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Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

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DANTE ALIGHIERI.

From a Print by Raffaello Morghen after a Picture by Tofanelli.

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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DANTE'S DEVIL.¹

BY MAXIMILIAN J. RUDWIN.

"Oh, what a sight!
How passing strange it seemed when I did spy
Upon his head three faces: one in front
Of hue vermilion, the other two with this
Midway each shoulder joined and at the crest;
The right 'twixt wan and yellow seemed; the left
To look on, such as come from whence the old Nile
Stoops to the lowlands. Under each shot forth
Two mighty wings, enormous as became
A bird so vast. Sails never such I saw
Outstretched on the wide sea. No plumes had they,
But were in texture like a bat, and these
He flapped in the air, that from him issued still
Three winds wherewith Cocytus to its depth
Was frozen. At six eyes he wept: the tears
Adown three chins distilled with bloody foam.
At every mouth his teeth a sinner champed,
Bruised as with ponderous engine; so that three
Were in this guise tormented."

Inferno. Canto xxxiv.

Ecco Dite!

NO wonder that the Devil is not pleased with this portrait of his. In G. Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman* he is wroth both at Dante and Milton for having misrepresented him. These two poets are usually mentioned together because of their portrayal of the Devil. Both took Satan out of the realm of popular imagination and raised him into the region of ideas. But that is just about as far as they agreed in regard to the person of the Prince of Demons. In their descriptions of him they went in two opposite directions. The Dantean Devil and the Miltonic Devil are as dissimilar as are Dante and Milton, Catholicism and Protestantism, Italy and England, the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. It has often been said that each mind, each creed, each country, and

¹ To the Sexcentenary of the death of Dante Alighieri (1321-1921).

each century paints the Devil in its own image. Of the two poets it is by far the Italian who was the least flattering to his Infernal Lowness. Dante's Dis is so inferior to Milton's Satan that we blush to think how he could ever sustain a conversation with him or even show himself in his company. The first is as frightful as the second is fascinating. The English Devil is a bright and beautiful angel, but the Italian Demon is a foul and frozen fiend. The Protestant shows us the Devil in his vain struggle against an almighty power, and the Catholic presents him to us in his sullen and savage despair. Milton's Satan compels our sympathy and admiration, but Dante's Dis is an object of horror and hatred. The latter Devil is what the former has become after a long sojourn in the dread and dismal darkness. In beholding the Dantean Demon we would never think that he "one day wore a crown in the eyes of God". Every vestige of his past glory has long been effaced. The glamor which surrounded him in heaven has wholly disappeared. Even the three pairs of wings, which remained from his ancient seraphic state (Is. vi. 2), have dropped all their feathers into the Cocytus and now resemble the wings of a bat. Dis is irredeemably and irretrievably a Devil.

"The Imagination of Dante", says Chateaubriand, "exhausted by nine circles of torment, has made simply an atrocious monster of Satan, locked up in the centre of the earth".² His Devil is an incarnation of ugliness, foulness and corruption. As he stands half sunk into the frozen fastness of his pit, in all his pervading brutality and cruelty, malignity and monstrosity, he is an appalling rather than an appealing sight. We cannot enter into his psychology. The action of his mind or will is closed to us. We do not even know whether it is sorrow over his departed glory or impotent fury which wrings the tears flowing over his three chins. In Purgatory the Devil reappears in the traditional shape of a snake. (*Purg.* viii. 98f.)

Dante's portrayal of the Devil is essentially allegorical. The Dantean Dis is the personification of the evils of the period. In his conception of the rebellion in heaven our poet does not follow Church tradition and teaching. The Church fathers, Irenæus, Eusebius and Nazianzen among others, taught that Satan's sin consisted in pride and envy, but to Dante the Devil is the author of treachery. According to our poet's view Lucifer was banished from heaven not because he refused in his haughty spirit to bow before

² *Génie du Christianisme*, Bk. iv, Chap. ix.

the Great White Throne, but because he committed high-treason against his Creator by conspiring to wrest the crown of heaven from him. The Italian poet, who saw his country torn asunder by its own jealousies and rivalries, considered treason the greatest of all evils (*Inf.* xxxii. 106). That is why of all the world's greatest criminals the three selected for punishment by the King-Devil himself were traitors. For this honor Dante picked out the three greatest traitors the world had ever known: Judas Iscariot, who betrayed our Lord, and Brutus and Cassius, who betrayed the celestial Cæsar and conspired against what the Italian patriot re-



DANTE'S ICE HELL.
(By Gustave Doré.)

garded as the sacred Will of the Almighty, the establishment of the Roman Empire.

To treachery must be added tyranny as a dominant trait in the character of the Dantean Demon. Dis is the child of the mind of a man who fled from a country which was groaning under the tyranny of its rulers. Dante preferred to be exiled from the Florence he so loved than allow himself to be cowed by the cruelty of the party

in power in his city, and in the opinion of Mme. de Staël's Corinne it must have been exile which was our poet's real hell. "I have found", said the poet of *Inferno*, "the original of my hell in the world which we inhabit". Having observed that physical force reigned suprême round about him, Dante represented hell as ruled by the law of the mailed fist.

Another reason for the prevalence of the physical over the moral in the portrayal of the Dantean Dis is the fact that he is a demon rather than a devil. Although he has already, through centuries of Christianity, been brought into connection with moral evil, he still retains his original physiognomy of physical pain. Primitive man saw in the Devil a tormentor rather than a tempter, a nightmare of terror and not the mainspring of moral woes.

Although a Catholic and well versed in Church lore and Canon law, Dante, it must be borne in mind, pursued his path, in the main, away from Christian tradition. He sought his masters and models in ancient literature rather than in medieval legend and learning. The Dantean demonology is classical rather than Christian, mythological rather than theological. The ruler of hell in Dante's *Inferno* answers not to any of his biblical names. Lucifer, Satan and Beelzebub have been overthrown by Dis.³ This Virgilian personage is of Northern origin and was the god of darkness among the Gauls.⁴ Dis, however, has a Teutonic ring and may be a corruption of Teutates (Tuisto in Tacitus), the god of the Teutones. It is wholly natural that the god of one race should become the devil of another race. The Romans, who adopted Dis, identified him with Pluto, the king of the underworld in Greek mythology. This god also appears in the *Inferno* under his own name as guardian of the department for usurers and misers. Apparently Dante considers Pluto and Plutus as identical in person. Already in classical times the god of the underworld and the god of wealth were identical. The god who dwells in the hollows of the earth was soon regarded as the possessor of all the gold and silver and precious stones hidden there as in a vault. In this manner Satan is also imagined as the

³ Dis and Hades are applied to the realm as well as to its ruler just as, on the other hand, the infernal monarch is called Inferus in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*.

⁴"Galli se omnes ab Dite patre prognatos praedicant idque ab druidibus proditum dicunt." (Cæsar, *Commentarii de bello Gallico*, vii. 18.)



HEL, THE GODDESS OF THE NETHER WORLD.
(By Johannes Gehrts.)

guardian of subterranean treasures and possessor of unlimited wealth.⁵

In addition to Dis and Pluto the *Inferno* contains many other classical characters. The reader encounters Acheron, the ferryman of the Styx, Cerberus, the hell hound, Minos, the judge of the dead, Geryon, the guardian of the fraudulent and Phlegyas who burned the temple at Delphi. This Christian hell also has among its population



THE DOOM OF THE DAMNED.
After Luca Signorelli.

Centaurs, half men and half horses, and Minotaurs, half men and half bulls. Naturally no hell can be conceived without the woman-faced and serpent-bodied Furies and the equally woman-faced and feather-bodied Harpies, both having with scandalous consistency always been described as members of the "gentler" sex.

⁵ Cf. also Algernon Sidney Crapsey, *The Ways of the Gods* (1921), p. 79.

It will not appear incongruous to find in a Christian hell classical characters, especially if they were already associated with the shadowy world in their pre-Christian existence. On this point the poet of the *Inferno* held the tradition of the Church, which regards the gods of mythology as fallen angels who beguiled men into worshipping them in the form of idols. Even Edmund Spenser in the sixteenth century described the Devil, as dwelling beneath the altar



THE FALLEN LUCIFER.
(After Doré.)

of an idol in a heathen temple and in his name performing miracles and uttering oracles. The Church fathers were very explicit on this point. Tertullian states unequivocally that all the old gods were devils (*De spectaculis*, 19). The resemblances between classical mythology and Christian theology were explained by the Church as diabolical counterfeits. Justin Martyr thought that by listening to the words of the inspired prophets the devils discovered the intentions of the Lord and anticipated them by a series of blasphemous imitations (*Apol.* i. 54). In this manner was explained the similar-

ity in creed and cult between Christianity and paganism. The diabolization of the Greek gods is well depicted in Mrs. Browning's poem *The Dead Pan*.

The individual features of the evil powers of pagan beliefs were transferred to the Devil of the Christian religion. His trinitarian head recalls Typhon of the Egyptians, Hecate of classical mythology,⁶ Hrim-Grimmir of the Edda and Triglaf of the Slavs.⁷ The Devil is described as a three-headed monster already in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus* and in the *Good Friday Sermon* of Eusebius of Alexandria, who addresses the Devil as "Three-headed Beelzebub". The trinity idea of the Devil was interpreted by the Church fathers as Satan's parody of the trinitarian Godhead. This tendency on the part of the Devil to mimic the Deity in every detail of his character and conduct has earned for him the designation of *simia Dei* (God's Ape).

The conception of the imprisoned rebel is also a pre-Christian tradition. It may be found in many of the ancient ethnic religions. Ahriman, who fought against Ormuzd, was bound for a thousand years; Prometheus, who assailed Zeus, was chained to the crag; and Loki, the calumniator of the Northern gods,⁸ was strapped down with thongs of iron in his subterranean cavern. It would seem, however, that Satan has not allowed his imprisonment to interfere with his activities. No matter how often he has been bound and sealed at the bottom of the bottomless pit, his evil influence on the affairs of men never suffered any diminution. Satan apparently directs his work from his dungeon and despatches millions of messengers to carry out his will on this earth.

In addition to classical mythology the poet of the *Inferno* has drawn on medieval superstition to fill his hell. That mythical Spanish king Geryon was not raised to the honors of demonhood until the medieval times. The guardians of the fifth *bolgia*, the *Malebranche* (Evil-claws), are the roguish imps of folk-lore. These secondary devils have not wholly lost the comical and jovial character with which popular imagination endowed them. They are mischievous rather than malignant spirits, and they carry on in hell in the manner of drunken men during a bout in a medieval tavern.

⁶ Lucifer, as the bringer of light, is, in truth, a surname of Hecate, the goddess of light.

⁷ Cf. Paul Carus, *The History of the Devil and the Idea of Evil* (1900), p. 249.

⁸ Cf. Hesiod's *Theogony*, 735ff.



Oben: Jesu Christus/der du als ein strenger vnd gerechter Richter der armē sündigē seelē so sich von dir ist abwerffen/ein vnendliche hellische straff verordnet hast bey Lucifero vnd andern sein mit verstoffene geistē vnd verdampfen: Ich bit dich/verlyk mir an verdienstlich lebe sie in zeit der gnaden also süren/dz ich teilhafte deins bitterē sterben/enttinnen mög solicher grausamē straff durch die grundlose barmherzigkeit deiner allmechtigen genaden: Amen.

THE TYPICAL CONCEPTION OF HELL.
German woodcut of the age of the Reformation.

The horned demons in Dante's *Inferno* bring to our minds the little devils who, on the medieval stage, ran howling around the mouth of hell and even darted to and fro amidst the crowd to the great amusement and terror of our forbears. As in the medieval mysteries we also find in the *Inferno* a devil carrying a lost soul to hell. This incident, common to all forms of medieval literature, may be traced back as far as the apocryphal *Vision of Saint Paul*. The weeping Devil may also have been introduced into the *Inferno* from the contemporary mystery-plays. But the idea of a repentant rebel is an ancient tradition and was acquired by the Jews from the Persians from whom they took their Devil. The writer of the *Book of the Secrets of Enoch* (written between 30 B. C. and 50 A. D.) already represents the apostatized angels as "weeping unceasingly".

In addition to the rebel angels and rival gods of the Lord we find in the *Inferno* the Impartial Emperians. It is not so generally known that during the war in heaven the angels were not wholly divided into two opposing camps. There were many angels who, untouched by partisan passions, remained wholly aloof from the conflict and refused to fight in this war for glory between Jahve and Satan. These non-combatants have been placed by Dante in the ante-hell amidst the throng of egoists and self-centered individuals. The zealous patriot of Florence had no patience with men who demanded their right of keeping out of a war which they did not bring about and in which they had no interest whatever. The Russians with their individualistic bent of mind are inclined to be more lenient to the neutral angels. According to an old Russian legend the Lord did not cast the Impartial Emperians into hell but, in order to give them another opportunity to choose between him and his rival, sent them down to earth to which the scene of the battle had been transferred. From these angels, who married mortal maidens, there developed a race which has always shown a striking contrast to the human race. It has furnished humanity with its prophets and poets, with its reformers and revolutionaries. The descendants of this union between the sons of God and the daughters of men have always been in the first rank of those who seek peace and abhor murder. They have proven valiant warriors in the eternal conflict between the Good and the Evil for the mastery of the world. They have long ago redeemed themselves, but they will not return to heaven until they have also redeemed all men.

Of them was also Dante Alighieri, the exiled poet of loyalty and liberty.

DANTE'S JOURNEY TO HELL.

AMONG the travellers' tales which delighted our wonder-loving forbears the greatest popularity was enjoyed by reports of journeys to the realms of the dead. Visions too numerous to tell were invented for their delectation and edification. It would indeed be too great a task to follow the mythical stream of a Beyond flowing out of and into the hearts and imaginations of men. Its sources reach far back, to "a time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary". It is found in Indian, Iranian, Greek, Roman, Jewish and Christian mythology. Many have been the visits of the living to the dead. Some went in the body and others out of the body. Some travelled by night and others in the light of the day. The first record of a journey to the World of Spirits is found in Plato. This Greek philosopher recorded the testimony of Er the Arminian to the effect that he had been admitted to witness the distribution of rewards and punishments to the souls of the departed and had been permitted to return to earth and tell his story (Rep. x. 614ff.). Homer described the descent of Ulysses to Hades to consult Tiresias (Odys. xi.). From Homer the idea descended to Virgil, Seneca, Ovid, Lucian, Statius, and other Greek and Roman writers. It also entered Jewish-Christian thought, the Church fathers elaborating it into a doctrinal system. The New Testament furnished the starting-point with its visions of the Beyond the Veil. The Book of Revelations offers many glimpses of the Unseen World, and in the Epistles we learn that St. Paul was caught up to the third Heaven (2 Cor. xii. 2). Details of this journey are suppressed by the biblical writer as "unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter", but are given in the *Vision of St. Paul* (4th cent.). Other biblical passages (Acts ii. 31; Eph. iv. 8-10; Rom. x. 7 and especially 1 Petri iii. 19-20) were interpreted to mean that Christ after his burial descended to hell for the purpose of redeeming from infernal pain the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Dispensation. This idea was elaborated in the Latin apocryphal book *Descensus Christi ad Inferos*, which forms the second part of *Evangelium Nicodemi* (3rd cent.) and the Nicene creed.

But while Christ visited hell after his death, others journeyed thither during their life-time. Zoroaster is said to have made mid-



HEAVEN AND HELL.

The Gnostic Trinity Ideal of God Father, God Mother and God Son.

night journeys to Heaven and Hell, and, according to Jewish tradition, Moses also visited Heaven and Hell in his body.⁹ The Holy Virgin and the Apostle Paul wandered likewise through Hell and witnessed the torments inflicted upon the wicked. As a matter of fact, it would seem that when the ancient World of Spirits was divided by Christianity into two realms, an upper and a lower, the majority of travellers preferred to go in the downward direction. The idea of Hell seems to have had a fascination for the Christian mind. What wonder that Hell is writ large on the manuscripts of the monks and missionaries! Many were the visions of Hell in medieval times. What we call the Dark Ages were indeed spiritually a perpetual *séance* with lights lowered. We need but refer to Beda Venerabilis, St. Brandan, Tundalus, Albericus, Wettin and Hildergard. Prominent among the medieval pilgrims to the pit is Owaine the Knight. His descent into St. Patrick's Purgatory, as told by Henry of Saltrey, took place in 1153.¹⁰ The most distinguished visitor, however, that Satan ever received at his court was Dante Alighieri, the first and greatest of the poets of Italy.

Dante, to be sure, visited all the three realms, to which the Catholic Church assigned the dead. Thus his journey included Hell, Purgatory and Heaven. It would seem, however, that our poet was most impressed by Hell. Of his trilogy the *Inferno* undoubtedly commends itself most to our imagination. The *Inferno* is the most powerful poem in the *Divina Commedia*. Next in importance is the *Purgatorio*. "If Dante's great poem", says Mr. Francis Grier-son, "had been a description of Heaven, no one would read it. The interest centers in Hell and Purgatory." It was Hell and not Heaven which, according to the testimony of his contemporaries, had left the deep marks on Dante's face. It is Hell and not Heaven which is the most real in the consciousness of man. "There may be Heaven, there must be Hell", is the conclusion reached at the end of Browning's poem "Times' Revenges". A further illustration of this fact is the legend of three monks of Mesopotamia, who set out on a journey to the departed and who found Hell and Purgatory, but not Heaven.

Dante's conception of Hell is not original but universal. Many of his ideas were current in his days. The *Inferno* is but a highly

⁹ Cf. Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, i. 309ff.

¹⁰ See *St. Patrick's Purgatory, an Essay on the Legends of Purgatory, Hell, and Paradise, current during the Middle Ages*. London, 1844.

poetical elaboration of popular medieval notions. Following all Roman writers our poet shows in his description of the Underworld a love of horrors and a delight in terrors for their own sakes. This predilection for scenes of bloodshed and corruption is especially typical of the art of the Etruscans.

The flaming and frigid divisions of Hell point to the two mythical currents, the Christian and the classical, which meet in Dante's vision of the Underworld. The essential element in the Christian Hell is fire. This idea rests upon many biblical passages.¹¹ It has been supported by Milton and other poets and rendered almost certain by the testimony of many a preacher now departed, who is not to be lightly doubted. And how can we scorn the testimony of the contemporaries of Dante, who pointed out to each other with holy shudder the marks which the scorching fires of Hell had left on this unhappy poet's face? In its conception of a flaming Hell Christianity, through its parent religion, had in mind the place Tophet in the Valley of Gehenna, where stood the idol Moloch with his fiery belly. This belief in a Hell of flames was confirmed by the sight of the smoking volcanoes. For notwithstanding the fact that a few theological astronomers wished to place Hell in the sun or moon or some other planet, the good orthodox theory has remained to the present day that Hell is at the earth's center. The Jewish-Christian Hell, however, seems to have been modelled not after Mulge, the Babylonian underworld, but after the Persian place of punishment, and Satan is but imitating Ahriman in making the sinners burn continually. It must also be borne in mind that Prometheus and Loki, Satan's cousins in other religions, had a great deal to do with fire.

The idea of a Hell of ice, on the other hand, is not in conformity with the teaching of the Church. By describing also a frozen region in Hell our poet is following not the Christian but the classical tradition. This element Dante introduced in Hell out of respect for Virgil, who served as his guide in Hell. But such a conception of Hell can only be the result of a Northern imagination. It is cited by Scandinavian scholars as a proof of the influence of Northern mythology on Southern thought.¹² M. Anatole Le Bras, the

¹¹ Is. ix. 17-18, xxx. 33, xxxiii. 14, 1.9-11, lxv. 5, lxvi. 24; Jer. xvii. 4; Matth. iii. 10, xiii. 30, 50, xviii. 8; Marc. ix. 43; Luc. xvi. 24; 2 Thess. i. 8; 1 Cor. iii. 15; Hebr. x. 27, xii. 29; Rev. ix. 2, xviii. 19-20, xx. 9-10.

¹² Cf. Paul Carus, *History of the Devil and the Idea of Evil* (1900), pp. 246-49.

Celtic scholar, may consider Virgil's conception of a cold Hell as another proof of his contention that the Roman poet was of Celtic origin.

This synthesis of Eastern belief and Western imagination is symbolized for the Teutonic races in the very name of the Christian Underworld. It is indeed an irony of etymology that the Eastern place of burning heat should bear a name which stands in the West for a place of cold and dreary darkness. "Hell" is the modern form of the name of the Scandinavian demoness Hei (Gothic Halja), daughter of Loki, whose abode was an icy hole.¹³

According to the Dutch folk-lore and novelist, Dr. Frederick Willem van Eeden, Satan disclaims any connection whatever with these regions of alternating fire and ice. In the allegorical novel *De kleine Johannes* by this author the Devil maintains that the place of eternal torment which Dante visited was not his but the Other's. He accuses Dante of unfair dealing in ascribing to him properties which belong to the god in whose name the Inquisition was instituted. As Little Johannes on his spiritual pilgrimage enters the domain of the Devil he is astonished to find it so different from the general opinion prevalent on earth. "What is this place, really?" asked Johannes. "Hell? Is it here that Dante was?" "Dante?" asked the Devil. And all his retainers whispered and tittered and chattered: "Dante? Dante? Dante?" Surely resumed the king, "you must mean that nice place full of light where it is so hot and smells so bad, where sand melts, where rivers of blood are seething, and the boiling pitch is ever bubbling, where they scream and yell and curse and lament and swear at one another". "Yes," said Johannes. "Dante told about that". "But my dear little friend!" said the Devil affably, "that is not here, as you can very well see. That is not my kingdom. That is the kingdom of another who, they say, is called Love. With me, no one suffers. I am not so cruel as that. I cause no one pain'.

Dante has had many imitators who also ventured to visit the Lower World. Emmanuel Swedenborg is said to have journeyed to Heaven and Hell. Perhaps the most prominent guest that Satan welcomed in modern times was Heinrich Heine.¹⁴ Letters purporting to come from Hell appeared in Germany in 1843 and in Den-

¹³ Hel was the queen of the Underworld in Scandinavia as Bahu was in Babylonia and Persephone in Greece.

¹⁴ W. Müller von Königswinter, *Höllenfahrt von Heinrich Heine*. Hrsg. von S. Ascher. (=Neudrucke literarischer Seltenheiten. Nr. 4.)

mark in 1868.¹⁵ A very interesting visit to the infernal world has recently been paid by the cartoonist, Art Young, who introduced himself to "Sate" as a newspaper man from Chicago and who reported after his return that "Hell is now run on the broad American plan."¹⁶ All of which goes to show how much truth there is in the words of the old Goethe that

"Culture, which the whole world licks,
Also unto the Devil sticks."¹⁷

¹⁵ Gregorovius, *Konrad Siebenhorns Höllenbriefe an seine lieben Freunde in Deutschland*. Hrsg. von Ferdinand Fuchsmund. Königsberg, 1843. *Letters from Hell*. Given in English by Julie Sutter. With a preface by George MacDonald. London, 1886. 2nd edition, New York, 1911.

B. Piscator started a series of *Modern letters from Hell* (Moderne Höllenbriefe) with his book *Psychological Studies from Hell* (Psychologische Studien der Hölle), Berlin, 1907. On letters from Heaven and Hell see W. Höhler's article "Zu den Himmelsund Höllenbriefen in *Hessische Blätter für Volkskunde*, vol. I (1902), pp. 143-9. Rachel Hayward published a novel with the title of *Letters from Là-Bas*.

¹⁶ Art Young, *Hell Up to Date*. Chicago, 1892.

¹⁷ For a bibliography on Dante's Devil see the present writer's *Bibliografia di Daemonologia Dantesca* in the October 1921 number of "Studies in Philology."