

Are We Reincarnated After Death?

By A. E. S. SMYTHE.

The Real Belief of a Theosophist

THEOSOPHY can be stated in the terms of any religion if it be so desired. Experience shows, however, that people who belong to any particular religion are more concerned about the name of their faith than its substance.

It does not commend itself to the ordinary religious person to hear that the same truths are taught in all religions. The phrases and terms may differ; more emphasis may be laid on one doctrine than another, but latent or implied one finds the same truths in them all. Many scholars of an intellectual rather than a spiritual turn, and anxious to exclude any religion but their own from the category of Religion, have defined religion in the terms of their own faith. Some Christians, for example, decline to recognize any religion as such that does not use the Bible as a text-book, overlooking the fact that all religions have their sacred books which convey the same spiritual truths in one form or another to the mind and heart and soul that reflects on such matters. For it must always be remembered that no one finds in any Bible or Sacred Book anything but what he brings to it or reads into it. It is the reader that brings the inspiration, not the book that gives it. One could not account otherwise for the differences of opinion and the four hundred sects more or less that have arisen over the study of the Bible. Each one reads into it what he has been trained to see, and he is earnestly warned not to listen to any interpretations that have not been endorsed by the body to which he belongs.

The exact contrary is the case with the Theosophist, who understands that truth is universal and that he has it in his own soul, but can only know it to the extent that he lives it. "A clean life, an open mind, a pure heart, an eager intellect, an unveiled spiritual perception, a brotherliness for one's co-disciple, a readiness to give and receive advice and instruction," are, therefore, in the words of Madame Blavatsky the first steps on the Path. It will be observed that these things apply to any religion, the Christian as well as another, and it is this fact that commends Theosophy to reasonable and unprejudiced people.

It should be clearly understood that Theosophists do not desire to tempt people away from the religion to which they belong. They only wish each person to try to understand his own religion better, and to seek its deeper spiritual meanings, instead of being content with its conventional forms, its stereotyped creeds, or its ritual routine. These should all convey more and not less to the student of Theosophy. If it be objected that many Theosophists do not belong to any religion and do not attend church regularly, such critics may be reminded of the fourth chapter of the Gospel of St. John. "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father. Ye worship that which ye know not: we worship that which we know: for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be His worshippers. God is spirit: and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (R.V.).

It is very largely because Theosophists lay stress on this truth that their views have been unpopular, because people like ceremonial and set beliefs and having things cut and dried. The other great religions of the world have the same teachings, as indeed the New Testament recognizes, and Jesus explicitly states (John x. 16).

Once this unity of thought and aspiration underlying all religion is grasped, a profound satisfaction takes hold of one. The world is no longer a chaos, but a place of order and system and progress. No man is out of place. No man suffers unjustly. No man is favored above his merit. Nothing is gained without effort. The universe is seen to be the abode of honesty and justice and right. How and why is this?

The question is an urgent one for all who begin to take thought about life and who have to face such world tragedies as the war with Germany. One need not go into the profounder metaphysics of The Secret Doctrine for the answer to this question. It is, in brief, that there is only One Person in the whole world. In the New Testament we are told that the Kingdom of Heaven is inside (*entos*) us, and that we are to pray to the Father which is in Heaven. The name given to Jesus, Emmanuel, means this truth also; God is in us. It is often repeated in that most spiritual scripture of India, the Bhagavad Gita, that "the Lord is seated in the heart of every creature." This Lord is called by some the Oversoul, by others God, by others Christ, and the various religions have each their own names for Him. Their conceptions vary as human ideas do, but it is in our spiritual identity with Him, that the brotherhood of the race, the brotherhood of Man, has its foundation. Our relation to this Person is the beginning and ending of religion and is the key to the understanding of all other religious questions.

The Secret Doctrine teaches "the fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul," and it is sufficient in an elementary account of Theosophy to say that all religions find their way back to this Divine Source. To know this unity is life in the highest and deepest sense. To be ignorant of it or to deny it, is death in the mystical sense. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these

THE second of a series of articles descriptive of various religions and faiths about which there is often much misunderstanding and controversy. The writer of this article, A. E. S. Smythe, is one of the foremost speakers on Theosophy in Canada—his assertions regarding their views may therefore be accepted as authentic.

Again let us emphasize that "Canadian Home Journal" neither advocates nor endorses any of the religions described—the articles are published to give information, not to arouse controversy.

are sons of God," says St. Paul, whose eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans is a treatise on this mystery, and of our interest in Him who is "the first-born among many brethren."

Popular Christianity has curiously distorted the teaching of Jesus in regard to men's souls. Much of our preaching is exhortation to save one's soul. This is due to a misapprehension of the facts, for which the translators of the New Testament are largely responsible. For all this talk of saving one's soul is wide of the mark. I have been in the habit of saying that the ninth chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke (like the eighth of Romans) contains all the occult teaching any one needs. At the 23rd verse one reads: "And He said unto all, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whosoever would save his soul (the word in Greek is *psyche*, though the translators render it "life") shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his soul for My sake, the same shall save it."

The Cross is a very ancient symbol, long antedating Christianity. We ought to remember what St. Augustine said: "What is now called the Christian religion, has existed among the ancients, and was not absent from the beginning of the human race, until Christ came in the flesh: from which time the true religion, which existed already, began to be called Christian." This "true religion" is what Theosophists call The Secret Doctrine. The Cross was the ancient symbol of the descent of spirit into matter; the Incarnation; the Word or Logos, becoming Man or flesh, as St. John expresses it; and "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." In the mystery by which all Souls are in fundamental identity with the Over-Soul, by which those who are not conscious of their divine origin are "dead, and their life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians iii.), we are all partakers in the Incarnation, which is the Cross and Passion of the Divine Life. We are the agents of the redemption of the world of matter into the world of Life; the Atonement is the at-one-ment of the lowest and the highest.

It is obvious that if men as individuals advance and evolve they will attain levels of power, of consciousness, and of wisdom far beyond anything in the experience of the ordinary man. It is idle to say that we cannot conceive such an expansion of our faculties. We see that there is a difference between the consciousness of the mineral, as Prof. Bose has shown us, and the consciousness of the vegetable; and between the consciousness of the vegetable and the consciousness of the animal; and between the consciousness of the animal and the consciousness of man.

There is a stage, many stages indeed, beyond the consciousness of the ordinary man and the consciousness of the Over-Soul, and it is our destiny to attain these successive stages by our own effort and according to our own will. Some people who do not understand the laws of growth think they might lose something by entering into a higher stage of consciousness. Would a dog lose anything by being endowed with the consciousness of a man? Does a boy or a girl lose anything by becoming a man or a woman? To become possessed of the consciousness of Christ is a forward step in evolution, the next goal of the race. As we do not lose our identity because our sense of sight is merged in the consciousness of light, so neither will we lose our identity when our sense of self is merged in the consciousness of Christ, or the Over-Soul.

One of the difficulties some people have in this connection is about the loss of memory. Memory has not so much to do with identity as some think. We forget most of the things we do, the thoughts we think, and the words we utter in the course of our lives. We are totally oblivious of most of the events in our commonplace existence in years gone past. But this loss of memory is the chief and practically the only objection most people have to the thought that they have lived before, that they are immortal.

The writer of the second epistle of Peter refers to this (i: 9), saying we are blind, short-sighted, having taken the draught of Lethe ("Lethe having taken" is the Greek phrase) and been purified from our ancient short-comings. So it comes about in

the merciful dispensation of the universe that every life is a fresh start, and while we bring back the character we have formed by our previous actions and decisions, and have to meet the results of our former deeds, whether for good or ill, we are relieved of the worthless memory of these ephemeral things, though their essence is preserved in our heart of hearts. Some think also that it is not just that we should suffer for things that we have done in past lives and which we have forgotten, or of which, at least, the brain is not conscious. But the real Self knows and is satisfied, because justice is one of the principles of its being, since, as we have seen, it is essentially one with the Over-Soul, and therefore desires justice above all things. It is no outside authority, no power outside ourselves, that brings us face to face with our old debts and requires their payment, with our old unlearned lessons and requires us to know them thoroughly. It is the Self within us which is just and requires justice, and which is wisdom, so that it leads us to know.

Desire for the world of sensation and of material life generally is very strong in us, and it is this desire that usually brings us back into bodily life again. This desire for life, or thirst for physical existence in the soul is called fire, and is symbolized by the tongue in the east. The Sanscrit word is *tanka*, and this force has to be conquered before we can attain what Christians call salvation. In the Epistle of James, chapter iii., there is an interesting passage on this point, obscured in the authorized version, however, by the translation. "The tongue (desire) is a fire; the world of iniquity among our members is the tongue, which defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the wheel of birth, and is set on fire by hell." Until desire is conquered we are bound to the wheel of birth. It can be conquered only by turning to the spiritual world for the Master who is within. United with Him there is no further need for reincarnation, and it is for this reason that little mention is made of reincarnation in the New Testament. Those who have entered into the Christ consciousness, or Nirvana, as the Buddhists call it, who have extinguished desire, do not need further births. This is what is meant in Revelation iii: 12, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out."

Those who have entered into this state of Nirvana, the extinction of desire, the "peace that passeth understanding," have nothing more to do with this earth in the present stage of creation or evolution. But there are some who participate in the active side of the nature of the Christ who said—"Lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the aeon," and they, when they have attained mastery over desire and the lower vehicles of the personal self, voluntarily incarnate again on earth, following the example of the great Teachers and Messengers, like Krishna, the Indian Christ, who said—"I produce myself among creatures whenever there is a decline of virtue, and an insurrection of vice and injustice in the world: and thus I incarnate from age to age for the preservation of the just, the destruction of the wicked, and the establishment of righteousness."

This was written long anterior to the Christian era, and Christians who believe that Christ came down from heaven and was born a little human infant, should have no difficulty about understanding incarnation, or in following the example of reincarnation and sacrifice which voluntary reincarnation for the sake of rendering service to others, implies.

There is nothing in religion, philosophy, or science, that Theosophy does not embrace and explain. It is obvious, therefore, that only a few aspects of it can be touched upon in a short article. The whole universe is open to the student who would unfold his inner faculties for such study. There is an organ in the brain called the conarium, or pineal gland, the activity of which depends on living according to the divine laws of nature, and the injunctions of morality, temperance and chastity which all religions preserve. This organ is sometimes called the third eye, and serves when active to convey to the brain such knowledge of the inner world as the ordinary eyes convey of the outer. The Master Jesus spoke of it in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew vi. 22), when He said: "The lamp of the body is the eye; if, therefore, thine eye be single" (active or perfect, would be a better rendering) "thy whole body is full of light." This is expounded in St. Luke xi. 34, 35, which may be rendered freely. "When thine eye is active thy whole body is full of light, but when thine eye is useless (*poneros*) thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed, therefore, that the light that is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body, therefore, be full of light, having no part dark, everything shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light." There is no occult gift more important than this of the inner vision, "the light that never was on sea or land, the consecration and the poet's dream," as Wordsworth describes it. There are still many who disbelieve in it, but all the prophets and the seers and the saints had it, and it was no imaginary faculty but a real gift. It can be exercised only by those who have abandoned all desire for self, who are in fact utterly unselfish. There is an automatic

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