

**Review of *The Wheel of Rebirth*
by H. K. Challoner**

Some Memories of an Occult Student.

This book was published in 1935 and has an introductory note by Cyril Scott. The writer was author of *Watchers of the Seven Spheres* which evidently was concerned with **devas**. Scott says: *The Wheel of Rebirth* deals specifically with the past, involving that fundamental truth of occultisms, the theory of **Karma** and reincarnation which alone explains in a rational manner the inequalities of human character and destiny" (p.13). He concludes: "This, in short, is a book that may be taken as the life of Everyman, and if the sins and failures of his past are dispassionately revealed, so the potentialities opening out from the moment he has set his feet upon the Path are indicated by one who speaks with the authority of personal experience" (p.14).

The way in which *The Wheel of Rebirth* is written, it is very difficult to determine, in a dispassionate mood, whether it is fact, fiction or fancy. In many respects it is superficially like *The Wave* of Algernon Blackwood. In a more remote sense it seems to resemble some of L. Adams Beck's writing, although my conclusion is that there was probably more fact and certainly more truth in the lady's fiction than in Mr. Challoner's purported record of ancient memories.

Briefly incarnation in Atlantis, Egypt, Persia, Greece, Germany, Italy and England are listed. One can see to some degree chains of logic—far more in the explanation than in the episodes—of **recurrences**, and those recurrences are explained as **karma**. If one has read Marie Corelli's *Ardath* both those recurrences and explanations are more **ad nauseam** than toward any light.

Before obtaining this work, there was some grapevining around the Academy that some of our leading cosmic scientists have concluded that the world is presumably governed either by a law of mercy or a universal personality of mercy. Whether this was the direct experience of the persons in question or whether it has come through the coalescing of the efforts of Stromburg and Aldous Huxley does not matter. But this meeting of the minds of the real scientists and the real, shall we say, occultists, is very far from Mr. Challoner's writing.

His wheel is one in the ruts. It does not move. It is a water wheel, perhaps; it is not a chariot or carriage wheel. He is very far from Ezekiel's "wheels within the wheels" and he is still further from "way up in the middle of the air." Karma is inexorable. The "hero" is guilty of "black magic" in **Atlantis** so he comes back to the earth again and again and again. There is a dualism between black magic and "goodness," whatever that is. The devil is a leading character, God is not.

It is just this dichotomy between goodness and badness that is so dangerous and confusing. Apparently by “being good” something else happens than having bad karma. How a man could possibly be a deva—and Mr. Scott regards Challoner as an authority on “devas”—remains a mystery. You sin, you come back and come back and come back. That is your wheel. It is far more Nietzsche's *Eternal Recurrence* than anything Oriental, or spiritual.

That real occultist worthy, Fabre D'Olivet, has set forth in his *Hermeneutic Interpretation of the Origin of the Social State of Man and of the Adamic Race* that there are three aspects of the universe which may be expressed philosophically as “Providence,” “Weill” and “Destiny.” It is **destiny** that is **karma**. It is the will-of-man that changes the static wheel into one of the rolling carriage which moves on and on and on. Providence is above these things and is not hampered by anything at all; it, however, is only concerned with principles.

D'Olivet presents the allegory of Cain and Abel, that Cain means a centering and Abel means a de-centering. Abel belongs to the universe, Cain to the earth. Yet the Frenchman makes it very clear that both Cain and Abel are both good and evil, and neither. Man's actions may be centripetal (Cain), centrifugal (Abel), or linear (Both). Moreover there is a sort of dualism within monism, and it is not between any inexorable “good” and “evil,” or especially between “black magic” and “white magic.”

Next I set up Milarepa against Challoner. Milarepa was certainly guilty of black magic, and in no distant Atlantis. Time and historical processes must of course, be ignored by “occultists.” Yet Milarepa, within a single incarnation attained enlightenment. “In a twinkling of an eye all shall be changed.”

There is no room in *The Wheel of Rebirth* for a God of Mercy, or for God at all; or for a Bodhisattva, or a Buddha. There is no rescue save in imaginary moral exhortations. The “soul” is one of the types of Sankhya **purushas**. All the efforts of the Hindus to substitute jiva, jivatman and a host of other words for **ahankara** have left **ahankara** in the same place—and on the wheel.

Now I “remember” some of my “former incarnations.” What is this “I” and what is this “memory?” There is no doubt that radio and television enable us, by selectivity, to pick up vibrations of plays, music, travels, etc. There is no reason to limit this selectivity. What is **alaya**? May not one by tuning into **alaya** pick up anything—his own “former incarnations,” the karmic stream which led to his coming into a body, any form or portion of the stream of life, or for that matter, an obsession? In my own case, the effect of karma is far more distinct than in Challoner's and resembles, more or less, some of the Burmese stories that have come down to us.

Challoner has not gone deep. Hindu's posit the breath of Brahm and stop. Every one of us is constantly taking in sucked air from a universal sea which is the same for all of us. We may call this sea **Antichthon**, in Plato's terminology. Or we may actually say it is nirvana, and we produce samsara by inhaling. Anyhow inhalation is like Cain and exhalation is like Abel. If we only exhale we cannot live in the flesh, ordinarily at least. So Abel was killed. Yet this sea is all there and it is

mentioned innumerable in the Hebrew text of Genesis and translated out of all resemblance to the original—partly on purpose in the days of Septuagint.

There is no value in talking about “karma” or the “wheel” without considering emancipation, which is much more important anyhow. The loose use of the word “truth” leaves out all possibility for the Prajna Paramita sutras. Actually the Hebrew and Greek words which are so glibly translated into English “truth” have totally different significations.

The wheel is the same and is different, in a sense, from the universe, or form nirvana. The focus of consciousness on things and thingness and self is illusion, is **avidya**. **Avidya** is not valueless. Or, as Fabre D'Olivet has put it, Cain is not necessarily evil. There is a purpose for the ego-sense, if we are not confused thereby. Paul says, “I die daily.” As one nears emancipation, he may die with every breath, and die to be resurrected immediately afterwards. This is so with every pulse of breath, it is so with every beat of heart.

Buddha tried to clear out a lot of rubbish; some people are trying to bring it back.