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## Box 08, Folder 10 - (Indian Twilight?) "Hinduism" (E.M.S.) (Fragments)

Edwin Mortimer Standing

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doubt this doctrine of Re-incarnation and it never seems to strike anyone that it is possible the whole idea is a false one - that it is just one huge omnipresent error. It rather reminds one of the way in which everybody in the Middle Ages, even the most intelligent people like Dante and St. Thomas Aquinas, all believed that the earth was flat and that it was the center of the universe. Yet at the time and for many centuries nobody was conscious of this huge and universal error. So I think it is in India today. From their earliest years people grow up in it; and come to take it for granted - like the atmosphere we breathe and it becomes a part of their mental make up. This happens with even the most intelligent and practical like Ghandi and Nehru. Yet, as I hope to show, this doctrine of re-incarnation, which is at the back of this Buddhist idea of Nirvana, is really an unfounded assumption, a mere abstract speculation.

But it is also a matter of supreme practical importance; for it affects the whole culture, civilization and social structure of Oriental life. In fact, when you live in the country you find yourself constantly coming up against unexpected habits and traditions which can ultimately be traced down to this idea of metempsychosis, or re-incarnation. One even finds it begins to unconsciously to affect ones own way of thinking - as you might notice in those doggeral rhymes that came in letter page .

Points of Similarity

It will help to make the matter clearer if we compare

the Christian point of view with that of the Buddhist or Hindu; for in doing so we shall find certain contrasts stand out ever more clearly. Let us begin by trying to find out what there is in common between the Eastern and Western philosophies. In the first place the Christian heaven and the Buddhist Nirvana both represent, generally speaking, a state of experience which have to do with the future. There are the ultimate destinations to which the individual soul aspires. They are places of rest and response, where the "wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest", where all the difficulties, evils,<sup>and</sup> sufferings of this life are done away with. About each state too there is an element of finality: once having reached it we shall remain in it with no wish (and perhaps no possibility) to return.

To come down to another point of similarity, and that a striking one, between the Eastern and the Western points of view. It is this - that the attainment of Heaven or the state of Nirvana is related to the manner in which we live and act in this present world. Indeed we might go so far as to say that it<sup>is</sup> directly dependent on our actions here and now. The Gospel tells us that "as a man sows so shall he reap", and the Hindu doctrine of Karma is ver similar in this respect.

This latter teaching affirms that if your actions are good they will bring you good Karma (or results) in the next life and vice versa. This, what ever your actions are, they will rebound back to you through the working of Karma. Let us suppose, for example, we have a man who in one of his incarnations behaved in an evil and cruel manner, like that of a crocodile. Well, in the next life he may come back as a crocodile. Perhaps you may remember the passage in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, which bears on this point. It comes in the famous Court Scene, where Gratiano says to Shylock:

"Thou almost makes me waver in my faith,  
To hold opinion with Pythagoras,  
That souls of animals infuse themselves  
Into the trunks of men: thy currish spirit  
Governed a wolf hanged for human slaughter-  
..... for thy desires  
Are wolfish, bloody, starved and ravenous."

#### Christian View Simpler

In the Christian view the whole question is much simpler, for, as the Bible tells us, "Man is born to live and die once and after comes the judgement". We are left in no doubt about the judgment coming; this is made clear by Christ in his teachings and in a number of his parables. At the end of the world, for instance, the goats will be separated from the sheep; in the parable of the fishing net the angels will come, at the end of the world, and separate the good fish from the bad and the latter will be thrown away.

The theory of re-incarnation appeals to many persons, and this applies to numbers of Europeans as well as Orientals - because it seems to explain and justify the vastly different circumstances into which people are born, as they come into this world. It would seem to explain, for example, why this baby should be born and brought up in a good cultured family, in a well organized environment; and that in the slums of a great city, or this other born a cripple. The Hindu would say this was because he was receiving in this new life what he had merited in the life which had gone on before.

Incidentally, in passing, it is rather interesting to note that some of the Jews at the time of Christ believed in re-incarnation. For on one occasion, when Christ and His disciples were passing a beggar, who was born blind, one of the disciples put the question, "Lord, why was this man born blind; on account of his own sins or those of his parents? If it was on account of his own they must have been committed in a former life." But Our Lord did not accept either one or the other suggestion, and replied, "Neither, but that the glory of God should be made manifest." And thereupon proceeded to heal the unfortunate beggar.

Christianity admits that the misfortunes and sufferings that beset us in this life in general are often the result of someone else's sins, even if it is only Adams Original Sin.

But though Christianity admits this it no less clearly

affirms that the good actions of others can have a beneficial effect on ones life. In the Hindu religion, on the other hand, with its rigid working out of the Law of Karma in each individual life there is no room left - in spite of appearances to the contrary - for any such inter-relationship between the destinies of individuals or groups. To this point we shall return later.