine, as it appears in many parts of the world where no such influence can be traced.

With the conception of the return to birth in human form, is also found the belief in rebirth as an animal or plant or mineral; this, however, is not the teaching of Theosophy. According to Theosophy, the soul does not retrograde by reincarnation, and no human soul takes birth in any form lower in evolution than the human.

There is, however, a possibility, in the case of an ego with strongly marked animal cravings, that either soon after or before birth he may join his consciousness to that of an animal. These rare cases are not instances of true reincarnation, as there is no rebirth as an animal, but only the temporary obsession by a man's soul of an animal. It must be remembered, however, that the soul of man has ascended from earlier

kingdoms of life. The life which is now man was, æons ago at an earlier stage, the life in animals, and previous to that the life in plants, and at an earlier age still the life of minerals. All these facts of evolution are confused in popular tradition.

PRIMITIVE PEOPLES

“Permanent transition, new birth, or reincarnation of human souls in other human bodies, is considered especially to take place by the soul of a deceased person animating the body of an infant. North American Indians of the Algonquin districts, when little children died, would bury them by the wayside, that their souls might enter into mothers passing by, and so be born again. In North-West America, among the Tacullis, we hear of direct transfusion of soul by the medicine-man, who, putting his hands on the breast of the dying or the dead, then holds them over the head of a relative and blows through them; the next child born to this recipient of the departed soul is animated by it, and takes the rank and name of the deceased. The Nutka Indians, not without ingenuity, accounted for the existence of a distant tribe speaking the same language as themselves, by declaring them to be the spirits of their dead.

“In Greenland, where the wretched custom of abandoning and even plundering widows and orphans was tending to bring the whole race to extinction, a

helpless widow would seek to persuade some father that the soul of a dead child of his had passed into a living child of hers, or *vice versa*, thus gaining for herself a new relative and protector. It is mostly ancestral or kindred souls that are thought to enter into children, and this kind of transmigration is therefore, from the savage point of view, a highly philosophical theory, accounting as it does so well for the general resemblance between parents and children, and even for the more special phenomena of atavism. In North-West America, among the Koloshes, the mother sees in a dream the deceased relative whose transmitted soul will give his likeness to the child; in Vancouver's Island in 1860, a lad was much regarded by the Indians because he had a mark like the scar of a shot-gun wound on his hip, it being believed that a chief, dead some four generations before, who had such a mark, had returned.

“In Old Calabar, if a mother loses a child, and another is born soon after, she thinks the departed one to have come back. The Winika consider that the soul of a dead ancestor animates a child, and this is why it resembles its father or mother; in Guinea, a child bearing a strong resemblance, physical or mental, to a dead relative, is supposed to have inherited his soul; and the Yorubas, greeting a new-born infant with the salutation, “Thou art come!” look for signs to show what ancestral soul has returned among them. Among the Khonds of Orissa,

births are celebrated by a feast on the seventh day, and the priest, divining by dropping rice grains in a cup of water, and judging from observations made on the person of the infant, determines which of his progenitors has reappeared, and the child generally, at least among the northern tribes, receives the name of that ancestor.

“In Europe the Lapps repeat an instructive animistic idea just noticed in America; the future mother was told in a dream what name to give her child, this message being usually given by the very spirit of the deceased ancestor who was about to incarnate in her. Among the lower races generally, the renewal of old family names by giving them to new-born children may always be suspected of involving some such thought. The following is a curious pair of instances from the two halves of the globe. The New Zealand priest would repeat to the infant a long list of names of its ancestors, fixing upon that name which the child, by sneezing or crying when it was uttered, was considered to select for itself; while the Chermis Tatar would shake the baby till it cried, and then repeat names to it till it chose itself one by leaving off crying.

“The belief in the new human birth of the departed soul, which has led even West African negroes to commit suicide when in distant slavery, that they may revive in their own land, in fact amounts among several of the lower races to a distinct

doctrine of an earthly resurrection. One of the most remarkable forms which this belief assumes is when dark-skinned races, wanting some reasonable theory to account for the appearance among them of human creatures of a new strange sort, the white men, and struck with their pallid, deathly hue, combined with powers that seem those of superhuman spiritual beings, have determined that the *manes* of their dead must have come back in this wondrous shape.

“The aborigines of Australia have expressed this theory in the simple formula: ‘Blackfellow tumble down, jump up Whitefellow.’ Thus a native, who was hanged years ago at Melbourne, expressed in his last moments the hopeful belief that he would jump up Whitefellow, and have lots of sixpences. The doctrine has been current among them since early days of European intercourse, and in accordance with it they habitually regarded the Englishmen as their own deceased kindred, come back to their country from an attachment to it in a former life. Real or imagined likeness completed the delusion, as when Sir George Grey was hugged and wept over by an old woman who found in him a son she had lost, or when a convict, recognised as a deceased relative, was endowed anew with the land he had possessed during the former life.

“A similar theory may be traced northward by the Torres Islands to New Caledonia, where the natives thought the white men to be the spirits of the dead

who bring sickness, and assigned this as their reason for wishing to kill white men. In Africa again, the belief is found among the Western negroes that they will rise again white, and the Bari of the White Nile, believing in the resurrection of the dead on earth, considered the first white men they saw as departed spirits thus come back." (*Primitive Culture*, by Édward B. Tylor, Professor of Anthropology in the University of Oxford, Vol. II, pp. 3—6. Professor Tylor gives all the references.)

"Among the same tribe [of Indians in Alabama] pregnant women were accustomed to go and meet funeral processions in the hope of receiving within themselves the soul of the deceased, for the benefit of the unborn child; the Algonquin Indians used to bury the bodies of children by the roadside that their souls might enter into the bodies of passing women and so be born again. For the same reason, the Calabris, the finest and most highly civilised negroes of the slave coast, buried their dead in their houses; the soul of a dead man thus buried was thought to pass into the child that was next born in the house." (*The Transmigration of Souls*, by D. A. Berthelot, Professor of Theology in the University of Basle, p. 25.)

AUSTRALIA

"In every tribe without exception, there exists a firm belief in the reincarnation of ancestors. Emphasis

must be laid on the fact that this belief is not confined to tribes such as the Arunta, Warramunga, Binbinga, Anula, and others, amongst whom descent is counted in the male line, but is found just as strongly developed in the Urabunna tribe, in which descent, both of class and totem, is strictly maternal." (*The Northern Tribes of Central Australia*, by Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, 1904, p. 145.)

"Every individual is the reincarnation of a spirit left behind by totemic ancestors in a far past time. The method of determining the totem of the individual varies in different tribes, the idea of the Arunta and Kaitish tribes, who inhabit the central area, being probably the simplest and most primitive in this respect. Various spots are inhabited by spirit individuals of a particular totem, and a child conceived at any spot is naturally regarded as a reincarnation of one of those spirit ancestors, and thus, of course, belongs to that special totemic group." (*Ibid.*, p. 174.)

"When a woman conceives, it simply means that one of these spirits has gone inside her, and, knowing where she first became aware that she was pregnant, the child, when born, is regarded as the reincarnation of one of the spirit ancestors associated with that spot, and therefore it belongs to that particular totemic group." (*Ibid.*, p. 150.)

"Suppose, for example, a Kirarawa man of the Emu totem dies When undergoing reincarnation it can only enter the body of a Matthurie

woman, who, of necessity, belongs to another totem, and thus at each incarnation the individual changes both his or her moiety and totem. Not only is this so, but it also changes sex—a belief which is also met with in the Warramunga tribe. In the course of ages any single individual can run the whole gamut of the totems, alternating from side to side of the tribe, but always returning at death to its original home.” (*Ibid.*, p. 149.)

“During his early years, up till perhaps the age of fourteen, the boy is perfectly free, wandering about in the bush, searching for food, playing with his companions in the daytime, and perhaps spending the evening watching the ordinary corrobborrees. From the moment of his initiation, however, his life is sharply marked out into two parts. He has first of all what we may speak of as the ordinary life, common to all the men and the women, and associated with the procuring of food and the performance of corrobborrees, the peaceful monotony of this part of his life being broken every now and then by the excitement of a fight. On the other hand, he has what gradually becomes of greater and greater importance to him, and that is the portion of his life devoted to matters of a sacred or secret nature. As he grows older he takes an increasing share in these, until finally this side of his life occupies by far the greater part of his thoughts. The sacred ceremonies, which appear very trivial matters to the

white man, are most serious matters to him. They are all connected with the great ancestors of the tribe, and he is firmly convinced that when it comes to his turn to die his spirit part will finally return to his old *acheringa* home, where he will be in communion with them until such time as it seems good to him to undergo reincarnation." (*Ibid.*, p. 34.)

"The belief in reincarnation is very firmly held by all the central tribes from the Urabunna in the South, right across the continent to those inhabiting the Coburg Peninsula on the northern coast line. In the Arunta tribe, the natives believe that in the far past times their ancestors, who were endowed with powers much superior to those of their living representatives, wandered across the country. They were divided into groups, kangaroo men and women in one, witchetty grub people in another, emu people in another, and so on. The track followed by each group is well known and, when they halted at various places, some of them went into the ground, their spirit parts remaining above, each of them in company with a *churinga*. The whole Arunta country is thus dotted over with local centres—one haunted by kangaroo, another by grub spirits, and so on. At the present day it is these spirit children who are continually undergoing reincarnation. Each spirit has associated with it another, called *Arumburinga*, which is its double and always remains outside, living at the old

camping ground of the spirit when the latter is reincarnated. Many of the more important of these old ancestors are known by name, and the old men decide the particular one of whom any child is the reincarnation. If the latter be known, the child bears the name of the ancestor. This name, however, is not used in public; it is secret, and known only to the old men of the totemic group. The individual himself only hears it when he is fully grown, and it is never mentioned except in whispers. When a child is born, one or two of the old men actually go out in search of the churinga. Sometimes they find it, sometimes they do not, in which event they make a new one, so that each individual is represented by his churinga in the local storehouse called ertnatulunga. A woman going into the vicinity of one of these places is always liable to be entered by one of the spirit children. Whenever also a native dies, his spirit goes back to its old camping-ground and remains there until it chooses to be reincarnated.”

(*Beliefs in Reincarnation and Spirit Children among the Aborigines of Australia*, by W. Baldwin Spencer, C.M.G., M.A., F.R.S., Professor of Biology in the University of Melbourne, Special Commissioner for Aborigines, Northern Territory. From *Federal Hand-book*, prepared in connection with the eighty-fourth meeting of The British Association for the Advancement of Science, held in Australia, August, 1914.)

EGYPT

Reincarnation is not mentioned in any inscription so far deciphered, and was not a part of the exoteric faith of Egypt; but it must have been a teaching of the secret mysteries of the Egyptian priesthood. Herodotus thus relates: "The Egyptians are also the first who reported the doctrine that the soul of man is immortal, and that when the body dies the soul enters into another creature which chances then to be coming to the birth; and, when it has gone all the round of all the creatures of land and sea and of the air, it enters again into a human body as it comes to the birth; and that it makes this round in a period of three thousand years. This doctrine certain Hellenes adopted, some earlier and some later, as if it were of their own invention, and of these men I know the names but I abstain from recording them." (Book II, para 123, translated by G. C. Macaulay.)

GREECE

Reincarnation was no part of the popular belief, but Greek philosophers knew of it. In Greece it was openly taught in the school of Pythagoras, who claimed memory of some of his past births.

"He remembered to have been Æthalides, the son of Mercury, to have assisted the Greeks during the Trojan war in the character of Euphorbus, to have

been Hermotimus (a philosopher of Clazomenæ), and last of all Pythagoras." (Various classical authors quoted in article on "Pythagoras," Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*.)

The philosopher Empedocles remembered his previous existences and declared: "I have been a youth and a maiden and a bush and a bird and a gleaming fish in the sea." Rebirth as a means of purification for sin is thus taught by him:

"There is an utterance of Fate, an ancient decree of the gods, everlasting, sealed with broad oaths; when any being stains his hand with sin of heart, or swears an oath of deceiving, aye, though he be a Spirit, whose life is for ever, for thrice ten thousand years he wanders away from the Blessed, growing, as the ages pass, through all the shapes of mortal things, passing from one to another of the weary ways of life. The might of the Æther hunts him to the sea, the sea vomits him back to the floor of Earth, and Earth flings him to the fires of Helios the unwearied, and he to the whirlwinds of Æther. He is received of one after another, and abhorred of all." (*A History of Ancient Greek Literature*, by Gilbert Murray, pp. 75-6.)

ROME

All Latin writers were aware of the teachings of the Pythagorean School. Virgil teaches it in the

Æneid, Book VI. Æneas visits the realms of the dead inside the earth, and there meets Anchises, his father. Anchises describes the purification of the soul through suffering in the underworld, followed by a period of happiness, and rebirth on earth thereafter.

“And we, the happy few, possess the fields of bliss; till length of time, after the fixed period is elapsed, hath done away the inherent stain, and hath left the pure celestial reason, and the fiery energy of the simple spirit. All these, after they have rolled away a thousand years, are summoned forth by the god in a great body to the river Lethe; to the intent that, losing memory [of the happy period in the underworld], they may revisit the vaulted realms above, and again become willing to return into bodies.”
(Translated by Davidson.)

Note.—According to Greek and Roman mythology, drinking of the water of the river Lethe effaces the memory of the past.

THE ANCIENT DRUIDS

“They wish to inculcate this as one of their leading tenets, that souls do not become extinct, but pass after death from one body to another; and they think that men by this tenet are in a great degree excited to valour, the fear of death being disregarded.”
(Julius Cæsar, *Gallic War*, Book VI, Ch. 14.)

THE TEUTONS

“Some of the Teutons seem (in the eighth century, at least) to have believed in the transmigration of souls, in a dead hero being born again in his descendant. Hence, when Hakon the Good—our Athelstane’s foster-son—came back to Norway, men said: ‘It is Harold Fairhair come again!’ And the soul of Helge the Good was—according to a fine tenth-century poem—twice reincarnated in heroes named Helge.” “Teutonic Heathendom,” by F. York Powell, in *Religious Systems of the World*, p. 287.)

ANCIENT IRELAND

The following story, found in the old Irish collection, *The Voyage of Bran*, (translated by Kuno Meyer, Section I, p. 49), shows the belief in reincarnation, though it seems to have been considered a secret. It will be seen that Mongán is the reincarnation of Finn the son of Cumal, but objects to the fact being openly proclaimed.

“Mongán was in Rathmore in Moylinny in his kingship. To him went Forgoll the poet. One day Mongán asked his poet what was the death of Fothad Airgdech. Forgoll said he was slain at Duffry in Leinster. Mongán said it was false.”

Mongán then bets all, even his kingdom, that his word will be proved true, and that within three days.

On the night of the third day, a strange man comes from the south.

"His cloak was in a fold around him, and in his hand a headless spear-shaft that was not very small. 'What is the matter here?' said he. 'I and the poet yonder,' said Mongán, 'have made a wager about the death of Fothad Airgdech. He said it was at Duffry in Leinster. I said it was false.' The warrior said the poet was wrong. 'It shall be proved. We were with thee, with Finn,' said the warrior. 'Hush!' said Mongán, 'that is not fair.' 'We were with Finn, then,' said he. 'We came from Scotland. We met with Fothad Airgdech here yonder on the Larne river. There we fought a battle. I made a cast at him, so it passed through him and went into the earth beyond him and left its iron head in the earth. This here is the shaft that was in that spear. A stone chest is about him there in the earth. There, upon the chest, are his two bracelets of silver, and his two arm-rings, and his neck-torque of silver. And by his tomb there is a stone pillar. And on the end of the pillar that is in the earth there is Ogam. This is what it says: 'This is Eochaid Airgdech. Cálite slew me in an encounter against Finn.' They went with the warrior. Everything was found thus. It was Cálite, Finn's foster-son, that had come to them. Mongán, however, was Finn, though he would not let it be told."

PALESTINE (PRE-CHRISTIAN)

The Jews had clearly the idea of Pre-existence, *i.e.*, that the soul was a self-conscious entity before birth in the body. At this time it is doubtful if the idea of reincarnation, that is, of successive births in a body, was accepted.

"Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." (Old Testament, *Jeremiah*, i: 4, 5.)

The exact nature of this pre-existence is not clear, but that it was a condition where actions, both good and *bad*, might be done, is shown by the question propounded to the Christ by His disciples, showing that they believed it possible that the blind man might have sinned *before his birth*.

"And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.

"And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" (New Testament, *S. John*, ix: 1, 2.)

PALESTINE (TIME OF CHRIST)

"And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Cæsarea Philippi: and by the way he

asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am ?

“ And they answered, John the Baptist : but some say Elias ; and others, One of the prophets.” (*S. Mark*, viii : 27, 28.)

“ And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come ?

“ And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.

“ But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

“ Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.” (*S. Matthew*, xvii : 10—13.)

“ And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

“ For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

“ And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

“ He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” (*S. Matthew*, xi : 12—15.)

PALESTINE (POST-CHRISTIAN)

“ Do not you know that those who depart out of this life, according to the law of nature, and pay

that debt which was received from God, when he that let it us is pleased to require it back again, enjoy eternal fame; that their houses and their posterity are sure, that their souls are pure and obedient, and obtain a most holy place in heaven, from whence, in the revolution of ages, they are again sent into pure bodies?" (Josephus, *Jewish War*, Book III, chapter 8, para 5.)

"The whole world once believed that the souls of men were perishable, and that man had no pre-eminence above a beast, till Abraham came and preached the doctrine of immortality and transmigration." (*The Threes of the Talmud*, af Sec. 40, translated in *A Talmudic Miscellany*, by P. I. Hershon.)

"He who neglects to observe any of the 613 precepts, such as were possible for him to observe, is doomed to undergo transmigration (once or more than once) till he has actually observed all he had neglected to do in a former state of being." (*Kabbalah*, Kitzur Shlu, p. 6, col. 2.)

"The sages of truth [the Kabbalists] remark that Adam contains the initial letters of Adam, David, and Messiah; for after Adam sinned his soul passed into David and, the latter also having sinned, it passed into the Messiah. The full text is: 'They shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them' (*Jer.*, xxx: 9); and it is written: 'My servant David shall be their Prince

for ever' (*Ezek.*, xxxvii: 25); and thus: 'They shall seek the Lord their God, and David their king' (*Hosea*, iii: 5)." (*Kabbalah*, Nishmath Chaim, fol. 152, col. 2.)

"Know thou that Cain's essential soul passed into Jethro, but his spirit into Korah, and his animal soul into the Egyptian. This is what scripture saith: 'Cain shall be avenged sevenfold' (*Gen.*, iv: 24), *i.e.*, the initial letters of the Hebrew word rendered 'shall be avenged' form the initial letters of Jethro, Korah and Egyptian . . . Sampson the hero was possessed by the soul of Japhet, and Job by that of Terah." (*Kabbalah*, Yalkut Reubini, Nos. 9, 18, 24.)

"Cain had robbed the twin sister of Abel, and therefore his soul passed into Jethro. Moses was possessed by the soul of Abel, and therefore Jethro gave his daughter to Moses." (*Kabbalah*, Yalkut Chadash, fol. 127, col. 3.)

"If a man be niggardly, either in a financial or a spiritual regard, giving nothing of his money to the poor or not imparting of his knowledge to the ignorant, he shall be punished by transmigration into a woman.

. . . Know that Sarah, Hannah, the Shunammite (*II Kings*, iv, 8), and the widow of Zarepta, were each in turn possessed by the soul of Eve . . . The soul of Rahab transmigrated into Heber the Kenite, and afterwards into Hannah; and this is the mystery of her words: 'I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit' (*I Sam.*, i: 15), for there still lingered in her soul

a sorrowful sense of inherited defilement . . . Eli possessed the soul of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite . . . Sometimes the souls of pious Jews pass by metempsychosis into Gentiles, in order that they may plead on behalf of Israel and treat them kindly. For this reason have our Rabbis of blessed memory said: 'The pious of the nations of the world have a portion in the world to come.' " (*Kabbalah*, Yalkut Reubini, Nos. 1, 8, 61, 63.)

"We have it by tradition that when Moses, our Rabbi—peace be unto him!—said in the law: 'O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh' (*Num.*, xvi: 22), he meant mystically to intimate metempsychosis takes place in all flesh, in beasts, reptiles, fowls. 'Of all flesh' is, as it were, 'in all flesh'." (*Kabbalah*, *Avodath Hakodesh*, fol. 49, col. 3. Hershon's *Miscellany*, pp. 324-6.)

"All souls are subject to transmigration: and men do not know the ways of the Holy One, blessed be He! They do not know that they are brought before the tribunal both before they enter into this world and after they leave it; they are ignorant of the many transmigrations and secret probations which they have to undergo, and of the number of souls and spirits which enter into this world and which do not return to the palace of the Heavenly King. Men do not know how the souls revolve like a stone which is thrown from a sling. But the time is at hand when these mysteries will be disclosed." (*Zohar*, II, 99b,

quoted in article on "Transmigration" in *The Jewish Encyclopædia*.)

ARABIA

"There is also a race called Al-Nakhawilah . . . This race of sectarians, about 35,000 in number, holds to the Imamship or supreme Pontificate of Ali and his descendants. They differ, however, in doctrine from the Persians, believing in a transmigration of the soul, which, gradually purified, is at last 'orbed into a perfect star'." (*A Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Mecca*, by Sir Richard Burton, Ch. XXI, note.)

PERSIA

"I DIED from the mineral and became a plant ;
 I died from the plant and re-appeared in an
 animal ;
 I died from the animal and became a man ;
 Wherefore then should I fear ? When did I
 grow less by dying ?
 Next time I shall die from the man
 That I may grow the wings of the angels.
 From the angel, too, must I seek advance ;
 ' All things shall perish save His face ' .
 Once more shall I wing my way above the angels,
 I shall become that which entereth not the
 imagination.

Then let me become naught, naught; for the
harp-string

Crieth unto me: 'Verily unto Him do we return!'"

(*Masnawi* of Jalálu'd-Dín, trs. by E. G. Browne.)

MIDDLE AGES IN EUROPE

"The Cathari believe that the soul was forced to migrate from body to body, until it became reincarnate in a member of the sect, that it might then be absolved of all guilt by the sacrament of the laying-on of hands, and be received into Paradise after death. Many believed that they had passed through hundreds of bodies. Paul was said to have passed through thirteen bodies, according to some, and through thirty-two according to others, before he attained the grace of God." (*The Troubadours and Courts of Love*, by J. F. Rowbotham, pp. 98, 99.)

"With coarse violence and obloquy Izarm issues his fulminations against the erring troubadours: 'In what school hast thou been taught, my friend, that the soul of man, when it has quitted his body, goes into that of an ox, an ass, a sheep, or a pig, or into the first animal it meets with after its separation from the body, until it returns again into the body of some man or woman? This, however, thou declarest for a fact to those whom thou hast seduced; thou takest from God to give to the devil; and thus dost thou hope to get salvation.'" (*Ibid.*, p. 304.)

SOME MODERN GERMAN WRITERS

Goethe, to Frau von Stein : " Ah, in the depths of time gone by, thou wast my sister or my wife." In a letter to Wieland, 1776 : " I cannot explain the significance to me of this woman or her influence over me, except by the theory of metempsychosis. Yes, we were once man and wife. Now our knowledge of ourselves is veiled, and lies in the spirit world. I can find no name for us—the past, the future, the All ! " In a letter to Frau von Stein, July 2, 1781 : " How well it is that men should die, if only to erase their impressions and return clean washed." (Quoted by Berthelot, in *The Transmigrations of Souls*.)

Richard Wagner : " Only the profound hypothesis of Reincarnation has been able to show me the consoling point where all converge in the end to an equal height of redemption, after their diverse life-careers, running severed but side by side in time, have met in full intelligence beyond it. On that beautiful Buddhist hypothesis the spotless purity of Lohengrin becomes easy to explain, in that he is the continuation of Parsival—who first had to wrest to himself his purity ; in the same sense would Elsa reach up to Lohengrin in her rebirth." (Letter 106*a* to Frau Mathilde Wesendonck, translated by W. Ashton Ellis.)

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing : " It is so ! The self-same road by which the Race reaches its perfection,

must every individual man—one sooner, one later—have travelled over. Have travelled over in one and the same life? Can he have been, in one and the same life, a sensual Jew and a spiritual Christian? Can he in the self-same life have overtaken both?

“Surely not that! But should not every individual man have existed more than once upon this world?

“Is this hypothesis so laughable merely because it is the oldest? Because the human understanding, before the sophistries of the schools had dissipated and debilitated it, lighted upon it at once?

“Why may not even I have already performed those steps of my perfecting which only temporal punishments and rewards can effect for man?

“And once more, why not another time have taken all those steps which the prospects of Eternal Rewards so powerfully assist us to perform?

“Why should I not come back as often as I am capable of acquiring fresh knowledge, fresh expertness? Do I bring away so much from a single visit that there is nothing to repay the trouble of coming back?

“Is this a reason against it? Or is the objection based on the ground of my forgetting that I have been here already? Happy is it for me that I do forget. The recollection of my former condition would permit me to make only a bad use of the present. And even that which I must forget now, is that necessarily forgotten for ever?

“Or is it a reason against the hypothesis that so much time would have been lost to me? Lost?—And how much then should I miss?—Is not a whole Eternity mine?” (*The Education of the Human Race*, pp. 93—100, translated by F. W. Robertson.)

INDIA : HINDUISM

“Nay, but as when one layeth
 His worn-out robes away,
 And, taking new ones, sayeth,
 ‘These will I wear to-day!’
 So putteth by the spirit
 Lightly its garb of flesh,
 And passeth to inherit
 A residence afresh.”

(*Bhagavad-Gita*, Discourse ii, verse 22.)

“The Blessed Lord said : This imperishable Yoga I declared to Vivasvan ; Vivasvan taught to Manu ; Manu to Ikshvaku told it. This, handed on down the line, the King-Sages knew. This yoga by great efflux of time decayed in the world, O Parantapa. This same ancient yoga hath been to-day declared to thee by Me, for thou art My devotee and My friend ; it is the supreme Secret.

“Arjuna said : Later was Thy birth, earlier the birth of Vivasvan ; how then am I to understand that Thou declaredst it in the beginning ?

“The blessed Lord said: Many births have been left behind by Me and by thee, O Arjuna. I know them all, but thou knowest not thine, O Parantapa.” (*Bhagavad-Gita*, Discourse, iv, 1—5.)

INDIA: BUDDHISM

Gautama Buddha speaks: “With his heart thus serene, made pure, translucent, cultured, devoid of evil, supple, ready to act, firm and imperturbable, he [the saint] directs and bends down his mind to the knowledge of the memory of his previous temporary states. He recalls to his mind his various temporary states in days gone by—one birth, or two or three or four or five births, or ten or twenty or thirty or forty or fifty or a hundred or a thousand or a hundred thousand births, through many an æon of dissolution, many an æon of both dissolution and evolution. ‘In such a place such was my name, such my family, such my caste, such my food, such my experience of discomfort or of ease, and such the limits of my life. When I passed away from that state I took form again here’—thus does he call to his mind his temporary states in days gone by in all their details, and in all their modes.” (*Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, para 93, “The Fruits of the Life of a Recluse”. *Dialogues of the Buddha*, translated by T. W. Rhys Davids.)

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