

Hell

OLDHAM, in his “Satires upon the Jesuits,” a work which would admit of a curious commentary, alludes to their “lying legends,” and the innumerable impositions they practised on the credulous. I quote a few lines in which he has collected some of those legendary miracles, which I have noticed in the article LEGENDS, and the amours of the Virgin Mary are detailed in Vol. II. art. *Religious Nouvellettes*.

Tell, how *blessed Virgin* to come down was seen,
Like play-house punk descending in machine,
How she writ *billet-doux* and *love-discourse*,
Made *assignments, visits, and amours*;
How hosts distrest, her *smock* for *banner* wore,
Which vanquished foes!

———how *fish* in conventicles met,
And mackerel were with *bait of doctrine* caught:
How cattle have judicious hearers been!—
How *consecrated hives* with bells were hung,
And *bees* kept mass, and *holy anthems* sung!
How *pigs* to th’ *rosary* kneel’d and *sheep* were taught
To bleat *Te Deum* and *Magnificat*;
How *fly-flap*, of church-censure houses rid
Of insects, which at *curse of fryar* died.
How *ferrying cowls* religious pilgrims bore
O’er waves, without the help of sail or oar;

How *zealous crab*, the *sacred image* bore,
And swam a Catholic to the distant shore.
With shams like these the giddy rout mislead,
Their folly and their superstition feed.

All these are allusions to the extravagant fictions in “the Golden Legend.” Among other gross impositions to deceive the mob, Oldham likewise attacks them for certain publications on topics not less singular. The tales he has recounted, Oldham says, are only baits for children, like toys at a fair; but they have their profounder and higher matters for the learned and the inquisitive. He goes on:

One undertakes by scales of miles to tell
The bounds, dimensions, and extent of HELL;
How many German leagues that realm contains!
How many chaldrons Hell each year expends
In coals for roasting Hugonots and friends!
Another frights the rout with useful stories
Of wild Chimeras, limbo’s PURGATORIES!
Where bloated souls in smoky durance hung,
Like a Westphalia gammon or neat’s tongue,
To be redeem’d with masses and a song.

Satyr IV.

The readers of Oldham, for Oldham must ever have readers among the curious in our poetry, have been

greatly disappointed in the pompous edition of a Captain Thompson, which illustrates none of his allusions. In the above lines Oldham alludes to some singular works.

Treatises and topographical descriptions of HELL, PURGATORY, and even HEAVEN, were once the favourite researches among certain zealous defenders of the Romish church, who exhausted their ink-horns in building up a Hell to their own taste, or for their particular purpose. We have a treatise of Cardinal Bellarmin, a Jesuit, on *Purgatory*; he seems to have the science of a surveyor, among all the secret tracks and the formidable divisions of "the bottomless pit."

Bellarmin informs us that there are beneath the earth four different places, or a profound place divided into four parts. The deepest of these places is *Hell*; it contains all the souls of the damned, where will be also their bodies after the resurrection, and likewise all the demons. The place nearest Hell is *Purgatory*, where souls are purged, or rather where they appease the anger of God by their sufferings. He says that the same fires and the same torments are alike in both these places, the only difference between *Hell* and *Purgatory* consisting in their duration. Next to *Purgatory* is the *limbo* of those *infants* who die without having received the sacrament;

and the fourth place is the *limbo* of the *Fathers*; that is to say, of those *just men* who died before the death of Christ. But since the days of the Redeemer, this last division is empty, like an apartment to be let. A later Catholic theologian, the famous Tillemont, condemns *all the illustrious pagans* to the *eternal torments of Hell!* because they lived before the time of Jesus, and therefore could not be benefited by the redemption! Speaking of young Tiberius, who was compelled to fall on his own sword, Tillemont adds, "Thus by his own hand he ended his miserable life, *to begin another, the misery of which will never end!*" Yet history records nothing bad of this prince. Jortin observes that he added this *reflection* in his later edition, so that the good man as he grew older grew more uncharitable in his religious notions. It is in this manner too that the Benedictine editor of Justin Martyr speaks of the illustrious pagans. This Father, after highly applauding Socrates, and a few more who resembled him, inclines to think that they are not fixed in *Hell*. But the Benedictine editor takes great pains to clear the good father from the shameful imputation of supposing that a *virtuous pagan might be saved* as well as a Benedictine monk! For a curious specimen of this *odium theologicum*, see the "Censure" of the Sorbonne on Marmontel's Belisarius.

The adverse party, who were either philosophers or reformers, received all such information with great suspicion. Anthony Cornellius, a lawyer in the 16th century, wrote a small tract, which was so effectually suppressed, as a monster of atheism, that a copy is now only to be found in the hands of the curious. This author ridiculed the absurd and horrid doctrine of *infant damnation*, and was instantly decried as an atheist, and the printer prosecuted to his ruin! Cælius Secundus Curio, a noble Italian, published a treatise *De Amplitudine beati regni Dei*, to prove that *Heaven* has more inhabitants than *Hell*, or, in his own phrase, that the *elect* are more numerous than the *reprobate*. However we may incline to smile at these works, their design was benevolent. They were the first streaks of the morning light of the Reformation. Even such works assisted mankind to examine more closely, and hold in greater contempt, the extravagant and pernicious doctrines of the domineering papistical church.