

**THEOSOPHICAL
MANUALS, NO. 2:
REINCARNATION**

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Theosophical Manuals, No. 2: Reincarnation by Annie Besant

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ANNIE BESANT

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W. W. Wood

REINCARNATION.

BY

ANNIE BESANT, F. T. S.

(NINTH THOUSAND.)

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PREFACE.

Few words are needed in sending this little book out into the world. It is the second of a series of Manuals designed to meet the public demand for a simple exposition of Theosophical teachings. Some have complained that our literature is at once too abstruse, too technical, and too expensive for the ordinary reader, and it is our hope that the present series may succeed in supplying what is a very real want. Theosophy is not only for the learned; it is for all. Perhaps among those who in these little books catch their first glimpse of its teachings, there may be a few who will be led by them to penetrate more deeply into its philosophy, its science, and its religion, facing its abstruse problems with the student's zeal and the neophyte's ardour. But these manuals are not written for the eager student, whom no initial difficulties can daunt; they are written for the busy men and women of the work-a-day world, and seek to make plain some of the great truths that render life easier to bear and death easier to face. Written by servants of the Masters who are the Elder Brothers of our race, they can have no other object than to serve our fellow-men.



REINCARNATION.

INTRODUCTION.

IF it be difficult for a new truth to gain a hearing amid the strife of tongues that marks our modern civilisation, it is yet more difficult for a truth to make itself heard, which has become new only by force of age. If our eye could sweep over the intellectual history of the race, unrolled before us for centuries of millenniums, then a gap in the dominance of some world-wide idea, stretching over some few hundreds of years among a small number of the nations, would but slightly impress us. But when that gap—a mere partial fissure in an immemorial past—includes the intellectual development of Europe, and is scanned by Europeans, it assumes an importance quite out of proportion to its relative extent in time, its relative weight in argument. Great and valuable as is the contribution brought by Europe to the mental treasure-house of mankind, we Europeans are very apt to over-estimate it, and to forget that the very brief period of intellectual achievement in Europe cannot rationally be taken as outweighing the total mental fruitage of the non-European races, gathered over

thousands of centuries. This looming large of our own recent past, until, as a plate held before our eyes shuts out the sun, it hides the past of the world from our mental gaze, is a danger against which we should be on our guard. Neither for individuals nor for nations is intellectual arrogance synonymous with intellectual stature; the feeling which makes the Englishman look on all dark-skinned races as inferior, and lump them comprehensively as "niggers," from whom nothing can be learned, is a feeling essentially petty and parochial. The wise listen most readily to those whose habits of thought are most alien from their own, knowing that thus they may chance to catch a glimpse of some new aspect of Truth, instead of seeing once more the mere reflexion of the aspect already familiar. Men's racial habits, traditions, surroundings, are as coloured glasses through which they look at the sun of Truth; each glass lends its own tint to the sunbeam, and the white ray is transmitted as red, or blue, or yellow—what you will. As we cannot get rid of our glass and catch the pure uncoloured radiance, we do wisely to combine the coloured rays and so obtain the white.

Now Reincarnation is a truth that has swayed the minds of innumerable millions of our race, and has moulded the thoughts of the vast majority for uncounted centuries. It dropped out of the European mind during the Dark Ages, and so ceased to influence our mental and moral development—very much, be it said in passing, to the injury of that development. For the last hundred years it has from time to time flashed through the minds of some of the greater Westerns, as a possible explanation of some of life's most puzzling problems: and during

the last dozen years, since its clear enunciation as an essential part of the Esoteric Teaching, it has been constantly debated, and is as constantly gaining ground, among the more thoughtful students of the mysteries of life and of evolution.

There is, of course, no doubt that the great historical religions of the East included the teaching of Reincarnation as a fundamental tenet. In India, as in Egypt, Reincarnation was at the root of ethics. Among the Jews it was held commonly by the Pharisees,* and the popular belief comes out in various phrases in the *New Testament*, as when John the Baptist is regarded as a reincarnation of Elijah, or as when the disciples ask whether the man born blind is suffering for the sin of his parents or for some former sin of his own. The *Zohar*, again, speaks of souls as being subjected to transmigration. "All souls are subject to revolution (metempsychosis, *a'leem b'gil-goo'ah*), but men do not know the ways of the Holy One; blessed be it! they are ignorant of the way they have been judged in all time, and before they came into this world and when they have quitted it."† The *Kether Malkuth* evidently has the same idea as that conveyed by Josephus, when it says: "If she (the soul) be pure, then shall she obtain favour and rejoice in the latter day; but if she hath been defiled then shall she wander for a time in pain and despair."‡ So also, we find the doctrine taught by eminent Fathers of the Church, and Ruffinus§ states

* Josephus, *Antiq.*, xviii. i. † 3, says the virtuous "shall have power to revive and live again."

† *Zohar*, ii. fol. 99, b. 59. Quoted in Myer's *Qabbalah*, p. 198.

‡ Quoted in Myer's *Qabbalah*, p. 198.

§ Letter to Anastasius, quoted by E. D. Walker, in *Reincarnation: a Study of Forgotten Truth*.