

ORPHEUS.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE belief in immortality naturally originates by the conception of man's soul as his dream-body. When our bodies lie stiff and stark in sleep, we dream. The soul walks about and visits its usual haunts, and oh wonder! in dreams we meet also people that have died. Then the idea that the dead are not truly dead but have departed only to a distant country, becomes a cherished faith



ORPHEUS AMONG THE ANIMALS.
(After an ancient mosaic from Blanzey.)¹

and man anxiously looks about for proofs. And proofs are forthcoming, for these dreams have only to be taken seriously to become a revelation of the immortality of the soul, or rather the reality of life after death.

But people want to know details and are anxious to be assured that the dead are comfortable, and so they long for evidences, and this demand is filled by tales such as the myth of Orpheus, the sweet singer, whose music is stronger than death.

¹ After Fleury, *Antiqu. et mon. du départ de l'Aisne*, 2, 1878, p. 20.

Since the Orphic mysteries were kept secret, our knowledge of them is limited, and many details of the legend that underlies their ceremonies are unclear and even contradictory. But we know that Orpheus whose lyre tamed the wild beasts and could



ORPHEUS PLAYING THE LYRE.¹

even cause stones to arrange themselves harmoniously to build up houses, lost his beloved wife Eurydice. Overwhelmed with grief, he followed her to Hades, and there he sang so sweetly that the



ORPHEUS ENCHANTING THE ANIMALS.
(Ancient relief.)²

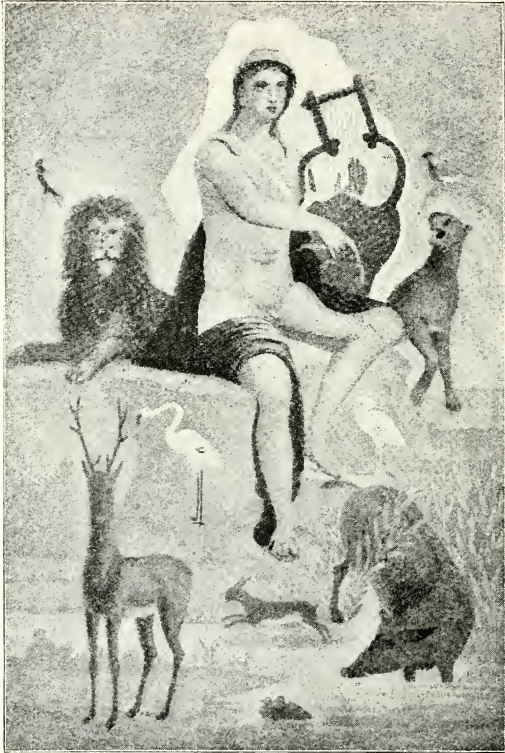
grim king of death allowed Eurydice to follow her husband to the world of the living, on the condition that on their way up Orpheus should not look back. But Orpheus was so full of longing for his

¹ *Mon. Inst.*, VIII., 43, 1.

² Venuti, *Monumenta Matthaiana*, 3, 1778, 37, 2.

wife that he turned round, and there he beheld her as beautiful as she ever had been in life, but then at once she vanished from his sight. (See frontispiece.)

The comfort which this legend gave to the Greek mind is comprised in the doctrine of the descent into the realm of Hades, *κατά-*



THE ORPHEUS FRESCO OF POMPEII.¹

βασις εἰς Ἅιδου. The Orphic mysteries were celebrated (as in fact all mysteries, especially the Eleusinian festival) to assure man of the truth of the belief in a life after death.

Other legends tell that Orpheus was torn to pieces, and his

¹ After Presuhn, *Ausgrab. von Pomp.*, 3, 6.



ORPHEUS SLAIN BY THE WOMEN OF THRACE.¹
(From an ancient vase.)



ORPHEUS AMONG THE THRACIANS.

Ancient vase from Gela.² The expression of the singer as well as his audience betrays a remarkable faculty of observation.

¹ Gerhard, *Trinkschalen und Gefässe*, pl. 1.

² Berl. Programm zum Winkelmannsfeste der archaol. Ges. zu Berlin, II.

flesh was devoured by women enamored with his beauty and his art, which indicates that the original Orpheus must have been a deity of vegetation, like Tammuz or Adonis, who dies and is resurrected. His death is commemorated with lamentations, and his reawakening to life is the feast of great rejoicing, a pagan Easter.

How deeply the cult of Orpheus was rooted in the hearts of the ancients appears from the fact that when Christian iconoclasm broke the statues of the gods, the name of Orpheus was not proscribed with Zeus and Hera, and his figure was deemed worthy to serve as the picture of Christ. The oldest pictures of Jesus represent him as Orpheus with the lyre, and the identification of Orpheus and Christ is not purely accidental, for both types point back to the more ancient conception of a saviour who descends to Hell and proves his power over the king of death.



CLAY TABLET OF NIPPUR.¹



COIN OF ANTONINUS PIUS.²

The cult of Orpheus must be very old, and we may have to look for his prototype in ancient Babylon. It is not impossible that Orpheus is but another name of Tammuz or some other deity of resurrection. Hilprecht discovered a clay-relief in the temple-school at Nippur representing a lute player surrounded by animals. The attitude of this ancient charmer of beasts is quite similar to the later Greek and Christian pictures of Orpheus.

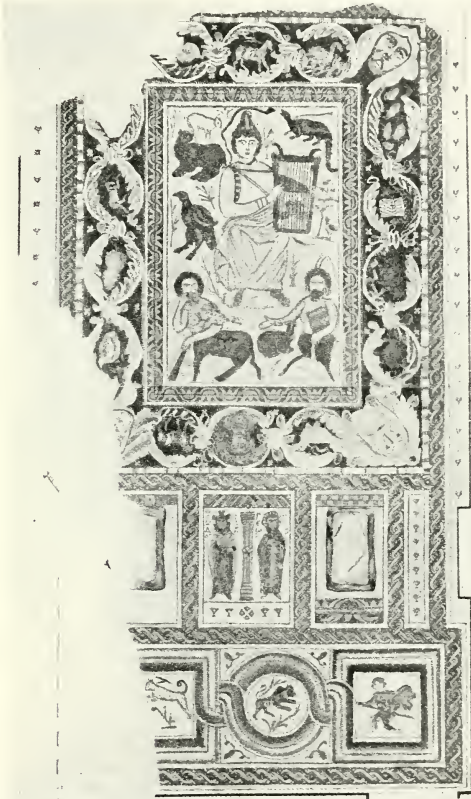
Legends of this kind are so deeply rooted in the natural longings of man's soul that they may have originated independently at a certain stage of man's mental evolution at various places and among different nationalities. Dr. J. W. Hudson of the Marshall Field Museum, Chicago, recently discovered in his wanderings among the North American Indians of the San Joaquin Basin a myth which bears some remarkable resemblances to the stories of

¹From Hilprecht, *Die Ausgrabungen im Bêl-Tempel zu Nippur*, p. 60.

²From Louisa Twining's *Symbols and Emblems of Early and Medieval Christian Art*.

the Greek Orpheus so far as we know them. His report, quoted from the *Journal of American Folklore*, reads as follows:

"From the Sacramento River in mid California there stretches southward a wide level plain some three hundred miles in length, which is walled in on three

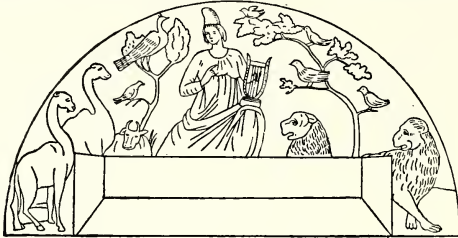


ORPHEUS MOSAIC OF JERUSALEM.¹

sides by the Sierras and Coast Range Mountains. This territory of some 20,000 square miles was once entirely held by two linguistic stocks of Indians: the Mari-

¹ Reproduction from the *Report to the Palestine Exploration Fund*, July, 1901. This mosaic is situated 600 feet north of the present city wall, west of the Damascus gate. It was accidentally

posans on the south occupied Tulare Basin, while the Moquelumnians to the north covered the San Joaquin Plains and extended northward almost around San Francisco Bay. There is evidence that the numerical strength of each family was in proportion to the extent of their territories, thus presuming that the mentalities of these two peoples were far more widely disseminated than any others of aboriginal California. The paltry remnants of this multitude are now scattered along the western slopes of the Sierra Mountains, and in each settlement I found one or more ancient representative of tribes otherwise extinct, each of whom, in their several tongues and dialects, repeated with singular consistency the following

CHRIST AS ORPHEUS.¹CHRIST AS ORPHEUS.¹

myth. This version is from a Mariposan native of the south fork of the Tule River :

"Once a man lived with his wife up the cañon. She was a handsome woman and he loved her much. One time they quarrelled and she died from his beating.

discovered by the proprietor of the ground while digging for a cistern. The mosaic is laid out in various colors, and represents Orpheus, and below him Pan and a centaur, surrounded with a fine frame, around which is a kind of twisted ornament of branches and wreaths enclosing various figures with their faces directed to Orpheus; then comes again an outer frame. Beneath are three other frames, one in the middle containing two women, with an inscription in Greek letters around them, "Theodosia" and "Georgia." The frames to the right and left contain simply a plain, flat surface. The whole is between ten and twelve feet long. The Dominican brethren made a colored copy of the mosaic on a large scale, and photographs were taken from the original, whereupon the owner had it covered up with earth.

¹After paintings in the cemetery of St. Calixtus in the Catacombs of Rome; from Louisa Twining's *Symbols and Emblems of Early and Mediæval Christian Art.*

He was sorry and cried aloud. He found no comfort. He ate nothing and lay down beside her grave. He lay there continually for three days and three nights fasting. During the fourth night he was crying for her to come back to him. As the great star stood overhead, he felt the ground tremble and saw the earth moving on her grave. The clouds rolled back, and she arose and stood brushing from herself every speck of dust until she was clean. He stared, but was silent (a man dies instantly when speaking to a ghost). She started away. She went swiftly down toward Toxil (the point of sunset), and he ran after her weeping. She often turned and warned him back, declaring that she was bound for the Tib'-ik-nitc, the home of the dead. He still pursued her for four days and four nights when they reached To-lit, a great roaring water. She mounted a bridge, slender and fragile like a spider's web, and began to cross over. He cried aloud with beseeching gestures. She turned. She pitied him. She stretched a hand toward him, and he felt strong and comforted. He sprang upon the bridge, but she would not suffer his touch. They crossed on Tcé-laul in this manner. Tcé-laul is long, very long, but the spirits of the good cross it easily; the bad fall off and turn into *e'pis* (pike fish), who must swim back to feed the living. The man saw a great land, a rich land, a warm, fruitful land, and people from all the world. He saw all kinds of different peoples, and they lived peaceably together, for there was plenty for all. The woman told him to observe closely; for he must return and tell all to his people before he died on the fourth day. He did so. She took him back across Tcé-laul and he ran home. He told all to his kin people and died on the fourth day as predicted."

Dr. Hudson adds that the translation follows the original very closely, only omitting repetitions which the Indians introduce whenever they emphasise a point. He publishes in the same article another version of the same story, which he takes from a Mariposan account given him in Madera County by a member of the Teuktcän-si tribe, and he adds:

"A very intelligent Indian living on the Merced River below Yosemite Valley sums up the opinions of his people in the following observation: 'When an Indian dies his spirit goes on, on, on, to O-lo-win (pointing westward). That is a big place, and a long, long ways off, and no live man can go to that place. Only the dead peoples. When a man is dead four days, his spirit gets loose and packs up everything and comes up and lights right out this way (pointing). No kind of hill can stop it. It stays around here four days and watches its chance to get away from the Devil. The Devil keeps it corralled, but we all pray and the spirit gets away all right. We pray to God. I don't know where he is. May be above somewhere. The spirit moves along night and day. It knows the road all right; for it has been that way before. We don't know when, but we all say that we all of us come from there. Even our little children know that trail. Yes, there is water, plenty of waters, big, this way (the arms are whirled in every direction). No, there is no boat about it. A bridge, a fine fragile long bridge, more than a mile, may be a hundred miles, a thousand miles long. The soul takes everything along. Now, since we bury everything, I don't know about it. If the soul should drop off that bridge into the water, it turns at once to ho-lo-mai (pike fish) and swims off. I never saw the ocean. That is the place we get our shells. That is not O-lo-win; for O-lo-win is land, plenty, big, fine, green, warm place, plenty game and seeds and fish. You call that He-win (heaven). That is the place.'"

The best known classical example is Homer's description of the shade of Patroclus who appears to Achilles in a dream, requesting of him the performance of the funeral rite. We read :¹

Then came the soul of his friend,
 Of the poor, much lamented Patroclus,
 Perfectly like unto him
 In beauty of eyes and in stature,
 Also in voice; being clad
 In exactly the same kind of garments.
 Taking his stand at the head of the couch,
 He addressed him as follows :
 "Sleepest thou here, forgetful of me,
 My dearest Achilles?
 Never in life neglectedst thou me,
 But death now has seized me.
 Grant me, my funeral friend,
 That the gates I may enter of Hades.
 Lest any longer the souls,
 The pale forms, of all those that are sleeping
 Hinder my crossing the stream
 And prevent me from joining their party.
 Lest I must wander alone
 There around the grand portals of Hades.
 Give me thy hand, I beseech thee,
 For never again shall I visit²
 Thee from the realm of the dead,
 As soon as the flame has consumed me.
 Never, alas! since I'm taken away,
 Shall we friendly in counsel,
 Living, be seated together;
 For fate prematurely has taken
 Me in the prime of my life,
 The stern fate that at birth is allotted."

Achilles promises the shade's request and asks for a last embrace; but in vain. Homer continues :

While he thus spoke, he extended
 His arms in loving desire,
 Failing to hold the dear soul,
 Which downward, like vapor dissolving,
 Faded away with a scream,³
 But Achilles awoke in amazement,
 Clapping together his hands ;

¹ This translation, specially made by the writer for the present occasion, preserves the meter of the original. For the sake of rendering the heroic hexameter more easy to the reader not accustomed to classic versification, we break each line at one of its cæsuras.

² *νίσσομαι*. Originally the word means "to sail," or "to travel on a ship," but is used in the sense of visiting. We might here translate "haunt."

³ *τετραγγυία*, denoting a weird, wailing cry of animals or birds, a doleful scream or screech, or gibbering shout.

And wailing exclaimed he in sadness :
 " Truly, 't is strange that the soul and its form,¹
 In the mansions of Hades,
 Somehow² persisteth,
 Albeit sensation³ is utterly lacking.
 All through the night stood the soul
 Of my hapless companion Patroclos
 Near me with yearning desire,
 Lamenting and wailing. It told me
 What I should do ;
 And it likened the living in marvellous semblance."

The famous German ballad "Leonore" by Bürger belongs to the same category. Although quite modern in tone and spirit, it reflects the beliefs of the lower strata of present society, viz., the fever dreams of a private soldier's bride, representing her conceptions of the dead, and is quite in line with this same kind of folklore tales, which may generally be classed under the common heading of Orpheus literature.

Orpheus is a Thracian according to the Greek legend, which indicates that originally he was not a Greek deity, and we find indeed legends of the same character among the North-European nations, which have crystallised into the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, described by Mr. S. Baring Gould in *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* as follows :

"Hamelin town was infested with rats, in the year 1284. In their houses the people had no peace from them ; rats disturbed them by night and worried them by day. One day, there came a man into the town, most quaintly attired in parti-colored suit. Bunting the man was called, after his dress. None knew whence he came, or who he was. He announced himself to be a rat-catcher, and offered for a certain sum of money to rid the place of the vermin. The townsmen agreed to this proposal, and promised him the sum demanded. Thereupon the man drew forth a pipe and piped. No sooner were the townfolk released from their torment than they repented of their bargain, and . . . they refused to pay the stipulated remuneration. At this the piper waxed wroth, and vowed vengeance. On the 29th June, the feast of SS. Peter and Paul, the mysterious piper reappeared in Hamelin town. (He) led the way down the street, the children all following, whilst the Hamelin people stood aghast, not knowing what step to take, or what would be the result of this weird piping. He led them from the town towards a hill rising above the Weser. (One lame lad) alone was left ; and in after years he was sad . . . Fathers and mothers rushed to the east gate, but when they came to the mountain, called Koppenberg, into which the train of children had disappeared, nothing was observable except a small hollow, where the sorcerer and their little ones had entered."

Mr. S. E. Winbolt, in his introduction to Browning's poem treating of this legend, makes the following comments :

¹ ψυχή και εἶδωλον.

² τίς as something.

³ φρένες.

sonified and represented as drawing after him with his music the souls of the dead, but the wind making the boughs to wave and the grass to quiver was represented as a piper setting all nature dancing."

Considering the associations which the belief in a visit to the realm of death played in the imagination of the Græco-Roman people, we can understand that the early Church laid much stress upon the doctrine of Christ's descent to hell, an event which is minutely described in the New Testament Apocrypha.

In the Catacombs we find representations of Orpheus with the lyre side by side with Christ's resurrection of Lazarus and other stories symbolising the doctrine of immortality. The ancient Orpheus had changed into Christ, and so to the Græco-Roman Christians the picture of Orpheus meant Christ, for both signify the conquest of death and a hope of immortality.



CHRIST AS ORPHEUS.
Painting in the Catacombs.

It faded from the memory of mankind only after the rise of the Copernican world-conception, when the idea of hell as a locality began to be superseded by allegorical interpretations and when purer views of immortality began to assert themselves.

¹After F. X. Kraus.