

*Visions of Heaven and Hell.**

From the time when these words were written, in the 32nd chapter of Deuteronomy, "a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell," the human mind has exercised itself, not unnaturally, in endeavours to penetrate the mystery. They are words which refer to a temporal punishment, but they also mention a locality which is not further defined. Men have variously speculated as to the whereabouts of that dread place; and after ages of vain speculation, the 'Catechism of the Diocese of Bruges' has definitely settled the dispute, as may be seen in the reply to the query, "Where is Hell?"—namely, "Hell is situated at the centre of the earth, and is exactly fifteen hundred leagues from this place." Before this Catechism, however, was compiled, the Jesuit Hardouin had detected the position, though he had not made out the distance; but he did something more,—he declared that the rotary motion of the earth was caused by the efforts of the damned to escape from Hell by climbing up the inward crust of the globe. As squirrels set their cylindrical cages spinning, so the condemned souls keep the world moving!

Cruel humanity has chosen, from various motives, to make a revelation of that which more merciful divinity has shrouded in terrible mystery. The Hindoo priests describe twenty-one hells. In Scandinavia, where fire was a luxury, the priesthood despatched sinners to a hell of frosts. In Thibet, where heat and cold alternate, the faithful were taught that punishment for errors would be carried out in a hell of sixteen circles, in eight of which they would be roasted in one half the year, and in the other eight frozen during the remaining six months!

Some of the worthiest of men have dishonoured Divine mercy by their savage and reckless assertions on this most awful subject. "What," asked a sincere inquirer of St. Augustine—"What was God doing before he created the world?"—"He was making Hell!" was the blasphemous reply of the mistaken saint. How much more to the honour and glory of God was the Talmudist reply to the same question,—namely, "He was creating repentance!"

St. Augustine would not have it so, and most of the Fathers were of his opinion,—that sinners suffered eternal physical pains; that they burned for ever and were never consumed; that they became saturated with fire, and always with increase of torment! St. Thomas Aquinas, good man as he was, went even further than St. Augustine. He believed that one of the chief joys of the blessed would be in contemplating the tortures of the damned! Berridge, unwilling to allow a gleam of hope that Divine vindictiveness could pause for a moment in its exercise, assures his readers, in the 'Christian World Unmasked,' that "the shortest punishment is eternal, and the coldest place in Hell will prove a hot one!"

On the other hand, worthy men, whom the unco-righteous take for heretics in this matter, have asserted opinions more consonant with the spirit of Mercy. The Rabbins could not comprehend eternal punishment; the utmost they allowed was that at the last day the sun would

* 'The Book of Visions; or Heaven and Hell described by those who have seen them'—[*Le Livre des Visions; ou, l'Enfer et le Ciel décrits par ceux qui les ont vus.* Par Octave Delepierre]. (Trübner and Co.)

burn up, once and for all, those who had sinned, and warm into eternal happiness those who had merited salvation. Origen disbelieved the local part of the subject, and held that Hell was in the fire of God's anger which lit up man's remorse. Eternal punishment he vehemently denied; and to this day it is matter of dispute whether this kindly-natured man is, or is not, undergoing what he denied as being possible. But Duns Scotus professed the same sentiments, on this one point, as Origen; yet he has not been assailed for it. In later days M. Petit-pierre, all Calvinist as he was, denounced the idea which the sterner Calvin most cherished, that of the Divine anger never being appeased, inasmuch as that they who had incurred it never ceased to endure extreme torture. The beauty of mercy and the glory of Heaven were much better comprehended by Origen and others, who believed that the divine glory and mercy would be made manifest at last, by restoring to their vacant seats in Heaven even those angels who had fallen from them through their rebellion.

This subject, in short, took such possession of the minds of men, that they passed from ideas to sensations, and these minds being more or less diseased, when the body was stricken by epilepsy or buried in an unnaturally profound sleep, hurried abroad, like the soul of Hermotimus, plunged into Hell, scaled Heaven, and came back to Earth to pour into the ears of greedy listeners all their terrible or joyous experiences.

These visions form the staple of the very singular volumes which M. Delepiere has contributed to mystical literature. There exist numerous accounts of the secrets and secret places in Heaven and Hell, invented by writers skilled in depicting imaginary horrors and delights. These M. Delepiere discards altogether, confining himself to the relations of monks and others who, having dreamed their dreams, accepted them as realities, and perhaps exaggerated and poetized what their active brains had been deluded to believe.

In studying these remarkable records it is impossible to avoid the conviction that priestcraft, kingcraft, and common human impulses have been concerned in the building of them up. Godefroed warned his hearers by the information that he saw in the lower regions the very men whom he least expected to find there, and others in purgatory whom Christian men had certainly assigned to hell. Charles Martel, tossed on a sea of fire for robbing the Church, is an example *in terrorem* to all princes who disregard the rights of the Church. Charlemagne, undergoing unimaginable, certainly indescribable, tortures in return for his loose gallantry in this world, is a monition to monarchs who love their neighbours' wives better than their own. Charles the Bald, after his visionary foretaste of the future, probably laughed, at least in his sleeve, as he looked in the faces of his household officers, while he told them of the diabolical anguish inflicted by demons on the dishonest predecessors of these officers. The bitter touch of an old bitter family quarrel is to be detected in this prince's vision, when he saw his own old father, Louis, in hell, sitting up to the hips in a tub of ever-boiling water! The readers of Odericus Vitalis need not be reminded how priests could keep their womenkind in order by telling them how their pastors had seen the disorderly and irregular tormented in the realm below.

The imagination runs wild riot in these visions, and the memory of the reader toils in vain to collect a thousandth part of what is imagined. We remember that souls, always retaining bodily form, are shadowless, and the eyelids fixed in, if we may so say, eternal unwinkingness. South says that some men's souls only keep their bodies from putrefaction, but beyond the barrier of the nether world soul and body suffer this process

as the least of the punishments due to them. Misers toss in coppers of molten gold, from which they are dragged by red-hot grappels to be plunged in freezing liquid lead, after which they are hardened in fire, forged into fresh shape on a red-hot anvil, whence they are taken to have bushels of gold coins poured down their throats, and these they are made to disgorge by the consequences of the rapid revolutions of a spiked wheel to which they are bound. And this for ever!—and for ever!

The most singular delight is taken by these visionaries in showing that sinners are always punished in the members whereby they have most sinned. The miser, as above. The slanderer hangs by his tongue over horrible flames, from amid which demons prod at him with their forks! Some demons are busy in converting, by hideous process, the souls of sinners into essences that are to animate beasts; while the grossest offenders of all undergo a penalty, the details of which (kept in the original rough Latin) almost induce us to believe that the visionary delights in his subject, and loves to dwell upon it. It is refreshing to get away from these peculiar offenders and their sufferings to others who suffer by a sort of *lex talionis*. M. Delepierre might have lighted some of the most lurid of his pages by showing how unskilful physicians are engaged, *in domo Diaboli*, in eternally being subjected to the most horrible cathartics and emetics. We remember that an old German idea states that all foolish mortal writers will in the next world be condemned to everlastingly setting up their own works with red-hot types, for having abused the critics in this! A more terrible penalty awaits the preachers of dull sermons, who are condemned to be for ever reading, from pages that burn their eyes out as they gaze and their fingers off as they hold them, *all* the bad discourses that have been preached upon earth!

“He that is hanged is accursed of God,” says the lawgiver, and that decree probably gave rise to the long-preserved tradition that, as the soul of a hanged man could only escape from the body in one way, and that Satan always placed himself where he could receive it, for such soul there was neither purification nor redemption. This idea, however, suggests that for other souls in Tartarus, such merciful boons *were* possible.

One other feature of this remarkable work is worthy of notice, namely, that when the ladies throw themselves into the ecstatic condition they become more unbridled in imagination and expression than the men. St. Christine, St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Theresa, St. Hildegarda, and other well-meaning women, helplessly uncontrolled as to judgment and expression, fancied themselves the true and lawful wives of the Saviour; and they narrate their visionary experiences in proof thereof in such terms as might have astonished even the persons of the not too fastidious times to whom they were uttered. In comparison with these, Engelbrecht's idea of marriage in heaven is a religious pastoral, and Swedenborg's familiarity with Moses and angels and archangels, as he met them in Cheapside, an amusing hallucination.

That Dante was acquainted with some of the earlier visions noticed in this book is more than possible; it is almost certain. They formed the materials which Genius only knows how to select, appreciate, and employ.

A more curious question is that of the condition of blood and of brain in the visionaries who pondered over these subjects, waking, till their sensations connected therewith possessed them as ideas, in sleep, when the deranged body and rudderless memory carried them into realms which no ordinary or healthy imagination can reach. Even waking spectral illusions take the form of whatever has long and entirely pos-

essed the mind; those of the hours of uneasy sleep seize and play with those forms in wilder fancies still. Sleeping or waking, we can remember but one man whose mind protested against the vision that haunted it. M. Delepierre, indeed, says that many of the early visionaries retracted more or less of the first editions of their wondrous narratives; but Mr. White, the Assessor of the Westminster Assembly, resisted the visions. Satan (on whose works he had been long meditating) one night came to the Assessor's bedside, as the latter had just lain down, seated himself, and looked at the astounded gentleman in a way to banish sleep for a month. The Assessor rubbed his eyes, muttered "This will never do," and then, gazing full in the face of the Prince of Darkness, quietly remarked, "I'll tell thee what it is. If thou hast nothing better to do, I have! I am going to sleep." After this wholesome exercise of mind, the Assessor was never more troubled by visionary visitors. His story might well find place in a second edition of M. Delepierre's collection of narratives. But among the many singularities of what we may well call this rare book is, that the author does not contemplate a second edition, and has printed only *twenty-five copies* of that which, as we may notice, is well illustrated, and which will doubtless meet fitting audience, though, it may be, few.—*The Athenæum*, June 30.

Mr. Carlyle on the Education of the Future.

I confess it seems to me there is in it a shadow of what will one day be; will and must, unless the world is to come to a conclusion that is altogether frightful: some kind of scheme of education analogous to that; presided over by the wisest and most sacred men that can be got in the world, and watching from a distance: a training in practicality at every turn; no speech in it except speech that is to be followed by action, for that ought to be the rule as nearly as possible among men. Not very often or much, rarely rather, should a man speak at all, unless it is for the sake of something that is to be done; this spoken, let him go and do his part in it, and say no more about it.

I will only add that it is possible,—all this fine theorem of Goethe's, or something similar! Consider what we have already; and what 'difficulties' we have overcome. I should say there is nothing in the world you can conceive so difficult, *primâ facie*, as that of getting a set of men gathered together as soldiers. Rough, rude, ignorant, disobedient people; you gather them together, promise them a shilling a day; rank them up, give them very severe and sharp drill; and by bullying and drilling and compelling (the word *drilling*, if you go to the original, means 'beating,' 'steadily tormenting' to the due pitch), they do learn what it is necessary to learn; and there is your man in red coat, a trained soldier; piece of an animated machine incomparably the most potent in this world; a wonder of wonders to look at. He will go where bidden; obeys one man, will walk into the cannon's mouth for him; does punctually whatever is commanded by his general officer. And, I believe, all manner of things of this kind could be accomplished, if there were the same attention bestowed. Very many things could be regimented, organised into this mute system;—and perhaps in some of the mechanical, commercial, and manufacturing departments, some faint incipencies may be attempted before very long. For the saving of human labour, and the avoidance of human misery, the effects would be incalculable, were it set about and begun even in part.