

## Topics in Reincarnation

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REINCARNATION is so replete with topics that the slightest inspection of it discloses several, each of which covers others more and more profound, till steadily the inquirer pierces into the foundation of things and approaches the very secret of Nature. Two or three of only the superficial layer are what I now have in view.

The need for more than a few years of earth-life to effect the development of that wonderful germ we call "the soul" is so palpable that sound reason at once concedes a succession of incarnations. We would naturally expect, however, that each should begin where its predecessor ended, that the Ego, after due rest through an interval, should resume the process at the point where death interrupted it. In our own cases, much more as to a Plato or a Bacon or a Darwin, we feel a propriety in the soul's return in the fulness of its powers, no attainment lost, every faculty refreshed and ready for a new exploration of Truth. In short, we would come back again as adults. But, in fact, this is not at all the method. Every revisitant of earth incarnates afresh as an infant, his powers embryonic, his terrestrial knowledge to be gained anew. Through several years he has to learn merely how to walk and talk, and when, further on, he is able to read and think and digest, a long course of schooling is requisite before he can understand even the terminology of sciences which, when he last died, were his familiar possessions. A stretch of industrious years does nothing more than equip him for comprehending the books he may have written before even if later discoveries have not rendered them obsolete.

There is something pitiable in this. It is not merely the repeated expenditure of effort on the initial steps of progress which, it might seem, should be taken once for all; it is the frightful waste of time, years upon years being consumed again and again in babyhood and juvenility, while the developed powers, fit for magnificent outreach in many quarters, are halted, forbidden use, kept in abeyance for untold centuries till an epoch comes when the Law releases them. There is something appalling in this iteration of elementary processes, this incessant renewal of infancy when an immediate re-start in manhood would appear rational and economical.

But even this is not all. We have to consider the statistics of life, the average duration of human existence and the proportions of deaths at various ages. As one child out of every three dies in infancy, as one adult out of every five dies of consumption, and as the average of human life is [Page 4] but thirty-three years, it is evident that the chances of any individual's reaching the point whence he can make an advance upon his last incarnation are small indeed. Not only is he thrown back for a re-beginning of his course in knowledge, but he has not even the security that the re-traversing of the first part of that course will ensure a continuance beyond the point last reached. If a Plato became a Plato in his three-hundredth incarnation, rested fitly in Devachan, and emerged for a new incarnation which lasted only twenty years — a thing entirely possible, unless we assume that all truly great men die old, there appears a painful

waste of strength and of opportunity. With ordinary men it would not so much matter; yet even with them the spectacle of a long succession of re-births, some futile because of death in childhood, others unproductive because ending before maturity of powers, even the remunerative few containing but a small section in which manhood's possibilities are at their height, causes some sinking of the heart over the prodigality of Nature's use of death as compared with life.

How little of time is really allowed to us for progress may best be made evident by diagrams. Let us take a series of twenty-five incarnations. In the first case (Diagram A) we will suppose the average to be of exceptional and abnormal length. Dividing the space between birth and eighty years into zones of ten years, and indicating the separate incarnations by lines reaching at a point the time of death and then dropping back into Devachan for a fresh birth, we will suppose that only one has ended at 30 years and one at 40, three reaching to 50, two to 55, three to 60, four to 65, four to 70, two to 75, and five to 80. It is obvious that this must be an extreme, perhaps a non-existent, case. The sum total of these years is 1600, an average of 64 years to each incarnation. But from these, for purposes of conscious progress, must be deducted at least 10 years of childhood, making 250 years; a further period of 15 years during which educational processes are maturing the individual for valuable work, — and surely little is possible before the age of 25, this deducting 375 years more; and yet again the period beyond the age of 70, when, as almost always happens, the powers abate and the mind does little more than repeat itself, this being in the diagram an aggregate of 60 years. From the 1600 years of the 25 incarnations must therefore be deducted 685 years of unproductiveness, reducing the average of productive years from 64 to  $36 \frac{3}{5}$ . And even this takes no account of sickness, business occupation, distraction by anxieties, the need for recreation, and the like.

But the case supposed is avowedly extreme. In Diagram B we have one more within the limits of probability. Still taking 25 incarnations, let us suppose one to have reached to 10 years, one to 15, two to 20, two to 30, two to 35, two to 40, one to 45, two to 50, two to 55, two to 60, two to 56, [Page 5] three to 70, one to 75, and two to 80. The total sum is 1225 years, all average of 49. But deducting the 10 years of childhood for each — 250 years; the 15 years of educational processes for each of the 21 incarnations lasting 25 years, and the 25 years for the four incarnations terminating earlier, in all, 340 years; and the 25 years beyond the age of 70; there are left 610 years, an average of but  $24 \frac{2}{5}$  years of productive capacity. As before, no allowance is made for sickness.

Even this is a case more favourable than actualities warrant. It has not included deaths in childhood, and it has made an average incarnation 50% longer than statistics show to be the fact. Diagram C is doubtless a more accurate representation. Of the 25 incarnations we will suppose four to have reached to 5 years, two to 10, one to 15, two to 20, two to 25, three to 30, one to 35, one to 40, one to 45, three to 50, one to 55, one to 60, one to 70, one to 75, and one to 80. The total is 845 years, an average of  $33 \frac{4}{5}$  years to an incarnation. But we deduct the 210 childish years of the 21 lasting to or beyond 10, and the 20 years of the four ending at 5, as well as the 15 years of educational processes for the 16 lasting to 25 or longer, and the small time for those ending prior, together with the 15 years beyond 70. These aggregate 540 years, leaving 305 years of productive capacity, an average of but  $12 \frac{1}{5}$  years to each incarnation. Here again we make no allowance for sickness.

In the case last supposed, the one most consonant with the statistics which modern science has carefully compiled, only about one sixty-ninth of the time actually passed in incarnate life is available for anything like real progress with matured faculties and a virile will. This truly seems a meagre proportion. Meagre

as it is, it becomes insignificant when we compare it with the duration of the Ego from the first to the last of the 25 incarnations supposed. For we have yet to consider Devachan. Now while Mr. Sinnett's 1500 years are universally admitted an error, and while, in the absence of knowledge, any period used must be speculative, it is, one may think, quite within bounds to suppose that an average length may be 250 years. Omitting, then, the four deaths at five years of age, when rebirth may be expected immediately or very soon, there would be, in the case depicted in Diagram C, 20 intervals of Devachan, aggregating 5000 years. These, plus the incarnated periods, would be 5845 years, of which the productive aggregate would be 305, — one-nineteenth, a trifle over 5%. Of course, if the Devachanic interval was longer, say 500 years, the proportion would be but one thirty-fifth, about 3%.

There is something most impressive, most staggering, in this enormous preponderance of the quiescent over the functioning eras of human life. We may consider it an instance of Nature's indifference to economics, her treasury of resources being so limitless. Or we may consider it as proof of [Page 6] the necessary slowness of evolution, whereof the millions of years expended upon the physical structure of this our earth are an illustration. Or we may take it as indicating the thoroughness to which everything pertaining to Man is effected, little time being given to him for action, and much exacted for digesting the results of action. Or, if responsive to the moral lessons of facts, we may see in it a hint of the incalculable value of time, of the enormous importance of so using the little productive section of each incarnation that the very best of outcome may be assured, best for our own characters, best for the absorption and distribution of truth, best for our neighbours and nation and race. However we may regard it, the fact remains that our era of possible advance is petty as compared with our ages of existence.

Another singular feature of reincarnation is as to influence during childhood. We should naturally expect that a character formed in a preceding earth-life would return here substantially as it left, its future modifications to be determined mainly as it should deliberately choose. And yet, in fact, the newly-incarnated being is plastic and pliable, receiving a large part of its impressions from its surroundings, and almost at the mercy, one may say, of those who have it in charge and shape it. There is reasonable certainty that a youth will reproduce the thoughts, opinions, beliefs, prejudices, habits, even phrases with which he has been encompassed, and may not change them till far later in life, if at all. Even in this land of social flux and of perpetually changing currents of force, we expect, especially in rural regions, to see the effects of parental influence. But remember that this influence is less here than anywhere else on earth. To see what sociological heredity means, we must take some land as China, India, or Turkey, where physical features are stereotyped, where opinions and usages have the sanction of religion and are therefore not open to change, where, if an independent spirit asserted himself, he would be execrated and shunned as not merely impudent but blasphemous. Birth there means of necessity the reproduction of national, local, family type. Opinions are not more varied than is colour of skin or texture of hair.

Certainly this exceeding, in some lands this irresistible, pressure of surroundings by which a child is moulded to the pattern of its progenitors raises large questions in reincarnation. In our own land, though it operates, there are constant variations from the parental type, and a man who thinks for himself and will not be gainsaid snaps all domestic fences and wanders whithersoever he sees the light of Truth. But in a country where no such phenomenon exists, all men are subjected to one uniform experience. What, now, is the interpretation of Karma as determining reincarnation? It determines it, we know, either as the expression of previous merit, or as [Page 7] the provision for a needed experience. As an enormous

majority of children are born under conditions determining their future views and habits, many absolutely so, some but partially, and as the number of assertors of independence is relatively small, are we to infer that the majority deserve no better fate, and that the independent thinkers are the rare souls who have been subjected to early restrictions only for some needed discipline till the real inner nature should burst its bonds and be free? What would be the object of long eras of Devachan for a being which in morals and thought was the same as when there before? What hope is there for the changeless races? How at all is it just that a rebirth which one did not choose and cannot escape, should place him helpless as clay in the hands of his family, his life and beliefs having no option and no advance? It would truly seem as if all real possibility of progress was reserved for a favoured few in an exceptional land.

I do not say that these questions can be answered even plausibly. Probably one part of the difficulty is in the fact that we do not, cannot, realize the vast disparity between ourselves and the majority of mankind. It is not simply that our hemisphere is more enlightened, or that our habits are more free, or that we are accustomed to thought: it is that the gulf between the cultivated few and the undeveloped many is so broad and deep, that their views, sensations, moral judgments, stolid ignorances, paralyzing prejudices are absolutely unconceived by us. So with their needs and possibilities. If, then, we demand for them a rebirth consonant with our own ideas of freedom and light, we are demanding something for which they would be unfitted, which they would not understand and could not use. Little would it profit an expiring Neapolitan, his nature coloured with local ideas of truth and honesty and honour, if reborn as the child of a New York philanthropist. The moral basis would not be there: the rebirth would be out of place and time. And so there must be congruity between the newcomer and his environment. If he is born an African savage, it is because he is entitled to nothing better; if he is born a Chinese, it is because that is his grade; if in a Western family of culture and finish, because that is where he belongs. And if millions of African savages and Chinese coolies are born for every dozen Westerners of promise, it must mean that only the dozen have evolved as yet from the millions. We have nothing to do with the proportion; the fact of birth indicates the fact of fitness.

The question of a long Devachan is perhaps less important than it seems. For, the longer the absence of an inadequately-developed soul from earth, the greater the chances of earth's evolutionary improvement meantime, and hence of his finding an environment a shade more favourable. National interflow has been awakening dormant faculties and slowly pushing [Page 8] communities forward to a better position. This, too, may constitute the hope for the changeless races. Modern commercial enterprise and scientific research are pushing probes through every land, and gradually channels are established through which must pour the modern life. Then antiquated ideas are sapped, fresher thought steals in, stolidity disintegrates, and society is re-formed. Liberty follows, and then the area for the rebirth of advanced souls is enlarged. If a soul is really advanced, we can hardly think of it as reborn in a stifling region.

Still, allowing for every consideration due to Karmic award, the fitness of environment, and the small proportion of developed souls, there is a mystery in the awful fact of the subservience of childhood to its elders, and we cannot fully see how freedom of the will can be preserved under such conditions of rebirth.

A third topic suggests itself. Has birth in a particular region any particular significance; and, if so, what region seems most adapted to a symmetrical development of the whole man? Without the slightest

Fourth-of-Julyism, and quite without conventional prejudices of patriotism, I venture to think that Karmic merit and evolutionary possibilities point to these United States. I do not say that rule by the rabble is sustained by either reason or experience; that the science of legislation, the most complex and delicate of all sciences, is best practised by those who know not a fact in jurisprudence, finance, political economy, or any other science the laws of which regulate the effects of legislation; that opera bouffe methods of government, delightful as they are on the stage, are felicitous in actual life; that total insecurity for property, and a judiciary ingenious only in devising technicalities for the protection of rascals, are pleasing spectacles to a reasoner or a moralist; for the reverse in each case is notoriously and grotesquely the fact. But I do say that there is a combination of freedom, energy, and intelligence which clears away many of the most doleful checks to advance. Ecclesiasticism, and with it private bigotry, have so far abated, that social ostracism for opinion's sake has been reduced to lightness. The enormous circulation of news and literature makes fresh thought permeate every quarter, and disinclines the natural mind to believe that nothing can be true which is not mildewed. Independence will not submit to dictation, and holds that conviction must precede assent. So constant is the flow of argument, and so resolute the decision to respect it, that men change their Churches without endangering their comfort, and even renounce them without forfeiture of esteem. They can meet fearlessly for conference in buildings surmounted by no cross, and in halls adorned with no altar.

This entire freedom of action, together with energy in pursuit of any [Page 9] study and peculiarly opulent facilities therefore makes America an area for privileged incarnation. Given the will for spiritual progress, the thirst for truth on higher planes and the resolution to act it and dispense it, how little there is to hamper or forbid! If the desideratum is an environment where intelligence stimulates, vitality impels, and resources nourish; one voided of reverence for tradition, fear of singularity, or misgiving over innovation; one in which an independent spirit can most easily think, act, and speak as it sees fit; one through which communication is so incessant that kindred souls have every facility for union and encouragement; surely this land at this date possesses it.

I know that many Theosophists look on India as the enviable spot. If you had been born there, you would probably have had a stronger sense of the reality of the unseen world. But the value of such a sense depends in part upon what kind of a world the unseen world is supposed to be, and also in part upon the effect that supposition has in shaping the seen world of society and men. For the sake of it, would you be content to fetter yourself with all the notions and restrictions of the caste system, and to fill your lives with binding rules as to when you should wash and pray with whom and of what you should eat, what clothes and what paint you should put on, and a multitude of tedious and petty rituals, each one of which you would consider as of momentous import? Would you like to be put back several hundred years in the evolution of intelligent thought, and to be as credulous and as superstitious as the civilians of the Middle Ages? If a man, would you fancy the oriental treatment of women, and if a woman, would you enjoy it? Would you prefer to give up your present habit of attending to your affairs as you choose, and accept instead a constant reference to the moon, or the conjunctions of the planets, or the horoscope made at your birth, or a passage from some Sacred Book? In short, would it have been better to be a slave to sect and ceremonial injunctions, clanking shackles at every step and in mortal terror of imaginary demons, or a free man, walking upright and everywhere in the sunlight, and preferring the nineteenth century to the sixteenth?

To my mind we have everything here which is needed for spiritual progress. We are not as near to the homes of the Masters, but as Their work is independent of distance, that fact is unimportant. All spiritual

forces here are as potent as they are ten thousand miles eastward; literature and science and intellectual influences are incomparably more mature; there is more to stimulate to a harmonious development and less to cramp or pervert it; and we are free from a vast stock of single and assorted superstitions which the blessed Orient will probably cherish for many generations. We have so very little to hamper us, so very much to aid us. Even the Theosophical Society is stronger here than anywhere [Page 10] else, and we are told on good authority that the seat of the next great Race is to be in this land. And so I should say that it is a privilege to have been born here and at this era, and that if we think and act and work as such a privilege incites, there may be hope of our reappearance here at a stage all the more rich and glorious for our having contributed something to the preparation for it during this present incarnation.

## PART 2

THE topic of heredity in its relations to reincarnation is one upon which the opinions of only a real teacher can have value. So much of fact in the unseen, and therefore to us speculative, world is involved that we have neither the data nor the explanations needed. Yet many of the surface items are tempting to thinkers, for they hardly see a child without comparing it with its parents, and the comparison raises the whole question "How and Why" in heredity.

If successive generations of men were like plants, that is, if they were exact reproductions of the immediate predecessor, and if the only variation during life came about through change in soil or treatment, or through grafting, — all of them artificial processes, the problem would be only of a material nature, and so need only a material interpretation. But with human beings there are several marked contrasts. Children physically resemble their parents but partially, sometimes not at all. In size, contour, features, and colouring they may be unlike either parent or both. This is no less true of talent and of disposition. A common-place pair may have a child of even genius, or the offspring of genius may be common-place; and gentle or ferocious temperaments may have the reverse for direct progenitors. In any of these cases the familiar facts of heredity prompt us to look back to prior generations for the source of the present type, for what is known as "atavism" exhibits the skipping of one or more generations by some quality of character and its reappearance at far later date. Holmes amusingly illustrates this. A certain man was guilty of an impropriety. "Oh yes", said Holmes, "his grandmother was once rude to me". Then we have the phenomena of mixed qualities, and of brothers and sisters unlike each other, and of resemblances to an earlier generation collateral to the line of descent. Yet, opposed to all the many contradictions to heredity, stand the monumental facts of national characteristics, which make the Englishman distinct from the Irishman, and the Italian a different being from the Hindu; of local peculiarities, as when a Yankee [Page 11] is contrasted with a Westerner; of family traits as when a Bayard is famed for his social charm. There is evidently a principle of inheritance, as with the plants, and yet no such uniformity and certainty in its workings. Of course this is due to the fact of individuality in humanity, the fact that each Ego is a separate being and incarnates itself from time to time in a separate body prepared for it by the process of parturition.

But why, if thus separate and independent, thus a voyager down the long stream of time, landing at intervals and then betaking itself to a new canoe for another journey, does it have any resemblance to its predecessors? How are individual marks and qualities consistent with a law of heredity, or how can a distinct being bear the impress of others whom it never saw, never knew, never encountered? Why should I, frail and weak from my own disabilities, be forced to fight with tendencies belonging really to some ancestor who has now perhaps expiated and overcome them?

Here is one of the spots at which a teacher is needed. Still we can see some of the explanations ourselves. One is in the physical transmission of physical and even immaterial traits. There is a law in nature that like begets like, and so in bodily structure we should expect to see a type perpetuating itself in humanity as in the animal or the vegetable world. But as in humanity there is the bodily structure *plus* the conscious will-forming habits, and conforming the structure to those habits, we may no less reasonably expect that the close connection which exists so long between the body and the soul inhabiting it, shall suffuse that body with aptitudes and super-sensual forces capable of transmission. It is not necessary to suppose, with a growing school of Theosophists, that each atom has a consciousness of its own, for the word "consciousness" seems to have little meaning when disconnected from organism and will, and its application to atoms sounds more like an ingenious sportiveness than a tenable theorem. Besides, those who attribute consciousness to atoms, usually deny it to the Deity, and one is hardly prepared to concede less to the Supreme Architect of the Universe than to a dust-speck or a brickbat. But without going thus far, it is quite conceivable that a physical organism may become furrowed and channelled with habit, and that life-forces, following (as do all forces) the lines of least resistance, more readily flow through those channels than elsewhere; and then that another body, procreated therefrom, may have naturally the same constitution, the same channels, the same tendency to certain acts; and then that the tenant of the derivative body may be reacted upon by the stored-up inclinations, and readily allow his own life-forces to pour through the channels reproduced from the primitive. Thus a newcomer into a new body would not find it without bent or bias, but tinged and moulded and [Page 12] vibrating, as was that of which it is the offspring. And so that body would affect him, influence him more strongly than could any objects outside of him and it, sway him, shape his nature to its own material, yet immaterially-saturated type. And so he, finding certain actions easier and more congenial, would practise them, the house and the tenant fitting themselves to each other.

This seems to concede very much to the power of matter, even when suffused with influences which have come from mind. And surely it would be unjust to a newly-incarnated child if the home made ready for it was really its master, or if it itself was a fresh creation, a being without antecedents or history, starting for the first time on a human career. But it is not that. It is really an epitome of many incarnations, a concentration of long experiences and activities and aptitudes, the outcome, last time, of a very distinct and vivid life. It has a character with marked inclinations, it has reached a stage of development in each of many traits, it is a bundle of forces and merits and evils. It is re-born, not first-born, is old in trials and perhaps in sin, has been through millions of years in varied lands and varied spheres. It has no right to a spotless house, but only to an appropriate one. And so Karma, the unerring guide, has taken it in its present helplessness and has put it where it belongs, in the house which other pilgrims, unknown to it but like-minded, have unwittingly prepared for it in the prosecution of their own designs or pleasures. Sometimes the home is altogether congenial, for the ingrained qualities of it and the occupant are alike, and then the life goes on merrily and swiftly and downwardly. Sometimes there is a jar, for a higher principle asserts itself and battles with its surroundings, seeking to elevate the body and the man to finer ways and nobler followings; and sometimes that is so encouraged that it masters all the life, and then both are purified and refined, vibrate to higher tones in the gamut of spirituality, and the body, saturated with new *habitudes*, becomes the parent of another, fitted for the indwelling of a tenant worthier still. If the bad, just-born, find bodies suited to them in moral saturation, so do the good.

Yet this does not explain why saints are sometimes the progeny of sinners, and sinners of saints. Marcus Aurelius was the father of Commodus, and Edward the Sixth was the son of Henry the Eighth. We need, of course, to allow for the other parent, but this element is inadequate. Evidently the problem of reincarnation has more factors than ancestral, and the ancestral more factors than procreation.

Character is an exceedingly complicated matter, and Karmic treatment of it cannot be less so. As we believe neither that every soul is a fresh creation nor that it is begotten by the parents of its physical body, we perceive as a consequence that heredity is strictly an affair only of that body, including [Page 13] its tendencies, and that a child resembles an ancestor in character, not because such character has been transmitted to him, but because he having independently that character through his own formation of it, is incarnated in a family whereto he is like. A and B have similar traits. A's time for reincarnation has come 30 years ahead of B's; he has an infant, and B enters it as his appropriate home. It is even conceivable that B may have been A's father long ago, Devachanic interludes having been unequal. Moreover, another consideration bears upon the matter. Either of two conditions may determine incarnations in a family. There may be no similarity of character, yet other circumstances so fitting that such is the proper spot for the incoming Ego, his needs and rights pointing thereto. We can imagine a meritorious Ego born as a child to evil but high-placed parents, Karma foreseeing that the parents would die young and that the child would secure the benefit of their station whilst losing the infection of their example. The other condition would be where there was similarity in some one element of character, but diversity in all others. To cure the one evil by experience of its hatefulness, an otherwise meritorious Ego might be born in a family possessing it, and so be disciplined out of his wrong as he felt and learned it to be such. Perhaps you have seen, certainly I have, a character fine in many ways but needing remedy to others placed by birth in a distasteful environment, everything repelling and odious and unsympathetic. Why? Because only by gradual perception of what his own evil must be when at its full, as illustrated around him, could he sense and loathe and correct it. It might be littleness or illiberality or selfishness or sham, what you please: in no other way than by bitter experience could the trait be exhibited and cured.

Of these two cases, one is an apparent violation of heredity, the other but a partial illustration of it. The deflection is caused by the working of Karma, and if Karma has power to override heredity, it is the superior law, and to it we must look for the source and reason of the anomalies, as well as the examples, in inheritance. Indeed, if Karma is omitted from the inquiry, it is hard to see how there can be any *law* of heredity at all. For as the body only, not the mental or spiritual nature, is generated by a parent, statistical tables of filial talent or dispositions or crime are mere collections of figures, suggesting no connection and pointing to no inference. If we are told that large investigation has shown a measurable uniformity of quality along lines of descent, we may reply, What of it? As the incarnating being is not the product of his ancestor, there is a total break between the statistics and any induction from them. Nothing but Karma can show *why* the son of a criminal is probably a criminal, and this Karma presupposes of necessity the doctrine of reincarnation. Given the fact that an incoming Ego has a character meriting a certain [Page 14] environment, and the fact that Karma will ensure his receiving it, and you have a rationale, a meaning, a coherence in heredity. It ceases to be a mental speculation or a moral puzzle, for we have the clue to its mystery.

That clue, as has been said, is found in antecedent character. Proper treatment of character being the aim of reincarnation, all minor questions bend before it. If a just man is the father of a reprobate, or the son of one, the fact may at first appear strange, but it ceases to be so when one thinks that the call for that treatment, whether through domestic experience or social surroundings or specific circumstances, is louder than for a mere compliance with external probabilities. For some reason the son deserves that environment and requires that experience. And this is equally true whether the environment is congenial or the reverse. It may be a reward or a discipline; in either case it is needed, it is just, it is Karmic.

Contrasts, then, between parents and children, or between the children of common parents, while they



weaken the purely scientific doctrine of heredity, are no puzzle Theosophically. Theosophy steps back a little from the scene, puts the ancestor and the descendant side by side, waives off their physical embodiments, and compares the two Egos. It notes the similar temperaments and inclinations, the relative strength of good and evil, the qualities which need bracing or repression, the general tones of character. The question which Ego came first in the world, and why, is minor. They have come into the world upon a common line which indicates a common element. Investigation may disclose it. Back of it stretches a long series of Karma-making lives, whereof the present is the latest. Both Egos must have had a large proportion of their merits alike in quality, ensuring their rebirth in the same general era, of the same race, in the same land, and of the same family. There are differences, perhaps, in social position, in wealth, and in opportunity. These indicate the divergences as to merit. At this point comes in the date of birth. The world is older now than it has ever been, and it is rather a privilege to be born into its riper thought and larger facts. Crumbling superstitions let in more of heaven's light, and one feels it better to be upon the planet now than forty, seventy, a hundred years ago. Possibly, then, the child, the grandchild, had a slightly finer past than the father, the grandfather, and so comes as the descendant and not the ancestor. Heredity takes a very different colour when we think less on theories of "pangeneses" and "selection" and more on doctrines of Karma and Reincarnation. And this is what may come to pass hereafter. The true cause of resemblances, the real impulse to inheritances, the inner reason for place in generation, may disclose itself to the scientific eye, and Galton will be superficial without Sinnett. [Page 15]

The question of Reincarnation as related to Sex is of no little moment. If I was sure that on another evening you would be as patient and good-natured as on this, I should be almost tempted to undertake it.

### PART 3

THE curious questions embedded in the topic of Reincarnation in its relations to sex are hardly more curious than the prior question as to mental distinctions in sex. The great palpable fact of physique separates the human family into two sharply-marked divisions, and yet the line is hardly more clear than is the almost coincident one in mental structure. Here and there in the space between the hosts, an individual stands forth as not exactly identified with either, — a woman with a man's spirit, or a man with a woman's, sometimes a being so compounded of both that it might as well have had the converse body; but almost universally the interior and the exterior, the mind and the form, correspond, and we infer character from gender. The strangeness of the fact escapes us because we are so accustomed to it that we never examine it.

For the difference is far greater than is explicable by relative proportions of muscle to flesh, or habits of out-door and in-door life, or the effects of any particular social system, or the down-treading of the weaker by the stronger. History does not affirm the theorem that preponderance of mere strength gives permanent ascendancy to any side. This would be to elevate matter above mind. If there is anywhere a permanent ascendancy, it must be because mind has secured it; and this cannot be less true of sex than of races or nations. A particular social system would only affect the region where it existed. Habits must be traced to some antecedent and causative reason. It is the mental which notably concern the questions in reincarnation.

The differences between the male and the female type of character have long been the subject of grave

research, of thoughtful speculation, and of jest. If any full illustrations were needful for our present study, it would be difficult to give them without verging on the comic, and thus transforming study into amusement; but a few generalized distinctions may prepare us for examining reincarnation as related to sex.

First, then, it may be said that the average opinion of women has smaller range than that of men. If you take fifty women at random and inquire their view upon some new topic, one upon which they have read nothing and heard nothing from husbands or brothers, the result will not [Page 16] vary beyond quite moderate limits, and will in almost all cases express conventional belief, antecedent prejudice, and a normal conservatism. If you take the same number of men, the result will give far larger variety, not, merely because conventionalism is less potent, prejudice less fixed, and conservatism less inherent; but because greater friction with the world and an enforced vision of things as they are, promote a freer play of thought on all topics, and consequently upon new ones. Hence the chances are that a man of a given class is less typical than a woman of the same class, and that anticipations or conclusions do not warrant so much precision.

In the second place, it may be said that the cooperative faculty has fuller function among men than among women. There are two aspects of this. One is that the inherent tendency of women to rely on guidance, and that guidance from a man, indisposes them to seek it among themselves. As each looks naturally to male support and leadership, she has no instinct to expect it from other women, and so the impulse to cooperation is slight. The history of Female Suffrage Societies is a case in point, although this has a tempting case to common union against the tyrant. Yet it seems as if the tyrant was more bearable than the deliverer. The other is the proverbial tendency of women to quarrel. I shall refrain from speculation as to the causes for this, but it seems to have been accepted as an axiom by sociologists, and may account for the brief career of most organizations from which the male element has been excluded.

In the third place, it may be said that the sentimental side of women dominates the rational; the finer, more delicate qualities exceeding those of robust, vigorous form. Hence their readiness for intuitional perceptions, and hence, too, their affinity for those interests wherein are combined a devotional and an aspirational element. This is why Church membership is so largely of women, and why the Theosophical Society owes to them so much of its size, its vital spirit, and its heart. They do not usually come into it because they are anxious to understand cosmogony, or because philosophy is fascinating and helpful, but because they feel the reality of a Universal Fraternity, and sense the buoyancy and sunniness of a spiritual principle which clears the air of pitiless creeds and murky dogmas that every soul may see heaven if it will — and reach it.. "Sweetness and light " — what a portraiture these words give of certain women in the Theosophical Society!

From such discussion as has had place on the reincarnation of the Ego in male and female forms, it would seem that the usual process is alternate. If so, any question of superiority is laid to rest. If the Ego, after repeated incarnations in both sexes, reached a point where it never needed again to incarnate in one of them, this could only be because that one was inferior, to be surpassed and dropped when permanent fitness for [Page 17] the other was achieved. This may be so at the Mahatmic stage. But at ours, we are given to understand, male and female embodiments succeed each other, neither having precedence as an evolutionary advance. As the mental type usually accompanies the physical body, we have to be alternately men and women in character, and so the two sides of our nature, like the opposite

hemispheres of our own earth, are successively brought into the light and plunged into the darkness.

Just how a reversal of sex in the next earth-life may be contemplated by our Theosophical sisters can only be made known by a paper or other declaration from one of their representatives. Speaking from the male stand-point, I confess to regarding it with some misgivings. It is not that I should not make a good wife and mother, for perhaps I might. It is not even that I prefer the larger range of opinion, the greater cooperative faculty, and the dominance of the rational over the sentimental. But it is because, when I recall scenes in telegraph offices, street cars, and shops, the maddening bunglings and confusions familiar to anyone who has read the letters to a business office, the caprices and social jealousies and petty occupations which one sees in daily life and reads in the weekly "Life", the aimlessness and worthlessness of existence which this era seems to have imposed on the sex to which I shall next time belong, and think that I shall then be an actor instead of a critic, that my heart sinks. You may say that memory of these scenes will then be absent. True; but that constitutes the distressing element, for without memory of the impression such things gave him, how can the newly-incarnated be expected to make reform? But let us turn from the sombre to the studential aspects of our topic.

It certainly seems strange that the same Ego, merely because changing its encasement to one of opposite gender, should exhibit itself as an opposite being. The process of orderly advance which we think natural, and which we should expect to see verified in continuous manifestation of each attained faculty, deficiencies being gradually made up and excrescences gradually pared down, does not hold. We do not find an Ego presenting himself as he must have been when he last quitted the earth, ready to take up the evolutionary work where it was dropped, but a being with converse traits, tastes, aptitudes, and desires. John Smith, who was vigorous and self-reliant, and perhaps aggressive, enjoying argument, and ever in the van of fresh opinion, active in business, fervent in spirit, whether or not serving the Lord, reappears as Mary Jones, timid and weak and dependent, impatient at reason and always taking refuge in feeling, conventional and indolent, devout but useless, a good nurse but a poor companion. Or perhaps Sarah Thompson, a refined and cultivated gentlewoman when before, now returns as a burly, pushing, not over-scrupulous politician. [Page 18] It would seem incredible that the two characters should be really one. And even where the cases are less extreme, there must be still the obverse sides of being, the distinctively masculine supplanting the feminine, the distinctively feminine supplanting the masculine. Can we find any rationale for it?

In the first place, there is the obvious fact that, but for the contrasted characters of sex, human life would be painfully monotonous in colour, indeed incapable of endurance. Sharp divergences in tastes make possible the execution of every conceivable function, as the social system turns out its innumerable needs and demands and demands and opportunities. The necessities of life do not require merely the provision for the birth of new generations and the maintenance of home and surroundings through sexes, but a vastly complicated range of varied avocations, each exacting a different combination of qualities. Thus every demand of humanity finds its fulfilment *in* humanity, and the world is tinted and variegated with countless colourings which, if not directly traceable to sex, are inconceivable without it. Had Nature arranged that each Ego should return with its totality in manifestation, we should all be at different stages of homogeneous development, or perhaps should not have developed at all because there would have been no development of society.

In the second place, the law of popularity seems to hold as fully in the manifestation of man as in the constitution of man. All Nature exhibits the action of two opposite forces, through the play and

interchange and balancing of which come about the phenomena of life. The centripetal and centrifugal, the negatively and positively magnetic, the composing and the decomposing, are at work about and through us. On the mental plane that same fact holds. The analytic and the synthetic power, the rational and the sentimental, the logical and the perceptive, ever antagonize each other. Characters, as they are sanguine or despondent, phlegmatic or lymphatic, dependent or self-reliant, show the pervasiveness of the law. This being so in man's make-up, it is properly so in his manifestation. And as, in the broad field of Nature, these forces are usually displayed in alternation, so in the epitomized field of human incarnation. There comes a birth when the male element is given vent, and then one when a female element has its turn; and then a male, qualified by its experience, is uppermost, and then the female, qualified by *its* experience. Both sides of the dual being have equal chance for true expansion; both forces in the double nature are allowed their just activity. When both are harmonized according to the highest law, their every movement free and accurate and common, the necessity for terrestrial discipline will have been over-passed. It is this state of things which we understand of the Exalted Souls who have gone on to loftier planes. [Page 19]

In the third place, the true contrast of an Ego is not with his precedent incarnation, but with the one before last. We must compare the man with the man, and the woman with the woman. If endowed with such powers as Theosophy claims to be attainable by humanity, and which illustrates in the persons of those from whom so much of its teachings have mediately flowed, we should be able to put a masculine record side by side with that it made two incarnations back, and see how far the old qualities were again asserting themselves, and how far they have been modified by discipline then and by the female incarnation between. It would not be John Smith as compared to Mary Jones, or the delicate lady with the bustling politician, but John Smith as he was in his last male career, and Mary Jones as she was prior to becoming John Smith. Similarly with the other pair. And then we should see how the qualities which have manifested themselves in the later incarnation were not unknown in the earlier, and how, co-existent with strong and vivid traits on the one side of the dual nature, were equally marked traits, but antithetical, on the other side. And, too, we should see that, but for the opportunity Nature gives in reincarnations for the due action and discipline of each, neither would have had expansion, training and correction. And too, I am sure, we should see that, by temporarily obliterating memory, she has given the condition indispensable to any advance at all.

But, it may be said, all this presupposes an invariably congruous manifestation, the body and its allied mind always re-appearing together. By no means. History records a Catherine of Russia, and Elizabeth of England, a Joan of Arc. And, indeed, we should rather expect some commingling, perhaps some survival, of traits, when we recall the fact that the two sides of the Ego, though distinct, are not dissociated, and the further fact that human evolution, more than any other evolution, is a field wherein play the most complicated and varied of all forces. Human nature supplies some, cosmic energy others; from the great realm of moral and spiritual potencies comes a third set. How all may operate, or what may be the outcome, in any case, of so many different influences, who can affirm? I think I can see how the normal process would lead to a female incarnation, and yet that some pent-up energy, obstructed in the past, might so need vent and be so valuable to humanity at the epoch, that it would properly be allowed dominance in the incarnation feminine only as to body. Or, perhaps, the previous incarnation might have been cut short by accident, and some higher law step in to modify the otherwise usual sequence. Or, perhaps, the last career had earned a certain status in this, but no fit embodiment was found of the sex demanded, and so one was taken from the converse. Or, perhaps, some quality needing repression or diversion could never find it wholly in the sex to which it was appropriate, [Page 20] and so it incarnated into the one wherein such discipline would surely come. And thus we might long go on,

speculating, imagining, combining various circumstances and conditions, seeking reasons for all the anomalies we see or read of, evoking explanations of the mysteries of birth. Yet we should only find hypotheses, for the clear vision of Initiates is still far ahead, distant probably many lives from that wherein we now are struggling and guessing and aspiring.

The Theosophical Society, though it has formulated no creed, has done what is better — it has expressed a principle. It has mounted above all the world's great nationalities and religions, has waived aside the social customs and the faiths of both the Orient and the Occident, and in the simple, sharp-cut statement of its position has shown its grasp of reincarnation. For its Constitution says emphatically that membership is without distinction of sex. One of its founders was a man, the other was a woman. Both knew that sex was no permanent quality of the being, exhibited once on earth and ever afterwards in the spirit-land, but an alternate expression of the converse sides of the Ego. The perfect Society, like the perfected Ego, needs both in manifestation. Nowhere else, with the exception of one or two insignificant sects, and those on other grounds, have the fact of reincarnation and the consequent equality of sexes been so displayed as they are here. The Theosophical Society, like Mother-Earth herself, welcomes with the same warmth male and female incomers, and tries so to improve and develop them that, when they reappear in their new and converse incarnation, they shall be the better for this. If we Aryans are privileged with a short Devachan and allowed to come back soon to our work and our mission, while it may be too much to hope that the Society will be co-extensive with civilized humanity, it is at least permissible to believe that it will contain the mass of enlightened philanthropists, and to trust that we, then women if now men, and men if now women, will be members of that mighty host. Perhaps then the now too-voiceless sisters will no longer sit mute as the discussion passes round, and we, the male talkers and essayists of the present, will have succumbed to that most untheosophic dictum of St. Paul, "Let your women be silent; for I suffer not a woman to speak, but to be in subjection to the men".