

## DEATH IN RELIGIOUS ART.

BY THE EDITOR.

DEATH appears to the imagination of mankind as the climax of all the evils in the world; for death is feared as annihilation, and death seems to destroy our entire life-work as well as ourselves.

Death is the main problem of life. If there were no death, there would be no need of religion, for religion originates as a so-



THANATOS AND HYPNOS LAYING A WARRIOR TO REST.  
From an Attic vase. (After Hermann Göll.)

lution of the problem of death. Every religion proposes its own peculiar solution than which there is nothing more characteristic in its doctrines and moral teachings. Salvation means an escape from death and the attainment of life everlasting. If we want to comprehend the spirit of a religion, we must learn what, according to its teachings, is the significance of death.

*Death in Pre-Christian Art.*

Demonolatry, the religion of savages, is based on the fear of death. Death is supposed to be a monster-deity that is thirsty for blood and takes delight in sufferings. For the sake of escaping



RELIEF ON A SARCOPHAGUS, REPRESENTING THE BATTLE WITH THE AMAZONS.  
(After Hermann Göll.)

his wrath, savage tribes feed him with such sacrifices, both animal and human, as are expected to pacify him.

Death in Brahmanism is not an annihilation of the soul but a mere transmigration. The soul which is conceived to be a being or an entity that can move about without a body, is supposed to assume a new shape and to reappear in a new incarnation. The



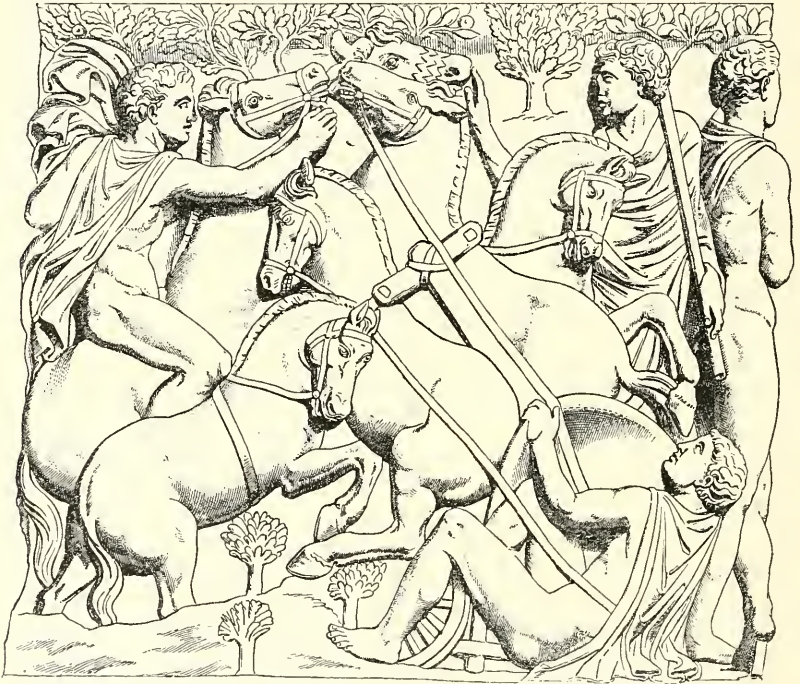
OKNOS AND THE DAUGHTERS OF DANAOS IN HADES (After Hermann Göll.)

religious Hindu, therefore, exhibits a strange indifference to his worldly fate and submits unflinchingly even to death.

In Buddhism, Mâra, the Evil One, is the demon of death (the word *mdio* meaning "slayer"). Buddha enjoins his followers to surrender to death what belongs to death, and to live in the realm of moral aspirations; for the body is subject to decay, but deeds

do not die. Mara, the Evil One, presides over that which is transient, the realm of birth and death. He is both sensuality and the perdition which all flesh is heir to, and this world is a world of death.

It appears that to the ancient Hebrews death was the end of life, for there is no mention of any kind of immortality in the canonical books of the Old Testament. This is the more strange as both the Assyrians and the Egyptians who have powerfully influenced the religious development of Israel, clearly taught that



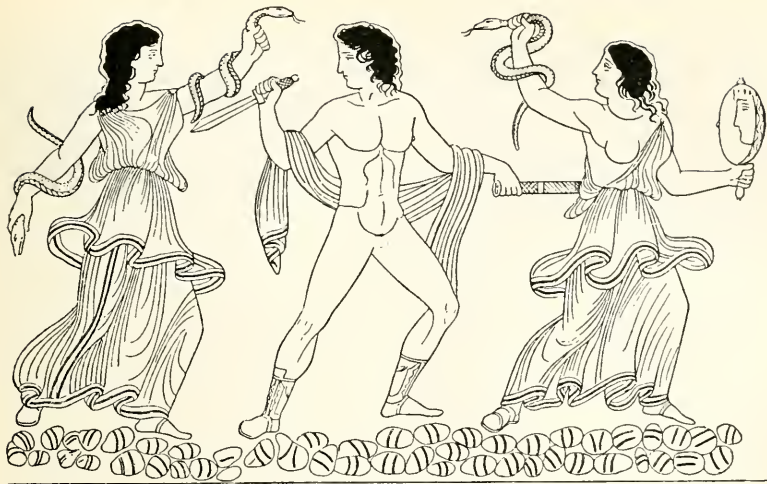
RELIEF ON A SARCOPHAGUS, REPRESENTING THE DEATH OF HIPPLYTUS.  
(After Hermann Göll.)

man's soul does not die but survives death and enters other regions, either for being rewarded or punished in the life to come, according to his deeds. They believed that evil-doers have reason to fear death, while the righteous may face it courageously, as the innocent man need not tremble before a judge who is absolutely just.

The Greeks are strongly influenced by their artistic sense. Homer<sup>1</sup> speaks of Death as the twin-brother of Sleep, and Pausa-

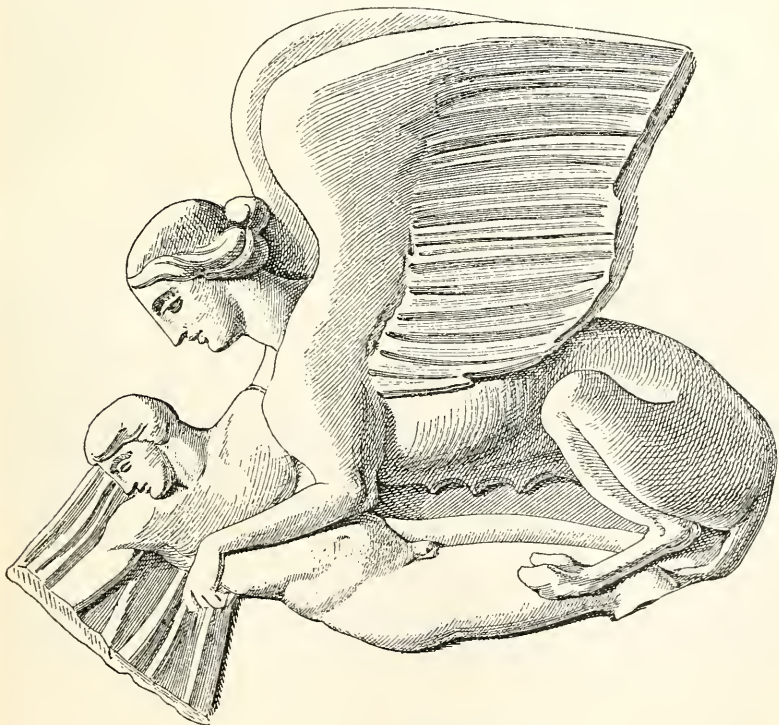
<sup>1</sup>*Iliad*, XVI. 682.





ORESTES PURSUED BY THE FURIES.

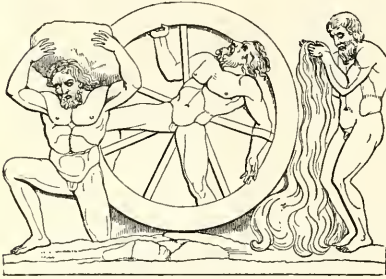
From an ancient vase. (After Hermann Göll.)



A SPHINX CARRYING OFF A VICTIM.

Terra Cotta relief from Melos. (After Hermann Göll.)

nias<sup>1</sup> describes a box of cedar wood in the temple of Juno at Elis on which Death and Sleep are represented as two boys resting in the arms of Night. Both have their legs crossed, as sleepers naturally would lie, and there is this difference only between the twin



SISYPHUS, IXION, AND TANTALUS IN HADES. Relief on a Sarcophagus.

brothers, that Death is black while Sleep is white. The box described by Pausanias is lost of course, but there are a great number of artistic representations of Death as the twin-brother of sleep. There is, for instance, an Attic vase which depicts Thanatos and Hypnos, Death and Sleep, laying a warrior to rest.

The Greek sarcophagi represent scenes of Greek mythology such as the battle with the Amazons, the Death of Hippolytus, and similar subjects.

There is a tendency prevalent among the artists of ancient Greece to hide everything that is ugly, or, if it could not be hidden, to transfigure it with beauty. In this way the pangs of a bad conscience, represented in the furies, the Harpies and Sphinxes



THE COFFIN OF THE SON OF VALERIUS (From Lessing.)

representing fatal diseases, the petrifying dread depicted in Medusa's face, and even the torments of Hell have assumed quite an æsthetical appearance in Greek art. It is in accord with the whole Hellenic world-conception that the Greeks covered their graves with flowers in order to conceal the terrors of death, which were

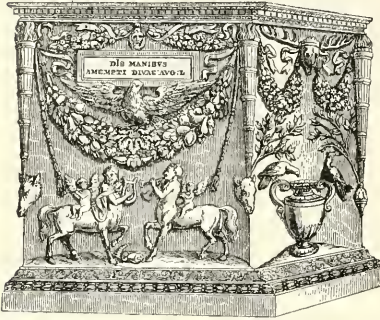
*Paus. Eliac, cap. XVIII p. 422.*



HEGESO'S TOMBSTONE. In the ancient cemetery on the Dypylon in Athens.



felt as a disturbance in the enjoyment of life. The æsthetic sense of Greek artists shrunk from picturing death in its ugly features, and death is depicted on the tombstone of an Athenian cemetery as a parting.



THE TOMBSTONE OF AMEMPTUS, A FREEDMAN.

According to Lessing's interpretation probably a musician. (From Lessing.)



DEATH AS A GENIUS HOLDING AN URN AND TURNING DOWN THE TORCH.

The soul is represented as a butterfly. (After an ancient gem, reproduced from Lessing.)



THE TOMBSTONE OF CAECILIUS FEROX.

Representing Death as a youth standing with crossed legs and down-turned torch. (From Lessing.)



DEATH AS A GENIUS WITH A WREATH, BUTTERFLY, AND DOWN-TURNED TORCH. (From Lessing.)

Lessing<sup>1</sup> has demonstrated beyond the shadow of a doubt that the ancient Greek artist did not represent death as a skeleton, but that they always followed the Homeric idea of death as the twin brother of sleep. He proved his case by reproducing and explain-

<sup>1</sup>Lessing (*Wie die Alten den Tod personificirten*), written in reply to a criticism of Herr Klotz.

ing a number of antique works of art, mostly tombstones and sarcophagi, on which a youth with down-turned torch can represent nothing else but Death. At the same time he showed that the few skeletons that are actually antique, must be *larva*, i. e., the departed souls of the wicked who are described by Seneca as consisting of bare bones.<sup>1</sup>

Schiller, who is himself one of the foremost representatives of classical taste, criticises the Greek habit of shrinking from that which is unpleasant in the following Xenion :

" Beautiful, truly, is he, the youth with his torch turning downward ;  
But 'tis apparent that Death lacks this æsthetical charm."

The idea of immortality was not missing in Hellas ; but the notions of a beyond were very indefinite. The hope of an after-life was indicated by the butterfly which is frequently found on tombstones and sarcophagi. The hope of a reawakening to new life found a symbolical expression in the Eleusinian mysteries as ears of wheat which were handed to the neophytes and worn in crowns by the initiated.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

<sup>1</sup>Nemo tam puer est, ut Cerberum timeat, et tenebras, et Larvarum habitum nudis coherentium ossibus. *Ep.* XXIV.