

OUR FUTURE IN THIS WORLD.

IN one of the popular magazines, some writers of distinction in various departments of literature have responded to invitations asking them to give their opinions on the grave and all important questions, "Have we lived on Earth before?" and "Shall we live on Earth again?" The questions are answered at some length by Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace, Mr. Rider Haggard, and Mr. W. T. Stead. In their respective departments of intellectual activity each of these well-known men would command respectful attention, but a deeply-seated comicality resides in the notion that because three men are respectively great in connection with biology, novel writing and journalism, they are qualified to have an opinion worth listening to concerning a mystery of Nature belonging to the category of those investigated by the student of Occult science. Mr. Stead, it is true, has had some touch with Spiritualism, but for reasons with which only occult students can be familiar, that in itself is almost sure *not* to have afforded him a glimpse of the laws governing re-incarnation. From the point of view of knowledge on these subjects there is a flavour of humour in the mere suggestion that psychic research confined to the methods of spiritualism could enable anyone to form an opinion concerning re-incarnation. Meanwhile, broadly speaking, the reference of the questions quoted above to the three eminent writers who have answered them, might be paralleled by a reference of the question, for example, whether "Alcyone" is a

G

hydrogen or a helium star to the Lord Mayor, the Archbishop of Canterbury and General Kitchener.

The reasoning and evidence which establish the truth of the Re-incarnation teaching (on so secure a foundation that it is just as certain, for those who study the subject properly, as, let us say, the existence of ice within the Antarctic Circle) is diffused through an extensive literature with which the three distinguished contributors to the "London Magazine" show themselves unacquainted. The great problem is fairly well discussed in various "Theosophical Manuals," in those, for example, by Mrs. Besant, entitled "Re-incarnation," "Death and After," and "Karma," and, not to speak of other books which deal with collateral aspects of the subject, in Mr. C. W. Leadbeater's admirable volumes, "The Other Side of Death," and "Glimpses of Occultism," in "The Growth of the Soul" and "Esoteric Buddhism," by the Editor of this Review, and in a large number of American contributions to occult literature of which "Re-incarnation, a Study of the Soul," by Jerome Anderson, may be mentioned as a favourable example. And all these books are again of no relative consequence compared with the personal experience of a considerable number of occult students who know how to recover consciousness of past incarnations—not merely their own, but also those of persons whom they knew in past incarnations and who happen to be again in incarnation with their former friends at the present time. The present writer is in touch with many persons gifted in the way described, who are as anxious as the students of any other science to get observations verified and checked; in a position to compare notes, and thus to arrive at some conclusions one may treat as bed-rock on which to build later inferences. One of the laws, for instance, controlling re-incarnation provides for the simultaneous return to Earth life of those who are in close bonds of sympathy of any kind, and besides the supreme tie of affection, intellectual sympathy, and intimate friendship often operates to bring about the same result, so that among those who are now earnestly engaged on occult research of the genuine kind, I am in a position to identify at least fifteen or twenty other persons, with whom at various periods during my own former lives I have been closely associated, and I know of one remarkable case in which a con-

tinuous series of lives culminating in one now going on, has been traced back for twenty-two thousand years, seventeen lives having been lived through during that time.

From the point of view of such knowledge as this, it is, of course, ludicrous beyond measure to read grave arguments like those of Dr. A. R. Wallace, in the essay before us, leading him to describe the conception of the re-incarnation as a "grotesque nightmare," and to answer the questions set him with an emphatic negative. His reasons for coming to these conclusions,—outside the fact that he evidently does not realise that he has never paid attention to the literature of the subject, are,—first, that the laws of heredity, as studied by Mr. Francis Galton, conflict with the idea! This is what the fifth proposition of Euclid is to geometry, and the fact that many people are troubled by it at first is a standing joke for more advanced students. The answer is of elementary simplicity. Form is developed along the line of heredity, and appropriate forms are picked up by Egos coming into incarnation. If I devote my life this time to music, for instance, I must be born next time in a family, the heredity of which will make it certain that my new body will be an instrument available for musical work,—and so on *ad infinitum*. Can any human being of intelligence fail to understand the principle when once plainly stated? Certain machinery will turn out, let us say, trousers of a given shape and size. They happen to fit my legs, and I wear them. Will Dr. Wallace tell me that the length of my legs is a consequence ensuing from the characteristics of the machine that made the trousers? All his remarks about genius and why we resemble our ancestors is covered by the simple illustration just given. And exhibiting in another way, his unfamiliarity with the subject in hand, he suggests that as mankind has not advanced morally since the days of Socrates and Plato, that conflicts with the theory that any process is in operation that provides for moral advance. But, the days of Plato and Socrates are yesterday as compared with the time Nature spends on evolution. Those of us who, besides being able to look back to former lives, can survey former civilisations, when the region we now call Europe was a swamp, and the foremost people of the then existing world lived on continents that have passed away,

can perceive, in the change that has come on since, a moral advance so stupendous that one is aghast to think we ourselves could ever have been morally what we were in the long (for most of us) forgotten past when we lived, for self alone, in the strangely contrasted conditions of Atlantean society.

Mr. Rider Haggard's little essay on the (to him) unfamiliar topic he has been invited to treat, is very modest in its tone, and his own opinion, which he humbly puts forward as of little worth, is that probably we have lived on earth before and will live here again. He reviews the various schools of opinion on the subject—the conventional religious doctrine—that in its naked, literal acceptance some people might be inclined to call by the phrase Dr. Wallace uses in another application, “a grotesque nightmare”—and the Buddhist idea of re-incarnation (not very inaccurately stated) and the widely diffused suspicion that nobody ever lives at all after he is once dead, either here or anywhere else. The truth of the matter is that the very wide diffusion of that last view is terribly disgraceful to the church that has mismanaged its mission to humanity so badly as to leave multitudes of cultivated people in the present day a prey to that dismal delusion.

Mr. Stead is, of course, amusing in his crisp, emphatic way of defining his own opinions, whether these have any basis in reason or otherwise. But a statement may be crisp, and at the same time comically wrong. Mr. Stead says of the people he knows who profess to believe in re-incarnation, “these excellent people do not agree among themselves.” If he said of astronomers,—on the strength of the fact that some persons professing to claim that title, say that the earth is flat, while others think it is round,—“these excellent people do not agree among themselves,” he would be doing exactly what he does in the case before us. We must weigh as well as count heads. There is no disagreement on any matter of principle among cultivated students of occultism in reference to re-incarnation. In minor details there is as much difference of opinion as, for example, among chemists, as to the true nature of a solution. But these last named differences do not impair the value of the chemical opinion that water is composed of oxygen and hydrogen. Mr. Stead says, “the late Dr. Anna Kingsford was quite sure she was Plato in a former incarnation.” I knew

Dr. Anna Kingsford very well, and I think Mr. Stead is mistaken in saying this. Mrs. Kingsford traced her former incarnations to one or two other historical personalities, but I never heard her suggest any fantastic idea of the kind described. But it would not affect the questions under discussion if she did. The circumstances under which such mistakes are possible could only be explained by the light of advanced occult knowledge, but are perfectly explicable. Mrs. Kingsford, at all events, was among those who sighted the main outlines of the great truth. Those who do this may be compared to ocean navigators of a former date, who may have sighted the coastline of a new continent. They might not all concur as to its precise contour or its exact latitude and longitude, but they corroborated each other as to the broad fact that in the region explored a mass of land existed.

Meanwhile the effort made by the *London Magazine* to turn attention to the supremely important questions it puts forward for treatment is entirely to be applauded. Comprehension of the law of re-incarnation do a great deal towards investing the religions of the West with practical meaning, and with influence on life and conduct. Sulphur and flames in a future state hardly intimidate the modern ploughman even. He knows that everyone who talks of them is laughing in his sleeve the while. But it is not good for humanity to imagine that no penalties await misconduct. If we all, gentle and simple alike, realised the profound truth that such penalties are inevitable, and take the practical shape of painful conditions of life in this world of the kind we all exactly comprehend, a stimulus to good behaviour would be found operative amongst us all, the value of which would eclipse that of any conventional preaching. And the mere warning value of the re-incarnation teaching is again subordinate to its importance as an encouragement and a hope. Grown up babies who fancy that Divine Power, when they die, is going to nurse them without any trouble of their own till they grow into angels, may be left for the moment out of account; they will learn better hereafter. But thoughtful persons must see that mental and moral improvement in the case of human beings can only be the fruit of effort from within. That it is possible by such effort, plainly suggests the further

reflection that there is no hard and fast limit to such improvement. Nor is the future possibility bounded by the limitations of the human organism, as we know it now. Dr. Wallace and Darwin, bringing to bear on the subjects they had studied, the light of brilliant intelligence, showed mankind that the existing organisms had been developed from very much lower forms. No great wisdom is needed to convince us that such a process has probably not yet reached its final stages. Any one who can imagine himself in the future developed by his own continuous exertions to a level of moral and intellectual advancement which would render the existing types of human organism unworthy of his occupation, may be quite sure that when he comes back he will find better ones ready for his use.

But to float out into a survey of all the inspiring ideas to which the re-incarnation teaching leads, would mean the expansion of these few remarks into a volume. By degrees, it is to be hoped, people who want to understand the teaching will get into the habit of making their inquiries in the right quarters, and will neither invite lawyers to teach them astronomy nor chemists to analyse the charms of Wagner's music, nor expect that a prominent place in the pages of "Who's Who" must necessarily entitle the persons thus distinguished to interpret the Mysteries of Nature.

AN OCCULT STUDENT.