

# HAVE LIVED IN OTHER AGES

### Cambridge Professor Claims People Existed Before Formation of Present Bodies

Professor J. Ellis McTaggart of Cambridge university, England, says we have all lived on earth before and are all going to live on earth again.

Prof. Taggart thinks there is much better chance of proving immortality with the addition of pre-existence than without it. There are two ways in which a proof of immortality may be attempted. The first he calls the directly metaphysical way. We may attempt to show that the nature of man is such that he cannot cease to exist while the universe continues to exist; or that his nature is eternal and that an eternal nature cannot have an end in time; or pursue some similar line of thought.

In this case it seems to him that immortality almost necessarily would stand or fall with the theory of pre-existence. He does not see how existence in future time can be shown to be necessary in the case of any being whose existence in past time is admitted not to be necessary. "If the universe got along without me a hundred years ago what reason could be given for denying that it might get on without me a hundred years hence?"

Or, "If my nature is compatible with its temporal manifestation having begun at some point of time could we find any reason for supposing it to be inconsistent with that nature that its temporal manifestation should cease at some point in time?" His conclusion then is that any demonstration of immortality is likely to show that each of us exists through all time past, as well as future, whether time be held to be finite or infinite.

#### Improvement Goes on After Death.

There are many considerations which the Cambridge professor finds strongly to suggest that we existed before the formation of our present bodies. In the first place, even the best men are not when they die in such a condition of intellectual and moral perfection as would fit them to enter heaven immediately, if heaven is to be taken as a state of perfection which renders all further improvement unnecessary and impossible. This fact generally is recognized and one or two alternatives commonly is adopted to meet it. The first is that some tremendous improvement out of proportion to that which can be observed in life is effected at the moment of death, at any rate in the case of those who die under certain conditions. For this view Prof. Taggart knows no arguments.

The other more probable view is that the process of gradual improvement can go on in each of us after the death of our present bodies. If we adopt this view he finds it only reasonable to take one more step, and to hold that this life will be followed by other lives like it, each separated from its predecessor and its successor by death and rebirth. For otherwise we should be limited to the hypothesis that a process begun in a single short earthly life then should be continued in one indefinitely long life not divided by death and birth at all. And to suppose without any reason such a sudden change from the order of our present experience seems unjustifiable.

#### Single Lifetime Always Incomplete.

Our lives, too, the professor finds to be not only incomplete in their results but fragmentary in their nature. All continually find that a process is cut short by death, that one life holds a fault without retribution, a preparation without an achievement, while in other cases, where the life has lasted longer, the process is complete between birth and death. The more probable conclusion is that the process which is worked out in an earthly life in the one case will be worked out in an earthly life in the other case also, even though death has intervened.

Such problems as these never have been put with more force than by Browning. Both in "Rabbi Ben Ezra" and in "Evelyn Hope" he adopts, at any rate for dramatic purposes, the hypothesis of a number of earthly lives. If a number of earthly lives once is granted it would be gratuitous to suppose that this was the first of the long chain, and since even the lowest man is high above many living beings, there would be strong reason for believing that it was in previous lives that he had gained this relative superiority.

Again, as a man grows up certain tendencies and qualities make themselves manifest in him. They cannot be due entirely to his environment, for they often are different in people whose environment has been similar. We call these the man's natural character and assume that he came into existence with it. Now, when we look at the natural characters of men, we find that they have a great resemblance to those differentiations

which can be produced in the course of a single life. One man seems to start with an impotence to resist some particular temptation which exactly resembles the impotence which has been produced in another man by continued yielding to the same temptation.

#### Benefit by Experience of Previous Lives.

One man again through life has a calm and serene virtue which another man gains only by years of strenuous effort. Others again have instinctive powers of judging nice and difficult questions of quality, in pictures for example, or precious stones, which place them soon after they have turned their attention to the subject in a position to which less fortunate men can attain, if at all, only by the experience of years.

A still more striking instance is to be found in personal relations. Two people who have seen but little of each other often are drawn together by a force equal to that which could be generated only by years of mutual trust and mutual assistance. The significance of this fact Prof. McTaggart thinks has been much underrated. As a rule, the only case of it which is considered is the case when the attraction is between people of different sexes, and the inexplicability then hastily is adjudged to be due the irrationality of sexual desire.

Here, then, are characteristic ties which are born with us, which are not acquired in our present lives and which strikingly like characteristics which in other cases we know to be due to the condensed results of experience. Is it not probable that the innate characteristics also are due to the condensed results of experience, in this case, of expedience in an earlier life? Thus queries Ellis McTaggart.

Without memory of our present life, however, it may be said our future life would be not ours. We might as well be mortal, it is maintained, as be immortal without a memory beyond the present life. To this the professor answers that memory chiefly is of value in our lives in three ways. In the first place it makes us wiser. The results which have been seen and conclusions at which we have arrived are preserved in memory, and add to our present knowledge.

In the second place it makes us morally better. The memory of a temptation, whether it has been resisted or not, under various circumstances, may help us in resisting present temptation. In the third place, it may tell us that people with whom we are thrown and now are related are the people whom we have loved in the past. And this may enter as an element in our present love for them.

Can we be wiser by reason of something which we have forgotten? Unquestionably we can. Wisdom depends primarily on a mind competent to deal with facts and to form judgments. The acquisition of knowledge and experience may strengthen the mind. And a man who dies after acquiring knowledge, and all men acquire some, might enter into his new life deprived indeed of his knowledge but not deprived of the increased strength and delicacy of mind which he had gained by virtue of that knowledge. And if so he will be wiser in the second life because of what has happened in the first. Progress, therefore, has not perished with memory.

#### Virtue Acquired in Moral Contests.

So, again with virtue. And there the point perhaps is clearer. For it is obvious that the memory of moral vicissitudes is of no moral value except in so far as it helps to form the moral character, and that if this is done, the memory could be discarded without loss. We cannot doubt that a character may remain determined by an event which has been forgotten. "I have forgotten the greater number of good and evil acts which I have done in this life. And yet each must have left its imprint upon my character."

And so if a man carries over into his next life the disposition and tendencies which he has gained by the moral contests of this life of value of those contests has not been destroyed by the death which has destroyed the memory of them.

So with love. What is uniquely valuable, the professor argues, is the relation to each particular person, and not the particular acts and feelings in which that relation is expressed. Much has been forgotten in any friendship, but the friendship is sweet and true and enduring by reason of the accumulated results of these forgotten episodes. So our relations with the people that we meet in this earth life are sweet and

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---See W. R. Haines' ad. page 5.

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