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*REBIRTH OR IMMORTALITY.*<sup>1</sup>

THERE can be few aspects of the Christian doctrine of immortality which have not been discussed and defended by previous lecturers on the Drew foundation. But the Christian doctrine of immortality is not the only solution offered of the problem of the life to come. There is another solution: the doctrine of transmigration and rebirth. It is a doctrine which has not lacked admirers in modern Europe. Goethe used it to explain the attraction he felt in one of the ladies whom he loved. In some previous existence she had surely been his wife. Thinkers like David Hume and Schopenhauer have spoken of this doctrine of rebirth as the only form of belief in an after-life worthy of a philosopher's attention, whilst, in our own days, a philosopher so eminent as Dr. McTaggart speaks of the possibility of rebirth in words of almost lyric beauty. But in the West the doctrine has an exotic air. It is an ingenious surmise, a great perhaps. It expresses the speculation of the few; it is not the conviction of the masses of the people. Only in the East is it a life-axiom, and my excuse for venturing to speak on it is, that for some years I lived in almost daily contact with men to whom it was the logical *prius* of all their thought and the sure explanation of life's tragedies and inequalities.

I.

The origin of this doctrine of transmigration and *karma* is still obscure. It is altogether alien from the simple piety of the *Rigveda*. There life was prized, and men prayed that they might "live a hundred lengthened

<sup>1</sup> A lecture given on the Drew Foundation, Hackney College, October, 1923.

autumns,"<sup>1</sup> and trusted that, when at last death came, they might enjoy in the world to come a life, like that on earth, but more rich and joyous. Even in the dreary period of the *Brāhmaṇas* it was still life, not death, men sought, and by now there was the fear of death, not in this life alone, but in the life to come. And with this dread of future death, we find traces of a hope of future birth which might lead again to life on earth, for rebirth is as yet regarded, not as curse, but boon.<sup>2</sup> Already we find the beginnings of that belief in the retributive adaptation of circumstance and conduct which the doctrine of *karma* was later to express; for, in a difficult passage, it is taught that a man is born into the world which he has made.<sup>3</sup> But such references are few, and seem to be little more than stray surmises. First, in the *Upanishads* do we find the clear formulation of that doctrine of transmigration and of *karma* which became the distinctive feature of Indian thought, and, through the spread of Buddhism, was carried far and wide into Asiatic lands.

It is probable that the earliest reference to the doctrine in the *Upanishads* is to be found in an obscure speech by Yājñavalkya, the great Brāhman sage. Yājñavalkya had claimed a prize offered by a king to the wisest Brāhman, and when his right to this was challenged by Ārtabhāga, justified his claim by revealing the way of knowledge by which the sage might gain the endless world. Ārtabhāga then asked about the man not thus redeemed, but this Yājñavalkya would not answer before others. "We two only will know of this. This is not for us two to speak of in public. The two went away and deliberated. What they said was *karma* (action). What they praised was *karma*. Verily, one becomes good by good action, bad by

<sup>1</sup> *Ṛigveda*, x. 18.      <sup>2</sup> *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, i. 5. 3. 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.* vi. 2, 2, 27.

bad action.”<sup>1</sup> In the same *Upanishad*, Yājñavalkya expounds his new-found secret in metaphors which have become the commonplaces of Indian thought. The soul passes from body to body, like a caterpillar passing from leaf to leaf, and makes for itself new embodiments like a goldsmith remodelling a piece of gold. “The doer of good becomes good. The doer of evil becomes evil.” “As is his desire, such is his resolve; as is his resolve, such the action he performs; what action he performs, that he procures for himself.”<sup>2</sup>

The doctrine, thus isolated, is plain and intelligible. A man's acts create his destiny, and the soul wins for itself in its next birth an embodiment which corresponds to its acts in this. But in a country as conservative as India, the old is rarely displaced entirely by the new, and this new and mysterious doctrine of soul-wandering was combined with the early eschatology which spoke of the world where Yama, the first man, ruled over the spirits of the blessed. Men went there by the *Way of the Fathers*. From it the evil were shut out. For them there was only the lower darkness. A higher way there was, the *Way of the Gods*, by which Agni bore the sacrificial offerings to the gods, and, by that way also, men might ascend to enjoy the bliss of the gods. The classic texts for the doctrine of transmigration and *karma* incorporate with this doctrine these earlier views. In India, where cremation is common, it was natural to think of the burning of the dead as a sacrifice borne upwards to the gods by Agni, the god of the sacrificial fire, and these texts teach first the obscure doctrine of the five fires. The faith of the dead man passes upwards, and is five times offered in sacrifice to the gods, and in these five fires is depicted the stages of the soul's

<sup>1</sup> *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* iii. 2. 6. 13 (Hume's translation).

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* iv. 4. 3-5.

descent to be reborn on earth. From the moon, the soul passes into rain ; from rain, into food ; from food, into the seed of the male, and from this is formed the embryo from which, in due time, appears the man. With this doctrine is combined the doctrine of the two paths. The wise, who know the doctrine of the five fires, "and those, too, who in the forest truly worship faith," ascend by the bright Way of the Gods to the worlds of Brahman and for them "there is no return." Men, devout and good, but unillumined thus, ascend by the less splendid Way of the Fathers to the moon, and from there descend, in the way described, to be born again on earth. In the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* there is a third path. "Those who know not these two ways, become crawling and flying insects, and whatever there is here that bites." <sup>1</sup>

The doctrine of transmigration and *karma*, so expressed, is very hard to visualise, and the passage of the soul from rain into seed seems a precarious one ; but the main idea is clear. The wise pass up by the Way of the Gods to the world of Brahman, from which there is no return. The devout pass by the Way of the Fathers to the moon, and, after enjoying there the fruit of their good works, are born again on earth. The careless are, after death, born on earth as noxious insects. In the corresponding passage in the *Chhāndogya Upanishad* a differentiation is made among those who journey along the Way of the Fathers to the moon. Those of "pleasant conduct" here will obtain a "pleasant birth" in one of the high castes. Those of repulsive conduct will have a repulsive birth, be born as dog, or swine, or outcaste.<sup>2</sup> As retribution is thus active in the Way of the Fathers, there is no need for the third path, mentioned in the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad*, yet this too is retained, and this confusing addition has become

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* vi. 2. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Chhāndogya Upanishad*, v. 10. 7.

an integral part of later Indian thought. Such are the classic texts for the Hindu doctrine of transmigration and *karma*. Their inconsistencies are manifest, and in the *Upanishads* themselves the attempt is made to reconcile them. Thus in the *Kaushītaki Upanishad* it is taught that all who depart from this world go to the moon. Only later do the two paths diverge, so that those unfit to dwell there descend as rain, and are born "either as a worm, or a moth, or as a fish, or as a bird, or as a lion, or as a wild boar, or as a snake, or as a tiger, or as a person, or as some other in this or that condition, he is born again here according to his deeds (*karman*), according to his knowledge."<sup>1</sup>

The *Upanishads* are not systematic works. They give the utterances, not of philosophers, but of seers, and it would be unreasonable to expect to find in them clear and coherent teaching. But the inconsistencies of the doctrine of transmigration and *karma* seem to be more than accidental. Certainly they are in no way removed in the elaborate exposition of the Vedānta given by Śāṅkarāchārya, who ranks among the greatest systematisers of our race. Esoterically he holds that nothing is real but the attributeless Brahman. Exoterically, there is the karmic order in which gods and men are alike involved. He was evidently acutely conscious of the difficulties of the doctrine of transmigration. What connexion, for instance, is there between the soul in this birth and the next? To this, his answer is hesitating and confused, whilst to the question, why should souls be reborn, "when they ascend to the sphere of the moon for the express purpose of finding there a complete requital of their works," he gives an answer more curious than convincing. "When only a little of the effects of their works is left, they can no longer stay there. For, as some courtier, who has joined the king's court with all the

<sup>1</sup> *Kaushītaki Upanishad*, i. 2.

requisites which the king's service demands, is unable to remain at court any longer when, in consequence of his long stay most of his things are worn out, so that he is perhaps left with a pair of shoes and an umbrella only ; so the soul, when possessing only a small particle of the effects of its works, can no longer remain in the sphere of the moon."<sup>1</sup> But Śaṅkarāchārya seems to feel himself the inadequacy of this explanation and suggests that a solution may be found in the difference between ritual and moral works. Ritual works earn heaven ; failure to perform them, hell. Moral works earn on earth an appropriate birth. Thus the greatest of crimes, such as the murder of a Brāhman, require many evil births on earth to expiate them.<sup>2</sup> Śaṅkarāchārya's suggestion does not seem to have had much influence, and popular literature depicts with lurid detail the frightful hells and the loathsome births on earth which alike await the doer of evil deeds.

## II.

Difficult as is the doctrine of transmigration and *karma*, obscure and inconsistent as is its presentation in the classic Hindu texts, it has become the logical *prius* of Hindu thought. I think we can all feel its attractiveness. As a recent writer remarks, "There is an undeniable dignity in the Hindu conception of the soul, pursuing its long pilgrimage through decaying worlds, until at length it reaches home in the endless sea."<sup>3</sup> To Hindus themselves, the interest of the doctrine is not so much speculative as practical. They are not greatly concerned with forecasts of future births, or with attempts to remember past existences. What they are concerned to have is this : an explanation of life's inequalities. And in the doctrine of *karma* they

<sup>1</sup> *Vedāntasūtras*, iii. 1. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.* iii. 1. 9-15.

<sup>3</sup> J. B. Pratt, *India and Its Faiths*, p. 106.

rightly claim to have an explanation which all alike can understand and which does seem to vindicate the justice of the universe.

Any explanation is easier to defend than no explanation, and that is where Hinduism seems to have the advantage over Christianity. Soon after I went to India, first the nephew, and then the son of an honoured Indian colleague died of typhoid, just as they were completing very successful university careers. A Hindu judge, who was calling on me a few days after the second death, asked me how I explained it all. I had no explanation, but he had. It was due to some evil *karma* of the past. Yet such explanations, facile as they are, do not make life's burdens easier to carry. It is all very well for the Brāhman to ascribe his advantages to the good *karma* accumulated in a previous birth, but it does not help the Pariah to be told that his degradation, which makes his very proximity a contamination to the Brāhman, is due to evil deeds, done in an earlier life of which he has no knowledge and no recollection. For the miserable it is no gospel to be told that "the Good Law is working on with undeviating accuracy, that its Agents apply it everywhere with unerring insight, with unfailing strength, and that all is therefore very well with the world and with its struggling Souls."<sup>1</sup> Actually the universal Hindu view has been that all is not "very well with the world and its struggling souls." The world is getting steadily and inevitably worse. The golden age was in the past. Ours is the *kalī yuga*, the iron age, last and most evil of all. Nor for those who find life an ill, is there the consolation of life's transiency. A Western poet can sing :

"This life holds nothing good for us ;  
But it ends soon, and never more can be ;

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Besant, *Karma*, p. 50.



But we know nothing of it ere our birth,  
And can know nothing when consigned to earth.  
I ponder these thoughts, and they comfort me."

"This life holds nothing good for us." That, in all the later *Upanishads*, was held to be an obvious truth. But life recurs and recurs, and escape from the bondage of rebirth became the supreme quest of Indian thought.

The doctrine has not only increased the misery it professes to explain. It has led to an undue acquiescence in others' sorrows. The blind, the maimed, the downtrodden and the bereaved are not unfortunates to be helped and comforted; they are criminals enduring the inexorable consequences of evil deeds. And this has stayed the course of pity, and allowed harsh customs to remain unchecked. Thus, when Christian missionaries began their work among the outcastes, they were told by Hindus that the work would be in vain. The degradation and semi-servitude of the outcastes were the inevitable results of deeds done in a previous birth which in this lifetime have to be expiated. The Hindu doctrine has been proved false to fact. There are in South India many Christians of outcaste origin who, in education and character, are at least the equal of many high caste Hindus. The success of these movements deserves more attention than it has generally received, for it is a clear proof that a man's lot is not the fixed result of deeds done in a previous birth. Spiritual forces can, in an improved environment, produce even in his present life a radical change of a man's character and circumstances. To-day, in imitation of the Christian Church, there are Hindu societies for the uplift of the Depressed Classes. It is significant of much that the most ardent workers have belonged, not to orthodox Hinduism, but to the Prārthanā Samāj, in which the doctrine of *karma* is rejected or ignored. Yet this is surely natural. It is hard to work for the un-

fortunate, if we regard them, not as unfortunate, but accursed, incapable in this life of any improvement.

The doctrine of transmigration and *karma*, though primarily an attempt to explain life's inequalities, is also an assertion of the principle of retribution. Here too its success seems incomplete. There is an apparent poetic justice in the popular form of the doctrine. As the *Laws of Manu* put it, "Men who delight in doing hurt become carnivorous animals ; those who eat forbidden food, worms ; thieves, creatures who consume their own kind." "For stealing grain, a man becomes a rat." "For stealing meat, a vulture, for stealing vehicles, a camel." <sup>1</sup> Against such a form of the theory, Herder's criticism is still unanswerable. If a man, who is a tiger in cruelty, becomes at his next birth an actual tiger, that is no true expiation. As a tiger he will have no conscience, and will be able to ravage and kill without remorse. And in its more subtle forms, the doctrine still fails to reveal the connexion between the joys and sorrows of this life, and the good deeds and bad of a previous existence. It is hard to believe that the newborn babe, in its appealing helplessness and apparent innocence, is really an old and world-weary traveller, who in former births may have been, not innocent, but wicked and sensual. And, when the child grows up, what knowledge has it of any earlier existences ? Mr. Leadbeater can tell us quite a lot about previous lives. Who of us can make that claim ? And, like ourselves, most Hindus confess that they know nothing about their former births. Thus, in the *Bhagavadgītā* Krishna expressly says that it is by his divine power that he knows of his previous incarnations, whilst Arjuna, his royal worshipper, is ignorant of his. And much of the awe with which men regarded Gautama the Buddha was due to the belief that he had

<sup>1</sup> *Laws of Manu*, xii. 59. 62. 63. 67.

the supernatural power of knowing of his own and others' earlier lives. Nor has Hindu philosophy succeeded in explaining the connexion between the deeds of a former birth and this present existence. We have only to turn to Śaṅkarāchārya's elaborate discussion of this problem to realise the difficulty of relating the effects of past deeds to a soul which is regarded as neutral and insentient.

The doctrine of *karma* in its classic Hindu form makes of retribution an inevitable law, concerned not with doers but with deeds. It is surely not an accident that the *Upanishads* which first formulate this doctrine have as their prime quest a redemption which ignores altogether the effect of deeds. The doctrine of *karma* treats retribution as an end, and not a means. Its justice is more blind and inexorable than that of the most unimaginative and pedantic of our judges, for, crude and harsh as criminal justice often is, judges are expected to take into consideration the degree to which the wrongdoer is responsible. But in the Hindu view, justice works blindly on, and deeds and their effects are thought of as if they were terms in an algebraic equation. And from the time of the *Upanishads*, the supreme endeavour of Hindu thought has been, in natural reaction, to escape altogether from a bondage more terrible than that which any law court can inflict, for it lasts, not for one lifetime, but for an endless succession of births and deaths. And so the redemption which the *Upanishads* proclaim, and which Śaṅkarāchārya and many a philosopher since have reaffirmed, is a redemption unrelated in any way to deeds, a redemption which comes from the intuitive realisation of the unity of the soul with Brahman. For redemption, thus conceived, good deeds are, at best, only a preliminary. As the *Upanishads* sometimes assert with almost brutal emphasis, for the man thus redeemed, good and evil deeds alike have no meaning, for

all activity belongs to that illusory sphere from which the wise man is liberated. And that is part of the tragedy of Indian life to-day. The doctrine of *karma*, by its exclusive emphasis on retribution, has led to a view of redemption which empties life in the world of meaning, a redemption whose nearest analogy is a dreamless sleep. Such a redemption is no Gospel for a rejuvenated India. Nor are Hindus to-day content to regard this age as a *kali yuga*, an iron age, and to look backwards to a golden past. Many of them are looking forward with high hopes to the time when India shall have a great and honoured place in the councils of the world. They desire to break down the barriers of caste, to uplift the depressed, and to unite all Indians in proud service to their Motherland, but the doctrine of *karma* is a grave obstacle. It unnerves effort, for it turns the unfortunate into the accursed, and makes this present life incapable of improvement, for each man's life is the inexorable effect of deeds done in previous lives of which he has no knowledge.

### III.

It would appear then that the doctrine of *karma* has increased the burden of the sorrow it sought to explain, and, by over-emphasising retribution, has led to a view of redemption which ignores altogether the effect of deeds. Yet the doctrine does provide an explanation of life's injustices which all can understand, and, if it be a mere contest of rival theories, it would be hard to show that this doctrine should be abandoned in favour of that doctrine of natural immortality which has been common in the West. In the East, men have seen in existence mere evil, and found in the annihilation of personality the supreme redemption. In the West, it has been commoner to desire the continuity of existence and to regard annihilation as, at

most, a dreadful possibility reserved for the finally impenitent. Apart from a belief in God, I do not know that the view of the West has much advantage over that of the East. Why should men desire life after death, if they have no interests which reach beyond the grave, why regard immortality as a boon, if the things they prize are not such as have eternal value? Dealt with in isolation, the two theories are both best regarded as reasonable, but precarious hypotheses. The issue between them cannot be settled by general considerations. It can be settled, if at all, only by reference to our faith in God.

It is here that we have the contrast between the Hindu and the Christian view. The forerunners of Christ, the great Hebrew prophets, ignored altogether the current beliefs in the existence of the spirits of the dead. Sheol was a half-pagan idea, for it was generally regarded as a sphere in which the souls of the dead were cut off from the presence of God. Only after men had realised what a true communion with God might be, did they conceive of an immortality which meant, not the dim existence of a material soul, but the perpetuation of a communion with God begun on earth. I doubt myself if there be any other way by which assurance of the Christian doctrine of immortality can be secured. God is the God, not of the dead, but of the living. He is a God who will not allow the communion men have had with Him to lapse by death. These words of Jesus are worth more for the Christian doctrine of immortality than many an elaborate argument. Communion with such a God as He revealed must be eternal. The Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is a God who, having loved, loves to the end.

We are concerned then in Christianity, not with a belief in natural immortality to which our belief in God has to be adjusted, but with faith in the God whom Christ revealed,

of which the belief in immortality is the inevitable correlate. It is here that the real issue between Hinduism and Christianity lies. In Hinduism the belief in *karma* is fundamental, and it has been found impossible to combine with this, belief in a God who is both ultimately real and personally active. The karmic order is inexorable. Every deed creates its effect. If God were active, He too would be bound by the karmic order, and so Hindu speculation, in its most influential form, has taught that the one reality is the Brahman who is insentient and attributeless. In his exposition of one of Bādarāyaṇa's *Sūtras*, Śaṅkarāchārya expressly states that the creation of the world was without aim or purpose.<sup>1</sup> Īśvara, the creator, is but the highest of the effected gods, under *karma*, and so unreal with the unreality of the whole karmic process. Even Rāmānuja's valiant attempt to legitimatise in the Vedānta a more theistic faith breaks down here. At times he speaks of the supreme Brahman as at once personal and real, yet in his discussion of this *Sūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa he has no better solution than Śaṅkarāchārya gave. The highest Brahman made, or rather "arranged," the world in motiveless sport, and Rāmānuja evidently believed that, if God had motive or desire, He too would fall under the karmic law.

A meaningless reality, or a living God who is unreal : it is a harsh alternative, and one that Indian devotion has often tried to evade.

Probably it is to this endeavour that the most prized to-day of all Hindu books, the *Bhagavadgītā*, owes much of its popularity. In it Kṛishṇa is proclaimed as a living God, personal and supreme, who loves men and seeks the good of those that worship him. Yet, though active, he is free from the karmic law, for, though he works, "works defile him not. He has no longing for the fruit of works." And

<sup>1</sup> On *Vedāntasūtras*, ii. 1. 33.

in words which have brought comfort to many, he bids his worshipper "Have thy mind on me, thy devotion toward me, thy sacrifice to me, do homage to me. To me thou shalt come. I make thee a truthful promise; thou art very dear to me. Surrendering all the laws, come for refuge to me alone. I will deliver thee from all sins; grieve not."<sup>1</sup> Such words as these explain in part the fascination of the book for many an educated Hindu to-day. Yet even here a true Theism is not reached, and the Kṛishṇa who loves men and seeks their love, is declared to be veiled by illusion and known to none; "indifferent to all born beings," there is none whom he loves.<sup>2</sup>

The belief in *karma*, which has compelled Indian thinkers to exclude the supreme God from all activity, lest He too be involved in the cycle of deeds and their effects, has only partly affected popular practice. The timorous still have thought it wise to buy off the hostility of evil powers, whilst the devout have prayed to the gods, and asked their help, as if these gods were at once active and real. It is hard to reconcile with the belief in *karma* the intense devotion to the gods which finds expression in much of the vernacular literature. Who, for instance, in reading the *Rāmāyana* of Tulsī Dās would imagine that to its author Rāma was unreal with the unreality of the whole karmic order? It is a personal God that is sought and loved, and the worshipper thinks of Him as real and loving. Tulsī Dās himself tells us of one who asked a famous sage to tell him about God, and the great seer began to describe Brahman, in the terms familiar in Hindu thought, as the "unwishful, the nameless, the formless," identical with the soul of men, but the man replied, "The worship of the impersonal laid no hold of my heart."<sup>3</sup> That is surely a true complaint;

<sup>1</sup> xviii. 65. 66 (Dr. Barnett's translation).

<sup>2</sup> vii. 25. 26. ix. 29.

<sup>3</sup> *Rāmāyana*, vii. 107.

it is the personal and the known that the heart desires. And with some of these saints, devotion to their God is so intense that their love for Him seems to give them at times all that they desire. Thus in Tukārām we find a joy in God so great that he can even turn away from the thought of liberation from the bondage of *karma*, and prefer, to absorption in the Infinite, a rebirth on earth ; all earth's sorrows are worth while, if only God be near to help.

“Hear, O God, my supplication,—  
Do not grant me Liberation.  
'Tis what men so much desire ;  
Yet how much this joy is higher.  
Heavenly joy is not for me,  
For it passeth speedily.  
But that name how strangely dear,  
That in songs of praise we hear.  
Ah, says Tukā, it is this  
Makes our lives so full of bliss.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet heart and head remain in opposition. The devotion of the *bhakta* and the wisdom of the seer are incompatible. Even where, as in the Śaiva Siddhānta of South India, the most strenuous endeavour is made to reconcile the two, a true Theism is not reached.<sup>2</sup> And this is inevitable, for the inexorable working of the karmic law leaves no room for a living God, active in men's salvation, and ultimately real.

#### IV.

Rebirth or immortality, which of these great historic answers best solves the problem of the life to come ? Many to-day in Europe find very attractive the Eastern answer of rebirth. Some accept it because it seems to explain the obvious inequalities of gifts and circumstances ; others are

<sup>1</sup> *Psalms of Marāṭhā Saints*, translated by Nicol Macnicol, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> See Schomerus, *Der Śaiva Siddhānta*, p. 430, or the present writer's *Redemption Hindu and Christian*, p. 136.



inclined to it, because in their natural revolt against what they think the orthodox doctrine, they are ready to embrace any theory which gives a further probation for that great majority of people who at death seem still too immature in character to have assigned to them a final destiny of weal or woe ; others find it reassuring to those Malthusian fears of over-population which they carry over even to the vast spaces of the universe. It has seemed worth while therefore to give some account of the working out of this doctrine in Hinduism, where it is no stray surmise, or fanciful speculation, but the prime axiom of life, influencing all thought and practice. Actually, as we have seen, the doctrine has not alleviated but increased "the burthen of the mystery," "the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world." Nor is this doctrine one of probation, as some have supposed, an educative process, appointed by a loving God. The soul has no knowledge of previous births, gains no insight from them. It is the victim of a fixed and automatic law of retribution, so that the miseries of this life are the almost mechanical effects of deeds done in a previous existence with which this present life has no discernible connexion. And this over-emphasis on retribution has led to the principle of retribution being unduly ignored. The doctrine of *karma*, which makes of retribution an end and not a means, has had as its correlate a view of redemption which seeks to evade altogether the effect of deeds, and to cut the supreme God off from all purposed activity lest He too fall under the inexorable karmic law.

Some facts there are which show that much which has been attributed to the working out of *karma* is really due to heredity or environment. If a man of impure life has a child born blind, it is surely more just that the man should blame himself than that he should forget his own

misdeeds, and regard his child as a criminal suffering in this life for sins of a previous birth ; yet, if the issue be simply between the doctrine of *karma* and the doctrine of man's natural immortality, it is unlikely that it will ever be decided. Like most ultimate problems, this problem is not to be solved by logic. Our answer will depend upon our thought of God, and our thought of God we derive less from reasoning than from the personal judgment of faith. Members of reform movements, like the Prārthanā Samāj, which reject or ignore the doctrine of *karma*, do so, so far as we can judge, not because of its inherent difficulties, but because they have reached a faith in a living God whose love gives life too great a meaning for it to be interpreted only by the karmic law. And converts from caste Hinduism become Christian, not because they have first renounced the doctrine of *karma*, but because, in some way or other, they have begun to think Christ's thought of God, and so have learnt to judge of life now, and of life hereafter, from the standpoint of His Gospel. Men feel the appeal of Christ's words, they gain from Him something of His confidence in God's love, and because of this they know themselves to be liberated from the bondage of the karmic order, that they may be no longer cogs in a great machine, but the children of a heavenly Father who is active in their lives and to whose mercy and faithfulness they can gladly leave the final issue of their own and others' lives.

In Christianity, the belief of immortality is not primary but derivative. It is one of the consequences of faith in the God whom Christ revealed. Unlike Zoroaster and Muhammad, Christ did not speak much of the life to come, nor base His appeal on hopes of heaven or fears of hell. Instead He proclaimed and revealed a God of love with whom already men might have communion. He showed in time the meaning of eternal life, and called men to share with Him in the

resources of the Kingdom of God, that unseen and supernal realm to which His followers were already introduced. The God He preached was a God of the living, not of the dead, and those who trust the God of Jesus are sure that, in death, and in the life to come, He still will be their God. God is no longer the utterly unknown. He has the content to us of Christ's character, so that such a one as Paul, in spite of the disappointments and hardships of his life, could speak of himself as being "in Christ." The unseen for him was no longer the unrevealed, for he already lived his life in God, the God whom Christ had shown. And with such a faith, the problems which the doctrine of *karma* sought to solve are eased, if not explained. Sorrow loses much of its bitterness and its perplexity. And, though retribution is recognised, it is regarded, not as an end, but as a means, for retribution itself serves the purposes of God's redeeming love. The Cross becomes the symbol of God's rule, the revelation of the way God bears the *karma* of our human sin, and the Cross is meant to be the symbol of our service, for none can shirk the Cross who follow Christ. There is no fixed law of *karma*. Instead we have God redeeming man, and men, thus redeemed, taking part in the world's redemption.

The issue then between the Hindu and the Christian doctrines is not primarily one of logical coherency. It goes deep down to our whole conception of God and man, and of the meaning and opportunities of our human lives. The Hindu doctrine of *karma*, in seeking to explain sorrow, has increased its burden. By its over-emphasis on retribution it has led to a view of redemption which ignores altogether the effect of deeds. And some of its implicates are contradicted by the clear witness of experience. Many in India are dissatisfied with this doctrine. They feel that it has led to an undue acquiescence in social cruelties and mocks

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their dream of a united Motherland restored to what they deem its pristine glory. But they have nothing to put in its place, and many not unnaturally complain that the followers of Christ are as little liberated from the seen as they have felt themselves to be from the bondage of the karmic law. The Christian Gospel speaks of God as redeeming love, and calls us now to an eternal life which death cannot interrupt but will consummate. A message so strange and glad will be believed as it is not only preached but manifested, and the Church will make credible the Christian doctrine of immortality as it shows forth in act the meaning of that communion with God which through Christ we are meant already to experience.

SYDNEY CAVE.

### *THE ENCRATITES AND THE MARRIAGE AT CANA.*

THE earliest days of the Church are marked by an outburst of asceticism, which expressed itself, amongst other developments, in abstinence from flesh-food and wine. As a consequence (just as in our own times in Temperance circles) it became necessary to prove that the New Testament was on the side of the abstainer, and that our Lord and His disciples belonged to the order of Nazarites, much as, if they were alive to-day, we might prove them to be Good Templars or members of the Independent Order of Rechabites.

Then, as now, the stumbling-block was in the account of the marriage at Cana of Galilee, where the house was "dry," at an early stage of the proceedings, and the language used suggests that the guests might have imbibed as much as was good for them. So the question arises as to how the