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TWENTIETH CENTURY

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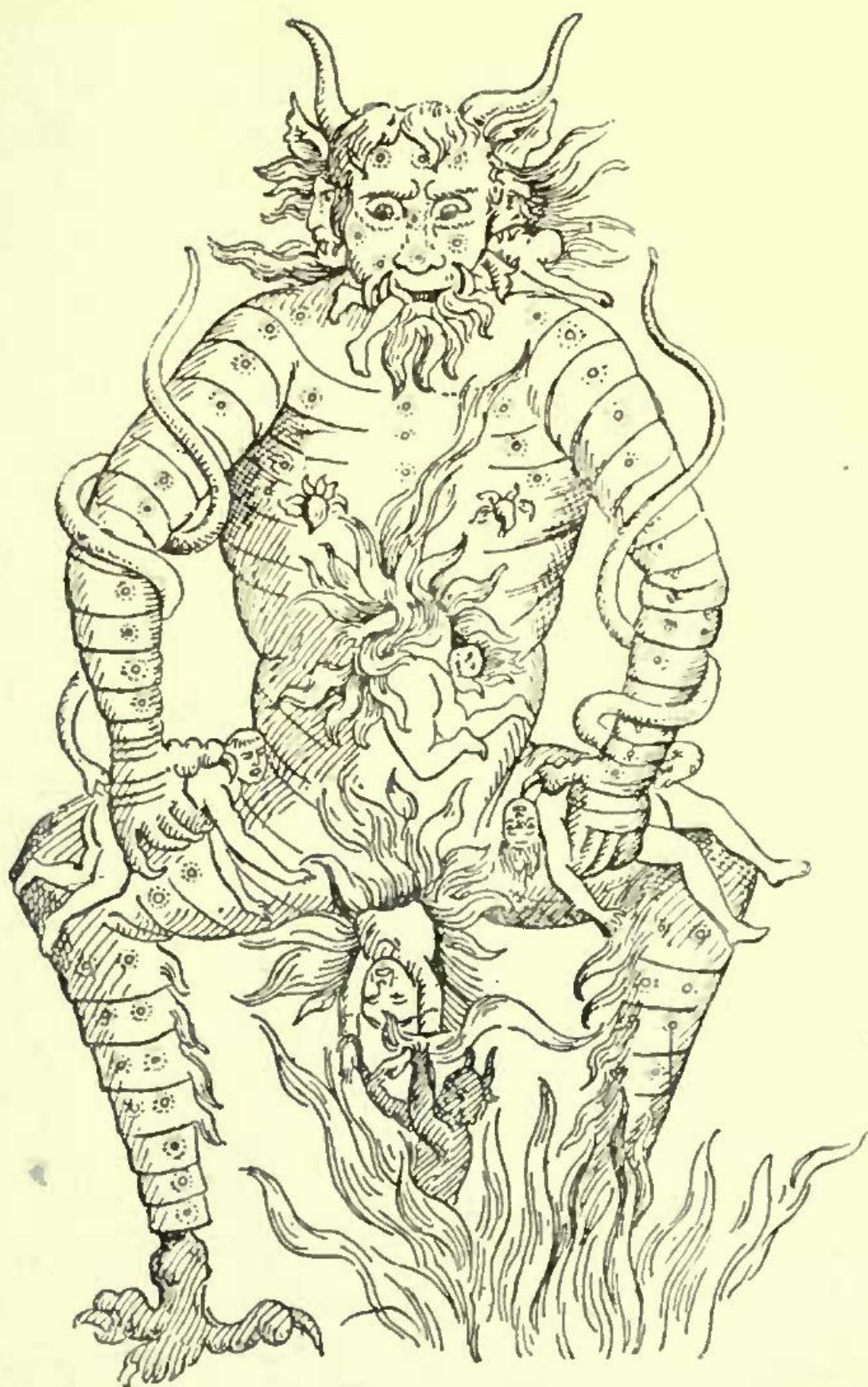
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SATAN, CASED IN ARMOUR, CRUNCHING SINNERS IN
THE GULF OF HELL.

(From Didron's *Christian Iconography*.)

THE
CHRISTIAN HELL

FROM THE FIRST TO THE
TWENTIETH CENTURY

BY
HYPATIA BRADLAUGH BONNER

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PREFACE

“WHAT old woman is so stupid now as to tremble at those tales of hell which were once so firmly believed in?” asked Cicero nearly two thousand years ago. This belief in an afterworld of pain, so scornfully rejected by the pagan philosophers, was made the cornerstone of the new Christian religion, and from the first century of the Christian era to the twentieth it has done more to poison the wells of human happiness than any other evil, real or imaginary, known to mankind.

Many books have been written upon the eschatology of the Christian religion, but the earlier ones were avowedly for the purpose of maintaining the reality of the last judgment and enlarging upon the awful fate which awaited the sinner in hell, while the object of most of the more recent is to deny that reality, and to explain away the terrors. The books which have dealt with this subject from a really critical and historical point of view are few and far between, and have the disadvantage that they are written from the theistic standpoint. In any case they are bulky volumes, more suited to the theological student or the man of leisure than for the information of the general public. Within the narrow limits of the following pages, I have endeavoured briefly to set forth the nature of the teaching of the Christian Churches in English-speaking countries, and, even at the risk of becoming wearisome, I have so far as possible given either the actual words or a brief *résumé* of the words of those whose authority has been accepted, or whose influence has been of weight in some or other of

the various sects which are sheltered under the name of Christianity.

The subject is one which urgently calls for free and open discussion upon serious lines, and should no longer be confined to the jester or to the timid utterances of clerics, who are necessarily hampered by the consciousness that any but the most superficial criticism is bound to undermine the creed which they have made it the business of their lives to disseminate and uphold. A sane and sound morality has everything to gain from the letting-in of a little light upon a doctrine which is, even at this day, cankering the lives of hundreds of thousands of our fellows, men, women, and children—especially the children—in different parts of the world. Where this terrible dogma does not embitter happiness, it corrupts character. Where people believe with a realized belief, their whole lives must be overshadowed with its stupendous horror; where they only pretend to believe, the extent of their hypocrisy can be measured only by their pretence.

The task of preparing this little book has not been a pleasant one, and as it proceeded there have been moments when I have been compelled to lay aside my work—I have felt absolutely overwhelmed and sickened by the interminable repetition of ferocious exultations at the pain and sorrow supposed to await the majority of the human race, the nauseous imaginings, the inhumanity of man to man. I have, however, been encouraged to persevere in my task by the hope that these pages may help some here and there to realize the full and dreadful significance of the Christian hell; and, realizing it, to reject it as a debasing and humiliating survival of an ignorant and superstitious past.

H. B. B.

October 1, 1913.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Decline in Belief—Necessary for the Common People—New Testament Teaching—Fate of Unbelievers—Exclusive Salvation—The Rich Man—Nature of Punishment—Church of England—Farrar—Nonconformists—Salvation Army—Revivals—Missionaries—Roman Catholics—Education.

AMONG scholars and advanced thinkers there exists a comfortable assumption that the idea of the devil and hell has become "a negligible quantity"; that it is not worth bothering about except as a matter of antiquarian research. It is a subject rarely discussed, seldom even named, in polite society; and is considered rather an unseemly topic for the platform or for general conversation. Contrasted with the widespread terrorism of the past, this attitude is, indeed, sufficiently remarkable, and if we looked no further we might be led to believe that the days of hell as a priestly incentive to morality have passed away. Unfortunately for morality, this sanguine view is very far from representing the real state of affairs.

It is true that during the last half century, among certain classes of the community in England and other progressive countries, there has been a notable decline in the belief in hell as a place of punishment for evildoers. Up to fifty years ago the Bible was regularly read in nearly all middle-class families in England and Scotland. It was read day by day, chapter by chapter, from Genesis to Revelation; and