

ARTICLE IV.

ST. PATRICK'S PURGATORY, AND THE INFERNO OF DANTE.

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THE theology of the Middle Ages was full of gloom. It had no cheerful views of the future. Ever since prayer to saints took the place of prayer to Christ, and wherever forgiveness for his sake is not taught and believed, "a fearful looking for of judgment," shrouds the grave in black. The sermons of the monks strove to fright men from sin by depicting purgatory and hell; and when the preachers turned poets, "Dies irae" was their noblest strain; when they descended to story-telling, their imagination only reproduced the parable of Lazarus. Two thirds of Dante's dread epic hover above "a sunless sea"; and the more cheerful portion is the insipid part. Long before him, inferior geniuses attempted the like voyage "twixt upper, nether, and surrounding fires." Those who grope farthest in mediaeval night, bring back many fragments resembling the underground world which he described.

In the year 1839, Vassal, of Paris, reprinted in forty-two copies, *fac simile*, a curious relic of those days, called "*Le voyage du saint patrix auquel lieu on voit les peines de purgatoire et aussi les loyes de paradis.*" No authorship was given, nor does the editor appear to have conjectured the origin of what he was restoring to the world of letters. The text copied was printed, "*lyon sur le rosne, mil cinq cens et six.*" The type is Gothic, the orthography quaint, some words obsolete, and the engravings excessively rude. The languid, repetitious manner shows that the narrative is far older than the date of its printing. The rarity of the book appears, from its not being noticed in Mr. Abbot's opulent "*Literature of the Doctrine of a Future Life,*" containing, as

that does, in its chapter on purgatory, nearly two hundred and fifty titles. Haym cites in the fourth volume of his *Biblioteca italiana*, "Viaggio del pozzo di s. Patrizio, nel qual luogo si vede le pene del purgatorio, ed altresì le gioje del paradiso," printed at Milan, "Napoli, ed altrove," about 1530, 8vo. No doubt this is the same legend, in Italian; and in Latin, the "Purgatorium divi Patricii, Memmingen, 1496," is perhaps the same. The phraseology of the little book reprinted by Vassal, may indicate a Latin original; and in the collection of ancient legends, edited by Messingham, and printed in 1624, is this title: "Super purgatorio s. Patricii, de quodam milite nomine Oweyn, qui deductus fuerat per poenas infernales." The author to whom he ascribes it is Henricus Salteriensis. Jöcher's *Allgemeines gelehrten lexikon*, vol. 2, informs us that Henry of Saltrey was an English monk, who lived in the middle of the twelfth century. From other sources we learn that he was born in Huntingdonshire, and flourished about 1150, in the reigns therefore of Stephen, and of Henry II., great grandson of the Conqueror. If we can identify our little French book with his Latin romance, we carry it back at once three hundred and fifty years. The tractatus de purgatorio s. Patricii, by Henricus Salteriensis is included in the *Patrologia Latina* of the abbé Migne, volume 180; and from this we copy as follows:

"Miles quidam Oenus nomine, qui multis annis sub rege Stephano militaverat, licentia a rege impetrata, profectus est in Hiberniam ad natale solum, ut parentes visitaret. Qui cum aliquandiu in regione illa demoratus fuisset, coepit ad mentem reducere vitam suam adeo flagitiosam Cum autem episcopus vellet ei injungere poenitentiam, miles respondit, Ut peccatorum meorum merear remissionem accipere, purgatorium sancti Patricii volo intrare."

The first sentence of Vassal's reprint runs thus:

"Il fut au temps du roy estieñe vng noble cheualier lequel estoit appelle Oben, et estoit natif des parties dalemaigne. Vng iour luy estant en cõtemplation cõsiderant en soy mesme que en cestuy monde ne sont q̄ toutes miserabletez, se mist en couraige daller visiter le puy saint patrix, auquel sont veuez les peines de purgatoire et aussi les ioyes de paradis."

These sentences, it will be perceived, have such a resemblance, and such differences, as the paraphrastic translators of early times were accustomed to produce in transferring from one language to another. The resemblance will grow much more distinct in comparing the parallel passages below. We propose to copy, in corresponding columns, from the Latin of Henry of Saltrey, as given by Migne, from the French, reprinted by Vassal, and from Roger of Wendover, who copied part of Henry's narrative in his own *Flores historiarum*, as translated by J. A. Giles, London, 1849.

*Henricus Salteriensis.*¹

42. Miles itaque ... per speluncam audacter licet solus, pergit. Ingravescens magis tenebris, in brevi totam amisit lucem; tandem ex adverso lux parvula coepit per foveam tenuiter lucere; nec mora ad campum praedictum pervenit et anlam; lux autem ibi non apparuit, nisi qualis hic in hyeme post solis occasum habetur.

43. ... Subito circum coepit audiri tumultus, ac si totus commoveretur orbis: et enim si omnes homines et animalia terrae, maris et aeris toto conamine pariter strepuissent, majorem tumultum (ut ei videbatur) non facerent; unde nisi divina virtute protegeretur ... ipso tumultu amentaretur. Et ecce post horribilem sonum sequitur terribilior daemonum visibilis aspectus; coepit

Vassal's Reprint.

Le noble chevalier entra hardiement dedans ceste merueilleuse fosse et espouventable, en faisant le signe de la croix devant soy; et incontinent perdit toute clarte et commença a entrer in obscures tenebres. Et quant il eut vng peu chemine il appercent vng peu de clarte par une petite fenestre. Et chemina droit a icelle ou tãtoest il trouva vng chãp, auquel auoit vng sale, en laquelle nauoit point de clarte sinon ainsi cõme apparoist en yver apres souleil couchant.

... Incontinent vindrent grãs multitude de dyables au tour d'luy q̄ faisoïent grãs crys et grans bruys et si grans tormens quil sembloit parfaitement que toutes les villes, cites, chasteaux, roches, ruieries, et mōtaignes combatissent toutes ensemble, et se le chevalier neust este bien garde de la puissance de dieu, laquelle estoit avec luy incontinent il fust sally hors de son sens. Et puis entrerent en la sale grans nombres de

Giles' Roger of Wendover.

The knight passed courageously along the cave, until he was in total darkness: at last the light broke upon him, and he found himself in the plain where was the hall that he had been told of; the light was no more than the twilight of evening.

He had no sooner wrought up his soul to courage, than a noise was heard around the building, as if all the men in the world, with all the animals and beasts, were making it. And after this noise came a terrible apparition of ugly demons, of which an immense multitude rushed into the hall, and in derision addressed the knight.

¹ Migne, *Patrologiae cursus latinus*. v. 180.

Henricus Salteriensis.

enim undique innumera multitudo daemonum formarum deformium in aulam irruere cachinnando illum salutare. . . .

44. Daemones igitur, a milite se contemni videntes, horribiliter fremebant in eum, et rognm ingentis incendii in aula succenderent, ligatisque manibus et pedibus, militem in ignem projecerunt, unciisque ferreis huc et illuc per incendium clamantes traxerunt.

Vassal's Reprint.

dyables en diverses formes lequels avoiet tres horribles figures et tres horribles fiers regars que nul ne fust quil les vist quil ne saillist hors du sens. Et pröptement vindrent autour du dit cheualier et luy commencerent en leur mocquans et truffans de luy a dire. . . .

Voyant les dyables que le cheualier ne tenoit compte ne de leurs promesses, peines ne tormens incontinent firent saillir au milieu de la sale vne grant flambe de feu, et puis prindrent le cheualier et luy lyerent les pieds et les mains et le getterent au milieu de celluy feu, et le tiroyent a grans crocz de fer düg coste et daultre dudict feu.

Giles' Roger of Wendouear.

The demons, indignant at being treated with contempt, kindled a large fire in the hall, and seizing the knight by his legs and arms, threw him into the midst of it, dragging him with iron hooks backwards and forwards through the fire.

The object of these ministers of hell was to compel the knight to go back to the entrance, and mingle again with men, in sign that his old desire of sinful indulgence was yet alive. But, invoking continually the name of Jesus, he passed through all the scenes of torment into which they led him, maintaining inflexibly his resolution to return no more to sin. Through vast and dreary regions, therefore, populous with forms of pain, they dragged him, — subjecting him everywhere to the agonies he saw, — till the cycle was complete, and the power of faith prevailed.

Henricus Salteriensis.

45. Tandem tractu daemonum, in latissimum et longissimum campum pervenit, miseris ac dolore perplenum cujus fines, prae nimia longitudine non poterant a milite transvideri. Ille autem campus, hominibus utriusque sexus, et aetatis

Vassal's Reprint.

. . . Ilz trouuerent vng autre champ tresgrät treslarge plain de douleurs et de tristesse, et ne pouuoit veoir le cheualier la fin di celluy champ tout estoit long et large, et estoit plain d'hommes et de femmes tous nudz lesquelz estoient de diuers eages, et estoient

Giles' Roger of Wendouear.

. . . At length he was dragged by the demons into a long and wide plain, filled with woe and calamities, and so long that it was impossible to see across it. It was full of persons of both sexes and of every age, naked, and

Henricus Salteriensis.

diversae, nudis et in terra
jacentibus erat plenus, qui
ventribus deorsum versis
clavis ferreis et ignitis per
manus pedesque in terram
usque transfixis misera-
biliter torquebantur. Ali-
quando autem pro doloris
angustia videbantur ter-
ram comedere, clamantes
et ejulantes: Parce, parce,
miserere, miserere, cum
qui parcere aut misereri
nequaquam adesset, dae-
mones vero super miseros
discarrentes durissimis
flagris eos caedebant.

Vassal's Reprint.

couches a terre, et le ventre
contre ladicte terre. Puis
estoitent clanelles a grandes
lances de fer en terre par la
teste, y celles lances estoient
toutes embrasees en feu. Et
pour la grant douleur quilz
enduroyent il semble quilz
mordissent la terre a gros
morceaux, tant ils souffroi-
ent et enduroient grans
peines et trauaulx. Aucuns
essoys en leur remnant
lenoiët le corps vng peu de
terre, et cryoient et brayoi-
ent en disant. Vuillez
auoir mercy de nous et nous
pardonnez nos mesfaits.
Nuls des dyables nauoient
de enlz pitie, mais couroient
et saultoient sur enlz comme
chiens enraiges.

Giles' Roger of Wendover.

lying with their bellies
to the ground, for their
bodies and limbs were
horribly fastened to the
ground with hot nails
of iron driven into the
earth. Sometimes, in
the anguish of their
sufferings, they gnawed
the dust, crying and
lamenting, "Spare us,
oh, spare us; have
mercy, have mercy
upon us!" though
there was no one there
to have mercy or to
spare them. The de-
mons coursed over these
wretched beings, strik-
ing them with heavy
blows as they passed.

In these dolorous regions the knight saw men previously known to himself, enduring every extremity of pain — hung up over fires, sunk in baths of boiling metal, roasted on spits and basted by satanic hands, whirled with intense rapidity on the periphery of a vast, red-hot wheel, hurried away on the blast of freezing winds, and plunged in a stinking stream. The final test of his endurance was the passage of a long, lofty, and narrow bridge, built over the burning lake; and as he essayed the slippery surface, legions of yelling demons rushed about him, confounding him by their shouts, and darting their fiery hooks to drag him from his feet. But the same triumphant faith held him firm, and enlarged the way as he proceeded, till he landed at last in the country of the blest beyond.

A prosaic mind, it is true, seems to have brought together most of these commonplace delineations of pain (could we but assure ourselves what *was* commonplace in the twelfth century); and yet, occasionally, where he summons the powers of nature to his aid, in blasts and floods, the author rises toward the poetic.

Henricus Salteriensis.

52. . . . Vidit flammam
teterrimam, et sulphureo
foetore plenam de puteo
quodam ascendentem, et
homines nudos et quasi
igneos, velut scintillas
ignis in aera sursum com-
pellantem, et flammaram
vi deficiente, iterum in
puteum et flammam re-
labi.

Vassal's Reprint.

La avoit une tres grande
flamme defeu et de souffre
fort puant qui sailloit du
puy denfer. En ceste
flamme sailloient hommes
et femmes comme estincelles
de feu, et resailloient dedans
le puy.

Giles' Roger of Wendover.

. . . A noisome flame,
which arose with a
stinking smell out of
a well, over which were
naked men, apparently
red hot, who were shot
forth into the air, like
sparks, and again, when
the flame subsided, fell
into the pit beneath.

No sentence of scripture seems anywhere to be cited, or alluded to, excepting St. Paul's description of the Christian panoply.

It is impossible to read the passages we have now extracted, and not be reminded of the *Divina Commedia*. The resemblance was pointed out long ago; it is noticed by many commentators on Dante, and specially is it recognized in the *Bibliografia dantesca* of Colomb de Batines. But Henry of Saltrey lived a hundred years earlier than the great Italian; and his striking legend was soon diffused through Christendom, and even translated into various languages of Europe. Bartholomew Cotton, who died about 1300, in his *Historia Anglicana*, under the date 1152, commemorates the adventure of the knight Owen, and inserts some of the very words of Henry of Saltrey. Henry Knighton, in the next century, in words like those of Cotton, says that "a certain knight of this Stephen [king of England], Oweyn by name, entered the purgatory of St. Patrick." Ralph Higden and, as we have seen, Roger of Wendover do the same thing at great length. In his "Descriptive Catalogue of Materials relating to the History of Great Britain and Ireland, to the Reign of Henry VII." (3 vols. 8vo., London, 1862), Thomas Duffus Hardy describes twelve Latin manuscripts (beside those in French) of Henry of Saltrey's legend, existing in various libraries of Europe. Three versions in French were also made at an early date — one by Marie of France, in language now so quaint as to be intelligible only to the antiquary. Vassal's reprint may be modernized from one of these. In the

British Museum, and in the Advocato's Library at Edinburgh, two different antique English versions are preserved. In some of these forms, the legend must have fallen under the eyes of Dante. This does not subtract from the originality of the *Divina Commedia*. It is in the use made of materials which to other men are but refuse or glittering dust, that the creative power of great poets appears.

Cousin, in his Introduction to the History of Philosophy, has said: "None but a rhetorician will insist that the mere scheme of a master-piece must be the work of him who perfects it." In the Essay of Labitte, entitled, "*La divina commedia avant Dante*," and published in the "*Revue des deux mondes*," 1842, we find the question: "How is it that the epic of Dante rises suddenly upon us, in the midst of historic night, *prolem sine matre creatam*? Is it the sole exception in the literature of time? Better than that; it is the grand alliance between creative intellect and intellect enriched with the spoils of the past." In nothing does the great Italian epic of heaven and earth so nearly resemble the English one as in being the storehouse where is garnered up all the learning of the world.

It is, indeed, difficult to identify any one passage in the *Inferno* with any in Henry of Saltrey; and yet, some lines in the fourteenth canto, agree precisely with the first line of page 279, above. But, in general, of course, it is hard to trace the splendor of the poet in the prose of the monk. A general accordance, only, of delineation is to be discovered; but a vague feeling of resemblance continually recurs. It must have often recurred to readers of the extracts already made.

The first access of the knight Owen to the sad region of the lost is made through utter darkness and sounds of immeasurable grief: "*Nigra enim erat terra, et regio tenebrosa, nec quidquam nisi daemones qui cum traxerunt vidit in ea. . . . In latissimum et longissimum campum pervenit, miseriis ac dolore perplonum. . . . Coepit miles quasi vulgi totius terrae miserimos ejulatus et fletus audire, et quo*

majus approximavit clarius fletus audivit." The very thought of this description is engraved above the gate of Dante's hell:

"Through me you pass into the city of woe;
Through me you pass into eternal pain;
Through me among the people lost for aye;

"Into that secret place he led me on.
Here sighs, with lamentations and loud moans,
Resounded through the air pierced by no star."

The torment of cold and fierce winds is repeatedly employed by Henry of Saltrey to image the misery of the lost, notwithstanding its diametrical inconsistency with popular notions, and with his own representations of hell as a place of fire. Let us look at several of these passages, and compare them with similar pictures in the *Inferno*.

Henricus Salteriensis.

Ecce ventus turbinis ab
aquilone veniebat, qui et
ipsos daemones, et cum eis
militem, totumque popu-
lum illum arripuit et in
quoddam flumen fetidum
ac frigidissimum flentes
et miserabiliter ejulantes
projecit; in quo inestima-
bili frigore vexabantur.

... Nudi etiam isti, sicut
et caeteri videbantur, et
vento frigido et urente,
flagrisque daemonum
cruciabantur.

Ventus quidam urens
ibi flavit, qui vix audiri
potuit, sed tamen sua frigiditate
corpus ejus videbatur perforare.

Vasal's Reprint.

Incōtinent se leua vng
vét treshorrible et froit et
fut si fort qui porta toutes
ses gens les dyables et
le cheualier dedans une
riuere tres froyde. Et
quant ilz furent dedans
celluy fleuve les dyables
commencerent a les noyer.

... Dessus eulx couroit
vng vent si tres froit quil
leur penetroit tout le corps.

En ycelle region couroit
vng vent tres impetueux et
si aspre et fort que se tous
les tonnoires et tempestes
du monde eussent assemblez
ilz neussent pas fait si grāt
bruyt.

Giles' Roger of Wendover.

Suddenly a violent
whirlwind from the
north swept them away
and the knight with
them, and carried them,
weeping and lament-
ing, into a cold and
stinking river. . . .

Dante, in like manner, repeatedly exhibits to us the lost as the sport of furious winds, tossing the wretched souls in everlasting rage.

“ The stormy blast of hell
With restless fury drives the spirits on,
Whirled round and dashed amain with sore annoy.”

Inferno, canto v. 32.

.... “As, in large troops
And multitudinous, when winter reigns,
The starlings on their wings are borne abroad ;
So bears the tyrannous gust those evil souls.
On this side and on that, above, below,
It drives them. Hope of rest to solace them
Is none, nor e'en of milder pang.”

Inferno, canto v. 39-46.

The torment of cold is exhibited near the end of the Inferno :

“ Blue, pinched, and shrined in ice the spirits stood,
Moving their teeth in shrill note, like the stork.
His face each downward held ; their mouth the cold,
Their eyes expressed the dolor of their heart.”

Inferno, canto xxxii. 34-37.

Harsh and gross as are most of the agents employed in both to produce the agonies of hell (consisting, for the most part, only in physical pain), a more refined idea enters into some of these passages, where weariness and despair result from the long-continued sameness of the infliction. Dante has expressed it in the words quoted above, and Henry of Saltrey in those which follow :

“ *Traxerunt illum versus fines eos, ubi sol oritur in media aestate ; cumque illuc venissent tanquam in finem mundi, coeperunt dextrorsum converti, per vallem latissimum tendere versus illam partem, quo sol oritur media hyeme.*”

But there is one most terrible passage in Henry of Saltrey, — in which the demons are described as transformed into serpents, dragons, and toads, fastening upon the prostrate sinners and tearing their vitals — which it is easy to identify in thought with a dread description and narrative in the Inferno.

“ *Dracones autem ignei super quosdam sedentes et quasi comedentes eos, modo miserabili dentibus igneis lacerabant. Aliorum quoque colla, brachia, vel totum corpus, serpentes igniti circumdabant, et capita sua pectoribus miserorum imprimentes, ignitum aculeum oris sui in cordibus eorum infigebant. Bufones etiam mirae magnitudinis, et tanquam ignei, videbantur super quorundam pectora sedere, et rostra sua deformia infi-*

gentes quasi eorum corda conarentur extrahere. Daemones praeterea inter et super eos cursitantes, et flagris asperrimis caedentes, miseros graviter cruciabant."

ROGER OF WENDOVER, TRANSLATED BY GILES.

"Fiery dragons were sitting on some of them, and gnawing them with iron teeth; others were the victims of fiery serpents, which, coiling round their necks, arms, and bodies, fixed iron fangs into their hearts. Toads, also, of immense size and terrific to behold, sat upon the breasts of some, and tried to tear out their hearts with their ugly beaks. Demons, also, coursed along over them, lashing them as they passed."

"I saw a crowd within
Of serpents terrible, so strange of shape
And hideous, that remembrance in my veins
Yet shrinks the vital current. Of her sands
Let Lybia vaunt no more;

. . . . plagues so dire
Or in such numbers swarming ne'er she showed.
Amid this dread exuberance of woe
Ran naked spirits, winged with horrid fear,
Nor hope had they of crevice where to hide,
Or heliotrope to charm them out of view.
With serpents were their hands behind them bound,
Which through their veins infix'd the tail and head."

Inferno, canto xxiv. 78-94.

"As I looked, a serpent with six feet
Springs forth on one, and fastens full upon him;
His midmost grasped the belly, a forefoot
Seized on each arm, while deep in either cheek
He fleshed his fangs.

Ivy ne'er clasped
A doddered oak, as round the other's limbs
The hideous monster intertwined his own."

Inferno, canto xxv. 44-58.

The honor of having thus furnished suggestions, or quickened the invention of Dante, and through him of Milton too, may well entitle this forgotten legendary to the notice, if not to the admiration of our times. The fictions of the Middle Ages were the seed-corn of modern literature, ready to germinate in other soils, and bear fruit under better culture. It is only surprising that so striking a legend as ours, should not have blossomed out in later times into

nobler plants than the Italian romance *Guerrino meschino*, and Calderon's drama, *El purgatorio di San Patricio*.

If, now, we regard Henry of Saltrey as the original from which have proceeded a multitude of such representations as these, and especially of those which respect St. Patrick's purgatory, so widely famous, and so fixed and localized in Ireland, it becomes a curious inquiry, on what basis of natural scenery and phenomena the legend first was fastened, and has ever since reposed. The monkish biographers of St. Patrick assert that in order to curb the wild Irish, God revealed to him an entrance to purgatory in a desolate part of their island. Gerald Barry, or, Ap Harry, known as Giraldu Cambrensis, writing before the year 1214, says: "There is a lake in Ulster, containing a double island, one portion of which, occupied by a church, is attractive and agreeable, often visited by angels and saints. The other, rough and dreary, is inhabited by demons alone, and continually frequented by crowds of evil spirits. This latter contains nine pits; in any one of which should a person presume to pass the night (as some rash men have ventured to do) he is instantly seized by the malignant spirits, and all night afflicted by so many and so grievous torments of fire and water, that by morning light, scarce a remnant of his life still animates his miserable body." It was a popular belief that whoever sustained this test and escaped alive, would, for the torments suffered there, be spared the purgatory of the other world. The wild and gloomy scenery of Lough Dearg, in Donegal county, in the northwest of Ireland, "the landscape of desolation," contrasted by all travellers with the loveliness around Lough Erne, immediately near, has led to the belief that this was the spot divinely pointed out to St. Patrick. Pilgrimages to the spot were early instituted, and have continued in every age. "On the patent rolls preserved in the Tower of London, under date 1358, and printed by Rymer in the *Foedera*, (vol. iii. part iv. p. 135) is a testimonial given by King Edward III. to two distinguished foreigners, of their having faithfully performed

this pilgrimage." Froissart testifies that he had heard of a descent into this cavern from one who had performed it. His narrative resembles Henry of Saltrey's. The abuses which attended admission to the purgatory at length drew discredit on the place, and in 1497 the reigning pope, Alexander VI. (of all the popes, that *he* should be a reformer!) sent orders for the closing of the purgatorial cave. So profitable an exhibition, however, could not long be suppressed, and the fame of the miracle spread through Europe again. Two other suppressions, by authority of Charles I. and of Queen Anne, had no more enduring result. Even in recent times it has been "an object of bewildering attraction, and the scene of odious orgies." The ignorant even of our own day resort thither from every part of Ireland and of the continent, in crowds numbering not less than ten thousand, sometimes twenty thousand a year. "The time appropriate to this act of devotion extends from the first of June to the fifteenth of August, and a rich revenue is raised from these squalid fanatics, by those who hire the precincts, and charge for admission, as well as for ferriage" to Station Island. This island consists of less than a single acre, surrounded by a lake whose extent is less than four square miles. The purgatory "itself is a cave or hole, no more than sixteen feet long, by two and a half broad. It is believed that whoever spends a night there has all his sins forgiven. But, as it is impossible for such numbers literally to comply with the requirement, it is common to pass the night in the chapel near. The pilgrims, called 'stationers,' enter 'prison' at seven o'clock in the evening, the men ranging themselves on one side of the edifice, the women on the other. Here they remain without food or sleep for twenty-four hours; but they are allowed to drink water, almost boiling hot, which they regard as 'wine.' During the night they must by no means sleep, on peril of being pricked by their neighbors. The rest of the penance consists in the repetition of prayers, and in perambulations, barefoot or on bare knees, on certain rocky paths, called the beds of saints."¹

¹ Chambers' Book of Days, June 1.