

TWO HELLS.

"Ye realms yet unrevealed to human sight !
Ye gods who rule the regions of the night !
Ye gliding ghosts ! permit me to relate
The mystic wonders of your silent state."



AMONG men of all nations and times speculation has ever been rife concerning existence in the spiritual world. Among the Pagans, the mode of life of the Olympian and Plutonian deities was the subject of various

theories ; that of God and his angels, as also of the devil and the fallen host among True Believers ; while both have eagerly sought for the true solution of the problem of the soul's whereabouts and condition after death. As innumerable are the theories which have been advanced concerning these various questions as there have been minds to conceive them : but those who have gloried most in their speculations, and have portrayed their ideas to the world in the most glowing colors are the greater poets of all ages. In the uncertain realms of the spiritual world, these photographers of speculative thought have had full scope for the exercise of their wildest fancies. For who had ever visited these realms and returned ? None ; therefore, could poets paint them as they would. Once without the pale of this most real world, their gigantic imaginations might expand to their utmost limits without fear of barrier or opposition. These realms they might fashion as they would, might build of what material, might compass with what elements they might think fit, and people with what beings they might choose.

And so, glancing back over the wide vista of human thought, we observe that the greatest poets that have ever ornamented our sphere, have spent themselves to the utmost in painting in the most glowing colors, the particular ideals which they possessed of these unexplored domains. Homer and Virgil especially, among the ancients, have revelled in this spirit-world : whilst among the moderns,

our greatest master-minds, Dante, Goethe, Milton, have likewise found scope for their elastic imaginations only in these obscure realms. So wondrous and vast have been their conceptions, and so graphically painted withal, that we can scarce contemplate them without harboring a doubt as to the purely human composition of their authors. Homer's clammy draughts chill us to the quick ; Virgil's hinted torments of the damned in the dread depths of Tartarus fill us with a fear more terrible perhaps than if he had described them, as dangers, which we would bravely face in the light of day, frighten us when shrouded in darkness ; Dante's horrible portrayal of the Almighty's mode of vengeance is the limit of man's imaginative powers ; Milton's building of Pandemonium awes us, causing us to reflect what mighty power God could bestow upon creatures, and yet be infinitely more powerful Himself ; and Goethe's portrait of Mephistopheles is so clever, that after making his acquaintance, we look with suspicion upon every new friend, lest he should be the incarnate fiend himself rambling on our earth.

Although the conceptions of these writers cannot be accepted as the standard in every particular whereby to judge of the opinions on these subjects held by the different ages in which they lived, yet we can gain from them a general idea of what men thought in their respective times. To examine the ideas held of the spiritual world by all the above-named writers would imply a survey of a wide field of literature, and would be too comprehensive a subject for our present purpose ; but a glance can be had here at the pictures of an after-life given to us by the two great epics of Pagan times, Homer and Virgil, in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey* and the sixth of the *Æneid*, wherein are described the descents of the respective heroes of the two poems to the nether world. It will be interesting to note wherein they differ, in order to see