

## The Religious Ideas and Institutions of the Greeks.

**W**ITHOUT at least some little knowledge of the religious ideas and institutions of the Ancient Greeks, we should find very many passages in history and elsewhere wholly unintelligible.

Like every other race the Greeks had some conception of the existence of a Supreme Being and hence cast their belief in the Gods and Goddesses. Their worship was that of the old Aryians, many other elements also being introduced according to their advancement. They supposed the earth to be as it appears to us a plane, round in form like a shield. Around it flowed the mighty ocean, a stream broad and deep, beyond which, on all sides, lay the realms of Cimmerian darkness and terror. The heavens were supposed to be a dome shut down close upon the earth. Hades, a place for departed shades, reached by subterranean passages, was beneath the earth. Still beneath this was a deep pit, Tartarus, made fast by gates of brass and iron, which was the awful prison of the Titans, as far beneath the earth as the heavens were above; and the latter distance can only be conjectured, from the fact that when Zeus, in a fit of anger, hurled Hephaestus, from the heavens to the earth, he fell "from morn to noon, from noon to dewy eve."

The sun was considered as an archer-god, borne in a fiery chariot up and down the pathway of the skies. Awaiting the god in the west was a winged-couch, in which he sank to rest, when it was wafted around to the east where new steeds awaited him. There were twelve members of the celestial council, six gods and as many goddesses. The male deities were Zeus, the father and ruler of gods and men, and the wielder of thunderbolts; Poseidon, ruler of the sea; Apollo or Phoebus, the god of light, of music, of healing, of poetry, and of prophecy; Ares the god of war; Hephaestus, the deformed god of fire and patron of useful arts dependent upon it, the forger of thunderbolts for Zeus, and the fashioner of arms and all sorts of metal work for the heroes and the gods; Hermes the wing-footed herald of the celestials, the god of invention and commerce, himself a thief and the patron of thieves.