



SUNDAY READING

SUNDAY IN GEHENNA.

The Origin of the Belief in a Day of Respite for Lost Souls.

Every Jew who has received any instruction in his religion knows that at the end of the Sabbath it is customary to prolong the recitation of certain prayers, in order to lengthen the respite granted on that day to the damned, for as long as the faithful have not terminated the evening service the wicked are not obliged to return to Gehenna, in order to take up again the course of their punishments.

The first casuist who mentions the rite is Rab Amram in the ninth century, who speaks of it as a popular usage. The casuists themselves have never taken as seriously as might be believed the motives alleged for this religious usage, for they have never tried to abolish the rule which prescribes the suppression of these prayers in certain cases, as, for instance, when a festival occurs in the week which begins at the end of the Sabbath, thus running the risk of condemning sinners to return sooner to Gehenna.

It can be shown, however, that the belief in the Sabbath repose of the damned is much older than the right which expresses it, and this belief, it is nearly certain, widely spread in the third century, at least, of our era.

What were the objects of establishing this rite? From a desire to soften the dogma of endless punishment? Dogma is a word unknown in the Talmudic theology, especially in eschatological questions. The Mishna does declare that those who deny the resurrection of the dead will be excluded from the future world, but it takes good care not to be precise in regard to what it means by the "future world." The collection of Talmudic doctrines in regard to life beyond the tomb is a veritable chaos, the most dissimilar conceptions being admitted. The belief in the immortality of the soul does not exclude faith in an existence half terrestrial, half spiritual, for those who are no more. The Talmud, or, to speak more precisely, the editors of that collection, record without hesitation, anecdotes which take us back to nearly prehistoric times, when the corpse, at the moment of being consigned to the grave, received objects of value and carried them to the subterranean world for the use of themselves or their companions.

The only possible hypothesis of the origin of the rite I am discussing is that it flows naturally from the sanctity with which the institution of the Sabbath was invested. If God allotted to mortals one day of repose every week, he could not refuse that to the damned, whoever they might be. The Sabbath is too holy to be restricted to the terrestrial world; the whole universe, visible and invisible, shares therein.

Our rabbis of the middle ages would have been not a little astonished that a like belief exists among Christians with this difference, naturally, that Sunday is substituted for Saturday. Not that the church has ever officially sanctioned this belief the theologians have always treated it as a heresy—but all the efforts of the fathers have not prevented such a belief becoming popular. Long would be a list of the writings in which this belief is mentioned without objection. The most ancient witness of its existence are Saint Augustine and Prudentius, that is, in the fourth century of our era.

It is admitted without contradiction that the notion of a Sunday respite for the damned entered christian literature by the circulation of a little work entitled "Apocalypse: or vision of St. Paul." This writing has come down to us under different forms in Greek, in Syriac, and in Latin. Neither of these versions represents the original, which seems to have been composed in Aramaic. However, by collating them and supplementing one by another, it is easy to reconstruct the first edition of the work, which has been done with great success by Mr. Herman Brandes in a book published at Halle in 1885.

According to this "Vision" St. Paul, accompanied by the Archangel Michael, visits first the abode of the blessed and contemplates their felicity, and then repairs to hell to witness the torments inflicted on the damned. He hears the lamentations of these unfortunate creatures, whose sufferings never stop, and, moved by pity, he supplicates his Lord to grant them at least one day of respite in memory of His resurrection. The prayer of St. Paul was granted, and ever since the sinners in hell can rest from their torment from Saturday evening to the beginning of Monday.

The question arises whether the belief indicated in the "Vision" came to the Christians from the Jews. My own opinion, after a careful study of all the authorities and sources, is that the belief did come from the Jews in the second half of the fourth century. The "Vision," I believe, was invented by a monk who was either born a Jew or else thoroughly instructed in the ideas and rites of the Jews in regard to death. In this way thanks to a Gentile romancer, the Jewish idea has made its way in the world. It has seduced the imagination of poets and writers of fiction in the middle ages while quieting those who were terrified by the dogma of endless punishment. —[Jewish Paper.]

A Souldier's Rave.

So great was my misery, that one night I went in full armor to the Suburban Bridge meaning to end a life so shamed and empty. But as I climbed the parapet, I was seized by the strong arm of a man in a slave's dress. I drew my dagger, and asked him, with a savage oath, if he held his life cheap, since he, a slave, thus dared to interfere with me, a praetorian soldier. He fixed his steady eyes on me and said: "I am unarmed; you can slay me if you

will; but I will try to prevent you from self murder." "My life is my own," I answered sullenly. "It is God's, who gave it. He set you here, and you have no right to desert your post." The man was Nereus, now the freedman of Prudens. He drew me away from the bridge, and I talked long with him. He was the first to give me the hope that I might live for better things. He taught me about Christ, and Christ's promise that he would cast out none who came to Him. That saved me. When I was a Pagan I knew shame and guilt, but I never knew that it could be washed away. —[From Farrar's "Darkness and Dawn".]

POLYCARP, BISHOP OF SMYRNA.

The Courage of a Saint Which Forsook Him Not at the Last.

St. Polycarp was ordained by the Apostles to the Bishopric of Smyrna, and it is supposed St. John took part in the solemnity. During a visit to Rome, Polycarp preached with great power against the subtle heresies of Marcion. The persecutions against the Christians grew in fierceness, and the faithful preacher was induced to retire to a village near the imperial city, and spent his time in prayer and exhortation. One day while praying, he had a vision—he saw his pillow consumed by fire, and turning to the company, said prophetically—"I must be burned alive." He was told the Roman officers were in search of him, and though he might have escaped, he refused, saying—"The will of the Lord be done." He gave himself up, ordered refreshment for the officers, and asked for one hour to pray without molestation. He prayed standing for two hours, and such unwonted power pervaded the assembly, that all were astonished, and his captors, awed by the good man's character, said—"Is it worth while to take pains to apprehend so aged a person." He was conveyed on an ass to Rome, and as he entered the Stadium, amid the tumult that prevailed, a voice was distinctly heard as from heaven, though no one saw the speaker, which said—"Be strong, Polycarp, and behave yourself like a man." The pro-consul urged him to swear by Caesar and reproach Christ, when Polycarp made the sublime answer—"Eighty and six years have I served Him and He hath never wronged me, and how can I blaspheme my King who hath saved me? If you still vainly contend to make me swear by the fortune of Caesar, hear me frankly declare what I am: I am a Christian!" They threatened to expose him to the wild beasts. "Call them," he quietly said, "our minds are not to be persuaded from better to worse; but it is a good thing to be changed from evil to good."

He was condemned to be burned at the stake. As they were about to fasten him to the stake with nails, in the usual way, he said—"Let me remain as I am, for He who giveth me strength to sustain the fire, will enable me also, without you securing me with nails, to remain unmoved in the fire." He was then simply bound to the stake without nails, and after he had offered a beautiful and affecting prayer, the pile was lighted. A great flame burst out, and to the amazement of the spectators, it formed an arch over the head and a glory round the body of the martyr, who seemed unscathed in the midst of it, and at the same time, the flame seemed to scatter around a delicious perfume like that of frankincense. Fearing the fire would not consume the martyr, the confector was ordered to plunge his sword into the body; and thus ended the magnificent career of one of the most illustrious preachers of the early church.

MISSIONARY WORK IN JAPAN.

Statistics of the Work of the Various Churches and Denominations.

Following is a compilation of missionary work in Japan: Presbyterian and Reformed bodies—entered Japan 1859; seven missions, missionaries 98, native ministers 53, preachers and helpers 103, churches 74, boarding schools 19, scholars 1,111, theological schools 3, students 106, adults baptized in 1892, 789; present membership, 11,190. Church of England—Four missions, entered Japan 1859, missionaries, 82, native ministers 21, preachers and helpers 92, churches 71, schools 11, scholars 340, theological schools 3, students 43, adults baptized in 1892, 639; present membership 4,366. Baptists—Four missions entered Japan, 1860, missionaries 47, native ministers 15, preachers and helpers 62, churches 23, schools (girls) 5, scholars (girls) 1,666, theological schools 1, students 15, adults baptized in 1892, 283. Present membership 1,761. Congregationalists—Entered Japan 1869 Two missions, missionaries 58, native ministers 28, preachers and helpers 101, churches 92, schools 17, scholars 1,241, theological schools 1, students 78, adults baptized, 1892, 1,096, membership 10,760. Methodist Episcopal—Entered Japan 1873. Five missions, missionaries 101, native ministers 111, preachers and helpers 71, churches 99, schools 19, scholars 1,254, theological schools 5, students 79, adults baptized in 1892, 862, membership 7,089. Total apart from Greek and Roman churches—Twenty-nine missions missionaries, not including wives, 422, native ministers 433, preachers and helpers 460, churches 365, boys' boarding schools 18, scholars 1,582, girls' schools 55, scholars 2,553, theological schools 16, students 359, adults baptized in 1892, 3,731, membership 35,534. Greek Church—Missionaries 4, native ministers 18, preachers and helpers 128, churches 219, schools 2, scholars 127, theological schools 2, students 26, additions 1892, 952, membership 30,325. Roman Catholics—Missionaries 78, native ministers 15, preachers and helpers 21, churches 244, schools 7, scholars 286, adults baptized in 1892 2,851, present membership 44,812.

NEWS AND NOTABILLIA.

In Scotland bishops have to support their dignity on some £600 or £700 a year.

The meetings of Evangelist Moody at Wilmington, N. C., are to be held in one of the great compartments of the Champion cotton press warehouse, which will seat 5,000 people.

The sum of \$4,000 has been subscribed by members of the Church of the Incarnation, New York, for the purpose of establishing, in connection with the church, a memorial to the late Bishop Brooks.

Mrs. Lyne Stephens stands in the unique position of being the only lady who has presented a cathedral to a religious community. The magnificent Roman Catholic Cathedral at Cambridge she built and presented to that body at a cost of £80,000.

Centuries ago the color of a hat or cap had its significance. Cardinals first began to wear red hats in 1253. In Italy, for ages, the members of the Hebrew race were known by the yellow caps they wore, it being compulsory for them to wear them.

There are some 100,000 Parsees in India especially at Bombay and Calcutta, but in the cradle of the creed, at Persia, barely 7,000 are left. The congregation at Teheran is small, merely 300, and the bulk of the Parsees are to be found in the south.

A revised version of the Apocrypha, from the same hands that revised the Old and New Testaments, will soon come from the university presses of Oxford and Cambridge. This was a part of the original plan entered on in 1892 for the revision of the Bible.

Since the Baptist mission in Swatow, China, was started 1,670 persons have been baptized. Of these nearly half were baptized after they reached 50 years of age and 61 after reaching 60 years of age; 98 were baptized after reaching 70 and 5 after reaching 80.

A church in Pittsburg Pa. has made a startling discovery, the result of which has been to immediately wipe off a heavy debt and to secure an income of about \$85,000 a year. This unexpected wealth is due to the opening of an oil well in the churchyard, yielding 1,000 barrels a day.

Pope Leo XIII. spends most of his mornings in the Vatican gardens catching birds with nets, a sport which he practised when Bishop of Perugia, and of which he is particularly fond. Hundreds of birds are caught every morning, and distributed among the hospitals and the poor.

The gold coronation chapel in the museum of Naples is said to have a framework made of the nails used in fastening Our Saviour to the cross. Little is known of the actual history of the relic other than that it was originally made in the year 391, and first used in the coronation of Agilulf.

Last Saturday was the 800th anniversary of the consecration of Winchester cathedral, England, and commemorative services were held of a very elaborate description. On Sunday "The Glory of Lebanon," a new musical work by Sir Herbert Oakley, was given for the first time.

The Bishop of Ripon, although one of the youngest members of the bench, being only a little over fifty, is accounted almost the finest orator in the Church of England. Dr. Boyd Carpenter always speaks extempore both on the platform and in the pulpit, not using a single note. His reputation was first gained as vicar of a large parish in Holloway, where he established a young men's debating society and instructed its members in the art he had mastered so well.

It seems strange that no mention of the cat occurs in the Bible or in any Assyrian record. Even in India, Professor Max-Muller is quoted as saying that it was but recently known as a domestic animal. Its Sanscrit name is marjara, from a root meaning to clean, from the creature's habit of licking itself at its toilet. The cats mousing habits were well known to the Romans, and even to the Etruscans, as shown by antique gems and even wall paintings.

An interesting report has recently been published in reference to the cost of new churches and the restoration of old churches in England during the years 1878-1891. During these eighteen years England and Wales alone expended for this purpose £20,500,000. Of this sum £1,250,000 have been put into church buildings in London, and almost the same amount in Manchester. The enormous sum of nearly £17,000,000 was given as volunteer offerings, the rest was voted by the government.

Mrs. Ormiston Chant occupies a pulpit in England every alternate Sunday. She has preached in the churches of all denominations with the exception of the church of England and Roman Catholic church. When in America Mrs. Chant preached even in the episcopalian churches; but she stood at the communion table instead of in the pulpit. As a rule her sermons occupy three-quarters of an hour in delivery, but on one or two occasions she has preached for two hours, retaining the whole time the close attention of her congregation.

A special meeting was held in Spurgeon's Tabernacle to take steps to decide upon a permanent pastor. The principal candidates have been Rev. Arthur Pierson, of Philadelphia; Rev. James Spurgeon, brother of the late Charles Spurgeon, and R. v. Thomas Spurgeon, son of the late Charles Spurgeon. The resignation of Rev. James Spurgeon from his temporary pastorate was accepted, and the meeting passed, by a majority of 2,000, a resolution that Rev. Thomas Spurgeon be invited to officiate in the pulpit for one year, with a view toward becoming the permanent pastor of the congregation. Rev. Thomas Spurgeon will begin his duties at once.

The death of Sir George Prevost, a nonagenarian baronet, has hardly been mentioned in the papers. Yet he was a second John Keble, and bore an important, albeit retiring, share in the Tractarian movement, as is well known to the readers of Mozley's "Reminiscences." He was the first arch-deacon appointed by the present Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol—a fact which seemed entirely overlooked when Dr. Ellicott was aoused for his approval of the Lincoln judgment. He had singularly winning manners, and was an inimitable raconteur. He was a great friend of Bishop Wilberforce, a frequenter of that prelate's famous convocation breakfast, and a warm opponent of any alteration of the marriage law or any tampering with the Athanasian creed.

Messages of Help For the Week.

Sunday.—Psalm 55, 14. "We took sweet council together, and walked into the house of God in company."

Monday.—Isaiah 61, 11. "As the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations."

Tuesday.—Isaiah 41, 5. "The isles saw it, and feared; the ends of the earth were afraid, drew near, and came."

Wednesday.—V. 6. "They helped every one his neighbor; and everyone said to his brother, he of good courage."

Thursday.—V. 7. "So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smoothed with the hammer, him that smote the anvil, saying it is ready for the soldering."

Friday.—V. 10. "Fear then not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

Saturday.—V. 17. "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them."

The Color Line in Church.

Rev. Henry R. Sargent, O. H. C., of Westminster, Md., has this to say as regard the colored race in the American church:

"In general no Church or sect is free from the charge of drawing a color line in the sanctuary, but the spectacle of a white priest served by negro acolytes ministering to both races may be seen in various portions of the South, not frequently, it is true, but quite as frequently at the least in American (ultra) Episcopal as in Roman churches. In the city of Baltimore, at a large and beautiful Episcopal church for colored people, white people regularly attend the services, and from time to time receive the blessed Eucharist from "white priests served by negro acolytes," and white and colored Sisters of Mercy work together among the poor of the parish. In the more Southern diocese of the same communion, before and since the war, white priests have ministered to both races. I recall an experience of my own in the diocese of Tennessee, not, I believe, the only one of its kind in the Episcopal Church, where in a mission devoted to the colored people I have at times communicated from the altar, without distinction, those of my own and of the darker race. It may be of further interest to add that the first to raise his voice against slavery in America was a priest of the Episcopal Church in the diocese of Virginia; that the first African church in America was built in the city of Philadelphia through the efforts of a churchman; that Bishop White of that diocese ordained an African to holy orders a century before the ordination of the first colored Roman priest."

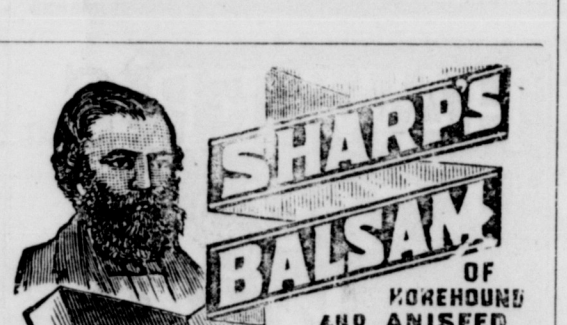
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