

SIR OLIVER LODGE TEACHES THE SOUL'S PRE-EXISTENCE

Famous Physicist Announces His Belief, Gained Through Scientific Research, in Immortality, the Gift of Prophecy, and Christ's Incarnation.

MY message is that there is some great truth in the idea of pre-existence—not an obvious truth, nor one easy to formulate—a truth difficult to express—not to be identified with the guesses of reincarnation and transmigration, which may be fanciful. We may not have been individuals before, but we are chips or fragments of a great mass of mind, of spirit, and of life—drops, as it were, taken out of a germinal reservoir of life, and incubated until incarnate in a material body.

It is thus that Sir Oliver Lodge announces his belief in a doctrine that has not been hitherto among the recognized tenets of Christianity, although, in some form or another, it is present in most of the great world-religions, and is older than Socrates, who used it as one of the links in his argument for the immortality of the soul. The statement just quoted, and its development, is made by Sir Oliver in his new book, "Reason and Belief," which is published this week by Moffat, Yard & Co.

For years Sir Oliver Lodge has been recognized as one of the foremost authorities in physical science, his discovery of the "coherer," an important adjunct in wireless telegraphy, placing him among the famous practical inventors of the day. Recently, however, Sir Oliver, who is at the head of the Society for Psychical Research, as well as Principal of the University of Birmingham, has been turning his attention to the great problems of religion, attacking these from the standpoint of the investigating scientist rather than that of the confirmed theologian or the skeptic, and the results of his studies, along certain special lines, have been put forth from time to time in such books as "Science and Immortality," "The Survival of Man." In his forthcoming book, however, he brings together in one view his conclusions on the leading doctrines of religion—the Immortality of the Soul, the Bible, the Incarnation of Christ—presenting these, as he explains in his preface, in an expository and not in an argumentative form, and declaring that the basis for these views is in "the facts of experience," and the "result of a lifetime of scientific study." Moreover, he finds that there is a "profound substratum of truth underlying ancient doctrines, and in so far as the progress of science instead of undermining, actually illustrates and illuminates some of them," he finds it his duty to indicate to the best of his ability "how matters stand."

Sir Oliver brings forward his idea of pre-existence in the very beginning of his book: "There is no real end to anything in the universe, no end to any real existence; nor is there any beginning." He argues that the soul will live forever in the future as a consequence of its pre-existence:

"John Smith was born a few years ago and will die, but he will not go into nothingness; and though as an individual he began at birth, it is not likely that he, any more than anything else, began from

nothing. The complexity of his organism, the far-reaching quality of his mind, combined with what we know of the leisurely processes of nature, forbid the idea of construction elaborated in such fantastic haste. The body has been formed to a given pattern quickly enough; so may a plant grow with great rapidity; but there must be some entity—even though it be only a germinal vesicle—which collects and arranges the particles to suit itself. The specific form of the structure depends on this entity, not on the miscel-

laneous sources of the particles. Some kinds of material can be used, some cannot: those which have been good for food serve their turn for a time and then are discarded again; but it is the arranging entity for which we postulate continuous existence. It is this of which we may seek to trace the continuous and perennial history. The discarded body looks dead and dismal enough, but that is only because the energizing spirit which constructed it has gone beyond our ken.



SIR OLIVER LODGE.

"All analogy is against the idea of disappearance being synonymous with destruction. Death is change, indeed—a sort of emigration, a wrenching away from old familiar scenes, a solemn and portentous fact—but it is not annihilation. No thoughtful person can really and consistently believe that he is destined

"To drop head foremost in the jaws Of vacant nothing, and to cease."

"Of every kind of individual existence will—a history—with an origin and a termination—we must ask what before? what after? For some kinds of existence we can answer these questions; for others, not. But we know that beyond their manifest history there must always be an infinite past and an infinite future; and hidden antecedents and sequents may in time be traced.

"The experience and memory of the past survive in our very organization; we are the product of evolution through the ages. Conscious memory may fall—does fall—but the effect of experience lasts. And it does not follow that our conscious memory will always fall; individuality once begun shall not again completely cease."

Birth, like death and marriage, he finds, is one of the three adventures in human life: "An adventure as great as any, perhaps—the coming to the planet, the becoming an individual, attaining a personality which, whether it begins then or not, at any rate is to continue. At birth we began a separate individual existence, but not from nothing. Children often appear to retain for a time some intimation, some 'shadowy recollection,' as it were, of a former state of being. And even adults, in certain moods, have 'gleams of more than mortal things,' and are perplexed, at times, with a dim reminiscence as of previous experiences."

Taking the pre-existence of the soul for granted, Sir Oliver speculates further: "What happened before earth-life, we have forgotten—if we ever knew, we have forgotten. Our individual memory begins soon after birth. Before that we cannot trace identity. Perhaps we had none. Either we had none, or we have forgotten. The latter is the more poetic mode of expression. It is not new. I am well aware that I am saying nothing new. The doctrine is old; Plato taught it before the time of Christ. Wordsworth taught it early last century—the doctrine that when we enter into flesh we leave behind all memory of previous existence—all, except for occasional dim and shadowy recollections which, though they may be stronger in infancy, occasionally surprise the grown man also, from whose mind they usually appear to have faded."

This occasional flashing from a supposedly "dislocated memory" he finds "is suggested by the analogy of hypnotic trance, and by cases of multiple personality; where in each of the lower states, or strata of personality, all memory of what happened in the higher has completely lapsed, until the appropriate state is again entered. It is true, and rather specially instructive, that in one of the highest states thus accessible it sometimes happens that the gaps of memory are filled up, and all events are more or less recollected—even those of lower states also; though as a rule the memory is discontinuous, and the appropriate thread is taken up again on re-entering any given state."

As to the existence of angels, and the help which they afford to man in his

struggles, Sir Oliver takes an affirmative view, for which he refers to "facts" that are known to him, but which he does not state here. "The idea of angels is usually treated as fanciful. Imaginative it is, but not altogether fanciful; and though the physical appearance and attributes of such imaginary beings may have been overemphasized or misconceived, yet facts known to me indicate that we are not really lonely in our struggles, that our destiny is not left to haphazard, that there is no such thing as laissez faire in a highly organized universe. Help may be rejected, but help is available; a ministry of benevolence surrounds us—a cloud of witnesses—not witnesses only, but helpers, agents, like ourselves, of the Immanent God. Hidden as they are to our present senses, poets can realize their presence in moments of insight, can become aware of their assistance in periods of dejection—dejection which else would be despair."

From this belief in the existence and ministry of angels he proceeds to an affirmative consideration of the doctrine of the incarnation of God in Christ:

"And the race has also been helped. A Divine Helper has actually taken flesh and dwelt among us—full of grace and truth. 'The second man is the Lord from heaven.' And at this advent season and Christmas time we commemorate that event. We commemorate it every time we date a letter; for what does 1910 mean except that we are counting the years since that event? The whole Christian world dates its history from that momentous epoch—the Incarnation.

"We are all incarnations, all sons of God, in a sense, but at that epoch a Son of God in the supremest sense took pity on the race, laid aside his majesty, made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, a minister, entered into our flesh, and lived on the planet as a peasant, a teacher, a reformer, a martyr. This is said to have literally happened; and as a student of science I am bound to say that, so far as we can understand such an assertion, there is nothing in it contrary to accepted knowledge. I am not testifying to it because it is a conventional belief, I am testifying because I have gradually found that it may be true—because I have gradually become assured of the possibility of such an incarnation. The historical testimony in its favor is entirely credible. The Christian churches have hold of a great truth. That is what I want people to realize distinctly and forcibly and without any convention. Freed, if possible, from the blinkers of custom, it can be recognized as a reality. All that the churches say about it need not be true; but something is true much better than they say—something which they and we together are gradually rising to understand. It is a great subject, on which many scholars have written; and what they have said is well deserving of study. We should take their writings seriously, but first we should be assured of the possibility of the solid fact with which they are dealing—assured that there is a fundamental truth underlying the tentative conclusions of reverent and studious men.

"Christ did not spring into existence as the man Jesus of Nazareth. The Christ spirit existed through all eternity. At birth he became incarnate. Then it was that he assumed his chosen title, 'Son of Man.' Before that he is called the Companion, the Counsellor, the Word of God, the Word, or the Thought, or the Logos,

the Idea, the Design, the Conception—these words all help to convey some notion of what is intended.

"Of the mystery of the Incarnation we need not speculate, and what He was before the Incarnation we can hardly express. The best attempt that has been made to express it conveys the idea in mystical and very beautiful language with which were all familiar; modulating the great creation theme—in the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters—into poetic utterance still more magnificent:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Yes, that is as near as we can get to the extraordinary truth! The Great Spirit took pity on the human race, which was blundering along, afflicted with a terrible burden of sins, with mistaken notions of worship—bloody sacrifices, burnt offerings, and all the machinery of priestcraft, even when it did not fall into idolatry. . . . A Divine Spirit—the Lord from Heaven—became incarnate, in order to reveal to us the hidden nature of God—the love, the pity, the long-suffering, the kindness—all that we had missed or misconceived or that priests had defaced. He came to tell us what the Kingdom of Heaven was really like. In many parables He tried to make it clear to us. He found it no easy task, but it was His central message. His constant endeavor, to convey some sense of the reality and meaning of the Kingdom of Heaven, and how it might be actually realized on earth. . . .

"While incarnate He, too, had, in some real sense, partially forgotten previous existence. Yet of Him pre-eminently it may be said that not in entire forgetfulness, but trailing clouds of glory did He come, from God who was his home. "We can see that His divine ancestry must have become intermittently plain to one after another of those with whom He came into contact as He walked the earth in Syria. An extraordinary influence, an effulgence of the spirit, shone through the earthly covering and inspired profound wonder, enthusiasm, and devotion. The healing influence of the hem of His garment is not beyond what we know may occur. And the Transfiguration itself, when even his peasant garments shared for a moment in the blaze of glory, was but a special manifestation, to the few who were susceptible, of what was more obscurely there all the time."

In regard to the prophecies as to the coming of Christ contained in the Old Testament, the inspiration of which, with certain qualifications, he does not doubt, the following remarkable statement is made, remarkable because of the suggestion conveyed that Sir Oliver is in possession of certain "facts" from which he is beginning to believe in the possibility of foretelling future events:

"Do you think that such prophetic anticipation is impossible? Do you think it absurd to suppose that such an event as the Incarnation was foreseen and heralded, in some fashion more or less distinct? If you think so it is not to be wondered at, for the possibility of such foresight into futurity is a strange one.

so. nevertheless. Facts are beginning to be known to me, still obscure and incomplete, which tend to show that even the birth of a human child, of ordinary parents, a child only remarkable for the fullness and richness of its nature and for the destiny soon to overtake it, was predicted, was shadowed forth in ways obscure, but subsequently unmistakable, more than a year before birth. It is not a subject on which dogmatism is appropriate; but the conclusion at which I am gradually arriving is that future events are planned, and are not haphazard and unforeseen; that arrangement is possible in other spheres than ours. Just as design and foresight are possible among human beings—anticipations and heraldings of a kind far above our present power. It is true, but of the same general character.

"Nor is the idea of some kind of—perhaps automatic, perhaps semi-conscious—choice, concerning our earthly destiny, foreign to the conception of inspired and informed philosophers and poets; for the parable in the tenth book of Plato's 'Republic' is well known, and perception of some real truth underlying it is the basis of the following apostrophe addressed to an ordinary human being:

"Soul, that in some high world hast made Pre-natal unbewailing choice, Thro' earth's perplexities of shade, Sternly to suffer and rejoice."

"But however it may be with the individual himself in ordinary cases, it is practically certain, in my mind, that anticipation in such matters is possible, and that inspired writers may express far more than they know.

"So I have been led to perceive that the description given of those other utterances—Christ's posthumous utterances at the end of Luke's Gospel—may be essentially true, and that some of the prophecies are genuinely and properly interpretable in ways of which the writers had barely a suspicion:

"Behooved it not the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."

"And while still living, he was imbued with the same idea; for did he not say to a Jewish audience, at a moment of danger and inspiration,

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad."

"Through the vista of a thousand years the coming of the Messiah had been dimly foreseen by the great patriarchs at inspired moments.

"Then it was that in answer to their easy, self-satisfied, sarcastic retort, 'Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?' He made that portentous utterance, announcing His pre-existence—His eternity; then it was that He made the claim which they took for blasphemy: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I Am.' That statement is clear and unmistakable—it was clear even to them—so clear that they could only reply with stones.

"The present, the past, and the future, all in some strange sense indistinguishable. Existence one continuous chain, manifested now, hidden then, but real always. Before them in flesh stood the earthly representation or incarnation of a Being who henceforth would be acclaimed by all Christendom as Eternal, Omnipresent, Divine! In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."