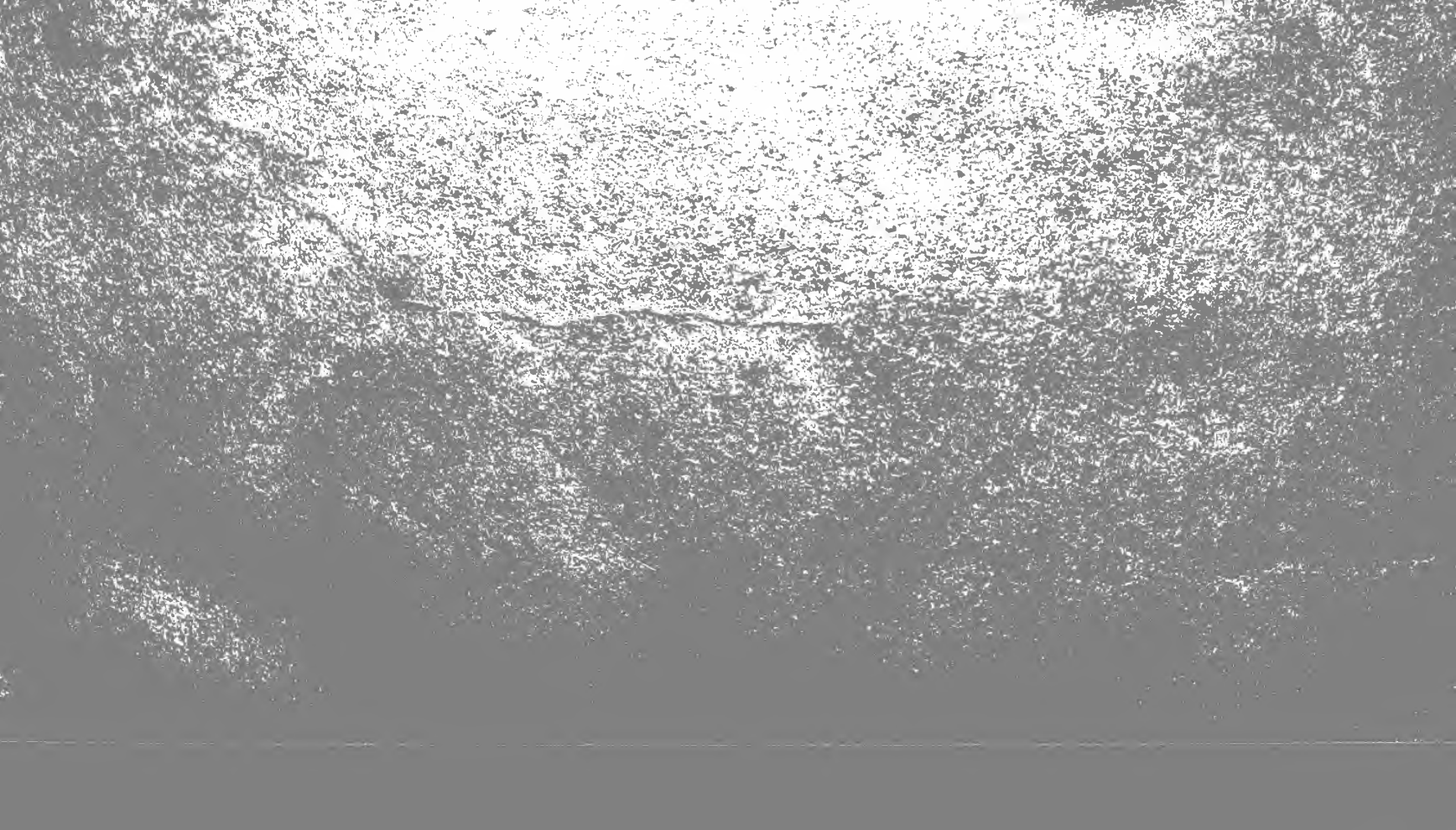

THE BRITISH ACADEMY

SIXTH ANNUAL LECTURE ON A MASTER-MIND

HENRIETTE HERTZ TRUST

Dante

By

Professor Edmund G. Gardner

[*From the Proceedings of the British Academy, Vol. X*]

London

Published for the British Academy

By Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press

Amen Corner, E.C.

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By Professor EDMUND G. GARDNER

Read May 3, 1921

L' Italia cerca in lui il segreto della sua Nazionalità ; l' Europa, il segreto dell' Italia e una profezia del pensiero moderno.—Mazzini.

Benedetto Croce, at the beginning of his recent volume, *La poesia di Dante*, asks the pertinent question: 'Is there any reason for which the poetry of Dante should be read and judged with a different method from that applied to every other poetry?' The answer that he gives amounts to a qualified negative; but it is obvious that, when speaking of Dante as one of those master-minds whose grasp has embraced the civilization of an entire epoch, whose intuition not only interprets what is of permanent significance in its own past and present, but seems, as far as may be, to reach out to the future, we are called upon to consider his work from a more comprehensive standpoint than that of aesthetics. In so doing, we do not forget that it is as poet, as supreme poet at least of the Latin races if not of the whole modern world, that Dante 'beacons from the abode where the Eternal are', and can never, in his own phrase,

perder vita tra coloro
che questo tempo chiameranno antico.

It is, indeed, a testimony to the power of inspiration, the irresistible vocation of poetry, that she could claim as her own, and compel to utterance in her medium, the ripest scholar and the deepest political thinker of his age, 'theologus Dantes nullius dogmatis expers', a man of action as well as of contemplation. The *Divina Commedia*—

il poema sacro
al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra—

came from the mind that had traversed every field of knowledge and of experience accessible to one who was born 'de li cristiani del terzodecimo centinaio'.[1]

And, to these 'cristiani del terzodecimo centinaio', the century had been one of spiritual adventure as well as literary development. In its first years, from among the mountains of Calabria, had rung out

[1] *Vita Nuova* xxix.

the prophecy of Joachim of Flora, announcing the advent of the third epoch, the epoch of the Holy Ghost, the kingdom of love in which men would live according to the spirit in the dispensation of the Everlasting Gospel. Swiftly upon this had followed the rise of St. Francis, as a mystical sun from Assisi, his espousals with Lady Poverty, the mystery of La Verna. Simultaneously, in the intellectual sphere, had come the recovery for western Europe of the works of Aristotle, opening men's minds to new possibilities of scientific attainment, giving them a fresh and less imperfect method, supplying reason with an armoury of new weapons for defence, should need arise, against the oppression of tradition and authority. The great schoolmen, Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, had seized upon this method and these weapons for the cause of orthodoxy, and had restated and systematized the philosophy and theology of the Church in a synthesis which, in appearance at least, had harmonized reason and revelation by assigning to each its own respective field. The secular struggle between Papacy and Empire had left both powers weakened, sunk far below the ideal heights to which an Innocent III or a Frederick II had lifted them, both alike to be soon confronted with the new claims of nationality, then mainly represented in the Latin world by France; while the Latin continuity, that key to the civilization of Italy throughout the centuries, was kept unbroken in the peninsula in the life of the Italian cities, in the study of Roman law, in the educative work of grammarians and rhetoricians—those masters of the *ars dictandi* whose influence upon Dante has not yet been fully examined. Rome herself—*Latiale caput* as Dante, echoing Lucan, calls her—still held her unique sway over heart and imagination, and not alone to the poet were 'the stones that are fixed in her walls worthy of reverence, and soil where she sits more worthy than can be preached and proved by men'.[1] Those children of Rome in the linguistic sphere, the romance or Neo-Latin tongues which are the continuation and development of her speech, were becoming aware (to adopt a phrase of Croce's) of their own power. The prose and poetry of France, the lyrics of the Provençal troubadours, had been followed by the development of a vernacular literature in Italy herself: the lyrics of the *Scuola siciliana* dealing exclusively with love, those of its Tuscan successors extending the subject-matter to political and ethical themes as well, those of the *dolce stil nuovo* wedding the sentiment and experience of love with the new scholastic philosophy; the impassioned mystical *laude* of Umbria, the fierce factional *serventesi* of Romagna, the didactic poems of Lombardy. More slowly and tentatively,

[1] *Convivio* iv. 5. Cf. *Epistola* viii. 10.

Italian literary prose had come into being when the masters of the *ars dictandi* had turned, from setting models for elegant composition in Latin, to show how similar methods might be applied to the vernacular. Nor is it, perhaps, without significance that the earliest translation into Italian that, apart from rhetorical examples for letters and discourses, has come down to us from the thirteenth century, should be the story of the foundation of Rome and in the dialect of the Eternal City itself.

It is to the last year of that century—the year in which he himself shared for two months in the chief magistracy of the Florentine commune—that Dante, in later life, assigned the vision that, in the literal sense, was to be the subject of the *Divina Commedia*.

Dante's earliest works—the *Vita Nuova* and the greater part of his lyrics composed before his exile—belong, not only chronologically but spiritually, to the thirteenth century. The imagery and motives of the Provençal troubadours, or of his own Italian predecessors, are rehandled and given a more mystical colouring; there is nothing essentially new; but these traditions and this phraseology are employed to depict—or, at times, veil—a true personal experience of love, even as the Christian mystics, like Augustine and Bernard, had adopted the psychological terminology of the Neo-Platonists to interpret their own experience of eternity. There are regions of romantic feeling and romantic experience for which the Middle Ages had evolved the corresponding artistic utterance, and the lyrics which enshrine the mystical passion of Dante for Beatrice give technical perfection to the forms in which they had already found expression. Incidentally, in the comparatively rudimentary and tentative prose of the *Vita Nuova*, we perceive Dante already interested in questions some of which he will treat more fully later: the development of vernacular poetry, its legitimate sphere and relation with classical verse, the extent to which the use of figures and rhetorical colour is lawful without impairing the sincerity of the work.

Already in the *Vita Nuova*, in the hint of 'una mirabile visione', and in the promise with which the book closes, to write of Beatrice 'quello che mai non fue detto d'alcuna', we recognize the germ—if not the first design—of the *Divina Commedia*. But there is as yet no anticipation that the work, thus vaguely foreshadowed, would be linked with the destinies of man and bear the weight, with lyrical freedom, of all the knowledge of the age. It is in the early years of his exile, wandering 'per le parti quasi tutte, alle quali questa lingua si stende, peregrino, quasi mendicando',[1] that we first find Dante

[1] *Convivio* i. 3.

conscious of a mission. This is expressed in allegorical fashion in a canzone: *Tre donne intorno al cor mi son venute.* And its imagery is noteworthy. For Dante, the turning-point in history was the alleged donation by Constantine of imperial prerogatives and territorial possessions to the Church, the initial cause alike of the disunion of civilization and the failure of Christianity to lead the world to its Founder. The supremely significant incident in the Middle Ages was, therefore, the mission of St. Francis and his marriage with Lady Poverty, as the attempted return to the primitive ideal of religion that Christ had left—although, in the poet's eyes, the Franciscan movement itself had proved but a passing episode.[1] So the canzone is based on the Franciscan legend, on the story of how Lady Poverty came to meet Francis as he journeyed on foot to Siena. But to Dante, instead of Poverty, comes Justice—she, too, with her spiritual offspring, cast out by men—that the poet, hearing the mystical promise of the triumph of righteousness and finding such high companionship in seeming misfortune, may declare:

L'esilio, che m'è dato, onor mi tegno.

Thus, even as Francis had been the bridegroom of Poverty, Dante becomes the preacher of Justice: *vir praedicans iustitiam* (as he was to call himself in the famous letter refusing to return to Florence under dishonourable conditions); a man who has the charge laid upon him, as he says in the *De Monarchia*, of keeping vigil for the good of the world.[2] And in the *De Monarchia* itself, at the beginning of the second book, we have indicated yet another shaping force upon Dante's spirit: a conception, represented there as a kind of political conversion, of the meaning of Roman history, of the part played by Rome and her Empire in the providential design for the promulgation of law and the unity of civilization; a conviction that Rome represented for the commonwealth of the human race that justice of which he, the poet, was the individual proclaimer. It can be deduced from the *Convivio* that this realization had come to him at an early date in his career.

To the earlier years of his exile belong Dante's two unfinished prose works: the *Convivio* and the *De Vulgari Eloquentia.* The former—in the shape of a commentary upon his own canzoni—is, under one aspect, a vernacular encyclopaedia; but distinguished from all other mediaeval works of the kind by its form, its artistic beauty, its personal note. In part a popularization of the christianized Aristo-

[1] *Paradiso* xi. 55-75, xii. 112-26.

[2] 'Ut utiliter mundo pervigilem' (*De Monarchia* i. 1).

telianism of 'Alberto della Magna' and 'il buono fra Tommaso d'Aquino', it holds a unique place in the development of Italian prose, of the potentialities of which, as a literary medium no less efficient than Latin, Dante professes himself the exponent. It is, he declares, by its prose, rather than by its poetry, that the capacity and beauty of a language must be tested.[1] The *Convivio* is full of passages of true beauty and insight, though at times obscured by excessive allegorization. Dante has made the discovery that man may love and pursue an intellectual ideal with a devotion similar to that which he offers to an adored woman. We have consequently the mystical conception of love as the yearning of the human soul to fortify its own being by union with God, or with what in nature appears a revelation of the divine perfection, and the personification of philosophy whose body is wisdom and whose soul is love. This aids us to understand how, in the *Divina Commedia*, what might well be arid scholastic disquisitions so often become great poetry; the interpretation of such themes is lyrical with Dante, because he can identify himself with them by approaching them in the spirit of a lover.

The *De Vulgari Eloquentia* is more original. If its opening chapters, in which, as Rajna observes, Dante appears as 'il primo storico cosciente del linguaggio', do not pass beyond the normal mediaeval circle of ideas, we are soon transported into a region where only occasional traces of specifically mediaeval thought remain. The Italy, throughout which he is seeking (in Mazzini's famous phrase) 'to create a form worthy of representing the national idea', is the Italy of to-day, and his examination and classification of the Italian dialects is an attempt so modern that it has only been fully accomplished in our own time by Graziadio Ascoli, that greatest of romance philologists whose native city of Gorizia is now happily redeemed for its motherland, and his more recent followers. Casini acutely observed that we owe to Dante the discovery that 'language is the symbol and character of nationality'. Like Aeneas, *Italiam quaero patriam.* Dante finds the symbol of the nation in her language, with all its then but partially realized possibilities of utterance for uplifting hearts and minds, and already he declares that, although their court in the body is scattered, the Italians 'have been united by the gracious light of reason'.[2] I will only add that the unfinished second book, with its lucid analysis of the art of the canzone, the highest form of Italian lyrical poetry, remains a masterpiece of intuitive criticism, indispensable still—not only for what it suggests, but also for its contents—to every student of early Italian poetry.

[1] *Convivio* i. 10.

[2] *De Vulgari Eloquentia* i. 18.

We know how this epoch in Dante's life was cut short by the Italian enterprise of Henry of Luxemburg. It has been well said (by Zingarelli) of Dante: 'Egli, morto per Firenze, è risorto cittadino d' Italia'. The great Latin letter to the Princes and Peoples of Italy reveals a keen sense of this Italian citizenship, and is a landmark in the evolution of the national idea in Italy. Rulers and subjects are addressed as members of one body, the advent of the potential deliverer from oppression and anarchy is announced to Italy as a whole; the writer's Italian nationality comes before his Florentine origin, when he subscribes himself: 'humilis italus Dantes Alagherii florentinus et exul immeritus'.

The question as to when the three parts of the *Divina Commedia* were composed has hardly yet been definitely solved by Italian scholars. We gather from his first Eclogue—that genial and delightful poem in which Dante revived the bucolic muse of Virgil and inaugurated the Latin pastorals of the Renaissance—that the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* had already been completed, and in some sort made public, and the *Paradiso* was still in preparation some two or three years before his death. It may be taken for granted that, even if the composition was spread over various periods in his life, or if the second and third canticles were written at definable earlier epochs, the work took ultimate shape, and was crowned by the third canticle, after the failure and death of Henry of Luxemburg had shattered the poet's hopes of an immediate renovation of Italy and his own return to Florence.[1] The *Divina Commedia* is the record of a life's experience, in which the various threads that we trace in his other works are ultimately woven together, and lifted to a higher sphere. It combines the fulfilment of the promise that Dante had made of old, to say of Beatrice 'what has never been said of any woman', with the fulfilment of the charge which he conceives laid upon him, of 'keeping vigil for the good of the world'.

Benedetto Croce has observed that the *Poeta-Vate* is a poet of a special character: one who, 'animated by a strong ethical spirit, proposes to his fellow-citizens, to his fellow-countrymen, or to men in general, a direction to follow in life. His poetry, then, is the objective rendering of a desire of moral force, whether for conservation or for revolution'. Such poets, he says, give expression to the aspiration of an epoch or

[1] For a masterly presentment of the view that an earlier date must be assigned to the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, the reader is referred to the two studies of E. G. Parodi, *La data della composizione e le teorie politiche dell' 'Inferno' e del 'Purgatorio'*, republished in his *Poesia e storia nella 'Divina Commedia'* (Naples, 1921).

of a people, and he notices how certain Italian poets, Alfieri and Carducci, who stand consciously in a symbolical relation to their age, claim this title for themselves. But Dante, while perfectly fulfilling Croce's definition of the *Poeta-Vate*, to our minds represents something more; something more nearly akin to the Old Testament idea of a prophet. The development of the prophetic element in Dante's works can be traced from the canzone of the *Tre donne* through the political letters to the *Divina Commedia*. He has grasped the special weapon of the Hebrew prophets: the conviction of the retributive justice of God. He is consciously renewing for the Rome of the new dispensation and for Christendom the moral and religious lessons, the terrible warnings, the Messianic and national hope that the Prophets had uttered for Jerusalem of old. From the beginning to the end of the *Divina Commedia* he makes their language his own. A comparison with Ariosto is possible. The first and last lines of the *Orlando Furioso* are modifications of lines in the *Divina Commedia*, which likewise echo the opening and concluding lines of the *Aeneid*. Dante knew and loved Virgil better than did Ariosto, and followed more closely in his footsteps; but the starting-point of the *Inferno*,

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita,

is from Isaiah; the final image of the *Paradiso*, symbolizing the assimilation of the powers of the soul with the Divine Will,

sì come rota ch'egualmente è mossa,

has its ultimate source in the wheels of the divine chariot in Ezekiel's vision of the four living creatures.

But Dante is the successor, not only of the Hebrew prophets, but of the Latin poets as well. The *Divina Commedia* is at once the prophetic book of the Middle Ages and the first poem of modern times to claim equality with the masterpieces of classical antiquity. If, in the *Paradiso*, Dante can apply to himself the words of the Lord to Jeremiah,[1] he has already, in the *Inferno*, found himself bidden to be one of the band of classical poets:

E più d'onore ancora assai mi fenno,
ch'esser mi fecer della loro schiera,
sì ch'io fui sesto tra cotanto senno.[2]

Nowhere does the debt of the mediaeval and modern world to the literature, the law, the civilization of ancient Rome find nobler expression than in the *Divina Commedia*. And the imagery of her poets—Virgil and Lucan in particular—often becomes a thing of more subtle beauty and significance in Dante's hands. Their

[1] Cf. especially *Paradiso* xxvii.

[2] *Inferno* iv. 100–2.

influence, more notably that of Virgil, is all-pervading, mingling even with the impassioned mysticism of Bernard's prayer to the Blessed Virgin:

> Ed io, che mai per mio veder non arsi
> più ch' io fo per lo suo, tutti i miei prieghi
> ti porgo, e priego che non sieno scarsi,
> perchè tu ogni nube gli disleghi
> di sua mortalità coi prieghi tuoi,
> sì che il sommo piacer gli si dispieghi;[1]

and heard in the words with which Dante expresses his supreme experience of Eternity beyond space and time:

> Qual è colui che somniando vede,
> che dopo il sogno la passione impressa
> rimane, e l' altro alla mente non riede;
> cotal son io; chè quasi tutta cessa
> mia visione, ed ancor mi distilla
> nel core il dolce che nacque da essa.
> Così la neve al sol si disigilla,
> così al vento nelle foglie lievi
> si perdea la sentenza di Sibilla.[2]

Further, the successor of the Hebrew prophets and the Latin poets is the interpreter of the great thinkers of the ages that followed the decay of classical Rome. The theologians and the mystics—Augustine with his philosophy of history, Dionysius with his Neo-Platonic raptures, Boethius with his philosophic ardour and devotion, Richard of St. Victor and Bonaventura with their minute investigation of the steps taken by the soul in her spiritual ascent, Albertus and Aquinas with their vast synthesis of human thought in the terms of the Aristotelian wisdom—have all contributed *vital nutrimento* to the sacred poem. The new christianized Aristotelianism, that great philosophical achievement of the thirteenth century, receives its apotheosis in those cantos of the *Paradiso*, where Dante—with a certain triumphant intonation—cites the *Metaphysics* of the Stagirite as Reason's argument for the existence of God as first Mover, as Supreme Good and therefore supreme object of Love.[3] In wedding the thought and aspirations of centuries to the music of the *Divina Commedia*, the poet treats what he thus receives as an independent thinker, interpreting its abiding significance in the light of his own personal experience, bearing in mind that 'the whole as well as the part was conceived, not for speculation, but with a practical object'.[4]

[1] Cf. *Aeneid* ii. 604–6.
[2] Cf. *Aeneid* iii. 441–52.
[3] *Paradiso* xxiv. 130–2, xxvi. 37–9. Cf. xxviii. 41–2.
[4] 'Non ad speculandum, sed ad opus inventum est totum et pars' (*Epistola* x. 16). I quote Dr. Paget Toynbee's text and translation (*Dantis Alagherii Epistolae*, Oxford, 1920).

It is inevitable that, in Dante's figuration of the classical world by the reconstruction of classical character, there should be traces of mediaeval anachronism, but there is immeasurably less of this pure mediaevalism than we should have anticipated from a man of his century. His profound and loving study of the Latin poets, his unique power of spiritual intuition, lifted him in this respect incomparably above all his predecessors and contemporaries. A notable example is his attitude towards Virgil and Virgil's poetry. We cannot regard his conception of the fourth Eclogue as a sheer anachronism, for—apart from the traditional interpretation dating from the fourth century—it is probable that the poem has a real, if indirect, connexion with the prophecies of Isaiah. Comparetti was, I think, assuredly right in urging that Dante entirely ignored the mediaeval legends, and that there is not the slightest trace of Virgil the magician in the Virgil of the *Divina Commedia*, who is a character constructed in the main from a prolonged and devoted study of his poetry. There is little that is purely mediaeval in Dante's representation of Virgil: a thoroughly human and perfectly realized personality; ineffably tender, courteous, and sensitive; a hater of all that is evil or unworthy; so oblivious of self in his devotion to his disciple's welfare that only on rare occasions does he give utterance to his own 'immortal longings', the infinite unrealizable yearning of those who 'without hope live in desire'.

As a rule, Dante reconstructs classical characters from the pages of the Latin poets. In some cases the result is little more than a transcript. Capaneus, lying prone on the burning plain of the violent against God, Curio, appearing among the sowers of scandal and schism, come directly from Statius and Lucan respectively. In the striking instance of Brutus, Dante shows his complete freedom in conception of character, in ethical judgement, when his sources are in conflict with his own convictions: freedom, not in his treatment of what he regarded as historical facts, but in what seemed to him their moral or political significance. Further, Dante inevitably approached his task in the spirit in which Albertus and Aquinas had turned to the interpretation of Aristotle, and the result is at times somewhat similar to that christianizing of Aristotle which those great schoolmen had effected. The two chief examples of this are Cato and Statius in the *Purgatorio*. The one is exalted from the *Pharsalia* into a type of something greater than he represented on earth, a higher conception of virtue than that of the Stoics, a truer liberty because spiritual instead of political; the other is depicted as a secret convert to Christianity, through the adaptation of an early mediaeval

legend (referring to another person) in the *Acta Sanctorum* to the poet of the *Thebaid*, in the light of the magnificent passage in its twelfth book—even as poetry standing alone in Statius—describing the *ara clementiae*, the 'altar of mercy', with phraseology strikingly in accordance with the language of the Gospels and the address of St. Paul to the Athenians. In a third case, poetically the most splendid of all, the story of Ulysses and his last voyage, where we can only in part trace his sources, Dante has—perhaps with greater freedom than elsewhere—brought his own imagination and invention into play, evolving a situation in accordance with his own philosophy of life. Ulysses, eager for experience and conceiving nobly of man's destiny, perishing on the shore of the purgatorial mountain on the summit of which is the Earthly Paradise, is for Dante the type of the pagan world; like the Platonists, in the *Confessions* of Augustine, who saw only the goal of vision, without knowing 'the way which leadeth, not to behold only, but to dwell in the beatific country'.

Dante's unfailing touch upon the unchanging factors of human character and drama, his revelation of the passions and motives of the men and women of his own day, have given us a unique interpretation of contemporary history. There are naturally many figures and episodes for which he drew from immediate and personal knowledge, but there are others in which we can only vaguely surmise what direct sources of information the poet may have possessed, over and above the often scanty records that have come down to us. We may draw analogy from Shakespeare. In Plutarch's account of the death of Cleopatra there is naturally nothing from the moment when the Queen has the doors closed upon her and the two women to that when Octavian's messengers break in and find her dead upon her couch of gold; but Shakespeare's creative imagination penetrated those closed doors, and gave us one of the most wonderful and moving scenes in literature. In like manner, Dante passes into the room at Rimini where Gianciotto Malatesta slew Paolo and Francesca, into the secret chamber where Pope Boniface took council with Guido da Montefeltro, into the locked-up dungeon tower of Count Ugolino and his sons, or reveals for us the mystery of the death of Buonconte and the last moments of Manfredi.

There are times when we can trace the construction of some of Dante's more dramatic episodes, and conjecture of what slight hints they may be the elaboration and interpretation. In his notable essay, *Il soggettivismo di Dante*, Egidio Gorra urged that the poet regarded history, tradition, popular sentiment, as having rights which he respected or, at least, seldom intentionally opposed; but he

reserved to himself the right of examining, shifting, and selecting, in accordance with his own feelings, his poetic instinct and aesthetic purpose. Recent research tends to show that Dante, with his supreme creative imagination, in general refrained from invention. He preferred to adapt to his purpose the records and legends that reached him, whether already written, or celebrated in the songs of the *giullari*, or passing on the lips of the people,—contenting himself with interpreting them in the light of his knowledge of the human heart, and illuminating them with his own characteristic dramatic touches. The damnation of Pope Celestine, as a dread possibility should he not accomplish his high mission, had been already indicated by Jacopone da Todi; Dante's instant recognition of the shade of him 'che fece per viltà lo gran rifiuto', whom he had never seen in life, is a satirical comment upon one of the miracles attributed to the hermit-pope after his renunciation. There is evidence, as Novati showed, that the repentance and salvation of Manfredi, when he fell at Benevento, had already become a tradition. Let me take two of the most famous episodes of the *Inferno*. Documents for the life of Guido da Montefeltro are copious, and chronicles—before the *Divina Commedia*—had dealt with his career; the words of evil counsel were already attributed to him. We may surmise that the Pope's summons to the old soldier turned friar is a historical fact. The interview would have been secret, but the surrender and destruction of Palestrina that followed would have thrown sinister light upon it, the whole story becoming summed up in the *lunga promessa con l'attender corto*, 'ample promise with scant fulfilment', placed upon Guido's lips. In this form it would have reached Dante, who expanded it, in accordance with the conception that he held of the character of Boniface, into the amazing dramatic scene of seduction, hardly rivalled elsewhere in the *Divina Commedia* itself. On the other hand, there is no trace of any previous legend or tradition concerning Francesca da Rimini. A few isolated documents incidentally naming the three chief actors in the drama are all we find before the poem, and these documents merely enable us to infer that, after a certain year, Paolo disappears from view and, by another year, Gianciotto has another wife. That Francesca and Paolo were lovers, and met their death at Gianciotto's hands, is simply deduced from Dante's lines. The wonderful passage, that closes the story, reveals with poetic insight the secret that lay hidden in the grave with the two protagonists. Nevertheless, as Torraca first suggested, Dante did not rely upon imagination alone, but turned to the legend of Tristram, to the scene on the ship that is bringing him and Iseult to Cornwall from Ireland,

substituting the reading of the romance of Lancelot by Paolo and Francesca for the playing of chess by Tristram and Iseult, the fatal kiss for the drinking of the magic potion. It is the interpretation of contemporary history with the aid of mediaeval romance. Such considerations do not detract from Dante's originality, but show him a more complete interpreter of the spirit of his age.

The power of Dante's characterization is more generally felt in the great episodes of the *Inferno* and in the tender humanity of the *Purgatorio*, for in the *Paradiso* the personalities of the souls in bliss are somewhat subdued to the universal background of light and love. But Piccarda Donati and St. Bernard, at least, are perfectly realized human characters; and it is noteworthy how admirably Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventura are individualized in the fourth heaven. Aquinas throughout is the great university professor of the thirteenth century, even in Paradise speaking in the tone of the master to the pupil in his class; Bonaventura is far more aloof from the poet, whom he does not address directly, and delivers himself in a different style, in the manner of the head of a religious order rather than a lecturer.

For the rest, the *Paradiso*, in its highest flights, brings us to a problem which is not purely one of poetry in the light of the claim made by Dante himself in the letter to Can Grande; the claim, profoundly impressive in its reticence, that the final cantos at least are the attempted expression of one of those experiences, common to the mystics of all creeds, to the psychology of which so much attention has been directed in our own day, in which the mind seems brought into contact, here and now, with what it believes to be the ultimate reality, and to attain fruition of what it takes to be God. If we are believers in mysticism, there need be no difficulty in reconciling this claim with the obvious fact that much of the form, in which what would be the preparation for this experience is set forth, is to modern notions unthinkable except as a poetic fiction. Dante's realization of the evil of sin finds expression in an *Inferno* which is not only mediaeval, but employs the machinery of classical mythology; his yearning for the soul's purification is represented by a *Purgatorio* which, although absolutely original in conception, is materialized into an impossible region on earth; his sense of passing spiritually upwards, through successive stages of ever-increasing knowledge and ever-increasing love, is symbolized by the passage through nine moving spheres of the *Paradiso* according to an obsolete cosmography. But this inevitable appeal to the comprehension of his contemporaries, this representation in accordance with mediaeval conceptions and mediaeval ideas of the universe, no more invalidates the claim that

a true mystical experience inspired the *Divina Commedia* than the use of troubadour traditions and imagery, the personifications of love and the like, need prevent us from holding firmly that the love story of the *Vita Nuova* had its basis in reality. And for the consummation of the vision, once granted the mystical possibility that Dante postulates, the possibility that there can be one to say truthfully of himself:

> Io, che al divino dall'umano,
> all'eterno dal tempo era venuto;

that a soul can so transcend human limitations as to see, contained within the depth of the eternal light,

> legato con amore in un volume,
> ciò che per l'universo si squaderna;

once granted this, it is hard to conceive how human language could approach more nearly to the adequate utterance of such an experience than in certain passages of the closing cantos of the *Paradiso*.

It is needless to repeat the famous passage in the *De Monarchia* concerning the two ends that Divine Providence has set before man: blessedness of this life, which consists in the exercise of his natural powers; blessedness of eternal life, which consists in the fruition of the sight of God. This dual scheme, the two ends and the two corresponding guides, is transferred in the *Divina Commedia* from the sphere of Church and Empire to the field of the individual soul. The *De Monarchia*, whenever written, is the supplement to the *Divina Commedia*. We know Augustine's distinction of the two cities: 'the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly, which in this intermediate age are, as it were, enwound and intermingled with each other'. The earthly city is of higher significance for Dante than it was for Augustine, and its attainment is the function proper to humanity as a whole, the function 'for which the totality of men is ordained in so great multitude', the goal of human civilization. And this goal is the realizing or actualizing, the bringing into play, of the whole potentiality of the human intellect. This is the proper work of the human race, and, for it to be realized, the first requisite is universal peace, 'the best of all those things which are ordained for our blessedness', and the second is freedom, 'the greatest gift conferred by God on human nature'.[1] We know how constantly the words *libertà* and *pace* are upon Dante's lips in the *Divina Commedia*. 'Libertà va cercando' is the key-note of the *Purgatorio*; 'Tu m'hai di servo tratto a libertate' is the lyrical salutation to Beatrice in the Empyrean, itself the 'vita intera d'amore e di pace'. Liberty and

[1] *De Monarchia* i. 4, i. 12.

peace are perfectly attainable only when the soul has come from time to the eternal, and the whole potentiality of the human mind is realized in the fulfilment of its entire capacity of love and knowledge, when the goals of the two cities become one, in that eternity which is 'the completely simultaneous and perfect possession of unlimited life at a single moment', as the famous definition of Boethius has it. There will be that 'novissimum liberum arbitrium', of which Augustine paradoxically wrote that it will be more potent than the free will first given to man, 'inasmuch as it shall be unable to sin'; there will be that fuller *pax romana*, where the soul shall be

sanza fine, cive
di quella Roma onde Cristo è romano.

But, relatively, here and now, this realization of the potentialities of the human mind, in liberty and in peace, is the goal of the human race; for felicity of this life is in some sort man's right; 'ch'è quello per che l'uomo è nato'.[1]

Now the obstacle that is keeping man from this goal is *cupiditas*; greed of territory and economic advantage. 'Greed is the sole corrupter of judgement and impeder of justice.' 'Inasmuch as the human mind does not rest in the limited possession of land, but ever desires to acquire territory, as we see by experience, discords and wars must needs arise between kingdom and kingdom. These things are the tribulations of cities, and, through the cities, of districts; and, through the districts, of households; and, through the households, of man; and thus felicity is impeded.'[2] Given the mediaeval organization of society, Dante saw no association capable of ensuring peace and liberty except the Empire, and hence that idealistic imperialism of his, sketched in the *Convivio*, worked out and developed in detail in the *De Monarchia*, represented allegorically in many passages of the *Divina Commedia*. The Empire was established 'to abolish these wars and their causes', to 'keep the kings contented within the boundaries of their kingdoms, so that there shall be peace between them'. The Emperor, be he who he may, is but the servant of the commonwealth. He is to devote his powers and energy chiefly to one purpose: 'that, on this threshing-floor of mortality, life may be lived in freedom and in peace'. For this, as the highest judge, he is to represent a permanent court of international justice, a supreme and impartial tribunal of international arbitration, to which the quarrels of princes and peoples must be submitted. Guided by his rule to peace, nations and kingdoms and cities—within this restored

[1] *Convivio* iv. 4.

[2] *De Monarchia* i. 13; *Convivio* iv. 4.

unity of civilization—will freely and peacefully develop in accordance with their own conditions and laws.[1] It is abundantly clear that the unity of civilization, to which Dante looked, anticipated Mazzini's United States of Europe and the ideal towards which we are now striving under the name of the League of Nations.

And the centre of Dante's earthly city, the nucleus of such a restored unity of civilization, was Italy. Mazzini wrote: 'Italy seeks in him the secret of her nationality; Europe, the secret of Italy and a prophecy of modern thought'. The 'garden of the Empire', the 'noblest region of Europe', Dante interpreted her historical mission in the past, revealed her national genius, looked forward to her leading Europe towards that goal of peace and liberty upon which his own eyes were set; for, with him no less than with Mazzini, *la parola della unità moderna* could come from Rome alone. Within that greater unity, it may be that her political unification was not directly envisaged by him, but her ideal unity—a part of her heritage in the sacred name of Rome—he most clearly saw and described. In celebrating this sexcentenary, in honouring Dante as the sovereign representative of her race, we offer our homage to Italy herself, 'mother of all men's nations', recognizing that the *più grande Italia*, the Greater Italy that the poet already foresaw, is—even as he said of the Roman Empire of old—'necessary for the well-being of the world'.

[1] *De Monarchia* i. 12, iii. 16, i. 10, i. 14. I have generally availed myself of Dr. Wicksteed's translation.