









THE RING OF RETURN

"O, how could I not be ardent for Eternity,  
and for the marriage-ring of rings, the ring  
of return?"

NIETZSCHE.

"Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure.  
This frail vessel thou emptyest again and again,  
and fillest it ever with fresh life."

RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

# THE RING OF RETURN

An Anthology of References to  
Reincarnation and Spiritual  
Evolution: from Prose and  
Poetry of All Ages.

Compiled by

**EVA MARTIN**

With an Introduction



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# THE RING OF RETURN

An Analysis of Reference to  
Karma and Spiritual  
Evolution in the  
Works of the  
Buddha

EVA MARTIN

With an Introduction  
by the Author



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A few apt quotations have perforce been omitted for copyright reasons, but it is hoped that these, and others that have been overlooked—for, like most Anthologies, this one makes no claim to having attained 'completeness'—may be included in any future editions.

EVA MARTIN.

Cornwall, 1927.



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I  
INTRODUCTION



THERE have existed, from earliest ages, certain universal images which symbolise the deepest truths the human mind is capable of conceiving, and one of the chief of these pictures the soul of man as a traveller, a sojourner in a strange land, the wandering heir to a lost inheritance. In the lamentations of Isis for Osiris, of Demeter for Persephone; in the parable of the Prodigal Son who had gone 'on a far journey'; in the stories of Cinderella mournful among the ashes, and of the Sleeping Beauty awaiting love's magic kiss; in the fantasy of the lost Princess in *The Immortal Hour*, loved by an earthly king, but drawn back by her immortal lover to the 'Country of the Young'; in many another folk-tale, legend, and poem is the same idea repeated, age after age, in varying forms.

There is a very remarkable poem about eighteen hundred years old, called *The Hymn of the Robe of Glory*, which speaks of the soul as a little child dwelling in its father's house, and tells of its being sent down into the Land of Egypt to seek the Pearl 'that lies in the Sea, hard by the loud-breathing Serpent.' But when it reached the Land of Egypt—that is, the body—the soul forgot its royal birth, forgot the Pearl, and sank into a deep sleep. From this it was aroused by the receipt of a letter, urging it to awaken and to remember the object of its journey; whereupon, after overcoming the Serpent with magical charms:

I snatched up the Pearl,  
And turned to the House of my Father. . . .  
My Glorious Robe that I'd stripped off,  
And my Mantle with which it was covered,

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Down from the Heights of Hyrcania  
Thither my Parents did send me. . . .  
And I stretched myself forth to receive it,  
With its beauty of colour I decked me,  
And my Mantle of sparkling colours  
I wrapped entirely around me.<sup>1</sup>

Thus garmented, in what might be described as the 'aura' or 'body of light,' in what St. Paul called the 'spiritual body,' the soul returned to the Presence of the King, its Father.

We are reminded of this old Gnostic poem when we find William Blake describing how the soul of Milton discards 'the Robe of the Promise' before descending to 'Eternal Death,' or in other words to rebirth in the 'Sea of Time and Space'; and again when among the quaint and lovely thoughts of Henry Vaughan, that wise physician, we come upon such a verse as this :

If a star  
Should leave the Sphere,  
She must first mar  
Her flaming wear,  
And after fall, for in her dress  
Of glory she cannot transgress ;

while many another seer, ancient or modern, has looked upon the body as a 'Land of Egypt,' a place of darkness and captivity. In the Orphic Mysteries, we are told, the cry of the believer, like that of St. Paul, was, '*Who shall deliver me from this body of death?*'; St. Clement of Alexandria speaks of the soul being 'yoked with and buried in the body as in a tomb'; and Thomas Vaughan, twin-brother to the poet just quoted, says that 'the soul of man, while she is in the body, is like a candle shut up in a dark lanthorn.'

It is not surprising that the poets and mystics of all ages should have been more fully conscious than other men of this state of separation and imprisonment, and also more successful in expressing the soul's ardent

<sup>1</sup> Translated by G. R. S. Mead.

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desire for reunion, and its joy at even temporary accomplishment of this desire. Thus Crashaw tells how :

The self-remembering soul sweetly recovers  
Her kindred with the stars ; not basely hovers  
Below ; but meditates her immortal way  
Home to the original source of Light and intellectual Day.

Francis Thompson cries :

My soul remembers its lost Paradise,  
And antenatal gales blow from Heaven's shores of spice ;

and F. W. H. Myers writes of man's ' incommunicable, homeless pain,'

Until his soul so yearns to reunite  
With her Prime Source, her Master and Delight,  
As if some loadstone drew her, and brain and limb  
Ached with her struggle to get through to Him.

Avicenna describes how the soul :

Midst the sign-posts and ruined abodes of this desolate world,  
It weeps, when it thinks of its home and the peace it possessed,  
With tears welling forth from its eyes without pausing or rest ;

and Jalālu'd-dīn Rūmī, the Sufi poet, puts the same thought in original fashion :

Every moment the voice of Love is coming from left and right.  
We are bound for heaven : who has a mind to sight-seeing ?  
We have been in heaven, we have been friends of the angels  
Thither, Sire, let us return, for that is our country.

Jacob Boehme says that we are

with our soul (in this world) in a strange lodging, and yet we certainly know that we must travel, either into heaven to God or into hell to the devil. . . . Yea, but in what misery we lie captivated, in what lodging we are, for we are captivated by the spirit of this world.

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And in Arthur O'Shaughnessy's poem *En Soph*, the unborn soul prays :

Oh, let me not be parted from the light,  
Oh, send me not to where the outer stars  
Tread their uncertain orbit. . . .  
I fear to live the life that shall be mine  
Down in the half lights of that wandering world.

Among contemporary poets, perhaps none has more beautifully expressed the soul's secret knowledge of the 'Robe of Glory' which once it wore than Laurence Binyon, in *Unsated Memory* :

Where is that world that I am fallen from? . . .  
Ah, surely I was rather native there  
Where all desires were lovely. . . .  
O, we go shrouded from ourselves, and hide  
The soul from its own splendour, and encrust  
The virgin sense with thinking. Then some chance  
Moment reveals us : we are deified,  
Feeling and seeing ; gold gleams from the rust ;  
And, marvelling at our lost inheritance,  
We breathe the air of beauty.

Again, Evelyn Underhill has the same thought :

Let me whilst yet I can  
In this life's span,  
Stretch to the Only Fair  
And teach my homing heart to breathe its native air ;

and A. E. Waite describes how :

in that time when I was lifted up,  
Refreshment from an everlasting cup  
To take with spiritual lips, Thou didst  
My soul sustain, its angel-peers amidst.  
Then at Thy board I sat, all sane and whole,  
Clothed in the proper garment of my soul ;

and how, since then,

Far as my paths might from Thy throne divide,  
Deep as the gulfs might be which I plunged in—  
Conduits and cesspools of the House of Sin—  
In the strange tavern and the stranger's bed  
I do remember still Thy wine and bread.

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So again Dante, in *The Banquet*, writes :

The strongest desire of everything and the one first implanted by Nature, is to return to its source. And since God is the Source of our soul and has made it like unto Himself . . . therefore this soul desires above all things to return to Him. And like a pilgrim who is going by a road he has never travelled, who believes each house that he sees from afar to be his inn, and, disappointed in this one, puts faith in the next, and so on from house to house until he comes to the inn, so our soul, as soon as she enters upon the new and never-travelled path of this life, directs her eyes towards her supreme good.

This symbolism of the traveller or pilgrim appears and reappears, in various guises, times innumerable throughout human literature. 'Death ought to be looked upon only as one stage in our journey,' writes Claude Saint Martin. 'We reach this stage with tired, worn-out horses, and we start again with horses that are fresh and able to take us farther on our road'; 'the Earth,' says William Blake, 'is a Vortex not yet pass'd by the traveller through Eternity'; and Walt Whitman urges us 'to know the Universe as a road, as many roads, as roads for travelling souls.'

It has been necessary to lay stress on the prevalence of this particular world-symbol, as it may be called, before passing to a consideration of the idea with which this Anthology is specially concerned—the idea of Reincarnation as an integral part of the scheme of Evolution, involving *repeated* sojourns in this place of exile, pleasure-ground, prison, or school of experience, as our earth may variously be described, by those of differing temperament and outlook. For the idea of the pilgrim soul's pre-existence in some diviner sphere is so closely bound up with that of its recurrent visits to earth that it is far from easy to disentangle the two. They cannot, indeed, be entirely separated, and if any quotations are found in the body of this book which seem, to some readers, to suggest merely such pre-existence, we can only say that we have done our best in the very difficult task of selection and elimination.

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The well-known lines from Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*,

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.  
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar,

were rejected for the reason that they offer no suggestion of the poet's having believed that this spiritual rising and setting might take place more than once; and for similar reasons other well-known names will be found missing. Keats, for example, having a vision of great spirits 'standing apart upon the forehead of the age to come,' believed that 'these will give the world another heart and other pulses'—thus definitely indicating the conscious existence of souls before their incarnation upon earth, but not necessarily a repetition of the experience. Indeed, the conception of the soul existing, not in embryo, but, as it were, full-fledged and in possession of all its faculties, in some heavenly region before birth, is one which has strongly appealed to poets of all ages, and a large Anthology could be compiled along this line alone. It is interesting to remark in passing that there is one poet, at least, who, while obviously believing in the soul's divine origin, regrets, instead of welcoming, childhood's evidences of it. Thus Edmund Gosse, in his lines *To My Daughter Teresa*, shows no delight in such 'bright shootes of everlastingness' as rejoiced the heart of Henry Vaughan, but looks upon them merely as 'cold immortal lights'; and instead of deploring, like Wordsworth, the inevitable gathering of the 'shades of the prison-house,' can write with all sincerity:

I joy in every childish sign  
That proves the stranger less divine—

a novel point of view which may appeal to the more human side of parents in general.

On the other hand, Thomas Hardy, so-called pessimist,

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and opposed (perhaps?) to the theory of personal immortality, speaks sympathetically of the ghosts who surround him when 'Copying Architecture in an Old Minster,' and suggests that,

Perhaps they speak to the yet unborn,  
And caution them not to come  
To a world so ancient and trouble-torn,  
Of foiled intents, vain lovingkindness,  
And ardours chilled and numb—

a very definite suggestion of the existence of individual souls before birth, whether or no their survival after death be admitted.

Not one of these poets, however, attempts to explain how each human soul has attained those varying qualities and faculties which they obviously believe it to possess at birth; not one of them offers any solution of the eternal problem as to the why and wherefore of its temporary sojourn upon earth under circumstances differing so widely, and apparently so unjustly, for each individual; though some of them do seem to be aware of the fact that this sojourn is, in many cases, too tragically short to allow of any benefit being reaped from what must, at the least, be an experience of universal importance and great educative value.

Well may Thomas Hardy ask—as he does in his *Chorus of Pities* in *The Dynasts*—

To what tune danceth this Immense? . . .  
Why the All-Mover,  
Why the All-Prover  
Ever urges on and measures out the chordless chime of Things?

And though he supplies as answer to his own question—

That the rages  
Of the ages  
Shall be cancelled, and deliverance offered from the darts that  
were,  
Consciousness the Will informing, till It fashion all things fair—

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there are those for whom that answer, satisfactory as far as it goes, is too abstract to carry either comfort or conviction.

It is, in part, the knowledge that there are still many people vainly seeking an answer to this pregnant question that has led to the compilation of an Anthology remarkable, we venture to think, both for the extent of time that it covers and for the variety of names that it includes. This company of writers, from such widely separated lands and periods, united here in common thought, will provide many seekers, we confidently believe, with an answer to 'the everlasting Why' that is both satisfying and unique. In any case, a book which includes between its covers such various names as Empedocles, Plato and Virgil; Shelley, Ibsen and Victor Hugo; Browning, Nietzsche, Tennyson and Martin Tupper; Walt Whitman, Marie Corelli, Bernard Shaw, 'A. E.' and H. G. Wells—such a book is not likely, whatever its shortcomings, to be found dull reading.

For it seems as if there could scarcely be a time in human history when some such doctrine as this—be it called Reincarnation, Metempsychosis, Palingenesis, or the Transmigration of Souls—had not been formulated in thoughtful and speculative minds as a possible explanation of the Riddle of the Universe, a possible indication of the tune to which 'danceth this Immense,' a possible solution of the way in which 'deliverance' shall be offered, and all things fashioned fair at last.

We find its traces in such unexpected regions: not only in the organised philosophy of Hinduism and Buddhism, but in the customs of untaught savage tribes; in the speculations of lonely heterodox thinkers; in the scornful parodies of some old Roman satirist; in the didactic allegories of some early Christian Father.

The idea that the soul with its inexplicable memories, its inborn characteristics, tendencies and gifts, must inevitably be the product of former experience in a similar material environment, as well as of intervening periods in some 'heavenly' realm; the idea that it is

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compelled by the mysterious laws of its being to seek out ever new habitations, new bodies, new circumstances, until in the course of ages it has learnt all that such experiences can teach it, and is ready to enter into a state of blessedness beyond the grasp of mortal speech or thought—this is an idea that appeals powerfully to man's innate sense of justice, to his innate yearning for eternal progress and hope.

And though in various schools of metaphysical speculation it has assumed a confusing and perhaps rather forbidding complexity, though much that has been said and written about it by well-meaning but not very well-instructed enthusiasts may have tended to arouse prejudice against it, yet the fact remains that, stripped of accretions, it appears before us as a teaching of extraordinary dignity, simplicity and spirituality.

In the ancient faith of Brahmanism, the vision of the continuity of the Self, or individual consciousness, treading again and again a path of purgation and illumination was, for millions of men and women, a force that made for righteousness, a curb on animal passions, an impetus to virtue. It is noteworthy that the Founder of Buddhism did not reject it from his reformed religion. His mind, so merciless to superstition, accepted this doctrine of Reincarnation and Karma—the harvest of results reaped in succeeding lives from the good or evil done in previous ones—as at once rational and sincerely religious. During his lifetime, it appeared also in Greek philosophy, derived from either Egyptian or Indian sources, or possibly from both. The legends told of Pythagoras, of his circumstantial recollection of events in previous incarnations of his own, may, or may not, be accepted as literally true; but they supply, in any case, strong evidence of the trend of his teachings, and of the influence of the doctrine upon his thoughts and actions. Plato, inheriting the tradition, touched it with his own eloquent genius, and to such a degree did he associate it with his philosophy that later believers, in various periods and places, were,

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as we know, to rediscover it by the light that he had kindled, and to speak of the doctrine as *Platonic*; while many people to-day owe all their knowledge of it to the immortal *Dialogues*, and to the wealth of critical and explanatory literature that has grown up around them.

It is true that orthodox Christianity for many centuries looked coldly upon it, but it has been mistakenly supposed that the opinions of Origen on the point were condemned by the fifth General Council of Constantinople. What now seems established is that the condemnation was, as a matter of fact, merely that of a local synod held at Constantinople in A.D. 543. The doctrine had, in any case, Christian adherents of some number and note, for it appears again and again in writings of the first centuries after Christ; and the fact that it was commonly accepted in Palestine during His lifetime is borne witness to by the various references to it in the Gospels (p. 71). In this connection the reader will find it interesting to compare the views of three such different writers as Joseph Glanvill (p. 123), Anna Kingsford (p. 190), and Eva Gore-Booth (p. 265); while, in *The Great Law*, Williamson definitely expresses the opinion that the words 'resurrection of the body,' in the Nicene Creed, should be rendered 'in a body,' and that but for this mistranslation the phrase 'might be recognised for what it is, neither more nor less than an affirmation of the doctrine of rebirth.' At the same time, one of the chief aims of Christian teaching having been to stress the importance of the present life, and the need for attaining grace and salvation here and now, it is not surprising to find that this doctrine was allowed to drop into the background, and, by most exponents of the Christian faith, definitely rejected. In the present day, however, the view that its acceptance is not consistent with a profession of Christianity seems to be rapidly dying out, as a glance through the sections of this Anthology devoted to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

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will make apparent; and, in surveying the subject dispassionately, it is well to bear in mind that a teaching which forms a main bulwark of the religious faith of two-thirds of the population of the world is one that cannot be lightly dismissed. Its prevalence is not, of course, a proof of its truth; neither is its antiquity, nor its persistent reappearances throughout long periods of history; for 'nothing worthy proving,' as Tennyson has remarked, 'can be proven nor yet disproven.' Its prevalence, however, its persistence, and its vast antiquity must all be taken into account before passing judgment.

Among many primitive tribes the belief, in a variety of crude forms, is found to flourish quite independently; for instance, among the Fijians, many African tribes, and the North American Indians. Examples can be found in any text-book of Anthropology, and it seems unnecessary to repeat them here. Of greater interest to the general reader is the fact that it also flourished among the early inhabitants of our own islands, and that here again, according to the view held by most students of the subject, it was original and spontaneous, not derivative. 'The ancients,' says Max Müller, 'were convinced that this belief came from the East; they imagined that Pythagoras and others could have got their belief in Metempsychosis from India only' . . . but 'it can easily be shown that a belief in the transmigration of souls sprang up in other countries also, which could not possibly have been touched by the rays of Indian or Greek philosophy.' With regard to Ancient Britain it is impossible to speak positively on this point, the evidences being too scanty. During the Druidic Ages teachings of this kind were only allowed to be transmitted orally, and any that were written down later are fragmentary, though extremely interesting. We may quote a Druidic proverb—'*The true home verily is heaven*'; and one of the Triads, obscure but suggestive, will be found on p. 110. As to the idea of a human being's reincarnation in animal forms, so commonly accepted

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among savage and primitive peoples—this, it must be remembered, finds no place in the more logical and more spiritual interpretation of the doctrine which prevails among civilised men to-day. It is well to make a definite distinction between Reincarnation (rebirth in human bodies) and Transmigration or Metempsychosis (the flitting of the soul through sub-human shapes). Whether even Pythagoras ever held the belief, so generally attributed to him, of the possible return of a human soul to the animal kingdom, seems extremely doubtful. Modern students of his teachings declare emphatically that he stood but for the fact that souls must always find expression of their strongest tendencies, and that it would be 'as impossible for a gallon to be contained in a pint measure as for a human spirit to inhabit an animal body'; while Dacier, in his *Life of Pythagoras*, says equally emphatically:

A sure token that Pythagoras never held the opinion attributed to him lies in the fact that there is not the faintest trace of it in the symbols we have left of him, or in the precepts his disciple, Lysis, collected together and handed down as a summary of the Master's teaching.

This may be compared with the statements of Hierocles on p. 56, of A. P. Sinnett on p. 194, and of Max Heindel on p. 242.

In Buddhism the idea of rebirth in animal bodies was derived from ancient folk-tales, but this rather childish teaching appears to have been held only by the monks and by their often totally uneducated hearers. It is considered more than doubtful, by informed opinion, whether Gotama and his co-teachers ever subscribed to it. At the same time, we must remark that Gotama, like many other seers, did, on looking back, behold himself in various sub-human shapes. The point is that he saw it all as an orderly progress:

Life's upward steps long-linked, from levels low  
Where breath is base, to higher slopes and higher.

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As Tennyson's 'Evolutionist' has it, the sceptre of the Human Soul must rule the province of the Brute, until

I hear no yelp of the beast, and the Man is quiet at last  
As he stands on the heights of his life with a glimpse of a  
life that is higher.

It is surprising that this eminently rational idea of the age-long evolution of the soul through repeated sub-human and human lives should have been largely ignored by those who have given so much attention to the age-long evolution of the body. Life and form, soul and body, spirit and matter—call them by what names we will, the two seem inextricably intermingled. The slow æonian growth of the one parallels the slow æonian growth of the other. Who can maintain that the souls inhabiting the bodies of pre-historic men were at the same stage of development as those inhabiting the bodies of average mankind to-day? Or that the soul of a Hottentot is as fully evolved as that of a civilised human being of fine character and high intellectual powers? Mere increase of physical brain-capacity fails to explain the differences—the immense differences—in outlook, in achievement, in aspiration, between the early stages and the later ones. 'Men rise on stepping-stones of their dead selves.' . . .

It has been left to a Frenchman, Gustave Geley, to remark that against this theory of palingenesis 'no objections of a scientific kind can be raised'; and to a German philosopher, Carl Du Prel, to point out that it is 'completely compatible with Darwinism' (pp. 273 and 137). We have been able to quote only a few short passages, but the whole of the second part of Geley's remarkable book, together with Du Prel's chapter on 'The Monistic Doctrine of the Soul,' will repay close study. So will, from the religious and philosophical, rather than the scientific, point of view, the very valuable contributions to modern thought of the late Dr. McTaggart, quoted on pp. 222-5. Hume also, it is true, admitted that metempsychosis is the

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only system of immortality 'that philosophy can hearken to' (p. 171); Huxley, though no believer, paid definite tribute to it as one of the most logical theories put forward in explanation of the meaning of the universe (p. 198); and Sir Oliver Lodge has pertinent and suggestive passages in several of his books, some of which we are privileged to quote (pp. 226-8), and all leading up to the conviction that 'humanity has a future, a potential future, beyond our wildest dreams!'<sup>1</sup>

Bergson, in his *Creative Evolution*, does not touch on the Reincarnation theory, but he does remark that our character is 'the condensation of our history since birth, or even before birth, since we bring pre-natal dispositions with us'; and an older philosopher, Henry Drummond, more than once comes very near to the doctrine—so near as to make us wonder why he held back from that one step farther which would so satisfactorily have completed his 'scheme of things.' 'Natural Law,' he says, 'could it be traced in the Spiritual World, would have an important scientific value—it would offer Religion a new credential. . . . It is not plain that the one thing thinking men are waiting for is the introduction of Law among the Phenomena of the Spiritual World?' And again he remarks that the continued existence of the discarnate souls of either men or animals—as 'ghosts,' that is to say—in a material environment, limited by space and time, does not constitute *eternal life*, 'because their environment is not eternal. . . . An eternal life demands an eternal environment.' And more suggestively still: 'The materialistic Evolution, so to speak, is a straight line. . . . But as Evolution unfolds everything else, it is now seen to be itself slowly unfolding. The straight line is coming out gradually in curves. . . . What we are reaching, in short, is nothing less than the evolution of Evolution.' Is it too much to say that the theory of soul-growth by means of innumerable successive lives in the lower and higher worlds does indicate a 'Natural

<sup>1</sup> *Ether and Reality*.

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Law' among spiritual phenomena, does provide disembodied souls with 'an eternal environment,' and does constitute what may very well be called 'the evolution of Evolution'—with the capital letters reversed?

Another writer—not scientist, but novelist—who comes near to the theory without actually adopting it, is George Du Maurier. In that remarkable book, *Peter Ibbetsen*, he certainly suggests the evolution of the spirit in this and other worlds when writing of 'that ever-growing Conscious Power. . . . That which is slowly, surely, painfully weaving Itself out of us and the likes of us all through the limitless Universe, and Whose coming we can but faintly foretell by the casting of Its shadow on our own slowly, surely, painfully awakening souls.' But at the same time he limits human reincarnation on this earth to those who marry and have children, thus excluding all the unmarried, and all who, though married, are childless, in a wholesale fashion that seems scarcely reasonable (p. 197).

Samuel Butler, rather similarly, involves himself in contradictions through his theory that the only form of human immortality (or reincarnation) is that of those who, either for their achievements or for themselves, live on in the memories of succeeding generations. Even this is a strictly limited 'immortality,' for, as he admits, 'Shakespeare and Homer may live long, but they will die some day, that is to say, they will become unknown as direct and efficient causes.' He seems here to mean that the 'persons' known as Shakespeare and Homer will die, together with their work, even in the memory of man; but as he says quite definitely elsewhere that 'the immortal constituents do not cease and never will,' we are left with a suspicion that he had not fully faced the problem. At any rate, whether he consciously believed in the possibility of any other kind of reincarnation or not, he appears to imply such a belief in the verse quoted on p. 209; just as George MacDonald, while frequently veering towards the doctrine in his prose writings, expresses it openly only in his verse

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(p. 189). Another such case may be cited in Oscar Wilde who, when speaking of the soul's innate, ancestral memories, declares that 'it is not our own life that we live, but the lives of the dead, and the soul that dwells within us is no single spiritual entity. . . . It is something that has dwelt in fearful places, and in ancient sepulchres has made its abode'—explaining all this, and much more, as merely 'the result of heredity . . . concentrated race-experience.' Yet in his sonnet to Sarah Bernhardt (p. 200) the same writer unreservedly adopts the idea of individual reincarnation. It may perhaps be argued that he looked on it merely as an attractive fancy, to be used for the sake of poetic effect, yet the frequency of such instances does suggest the presence of some intuitive knowledge which had not fully penetrated to the writer's conscious, everyday mind, and could therefore only find expression when subconscious inspiration was at work through the medium of poetry.

A similar solution presents itself when we consider De Quincey's famous *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Here it seems as though the subconscious mind, stimulated to unnatural activity by the drug, called up vivid, though chaotic, memories of former lives—just as we know has happened even more definitely in experiments on subjects under hypnosis. Hear the opium-eater describe how he sometimes saw 'a crowd of ladies, and perhaps a festival and dances. And I heard it said, or I said to myself, "These are English ladies from the unhappy times of Charles I." . . . This pageant would suddenly dissolve; and at a clapping of hands would be heard the heart-quaking sound of *Consul Romanus*; and immediately came sweeping by, in gorgeous paludaments, Paulus or Marius, girt round by a company of centurions.' The intense horror with which his visions of the Orient always filled him suggest some particularly unhappy life (or several such) in an Eastern environment. 'The causes of my horror lie deep,' he says—and perhaps they lay deeper than he

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knew, in some long-buried substratum of memory. 'I ran into pagodas, and was fixed for centuries at the summit, or in secret rooms; I was the idol; I was the priest; I was worshipped; I was sacrificed. . . . I was buried for a thousand years in stone coffins, with mummies and sphinxes in narrow chambers at the heart of eternal pyramids. . . . Over every form, and threat, and punishment, and dim sightless incarceration, brooded a sense of eternity and infinity that drove me into an oppression as of madness.' The fantastic, nightmare quality of these visions was no doubt due to De Quincey's abnormal state of body and mind; but it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that there was something more than diseased imagination at work. It is interesting to compare the experiences of a modern poet (p. 222).

We do not know whether Shelley's beautiful but rather obscure poem, *The Triumph of Life*, has ever been interpreted in the light of reincarnation. Because it is obscure we have refrained from placing it with the other much more definite extracts from this poet's work (pp. 174-6), but that some such idea was in his mind seems not improbable. The poem begins, indeed, with an intimation that the whole vision partook of the nature of a recollection:

I knew  
That I had felt the freshness of that dawn,  
Bathed in the same cold dew my brow and hair,  
And sate as thus upon that slope of lawn  
Under the selfsame bough.

And what were those 'shadows of shadows' sent forth from themselves by the great crowd of beings, if not the passing selves of various earthly incarnations?

Each one  
Of that great crowd sent forth incessantly  
These shadows numerous as the dead leaves blown  
In autumn evening from a poplar tree . . .  
Mask after mask fell from the countenance  
And form of all. . . .

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It is illuminating to compare this with a sentence from that little book of mystical wisdom, *The Voice of the Silence*: 'Have perseverance as one who doth for evermore endure. Thy shadows live and vanish.'

But, apart from any such 'dark horses,' perhaps it is as well to state here that not all the authors quoted in this Anthology are claimed as *believers* in reincarnation, even in a broad sense. Our aim has been to collect 'references' to the doctrine, and we have, in consequence, quoted some who openly scoffed at it, and a few whose views, while not actually including it, seem of peculiar interest when read in conjunction with those of convinced adherents.

Of the definite unbelievers, John Donne, while deliberately making fun of the idea, yet can very happily describe the body of a sparrow as 'this soul's moving inn'; and it is interesting to find that he has remarked elsewhere upon the unreasonable shortness of the life of man, as usually envisaged. 'Who lives to age,' he asks, in his *Anatomy of the World*,

Fit to be made Methusalem his page?

Alas! we scarce live long enough to try

Whether a true-made clock run right or lie. . . .

Nor are we grown

In stature to be men till we are none—

a disturbing thought which must have occurred to many.

A few of the authors quoted have possibly made use of the idea of reincarnation in their work merely because it appealed to their imagination—as suggested in the case of Oscar Wilde—and because they found it useful for the purpose of that work. If such cases exist, all we need say is that the use these authors have made of it is extremely effective. Several, however, will be found to have treated it quite seriously in prose (apart from fiction) as well as in verse. It appears definitely in Mr. Bernard Shaw's *Back to Methuselah*; and the late Sir Rider Haggard has not only used the idea most successfully in fiction, but, in his

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recently published autobiography, *The Days of My Life*, has declared his belief that 'the Personality which animates each one of us is immeasurably ancient, having been forged in many fires, and that, as its past is immeasurable, so will its future be.' He adds that he himself feels no wish to live again upon earth and does not hold the reincarnation theory to be susceptible of proof; yet—'unless we have lived before, or the grotesque incongruities of life are to be explained in some way unknown to us, our present existence, to my mind, resembles nothing so much as a handful of what is known as "printer's pie" cast together at hazard.'

It should be noted that when Sir Rider Haggard speaks of the 'immeasurably ancient' Personality, he obviously means what most writers on the subject would call the 'inner man,' or 'ego' or 'individuality.' The 'personality' is usually understood to be the transient garb or mask (*persona* = a mask) assumed by the soul for one incarnation only. Schopenhauer, equally obviously, when he speaks of throwing off 'our individuality, like a worn-out garment' (p. 133) is referring to the non-reincarnating personality, while he describes the individuality as a 'Being,' meaning a permanent Being of which the other is only a temporary manifestation. Du Prel, again (p. 136), calls this Being 'the transcendental Subject.' If these differences of terminology are kept in mind, any confusion of thought can be avoided.

Certain differences, however, not of terminology but of opinion, will be found to exist on three points. One we have already dealt with—the possibility of a human soul entering an animal body. The others are (1) the desirability, or otherwise, of remembering our past lives, and (2) the rigidity of the Law of Karma. Most writers hold that the loss of memory with each new incarnation—for indeed 'body is the true river of Lethe' as Plotinus has said—is a wise dispensation of Providence, by means of which we are enabled to take up our responsibilities and renew our adventures with fresh strength and courage every time. Others express a contrary opinion,

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and look upon the recovery of the spirit's memory as a thing greatly to be desired. Probably both are right; and, in the earlier stages, loss of memory with each rebirth is helpful, as well as inevitable, although in later stages of soul-development its recovery becomes at the same time possible and desirable. With regard to the Law of Karma, while certain schools have held that every event and experience must be looked on as the direct result of the individual's own acts and thoughts in the past, the more recent—and more reasoned—view appears to be that there are other forces to be reckoned with as well, forces for which individual human beings are not responsible (though in some cases mankind as a whole may be, in the form of what is known as 'racial Karma'). The reader is especially referred to the quotation from A. P. Sinnett on pp. 195-6.

The extreme frequency with which this idea of repeated earth-lives appears in modern philosophy, fiction and verse, gives peculiar point to the following passage written by Lafcadio Hearn more than thirty years ago :

Proof that a reconstruction of the problem of the Ego is everywhere forcing itself upon Occidental minds, may be found not only in the thoughtful prose of the time, but also in its poetry and romance. . . . Creative art, working under larger inspiration, is telling what absolutely novel and exquisite sensations, what hitherto unimaginable pathos, what marvellous deepening of emotional power, may be gained in literature with the recognition of the idea of pre-existence.<sup>1</sup> Even in fiction we learn that we have been living in a hemisphere only, that we have been thinking but half-thoughts, that we need a new faith to join past with future over the great parallel of the present, and so to round out our emotional world into a perfect sphere.

All this is as true now as it was towards the end of the nineteenth century—perhaps even more strikingly true. And when Hearn goes on to say that the knowledge of the Ego as infinite can never be reached until that

<sup>1</sup> i.e., pre-existence upon the earth.

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'blind pride which imagines Self unique shall have been broken down,' and the *feeling* of self and of selfishness 'utterly decomposed,' we may begin to question whether this also is not still an applicable truth, and whether the sense of the vast importance of the personal 'I' is not still as deeply rooted in the Western mind as it was when those words were written. Perhaps insufficient time has elapsed since Lafcadio Hearn's day for us to be able to judge how far the West has ceased to 'think half-thoughts,' or how far it has moved towards finding 'a new faith to join past with future'; but it is certain that those who cling to a conviction of the supreme importance of the *personal* self, its joys and sorrows, losses and gains, will not willingly or easily accept this doctrine of Reincarnation, with its belief in a Higher Self whose enrichment is the sole aim and purpose of our transitory earth-experiences. The increase of individuality, of power, life and love; the enlargement of consciousness; the hastening of the steps of the Eternal Pilgrim towards his rightful Home—these, according to this philosophy, form the object of human incarnation and reincarnation, and whether we, as *persons*, suffer or rejoice in the process is of little moment compared to the attainment of our transcendent End.

On the other hand, the Western mind, though it may fail to grasp the Eastern point of view in some respects, yet has surely gained something in breaking away from the pessimistic attitude which this doctrine has induced in many of its adherents. Severe criticism has been levelled at certain modern believers in Reincarnation by a recent writer<sup>1</sup>—criticism which appears somewhat unreasonable when we consider that a fusion of the ideas of West and East on any such subject is bound to result in the appearance of something new, and not merely in a repetition of the old. Where the East sees all earthly experience merely as illusion, *maya*, a thing to be escaped from with all possible speed, the

<sup>1</sup> Count Hermann Keyserling, in *The Travel-Diary of a Philosopher*.

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West, more hopefully, holds that our earthly lives, while admittedly far removed from the sphere of Supreme Reality, are yet of incalculable value, in that they offer us a field for the development of our faculties, for mental, moral and spiritual growth. Here, it seems to an unbiased observer, the West undoubtedly gives something of value to the East, while receiving much of value from it. The value of what it receives has been put very clearly in an article in the *Hibbert Journal*,<sup>1</sup> where the Eastern and Western attitudes of mind are compared, and the conception of God and man as found in Eastern philosophy and religion is upheld as a most desirable antidote to Western materialism.

The Gospel of Spiritual Evolution, as preached by Buddha, and preached again five centuries later by Christ, is the practical embodiment of that sublime conception. And it is for the Gospel of Spiritual Evolution that the world is waiting now. Until the higher thought of the West is able to enter, with some measure of understanding and sympathy, into the ideas that dominate the Upanishads, it will continue to waver, as it has long done, between supernaturalism and materialism, seeking rest and finding none—finding none, because it does not see that the only rest which can refresh and revivify the soul is the inward peace which comes from the progressive realisation of our potential oneness with God, the peace which passeth all understanding, the rest of infinite unrest.

In the doctrine of Reincarnation this 'Gospel of Spiritual Evolution,' in its most reasonable form, finds expression.

We are not, however, concerned here with adducing arguments for or against acceptance of the belief. That can be done much more forcibly by the writers gathered together between these covers. We would merely point out, in conclusion, that the appeal made by it to so many of the greatest minds throughout human history can be effectively illustrated by tracing a few analogies.

It will be found a fascinating and most suggestive

<sup>1</sup> 'The Ancient Wisdom of India,' by Edmund Holmes (*Hibbert Journal*, January 1925).

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occupation to compare the startling similarities, both in thought and expression, between such writers as Plutarch (p. 72) and W. H. Davies (p. 290); between the Chinese philosopher, Chuang Tzu (p. 98) and the French poet, Victor Hugo (p. 149); between the Hindu *Ūpanishat* of unknown antiquity quoted on p. 39 and the saying of Bernard Shaw's *Serpent* (p. 276)—'Why not be born again and again as I am, new and beautiful every time?'; between the old Chinese poet (p. 100) imagining his friend's spirit passing into 'some far-towering pine' and the two American poets quoted on pp. 162 and 167; between the French philosopher, Dr. Pascal (p. 157) and the English poet, Francis Thompson (p. 197); between the ancient Buddhist and the modern French descriptions of the sensations of one about to be reborn on earth (pp. 43-4 and 236-7); the vision experienced by A. C. Benson (p. 239); and the statement of the 'Living-Dead Man' (p. 261)—'Do you know what they call death? It is rebirth into the world. Yes, even so.' A contrasting point of view, however, is expressed by Eva Gore-Booth in her poem (pp. 261-2), where the soul, weary of wings, is glad to find itself once more 'safe among shadowy, unreal human things.'

With regard to divine, not human, reincarnation the *Bhagavad-Gītā* (p. 41), dating from long before the Christian era, is in perfect accord with a German poet, Friedrich Rückert (p. 131)—the latter directly influenced, no doubt, by a study of Eastern philosophy; while a woman-poet of the twentieth century, the late Alice Meynell, has extended the same thought to its farthest compass, and has clothed in words of rare and dignified beauty the conception of the Divine Being assuming new and different forms, not on our own small globe, but in other worlds throughout the immensities of the stellar Universe (p. 258).

Finally, attention may be called to the verses which close the modern section of the Anthology, from the pen of an American child-poetess, aged ten. So, from old

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Egypt to new America, the extremes of antiquity and modernity meet full-circle ; and so may we fitly conclude this brief survey of what, whether accepted as truth or rejected as fantasy, must still be admitted to merit honourable inclusion among those

Large heroic hopes, whereby should thrive  
Man's spirit as he moves  
From dawn of life to the great dawn of death.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John Drinkwater.

II

PRE-CHRISTIAN ERA



## ANCIENT EGYPT

**H**AIL! I have become helpless! But I go forward.  
 . . . I have come forth from the uttermost parts  
 of the earth and received my apparel. . . .

Make thou smooth for me the ways and let me go  
 round about [to visit] my thrones; I have renewed myself  
 and raised myself up. . . .

Grant thou that my soul may come unto me from  
 wherever it may be. . . . Let me have possession of my  
 soul and let me triumph therewith in every place where-  
 soever it may be. . . .

O keep not captive my soul! O keep not ward over  
 my shade; but let a way be opened for my soul and for  
 my shade and let them see the great God. . . . Let not  
 injury be inflicted upon me [but let me be], clothed on  
 the day of those who go forward to every good thing.

Nebseni, the lord of reverence, saith: 'I am Yesterday,  
 To-day and To-morrow, [and I have] the power to be  
 born a second time. I am the divine hidden Soul who  
 created the gods, and who giveth sepulchral meals unto  
 the denizens of Tuat [the underworld], Amentot, and  
 heaven.'

Homage to thee, O Governor of those who are in  
 Amenti, who makest mortals to be born again, who  
 renewest thy youth.

I am the Swallow: I am the Swallow. I am the  
 Scorpion-bird [or white bird] the daughter of Ra. . . .  
 And that which I went in order to ascertain, I am come  
 to tell. Come, let me enter and report my mission.  
 And I, entering and ascertaining who cometh forth

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through that gate of the Inviolable one, I purify myself at that great stream, where my ills are made to cease and that which is wrong in me is pardoned, and the spots which were on my body upon earth are effaced. Here am I, and I come that I may overthrow mine adversaries upon earth, though my dead body be buried. For I am the Crocodile-god in all his terrors. I am the Crocodile-god in the form of man. I am he who carrieth off with violence. I am the almighty Fish in Kamurit, I am the Lord to whom one bendeth down in Sechem. . . . Oh, thou who bringest ; oh, thou runner who dwellest in thy keep, thou great god ; grant that my soul may come to me from whatsoever place wherein it abideth. . . . Let my soul [*ba*] be caught, and the spirit [*khui*] which is with it wheresoever it abideth. Track out among the things in heaven and upon earth that soul of mine, wherever it abideth. . . .

From *The Book of the Dead*.

AND they came to the acacia, and they cut the flower upon which was the soul of Bata, and he fell dead suddenly. . . . And Anpu, the elder brother of Bata . . . wept when he saw his younger brother verily lying dead. And he went out to seek the soul of his younger brother. . . . He found a seed. He returned with it. Behold this was the soul of his younger brother. He brought a cup of cold water, and he cast the seed into it. . . . Bata shuddered in all his limbs, and he looked on his elder brother ; his soul was in the cup. Then Anpu took the cup of cold water, in which the soul of his younger brother was ; Bata drank it, his soul stood again in its place, and he became as he had been. They embraced each other, and they conversed together.

And Bata said to his elder brother : " Behold I am to become as a great bull, which bears every good mark ; no one knoweth its history, and thou must sit upon my back." . . .

And when the land was lightened, and the next day appeared, Bata became in the form which he had told

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to his elder brother. And Anpu sat upon his back until the dawn. . . .

And . . . the bull entered the purified place ; he stood in the place where the princess was ; he began to speak with her, saying, " Behold I am alive indeed." And she said to him, " And pray, who art thou ? " He said to her, " I am Bata. I perceived when thou causedst that they should destroy the acacia of Pharaoh, which was my abode, that I might not be suffered to live. Behold I am alive indeed, I am as an ox." . . .

And the King sent one of the chief butchers of his Majesty, to cause the ox to be sacrificed. And when he was sacrificed, as he was upon the shoulders of the people, he shook his neck, and he threw two drops of blood over against the two doors of his Majesty. . . . They grew as two Great Persea trees, and each of them was excellent. . . .

And his Majesty sat beneath one of the Persea trees, and it spake thus with his wife : " Oh, thou deceitful one, I am Bata, I am alive, though I have been evilly entreated. I knew who caused the acacia to be cut down by Pharaoh at my dwelling. I then became an ox, and thou causedst that I should be killed."

And many days after these things the princess stood at the table of Pharaoh, and the King was pleased with her. . . . And he hearkened unto all she said. And after this his Majesty sent skilful craftsmen, and they cut down the Persea trees of Pharaoh ; and the princess, the royal wife, was standing looking on, and they did all that was in her heart unto the trees. But a chip flew up, and it entered into the mouth of the Princess ; she swallowed it, and after many days she bore a son. . . .

His Majesty made him heir of all the land. . . . He was thirty years King of Egypt, and he died, and his elder brother stood in his place on the day of burial.

### *The Two Brothers.*

An anonymous story dating  
from about 1400 B.C.

(Translated by W. FLINDERS PETRIE.)

## The Ring of Return

(THE sorcerer Horus, son of Panishi . . . knowing that Egypt was menaced by the incursions of an Ethiopian invader, insinuated himself into the body of the Princess Mahîtuashkîh, and was reborn into the world under the name of Senosiris, and as the son of Satmi-Khâmoïs. He traversed afresh all the stages of human existence, but he retained the acquirements and consciousness of his former life, and only returned to Hades after having victoriously accomplished the patriotic task he had imposed on himself.)

“ The Ethiopian plague knew that he was incapable of combating the sorcerer of Egypt ; he performed a deed of magic by written spells, so that no one saw him any more in the court of audience, and that with the intention of going to the land of the Negroes, his country. But Horus, the son of Panishi, recited a writing over him, he unveiled the enchantments of the Ethiopian, he caused Pharaoh to see him, as well as the people of Egypt who were in the court of audience, so that he appeared as a wretched gosling ready to start. Horus, the son of Panishi, recited a writing over him, he turned him over on his back with a fowler standing over him, a pointed knife in his hand, on the point of doing him an evil turn. While all this was being done, the signs which Horus, the son of Tnahsît, had arranged between him and his mother occurred all of them before her. . . . She did not delay to go up to Egypt in the form of a goose, and she stopped before the palace of Pharaoh ; she called with all her voice to her son who had the form of a wretched bird menaced by the fowler. Horus, son of Panishi, looked up to the sky ; he saw Tnahsît under the form in which she was, and he recognised that she was Tnahsît, the Ethiopian ; he recited a writing against her, he turned her over on her back with a fowler standing over her with a knife ready to deal death. She cast off the form in which she was, she assumed the form of an Ethiopian woman, and she prayed him,

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saying, ' Do not come against us, Horus, son of Panishi, but forgive us this criminal deed! If thou wilt but give us a boat, we will never come back to Egypt again.' Horus, the son of Panishi, swore by Pharaoh, as well as by the gods of Egypt, to wit, ' I will not stay my work of magic by written spells if you will not swear to me never to return to Egypt under any pretext.' Tnahsît raised her hand as witness that she would not come to Egypt for ever and ever. Horus, the son of Tnahsît, swore, saying, ' I will not come back to Egypt for fifteen hundred years.' Horus, the son of Panishi, reversed the deed of magic, he gave a boat to Horus, son of Tnahsît, as well as to Tnahsît, his mother, and they departed to the land of the Negroes, their country."

This discourse Senosiris uttered before Pharaoh while the people listened to his voice, and Satmi, his father, beheld all, the Ethiopian plague being prostrated with his forehead to the ground; then he said; " By the life of thy countenance, my great lord, the man here before thee is Horus, the son of Tnahsît, the same whose doings I recount, who has not repented of that he did before, but who has come back to Egypt after fifteen hundred years to cast his enchantments over it. By the life of Osiris, the great god, lord of the Amentît, before whom I go to rest, I am Horus, son of Panishi, I who stand here before Pharaoh. When I learnt in Amentît that this Ethiopian enemy was going to hurl sacrilege against Egypt, as there was no longer a good scribe or a sage in Egypt who could contend with him, I implored Osiris in Amentît to allow me to appear again on earth to prevent his reporting the inferiority of Egypt to the land of the Negroes. Command was given on the part of Osiris to return me to earth; I came back as a seed until I met with Satmi, the son of Pharaoh, on the mountain of Heliopolis or Memphis. I grew in that plant of colocasia in order to enter a body and be born again on earth to make enchantments against that Ethiopian enemy who is there in the court of audience." Horus, son of Panishi, performed a deed of magic by written

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spells in the form of Senosiris against the plague of Ethiopia ; he surrounded him with a fire, which consumed him in the midst of the court, in the sight of Pharaoh, as well as of his nobles and the people of Egypt ; then Senosiris vanished as a shadow before Pharaoh and his father Satmi, so that they saw him no more.

From *Popular Stories of Ancient Egypt*.  
(Translated by SIR G. MASPERO.)

FROM one Soul of the Universe are all those Souls which in all Worlds are tossed up and down as it were, and severally divided. Of these Souls there are many Changes, some into a more fortunate Estate, and some quite contrary. And they which are of Creeping Things are changed into those of Watery Things, and those of Things living in the Water to those of Things living on the Land ; and Airy ones into Men ; and Human Souls that lay hold of Immortality are changed into (holy) Demons. And so they go on into the Sphere of the Gods. . . . And this is the most perfect Glory of the Soul.

Human souls, not all of them, but only the pious ones, are daimonic and divine. Once separated from the body, and after the struggle to acquire piety, which consists in knowing God and injuring none, such a soul becomes all intelligence. The impious soul, however, remains in its own essence and punishes itself by seeking a human body to enter into, for no other body can receive a human soul ; it cannot enter the body of an animal devoid of reason. Divine law preserves the human soul from such infamy.

*Hermes Trismegistus.*

(NOTE.—The so-called Hermetic Books are of unknown date, and are supposed by competent authorities to represent the esoteric doctrines of the Ancient Egyptian priesthood, which were inspired by the god Thoth, known also as Hermes Trismegistus.)

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AND every God by his own proper power brought forth what was appointed him. Thus there arose four-footed beasts, and creeping things, and those that in the water dwell, and things with wings, and everything that beareth seed, and grass, and sport of every flower, all having in themselves seed of again-becoming.<sup>1</sup>

The Sole Ruler said to the souls: "You know that, as long as you were sinless, you dwelt in the places nigh to heaven; but now that blame has come upon you, you have been condemned to imprisonment in the organs of mortal bodies, and must yourselves dwell in the regions assigned to them. And in that region, Desire and Necessity will be your masters; for it is they that, after me, are masters and captains of all things below. Howbeit, not at random have I ordained the changes of your state; but as your condition will be changed for the worse if you do aught unseemly, so will it be changed for the better if you resolve on action worthy of your origin. I myself will keep watch on you; and if the charges against you shall be but slight, you shall be released from the deadly bondage of the flesh, and, freed from sorrow, shall greet again your home above. But if you shall be found guilty of any greater sins, in that case, when you quit your bodily frames, you shall not thereafter dwell in [heaven], nor yet in human bodies, but you shall be transferred into the bodies of beasts, and shall thenceforth continue to wander upon earth."

Having said this, my son Horus, God gave [bodies] to all the souls; and thus he spoke again, and said, ". . . The destruction of your bodies then will be the starting point for a rebirth, and their dissolution a renewal of your former happiness."

<sup>1</sup> Or reincarnation.

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“Souls of the noblest kind, when they enter human bodies, become righteous kings, founders of cities and lawgivers, genuine philosophers, true diviners, trustworthy prophets, skilled musicians, sage astronomers, priests exact in the rites of sacrifice,<sup>1</sup> and all kinds of men that are of high worth in any sort of work. When such souls enter the bodies of birds, they become eagles ; because eagles neither drive away other creatures of their kind, nor devour them, and do not seek to wrong any other sort of animal that is weaker than themselves, for eagles are most righteous by nature. When they enter the bodies of quadrupeds, they become lions ; for the lion is a strong beast, and one that trains itself to imitate with its mortal body the immortal nature of the gods, inasmuch as lions are never tired, and never sleep. When they enter the bodies of reptiles, they become dragons ; for the dragon is a powerful animal, and long-lived ; and it is harmless, and so friendly to man that some dragons are even tamed by men ; it has no venom ; and it renews its youth when it has grown old, resembling the gods in this. And among the fishes <sup>2</sup> such souls are dolphins ; for dolphins take pity on men who fall into the sea, they convey the man to land if he is still alive, and they never even touch him if he is dead, though the race of fishes is voracious beyond all others.”

And, having thus spoken, God vanished from their sight.

*Hermes Trismegistus.*

(Translated by G. R. S. MEAD.)

THE Egyptians were the first who propounded the theory that the human soul is immortal and that, when the body of any one perishes, it enters into some other creature that may be born 'ready to receive

<sup>1</sup> Or possibly 'unerring herbalists.'

<sup>2</sup> Or 'when they are in fish-bodies.'

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it, and that when it has gone the round of all created forms on land, in water and in air, then it once more enters a human body born for it; and this cycle of existence for the soul takes place in three thousand years.

HERODOTUS (Book II.).

# The Ring of Return

## HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM

**L**ET him reflect on the transmigrations of men, caused by their sinful deeds, on their falling into hell, and on the torments in the world of Yama ;

On the separation from their dear ones, on their union with hated men, on their being overpowered by age and being tormented with diseases ;

On the departure of the individual soul from this body and its new birth in another womb, and on its wanderings through ten thousand millions of existences ;

On the infliction of pain on embodied spirits, which is caused by demerit, and the gain of eternal bliss, which is caused by the attainment of their highest aim through spiritual merit.

*Laws of Manu (Book V.).*

**B**UT they who conquer the worlds by sacrifice, charity and austerity go to smoke, from smoke to night, from night to the waning half of the moon, from the waning half of the moon to the six months when the sun moves South ; from these months to the world of the Fathers, from the world of the Fathers to the moon. Having reached the moon, they become food, and the gods consume them there, as they consume Soma (moon) the King, saying, Wax and wane ! But when this is over, they go back to the same ether, from ether to air, from air to rain, from rain to the earth. And when they have reached the earth, they become food, they are offered again in the fire which is man, and thence are born in the fire of woman. Then they rise upwards to the worlds, and go the same round as before. Those, however, who know neither of the two paths, become worms, insects, and creeping things.

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As a goldsmith, having taken a piece of gold, makes another form, new and more beautiful, so, verily the Self, having cast off this body and having put away ignorance, makes another new and more beautiful form. . . . Having arrived at the end of that work—whatsoever he here doeth—he returns again from that world to this world of action.

*Brhadāranyaka Upanishat.*

**H**AVING abandoned the former body, the incarnate Spirit, following the Law of Karma, obtains either heaven or hell according to his deeds. And having obtained a celestial body, or a body of suffering born of objects of desire, he experiences varied fruits in heaven or hell. At the end of the fruits, when the time for his rebirth arrives . . . then Time unites him again with activities selected from the accumulation of past activities.

*Devi Bhagavata.*

**D**EVOTED to the fruits of acts, whatever kind of acts a person covetous of fruits accomplishes, the fruits, good or bad, that he actually enjoys, partake of their character. Like fishes going against a current of water, the acts of a past life are flung back on the actor. The embodied creature experiences happiness for his good acts, and misery for his evil ones.

*Mahabharata, Shanti Parva.*

**H**E who forms desires in his mind is born again through his desires here and there.

*Mundaka Upanishat.*

**I**N the source of all life, vast basis of all, in that wheel-sphere of Brahm, he is made to revolve, who comes and who goes; but if on the Self and Ordainer he dwells, as apart from the wheel, held by Him in honour thereafter, he goes to the state free of death.

*Shvetashvatar Upanishat.*

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**P**URIFIED, clarified in mind, the Bikkhu now directs his mind toward the recollection and recognition of previous modes of existence.

And he calls to mind his various lots in former lives ; first one life, then two lives . . . up to fifty lives, then a thousand lives ; then a hundred thousand.

Then he recalls the epochs of many a world-arising ; then the epochs of many a world-destruction. . . .  
“ There was I. That was my name. To that family I now belonged. This was my rank. This was my occupation.

“ Such and such were the fresh weal and woe I underwent. Thus was now my life’s ending. Departing once more, I came into existence again elsewhere.” In such wise does the Bikkhu remember the characteristics and particulars of his varied lots in times past.

*Sāmaññāpala Sutta.*

**A**S the dweller in the body experienceth in the body childhood, youth, old age, so passeth he on to another body ; the steadfast one grieveth not thereat. . . .

He who regardeth this as a slayer, or he who thinketh he is slain, both of them are ignorant. He slayeth not, nor is he slain.

He is not born, nor doth he die ; nor having been, ceaseth he any more to be ; unborn, perpetual, eternal and ancient, he is not slain when the body is slaughtered.

As a man, casting off worn-out garments, taketh new ones, so the dweller in the body, casting off worn-out bodies, entereth into others that are new.

Weapons cleave him not, nor fire burneth him, nor waters wet him, nor wind drieth him away.

Uncleavable he, incombustible he, and indeed neither to be wetted nor dried away ; perpetual, all pervasive, stable, immovable, ancient.

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Unmanifest, unthinkable, immutable, he is called ; therefore, knowing him as such, thou shouldst not grieve.

Or if thou thinkest of him as being constantly born and constantly dying, even then, O mighty-armed, thou shouldst not grieve.

For certain is death for the born, and certain is birth for the dead ; therefore over the inevitable thou shouldst not grieve.

. . . . .

Many births have been left behind by Me and by thee, O Arjuna. I know them all, but thou knowest not thine. . . .

Whenever there is decay of righteousness, O Bhârata, and there is exaltation of unrighteousness, then I myself come forth.

For the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil-doers, for the sake of firmly establishing righteousness, I am born from age to age.

He who thus knoweth My divine birth and action, in its essence, having abandoned the body, cometh not to birth again, but cometh unto me, O Arjuna.

. . . . .

Having attained to the worlds of the pure-doing, and having dwelt there for immemorial years, he who fell from yoga is reborn in a pure and blessed house.

Or he may even be born into a family of wise Yogis ; but such a birth as that is most difficult to obtain in this world.

There he recovereth the characteristics belonging to his former body, and with these he again laboureth for perfection. . . .

Purified from sin, fully perfected through manifold births, he reacheth the supreme goal.

*Bhagavad-Gîtâ.*

(Translated by ANNIE BESANT.)

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HE . . . who is without understanding, whose mind is uncontrolled and impure, does not reach the state [of Bliss] but enters into the circle of births and deaths.

He, however, who is gifted with understanding, who is steadfast in mind and [keeps himself] continually pure, verily he will never again lapse from that state [of Bliss] to be born again into the world.

He whose mind is guided by Intelligence and who can handle the reins of reason will reach the end of his journey [in safety], and attain to the exalted state of that All-pervading Spirit.

*The Yoga of Yama.*

(Translated by W. GORN OLD.)

THE Lord uttered the following stanzas :

With my Buddha-eye, monks, I see that the senior Kâsyapa here shall become a Buddha at a future Epoch, in an incalculable Æon, after he shall have paid homage to the most high of men.

This Kâsyapa shall see fully thirty thousand kotis of Ginas, under whom he shall lead a spiritual life for the sake of Buddha-knowledge.

After having paid homage to those highest of men and acquired that supreme knowledge, he shall in his last bodily existence be a Lord of the world, a matchless, great Seer.

And his field shall be magnificent, excellent, pure, goodly, beautiful, pretty, nice, even delightful, and set off with gold threads.

*The Saddharma-Pundarika,*

*or The Lotus of the White Law.*

(Translated by H. KERN.)

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'And Ananda said: The monk Sālha has died, sir, at Nādika. Where has he been reborn, what is his destiny? The nun Nandā has there died. Where has she been reborn, what is her destiny? . . .

'The monk Sālha, Ananda, by the destruction of the cankers has, by himself and in this world, known, realised, attained to release of heart and mind. The nun Nandā has, by the destruction of the five fetters binding to the lower worlds, become reborn without parents, in higher worlds, there to become utterly well, thence never to return. The lay disciple Sudatta by the complete destruction of the three fetters, by the reducing to a minimum lust, ill-will and stupidity, has become a Once-returner, who on returning to this world will make an end of ill. The lay disciple the woman Sugatā, by the complete destruction of the three fetters has reached the stream (i.e. entered on the Way) is no longer liable to be reborn in an unhappy world, is assured of hereafter attaining enlightenment.' . . .

*Dialogues of the Buddha.*

(Translated from the Pali of the

*Dīgha Nikaya*

by MRS. C. A. F. RHYS DAVIDS.)

(I)

WHEN a *deva*<sup>1</sup> comes to decease from a world of *devas* there are five symptoms manifested: his garlands wilt, his robes are soiled, he sweats, he becomes weak, he takes no joy among his fellows. The *devas* seeing this, cheer him with three sayings: "Go hence to a happy bourne, sir; when you go, win a lucky state—enjoy!" And a monk said to the Lord: "What, sir, is reckoned a happy destiny for *devas*?" . . . "The state of man, monks! Then can he win faith in the *dhamma* and discipline taught by the *Tathāgata*."

<sup>1</sup> A word which in Buddhist scriptures frequently means not 'god' (as in the Vedas), but a *human being* in some happy, or heavenly world.

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(2)

When a *deva* from *deva*-world deceases from waning of life-span, three words of *devas* cheering him go forth : " Hence, sir, go to happy bourne, to fellowship of men ; become a man, win faith in the peerless teaching of the Better. That faith, for thee settled, become thy base, immovable while life lasts in the peerless teaching of the Better. Putting off bad ways in thought and word and deed, and all else that is corrupt, doing good in thought and word and deed, boundless, ungrasping, do well-based merit in giving, yea, much of it, and show other mortals the holy teaching of the Better." With this compassion the *devas*, when they know a *deva* is deceasing, cheer him, saying again and again : " Come, *deva* ! "

(1) *Prose passage*, (2) *Poem*.

(Translated from the Pali by  
MRS. C. A. F. RHYS DAVIDS.)

FIVE in number are the destinies . . .—in purgatory, as an animal, as a *petā*,<sup>1</sup> as a human being, and as a *deva*<sup>2</sup>. Purgatory I know, the road thereto, the courses that lead to it, and what courses a man pursues to pass, at the body's dissolution after death, to rebirth in some unhappy state of misery or woe in purgatory. The animal world I know, and the worlds of *petas* and men, together with the roads to each. . . . *Devas* I know . . . and what courses a man pursues to pass, at the body's dissolution after death, to a state of blessedness in heaven. I know too Nirvana . . . and what courses a man pursues to dwell—here and now—by the extirpation of the Cankers, in that Deliverance of heart and mind which knows no Cankers, a Deliverance which he has, for and by himself, thought out and realised, so as to enter and abide therein.

There are two quests, Almsmen—the noble and the

<sup>1</sup> A man suffering penalty in an invisible body in this world.

<sup>2</sup> See note on previous page.

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ignoble. First, what is the ignoble quest? Take the case of a man who, being in himself subject to rebirth, pursues what is no less subject thereto; who being in himself subject to decay, pursues what is no less subject thereto . . . wives and children, bondmen and bondwomen, goats and sheep, fowls and swine, elephants, cattle, horses and mares, together with gold and coins of silver. . . . Secondly, what is the noble quest? Take the case of a man who, being himself subject to the round of rebirth—decay—disease—death—sorrow and impurity—sees peril in what is subject thereto, and so pursues after the consummate peace of Nirvana, which knows neither rebirth nor decay, neither disease nor death, neither sorrow nor impurity. This is the Noble Quest.

Just as a man who had passed from his own village to a second and thence to a third and finally back to his own village, might think how in his absence from home he had visited these other villages and how in each he had stood, sat, spoken, been silent—in just the same way does the Almsman call to mind his former existences . . . in all their details and features. . . .

Just as if there were two houses with doors and a man with eyes to see were to stand between those two houses and observe men going in and out and passing to and fro—in just the same way, with the Eye Celestial which is pure and far surpasses the human eye, does the Almsman see creatures in act of passing hence and reappearing elsewhere, creatures either lowly or debonair, fair or foul to view, happy or unhappy; and he is aware that they fare according to their deserts.

In the truth-finder all those Cankers which are of impurity, which lead to rebirth, entail suffering, ripen into sorrow, leaving behind a heritage of birth, decay,

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and death—all these have been grubbed up by the roots, like a bare cleaned site where once a palm tree grew, things which once have been and now can be no more.

Take the case of an Almsman who possesses faith and virtue, instruction, munificence, and understanding. The wish comes to him that, at the body's dissolution after death, he may be reborn a wealthy noble. On this he fixes and sets his heart, to this he trains his heart. The possession of the foregoing five plastic forces, coupled with this wish of his, conduce, with cultivation and development, to his being reborn accordingly. This is the road and way to such rebirth. . . .

Or in like manner, he forms the wish to be reborn a wealthy brahmin, or householder . . . or in communion with the Brāhma of one, two, three, four or five thousand worlds. . . . Or, possessing those same five qualities, the Almsman, hearing that the Brāhma of ten thousand worlds enjoys long life and beauty and abounds in well-being, forms the wish that he may be reborn in communion with that Brāhma. Now that Brāhma illuminates and pervades ten thousand worlds and all the creatures that are reborn there. . . . On this the Almsman fixes and sets his heart. . . . This is the road and way to such rebirth.

*Further Dialogues of the Buddha.*  
(Translated from the Pali of the  
*Majjhima Nīkaya*  
by LORD CHALMERS.)

THOSE who again and again go to the world with birth and death, to existence in this way or in that way—that is the state of ignorance. . . . The wise do not go to rebirth.

*Dvayatānupassanasutta.*

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**I**F a Bikkhu should desire, O brethren, to call to mind his various temporary states in days gone by—such as one birth, two births, three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, fifty, one hundred, or one thousand, or one hundred thousand births—in all their modes and all their details, let him be devoted to quietude of heart—let him look through things, let him be much alone.

*Akankhayasutta.*

**H**E in whom there are no sins whatsoever originating in fear, which are the causes of coming back to this shore, that ascetic leaves this and the farther shore, as a snake its old worn-out skin.

*Uragasutta.*

**T**HE man who knows his previous birth-abodes, who sees both heaven and hell, who has reached the destruction of births, attained to insight, supreme, perfect in knowledge—him do I call a Brāhmana.

*Vasetthasutta.*

**T**HERE was a great god-sage called Nārada. . . . He travelled everywhere, and one day he was passing through a forest, and he saw a man who had been meditating until the white ants had built a huge mound round his body, so long had he been sitting in that position. He said to Nārada, "Where are you going?" Nārada replied, "I am going to heaven." "Then ask God when He will be merciful to me, when I shall attain freedom." Further on Nārada saw another man. He was jumping about, singing and dancing, and he said, "O Nārada, where are you going?" Nārada said, "I am going to heaven." "Then ask when I shall attain freedom." So Nārada went on. In the course of time he came again by the same road, and there was

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the man who had been meditating till the ant-hills had grown round him. He said, "O Nârada, did you ask the Lord about me?" "O yes." "What did He say?" "The Lord told me that you would attain freedom in four more births." Then the man began to weep and wail, and said, "I have meditated until an ant-hill has been raised around me, and I have to endure four more births yet!" Nârada went on to the other man. "Did you ask about me?" "O yes. Do you see this tamarind tree? I have to tell you that as many leaves as there are on that tree, so many times you will be born, and then you will attain freedom." Then the man began to dance for joy, and said, "After so short a time I shall be free!" A voice came, "My child, you shall have freedom this instant."

*Kurma Purâna.*

**W**HAT now, Brothers, is the holy truth of the Cessation of Suffering? . . .

Released from Sensual Craving, released from the Craving for Existence, one does not return, one does not enter again into the world of Existence.

For it is even through the total extinction of this Craving that the Clinging to Existence ceases; with the cessation of the Clinging to Existence the Action-Process ceases; with the cessation of the Action-Process Rebirth is done away; through not being reborn, decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, suffering, grief, and despair cease.

*The Word of the Buddha.*

**A**S a wayfarer takes a brief lodging, so he that is travelling through the way of existence finds in each birth but a passing rest.

*Bodhicharyāvatāra.*

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LONG ago, they say, when Kassapa the Buddha was promulgating the faith, there dwelt in one community near the Ganges a great company of members of the Order. Then the brethren, true to established rules and duties, rose early in the morning, and taking the long-handled brooms, would sweep out the courtyard and collect the rubbish into a heap, meditating the while on the virtues of the Buddha.

One day a brother told a novice to remove the heap of dust. But he, as if he heard not, went about his business; and on being called a second time, and a third, still went his way as if he had not heard. Then the brother, angry with so intractable a novice, dealt him a blow with the broomstick. This time, not daring to refuse, he set about the task, crying; and as he did so he muttered to himself this first aspiration: "May I, by reason of this meritorious act of throwing out the rubbish, in each successive condition in which I may be born up to the time when I attain Nirvana, be powerful and glorious as the mid-day sun!"

When he had finished his work, he went to the riverside to bathe, and on beholding the mighty billows of the Ganges seething and surging, he uttered this second aspiration: "May I, in each successive condition in which I may be born till I attain Nirvana, possess the power of saying the right thing, and saying it instantly, under any circumstances that may arise, carrying all before me like this mighty surge!"

Now that brother, after he had put the broom away in the broom closet, had likewise wandered down to the riverside to bathe, and as he walked he happened to overhear what the novice had said. Then thinking: "If this fellow, on the ground of such an act of merit, which after all was instigated by me, can harbour hopes like this, what may not I attain to?" He too made his wish, and it was thus: "In each successive condition in which I may be born till I attain Nirvana, may I too be ready in saying the right thing at once, and more especially may I have the power of unravelling and of solving each

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problem and each puzzling question this young man may put—carrying all before me like this mighty surge!”

Then for the whole period between one Buddha and the next those two people wandered from existence to existence among gods and men. And our Buddha saw them too, and just as he did to the son of Moggali and to Tissa the Elder, so to them also did he foretell their future fate, saying: “Five hundred years after I have passed away will these two reappear, and the subtle Law and Doctrine taught by me will they two explain, unravelling and disentangling its difficulties by questions put and metaphors adduced.”

*(The novice and the brother were subsequently reborn as the King Milinda and the Sage Nagasena.)*

The king said: “Nagasena, is there any one who after death is not re-individualised?”

“Some say so, and some not.”

“Who are they?”

“A sinful being is re-individualised, a sinless one is not.”

“Will you be re-individualised?”

“If when I die, I die with craving for existence in my heart, yes; but if not, no.”

“Very good, Nagasena.”

The king said: “Nagasena, he who escapes re-individualisation, is it by reasoning that he escapes it?”

“Both by reasoning, your Majesty, and by wisdom, and by other good qualities.”

“But are not reasoning and wisdom surely much the same?”

“Certainly not. Reasoning is one thing, wisdom is another. Sheep and goats, oxen and buffaloes, camels

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and asses have reasoning, but wisdom they have not."

"Well put, Nagasena."

The king said: "What is it, Nagasena, that is reborn?"

"Name-and-form is reborn."

"What, is it this same name-and-form that is re-born?"

"No, but by this name-and-form deeds are done, good or evil, and by these deeds (this Karma) another name-and-form is reborn."

"If that be so, sir, would not the new being be released from its evil Karma?"

The Elder replied: "Yes, if it were not reborn. But just because it is reborn, O king, it is therefore not released from its evil Karma."

"Give me an illustration."

"Suppose, O king, some man were to steal a mango from another man, and the owner of the mango were to seize him and bring him before the king, and charge him with the crime. And the thief were to say: 'Your Majesty, I have not taken away this man's mangoes. Those that he put in the ground are different from the ones I took. I do not deserve to be punished.' How then? Would he be guilty?"

"Certainly, sir. He would deserve to be punished."

"But on what ground?"

"Because, in spite of whatever he may say, he would be guilty in respect of the last mango which resulted from the first one (the owner set in the ground)."

"Just so, great king, deeds good or evil are done by this name-and-form and another is reborn. But that other is not thereby released from its deeds (its Karma)."

*The Questions of King Milinda.*

(Translated by T. W. RHYS DAVIDS.)

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SUCH an one who does his duty is tolerant like the earth, or like a threshold ; he is like a lake without mud ; no new births are in store for him.

. . . . .

Many a birth have I traversed in this round of lives and deaths, vainly seeking the builder of the house. Wretched is birth again and again !

Builder of the house, now art thou seen ! Never again shalt thou build the house. Thy timbers all are broken, thy ridge-pole destroyed. Delivered is my mind ; achieved the conquest of craving.

. . . . .

Be free from the past, be free from the future, be free from the present, passing beyond them ! From all thus delivered in mind, no more shalt thou come to birth and to decay. . . .

Done with craving, unattached to aught, skilled in the meaning of the Teaching, knowing the arrangement of the words in order due—this is the final body of such an one !

*Dhammapada.*

*(The Way of Truth.)*

ALTHOUGH the Master was preaching, yet, of five laymen who sat there in His presence, one, being drowsy, fell asleep ; another sat grubbing in the ground with his finger ; the third idly shook a tree to and fro ; the fourth sat gazing at the sky and paid no heed to what was said ; while the fifth was the only one of them who gave heed to the teaching.

So the Elder Ananda, who stood there fanning the Master, observing the behaviour of these men, said to Him : “ Lord, Thou art teaching the Truth to these men even as the voice of the thunder when the heavy rains

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are falling. Yet, behold! they sit doing this and that, while Thou dost preach." . . .

Then said the Master to Ananda: "Of these five men, the one that sits asleep was reborn as a goblin-snake in many a birth, and, laying his head on his coils, would go to sleep. So now he sleeps, and no sound of mine can penetrate his ears. . . . Yonder man, who sits grubbing in the ground with his finger, took birth as an earth-worm many a time and bored the earth. Now, too, he does the same and hears no word of mine. That one, who sits there and shakes a tree, was born many times successively as a monkey. It is his nature so to do—a habit engrained by countless former births. Thus no sound of mine can penetrate his ears. Next, yonder brāhmana, who sits gazing at the sky, was born for many times successively as an astrologer, a star-gazer. By dint of engrained habit even to-day he looks up at the sky, and no sound of mine can penetrate his ears. But this one, who, sitting, hears the Law attentively, for many, many times successively was a master of the Vedas three, a brāhmana who could repeat the Sacred Texts. So now also he pays good heed unto my words, just as if he were linking up a mantram."

"But, Lord," said Ananda, "Thy teaching cleaveth even through the skin and reacheth unto bones and marrow. How can it be that when Thou preachest the Law these men pay no heed thereto?"

"Ananda, such things as The Buddha, or The Law, or The Order of Brethren, through countless hundred thousand cycles of time have never been heard of by these beings. Therefore they cannot listen to this Law. In this round of births and deaths, whose beginning is incalculable, these beings have come to birth hearing only the talk of divers animals. They spend their time in song and dance, in places where men drink and gamble and the like. Thus they cannot listen to the Law."

"But what, Lord, is the actual reason, the immediate cause why they cannot?"

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The Master replied : " Ananda, owing to hatred, owing to delusion, owing to lust, they cannot do so. There is no such fire as the fire of lust. It burns up creatures, nor even leaves an ash behind."

From the *Dhammapada Commentary*.  
(Translated by F. L. WOODWARD.)

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### ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME

**P**YTHAGORAS was reported to have been the first of the Greeks to teach the doctrine that the soul, passing through the 'circle of necessity,' was bound at various times to various living bodies. . . . He was accustomed to speak of himself in this manner: that he had formerly been Æthalides, and had been accounted the son of Mercury; and that Mercury had offered him any gift he pleased except immortality. Accordingly, he had requested that, whether living or dead, he might preserve the memory of what had happened to him. . . . At a subsequent period, he was reborn as Euphorbus, and was wounded by Menelaus at the siege of Troy, and so died. In that life he used to say that he had formerly been Æthalides; and that he had received as a gift from Mercury the memory of his soul's transmigrations, and of its temporary sojourns in the kingdoms of plants and animals; also the gift of recollecting what his own soul and the souls of others had experienced between death and rebirth.

After Euphorbus died, he passed into Hermetimus; and in that life he went into the territory of the Branchidæ, and, entering the temple of Apollo, he pointed out the shield which he had carried as Euphorbus, and which Menelaus had sent to the temple as a dedicatory offering. The shield had by that time rusted away until nothing remained but the carved ivory face on the boss of it. In his next birth he was a Delian fisherman; and finally he reincarnated as Pythagoras.

DIOGENES LAERTIUS  
(*Life of Pythagoras*).

**M**ANY of his associates he reminded of the lives lived by their soul before it was bound to the body, and by irrefutable arguments demonstrated that he had been Euphorbus, the son of Panthus.

PORPHYRY  
(*Life of Pythagoras*).

## The Ring of Return

WHAT Pythagoras wished to indicate by all these particulars was that he knew the former lives he had lived, which enabled him to begin providential attention to others and remind them of their former existences.

IAMBlichus  
(*Life of Pythagoras*).

HE who believes that he transmigrates, after death, into the body of a beast or a plant is grossly mistaken; he is ignorant of the fact that the essential form of the soul cannot change, that it is and it remains human, and only metaphorically speaking does virtue make of it a god and vice an animal.

HIEROCLES  
(*Commentary of the Golden Verses of Pythagoras*).

THERE is a word of Fate, an old decree  
And everlasting, of the gods, made fast  
With amplest oaths that whosoe'er of those  
Far spirits, with their lot of age-long life,  
Do foul their limbs with slaughter in offence,  
Or swear foresworn, as failing of their pledge,  
Shall wander thrice ten thousand weary years  
Far from the Blessed, and be born through time  
In various shapes of mortal kind, which change  
Ever and ever troublous paths of life;  
For now Air hunts them onward to the Sea;  
Now the wild Sea disgorges them on Land;  
Now Earth will spue toward beams of radiant Sun;  
Whence he will toss them back to whirling Air—  
Each gets from other what they all abhor,  
And in that brood I too am numbered now,  
A fugitive and vagabond from heaven,  
As one obedient unto raving Strife.  
Charis abhors intolerable Fate,  
For I was once already boy and girl,  
Thicket and bird, and mute fish in the waves.

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All things doth Nature change, enwrapping souls  
In unfamiliar tunics of the flesh.  
The worthiest dwellings for the souls of men,  
When 'tis their lot to live in form of brutes,  
Are tawny lions, those great beasts that sleep  
Couched on the black earth up the mountainside ;  
But when in forms of beautiful plumed trees  
They live, the bays are worthiest for souls.

And seers at last and singers of high hymns,  
Physicians sage, and chiefs o'er earth-born men  
Shall they become, whence germinate the gods,  
The excellent in honours.

EMPEDOCLES (*The Purifications*).  
(Translated by WILLIAM ELLERY LEONARD.)

THE souls of them from whom Persephone has  
accepted atonement for an ancient woe, she  
restoreth the ninth year to the light of the sun  
above the earth.

And from these souls come glorious kings and such  
as are strong and swift and excel in wisdom ; and  
throughout all future time they are called holy heroes  
by mankind.

PINDAR.

THEY who thrice on either side of death have  
refrained their souls from wickedness, travel on the  
road of Zeus to the tower of Cronus, where the  
ocean breezes blow around the island of the blest !

PINDAR.

EVERY soul is immortal—for whatever is in perpetual  
motion is immortal. . . . All that is soul presides  
over all that is without soul and patrols all  
heaven, now appearing in one form and now in another.  
When it is perfect and fully feathered, it roams in upper

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air, and regulates the entire universe ; but the soul that has lost its feathers is carried down till it finds some solid resting-place ; and when it has settled there, when it has taken to itself, that is, an earthly body, which seems capable of self-motion, owing to the power of its new inmate, the name of animal is given to the whole ; to this compound, I mean, of soul and body. . . . The natural efficacy of a wing is to lift up heavy substances and bear them aloft to those upper regions which are inhabited by the race of the Gods. . . . There are many ravishing views and opening paths within the bounds of heaven, whereon the family of the blessed Gods go to and fro . . . and they are followed by all who from time to time possess both will and power. . . . But whenever they go to feast and revel, they forthwith journey by an uphill path to the summit of the heavenly vault. Now the chariots of the Gods being of equal poise and obedient to the rein, move easily, but all others with difficulty ; for they are burdened by the horse of vicious temper, which sways and sinks them towards the earth, if haply he has received no good training from his charioteer.<sup>1</sup> Whereupon there awaits the soul a crowning pain and agony. For those which we called immortal go outside when they are come to the topmost height, and stand on the outer surface of heaven, and as they stand they are borne round by its revolution and gaze on the external scene. . . . Real existence, colourless, formless and intangible, visible only to the intelligence which sits at the helm of the soul . . . has its abode in this region. . . . And the mind of every soul that is destined to receive its due inheritance is delighted at seeing the essence to which it has been so long a stranger, and by the light of truth is fostered and made to thrive, until, by the revolution of the heaven, it is brought round again to the same point. . . . And when in like manner it has seen all the

<sup>1</sup> The soul is compared throughout to a pair of winged steeds, with charioteer, one steed being 'of generous breed,' the other 'of opposite descent and opposite character.'

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rest of the world of essence, and feasted on the sight, it sinks down again into the interior of heaven and returns to its own home. . . . That [soul] which follows a God most closely and resembles him most nearly, succeeds in raising the head of its charioteer into the outer region and is carried round with the Immortals in their revolution, though sore encumbered by its horses and barely able to contemplate the real existences ; while another rises and sinks by turns, his horses plunging so violently that he can discern no more than a part of these existences. . . . But the common herd follow at a distance . . . they make the revolution in the moisture of the lower element, trampling on one another. . . . There is an irrevocable decree that if any soul has followed a God in close companionship and discerned any of the true essences, it shall continue free from harm till the next revolution, and if it be ever thus successful, it shall be ever thus unharmed ; but whenever, from inability to follow, it has missed that glorious sight, and, through some mishap it may have encountered, has become charged with forgetfulness and vice, and been thereby so burdened as to shed its feathers and fall to the earth, in that case there is a law that the soul thus fallen be not planted in any bestial nature during the first generation, but that if it has seen more than others of essential verity, it pass into the germ of a man who is to become a lover of wisdom or a lover of beauty.

*[Here follows the list of the various conditions of life for the various 'ranks' of soul ; that of 'an absolute monarch' being ranked lowest of all.]*

And in all these various conditions those who have lived justly receive afterwards a better lot ; those who have lived unjustly a worse.

For to that same place from which each soul set out it does not return for ten thousand years ; so long is it before it recovers its plumage, unless it has belonged to a guileless lover of philosophy. . . . On the termination

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of their first life . . . some go to the prison-houses beneath the earth, to suffer for their sins ; while others, by virtue of their trial, are borne lightly upward to some celestial spot, where they pass their days in a manner worthy of the life they have lived in their mortal form. But in the thousandth year both divisions come back again to share and choose their second life, and they select that which they severally please. . . .

And this is nothing more nor less than a recollection of those things which in time past our soul beheld when it travelled with a God, and, looking high over what we now call real, lifted up its head into the region of eternal essence. . . .

Every man's soul has by the law of his birth been a spectator of eternal truth, or it would never have passed into this our mortal frame, yet still it is no easy matter for all to be reminded of their past by their present existence. It is not easy either for those who, during that struggle I told you of, caught but a brief glimpse of upper glories, nor for those who, after their fall to this world, were so unfortunate as to be turned aside by evil associations into the paths of wickedness, and so made to forget that holy spectacle. . . .

PLATO

(*Phædrus*).

(Translated by J. WRIGHT.)

WELL, I will tell you a tale, not like that of Odysseus to Alcinous, but of what once happened to a brave man, Er, the son of Armenius, a native of Pamphylia, who, according to story, was killed in battle. . . . On the twelfth day after his death, as he lay on the funeral pyre, he came to life again, and then proceeded to describe what he had seen in the other world. . . .

Each soul, as it arrived, wore a travel-stained appearance . . . and those who had descended from heaven were questioned about heaven by those who had risen out of the earth ; while the latter were questioned by

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the former about the earth. Those who were come from earth told their tale with lamentations and tears, as they bethought them of all the dreadful things they had seen and suffered in their subterranean journey, which they said had lasted a thousand years; while those who were come from heaven described enjoyments and sights of marvellous beauty. . . .

Now the souls were required to go to Lachesis. An interpreter first of all marshalled them in order, and then having taken from the lap of Lachesis a number of lots and plans of life, mounted a high pulpit, and spoke as follows: "Thus saith the maiden Lachesis, the daughter of Necessity. Ye short-lived souls, a new generation of men shall here begin the cycle of its mortal existence. Your destiny shall not be allotted to you, but you shall choose it for yourselves. Let him who draws the first lot be the first to choose a life, which shall be his irrevocably. Virtue owns no master. He who honours her shall have more of her, and he who slights her less. The responsibility lies with the chooser. Heaven is guiltless." Having said this, he threw the lots down upon the crowd; and each spirit took up the one which fell at his side, except Er himself, who was forbidden to do so. . . . This done, the plans of life, which far outnumbered the souls that were present, were laid before them on the ground. They were of every kind. There were lives of all living things, and among them every sort of human life. . . . The materials were very variously combined—wealth appearing here, and poverty there; disease here, and health there; and here again a mean between these extremes. This, my dear Glaucon, is apparently the moment when everything is at stake with a man; and for this reason, above all others, it is the duty of each of us diligently to investigate and study, to the neglect of every other subject, that science which may haply enable a man to learn and discover who will render him so instructed as to be able to discriminate between a good and an evil life, and according to his means to choose, always and everywhere,

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that better life, by carefully calculating the influence which the things just mentioned, in combination or in separation, have upon real excellence of life ; and who will teach him to understand what evil or good is wrought by beauty tempered with poverty or wealth, and how the result is affected by the state of soul which enters into the combination . . . so as to be able to form a judgment from all these data combined, and, with an eye steadily fixed on the nature of the soul, to choose between the good and the evil life, giving the name of evil to the life which will draw the soul into becoming more unjust, and the name of good to the life which will lead it to become more just, and bidding farewell to every other consideration. . . .

It was a truly wonderful sight, he said, to watch how each soul selected its life—a sight at once melancholy, and ludicrous, and strange. The experience of their former life generally guided the choice. . . . It so happened that the soul of Odysseus had drawn the last lot of all. When he came up to choose, the memory of his former sufferings had so abated his ambition that he went about a long time looking for a quiet retired life, which with great trouble he discovered lying about, and thrown contemptuously aside by the others. As soon as he saw it, he chose it gladly, and said that he would have done the same if he had even drawn the first lot. . . .

Now, when all the souls had chosen their lives in the order of the lots . . . they all travelled into the plain of Forgetfulness . . . and took up their quarters by the bank of the river of Indifference, whose waters cannot be held in any vessel. All persons are compelled to drink a certain quantity of the water ; but those who are not preserved by prudence drink more than the quantity ; and each, as he drinks, forgets everything. When they had gone to rest, and it was now midnight, there was a clap of thunder and an earthquake ; and in a moment the souls were carried up to their birth, this way and that, like shooting stars. Er himself was prevented from drinking any of the water ; but how,

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and by what road, he reached his body, he knew not : only he knew that he suddenly opened his eyes at dawn, and found himself laid out upon the funeral pyre.

PLATO

(*The Republic*, Book X.).

THE soul of the true philosopher . . . abstains as much as possible from pleasures and desires, griefs and fears . . . because each pleasure and pain, having a nail, as it were, nails the soul to the body, and fastens it to it, and causes it to become corporeal, deeming those things to be true whatever the body asserts to be so. For, in consequence of its forming the same opinions with the body, and delighting in the same things . . . it can never pass into Hades in a pure state, but must ever depart polluted by the body, and so quickly falls again into another body, and grows up as if it were sown, and consequently is deprived of all association with that which is divine, and pure, and uniform.

PLATO

(*Phædo*).

(Translated by HENRY CARY.)

KNOW that if you become worse you will go to the worse souls, or if better to the better, and in every succession of life and death you will do and suffer what like may fitly suffer at the hands of like.

PLATO

(*Laws*, Book X.).

THE mistakes and the sufferings of human life make me think sometimes that those ancient seers, or interpreters of the secrets of heaven and the counsels of the Divine Mind, had some glimpses of the truth, when they said that men are born in order to suffer the penalty for some sins committed in a former life.

CICERO

(*Treatise on Glory*).

## The Ring of Return

ON the level bosom of this vale more thickly the tall  
trees  
Grow, an' aneath quivering poplars and whispering  
alders

Lethe's dreamy river throu' peaceful scenery windeth.  
Whereby now flitted in vast swarms many people of all  
lands,

As when in early summer honey-bees on a flowery  
pasture

Pill the blossoms, hurrying to an' fro,—innumerable  
they,

Revisiting the ravish'd lily cups, while all the meadow  
hums.

Æneas was turn'd to the sight, and marvelling  
inquired,

“ Say, sir, what the river that there i' the vale-bottom I  
see ? ”

And who they that thickly along its bank have  
assembled ? ”

Then Lord Anchises, “ The spirits for whom a second  
life

And body are destined ar' arriving thirsty to Lethe,  
And here drink th' unmindful draught from wells of  
oblivyon.

My heart greatly desired of this very thing to acquaint  
thee,

Yea, and show thee the men to be born, our glory  
her'after,

So to gladden thine heart where now thy voyaging  
endeth.”

“ Must it then be believ'd, my sire, that a soul which  
attaineth

Elysium will again submit to her old body-burden ?

Is this well ? what hap can awake such dire longing in  
them ? ”

“ I will tell thee, O son, nor keep thy wonder awaiting,”  
Answereth Anchises, and all expoundeth in order.

“ Know first that the heavens, and th' Earth, and space  
fluid or void,

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Night's pallid orb, day's Sun, and all his starry coëvals,  
Are by one spirit inly quickened, and, mingling in each  
part,

Mind informs the matter, nature's complexity ruling.  
Thence the living creatures, man, brute and ev'ry  
feathered fowl,

And what breedeth in Ocean aneath her surface of  
argent :

Their seed knoweth a fiery vigour, 'tis of airy divine  
birth,

In so far as unimpeded by an alien evil,  
Nor dull'd by the body's framework condemn'd to  
corruption.

Hence the desires and vain tremblings that assail them,  
unable

Darkly prison'd to arise to celestial exaltation ;

Nor when death summoneth them anon earth-life to  
relinquish,

Can they in all discard their stain, nor wholly away  
with

Mortality's plague-spots. It must be that, O, many  
wild graffs

Deeply at heart engrain'd have rooted strangely upon  
them :

Wherefore must sufferings purge them, yea, Justice  
atone them

With penalties heavy as their guilt : some purify  
exposed

Hung to the viewless winds, or others long watery  
searchings

Low i' the deep wash clean, some bathe in fiery renewal :  
Each cometh unto his own retribution,—if after in  
ample

Elysium we attain, but a few, to the fair Happy  
Woodland,

Yet slow time still worketh on us to remove the  
defilement,

Till it hath eaten away the acquir'd dross, leaving  
again free

## The Ring of Return

That first fiery vigour, the celestial virtue of our life,  
All whom here thou seest, hav' accomplished purification:  
Unto the stream of Lethe a god their company calleth,  
That forgetful of old failure, pain and disappointment,  
They may again into earthly bodies with glad courage  
enter."

VIRGIL (*Æneid*, Book VI.).  
(A line for line paraphrase by  
ROBERT BRIDGES.)

**O**RACE! stricken by the alarms of icy death, why  
do you dread Styx? . . . Souls are not subject  
to death; and having left their former abode,  
they ever inhabit new dwellings and, there received,  
live on . . .

The soul wanders about and comes from that spot  
to this, from this to that, and takes possession of any  
limbs whatever; it both passes from the beasts to  
human bodies, and so does our soul into the beasts;  
and in no lapse of time does it perish.

And as the pliable wax is moulded into new forms,  
and no longer abides as it was before, nor preserves the  
same shape, but yet is the same wax, so I tell you that  
the soul is ever the same, but passes into different  
forms.

OVID  
(*Metamorphoses*).  
(Translated by H. T. RILEY.)

*Pythagoras speaks:*

**T**HOSE I would teach; and by right reason bring  
To think of death as but an idle thing.  
Why thus affrighted at an empty name,  
A dream of darkness, and fictitious flame?  
Vain themes of wit, which but in poems pass,  
And fables of a world that never was?  
What feels the body when the soul expires,  
By time corrupted, or consumed by fires?  
Nor dies the spirit, but new life repeats  
In other form, and only changes seats.

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Ev'n I, who these mysterious truths declare,  
Was once Euphorbus in the Trojan war ;  
My name and lineage I remember well,  
And how in fight by Sparta's king I fell.  
In Argive Juno's fane I late beheld  
My buckler hung on high, and own'd my former shield.

Then death, so call'd, is but old matter dress'd  
In some new figure, and a varied vest :  
Thus all things are but alter'd, nothing dies ;  
And here and there the unbodied spirit flies,  
By time, or force, or sickness disposess'd,  
And lodges, where it lights, in man or beast ;  
Or hunts without, till ready limbs it find,  
And actuates those according to their kind ;  
From tenement to tenement though toss'd,  
The soul is still the same, the figure only lost :  
And, as the soften'd wax new seals receives,  
This face assumes, and that impression leaves ;  
Now call'd by one, now by another name,  
The form is only changed, the wax is still the same.  
So death, so call'd, can but the form deface ;  
The immortal soul flies out in empty space,  
To seek her fortune in some other place.

OVID

(*Metamorphoses*).

(Translated by JOHN DRYDEN.)



III

EARLY CHRISTIAN AND OTHER  
WRITINGS OF THE FIRST FIVE  
CENTURIES A.D.



**F**OR all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

*Matthew xi. 13, 14.*

**W**HEN Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying: Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am? And they said: Some say that Thou art John the Baptist; some Elias; and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

*Matthew xvi. 13, 14.*

**H**IS 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. . . . Then the disciples understood that He spake unto them of John the Baptist.

*Matthew xvii. 10-13.*

**N**OW Herod . . . was perplexed, because that it was said of some, that John had risen from the dead; and of some, that Elias had appeared: and of others, that one of the old prophets was risen again.

*Luke ix. 7, 8.*

**A**ND 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? Jesus answered, Neither did this man sin nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

*John ix. 1-4.*

## The Ring of Return

THE company of disembodied souls is distributed in various orders. The law of some of them is to enter mortal bodies and after certain prescribed periods be again set free. But those possessed of a diviner structure are absolved from all local bonds of earth. . . . Some of these souls choose confinement in mortal bodies because they are earthly and corporeally inclined. Others depart, being released again according to supernaturally determined times and seasons. Therefore, all such as are wise, like Moses, are living abroad from home. For the souls of such formerly chose this expatriation from heaven, and through curiosity and the desire of acquiring knowledge they came to dwell abroad in earthly nature, and while they dwell in the body they look down on things visible and mortal around them and urge their way thitherward again whence they came originally: and call that heavenly region in which they have their citizenship, fatherland, but this earthly in which they live, foreign.

PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA.

EVERY soul, whether without mind, or joined to mind, or departing from the body, is ordained to wander in the region lying between the moon and the earth for a term. . . .

In like manner there are deep places and gulfs—like in the moon . . . in which the souls either suffer or inflict punishment for the things which they have either done or endured when they have already been made genii. . . . The genii do not always pass their time upon her [the moon], but they come down hither or take charge of Oracles; they are present at, and assist in, the most advanced of the initiatory rites, as punishers and keepers of wrongdoers; they act, and shine as saviours in battle and at sea; and whatsoever thing in these capacities they do amiss . . . they are punished for it, for they are driven down again to earth and coupled with human bodies.

PLUTARCH  
(*Morals*).

## First Five Centuries A.D.

TO his [Apollonius's] mother, just before he was born there came an apparition of Proteus, who changes his form so much in Homer, in the guise of an Egyptian demon. She was in no way frightened, but asked him what sort of child she would bear. And he answered: "Myself." "And who are you?" she asked. "Proteus," answered he, "the god of Egypt."

Iarchas explained that his own soul had once been in the body of another man who was a king, and that in that state he had performed this and that exploit; while Apollonius told them that he had once been the pilot of a ship in Egypt, and had accomplished all sorts of exploits, which he enumerated to them.

"And you must not be surprised at my transformation from one Indian to another; for here is one"—and he [Iarchas] pointed to a stripling of about twenty years of age—"who in natural aptitude for philosophy excels everyone, and he enjoys good health, as you see, and is furnished with an excellent constitution; moreover, he can endure fire and all sorts of cutting and wounding, yet, in spite of all these advantages, he detests philosophy." "What, then," said Apollonius, "O Iarchas, is the matter with the youth? For it is a terrible thing to tell me, if one so well adapted by nature to the pursuit refuses to embrace philosophy, and has no love for learning, and that although he lives with you." "He does not live with us," replied the other, "but he has been caught like a lion against his will and confined here, but he looks askance at us when we try to domesticate him and caress him. The truth is this stripling was once Palamedes of Troy, and he found his bitterest enemies in Odysseus and Homer; for the one laid an ambush against him of people by whom he was stoned to death, while the other denied him any place in his Epic; and because neither the wisdom with which he was endowed was of any use to him nor did he meet with any praise

## The Ring of Return

from Homer, to whom, nevertheless, many people of no great importance owe their renown, and because he was outwitted by Odysseus in spite of his innocence, he has conceived an aversion to philosophy, and deploras his ill-luck. And he is Palamedes, for indeed he can write without having learned his letters."

The following incident of Apollonius's stay in Egypt was thought remarkable. There was a man led a tame lion about by a string, as if it had been a dog; and the animal not only fawned upon him, but on anyone who approached it. It went collecting alms all round the towns, and was admitted even in the temples, being a pure animal; for it never licked up the blood of the victims, nor pounced on them when they were being flayed and cut up, but lived upon honey-cakes and bread and dried fruits and cooked meat; and you also came on it drinking wine without changing its character. One day it came up to Apollonius when he was sitting in the temples, and whined and fawned at his knees, and begged of him more earnestly than it had ever done of anybody. The bystanders imagined it wanted some solid reward, but Apollonius exclaimed: "This lion is begging me to make you understand that a human soul is within him, the soul namely of Amasis, the king of Egypt in the province of Sais." And when the lion heard that, he gave a piteous and plaintive roar, and, crouching down, began to lament, shedding tears. Thereupon Apollonius stroked him, and said: "I think the lion ought to be sent to Leontopolis and dedicated to the temple there, for I consider it wrong that a king who has been changed into the most kingly of beasts should go about begging, like any human mendicant." In consequence the priests met and offered sacrifice to Amasis, and, having decorated the animal with a collar and ribbons, they conveyed him up-country to Egypt, with pipings, hymns, and songs composed in his honour.

PHILOSTRATUS  
*(Life of Apollonius of Tyana).*

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HOW my spirit first proceeded from Apollo, and took flight to earth, and entered into a human form, and what was the nature of the crime thus expiated—all this would take too long to tell; nor is it fitting either for me to speak of such matters or for you to hear them. . . . When I was Euphorbus, I fought at Troy and was slain by Menelaus. Some time then elapsed before I entered into the body of Pythagoras. . . .

A king; then a pauper; and presently a satrap; and after that came horse, jackdaw, frog, and I know not how many more; there is no reckoning them up in detail.

LUCIAN

(*Dialogue of the Cock and the Cobbler*).

**F**IRST DEALER: Where do you come from?

*Pythagoreanism*: From Samos.

*First Dealer*: Where did you get your schooling?

*Pythagoreanism*: From the sophists of Egypt.

*First Dealer*: If I buy you, what will you teach me?

*Pythagoreanism*: Nothing. I will remind you. . . . You have to learn that you yourself are not the person you appear to be.

*First Dealer*: What, I am someone else; not the I who am speaking to you?

*Pythagoreanism*: You are that you now: but you have formerly inhabited another body and borne another name. And in course of time you will change once more.

*First Dealer*: Why, then I shall be immortal and take one shape after another? But enough of this. . . .

LUCIAN.

(*The Sale of Creeds*).

**E**VERY soul . . . comes into this world strengthened by the victories or weakened by the defeats of its previous life. Its place in this world as a vessel appointed to honour or dishonour is determined by its previous merits or demerits. Its work in this world determines its place in the world which is to follow this.

. . . . .

## The Ring of Return

I am indeed of the opinion that as the end and consummation of the saints will be in those [ages] which are not seen, and are eternal, we must conclude that rational creatures had also a similar beginning. . . . And if this is so, then there has been a descent from a higher to a lower condition, on the part not only of those souls who have deserved the change by the variety of their movements, but also on that of those who, in order to serve the whole world, were brought down from those higher and invisible spheres to these lower and visible ones, although against their will. . . . The hope of freedom is entertained by the whole of creation—of being liberated from the corruption of slavery—when the sons of God, who either fell away or were scattered abroad, shall be gathered into one, and when they shall have fulfilled their duties in this world.

ORIGEN  
(*De Principiis*).

IS it not more in conformity with reason that every soul for certain mysterious reasons (I speak now according to the opinion of Pythagoras and Plato and Empedocles, whom Celsus frequently names) is introduced into a body, and introduced according to its deserts and former actions?

Is it not rational that souls should be introduced into bodies, in accordance with their merits and previous deeds, and that those who have used their bodies in doing the utmost possible good should have a right to bodies endowed with qualities superior to the bodies of others? . . .

The soul, which is immaterial and invisible in its nature, exists in no material place without having a body suited to the nature of that place; accordingly, it at one time puts off one body, which was necessary before, but which is no longer adequate in its changed state, and it exchanges it for a second.

ORIGEN  
(*Contra Celsum*).

## First Five Centuries A.D.

WE were in being long before the foundation of the world ; we existed in the eye of God, for it is our destiny to live in Him. We are the reasonable creatures of the Divine Word ; therefore we have existed from the beginning, for in the beginning was the Word. . . . Not for the first time does He show pity on us in our wanderings ; He pitied us from the very beginning.

ST. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA  
(*Exhortations to the Pagans*).

IT is a dogma recognised throughout antiquity that the soul expiates its sins in the darkness of the infernal regions, and that afterwards it passes into new bodies, there to undergo new trials.

When we have gone astray in multiplicity, we are first punished by our wandering away from the path, and afterwards by less favourable conditions, when we take on new bodies.

The gods are ever looking down upon us in this world. No reproach we bring against them can be justifiable, for their providence is never-ending ; they allot to each individual his appropriate destiny, one that is in harmony with his past conduct, in conformity with his successive existences.

PLOTINUS  
(*Second Ennead*).

THOSE who have exercised human faculties are born again as men. Those who have used only their senses go into the bodies of brutes, and especially into those of ferocious beasts, if they have yielded to bursts of anger ; so that even in this case, the difference between the bodies that they animate conforms to the difference of their propensities. Those who have sought

## The Ring of Return

only to gratify their lust and appetite pass into the bodies of lascivious and gluttonous animals. Finally, those who have degraded their senses by disuse, are compelled to vegetate in the plants. Those who have loved music to excess and yet have lived pure lives, go into the bodies of melodious birds. Those who have ruled tyrannically become eagles. Those who have spoken lightly of heavenly things, keeping their eyes always turned toward heaven, are changed into birds which always fly toward the upper air. He who has acquired civic virtues becomes a man; if he has not these virtues, he is transformed into a domestic animal, like the bee.

PLOTINUS

(Translated by THOMAS TAYLOR).

THE soul therefore, falling from on high, suffers captivity, is loaded with fetters, and employs the energies of sense. . . . She is reported also to be buried and to be concealed in a cave; but when she converts herself to intelligence she then breaks her fetters and ascends on high, receiving first of all from reminiscence the ability of contemplating real beings; at the same time possessing something super-eminent and ever abiding in the intelligible world. Souls therefore are necessarily of an amphibious nature, and alternately experience a superior and inferior condition of being; such as are able to enjoy a more intimate converse with Intellect abiding for a longer period in the higher world, and such to whom the contrary happens, either through nature or fortune, continuing longer connected with these inferior concerns. . . .

Thus the soul, though of divine origin, and proceeding from the regions on high, becomes merged in the dark receptacle of body, and, being naturally a posterior god, it descends hither through a certain voluntary inclination, for the sake of power, and of adorning inferior concerns. . . . By this means it receives a knowledge

## First Five Centuries A.D.

of evil, unfolds its latent powers, and exhibits a variety of operations peculiar to its nature, which, by perpetually abiding in an incorporeal habit, and never proceeding into energy, would have been bestowed in vain. . . .

Through an abundance of sensible desire it becomes profoundly merged in matter, and no longer totally abides with universal soul. Yet our souls are able alternately to rise from hence, carrying back with them an experience of what they have known and suffered in their fallen state ; from whence they will learn how blessed it is to abide in the intelligible world, and by a comparison, as it were, of contraries, will more plainly perceive the excellence of a superior state. For the experience of evil produces a clearer knowledge of good. . . . This is accomplished in our souls according to the circulations of time, in which a conversion takes place from subordinate to more exalted natures. . . .

Indeed, if it is proper to speak clearly what appears to me to be the truth, contrary to the opinions of others, the whole of our soul does not enter into body, but something belonging to it always abides in the intelligible and something different from this in the sensible world : and that which abides in the world of sense, if it conquers—or rather if it is vanquished and disturbed—does not permit us to perceive that which the supreme part of the soul contemplates. . . . For every soul possesses something which inclines towards the body, and something which tends upwards towards intellect . . . but the superior part of the soul is never influenced by fraudulent delights, and lives a life always uniform and divine.

PLOTINUS

*(The Descent of the Soul).*

(Translated by THOMAS TAYLOR.)

PHILOSOPHY speaks of souls being prepared by a course of transmigrations, the imagination being made light in weight or being polluted by the good or bad disposition. . . . In the region

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beneath the earth is the place where moist spirits are punished by spending an unhappy life. By several lives of this kind the soul may be purified and arise again. When first it comes down to earth, it embarks on this animal spirit as on a boat, and through it is brought into contact with matter. The soul's object is to take this spirit back with her; for if she were to abandon it and leave it behind on earth . . . the manner of her return would bring disgrace on her. . . .

The soul which did not quickly return to the heavenly region from which it was sent down to earth had to go through many lives of wandering.

SYNESIUS  
(*On Dreams*).

FATHER, grant that my soul may merge into Light and be no more thrust back into the illusion of earth.

SYNESIUS.

SAY, Lord, to me . . . say, did my infancy succeed another age of mine that died\* before it? Was it that which I spent within my mother's womb? . . . and what before that life again, O God my joy, was I anywhere or in any body? For this I have none to tell me, neither father nor mother, nor experience of others, nor mine own memory.

*The Confessions of Saint Augustine.*

THE message of Plato, the purest and most luminous in all philosophy, has at last scattered the darkness of error, and now shines forth mainly in Plotinus, a Platonist so like his master that one would think they lived together, or rather—since so long a period of time separates them—that Plato is born again in Plotinus.

SAINT AUGUSTINE  
(*Contra Academicos*).

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THE souls that are not destined for the tortures of hell, and those that have passed through this expiation, are born again, and divine Justice gives them a new body, in accordance with their merits and demerits.

PORPHYRY

(*Concerning Abstinence*).

WHAT appears to us to be an accurate definition of justice does not also appear to be so to the Gods. For we, looking at that which is most brief, direct our attention to things present, and to this momentary life, and the manner in which it subsists. But the powers that are superior to us know the whole life of the Soul, and all its former lives; and in consequence of this, if they inflict a certain punishment in obedience to the entreaties of those that invoke them, they do not inflict it without justice, but looking at the offences committed by souls in former lives: which men, not perceiving, think that they unjustly fall into the calamities which they suffer.

IAMBlichus

(*Egyptian Mysteries*, Book IV.).

THEY [the great ones of the emanations of the Light] indeed have not at all suffered and have not at all changed themselves in the regions, nor at all torn themselves asunder, nor poured themselves into bodies of different kinds and from one into another, nor have they been in any affliction at all. . . . And ye are in great suffering and great afflictions in your being poured from one into another of different kinds of bodies of the world.

. . . . .

Now, therefore, all men, sinners or better who are no sinners, not only if ye desire that they be taken out of

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the judgments and violent chastisements, but that they be removed into a righteous body which will find the mysteries of the Godhead, so that it goeth on high and inheriteth the Light-Kingdom—then perform the third mystery of the Ineffable and say: Carry ye the soul of this and this man of whom we think in our hearts, carry him out of all the chastisements of the rulers and haste ye quickly to lead him before the Virgin of Light; and in every month let the Virgin of Light seal him with a higher seal, and in every month let the Virgin of Light cast him into a body which will be righteous and good, so that it goeth on high and inheriteth the Light-Kingdom.

And the Virgin of Light sealeth that [the sinful] soul and handeth it over to one of her receivers, and will have it cast into a body which is suitable to the sins which it hath committed.

And amen, I say unto you: They will not discharge that soul from the changes of the body until it hath yielded its last circuit according to its merit.

Blessed indeed are the souls which shall receive of those mysteries; but if they turn and transgress and come out of the body before they have repented, the judgment of those men is sorer than all the judgments and it is exceedingly violent, even if those souls are new and it is their first time for coming into the world. They will not return to the changes of the bodies from that hour onwards and will not be able to do anything, but they will be cast out into the outer darkness and perish and be non-existent for ever.

The Saviour answered and said unto his disciples: "Herald unto the whole world and say unto men: Strive thereafter that ye may receive the mysteries of

## First Five Centuries A.D.

the Light in this time of affliction and enter into the Light-Kingdom. Join not one day to another, or one circuit to another, hoping that ye may succeed in receiving the mysteries if ye come into the world in another circuit."

But the rulers of the Fate, when an old soul is about to come down through them . . . give the old soul a cup of forgetfulness out of the seed of wickedness, filled with all the different desires and all forgetfulness. And straightway, when that soul shall drink out of the cup, it forgetteth all the regions to which it hath gone and all the chastisements through which it hath travelled.

And when I came to the regions of the æons, I have turned Elias and sent him into the body of John the Baptist, and the rest also I turned into righteous bodies.

And then cometh Yaluham, the receiver of Sabaoth, the Adamas, who handeth the souls the cup of forgetfulness, and he bringeth a cup filled with the water of forgetfulness and handeth it to the soul, and it drinketh it and forgetteth all things and all the regions to which it hath gone. And they cast it down into a body which will spend its time continually troubled in its heart.

This is the chastisement of the curser.

Thereafter cometh Yaluham, the receiver of Sabaoth, the Adamas, who bringeth the cup of forgetfulness and handeth it unto the soul; and it drinketh it and forgetteth all things and all the regions to which it had gone. And they cast it into a lame, halt, and blind body.

This is the chastisement of the thief.

And Yaluham, the receiver of Sabaoth, the Adamas,

## The Ring of Return

cometh and bringeth the cup with the water of forgetfulness and handeth it to the soul, and it drinketh and forgetteth all things and all the regions to which it had gone. And they cast it up into a lame and deformed body, so that all despise it persistently.

This is the chastisement of the arrogant and overweening man.

[To] a man who hath committed no sin but done good persistently, but hath not found the mysteries . . . there cometh a receiver of the little Sabaoth, the Good, him of the Midst. He himself bringeth a cup filled with thought and wisdom, and soberness is in it; and he handeth it to the soul. And they cast it into a body which can neither sleep nor forget because of the cup of soberness that hath been handed unto it; but it will whip its heart persistently to question about the mysteries of the Light until it find them, through the decision of the Virgin of Light, and inherit the Light for ever.

Jesus said unto his disciples: "When the sphere turneth itself, and Kronos and Ares come behind the Virgin of Light and Zeus and Aphrodite come in face of the Virgin, they being in their own æons, then the veils of the Virgin draw themselves aside and she falleth into joy in that hour when she seeth these two light-stars before her. And all the souls which she shall cast at that hour into the circuit of the æons of the sphere, that they may come into the world, will be righteous and good and find at this time the mysteries of the Light; she sendeth them anew that they may find the mysteries of the Light.

From the *Pistis Sophia*: a Gnostic Gospel translated from Greek into Coptic in the third or fourth century. (English version by G. R. S. MEAD.)

## First Five Centuries A.D.

**B**EING born from out the state of birth-and-death  
that giveth birth to mortal life, I now, set free,  
pass to the state transcending birth, as Thou  
hast stablished it, according as Thou hast ordained  
and made the mystery.

From *A Mithraic Ritual*.  
(Fourth century.)



IV

MISCELLANEOUS SOURCES  
(BEFORE A.D. 1700)



## JEWISH

**N**OW I was a child good by nature, and a good soul fell to my lot. Nay, rather, being good, I came into a body undefiled.

*The Book of Wisdom viii. 19, 20.*

**T**HEN Job arose and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped. And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither.

*Job i. 20, 21.*

**L**ORD, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations. . . . Thou turnest man to destruction: and sayest, Return, ye children of men. For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past. . . . The days of our years are three-score years and ten.

*Psalms xc.*

**D**O ye not remember that all pure Spirits who are in conformity with the divine dispensation live on in the lowliest of heavenly places, and in course of time they are again sent down to inhabit sinless bodies; but the souls of those who have committed self-destruction are doomed to a region in the darkness of the underworld?

(From an address of Josephus to some Jewish soldiers who desired to kill themselves rather than be captured by the Romans.)

## The Ring of Return

THEY say that all souls are incorruptible ; but that the souls of good men are removed into other bodies, while the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment.

JOSEPHUS  
(*De Bello Judaico*).

KNOW that Cain's essential soul passed into Jethro, but his spirit into Korah, and his animal soul into the Egyptian. . . . Samson the hero was possessed by the soul of Japhet, and Job by that of Terah.

. . . . .

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 thou that Sarah, Hannah, the Shunamite, 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 "—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 one form of uncleanness the soul will be invested with the body of a Gentile, who will [eventually] become a proselyte ; for another, the soul will pass into the body of a mule ; for others it transmigrates into an ass, a woman of Ashdod, a bat, a rabbit or a hare, a she-mule or a camel. Ishmael transmigrated first into the ass of Balaam, and subsequently into the ass of Rabbi Pinchas ben Nair.

## Miscellaneous Sources

Sometimes the soul of a righteous man may be found in the body of a clean animal or fowl.

. . . . .

The soul of a slanderer is transmigrated into a silent stone.

. . . . .

Rabbi Isaac Zuria was once passing the great academy of Rabbi Jochanan in Tiberias, when he showed his disciples a stone in the wall, remarking, "In this stone there is a transmigrated soul, and it cries that I should pray on its behalf. And this is the mystic meaning of 'The stone shall cry out of the wall'" (Hab. ii. 11).

. . . . .

The murderer is transmigrated into water. The mystical sign of this is indicated in "Ye shall pour it upon the earth as water" (Deut. xii. 16); and the meaning is, he is continually rolling on and on without any rest. Therefore let no man drink [direct] from a running tap or spout, but from the hollow of his hands, lest a soul pass into him, and that the soul of a wicked sinner.

. . . . .

One who sins with a married woman is, after undergoing the penalty of wandering about as a fugitive and vagabond, transmigrated, together with his accomplice, into the millstone of a water-mill, according to the mystery of "Let my wife grind unto another" (Job xxxi. 10).

. . . . .

The sages of truth have written, "He who does not wash his hands before eating, as the Rabbis of blessed memory have ordained, will be transmigrated into a cataract, where he will have no rest, even as a murderer, who is also transmigrated into water."

From *A Talmudic Miscellany*.  
(Translated by PAUL ISAAC HERSHON.)

## The Ring of Return

IN the house of Rabbi Elazar a filly was born which killed everybody who came near it. He presented it to the king. There it only permitted Jews to attend it. It was used by the king in battle, and helped him to victory, but was unmanageable afterwards. He therefore returned it to Rabbi Elazar. The horse suddenly spoke with a human voice and told its story. It was possessed of the soul of a certain Abiathar, a priest who had led a wicked life. He had died through a fiery snake coming out of his body and killing him. After death, he had suffered all kinds of punishment in Hell, and had been reborn as a hare, and after death had again been punished in Hell. While there he witnessed the triumphant progress of the pious to Paradise, hoping that they might rescue him. The soul of Abiathar was then again sent up to the world and entered the body of a young man. It was exorcised by Rabbi Nathan Jerushalmi, and then entered the horse. It was exorcised again by Nathan Jerushalmi, and the spirit came out like a fiery flame, destroying everything.

From *Exempla of the Rabbis*: A Collection  
of Tales from rare Hebrew books and MSS.  
(Edited by DR. MOSES GASTER).

ALL souls are subjected to the tests of transmigration ; men know not the designs of the Most High with regard to them ; they know not how they are being at all times judged, both before coming into this world and when they leave it ; they have no knowledge of the mysterious transformations and sufferings they must undergo ; . . . they are ignorant of the revolutions to which they are subjected, revolutions similar to those of a stone when it is being hurled from a sling. And now the time has come when the veil shall be removed from all these mysteries. . . . Souls must in the end be plunged back into the substance from which they came. But before this happens, they must have developed all the perfections the germs of which are implanted within

## Miscellaneous Sources

them ; if these conditions are not realised in one existence, they must be born again until they reach the stage that makes possible their absorption in God. At the time when the soul is to descend, the Lord calls it and says, " Go to such and such a place ! " The soul replies, " Let me remain here and not be defiled in that other world." The Lord answers, " From the beginning thou hast been created for the purpose of getting into this world." Then the soul submits, and descends against its will. The Law which helps the soul, says to it, " See how the Lord had mercy on you. He has given you his precious pearl [the Law] to help you in this world, so that ye may remain pure." But, if laden with sin, the soul must obtain purification so as not to be delivered to Gehinnom ; for two rows of angels and demons are waiting for the soul ; the good to lead to Eden and the evil spirits to Gehinnom ; and to be saved from punishment the soul migrates from body to body.

*The Zohar (Book of the Splendour of God).*

(A Cabbalistic classic of the  
fourteenth century.)

# The Ring of Return

## PERSIAN

**O** BROTHER, know for certain that this work has been before thee and me in bygone ages, and that each man has already reached a certain stage. No one has begun this work for the first time.

SHARF-U'D-DÍN-MANERÍ  
(A Sufi Teacher).

**A** STONE I died and rose again a plant,  
A plant I died and rose an animal ;  
I died an animal and was born a man.  
Why should I fear ? What have I lost by death ?  
As man, death sweeps me from this world of men  
That I may wear an angel's wings in heaven :  
Yet e'en as angel may I not abide,  
For nought abideth save the face of God.  
Thus o'er the angels' world I wing my way  
Onwards and upwards, unto boundless lights ;  
Then let me be as nought, for in my heart  
Rings as a harp-song that we must return to Him.

JALÁLU'D-DÍN RÚMÍ  
(Persian Mystic ; thirteenth century).

**F**IRST man appeared in the class of inorganic things,  
Next he passed therefrom into that of plants.  
For years he lived as one of the plants,  
Remembering naught of his inorganic state so different ;  
And when he passed from the vegetive to the animal state  
He had no remembrance of his state as a plant,  
Except the inclination he felt to the world of plants,  
Especially at the time of spring and sweet flowers ;  
Like the inclination of infants towards their mothers,  
Which know not the cause of their inclination to the  
breast.  
Again the Creator, as you know,  
Drew men out of the animal into the human state.

## Miscellaneous Sources

Thus man passed from one order of nature to another,  
Till he became wise and knowing and strong as he is now.  
Of his first states he has now no remembrance,  
And he will be again changed from his present state.

JALÁLU'D-DÍN RÚMÍ  
(*Masnavi*, Book IV.).

THOSE who, in the season of prosperity, experience  
pain and grief, suffer them on account of their  
words or deeds in a former body, for which the  
Most Just now punisheth them.

*The Desatir.*

(The Book of the Prophet Zoroaster.)

# The Ring of Return

## MOHAMMEDAN

THEY shall say : Our Lord ! twice didst Thou make us subject to death, and twice hast Thou given us life, so we do confess our faults : is there then a way to get out ?

How is it that ye believe not in God ? Since ye were dead, and He gave you life, He will hereafter cause you to die, and will again restore you to life ; then shall ye return unto Him.

God generates beings, and sends them back over and over again, till they return to Him.

Or the like of him who passed by a town, and it had fallen down upon its roofs. He said : When will Allah give it life after its death ? So Allah caused him to remain in a state of death for a hundred years, then roused him. He said : How long have you tarried ? He said : I have tarried a day, or part of a day. Said He : Nay ! You have tarried a hundred years ; then look at your food and drink—years have not passed over it ; and look at your ass : and that We may make you a sign to men, look at the bones, how We set them together, then clothe them with flesh. So when it became clear to him, he said : I know that Allah has power over all things.

They say, What ! when we have become bones and rubbish are we to be raised up a new creature ? Say, Be ye stones or iron, or a creature, the greatest your breasts can conceive ! Then they shall say, Who is to restore us ? Say, We who originated you at first. And they will wag their heads and say, When will that be ? Say, It may perhaps be nigh. *The Koran.*

## Miscellaneous Sources

AND when his body falleth off altogether, as an old fish-shell, his soul doeth well by the releasing, and formeth a new one instead.

The disembodied spirits of man and beast return as the clouds to renew the young streamlets of infancy. . . .

When a man dieth or leaveth his body, he wendeth through the gate of oblivion and goeth to God, and when he is born again, he cometh from God and in a new body maketh his dwelling ; hence is this saying :

The body to the tomb and the spirit to the womb. . . .

The soul of the lower beast goeth to the body of the higher, and the soul of the higher beast to the body of the savage, and the soul of the savage to the man. . . .

Ye who now lament to go out of this body wept also when ye were born into it. . . .

The person of man is only a mask which the soul putteth on for a season ; it weareth its proper time and then is cast off, and another is worn in its stead. . . .

I tell you, of a truth, that the spirits which now have affinity shall be kindred together, although they all meet in new persons and names.

*The New Koran.*

YOU were an apple, friend of mine,  
And apples upon you shall dine,  
Varied the lanterns where the flame is lit,  
In varied ways of dance the shadows flit.

ABUL ALA, THE SYRIAN.

# The Ring of Return

## CHINESE

ONCE upon a time, I, Chuang Tzu, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of following my fancies as a butterfly, and was unconscious of my individuality as a man. Suddenly I awaked, and there I lay, myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly dreaming I am a man. Between a man and a butterfly there is necessarily a barrier. The transition is called metempsychosis.

To have attained to the human form must be always a source of joy. And then, to undergo countless transitions, with only the infinite to look forward to—what incomparable bliss is that! Therefore it is that the truly wise rejoice in that which can never be lost, but endures always.

The Master came, because it was his time to be born; he went, because it was his time to die. For those who accept the phenomena of birth and death in this sense, lamentation and sorrow have no place. . . . The fuel is consumed, but the fire may be transmitted, and we know not that it comes to an end.

Birth is not a beginning; death is not an end.

CHUANG TZU, c. 450 B.C.

(From *Musings of a Chinese Mystic*).

(Translated by LIONEL GILES.)

IF I depart, I cast no look behind  
Still wed to life, I still am free from care.  
Since life and death in cycles come and go,  
Of little moment are the days to spare.

## Miscellaneous Sources

Thus strong in faith I wait, and long to be  
One with the pulsings of Eternity.

PO CHU-I, c. A.D. 800  
(*Peaceful Old Age*).

(Translated by LIONEL GILES.)

A PRIEST of Tao, one of the Hung-tu school,  
Was able by his magic to compel  
The spirits of the dead. So to relieve  
The sorrows of his king, the man of Tao  
Receives an urgent summons. Borne aloft  
Upon the clouds, on ether charioted,  
He flies with speed of lightning [till] . . .  
. . . knocking at the jade door  
At the western gate of the golden house, he bids  
A fair maid breathe his name to one more fair  
Than all. She, hearing of this embassy  
Sent by the Son of Heaven, starts from her dreams  
Among the tapestry curtains. Gathering  
Her robes around her. . . begins to deck herself  
With pearls and gems. . .

Then raising from their lacquered gloom  
Old keepsakes, tokens of undying love,  
A golden hair-pin, an enamel brooch,  
She bids him bear them to her lord. One half  
The hair-pin still she keeps, one half the brooch,  
Breaking with her dim hands the yellow gold,  
Sundering the enamel. "Tell my lord,"  
She murmured, "to be firm of heart as this  
Gold and enamel; then, in heaven or earth  
Below, we twain may meet once more."

PO CHU-I  
(*The Never-Ending Wrong*).  
(Translated by L. CRANMER BYNG.)

YEARS since We last forgathered, O Man-ch'ing!  
Methinks I see thee now,  
Lord of the noble brow,  
And courage from thy glances challenging.

## The Ring of Return

Ah! when thy tired limbs were fain to keep  
The purple cerements of sleep,  
Thy dim beloved form  
Passed from the sunshine warm,  
From the corrupting earth, that sought to hold  
Its beauty, to the essence of pure gold.  
Or haply art thou some far-towering pine,  
Some rare and wondrous flower?

Ah! that a song could bring  
Peace to thy dust, Man-ch'ing!

OU-YANG HSIU OF LU-LING, c. A.D. 1050  
(Translated by L. CRANMER BYNG.)

MOTHER of Pity, hear my prayer  
That in the endless round of birth  
No more may break my heart on earth,  
Nor by the windless waters of the Blest  
Weary of rest:  
That, drifting, drifting, I abide not anywhere.  
Yet if by Karma's law I must  
Resume this mantle of the dust,  
Grant me, I pray,  
One dewdrop from thy willow-spray,  
And in the double lotus keep  
My hidden heart asleep.

*Lines from the Tomb of an Unknown  
Woman in the Mountain District of So-  
Chan in the Province of Kiangsu.*  
(Translated by L. CRANMER BYNG.)

## Miscellaneous Sources

### JAPANESE

WHEN he who is born into the land of Pure Peace returneth again into this sinful world, even like unto that Buddha made flesh in India, he wearieth not in asking the welfare of all men. . . .

The Srāvakas, the Bodhisattvas, the Heavenly Beings and Souls in Paradise, they in whom wisdom is made equal unto beauty, declare their attributes in order, according to their former birth. . . .

Whoso would be born into Paradise shall in this life be made one with those men that return no more unto birth and death. . . .

Go forward, O Valiant Souls, seeking the Law though all the world fall into flame and ruin, for ye shall have passed beyond birth and death.

Teaching all that have life in the Ten Regions, that they might, with sincerity, faith, and hope, be born again into Paradise, He set forth that promise infinite and divine—the true seed of birth within the Kingdom of Truth.

Whoso attaineth unto the True Faith is in unity with them that return no more to birth and death, for, having thus attained, they pass onward into Nirvana, their lives being ended. . . .

Seek refuge in the Sole Vehicle of His merciful promise. For the transitory teachings have let and hindered men in the Way of Enlightenment so that they must needs pass through the long weariness of birth and death.

At that moment when faith in the Enlightened One is perfected, pure and lasting as the diamond, then shall the Spiritual Light shine upon us and guard us, the light which for ever guideth us from rebirth and death. . . .

## The Ring of Return

Throughout the long, long Kalpa of my lives that are overpast could I never find the way of Deliverance, and if Hōnen Shōnin, the Great Teacher, had not arisen in this world, vainly had I spent the precious hours of my life.

The people passed it from mouth to mouth that this Hōnen Shōnin was the living incarnation of Doshaku Zenji, or yet again of Zendo Daishi. . . .

And now, his time being at hand, Hōnen Shōnin spake :

“Thrice have I taken birth in the Land of Purity, and of these three times the last hath given unto me the fullness of peace.”

Once did Hōnen Shōnin speak, saying :

“In the glorious day of our Lord was I among the holy Assemblage on the Peak of Vultures, and my Spirit was rapt in self-instruction and in the doctrine of salvation.”

Having taken birth in that small and remote island, Hōnen Shōnin spread abroad the doctrine of the Holy Name for the sake of all men's salvation. And thus had he done not only then, but many times in ages gone by.

. . . . .  
No hope is there that the men now living in these last days shall escape the fetters of birth and death if they refuse the merciful promise of the Blessed One. . . .

He that receiveth the true Faith, and is one with them that return no more to birth and death, shall receive the Perfected Wisdom even as that Bodhisattva Maitreya that is called “He that shall come.” . . .

Our Father hath perfected His mercy by uttering the Divine Promise that giveth all His merit unto man, that He might save them that are fast bound unto birth and death. . . .

If we accept not the two divine gifts, the gift of entering the Promised Kingdom, and the gift of return

## Miscellaneous Sources

into this evil world, then shall the wheel of birth and death turn with us for ever.

*Japanese Buddhist Psalms.*  
(Translated by S. YAMAKE  
and L. ADAMS BECK.)

**E**XALTED One, to Thee I pray  
Whose beams the regions ten illumine.  
In Thee, Tathāgata, I trust,  
Grant me Thine ever-ready aid.  
O give me birth in Thy Pure Land,  
Which now in vision I behold. . . .  
O may we all be born again  
With Thee ; like Thee, the Truth proclaim !  
I pray that I may see Thee, Lord,  
That I and all men by Thy grace  
May to Thy Land of Bliss attain.

AMITAYUS SUTROPADESA  
(Fourth or fifth century A.D.).

**O**LD scrolls of Scripture, row on row,  
Five score, a hundred score, we know !  
Profound, profound past human ken,  
Their teachings manifold we pen.  
What boots this toil of scribe and sage  
While wisdom hides within the page ?  
Self yet unknowable remains :  
It thinks and thinks, nor wisdom gains.  
Mad, mad are beings here forlorn,  
Yet know they not their madness :  
Blind, blind are sentient creatures all,  
Yet know they not their blindness.  
Again, again, they are reborn  
To darkness and to sadness :  
Again, again they pass and die  
Blinded by sense eternally !

*Japanese Buddhist Hymn.*  
(Eighth century A.D.)

# The Ring of Return

## INDIAN

**D***USHMANTA* (Emperor of India): "Ah, what makes me so melancholy at hearing a mere song on absence, when I am not in fact separated from any real object of my affection? Perhaps the sadness of men otherwise happy, on seeing beautiful forms and listening to sweet melody, arises from some faint remembrance of past joys and the traces of connexions in a former state of existence."

*Kasyapa*: "What other favours can I bestow on thee?"

*Dushmanta*: "Can any favours exceed those already bestowed? Let every king apply himself to the attainment of happiness for his people; let Sereswati, the goddess of liberal arts, be adored by all readers of the Veda; and may Siva, of the azure neck and red locks, eternally potent and self-existing, avert from me the pain of another birth in this particular world, the seat of crimes and of punishment."

KALIDASA

(*Sakuntala*: an old Indian drama of uncertain date; probably about A.D. 300. From an anonymous translation published in 1789).

**I** WAS in immobile and mobile creatures, in worms and in moths;

I passed through many births of various kinds.  
In this way I occupied many bodies;  
But when, O God, I assumed *human* birth,  
I was a Jogi, a Jati, a penitent, a Brahmachāri;  
Sometimes a king, an emperor, and sometimes a beggar,  
Saith Kabir, "O God, have mercy on us;  
We have grown weary; make us now whole."

## Miscellaneous Sources

. . . Through error I have wandered among human and lower births ; I am now weary and over-spent with travel.

KABIR

(Indian mystic and reformer of the fifteenth century).

(Translated by MAX ARTHUR MACAULIFFE.)

TUKA to Iswara saith :

“ We shall take, if so Thou will,  
Birth, and learn of life and death ;  
But we ask that Thou shalt fill  
All our life-ways, dark and long  
With remembrance of Thy Face  
And with comrades rich in song,  
Mindful of our heavenly place.  
So in frailty of the flesh  
We may travel free from stain,  
Miss the snaring senses' mesh,  
Yea, and freedom's subtle chain.”

From the *Marathi of Tukaram*.

(Seventeenth century.)

(Paraphrased by JAMES COUSINS.)

# The Ring of Return

## GERMAN

DO not think that mankind hath such a beginning, as we must say of ourselves, according to the creation: no, the image hath appeared in God from eternity in the virgin of wisdom. . . .

The living Word, which dwelleth in the eternal virgin, attracted to it the flesh of Mary. . . . And thus the perished soul of Adam, in the body of Mary, was again set in the eternal humanity, for the Word dwelt in Christ's flesh and assumed the soul in him. . . .

The soul is out of the centre of nature, generated out of the essences, and it belongeth to the body; for it goeth forth from the essences of the body, and it attracteth corporeity to it.

JACOB BOEHME  
(*Threefold Life of Man*).

## SPANISH (Dutch)

IT is impossible for us to remember that we had existence prior to the body, since the body can have no vestige of it, and eternity cannot be defined in terms of time or have any relation of time. But, nevertheless, we have in our experience a perception that we are eternal. For the mind is sensible no less of what it understands than of what it remembers. . . .

Although, therefore, we do not remember that we existed before the body, yet we perceive that our mind is eternal, in so far as it involves the body's essence under the category of eternity, and that this its existence cannot be defined by time or interpreted by duration.

SPINOZA  
(*Ethics*, Book V.).

## Miscellaneous Sources

### ITALIAN

IF, in man, the immortal nature is united for an instant to the mortal nature, only to abandon it for the rest of the time, no permanent bond would be made between these two mortal and immortal elements, but a temporary union which, the mortal element once removed, would immediately dissolve, and dissolve with it the general harmony. It remains to be said that the union of these two natures exists partially, temporarily, and that whenever the body is destroyed each returns to its respective independence, and this process is renewed indefinitely throughout eternity.

As to ourselves, our soul, partaking of the divine nature, remains immortal and eternal in the precincts which are the limit of our world. Attached to a mortal envelope, it is sent by the gods now into one body, now into another, in view of the universal harmony, in order that the union of the mortal and immortal elements in human nature may contribute to the unity of the Whole.

GEORGE GEMISTUS: the 'Sage of Miziterra.'  
(Fourteenth century.)

THERE is an eternal Principle or Substance which is truly the man and no accident derived from Composition. This is the Deity, the hero, the particular God, the intelligence in, from, and through whom different Complexes and bodies are formed and form themselves, so that it continually reappears in different species, names, and fortunes.

I have reasoned deeply, and, speaking as a philosopher, since the soul is not found without body, and yet is not body, it may be in one body or in another, and pass from body to body.

## The Ring of Return

If not to be believed, it is gravely to be pondered whether a vile life be not disposed of by fatal justice, interwoven in a prison-house suited to its failure or crime, with organs and instruments suitable for such a workman or craftsman. . . . Let us supplicate the Divinity to bestow happy geniuses upon us in our trans- fusion, passage, or metempsychosis ; since, however inexorable He be, we must attend Him with wishes, to be either preserved in our present state, or to enter into a better or a like, or one but a little worse. . . . He that is favoured by the Gods must obtain this by means of good desires and good actions.

GIORDANO BRUNO (sixteenth century).  
*(The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast.)*

I FEAR that by my death the human race  
Would gain no vantage. Thus I do not die.  
So wide is this vast cage of misery  
That flight and change lead to no happier place.  
Shifting our pains, we risk a sorrier case :  
All worlds, like ours, are sunk in agony :  
Go where we will, we feel ; and this my cry  
I may forget like many an old disgrace.  
Who knows what doom is mine ? The Omnipotent  
Keeps silence ; nay, I know not whether strife  
Or peace was with me in some earlier life.  
Philip in a worse prison has me pent  
These three days past—but not without God's will.  
Stay we as God decrees : God doth no ill.

T. CAMPANELLA (sixteenth century).  
*(A Sonnet on Caucasus.)*

## Miscellaneous Sources

### DRUIDIC AND CELTIC

AS one of their leading dogmas they [the Druids] inculcate this : that souls are not annihilated, but pass after death from one body to another, and they hold that by this teaching men are much encouraged to valour, through disregarding the fear of death.

CÆSAR

(*De Bello Gallico*, Book VI.).

AMONG them [the Druids] the doctrine of Pythagoras had force, namely, that the souls of men are undying, and that after a fixed number of years they begin to live again, the soul passing into another body.

DIODORUS OF SICILY.

[THE Druids] would fain have us believe that the souls of men are immortal. I should be tempted to call these breeches-wearing gentry, fools, were not their doctrine the same as that of the mantle-clad Pythagoras.

DALERIUS MAXIMUS.

FROM you [the Druids] we learn that the destination of man's spirit is not the grave, nor the Kingdom of the Shades. The same spirit in another world animates a body and, if your teaching be true, death is the centre, not the finish, of a long life [= a round of lives]. Happy the folk upon whom the Bear looks down, happy in this error, whom of fears, the greatest moves not, the dread of death. . . . For who were coward enough to grudge a life sure of its return ?

LUCAN

(*The Pharsalia*).

## The Ring of Return

THREE necessities of Transmigration—the least of all things, whence a beginning; the substance of all things, whence progress; and the formation of all things, whence individuality.

*A Druidic Triad.*

HE will be in the shape of every beast,  
Both in the azure sea and on land.  
He will be a dragon before hosts at the onset,  
He will be a wolf of every great forest.  
He will be a stag with horns of silver  
In the land where chariots are driven,  
He will be a speckled salmon in a full pool,  
He will be a seal, he will be a fair white swan.

From *The Voyage of Bran*.

(Translated by ALFRED NUTT.)

I HAVE been in many shapes before I attained a congenial form. I have been a narrow blade of a sword; I have been a drop in the air; I have been a shining star; I have been a word in a book; I have been a book in the beginning; I have been a light in a lantern a year and a half; I have been a bridge for passing over three score rivers; I have journeyed as an eagle; I have been a boat on the sea; I have been a director in battle; I have been a sword in the hand; I have been a shield in fight; I have been the string of a harp; I have been enchanted for a year in the foam of water. There is nothing in which I have not been.

TALIESIN

(Welsh bard; sixth century, A.D.).

PRIMARY chief bard am I to Elphin,  
And my original country is the region of the  
summer stars;  
Idno and Heinin called me Merddin,  
At length every king will call me Taliesin.

## Miscellaneous Sources

I was with my Lord in the highest sphere  
On the fall of Lucifer into the depth of hell ;  
I have borne a banner before Alexander ;  
I know the names of the stars from north to south ;  
I have been on the galaxy at the throne of the Distributor ;  
I was in Canaan when Absalom was slain ;  
I conveyed the Divine Spirit to the level of the vale of Hebron ;  
I was in the court of Don before the birth of Gwydion.  
I was instructor to Eli and Enoc ;  
I have been winged by the genius of the splendid crosier ;  
I have been loquacious prior to being gifted with speech ;  
I was at the place of the crucifixion of the merciful Son of God ;  
I have been three periods in the prison of Arianrod ;  
I have been the chief director of the work of the tower of Nimrod ;  
I am a wonder whose origin is not known.  
I have been in Asia with Noah in the ark,  
I have seen the destruction of Sodom and Gomorra ;  
I have been in India when Roma was built,  
I am now come here to the remnant of Troia.  
I have been with my Lord in the manger of the ass ;  
I have strengthened Moses through the water of Jordan ;  
I have been in the firmament with Mary Magdalene ;  
I have obtained the muse from the cauldron of Caridwen ;  
I have been bard of the harp to Lleon of Lochlin.  
I have been on the White Hill, in the court of Cynvelyn,  
For a day and a year in stocks and fetters,  
I have suffered hunger for the Son of the Virgin,  
I have been fostered in the land of the Deity,  
I have been teacher to all intelligences,  
I am able to instruct the whole universe.

## The Ring of Return

I shall be until the day of doom on the face of the  
earth ;  
And it is not known whether my body is flesh or fish.

Then I was for nine months  
In the womb of the hag Caridwen ;  
I was originally little Gwion,  
And at length I am Taliesin.

TALIESIN

(Translated by DR. OWEN PUGHE).

*I AM a grey-cowled minstrel.*

I believe in illusion.  
I was for a time in the sky.  
I was observing the stars.

. . . . .  
I went travelling : I was an eagle ;  
I was a coracle on the seas,  
I was the attraction in good,  
I was a drop in a shower.

. . . . .  
I am not one who does not sing ;  
I sang, though I was little,  
At the battle of the Scrub-shoots,  
Against Britain's ruler,  
And the *Irish* ships,  
A rich-laden fleet.

. . . . .  
'Twas not of father and mother, whence I was born.  
'Tis after a new fashion I was created from nine  
constituents :

From the essence of fruits  
did God begin :  
from primrose flowers :  
from the pollen of shrubs,  
the pollen of Oak and Nettle,  
of Meadow-sweet and Broom ;

## Miscellaneous Sources

from the Mould of the earth ;  
from the Water of the ninth wave ;  
from the Fire of the lightning—  
from these things was I made.

. . . . .  
I was a speckled snake on the hill ;  
I was a dragon in the lake ;  
I was the slave of Kynbyn ;  
I was a herdsman besides.

. . . . .  
Thin and white are my fingers :  
It is long since I was a herdsman.  
I wandered on the earth  
Or ever I touched literature,  
I slept in a hundred mansions,  
A hundred inhabited forts.

TALIESIN

*(The Battle of the Scrub).*

**D**ECHTIRE, sister of Conchobor, fled one day, and with her fifty damsels. . . . Track nor trace of them was not found for three years, nor was aught heard of them. Then they came in bird-guise to the plain of Emania and they devoured everything and left no blade of grass standing. . . . Full of beauty was the bird-flock and their song. They sang as they were flying . . . preceding the hunters to the end of the land. Night fell upon the men of Ulster and thick snow fell. . . . Hardly were they in the house with their chariots and their horses and their arms, but there came to them all manner of good things, meats known and unknown, so that they never had a better night. The master of the house then told the men of Ulster that his wife was in travail. Dechtire went to her and she gave birth to a son. . . . The men of Ulster took the child . . . Dechtire brought him up. . . . The child grew up and, falling ill, died. Great was Dechtire's grief.

## The Ring of Return

On her return from burying him she asked for drink in a vessel of brass. Drink was brought to her. As she raised the vessel to her lips she felt a little beast come with it, and she drank it in. She slept afterwards, and at night she saw somewhat ; a man neared her and spake unto her, telling her she was with child by him.

He it was who had carried her off with her companions, he had led them in the shape of birds. He was the child she had reared ; now he was about to enter her womb, and would take the name of Setanta. He was Lug, son of Ethne.

Fragments of the ancient Irish folk-tale of the *Birth of Cuchulinn* ; preserved in *The Book of the Dun Cow* ; eleventh century.

ON the morrow early in the morning there came to them<sup>1</sup> a venerable cleric, who bade them welcome. . . . Finnen asked him to tell his name. Said he to them, " Of the men of Ulster am I. Tuan, son of Cairell, son of Muredach Red-neck, am I. I have taken this hermitage in which thou art upon the hereditary land of my father." . . . Finnen said they would not eat with him until he told them the stories of Ireland. . . .

" Five times verily," said he, " Ireland was taken after the Flood, and it was not taken after the Flood until three hundred and twelve years had gone. Then Partholon, son of Sera, took it. He had gone upon a voyage with twenty-four couples . . . They settled in Ireland until there were five thousand of their race. Between two Sundays a mortality came upon them, so that all died, save one man only . . . That man am I," said he. " Then I was from hill to hill and from cliff to cliff, guarding myself from wolves. . . . At last old age came upon me. . . . Then as I was asleep one night I saw myself passing into the shape of a stag. In

<sup>1</sup> Finnen of Moville and his men who had come with the Gospel into Ireland.

## Miscellaneous Sources

that shape I was, and I young and glad of heart. . . . In that way I spent my life during the time of Nemed and his offspring. . . . Then at last old age came upon me and I fled from men and wolves. Once as I was in front of my cave—I still remember it—I knew that I was passing from one shape to another. Then I passed into the shape of a wild boar. . . . In the same place I changed into all these shapes. Therefore I always visited that place to await the renewal. . . . I went to my own dwelling always. I remembered every shape in which I had been before. . . . I went into the shape of a large hawk. . . . Beothach, the son of Iarbonel the prophet, seized this island from the races that dwelt in it. From them are the Tuatha Dè and Andè whose origin the learned do not know. . . . I was for a long time in the shape of that hawk, so that I outlived all the races who had invaded Ireland. However, the sons of Mil took this island by force from the Tuatha Dè Danann. Then I was in the shape of that hawk in which I had been, and was in the hollow of a tree on a river. There I fasted for three days and three nights, when sleep fell upon us, and I passed into the shape of a river salmon. . . . Once more I felt happy and my swimming was good, and I used to escape from every danger and every snare. . . . Once, however, when God, my help, deemed it time . . . the fisherman of Cairell, the king of that land, caught me and took me to Cairell's wife. . . . And the Queen desired me and ate me by herself, so that I was in her womb. Again I remember the time I was in her womb and what each one said to her in the house and what was done in Ireland during that time. I also remember when speech came to me, as it comes to any man, and I knew all that was being done in Ireland and I was a seer ; and a name was given to me—to wit, Tuan, son of Cairell. Thereupon Patrick came with the Faith to Ireland. Then I was of great age ; and I was baptised, and alone believed in the King of all things with His elements.

From *The Book of the Dun Cow*.

## The Ring of Return

. . . MONGAN was in Rathmore of Moylinny in his kingship. To him went Forgoll the poet. . . . One day Mongan asked his poet what was the death of Fothad Airgthech. Forgoll said he was slain at Duffry in Leinster. Mongan said it was false. The poet said he would satirise his father and his mother and his grandfather and he would sing (spells) upon their waters, so that fish should not be caught in their river-mouths. He would sing upon their woods, so that they should not give fruit, upon their plains so that they should be barren for ever. . . . Mongan promised him his will in precious things. . . . At last (anything) save his own liberty with that of his wife Briothigemd, unless he were redeemed before the end of three days. The poet refused all except as regards the woman. For the sake of his honour Mongan consented. Thereat the woman was sorrowful. . . . Mongan told her not to be sorrowful, help would certainly come to them. . . . When night came to them, Mongan was on his couch in his palace, and his wife at his right hand. . . . The poet was summoning them by their sureties and their bonds. While they were there, a man is announced, approaching the earth from the south. . . . "What is the matter here?" said he. "I and the poet yonder," said Mongan, "have made a wager about the death of Fothad Airgthech. He said it was false." The warrior said the poet was wrong. . . . "It shall be proved. We were with thee with Find," said the warrior. "Hush!" said Mongan, "that is not fair." "We were with Find then," said he. "We came from Scotland. We met with Fothad Airgthech here yonder on the Larne river. There we fought a battle. I made a cast at him, so that 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. The bare stone from which I made that cast will be found, and the iron head will be found in the earth, and the tomb of Fothad Airgthech will be found a little to the east of it. . . . And by his tomb there is a stone pillar. . . ." They

## Miscellaneous Sources

went with the warrior. Everything was found thus. It was Caille, Find's foster-son, that had come to them. . . . Mongan, however, was Find, though he would not let it be known.

Story from which it is inferred that Mongan was a reincarnation of Find na Cumail, and the cause of the death of Fothad Airgthech.

(From *The Book of the Dun Cow*.)

# The Ring of Return

## ENGLISH

**I**F there be nothing new, but that which is  
Hath been before, how are our brains beguiled,  
Which, labouring for invention, bear amiss  
The second burthen of a former child!  
O, that record could with a backward look,  
Even of five hundred courses of the sun,  
Show me your image in some antique book,  
Since mind at first in character was done.  
That I might see what the old world could say  
To this composèd wonder of your frame;  
Whether we are mended, or whether better they,  
Or whether revolution be the same.  
O, sure I am, the wits of former days  
To subjects worse have given admiring praise.

SHAKESPEARE  
(*Sonnet LIX.*).

**R**OSALIND: I was never so be-rhymed since  
Pythagoras' time, that I was an Irish rat, which  
I can hardly remember.

SHAKESPEARE  
(*As you Like It*, III. ii.).

**G**RATIANO: Thou almost makest me waver in my  
faith  
To hold opinion with Pythagoras,  
That souls of animals infuse themselves  
Into the trunks of men; thy currish spirit  
Govern'd a wolf, who, hang'd for human slaughter,  
Even from the gallows did his fell soul fleet,  
And, whilst thou lay'st in thy unhallow'd dam,  
Infused itself in thee: for thy desires  
Are wolfish, bloody, starved and ravenous.

SHAKESPEARE  
(*The Merchant of Venice*, IV. i.).

## Miscellaneous Sources

**CLOWN**: What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wild fowl?

**Malvolio**: That the soul of our grandam might haply inhabit a bird.

**Clown**: What thinkest thou of his opinion?

**Malvolio**: I think nobly of the soul, and no way approve his opinion.

**Clown**: Fare thee well. Remain thou still in darkness: thou shalt hold the opinion of Pythagoras ere I will allow of thy wits, and fear to kill a woodcock, lest thou dispossess the soul of thy grandam. Fare thee well.

SHAKESPEARE

(*Twelfth Night*, IV. ii.).

**A**LL which I will bid you remember . . . is, that the Pythagorean doctrine doth not only carry one soul from man to man, nor man to beast, but indifferently to plants also: and therefore you must not grudge to find the same soul in an Emperor, in a Post-horse, and in a Macaron. . . . And therefore though this soul could not move when it was a Melon, yet it may remember, and can now tell me, at what luxurious banquet it was served. And though it could not speak when it was a Spider, yet it can remember, and now tell me, who used it for poison to attain dignity. However the bodies have dulled her other faculties, her memory hath ever been her own. . . .

JOHN DONNE

(From the Foreword to his satirical poem,  
*The Progress of the Soul*).

**I** SING the progress of a deathless soul,  
Whom fate, which God made, but doth not control,  
Placed in most shapes; all times, before the law  
Yoked us, and when, and since, in this I sing. . . .

For though through many straits and lands I roam,  
I launch at Paradise, and I sail towards home;

## The Ring of Return

The course I there began shall here be stay'd,  
Sails hoisted there, struck here, and anchors laid  
In Thames, which were at Tigris and Euphrates  
weigh'd.

For the great soul which here amongst us now  
Doth dwell, and moves that head, and tongue, and brow,  
Which, as the moon the sea, moves us ; to hear  
Whose story with long patience you will long—  
For 'tis the crown and last strain of my song—  
This soul, to whom Luther and Mahomet were  
Prisons of flesh ; this soul, which oft did tear  
And mend the wracks of th' Empire, and late Rome,  
And lived when every great change did come,  
Had first in Paradise a low, but fatal room.

JOHN DONNE

(*The Progress of the Soul*).

THE Pythagoreans defend Metempsychosis; and Paligenesia, that souls go from one body to another, *epotâ prius Lethes undâ*, as men into wolves, bears, dogs, hogs, as they were inclined in their lives. . . . Julian the Apostate thought Alexander's soul was descended into his body: Plato in *Timæo* and in his *Phædon* (for aught I can perceive) differs not much from this opinion, that it was from God first and knew all, but being inclosed in the body, it forgets, and learns anew, which he calls *reminiscentia* or recalling, and that it was put into the body for a punishment; and thence it goes into a beast's or man's . . . and after ten thousand years is to return into the former body again.

ROBERT BURTON

(*The Anatomy of Melancholy*).

WERT thou some Starr which from the ruin'd rooffe  
Of shak't Olympus by mischance did fall ;  
Which carefull Jove in nature's true behoofe  
Took up, and in fit place did reinstall ?

## Miscellaneous Sources

Or did of late Earth's Sonnes besiege the wall.  
Of sheenie Heav'n, and thou some goddess fled  
Amongst us here below to hide thy nectar'd head?

Or wert thou that just Maid who once before  
Forsook the hated earth, O tell me sooth,  
And cam'st again to visit us once more?  
Or wert thou that sweet-smiling Youth?  
Or that crown'd Matron, sage white-robed Truth?

Or any other of that heav'nly brood  
Let down in clowdie throne to do the world some good?

Or wert thou of the golden-wingèd hoast,  
Who having clad thyself in humane weed,  
To earth from thy præfixèd seat didst poast,  
And after short abode flie back with speed,  
As if to show what creatures Heav'n doth breed,  
Thereby to set the hearts of men on fire  
To scorn the sordid world, and unto Heav'n aspire?

JOHN MILTON

*(On the Death of a Fair Infant).*

TO see ourselves again we need not look for Plato's  
year; every man is not only himself; there  
hath been many Diogenes, and as many Timons,  
though but few of that name; men are liv'd over  
again; the world is now as it was in Ages past; there  
was none then, but there hath been someone since  
that parallels him, and is, as it were, his revived self.

SIR THOMAS BROWNE

*(Religio Medici).*

A SPARK or ray of the Divinity,  
Clouded in earthly fogs, yclad in clay,  
A precious drop sunk from Eternity,  
Spilt on the ground or rather slunk away.  
For then we fell when we 'gan first t'assay  
By stealth, of our own selves something to bear,  
Uncentring our selves from our great stay.

## The Ring of Return

So we as stranger Infants elsewhere born  
Can not divine from what spring we did flow,  
Nor dare these base alliances to scorn,  
Nor lift ourselves a whit from hence below,  
Nor strive our Parentage again to know.

. . . . .

Thus may the souls in long succession  
Leap out into distinct activity. . . .  
What may engage them to descend so low,  
Removed far from the steam of earthly mire?  
My wits be here too scant and faith too slow,  
Nor longer lists my wearied thought to tire.  
Let bolder spirits to such heights aspire,  
But well I wrote, if there admitted were  
A pre-existency of souls entire,  
And due Returns in courses circular,  
This course all difficulties with ease away  
would bear.

HENRY MORE  
(*The Song of the Soul*).

**I** LOOK on this life as the progress of an essence royal :  
the soul but quits her court to see the country. . . .  
Thus her descent speaks her original. God in love  
with His own beauty frames a glass, to view it by reflec-  
tion. But the frailty of the matter excluding eternity,  
the composure was subject to dissolution. Ignorance  
gave this release the name of death, but properly it is  
the soul's birth and a charter that makes for her liberty.  
. . . The magicians tell me that the soul passes out of one  
mode and enters another.

. . . . .

I speak of that most secret and silent lapse of the  
spirit 'through the degrees of natural forms'; and this  
is a mystery not easily apprehended. It is a Kabalistic  
maxim that 'no spiritual being descending here below  
can operate without a garment.' . . . The soul of man,  
whiles she is in the body, is like a candle shut up in a

## Miscellaneous Sources

dark lanthorn, or a fire that is almost stifled for want of air. Spirits—say the Platonics—when they are ‘in their own country’ are like the inhabitants of green fields who live perpetually amongst flowers, in a spicy, odorous air: but here below ‘in the circle of generation,’ they mourn because of darkness and solitude, like people locked up in a pest-house. This is it makes the soul subject to so many passions, to such a Proteus of humours. Now she flourishes, now she withers—now a smile, now a tear; and when she hath played out her stock, then comes a repetition of the same fancies, till at last she cries out with Seneca: “How long this self-same round?” . . .

Now will the Peripatetics brand me with their *contra principia*, and the school divines with a *tradatur Satanae*. I know I shall be hated of most for my pains, and perhaps scoffed at like Pythagoras in Lucian: ‘Who buyeth Eugenius? Who seeketh to be more than a man, or to know the harmony of the world and be born again?’

THOMAS VAUGHAN (‘EUGENIUS PHILALETHES’).

CHRIST and His Apostles spoke and writ as the condition of the persons, with whom they dealt, administered occasion. . . . Therefore doubtless there were many noble theories which they could have made the world acquainted with. . . . Few speculative truths are delivered in Scripture but such as were called forth by the controversies of those times; and Pre-existence was none of them, it being the constant opinion of the Jews, as appears by that question, “Master, was it for this man’s sin or his father’s that he was born blind?” . . . And the author of the Book of Wisdom, who certainly was a Jew, probably Philo, plainly supposeth the same doctrine in that speech, “For I was a witty child and had a good spirit, wherefore the rather, being good, I came into a body undefiled.” As also did the disciples in their forementioned

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question to our Saviour ; for except they supposed that he might have sinned before he was born, the question had been senseless and impertinent. Again when Christ asked them whom men said He was they answered, that some said John the Baptist, others, Elias, others, Jeremias or one of the Prophets, which sayings of theirs suppose their belief of a Metempsychosis and consequently of Pre-existence. These, one would think, were very proper occasions for our Saviour to have rectified His mistaken followers had their supposition been an error. . . .

Every soul brings a kind of sense with it into the world, whereby it tastes and relisheth what is suitable to its peculiar temper. . . . What can we conclude but that the soul itself is the immediate subject of all this variety and that it came prejudiced and prepossessed into this body with some implicit notions that it had learnt in another? To say that all this variety proceeds primarily from the mere temper of our bodies is methinks a very poor and unsatisfying account. For those that are the most like in the temper, air, and complexion of their bodies, are yet of a vastly differing genius. . . . Besides, there are all kind of makes, forms, dispositions, tempers and complexions of body, that are addicted by their natures to the same exercise and employments. . . . And to say all these inclinations are from custom or education, is the way not to be believed, since all experience testifies to the contrary.

What then can we conjecture is the cause of all this diversity, but that we had taken a great delight and pleasure in some things like and analogous unto these in a former condition ?

JOSEPH GLANVILL  
(*Lux Orientalis*).

**I**F thy pre-existing soul  
Was form'd at first with myriads more,  
It did through all the mighty poets roll  
Who Greek or Latin laurels wore,

## Miscellaneous Sources

And was that Sappho last, which once it was before.

If so, then cease thy flight, O heaven-born mind!

Thou hast no dross to purge from thy rich ore:

Nor can thy soul a fairer mansion find,

Than was the beauteous frame she left behind:

Return to fill or mend the choir of thy celestial kind.

DRYDEN

*(Ode to the Memory of Mrs. Anne Killigrew).*



V

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## GERMAN

THE soul of man  
Is like water :  
From heaven it cometh,  
To heaven it mounteth,  
And thence again  
It must back to earth,  
Forever changing.

WOLFGANG VON GOETHE  
(*Faust*).

TELL me what destiny has in store for us? Wherefore has it bound us so closely to each other? Ah! in bygone times thou must have been my sister or my wife . . . and there remains, from the whole of those past ages, only one memory, hovering like a doubt above my heart, a memory of that truth of old that is ever present in me.

WOLFGANG VON GOETHE  
(From a letter to Frau von Stein).

THE very same way by which the race reaches its perfection must every individual man—one sooner, another later—have travelled over. Have travelled over in one and the same life? . . . Surely not that: but why 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 bring to men only

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temporal punishments and rewards? And, once more, why not another time all those steps to perform which the views of eternal rewards so powerfully assist us? 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 once that there is nothing to repay the trouble of coming back? Is this a reason against it? Or, because I forget 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 that which even I must forget *now*, is that necessarily forgotten for ever?

LESSING

*(The Divine Education of the Human Race).*

(Translated by REV. F. W. ROBERTSON.)

**D**O you not know great and rare men who cannot have become what they are at once, in a single human existence? Who must often have existed before in order to have attained that purity of feeling, that instinctive impulse for all that is true, beautiful, and good—in short, that elevation and natural supremacy over all around them? . . .

Have you never had remembrances of a former state, which you could find no place for in this life? . . . Have you not seen persons, been in places, of which you were ready to swear that you had seen those persons, or had been in those places before? . . . And such are *we*; we who, from a hundred causes, have sunk so deep and are so wedded to matter, that but few reminiscences of so pure a character remain to us. The nobler class of men who, separated from wine and meat, lived in perfect simplicity according to the order of nature, carried it further, no doubt, than others, as we learn from the example of Pythagoras, of Iarchas, of Apollonius, and others, who remembered distinctly what and how many times they had been in the world before.

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If we are blind, or can see but two steps beyond our noses, ought we therefore to deny that others may see a hundred or a thousand degrees farther, even to the bottom of time, into the deep, cool well of the foreworld, and there discern everything, plain and bright and clear? . . .

You know the law of economy which rules throughout nature. Is it not probable that the Deity is guided by it in the propagation and progress of human souls? He who has not become ripe in one form of humanity is put into the experience again, and, some time or other, must be perfected. I am not ashamed of my half-brothers, the brutes; on the contrary, as far as they are concerned, I am a great advocate of metempsychosis. I believe, for a certainty, that they will ascend to a higher grade of being, and am unable to understand how anyone can object to this hypothesis, which seems to have the analogy of the whole creation in its favour. . . .

When you stand before the statue of a high-hearted Apollo, do you not feel what you lack of being that form? Can you ever attain to it here below, though you should return ten times? And yet that was only the idea of an artist. . . . Has the almighty Father no nobler forms for us than those in which our heart now heaves and groans? The soul lies captive in its dungeon, bound as with a sevenfold chain, and only through a strong grating, and only through a pair of light and air-holes, can it breathe and see. . . . That restless discontent shall some time finally release us from our repeated sojourns on earth, through which the Father is training us for a complete divorce from sense-life.

J. G. VON HERDER

(*Dialogues on Metempsychosis*).

(Translated by F. H. HEDGE.)

**I**N this tumultuous world of misery and sin  
From one belief alone I hope and comfort win:  
That the One God, who sees us with the Sun for  
Eye,



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loss of intellect is the Lethe but for which the Will would remember the various manifestations it has caused. When we die, we throw off our individuality, like a worn-out garment, and rejoice because we are about to receive a new and better one.

Were an Asiatic to ask me for a definition of Europe, I should be forced to answer him : It is that part of the world which is haunted by the incredible delusion that man was created out of nothing, and that his present birth is his first entrance into life.

SCHOPENHAUER  
(*Parerga and Paralipomena*).

WHAT sleep is for the individual, death is for the will. It would not endure to continue the same actions and sufferings throughout an eternity, without true gain, if memory and individuality remained to it. It flings them off, and this is Lethe ; and through the sleep of death it reappears refreshed and fitted out with another intellect, as a new being—' a new day tempts to new shores.' These constant new births, then, constitute the recession of the life-dreams of a will which in itself is indestructible. . . . Every new-born being comes fresh and blithe into the new existence, and enjoys it as a free gift : but there is, and can be, nothing freely given. Its fresh existence is paid for by the old age and death of a worn-out existence which has perished, but which contained the indestructible seed out of which the new existence has arisen : they are *one* being. To show the bridge between the two would certainly be the solution of a great riddle. . . . We find the doctrine of metempsychosis springing from the earliest and noblest ages of the human race, always spread abroad in the earth as the belief of the great majority of mankind ; nay, really as the teaching of all religions, with the exception of that of the Jews and the two which have proceeded from it : in the most subtle form,

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however, and coming nearest to the truth, in Buddhism. Accordingly, while Christians console themselves with the thought of meeting again in another world . . . in those other religions the meeting again is going on now, only *incognito*. In the succession of births . . . the persons who now stand in close connection or contact with us will also be born again with us at the next birth, and will have the same or analagous relations and sentiments towards us as now, whether these are of a friendly or a hostile description.

SCHOPENHAUER

(*The World as Will and Idea*).

OUR duty is present with us every instant. My doctrine is: Live so that thou mayest desire to live again—that is thy duty; for, in any case, thou wilt live again!

And in every one of these cycles of human life there will be one hour where for the first time one man, and then many, will perceive the mighty thought of the eternal recurrence of all things—and for mankind this is always the hour of noon.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE.

TO those who think like us, things all dance themselves: they come and hold out the hand, and laugh, and flee—and return.

Everything goeth, everything returneth; eternally rolleth the wheel of existence. Everything dieth, everything blossometh forth again; eternally runneth on the year of existence.

Everything breaketh, everything is integrated anew; eternally buildeth itself the same house of existence.

All things separate, all things again greet one another; eternally true to itself remaineth the ring of existence.

Behold, we know what thou teachest, that all things eternally return, and ourselves with them, and that we

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have already existed times without number, and all things with us. . . .

The plexus of causes returneth in which I am intertwined—it will again create me! I myself pertain to the causes of the eternal return.

If I be a diviner and full of the divining spirit, which wandereth on high mountain-ridges, 'twixt two seas:—

Wandereth 'twixt the past and the future as a heavy cloud—hostile to sultry plains, and to all that is weary and can neither die nor live:

Ready for lightning in its dark bosom and for the redeeming flash of light, charged with lightnings which say Yea! which laugh Yea! ready for divining flashes of lightning:—

Blessed, however, is he who is thus charged! And verily, long must he hang like a heavy tempest on the mountain, who shall one day kindle the light of the future!—

Oh, how could I not be ardent for Eternity, and for the marriage-ring of rings—the ring of the return?

If ever a breath hath come to me of the creative breath, and of the heavenly necessity which compelleth even chances to dance star-dances:

If ever I have laughed with the laughter of the creative lightning, to which the long thunder of the deed followeth, grumblingly, but obediently:

If ever I have played dice with the Gods at the divine table of the earth . . .

Oh, how could I not be ardent for Eternity, and for the marriage-ring of rings—the ring of the return?

If my virtue be a dancer's virtue, and if I have often sprung with both feet into golden-emerald rapture:

If my wickedness be a laughing wickedness, at home among rose-banks and hedges of lilies:

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For in laughter is all evil present, but it is sanctified and absolved by its own bliss :

And if it be my Alpha and Omega that everything heavy shall become light, every body a dancer, and every spirit a bird : and verily, that is my Alpha and Omega !—

Oh, how could I not be ardent for Eternity and for the marriage-ring of rings—the ring of the return ?

If ever I have spread out a tranquil heaven above me, and have flown into mine own heaven with mine own pinions :

If I have swum playfully in profound luminous distances, and if my freedom's avian wisdom hath come to me :—

Thus however speaketh avian wisdom : “ Lo, there is no above and no below ! Throw thyself about—outward, backward, thou light one ! Sing ! Speak no more !

“ Are not all words made for the heavy ? Do not all words lie to the light ones ? Sing ! Speak no more ! ”—

Oh, how could I not be ardent for Eternity, and for the marriage-ring of rings—the ring of the return ?

Never yet have I found the woman by whom I should like to have children, unless it be this woman whom I love : for I love thee, O Eternity !

*For I love thee, O Eternity !*

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

*(Thus Spake Zarathustra).*

(Translated by THOMAS COMMON.)

NOW, if the real heir of our attainments in the world of sense—of all, that is, which in Darwinism is thrown to the Unconscious—is the transcendental Subject and inasmuch as this Subject possesses essentially the same physical powers as its projection, the man of the senses, the capacity of the transcendental Subject for development cannot be limited to the single case of the

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earthly existence, but the marked individuality which we already bring with us into this existence must have been acquired in a similar way to that in which it is augmented in this life. . . . From the strength of the impulse to incarnation . . . is to be inferred a great advantage from immersion into the world of sense, and the consequent desirability in the interest of the Subject of the repetition of this mode of existence, so that the unconscious attainments of one existence may be transmitted to the next. The hypothesis of a transcendental consciousness, which many followers of Darwin might repudiate, is therefore completely compatible with Darwinism. . . .

According to Darwin, habits are transmitted to the germ-cells, and so to all later generations, species, and kinds; according to the transcendental psychologist, habits pass as predispositions to the transcendental Subject, and so determine its later phenomenal forms, which these later generations just are. These two views are not opposed to each other. . . .

Those who think the metaphysical Darwinism, tending to Palingenesis, a crude explanation of individuality, should consider that the alternative explanations offered by materialism and pantheism are by no means less crude. They do not simplify the problem of life, if only because they do not seek in it unity; it returns with every birth; and becomes permanent when in every birth they see a new creation. . . .

Our transcendental Subject not only introduces us into life and determines our particular individuality, but also leads us through life; but it cares only for our transcendental good, and is regardless of our wishes, just as in dreams we, the secret directors, are regardless of our wishes in the dream. . . .

Whoever recognises the transcendental Subject in us will see that the earthly misery is for our transcendental advantage, and that this earthly existence is our own act. . . .

Man is his own heir, the Subject inherits from the

## The Ring of Return

person, and what I have acquired morally and intellectually remains with me. The law of the Conservation of Energy . . . avails also for the psychical world.

So should we again arrive at the oldest of philosophical conceptions of man, the migration of souls ; but this old theory would be revived in a new and incomparably higher form, which could only be described as Palingenesis. . . .

As our earthly phenomenal form is the product of our intelligible character, so also after stripping off this phenomenal form we shall be that which we have made ourselves through the earthly existence, whether we have thereby advanced or injured our Subject. This is the transcendental justification, before which all human complaint of terrestrial injustice is dumb.

CARL DU PREL

(*The Philosophy of Mysticism*).

(Translated by C. C. MASSEY.)

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SWEDISH

*MAXIMUS*: "Must I remind you how fortune has borne you, as on mighty pinions, through an agitated and perilous life? Who are you, sire? Are you Alexander born again, not, as before, in immaturity, but perfectly equipped for the fulfilment of the task?"

*Julian*: "Maximus!"

*Maximus*: There is One who ever reappears, at certain intervals, in the course of human history. He is like a rider taming a wild horse in the arena. Again and yet again it throws him. A moment, and he is in the saddle again, each time more secure and more expert; but off he has had to go, in all his varying incarnations, until this day. Off he had to go as the god-created man in Eden's grove; off he had to go as the founder of the world-empire; off he *must* go as the prince of the empire of God. Who knows how often he has wandered among us when none have recognised him? How know you, Julian, that you were not in him whom you now persecute?"

*Julian* (looking far away): "Oh, unfathomable riddle——!"

HENRIK IBSEN

(*Emperor and Galilean*).

(Translated by WILLIAM ARCHER.)

# The Ring of Return

## FRENCH

IT is not more surprising to be born twice than once ;  
everything in Nature is resurrection.

VOLTAIRE.

WHERE is there an old man who would not like to feel certain that he would be born again and bring back into another life the experience he has gained in the present one? . . . We must recognise that we have already lived before being what we now are, and that many other lives await us, some in this world, and the rest in a higher sphere, with a finer body and more delicate senses.

FRANÇOIS FOURIER  
(*Theory of Universal Unity*).

EACH of us is a reincarnating being, ignorant both of his present and of his former transformations. . . . This life we spend on earth, shut in between an apparent birth and an equally apparent death is, in reality, only a portion of our existence, one manifestation of man in time.

Animals are without individuality, but nevertheless the immaterial principle which is in them cannot be destroyed. Can there be an eternal cosmic law whereby the Being at the head of a hierarchy unceasingly recalls, and by continuous action makes his own, the immaterial principle of the whole Sphere ruled by him? The law of an intelligent being is to perfect himself, for without that he would be like the animals whose instincts remain unaltered, unless, through domesticity, they enter the magnetic Sphere of man. One can conceive that the

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essence of all the species gravitates gradually towards the essence of domestic animals.

There are men in advance of their century ; there are even some in advance of this actual existence, who participate in the future existence. . . . There are men sustained by divine goodness to hasten the accomplishment of its designs, who voluntarily take up the burden in order to lighten it for others.

PIERRE BALLANCHE  
(Translated by EVA MARTIN).

IN philosophic mood, last night, as idly I was lying,  
That souls may transmigrate methought there could  
be no denying :

So, just to know to what I owe propensities so strong,  
I drew my soul into a chat—our gossip lasted long.

“ A votive offering,” she observed, “ well might I claim  
from thee ;

For thou in being hadst remained a cipher, but for me :  
Yet not a virgin soul was I when first in thee enshrined.”  
Ah ! I suspected, little soul, thus much that I should  
find !

“ Yes,” she continued, “ yes, of old—I recollect it now—  
In humble ivy I was wreathed round many a joyous  
brow.

More subtle next the essence was that I essayed to warm,  
A bird’s, that could salute the skies—a little bird’s my  
form :

Where thickets made a pleasant shade, where shep-  
herdesses strolled.

I fluttered round, hopped on the ground, my simple lays  
I trolled ;

My pinions grew whilst still I flew in freedom on the  
wind.”

Ah ! I suspected, little soul, thus much that I should  
find !

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“ Médor my name, I next became a dog of wondrous  
tact,  
The guardian of a poor blind man, his sole support, in  
fact ;  
The trick of holding in my mouth a wooden bowl I  
knew—  
I led my master through the streets, and begged his  
living, too.  
Devoted to the poor, to please the wealthy was my care,  
Gleaning as sustenance for one, what others well could  
spare ;  
Thus did I good, since to good deeds so many I inclined.”  
Ah ! I suspected, little soul, thus much that I should  
find !

“ Next, to breathe life into her charms, in a young girl I  
dwelt ;  
There, in soft prison, snugly housed, what happiness I  
felt !  
Till to my hiding-place a swarm of Cupids entrance  
gained,  
And, after pillaging it well, in garrison remained.  
Like old campaigners there the rogues all sorts of mischief  
did ;  
And night and day, whilst still I lay in little corner hid,  
How oft I saw the house on fire I scarce can call to  
mind.”  
Ah ! I suspected, little soul, thus much that I should  
find.

“ Some light on thy propensities may now upon thee  
break ;  
But prithee, hark ! one more remark I still,” said she,  
“ would make.  
'Tis this—that having dared one day with Heaven to  
make too free,  
God for my punishment resolved to shut me up in  
thee.

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And what with sittings up at night, with work and  
woman's art,  
Tears and despair—for I forbear some secrets to impart—  
A poet is a very hell for soul thereto consigned!"  
Ah! I suspected, little soul, thus much that I should  
find.

PIERRE JEAN DE BÉRANGER  
(*La Métempsychose*).  
(Translated by WILLIAM YOUNG.)

**I**N proportion as the soul is developed by successive  
lives, the body to which it is to be united will  
necessarily be superior to those it has worn out,  
otherwise there would be no harmony between these  
two elements of human existence. . . .

Man's work will be a continuation of his past work.  
. . . He will again have a life of toil; he will participate,  
to the extent God has permitted him, in the endless  
creations produced by divine omnipotence; he will again  
love; he will never cease to love; he will continue his  
eternal progress, because the distance between himself  
and God is infinite.

CONSTANT SAVY.

**I**F this [law of reincarnation] had not been instituted  
by God and if it had not been the essential reality,  
then man would have shown himself greater and  
better than God by the mere fact of having imagined it.

CHARLES LANCELIN.

"**H**OW is it that in thy short life thou hast found  
the time to learn so many things?" said the  
young girl.

"I remember," he replied.

"Farewell," she said, "farewell, home of Earth,

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warmed by the fires of love ; where all things press with ardent force from the centre to the extremities. . . . Farewell, all ye who have descended into the sphere of Instinct that you may suffer there for others ! . . . Farewell, ye granite rocks that shall bloom a flower ; farewell, flower that becomes a dove ; farewell, dove that shalt be woman ; farewell, woman, who art Suffering, man who art Belief ! Farewell, you who shall be all love, all prayer ! ”

All human beings go through a previous life in the sphere of Instinct, where they are brought to see the worthlessness of earthly treasures, to amass which they gave themselves such untold pains ! Who can tell how many times the human being lives in the sphere of Instinct before he is prepared to enter the sphere of Abstraction, where thought expends itself on erring science, where mind wearies at last of human language ? For, when Matter is exhausted, Spirit enters. Who knows how many fleshly forms the heir of heaven occupies before he can be brought to understand the value of that silence and solitude whose starry plains are but the vestibule of Spiritual Worlds ? He feels his way amid the void, makes trial of nothingness, and then at last his eyes revert upon the Path. Then follow other existences—all to be lived to reach the place where Light effulgent shines. Death is the post-house of the journey. A lifetime may be needed merely to gain the virtues which annul the errors of man's preceding life. . . .

The virtues we acquire, which develop slowly within us, are the invisible links which bind each one of our existences to the others—existences which the spirit alone remembers, for Matter has no memory for spiritual things. Thought alone holds the tradition of the bygone life. The endless legacy of the past to the present is the secret source of human genius. . . .

When a human soul draws its first furrow straight,

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the rest will follow surely. . . . All ends in God ; and many are the ways to find Him by walking straight before us. . . .

The final life, the fruition of all other lives, to which the powers of the soul have tended, and whose merits open the Sacred Portals to perfected man, is the life of Prayer. . . . Cast yourself on the breast of the stream in Prayer ! Silence and meditation are the means of following the Way. God reveals Himself, unfailingly, to the solitary, thoughtful seeker.

It is thus that the separation takes place between Matter, which so long has wrapped its darkness round you, and Spirit, which was in you from the beginning, the light which lighted you and now brings noon-day to your soul.

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

(*Scraphita*).

(Translated by K. P. WORMELEY.)

**I**N this doctrine, so evidently based on reason, everything is linked and held together : the fore-knowledge of God and the agreement thereof with man's free-will. This problem, hitherto impossible to solve, no longer offers any difficulty, if by it is meant that God, knowing before birth, by reason of his previous deeds, what there is in the heart of man, brings man to life and removes him from it in circumstances that best fit in with the accomplishment of his purposes. . . .

And so there falls away and disappears the greatest difficulty in the doctrine of grace, which consisted in explaining how it came about that God made some men pitiful and others hard-hearted, without there being in him either justice or acceptance of persons . . . since evidently according to this theory it is not (as Origen has already said) apart from previous merit that some are formed for vessels of honour, and others for vessels of shame and wrath. . . .

Consequently the most sublime mysteries of religion,

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the most wonderful facts regarding the destiny of the soul, find their natural explanation in a clear understanding of the doctrine of metempsychosis, however strange and extraordinary it may at first appear.

D'ORIENT  
(*The Soul's Destinies*).

IF we regard the world as a series of successive lives for each creature, we see very well how it comes about that God, to whom there is neither time nor space, and who perceives the final goal of all things, permits evil and suffering as being necessary phases through which creatures must pass, in order to reach a state of happiness which the creature does not see, and consequently cannot enjoy in so far as it is a creature, but which God sees, and which, therefore, the creature virtually enjoys in him, for the time will come when it will partake of that happiness.

PIERRE LEROUX  
(*Concerning Humanity*).

THE question may well be asked whether the talents, the good and evil tendencies man brings with him at birth, may not be the fruit of acquired intelligence, of qualities and vices gained in one or many former existences. Is there a previous life the elements of which have prepared the conditions of the life now being lived by each of us? People in ancient times thought so. Inborn dispositions, so different in children, caused them to believe in impressions left by previous existences in the imperishable germ of man. From the time when intelligence begins to show itself in children, we faintly discern a general attitude towards things, which is very like a memory thereof. . . . Rebirth in humanity constitutes no more than an initial circle of tests. . . . The limit to the progress man must have attained to, before entering upon another circle of tests in another sphere,

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is at present unknown to us ; science and philosophy will doubtless succeed in determining this limit later on.

I affirm the perpetual union of the soul to organic bodies ; these bodies succeed each other, being born from one another, and fitting themselves for the constitutive forms of the worlds traversed by the immortal ego in its successive existences. . . . Let us not forget that the soul always carries off a material germ from one existence to the next, making itself anew, so to speak, several times, in that endless ascent of lives through the worlds.

ALPHONSE ESQUIROS.

“ALBERT had persuaded himself, and would have persuaded us, that he was the same Wratislaw, the son of Withold, who was the first to bear the maternal name of Rudolstadt. He recounted all the events of his childhood ; his memories of the execution of Count Withold (for which he blamed the Jesuit Dithmar, whom he declared to be none other than the Abbé, his present tutor) ; the deep hatred he had felt during his childhood for this Dithmar, for Austria, and for all Imperialists and Catholics. Then his recollections seemed to become confused, and he uttered a thousand incomprehensible statements about eternal and perpetual life, asserting the reappearances of men on earth . . . all with such a show of conviction, with such precise and interesting details of what he claimed to have seen, not only as Wratislaw, but again as John Ziska, and I know not how many other dead persons whom he maintained to have been previous incarnations of himself in the past, that we listened with open mouths, incapable either of interrupting or contradicting him.”

“ If one asks him how he has been able to learn so many different languages, he replies that he knew them before

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he was born, and that he only has to recall them to memory—one that he spoke twelve hundred years ago, another during the Crusades—alas, how can I tell? You will hear many strange accounts of what he calls his former existences.”

“ Albert,” she said, “ for your name is no longer John, as mine is no longer Wanda, look at me well, and understand that I am changed in face and in character, even as you are. . . . God commands us to pardon and to forget. These wild and detailed recollections of former lives, this determination to exercise a faculty not given to other men, this fatal memory is an offence to God, and He withdraws it from you because you have abused it. . . . It is God who has made you to live again under new conditions and with new duties. These duties you do not know, Albert—or you despise them. You retrace the course of ages with an impious pride ; you aspire to penetrate the secrets of destiny ; you think to attain equality with God, embracing in a glance the present and the past. This retrograde thought is rash and criminal. . . . Renounce in your own soul, renounce firmly and once for all, the wish to know yourself beyond this transitory life that is imposed on you. . . . Without losing faith in your immortality, without doubting the divine goodness which pardons the past and protects the future, concentrate on rendering humane and fruitful this present life that you despise, when you ought to respect it and give yourself up to it entirely, with all your strength, and abnegation, and charity.”

“ Consuelo,” he said to her. . . . “ I am going to leave you for a time, and then I shall return to earth by means of a new birth. I shall return accursed and despairing if you abandon me now, in my last hour. You know that the crimes of John Ziska are not fully expiated, and only you, my sister Wanda, can accomplish the act of purification in this phase of my life. We

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are brethren ; ere we become lovers, death must once more separate us. But we must be united by the marriage-vow, that I may be re-born calm and strong, and free, like other men, from the memory of past lives which has been my torment and my punishment for so many centuries. Consent to this vow. It will not bind you to me in this life, which I am about to leave, but it will reunite us in eternity. It will be as a seal to help us to recognise one another when the shades of death have effaced the clearness of our memories."

GEORGE SAND

(*Consuelo*).

(Translated by EVA MARTIN.)

I AM a soul. I know well that what I shall render up to the grave is not myself. That which is myself will go elsewhere.

Earth, thou art not my abyss !

. . . . .  
The whole creation is a perpetual ascension, from brute to man, from man to God. To divest ourselves more and more of matter, to be clothed more and more with spirit, such is the law. Each time we die we gain more of life.

Souls pass from one sphere to another without loss of personality, become more and more bright, unceasingly approach nearer to God.

. . . . .  
A man sleeps. He dreams. He dreams that he is a wild beast, a lion, a wolf, and he experiences all the adventures of the wilds. On awakening he recovers himself. The dream has vanished. He is what he was before. He is a man and not a lion.

The next night he has another dream. He is a bird or a serpent. He awakes and finds himself a man.

So it is with life. So with all the terrestrial lives that we may be compelled to traverse. . . .

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The I which persists after the awakening is the I anterior and external to the dream. The I which persists after death is the I anterior and external to life.

VICTOR HUGO

(*Life and Death: From Victor Hugo's Intellectual Autobiography*).

(Translated by LORENZO O'ROURKE.)

OUR efforts must be free, voluntary, sheltered from the influences of the past; the field of strife must be seemingly untrodden, so that the athlete shall show and exercise his virtue. Previously gained experience, the energies which he has acquired, help him in the new strife, but in a latent way of which he is unconscious. . . . Lethe, like free-will, is a law of the world as it is.

Original sin does not account for the particular fate of individuals, as it is the same for all. . . .

Once accept the theory of pre-existence, and a glorious light is thrown on the dogma of sin, for it becomes the result of personal faults from which the guilty soul must be purified.

Pre-existence, once admitted as regards the past, logically implies a succession of future existences for all souls that have not yet attained to the goal, and that have imperfections and defilements from which to be cleansed. In order to enter the *circle of happiness* and leave the *circle of wanderings*, one must be pure.

ANDRÉ PEZZANI

(*The Plurality of the Soul's Existences*).

ALL are destined to attain perfection by passing through the different degrees of the spirit-hierarchy. . . . Material life is a trial which they have to undergo many times until they have attained to absolute

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perfection ; it is a sort of filter, or alembic, from which they issue more or less purified after each new incarnation. . . .

The incarnation of spirits always takes place in the human race ; it would be an error to suppose that the soul or spirit could be incarnated in the body of an animal. . . .

The soul possessed its own individuality before its incarnation ; it possesses that individuality after its separation from the body.

On its re-entrance into the spirit-world, the soul finds there all those whom it has known upon the earth, and all its former existences eventually come back to its memory, with the remembrance of all the good and of all the evil which it has done in them.

. . . . .

He who is conscious of his own inferiority derives a consoling hope from the doctrine of reincarnation. If he believes in the justice of God, he cannot hope to be placed, at once and for all eternity, on a level with those who have made a better use of life than he has done ; but the knowledge that his inferiority will not exclude him for ever from the supreme felicity, and that he will be able to conquer this felicity through new efforts, revives his courage and sustains his energy. Who does not regret, at the end of his career, that the experience he has acquired should have come too late to allow of his turning it to useful account ? This tardily acquired experience will not be lost for him ; he will profit by it in a new corporeal life.

. . . . .

Just as in a human lifetime there are days which bear no fruit, so in the life of a spirit there are corporeal existences which are barren of profitable result, because he has failed to make a right use of them.

. . . . .

The possibilities of the future are open to all, without

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exception, and without favour to any. Those who are the last to arrive have only themselves to blame for the delay.

. . . . .

A philosopher has said that 'if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him for the happiness of the human race'; the same might be said in regard to the plurality of existences.

. . . . .

We assert that the doctrine of the plurality of existences is the only one which explains what, without this doctrine, is inexplicable; that it is at once eminently consolatory and strictly conformable with the most rigorous justice; and that it is the anchor of safety which God in His mercy has provided for mankind.

ALLAN KARDEC

*(The Spirit's Book).*

(Translated by A. BLACKWELL.)

**H**OW glorious the light that would be cast on the present order of things by a knowledge of our former existences! And yet, not only is our memory helpless regarding the times that preceded birth, it is not even conscious of the whole of the intervening period, often playing us false in the course of a lifetime. . . . We die, and everything is dark around us; we are born again, and the light begins to appear, like a star through the mist; we live, and it develops and grows, suddenly disappears again, and reappears once more; from one eclipse to another we continue our way, and this way, interrupted by periods of darkness, is a continuous one, whose elements, only apparently separated, are linked to each other by the closest of bonds; we always bear within ourselves the principle of what we shall be later on; we are always rising higher. . . . And who knows but what our soul, in the unknown secret of its essence,

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has power some day to throw light on its successive journeyings. . . . There are strong reasons for thinking that such is the case, since the entire restoration of memory appears, with good reason, to be one of the main conditions of our future happiness.

We cannot fully enjoy life until we become, like Janus, kings of time ; until we know how to concentrate in ourselves, not only the sentiment of the present, but that of the future and the past. Then, if perfect life be one day given to us, perfect memory must also be given to us. Let us try to conceive the infinite treasures of a mind enriched by the recollections of an innumerable series of existences, entirely different from each other, and yet admirably linked together by a continual dependence. . . . Let us banish the idea of disorder from the earth, by opening the gates of time beyond our birth, as we have banished the idea of injustice by opening other gates beyond the tomb.

JEAN REYNAUD  
(*Earth and Heaven*).

**D**ESCARTES and Leibnitz have demonstrated that the human understanding possesses ideas called *innate*, that is to say, ideas which we bring with us to our birth. This fact is certain. In our time, the Scotch philosopher Dugald Stewart, has put Descartes' theory into a more precise form, by proving that the only really *innate* idea, that which has universal existence in the human mind after birth, is the idea or the *principle of causality*, a principle that makes us say and think that there is no effect without cause, which is the beginning of reason. . . .

Innate ideas and the principle of causality are explained very simply by the doctrine of the plurality of existences ; they are, indeed, merely deductions from that doctrine. A man's soul, having already existed, either in the body of an animal or that of another man, has preserved the trace of the impressions received

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during that existence. It has lost, it is true, the recollection of actions performed during its former incarnation, but the abstract principle of causality, being independent of the particular facts . . . must remain in the soul in its second incarnation.

. . . . .

We are endeavouring to prove that the soul of the man remains always the same, in spite of its numerous peregrinations, notwithstanding the variety of form of the bodies in which it is successively lodged. . . . We are endeavouring to establish that the soul, notwithstanding all its journeys, throughout all its incarnations and metamorphoses, remains always identical with itself, doing nothing more in each metamorphosis . . . than perfect and purify itself, growing in power and in intellectual capacity. We are endeavouring to prove that, notwithstanding the shadows of death, our individuality is never destroyed. . . .

Natural aptitudes, special faculties, vocations, are the traces of impressions formerly received, of knowledge already acquired, and, being revealed from the cradle, cannot be explained otherwise than by a life gone by. We have lost the remembrance of the facts, but there remains the moral consequence, the *resultant* . . . and thus the *innate ideas* indicated by Descartes, which exist in the soul from its birth, and also the *principle of causality*, which teaches us that every effect has a cause, are explained.

LOUIS FIGUIER  
(*The Day After Death*).

THE degrees of initiation are innumerable. Watch, then, disciple of life, watch and labour towards the development of the angel within thee! For the divine Odyssey is but a series of more and more ethereal metamorphoses, in which each form, the

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result of what goes before, is the condition of those which follow.

.....

All that we are, desire, do, and know, is more or less superficial, and below the rays and lightnings of our periphery there remains the darkness of unfathomable substance . . . the abyss of the Unrevealed, the Virtual, pledge of an infinite future—the obscure self, the pure subjectivity which is incapable of realising itself in mind, conscience, or reason, in the soul, the heart, the imagination, or the life of the senses, and which makes for itself attributes and conditions out of all these forms of its own life.

.....

Life is only a document to be interpreted, matter to be spiritualised. Such is the life of the thinker. Every day he strips himself more and more of personality. . . . He does not even believe his body his own ; he feels the vital whirlwind passing through him—lent to him, as it were, for a moment, in order that he may perceive the cosmic vibrations. . . . He asks nothing from life but wisdom.

.....

I possess myself only as Monad and as Ego, and I feel my faculties themselves reabsorbed into the substance which they have individualised. . . . The whole rainbow is withdrawn within the dewdrop ; consequences return to the principle, effects to the cause, the bird to the egg, the organism to its germ. This psychological reinvolution is an anticipation of death ; it represents the life beyond the grave ; . . . it implies the simplification of the individual who, allowing all the accidents of personality to evaporate, exists henceforward only in the indivisible state, the state of point, of potentiality, of pregnant nothingness. . . . What is the acorn but the oak which has lost its leaves, its branches, its trunk, and

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its roots—that is to say, all its apparatus, its forms, its particularities—but which is still present in concentration, in essence, in a form which contains the possibility of complete revival? . . . To be reduced to those elements in one which are eternal is indeed to die, but not to be annihilated.

*Amiel's Journal*

(Translated by MRS. HUMPHRY WARD).

TO every awakened soul the question comes: Why does evil exist?

So long as the enigma remains unsolved, Suffering remains a threatening sphinx, opposing God and ready to devour mankind.

The Key to the secret lies in Evolution, which can be accomplished only by means of the continual return of souls to earth.

When once man learns that suffering is the necessary result of divine manifestation; that inequalities of condition are due to the different stages which beings have reached and the changeable action of their will; that the painful phase lasts only a moment in Eternity, and that we have it in our power to hasten its disappearance; that, though slaves of the past, we are masters of the future; that, finally, the same glorious goal awaits all beings—then despair will be at an end; hatred, envy, and rebellion will have fled away; and peace will reign over a humanity made wise by knowledge.

. . . . .  
Inequality of condition arises, above all else, from the continuity of what might be called creation. . . . Souls ascend slowly from one kingdom to another, whilst the places they leave are filled by new-comers, by younger souls.

A second cause of human inequality is the difference in effort and deed accomplished by the will of human beings who have reached a certain point in evolution.

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As soon as this will is guided by intelligence and the moral sense, it hastens or delays individual evolution, makes it easy when it acts in harmony with divine Law—by doing what is called 'good'—or disturbs evolution by pain, when it opposes this Law, by doing 'evil.' . . . These effects of the will influence to a noticeable degree the life during which they have originated; they are preserved in a latent condition after death, and appear again in future returns to earth.

Thus are men born laden with the result of their past, and in possession of the capacities they have developed in the course of their evolution. . . . Men are philosophers or mathematicians, artists or *savants*, from the very cradle.

. . . . .

But if we are the slaves of the past, if fate compels us to reap what we have sown, we yet have the future in our hands, for we can tear up the weeds, and in their place sow useful plants. Just as, by means of physical hygiene, we can change within a few years the nature of the constituents that make up our bodies, so also, by a process of moral hygiene, we can purify our passions and then turn their strength in the direction of good.

. . . . .

Another fact strikes the observer: the cyclic march of evolution. After action comes reaction; after activity, rest; after winter, summer; after day, night. . . . Ideas also have their successive cycles of glory and decadence. . . . Races are born and grow up, die and are born again; pass through a state of childhood, of youth, of maturity, and of old age. . . . Continents submit to the same law; history and science show how they pass through a series of immersions and emersions. . . . The very planets, too, come under this law. . . .

Everything, then, in appearance is born and dies. In reality, each thing springs from its germ, makes an effort—the effort of the divine Will incarnated in this

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germ—develops its potentialities up to a certain step in the ladder of evolution, then garners the acquired qualities and again returns to activity in continuous cycles of life until its full development is reached.

DR. THÉOPHILE PASCAL

(*Reincarnation: A Study in Human Evolution*).

(Translated by FRED ROTHWELL.)

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## AMERICAN

WHEN I see nothing annihilated (in the works of God) and not a drop of water wasted, I cannot suspect the annihilation of souls, or believe that He will suffer the daily waste of millions of minds ready made that now exist, and put Himself to the continual trouble of making new ones. Thus, finding myself to exist in the world, I believe I shall, in some shape or other, always exist; and, with all the inconveniences human life is liable to, I shall not object to a new edition of mine, hoping, however, that the *errata* of the last may be corrected.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

The Body  
of

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

Printer,

Like the cover of an old book,

Its contents worn out,

And stripped of its lettering and gilding,

Lies here, food for worms.

But the work shall not be lost,

For it will, as he believed, appear once more,

In a new and more elegant edition,

Revised and corrected

by

The Author.

*(Epitaph written for*

*himself by BENJAMIN FRANKLIN when  
he was twenty-three years of age.)*

THUS the seer, with vision clear,  
Sees forms appear and disappear  
In the perpetual round of strange  
Mysterious change

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From birth to death, from death to birth,  
From earth to heaven, from heaven to earth ;  
Till glimpses more sublime  
Of things, unseen before,  
Unto his wondering eyes reveal  
The Universe, as an immeasurable wheel  
Turning for evermore  
In the rapid and rushing river of Time.

H. W. LONGFELLOW  
(*Rain in Summer*).

WHERE do we find ourselves? In a series, of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none. We wake, and find ourselves on a stair: there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight. But the Genius which, according to the old belief, stands at the door by which we enter, and gives us the lethe to drink, that we may tell no tales, mixed the cup too strongly, and we cannot shake off the lethargy now at noon-day. Sleep lingers all our lifetime about our eyes, as night hovers all day in the boughs of the fir-tree.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

WE must infer our destiny from the preparation. We are driven by instinct to live innumerable experiences which are of no visible value, and we may revolve through many lives before we shall assimilate or exhaust them. Now there is nothing in nature capricious, or whimsical, or accidental, or unsupported. Nature never moves by jumps, but always in steady and supported advances. . . . If there is the desire to live, and in larger sphere, with more knowledge and power, it is because life and power are good for us, and we are the natural depositaries of these gifts. The love of life is out of all proportion to the value set on a single day, and seems to indicate a conviction of immense

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resources and possibilities proper to us, on which we have never drawn. All the comfort I have found teaches me to confide that I shall not have less in times and places that I do not yet know.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

PERCHANCE not he but Nature ailed,  
The world and not the infant failed.  
It was not ripe yet to sustain  
A genius of so fine a strain,  
Who gazed upon the sun and moon  
As if he came unto his own,  
And, pregnant with his grander thought,  
Brought the old order into doubt.  
His beauty once their beauty tried ;  
They could not feed him, and he died,  
And wandered backward as in scorn  
To wait an æon to be born.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON  
(*Threnody*).

AS when the haze of some wan moonlight makes  
Familiar fields a land of mystery,  
Where, chill and strange, a ghostly presence wakes  
In flower or bush or tree,

Another life the life of day o'erwhelms,  
The past from present consciousness takes hue,  
As we remember vast and cloudy realms  
Our feet have wandered through :

So, oft, some moonlight of the mind makes dumb  
The stir of outer thought, wide open seems  
The gate wherethrough strange sympathies have come,  
The secret of our dreams. . . .

All outward vision yields to that within,  
Whereof nor creed nor canon holds the key ;

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We only feel that we have ever been  
And evermore shall be.

And thus I know, by memories unfurled  
In rarer moods, and many a nameless sign,  
That once in Time and somewhere in the world  
I was a towering pine. . . .

Some blind harmonic instinct pierced the rind  
Of that slow life which made me straight and high,  
And I became a harp for every wind,  
A voice for every sky. . . .

And if some wild, full-gathered harmony  
Rolls its unbroken music through my line,  
There lives and murmurs, faintly though it be,  
The spirit of the pine.

BAYARD TAYLOR

*(The Metempsychosis of the Pine).*

THE river hemmed with leaving trees  
Wound through the meadows green,  
A low blue line of mountain showed  
The open pines between.

One sharp tall peak above them all  
Clear into sunlight sprang,  
I saw the river of my dreams,  
The mountain that I sang.

No clue of memory led me on,  
But well the ways I knew ;  
A feeling of familiar things  
With every footstep grew.

Yet ne'er before that river's rim  
Was pressed by feet of mine,  
Never before mine eyes had crossed  
That broken mountain line.

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A presence strange at once and known  
Walked with me as my guide,  
The skirts of some forgotten life  
Trailed noiseless at my side.

Was it a dim-remembered dream  
Or glimpse through æons old?  
The secret which the mountains kept,  
The river never told.

J. G. WHITTIER  
(*A Mystery*).

I KNOW I am deathless,  
I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a  
carpenter's compass. . . .  
And whether I come to my own to-day or in ten thousand  
or ten million years,  
I can cheerfully take it now, or with equal cheerfulness  
I can wait.  
My foothold is tenon'd and mortis'd in granite,  
I laugh at what you call dissolution,  
And I know the amplitude of time. . . .

To be in any form, what is that?  
(Round and round we go, all of us, and ever come back  
thither.) . . .  
I troop forth replenish'd with supreme power, one of an  
average unending procession,  
Inland and sea-coast we go, and pass all boundary lines,  
Our swift ordinances on their way over the whole earth,  
The blossoms we wear in our hats the growth of  
thousands of years. . . .

I do not despise you priests, all time, all the world over,  
My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths,  
Enclosing worship ancient and modern and all between  
ancient and modern,

## The Ring of Return

Believing I shall come again upon the earth after five  
thousand years. . . .

The clock indicates the moment—but what does eternity  
indicate?

We have thus far exhausted billions of winters and  
summers,

There are trillions ahead, and trillions ahead of them.

Births have brought us richness and variety,

And other births will bring us richness and variety. . . .

I am an acme of things accomplished, and I an encloser  
of things to be.

My feet strike an apex of the apices of the stairs,  
On every step bunches of ages, and larger bunches  
between the steps,

All below duly travell'd, and still I mount and mount.

Rise after rise bow the phantoms behind me,  
Afar down I see the huge first nothing, I know I was  
even there,

I waited unseen and always, and slept through the  
lethargic mist,

And took my time, and took no hurt from the foetid  
carbon.

Long I was hugg'd close—long and long.

Immense have been the preparations for me,  
Faithful and friendly the arms that have help'd me.

Cycles ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful  
boatmen,

For room to me stars kept aside in their own rings,  
They sent influences to look after what was to hold  
me. . . .

All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and  
delight me,

## A.D. 1700-1900

Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul.

I tramp a perpetual journey (come listen all!) . . .  
This day before dawn I ascended a hill and look'd at  
the crowded heaven,  
And I said to my spirit, *When we become the enfolders of  
those orbs, and the pleasure and knowledge of every-  
thing in them, shall we be fill'd and satisfied then?*  
And my spirit said, *No, we but level that lift to pass and  
continue beyond.*

And as to you, Life, I reckon you are the leavings of  
many deaths.  
(No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before.)

WALT WHITMAN  
(*Song of Myself*).

TO the garden the world anew ascending,  
Potent mates, daughters, sons, prelude,  
The love, the life of their bodies, meaning and  
being,  
Curious here behold my resurrection after slumber,  
The revolving cycles in their wide sweep having brought  
me again,  
Amorous, mature, all beautiful to me, all wondrous,  
My limbs and the quivering fire that ever plays through  
them, for reasons most wondrous,  
Existing I peer and penetrate still,  
Content with the present, content with the past,  
By my side or back of me, Eve following,  
Or in front, and I following her just the same.

WALT WHITMAN.

YEAR after year beheld the silent toil  
That spread his lustrous coil;  
Still, as the spiral grew,  
He left the past year's dwelling for the new,

## The Ring of Return

Stole with soft step its shining archway through,  
Built up its idle door,  
Stretched in his last-found home, and knew the old no  
more.

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul!  
As the swift seasons roll!  
Leave thy low-vaulted past!  
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,  
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,  
Till thou at length art free,  
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES  
(*The Chambered Nautilus*).

I KNOW my own creation was divine.  
Strewn on the breezy continents I see  
The veined shells and burnished scales which once  
Enclosed my being—husks that had their use;  
I brood on all the shapes I must attain  
Before I reach the perfect, which is God,  
And dream my dream, and let the rabble go;  
For I am of the mountains and the sea,  
The deserts and the caverns in the earth,  
The catacombs and fragments of old worlds.

I was a spirit on the mountain-top,  
A perfume in the valleys, a simoon  
On arid deserts, a nomadic wind  
Roaming the universe, a tireless Voice.  
I was ere Romulus and Remus were;  
I was ere Nineveh and Babylon;  
I was and am and evermore shall be,  
Progressing, never reaching to the end.

A hundred years I trembled in the grass,  
The delicate trefoil that muffled warm  
A slope on Ida; for a hundred years



## The Ring of Return

earned by his own previous history. He carries with him from one stage of existence to another the habits or tendencies which he has formed, the dispositions which he has indulged, the passions which he has not chastised. . . .

We can easily imagine and believe that every person now living is a *re*-presentation of some one who lived perhaps centuries ago under another name in another country. . . . His surroundings are changed; the old house of flesh has been torn down and rebuilt; but the tenant is still the same. He has come down from some former generation, bringing with him what may be either a help or a hindrance—namely, the character and tendencies which he there formed and nurtured. And herein is retribution; he has entered upon a new stage of probation, and in it he has now to learn what the character which he there formed naturally leads to when tried upon a new and perhaps broader theatre. . . . [Men] bring with them no recollection of the incidents of their former life, as such memory would unfit them for the new part which they have to play. But they are still the same in the principles and modes of conduct, in the inmost spring of action, which the forgotten incidents of their former life have developed and strengthened. . . .

The transmigration of souls may be regarded also in another light, as that portion of the divine government of this world's affairs which maintains distributive justice, since, through its agency, in the long run, all inequalities of condition and favouring or unfavouring circumstances may be compensated, and each person may have his or her equitable share of opportunities for good and of the requisite means for discipline and improvement.

PROFESSOR FRANCIS BOWEN  
(From an article on 'Christian Metem-  
psychosis' in the *Princeton Review*,  
May 1881).

## A.D. 1700-1900

**R**EINCARNATED we have all been many times. Regeneration is a step beyond reincarnation. Reincarnation means the total loss of one physical body and the getting of a new one through the aid of another organisation. . . .

A spiritualising and refining power has ever been and will ever be working on this planet. It has through innumerable ages changed all forms of being, whether mineral, animal, or vegetable, from coarse to finer types. It works with man as with all other organisations. It is ever changing him gradually from a material to a more spiritual being. It is carrying him through his many physical existences from one degree of perfection to another. It has in store for him new powers, new lives, and new methods of existence. . . .

Regeneration may supersede reincarnation, because of our coming into a higher order of life, or receiving and being built of a higher order of thoughts. The spirit will then be ever changing its physical body for one still finer and more spiritualised. This is the process referred to by Christ as being 'born again.'

Life is an eternal series of regenerations. . . . The spirit is regenerated when it shakes off the old physical body. It shakes off an old body because it is tired of carrying an instrument through which it cannot express itself.

The spirit of a mammoth living countless ages ago may now exist in the elephant, deer, or wild horse. It is the refined spirit, using a body lesser in size, finer in quality, more graceful, and more agile. It is the result of the unconscious tendency in all forms of life to the finer and better. . . .

The true evolution, then, is that of spirit, taking on itself through successive ages many re-embodiments and adding to itself some new quality with each re-embodiment.

PRENTICE MULFORD  
*(The Gift of the Spirit).*

## The Ring of Return

A BOY went to school. He was very little. All that he knew he had drawn in with his mother's milk. His teacher (who was God) placed him in the lowest class, and gave him these lessons to learn : Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt do no hurt to any living thing. Thou shalt not steal. So the man did not kill ; but he was cruel, and he stole. At the end of the day (when his beard was grey ; when the night was come) his teacher (who was God) said : " Thou hast learned not to kill. But the other lessons thou hast not learned. Come back to-morrow."

On the morrow he came back, a little boy. And his teacher (who was God) put him in a class a little higher, and gave him these lessons to learn : Thou shalt do no hurt to any living thing. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not cheat. So the man did no hurt to any living thing ; but he stole and he cheated. And at the end of the day (when his beard was grey ; when the night was come) his teacher (who was God) said : " Thou hast learned to be merciful. But the other lessons thou hast not learned. Come back to-morrow."

Again, on the morrow, he came back, a little boy. And his teacher (who was God) put him in a class yet a little higher, and gave him these lessons to learn : Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not cheat. Thou shalt not covet. So the man did not steal ; but he cheated, and he coveted. And at the end of the day (when his beard was grey ; when the night was come) his teacher (who was God) said : " Thou hast learned not to steal. But the other lessons thou hast not learned. Come back, my child, to-morrow."

This is what I have read in the faces of men and women, in the book of the world, and in the scroll of the heavens which is writ with stars.

BERRY BENSON

(*The Century Magazine*, May 1894).

## A.D. 1700-1900

### ENGLISH

**W**HAT is incorruptible must also be ungenerable. The soul, therefore, if immortal, existed before our birth. . . . The metempsychosis is therefore the only system of this kind that philosophy can hearken to.

DAVID HUME

*(The Immortality of the Soul).*

**O**FT o'er my brain does that strange fancy roll  
Which makes the present (while the flash doth  
last)

Seem a mere semblance of some unknown past,  
Mix'd with such feelings as perplex the soul  
Self-question'd in her sleep: and some have said  
We liv'd ere yet this fleshy robe we wore.  
O my sweet Baby! when I reach my door,  
If heavy looks should tell me thou wert dead  
(As sometimes, thro' excess of hope, I fear)  
I think that I should struggle to believe  
Thou wert a Spirit to this nether sphere  
Sentenc'd for some more venial crime to grieve;  
Didst scream, then spring to meet Heaven's quick  
reprieve,

While we wept idly o'er thy little bier.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

*(Sonnet composed on a journey homeward,  
after hearing of the birth of his son;  
September 1796).*

**A**ND as the seed waits eagerly watching for its flower  
and fruit,  
Anxious its little soul looks out into the clear  
expanse  
To see if hungry winds are abroad with their invisible  
array;

## The Ring of Return

So Man looks out in tree, and herb, and fish, and bird,  
and beast,  
Collecting up the scattered portions of his immortal body  
Into the elemental forms of everything that grows. . . .  
He stores his thoughts  
As in store-houses in his memory. He regulates the  
forms  
Of all beneath and all above, and in the gentle West  
Reposes where the sun's heat dwells. He rises to the  
sun,  
And to the planets of the night, and to the stars that  
gild  
The zodiacs, and the stars that sullen stand to North  
and South ;  
He touches the remotest pole, and in the centre weeps  
That man should labour and sorrow, and learn and forget,  
and return  
To the dark valley whence he came, and begin his  
labours anew.  
In pain he sighs, in pain he labours in his universe. . . .  
And in cries of birth and in the groans of death his voice  
Is heard throughout the universe. Wherever a grass  
grows,  
Or a leaf buds, the Eternal Man is seen, is heard, is felt,  
And all his sorrows, till he reassumes his ancient bliss.

WILLIAM BLAKE  
(*Vala*).

THEN Milton rose up from the Heavens of Albion  
ardorous :  
The whole Assembly wept prophetic, seeing in  
Milton's face  
And in his lineaments divine the shades of Death and  
Ulro ;  
He took off the robe of the Promise, and ungirded  
himself from the oath of God.  
And Milton said : " I go to Eternal Death ! The nations  
still

## A.D. 1700-1900

Follow after the detestable Gods of Priam, in pomp  
Of warlike Selfhood, contradicting and blaspheming. . . .

My soul lies at the gates of death. . . .  
I will go down to self-annihilation and Eternal Death ;  
Lest the Last Judgment come and find me unannihilate,  
And I be seiz'd and giv'n into the hands of my own  
Selfhood." . . .

And Milton said : " I go to Eternal Death ! " Eternity  
shudder'd ;  
For he took the outside course, among the graves of  
the dead,  
A mournful Shade. Eternity shudder'd at the image  
of Eternal Death.

Then on the verge of Beulah he beheld his own Shadow,  
A mournful form, double, hermaphroditic, male and  
female

In one wonderful body, and he enter'd into it  
In direful pain. . . . Milton bent down  
To the bosom of Death : what was underneath soon  
seem'd above,

A cloudy heaven mingled with stormy seas in loudest  
ruin ;

But as a wintry globe descends precipitant, thro' Beulah  
bursting,

With thunders loud and terrible, so Milton's Shadow  
fell

Precipitant, loud thund'ring, into the Sea of Time and  
Space.

WILLIAM BLAKE  
(Milton).

**W**HY is it that some scenes awaken thoughts which  
belong, as it were, to dreams of early and shadowy  
recollections, such as old Brahmin moonshine  
would have ascribed to a state of previous existence ?  
How often do we find ourselves in society which we have

## The Ring of Return

never before met, and yet feel impressed with a mysterious and ill-defined consciousness that neither the scene nor the speakers nor the subject are entirely new ; nay, feel as if we could anticipate that part of the conversation which has not yet taken place.

SIR WALTER SCOTT  
(*Guy Mannering*).

YESTERDAY at dinner-time, I was strangely haunted by what I would call the sense of pre-existence—viz. a confused idea that nothing that passed was said for the first time—that the same topics had been discussed, and the same persons had stated the same opinions, on them. . . . The sensation was so strong as to resemble what is called a *mirage* in the desert.

SIR WALTER SCOTT, February 17, 1828.

STRANGER, though new the frame  
Thy soul inhabits now, I've traced its flame  
For many an age, in every chance and change  
Of that Existence, through whose varied range—  
As through a torch-race, where, from hand to hand  
The flying youths transmit their shining brand—  
From frame to frame the unextinguished soul  
Rapidly passes, till it reach the goal !

THOMAS MOORE  
(*Lalla Rookh*).

WORLDS on worlds are rolling ever  
From creation to decay,  
Like the bubbles on a river,  
Sparkling, bursting, borne away.  
But they are still immortal  
Who, through birth's orient portal  
And death's dark chasm hurrying to and fro,  
Clothe their unceasing flight  
In the brief dust and light  
Gathered around their chariots as they go ;

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New shapes they still may weave,  
New gods, new laws receive :  
Bright or dim are they as the robes they last  
On Death's bare ribs had cast.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY  
(*Hellas*).

O HAPPY Earth ! reality of Heaven !  
To which those restless souls that ceaselessly  
Throng through the human universe, aspire. . . .  
Thou art the end of all desire and will,  
The product of all action : and the souls  
That by the paths of an aspiring change  
Have reached thy haven of perpetual peace,  
There rest from the eternity of toil  
That framed the fabric of thy perfectness.

Yet, human Spirit, bravely hold thy course,  
Let virtue teach thee firmly to pursue  
The gradual paths of an aspiring change :  
For birth and life and death and that strange state  
Before the naked soul has found its home,  
All tend to perfect happiness, and urge  
The restless wheels of being on their way.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY  
(*Queen Mab*).

A RIEL to Miranda : Take  
This slave of music for the sake  
Of him, who is the slave of thee. . . .  
Poor Ariel sends this silent token  
Of more than ever can be spoken ;  
Your guardian spirit, Ariel, who  
From life to life must still pursue  
Your happiness, for thus alone  
Can Ariel ever find his own. . . .  
When you die, the silent moon,



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that the Muses are the daughters of memory ; not one of the Muses was ever said to be the child of invention."

From DOWDEN'S *Life of Shelley*.

IT does not appear improbable to me that some of the more refined machinery of thought may adhere, even in another state, to the sentient principle, for though the organs of gross sensation, the nerves and brain, are destroyed by death, yet something of the more ethereal value may be less destructible, and I sometimes imagine that many of those powers which have been called distinctive belong to the more refined clothing of the spirit. Conscience, indeed, seems to have some undefined source, and may bear relations to a former state of being.

SIR HUMPHREY DAVY

(*Consolations in Travel*, Dialogue IV.).

THE power that dwelleth in sweet sounds to waken  
Vague yearnings like the sailor's for the shore,  
And dim remembrances whose views seem taken  
From some bright former state, our own no more :  
Is not this all a mystery ? Who shall say  
Whence are these thoughts and whither tends their way ?

The sudden images of vanished things  
That o'er the spirit flash, we know not why ;  
Tones from some broken harp's deserted strings,  
Warm sunset hues of summers long gone by,  
A rippling wave, the dashing of an oar,  
A flower scent floating past our parent's door !

Darkly we move, we press upon the brink  
Haply of viewless worlds, and know it not,  
Yes ! it may be that nearer than we think  
Are those whom death has parted from our lot !  
Fearfully, wonderfully our souls are made.  
Let us walk humbly on, but undismayed.

FELICIA HEMANS.

## The Ring of Return

**D**ETACHED, separated! I say there is no such separation: nothing hitherto was ever stranded, cast aside; but all, were it only a withered leaf, works together with all; is borne forward on the bottomless, shoreless flood of Action, and lives through perpetual metamorphoses.

Nay, if you consider it, what is Man himself, and his whole terrestrial Life, but an Emblem; a Clothing or visible Garment for that divine life of his, cast hither, like a light-particle down from Heaven?

Are we not Spirits, that are shaped into a body, into an Appearance; and that fade away again into air and Invisibility? . . . Ghosts! There are nigh a thousand-million walking the Earth openly at noontide. . . . These Limbs, whence had we them; this stormy Force; this life-blood with its burning Passion? They are dust and shadow; a Shadow-system gathered round our life; wherein, through some moments or years, the Divine Essence is to be revealed in the Flesh. . . . Thus, like some wild-flaming, wild-thundering train of Heaven's Artillery, does this mysterious Mankind thunder and flame, in long-drawn, quick-succeeding grandeur, through the unknown Deep. . . . Can the Earth, which is but dead and a vision, resist Spirits which have reality and are alive? On the hardest adamant some footprint of us is stamped-in; the last Rear of the host will read traces of the earliest Van. But whence? O Heaven, whither? Sense knows not; Faith knows not; only that it is through Mystery to Mystery, from God and to God.

THOMAS CARLYLE  
(*Sartor Resartus*).

**E**TERNITY may be but an endless series of those migrations which men call deaths, abandonments of home after home, ever to fairer scenes and loftier heights. Age after age the spirit may shift its

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tent, fated not to rest in the dull Elysium of the heathen,  
but carrying with it evermore its two elements,  
activity and desire.

BULWER LYTTON.

AS when with downcast eyes we muse and brood  
And ebb into a former life, or seem  
To lapse far back in a confused dream  
To states of mystical similitude,  
If one but speaks or hems or stirs a chair  
Ever the wonder waxeth more and more,  
So that we say, all this hath been before,  
All this *hath* been, I know not when or where:—  
So, friend, when first I looked upon your face,  
Our thoughts gave answer, each to each, so true,  
Opposèd mirrors each reflecting each—  
Although I knew not in what time or place,  
Methought that I had often met with you,  
And each had lived in other's mind and speech.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON.

O DEAR spirit half-lost  
In thine own shadow and this fleshly sign  
That thou art thou—who wailest being born. . . .  
Live thou. . . .  
From death to death, thro' life and life, and find  
Nearer and ever nearer Him, who wrought  
Not Matter, nor the finite Infinite,  
But this main miracle that thou art thou,  
With power on thine own act and on the world.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON  
(*De Profundis*).

YET oft when sundown skirts the moor  
An inner trouble I behold,  
A spectral doubt which makes me cold,  
That I shall be thy mate no more,

## The Ring of Return

Tho' following with an upward mind  
The wonders that have come to thee,  
Thro' all the secular to-be,  
But evermore a life behind.

I vex my heart with fancies dim :  
He still outstript me in the race ;  
It was but unity of place  
That made me dream I ranked with him.

And so may Place retain us still,  
And he, the much-beloved again,  
A lord of large experience, train  
To riper growth the mind and will.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON  
(*In Memoriam*).

AS old mythologies relate,  
Some draught of Lethe might await  
The slipping thro' from state to state.

As here we find in trances, men  
Forget the dream that happens then,  
Until they fall in trance again.

So might we, if our state were such  
As one before, remember much,  
For those two likes might meet and touch.

But, if I lapsed from nobler place,  
Some legend of a fallen race  
Alone might hint of my disgrace ;

Or if thro' lower lives I came—  
Tho' all experience past became  
Consolidate in mind and frame—

I might forget my weaker lot ;  
For is not our first year forgot ?  
The haunts of memory echo not.

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Moreover, something is or seems  
That touches me with mystic gleams,  
Like glimpses of forgotten dreams—  
Of something felt, like something here ;  
Of something done, I know not where ;  
Such as no language may declare.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON  
(*The Two Voices*).

AT times I almost dream  
I too have spent a life the sages' way,  
And tread once more familiar paths. Perchance  
I perished in an arrogant self-reliance  
Ages ago ; and in that act, a prayer  
For one more chance went up so earnest, so  
Instinct with better light let in by death,  
That life was blotted out—not so completely  
But scattered wrecks enough of it remain,  
Dim memories, as now, when once more seems  
The goal in sight again.

ROBERT BROWNING  
(*Paracelsus*).

I SHALL never, in the years remaining,  
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues,  
Make you music that should all-express me ;  
So it seems : I stand on my attainment.  
This of verse alone, one life allows me ;  
Verse and nothing else have I to give you.  
Other heights in other lives, God willing :  
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love !

ROBERT BROWNING  
(*One Word More*).

IS it too late then, Evelyn Hope ?  
What, your soul was pure and true,  
The good stars met in your horoscope,  
Made you of spirit, fire and dew—

## The Ring of Return

And, just because I was thrice as old,  
And our paths in the world diverged so wide,  
Each was nought to each, must I be told?  
We were fellow-mortals, nought beside?

No, indeed! for God above  
Is great to grant, as mighty to make,  
And creates the love to reward the love:  
I claim you still, for my own love's sake!  
Delayed it may be for more lives yet,  
Through worlds I shall traverse not a few:  
Much is to learn and much to forget  
Ere the time be come for taking you.

But the time will come—at last it will,  
When, Evelyn Hope, what meant (I shall say)  
In the lower earth, in the years long still,  
That body and soul so pure and gay?  
Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,  
And your mouth of your own geranium's red—  
And what you would do with me, in fine,  
In the new life come in the old one's stead.

ROBERT BROWNING  
(*Evelyn Hope*).

THEREFORE I summon age  
To grant youth's heritage,  
Life's struggle having so far reached its term:  
Hence shall I pass, approved  
A man, for aye removed  
From the developed brute; a god though in the germ.  
And I shall thereupon  
Take rest, ere I be gone  
Once more on my adventure brave and new:  
Fearless and unperplexed,  
When I wage battle next,  
What weapons to select, what armour to indue.

ROBERT BROWNING  
(*Rabbi Ben Ezra*).

A.D. 1700-1900

**B**E ye my judges, imaginative minds, full-fledged to  
soar into the sun,  
Whose grosser natural thoughts the chemistry of  
wisdom hath sublimed,  
Have ye not confessed to a feeling, a consciousness  
strange and vague,  
That ye have gone this way before, and walk again your  
daily life,  
Tracking an old routine, and on some foreign strand,  
Where bodily ye have never stood, finding your own  
footsteps?  
Hath not at times some recent friend looked out, an old  
familiar,  
Some newest circumstance or place teemed as with  
ancient memories?  
A startling sudden flash lighteth up all for an instant,  
And then it is quenched, as in darkness, and leaveth the  
cold spirit trembling.

MARTIN TUPPER

*(Proverbial Philosophy: On Memory).*

**W**HO taught this pleading to unpractis'd eyes?  
Who hid such import in an infant's gloom?  
Who lent thee, child, this meditative guise?  
Who mass'd, round that slight brow, these clouds  
of doom?

What mood wears like complexion to thy woe?  
His, who in mountain glens, at noon of day,  
Sits rapt, and hears the battle break below?  
Ah! thine was not the shelter, but the fray.

What exile's, changing bitter thoughts with glad?  
What seraph's, in some alien planet born?  
No exile's dream was ever half so sad,  
Nor any angel's sorrow so forlorn.

## The Ring of Return

Is the calm thine of stoic souls, who weigh  
Life well, and find it wanting, nor deplore :  
But in disdainful silence turn away,  
Stand mute, self-centred, stern, and dream no more ?

Or do I wait to hear some grey-hair'd king  
Unravel all his many-coloured lore :  
Whose mind hath known all arts of governing,  
Mused much, lov'd life a little, loath'd it more ?

Down the pale cheek long lines of shadow slope,  
Which years, and curious thought, and suffering  
give—  
Thou hast foreknown the vanity of hope,  
Foreseen thy harvest—yet proceed'st to live.

The Guide of our dark steps a triple veil  
Betwixt our senses and our sorrow keeps :  
Hath sown, with cloudless passages, the tale  
Of grief, and eased us with a thousand sleeps.

Ah ! not the nectarous poppy lovers use,  
Not daily labour's dull, Lethæan spring,  
Oblivion in lost angels can infuse  
Of the soil'd glory, and the trailing wing. . . .

MATTHEW ARNOLD

*(To a Gipsy Child by the Sea-shore).*

AND then we shall unwillingly return  
Back to this meadow of calamity,  
This uncongenial place, this human life ;  
And in our individual human state  
Go through the sad probation all again,  
To see if we will poise our life at last,  
To see if we will now at last be true  
To our own only true deep-buried selves,  
Being one with which we are one with the whole world ;

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Or whether we will once more fall away  
Into some bondage of the flesh or mind,  
Some slough of sense, or some fantastic maze  
Forg'd by the imperious lonely Thinking-Power . . .

Slave of Sense

I have in no wise been : but slave of thought—?

And who can say—I have been always free,

Liv'd ever in the light of my own soul?

I cannot : I have lived in wrath and gloom,

Fierce, disputatious, ever at war with man,

Far from my own soul, far from warmth and light.

But I have not grown easy in these bonds—

But I have not denied what bonds these were. . . .

And therefore, O ye Elements, I know—

Ye know it too—it hath been granted me

Not to die wholly, not to be all enslav'd.

I feel it in this hour. The numbing cloud

Mounds off my soul : I feel it, I breathe free.

MATTHEW ARNOLD

(*Empedocles on Etna*).

OUR present lack of recollection of past lives is no disproof of their actuality. Every night we lose all knowledge of the past, but every day we reawaken to a memory of the whole series of days and nights. So in one life we may forget and dream, and in another recover the whole thread of experience from the beginning.

In every event, it must be confessed that of all the thoughtful and refined forms of the belief in a future life, none has had so extensive and prolonged a prevalence as this. It has the vote of the majority, having for ages on ages been held by half the human race with an intensity of conviction almost without a parallel. Indeed, the most striking fact about the doctrine of the repeated incarnations of the soul, its form and experience in each successive embodiment being determined by its merits and demerits in the preceding ones, is the constant

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reappearance of that faith in all parts of the world, and its permanent hold on certain great nations.

REV. WILLIAM ALGER  
(*A Critical History of the Doctrine  
of a Future Life*).

THERE is an end  
Of Wrong and Death and Hell! When the long  
wear  
Of Time and Suffering has effaced the stain  
Ingrown upon the soul, and the cleansed spirit,  
Long ages floating on the wandering winds  
Or rolling deeps of Space, renews itself  
And doth regain its dwelling, and, once more  
Blent with the general order, floats anew  
Upon the stream of Things, and comes at length,  
After new deaths, to that dim waiting-place  
Thou next shalt see, and with the justified  
White souls awaits the End.

Time calls and Change  
Commands both men and gods, and speeds us on  
We know not whither; but the old earth smiles  
Spring after Spring, and the seed bursts again  
Out of its prison mould, and the dead lives  
Renew themselves, and rise aloft and soar  
And are transformed, clothing themselves with change  
Till the last change be done.

SIR LEWIS MORRIS  
(*The Epic of Hades*).

LIKE all the higher forms of inward life this character is a subtle blending and interpenetration of intellectual, moral, and spiritual elements. . . . It is a mind of taste lighted up by some spiritual ray within. . . . A magnificent intellectual force is latent within it. It is like the reminiscence of a forgotten culture

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that once adorned the mind; as if the mind of one φιλοσοφήσας ποτε μετ' ἔρωτος fallen into a new cycle, were beginning its spiritual progress over again, but with a certain power of anticipating its stages.

WALTER PATER  
(*Diaphaneité*).

PERHAPS I lived before  
In some strange world where first my soul was  
shaped,  
And all this passionate love, and joy, and pain,  
That come, I know not whence, and sway my deeds,  
Are old imperious memories, blind yet strong,  
That this world stirs within me.

GEORGE ELIOT  
(*The Spanish Gypsy*).

THE absence of memory of any actions done in a previous state cannot be a conclusive argument against our having lived through it. Forgetfulness of the past may be one of the conditions of an entrance upon a new stage of existence. The body, which is the organ of self-perception, may be quite as much a hindrance as a help to remembrance. In that case, casual gleams of memory, giving us sudden abrupt and momentary revelations of the past, are precisely the phenomena we would expect to meet with. If the soul has pre-existed, what we would *a priori* anticipate are only some faint traces of recollection surviving in the crypts of memory.

PROFESSOR WILLIAM KNIGHT  
(From an article in *The Fortnightly Review*,  
September 1878).

WHO toiled a slave may come anew a Prince  
For gentle worthiness and merit won;  
Who ruled a King may wander earth in rags  
For things done and undone.

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Before beginning and without an end,  
As space eternal and as surety sure,  
Is fixed a Power divine which moves to good ;  
Only its laws endure.

It slayeth and it saveth, nowise moved  
Except unto the working out of doom ;  
Its threads are Love and Life, and Death and Pain  
The shuttles of its loom.

It will not be contemned of anyone ;  
Who thwarts it loses, and who serves it gains ;  
The hidden good it pays with peace and bliss,  
The hidden ill with pains.

That which ye sow ye reap. See yonder fields !  
The sesamum was sesamum, the corn  
Was corn. The Silence and the Darkness knew !  
So a man's fate is born.

He cometh, reaper of the things he sowed,  
Sesamum, corn, so much cast in past birth ;  
And so much weed and poison-stuff, which mar  
Him and the aching earth.

If he shall labour rightly, rooting these,  
And planting wholesome seedlings where they grew,  
Fruitful and fair and clean the ground shall be,  
And rich the harvest due.

If he shall day by day be merciful,  
Holy and just and kind and true ; and rend  
Desire from where it clings with bleeding roots,  
Till love of life shall end :

He, dying, leaveth as the sum of him  
A life-count closed, whose ills are dead and quit,  
Whose good is quick and mighty, far and near,  
So that fruits follow it.

SIR EDWIN ARNOLD  
(*The Light of Asia*).

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I HAVE been here before,  
But when or how I cannot tell ;  
I know the grass beyond the door,  
The sweet keen smell,  
The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.  
You have been mine before—  
How long ago I may not know :  
But just when at that swallow's soar  
Your neck turned so,  
Some veil did fall—I knew it all of yore.  
Then, now, perchance again !  
O, round mine eyes your tresses shake !  
Shall we not lie as we have lain  
Thus for Love's sake,  
And sleep, and wake, yet never break the chain ?

D. G. ROSSETTI  
(*Sudden Light*).

CREATION thou dost work by faint degrees,  
By shade and shadow from unseen beginning ;  
Far, far apart, in unthought mysteries  
Of thy own dark, unfathomable seas,  
Thou wilt thy will ; and thence, upon the earth—  
Slow travelling, his way through centuries winning—  
A child at length arrives at never-ending birth.

GEORGE MACDONALD  
(*The Diary of an Old Soul*).

BUT who believeth he shall not make haste,  
Even passing through the water and the fire,  
Or sad with memories of a better lot ! . . .  
Who knows love all, time nothing, he shall feel  
No anxious heart, shall lift no trembling hand ;  
Tender as air, but clothed in triple steel,  
He for his kind, in every age and land,  
Hoping, will live ; and, to his labour bent,  
The Father's will shall, doing, understand.

GEORGE MACDONALD  
(*Somnium Mystici*).

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IT may be centuries of ages before a man comes to see a truth—ages of strife, of effort, of aspiration.

[God] regards men not as they are merely, but as they shall be. . . . Therefore a thousand stages, each in itself all but valueless, are of inestimable worth as the necessary and connected gradations of an infinite progress.

We cannot yet have learned all that we are meant to learn through the body. How much of the teaching even of this world can the most diligent and most favoured man have exhausted before he is called upon to leave it! Is all that remains to be lost?

GEORGE MACDONALD  
(*Unspoken Sermons*).

NOR are recognitions of the doctrine [of reincarnation] wanting in the Old and New Testaments. Thus the writer of the Book of Wisdom says of himself: 'Being good, I came into a body undefiled.' The prophets Daniel and John are told by their inspiring angels that they shall stand again on the earth in the last days of the Dispensation. And of John it was also intimated by Jesus that he should tarry within reach of the earth-life, either for reincarnation or metempsychosis when the appointed time should come. . . .

The opening chapters of the Book of Genesis imply the like doctrine. For they represent creation as occurring through a gradual evolution from the lowest types upwards . . . they represent the animal as the younger self of the man, namely, as man rudimentary. All this is involved in the fact that the term applied to the genesis of living things below man, signifies *soul*, and is so translated when applied to man; whereas when applied to beasts it is rendered 'living creature.' Thus, had the Bible been accurately translated, the doctrine

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that all creatures whatsoever represent incarnations, though in different conditions, of one and the same universal soul, would not now need to be re-declared, or when re-declared would not be received with repugnance. . . . Animals appeared first on earth, not, as is vainly supposed, to minister to man's physical wants, but as an essential preliminary to humanity itself. On no other hypothesis is their existence intelligible for the long ages which elapsed before the appearance of man.

When Psyche has once gathered force sufficient to burn centrally, her flame is not quenched by the disintegration of the physical elements. These, indeed, fall asunder and desquamate many times during life; yet the consciousness and memory remain the same. We have not in our physical bodies a single particle which we had some few years ago, and yet our ego is the same and our thought continuous. The Psyche in us, therefore, has grown up out of many elements; and their interior egos are perpetuated in our interior ego, because their psychic force is centralised in our individuality. And when our Psyche is disengaged from the disintegrating particles of our systems, she will—after due purification—go forth to new affinities, and the reversion of matter to substance will still continue.

ANNA KINGSFORD AND EDWARD MAITLAND  
(*The Perfect Way*).

**E**VOI, Father Iacchos, Lord God of Egypt, initiate thy servants in the halls of thy Temple;

Upon whose walls are the forms of every creature :  
of every beast of the earth, of every fowl of the air ;

The lynx, and the lion, and the bull : the ibis and the serpent : the scorpion and every flying thing.

And the columns thereof are human shapes ; having the heads of eagles and the hoofs of the ox.

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All these are of thy kingdom ; they are the chambers of ordeals, and the houses of the initiation of the soul.

For the soul passeth from form to form ; and the mansions of her pilgrimage are manifold.

Thou callest her from the deep, and from the secret places of the earth ; from the dust of the ground ; and from the herb of the field.

Thou coverest her nakedness with an apron of fig-leaves ; thou clothest her with the skins of beasts.

Thou art from of old, O soul of man ; yea, thou art from the everlasting.

Thou puttest off thy bodies as raiment : and as vesture dost thou fold them up.

They perish, but thou remainest ; the wind rendeth and scattereth them ; and the place of them shall no more be known.

For the wind is the Spirit of God in man, which 'bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it shall go.'

Even so is the spirit of man, which cometh from afar off and tarrieth not, but passeth away to a place thou knowest not.

ANNA KINGSFORD

(*Hymn to Iacchos*).

(From *Clothed with the Sun*.)

**B**EHOLD the manifold waves of the sea, which rise and sink, which break and are lost, and follow each other continually ; even as these are the transmutations of the soul.

For the soul is one substance, as is the water of the deep, whose waves thou canst not number, neither tell their shapes, for the form of them passeth away ; even as these are the incarnations of the soul.

ANNA KINGSFORD

(*Hymn to Poseidon*).

(From *Clothed with the Sun*.)

AN occultist or a philosopher will not speak of the goodness or cruelty of Providence ; but, identifying it with Karma-Nemesis, he will teach that nevertheless it guards the good and watches over them in this as in future lives ; and that it punishes the evil-doer, aye, even to his seventh re-birth, so long, in short, as the effect of his having thrown into perturbation even the smallest atom in the Infinite World of harmony has not been finally readjusted. For the only decree of Karma—an eternal and immutable decree—is absolute Harmony in the world of Matter as it is in the world of Spirit. It is not, therefore, Karma that rewards or punishes, but it is we who reward or punish ourselves, according to whether we work with, through, and along with Nature, abiding by the laws on which that Harmony depends, or—break them. . . .

We stand bewildered before the mystery of our own making, and the riddle of life that we will not solve, and then accuse the great Sphinx of devouring us. But verily, there is not an accident in our lives, not a misshapen day or a misfortune, that could not be traced back to our own doings in this or in another life.

H. P. BLAVATSKY  
(*The Secret Doctrine*).

INTIMATELY, or rather indissolubly, connected with Karma, then, is the Law of Re-birth, or of the reincarnation of the same spiritual Individuality in a long, almost interminable, series of Personalities. The latter are like the various characters played by the same actor, with each of which that actor identifies himself and is identified by the public, for the space of a few hours. The *inner*, or real Man, who personates those characters, knows the whole time that he is Hamlet, only for a brief space of a few acts, which, however, on the plane of human illusion, represent the whole life of Hamlet. He knows also that he was, the night before, King Lear, the transformation in his turn of the

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Othello of a still earlier preceding night. And though the outer, visible character is supposed to be ignorant of the fact, and in actual life that ignorance is, unfortunately, but too real, nevertheless the *permanent Individuality* is fully aware of it. . . .

The Delphic command 'Know thyself' was perfectly comprehensible to every nation of old. So it is now, save to the Christians, since, with the exception of the Mussulmans, it is part and parcel of every Eastern religion, including the Kabalistically instructed Jews. To understand its full meaning, however, necessitates first of all belief in Reincarnation and all its mysteries. . . . Man must, in short, know who he was, before he arrives at knowing what he is.

H. P. BLAVATSKY  
(*The Secret Doctrine*).

**B**UDDHISM does not believe in anything resembling a passage backwards and forwards between animal and human forms, which most people conceive to be meant by the principle of transmigration. . . . Buddhist writings certainly contain allusions to former births, in which even the Buddha himself was now one and now another kind of animal. But these had reference to the remote course of pre-human evolution, of which his fully-opened vision gave him a retrospect. Never in any authentic Buddhist writings will any support be found for the notion that any human creature, once having attained manhood, falls back into the animal kingdom.

Now, it is only by a return to physical existence that people can possibly be conceived to reap with precise accuracy the harvest of the minor causes they may have generated when last in objective life. Thus, on

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a careful examination of the matter, the Karmic law . . . will be seen not only to reconcile itself to the sense of justice, but to constitute the only imaginable method of natural action that would do this. The continued individuality running through successive Karmic rebirths once realised, and the corresponding chain of physical existences, intercalated between each, borne in mind, the exquisite symmetry of the whole system is in no way impaired by that feature which seems obnoxious to criticism at the first glance—the successive baths of oblivion through which the reincarnating spirit has to pass. On the contrary, that oblivion itself is in truth the only condition on which objective life could fairly be started afresh. Few earth-lives are entirely free from shadows, the recollection of which would darken a renewed lease of life for the former personality. And if it is alleged that the forgetfulness in each life of the last involves waste of experience and effort, and of intellectual acquirements, painfully or laboriously attained, that objection can only be raised in forgetfulness of the Devachanic life in which, far from being wasted, such efforts and acquirements are the seeds from which the whole magnificent harvest of spiritual results will be raised. In the same way, the longer the esoteric doctrine occupies the mind, the more clearly it is seen that every objection brought against it meets with a ready reply, and only seems an objection from the point of view of imperfect knowledge.

A. P. SINNETT  
(*Esoteric Buddhism*).

THE way the law of Karma works when it is infringed in the first instance, as it constantly is being infringed, is by ultimate compensation. In everyday life, the action of anyone connected with us may impose suffering upon ourselves that we have not earned. People sometimes think that everything you suffer must have been earned by your own Karma. In the majority

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of cases probably that is true, but in a great number of cases it is not so, and all who want to understand the course of human life should bear that in mind. . . . The individual has many more lives than one, and if suffering is incurred in one life it is amply made up for in another. . . . I mean that if an ordeal is imposed upon you by no past sins of your own, and if you bear that ordeal with courage and without being in any way drawn aside from the path you want to tread, your success in passing through the ordeal claims a reward of a much higher order than one which would consist merely in the repayment to you on this plane of whatever you have been robbed of, if I may put it so. The higher reward is spiritual progress, and spiritual progress accomplished in that way, as compensation for ordeals passed through successfully on this plane, looked upon from above, is infinitely more important than a commonplace reward having to do with this one life or the next of the same order.

A. P. SINNETT

*(Theosophy and the Problems of Life).*

THY voice is like to music heard ere birth,  
Some spirit lute touched on a spirit sea ;  
Thy face remembered is from other worlds.  
It has been died for, though I know not when,  
It has been sung of, though I know not where.  
It has the strangeness of the luring West,  
And of sad sea-horizons ; beside thee  
I am aware of other times and lands,  
Of birth far back, of lives in many stars.

STEPHEN PHILLIPS

*(Marpessa).*

IF anything can keep us well within the thorny path that leads to happiness and virtue, it is the certainty that those who come after us will remember having been ourselves, if only in a dream. . . .

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Wherefore, O reader, if you be but sound in mind and body, it most seriously behoves you . . . to go forth and multiply exceedingly, to marry early and much and often, and to select the very best of your kind in the opposite sex for this most precious, excellent, and blessed purpose ; that all your future reincarnations (and hers), however brief, may be many.

GEORGE DU MAURIER  
(*Peter Ibbetson*).

**M**Y little-worlded self ! the shadows pass  
In this thy sister-world, as in a glass,  
Of all processions that revolve in thee :  
Not only of cyclic Man  
Thou here discern'st the plan,  
Not only of cyclic Man, but of the cyclic Me. . . .  
How many trampled and deciduous joys  
Enrich thy soul for joys deciduous still,  
Before the distance shall fulfil  
Cyclic unrest with solemn equipoise !  
. . . I do hear  
From the revolving year  
A voice which cries :  
" All dies ;  
Lo, how all dies ! O seer,  
And all things too arise :  
All dies and all is born ;  
But each resurgent morn, behold, more near the  
Perfect Morn."

FRANCIS THOMPSON  
(*From the Night of Forebeing*).

**W**HAT think we of thy soul ?  
Which has no parts, and cannot grow,  
Unfurled not from an embryo ;  
Born of full stature, lineal to control ;  
And yet a pigmy's yoke must undergo :  
Yet must keep pace and tarry, patient, kind,  
With its unwilling scholar, the dull, tardy mind ;

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Must be obsequious to the body's powers,  
Whose low hands mete its paths, set ope and close its  
ways ;

Must do obeisance to the days,  
And wait the little pleasure of the hours ;  
Yea, ripe for Kingship, yet must be  
Captive in statuted minority !

FRANCIS THOMPSON  
(*Sister Songs*).

**I**N the doctrine of transmigration, whatever its origin, Brahminical and Buddhist speculation found, ready to hand, the means of constructing a plausible vindication of the ways of the Cosmos to man. . . . This plea of justification is not less plausible than others ; and none but very hasty thinkers will reject it on the ground of inherent absurdity. Like the doctrine of evolution itself, that of transmigration has its roots in the world of reality ; and it may claim such support as the great argument from analogy is capable of supplying.

PROFESSOR T. H. HUXLEY  
(*Evolution and Ethics*).

**G**REAT music is a psychical storm, agitating to unimaginable depth the mystery of the past within us. Or we might say that it is a prodigious incantation—every different instrument and voice making separate appeal to different billions of pre-natal memories. There are tones that call up all ghosts of youth and joy and tenderness ; there are tones that evoke all phantom pain of perished passion ; there are tones that resurrect all dead sensation of majesty and might and glory—all expired exultations, all forgotten magnanimities. Well may the influence of music seem inexplicable to the man who idly dreams that his life began less than a hundred years ago ! But the mystery lightens for whomsoever learns that the substance of Self is older than the sun. . . . To every ripple of

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melody, to every billow of harmony, there answers within him, out of the Sea of Death and Birth, some eddying immeasurable of ancient pleasure and pain.

LAFCADIO HEARN  
(*Ghostly Japan*).

I SEEMED to understand as never before, how the mystery that is called the Soul of me must have quickened in every form of past existence, and must as certainly continue to behold the sun for other millions of summers, through eyes of other countless shapes of future being. . . . For thousands of years the East has been teaching that what we think or do in this life really decides—through some inevitable formation of atom-tendencies or polarities—the future place of our substance, and the future state of our sentiency. . . . Acts and thoughts, according to Buddhist doctrines, are creative. . . . What we think or do is never for the moment only, but for measureless time ; it signifies some force directed to the shaping of worlds—to the making of future bliss or pain.

What becomes of the dewdrop? By the great sun its atoms are separated and lifted and scattered. . . . Each one of them will combine again. . . . Even so with the particles of that composite which you term your very Self. Before the hosts of heaven the atoms of you were—and thrilled—and quickened—and reflected appearances of things. And when all the stars of the visible Night shall have burnt themselves out, those atoms will doubtless again take part in the orbiting of Mind—and will tremble again in thoughts, emotions, memories—in all the joys and pains of lives still to be lived in worlds still to be evolved. . . . Your personality signifies, in the eternal order, just as much as the especial motion of molecules in the shivering of any single drop. Perhaps in no other drop will the thrilling and the

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picturing be ever exactly the same ; but the dews will continue to gather and to fall, and there will always be quivering pictures.

The very delusion of delusions is the idea of death as loss.

LAFCADIO HEARN

(*Kotto*).

HOW vain and dull this common world must seem  
To such a One as thou, who shouldst have talked  
At Florence with Mirandola, or walked  
Through the cool olives of the Academe :  
Thou shouldst have gathered reeds from a green stream  
For Goat-foot Pan's shrill piping, and have played  
With the white girls in that Phæacian glade  
Where grave Odysseus wakened from his dream.

Ah ! surely once some urn of Attic clay  
Held thy wan dust, and thou hast come again  
Back to this common world so dull and vain,  
For thou wast weary of the sunless day,  
The heavy fields of scentless asphodel,  
The loveless lips with which men kiss in Hell.

OSCAR WILDE

(*Phèdre* : To Sarah Bernhardt).

ALONG the garden ways just now  
I heard the flowers speak ;  
The white rose told me of your brow,  
The red rose of your cheek ;  
The lily of your bended head,  
The bindweed of your hair :  
Each looked its loveliest and said  
You were more fair.

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I went into the wood anon,  
And heard the wild birds sing,  
How sweet you were ; they warbled on,  
Piped, trilled the self-same thing.  
Thrush, blackbird, linnet, without pause,  
The burden did repeat,  
And still began again because  
You were more sweet.

And then I went down to the sea,  
And heard it murmuring too,  
Part of an ancient mystery,  
All made of me and you.  
How many a thousand years ago  
I loved, and you were sweet—  
Longer I could not stay, and so  
I fled back to your feet.

ARTHUR O'SHAUGHNESSY

(*A Love Symphony*).

WAS I a Samurai renowned,  
Two-sworded, fierce, immense of bow ?  
A histrion angular and profound ?  
A priest ? a porter ?—Child, although  
I have forgotten clean, I know  
That in the shade of Fujisan,  
What time the cherry-orchards blow,  
I loved you once in old Japan.

As here you loiter, flowing-gowned  
And hugely sashed, with pins a-row,  
Your quaint head as with flamelets crowned,  
Demure, inviting—even so,  
When merry maids in Miyako  
To feel the sweet o' the year began,  
And gardens green to overflow,  
I loved you once in old Japan.

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Clear shine the hills ; the rice-fields round  
Two cranes are circling ; sleepy and slow,  
A blue canal the lake's blue bound  
Breaks at the bamboo bridge ; and lo !  
Touched with the sundown's spirit and glow,  
I see you turn, with flirted fan,  
Against the plum-tree's blooming snow . . .  
I loved you once in old Japan !

### *Envoy.*

Dear, 'twas a dozen lives ago ;  
But that I was a lucky man  
The Toyokuni here will show :  
I loved you—once—in old Japan.

W. E. HENLEY

*(Ballade of a Toyokuni Colour-Print).*

IT is evident that the universal repetition of idea in form throughout all nature, to which we have called attention, is but the expression of a deep and basic law. This law is that all existence proceeds in cycles, each having its objective and its subjective arc. . . . In the vegetable kingdom, this ebb and flow of conscious force is within material limits largely and easily studied. . . . All the beautiful imagery and design expressed in leaf, stalk, and flower perish as completely as though they had never existed. The life force has ebbed, yet not entirely. Root, rhizoma, or bulb hold in subjective embrace every detail, even to the most minute ; and when the subjective cycle is completed the inner, subjective entity thrills, expands, clothes itself again with its vestment of cells, and reproduces the dead plant in all its former perfection and beauty. Every such reproduction by a root or bulb is a genuine specific reincarnation of the same elemental centre of consciousness, or 'elemental soul,' in the same plant ; yet we fail to recognise this. . . .

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In the vegetable kingdom specific re-embodiment of plants takes place under the ebb and flow of the natural, cyclic laws known as the 'seasons.' In the animal, the metamorphosis of insects absolutely proves the reincarnation of the same conscious entity in an entirely different organism, under an inner subjective force, unaided by external conditions. . . . Now, if the individualisation of a tulip, even, has proceeded so far that nature has expressly provided for subjective cycles of the same individual, by the evolution of a bulb, how much more reasonable it is that the intense individualisation in man should also be conserved by subjective periods in his life-history. That the conditions limiting his consciousness in each state are different is no argument against these existing. The consciousness of a butterfly differs vastly from that of a caterpillar. . . . It logically follows, then, that the individualisation, carried to so marked an extent as it is in man, should be provided with subjective periods in which to assimilate and make its own the experiences of the last physical life.

DR. JEROME ANDERSON

*(Reincarnation: A Study of the Human Soul).*

"DEATH lies between us, my Beloved," she continued. "One line of shadow—only one little line! But thou mayst not pass it save when God commands—and I—I cannot! For I know naught of death—save that it is a heavy, dreamless sleep allotted to over-weary mortals, wherein they gain brief rest 'twixt many lives—lives that, like recurring dawns, rouse them anew to labour. How often hast thou slept thus, my Theos, and forgotten me? . . .

"Life after life hast thou lived, and given no thought to me—yet I remember and am faithful."

"Wouldst thou be willing to live again, Sah-lûma, if such a thing could be?"

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"Friend, I would rather never die!" responded the Laureate, half playfully, half seriously. "But—if I were certain that death was no more than a sleep, from which I should assuredly awaken to another phase of existence—I know well enough what I would do!"

"What?" questioned Theos. . . .

"I would live a different life *now!* . . . so that when the new Future dawned for me, I might not be haunted or tortured by the remembrance of a misspent Past! For if we are to believe in any everlasting things at all, we cannot shut out the fatal everlastingness of Memory! Never to lose sight of one's own bygone wilful sins—this would be an immortal destiny too terrible to endure. For then, inexorable retrospection would for ever show us where we had missed the way, and how we had failed to use the chances given us. . . . Thus, if we indeed possessed the positive foreknowledge of the eternal regeneration of our lives, 'twould be well to free them from all hindrance to perfection here—while we are still conscious of Time and Opportunity."

MARIE CORELLI

(*Ardath: The Story of a Dead Self*).

OLD memories are mine once more,  
I see strange lives I lived of yore;  
With dimmed sight see I far-off things,  
I feel the breath of bygone springs,  
And ringing strangely in mine ears  
I hear old laughter, alien tears  
Slow falling, voices of past years.

None sees the slow sure upward sweep  
By which the soul from life-depths deep  
Ascends—unless, mayhap, when free  
With each new death we backward see  
The long perspective of our race,  
Our multitudinous past lives trace,  
Since first as breath of God through space

## A.D. 1700-1900

Each came, and filled the lowest thing  
With life's faint pulse scarce quivering ;  
So ever onward, upward, grew,  
And ever with each death-birth knew  
An old sphere left, a mystic change—  
A sense of exaltation strange  
Thus through a myriad lives to range.

But even in our mortal lives  
At times the eager spirit strives  
To gain through subtle memories  
Some hint of life's past mysteries—  
Brief moments they, that flash before  
Bewilder'd eyes some scene of yore,  
Some vivid hour returned once more.

Each death is but a birth, a change—  
Each soul through myriad by-ways strange,  
Through birth and death, doth upward range.

WILLIAM SHARP ('FIONA MACLEOD').  
(*A Record.*)

WHERE have I known thee, dear, in what strange  
place,

Midst what caprices of our alien fate,  
Where have I bowed, worshipping this thy face,  
And hunger'd for thee, as now, insatiate?  
Tell me, white soul, that through those starry veils  
Keepst steadfast vigil o'er my wavering spirit,  
On what far sea trimm'd we our darkling sails  
When fell the shadow o'er that we now inherit?  
Two tempest-driven souls were we, or glad  
With the young joy that recks of no to-morrow?  
Or were we as now inexplicably sad  
Before the coming twilight of new Sorrow?

Did our flesh quail as now this poor flesh quails,  
Our faces blanch, as mine, as thine that pales!

WILLIAM SHARP ('FIONA MACLEOD').  
(From *A Sonnet-Sequence.*)

## The Ring of Return

STUDENTS of Gaelic will remember that Tuan—who under the grey cloud and by the whispering rushes of the west, gave out the same ancient wisdom as Pythagoras gave by Ionian Kroton, or as Empedocles gave by Sicilian Acragas—remembered his many transformations. He had been, he said, an eagle and a stag and a salmon in deep waters, and had known other changes. In like manner the Sicilian sophist remembered that he had been 'a youth and a maiden and a bush and a bird and a gleaming fish in the sea'; and the greatest of Greek mages declared that again and again he had lived in a changed body, as old raiment discarded or new raiment donned.

I think the soul knows. I think the soul remembers. I think that intuition is divine and unshakable. . . . I think we have travelled a long way, and have forgotten much, and continually forget more and more. The secret road of the soul is a long road. When, at last, we turn, looking backward so as at last to go forward, we shall see a long way off the forsaken homes of joy, and above these our inheritance behold the stars of our spiritual youth.

WILLIAM SHARP ('FIONA MACLEOD').  
(*The Winged Destiny.*)

WHEN from that world ere death and birth  
He sought the stern descending way,  
Perfecting on our darkened earth  
His spirit, citizen of day—  
Guessed he the pain, the lonely years,  
The thought made true, the will made strong?  
Divined he from the singing spheres  
Eternal fragments of his song?

## A.D. 1700-1900

Hoped he from dimness to discern  
The Source, the Goal, that glances through?  
That one should know, and many turn—  
Turn heavenward, knowing that he knew?  
Once more he rises; lulled and still,  
Hushed to his tune the tideways roll;  
These waveless heights of evening thrill  
With voyage of the summoned Soul.

O closing shades that veil and drown  
The clear-obscure of shore and tree!  
O star and planet, shimmering down  
Your sombre glory on the sea!  
O soul that yearned to soar and sing,  
Enamoured of immortal air!  
Heart that thro' sundering change must cling  
To dream and memory, sad and fair!

Sun, star, and space, and dark and day,  
Shall vanish in a vaster glow;  
Souls shall climb fast their age-long way,  
With all to conquer, all to know:  
But thou, true Heart, for aye shalt keep  
Thy loyal faith, thine ancient flame;  
Be stilled an hour, and stir from sleep  
Reborn, risen, and yet the same.

F. W. H. MYERS  
(To Tennyson).

**W**E commonly know that we are going to die, though  
we do not know that we are going to be born.  
But are we sure this is so? We may have had  
the most gloomy forebodings on this head and forgotten  
all about them.

## The Ring of Return

Death is the dissolving of a partnership, the partners to which survive and go elsewhere. It is the corruption or breaking up of that society which we have called Ourselves. The corporation is at an end, both its soul and body cease as a whole, but the immortal constituents do not cease and never will. The souls of some men transmigrate in great part into their children, but there is a large alloy in respect both of body and mind through sexual generation; the souls of other men migrate into books, pictures, music or what not; and everyone's mind migrates somewhere, whether remembered and admired or the reverse. . . .

Our mistake has been in not seeing that death is indeed, like birth, a salient feature in the history of the individual, but one which wants exploding as the end of the individual, no less than birth wanted exploding as his beginning.

Dying is only a mode of forgetting. We shall see this more easily, if we consider forgetting to be a mode of dying. So the ancients called their River of Death, Lethe—the River of Forgetfulness. They ought to have called their River of Life, Mnemosyne—the River of Memory.

I must have it that neither are the good rewarded nor the bad punished in a future state, but everyone must start anew quite irrespective of anything they have done here, and must try his luck again, and go on trying it again and again *ad infinitum*. Some of our lives, then, will be lucky and some unlucky. . . .

To die is to change, and to change is to die to what has gone before.

(From *The Note-Books of Samuel Butler*.)

A.D. 1700-1900

YET for the great bitterness of this grief,  
We three, you and he and I,  
May pass into the hearts of like true comrades  
hereafter,  
In whom we may weep anew and yet comfort them,  
As they too pass out, out, out into the night,  
So guide them and guard them Heaven and fare  
them well!

SAMUEL BUTLER

(*In Memoriam—to H. R. F.*).

# The Ring of Return

## RUSSIAN

I REMEMBER, O Fire,  
How thy flames once enkindled my flesh,  
Among writhing witches caught close in thy flame-  
woven mesh.

How, tortured for having beheld what is secret,  
We were flung to the fire for the joy of our sabbath.  
But to those who had seen what we saw,  
Yea, Fire was naught.

Ah, well I remember  
The buildings ablaze where we burned  
In the fires we lit, and smiled to behold the flames wind  
About us, the faithful, among all the faithless and  
blind.

To the chanting of prayers, the frenzy of flame,  
We sang thy hosannahs, oh strength-giving Fire:  
I pledged love to thee from the pyre!

Oh, Fire, I know  
That thy light with an ultimate splendour our being  
shall drench;  
It shall flare up before eyes that Death fain would  
finally quench.

With swift knowledge it burns, and with joy heaven-  
high

At the vastness of vistas unfolding afar.  
Who has summoned these visions to being? And  
why?

Who has rayed them in colours befitting a star?  
Beyond life is the answer.

Oh, thou heavenward heart of the element ever in flight,  
On my twilight horizon let Death, necromancer,  
Shed perpetual light!

KONSTANTIN BALMONT  
(From *Hymn to Fire*).  
(Translated by BABETTE DEUTSCH  
and AVRAHM YARMOLINSKY.)

## A.D. 1700-1900

IN the land of Ra the flaming, by the shores of Nile's  
slow waters, where the roofs of Thebes were  
seen,  
In the days of yore you loved me, as dark Isis loved  
Osiris, sister, friend and worshipped queen!  
And the pyramid its shadow on our evening trysts  
would lean.

Oh, the mystery remember of our meeting in the temple,  
in the aisle of granite, dim and straight,  
And the hour when, lights extinguished, and the sacred  
dances broken—each to each was sudden mate;  
Our caresses, burning whispers, ardours that we could  
not sate.

In the splendour of the ballroom, clinging to me, white  
and tender—through Time's curtain reft in twain,  
Did your ear not catch the anthems, mingling with  
the crash of cymbals, and the people's answering  
refrain?  
Did you not repeat in rapture that our love awoke  
again?

Once before, we knew existence, this our bliss is a  
remembrance, and our love—a memory;  
Casting off its ancient ashes, flames again our hungry  
passion, flames and kindles you and me—  
As of old by Nile's slow waters, in the land beyond  
the sea.

VALERY BRUSOV

(*The Tryst*).

(Translated by AVRAHM YARMOLINSKY.)



VI  
THE TWENTIETH CENTURY  
1900-1927



**M**YRTALÉ, when I am gone  
 (Who was once Anacreon),  
 Lay these annals of my heart  
 In some sacred shrine apart ;  
 Into it put all my sighs,  
 All my lover's litanies,  
 All my vows and protestations,  
 All my jealous accusations,  
 All my hopes and all my fears,  
 All the tribute of my tears—  
 Let it all be there inurned.  
 All my passion as it burned ;  
 Label it, when I am gone,  
 'Ashes of Anacreon.'

AUSTIN DOBSON  
 (*To Myrtalé*).

**O**UT of the depths of the Infinite Being eternal,  
 Out of the cloud more bright than the brightness  
 of sun,  
 Out of the inmost, the essence of spirit supernal,  
 We issued as one.

First essence electric, concentric, revolving, subduing,  
 We throbbled through the ether, a part of the infinite  
 germ,  
 Dissolving, revolving, absorbing, reforming, renewing,  
 The endless in term.

. . . . .  
 Spirit of growth in the rocks, and the ferns, and the  
 mosses,  
 Spirit of growth in the trees, and the grasses, and  
 flowers,

## The Ring of Return

Rejoicing in life, unconscious of changes or losses,  
Of days or of hours.

Spirit of growth in the bird and the bee, ever tending  
To form more complex, its beauty and use combined,  
Adapted perfection, the finite and infinite blending,  
One gleam from One Mind.

Thus spirally upward we come from the depths of  
creation;  
The man and the woman the Garden of Eden have found,  
And are joined by the Lord in an endless and holy  
relation,  
Ensphered and made round.

Obedience still is the law of each fresh emanation,  
The prayer to the Father, 'Not my will, but Thy will  
be done';  
Then deathless, immortal, we pass through all forms of  
creation,  
The twain lost in One.

ELLA DIETZ  
(*Emanation*).

**S**MALL wonder that his dreaming had seemed real  
to Charlie. The Fates that are so careful to shut  
the doors of each successive life behind us had,  
in this case, been neglectful, and Charlie was looking,  
though that he did not know, where never man had  
been permitted to look with full knowledge since Time  
began. . . .

It was no consolation that once in his lives he had  
been forced to die for his gains. I also must have died  
scores of times, but behind me, because I could have  
used my knowledge, the doors were shut. . . . One  
thing only seemed certain, and that certainty took my  
breath away for the moment. If I came to full know-  
ledge of anything at all, it would not be one life of the

## The Twentieth Century

soul in Charlie Mears's body, but half a dozen—half a dozen several and separate existences spent on blue water in the morning of the world!

RUDYARD KIPLING  
(*The Finest Story in the World*).  
(From *Many Inventions*.)

STRANGERS drawn from the ends of the earth,  
jewelled and plumed were we.

I was Lord of the Inca race, and she was Queen  
of the Sea.

Under the stars beyond our stars where the new-forged  
meteors glow

Hotly we stormed Valhalla, a million years ago.

She with the star I had marked for my own—I with  
my set desire—

Lost in the loom of the Night of Nights—lighted by  
worlds afire—

Met in a war against the Gods where the headlong  
meteors glow,

Hewing our way to Valhalla, a million years ago!

*They will come back, come back again, as long as the red  
Earth rolls.*

*He never wasted a leaf or a tree. Do you think He would  
squander souls?*

RUDYARD KIPLING  
(*The Sack of the Gods*).  
(From *Naulahka*.)

THINK not that the love thou enterest into to-day  
is for a few months or years:

The little seed set now must lie quiet before  
it will germinate, and many alternations of sunshine  
and shower descend upon it before it become even a  
small plant.

## The Ring of Return

When a thousand years have passed, come thou again.  
And behold ! a mighty tree that no storms can shake.

Love does not end with this life or any number of  
lives ; the form that thou seekest lies hidden under  
wrapping after wrapping ;

Nevertheless it shall at length appear—more wondrous  
far than aught thou hast imagined.

Therefore leave time : do not like a child pull thy  
flower up by the roots to see if it is growing ;

Even though thou be old and near the grave there  
is plenty of time.

EDWARD CARPENTER

*(When a Thousand Years have Passed).*

**A**FTER long ages resuming the broken thread—com-  
ing back after a long but necessary parenthesis,  
To the call of the early thrush in the woods, and of  
the primrose on the old tree-root by the waterside—

Up with the bracken uncurling from the midst of dead  
fronds of past selves :

As of morning, and to start again after long strange  
slumber and dreams,

Beholding the beautiful light, breathing the dainty  
sweet air, the outbreath of innumerable creatures,

Seeing the sun rise new upon the world as lovers see  
it after their first night.

All changed and glorified, the least thing trembling  
with beauty—all old sights become new, with new  
meanings—

Lo ! we too go forth.

The great rondure of the earth invites us, the ocean-  
pools are laid out in the sunlight for our feet.

For now, having learned the lesson which it was  
necessary to learn, of the intellect and of civilisation—

Having duly taken in and assimilated, and again  
duly excreted its results—

Once more to the great road with the animals and  
the trees and the stars travelling to return—

# The Twentieth Century

To other nights and days undreamt of in the  
vocabularies of all dictionaries  
I inevitably call you.

. . . . .

Then after many years, after many thousands of years—  
After many times lying down to sleep and rising again,  
after many times entering again into the mother's womb,  
after often passing through the gates of birth and  
death—the sleeper says to him that awakes him :

“ Ah! beautiful one, ah! prince of love, so many times  
with thy fingers in vain touching my closed lids! . . .

Henceforth the long chain of births and deaths I  
abandon, I arise and go forth with thee—to begin  
my real life.”

. . . . .

Centuries long in her antechambers tarrying,  
Lost in strange mazes, wandering, dissatisfied—in sin  
and sorrow, lonely, despised and fallen—

At length the soul returns to Paradise. . . .

Through the great gates, redeemed, liberated, suddenly  
in joy over the whole universe expanding—after her  
many thousand year long exile,

At length the soul returns to Paradise.

EDWARD CARPENTER  
(*After Long Ages*).

I SAW deep in the eyes of the animals the human soul  
look out upon me.

I saw where it was born deep down under feathers  
and fur, or condemned for awhile to roam four-footed  
among the brambles. I caught the clinging mute  
glance of the prisoner, and swore that I would be faithful.

Thee my brother and sister I see and mistake not.  
Do not be afraid. Dwelling thus and thus for a while,  
fulfilling thy appointed time—thou too shalt come to  
thyself at last. . . .

## The Ring of Return

Come nigh little bird with your half-stretched,  
quivering wings—within you I behold choirs of angels,  
and the Lord himself in vista.

EDWARD CARPENTER

(*Have Faith*).

(From *Towards Democracy*.)

THE important thing . . . is to see that undoubtedly various orders of consciousness do exist, *actually embedded within us*; and that the words I and Thou do not merely cover our bodily forms and the outlines of our minds as we habitually represent them to ourselves, but cover also immense tracts of intelligence and activity lying behind these and only on occasions coming into consciousness. . . . To command these tracts in such a way as to be able to enter in and make use of them at will, and to bring them into permanent relation with the conscious ego, will I think be the method of advance, and the means by which all these questions of the perduration and reincarnation of the ego, and of its real relation with other egos, will at length be solved. If we could by any means explore and realise what is meant by that letter 'I'; if we could travel inward with firm tread to its remotest depth, and find the regions where it touches close, so close, on the other forms of the same letter; if we could stand assured, and look around us, in that central land where it ceases to convey the sense of difference and only indicates unity; and if then with lightning swiftness we could pass to the extreme periphery where in its particular and invincible shape it almost rejoices to stand alone antagonising the rest of the universe—why, then, surely all would be clear to us, and Gladness and Beauty would be our perpetual attendants. . . .

Here in this perennial, immeasurable consciousness sleeping within us we come again to our Celestial City, our Home from which as individuals we proceed, but from which we are never really separated. . . . Every man feels doubtless that his little mortal life is very

## The Twentieth Century

inadequate, and that to express and give utterance to all that is in him would need many lives, many bodies. Even what we have been able to say here shows that the deeper self of him—that which is the source of all his joy and inspiration—has had the experience of many lives, many bodies, and will have.

EDWARD CARPENTER  
*(The Art of Creation).*

THE blue dusk ran between the streets: my love  
was winged within my mind,  
It left to-day and yesterday and thrice a thousand  
years behind.  
To-day was past and dead for me, for from to-day my  
feet had run  
Through thrice a thousand years to walk the ways of  
ancient Babylon.  
On temple top and palace roof the burnished gold  
flung back the rays  
Of a red sunset that was dead and lost beyond a million  
days.  
The tower of heaven turns darker blue, a starry sparkle  
now begins ;  
The mystery and magnificence, the myriad beauty and  
the sins  
Come back to me. I walk beneath the shadowy multi-  
tude of towers ;  
Within the gloom the fountain jets its pallid mist in  
lily flowers.  
The waters lull me, and the scent of many gardens, and  
I hear  
Familiar voices, and the voice I love is whispering in  
my ear.  
Oh real as in dream all this ; and then a hand on  
mine is laid :  
The wave of phantom time withdraws ; and that young  
Babylonian maid,  
One drop of beauty left behind from all the flowing  
of that tide,

## The Ring of Return

Is looking with the self-same eyes, and here in Ireland  
by my side.

Oh light our life in Babylon, but Babylon has taken  
wings,

While we are in the calm and proud procession of eternal  
things.

A. E.  
(*Babylon*).

TO those who cry out against romance I would say,  
You yourself are romance. You are the lost  
prince herding obscurely among the swine. The  
romance of your spirit is the most marvellous of stories.  
Your wanderings have been greater than those of  
Ulysses. . . .

Looking back upon that other life through the vistas  
of memory, I see breaking in upon the images of this  
world forms of I know not what antiquity. I walk out  
of strange cities steeped in the jewel glow and gloom  
of evening, or sail in galleys over the silvery waves of  
the antique ocean. I reside in tents, or in palace  
chambers, go abroad in chariots, meditate in cyclopean  
buildings, am worshipper of the Earth-gods upon the  
mountains, lie tranced in Egyptian crypts, or brush  
with naked body through the long, sunlit grasses of the  
prairies. Endlessly the procession of varying forms  
goes back into remote yesterdays of the world. . . .  
Were not [these] . . . I ask myself, memories of the  
spirit incarnated many times?

A. E.  
(*The Memory of the Spirit*).  
(From *The Candle of Vision*.)

EVEN the best men are not, when they die, in such  
a state of intellectual and moral perfection as  
would fit them to enter heaven immediately.  
. . . This is generally recognised, and one of two alterna-  
tives is commonly adopted to meet it. The first is that

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some tremendous improvement—an improvement out of all proportion to any which can ever be observed in life—takes place at the moment of death. . . . The other and more probable alternative is that the process of gradual improvement can go on in each of us after the death of our present bodies. . . .

And it seems to me that the natural inference . . . is that this life will be followed by others like it, each separated from its predecessor and successor by death and rebirth. For otherwise we should be limited to the hypothesis that a process of development, begun in a single life bounded by death, should be continued as an indefinitely long life not divided by birth and death at all. And to suppose, without any reason, such a change from the order of our present experience seems unjustifiable.

The doctrine of pre-existence does not compel us to deny all influence on a man's character of the characters of his ancestors. . . . But there is no impossibility in supposing that the characteristics in which we resemble the ancestors of our bodies may be to some degree characteristics due to our previous lives. . . . A man whose nature had certain characteristics when he was about to be reborn, would be reborn in a body descended from ancestors of a similar character. . . . It would be the character of the ancestors . . . and its similarity to his character, which determined the fact that he was reborn in that body rather than another. The shape of the head does not determine the shape of the hat, but it does determine the selection of this particular hat for this particular head.

A man who dies after acquiring knowledge—and all men acquire some—might enter his new life, deprived indeed of his knowledge, but not deprived of the increased strength and delicacy of mind which he had gained in acquiring the knowledge. And, if so, he will

## The Ring of Return

be wiser in the second life because of what has happened in the first. . . . So a man may carry over into his next life the disposition and tendencies which he has gained by the moral contests of this life, and the value of those experiences will not have been destroyed by the death which has destroyed the memory of them. . . . In the same way, if the whole memory of the love of a life is swept away at death, its value is not lost if the same love is stronger in a new life because of what passed before. . . . If love has joined two people in this life, we have reason for believing that their existences are bound up with one another, not for one life only, but for ever.

The prospect of a great number of lives—perhaps an infinite number, though this is not a necessary part of the theory—gives us the prospect of many dangers, many conflicts, many griefs, in an indefinitely long future. Death is not a haven of rest. It is a starting-point for fresh labours. But if the trials are great, so is the recompense. We miss much here by our own folly, much by unfavourable circumstances. Above all, we miss much because so many good things are incompatible. We cannot spend our youth both in the study and in the saddle. We cannot gain the benefit both of unbroken health and of bodily weakness, both of riches and of poverty, both of comradeship and of isolation, both of defiance and of obedience. We cannot learn the lessons alike of Galahad and of Tristram and of Caradoc. And yet they are all so good to learn. Would it not be worth much to hope that what we missed in one life might come to us in another? And would it not be worth much to be able to hope that we might have a chance to succeed hereafter in the tasks which we failed in here? . . .

And surely death acquires a new and deeper significance when we regard it no longer as a single and unexplained break in an unending life, but as part of the continually recurring rhythm of progress—as inevitable,

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as natural, and as benevolent as sleep. We have only left youth behind us, as at noon we have left the sunrise. They will both come back, and they do not grow old.

JOHN M. ELLIS McTAGGART  
(*Some Dogmas of Religion*).

O NEVER take those eyes away from me ;  
Such storms are mine, I have great need of stars ;  
For at such radiant shrines of mystery  
Awhile I pray, forgetting prison-bars.  
Where have we met before, that such delight  
Thrills through mine inmost soul when'er I meet  
The gaze that pierces through heart's darkest night ?  
Beam in the wilderness to guide my feet  
Where'er thy heart shall bid me stand or go,  
In some far ancient shrine (this is my dream)  
Still wert thou mine alone ; full well I know  
The channel of one life holds not that stream  
Of love, which flows from one who vainly longs  
To hymn a deathless love in mortal songs.

LILY NIGHTINGALE  
(From *A Cycle of Sonnets*).

WE parted, and not a word was spoken, but at one and the same moment had we understood our inexpressible thought. . . . We have never met again. Perhaps centuries will elapse before we do meet again.

Much is to learn, and much to forget,  
Through worlds I shall traverse not a few

before we shall again find ourselves *in the same movement of the soul* as on that evening : but we can well afford to wait.

MAURICE MAETERLINCK  
(*The Invisible Goodness*).  
(From *The Treasure of the Humble*.)  
(Translated by ALFRED SUTRO.)

## The Ring of Return

THE experience and memory of the past survive in our very organisation ; we are the product of evolution through the ages. Conscious memory may fail—does fail—but the effect of experience lasts.

What happened before earth-life we have forgotten—if we ever knew, we have forgotten. Our individual memory begins soon after birth. Before that we cannot trace identity. Perhaps we had none. Either we had none or we have forgotten. . . . The doctrine is old ; Plato taught it before the time of Christ, Wordsworth taught it early in the last century—the doctrine that when we enter into flesh we leave behind all memory of previous existences ; all, except for occasional dim and shadowy recollections which, though they may be stronger in infancy, occasionally surprise the grown man also. Dimly he may remember the days of his infancy,

But he forgets the days before  
God shut the doorways of his head.

Crowds of unsuspected things are awaiting our discovery. . . . The doctrine of evolution—evolution of capacity for knowledge—is profoundly true with respect to the spirit of man.

SIR OLIVER LODGE  
(*Reason and Belief*).

WE are not things of yesterday, nor of to-morrow. We do not indeed remember our past ; we are not aware of our future ; but, in common with everything else, we must have had a past, and must be going to have a future. Some day we may find ourselves able to realise both.

All we can cause or can observe is variety of *motion*—never creation or annihilation. And even the motion is *transferred* from one body to another, and transformed in the process ; it is not generated from nothing, nor can it