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REINCARNATION

Reincarnation is the supposed return to earth in other bodies or forms by the souls of the dead, usually in many successive life cycles. The belief is common in the East, in countries dominated by the Buddhist and Hindu religions, but has few adherents in the West. It conflicts with orthodox science which gives man one life, here and now. For those to whom this account is too limited, the Christian religion usually completes the story. But there is little support for reincarnation here, except in the special form of resurrection, according to which we shall all be incarnated again, but only once and in our own bodies.

Even persons concerned with the scientific study of the question of survival after death have tended to ignore reincarnation. Most survival research involves mediums in whom the spirits of the dead may briefly appear to "reincarnate" but who otherwise seem settled in the other world.

It is only recently and because of the

work of one individual that reincarnation is receiving serious attention from parapsychologists. This man is Dr. Ian Stevenson, Chairman of the Department of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

The present issue of THETA will be devoted to a review by Dr. Stevenson of a volume containing some of the older material in the area of reincarnation, followed by a review of a book written by Dr. Stevenson himself. The reviewer is Dr. J. G. Pratt, Assistant Professor at the School of Medicine, the University of Virginia. Dr. Pratt is President of the Board of Directors of the Psychical Research Foundation and Dr. Stevenson is a Board member.

Instead of mentioning all the cases in Dr. Stevenson's book, Dr. Pratt has selected one as a detailed illustration of Dr. Stevenson's approach. This case is of particular interest because Dr. Stevenson was able to investigate it at firsthand, nearly from the beginning.

REINCARNATION: A STUDY OF FORGOTTEN TRUTH

Edited by E. D. Walker¹

Reviewed by Ian Stevenson

This book, which is principally an anthology of writings and comments on reincarnation, was originally published in 1888. It was reprinted in 1911 by the Theosophical Publishing House and again in 1923 by the same publishers who then added some supplementary material and extended the bibliography. The present edition, with an Introduction by S. Digby Smith, is based on the 1923 edition, but restores some passages of Walker's original section of "Conclusion" which had been

cut in the 1923 edition.

The anthology contains a chapter with extracts from Western writers sympathetic to the idea of reincarnation, one quoting passages in the Bible relevant to the subject, one on reincarnation in early Christendom, one on reincarnation in the East, and several others. Two long chapters quote extensively poets of the West and the East on reincarnation and these are perhaps the least useful and instructive portions of the book. In the concluding chapters of the book Walker takes up the topics of transmigration through ani-

¹New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1965. xxv + 385 pp., \$5.00.

By Ian Stevenson¹
Reviewed by J. G. Pratt

mals, the nature of the after-death state and the relation of reincarnation and karma, a subject usually considered along with reincarnation by most writers.

In reading this anthology one is impressed by the wide range of peoples, both temporally and geographically, who have believed in reincarnation. The believers today include almost all peoples of Asia and Africa, except many, but not all Mohammedans. And many, perhaps most of the ancient peoples of Europe until the sixth century of the Christian era also believed in reincarnation. Indeed one is reminded of Schopenhauer's statement (actually not quoted in this book, although other extracts from him are given): "Were an Asiatic to ask me for a definition of Europe, I should be forced to answer him: It is that part of the world which is haunted by the incredible delusion that man was created out of nothing, and that his present birth is his first entrance into life."

When Walker first compiled this anthology in the last century, little existed in the way of evidence for reincarnation. Not many years later F. W. H. Myers, although favorably disposed to the belief, was to write in his great book: "Yet for reincarnation there is at present no valid evidence." It is therefore a little surprising that Walker included a chapter entitled "Western Evidences of Reincarnation." This chapter in fact consists largely of *a priori* arguments in favor of reincarnation some of which will seem as doubtful today as they probably did then. At the end of the chapter Walker cites a few interesting cases of déjà vu, including the experience of Charles Dickens in Italy and another of an American woman who, visiting Heidelberg for the first time, showed a remarkable familiarity with the library and castle of that town. But compared to the evidence available today, Walker's gleanings offer scanty nourishment. His book consequently is almost entirely a collection of testimonies to the belief in reincarnation and, which is a little different, to the belief in its reason-

ableness as a belief. An impressive number of notable Western philosophers from Plato to Hume and Schopenhauer (to come no further towards our own times) have expressed either a belief in reincarnation or a sympathetic interest in it.

There exist in print today two other English anthologies on reincarnation. Since all three contain different material while also sharing some, it may be helpful to list here the other two. They are: *Reincarnation: The Ring of Return*, compiled with an Introduction by Eva Martin and originally published in 1927 (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1963); and *Reincarnation: An East-West Anthology*, compiled and edited by Joseph Head and S. L. Cranston (New York: The Julian Press, 1961). To these may be added two French surveys of the belief in reincarnation, again dealing only slightly with evidence for it. These are: *La Réincarnation*, by Edouard Bertholet (Lausanne, Switzerland: Pierre Genillard, 1943); and *La Réincarnation des Ames Selon Les Traditions Orientales et Occidentales*, by A. des Georges (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1966). These French books are not, strictly speaking, anthologies but rather surveys and guides to the original literature, each containing an extensive bibliography. The same is true, however, of Walker's book which contains, in addition to its numerous quotations, a good deal of connecting and argumentative material written by Walker himself including his extensive "Conclusion." In contrast, the books edited by Martin and by Cranston and Head are pure anthologies with comparatively little introductory material and commentary. Of the three English books, Walker's alone contains an extensive bibliography, especially of early source material. The other two contain lists of acknowledgments rather than a true bibliography. As an introduction to the literature of reincarnation, especially the early and foreign literature, Walker's book is extremely valuable and University Books are to be congratulated for making it again available.

WHO IS IMAD ELAWAR?

In mid-March of 1964, Dr. Ian Stevenson (I. S.) went to the village of Kornayel in Lebanon, 15 miles east of Beirut. He carried a letter of introduction in Arabic to a resident whom he hoped would give him information about cases of reincarnation that were said to occur frequently there. He discovered that the person to whom the note was addressed was in Beirut for the winter. But in the course of making inquiries and explaining the reason for his visit, he heard of a case of the type he was seeking: a five-year-old child in the village, Imad Elawar, had been making claims regarding an earlier life he had lived in another town. Dr. Stevenson sought out the family of this child and they invited him to hear the account of the claims that Imad had made since he was between a year and a half and two years of age.

During the evening of March 16 Imad's parents told I. S. their recollections of the boy's statements over the past three years of what he remembered about a preceding life. I. S. made a written record of this information which included, in addition to the statements the parents had heard from Imad, their efforts to put the information together in a manner that would make a coherent, meaningful account of the boy's statements. As appeared later from the efforts of I. S. to check up on the account, no clear distinction was made by the parents in this first interview between what Imad had *said* and what they *inferred* from some of his statements in the effort to make sense of them.

The principal facts regarding the boy's statements made up to that time were as follows. He claimed to have been a member of a Bouhamzy family that lived in Khriby, a village lying about 20 miles

southeast of Beirut. (Kornayel and Khriby are about 15 miles apart, but they are connected only by a winding mountain road with a driving distance of 25 miles and there is little travel between the two villages. I. S. was careful to explore for instances when people living in the vicinity of Khriby who knew something of the Bouhamzy family had visited Kornayel and the possibility that they might have brought information that had somehow been conveyed to Imad and out of which his "memories" of a life in Khriby might have evolved. I will return to this point later in connection with I. S.'s discussion of the interpretation of this case.)

In addition to naming a family to which he claimed to belong and a place where he had lived, Imad made frequent references to a woman Jamile, and he mentioned a given name Mahmoud. Jamile was described as beautiful, as dressing well and wearing high-heels, and as dressed in red clothes which Imad often bought for her. The boy also claimed to have had a sister Huda, and he mentioned a number of other names without specifying blood relationships but referring to each one (as is the custom in that culture) as "brother." These names included Amin, Mehibe, Adil, Talil (or Talal), Said, Toufic, Salim, Kamel, and a friend Yousef el Halibi. The parents assumed that Imad was claiming to have been Mahmoud Bouhamzy, that his wife was named Jamile, and that he had four sons (Adil, Talil, Salim, and Kamel). They also assumed that the other names used by Imad were a sister and brothers in his family.

From other statements made by Imad, the parents inferred other circumstances regarding the life and death of the boy in his former existence. Imad referred to an accident in which a man was run over by a truck and received serious injuries, including breaking both of his legs, from which he later died. The parents supposed

¹ *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research*, Vol. 26, September 1966, p. 362 pp., \$6.00 (880 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y. 10021).

that this referred to the manner in which Mahmoud Bouhamzy had met his death. There were a number of other references to specific details related to the earlier existence, all of which I. S. recorded on his first evening in Kornayel.

Imad was still talking in March, 1964, about the circumstances of his earlier life whenever anything happened that seemed to stir some recollection. On the second day of his visit, I. S. made a trip by car to Khriby, accompanied by Imad, his father, and an interpreter. On this journey, before reaching Khriby or before any verifications of his earlier statements were attempted, Imad made and I. S. recorded ten further statements about the former life in Khriby.

All told, this record of the claims made by Imad regarding a former life consisted of 57 details, 47 older claims or incidents reported by the parents or other adult members of Imad's family and 10 new ones heard directly by I. S. from the boy in connection with the journey to Khriby. In a tabulation of the items, together with the nature or source of verifying information and explanatory comments upon most of them, I. S. reports that 51 details were found to be correct. Surprisingly and significantly, however, the statements were not found to apply to the person whom the parents had assumed Imad claimed to have been. While there was a man named Mahmoud Bouhamzy in Khriby, he was still living.

There was another person, Said Bouhamzy, to whom the facts applied to some degree. He had died following an accident in which he had been run over by a truck and had received the injuries described by Imad. But there were difficulties about equating most of the details from Imad's collected statements with the circumstances of Said Bouhamzy's life. Up to this point in the investigation, the statements made by Imad (as interpreted by his parents) appeared to reduce to a small nucleus of facts largely cancelled out by a mass of inaccurate imagined relationships and circumstances.

On a second visit to Khriby on March

18, I. S. principally interviewed the son of Said Bouhamzy (the man who had died as a result of the truck accident), Mr. Hafez Bouhamzy, who had been absent the day before. This interview further brought out the inaccuracy of the parents' interpretations of Imad's claims. Mr. Hafez Bouhamzy then tried fitting the statements of Imad to other members of the Bouhamzy family who had lived and died in Khriby. He pointed out that the items applied with remarkable accuracy to the life of one Ibrahim Bouhamzy, a cousin, who had lived with his uncle in a house located only 300 feet from Said's house. Ibrahim was not married, but he had a mistress, Jamile. He had died at the age of about 25 of tuberculosis. It is to the circumstances of Ibrahim's life, including the names and outstanding experiences of his close relatives and associates, that Imad's statements seemed to refer. The earlier fruitless efforts by I. S. at verification were due to the incorrect inferences made by the parents in attributing meaning to Imad's statements beyond the things that he actually said, as they readily admitted having done when questioned further by I. S.

So far I have been considering only the verbal statements made by Imad and the degree to which they were confirmed by people who knew Ibrahim. It is, of course, on the basis of verbal statements made by a child that a reincarnation case is first recognized as occurring, but there are other aspects of the child's behavior that may be more important from the point of view of the evidentiality of such a case. One is the ability of the child himself to recognize the people and the places that he claims to know from his previous existence. Naturally, I. S. took advantage of the rare opportunity for the investigator himself to be present when tests of recognition by the boy were made in Khriby.

The first recognition of a person actually occurred in Kornayel. Once at the age of four Imad was on the street with his maternal grandmother when he suddenly went up to a stranger and embraced him.

The man asked in surprise: "Do you know me?" Imad answered: "Yes, you were my neighbor." As it turned out, the man lived in Khriby where he had been a neighbor of Ibrahim Bouhamzy. His first name was among those which Imad claimed to remember. This event led the parents of Imad to take the lad's claims more seriously. Until it happened, the father had scolded the boy for lying about his previous life and threatened him with punishment if he continued. This caused Imad to limit his remarks to times when he was apparently talking to himself or to confide only in his mother and grandparents.

On the visits when Imad was taken to Khriby, he did not do particularly well in identifying buildings and directions in the town. He did point across a valley toward the house where he said he lived but at the same time called attention to a nearby house which was not the correct one. (He also correctly pointed in the direction of the village where Jamile had lived.) He did not recognize houses in the immediate neighborhood where Ibrahim lived; but the people of Khriby said the appearances had changed considerably over the years. The more important aspect of the test of recognition was that of whether Imad would know people Ibrahim had known and details regarding the interior of "his" house.

A second, separate tabulation given by I. S. lists 16 correct statements or identifications made by Imad when he was taken through Ibrahim's house by his mother and his sister, Huda. This was the first time Imad had seen these two ladies, and they appeared unexpectedly at the house when the tour of the premises was about to begin. I. S. had planned to conduct this phase of the investigation in a manner that would insure that no clue was given to Imad, but matters passed out of his hands when the ladies took the boy in tow and led him through the house.

The interpreter and I. S. followed closely, the interpreter listening with as much care as he could to what the mother

and sister said to the boy and how the boy replied. The interpreter said he was confident in almost all instances that the ladies asked only direct, non-leading questions. (In a few instances, as noted, things happened too fast for direct observation.)

The accuracy of the 16 items listed in the second tabulation and the degree to which this information was not inferable from things to be seen in the house (it had been closed up for a number of years) add greatly to the evidentiality of the case as a whole. A reader can well agree with I. S. that it was unfortunate that his own plan for conducting this tour could not be carried out as intended. It would, however, be quite unjustified to use this fact as an excuse for discounting completely the evidential value of the additional items of correct information produced.

The case of Imad Elawar as a whole is a strong one indicating a real relationship between the "memories" of Imad and the experiences of Ibrahim Bouhamzy. This outline is too condensed to do justice to the full account, which presents the findings brought to light by three visits of I. S. to Khriby in March, 1964, and a fourth one during a second visit to Lebanon in August of that year and that fills more than 35 pages in his book. As valuable as this case is because of the circumstances under which the investigation was conducted, it is not as good an example of some evidential aspects of such material as are some of the other 19 cases. Those aspects of other cases that bear in a special way upon the evidence of paranormality and also upon the interpretation of the evidence can better be considered in connection with a discussion of the material as a whole. At this point, however, it is in order to raise the question of interpretation and to answer it as fully as possible on the basis of the case of Imad alone.

The first question, naturally, is whether the statements and correct recognitions made by Imad really fit the circumstances of Ibrahim's life to a degree that exceeds reasonable chance correspondences. To some extent, the answer to this question

is a matter of personal judgment. I can only say that on the basis of the facts about the case as presented, for me the answer to the question is clearly in the affirmative.

Perhaps the next question is whether the correspondences between Imad's statements and Ibrahim's life were brought about as a result of a hoax or fraud. It appears to me that I. S. has given full consideration to the facts relevant to this question and that his arguments show that the balance weighs so heavily against fraud as to justify our dismissing this possibility. For one thing, the wrong inferences of the parents drawn from Imad's statements about his previous life are hard to explain if the case was fraudulent. For another thing, a hoax would have had to involve a number of people from both villages, and it would therefore have been very difficult to plan and to conceal. Furthermore, some aspects of the case, if it were fraudulent, would have required careful coaching and considerable dramatic ability on the part of the people concerned, including the five-year-old boy Imad, who would have to be trained to "act the part" in his reactions to people and places in Khriby. Finally, I agree with Dr. Stevenson that there is no recognizable motive to account for the working up of the case as a fraud. It is difficult to see how anybody had anything to gain from such a scheme; on the contrary, they had much to lose. Even if there had been any such motive that escaped detection, there is no way to explain the fact that the father discouraged Imad's statements, nor the fact that the case was allowed to go unchecked until the totally unexpected visit of Dr. Stevenson, who himself arranged the visits to Khriby and other places as a part of his own full investigation.

The third question is the possibility that the case may have been based upon information that was normally acquired and then forgotten, but which, after a suitable period of incubation on Imad's part, was produced in scattered statements accepted

by the adults in his family as referring to an earlier life. Again, I. S. is careful to point out all the possible contacts he could discover between people living in the two localities, Kornayel and Khriby. In the light of the search he made and the information he uncovered, it seems unlikely that any of the quite limited visiting between the two villages could have revealed information that reached Imad and that became, subsequently, the basis of his utterances through cryptomnesia, or memories from one source unconsciously disguised so as to be incorrectly attributed to another source.

These considerations, mentioned briefly here but discussed more extensively and thoroughly in Dr. Stevenson's book, appear to dispose of the possibilities of explaining the case along normal lines. We are left, then, with hypotheses that require paranormal or parapsychological explanations.

These can better be discussed in relation to the 20 cases as a whole, to which I will now turn, but too briefly to do justice to the lengthy and thorough general discussion presented by Dr. Stevenson.

Dr. Stevenson says that this selection of 20 cases is not offered as being the most evidential ones available at this time. Rather, he has chosen them to illustrate the kinds of cases encountered and the different facets of evidence relevant to the reincarnation question. Beyond the informational content of the memories about a previous life, the principal evidential aspects of the cases are: (1) the degree to which the child behaves in a manner that is consistent with the life and personality of the individual he claims to have been (such as exhibiting special tastes that the former person had, or longing for his former home and family and showing appropriate recognitions and emotional reactions in their presence); (2) the demonstration of special skills or technical knowledge which the former individual possessed and which the later individual had no opportunity to learn; and (3) the presence on the body of the later person of birthmarks similar to those that were

carried by the former person or a scar such as would have been caused by the wound from which the former person died.

That there are great difficulties inherent in the investigation of such cases no one could possibly deny. But I. S. has gone ahead in spite of the difficulties and with his eyes wide open to them. Thus he has personally gone to the scene of the cases he presents and has made every effort to establish the facts by interviewing the people available who were most directly involved. When he has required interpreters he has frequently used different ones in separate interviews in order to check the consistency of the information obtained. And, as we have seen in the case of Imad, he has not hesitated to make a second visit to continue the study of a case when further study of his findings revealed gaps in the evidence.

That the occurrence of reincarnation cases is in some way linked with cultural differences is apparent, but why or how is not fully clear. Cases are found among people who traditionally accept reincarnation on religious grounds, whereas the incidence is very low, for example, in the United States where there is little belief in the idea. Could this mean that the cases that are found are somehow produced to foster a religious belief, perhaps by subtle suggestion working in both directions between the parents and the child? I. S. makes it clear that, whatever the larger cultural influences, in many cases the parents discouraged the child's claims to have lived before.

In many instances the distances involved, the difficulties of communication between villages, castes, etc., and the early age at which the child began "remembering" his previous life make it more difficult to discount the validity of the cases. And for reasons comparable to those already stated from the case of Imad, fraud and cryptomnesia do not satisfactorily account for the facts of the cases as a whole.

Clearly, the cases invite and deserve further study. Even if in the end such

studies only threw light upon sociological and psychological questions, they would be amply rewarding. But I. S. thinks that they will make important contributions to parapsychology as well. Weighing against a simple ESP explanation, as he points out, is the fact that these children do not show any evidence for ESP outside the framework of their "memories" of a former life. Also, the other kinds of evidence (as indicated above) are not easy to attribute to the operation of ESP as we know it from other situations.

This is not to say that the argument against ESP is compelling, and I. S. readily admits that anyone who insists upon doing so can use this route as an escape from having to consider seriously the reincarnation hypothesis. Similarly, of course, case material of this kind will not convince any hardened skeptic that any kind of paranormal principle is involved, ESP or otherwise, because he can always find an out.

But would anyone argue that as long as different possibilities of interpretation exist I. S. should not have undertaken his investigations at all? Or that he should not give any favorable consideration to the reincarnation interpretation as long as there is any remote possibility that some other explanation might be found? My answer to both questions is—no. As Sir Alister Hardy has said, we can appreciate Occam's Razor without using it to cut our throats. Dr. Stevenson does not reach any conclusion on the basis of the evidence presented in this book. He clearly does not think that the project has advanced to that stage at this time. But he considers fully the bearing of the findings upon different possibilities of interpretation—in fact, it is difficult to think of any that he has overlooked—and he thinks that, on balance, the facts favor interpretation in terms of either possession (the temporary occupation of the body of the child by an incorporeal agency, presumably an entity surviving the earlier person's death) or reincarnation. As between the two alternatives, I. S. states his reasons for think-

ing that the reincarnation hypothesis is the more strongly supported at this stage.

Cultures engender strong prejudices against ideas as well as in their favor. There is no escaping the fact that the concept of reincarnation is repulsive to most educated people in the Western world. But this is not tantamount to saying that it is false, any more than that the widespread belief in it in other parts of the world argues in favor of its truth. Nevertheless, the status of the idea causes us to experience surprise over the publication of Dr. Stevenson's book. But now that the shock of my own surprise has subsided, my judgment is that his project has opened up another avenue for the investigation of the survival problem which parallels and supplements those methods that scientific investigators have been following in the past.

This new development does not justify any hopes—not yet, at least—that the survival problem as a scientific issue will now be quickly and finally solved. On the contrary, investigators will likely still be grappling with it for centuries ahead. But this work has already enlarged the area of behavior relevant to survival available for study, and it justifies an optimistic outlook regarding whether survival research itself will survive.

Editor's Note: Dr. Stevenson would like to receive information about cases of the reincarnation type known to readers of THETA. He prefers to hear about cases in which the informants are willing to give details either by correspondence or possibly in interviews. He expects that informants will agree to publication of the case, should it prove suitable, although with the understanding that the identities of the persons involved could be concealed by pseudonyms if this is desired. (Ian Stevenson, M.D., Department of Neurology and Psychiatry, School of Medicine, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va. 22901).

Hornell Hart

1888-1967

The Psychical Research Foundation announces with deep regret the death of Dr. Hornell Hart, a member of its Advisory Committee, on February 27, 1967. Dr. Hart was professor of sociology at Duke University for nearly 20 years. After his retirement in 1957 and until 1965, he taught at Center College of Kentucky in Danville and at Florida Southern College in Lakeland.

His interest in parapsychology centered on the survival issue with special emphasis on the evidence from apparitions. His book, *The Enigma of Survival*, published by Charles C Thomas in 1961, is a forceful and scholarly presentation of the evidence for survival. He contributed to the P. R. F. symposium, "What Next in Survival Research?", with a paper entitled "A Prospectus for Survival Research" (THETA 5) and to the discussion of the other symposium papers with "A Chasm Needs To Be Bridged," published in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychological Research* (60, 1966, pp. 380-389). His most recent article is entitled, "Scientific Survival Research," and appears in the present issue of the *International Journal of Parapsychology* (6, 1967, 43-52).

Dr. Hart found that apparitions reported in connection with cases of ESP projection, where the hallucination of a living person is seen in the place to which he has the experience of projecting himself, are in many respects similar to apparitions of the dead. Since the two kinds of apparitions are alike in so many ways, Dr. Hart suggested that they also share the characteristic of consciousness; in other words, that many apparitions of the dead represent conscious personalities that have survived bodily death.