

THE PLEIADES AS THE HESPERIDES, ISLE OF THE BLEST, OR PLACE OF FUTURE

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MR. HAMILTON referred to Dr. Wallace's theory, that the solar system is the centre of the universe, as controverting both scientific and classical notions, and not yet at least generally held. He then took up in detail legends of many nations which pointed to the stars of the Pleiad group as the resting place of their ancestors' spirits and their own heaven. Such were the Arabs, the Berbers of North Africa, and Dyaks of Borneo. The British Druids had an ancient mythology drawn from the same source as that of the Greeks, had gods of characters similar to Pluto, Mercury and Zeus, and, in strange metaphoric poems, referred to the Pleiades. Their midnight ceremonies in the autumn, at the time of our Halloween, commemorated the season when the Seven Stars were highest in the visible firmament.

The lecturer discussed legends of the Adipones, the Hurons, Iroquois, Black-foot and other native American races, which made their heaven where the sun sets. Hiawatha's departure to the west in his birch canoe was compared to that of King Arthur in the Druid legend, the basis of Tennyson's "Mort d'Arthur." "The White Stone Canoe," an Ojibway legend translated into Hiawathan metre, by the late Sir James D. Edgar, represents the young brave Abeka, seeking his lost love, Wabose, in the redman's spirit land, where he finds her on a beautiful happy island, and here is repeated the Greek legend of the "Isle of the Blest" with a Promethean moral. Such beliefs were found also among the Hydahs, Eskimos, Chippewayans, Salish, Chiwaks, and, throughout the continent, to California. The curious myths of the Polynesians were referred to, and examples given of many strange coincidences with the legends of Egypt and Phoenicia, and paralleling those as to Atlas, Hercules, Pluto and other deities of Greece. They had, too, an "Isle of the Blest," but knew only six Pleiades, which they called "Matariki"—"Little Eyes," or "Tau Ono," The Six. They were objects of worship in these islands until the introduction of Christianity in 1857.

The ideas of the Hindus, Chinese and other Eastern people as to the place of the future were reviewed. The different views expressed by Homer, Hesiod, Lucian, Pindar and Plato were discussed. There were depicted beautiful plains without winter, fear or pain, where fruit of every kind abounded and joys never ceased. They were placed in the West, where the sun goes down, in a happy isle, where gentle sea breezes blow. Plato taught that only those enjoyed such bliss who had spent life in holy philosophical pursuits, useful to their fellow-men. He placed this pure abode in "the upper parts of the earth in places not easy to describe." The conception of the Hurons, Iroquois and Algonquins as to this place of bliss, is described by Colonel Garrick Mallory and Dr. A. F. Chamberlain, the archaeologists, and by the historians, Bancroft and Schoolcraft, in very similar expressions. The essayist quoted several beautiful Greek epitaphs in which such ideas are embodied along with hope of future meeting. He then explained the theory which assigned Aleyone, the chief star of the Pleiades, to the position practically of the centre of the universe and the place of future bliss. This great star was often so regarded and called "the central one" and "the leading one." However much appears to sustain such theory in classic story and in legends of uncivilized tribes, it was admitted that such claim is not as yet supported by science.

The lecturer concluded his discourse, stating that these many widespread traditions furnish a mass of evidence in favour of a common origin of mankind and of the existence of a general belief in life hereafter, where those who had here lived worthily would meet their ancestors and friends in a beautiful happy place somewhere, either on an island in a western ocean or in the most favoured of the great orbs, which, to use Shelley's words, form "Heaven's constellated wilderness."