

On the Destiny of the Soul

By F. S. Darrow, PH.D.

Part I

There is an imperishable wisdom of the soul that individuals of every age have sought to find and to live by. At one time they stand as lone sentinels, guardians of the Light; at another, they are grouped in clusters, veritable constellations of luminaries, who brighten the horizon of human experience with the earnestness of their endeavors. One such group was the 17th century Cambridge Platonists which had its seeding in the rebellion of young men studying at the university who would tolerate no form of authoritarianism, whether of Hobbes or of Calvin. No dogma, social or ecclesiastic, they affirmed, should override the innate freedom of man to choose the path best suited to him. Though deeply loyal to the Christian thought-mold, they were yet profoundly influenced by the teachings of Pythagoras and Plato as well as the Kabbalah which the Renaissance had once again brought to the fore. The research of Professor F. S. Darrow offers further evidence that always there are those in every century who keep alive the sacred flame of truth. -- ED.

That which has a beginning must have an end. The oak may live for centuries, the butterfly for only a few days or hours, both must die. If the soul were also born, then at death, or sooner or later after the death of the body, it likewise must die. There is no escape from the stern logic of this conclusion. A fragmentary immortality is a logical absurdity, for endless existence after death is conceivable only if the soul is eternally pre-existent.

This does not mean that the soul changes its identity. That part of man which conceives of itself as *I*, whether in this or in another human vehicle, is the same. The carpenter remains the same, whether using a plane, a hammer, or a saw. So too the bodies in which the *I* temporarily dwells are but its tools, not itself.

It hardly seems necessary to say that this does not imply the transmigration of souls into animal bodies, for although this is one of the falsehoods that have been circulated from time to time it is incredible that anyone could be misled today by any such misstatement. Natural fact affirms that once a soul has inhabited a human body, it will at intervals continue to do so until, after having learned all that it is possible to glean from human experience, it is prepared for some higher form of existence.

Granting the rebirth of the soul again and again in human form, the apparent contradictions of life are reconciled, and one's environment and prenatal inheritance are seen to be exactly that best suited for and earned by the soul as a result of its former manner of life. There is no arbitrary or fortuitous bestowal of joys and sorrows, but now and always justice reigns.

Let us turn our attention to the England of about three hundred years ago -- to a group of thinkers known as the Cambridge Platonists -- since it is our purpose to pick up some of the golden threads of Wisdom-teaching insofar as they can be traced in the

skein of English thought of that time. These threads have been gathered from rare and priceless old volumes. The difficulty has been to select from an overwhelming wealth of sparkling beauty. It would well repay us to study the theosophy of Joseph Glanvil, Rector of Bath and Chaplain in Ordinary of His Majesty, Charles the Second; of Dr. Ralph Cudworth, Master of Christ's College; of Dr. George Rust, Lord Bishop of Dromore in the Kingdom of Ireland; of the learned Dr. Thomas Burnet, Master of Charterhouse; of John Norris, Rector of Bemerton near Sarum, and Fellow of All Souls' College in Oxford; and of the Lady Anne, Viscountess Conway.

James Glanvil writes in a letter to Richard Baxter about 1660: "The Doctrine of Prae-existence is so far from being a novelty that 'tis one of the most ancient opinions in the world." (The original is preserved in the Baxter Collection in Dr. Williams' Library, London, England (*Letters*, Vol. 1, No. 29, 16.1.) and the letter is published in *Bibliotheca Platonica*, Osceola, Missouri, edited by Thomas Johnson, for May-June, 1890, I, pp. 186n-192.) Of similar import is the testimony of Dr. Thomas Burnet, who says:

But though we cannot certainly tell under what circumstances human souls were placed at first, yet all antiquity agrees, Oriental and Occidental, concerning their preexistence in general, in respect of these mortal bodies. And our Saviour never reproaches or corrects the Jews when they speak upon that supposition (Luke ix, 18-19; John ix). . . . The doctrine of the prae-existence and revolution (or rebirth) of souls. . . was very ancient and universal, if any ever was so, since it prevailed not only through all the East but also in the West. . . . This doctrine, I say, as if sent down from heaven, without Father, without mother, and without any genealogy, has made its progress through the universe. (*Sacred Theory of the Earth*, London, 1726, II., The Fourth Book, Preface. *Doctrina Antiqua de rerum originibus*, etc., made English by Mr. Mead and Mr. Foxton, London, 1736, Chap. XIV, p. 239. (This latter work is an English translation of Dr. Burnet's *Archaeologix Philosophicae*, Liber I.)

The antiquity and universality of the teachings in regard to the nature and destiny of the human soul were clearly recognized by these seventeenth century authors. But we must rest content with a few references only, drawn largely from two of the most prominent of the group, namely Dr. Henry More, the revered head of the Cambridge Platonists, and Baron Francis van Helmont, who, though a Hollander by birth, nevertheless passed much of his life in England. Thus Dr. More says:

This consequence of our soul's Pre-existence is more agreeable to reason than any other hypothesis whatever and has been received by the most learned philosophers of all ages . . . and as this hypothesis is rational in itself, so has it gained the suffrage of all philosophers of any note that have held the soul of man to be incorporeal and immortal. . . . Let us cast our eyes therefore into what corner of the world we will, that has been famous for wisdom and literature and the wisest of these nations you shall find the assertors of this opinion . . . for this hypothesis of the soul's pre-existence was deemed a vision of Truth by the most awakened souls in the world. . . . And if testimonies please you; be assured of this, that there was never any philosopher that held the soul spiritual and

immortal but he held also that it did pre-exist. (Cf. *Immortality of the Soul*, II, 12, 1st ed. London, 1659, pp. 240, 245-246. *Divine Dialogues*, III, 31, 2nd ed. London, 1713, pp. 261, 263.)

Dr. Henry More was born at Grantham in Lincolnshire, 1614, and was admitted at Christ's College, Cambridge, 1631, just shortly before Milton received his M.A. After receiving his Bachelor's degree, More became and remained until his death in 1687 a Fellow of his Alma Mater. Universally esteemed because of his noble character and great learning, he is thus addressed in an Ode, composed by the ingenious and scholarly John Norris:

Whilst to be Great the most aspire,
Or with low souls to raise their fortunes higher;
KNOWLEDGE, the chiefest treasure of the blest,
KNOWLEDGE, the wise man's best request, Was made
thy choice; . . .

Manifold are the references and arguments in support of the pre-existence of the human soul to be found in the numerous works of Dr. More. In his *Divine Dialogues* he recounts with a wondrous beauty of language and imagery a revery in which he saw the two keys of Providence, one silver and the other golden. Pondering as to the treasure which they were to unlock, he discovered that the keys were treasures in themselves and each a key to itself. Both were all bespattered with letters very confusedly and disorderly; when regularly arranged, these formed the motto which constituted the Key of the Key.

Now he could unlock the silver key by forming this sentence: *Claude fenestras, ut luceat domus* ("Close the windows that the light may shine within") -- in other words, cease to attend to the noise and bustle of the outward world that the quiet voice of the soul may be heard within. He next pulled at the handle, whereupon there came forth from the interior of the key a silver tube in which was a scroll inscribed with the words -- *The True System of the World*.

Having thus succeeded in opening the first treasure, he was the more eager to assay the other and he found its motto to be *Amor dei lux animae* ("the love of the Deity is the light of the soul"). Thereupon he pulled at both ends of the Golden Key and found another scroll, "only it was more glorious, being adorned richly with flowerwork of gold, vermilion and blue." On it were these twelve sentences "written with letters of gold."

"1. The measure of Providence is the Divine Goodness, which has no bounds but itself, which is infinite.

"2. The Thread of time and the expansion of the universe, the same hand drew out the one and spread out the other.

"3. Darkness and the abyss were before the light, and the suns or stars before any opakeness or shadow.

"4. All intellectual spirits that ever were, are or ever shall be sprung up with the light, and rejoiced together before God in the morning of the Creation.

"5. In the Infinite myriads of free agents which were the farmers of their own fortunes, it had been a wonder if they had all of them taken the

same path: and therefore sin at the long run shook hands with opacity.
"6. As much as the light exceeds the shadows, so much do the regions of happiness those of sin and misery."

"These six," he says, "I distinctly remember but I had glancingly cast mine eye on all twelve when the silver and golden keys, and glorious parchment, were all suddenly vanished. . . . But I see with the eyes of my mind, wide open in broad day, the Reasonableness of this hypothesis that *the souls of men did exist before they came into these terrestrial bodies.*" (*Divine Dialogues*, M., 27-29, 31, 2nd. ed. London, 1713, pp. 247-255, 264.)

One entire canto of Dr. More's *Philosophical Poems* (*Philosophical Poems*, Cambridge, 1647: *Prae-existency of the Soul*, stanzas 2-7, 95,98, 100, pp. 255-257, 279-280.) is devoted to the same subject of the pre-existency of the soul and from this the ensuing stanzas are selected. Attention is called to the following points: *Aread* is a verb meaning to interpret: Plotin is the great ancient theosophist and later Platonist, Plotinus.

The simple Good is the Platonic Absolute. *Aeon* is eternity, and *Psyche* the world soul; while *Rhea* stands for the Great Mother, Nature, and the *Satyres* and *Pan*, for material powers; *Jove*, for the Deity.

I would sing the Prae-existency
Of humane souls, and live once ore again
By recollection and quick memory
All that is past since first we all began.
But all too shallow be my wits to scan
So deep a point and mind too dull to clear
So dark a matter, but Thou, O more than man!
Aread thou sacred Soul of Plotin deare
Tell what we mortalls are, tell what of old we were.

A spark or ray of the Divinity
Clouded in earthly fogs, yclad in clay,
A precious drop sunk from Aeternitie,
Spilt on the ground, or rather slunk away
For then we fell when we gan first t'assay,
By stealth, of our own selves something to been,
Uncentring our selves from our great stay.
Which fondly we new liberty did ween
And from that prank right jolly wights our selves did deem.

For then forthwith some thing beside our God
We did conceive our parted selves to be,
And loosened, first from that simple Good,
Then from great Aeon then from Psyche free,
We after fell into low phantasie,
And after that into corporeall sense,
And after sense embark'd as in a tree,
(First sown in earthly slime, then sprung from thence)
A fading life we lead in deadly influence.

Thus groping after our own Centres near
And proper substance we grew dark, contract,
Swallow'd up of earthly life; ne what we were
Of old, through ignorance can we detect.
Like noble babe by fate or friends neglect,
Left to the care of sorry salvage, wight.
Grown up to manly years, cannot conject
His own true parentage.

So we as stranger Infants elsewhere born
Can not divine from what spring we did flow
Ne dare these base alliances to scorn,
Nor lift ourselves a whit from hence below,
Ne strive our Parentage again to know;
Ne dream we once of any other stock,
Since foster'd upon Rhea's knee we grew,
In Satyres' arms with many a mow and mock
Oft danc'd, and hairy Pan our cradle oft hath rock'd.

But Pan nor Rhea, be our Parentage
We been the Offspring of all-seeing Jove . . .
Wherefore man's soul's not by Creation.
Nor is it generate as I prov'd before.
Wherefore let't be by emanation
By flowing forth from that eternall store
Of lives and souls ycleep'd the World of life,
Which was, and shall endure for evermore.

. . . . But well I wote, if there admitted were
A prae-existency of souls entire,
And due Returns in courses circular
This course all difficulties with ease away would bear.
. . . . For Birth is Death, Death Life and Liberty.

PART II

There is an imperishable wisdom of the soul that individuals of every age have sought to find and to live by. At one time they stand as lone sentinels, guardians of the Light; at another, they are grouped in clusters, veritable constellations of luminaries, who brighten the horizon of human experience with the earnestness of their endeavors. One such group was the 17th century Cambridge Platonists which had its seeding in the rebellion of young men studying at the university who would tolerate no form of authoritarianism, whether of Hobbes or of Calvin. No dogma, social or ecclesiastic, they affirmed, should override the innate freedom of man to choose the path best suited to him. Though deeply loyal to the Christian thought-mold, they were yet profoundly influenced by the teachings of Pythagoras and Plato as well as the Kabbalah which the Renaissance had once again brought to the fore. The

research of Professor F. S. Darrow offers further evidence that always there are those in every century who keep alive the sacred flame of truth.
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Turning now to the second of the seventeenth-century scholars to be considered, we find the sources for an adequate biography of the Baron Francis Mercury van Helmont, son of the famous chemist, Jan Baptista van Helmont, are widely scattered and exist principally in old Latin and German works, which have now become almost inaccessible. Yet a most fascinating and informative account could be given of this great thinker and noble man.

Francis Mercury van Helmont was conversant with the greater part of Europe by actual personal residence therein. As a philosopher and religious teacher and reformer, he was acquainted with nearly every prominent ruler, statesman, philosopher, theologian and philanthropist of his time and was an intimate friend of Leibnitz, who was largely indebted to van Helmont, not only for a belief in the pre-existancy of the soul, but also for the form he gave to his hypothesis that the universe is built of individual beings or monads.

Both father and son were pre-eminent "in acuteness, subtlety and comprehensiveness of mind," as is declared by Leibnitz, in the Latin epitaph which he composed at the time of his friend's decease in 1699, from which we quote:

In no wise inferior to his father here lies van Helmont the younger,
A man who united varied resources of mind and of art
By whom Pythagoras and the sacred Kabbala and Zeno
Lived again, a man who made everything for himself with his own
hands. --*Les Nouvelles de la Republique des Lettres*, Juin et Nov., 1699;
Latin original quoted in Adelung: *Geschichte der menschlichen
Nartheit*, 1787, IV, 316.

His appearance, even when in his eightieth year, was as remarkable as his intellect and nobility of heart, while his mode of living was so abstemious that he towered above his contemporaries in temperance and moderation. A constant traveler on foot throughout the length and breadth of Europe, he was always teaching and striving to help others -- a seeker, as he called himself. Listen to a translation of what he says in regard to his own training:

I, Francis Mercury, from my earliest childhood, was brought up by my father in the doctrines of the Occult Hermetic school and was imbued with some trait or other by reason of which my restless spirit would not be content until it should discover through meditation and prayer the one all-embracing Sacred Knowledge of the Tree of Life and should eat of its fruits. Consequently, I was unwilling to put my hand to any other work until indeed I might be versed in this from head to heel. Also, I determined in my heart with the approval of truth to succeed by this means in reaching the Ultimate in thought without the assistance of external instruction. Therefore, I separated mentally all creatures into their classes, first, into the external and corporeal, so to speak, and then into the internal, spiritual and body-forming, whereupon I was enabled again to reduce them to one.

(Preface to his father's works, Latin original quoted in Adelung, *ibid.*, 295.)

Discovering that spiritual and corporeal beings in all their varied grades and stations have emanated from the One Life he consequently came to be known as the philosopher *per unum in quo omnia* -- "By the one in which we are all things." (Jacobus Brucker: *Historia Critica Philosophiae*, 2nd ed. Lipsiae, 1766, IV., 721. He was imprisoned by one of the Romish princes of Germany, as we learn from certain letters of Mr. Serrarius, written to Samuel Hartlib, the close friend of Milton:

We hear from Germany that Helmont is secured prisoner in the name of the Elector of Mentz with whom he dined newly before and parted friendly from him.

They carried him to Newburg and there keep him close, so that no man may come to him. The Lord be with him and preserve him from evil. (Dr. John Worthington, *Diary and Correspondence*, edited by James Sley, II, 1, Manchester, Chetham Society, 1855, pp. 100-101.)

Again we read:

From Frankfort they wrote to me that it is feared Helmont shall be carried away prisoner to the Pope at Rome. Let it be how it will his case is dangerous --

O treachery of the world!

(English translation, London, II., 38.)

In 1663, a year later, what Mr. Serrarius feared did indeed take place and Baron van Helmont was a victim of the Inquisition at Rome.

The reason for this persecution was that he taught the pre-existence and rebirth of the human soul, as we learn from other contemporary sources. Not at all daunted by his German and Roman experiences, the Baron after his release continued throughout his long life to devote all his energies to the publication of these truths. In Croese's *General History of the Quakers*, (English Original London, 1685, Part II, 135, 139, 151, 154-7) published in 1696 when the Baron was in his seventy-eighth year, we read, "the doctrine of the perpetuity of souls and of their revolution (or rebirth) through several bodies, in these our days, is revived by Baron van Helmont who hath decked it with all necessary ornaments fit to procure its reception: an author famous for the splendour of his nobility and his insatiable desires after knowledge and learning."

The following are direct quotations from van Helmont's works. First, from *The Paradoxal Discourses concerning the Macrocosm and Microcosm or the Greater and Lesser World, and their Union* (English Original London, 1685, Part II, 135, 139, 151, 154-7) --

"For man himself works his own suffering and punishment; but God in and by the same works out and manifests His own Glory.

"Would it not therefore prove a very false imagination for any one to think, that God for every Birth doth create a new Soul, and afterwards eternally punish the same for sin (which according to the meaning of *some*) it could not avoid, nor was once guilty of? For this can never comport with the infinite Righteousness and Mercy of God. . . .

"Is it not therefore more rational for us to conceive, that the Soul of a Child prae-exists? . . .

"(Matth. vii., 2; Luke vi., 37-38; Mark iv, 24.) *With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.* (Rev. xiii, 10) *He that leadeth into captivity, shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword, shall be killed with the sword.* Now how can these words be fulfilled, when we see that many of those who have used violence and unrighteousness, committed Murther and Manslaughter, led others into captivity, and the like, do notwithstanding all this die upon their beds? or how can the just Vengeance of God be satisfied upon them, if they be not to return again into this World, there to receive a due reward and punishment for their misdeeds, which in a former life or lives they have committed, and for which they have not been punished, but are yet accountable, and therefore must make restoration, payment, and satisfaction? . . . ". . . must not we then conclude, from the power a man hath to obtain the highest perfection possible in this World, that the said power must at one time or other be brought into act and perfected? And that in this World, seeing it is very probable that man must attain his end, where he hath had his beginning? For seeing man consists of many parts [that is, powers and capabilities], and that during his Life time he doth not onely work out some few of them to any perfection . . . Must not he therefore also have different times allotted him for the working out of those parts to perfection? And what other medium can we imagine for to attain to this perfection, than by dying to their former body, by which means the ungodly are snatch'd away from the stage of this World, that they may no further proceed in their wickedness, but may be prepared to enter into another body, therein to be punished for the sins of their former Life, and receive the measure they have measured out to others, in order to their being bettered thereby. Whereas on the contrary, to the pious and good, a way is made by means of the suffering of Death, for them to attain to a higher degree of perfection, than yet they are arrived to. . . .

"If any should Query, seeing that Man is constantly changed and renewed, from one Life into another; how is it possible that notwithstanding all these changes, his memory should continue with him? May not we return this answer? That how great so ever the efflux or emanation from any man may be, yet he continues still as the General and Commander over all his outworkings and emanations, onely he grows older, that is, approacheth nearer and nearer to perfection, according to the proportion of his work he hath wrought out in this World: and that the Spirits which he hath given forth are his remembrancers and monitors, and still abide with him. And therefore, when a man brings wisdom with him into this World, is it not a proof

that he hath attained, and wrought out the same in another Life or preceding Revolution? . . .

"But in case it should be further objected; how is it possible that a man should several times be born into the World, and yet not be able to call to mind the least of any thing that hath passed in the former times of his Life; may not we return this answer, That the onely end of a mans being in this World is, that he may attain to perfection; and if he attains the same in any of his Life times (so as he works it out himself) it abides with him, and accompanies him through all his Lives and Revolutions. And that it is not at all material that a man cannot call to mind, or give any account of the trouble he hath had, before he arrived so far as now he is come; no more than it is any trouble to us, or matter of disquiet, that we cannot remember how we first learn'd to go, or how many difficulties and accidents we met with in that undertaking? It is enough for us that we can go now, and upon all occasions make use of our Feet, without troubling our selves about the circumstances and means whereby we attained the same at first. In like manner, seeing that man is possessed of all these things as his property; yea, that he is all these things himself; would it not be uneasie and troublesome to him, to have his head always filled with these unprofitable Images? And is not this the reason why it is needful for Man, during the time of his Life, as well as at his Death, to die to many of these Images, and that in order to his forgetting of those things, which it is not needful for him to keep in his memory?

"Forasmuch as we find that the Children of Men are differently gifted, *viz.* that some are wise and understanding, others simple and dumb born; we may put this query concerning those that are wise, *viz.* Whether or no those Spirits which come from wise persons, have not heretofore appeared, and acted their parts upon this Theatre? . . . Now we know that no body can reach the uppermost round of a Ladder, but by passing all that are between it and the lowest; and to pass over all these in the Life of one Body, is not possible. . . . Is it not therefore necessary, in case a man shall ever attain to his full perfection, as to the uppermost round of the Ladder, that in order thereto, he appears several times upon this Theatre, and be born again; until at last through often Dyings and Revolutions, he attain to a perfect conquest and dominion over Death? . .

"Man, . . . being created in this World, must therein work out his Salvation and Happiness, and that by means of frequent and reiterated dying. . . .

"Lastly, and to conclude, can it be denied, that all of us proceed from one Unity? Now if any one pondering this in his mind, should be troubled how to reconcile the great variety and difference which is found amongst men, with the uniformity of their Original; would not such an one, in order to the clearing of this difficulty, find it of use to him to consider the manifold members of mans body, all of which (though never so different) make up but one man? And would not he by this

means come to understand the true ground of this variety which is found amongst men, and acknowledge, that notwithstanding all this, they are but an emanation from the highest Unity? And when we compare this body, consisting of many members (every one of which are operative and working to a higher degree of perfection) to an Army? Can we make any other inference from what hath been said, but that every Souldier in this Army that hath well discharged his place, and done his duty, which belonged to him at such a time, is afterwards made an Officer, and so proceeds till he comes to be a General?"

This final quotation is taken from Baron van Helmont's very rare work entitled: *Seder Olam, or the Order, Series, or Succession of All the Ages, Periods and Times of the whole World*. (English translation by J. Clark, M.D., London, 1694, pp. 6, 15, 19, 86.) In this volume not only is the pre-existence and rebirth of the human soul taught but also the development of successive worlds, so that just as the present world has come into being out of the ruins of an earlier one, so at the end of this world a new one will come into being, upon which men will continue to live.

"God is a Creator from Eternity and so by consequence did make creatures from infinite ages;. . . the worlds, therefore, in respect of us, are infinite and innumerable. . . . Nothing, which belongs to this visible world is immediately created; for this visible world is not properly a created world but made and composed of pre-existent principles, which pre-existent principles belong to the world of formation and the world of formation owes its original to the pre-existent principles of the world of creation. . . . Therefore men born into this world (to speak properly) are not immediately created, neither in respect of soul nor body; for from what has been said it evidently appears that humane souls did pre-exist before they came into these gross and earthly bodies. . . . This doctrine of the return of souls to live again and be born in a body of flesh . . . wonderfully demonstrates the justice, wisdom and goodness of God towards mankind, in all his ways, and administrations; it also evidently shows the quality of the ways of God and his marvellous benefits."

How could the ancient truths of karma and reincarnation, of which Francis Mercury van Helmont had been an ardent proponent, have been expressed more clearly or with greater nobility?

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