

“He said, ‘O my Lord! how when my wife is barren shall I have a son, and when I have now reached old age, failing in my powers?’

“He said, ‘So shall it be. Thy Lord hath said, Easy is this to me, for I created thee aforetime when thou wast nothing.’

“He said, ‘Vouchsafe me, O my Lord! a sign.’ He said, ‘Thy sign shall be that for three nights, though sound in health, thou speakest not to man.’

“And he came forth from the sanctuary to his people, and made signs to them, as though he would say, ‘Praise God at morn and even.’

“We said, ‘O John! receive the Book with purpose of heart,’ and we bestowed on him wisdom while yet a child;

“And mercifulness from ourself and purity; and pious was he, and duteous to his parents, and not proud, rebellious.

“And peace was on him the day he was born, and the day of his death, and shall be on the day when he shall be raised to life!”

Sura XIX, 1-15.

“And Zacharias, when he called upon his Lord saying, ‘O my Lord, leave me not childless: but there is no better heir than Thyself’;

“So we heard him, and gave him John, and we made his wife fit for child-bearing. Verily these vied in goodness, and called upon us with love and fear, and humbled themselves before us.”

Sura XXI, 89, 90.

“And Zachariah, John, Jesus, and Elias, all were just persons.”

Sura VI, 85.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

### AN EIGHTH-CENTURY ANGLIAN ACCOUNT OF PURGATORY AND HELL.

BY A. G. WITTING.

In connection with Roy Temple House's "Notes on the Medieval Conception of Purgatory" in the November issue of *The Open Court* it might be of interest to recall an early English description of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, a prototype to Dante's *Comedia*. It is found in Book V, Chapter XII, of *Historia Ecclesiastica* by Beda Venerabilis, written 731 A. D.

A Northumbrian, Drithelm, "died in the beginning of the night; but in the morning early he suddenly came to life again." During the night he was con-

ducted on a truly wonderful journey by a man with "a shining countenance and a bright garment." They walked silently toward the northeast. "Walking on, we came to a vale of great breadth and depth, but of infinite length; on the left it appeared full of dreadful flames, the other side was no less horrid for violent hail and cold snow flying in all directions; both places were full of men's souls, which seemed by turns to be tossed from one side to the other, as it were by a violent storm; for when the wretches could no longer endure the excess of heat, they leaped into the middle of the cutting cold; and finding no rest there they leaped back again into the middle of the unquenchable flames. Now whereas an innumerable multitude of deformed spirits were thus alternately tormented far and near, as far as could be seen, without intermission, I began to think that this perhaps might be Hell, of whose intolerable flames I had often heard talk. My guide, who went before me, answered to my thought, saying, 'Do not believe so, for this is not the Hell you imagine.'"

Here follows now a picture of the mouth of Hell, of which more anon. Drithelm is then led by his guide in another direction and finds himself suddenly on the top of a wall "the length and height of which, in every direction, seemed to be altogether boundless. . . . Within it (the wall) was a vast and delightful field, so full of fragrant flowers that the odor of its delightful sweetness immediately dispelled the stink of the dark furnace, which had pierced me through and through. So great was the light in this place, that it seemed to exceed the brightness of the day, or the sun in its meridian height. In the field were innumerable assemblies of men in white and many companies seated together rejoicing. As he led me through the midst of these happy inhabitants, I began to think that this might, perhaps, be the Kingdom of Heaven, of which I had often heard so much. He answered to my thought, saying, 'This is not the Kingdom of Heaven, as you imagine.'"

Drithelm was permitted a fleeting glance of the light of Paradise, but was immediately led back by his guide.

"When we returned to those joyful mansions of the souls in white, he said to me, 'Do you know what all these things are which you have seen?' I answered I did not; and then he replied, 'That vale you saw so dreadful for consuming flames and cutting cold, is the place in which the souls of those are tried and punished, who, delaying to confess and amend their crimes, at length have recourse to repentance at the point of death, and so depart this life; but nevertheless because they, even at their death, confessed and repented, they shall all be received into the Kingdom of Heaven at the day of judgment; but many are relieved before the day of judgment by the prayers, alms, and fasting of the living, and more especially by masses. . . . This flowery place, in which you see these most beautiful young people, so bright and merry, is that into which the souls of those are received who depart the body in good works, but who are not so perfect as to deserve to be immediately admitted into the Kingdom of Heaven; yet they shall all, at the day of judgment, see Christ and partake of the joys of His Kingdom; for whoever are perfect in thought, word, and deed, as soon as they depart the body, immediately enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.'"

We have here a beautifully artistic treatment of the dogma of Purgatory dating as far back as to the beginning of the eighth century. It is moreover interesting to note the dualism of Greek philosophy and reminiscences of the old Germanic myths, adopting the Elysian Fields as a waiting-place for

the not quite perfect and the "vale" between Muspelheim and Niflheim for the not altogether bad.

The Venerable Bede's description of Hell will also be of interest as a supplement to Dr. Pick's article on "The Punishments in the Other World," as it appears to have inspired Milton to the verses quoted by Dr. Pick.

"When he had conducted me, much frightened with that horrid spectacle, by degrees to the farther end, on a sudden I saw the place begin to grow dusk and filled with darkness. When I came into it, the darkness, by degrees, grew so thick that I could see nothing besides it and the shape and garment of him that led me. As we went on through the shades of night, on a sudden there appeared before us frequent globes of *black flames*, rising as it were out of a great pit and falling back again into the same. When I had been conducted hither, my leader suddenly vanished and left me alone in the midst of darkness and this horrid vision, while those same globes of fire, without intermission, at one time flew up and at another fell back into the bottom of the abyss; and I observed that all the flames, as they ascended, were full of human souls which like sparks flying up with smoke were sometimes thrown on high, and again, when the vapor of the fire ceased, dropped down into the depth below. Moreover, an insufferable stench came forth with the vapors, and filled all those dark places.

"Having stood there a long time in much dread, not knowing what to do, which way to turn, or what end I might expect, on a sudden I heard behind me the noise of a most hideous and wretched lamentation, and at the same time a loud laughing, as of a rude multitude insulting captured enemies. When that noise, growing plainer, came up to me, I observed a gang of evil spirits dragging the howling and lamenting souls of men into the midst of the darkness, while they themselves laughed and rejoiced. Among those men, as I could discern, there was one shorn like a clergyman, a layman, and a woman. The evil spirits that dragged them went down into the midst of the burning pit; and as they went down deeper, I could no longer distinguish between the lamentation of the men and the laughing of the devils, yet I still had a confused sound in my ears. In the meantime some of the dark spirits ascended from that flaming abyss, and running forward, beset me on all sides, and much perplexed me with their glaring eyes and the stinking fire which proceeded from their mouths and nostrils. . . ."

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#### BOOK REVIEWS.

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF PLOTINUS. Translated by *Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie*. Together with the Lives of Plotinus, Commentary by Porphyry, and Illustrations by Jamblichus and Ammonius. With Studies in Sources, Development, and Influence. Concordance of 60 pages to Subjects, Thoughts, and Words. 4 vols. 1400 pages, cloth-bound, \$12 net. Comparative Literature Press, Alpine, N. J.

Emerson, Swedenborg, St. Augustine, and many other mystics were fond of quoting stray thoughts of Plotinus, as the fount of the wisdom-religion that has come down the ages. But up to the present time this great mine of practical religious and philosophical thought has been inaccessible. Translations, of course, there were; but the French, that of Bouillet, was scarce at \$50; the German, at \$20, was as difficult to understand as the original, if not more so.