

Children Who Remember Previous Lives

A Question of Reincarnation
revised edition



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My wife, Margaret, generously gave up much time that we could have spent pleasantly together so that I could finish this book, and I dedicate it affectionately to her.

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Preface to the Revised Edition

Happy is the author who can claim advances in his subject when he revises a book written only a little more than a decade earlier. I claim such happiness for several reasons.

The first advance derives from the publication of replication studies. Until the 1980s I worked almost alone on the investigation of the children who claim to remember previous lives. I had the blessing of unusually competent and diligent interpreters and assistants, but they could not conduct and publish independent investigations. Soon after the publication of the first edition of this work other investigators began to publish reports of these cases independently of me. More than that, in different ways these new investigators have undertaken imaginative projects that have advanced the research beyond what I accomplished. Much of the additional text and many of the added references in this edition derive from their work. I am thinking here (in alphabetical order) of Erlendur Haraldsson, Jürgen Keil, Antonia Mills, Satwant Pasricha, and Jim Tucker. As they have traveled more, I have traveled less. I have slowed my own investigations to spare time for writing. I investigated the cases that I summarize in chapter 4 many years ago. This is true even of the two cases that I added to the twelve included in the first edition of this work. I advise readers who wish to study reports of recently investigated cases to study the publications of my colleagues.

The second noteworthy development is the publication in 1997 of my two-volume monograph on the cases whose subjects had pertinent birthmarks and birth defects. This work includes many cases that I had studied before the publication of the first edition of this book. I had held back case reports with these features in order to present their evidence all together.

Having done that, I can include in this edition additional information about birthmarks and birth defects.

This edition also contains the results of numerous analyses of the data (from a large number of cases) that my colleagues and I have made since the first edition was published.

Apart from the new material, I have tried wherever I could to improve the clarity of the text and bring it and the references up to date.

Attentive readers may note that I give scant references to recent publications in neuroscience. I have not failed to follow developments in this important field, which has greatly advanced with the infusion of funds it received during the "decade of the brain." I remain skeptical, however, that the reductionist approach of nearly all neuroscientists will contribute to understanding the mind-brain problem. I believe that only the recognition of the experiences now called paranormal will do that. I look forward eagerly to the "decade of the mind."

One political development since the first edition of this book deserves comment. The country long known as Burma has been governed by a military dictatorship for almost four decades. In 1989 the government changed the name of the country to Myanmar. Some other place names were also changed; for example, Rangoon became Yangon. My investigations of cases in this country occurred between 1970 and 1987, when the country was called Burma, and I have generally retained that name in this book.

Readers should understand that the names of subjects and deceased persons mentioned in this book are a mix of real names and pseudonyms. Persons wishing more information about particular cases can often find these in detailed case reports to which the Appendix provides a directory; if these reports prove insufficient, readers may write me for more information.

Many of the persons whose assistance I gratefully acknowledged in the first edition have continued to help me selflessly. A few persons have been especially important, indeed essential in the task of revision. I wish to thank two colleagues who kindly read through the revision and offered helpful comments for its improvement; they are Emily Williams Kelly (formerly Cook) and Jim Tucker. Dawn Hunt also read the full text; she gave special attention to the references and much other help. Patricia Estes retyped the book with inexhaustible patience and awesome accuracy. In doing this she was greatly helped by Irene Dunn.

As I was working on this revision Margaret, my wife, asked me why I had dedicated it to her. Those who know Margaret know the answer to this question.

Preface to the First Edition

This book aims at presenting for the general reader an account of my research on cases suggestive of reincarnation. It does not provide detailed evidence for reincarnation. Rather, it offers a summary of the way I have conducted my research, of the more important results obtained, and of my present conclusions.

In order to familiarize readers with the types of cases from which the evidence derives, I have included summaries of twelve typical cases. These, however, are unfleshed skeletons compared with the detailed case reports that I have published elsewhere, in which I have tried to marshal all the evidence bearing on the cases reported. (I have now published sixty-five detailed case reports and have more than 100 in various stages of preparation for future publication.) I should regard disapprovingly anyone who, solely from reading this book, moved from skepticism — or ignorance — concerning reincarnation to a settled conviction that it occurs. I shall be content if I have succeeded in making the idea of reincarnation plausible to persons who have not thought it was; if some of them then think it worth their while to examine the evidence in my detailed case reports, I shall have accomplished more than I set out to do.

I have also drastically abbreviated my discussion of the interpretation of the evidence, although I have tried to give a balanced exposition of its strengths and weaknesses. I hope that the brevity of this part of the book will induce readers to study my longer deployment of arguments in other books.

In addition to providing an outline of my methods and principal results, this book will perhaps serve several other purposes. First, I hope that it will

help to correct some common misconceptions about reincarnation. For many Westerners the idea of reincarnation seems remote and bizarre. They often associate it with, and only with, Hinduism and Buddhism and the Hindu and Buddhist ideas concerning retributive *karma*¹* and rebirth in nonhuman animal bodies. I shall take some pains to show that the cases I have studied rarely furnish evidence supporting these ideas. Moreover, many of the numerous peoples other than Hindus and Buddhists who believe in reincarnation do not link it with concepts of reward, punishment, or rebirth in nonhuman animal bodies. A belief that reincarnation must happen in a particular way can impede useful thought about the subject almost as much as can total rejection of the idea; some correspondents who write me with dogmatic assurance about how reincarnation occurs seem to have almost as much to unlearn as those who insist that reincarnation is impossible.

I have a second, subsidiary motive for writing this book: my hope that it will elicit reports of new cases that we can investigate. I am convinced that cases of the reincarnation type are underreported, particularly in the West. Correspondents sometimes tell me that a child of their family seemed to speak about a previous life when he² was about three years old, but by the time the correspondent writes, the child is often already ten or fifteen years of age, or even older. Some persons repentantly mention that when the child was younger they ignored him or even derided him for talking about a previous life. Later, the child forgot what he had seemed to remember earlier. If I and my successors can study cases among young children of the West while the cases are still active, as we have been doing in Asia and other parts of the world for many years, our research should make more rapid progress.

It may seem contradictory, just after inviting readers to send me information about new cases, to mention that I wish also in this book to discourage a deliberate searching for memories of previous lives — whether through the use of drugs, meditation, or hypnosis. Unfortunately, some hypnotists have stated that anyone can recover memories of previous lives by means of hypnosis, and great therapeutic benefits from this are claimed or hinted at. I shall try to quench misguided and sometimes shamefully exploited enthusiasm for hypnosis, especially when it is proposed as a sure means of eliciting memories of previous lives.

The cases that seem to me most deserving of our attention have nearly all occurred outside areas of Western culture, that is, among the peoples of Asia, West Africa, and the tribal groups of northwestern North America. There are reasons for this geographical disproportion, and although we have little understanding of them, I have offered some speculations about it. Here

*See Chapter Notes, beginning on page 261.

I wish to offer two related comments. First, not all cases come from the areas where most occur; some excellent ones have occurred in Europe and North America (among nontribal peoples). Second, cases suggestive of reincarnation show significant similarities in their main features to phenomena that have been carefully studied in the West for more than a century: apparitions, telepathic impressions, telepathic dreams, and lucid dreams. Here and there throughout this book I have drawn attention to these parallels. I hope these allusions will help to make the cases that I mainly discuss seem less remote and exotic, and therefore more credible, than they might otherwise appear to be.

A Guide for Readers Wishing More Details

This book is written for the layperson. But which one? One who moves rapidly may read it without examining a single note or reference. Such a reader may resent paying one-sixth of the cost of a book for notes that do not interest him. I would also like, however, to attract readers whose study of this book will not slake their thirst for knowledge, but increase it. I hope that these readers will find the extensive notes and references useful. They are all placed at the end of the book.

How to Find a Reference to a Source

Most of the references are given in the Chapter Notes. When I have not provided a note about an author whose name I mention in the text, the reader wishing a reference to the author's work should turn to the list of References, where I have listed published sources alphabetically by author.

Detailed Case Reports

Readers who wish to read a detailed report of a case will find a citation to the report (if one has been published) in the list of cases given in the Appendix; the cases are listed there by the first or given names of the persons who say they have had a previous life (or, in a very few instances, who are said by other persons to have had a previous life). I refer to these persons as the subjects of the cases.

CHAPTER 1

An Introduction to the Study of Reincarnation

It may disappoint some readers to learn that this book is not about reincarnation directly; instead, it is about children who claim to remember previous lives. From studying the experiences of such children some understanding about reincarnation may eventually come. Before that can happen, however, we must become confident that reincarnation offers the best explanation for these children's apparent memories.

When I refer to these memories, I shall at times omit qualifying adjectives, such as "apparent" or "purported"; but I do this only to make reading easier and with no intention of begging the main question that the cases of these children present. From the perspective of the child subject of a case, however, the memories that he experiences of a former life seem just as real — just as much true memories — as memories he may have of events since he was born. The verified statements he makes about the other life derive from memories of some kind.¹ Those who observe him need to decide whether they are memories of a life that he lived in a former incarnation or ones that he acquired in some other way. If readers remember this point, they should not find the title of this book misleading.

I have another reason for saying little about reincarnation itself. Although I shall be drawing on the information of more than 2,500 cases,² this is a minuscule number compared with the billions of human beings who have lived. It would be rash to generalize from so few cases, even if we were sure they are all best interpreted as instances of reincarnation (which we cannot be); furthermore, although the cases show considerable uniformities, we cannot say that they are representative of the lives of ordinary people. Indeed, when I later describe the recurrent features of the cases, readers will quickly

realize that the lives apparently remembered are not ordinary ones. This is only partly due to the haphazard methods I have had to use, *faute de mieux*, in collecting cases. The cases are also unrepresentative because remembering a previous life is an unusual experience that occurs to only a few persons for reasons that we are, at most, just beginning to understand.

Although I am not writing directly about reincarnation, the central issue of my research and of this book is whether or not reincarnation occurs, at least sometimes. This amounts to asking whether a human personality (or a component of it) may survive death, and later — perhaps after an interval passed in some nonphysical realm — become associated with another physical body. Reincarnation is not the only conceivable way in which a human personality might survive death. It is not the form of survival that most Christians and Moslems expect. Nor is it the only form of survival that scientific investigators of this possibility have envisaged.³

Most scientists today do not believe that any survival of human personality after death does or can occur.⁴ Nearly all scientists who do believe in a life after death derive their conviction in the matter from faith in a particular religious teaching. Most of them would deny that the question of human survival after death could be studied scientifically. Nevertheless, in the late nineteenth century a handful of scientists and scholars in England began to discuss the possibility of obtaining evidence of survival after death through the collection and analysis of data with methods customary in other branches of science. They and their successors have obtained a variety of such data. The cases discussed in this book represent only one block of information that anyone studying the subject of survival after death should try to appraise.⁵

In the two paragraphs above I referred to human personality. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word “personality” as: “The quality, character, or fact of being a person as distinct from a thing.... Personal existence, actual existence as a person; the fact of there being or having been such a person; personal identity.... That quality or assemblage of qualities which makes a person what he is, as distinct from other persons.” The first part of the definition indicates the crux of this matter. Are human beings things, or are they more than that? If they have “something more” than a thing has, can that “something more,” whatever it is, survive death? The persistence of a person’s stream of consciousness after death can be known directly only to that person. Other persons who outlive him can obtain only indirect evidence of his survival. What criteria should they adopt for deciding that a particular person has survived death? What is meant, in the definition above, by “personal identity?” Philosophers have much debated what constitutes a person’s identity.⁶ Most seem to agree that, each life being unique, the memories of

it will be unique; therefore, evidence of the persistence of memories will provide the best — and perhaps the only — indication that a particular person has survived the death of his body.

Thus, the search for evidence that someone has survived death has usually involved studying indicia of the continuation of that person's memories. The information examined must, however, extend beyond mere imaged memories of past events; we can have such memories on a video tape, yet we would not say that the tape and its electronic player were personalities. The concept of personality should also include feelings and purposes and at least some degree of consciousness. We could allow for a temporary lapse of consciousness after death, just as we do when we sleep and awake to another day; but I do not think we should regard anyone as having survived death if he did not resume what we call consciousness, even though the kind of consciousness that he had after death might differ greatly from that familiar to us when alive.

The evidence of survival after death deriving from children who remember previous lives differs in one important respect from some of the other types of evidence of survival, such as that obtained from some apparitions of the dead. An apparition may suggest that a person who is dead has somehow survived death and become able to communicate evidence of his identity to living persons, whereas a child who claims to remember a previous life is a living person who claims to have had an earlier life in which he died. In some respects it is easier to work forward from a dead person to a still-living one than it is to work backward from a living person to the dead one whose life the child claims to have lived. I shall next try to explain why I think this.

So far as the evidence goes, dead persons — at least up to the stage where any evidence of their discarnate existence can be obtained — may undergo comparatively little change of personality⁷ solely as a result of dying. In contrast, the association of a discarnate personality with a new physical body would entail major adaptations as it becomes housed in a new and smaller physical frame with still-rudimentary sensory and cognitive organs. Moreover, this new body might be born in a different family, to which the personality would need to adapt, and this new environment would inevitably lead to further modifications. By the time a child could communicate memories of a previous life, the different ingredients of his personality would have blended, more or less, and become difficult for an investigator to distinguish from each other. This makes the evidence for the survival of a deceased person that we derive from such children less easy to evaluate — at least as to the deceased person's identity — than that provided by, for example, an apparition of a deceased person as he was at the time of his death. There are

several rival interpretations to consider in appraising an apparition, but at least the figure seen is often — although not always — that of a whole person and a recognizable one.⁸ It is not the same with children who remember previous lives. From the information they furnish, which often comes in fragments only, an investigator must decide whether the pieces he can put together credibly evoke a particular deceased person and no one else. I shall return later to the important topic of criteria for identifying a particular person.

The evidence for reincarnation that we have suggests that living human beings (and perhaps nonhuman animals also) have minds, or souls if you like, that animate them when they are living and that survive after they die. Most biologists will stigmatize this suggestion as vitalism⁹ and declare it to have been discredited decades ago. However, new evidence — and even examination of older, neglected evidence — may restore the credit of vitalism. I do not think scientists in other disciplines need lose anything except some of their assumptions — such as that a person is nothing but a physical body — if they examine open-mindedly the evidence we have of life after death. Reincarnation, at least as I conceive it, does not nullify what we know about evolution and genetics. It suggests, however, that there may be two streams of evolution — the biological one and a personal one — and that during terrestrial lives these streams may interact. How they might do this we can barely envisage at present, although in a later chapter I put forward some tentative speculations about processes that may occur.

The idea of reincarnation offers a contribution to the understanding of the uniqueness of individual persons. Geneticists use the word “phenotype” to indicate the living person produced by the interaction of a person’s genes and his environment (the only elements involved that most geneticists now acknowledge). Most biologists recognize the uniqueness of each phenotype — even those of one-egg (identical) twins. They believe that genetics and the influences of environment will ultimately explain this uniqueness. Almost infinite possibilities exist for variations in genetic composition: these include the random distribution of chromosomes into gametes (the male and female cells that unite when conception occurs), the recombination of genes among chromosomes, and occasional mutations of genes. Environments also vary widely. Even twins have somewhat different environments, and someone once remarked that not even conjoined (Siamese) twins have precisely the same environment, because one of them has to go through a door first.¹⁰

Ideas that seem to have general validity, however, may prove insufficient when tested against all relevant observations. Some persons have unique attributes that we cannot now explain satisfactorily as due solely to a combination of genetic variation and environmental influences. Reincarnation deserves consideration as a third factor in play.

If we are, through the shuffling of our genes, the products of “chance and necessity,” to use Jacques Monod’s phrase, we can expect no solution to the problem of the inequalities in the conditions of different persons at birth. And we can draw little comfort from the analogy of being dealt a hand at cards with the opportunity to play it well or badly; a person born blind cannot even see the cards in his hand. The belief in reincarnation provides no quick reparation for congenital blindness. The research that this book reviews may, however, ultimately offer a better understanding of why a particular person is born blind than any other explanation now available. The important question to be answered is not that of why any person is born blind; it is that of why a particular person is born blind when others are not. Just to ask this question assumes that there is a person associated with a body during life; and that we can distinguish the person (or personality) from the body.

Furthermore, if reincarnation occurs, the congenitally blind person can rationally hope ultimately to enjoy vision — in another life. Critics of the evidence for reincarnation have sometimes pointed to its element of hopefulness with the dismissing suggestion that such evidence as we have derives only from wishful thinking. This objection wrongly assumes that what we desire must be false. We might be more easily persuaded to believe what we wish to believe than the contrary; nevertheless, what we wish to believe may be true. Our inquiry into the truth or falseness of an idea should proceed without regard to whether it fortifies or undermines our wishes.

Apart from this, the cases that I have studied include some for which informants have given testimony opposing their own beliefs and wishes. This occurs sometimes when a case develops in a family whose members do not believe in reincarnation, or who would rather not accept the claims of their child to remember a particular previous life. This also is a topic to which I shall return later.

In the remainder of this chapter I shall define some terms that I shall use, or usages that I have adopted, with which many readers will be unfamiliar. Along the way I shall digress to present some cases illustrating the occurrence of telepathy in everyday life; knowledge of such cases will assist the reader to appraise the cases of children who claim to remember previous lives. I shall then briefly outline the later chapters of the book.

Terms Used in Psychological Research

The cases I describe in this book fall within the branch of science called psychological research and often parapsychology. These are not satisfactory terms

for the study of phenomena that we cannot account for by our present understanding of the known sensory organs and muscular activity of humans (and perhaps other animals). The word “parapsychology,” which was first used (in Germany) in the late nineteenth century, is especially unsatisfactory. It emphasizes the relationships of this branch of science to psychology, whereas most of the scientists working in the field now realize that its links with physics and biology are just as important as those with psychology. Also, the word implies (or has come to suggest) phenomena that do not show the same lawfulness that psychologists like to think the phenomena they study show. Scientists working in this field believe that they also study lawful phenomena, but ones that may follow laws other than those currently accepted in physics and physiology. The recurrence of similar features in many cases occurring far apart from each other provides some support for this belief.

The word “parapsychology” has another disadvantage. It tends to isolate the phenomena under investigation — and also the scientists who study them — from other endeavors in science. It has not always been this way. Modern science is a recent and parochial activity. It arose in the West around A.D. 1600. Up to that time, in Europe (and still today throughout most of the world not counted as the West) the phenomena now considered paranormal were accepted without question. I do not mean that they were not considered unusual or that individual reports of such phenomena were never doubted. I mean only that they were not treated with the general skepticism toward them that later developed among scientists in the West and, following them, among many other educated Westerners. For example, Descartes referred casually to the communication of thoughts between two persons separated by a long distance, and Bacon, another founder of modern science, proposed experiments in what he called “binding of thoughts” and also ones with the throwing of dice to study the influence of “imagination” on the outcome.¹¹ Even up to the end of the nineteenth century, scientists interested in what we now call psychical research associated on equal terms with psychologists and attended the same professional meetings (then usually called congresses). How they and their successors came to be illegitimated and sent into exile may form a chapter in the histories of science that will be written in the future. Here I wish only to add that most scientists working in this field look forward with hope and expectation to the ultimate reunion of their branch of science with the rest of it. When that happens, words that are now current may be superseded.

In the meantime, however, we must make the best use we can of the words our predecessors adopted for phenomena that are still little understood, but that undeniably occur. I shall therefore define a few terms that the reader will meet in this book.¹² We speak of an experience or an event as *paranormal*

when we cannot account for it by any known sensory or muscular process. We usually now refer to paranormal sensory experiences as *extrasensory perceptions*, but I myself prefer to speak of them as *paranormal cognitions* or — better yet — as instances of *paranormal awareness*. Paranormal sensory experiences contrast with *normal means of communication*, by which we mean all the ways in which information reaches our minds through the recognized senses, particularly from reading, other visual perception, and hearing.

Extrasensory perception may occur through *telepathy* or *clairvoyance*. The word “telepathy” refers to communication between two minds and has come to replace the older terms “thought-reading” and “thought-transference.” The word “clairvoyance” refers to extrasensory perception (usually of an object) without the mediation of another person’s mind.¹³ Telepathy and clairvoyance are processes of obtaining knowledge about contemporary events. Extrasensory perception also subsumes two other modalities: that of *precognition* (sometimes called *paranormal foreknowledge*), which refers to noninferential knowledge of the future, and that of *retrocognition*, which refers to paranormal knowledge of the past.

We refer to a person who has an experience of extrasensory perception — whether spontaneously or during the course of an experiment — as the *percipient* or the *subject*. And we call the person about whom the percipient obtains information the *agent* or, sometimes, the *target person*. The word “agent” is not satisfactory; it suggests that the person concerned is an active, willing participant in the experience, and although he sometimes is, he may also be passive and unaware of any communication that occurs.

A few persons claim to obtain communications that appear to have originated in the minds of deceased persons who are conceived of as still living in a discarnate state. The persons who do this are called *mediums* or *sensitives*, and the discarnate persons who purport to give information through them are called *communicators*. I shall occasionally refer to such *mediumistic communications*.

In some places I shall use the words “psychic” and “psychical” as approximately synonymous with “paranormal” and “parapsychological.” I shall use these terms especially in considering the possible influence of presumed discarnate persons on living persons or living embryos.

Investigators have studied paranormal phenomena in two ways. They have tried to observe the phenomena as they occur spontaneously or obtain reports from other persons who have observed them, and they have tried to elicit them under experimental conditions. By means of experiments scientists can control circumstances and vary them so that when they interpret their results they can often confidently exclude explanations other than that of some paranormal process. These opportunities are nearly always lacking

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finished dressing; and as we had agreed to make an early start, I was ready by six o'clock, the hour of our early breakfast.

Many years later, the percipient, in publishing an account of his experience, added the following information:

Soon after my return to Edinburgh, there arrived a letter from India announcing G_____’s death! and stating that he had died on the 19th of December!! Singular coincidence! yet when one reflects on the vast number of dreams which night after night pass through our brains, the number of coincidences between the vision and the event are perhaps fewer and less remarkable than a fair calculation of chances would warrant us to expect.

I give the next case in the words of a man (a Russian) who, as a child, was apparently seen as an apparition by his mother.

I was then twelve years old and had just passed into my second year of high school; I went to the cottage not far from Pskov. My mother, who had a severe liver ailment, had gone with her husband (my father) for treatment to Karlsbad (now Karlovy Vary), leaving me, my sister and brother in the charge of her younger sisters. We, the children, were given a greater than usual freedom of action and used it. Once, in the evening, we decided to recreate one of the adventures of the children of Captain Grant, who had saved themselves from a flood by climbing a tree. We chose a big willow leaning over the water on the bank of the river. I was to play Paganel and became so engrossed in this part that, just like him, I fell off the tree into the water and, unable to swim, began drowning. Only grabbing a branch, I managed to reach the steep bank, with great difficulty. In silent horror, my brother and sister were witnessing this event from the tree. We were particularly worried by the inevitability of the punishment. We could not conceal from our aunts this adventure: I was completely wet and my brand new high school cap with its white peak — the object of pride and love — had been carried away by the current. At home, our young aunts, sympathizing, decided not to report to Karlsbad of the event (they also were uneasy about it). They made us promise that we would not repeat it. You can imagine the amazement and confusion — both ours and our aunts’ — when the moment she arrived, our mother described this incident in all details, pointed out the willow, mentioned the cap which had been carried to the dam, etc. She had dreamed of all this in Karlsbad and, waking up in tears, and disarray, asked her husband immediately to cable home asking whether everything was all right with the children. Father admitted that he had not sent a cable but, in order to calm the sick woman, dozed for half an hour in the reception room of the hotel and returned saying that he had cabled.

For the next case, I again quote the words of a person directly concerned in it. Here is his account of how his sister became aware, while a long distance away, of an accident he had:

As a 19 year old [German] student, I had a serious accident during a military exercise near Würzburg and barely escaped certain death. Riding on the narrow edge of a steep ravine through which a road led, I fell with my rearing and tumbling horse down into the path of a mounted battery and came to lie almost beneath the wheel of one of the guns. The latter, pulled by six horses, came to a stop just in time and I escaped, having suffered no more than fright. This accident happened in the morning hours of a beautiful spring day. In the evening of the same day, I received a telegram from my father who inquired about my well being. It was the first and only time in my life that I received such a query. My oldest sister, to whom I had always been particularly close, had occasioned this telegraphic inquiry, because she had suddenly told my parents that she knew with certainty that I had suffered an accident. My family lived in Coburg at the time. This is a case of spontaneous telepathy in which at a time of mortal danger, and as I contemplated certain death, I transmitted my thoughts, while my sister, who was particularly close to me, acted as the receiver.

Armchair critics sometimes say of reports such as those I have cited that they all derive from woolly-minded persons who have no credibility. No one can reasonably say this of the persons concerned in these cases. I did not mention their names earlier, because I did not wish any reader to accept the authenticity of the cases from the mere dropping of names. However, I will now tell you that the reporters of these experiences were, in order: H. M. Stanley, the African explorer and "discoverer" of Dr. Livingstone; Lord Brougham, a notable British orator and statesman, who was Lord Chancellor in the Whig government of 1830; L. L. Vasiliev, who became professor of physiology in the University of Leningrad; and Hans Berger, the discoverer of electroencephalography.¹⁵

Berger's experience affected him so much that he dropped an intention he had had of becoming an astronomer and decided instead to devote his life to the study of the relationship between the mind and the physical world, with consequences for which we should all be grateful. The experiences of the other persons concerned deeply affected them also, in different ways. Vasiliev cited his experience in one of his books on parapsychology (to which he made notable contributions), and his childhood experience with telepathy seems to have been a factor in his later undertaking research in parapsychology. However, I mainly wish to emphasize that the persons who had these experiences deserve to be listened to thoughtfully when they recount them, because they have earned our respect through their competence in unrelated activities.¹⁶

Skeptics have also suggested that apparitions of the dead coincide by chance with the deaths of the persons perceived. The early psychical researchers paid much attention to this objection, and they refuted it with a

careful appraisal of the likelihood that an apparition of a person might be seen at the moment of his death by chance.¹⁷

Even if it were not wrong, the argument of chance coincidence could only be brought against instances in which a person was identified in a dream or apparition at the moment of his death without specific details of the death. When such details occur — as they do in many instances — and are outside the percipient's normal powers of inference, we are considering a unique perception, at a long distance, of a unique event. To illustrate this point I shall present another case. The percipient was Agnes Paquet, whose brother, Edmund Dunn, drowned in the harbor of Chicago in 1889. She made the following statement:

I arose about the usual hour on the morning of the accident, probably about six o'clock. I had slept well throughout the night, had no dreams or sudden awakenings. I awoke feeling gloomy and depressed, which feeling I could not shake off. After breakfast my husband went to his work, and, at the proper time, the children were gotten ready and sent to school, leaving me alone in the house. Soon after this I decided to steep and drink some tea, hoping it would relieve me of the gloomy feelings aforementioned. I went into the pantry, took down the tea canister, and as I turned around my brother Edmund — or his exact image — stood before me and only a few feet away. The apparition stood with back toward me, or, rather, partially so, and was in the act of falling forward — away from me — seemingly impelled by two ropes or a loop of rope drawing against his legs. The vision lasted but a moment, disappearing over a low railing or bulwark, but was very distinct. I dropped the tea, clasped my hands to my face, and exclaimed, "My God! Ed. is drowned."

At about half-past ten a.m. my husband received a telegram from Chicago, announcing the drowning of my brother. When he arrived home he said to me, "Ed. is sick in hospital at Chicago; I have just received a telegram," to which I replied, "Ed. is drowned; I saw him go overboard." I then gave him a minute description of what I had seen. I stated that my brother, as I saw him, was bare-headed, had on a heavy, blue sailor's shirt, no coat, and that he went over the rail or bulwark. I noticed that his pants' legs were rolled up enough to show the white lining inside. I also described the appearance of the boat at the point where my brother went overboard.

I am not nervous, and neither before nor since have I had any experience in the least degree similar to that above related.

My brother was not subject to fainting or vertigo.

Agnes Paquet's husband, Peter, provided the following corroboration of his wife's experience and his brother-in-law's death:

At about 10.30 o'clock a.m., October 24th, 1889, I received a telegram from Chicago, announcing the drowning of my brother-in-law, Edmund Dunn, at 3 o'clock that morning. I went directly home, and, wishing to break the force of the sad news I had to convey to my wife, I said to her: "Ed. is sick in hospital

at Chicago; I have just received a telegram." To which she replied: "Ed. is drowned; I saw him go overboard." She then described to me the appearance and dress of her brother as described in her statement; also the appearance of the boat, &c.

I started at once for Chicago, and when I arrived there I found the appearance of that part of the vessel described by my wife to be exactly as she had described it, though she had never seen the vessel; and the crew verified my wife's description of her brother's dress, &c., except that they thought that he had his hat on at the time of the accident. They said that Mr. Dunn had purchased a pair of pants a few days before the accident occurred, and as they were a trifle long before, wrinkling at the knees, he had worn them rolled up, showing the white lining as seen by my wife.

The captain of the tug, who was at the wheel at the time of accident, seemed reticent. He thought my brother-in-law was taken with a fainting fit or vertigo and fell over backward; but a sailor (Frank Yemont) told a friend of mine that he (Yemont) stood on the bow of the vessel that was being towed and saw the accident. He stated that my brother-in-law was caught in the tow-line and thrown overboard, as described by my wife. I think that the captain, in his statement, wished to avoid responsibility, as he had no right to order a fireman — my brother-in-law's occupation — to handle the tow-line.

My brother-in-law was never, to my knowledge, subject to fainting or vertigo.¹⁸

To state the obvious, one can die only once in a lifetime. Therefore, the precise details of how one dies are always unique. Some deaths resemble others, and we can sometimes predict, in a general way, how a particular person will die. Other deaths, however, have unusual features, and I place that of Edmund Dunn in this category. His kind of death — from drowning when his foot got caught in a tow-line — cannot have happened to more than a few people at any time, and it can only have happened once to him.¹⁹ We cannot reasonably argue that his sister just happened by chance to have a vision with details corresponding to those of her brother's death at about the time he did die in the manner she described. It makes more sense to conclude that she somehow became aware (at a long distance) of the details of his death. If we cannot state exactly how she did this, we should not for that reason deny that she did. "Rarities and reports that seem incredible are not to be suppressed or denied to the memory of men."²⁰

Confronted with cases like Agnes Paquet's, some critics have suggested that we cannot trust the accounts of such experiences because they were usually written down after the percipient obtained knowledge of the corresponding events and often only many years later, when faulty memories could have blurred details and permitted a forgetting of discrepancies. This is an objection that we must take seriously in the appraisal of these cases (and of the children's cases with which this book is mainly concerned). We do not

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The Experience of Déjà Vu

Some persons have had the experience of believing, on visiting a place for the first time, that they have seen it before. Psychologists call this experience *déjà vu* ("already seen"). In one survey 76 percent of the respondents reported having had such an experience.¹³

Some young subjects of cases of the reincarnation type experience *déjà vu* when they first go to the villages where they say they lived in a previous life. All or much of the village seems familiar to such a child, although he may also remark on changes in doors, rooms, trees, or other features of the local buildings and grounds that have been altered since the life he remembers.¹⁴ Perhaps other persons who have experience of *déjà vu*, but who do not have any imaged memories of a previous life, remember just the tip of such a life, so to speak, and cannot bring further memories into consciousness.

Most cases of *déjà vu*, however, probably require no such interpretation. Several other explanations account for many instances of this experience better than reincarnation does.¹⁵ For example, some instances may be due to the kind of noninferential knowledge of the future that we call precognition. Precognition sometimes occurs during dreams. Suppose that a person dreams of a place that he had never seen before, but that he will later visit, although he does not know this at the time. He may then forget the dream, although residues of it may remain just below the threshold of consciousness. Experiments with memory have shown that "recognition is greater than recall." This means that although we may try unsuccessfully to recall a name, for example, we may recognize it if we see it in a list along with other names. In the present example, the dreamer, when he actually visits the place dreamed about, may find that it seems familiar and may even think that he has seen it before, although he cannot explain why he thinks this. A few instances of *déjà vu* seem to support this explanation. In these the person having an experience of *déjà vu* has later recalled a dream he had earlier about the place that seemed familiar.

Some *déjà vu* experiences may have an even simpler explanation. The scene that appears familiar may resemble one previously seen by the person having the experience without his recognizing the similarity. Something like this happens when we approach and even address by name a complete stranger whom we have mistaken for someone we know. In the latter situation the stranger quickly tells us we are wrong, if we do not realize the error ourselves before he does so. A stretch of scenery, however, or an event in progress cannot speak and correct our errors; so when they appear familiar some persons may persist in thinking incorrectly that they have "been there before."

A neurological explanation has also been suggested for some déjà vu experiences. If the two hemispheres of the brain should function slightly out of phase with each other, information reaching consciousness through one hemisphere would be recorded by that hemisphere as new while the other side of the brain, a millisecond later, might register it as old. I know of no experimental evidence that this can happen; and even if it could, it would not explain those few instances of déjà vu in which the person having the experience showed knowledge of a place that he could not have obtained normally.¹⁶

Dreams and Nightmares

Some persons have dreams in which they seem to see themselves in another place and wearing clothes of a different epoch. Many such dreams are recurrent and may have an unpleasant, nightmarish quality. Some of the persons having such dreams say that they first started in childhood and have recurred often thereafter. Sometimes the dreams diminish in frequency as the person becomes older, and they may eventually cease altogether.

In the more valuable of such dreams — as I judge them — the dreamer seems to experience a reliving of the events in the dream. He may not find it easy to describe the difference between these unusual dreams and his ordinary ones. He will likely say, however, that his ordinary dreams seem disjointed, incongruous, and generally unrealistic, even though he may not recognize these features until he awakens. In contrast, in the “previous life” dreams the scenes are completely realistic and coherent. The details of the surroundings are as vivid and as natural as waking perceptions are, and they lack the bizarreness that objects and surroundings so often have in ordinary dreams. If the dream is recurrent, each dream of the series is usually exactly like all the others, with the dreamer always awakening at the same point — often a crisis in the event enacted — of the dream. Finally, dreams of this type become strongly fixed in the memory and do not fade away as do the majority of ordinary dreams. This fixation in memory may occur even in dreams of this kind that do not recur, so it does not necessarily depend upon repetition.

Many persons have described such dreams to me. The majority of them have no verifiable details, although a few correspond with other aspects of the dreamer’s personality, such as unusual fears or interests in particular countries.

In one case an American girl, Alice Robertson (who was born in 1932), suffered for many years (beginning in early childhood) from recurrent

nightmares, the vivid details of which never changed. In the nightmares she was an adult woman dressed in an ankle-length garment and walking tranquilly along a road with a young girl whom she knew to be her daughter. It was evening and the sun was approaching the horizon. Suddenly, she became aware of a deafening roar, and the earth seemed to give way beneath her. At this point she would awaken in terror, screaming. This would bring her solicitous mother running to her side. The child — as Alice then was — would try to explain to her mother that she had really lived the scene of the nightmare; but her mother, the wife of an Episcopalian bishop, would assure her that this could not be possible and that she had “only been dreaming.” Eventually Alice gave up trying to persuade her mother that in her nightmares she was remembering real events that she had once experienced. The nightmares, however, persisted, although in later life they gradually diminished in frequency.

After Alice grew up, she identified the ankle-length garment that she wore in the dream as a sari. This detail harmonized with a strong attraction she felt for India. When she was a young woman, she saw a motion picture about Darjeeling (in northeastern India), which produced in her a strong sense of *déjà vu*. She then for the first time read something about Darjeeling and learned that disastrous landslides had occurred there on a number of occasions between 1890 and 1920. She thus became convinced that the previous life of her nightmares had occurred in Darjeeling. I could not verify this, because Alice could not give sufficient details of personal names and places to permit an attempt at this. She was one of the persons I mentioned earlier with whom an effort was made with hypnosis to elicit additional memories, but during the hypnosis she merely relived the familiar terrifying experience of the nightmare without adding any new details.

Another American girl, Mary Magruder, had equally distressing nightmares, which also began in her early childhood. In hers she seemed to be a young girl who was being chased by an (American) Indian during a raid by Indians on a settlement of white pioneers. Like the dreams of Alice Robertson, those of Mary Magruder were vivid and the details similar at each recurrence. However, the dream did not always run to its full length. In some of the dreams Indians were only chasing her; in others an Indian had actually caught her and was holding her by the hair. At this point she would awaken, screaming. Sometimes she would say: “Mother, they are taking my curls.” Mary particularly noted that whereas her own hair was light and straight, that of the young girl she seemed to be in the dream was brown and curly.

Although Mary appeared to be reliving a previous life in the nightmares, she did not think much about the matter until a chance visit brought her to a place in western Virginia where her ancestors had lived during the

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experienced since her birth, although they were mixed with memories of such events. In addition to being seriously ill, however, the patient was also under the influence of medication, so it would be difficult to identify the immediate physical cause of the unusual images she experienced.

Several of the child subjects of cases of the reincarnation type have had an increase in memories of a previous life during an illness (usually with a fever), and a few have made their first statements about the previous life during an illness.²¹

Meditation

Some persons have seemed to recover memories of previous lives during meditation. The *siddhis* (spiritual and paranormal powers) said to be acquired incidentally by spiritual aspirants in Hinduism and Buddhism include the ability to remember previous lives. In some instances known to me, apparent memories of previous lives have erupted suddenly and unexpectedly into consciousness during meditation, but I know of only one person who has obtained verifiable memories in this way. This is Pratomwan Inthanu (a Buddhist nun of Thailand), who recovered, while meditating, some subsequently verified memories of the lives of two infants who had lived in places far removed from where Pratomwan herself was born and lived.

Apparent memories of a previous life that occur spontaneously during meditation may have value for the meditator, even though they are unverified and contribute nothing to evidence. (Meditators are not usually seeking evidence.)

I think I should warn, however, against attaching importance to apparent memories of previous lives evoked during meditation, especially when the meditator has deliberately set out to recover such memories. This merely invites fantasies that appear deceptively as memories of a previous life. A person searching for memories of a previous life during meditation is in no better position than someone under the influence of a hypnotist; in both situations there is a task to do and the likelihood of fulfilling the task with a fantasy.

Even without such deliberate elicitation, fantasies may emerge during meditation and be mistaken for actual memories. We should remember that many Western practitioners of meditation adopt some technique of Asian provenance; few of them are naive with regard to the possibility of reincarnation, and nearly all know that meditation may lead to the emergence of memories of previous lives. This makes them liable to interpret uncritically as memories of previous lives any fantasies that happen to develop during their meditation.

Strong Emotion

In a small number of cases known to me, adults have had apparent memories of previous lives that occurred during periods of strong emotion, such as grief. The case of Georg Neidhart seems to me the best example of this type. When Georg Neidhart, who lived in Munich, Germany, was still a young man, his first wife and daughter both died within a short interval. As a consequence, he fell into a depression that lasted several months. While in this condition one day, he suddenly began to see inwardly a series of scenes of what seemed to be a previous life. The scenes ordered themselves into a sequence of events, about which he made notes. Subsequently, he verified some of the details and found that others were plausible for the life of a man who had lived in the part of Bavaria northeast of Munich during the twelfth century. A few other cases of this type have come to my attention, although none have been as strong evidentially as that of Georg Neidhart.

Miscellaneous Waking Experiences of Adults

Some adult persons have had occur to them spontaneously, during a normal, waking state, “flashes” — or longer sequences — of what seem to be memories of previous lives. We cannot tell how common such experiences are because reports of them so far have depended on voluntary submission of accounts by the persons having them. These spontaneous “flashes” pose the same problems of analysis as do all the other types of evidence that I have mentioned: they are of little value unless verified, and, even if verified, of little value unless we can exclude normal sources of information for their content.²²

Spontaneous Experiences of Young Children

Apart from the dreams and nightmares, which often begin when the subject is a young child, the subjects for all the types of evidence so far discussed have been adults. By the time a person reaches adulthood, his mind has been filled with a wide variety of information from many sources. Much of this information lies in obscure recesses of the mind, and its possessor may not even be aware of having acquired it. Yet it remains available to be tapped for fantasies about previous lives. Such mobilization of unconscious memory stores is particularly likely to occur when a deliberate effort is made to evoke previous life memories. I have described how this can occur in cases

of hypnotic regression and during meditation; it seems to occur sometimes also when hallucinogenic drugs are taken.

The foregoing remarks will help readers to understand why I value so highly the spontaneous utterances about previous lives made by young children. With rare exceptions, these children speak of their own volition; no one has suggested to them that they should try to remember a previous life. And at the young age when they usually first speak about the previous lives their minds have not yet received through normal channels much information about deceased persons. Moreover, we can usually make a satisfactory appraisal of the likelihood that they have obtained normally whatever information they communicate about such persons. For the past thirty years I have concentrated my attention on the cases of these young children, and I feel justified in devoting almost all the remainder of this book to them. In the next chapter I shall present fourteen typical cases, the subjects of which were all young children when they first spoke about previous lives.

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she was taken to a horse farm; she went directly to the horses and petted them. When someone asked her: "Aren't you afraid of the horses?" she replied: "No, I have been on horses lots of times." Roberta also spoke of an automotive vehicle that the previous father had owned. (It was not clear whether this had been a passenger automobile or a truck.) She would sometimes indicate a vehicle and remark: "There is a car [or truck] [like the one] that my Dad used to own."

Roberta said that her "other mummy and daddy" lived in the same town where she and her family were then living. (This was a different town than the one where I visited them.) On one occasion, Roberta was in a car with her mother and pointed to a road, saying that was where she lived; she indicated a dirt road that joined the highway. She wanted to go down the road to see the previous family. Her mother did not wish to do this, evidently because at this time she was not able to think that Roberta might be correct. Roberta reproached her mother for days afterward for not having taken her to the previous family when they had a chance to visit them.¹¹

Roberta asked her mother to buy her toys similar to those she said that she used to have; when her mother said she did not know what these were, Roberta became annoyed at what she considered her mother's dullness. On other occasions, also, she scolded her mother for not remembering her (Roberta's) previous life, as it seemed to Roberta she should have done. (And yet Roberta did not claim that her mother had had a part in the previous life.)

Roberta evidently had clear visual images of the appearances of the previous parents. Referring to the previous mother, she told her mother: "You act like her, but she did not look like you."¹² Roberta favored the previous mother's style in various household tasks, including cooking. When her (present) mother prepared some new dish for dinner, Roberta would sometimes tell her parents that she had eaten it many times before. Once her mother cooked scalloped corn as a surprise for the family. When she placed this on the table, Roberta said: "I had that lots of times. Don't you remember, my other mother used to make it." She then referred to it by some name other than scalloped corn, but Shirley Morgan later forgot this name. Shirley Morgan asked Roberta how her "other mother" prepared the dish, and Roberta patiently explained her "other mother's" way of cooking it. Roberta also thought her mother foolish not to wash windows in the more efficient manner of her previous mother. She often intervened in her parents' conversations and remarks indicating familiarity with some topic or object of which, in her mother's opinion, she could have known nothing normally.

Roberta gave few clues to the period when the previous life took place. She did not, for example, refer to wearing clothes that obviously belonged

to earlier fashions. Her familiarity with automobiles suggested that the previous life had occurred at least after they had become commonly owned by American farmers. She implied, more than she expressly stated, that the previous parents were still living and could be found if only her parents would apply themselves to the task.

Roberta showed some inclination to wear boys' clothes, and she complained of being a girl. She did not, however, state that she had been a boy in the previous life. Her requests for toys suggested that the person whose life she was recalling had died young, yet Roberta never said anything about how that person had died. In fact, she denied having died. When Shirley Morgan once asked a direct question about this, Roberta replied: "I didn't die. I had to leave them [the other parents] for a while. And I told them I was coming back." She never said that she loved the previous parents, and, indeed, Shirley Morgan thought that in a straight popularity contest between herself and the previous mother, she (Shirley Morgan) would win, although barely. Roberta's pressure to return to the previous family appeared to derive more from her promise to go back to them than from ties of affection. Since, however, she never gave any names for herself or the family of the previous life, Shirley Morgan had no way of tracing them, even if she had wished to do so at the time, which was far from being the case.

Shirley Morgan and her husband were both Christians — she a member of the Assembly of God, he of the Roman Catholic Church; reincarnation had no place in the teachings of either of these religions. Shirley Morgan knew nothing about reincarnation at the time Roberta began talking about a previous life. She was not prepared for such talk, and even less prepared for Roberta's demands to be taken to the "other mother" and for her constant, unfavorable comparisons of Shirley Morgan with the "other mother." Every parent has a limit of tolerance for such assessments, and Shirley Morgan reached hers after about six months of daily pounding by Roberta. She then began to punish Roberta every time she alluded to the previous life. She spanked her for doing so. This gradually brought Roberta's utterances to a halt (except for occasional lapses, such as the one that occurred when she was four and spoke about having ridden horses).

I do not know when Roberta actually forgot about the previous life. She may have remembered it for a time after her mother began punishing her for talking about it. To outward appearances, however, she remembered it less than her mother did in the years that followed her mother's efforts to suppress her memories. The matter continued to trouble Shirley Morgan, latently at first and then openly. Finally, as I have explained, she became "obsessed" — that was her own expression — with the thought that she must trace Roberta's previous family and allow her to meet them. She began blaming herself also

for not having allowed Roberta to speak freely about the previous life; she was sure that Roberta at that time could have stated some names that would have permitted verification of her memories.

Unfortunately, this change of attitude came too late. Roberta by this time was nine and a half years old, and she had given no additional clues to the identity of the previous family since her allusion to horses at the age of four; she never added proper names to what she had said earlier. Shirley Morgan appears to have considered a search of farms with horses in the area of the Morgans' former home: this seemed impractical without some further clues that might have narrowed the area of searching. However, I do not understand why she did not try driving down the farm road that Roberta herself had indicated about six years earlier.

Soon after my visit to Roberta and her mother in the early summer of 1972, I lost touch with them and have been unable to trace them since. I can say nothing therefore about Roberta's further development.

The Case of Susan Eastland

I first learned of this case in 1968, when I received a letter from Charlotte Eastland, who, having read about my research in a magazine, volunteered information about the statements and behavior of her daughter Susan. These suggested that Susan had memories, albeit fragmentary ones, of the life of her deceased older sister, Winnie. I exchanged letters with Charlotte Eastland during 1968 and early 1969, and in the summer of 1969, I visited her in her home in Idaho. There I also met Susan, the subject of the case, and Charlotte Eastland's older daughter, Sharon. However, I did not meet Robert Eastland, the stepfather of Sharon and Susan, who had also been, according to Charlotte Eastland, a witness for some of Susan's statements about the previous life.

Winnie was a lovable six-year-old girl who was hit by an automobile and fatally injured in 1961. Her sudden death devastated the members of her family. Her mother suffered grievously and found herself longing to have Winnie somehow back in the family. At this time, she had only the vaguest notions about reincarnation; she told me later that she had heard about the belief held by people in India that humans can be reborn as nonhuman animals (which she considered impossible), but she had never heard of reincarnation in another human body.

Nevertheless, the family members had an idea that Winnie might somehow return to them. About six months after Winnie's death, her older sister, Sharon, dreamed that Winnie was coming back to the family. And when

Charlotte Eastland became pregnant two years later, she dreamed of Winnie being with the family again. In 1964, when she was in the delivery room for the birth of her new baby, her first husband (the father of all her children) thought he heard Winnie's voice saying distinctly: "Daddy, I'm coming home." The baby, Susan, thus came into a family that had lost a girl just a few years earlier and that had some expectations that this same girl would be reborn among them. We have to remember these facts when we evaluate Susan's remarks related to Winnie's life.

When Susan was about two years old, she made several statements that seemed like references to the life of Winnie. When anyone asked her how old she was, she would answer that she was six (the age Winnie had been when she was killed). Her sense of being older than her actual age persisted at least up to the age of five, because at that time she insisted that she was older than her brother Richard, who was then eleven. Winnie had been more than three years older than Richard, so Susan's remark was correct for Winnie but obviously wrong with regard to her own age relationship to Richard.

Susan expressed unusual interest in two photographs of Winnie and said of them: "That was me." Charlotte Eastland thought that she might earlier have told Susan that the photographs were of Winnie; but she had not told Susan that she thought she (Susan) might be Winnie reborn. Susan not only identified the photographs as being of her; she insisted on having them for herself. She kept one hanging by her bed and carried the other around with her for weeks, sometimes repeating that it was a photograph of herself.

Susan never asked to be called Winnie, but on one occasion, when she could barely scrawl, she took a crayon and wrote letters on the kitchen door that spelled "WINNI." She omitted the final *E* of *Winnie*, and she laid the second *I* on its side, instead of standing it upright.

During this same period, Susan frequently used the phrase "When I went to school," and she talked also about playing on the swings at school. Susan had not yet gone to school; she had played on a swing in the family's back yard, but not on one at a school. Winnie, on the other hand, had started school before she was killed, and she used to play on the swings at her school.

During Winnie's lifetime, Charlotte Eastland had a cookie jar that had a cat on its lid. She used to play a game with her children in which, when one of them wanted a cookie from the jar, she would ask the cat how many cookies the child could have. She would then imitate a cat by replying in a squeaky voice: "Meow, you may have one." (The number of allowed cookies varied with Charlotte Eastland's estimate of the child's needs and hunger.) After Winnie's death, Charlotte Eastland put the cookie jar away and forgot it; the jar remained packed away for several years. When Susan was about four, Charlotte Eastland brought it out and again filled it with cookies.

Susan asked for a cookie. Without realizing that Susan would know nothing about the game with the cat on the cookie jar, her mother unthinkingly asked her: "Well, what does the kitty say?" Susan startled her by replying: "Meow, you may have one." Charlotte Eastland, in recounting this episode to me, wisely remarked that a child as intelligent as Susan might have inferred the answer; and I would add that she might also have obtained the reply from her mother by telepathy. Her spontaneous reply was nevertheless harmonious also with the interpretation that Susan somehow had access to Winnie's memories.

After this, Susan spoke of several other events in which Winnie had participated. She described an occasion when she and other members of the family had gone to a beach and had caught a crab, and she named family members present on this outing. Charlotte Eastland recalled that the family had gone to a beach in the state of Washington the year before Winnie's death. They had played in the surf and on the sand; they had found shells and dug for clams; Charlotte Eastland could not, however, remember that they had caught a crab. Susan correctly named three of the four persons who had been present, but she included one person, her stepfather, who had not. Later, however, she corrected herself and said that Winnie's (and her) father had been present.

Susan also referred to playing in a pasture with her sister, Sharon; she said that she had been unafraid of the horses and that she had once walked under a horse. All this was correct for Winnie, who had played in a pasture with Sharon, was unafraid of horses, and had once walked under one.

Charlotte Eastland once asked Susan whether she remembered the little boy Gregory who had lived across the street from them. Susan replied: "Yes, I remember Greggy. I used to play with him." "Greggy" had been Gregory's short name; Charlotte Eastland had not mentioned it before Susan did.

Susan's mother also asked her if she remembered Uncle George, who had lived up the street from them. Susan could not remember what Uncle George's house looked like, but said that she remembered him and then added: "We used to stop and see him before going to school, and play awhile." This had been Winnie's custom; in fact, she had stopped to play at Uncle George's house on the day she was killed. I should add that Gregory and Uncle George lived in the town where the family lived during Winnie's life. Susan was born and had lived all her life in another, smaller town of Idaho.

Readers will have noticed that Susan's mother tried sometimes to stimulate her memories by asking questions about events that had occurred during Winnie's life. This sort of conversation carries some risk of inadvertently

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of their speaking about the previous life; too often we meet them only later, by which time many details may have slipped away and left a smaller residue of fading memories, or perhaps no memories at all. Some children's parents say that they too have forgotten much of what their child said earlier. Be that as it may, in most cases that I have studied, the informants have remembered between five and fifty separate statements that the child has made about the previous life.

The children also vary widely in their desire and apparent need to talk about the previous life. Some, like Mallika Aroumougam, talk about the previous life only when some object or event reminds them of a similar feature of the previous life. Others cannot keep off the subject and become bores or worse. They talk about the previous life so incessantly, even after several years, that the other members of the family may crave a meal without having to hear once again about how much better the child's previous life was than his present circumstances are. The number of details in a child's memories may correlate poorly with his desire to talk about them. Mahes de Silva, for example, remembered only a few details about a previous life, but he battered his parents — especially his mother — with them until it became a wonder that they applied no measures of suppression to him. Other parents have been less forbearing.

The subjects also differ markedly in the forcefulness with which their memories impinge on them. Some use the present tense in their statements. They may say, for example: "I *have* a wife and two sons," or "My house *is* much bigger than this one." (They may talk in this way even after they have learned to distinguish past and present with appropriate words.) Other children make a point of distinguishing the two lives in their remarks. They will begin some reference to the previous life with a phrase such as: "When I was big..."

Sometimes the children act as if they have been snatched without warning from the body of an adult and thrust into that of a helpless child.¹¹ When Celal Kapan, a subject in Turkey, began to speak, almost his first words were: "What am I doing here? I was at the port." When he could say more, he described details in the life of a dockworker who had fallen asleep in the hold of a ship that was being loaded. Unfortunately, a crane operator who did not know he was there allowed a heavy oil drum to drop on him, killing him instantly. From the evidence of the case, one might say that this sleeping man regained consciousness in the body of a two-year-old child. These cases remind me of the case of a woman who had a stroke and became unconscious while playing bridge. When she regained consciousness several days later, her first words were: "What's trumps?"

What I have said above may have prepared readers for my now saying

that the children show differing expressions of emotion when they speak about the previous lives. Some speak of them with detachment, as if they are referring to far-off things, but the majority show a continuing strong involvement with the remembered people and events. Some weep as they talk about the previous life; others angrily denounce murderers who ended it. Teasing adults and siblings have brought some subjects to tears by falsely telling them that a spouse, other relative, or close friend of the previous personality was ill or had died.¹²

Some of the subjects switch rapidly from being completely absorbed in the memories of the previous life to the usual behavior of a young child. For example, a boy may gravely talk about his wife and children one minute, and the next minute run off to play a child's game with his young brothers.

A few children become abstracted from their immediate surroundings as they talk about the previous life. They may talk about it to themselves. Sometimes they may appear to onlookers to be in a partial trance, but the word "trance" may be inappropriately strong, because these children can be readily brought back to awareness of their environment. Cases like that of Uttara Huddar, in which an apparently total change of personality occurs, are extremely rare.

Most of the children have their memories only in the waking state. However, I have studied some cases in which the subject definitely or probably had memories of the previous life during dreams or nightmares.¹³ Also, some children have tended to talk about the memories more when getting ready to go to sleep (and perhaps already drowsy) or soon after awakening.

Although most of the children have communicated their memories in words only, perhaps supplemented with gestures, some have also made drawings in which they depicted persons and events of the previous life.

The children nearly always stop talking about the previous lives between the ages of five and eight, but some stop earlier and others later. A few subjects claim to preserve all their memories into adulthood, and a few others pretend they have forgotten everything, although they apparently still remember much. Parents often credit themselves with having arrested the flow of a child's talk about a previous life by various measures they adopted to "help" him forget. Yet the children appear to forget the memories at about the same age regardless of whether their parents have encouraged them to remember or have forbidden them to do so. Dr. Narendar Chadha and I found in an analysis of sixty-nine cases in India that in twenty-nine (41 per cent) of them the child's parents had suppressed the child. We also found that the measures of suppression had no demonstrable effect; suppressed children continued talking about a previous life just as long as those not suppressed.¹⁴

The usual age of forgetting seems to coincide with the increased activity of a child outside the physical and social environment of his immediate family. Whether or not he goes to school, this is a period when a child can no longer manage life solely by controlling other members of his family; he must adapt to other, less indulgent persons. I believe this adjustment brings new experiences, the memories of which cover and seem to obliterate those of the previous life. Another occasion for the beginning of forgetting that the subject's parents often mention is his first visit to the family of the previous personality. Sometimes, after such a visit, what had seemed before to be a torrent of talk about the previous life dries to a trickle and soon afterward ceases.¹⁵

The attention given a child who talks about a previous life appears to influence how long he continues talking about it; this is how I interpret our finding that children who talk about the lives of identified deceased persons go on talking longer than do children who speak about persons who cannot be traced. Children who remember verified previous lives (solved cases) continue speaking about them to an average age of just under seven and a half years, whereas children having unverified memories stop speaking about the previous lives at an average age of under six. When the child's statements cannot be verified, members of his family tend to lose interest in them; and without any encouragement from surrounding adults the child may soon cease to mention his memories. In contrast, if the statements are verified — and especially if the child then has the additional attention of another family, that of the deceased person about whom he has been talking — he has incentives and stimuli to continue talking about the previous life.¹⁶

Although social factors have some importance in bringing on the amnesia for the memories, they are probably less important than developmental ones within the subject himself. The onset of the amnesia coincides with the rapid development of verbal language and the associated loss of visual imagery in the child. Memories of previous lives appear to occur primarily (in the child's mind) in the form of visual images.¹⁷ Then as the child acquires the ability to speak, he gradually finds words with which he tries to communicate the content of these images to his family. However, the development of language leads in most persons to a layering over of visual images, which gradually become less and less accessible. Even the ability to have visual images becomes greatly impaired in most persons as they leave early childhood. After that age, most ordinary persons have visual images only in dreams or when deliberately reminiscing; apart from poets and artists, few adults preserve an ability to think normally with visual imagery.

I cannot emphasize too strongly that — with some exceptions — a child who is going to remember a previous life has little more than three years in

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would have meant that their failure to remember proper names was only one aspect of a general paucity of memories. However, a comparison of the number of statements American children made with the number made by Indian children failed to support this conjecture. Nevertheless, American children do not make as many verified statements as Indian children, and it is possible that many of their statements derive from fantasies with which they fill gaps in real memories. This question is one of many awaiting further research.

Most of the subjects have nothing whatever to say about events between the death of the person whose life they remember and their own birth. In their memories this period is usually a complete blank. Parmod Sharma, the subject of an Indian case, passed over this interval in a single sentence when he said: "I was sitting in a bathtub, and my feet have become small." (This was a reference to naturopathic tub baths that the man whose life he recalled had taken just before he died.)

Nevertheless, some subjects do claim to remember events that happened between the death of the previous personality and their own birth. These memories are of two types: of terrestrial events (chiefly in the previous personality's family) and of experiences in a discarnate "realm."

In the first type, the subject remembers events happening to living persons after the previous personality's death. It is as if the previous personality had somehow stayed near where he had lived and died and had monitored the activities of living persons while he was discarnate; in fact, some subjects claim that they did just that. I mentioned in chapter 4 that Bongkuch Promsin remembered that Chamrat's murderers had dragged his body into a field and that he (the then discarnate Chamrat) had stayed at a bamboo tree near the murder site until he saw Bongkuch's father. Disna Samarasinghe (a subject in Sri Lanka) remembered that the body of Babanona (whose life she recalled) had been buried near an anthill; the burial site had been chosen only after Babanona's death. Similarly, Dellâl Beyaz stated that her (previous) body had been buried under an olive tree.

Veer Singh, the subject of another case, in India, claimed that after death in the previous life he had remained near the house of the previous family. As evidence of this he gave an account of the food consumed at family social occasions, such as weddings. There was nothing especially remarkable about his description of the food at the weddings, which is just as predictable as the conventional food served at Western weddings, although different. More impressive was his assertion that he had accompanied members of the family who went out of the house alone. This matched a dream that the mother of the previous personality (Som Dutt) in this case had had. She had dreamed that the discarnate Som Dutt told her that he was accompanying his older brother, who was slipping out of the house at night and

attending fairs being held in the region. (Upon being asked, the brother acknowledged that he had been doing just that, but the other members of the family did not know it until the mother had her dream.) Veer Singh also showed knowledge of other private family matters occurring after Som Dutt's death and before Veer Singh's birth, such as lawsuits involving the family, a camel they had purchased, and children born during this interval.

The Thai monk Ven. Chaokhun Rajsuthajarn, to whose case I referred earlier (in describing the futile efforts of his parents to suppress his memories), remembered that after dying in the previous life he had attended the funeral of the person whose life he recalled. At this time, he said, he had a sense of lightness and seemed to move easily from place to place. He thought that he was in charge of the ceremony and was receiving the guests; in fact, however, he was invisible to the participants, who went on with the ceremony with no suspicion of his presence.

Occasional subjects claim to have engaged in poltergeist activity while discarnate. Veer Singh said that he had broken the plank of a swing on which people were playing, and Tinn Sein said that he had thrown a stone at the man who later became his father (in the next incarnation).

The second, more common type of memory of the period between death and presumed rebirth is that of another realm where the subject claims he sojourned — usually not knowing for how long — after death in the previous life and before his birth in the present one. Disna Samarasinghe gave a rather circumstantial account of her stay in such a place after the death of Babanona, the elderly woman whose life and death Disna remembered. The clothes one wore there were rich and elegant, she said, and they needed no washing. One could have food, which appeared when one wished for it, but there was no need to eat. She met a kindly "ruler," who eventually advised her to get herself reborn, but did not tell her where.

Subjects in Burma and Thailand (and occasionally elsewhere) who have memories of a discarnate realm may describe meeting in it a sagelike man who befriends them and later guides them to a family for their next rebirth. The Burmese monk Ven. Sayadaw U Sobhana, who (as a child) remembered a previous life, gave one of the fullest descriptions I have of a meeting with such a discarnate advisor. He recalled that the sage had brought him back to the village where the previous personality had lived, had taken him first to that person's house, and finally had led him to another house a few doors away and left him there; this was the house of Ven. Sayadaw U Sobhana's parents, where he was born.²⁰

The Accuracy of the Subjects' Statements. An analysis by Dr. Sybo Schouten and myself of 103 cases in India and Sri Lanka showed that the subjects in India were correct in a little more than 80 percent of the statements they

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Can human personality survive death, to return in another body? Here, in a newly revised edition, is a classic work on an intriguing phenomenon: children who claim to remember previous lives.

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Children Who Remember Previous Lives

A Question of Reincarnation

REVISED EDITION

by

IAN STEVENSON, M.D.



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Honorifics (such as Maung, U, Ma, and Daw) that have been used in the text (especially for Burmese subjects and for monks in Thailand) are not used in the index.

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