

life seems to have been much that of the dog-fish pursuing a shoal of mackerel.

But this glimpse of early man that geology has recently given us at once raises up momentous questions. If, as we are told, individual souls have existed from all eternity, and amelioration by re-births has been the great law of the universe, how is it that, after millions of billions of years, we only get the dog-fish man? This suggests another question. The dog-fish man, almost before our eyes, has been changed into a Pascal and a Newton, and this, as far as we can see, by quite another process. He has been transformed by the steady and potent law of heredity. Is heredity, in 200,000 years, more effective than Re incarnation working through eternity?

Another aspect of this question suggested itself to me the other day when I was reading Daudet's amusing *Tartarin de Tarascon*. That worthy individual never told lies, but also he never told the truth. A *mirage*, it is recorded, was over his mind. This particular *mirage* is over many groups of men in many countries. There can be no doubt that a little Hindû born at Benares and a little Englishman born in a nobleman's country seat in Sussex will not be equally truthful, if I may be allowed that moderate way of putting it. Let us suppose that one of these little boys, about to be born, in his last birth was a Hindû of surprising spiritual development, and the other a squire and dragoon killed at Balacava. Now it seems to me Mr. Sinnett's unconscious but very intelligent vice-Providence, Karma, will here have rather a knotty question to settle. Should the Hindû be re-born in India and the dragoon in Sussex, or *vice versa*? If the ascetic is sent back to a region where lying is treated as one of the fine arts, it is very plain that all the Karma of his many million previous existences will not prevent him from growing up an abominable little liar. On the other hand, if for a reward he is given a spell in a bracing climate where truth is sometimes spoken, is the worthy dragoon to become a timorous and lying black boy, that he make a vacancy for someone else? Is this in point of fact strict Karma? "Karma" means simply causation; but in Theosophy we seem to reach that region rendered famous by the poet Robert Montgomery, where

"Cause and Effect from their dark thrones are cast."

Mr. Wallace in the letter above cited says, I think with justice, that if there is a law of heredity which hands down moral and intellectual as well as physical characteristics, it must neutralise the law of amelioration by re-births. Plainly there is such a law, for we see the daughter of a Fawcett eclipse the Senior Wrangler, and the son of an impure Maharanee remain a Duleep Singh in spite of much official scrubbing and gilding. "Excelsior" thinks this law of amelioration by heredity unjust, but it is difficult to see the injustice of it, especially when we compare it with the alleged law of amelioration by re-births. The last is a law of perpetual and arbitrary special providences—conceptions that have quite gone out of favour in the scientific, almost in the religious world. The other is a large law which proclaims that the status of the individual can be improved, but only on the condition that the improvement shall be more or less general. "Excelsior" sees many inequalities and injustices. A drinks, although his father was sober; B writes *Endymion*, although his father was a stable-keeper. Just so. This is real Karma, real cause and effect. For real improvement it is not enough to have the genius of Chatham and Sheridan in the blood, we must get rid of ancestral port wine and idiocy. We must eliminate the stable-keeper and exalt the Keats.

COLENSO.

### RE-BIRTHS.

"Excelsior" has written two letters recently ("LIGHT," August 9th and 26th) maintaining that it is utterly "impossible" that an individual soul and its material envelope can have come into existence simultaneously. He seems to favour apparently the doctrine of an eternity of previous existences, an idea which was so ably dealt with by Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace in his letter ("LIGHT," July 26th). If our personal individualities, says that writer, "have existed from eternity, then we are all uncreated, independent beings—gods in fact."

Let us see if science can let in a few side lights on this momentous question. Anthropology, aided by geology, tells us that about the glacial period, or some 250,000 years ago, the river-drift man, armed with his flint spear and fish-bone arrows, pursued his prey, the reindeer and the urus, guided by their summer and winter migrations, from Africa to England, and from England to Africa, unchecked by modern seas. He is the earliest and most savage specimen of humanity of which we have record; and his