

THE DOOMED WOLF.

Our pleasant and somewhat retired village was in the midst of commotion. A rival of Religion, commonly so called, was in "the full tide of successful experiment."

But a circumstance occurred in the progress of the excitement, which wrought it up to the highest pitch of endurance and then—the long agony was over—and the preachers departed—and the people removed—and the village became a waste and howling wilderness.

It was a delightful afternoon in September. The outward harvest had been secured as the reward of industry, and a harvest of souls was being gathered in the sanctuary as the first fruit of many days' excitement.

But there is a stir next the door. What means it? There are voices, and anon there are departures in haste. The whispering spread till they pervade the house—and there is a general uprising.

In the midst of it all, there is still Revivalism, for is not here a subject of most woful and touching appeal? The heart is now open, and you can look into it, and breathe into it your own will.

On the morrow, ere the sun had risen, there was a fearful wolf-howling heard—a cry as of suffocating agony—and the mother clasped her babe still closer to her breast, and wept as she thought of the funeral scene of yesterday.

Mysterious indeed, and awful, is the scene. He is suspended by the neck, yet not so as to prevent a continuous wild and agonizing howl, nor a fierce struggle for release.

The hour for meeting arrived—but who shall describe the feelings and thoughts, the sayings and doings of that day? The solemn tones of the church bell mingled with the doleful sounds above—and O what a worship-warring was heard in the combination!

"Far in the deep where darkness dwells, The land of horror and despair,— and an illustration was drawn from the position of the wolf, who struggles, and was not released—who howled and was not comforted—who lives in torment, and shall not die.

The people were moved with intensity of love. The sinful were convicted—the penitent were redeemed—the patient were redeemed—the woe was no shout in the camp of Israel—for did not the wolf howl chill the fevered-blood of enthusiasm?

Noon arrived and the people dismissed with a benediction which they heard not—for their thoughts were with the suspended destroyer. And when they went home, and looked upwards, they spoke to each other of what they saw; and feeling and thought were expressed in tones of sorrow.

What shall be done? A rifle is brought, and a strong arm elevates it, and a keen eye aims it, but the ball falls short of the mark.

's made, and another—for were not the people human? Verily they would even hazard the issue, for peradventure a fortunate shot might terminate the suffering of the wolf.

The bell again summons to public worship, but the summons is regarded by few. Why shouldst thou enter the sanctuary, and leave thy thoughts and feelings in the open air?

And so the sanctuary is well nigh deserted. Not so the streets of the village. Moans are devised to release the sufferer—but the desire hath not always the means to accomplish—and all is vain.

Twilight came, and still the wolf was seen struggling and heard howling. Night shut out the sight—but darkness cannot smother sound. And what a night to the people of that village!

Another day—and what a day! The bell will shortly summon you to the sanctuary. Wherefore will ye obey the call? Ye cannot sing the song of praise—Ye cannot hear the pulpit message.

To the sanctuary they repair, and they pray. O how fervently they pray. Even for the wolf they pray. "O Lord, it is enough! Merciful Heaven, O how long?"

And they went forth from the sanctuary in despair. Sirs, ye may well be solemn in this time of gloom, for it is a solemn and gloomy thing to know that ye are within sight and hearing of an agonizing creature which cannot die.

And the day waxed till meridian, and waned till the night-fall, and the people became haggard and grief-worn, and shut themselves up in their dwellings—but the voice of woe was a penetrating thing.

But friends, ye are wearied with watching, and ye will sleep. Peradventure ye will dream. Ay, if ye sleep ye will dream—and ye will see and hear, and feel, and think, and pray, and shudder!

Another day dawned, and the same sun has risen and the same people have gone forth to gaze on the same spectacle. Humanity can bear much—but it cannot bear every thing.

And thus by and by, they prepared to depart. It is a common impulse. No one asks his neighbour, Why? for every one has the answer in his own heart; nor, Whether? for every one feels that he neither knows nor cares, provided he can see from a safe distance.

And as he springs up, and utters, where happy children were wont to play, and desolation covers the long-hallowed scenes of domestic joy. And the wind sweeps mournfully through the dwellings fast falling to decay, bearing with it the doleful howl of the still suspended and still suffering destroyer!

The once happy villagers are scattered far and wide; but they have not forgotten the fearful spectacle, nor any of its circumstances; and when they present themselves at the throne of grace, they remember to pray that the poor wolf may be permitted to die!

"Well, and what is the meaning of this improbable story about the doomed wolf?"

First tell me wherein it is improbable except in the suspension of the destroyer? And is it any more improbable that God has thus suspended a wolf, and will not grant him the small boon of permission to die, than that he will ever immortalise some of his own offspring, merely that they may suffer enduring pangs?

If thou hadst been in that village, wouldst thou not have prayed for the wolf? Verily, if thou hadst the heart of humanity, thou wouldst pray even for the devil, under such circumstances?

Friend, thy imagination has peopled a gloomy world of endless despair. Suppose, if thou wilt, that a score of those woful sufferers, instead of being wholly out of sight and hearing, were suspended in the heavens, directly over thy dwelling. Thou canst see them writhing in deepest pangs—thou canst hear their continuous wail of despair, tortured as they are in every fibre!

But whether wilt thou flee? They follow thee. In the broad glare of day, they are still seen suspended over thy head. In the pale moon-beams, and in the cold star light, thou shalt still behold their struggles; and those ears shall ever be filled with their terrific cry!

PARABLE OF THE OFFENDING HAND. (Continued from last No.)

Q. How are we to arrive at the meaning of the word hell, as used in this parable?

A. Not by taking the view of it, which is the most popular at the present day, but by striving to ascertain how the Saviour understood it, when he uttered it.

Q. What is the most proper way to obtain this important information?

A. By endeavouring to learn the origin of the phrase under consideration.

Q. What is the original word which the translators of our English Bible have rendered hell, in this parable?

A. It is the Greek word of Gehenna. Q. What is the derivation of Gehenna?

A. It is derived from two Hebrew words, Gee, (valley,) and Hinnoo, (the name of the owner of the valley.) These words united make Gee Hinnoo, (Gehenna,) the valley of Hinnoo.

Q. What does Professor Stuart say on the situation of this valley?

A. He says "the valley of Hinnoo was a part (the eastern section) of the pleasant wadi or valley, which bounds Jerusalem on the south."

Q. What does he say of the uses to which this valley was put in ancient times?

A. "Here, in ancient times, and under some of the idolatrous kings, the worship of Moloch, the horrid idol god of the Ammonites, was practiced. To this idol children were offered in sacrifice."

Q. How does he describe the appearance of the image of the god Moloch, and the manner of sacrificing to it?

A. "If we may credit the Rabbins, the head of the idols was like that of an ox; while the rest of its body resembles that of a man. It was hollow within; and being heated by fire, children were laid in its arms, and were there literally roasted alive."

Q. What other name was the valley of Hinnoo known by anciently?

A. Schlausner, a German commentator, says, "In Jeremiah vii. 31, this valley is called Tophet, from the Hebrew Toph, a drum; because the priests in those horrible rites, beat drums, least the wailings and cries of the infants who were burned, should be heard by those standing around."

Q. Who abolished the worship of Moloch and other heathen idols, into which the Jews had fallen?

A. The good king Josiah, as we learn in 2 Kings xxiii. 10.

Q. To what use was Gehenna (the valley of Hinnoo) afterwards put?

A. Professor Stuart says, "that after these [idolatrous] sacrifices had ceased, the place was desecrated, and made one of loathing and horror. The pious king Josiah caused it to be polluted—that is, he caused to be carried there the filth of the city of Jerusalem. It would seem that the custom of desecrating this place, thus happily begun, was continued in after ages, down to the period when our Saviour was on earth. Perpetual fires were kept up, in order to consume the filth which was deposited there."

Q. Was this Gehenna (valley of Hinnoo) ever used for the punishment of criminals?

A. It is. And we learn that they viewed it with great dislike and horror.

Q. Did the Jews, at length, come to use the name of this detested valley of Hinnoo, Gehenna, as emblematical of the severe judgment or woes, which God brings upon the wicked in this life?

A. They did. Schlausner says that "over severe punishment, and particularly every ignominious kind of death, was called by the name of Gehenna"—or hell. And the prophet Jeremiah, in describing the calamities that should come upon Jerusalem, declares that it shall be as 'Tophet'—or Gehenna.

Q. Is there any proof that the Saviour, or the Jews in his day, ever used the word Gehenna, or hell, to signify a place of endless wretchedness?

A. There is no proof of this description.

Q. What evidence is relied upon by Behovora in that sentiment, to prove that Gehenna was used to denote a place of ceaseless woe?

A. The manner in which this word is used in the Targums, or commentaries, of Jewish writers, who are supposed to have lived near the days of the Saviour.

Q. How do these Targums fall short of proving the point in question?

A. They fail, because it is not at all certain that any of them were written in the days of Christ. It was the opinion of Bauer and John, that the oldest of these Targums were not written until the second or third century of the Christian era; in case they afford no evidence of the meaning attached to Gehenna by the Redeemer.

Q. Are the words, valley of Hinnoo, or Gehenna, or Tophet, ever used in the Old Testament, as signifying a place of endless suffering?

A. They are not. No evidence to this effect, can be adduced.

Q. How are these words used in the Old Testament?

A. They are used as signifying temporal punishment and calamity.

Q. Is there any evidence, or any probability, that the meaning of these words had changed between the days of the Old Testament writers and the advent of the Redeemer?

A. There is no evidence whatever of this description.

Q. What meaning, then, are we bound to suppose the Saviour attached to these words when he used them?

A. We are bound to believe he used them precisely as they are used in the Old Testament, viz., to signify temporal calamity and distress.

Q. With these explanations before us, how should we understand the words "cast into hell," as used in the parable under consideration?

A. We may understand them either literally, as signifying being cast into the valley of Hinnoo to be burned to death, or figuratively, as becoming involved in calamities and woes, in consequence of sinful gratifications.

Q. How should we understand the phrase "where their worm dieth not?"

A. We should understand it as indicative of the intensity of the punishments inflicted. Professor Stuart describes the origin of this phrase.

Q. What is his language?

A. He says, "Perpetual fires were kept up [in the valley of Hinnoo, or Gehenna] in order to consume the filth which was deposited there. And as the same filth would breed worms, (for so all putrifying meat of course does,) hence came the expression where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

Q. How are we to understand the words, "the fire that never shall be quenched?"

A. In the quotation above, Professor Stuart declares that this expression arose from the circumstance, that perpetual fires were kept burning in Gehenna, to consume the filth of Jerusalem.

Q. Where was it that the worm died not, and fire was not quenched?

A. In the valley of Hinnoo, or Gehenna.

Q. What is the general instruction we should understand the Saviour as imparting to his disciples in this parable?

A. We should understand him as instructing them, that it was better for them to put away all habits, all practices, all inclinations, however strong or dear, that would interfere in the way of their duty as his disciples, and enter into the life and enjoyment of the gospel, then by indulging in those habits and inclinations, to be led, thereby to neglect their duty, apostatize from their Master, and become involved in the dreadful woes which were soon to come upon the Jews for their wickedness.

Q. Were those followers of Christ who apostatized from him, involved in the calamities, that soon afterward overwhelmed the Jewish nation?

A. We are informed by historians that they were. They were cast into Gehenna—into a scene of distress, and suffering, and awful horror, such as the world has never witnessed in any other instance.

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