

THE MEMORY OF PAST BIRTHS

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PREFACE.

By reading the title, *The Memory of Past Births*, you have already taken the first step towards remembering, for you have sowed in your mind the seed of an idea which will germinate and grow till at last it blossoms into full knowledge. Of those who receive this thought of endless life through many births, most accept it at once with a conviction which runs ahead of evidence; many hold it tentatively with gradually growing credence; none altogether reject or forget it. The thought remains, the seed stirs and grows, and as rebirth is a true law of life, every turn and incident of life gives it new force, till at last belief ripens into certainty. That certainty of the larger life wherein the lives and deaths of this our world are but as days and nights, lightens the burden of death, dulls the edge of sorrow, takes away the terror of separation. Immortality, the dearest hope in every human heart, becomes once more credible and intelligible; nay more, demands and compels our belief. We begin to catch the light of our immortal selves, the gleam from beyond the heavens which shall illumine our hidden past, and, still greater boon, bring clear vision of the path before us, winding through the mists and shadows of the valley, till it rises at last into the everlasting sunshine.

C. J.

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CHAPTER I.

HOW THE TEACHING CAME.

When reincarnation is spoken of, one question is invariably raised—If I have lived before, why do I not remember it? The defenders of reincarnation almost invariably evade this question, or give vague and unsatisfactory answers; so that, while almost every one who once grasps the thought of successive lives on earth feels strongly inclined to adopt it, still this one point has remained a stumbling-block, and in all the years reincarnation has been talked of nothing definite or to the point has been said as to this really vital question.

The idea of reincarnation came to the Western world only a few years ago. It was first clearly presented in an attractive and sympathetic form in the "Fragments of Occult Truth" which Mme. Blavatsky published some sixteen or seventeen years back in *The Theosophist*.

The idea in the "Fragments" was this: To understand our lives, to know what lies before us after death and what lay behind us, before birth, we must begin by a better understanding of ourselves. We are not body only, but soul and spirit as well—the soul half earthly, half heavenly; the spirit, as yet, almost unknown to us.

The soul is everything between the body and the spirit—the passions, as well as the pure will; the desires, as well as the love of

beauty, and truth, and goodness. To the lower half of the soul the "Fragments" gave the name: the Body of Desire, while its higher half was called the Mind.

The soul is drawn downward toward the body by the Body of Desire, and then the animal in us comes out and fills our lives with passions and appetites. The soul is drawn upward toward the spirit by its higher part; then genius, and power, and beauty, and faith are developed—the true qualities of human life. In the fullness of time, death comes. What happens then? or, first, what has happened at the moment of death?

First, the body has been separated from the soul; the body, with all that network of instinctive and elemental powers in it, which built it up and carried on its work during life, and which now pulls it to pieces again, in dissolution. But, when the body is laid aside, the soul is not all pure, any more than it was a day, a month or a year before, while its life still lasted on earth. The soul has its worse half still clinging to it, passions, pictures of lust and appetite, unsatisfied longings for sensuous things, and the sins of malice, selfishness and self-love, which make up so much of ordinary human life.

The soul is, as it were, surfeited with these passions—clogged like a heavy feeder after too rich a meal. It cannot rise at once to spiritual life. Almost immediately after physical death the soul comes to itself, rid of its pains and sickness, and with a feeling of lightness and vigor, resembling the vigor of keen health and high spirits. The vesture of mortality has been laid aside, but there is often no clear consciousness that death has actually taken place, and this only comes after repeated attempts to talk to the living people so recently left, who are still vividly present to the person just dead.

But this vivid touch with earthly life lasts for a few hours only, or a few days at most; then the scenery round the soul begins to change, the passions and desires begin to assert themselves and gradually work themselves out through a period of purification, which is at the root of the teaching of Purgatory. The spirit draws the soul

toward its strong, pure life; but the soul, overburdened with passions, cannot at first respond. It must gradually put off the earthly desires, and, apparently, is still in contact with the living world, in the sense that it has a consciousness of the nearness of living people. And the "Fragments" suggested that any strong bond of affection toward people still in the world would keep the soul of the dead person close to them, and conscious of them; and, so far as lay in the power of the soul, it would help and protect the living.

Then, in the course of days, or months, or years, according to the strength of its earthly desires, the soul shakes itself free from its bondage and puts off the Body of Desire. The passions become latent and are as seeds in the dried and withered flower. The higher part of the soul is drawn back into the spirit, and the radiant power and strong, pure will of the spirit pour into it, and breathe new life and vigor into the soul's dreams of beauty, inspirations of goodness and strivings after truth. That is the soul's great holiday and day of refreshment, when all the pains of this mortal life are laid aside.

And the "Fragments" further suggest that, as our spirits are far more intimately united than our bodies, so the souls of those who are truly bound together are keenly conscious of that bond and union, in the great rest they enter into, when the Body of Desire is put away. To that rest of the soul, the "Fragments" gave the name of Devachan, a Tibetan word meaning "the Blissful," and one well known in the books of the northern Buddhists. It was the idea of Devachan more than any other teaching which made the fortune of the "Fragments of Occult Truth." There was something in this teaching, at once so reasonable and so sublime, so unlike the material heavens of the churches, with their gold and stones, their trees and rivers, and yet something so satisfying to our best aspirations that one could not help believing that something like it must be the truth.

The spirit in us, standing close to divinity, has a power and immortal youth; an eternal vigor, that is the very heart of joy; and a wide and sweeping knowledge that almost reaches omniscience. As

the soul puts away its garment of desires it rises up to union with the spirit in Devachan, the Blissful, and is thrilled through and through with the spirit's exultant and immortal youth. All that the soul had in it, of beauty, and truth, and goodness, is kindled into rich and vigorous life; all aspirations are satisfied; all hopes of heaven are fulfilled; all dreams of joy are more than realized.

Then the soul bathes in the waters of life, and is strengthened and refreshed. As the measure of its aspiration, so is the measure of its reward; every hope in it, every seed of hope, blossoms out into a perfect flower, under the sunlight of the spirit and its vivifying rays. And as the souls of men are of every different measure of aspiration, so is the Blissful Rest different for each. Every soul forms its own Devachan, through its own powers and energies, reinforced and strengthened by the energies of the spirit. And that life in Devachan is the soul's great opportunity to rise to new aspirations, to receive new seeds of beauty and joy, which shall in their turn blossom in the time to come. Drawn thus close to the spirit, the soul shares the spirit's greater life and receives the seeds of hope, the ideals of future growth, which are to guide and stimulate it when it returns again to this earthly life.

But the soul does not only receive from the spirit, it also gives to the spirit; brings to it the harvest of its best hours in life; the knowledge it has won; the sense of the beauty of the world; the sense of human life, with its loves and its efforts; the sense of toil well done, of difficulties overcome. For if the spirit soars angelic above our life it is thereby cut off from many a secret that every mortal knows; and these are the messages it learns from the soul in return for the power and peace it breathes over the soul in paradise.

That paradise of peace and power may last as long as a full human life; it may last thrice as long; no years are given for us to measure it by, but it will not end until there has come fullness of refreshing and a rest from the memory of human ills.

The radiance of rest becomes slowly quiescent; the overshadow-