

THE GREEK IDEA OF SALVATION.

BY THE EDITOR.

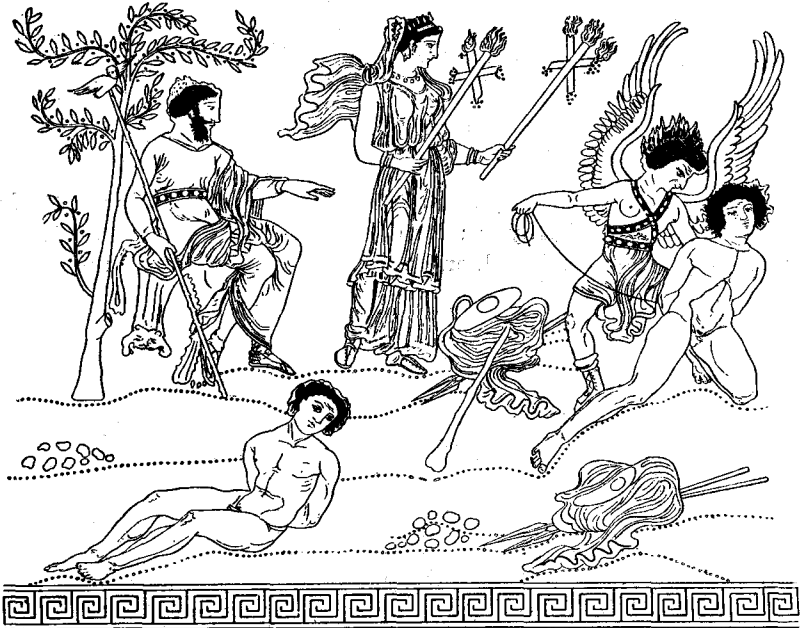
JUDAISM is commonly regarded as the mother-religion of Christianity, and rightly so; for Christ accepted the law of Moses and the prophets of Israel, and all Christians recognised the sacred



CHIMÆRA OF AREZZO. The monster slain by Bellerophon. (Now at Florence.)

literature of the Hebrew as an essential part of their canonical scriptures. But we must bear in mind that Christianity is, as it were, the sum total of the religious experiences of mankind, and we must therefore not be blind to the fact that other nations,

Egypt, Persia, Asia Minor, and Greece, contributed important ideas to the make-up of Christianity, and Greek thought is a more powerful factor than is generally acknowledged. Think only of the Neo-Platonic Logos philosophy, the conception of the eternal word that became flesh, formulated after Platonic models by Philo and Christianised by the author of the Fourth Gospel!



THESEUS AND PERITHOUS.

Venturing down to Hades for the purpose of bringing up Persephone, the daughter of Ceres, they are made prisoners and bound by an Erinyes. Theseus is at last rescued by Hercules. Pluto holds in his hand a scepter on the top of which sits the dismal owl as an *avis funebris*. Persephone carries two cross-torches.

(From an Etruscan Vase. Baumeister, *Denkmäler des class. Altertums*.)

It is true that in Greece Christianity developed in opposition to, and gained a foothold after a severe struggle with, national idolatry, but the weapons with which the conflict was carried on were taken mainly from the spiritual treasure-store of Greek traditions. The ideas of sin and hell, of salvation and immortality, of a saviour and a son of God, of atonement and forgiveness, were not new to the Greek mind. Hellas was thoroughly prepared for the acceptance of Christianity, for all the main notions of the new

religion were prevalent in Greece, and awaited only the genius of a prophet who would systematise them in the higher unity of an organised religious doctrine which excluded all discrepancies and dropped the grosser elements of pagan worship.

The Greek idea of salvation is mirrored in the legends of Hercules, Bellerophon, Theseus, Dionysus, and other myths, which



PERSEUS WITH THE HEAD OF THE DECAPITATED MEDUSA.

The soul of the latter is represented as a small figure leaving the body and still trying to retain the head.

(Terra cotta from Melos. Baumeister, *Denkmäler des class. Altertums.*)

had become dear to the Greek mind through the tales of poets and the works of artists.

The powers of evil which Hercules overcomes are represented as a lion, a dragon, a wild boar, harpy-like birds, and a bull. In addition he captures the swift hind of Arcadia, he cleanses the

stables of Augeas, tames the man-eating mares of Diomedes, conquers Hypolyte, the queen of the Amazons, brings the oxen of Geryon from the far West, and carries Cerberus to the upper world.



PERSEUS AND ANDROMEDA.¹

Picture of an ancient Amphora in Naples. (From Baumeister, *D. d. cl. A.*, p. 1291.)

The poet Pisander (who lived about 650 B. C.) wrote an apotheosis of Hercules, called the *Heracleus*, which contributed much towards idealising the hero. Later Greek philosophers, such

¹Trendelenburg has discovered a passage commenting on this or a similar picture in Achilles Tatius, and explains it as follows: Andromeda, adorned as the bride of death with girdle, crown, and veil, is tied to two poles. Above her Cupid stands engaged with women in the preparations of a wedding. Andromeda's old nurse hands her a twig. Behind and above the nurse are guards with Phrygian caps and arms. On the left, Cassiopeia, Andromeda's mother, is seated, who exhibits the vanity, of which the legend accuses her, in conversation with her servants. Underneath Perseus fights the sea-monster to whom the princess is to be sacrificed, which scene is witnessed by three Nereids, one riding on a sea-horse, one on a dolphin, and the third resembling the typical figure of Scylla.

men as Xenophon, and the sophist Prodicus,¹ regarded him as the realisation of divine perfection, and now it became customary to look upon the old legends as perversions of a deeper religious



SICILIAN COIN WITH MEDUSA-HEAD.

The use of the *Triquetra* (three legs) is frequent in the three-cornered island. The ears of wheat indicate the proverbial fertility of Sicily, the granary of Rome.



THE GORGONEION ON THE SHIELD OF PHIDIAS'S ATHENE.

The head of the Medusa is surrounded by scenes of a battle with Amazons. One of the fighters (the man with the bald head) is supposed to be a portrait of the artist Phidias.

truth. Epictetus, who speaks of Hercules as the saviour, as son of Zeus, says (iii. 24): "Do you believe all the fables of Homer?"

¹Xen., *Mem.*, ii. 1. Plato, *Symp.*, 177 B.



GORGONEION, ANCIENT FACE OF THE GORGON MEDUSA.

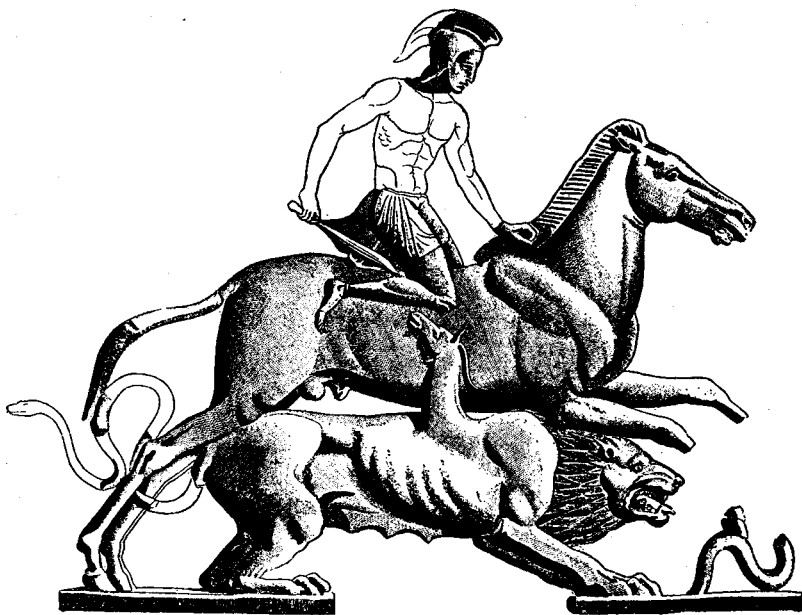


MEDUSA RONDANINI.

Beautiful yet ghastly. (Glyptothek, Munich.)

Hercules is called repeller of evil (*ἀλεξίκακος*), leader in the fray (*πρόμαχος*), the brightly victorious (*καλλίνικος*),¹ the celestial (*δλύμπιος*), destroyer of flies, vermin, and grasshoppers (*μνίαργος, ἰπόκτονος, κορνοπίων*). He, the solar hero, is identified with Apollo, the sun-god, in the names prophet (*μάντις*), and leader of the Muses (*μουσαγέτης*).

The legends of Perseus are in many respects similar to the tales of Hercules. Perseus, too, the Greek prototype of the Christian St. George, is a divine saviour. Assisted by Athene, he kills



BELLEROPHON SLAYING THE CHIMÆRA.

(A terra cotta statue of Melos, now at the British Museum.)

the horrible Medusa, a symbol of deadly fright,² and liberates Andromeda, the bride of Death.

As a symbol, the Medusa-head frequently appears on shields and coins to terrify the enemy and avert hostile influences.

Bellerophon is another solar hero. He rides on Pegasus, a

¹The Greek *καλός* is not limited to the definition of beautiful as we use the word.

²The Medusa is mentioned by Homer, *λ* 634, as a terrible monster of the Nether World; it was used as an amulet to avert evil, and became therefore a favorite device on shields. The original is colored, which adds to the frightful appearance of the picture found on the Acropolis at Athens.

mythological representation of the thunder-cloud,¹ and slays the Chimæra, a monster half lion, half goat, representing barbarism and savagery, or some similar evils.

Some of the tales of divine saviours may be ultimately founded upon local Greek traditions, but many features of these religious myths indicate that they were introduced early from the Orient whose religions began to influence the occidental nations at the very dawn of their civilisation. Thus Hercules is the Tyrian Baal Melkarth, probably identical with the Babylonian Bel,—the conqueror of Tiamat; and his twelve labors are the deeds of the sun-god in the twelve months of the year. Phoenix-like, he dies by self-combustion and rises in a transfigured shape from the flames

of the pyre. The Jews also appropriated the figure of this solar hero in the shape of Samson, whose strength is conditioned by his hair, as the power of the sun lies in his rays.



THE LION-KILLING HERO OF KHORSABAD.²

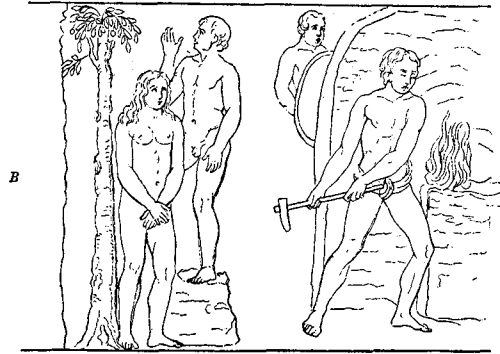
In spite of the strong admixture of foreign mythology, Hercules has become the national hero of Greece, and the Greek idea of salvation has found in him the typical expression, which has been most beautifully worked out by Æschylus in a grand tragedy which represents Prometheus (the fore-thinker) as struggling and suffering mankind, tied to the pole of misery by Zeus as a punishment for the sin of having brought the bliss of light and fire down to the earth. But at last the divine saviour, Hercules, arrives, who kills the eagle that lacerates the liver of the bold hero, and sets him free.

Prometheus and Hercules are combined into one person in the Christian Saviour, Jesus Christ. The similarity of the story of Golgotha with the myth of Prometheus is not purely accidental. For observe that in some of the older pictures, as for instance in

¹ The statue on page 681 belongs to an older period of Greek art, and the horse Pegasus is not as yet endowed with wings, which became very soon its never-missing attributes. The modern notion that Pegasus is the symbol of poetical enthusiasm only dates back to the fifteenth century of our era, and was foreign to the Greek.

² Figures of the lion-killing saviour are also found on Asiatic coins and on Assyrian cylinders.

THE MYTH OF PROMETHEUS ON A SARCOPHAGUS.



i. Deukalion and Pyrrha, naked and unacquainted with the use of fire.



iii. Prometheus tied to a rock and delivered by Hercules. In the background the mountain-god Caucasus.



ii. Prometheus forming man out of clay, and shaping his fate with the assistance of the gods.

the vase of Chiusi (see illustration below), Prometheus is not chained to a rock but tied to a pole, i. e., to a *σταυρός*, rood, or cross, and Greek authors frequently use expressions such as the verbs *ἀνασκολοπιζέσθαι* (Æschylus) and *ἀνασταυρούσθαι* (Lucian) which mean "to be crucified."¹

Observe also that Andromeda in the illustration on page 678 is not chained to a rock; she, too, is represented as suffering impalement. It appears, however, that artists yielded to a desire for symmetry when picturing the victim tied to two poles.

Perhaps under the impression of Æschylus's conception of the tragic fate of Prometheus, Plato sets up the ideal of the perfect man who would rather be than appear just, saying,

ἔροῦσι δέ τάδε, ὅτι οὕτω διακείμενος ὁ δίκαιος μαστιγώσεται, στρεβλώσεται, δεδήσεται, ἐκκαυθήσεται τῷ φθαλμῷ, τελευτῶν πάντα κακὰ παθῶν ἀνασχυνδουλευθήσεται.

"They will tell you that the just man (who is thought unjust) will be scourged, racked, bound; will have his eyes burnt out; and, at last, after suffering every kind of evil, he will be crucified."



PROMETHEUS TIED BY ZEUS TO THE STAKE (OR CROSS) AND EXPOSED TO THE EAGLE; RESCUED BY HERCULES.

(A vase found at Chiusi, now in Berlin. Baumeister, *D. d. cl. A.*, p. 1410.)

The word *ἀνασχυνδουλευθήσεται* means "he will be crucified, hung up at the *σταυρός* (the cross or rood)," is an older synonym of the New Testament term *σταυρόειν*, commonly translated "to crucify."

Seneca speaks of Hercules as the ideal of the good man who lives exclusively for the welfare of mankind. Contrasting him with Alexander the Great, the conqueror of Asia, he says (*De Benef.*, I., 14):

"Hercules never gained victories for himself. He wandered through the circle of the earth, not as a conqueror, but as a protector. What, indeed, should the

¹ In the beautiful sarcophagus (see illustration on p. 683), which represents the Promethean myth, the first design is comparatively incomplete; for we should expect to see Prometheus represented as stealing the fire and offering it to Deukalion.

enemy of the wicked, the defensor of the good, the peace-bringer, conquer for himself either on land or sea !”

Epictetus praises Hercules frequently and declares that the evils which he combated served to elicit his virtues, and were intended to try him (I., 6). Zeus, who is identified with God, is called his father, and Hercules is said to be his son (III., 26). Hercules, when obliged to leave his children, knew them to be in the care of God. Epictetus says (III., 24) :

“He knew that no man is an orphan, but that there is a father always and constantly for all of them. He had not only heard the words that Zeus was the father of men, for he regarded him as *his* father and called him such ; and looking up to him he did what Zeus did. Therefore he could live happily everywhere.”

In Christianity the struggles of the Saviour receive a spiritual interpretation and are conceived as a victory over the temptations of the flesh and other worldly passions.



THE TEMPTATIONS OF CHRIST.

(Seventh century. Mosaic in the cathedral of Monreale, Sicily.)

The conception of evil as hell received a philosophical foundation in the dualism of Plato, who did not shrink from depicting its minutest details ; and his views of the future state of the soul, its rewards in heaven and hell, are in close agreement with the belief of the early Christians, even in most of their details, with the exception of the doctrine of the transmigration of the soul.

Plato concludes his book on the Republic (X., 614-621) with the tale of Er, the son of Armenius, a man who had died and came back to life for the purpose of giving information to mankind concerning the other world which might serve as a warning as to what people have to expect in the life to come. Plato says that this Er, a Pamphylian by birth, was slain in battle, but when the dead

were taken up his body was found unaffected by decay, and, on the twelfth day, as he was lying on the funeral pile, he returned to life. Plato continues :

“ He (Er, the son of Armenius) said that when his soul left the body he went on a journey with a great company, and that they came to a mysterious place at which there were two openings in the earth ; they were near together, and over against them were two other openings in the heaven above. In the intermediate space there were judges seated, who commanded the just, after they had given judgment on them and had bound their sentences in front of them, to ascend by the heavenly way on the right hand ; and in like manner the unjust were bidden by them to descend by the lower way on the left hand ; these also bore the symbols of their deeds, but fastened on their backs.

“ Er said that for every wrong which they had done to any one they suffered tenfold.”

Hell is described as follows :

“ ‘And this,’ said Er, ‘was one of the dreadful sights which we ourselves witnessed. We were at the mouth of the cavern, and, having completed all our experiences, were about to reascend, when of a sudden Ardiaeus (the tyrant) appeared and several others, most of whom were tyrants ; and there were also, besides the tyrants, private individuals who had been great criminals : they were, as they fancied, about to return into the upper world, but the mouth, instead of admitting them, gave a roar whenever any of these incurable sinners or some one who had not been sufficiently punished, tried to ascend ; and then wild men of fiery aspect, who were standing by and heard the sound, seized and carried them off ; and Ardiaeus and others they bound head and foot and hand, and threw them down and flayed them with scourges, and dragged them along the road at the side, carding them on thorns like wool, and declaring to passers-by what were their crimes, and that they were being taken away to be cast into hell.’ And of all the many terrors which they had endured, he said that there was none like the terror which each of them felt at that moment, lest they should hear the voice ; and when there was silence, one by one they ascended with exceeding joy. These, said Er, were the penalties and retributions, yet there were blessings as great.”

The idea of the rising and sinking of the wicked in hell is similar to the Buddhist view of Buddhagosa, who in his parables (translated by Capt. T. Rogers, R. E., pp. 128-129) tells us how the condemned go up and down like grains of rice in a boiling cauldron. The conceptions of the mouth of hell, of the fierce tormentors and the various punishments are probably older than Plato ; they reappear in the gnostic doctrines and were retained by Christianity down to the age of the Reformation.

The doctrine of a last judgment is taught by Plato, who says in his *Phædo* :

“ If the departed ones arrive at the place whither the demon leads every one, they shall first be judged, both those who lead a good, holy, and just life, and those who did not.”

Similar passages are frequent and prove the importance which was attributed to this belief. We read in *Gorgias* (p. 526) :

"If Rhadamanthus (the judge of the dead) finds a bad man, he sends him to Tartarus with a mark indicating whether he appears to be curable or incurable; whereupon that man will suffer what he deserves. But if he (the judge) beholds, as sometimes happens, another soul that lived a holy life and was in accord with truth, be it a commoner or somebody else, he rejoices and sends it to the isles of the blessed."

The belief in hell and the anxiety to escape its terrors produced conditions which are drastically described by Plato, who says, speaking of the desire of the wicked to ransom their souls from a deserved punishment :

"Mendicant prophets go to rich men's doors and persuade them that they have a power committed to them by the gods of making an atonement for a man's own or his ancestors' sins by sacrifices or charms, with rejoicings and feasts. . . . And they produce a host of books written by Musaeus and Orpheus, who were children of the Moon and the Muses—that is what they say—according to which they perform their ritual, and persuade not only individuals, but whole cities, that expiations and atonements for sin may be made by sacrifices and amusements which fill a vacant hour, and are equally at the service of the living and the dead; the latter sort they call mysteries, and they redeem us from the pain of hell, but if we neglect them no one knows what awaits us."

The dualism that underlies Plato's views began to be taken more seriously by his disciples, the Neo-Platonists, and reached an extraordinary intensity in the beginning of the Christian era. The philosopher longed for death, and the common people feared the terrors of the next life.

The philosophical longing for death is satirically described in one of the epigrams of Callimachus, who says (No. XXIV) :

"Cleombrot,¹ he of Ambracia, took leave of the sun in the heavens :
Leapt from a wall in the hope Sooner to reach the Beyond ;
Not that he e'er had encountered an ill that made life to him hateful ;
Merely because he had read Plato's grand book on the soul."

The idea of immortality became more and more accepted by the masses of the people; but there were many to whom it was no welcome news, for it served only to enhance the fears of man's fate after death. Acquaintance with other religions revealed new terrors everywhere. The Egyptians' dread of judgment in the nether world, the Jews' horror of Gehenna, the Hindus' longing for an escape from future sufferings, were now added to the Greek notions of Hades, and rendered them more terrible than before. The

¹Cleombrotus may have been the same disciple of Socrates who is mentioned in *Phædo*, II., p. 59, c. This strange case of suicide is alluded to by St. Augustine in *de Civ. Dei*, I., 22.—The verses are translated in the original metre.

Christian conception of hell is more fearful and at the same time more drastic than any one of the older beliefs in future punishment.

Lucian tells the story of Peregrinus, surnamed Proteus, who after various adventures became a convert to Christianity. He would have been forgotten and his name would never have been mentioned in history but for the fact that in the presence of a great crowd at the Olympian festivals he burned himself to death on a big pile of wood.

All these strange facts were symptoms which illustrated the religious zeal of the people and characterised the unrest of the times. Further, Plutarch tells us in his *Morals* that the superstitions are chastised by "their own imagination of an anguish that will never cease." He says:

"Wide open stand the deep gates of the Hades that they fable, and there stretches a vista of rivers of fire and Stygian cliffs; and all is canopied with a darkness full of fantasm, of spectres threatening us with terrible faces and uttering pitiful cries."

Mr. F. C. Conybeare, in his *Monuments of Early Christianity*, says, concerning the belief in hell:

"We make a mistake if we think that this awful shadow was not cast across the human mind long before the birth of Christianity. On the contrary, it is a survival from the most primitive stage of our intellectual and moral development. The mysteries of the old Greek and Roman worlds were intended as modes of propitiation and atonement, by which to escape from these all-besetting terrors, and Jesus the Messiah was the last and best of the *λυτήριοι θεοί*, of the redeeming gods. In the dread of death and in the belief in the eternal fire of hell, which pervaded men's mind, a few philosophers excepted, Christianity had a *point d'appui*, without availing itself of which it would not have made a single step towards the conquest of men's minds."

And why was Christ a better Saviour than the gods and heroes of Greece? Simply because he was human and realistic, not mythological and symbolical; he was a sufferer and a man,—the son of man, and not a slayer, not a conqueror, not a hero of the ferocious type, ruthless and bloodstained; he fulfilled the moral ideal which had been set up by Plato.

Alluding to Plato, Apollonius, a Christian martyr, declares:

"One of the Greek philosophers said: The just man shall be tortured, he shall be spat upon, and last of all he shall be crucified. Just as the Athenians passed an unjust sentence of death, and charged him falsely, because they yielded to the mob, so also our Saviour was at last sentenced to death by the lawless."

¹The Apology and Acts of Appollonius, 40-41. Translated by F. C. Conybeare in *Monuments of Early Christianity*, p. 47.

Thus the Greek ideal of salvation and of the perfect man paves the way for Christianity.

In the days of Augustus and his successors the people were taught to expect salvation, the dispensation of justice, protection, peace, and prosperity from the emperor; and just as we have to-day monarchies where the king regards himself as the Anointed One by the grace of God and a representative of God on earth, so the Roman emperor arrogated to himself divine honors, and even philosophers such as Seneca did not hesitate to acknowledge the claim. The practical significance of this view is that the government should be regarded with religious awe, and its officers, as such, are divine. The Christians who refused to worship before the emperor's images must have appeared to the Romans of those days as anarchists and rebels. But when Nero committed matricide and other most outrageous crimes, the belief in the emperor's divinity dwindled away, and the idea of the suffering God, the man who died on the cross because he would rather be than appear just, gained ground among the people.

We need not hesitate to look upon the Greek sages as forerunners of Christianity. Plato was as much a prophet of Christianity as Isaiah. To be sure, the Platonic conception of the crucified sufferer as the ideal of moral perfection was not a prophecy in the accepted term of the word, not a mystic revelation of the future: it was a prophecy in the true sense of the word. Prophet means preacher, and Plato's prophecy was a sermon which established the belief that the ideal of divine justice and perfection will prove himself genuine by suffering and finally by dying in contumely on the cross.