A HISTORY OF HADES.

Hells Ancient and Modern—Different Beliefs in Different Countries.

The idea of a place for the punishment after death of wicked men is found in most, though not all, of the religions of the present time and of antiquity. According to some beliefs, the punishment is to last forever; according to others, the torments are to continue only for a time, and to result in purifying the imprisoned souls and fitting them for heaven. The Roman catholic religion has both a purgatory, or place of temporary torment, and a hell, which is everlasting. No idea of penalty was connected with the classic Hades—it was simply an under-world where dwelt all those who had the misfortune to be dead, irrespective of their conduct in life. The word comes from the Greek adjective meaning unseen. The English word hell had also originally the same meaning. It is derived from the Teutonic base "hal," whence also the Anglo-saxon helan, to hide, "so that the original sense is the hidden or unseen place" (Skeat).

The conception of future existence which lays claim to the greatest antiquity is that of the ancient Egyptians. According to the Egyptian belief, if the great judgment resulted adversely, "the condemned soul is either scourged back to the earth straightway, to live again in the form of a vile animal, as some of the emblems appear to denote; or plunged into the tortures of a horrid hell of fire and devils below, as numerous engravings set forth; or driven into the atmosphere, to be vexed and tossed by tempests, violently whirled in blasts and clouds, till its sins are expiated, and another probation granted through a renewed existence in human form."

From Persia, also, we get a religion of great antiquity—Zoroastrianism—which, in a modified form, is held today by the small body of Parsees still to be found in Persia and India. According to the Parsee belief, the good, after death, pass safely over the bridge Chinevat, which stretches from Mount Alborj up to Garotman, the blissful realm of Ormuzd; while the wicked fall from the bridge into the Gulf of Duzahk, which yawns beneath, where they are tormented by dævas.

The Laws of Manu, one of the early sacred books Brahminism, names twenty-one hells. Punishments for different sins are, to be reborn into one of these hells, or to return to earth as a beggar, cripple, leper, or in the form of a rat, a snake, or a louse, the penalty being, in each case, appropriate to the crime. Punishment need not be endless for any one, as each successive life is a new probation, in which righteousness wins admission to a higher stage of existence.

In Buddhism, which is one of the religions of China and the State religion of Thibet and other countries of Eastern Asia, future punishment is provided for in a great hell, comprising a system of 136 lesser hells. The torments of these hells are depicted in many Buddhist books and paintings with much detail and vividness.

As for the two other religions of China, Confucianism tells nothing whatever about punishment after this life, while Taouism has a theory of retribution much like that of Brahminism.

In the Greek mythology, which was copied by the Romans, the place of future punishment is called Tartarus. The universe is represented in the poetry of Homer and Hesiod as a hollow globe, divided by flat earth. In the top of the upper hemisphere was Olympus, the home of the gods; in the hemisphere beneath the earth was Hades, the abode of all the dead; and in its lowest depths was Tartarus. An anvil would be nine days and nights in falling from Olympus to the earth; nine days and nights from the earth to the bottom of Tartarus. "Around it, moreover, a brazen fence has been forged; and about it Night is poured in three rows." In Tartarus there is darkness, and the air has no motion. Prometheus, who was guilty of overreaching Zeus, was punished by being chained to a rock, part of the time on earth and part in Tartarus. An eagle devoured his liver every day, and it was renewed every night. Ixion, who had been treacherous to Zeus, was chained by the hands and feet to a wheel, which is described as winged or fiery, and said to have rolled perpetually in the air. He is further said to have been scourged and compelled to exclaim—"Benefactors should be honored."

Sisyphus is represented by different authors as guilty of treachery of various kinds. "His wickedness during life was severely punished in the lower world, where he had to roll up hill a huge marble block, which, as soon as it reached the top, always rolled down again." Tantalus was a wealthy king, who divulged the secrets of Zeus. "The gods punished him by placing him in the nether world in the midst of a lake, but rendering it impossible for him to drink when he was thirsty, the water always withdrawing when he stooped. Branches laden with fruit, moreover, hung over his head, but when he stretched out his hand to reach the fruit the branches withdrew. Over his head there was suspended a huge rock, ever threatening to crush him." The Danaides, or 50 daughters of Danaus, all but one of whom, in obedience to their father, killed their husbands on their wedding night, were punished in Tartarus by being compelled, everlastingly, to pour water into a sieve.

According to the Scandinavian mythology, all who die bravely in battle are snatched away to Valhalla, Odin's magnificent banquet-hall in the sky. Those who, after lives of ignoble labor or inglorious ease, die of sickness, descend to a cold and dismal cavern beneath the ground, called Niflheim, i. e., the mist-world. This abode is ruled by the goddess of death, whose name is Hel. The place of torment for reprobates is Nastrond, deeper underground than Niflheim, and far toward the frigid north. This grim prison is described in the following passage from the prose Edda, written in Ireland in the thirteenth century: "In Nastrond there is a vast and direful structure with doors that face the north. It is formed entirely of the backs of serpents, wattled together like wickerwork. But the serpents' heads are turned toward the inside of the hall, and continually vomit forth floods of venom, in which wade all those who commit murder or who forswear themselves."

The Jews in Old Testament times had no idea of a hell. There is no mention of punishment after death in the teachings of Moses, nor is this doctrine taught by the prophets. The word Sheol, which is translated by hell in the King James version of the bible, meant simply the abode of the dead, and corresponded to the Greek Hades, used in the New Testament and other Greek writings. Gloomy and repulsive ideas were associated with Sheol, similar to those we connect with death and the grave, but it was the destination of good and bad alike, and not a place of punishment. The troubles which the wicked and the enemies of the Jews were threatened with by the prophets pertained to this world. They were pain, disease, loss of possessions and kindred, hostility of neighbors, death, and indignities to the dead body. The idea of Sheol first became modified after the Persian captivity. The place was divided into two parts which which were separated only by the width of a thread. One of these divisions was for the good, awaiting resurrection, and was called Paradise; the other, set apart for the wicked, was called Gehenna. This latter designation means "the valley of the son of Hinnom," and was originally the name of a gorge outside of Jerusalem, in which the Jew had practised the fiery worship of Moloch, and where afterward offal from the city and the bodies of criminals were thrown, to be consumed by the fires always kept burning there. The idea of Gehenna as a place of future punishment had appeared in Rabbinical theology and become quite detailed a century or more before Christ.

At the coming of Christ there were three chief sects among the Jews. The Pharisees, who were by far the most numerous, believed that sinners were kept forever in prison in the under-world; the Essenes believed that the vicious suffered eternal punishment in a dark, cold place; and the Sadducees thought that the soul died with the body. The first threats of hell in the Scriptures occur in the teachings of Jesus. There are three words in the New Testament which were translated by hell in the King James bible—Hades, meaning the same as elsewhere in Greek literature; Gehenna, which was properly the hell of Hebrew conception, and is uniformly so rendered in the revised version; and Tartarus, used only once (2 Peter iii., 4), which is the regular Greek word for the place of punishment after death. The place of future punishment represented in Christ's teachings is a region of fire—"Whosoever shall say, thou fool shall be in danger of the hell of fire" (Matt v., 22, revised version); the fire is to be eternal and unquenchable—"It is good for thee to enter into life maimed, rather than having thy two hands to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, ... where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." (Mark ix., 43, 48; see also Matt. xviii, 8,) In Revelation, St. John informs us what fuel is to support the unquenchable fire—"If any man worshippeth the beast and his image, . . . he shall be tortured with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment goeth up for ever; and they have no rest day and night." (Rev. xiv., 9.11.) In another passage it is revealed concerning various kinds of sinners that "their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Rev. xxi., 8,) This doctrine was intended to last unchanged for all time, for we find in the last chapter the statement that, if any man shall add to or take from the words of this book, he shall suffer all the torments and lose all the rewards which are written in this prophecy. (Rev. xxii., 18.19.)

The religion of Islam is characterized by lack of originality, and the Mohammedan hell contains nothing but easily-made variations of the Gehenna of the Jews. To the man that disobeys the precepts of the Koran it is promised that "God shall cast him into the hell-fire; he shall remain therein for ever."

The fathers of the christian church generally taught the existence of a hell of material fire and brimstone. Alger gives as their belief that at the resurrection the damned "were to be banished for ever to a fiery hell in the centre of the earth, there to endure uncomprehended agonies, both physical and spiritual, without any respite, without any end." The strict literality with which these doctrines were held is strikingly shown in Jerome's artless question: "If the dead be not raised with flesh and bones, how can the damned, after the judgment, gnash their teeth in hell?" "Origen, who was a Platonist, and a heretic on many points," says Alger, "was severely condemned for saying that the fire of hell was inward and of the conscience, rather than outward and of the body." Tertullian says: "The damned burn eternally without consuming, as the volcanoes, which are vents from the stored subterranean fire of hell, burn for ever without wasting." These words point also to the belief, noted above, that hell was located under the earth.

In the middle ages the christian conception of hell became more detailed and more terrible. The details can be found not only in the books of the period, but they were favorite subjects for miracle plays and for works of art, especially for the pictures, carvings, and painted windows with which cathedrals were adorned. The monks of the period produced an extensive literature of visions describing the torments of hell. In these visions, according to Lecky:

"The devil was represented bound by red-hot chains on a burning gridiron in the centre of hell. The screams of his never-ending agony made its rafters to resound; but his hands were free, and with these he seized the lost souls, crushed them like grapes against his teeth, and then drew them by his breath down the fiery cavery of his throat. Demons with hooks of red-hot iron plunged souls alternately into fire and ice. Some of the lost were hung up by their tongues, others were sawn asunder, others gnawed by serpents, others beaten together on an anvil and welded into a single mass, others boiled and then strained through a cloth, others twined in the embraces of demons whose limbs were of flame. The fire of earth, it was said, was but a picture of that of hell. The latter was so immeasurably more intense that it alone could be called real."

By far the most elaborate description of the punishments of sinners which the middle ages produced is that of Dante, whose Inferno combines the torments of the classical Tartarus and the horrors of the christian hell. In this poem, which was written about 1300, the author represents himself as being conducted through the infernal regions by Virgil. Within the gates of hell, but before crossing the river Acheron, the visitors found those who have lived "withouten infamy or praise," and angels who had been neither faithful nor rebellious, but only selfish. They "were naked, and were stung exceedingly by gad-flies and by hornets that were there." Beyond Acheron were found the great ones of old, whose sin was lack of baptism. These were "only so far punished that without hope we live on in desire."

The Reformers made little change in the mediæval conception of hell. Calvin writes: "Forever harassed by a dreadful tempest, they shall feel themselves torn asunder by an angry God and transfixed and penetrated by mortal stings, terrified by the thunderbolts of God, and broken by the weight of his hand, so that to sink into any gulfs would be more tolerable than to stand for a moment in these terrors."

The characteristic austerity of the Puritans finds free scope in the depiction of hell's torments. Their great poet Milton describes the place in the first and second books of "Paradise Lost," Satan and his host are cast into it, "there to dwell in adamantine chains and penal fire."

A dungeon horrible, on all sides round,
As one great furnace, flamed; yet from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible. (i, 61.63).

The Puritans in America were no less emphatic in their depictions of hell than the parent stock in England. Many are the passages in the sermons of that staunch New England divine, Jonathan Edwards, devoted to setting forth the agonies of eternal punishment. The following extract is typical not only of Edwards but also of his contemporaries:—

Imagine yourself to be cast into a fiery oven or a great furnace, where your pain would be as much greater than that occasioned by accidentally touching a coal of fire as the heat is greater. Imagine also that your body was to lie there for a quarter of an hour, full of fire, and all the while full of quick sense; what horror would you feel at the entrance of such a furnace! and how long would that quarter of an hour seem to you! And, after you had endured it for one minute, how overbearing would it be to you to think that you had to endure it the other fourteen! But what would be the effect on your soul if you knew you must lie there, enduring that torment to the full, for twenty-four hours! And how much greater would be the effect if you knew you must endure it for a whole year! And how vastly greater still if you knew you must endure it for a thousand years! O, then, how would your hearts sink if you knew that you must bear it for ever and ever! and that there would be no end! that after millions of millions of ages your torments would be no nearer to an end, and that you never, never should be delivered! But your torment in hell will be immensely greater than this illustration represents.

Christian preachers and writers of the present day do not agree as to the nature of hell's torments. Many of them are coming to attach a figurative meaning to the Biblical description of hell, and seem as loath as their predecessors were eager to dwell upon the subject. In the *Fortnightly Review* for January, 1876, Lionel A. Tollemache says: "The wiser among us are seeking to drop hell out of the Bible as quietly and about as logically as we already contrive to disregard the plain texts forbidding Christians to go to law and christian women to plait their hair." Canon Farrar, in a series of sermons, has emphatically declared his disbelief in a hell of material and everlasting fire.—*Frederick A. Fernald.*

Chrystmasse of Olde.

God rest you, Chrysten gentil men,
Wherever you may be,—
God rest you all in feilde or hall,
Or on ye stormy sea;
For on this morn Chryst is born
That saveth you and me.

Last night ye shepherds in ye east
Saw many a wondrous thing;
Ye sky last night flamed passing bright
Whiles that ye stars did sing,
And angels came to bless ye name
Of Jesus Chryste, oure Kyng.

God rest you, Chrysten gentil men,
Faring where'er you may;
In noblesse court do thou no sport
In tournament no playe,
In paynim lands hold thou thy hands
From bloudy work this daye.

But thinking on ye gentil Lord
That died upon ye tree,
Let troublings cease and deeds of peace
Abound in chrystantie;
For on this morn ye Chryst is born
That saveth you and me.

—*Eugene Field.*

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