

## Books for Further Reading

Reincarnation ..... Annie Besant  
Reincarnation: Fact or Fallacy?

Geoffrey Hodson

First Principles of Theosophy . C. Jinarajadasa

Do the Dead Suffer? ..... L. W. Burt

The Other Side of Death .. C. W. Leadbeater

The Key to Theosophy ..... H. P. Blavatsky

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# THE PANORAMA OF IMMORTALITY

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## THE PANORAMA OF IMMORTALITY

**I**T is not untrue to say that throughout all epochs in history there has been no period when man has not been pre-occupied, indeed troubled, about the mystery of death and what part death plays in the wide scheme of things, if there is a wide scheme of things. There is, apart from the Bibles of all religions, a large literature, if you go looking for it, on what happens after death. There are the voluminous researches by the scientists who have investigated psychic phenomena; there is the experience of amateurs in what is called spiritualism, and there is also the wide body of literature of reputable people who go under the general name of occultists who claim to possess supernormal faculties beyond those of the ordinary senses which enable them to investigate this sort of thing. A very good and cheap book along the scientific side of this wide subject is Dr. Raynor Johnson's *Psychical Research*.

Now there is no space to go into this subject of what is claimed to happen after death, but I have mentioned it in general terms at this point because it fits into a place in a wide panorama which I will be trying to sketch; call it if you like the panorama of immortality. I think if one looks at this panorama on a wide enough screen, death is seen rather as an incident and not, as it is often looked at, as a crisis, or as the crisis in the spiritual life of the individual. The scientist, by investigation and experiment, tells us all about the *detail* of the make-up of things in the world. The philosopher, on the other hand, tries to see the detail within the panorama of all knowledge. While the

detail is important in one sense, the panorama is important in another sense. Jesus and Buddha did not tell us much about the detail with which science is concerned, but they told us a lot about the panorama which sees life as a whole with which religion and philosophy are concerned.

### Differences in People

When one speaks about the question of immortality, that is the continuance of the identity of the person after death, it inevitably brings into focus allied questions. Significant among these is the dilemma arising from the vast inequality in the faculties and characters of people who live and die; why some are born fools and others geniuses; some saints and others sinners. Now all the religions of the world teach survival after death in some form or another. The scientific and other research into the invisible world under what is broadly called psychic phenomena seems, in the opinion of a number of investigators of high standing, not only to confirm the survival always asserted by religion, but also to indicate that the *personal identity* of the individual endures after death. The fact that Mr. Jones has lost his physical body through death makes little or no immediate personal change in him. He is in a better world in every way, but he is still Mr. Jones reacting to and learning from a richer and more ample environment to the extent that he is able to do so.

If this point of view is correct, it would follow that there must be just as much a mixture of types of individuals in the after-death world as there is in this world. A primitive New Guinea headhunter who eats his grandfather as a matter of routine dies in due course as does a Shakespeare or a Mozart. It does not seem rational that the act of death, as such, should suddenly



make the headhunter and Mozart equal in capacities. Therefore, the after-death world which would follow from the view above outlined would be a dynamic one and not the static one implied by the teachings of some branches of orthodox theology, with its rigid opposites of heaven and hell, its eternity of duration of these two states, and its doctrine of salvation often depending primarily on "right belief." Indeed, so much emphasis is placed on "right belief" by some exponents of the Bible that they even go so far as to say that if their interpretation of certain of its texts is not accepted by any person to whose attention this has been drawn in his lifetime, that person will incur, after death, the dire consequences of irrevocably losing his chances of salvation. If this view is accepted it would follow that the sector of the after-death state, called perdition or hell, must have a substantial population of heretics.

## Different Theories

I do not think that what a moment ago I called the "panorama of immortality" can be apprehended fully until we have first looked at what is a related question, namely, the strange mystery of the individuality of man; the dilemma which would occur to our New Guinea head-hunter if, in a lucid interval of introspection, he looked at such a many-sided and picturesque person of genius as say Mr. Churchill and asked, "Why is it that you are you and I am I"? Such a question brings into our panorama three theories or explanations of human inequalities. The first of these theories is that each person born into this world alive, or indeed born to survive only a few minutes or a few days, is a special creation of God whose incalculable will controls that person's destinies, and no reason given.

Here we see a position where, to use the language of the lottery, some draw blanks and others draw prizes.

The second of these three theories would be that of heredity. The importance of heredity in this connection cannot be overlooked, but it is impossible to embark on it in a short article. If heredity accounts for a great deal, there is much that it does not elucidate, such as the appearance of genius, in unexpected places; the striking differences in capacity, temperament and what not between members of the same family; and, also, why one person should be born into a background of bad heredity and another get a birth of good heredity.

This brings us to the third of the theories to explain the mystery of human inequalities, known as reincarnation. The fundamental basis of it is what every religion teaches—the immortality of the soul. It says that the innermost part of man, call it if you like, his soul or spirit, puts a part of itself down into the material world through the gateway of birth to gather the experiences which will enable it to grow into perfection. Many such occasions as this are necessary because the brief span of even the longest life is hopelessly inadequate to accomplish this, as every one would agree. But behind this process of repeated lives, or descents into the material world, to put it in this way, would be the law of nature which says that each cause produces an effect. In the world of our everyday lives we know that unchangeable laws of nature operate, such as the law of gravitation, the laws governing chemical processes and the rest. This normally refers to the "seen" world; but the reincarnation theory would contend that laws of nature, equally unchangeable, govern the moral and spiritual nature of man; and the Bible says so too, for it tells us that we cannot gather figs from thistles and that with



what measure we mete out it will be meted unto us.

Every person commences his life from a tiny cell a-hundred-and-twenty-fifth of an inch in diameter, wonder of wonders! Looked at, however, from the point of view of reincarnation the person into whom this tiny cell eventually grows has two facets to his or her make-up. The first facet, for want of a better name, might be called the *individuality*, and the second the *personality*. The individuality, the real self, existed before birth and cannot be touched by death. It is a fragment of God. The personality, on the other hand, commenced at birth and was woven into the very warp and woof of the tiny cell when it commenced its wondrous journey. This is another way of saying that when the time of physical birth has come, the immortal being has gathered round himself what we have called a personality. St. Paul has said that at *death* the mortal takes on immortality. One might reverse the metaphor and say that at *birth* the opposite happens, the *immortal* puts on *mortality*; or, in other words, wraps itself in a body subject to birth and death, growth and decay. It leaves a timeless world and enters a world of duration-of-time to work out a destiny.

### An Example

Let us now apply this situation to our hypothetical Mr. Jones. What we called his personality can be divided into two parts—a “seen” part or physical body which is dispersed at death; and an unseen part which survives death for a longer or shorter period of time, depending on certain circumstances. In the case of a primitive person like our head-hunter, the period of time may be short (a few years only) because such a person would have little or none of those elements in himself which can find expression only in the finer part

of the environment of the after-death life; but if Mr. Jones is a gifted person of high ideals, his after-death life may extend to many centuries. In a situation such as this, a period of “many centuries” should not occur to one as very odd when one contemplates the enormous time-eras in which science reckons things. Science tells us that it took Nature a million years to evolve the wing of a bird.

So in course of time the after-death life of the head-hunter and Mr. Jones comes to an end. They vanish from the picture for ever and all that remains of them is preserved as added experience distilled into faculty and stored in the respective permanent, immortal entities of which they formed part when they set out on the adventurous journey of birth and death, commencing from the cell so small as to be visible only to a powerful microscope. This process being completed, the cycle of birth and death is recommenced in a new adventure. The immortal being which you will remember we called the individuality now takes on another body or personality, which on this occasion might be known as Mr. Robinson; or, indeed, it might be someone who eventually becomes Mrs. Robinson. Variety is the spice of life and the immortal soul of man is outside the divisions of sex. The lessons available to it in one sex are as necessary as those in another.

And so this pamphlet has been called the *panorama* of immortality. An endeavour has been made to point out the role which death plays when you look at man's journey towards human perfection in the wider vista. This role can be summed up in the following definition which says: “Death is not the end of anything except a personality . . . a shadow cast in matter by an immortal being who lives all lives . . .”