

Rays From The Rose Cross Magazine

The Panorama of a Past Life

No matter how long we may keep the Spirit from passing out, however, at last there will come a time when no stimulant can hold it and the last breath is drawn. Then the silver cord of which the Bible speaks, and which holds the higher and the lower vehicles together, snaps in the heart and causes that organ to stop. That rupture releases the vital body, and it, with the desire body and mind, floats above the visible body for from one to three and one-half days, while the Spirit is engaged in reviewing the past life, an exceedingly important part of its post-mortem experience. Upon that review depends its whole existence from death to a new birth.

The question may arise in the student's mind: "How can we review our past life from the cradle to the grave, when we do not even remember what we did a month ago? To form a proper basis for our future life, this record ought to be very accurate, but even the best memory is faulty." When we understand the difference between the conscious and subconscious memory and the manner in which the latter operates, the difficulty vanishes. This difference and the manner in which the subconscious memory keeps an

accurate record of our life experiences may be best understood by an illustration, as follows: When we go into a field and view the surrounding landscape, vibrations in the ether carry to us a picture of everything within the range of our vision. It is as sad as it is true, however, that "we have eyes and see not," as the Saviour said. These vibrations impinge upon the retina of our eyes, even to the very smallest details, but they usually do not penetrate to our consciousness, and therefore are not remembered. Even the most powerful impressions fade in the course of time, so that we cannot call them back at will when they are stored in our conscious memory.

When a photographer goes afield with his camera, the results which he obtains are different. The ether vibrations emanating from all things upon which his camera is focused, transmit to the sensitive plate an impression of the landscape, true to the minutest detail; and, mark this well, this true and accurate picture is in no wise dependent upon whether the photographer is observant or not. It will remain upon the plate and may be reproduced under proper conditions. Such is the subconscious memory, and it is generated automatically by each of us during every moment of time, independently of our volition, in the following manner: From the first breath which we draw after birth to our last dying gasp we inspire air which is charged with pictures of our surroundings, and the same ether which carries that picture to the retina of our eye is inhaled into our lungs where it enters the blood. Thus it reaches the heart in due time. In the left ventricle of that organ, near the apex, there is one little atom which is particularly sensitized and which remains in the body all through life. It differs in this respect from all other atoms which come and go, for it is the particular property of God, and of a certain Spirit. This atom may be called the book of the Recording

Angel, for as the blood passes through the heart, cycle after cycle, the pictures of our good and evil acts are inscribed thereon to the minutest detail. This record may be called the subconscious memory. It forms the basis of our future life when reproduced as a panorama just subsequent to death. By removal of the seed atom—which corresponds to the sensitized plate in a camera—the reflecting ether of the vital body serves as a focus, and as the life unrolls slowly, backwards, from death to birth the pictures thereof are etched into the desire body, which will be our vehicle during our sojourn in Purgatory and the First Heaven where evil is eradicated and good assimilated, so that in a future life the former may serve as conscience to withhold the man from repeating mistakes of the past, and the latter will spur him to greater good.

A phenomenon similar to the panorama of life usually takes place where a person is drowning. People who have been resuscitated speak of having seen their whole life in a flash. That is because under such conditions the vital body also leaves the dense body. Of course there is no rupture of the silver cord, or life could not be restored. Unconsciousness follows quickly in drowning, while in the usual post-mortem review the consciousness continues until the vital body collapses in the same manner that it does when we go to sleep. Then consciousness ceases for a while and the panorama is terminated. Therefore also the time occupied by the panorama varies with different persons, according to whether the vital body was strong and healthy, or had become thin and emaciated by protracted illness. The longer the time spent in review, and the more quiet and peaceful the surroundings, the deeper will be the etching which is made in the desire body. As already said, that has a most important and far-reaching effect, for then the sufferings which the Spirit will realize in Purgatory on account of bad habits and misdeeds will be much

keener than if there is only a slight impression, and in a future life the still small voice of conscience will warn much more insistently against mistakes which caused sufferings in the past.

When conditions are such at the time of death that the Spirit is disturbed by outside conditions, as for instance the din and turmoil of a battle, the harrowing conditions of an accident, or the hysterical wailings of relatives, the distraction prevents it from realizing an appropriate depth in the etching upon the desire body. Consequently its post-mortem existence becomes vague and insipid; the Spirit does not harvest the fruits of experience as it should have done had it passed out of the body in peace and under normal conditions. It would therefore lack incentive to good in a future life, and miss the warning against evil which a deep etching of the panorama of life would have given. Thus its growth would be retarded in a very marked degree, but the beneficent Powers in charge of evolution take certain steps to compensate for our ignorant treatment of the dying and other untoward circumstances mentioned. What these steps are, we shall discuss when considering the life of children in heaven; for the present let it be sufficient to say that in God's kingdom every evil is always transmuted to a greater good, though the process may not be at once apparent.

Purgatory

During life the collapse of the vital body at night terminates our view of the world about us, and causes us to lose ourselves in the unconsciousness of sleep. When the vital body collapses just subsequent to death, and the panorama of life is terminated, we also lose consciousness for a time which varies according to the individual. A darkness seems to fall upon the Spirit; then after a while it wakes up and begins dimly to perceive the light of the

other world, but is only gradually accustomed to the altered conditions. It is an experience similar to that which we have when coming out of a darkened room into sunlight, which blinds us by its brilliancy, until the pupils of our eyes have contracted so that they admit a quantity of light bearable to our organism.

If under such a condition we turn momentarily from the bright sunlight and look back into the darkened room, objects there will be much plainer to our vision than things outside which are illumined by the powerful rays of the Sun. So it is also with the Spirit; when it has first been released from the body it perceives sights, scenes, and sounds of the material world which it has just left much more readily than it observes the sights of the world it is entering. Wordsworth in his "Ode To Immortality" noted a similar condition in the case of newborn children, who are all clairvoyant and much more awake to the spiritual world than to this present plane of existence. Some lose the spiritual sight very early, others retain it for a number of years, and a few keep it all through life, but as the birth of a child is a death in the spiritual world and it retains the spiritual sight for a time, so also death here is a birth upon the spiritual plane, and the newly dead retain a consciousness of this world for some time subsequent to demise.

When one awakes in the Desire World after having passed through aforementioned experiences, the general feeling seems to be one of relief from a heavy burden, a feeling perhaps akin to that of a diver encased in a heavy rubber suit, a weighty brass helmet upon his head, leaden soles under his feet, and heavy weights of lead upon his breast and back, confined in his operations on the bottom of the ocean by a short length of air tube, and able to move only clumsily and with difficulty. When after the day's work such a man is hauled to the surface, and divests himself of his heavy garments and he moves about with

the facility we enjoy here, he must surely experience a feeling of great relief. Something like that is felt by the Spirit when it has been divested of the mortal coil and is able to roam all over the globe instead of being confined to the narrow environment which bound it upon Earth.

There is also a feeling of relief for those who have been ill. Sickness, such as we know it, does not exist there. Neither is it necessary to seek food and shelter, for in that world there is neither heat nor cold. Nevertheless, there are many in the purgatorial region who go to all the bothers of housekeeping, eating and drinking just as we do here. George Du Maurier in his novel, "Peter Ibbetson," gives a very good idea of this condition, in his life lived between the hero and the Countess of Towers. This novel also illustrates splendidly what has been said of the subconscious memory, for George DuMaurier has somewhere, somehow discovered an easy method which anyone may apply to do what he calls "dreaming true." By taking a certain position in going to sleep, it is possible, after a little practice, to compel the appearance, in a dream, of any scene in our past life, which we desire to live over again. The book is well worth reading on that account.

When a fiery nebulae has been formed in the sky and commences to revolve, a little matter in the center where motion is slowest commences to crystallize. When it has reached a certain density it is caught in the swirl, and whirled nearer, and nearer to the outward extremity of what has, by that time, become the equator of a revolving globe. Then it is hurled into space and discarded from the economy of the revolving Sun.

This process is not accomplished automatically as scientists would have us believe. Herbert Spencer rejected the nebular

theory because it required a First cause, which he denied (though unable to form a better hypothesis of the formation of solar systems), but it is accomplished through the activity of a Great Spirit, which we may call God or any other name we choose. As above, so below, says the Hermetic axiom. Man, who is a lesser Spirit, also gathers about himself spirit-substance, which crystallizes into matter and becomes the visible body which the spiritual sight reveals as placed inside an aura of finer vehicles. The latter are in constant motion. When the dense body is born as a child it is extremely soft and flexible.

Childhood, youth, maturity, and old age are but so many different stages of crystallization, which goes on until at last a point is reached where the Spirit can no longer move the hardened body and it is thrown out from the Spirit as the planet is expelled from the Sun. That is death—the commencement of a disrobing process which continues in Purgatory. The low evil passions and desires we cultivated during life have crystallized the desire-stuff in such a manner that that also must be expelled. Thus the Spirit is purged of evil under the same law that a sun is purged of the matter which later forms a planet. If the life has been a reasonably decent one, the process of purgation will not be very strenuous nor will the evil desires thus expurgated persist for a long time after having been freed, but they quickly disintegrate. If, on the other hand, an extremely vile life has been led, the part of the expurgated desire nature may persist even to the time when the Spirit returns to a new birth for further experience. It will then be attracted to him and haunt him as a demon, inciting him to evil deeds which he himself abhors. The story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is not a mere fanciful idea of Robert Louis Stevenson, but is founded upon facts well known to spiritual investigators. Such cases are extremes, of course, but they are nevertheless possible,

and we unfortunately have laws which convert such possibilities of probabilities in the case of a certain class of so-called criminals. We refer to laws which decree capital punishment as penalty for murder.

When a man is dangerous he should of course be restrained, but even apart from the question of the moral right of a community to take the life of anyone—which we deny—society by its very act of retaliatory murder defeats the very end it would serve. If the vicious murderer is restrained under whatever discipline is necessary in a prison, for a number of years until his natural death, he will have forgotten his bitterness against his victim and against society, and when he stands as a free Spirit in the Desire World, he may even by prayer have obtained forgiveness and have become a good Christian. He will then go on his way rejoicing, and will in the future life seek to help those whom he hurt here.

When society retaliates and puts him to a violent death shortly after he has committed the crime, he is most likely to feel himself as having been greatly injured, and not without cause. Then such a character will usually seek to "get even," as he calls it, going about for a long time inciting others to commit murder and other crimes. Then we have an epidemic of murders in a community, a condition not infrequent.

The regicide in Serbia shocked the Western world in 1914 by wiping out an entire royal house in a most shockingly bloody manner, and the Minister of the Interior was one of the chief conspirators. Later he wrote his memoirs, and therein he writes that whenever the conspirators had tried to win anyone as a recruit, they always succeeded when they burned incense. He did not know why, but simply mentioned it as a curious coincidence.

To the mystic investigator the matter is perfectly clear. We have shown the necessity of having a vehicle made of the materials of any world wherein we wish to function. We usually obtain a physical vehicle by going through the womb, or perhaps in a few special cases, from a particularly good materializing medium, but where it is only necessary to work upon the brain and influence someone else to act, we need but a vehicle made of such ether as may be obtained from fumes of many different substances. Each kind attracts different classes of Spirits, and there is no doubt that the incense burned at meetings where the conspirators were successful was of a low and sensual order and attracted Spirits who had a grudge against humanity in general and the King of Serbia in particular. These malcontents were unable to injure the king himself, but used a subtle influence which helped the conspirators in their work. The released murderer who has a grudge against society on account of his execution, may enter low gambling saloons where the fumes of liquor and tobacco furnish ample opportunity for working upon the class of people who congregate in such places, and the man whose spiritual sight has been developed is often sadly impressed when he sees the subtle influences to which those who frequent such places are exposed. It is a fact, of course, that a man must be of a low caliber to be influenced by low thoughts, and that it is as impossible to incite a person of benevolent character to do murder—unless we put him into a hypnotic sleep—as to make a tuning fork which vibrates to C sing by striking another attuned to the key of G. But the thoughts of both living and dead constantly surround us, and no man ever thought out a high spiritual philosophy under the influence of tobacco fumes or while imbibing alcoholic stimulants. Were capital punishment, newspaper notoriety of criminals, and the manufacture of liquor and tobacco eliminated from society, the gun factories would soon cease to advertise and go out of business

along with most of the locksmiths. The police force would decrease, and jails and taxes would be correspondingly minimized.

When a person enters Purgatory he is exactly the same person as before he died. He has just the same appetites, likes and dislikes, sympathies and antipathies, as before. There is one important difference, however, namely, that he has no dense body wherewith to gratify his appetites. The drunkard craves drink, in fact, far more than he did in this life, but has no stomach which can contain liquor and cause the chemical combustion necessary to bring about the state of intoxication in which he delights. He may and does enter saloons where he interpolates his body into the body of the physical drunkard so that he may obtain his desires at second hand, as it were, inciting his victim to drink more and more.

Yet there is no true satisfaction. He sees the full glass upon the counter but his spirit hand is unable to lift it. He suffers the tortures of Tantalus until in time he realizes the impossibility of gratifying his base desire. Then he is free to go on, so far as that vice is concerned. He has been purged from that evil without intervention of an angry Deity or a conventional devil with hell's flames and pitchfork to administer punishment, but under the immutable law that as we sow so shall we reap, he has suffered exactly according to his vice. If his craving for drink was of a mild nature, he would scarcely miss the liquor which he cannot there obtain. If his desires were strong and he simply lived for drink, he would suffer veritable tortures of hell without need of actual flames. Thus the pain experienced in eradication of his vice would be exactly commensurate with the energy he had expended upon contracting the habit, as the force wherewith a falling stone strikes the earth is proportionate to the energy expended in hurling it upwards into the air.

Yet it is not the aim of God to "get even;" love is higher than law and in His wonderful mercy and solicitude for our welfare He has opened the way of repentance and reform whereby we may obtain forgiveness of sin, as taught by the Lord of Love: the Christ. Not indeed contrary to law, for His laws are immutable, but by application of a higher law, whereby we accomplish here that which would otherwise be delayed until death had forced the day of reckoning. The method is as follows:

In our explanation concerning the subconscious memory we noted that a record of every act, thought, and word is transmitted by air and ether into our lungs, thence to the blood, and finally inscribed upon the tablet of the heart: a certain little "seed atom," which is thus the book of the Recording Angels. It was later explained how this panorama of life is etched into the desire body and forms the basis of retribution after death. When we have committed a wrong and our conscience accuses us in consequence, and this accusation is productive of sincere repentance accompanied by reform, the picture of that wrong act will gradually fade from the record of our life, so that when we pass out at death it will not stand accusingly against us. We noted that the panorama of life unwinds backwards just after death. Later in the purgatorial life it again passes before the spiritual vision of the man, who then experiences the exact feeling of those whom he has wronged. He seems to lose his or her identity for the time being and assumes the condition of his one time victim, he experiences all the mental and physical suffering himself which he inflicted upon others. Thus he learns to be merciful instead of cruel, and to do right instead of wrong in a future life. But if he awakens to a thorough realization of a wrong previous to his death, then, as said, the feeling of sorrow for his victim and the restitution or redress which he gives of his own free will makes the

suffering after death unnecessary. Hence "his sin is forgiven." The Western Mystery Teaching gives a scientific method whereby an aspirant to the higher life may purge himself continually, and thus be able entirely to avoid existence in Purgatory. Each night after retiring the pupil reviews his or her life during the day in reverse order. He starts to visualize as clearly as possible the scene which took place just before retiring. He then endeavors to view impartially his actions in that scene, examining them to see whether he did right or wrong. If the latter, he endeavors to feel and realize as vividly as possible that wrong. For instance, if he spoke harshly to someone, and upon later consideration finds it was not merited, he will endeavor to feel exactly as that one felt whom he wronged and at the very earliest opportunity to apologize for the hasty expression. Then he will call up the next scene in backward succession which may perhaps be the supper table. In respect of that scene he will examine himself as to whether he ate to live, sparingly and of foods prepared without suffering to other creatures of God (such as flesh foods that cannot be obtained without taking life). If he finds that he allowed his appetite to run away with him and that he ate gluttonously, he will endeavor to overcome these habits, for to live a clean life we must have a clean body, and no one can live to his highest possibilities while making his stomach a graveyard for the decaying corpses of murdered animals.

Thus the pupil will continue to review each scene in reverse order from night till morning, and to feel really sorry for whatever he has done amiss. He will not neglect to feel glad either when he comes to a scene where he has done well, and the more intensely he can feel, the more thoroughly he will eradicate the record upon the tablet of the heart and sharpen his conscience, so that as time goes on from year to year, he will find less cause for blame and

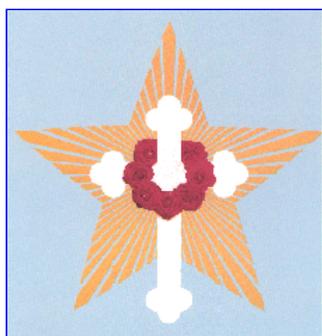
enhance his soul power enormously. Thus he will grow in a measure impossible by any less systematic method, and there will be no necessity for his stay in Purgatory after death.

This evening exercise, and another for the morning, if persistently performed day by day will in time awaken the spiritual vision as they improve life.

This article was adapted from "[The Rosicrucian Mysteries](#)," by [Max Heindel](#).

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