SOUL OF NYRIA
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THE MEMORY OF A PAST LIFE IN ANCIENT ROME

IN THREE BOOKS

By

MRS. CAMPBELL PRAED

AUTHOR OF "NADINE," "MY AUSTRALIAN GIRLHOOD," "AS A WATCH IN THE NIGHT," AND OTHER WORKS

With Critical Preface by

THE HON. RALPH SHIRLEY

AND

SIX PAGES OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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A SOUL OF NYRIA

THE MEMOIR OF A PAST LIFE IN ANCIENT ROME

By

MRS. CAMPBELL BRAED

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THE INSTRUMENT

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THE OCCULTIST. Writer and Lecturer on Occult Philosophy and Introducer of the Instrument.

THE INSTRUMENT. A modern Englishwoman who, in an abnormal state of consciousness, relates the life-story of Nyria, a slave-girl in Imperial Rome.

THE RECORDER AND EDITOR. To whom Nyria, through the lips of the Instrument, dictates her story.


THE COMMENTATOR. A Source of Information and Instruction upon the super-physical Level, whether individual or collective is indeterminable: which is apart from the Entity Nyria, but is also expressed on the physical level through the mouth of the Instrument.

PERSONS CONCERNED IN THE ROMAN LIFE OF NYRIA.
A.D. 77 TO THE END OF A.D. 95

NYRIA. Body-Slave to Julia.

JULIA. Daughter of the Emperor Titus.

LUCIA VALERIA. Youngest Daughter of the Emperor Vitellius.

VITELLIA. Eldest Daughter of the Emperor Vitellius.

DOMITIA. Wife of the Emperor Domitian.

DOMITILLA. Niece of Domitian.

ANTÆIA. First wife of Pliny the Younger.

GALLA. A Roman lady.

SALOME. So-called Wife of Marcus Licinius Sura.

PHYLLIS. Nurse of the Emperor Domitian.

EUPHENA. Wise-Woman and Ethiopian Slave in the Household of Julia.

ÆMILIA. 

THANNA. 

SAMU. 

CORELLIA. 

ÆOLA. 

THE APOSTLE—OR PRESBYTER. 

DOMITIAN. Emperor of Rome, A.D. 81–96.

FLAVIUS SABINUS. Husband of Julia.

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CRITICAL PREFACE

BY THE HON. RALPH SHIRLEY

To write anything like a systematic defence of the doctrine of Reincarnation or Re-birth would be outside the scope of an introductory chapter, but inasmuch as an acceptance of the *bona fides* of the present work suggests that the principle of a plurality of lives plays its part in the evolution of the human ego, it is impossible to dismiss the subject without putting forward some brief argument in favour of an hypothesis which has been adopted in explanation of the problems of human life by some of its foremost thinkers in all ages of the world's history, and has not been without its apologists during the present age.

We need not indeed go back to Pythagoras or to the Hindu sages for its defence. Even such a protagonist of modern science as Professor T. H. Huxley looked upon it as a possible solution of the difficulties of life. "In the doctrine of Transmigration," he says, "Brahminical and Buddhist speculation found ready to hand the means of constructing a plausible vindication of the ways of the Cosmos to man . . . this plea is not less plausible than others and none but very hasty thinkers will reject it on the ground of inherent absurdity."\(^1\)

At an earlier date David Hume saw in it the only alternative to a sceptical philosophy. "The soul," he says, "if immortal existed before our birth. The Metempsychosis is therefore the only system of the kind that philosophy can hearken to."\(^2\) Schopenhauer defended a variant of the same belief. "Were an Asiatic," he says, "to ask me for a definition of Europe, I should be forced to answer him: 'It is that part of the world which is haunted by the incredible delusion that man was created out of nothing and that his present birth is his first entrance into life.'"\(^3\)

Dr. McTaggart wrote comparatively recently in his learned work, *Some Dogmas of Religion*, in defence of the hypothesis: "It seems to me," he says, "a natural inference that this life will be followed by others like it, each separated from its predecessor and successor by death and re-birth. For otherwise we should be limited to the hypothesis that a process of development begun in a single life bounded by death should be continued as an indefinitely long life not divided by birth and death at all; and to suppose, without any reason, such a change from the order of our present experience seems unjustifiable."

\(^1\) T. H. Huxley. *Evolution and Ethics.*
\(^2\) Essay on the Immortality of the Soul.
\(^3\) Parerga and Paralipomena.
We do not, most of us, take the opinions of the poets as seriously as those of the men of science or the philosophers, but it is not a little curious how many poets of the first rank have in one form or another expressed a belief in this theory or at least played in a sympathetic manner with the conception. We have but to recall the names of Goethe, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning, in this connection, and the present Poet Laureate, John Masefield, has expressed his faith in the belief in a more definite form than any of his predecessors. We need not, therefore, have any fear that we have ruled ourselves out of the advance-guard of the modern intellectual world by at least tentatively adopting the theory of re-birth as a plausible solution of the riddle of life.

It is indeed when we come, after rejecting a materialistic solution, to consider the possible alternatives to reincarnation, that we find ourselves more and more disposed to regard the old Eastern doctrine with sympathetic consideration.

If we had to ask ourselves what one factor it is beyond all others which goes to the root of the essential antagonism between the materialistic and the spiritual interpretation of life, we are, it seems to me, driven to the conclusion that the true answer is that, on the basis of the spiritual hypothesis, the life force antedates its material vehicle and is its originating cause, whereas on the materialistic hypothesis, the material vehicle antedates the life force.

In a spiritual interpretation of the universe, there would thus appear to be implicit a belief in the pre-existence of the spirit in some condition or other before the body came into being. Now to many, the principal reason of the occurrence of an earth life at all, lies in the fact that the object of this life is to usher an immortal soul into existence. It may, however, well be contended that so far from this being the case, if the soul is immortal it cannot be ushered into existence in the present life for, as Hume observes, "what is incorruptible must also be ungenerable," and alternatively, if it is ushered into existence at birth, as the materialist may not unreasonably claim, it cannot possess any quality of immortality which should enable it to survive death. We do not know what operating cause there may have been to produce our present life on earth, but if it operated once there seems no reason to suppose that it will not operate again. Are we not justified in supposing that the force in question, this attraction to the physical, is something inherent in the essential nature of the spirit? As Voltaire observes, "It is not more surprising to be born twice than once. Everything in nature is resurrection."

The old orthodox hypothesis that death brings about a total transformation of the individual will not bear investigation. Much more reasonable is the contention of the sceptic that it brings about annihilation. If this is not the case, the conscious ego must look back, hypothetically at least, to a past existence just as he looks forward to a life to come. Most of the arguments indeed which support a belief in the indestructibility of the conscious ego, would appear to be equally valid as evidences of its pre-existence.

We may, of course, evolve some ingenious theory of a form of pre-existence which does not imply the belief in a plurality of lives on earth, but it must frankly be admitted that it is not at all easy to conceive it. The critic

of reincarnation should be ready with his alternative hypothesis and it is precisely here that the shoe pinches.

There may doubtless be many who would be inclined to reject the theory of re-birth, holding that the doctrine is in its nature unscientific. It is for their sake that the authority of Professor T. H. Huxley has been invoked. It may indeed be contended that it is in fact an extension on a broader basis of the principle of evolution which, if it holds good on the physical plane, may surely be equally valid on the spiritual.

For those who would reject the belief on the ground that it is antagonistic to Christianity, many passages may be cited which would leave the option of decision to individual judgment, the most obvious being the references to Elijah, identifying him with John the Baptist. The question of the disciples to Jesus: "Did this man sin or his parents that he was born blind?" has also often been cited, offering as it did an opportunity for repudiating the principle involved of which the Master took no pains to avail himself.

Those are on surer grounds who would give a verdict of "not proven." It is to such that the publication of these records may seem pertinent as an aid to the solution of a fascinating and obscure problem.

Mrs. Campbell Praed has been at great pains to discover historical evidences which might serve to confirm or refute Nyria's story. The results of these are cited in the appendix, and it must, I think, be admitted that the cases in which Nyria appears to be convicted of error or lapses of memory, are singularly few and unimportant. On the other hand, investigation has been successful in confirming a large proportion of her statements of fact with regard to incidents and individuals concerned, as also with regard to geographical details, while the character studies, which form no insignificant part of the record, such, for instance, as those of Domitian, Juvenal, Pliny and others, will generally, I think, be admitted to be singularly true to life as far as it is possible for us to estimate them at the present day.

Some of the evidences seem indeed trivial enough in themselves, but to discover a reference, in a later authority, to the beard of a philosopher, where Nyria emphasises the point, is not without its significance. And it is no less pertinent to unearth from records of the reign of Domitian the reputation and characteristics of a ladies' doctor of that period in substantiation of the statements of the narrator.

It is only the student who is acquainted with the minutest historical details of the time who will be able to put his finger on such facts. Battles, conspiracies and legal enactments fill the picture to the less erudite of historical scholars. It is in her lighter and more delicate touches, as well as in her descriptions of slave life and the slave market, that Nyria appears to be most effective and convincing.

It is hoped that the critical reader will be able to add something of value here and there where historical research has failed to bring significant facts to light, whether these should tend to confirm Nyria's narrative or the reverse.

One point in connection with this record calls for special comment and places it in a niche of its own quite apart from any alleged communications from beyond the borderline. Nyria was not hypnotised, at least from the physical plane, but in spite of this she entirely loses consciousness of her identity as an Englishwoman of the present day. The process by which she
does this is gradual at first but soon becomes complete, and she remains throughout the record a Roman slave girl recording the details of her life in Rome without any appreciation of the fact that upwards of 1800 years have elapsed since the incidents occurred. This adds to the vividness of the story as she is in the position of a person dictating her own autobiography in her own lifetime.

This physical condition is reminiscent of records which have recently been given to the world of dual (or multiple) personalities, such, for instance, as that of "Miss Beauchamp" narrated in detail by Dr. Morton Prince of Boston, U.S.A., in *The Dissociation of a Personality*.

It is perhaps futile to speculate whether such a transference of the consciousness could be achieved by the personal volition of the individual. It is noteworthy, however, that Nyria is reluctant in the first instance to recur to the painful episodes of the past and does not do so of her own free choice.

Lapsing into Roman life soon, however, becomes easy and painless, indeed one might almost say automatic, just as an individual with a dual personality slips from one state of consciousness into another, often in the very midst of a conversation. When the alternating personality returns, a sentence left uncompleted at the previous "change-over" may be finished without any sense of incongruity or awareness of the time interval that has elapsed. So with Nyria. At her next sitting she takes up her narrative exactly where she left off. The English consciousness is once more dormant and the Roman self-hood holds the field.

There are those who will attribute such phenomena to obsession by some outside entity anxious to tell her own story or narrate her own past experiences. Others, again, may point to the possibility that the Instrument was reading, while in a clairvoyant state, past events imprinted on the etheric film, a process which, though perhaps theoretically conceivable, is nevertheless, one would suppose, hardly feasible in practice without the possession of almost supermundane powers. However hard it admittedly is to believe that the Instrument was recalling her own past when she lived as a slave girl in the days of Domitian, either of these alternatives would merely serve to enhance the difficulty.

A third hypothesis acceptable to a certain type of mind is that the Instrument was reading the mind of the Recorder. There is, however, no evidence to suggest this form of thought transference and, while admitting that the Recorder's knowledge of Roman history was far in excess of that of the Instrument, we must bear in mind that the familiarity shown with small details was far beyond anything she possessed at the time, and was only subsequently obtained (and that partially) by long and very painstaking research. A personal disinclination to the reincarnationist hypothesis should hardly be allowed to weigh down the scales in face of the probabilities of the case. Admittedly, all solutions present grave difficulties and readers must be left to form their own judgment on the strength of the evidence submitted.

If the hypothesis of reincarnation be justified, how came it about, the critic may ask, that the Roman slave girl (as she believed herself to be) narrated her past life to an Englishwoman in archaic English of which, as a Roman slave, she obviously had no knowledge?
There is an interesting exposition in Plutarch of a theory of oracular inspiration which may serve to throw some light on such a problem. The exposition is put into the mouth of Theon in a discussion between a group of friends at Delphi and occurs in the tract De Pythiae Oraculis. "The voice, the pronunciation, the phrasing, the metre—none of these things," Theon says, "is the God's but the woman's; the God merely presents the images to her mind and makes light in her soul regarding the future." "That," he says, "is what enthusiasm, possession by the God, really is."

This argument was advanced primarily to explain why the Delphic oracles had been ordinarily given out in such indifferent verse.

"It is not the vocal organs, according to Theon's theory, which are the instrument used by the God: the human mind, Theon insists, with all its existing body of ideas, all its natural or acquired faculties, is the instrument, and the Divine power cannot bring out of each instrument more than the instrument can give; every instrument by its special nature limits possibilities for the musician; he cannot get the sounds of a trumpet out of a lyre; all that the God can do is to suggest to the inspired person certain thoughts or feelings; these are then given to the world by the ordinary mechanism by which this particular person translates his or her thoughts or feelings into speech."¹

The suggestion advanced is at least worthy of consideration. Whatever truth there may be in it, it is safe to say that the complexities of the human ego will remain to baffle the psychologist for many a generation yet to come.

¹ Sybils and Seers, by Bevan.