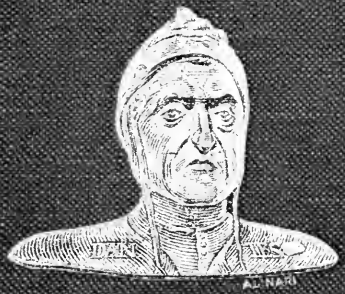
Dante and the Divine Comedy



By W. J. Payling Wright

DANTE AND THE DIVINE COMEDY
STUDIES AND NOTES

Und soll ich dir noch einen Vorzug sagen,
Den unvermerkt sich dieses Lied erschleicht?
Es lockt uns nach und nach, wir hören zu,
Wir hören und wir glauben zu verstehn,
Was wir verstehn, das können wir nicht tadeln,
Und so gewinnt uns dieses Lied zuletzt.

GOETHE, *Torquato Tasso.*

DANTE AND THE DIVINE COMEDY

STUDIES AND NOTES

BY

W. J. PAYLING WRIGHT, B.A.

JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD,
LONDON & NEW YORK. MDCCCCII

Printed by
Richard Folkard & Son,
Devonshire Street, London, W.C.

CONTENTS.

BENEVENTO

I.

BENEVENTO.

THE Middle Ages were dying when Dante was born. The Crusades and the long strife between the Popes and Emperors were well-nigh ended. The Schoolmen had culminated in Thomas Aquinas. Feudalism was in its wane. Simon de Montfort in England and the cities of the Continent were already asserting the cause of liberty. It was in the decay of a great age that Dante stood forth as its spokesman and poet.

To choose any one date as the end of a great historic period must always seem arbitrary, but, so far as Dante is concerned, the Middle Ages may be said to have terminated within a year of his birth. In the spring of 1266, near Benevento, where the territory of the Church bordered on the kingdom of

Apulia or Naples, a battle was fought which showed that a new political power had arisen in Western Christendom and was thenceforward to be a potent factor in the Italian peninsula. Until then, Italy had been a sphere of German influence. Her Emperors were first of all kings of Germany. They were of German blood and elected by German princes and prelates. German troops had decided her battles. Her party names of Guelf and Ghibelline had been imported from beyond the Alps. Her noble houses, as their Teutonic names so often declared, were of German origin. Her counts and marquises pointed by their titles, if not always by their loyalty, to the Emperor as their lord, and reminded men that Italy was part of that Holy Roman Empire which still in theory extended from the northern to the southern seas.

At Benevento, Frenchman contended for the first time with German for the prize of Italy, and the Frenchman won. The victor was Charles of Anjou, by birth if not by character, brother of St. Louis of France. His appearance in Italy at the head of an

army largely recruited on the banks of the Rhone and the Somme was portentous. It sounded the death knell of the mediæval Empire and illustrated the growth of France, which, by the middle of the thirteenth century, had reached the shores of the Mediterranean and gained an outlook towards Italy. Instinctively Rome, in the crisis of its struggle with the Empire, turned for help to the new power across the sea. French ecclesiastics, after an interval of nearly two centuries, were again allowed to sit in the chair of St. Peter. The first of them, Urban IV., invited St. Louis and, when he refused, Charles of Anjou to enter Italy as his friend and ally; and then began that persistent French interference in the affairs of Italy which ceased only with the withdrawal of the French garrison from Rome in 1870, when Germany was once more in the ascendant. Indeed, if intrusion into Italy is a proof of papal paternity, we may safely say that it was in the age of Dante that France first earned the title of "Eldest Son of the Church"

At the head of the defeated was Manfred, King of Sicily and Apulia, who as the son,

though with a bar sinister, of the Emperor Frederick II., was at once a descendant of the Swabian Barbarossa and of the Norman conquerors of Sicily, and the last, or all but the last, of the great Imperial house of the Hohenstaufen. Manfred represented more than a dynasty. He represented the succession of great men who, from the days of Charles the Great, had worn the Imperial crown as chief of European sovereigns and had been the centre of the chivalry, the poetry and the romance of the Middle Ages. Under his banner the past seemed to fight almost visibly and, when he fell, it was not a king but an age that passed away—the age of the troubadour, the noble and the serf.

The ruin of the Hohenstaufen was the victory of the popes. Manfred was Rome's hereditary and excommunicated foe. The papacy seemed triumphant, and in the next generation Boniface VIII. felt strong enough, or arrogant enough, to publish his famous Bull "Unam Sanctam" which made papal absolutism a necessary article of the faith. But Benevento was a worse than Pyrrhic victory. "Unam Sanctam" was quickly followed by

the French capture of the papacy, and by that "Babylonish Captivity" at Avignon, which completed the disintegration of the church, and prepared the way for the Council of Constance and the Protestant Reformation.

Thus the battle of Benevento serves as a landmark in European history. It made the Holy Roman Empire an anachronism, and its restoration an impossibility; and it hastened, if it did not cause, the degradation and expatriation of the papacy. To the generation which preceded Dante's birth it was impossible to conceive of an Italy which was not the home of a Pope and under the sway of an Emperor. By the time that Dante had completed his fortieth year Italy had lost her popes, the Empire had become little more than a tradition, a French dynasty reigned at Naples and French princes and men-at-arms were a familiar spectacle in Rome and Florence.

To Dante this was disastrous. In all things a catholic his dream was of one catholic and universal empire as the secular counterpart of the one catholic and universal church; but in his day catholicity, whether in state or

church, had reached the verge of impossibility; and above all, the theory that, as the successor of Augustus, a German monarch inherited all the kingdoms of the world had become what Hallam justly calls a magnificent absurdity. The European Powers were supplanting the Empire; the Church was slowly approaching a great and lasting schism; and the old antagonism between Church and Empire was to be superseded by a new antagonism between France and Germany in politics and between Protestant and Catholic in religion.

FLORENCE

II.

FLORENCE.

In Dante's day Florence was the most progressive and enlightened city in the world. Her supremacy over the surrounding country was established, her franchises were extended, her serfs were emancipated, her commerce and wealth were rapidly increasing; while in art and literature she was laying the foundations of that pre-eminence which has won for her the admiration and gratitude of mankind.

Her policy in the thirteenth century may be summed up under three heads. She sought to maintain her independence, to curb the license of her nobles and to extend her trade. In each of these aims she was successful. Her independence was threatened by the Empire and by the Papacy, between whose territories Tuscany lay as what it is now the fashion

to call a buffer state. At the beginning of the twelfth century Florence was part of the domains of that Matilda, Countess of Tuscany, who was the staunch friend and supporter of Hildebrand, and in whose castle of Canossa, Henry IV. so abjectly humbled himself before the great champion of ecclesiastical authority. When she died she proved her loyalty to the Church by bequeathing her territories, Florence included, to the Papal See. Claimed at once by the Emperor as an inalienable fief of the Empire, and by the popes in virtue of this bequest, Florence stood between two fires; but her interests as well as her sympathies led her to side with the popes, of whose revenues she was the banker, and whose policy it was to foster the growing liberty of the cities of Northern Italy as a thorn in the flesh of the Emperor. Hence Florence was a Guelf city.

Twice, at least, before Dante's birth her independence had been temporarily lost. By the aid of the Emperor Frederick II. the Ghibelline party had, towards the end of that monarch's reign, become masters of the city, only to fall, however, as soon as death had robbed

them of his support. Ten years later, in 1260, the crushing defeat of the Guelfs at Montaperti again gave Florence to the Ghibellines, but they were aliens to the true life of the city, and the records of their short-lived misrule and oppression help us to understand how inglorious the annals of Florence might have been if their power had been permanently established within her walls. They depended on Manfred and his German auxiliaries, and after his overthrow at Benevento they never raised their heads again in Florence. Indeed, the future of the city was with the Guelfs. Theirs was a Florentine policy. They had presided in Florence during the ten brilliant "years of victory" between 1250 and 1260; and under their restored leadership Florence, between 1266 and 1300, crushed her rivals and placed herself at the head of Tuscany.

The division of Florence into Guelfs and Ghibellines was probably as much a matter of caste as of politics. Her oldest families, such, for instance, as the Uberti, traced their descent as far back as to the days of the great Countess Matilda and earlier; and constituted an aristocracy by birth

whose interests and feudal traditions naturally attached them to the Empire and the Ghibelline party. But during the 12th and 13th centuries Florence became above all else a trading city, and new men arose whose rank was founded on their wealth. Among them were the Cerchi, who had, says Villani, "come in a short time to great estate and power," the Mozzi "of small beginnings," the Cavalcanti, "descended from merchants," and the Adimari, "who were not of the most ancient." These were an order of plutocrats rather than aristocrats; and deriving much of their wealth from Rome, they naturally inclined towards the Church and became Guelfs. More in harmony with the commercial spirit of Florence, they may almost be said to have constituted a *bourgeois régime*, and in these days, when the term *bourgeois* has become a reproach, it is perhaps worth remembering that it was under such a *régime* that the one city of modern Europe which can be compared with ancient Athens achieved her liberties and her greatness.

Side by side with the Guelf party existed another power with which it had much in com-

mon, but with which it was nevertheless doomed to come into conflict. As the old Ghibelline nobility was crushed or banished, the Guelfs rose on its ruins, became a new order of magnates or grandees, and in turn threatened the growing freedom of the city. Over against them was the Popolo, or, as we should now say, upper middle class of citizens, from which nobles and proletariat were alike excluded. Comprising the seven great Guilds or Arts, each of which was a petty republic in itself, with its own ensign, officers and regulations, the Popolo during Dante's life in Florence rapidly acquired political power. They succeeded in humiliating the grandees, in excluding them, permanently as it proved, from office if not from power, and in enacting that none but members of the greater Arts should be eligible for the priorate of the city. To be enrolled among the grandees was made a disqualification. It was not uncommon for an obnoxious citizen to be declared a grandee as a penalty or as a convenient form of ostracism; and on the other hand, when a grandee sought power and office he not

seldom renounced his rank and joined one of the greater Arts. Jealousy for the Republic was the soul of their policy. They had good reason to dread the unscrupulous ambition of the nobles within, and of the great territorial magnates without, their borders. In the cities to the east of the Apennines mighty lords, such as the Visconti and the Scaligeri, were establishing themselves as despots, and the same fate was to be feared for Florence. Eventually it overtook her when she bowed her neck to the gilded yoke of the Medici, but thanks to the determination of her Popolo, Florence was the last of Italian cities to lose her liberties, and even then she succumbed to one of her own merchant sons.

In the year 1300 occurred the great split of the Guelf party into the Bianchi and Neri. It illustrates the tendency of parties to break up when no longer confronted by a powerful opposition. Ghibellinism was dead in Florence. The old names no longer represented great principles and the Guelf party had lost cohesion; many of its more influential members chafed under the restrictions imposed

on them as grandees, and sought to regain their old privileges and license. Their military skill, through which the Florentines had been victorious in war, roused their ambitions, but their fellow-citizens, though ready enough to follow them in battle, were by no means inclined to submit to their rule in time of peace. These turbulent spirits were the soul of the Neri, and Corso Donati was their chief.

The Bianchi included the more moderate Guelfs who were content with the new order. At their head were the Cerchi, who were of great wealth recently accumulated and, as we have already seen, of humble origin, while the Donati were of older family, of straitened means and of corresponding pride. As was the case with the Guelfs and Ghibellines, so also in that of the Bianchi and Neri it seems possible to discern the spirit of caste as the cause of faction. The Neri represented the still-surviving ancient and lawless aristocratic element; the Bianchi, on the other hand, were more ready to unite with the classes immediately below them and to maintain the new *régime*.

In the spring of 1300, the factions came

to blows; the leaders on both sides were impartially banished and there apparently matters might have ended but for foreign intervention. But the popes had never forgotten the bequest of the Countess Matilda, and Boniface VIII. judged the hour favourable for reducing Florence to his own possession. *Papa Bonifacius volebat sibi dari totam Tusciam.* Like his predecessor, Urban, he called in a Frenchman, Charles of Valois,* to subvert the independence and liberty of Florence. The Donati were privy to the pope's designs, and both were willing to use Charles as their accomplice and tool. On the 1st of November he entered the city with an armed force, and after swearing on the word of a king's son that he would maintain the peace and freedom of Florence, straightway permitted Corso Donati to return, and calmly looked on while Corso and his followers pillaged and murdered his former opponents. The helpless Bianchi left the city and for the more part joined themselves to the Ghibel-

* Son, brother and father of a French king, and never a king himself—*Sansterre* or "Lackland" as his biographers call him.

line enemies of Florence. Dante, whether he prudently withdrew or was on an embassy to Rome at the time, found himself for ever excluded from his native city. As the advent of Charles of Anjou overthrew the Empire which he loved, so the coming of another Charles made him a fugitive, an exile and a mendicant, revisiting Florence only in his dreams. Thereafter, through years of bitterness, he used his pen as Farinata had used his sword, against the city of his birth, but we would fain think that in hours of relenting he still remembered with affection that he was

> "Di quella nobil patria natio
> Alla qual forse fui troppo molesto."*

Dante's political career ended, as we all know, in disaster; but from the tangled wilderness of her politics we would gladly turn to what we conceive to be the true life of Florence in the days when her noblest son still found a home within her walls and could mingle in her May-day

* "Child of that noble Fatherland
To which, perchance, I too molestful was."
Inf. x. 26-27.

festivities; could walk her streets with Cimabue and Giotto and watch the rising fabrics of Arnolfo; or, seated in the shade by the side of the slothful Belacqua, "to whom laziness was as a sister," could hear Casella sing and listen to Guido Cavalcanti as he recited his latest poem.

As we lay down the troubled chronicles of Villani for the sweet pages of the *Vita Nuova* we seem to enter another world. In Villani all is disorder, faction and tumult, and we marvel that Florence was able to exist, much more that she flourished. In the *Vita Nuova* there is no "war or battle's sound;" Guelfs and Ghibellines, magnates and popolo, have left the scene, and in their stead we have the children's party, the worship in the church, the greeting of young man and maiden in the street, the interchange by youthful poets of the early blossoms of their genius, the peaceful journey of the pilgrims to behold the face of Christ, the devotion of the student to his books and of the lover to his beloved. In this record of Dante's youth there is no storm. There is shadow only—the universal shadow of death—and were the *Vita Nuova* our only picture of

life in Florence in Dante's early days we should imagine them to have been spent in some millennial city from which sin and strife had disappeared and in which mortality was the only evil that survived.

THE *VITA NUOVA*

III.

THE *VITA NUOVA*.

THE *Vita Nuova* is written in Italian prose, studded with many sonnets and other lyrics in praise of Beatrice. Most of the lyrics were written before her death in 1290, and the prose in which they are set was completed a year or two later, certainly before 1295. With the possible but unlikely exception of the *de Monarchiâ*, this small volume is all that Dante gave to the world during the first thirty-five or forty years of his life.

The title means either "the Early Life" or "the New Life." Of early life apart from love there is nothing in the *Vita Nuova*, for parents, home, and teachers are ignored. Of new life, in the religious sense, there is no trace. The story is one of development rather than of conversion; and what Dante was in his

ninth year when he first loved Beatrice, such was he essentially at the close of his first manhood when, after her death, she revisited him in dream—the sensitive and ecstatic lover carrying in his heart the image of the beloved. The new life, in its deeper significance, came later, somewhere in the interval between the wonderful vision which Dante tells us made him suddenly lay down his pen at the end of the *Vita Nuova*, and that yet more marvellous vision which came to him when the natural love of his early years had been rarefied into the purely spiritual and he beheld not only Beatrice, but God. First came that which is natural; afterward, that which is spiritual.

Incipit Vita Nova was the rubric which stood in the forefront of the first chapter of Dante's memory as he began to write of "the glorious lady of his mind." "Here beginneth a new life"—the life of love, the love of a child for a child, of a youth for a maiden, of a poet for a memory and an ideal. The *Vita Nuova* is the age-long story of Love and Death as told by the greatest of lovers. It is a story of boyhood and youth, in which Love is supreme; of

an early manhood in which Love's supremacy is disputed and well-nigh overthrown by Death; of days of bereavement and sorrow followed by forgetfulness; and of a new and noble dawn when Love rises from the tomb triumphant and immortal.

Ecce deus fortior me qui veniens dominabitur mihi. "Behold a god mightier than I, who cometh to reign over me." Such, says Dante, was the cry of his vital spirit in the most secret chamber of his heart, when in his ninth year he saw Beatrice, who was a few months younger. Love, as a mighty lord, at once asserted dominion over him. *Apparuit jam beatitudo vestra.* "Thy bliss hath appeared to thee" was the cry of another voice within; and then a third voice exclaimed in sorrowful foreboding, *Heu miser! quia frequenter impeditus ero deinceps.*" Woe is me; for henceforth I shall often be wretched." In these three sayings we have the soul of the *Vita Nuova*—the domination of love, the promise of beatitude, and the presentiment of intervening sorrow.

Ofttimes after the first appearance of Beatrice, Love drove Dante to seek her who, in

Homeric phrase, seemed to be the daughter of a god and not of a mortal man. But not until his eighteenth year did he hear the sound of her voice, when, "of her ineffable courtesy," she gave him a passing salutation. Intoxicated with joy, he withdrew to his chamber, and thereupon he had the first, or at any rate the first recorded, of his many visions. He saw his lady borne in the arms of Love, who (always personified in the *Vita Nuova*) at first rejoiced but afterwards wept bitterly—a presage which found its interpretation in Dante's subsequent experience. This vision, he found, had come to him in the first of the nine hours of night—an association of Beatrice with the number nine which ran like a mystic thread through her earthly life. Having already learnt "the art of uttering words in rhyme," he related his vision in a sonnet, which he sent to the faithful servants of love—*i.e.*, to the poets of his acquaintance. This sonnet he transcribes, and in like manner he proceeds throughout. First in simple, yet often heart-piercing prose, he tells us of some incident or emotion, such as the withholding by Beatrice of her customary greet-

ing, the death of her father, the contemplation of her worth, or his own sickness and sad presentiments; and then he gives us the sonnet, the ballata, or the canzone—"the sweet and gracious rhymes of love"—which he had thereby been impelled to write. Thus in its outward form the *Vita Nuova* is an account of the genesis of his lyric poems, or of such of them as he thought fit to associate with Beatrice. Had Shakespeare done the like for the "onlie begetter" of his sonnets, and set before each of them a chapter of his experience, we should have had an English *Vita Nuova* written by the only man to whom Dante need pay homage as greater. But Shakespeare gave only the fruit of his travail. Dante shows us the root. The genial Englishman was more reserved or less self-conscious than the stern Italian.

For in the *Vita Nuova* Dante is the most self-conscious of poets. He takes it for granted that all the world would like to know how he felt and why he wrote. He seems to say, "You already know 'the sweet style' of my rhymes; now I will tell you their secret, and how I came

to write them. They are words which my heart spoke to me in the language of love, or, rather, Love himself dictated them to me, for

> "One am I who whenever
> Love doth inspire me, note, and in that measure
> Which he within me dictates singing go."*

Such, as he afterwards tells us in the *Purgatorio*, was the secret of the *dolce stil nuovo*, of that new sweet style which had already, in 1300, won him the meed of praise above his fellows.

But Dante was no idle singer of an empty day. Beneath the apparent spontaneity of his song, he shows us the travail of his soul. He sang because Love inspired him; and he whom Love elects for plenary inspiration is chosen by a god who often drives him into that wilderness where hope and strength seem to perish. In loneliness he weeps bitter tears and falls asleep like a child that has been punished. In his weakness he meditates on the brevity of life

> * Io mi son un che, quando
> Amor mi spira, noto, ed a quel modo
> Che dêtta dentro, vo significando.
>
> *Pur.* XXIV., 52-54.

and the certainty that Beatrice must die. He is half in love with easeful death; and when at last Beatrice dies (though after her death Dante never speaks of her as dying, but always uses a periphrasis) he laments in the desolate city like Jeremiah in the ruins of Jerusalem. The *Vita Nuova* is at once an *In Memoriam* and an *Anatomy of Love*. It is the psychology of a poet subdued by grief.

In self-consciousness and introspection only one English book can be compared with it. In the *Grace Abounding* of John Bunyan we have the same nervous and fervid imagination, the same susceptibility to inward voice and vision, and the same revelation of self under the power of an elemental and overmastering emotion. In each work there is the realisation that all this inward experience is a call and preparation for the great work of life; and possibly there is also in each of them somewhat of an *apologia*, and an underlying desire to vindicate character against the aspersions of an adversary. Furthermore, there is in each the same pure and limpid language and the same exquisite literary charm, while, to complete the resemblance, with Bunyan

and Dante alike, the early life of the man is the key to the symbolism of the mystic, and the most subjective experience becomes the indispensable preface to the most objective of visions.

The subject of the *Vita Nuova* is not Beatrice, but Dante as affected by love. The book is not an autobiography, but an account of the phases of Dante's soul as perturbed by the nearness of another sphere which remains hidden from our view. For we never see Beatrice herself or hear the tones of her voice. Once or twice we catch a glimpse of her apparel, but no feature or word of hers is recorded. We do not know who she was or whence she came. Her home, we assume, was in Florence; but Dante does not say so. We are not even quite sure that her name was Beatrice, and that Dante did not confer that name upon her as a pseudonym of his own invention. Still less do we learn from the *Vita Nuova* whether she returned his love, or whether his devotion, like that "of the moth for the star," was unknown and unrequited. By his reticence Dante has invested her with the spell of mystery; and like the painter who depicted the Christ with averted face, he challenges

our imagination as well as claims our worship. His aim was to create an impression of a pure and spiritual beauty which hovers in that ideal world where every man is perforce his own artist, and where, if the portraiture be defective, our own creative faculties are at fault.

Note on the name "Beatrice."

The name Beatrice seems to have been common in the Middle Ages. Without seeking for them, but merely noting such as I have come across, I have found the following ladies of that name:—[The date with an *obelus* (†) is in every case that of the death of the person whose name immediately precedes it.]

1. Beatrice of Lorraine (†1076), mother of the famous Countess Matilda (†1115).
2. Beatrice of Burgundy, consort of the Emperor Frederick I. ("Barbarossa," †1190).
3. Beatrice, wife of Marcovaldo (†1229), of the Conti Guidi. (The Conti Guidi were of great importance in Tuscany.)
4. Beatrice, daughter of Farinata degli Uberti (†*c.* 1264), and wife of Guido Cavalcanti (†1300).
5. Beatrice, wife of Raymond of Provence (†1245).

> "She had already given birth to three illustrious queens—those of France, England and Germany; and two of these, namely the Queen of France and the Queen of England,

had brought two queens into the world, namely the Queen of Scotland and the Queen of Navarre. And thus by such propagation, which was a dispensation of the Deity, the aforesaid Countess Beatrice shed a halo of light over the whole extent of Christendom by giving five queens to the community."—*Matthew Paris* (A.D. 1257).

*** The chronicler might have added yet more lustre to this lady's halo by including her daughter Beatrice, wife of Charles of Anjou (No. 6 in this list). *cf.* "Quattro figlie ebbe, e ciascuna reina, Ramondo."—*Par.* VI. 133-4.

6. Beatrice (†1267), daughter of Raymond, Count of Provence, and wife of Charles of Anjou, King of Apulia and Naples (†1285).
7. Beatrice of Savoy, wife of Manfred (†1266), King of Apulia and Sicily.
8. Beatrice, wife of Otto IV. and daughter of Philip of Swabia, who was a cousin of the Emperor Frederick II. (†1250).
9. Beatrice, sister of Ezzelino of Romano (†1259) who is said to have given her in marriage to the famous Sordello († *after* 1266).
10. Beatrice Malaspina, daughter of Moroello II. (†1285).
11. Beatrice, mother of Henry VII. of Luxemburg (†1313).
12. Beatrice, daughter of Alfonso X. of Castile, and wife of Alfonso III. of Portugal (†1279).
13. Beatrice, married in 1269 to Paolo of Rimini (Francesca's brother-in-law and paramour).
14. Beatrice Lancia, daughter of Provenzano Salvani (†1269), and wife of Ugolino of Azzo.
15. Beatrice della Fratta, wife of Guido Guinicelli (†1276).
16. Beatrice, daughter of Obizzo II. of Este, and wife of Nino Visconti (†1296).

17. Beatrice Portinari, daughter of Folco Portinari (†1289).
18. Beatrice, daughter of Charles II. of Naples, married (1305) Azzo VIII. of Este.
19. Beatrice, daughter of Charles Martel (†1295), titular King of Hungary.
20. Beatrice, daughter of Dante.
21. Beatrice of Bourbon, wife of John of Bohemia (†1346, at Crécy).

IN ENGLAND.

22. Beatrice, niece of Earl Morcar.

> "This Ribaldi, the first Norman Lord of Middleham, gave to God and St. Mary at York, and the Abbot Gosfrid, in perpetual alms for the soul of *Beatrix* his wife (daughter of Ivo de Tallebois by the Countess Lucy of Lincoln, the sister of Earl Morcar, &c."—*History and Topography of City of York, &c.*, Beverley, 1859, Vol. II., p. 132.

23. Beatrice, wife of the King's Harper.

> "In the reign of K. Henry III. we have mention of Master Richard, the King's Harper, to whom in his thirty-sixth year (1252) that monarch gave not only forty shillings and a pipe of wine, but also a pipe of wine to Beatrice his wife. Burney's *Hist.* II., 355. *Rot. pip. An.* 36, H. III. 'Et in uno dolio vini empto et dato magistro Ricardo Citharistae Regis, xl. sol. per br. Reg. Et in uno dolio empto et dato Beatrici uxori ejusdem Ricardi.'"—Bp. Percy, *Essay on The Ancient Minstrels, in "Reliques of Ancient English Poetry."* London, 1876, I., 365.

24. Beatrice, daughter of Henry III.

Most of these names may be found in Scartazzini's Commentary, or in the genealogical tables appended to Mr. Paget Toynbee's Dic-

tionary of Dante. The list shows (*a*) that a Beatrice (No. 1) had been the first lady in Tuscany, and another Beatrice (No. 2) had been the first lady in Europe; and (*b*) that the name was common in the royal and noble houses of the thirteenth century. By a singular coincidence, the two Guidos supposed to be mentioned in *Pur.* XI., 97 (Guido Guinicelli and Guido Cavalcanti), and also the two protagonists at Benevento had each married a Beatrice. If rank in the middle ages set the fashion in the naming of children, it is extremely likely that the name Beatrice was common in Florence. Beatrice of Lorraine may have introduced it. In 1266, the year in which Dante's Beatrice was doubtless born, the head of the Guelf party was the husband of a lady of that name, and an enthusiastic partizan might be tempted to christen a new-born daughter after the wife of his victorious leader. Beatrice Portinari (whose existence is proved by her father's will) was possibly not the only maiden of that name in Florence in Dante's youth. Folco Portinari was not necessarily the only member of the house of Portinari who had a daughter called Beatrice. Dante's Beatrice was, according to

Pietro di Dante, as quoted by Mr. Toynbee, *nata de domo quorumdam civium florentinorum qui dicuntur Portinarii.* As we know nothing of the Portinari family, we know nothing of its branches, of which there may have been several. Boccaccio's identification of Beatrice, daughter of Folco Portinari and wife of Simone dei Bardi, with Dante's Beatrice was not made until three-quarters of a century after the death of the latter. We cannot be sure that in Dante's works the name is not a pseudonym, but of the reality of Beatrice there seems to be no room for doubt. The late Dean Plumptre claimed to have proved that she was already married when Dante wrote the first sonnet of the *Vita Nuova.* But as Dante was then only eighteen, that sonnet cannot have been written later than 1284; whereas, according to Mr. Toynbee, the daughter of Folco Portinari was not married until 1287. (*Cf.* Plumptre's translation, 2nd Ed. II. 200, and Mr. Toynbee's *Dante Dictionary*, p. 71.)

THE *TERZA RIMA*

IV.

THE *TERZA RIMA.*

THE *Divina Commedia* is in three parts, is subdivided into one hundred cantos, and contains more than fourteen thousand lines or some two thousand more than Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, added together. It is written in *Terza Rima*, in which the rhymes recur in the following order :—

a b a b c b c d c d e d e f

It will be seen that in these triplets the last two rhymes of one group correspond with the first two lines of the next group; that each rhyme (save in the first and last groups of a Canto which are necessarily imperfect) occurs three times; and that before one rhyme has died out, a second and third have been caught

up. Thus, like intertwining tracery, lines grow out of and support lines; they are joined together in harmonious unity. As Dante says of men, so we may say of them, that "they are by nature sociable;" and, in fact, we cannot anywhere divide a Canto without mutilating a rhyme. The feat is a great one, unequalled by any great master in the art of poetry, save, perhaps, by our own Edmund Spenser in his *Faerie Queene*.

THE *INFERNO*

V.

THE *INFERNO.*

DANTE'S Hell underlies the Northern hemisphere, which alone is habitable, the Southern hemisphere being covered by the waters of the ocean. Consequently, though Dante does not explicitly say so, man's highest civilisation and proudest works overhang the eternal miseries from which they are separated only by a thin dome of earth's crust. *Incedis per ignes suppositos.*

A vast concave, Hell contracts as it descends after the manner of a basin or funnel. It may be likened to a huge subterranean quarry, rotund, dark, and hollow—its rocky sides converging to the centre of the earth and rough-hewn into ledges or terraces, on which, as on the successive and diminishing tiers of an infernal amphitheatre, different

classes of sinners suffer endless woe. The depth at which they suffer is according to the heinousness of their offence; and at the lowest point of all is Lucifer, imprisoned in thick-ribbed ice.*

This conception of a Hell which is graduated and classified is peculiar to Dante. Theologians have unanimously consigned all lost souls to one indiscriminating fire. It is not so with Dante, for such a hell is not only unpicturesque; it is unethical and takes no count of moral distinctions or of diversities of guilt. It is the work of the theologian to deal with sin; and sin, however protean it may be in form and manifestation, is one in essence and principle, and therefore logically involves all its victims in one uniform fate. But in the *Inferno* Dante is not a theologian; he is a

* Thus, it may be observed in passing, just as in the *Paradiso*, Dante places Deity at the outermost circumference of the Universe, so, in the *Inferno*, he places Satan at the centre of the earth, which is also, according to the astronomy of the Middle Ages, the centre of all. From this paradox, inevitable under the Ptolemaic system, Copernicus has happily set us free. A truer science has led to a nobler theism.

moralist. His business is not with sin in the abstract, but with crimes in the concrete—with crimes which are condemned by the moralist and punished by the legislator, or with dispositions such as pride and anger which are in themselves a crime against our human environment. It is not too much to say that every soul in Dante's Hell is there for an indictable offence or for some characteristic habit of life which is in its essence anti-social and criminal. The thought of sin as social wrong-doing underlies the whole of Dante's conception of future punishment.

The Hell of Dante is not only more ethical and discriminating than the Hell of popular imagination; but for this very reason it is milder and more charitable. Certainly he invents new forms of torment which were meant to strike the conscience of a callous and cruel age; and in so doing he had formidable competitors in real life. If, as is quite possible, he was in Paris in 1310, he might have seen no fewer than fifty-nine Templars burnt alive in one day as an offering to the cupidity of the French king. Death by burning or burying

alive was commonplace, not rarely accompanied by fiendish tortures, such as those which three centuries later were inflicted on Ravaillac in the first and most enlightened city of Europe. Dante did not live in a humanitarian world, and in prophesying to his own generation he was bound to speak emphatically and in language which it could understand. To the fourteenth century a moral and spiritual hell would have been incomprehensible, and if comprehended would have been laughed at. The age believed in material punishment, and what the age believed in, that Dante gave it.

But, paradoxical as it may seem, the Dantesque horrors of the *Inferno* are a mitigation rather than an aggravation of eternal punishment. For one thing, in the higher zones, which are necessarily of much greater extent, the penalties are less severe; and if the population is of anything like uniform density throughout, we are free to hope that a majority of the lost are in those more capacious and less agonising circles. Then again, in no two circles are the punishments alike; they are intended (not always successfully, for in some cases they could

be interchanged without apparent incongruity) to be analogous to the crime; but the worst of them cannot be said to surpass in horror the awful doom to which, without distinction of creed or opportunity, so many Christians have consigned all but a small fraction of the race. The pangs may be more varied; they certainly cannot be more acute.

Indeed, the first circle of the *Inferno*—the Limbo of unbaptised children and of virtuous heathen—has little in common with the vulgar representation of Hell, save that it is underground. There, as in the spacious balcony of some vast natural amphitheatre, are those

> "kings of thought
> Who waged contention with their time's decay,
> And of the past are all that cannot pass away."

They still walk the verdant floor as once they walked the streets of Athens or of Rome, engaged in mutual converse on high themes of philosophy and art. They suffer no pain. They are neither sad nor glad. Only privation is theirs—privation of the sunlight and of the vision of God, who is the sun of the intellect. Desire for God, without the hope of ever satis-

fying it, is the only bitterness in that Elysium of the Sages, where Stoics and Peripatetics and Epicureans commune together, and, united "by the art of eternal truth, in one will harmoniously agree."

Neither is the second circle utterly grievous. There, it is true, punishment is positive and not merely privative; for in it are the victims of unruly love, driven for ever by tempestuous winds as once on earth they were driven by fierce gusts of passion. Among them is the ill-fated Francesca, half-redeemed by the tragic pathos of her death, and certainly not altogether to be pitied. In death she and her lover are not divided. Borne along, like doves, side by side on the breezes, they are eternally united, and for them Hell itself has somewhat of a lover's heaven. No pious ecclesiastic would have dealt so tenderly with a sinful woman cut off in her sin.

This second circle is one of a series, in which vices and faults of character are punished. In them, gluttony, avarice, prodigality, pride, and wrath meet their due requital. These are obviously sins of temper and infirmity into which

the natural man inevitably falls, and from which the regenerate are not wholly free; though fatal if unrepented of—and in Dante there is no casuistic distinction between venial and deadly sins—they are not the worst of which man can be guilty. They do not incur the sternest reprobation of the moralist, and Dante, recognising this, inflicts in these circles punishments into which the appalling element of fire does not enter.

There is, according to Dante, a hell within a hell, and it is not until five out of his nine circles are passed (and those, be it remembered, the largest and presumably the most populous) that we come to the real Hell of Dante. So far we have been in the Ante-Inferno, in the approaches and outworks of that city of Dis, whose fiery walls defend the very citadel of evil. In it we meet the criminal rather than the vicious. There, in their red-hot tombs, are those victims of the materialism of their day, who, denying the immortality of the soul, deliberately set at nought the moral law and abandoned themselves to license and self-indulgence. They sinned knowingly and of malice aforethought. What they did, they did on principle and with full con-

sent of intellect and will. Thus they are in a very different case from those above them, who fell through frailty and temptation; but, on the other hand, as they did not directly seek the injury of others, but only the satisfaction of their own lusts, they are far removed from the lowest depth of the Inferno. Below them are the violent and the fraudulent, who intentionally and of set purpose have hurt and destroyed their fellowmen. For them Dante reserves those horrors which are for ever associated with his name. In the last three circles are the boiling blood, the seething pitch, the demons, the cruelties and the ignominies of the mediæval Hell; and there, in the ninth circle, in the Traitor's Hell, is that Lucifer, who is at once the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning. And with Dante, lying and fraud and treachery are the most diabolical because the most intellectual of sins. The intellect is the best in man, for it is God's image in the soul, and man is guilty of the most sacrilegious of all crimes when he perverts this divinest of all gifts to wilful falsity and to the undermining of all social order and confidence. *Corruptio optimi pessima.*

As has already been remarked, this conception of a graduated Hell belongs to the moralist rather than the theologian. It is, in fact, based on Aristotle and Cicero, and contains little that could not be discerned in the light of nature. Dante indicates as much by making Virgil his guide throughout the *Inferno*, for Virgil evidently symbolises the highest human reason not yet illuminated by special revelation. But it would be strange indeed if no elements of revealed religion entered into Dante's scheme of final retribution. These must be sought for in the fundamental principles of the *Inferno*. If the elaboration is ethical, the foundation is, after all, theological; for in the first place, Hell is of divine appointment, and in the second place, it is reserved only for the impenitent and unbelieving.

It is of divine appointment. The three great attributes of Deity—the power of the Father, the wisdom of the Son, and the love of the Spirit—co-operated in its creation. In the dread inscription on Hell's portal there is at once a doctrine of the Trinity and a declaration that within the Godhead there is no schism.

The Father is not represented as the sole principle of righteousness and holy indignation, nor the Son as the interceding mercy. In fact, God's justice, holiness, and wrath are passed over in silence, and Dante, whose every word was carefully weighed by himself, and therefore deserves to be carefully weighed by us, expressly affirms that Hell itself is the necessary outcome of God's infinite love.

Dante reserves Hell for the impenitent and unbelieving, and in making impenitence and unbelief the only cause of perdition, he was faithful to that ultimate and distinctive truth of the Gospel which no superstition has been able wholly to obscure. He judges men by their final attitude towards God. They suffer for and according to their works, but their suffering is penal or disciplinary according as they persist in sin, or submit and repent. The lost are lost, not because they sinned, but because they did not seek salvation. The saved are not saved because of their own inherent merit, but by that mercy of God on which no soul, even in the moment of death, can cast itself in vain. Dante has reconciled the two principles which run side

by side through the New Testament—justification by faith and judgment by works, and in so doing has further succeeded in blending the Gospel with natural religion and ethics. Always with him salvation is of the grace of God and condemnation of the self-will of man.

The denizens of Hell belong partly to that world which, to Dante, was modern or contemporaneous, and partly to that old world before the dark ages, which was to him as to us, a matter of ancient history. Between these two worlds there is, in the *Inferno*, an interval of centuries. To the old world belong many names, real or legendary, famous or infamous, with which we are not concerned. They are too remote to excite our interest, and Dante's judgment of them is but an echo of the past. But when we come to his own times our critical faculties grow keen, and we feel called upon to mete out to him that justice which he so rigorously meted out to others. We pass in review the lost souls

who once belonged to Dante's own day and generation, and as we deem of them, so must we deem of him who has assumed the awful office of an infallible and final judge.

From among the mixed multitudes which fill the background of the Inferno, some eighty or more souls, belonging to the thirteenth century, are singled out by name and circumstance and immortalised by Dante. Only one of them, Francesca, is a woman. The ubiquitous Scot is, of course, there, in the person of Michael Scott, that wizard from the North commemorated by the Wizard of the North in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel.** Bertrand of Bearn, as the evil counsellor of our own Henry II.'s eldest son, and Guy of Montfort, as the avenger of his father's death at Evesham, associate themselves, though somewhat remotely, with English history. The popes and that "world's wonder," the Emperor Frederick II., belonged to Christendom in general. But the great majority were from Northern Italy, and of these some, like the great Farinata, were dead before Dante was

* See Note L to Canto II. of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*.

born, and others, like Brunetto Latino, were old when he was young. About a score were citizens of Florence, perhaps ten were personally known by him, and two were his personal friends. These numbers show that Dante cannot justly be charged with damning his acquaintances or with showing a special animus against his native city. Francesca was not a Florentine. In quality, if not in quantity, Pisa and Genoa fare worse than Florence, and, judging her by the citizens she sent to Hell, we cannot help feeling that, if not justified of her children, she needed not to be utterly ashamed of them. Some of them seem great, even in their ruin.

But, while Dante's impartiality appears to be unimpeachable, we are inclined to suspect that in his character there lurked a vein of innate ferocity. We justly excuse his cruel inventions as part of the spiritual machinery of his age. We remember that he himself had been sentenced to death by fire, and that, except in their endless duration, the torments of the Inferno are not one whit worse than those which his contemporaries inflicted with satisfaction. But, from one who has passed through the heavens

and beheld the Eternal Love we expect the best and noblest. We find it hard to forgive the man who pauses on the very threshold of the Holy of Holies to utter one last gibe at his native city; who praises Dominic for the atrocities perpetrated on the Albigenses, and who has left on record his wish that every soul in Pisa might be swept away in one common deluge. God's pity on Nineveh and Christ's tears over Jerusalem might have taught him to deplore the fate of those whom he could not save. It is from such men as Dante that the world expects guidance to loftier heights, and not confirmation in ancient wrong. Were the *Inferno* his only work, we could not but suspect him of taking pleasure in suffering for its own sake.

But to restrict our reading of Dante to the *Inferno* is as if we were to confine our reading of the Psalter to the imprecatory Psalms. Such knowledge would not only be inadequate; it would be positive misknowledge. We should know Dante as artist in human misery and as critic of human life; we could admire his graphic power; we could acquiesce in his ethical discriminations; but, after all, we should lay him

down with the conviction that the supreme poets and prophets of humanity have a nobler duty than that of emphasizing the primæval curse. Happily for us and for his own fame, he lived to accomplish his task; to sing the beatitudes of the penitent and the victory of the sanctified. His *Inferno* alone would have been a disheartening legacy to mankind; but after its lurid darkness come the rainbow hues of the mount of purgation, and the white radiance of Heaven; and whoso knows not these knows not Dante.

THE *PURGATORIO*

VI.

THE *PURGATORIO.*

ONE of the most remarkable episodes in the *Inferno* is the story of the death of Ulysses as told by himself to Dante. Overcome by a longing to see more of that world of which he had already seen so much, he sailed again with a few trusty companions, and, after passing between the pillars of Hercules into the open ocean, bent his course westward and southward beneath the unknown constellations of the southern hemisphere. After a voyage of some five months they saw "a mountain brown through the distance,"* but before they could reach it Divine providence sent a sudden storm and they per-

* "*Una montagna bruna*
Per la distanza."—*Inf.* XXVI. 132—3.
On *bruna* see note on page 82.

ished within sight of land. The mountain which they saw was Dante's Mount of Purgation.

In the last canto of the *Inferno* Virgil describes a tremendous terrestrial catastrophe which was caused by the fall of Lucifer from heaven. For fear of him the dry land fled from the southern to the northern hemisphere, and the sea now occupies its place. At the same moment part of the interior of the earth shot forth to avoid his touch and formed the mountain in sight of which Ulysses and his crew perished.*

From these and other indications given by Dante we learn that his *Purgatorio* is on an island, cone-like in shape and rising to an immense height in the midst of a vast solitude of water which now covers the southern half of our globe. Moreover, it is the exact antipodes of Jerusalem, which is the centre of the habitable land and the place where our Lord was crucified.

From the foot of the mountain a fairly wide strand shelves downwards to the shore. Over this, Cato keeps watch, lonely and severe; and on it (for a period thirty times the length of their

* *Inf.* XXXIV. 121—126.

contumacy) wander the shades of those who, like King Manfred, died under the ban of excommunication. A path, so steep as to be climbed only on hands and knees, leads upwards through a cleft in the rock to a terrace which encircles the mountain; and on this terrace those who, through negligence or through pre-occupation with the cares and obligations of this present life, left their souls' salvation to the last, await admission to the real purgatory. Among them, or rather aloof from them in leonine grandeur and isolation is Sordello; and hard by, in a Flowery Valley, are a number of sovereigns of western Christendom who were contemporary with Dante's boyhood and youth.*

The portal of purgatory strictly so called —"St. Peter's Gate," as Dante names it elsewhere†—is above this at a great height (up which Dante is carried in sleep), and is approached by three steps—the first of white marble polished as a mirror; the second, rough, calcined, cracked and of so deep a purple as to be

* So far is what is often called the Ante-purgatorio.

† *Inf.* I. 134.

almost black; and the third of blood-red porphyry. God's angel is seated on the threshold, which is of adamant. A glittering sword is in his hand; and with the point of it he inscribes the letter P seven times on Dante's forehead.* Then with two keys, one of gold and the other of silver, he unlocks the doors. They open with a loud and discordant noise. Dante enters, and hears the sweet sound of a *Te Deum*, accompanied, as it were, by the pealing of an organ.†

* P as the initial letter of *Peccata*. The seven Ps are signs of the seven mortal sins (pride, envy, anger, *accidia* or sloth, avarice and prodigality, gluttony and licentiousness), which are purged away in the seven successive circles of the *Purgatorio*. With careful precision Dante tells us (*Pur.* x. 24) that the first and lowest of these circles or cornices is of a width equal to three times the length of a man's body.

† The portal with its three steps and angelic warder is usually interpreted as representing the sacrament of penance. The three steps are the three acts of the penitent, viz.:—contrition, confession and satisfaction (*contritio cordis, confessio oris, satisfactio operis*), and the angel is the absolving priest or the absolving power of the Church. But this interpretation is not without considerable difficulties. It seems quite out of analogy with the rest of the *Purgatorio* in which there is an entire and (considering the age in which Dante lived) a very remark-

Unlike the popularly accepted idea of purgatory, the *Purgatorio* of Dante is not a mere *annexe* of Hell. Fire is all but absent, and suffering, though sharp, is patiently and gladly borne for it is expiatory and ameliorative, and not simply punitive. As in the *Inferno*, the pain is analogous to the sin. The proud are bowed down beneath heavy weights. The envious, who once cast an evil eye on others, are blinded. The wrathful are enveloped in thick fumes. The victims of *accidia*, or apathetic sloth, race along in great haste. The avaricious are stretched face downwards on the ground. The gluttonous are emaciated to skeletons. The licentious burn out their lust in fire much hotter than boiling glass.

But contemplation is the peculiar discipline

---

able absence of the sacerdotal element. It sets this angel in a category by himself and apart from the other angels, of whom there are many in the *Purgatorio*, and none of whom represents any officer or institution of the Church on earth. Mr. Ruskin (*Sesame and Lilies* I. 24), who was not often at a loss to find a meaning for symbolism, confessed himself beaten here. "It is not easy to determine the meaning either of the substances of the three steps of the gate or of the two keys."

of Dante's *Purgatorio.* The inner wall of rock, which rises from the cornice of the proud, is of sculptured marble, and there, in life-like reality, *(morti li morti e i vivi parean vivi*)* are examples of the beauty of humility. There is the Virgin Mary as she meekly bowed before the Angel of the Annunciation; and there also is David as, forgetful of his regal dignity, he danced before the Ark. Underfoot and in contrast are illustrations, taken alternately from sacred and profane sources, of the fall of pride. Among them are Lucifer and Briareus, Nimrod and Niobe, and proud Ilium in her ashes. In the next cornice, whose occupants once envious are now blinded, appeal can be made only to the ear. An aëry voice sweeps by, loudly crying *Vinum non habent*, reminding them that the Virgin Mary, who was always adorned with every virtue, delighted to remedy a defect over which, had she been envious, she would have gloated. Thus, like Christian in the Interpreter's house, in every cornice the souls are educated in piety. Through eye or ear, the Virgin Mary always

* *Pur.* XII. 67—"Dead seemed the dead, the living seemed alive."

first, examples are presented for their contemplation of the virtues which they lacked on earth and of the evils wrought by the contrasting vices.

The altitude of the mount is so great, that rain does not fall and storms do not rise above the gateway on its side.* Some (the

* Those who are interested in literary parallels may be glad to see how a similar idea is represented by four great poets (Homer, Lucretius, Dante and Tennyson).

Ἣ μὲν ἄρ' ὣς εἰποῦσ' ἀπέβη γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη
Οὔλυμπόνδ', ὅθι φασὶ θεῶν ἕδος ἀσφαλὲς αἰεὶ
ἔμμεναι· οὔτ' ἀνέμοισι τινάσσεται οὔτε ποτ' ὄμβρῳ
δεύεται οὔτε χιὼν ἐπιπίλναται, ἀλλὰ μάλ' αἴθρη
πέπταται ἀνέφελος, λευκὴ δ' ἐπιδέδρομεν αἴγλη·
τῷ ἔνι τέρπονται μάκαρες θεοὶ ἤματα πάντα.

Odyssey VI. 41—46.

Apparet divum numen sedesque quietae
Quas neque concutiunt venti nec nubila nimbis
Aspergunt neque nix acri concreta pruina
Cana cadens violat semperque innubilus aether
Integit et large diffuso lumine rident.

Lucretius, III. 18-22.

Libero è qui da ogni alterazione;
Di quel che il ciel da sè in sè riceve
Esserci puote, e non d'altro, cagione
Perchè non pioggia, non grando, non neve,
Non rugiada, non brina più su cade
Che la scaletta dei tre gradi breve.

Latin poet Statius had sojourned in at least three cornices*), after undergoing the purgation of one cornice, pass into another. But appar-

> Nuvole spesse non paion, nè rade,
> Nè corruscar, nè figlia di Taumante
> Che di là cangia sovente contrade.
> Secco vapor non surge più avante
> Che al sommo dei tre gradi, ch' io parlai,
> Ov' ha il vicario di Pietro le piante.
>
> *Purg.* XXI. 43—54.

> The Gods, who haunt
> The lucid interspace of world and world,
> Where never creeps a cloud or moves a wind,
> Nor ever falls the least white star of snow,
> Nor ever lowest roll of thunder moans,
> Nor sound of human sorrow mounts to mar
> Their sacred everlasting calm!
>
> *Tennyson, Lucretius.*

In justice to Dante it may be said that in this quotation, with its list of meteorological phenomena, he is far below his best. On the other hand, Tennyson, with his added touch of "human sorrow," need not fear comparison with the ancients.

---

* *Purg.* XXI. 68: XXII. 91—92. Statius had spent over four centuries among the slothful, over five among the prodigal and avaricious, and two or more in some other circle or circles not specified (1200 years in all). The great majority belong to the thirteenth cen-

ently souls do not stay for a long time in purgatory. At any rate, most of those whom Dante meets are comparatively recent arrivals.

In the *Inferno* and *Paradiso*, the *ne plus ultra* of evil and of good have been reached, and necessarily there is fixity and finality. But aspiration and progress are the law of the *Purgatorio*. Angels preside over every ascent of this school of love. Evil and temptation cannot come near.*

tury, and, in fact, to its latter half. Many died in its last decade. Out of some six and forty souls, fewer than twenty have been there over fifteen years. On the other hand, Arnaldo Daniello, the Provençal poet, and Dante's great grandfather, Aldighiero (whom Dante might have treated more kindly, as to him he owed at least his family name) had already languished there for a century. Hugh Capet (†996) and Statius had been there two and twelve centuries respectively, and the purgation of the former was not yet complete. From the absence of notable persons of the Dark Ages and of the early Middle Ages we may infer either that they had already ascended to Heaven or that Dante knew or cared little about them.

---

* True, the serpent invades the Flowery Valley of the kings, but the two guardian angels turn it back. This is the only instance of evil in the Purgatorio; and this one, be it noted, is in the Ante-purgatorio and is moreover ineffective.—*Purg.* VIII. 39: 97—108.

Souls sing their evening hymn in rapturous strains which move Dante to ecstasy.* Beatitudes and psalms of praise and penitence are chanted by angelic voices. The whole mountain experiences a thrill, or rather an earthquake, of joyful sympathy, and a *gloria in excelsis* resounds from every part of it when the purification of any soul is complete and it is fit to mount upwards to the stars.† No external voice, whether of God or angel, announces that its warfare is accomplished. By a spontaneous instinct, by an inward monition, by an unexpected motion of the will, the soul knows that, at last, it is free from evil and therefore free to rise, and soars as if by its own native buoyancy. In Dante's *Purgatorio* there is no coercion or slavish bondage. All wait patiently, submissive to a higher will. The angels who keep watch over them are not prison warders but heavenly guardians. When the last fiery trial is passed, man's moral liberty is won. He needs no guidance from without. He may follow every inner impulse without fear. He is lord of himself, not

* *Purg.* VIII. 1—15.

† *Purg.* XX. 127—141.

through repression and self-control, but because he has no longer any evil tendency to master and subdue.

> "Love is an unerring light
> And joy its own security."

The transition from the *Inferno* to the *Purgatorio* is as marked as that from the second to the third book of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Nowhere is Dante's consummate art more finely illustrated. As he and Virgil emerge from the dark and tortuous path which leads upwards from Lucifer's icebound cavern to the narrow strand at the foot of the mountain, they once more behold the stars. Venus—at once the morning star and the symbol of love—makes the Eastern sky to smile. Like Ulysses they see a new constellation—the Southern Cross, whose four stars make the heavens glad. The day breaks; the early morning breeze dies away; the growing light makes visible the tremulous motion of the sea as it touches the shore. The dew still lingers in the shade as, at Cato's bidding, the two pilgrims descend to the water's edge, and Dante girds himself with a rush as an emblem of humility. As is befitting, purity and beauty

are the first notes of the *Purgatorio*—the transparent purity of light and air and dew, and the beauty of the sapphire sky and gleaming wave. From the foot of the mount to the summit we are in the open air, beneath the open heavens, and within sight of the open sea. As we ascend we gain a sense of increasing altitude—a growing amplitude of ether and of vision. Like the loved haunts of that Liberty which he was seeking, the *Purgatorio* of Dante is of the mountain and the sea.

The hearts of those who reach the mountain have already undergone a great change. The heroic Manfred has become timid and hesitating as a sheep. Those who died in the heat of battle now chant their *Miserere*. The bitter hatreds of the past have ended in perfect reconciliation, and those who were mortal foes on earth now sing together in sweet and ravishing harmony. At the moment of death they gave to others the pardon which they asked for themselves from God.* Earthly distinctions are cancelled, and Pope Adrian is now Dante's brother

* *Pentendo e perdonando.* "Repenting and pardoning."—*Purg.* v. 55.

and equal.* Those who are on the mountain side are exempt from temptation and pray for those who are still exposed to it on earth. The prayers of those on earth avail for them—the simple human prayers of wife and child and friend. Only the baptised are there,† penitence and faith are the two indispensable conditions of admission. Dante expected that after death he must return for a prolonged sojourn and discipline,‡ notwithstanding that, after he had passed through the fire of the last cornice, and the seven Ps had been erased from his forehead, Virgil pronounced him fit to mount upwards to the stars.‡

* *Purg.* XIX. 133—4 : v. 88 ; cf. *Par.* VI. 10. *Cesare fui e son Giustiniano.* "Cæsar I was, and am Justinian."

† But the Trojan Rhipeus and the Emperor Trajan, though unbaptised, are in heaven (*Par.* XX. 44—68 : cf. *Purg.* X. 73). Presumably Beatrice had no need of purgation. Apparently Henry VII. is to take his throne immediately after death (*Par.* XXX. 137). Piccarda (*Par.* III. 49) cannot have been dead long, and if the Matilda of the earthly paradise was an earthly friend of Beatrice, she, also, must have been exempt.

‡ *Purg.* XXVII. 127—142 : cf. *Par.* XXVIII. 64—65 ; *Par.* XXII. 106—108 ; *Purg.* XXIV. 75—81 ; *Purg.* XIII. 136—138.

The *Purgatorio* has a wider range than the *Inferno*. Its geographical horizon is extended and Dante shows himself more as a citizen of the world. Italy no longer engrosses his attention and he notices, if only casually, the affairs of countries so remote as Scotland and Bohemia.* His æsthetic faculties are free to work; in lines which are the quintessence of poetry he reveals the secret of his own lyric power.† Earlier and contemporary poetic literature come within his ken and it is in the pages of the *Purgatorio* that we meet for the first time with the names of Cimabue and Giotto.

The conditions of life in the *Purgatorio* are more nearly akin to our own. Its occupants are still subject to the laws of space and time and change. Day and night, toil and rest succeed one another. The presence of hope and anticipation distinguish it alike from the *Inferno* and the *Paradiso*. In Hell, hope never comes, and even desire is dead; at best, the virtuous sages in their Elysium are doomed "to desire without hope" of realisation through all eternity. In

* *Purg.* VII. 98—99: cf. *Par.* XIX. 115—148.

† See *ante* on the *Vita Nuova*, p. 30.

heaven, hope has ended in full fruition. But to them, as to us, both the future and the past belong. "They look before and after" and if memory saddens, hope inspires them. They are indeed assured of their final bliss and are already in the first of the many mansions of the Father's house—in the ante-chamber of heaven.*

If the church on earth is still the church militant and if the church in heaven is for ever the church triumphant, the church on the mount of purgation can be characterised only as the church penitent. As in heart we unite with it in sorrow and aspiration, we feel as those who sit at evening prayer in the shadowy nave of some vast cathedral while light and music stream over them from some holy choir beyond. Outside are sin and despair. Before and above us are the unseen and eternal whose powers we already taste and whose joys we shall one day share.

* To understand Dante's *Purgatorio* we must entirely dissociate it from popular notions of purgatory; and think of it as akin to the "Intermediate State." Dante does not omit, but neither does he emphasize, the penal aspect of suffering; discipline and chastening are first and foremost.

The *Purgatorio* ends, as the *Inferno* began, with a wood. But the dark valley has been exchanged for the mountain top, and night for morning. The shade now cast by the trees is as grateful as the darkness of the former wood was distressing. Birds sing in the branches. Fragrance fills the air. A stream flows by, clearer than the clearest on earth. On its further bank is a lady, Matilda* gathering flowers and singing. She converses with Dante; tells him that the stream between them is Lethe; that another stream on another side of the forest is called Eunöe; and that he is now in the earthly paradise or Garden of Eden and home of our first parents in their unfallen innocence. Suddenly, a bright light and a sweet melody arrest his attention. A mystic procession draws near.

* This lady has given almost as much trouble as Beatrice to the commentators. Who is she? Either the famous Countess of Tuscany of that name, who died in 1115, or one of the maidens of the *Vita Nuova*, is the general answer. What does she symbolise? Those who read Dante as poetry and not as theology will not greatly care. For most of us, symbols are no more than mirrors in which our own mental features are reflected. In these, as in other matters, "we receive but what we give."

In it is a triumphal chariot (the Church), drawn by a gryphon (half eagle, half lion), whose two natures symbolise the two natures of the Incarnate Christ. Upon the chariot is Beatrice, crowned with olive and veiled in white; her mantle is of green and her robe is the colour of living flame.* As Dante turns to her with all the force of his early love, Virgil, "sweetest of fathers" (*dolcissimo padre*) silently disappears. With the scathing, cutting, biting speech of a true woman (for whatever Beatrice may stand for in the *Paradiso*, her tongue is that of a woman in the immortal scene at the summit of the Mount of Purgation), Beatrice reproaches Dante for the aberrations of his past life. No longer "crowned and mitred,"† he hangs his head in shame. His lips refuse their office. He whispers an inaudible monosyllable of confession. Then, after a bitter sigh, he contrives to stammer out the plea that after her death the power of

* White, green, and red are the colours of faith, hope, and love. The vesture of Beatrice is not mentioned in the *Paradiso*. From it all colour has disappeared.

† *Purg.* XXVII. 142.

things present had caused him to err. Beatrice, with as much disdain as is lawful in the spirit of a just woman made perfect, taunts him with his forgetfulness of her earthly beauty, which had only been enhanced by death. Dante feels the venom of her argument *(il velen dell' argomento)* and falls overcome by self-reproach. As he recovers from his swoon, the lady whom he first saw draws him across the stream of Lethe and, in doing so, plunges him beneath its waters. Of them perforce he drinks; and thereby all remorseful memories are blotted out. She and her attendant nymphs lead him to the Incarnate Christ. Beatrice unveils and at last Dante quenches his "ten years' thirst."*

This meeting at the end of the journey is Dante's true purgatorio. Compared with it, the obliteration of the seven Ps on his forehead as he ascended the mount was but superficial and conventional. If, for Him whose name is above every name, we could, without irreverence, substitute the person of Beatrice, the words of the angel to Gerontius might be applied to Dante :—

* *Purg.* XXXII. 2. Beatrice died in 1290. The fictive date of the vision is 1300.

"though
Now sinless, thou wilt feel that thou hast sinn'd,
As never thou didst feel; and wilt desire
To slink away, and hide thee from His sight:
And yet wilt have a longing aye to dwell
Within the beauty of His countenance.
And these two pains, so counter and so keen,—
The longing for Him when thou seest Him not;
The shame of self at thought of seeing Him,—
Will be thy veriest, sharpest purgatory."*

According to "the master of them that know," the aim of tragedy is to refine the affections through pity and terror; but if there be any one lesson which, above all others, is taught by the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, it is that the sight of the eternal tragedy of Hell and the contemplation of the sufferings which follow sin, even in the elect, are weaker far than the power of love to quicken and refine the soul.

"That sight of the Most Fair
Will gladden thee, but it will pierce thee too."

* J. H. Newman, "The Dream of Gerontius."

Note on Dante's Use of the Word *Bruno*.

The word *Bruno* or *Bruna*, according to its gender, affords an interesting illustration of the freedom with which Dante uses language. In the *Inferno* (xxv. 64—66) he defines this word very exactly :—

Come procede innanzi dall' ardore
Per lo papiro suso un color bruno
Che non è nero ancora, e 'l bianco more.

["E'en as proceedeth on before the flame
Upward along the paper a brown colour
Which is not black as yet, and the white dies."
Longfellow.]

He uses it of the ant, *loro schiera bruna. Purg.* xxvi. 34 (cf. *It nigrum campis agmen.* Virgil, Æneid iv. 404, quoted by Scartazzini).

In the *Paradiso* it is the opposite of white.

U' non si muta mai bianco nè bruno.
Par. xv. 51.
[Wherein is never changed the white nor dark."
Longfellow.]

Tu vederai del bianco fatto bruno.
Par. xxii. 93.
["Thou shalt behold the white changed into brown."
Longfellow.]

In *Inf.* XXVI. 133, as we have found, it is applied to a mountain dimly seen at a great distance; and in *Par.* II. 73, to the dark parts of the moon.

In *Inf.* XIII. 34, it is used of the smear or stain caused by blood which has just been shed.

In *Purg.* XXIV. 27, it describes what is sometimes called "a shady act," *un atto bruno.*

In *Purg.* XIX. 6, it is used of the dark that precedes the dawn. The evening air is *bruno (Inf.* II. 1*).*

[cf. Milton—

"*All' imbrunir di sera.*"
Sonnet IV.

"Shadows brown."
Il Penseroso 134.

"Where the unpierced shade
Imbrowned the noontide bowers."
P. L. IV. 246.

"Brown as evening."
P. L. IX. 1088.

Also Shakespeare—

"The morn in russet mantle clad."
Hamlet I. i. 166.

And Tennyson—

"The twilight falling brown."
To the Rev. F. D. Maurice.]

The colour of Lethe is *bruna, bruna,* as it flows in the shade of the trees of the earthly paradise—*Purg.* XXVIII. 31. So is that of Acheron, *l'onda bruna—Inf.* III. 118.

Mr. Ruskin (*Modern Painters* III. 240, quoted in Longfellow's note to *Inf.* II. 1), came to the conclusion that by *bruno* Dante meant "dark gray." "So when he was talking of twilight his eye for colour was far too good to let him call it brown in our sense. Twilight is not brown, but purple, golden or dark gray; and this last was what Dante meant." Perhaps Tennyson has hit Dante's meaning when he says (*In Memoriam* 67)

> "I sleep till dusk is dipt in gray."
> [cf. Milton's "twilight gray". *P. L.* IV. 598.]

Victor Hugo, according to his English translator (I have not the French at hand), renders *brunus* as gray. *Azurini coloris et bruni* appears in *Notre Dame* as "gray, blue or violet" cloth.

But Mr. Vernon (Readings in the *Inferno,* Note on II. 1) says that *bruno* is "black" in the Tuscan idiom. *Portare il bruno*—"to be in

mourning," and *portare il bruno sul capello*—"to wear crape on one's hat." [May the present writer add a wish that Mr. Vernon could see his way to publishing his own translation and notes in a compact form without Benvenuto da Imola's Commentary? Benvenuto is very good, but Mr. Vernon himself is often better.]

THE *PARADISO*

VII.

THE *PARADISO.*

"δύσφραστον τὸ θέαμα."

THE *Paradiso* is an account of Dante's ascent through the heavens. Its starting point is the Earthly Paradise on the summit of the Mount of Purgation, and its goal is the Beatific Vision of God. Beatrice is his companion until at the last she returns to her seat among the glorified, when St. Bernard of Clairvaux takes her place at Dante's side. He and Beatrice visit in succession the heavens—ten in all—of the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the Fixed Stars, the Crystalline Sphere or Primum Mobile, and the Empyrean. The Earth is fixed at the centre, and the Empyrean is motionless. The nine intervening spheres are concentric with the

Earth and move round it with velocities varying with their distance from it, or, more correctly, and as Dante would have preferred to express it, with the degree of their nearness to the Empyrean. Every part of the Primum Mobile is inspired with an intense desire for communion with every part of the Empyrean. Consequently it revolves with immense rapidity; and the motion thus acquired is, in part, transmitted from one to another of the lower spheres. At each transmission there is a loss, and the sphere of the Moon, which is the lowest and the nearest to the Earth, is therefore the slowest.

Immediately above the earth's atmosphere is a sphere of fire, through which Dante must necessarily pass. In so doing he experiences a great change. He is transhumanised, so that thereafter he seems uncertain whether he is in the body or out of the body*. Each of his ascents from one sphere to another is accomplished instantaneously and without consciousness of motion. He becomes aware that he has entered another heaven only by a change in his perceptions and experience.

* *Par.* I. 70—75.

Although the account of his visits to these moving spheres forms much the largest part of the *Paradiso*, they are not the real heaven. They are but an Ante-paradiso, or rather a symbolic anticipation, adapted to our earthly modes of perception, of higher and lower degrees of bliss in the one true heaven of divine peace—the Empyrean, which is the seat of Deity and home of the redeemed.

Of the physical extent of Dante's Universe it is difficult to form an estimate, but towards the end of the *Paradiso* there are indications that, however great the interval of space between one planet and another, the interval between the highest of the planets and the fixed stars, and also that between the fixed stars and the Primum Mobile are immeasurably greater.

In the whole of the *Divina Commedia* Dante smiles but once, and his one smile is characteristic. When, at the suggestion of Beatrice, he looked downwards from the sphere of the Fixed Stars, he smiled at the *vil sembiante*, or mean appearance of our globe—that "little threshing-floor" whose possession men so ferociously dispute. But, at that celestial altitude,

he was also able to see all the planetary spheres in their true perspective, and to gauge their dimensions and velocities.* Very remote must he have been when he could thus, at a glance, survey the whole of our mundane system. Afterwards, but while Dante is still in the same heaven, his powers of vision, although re-inforced by celestial virtue, were not able clearly to discern the Primum Mobile above him,† and, apparently, another immense distance must be assumed to exist between it and the Fixed Stars.

Neither the spheres or firmaments themselves, nor the luminous bodies which they bear round in their circuits, must be thought of as consisting of mere matter moved by physical forces which act in accordance with natural laws. They are actuated by celestial intelligences or angelic orders, which dwell in them as the soul in the body, and shine through them as joy shines through the pupil of the eye. The

* *Par.* XXII. 128—154.

† *Par.* XXIII. 112—117—Nearly all the commentators apply these lines to the Primum Mobile and not to the Empyrean.

Church, by an anthropomorphism similar to that by which the Scriptures speak of Deity as having hands and feet, allows these angelic intelligences to be depicted as possessing glorious human bodies. But in reality they are entirely separate from matter. Though in the worlds, they are not of them. Like God, whose immediate creation they are, they transcend the spheres which they animate. In the Empyrean they are in immediate communion with the Most High; and by their mediation divine influence is distributed in varying degrees throughout the Universe.

These angelic choirs or orders are nine in number, and are co-ordinate with the spheres.* First in love and knowledge, and therefore nearest God, are the Seraphim; they preside over

* This co-ordination is as follows:—

Primum Mobile	Seraphim.
Fixed Stars	Cherubim.
Saturn	Thrones.
Jupiter	Dominations.
Mars	Virtues.
The Sun	Powers.
Venus	Principalities.
Mercury	Archangels.
The Moon	Angels.

the Primum Mobile, which is the nearest to the Empyrean and the first in dignity. Next are the Cherubim to whom the Fixed Stars are allotted, and so downwards to the angels specifically so called, whose sphere is the Moon.

In partial correspondence with these two hierarchies of spheres and angels is a hierarchy of human souls. As star differs from star in glory and as choir excels choir of angels in depth of intuition and intensity of love, so spirit differs from spirit in its capacity for joy; and this gradation in bliss is exhibited to Dante in a twofold manner—first of all, in his passage through the nine moving heavens, and afterwards, in the Empyrean.

In the lowest and most tardy of the spheres —that of the Moon—he discerns dim, pearly and almost phantasmal forms as of human faces. These are spirits who had fallen short of the counsels of perfection. They had vowed and had failed to pay their vows. Among them is Piccarda, whom Dante had known on earth, and who (as her brother, Forese Donati, so happy in his wife and sister, says of her)

"'twixt beautiful and good,
I know not which was more, triumphs rejoicing
Already in her crown."*

Instead of offering uncompromising resistance to evil, they had yielded to coercion, had allowed themselves to be drawn from the cloister to the home and had broken their vow of perpetual virginity.

In the next sphere—that of Mercury—Dante sees more than a thousand splendors or flashing points, kindled by that light of love which spreads through all the heavens. These sought the glory which comes from men rather than that which comes from God. The Emperor Justinian, no longer an earthly Cæsar, is one of them.

In the higher sphere of Venus and enjoying a higher degree of bliss, are Rahab, Sordello's Cunizza whose turbid earthly life is now clarified into perfect purity, and Dante's royal friend, Carlo Martello, heir of Apulia and Sicily, and titular King of Hungary.

* *Purg.* XXIV. 13—15. cf. *Purg.* XXIII. 85—93. Dante indulges in fierce general invectives against the women of his day; but when he individualizes, his portraits are always of singular beauty.

In the Sun the spirits appear of the great teachers who, from the days of Solomon to those of Thomas Aquinas, had sought to make luminous the obscure depths of theology. God's warriors are in Mars. Among them is Dante's crusading and earliest known ancestor, Cacciaguida. The highest Imperial virtue—the love of justice—is exemplified in Jupiter; and the highest ecclesiastical virtue — that of contemplation — in Saturn. Finally, in the heaven of the Fixed Stars, the three chief of the Apostles — St. Peter, St. James and St. John — examine Dante in the three theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Love. The last two heavens are reserved for Apocalyptic Visions of the nine choirs of angels and of the Church triumphant.

But, although there are gradations in heaven, there is no envy or discontent. Everything is in accordance with that divine order in which the unity of the world consists, and the mere contemplation of the excellence of that order gives an added joy. As human voices in their several parts compose our terrestrial harmonies and as the order of the planets is the basis

of the music of the spheres, so ranks and degrees in heaven underlie the grander harmonies of the spiritual universe. To wish it otherwise would make a discord, and be contrary to Him Whose will is their peace.

"So that, as we are station above station
Throughout this realm, to all the realm 'tis pleasing
As to the King who makes His will our will."*

But this distribution of souls is in appearance only. It is a symbol and not an eternal fact. Only in condescension to Dante's sense-bound faculties have they thus presented themselves, that he may the more easily perceive their different measures of bliss.

"He of the Seraphim most absorbed in God,
Moses and Samuel, and whichever John
Thou mayst select, I say, and even Mary,
Have not in any other heaven their seats
Than have those spirits that have just appeared to thee,
Nor of existence more or fewer years.
But all make beautiful the primal circle,
And have sweet life in different degrees
By feeling more or less the eternal breath.
They show themselves here, not because allotted

* *Par.* III. 70—90, cf. VI. 115—126.

This sphere has been to them, but to give sign
Of the celestial, which is least exalted.
To speak thus is adapted to your mind,
Since only through the sense it apprehends."*

The "primal circle," which "all make beautiful," is the Empyrean. It contains all other spheres and is itself contained by none. Its bounds are only light and love. In it time and motion are not, but only "light, intellectual and full of love." It belongs, not to the finite, but to the spiritual and eternal, and in this absolute and perfect heaven a second and final revelation of the saints is vouchsafed to Dante. In the spheres, except in that of the Moon where they still retained some human semblance, Dante had seen them only as points of intense luminosity. But, by a prophetic or anticipatory vision, he saw them in the Empyrean as they will be after the consummation of their bliss through the resurrection of the body. Then their whole being will be complete, and, in consequence, more than ever acceptable to God. His gracious light will be poured forth upon them even more abundantly. Their vision will thereby become fuller, and

* *Par.* IV. 28—42.

with fuller vision the love which that vision kindles will be intensified, and intenser love will be followed by a heightened glory. For the law of glory is this. Radiance depends on ardour of love; love depends on vision; and vision on merit, or rather, on the grace of God which is the superabundant source of all merit in the redeemed.*

Thus, then, re-invested in glorified human forms, as they will appear after the restitution of all things, Dante sees them seated, rank above rank, in the more than thousand tiers of a celestial amphitheatre whose lowest circle is wider than the circumference of the sun. Angels whose faces are of living flame and whose wings are of gold, minister peace and love to them. Mary presides over them, and a little below her Beatrice takes her exalted place. Many thrones are vacant, for the number of the elect is not yet full. One of them, over which a crown already hangs, is reserved for Henry VII., that German Emperor who was the hope and disappointment of so many.†

The *Paradiso* ends with the ineffable vision

* *Par.* XIV. 37—60.

† *Par.* XXX. 97.—XXXI. 18.

of Deity—of that love which is the cause and explanation of all modes of finite existence.*

The souls whom Dante sees in heaven are, for the most part, of those who, by general consent, were most illustrious in the history of revelation and the Church. Adam and David are there, and St. Peter, St. James and St. John, with many of a later age. But the omissions are, perhaps, as significant as the inclusions. Apparently, the worthiest of French kings was not worthy of a throne by the side of the German Henry, for St. Louis of France is not seen there. Most remarkable of all, neither Abraham, the Father of the Faithful, nor St. Paul, the Apostle of Faith, is met with, although the latter is mentioned with respectful politeness by his brother apostles. Was the Pauline theology of small account with Dante? At any rate, copious as are his references to Scripture, his allusions to the writings of St. Paul are comparatively few, and of these some are faint and uncertain.

The fact seems to be, that souls are introduced into the *Paradiso* not always for their

* *Par.* xxxiii. 85—88, 143—5.

intrinsic merit, but for their ability to answer questions. Adam, whom Dante, a little indelicately, addresses as

> "O Apple, that mature
> Alone hast been produced,"

is able to satisfy Dante's inquisitiveness as to the age of the world, the length of his sojourn in the Garden of Eden (alas! only six hours) and the language that was spoken there.* The theologians of the Middle Ages wondered whether Solomon was lost or saved. His presence in heaven solves the doubt, and furnishes Thomas Aquinas with a text for a sermon, which, if Dante had taken it to heart, would have effectually prevented him from writing the *Divina Commedia*, for its last point was that fallible man must not be too confident in pronouncing final judgment on others.†

This intellectual interest, this keen desire to know, suggests a clue to the principle by which his selection of theological truths is guided. For one reference to the Atonement, there are many references to the Trinity and the Incarnation. But we must not therefore suppose

* *Par.* XXVI. 91—142. † *Par.* XIII. 130—142.

that Dante thought lightly of Christ's death. Rather it would seem as if he understood, or thought that he understood, the Atonement, of which he had a quite definite theory and which was therefore devoid of mystery. But no teacher and no philosophy had been able to fathom the nature of the Trinity or to explain the possibility of the Incarnation. If we may reverently say so, it was the profundity of these questions that fascinated Dante. Consequently he returned to them again and again. He longed to get beyond the fact, to the inner cause and reason, and therefore the crowning joy of his experience of the Beatific Vision was that by a transcendent and ineffable act of intuition he was enabled to discern the inner relations of the Triune God, and as by a momentary lightning flash to perceive *how* God and man are one in the Second Person. The *Divina Commedia* ends with the reconciliation of Reason and Faith, and tells us not only how Dante found peace for his heart, but also how, by humility and not by suppression, his eager intellect was exalted and satisfied, and found its solution of the problems of eternity.

The *Paradiso* is the heaven of the intellect

rather than of the heart or of the sensuous imagination. Imaginative it is with the super-sensuous imagination of the mathematician and philosopher whose thought moves easily in a world of symbols and abstractions. Here and there is a simple human touch as in the longing of the beatified for re-union with those beloved on earth, "for their mothers, for their fathers, and for others who had been dear to them."* This hint of the survival of earthly relationship redeems Dante's heaven from its apparent disregard of kinship and common affections. But for it, those words of Adrian V. in the *Purgatorio*, *Neque nubent*, might be written over all the *Paradiso*. "They neither marry nor are given in marriage." They contemplate the Trinity, but their fellowship is not with the Father or with the Son or with one another.

That the *Paradiso* should lack the dramatic interest of the *Inferno* and the picturesque beauty of the *Purgatorio* was inevitable. There was no place in it for those mingled hopes and fears with which we act our part in the unfolding of our earthly drama; for progress where the goal

* *Par.* XIV. 65.

has been reached; or for shade and colour in a world where there are no broken lights, no obscuring media and no darkness at all. But formless and colourless as are Dante's heavens, they overflow with a gladness that is akin to the "unbodied joy" of the skylark, and has nothing of the "plaintive anthem" of the nightingale. They are radiant with smiles. The eyes of Beatrice glow with smiles as she teaches Dante. The saints smile as they recount one another's holy lives. The moment Gregory the Great entered heaven he smiled at the mistakes of his own angelology.* The stars smile, and the flowers on the banks of the river of light; and when all Paradise began its song, so intoxicating in its sweetness, of Glory to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, it seemed to Dante as the smile or laughter of the Universe.†

The *Paradiso* is full of dance and song. As with David before the ark—to use an illustration on which Dante has set his seal—there

* *Par.* XXVIII. 133—5.

† The *risi* and *sorrisi* of the *Paradiso* are innumerable. "Smile" seems inadequate, and "laughter" too coarse for *riso*, but evidently Dante would not have been shocked at the sound of laughter in heaven.

is a gaiety, an absence of awe and hushed solemnity, an exuberant *abandon* in which all conventional reverence is lost in rapturous delight. His heaven is no mere negation of earthly sorrow, or a haven of peace for souls released from pain and exile. It is a high festival, which no languor can ever dull, and whose springs of joy are inexhaustible and widespread as the love which moves, and the glory which fills, the Universe.

The *Divina Commedia* is the greatest single achievement of any human mind, and the *Paradiso* is its befitting crown. Obsolete it may be in its science, obscure in its metaphysics and inadequate in its theology. No church or school has ever existed that would accept it as a perfect exposition of its creed, to which nothing must be added and from which nothing must be taken away. But like one of those separate intelligences which animate the spheres, the soul of Dante shines through and transcends his world of symbols, and reveals him not only as the most interesting person in all literature, but as one of those seraphic spirits to whose clear vision and ardent love of righteousness it is given to serve as mediators between the temporal and the eternal.

THE *MOTIF* OF THE *DIVINA COMMEDIA*

"Death is terrible, for it is an end"—*Aristotle.*

"The Contemplation of *Death* as the *wages of sinne*, and Passage to another world, is Holy and Religious; But The Feare of it, as a Tribute due unto Nature, is weake"—*Bacon.*

"And thus, Glaucon, the tale was preserved and did not perish; and it may also preserve us, if we listen to its warnings; in which case we shall pass prosperously across the river of Lethe and not defile our souls. Indeed if we follow my advice, believing the soul to be immortal and to possess the power of entertaining all evil as well as all good, we shall ever hold fast the upward road and devotedly cultivate justice combined with wisdom; in order that we may be loved by one another and by the gods, not only during our stay on earth, but also when, like conquerors in the games collecting the presents of their admirers, we receive the prizes of virtue; and in order that both in this life and during the journey of a thousand years we may never cease to prosper.—*Plato.*

"That He might deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."—*Epis. to Hebrews.*

VIII.

THE *MOTIF* OF THE *DIVINA COMMEDIA.*

THE first two cantos of the *Inferno* are admittedly of the utmost importance to the student of Dante. They stand as prologue to his greatest work—to the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* as well as to the *Inferno.* They are rich in autobiographical allusions. By unanimous consent they contain the *motif* of the *Divina Commedia*, and, rightly understood, they cannot but throw valuable light on the personality and poetry of their author. Indeed whoso would know him whom Carlyle has so happily called the spokesman of the middle ages, and whom many, going further, would call the one great poet of the Christian Church, must pore over them again and again until a consistent meaning begins to dawn upon him.

But, unfortunately, at the outset of our study, we, like Dante at the outset of his journey, are lost in a dark wood where the lamps of commentators give us no effectual guidance. These "riddling triplets of old time" are, we soon feel, still unriddled. The sphinx still baffles us, and we have to admit with so eminent a Dantist as Dr. Scartazzini* that Dante still awaits his Œdipus.

The argument of these mysterious cantos is as follows:—

When half the course of life is run, Dante finds himself in the midst of a dark wood which, as we learn later on, is also a valley, and which he has entered unwittingly in sleep. He has lost his way and is well-nigh overcome with fear. Eventually he escapes from the wood, and sees a hill whose summit is lit up with the rays of the rising sun. This hill he attempts to climb, but is thwarted by three beasts—a leopard, a lion and a wolf—which successively cross his path. The wolf drives him back into the obscurity whence he has emerged, and he is reduced to

* Alas! now the late Dr. Scartazzini, to whose life-long labours all students of Dante owe so much.

despair when Virgil comes to the rescue, prophecies the advent of a greyhound who will chase the wolf back to Hell, offers to conduct Dante through Hell and Purgatory and promises that a worthier soul (to wit, Beatrice) shall guide him through Heaven. Dante follows Virgil who explains to him the cause of his coming and encourages him to set out on this arduous enterprise.

This symbolism is commonly regarded as a veiled confession of moral aberration, and is supposed to refer to the time when Dante first became conscious of himself as a lost soul. The dark wood stands for a life of evil. The sleep is the slumber of the spirit. The way which he has abandoned is the path to the true good. The sunlit hill which he attempts to climb is moral and spiritual perfection. The sun itself is the Deity. The three beasts are the three sins of sensuality, pride and avarice, which hinder the upward progress of the soul. Virgil, who is the impersonation of the highest human wisdom, comes to deliver him from perdition and to lead him in the way of salvation.

In support of this view we may adduce the

fact that for a while Dante undoubtedly fell far below his own ideal of life. Of this we need no other evidence than the open confession made to Beatrice on the summit of the Mount of Purgation; and furthermore it is only natural that students of Dante, endued with that keen ethical sensibility which their devotion implies, should be strongly prepossessed in favour of a strictly ethical interpretation of this picturesque imagery. They can cite many eminent authorities. Indeed, they hold the field. But, nevertheless, their theory is beset with difficulties, and in fact, whether we study the cantos in detail, or have regard to their general tenor as a whole, we find it no easy task to make Dante's text square with their comment.

If, for instance, the three beasts represent the three cardinal sins which ruin human life, we cannot but ask with Dr. Scartazzini why they are first met with on the hillside which Dante is already ascending, and not in the dark wood of sin which seems to be their natural habitat. Dante has left his sinful life behind him when sins first cross his path. Again, is it likely that so masculine a moralist as Dante would make

the flimsy excuse that he first went wrong unknowingly in sleep? "Very hateful to his fervid heart and sincere mind would have been the modern theory which deals with sin as involuntary error." So said Mr. Russell Lowell in his masterly essay on Dante, and we cannot but believe that Dante's intense moral fervor would speedily have shrivelled up a palliation so poverty-stricken as this.

Further, if he is all wrong morally, why does he not turn back?

"He that once hath missèd the right way
The further he doth goe, the further he doth stray."

But on the contrary, though persisting in his evil way, and without celestial aid, he escapes from the wood on the sunny side. Why, when he wants to climb the hill does Virgil tell him that he must take a peculiar road? *A te convien tenere altro viaggio* ("Thee it behoves to make a different journey").* Why not the common track? The way of salvation is the same for all.

Further, can we suppose that sensuality, pride and avarice were the three sins which

* *Inf.* I. 91.

were ruining Dante's soul? Of pride we may suspect him—of such pride as is not unbecoming in one who knows his proper worth. "This Dante," says Villani, "was a little haughty and shy and disdainful." We can well believe it. Possibly he never learned the gentle art of suffering fools gladly. But of sensuality, never! The most prurient critic of the dunghill kind may safely be defied to detect one trace of sensuality in that pure heart of which Dante has made a spectacle for all time. As for avarice, the mere imputation would bear the word "absurdity" written across its face. The man whose work "had made him lean for many years," and who had endured the "ten years' thirst" for Beatrice, felt little of the accursed thirst for gold. Moreover, if such were his besetting sins, how comes it that he betrays no specially-marked self-consciousness when passing through those circles where these sins are punished or purged away?

Nowhere in the Inferno, it may be remarked, does Dante show any sign of moral compunction or of a guilty conscience. He never reproaches himself, never admits moral comradeship with the sinners whom he sees in torment, never seems to

feel, even when he pities, that he is under the same condemnation, and is never overheard saying to himself, "But for the grace of God there lies Dante Alighieri, paying the just penalty of his transgressions." On the contrary, his journey is an "honorable enterprise."* Fortune, not his own evil heart, is his enemy.† Up to a certain point his life has been unclouded.‡ Conscience does not reproach him.§ Lazarus might have visited Dives in Hades with as few qualms of remorse. Throughout, his language and bearing are those of a disinterested spectator, occasionally pitiful, more often indignant; but never are they such as becomes one who stands in the garb of a penitent and confesses himself to be the chief of sinners. Not until Hell and Purgatory are passed and he hears the sharp rebuke of Beatrice, does he hang his head with shame and show unequivocal signs of contrition.

Fear, not guilt, is the note of the *Inferno*, and more especially of its opening cantos. Virgil goes to the root of the matter when he says to Dante :—

* *Inf.* II. 47. † *Inf.* II. 61. ‡ *Inf.* XV. 49.
§ *Inf.* XV. 91—93.

Se io ho ben la tua parola intesa
L'anima tua è da viltade offesa.

"If I have understood thy speech aright,
Thy soul is overthrown by *cowardice*."*

Fear, not to say abject terror, is his one overmastering emotion. He dwells on it again and again. The very thought of the dark wood renews the fear with which it had once inspired him and which had lasted through a night of misery.† When he looks up to the sunlit hill his fear is a little relieved, but he still pants breathlessly as he looks back on the scene of his hair-breadth escape.‡ His fear is revived by the appearance of the lion, before whom the very air trembles, while the she-wolf causes such an access of fear that he loses all hope of reaching the summit; she makes him tremble in every pulse and vein.§

He is anxious to know whether he is equal to the arduous enterprise to which Virgil invites him. Beatrice sees that he is driven back by fear; Lucia sees him fighting with death;

* *Inf.* II. 43—45.
† *Inf.* I. 6, 15—21.
‡ *Inf.* I. 22—27.
§ *Inf.* I. 49—54, 90.

and Dante himself admits that his courage is gone.* Well may Virgil exclaim, *Perchè tanta viltà!* "Why such cowardice!"† The truth is that fear sobs through the opening of the *Inferno* like the worn-out crying of a child in the dark; and the fear is not ethical; it is primitive, instinctive, physical.

If then we can discover the cause of his fear, we have the key to the cantos and the *Motif* of the *Divina Commedia.* Lucia's words already quoted give the needful hint. Dante is combatting with Death, and we infer that his fear is that primitive fear of Death through which men are all their lifetime subject to bondage. The different journey—*l'altro viaggio*—lies through the awful regions of the dead, and he quivers instinctively like a noble steed on the threshold of a charnel house. The journey is unique. Two only have gone that way before—Æneas and St. Paul‡—but neither of them has traversed the whole distance. Æneas had descended to Hades. St. Paul had been caught up into Paradise; but to Dante alone was vouch-

* *Inf.* II. 11, 63, 107, 130. † *Inf.* II. 122.
‡ *Inf.* II. 13—33.

safed the dread privilege of passing through the unseen world in its entirety, and of beholding the eternal fires of Hell, the temporal fires of Purgatory and the eternal beatitudes of Heaven.

> "Long is the way
> And hard, that out of Hell leads up to light." *

and, like Milton's Satan on "his uncouth way" through "the palpable obscure," his voyage is one of exploration and discovery, in order that to his peers he may relate what he has found. In other words, his journey is not typical and normal; it is vicarious, and solitary in human experience. But though not typical, it is of universal significance. His subject, we are told in the Epistle to Can Grande, is the state of souls after death, or man as subject to rewards and punishments. This is so obviously and literally the case, that we need not raise the question whether the epistle is Dante's own and stamped with his authority. But the description of the state of souls after death and the exploration of the consequences of death are not to be undertaken with a light heart or without fear and trembling;

* *Paradise Lost* II. 432—433.

Che non è impresa da pigliare a gabbo
Descriver fondo a tutto l'universo
Nè da lingua che chiami mamma e babbo.

"For 'tis no enterprise to take in jest
To sketch the bottom of all the Universe
Nor for a tongue that cries Mamma and Babbo."*

Assuredly to visit and describe the secrets of the other world were no task for childlike confidence or childish speech. Well might the bravest stand back, for, as a necessary preliminary, he must cross the boundary line which lies between this life and the next, and must undergo an experience analogous to the common experience of death. He must feel something of its dread, taste something of its bitterness, must even pass through a horror of great darkness. In spirit he must die, and in solitude and helplessness must pass into the great unknown. Dante was no coward, but the strong man bows himself at times. There is a *metus qui cadit etiam in constantem virum*, and assuredly the most imaginative, sensitive and realistic of poets, though *vir constantissimus*, may be excused if he shrank from his awful baptism into death.

* *Inf.* XXXII. 7—9.

The dark wood at the beginning of the *Divina Commedia* corresponds with the deep river—"Death's cold flood"*—so fearful to Christian at the end of the *Pilgrim's Progress*. Both wood and river alike denote the passage from the here to the hereafter, and brave hearts like Bunyan and Dante are not afraid to confess their fear. But the dark wood is also a valley—the valley of the shadow—into which he has plunged prematurely† without God's rod and staff to comfort him. He is

"Of heav'n and earth and God and man forlore"

in the awful solitude of death. In other words, the first two cantos are the outcome of Dante's intense realization of man's mortality; of the unique and awful consciousness necessary to the man who would tell all other men what Death means for the individual and the race.

There was a time, even before Beatrice died, when the thought of death lay heavy on Dante's soul. Parts of the *Vita Nuova* are tremulous with dread anticipation. *Tu pur morrai* ("Thou, too, shalt die") fell upon his ear

* *Inf.* II. 108. † *Inf.* I. 14; XV. 49—52.

just as the opposite presentiment, "I shall not die, I shall not die," came to John Henry Newman in the crisis of his fever. *Di necessità conviene che la gentilissima Beatrice si muoia.* Neither can the beloved Beatrice escape. "Then," he says, "the sun went out . . . I was filled with a grievous fear."* Afterwards, poetising his experience, as was his wont, he wrote the following lines—

Mentre io pensava la mia frale vita
E vedea il suo durar com' è leggiero
Piansemi Amor nel core ove dimora;
Per che l'anima mia fu sì smarrita
Che sospirando dicea nel pensiero
'Ben converrà che la mia donna mora.'

While I was thinking of my frail life and seeing its duration how short it is, Love wept within my heart wherein he dwells; wherefore my soul went so astray that, sighing, I said in my thought, "Sure it behoveth that my lady die."—*Canzone* IV.

In fact, the *Vita Nuova* and the *Divina Commedia* together give Dante's version of the age-long story of Love and Death. At first, Death conquers Love. Finally, Love conquers Death. The *Vita Nuova* is the earthward side

* *Vita Nuova* XXIII.

of the conflict and tells how the short-lived joy of love soon changed to bitterest sorrow.* The *Divina Commedia* is its heavenward side. In it Love is the deliverer. *Amor mi mosse*,† says Beatrice. "Love moved me." Love gives Dante courage to plunge into the wall of fire, the *ultima tortura*,‡ which bars the way to her. The journey ends in love—

> "Such love as spirits feel
> In worlds whose course is equable and pure,"

and in the realisation of that Divine and Eternal "Love, which moves the sun and stars."§ The motto of the poem might well be, "Perfect Love casteth out fear." To penitential love, death is an unreality. Only the impenitent and unbelieving need fear. The terror by night ends in the vision and victory of love.

Regarded as the proem to an apocalyptic vision of the regions of the dead, the imagery

* *Poco dimorava che la sua letizia si convertia in amarissimo pianto.—Vita Nuova* III.

† *Inf.* II. 72. ‡ *Purg.* XXVII. 35—42.

§ *Par.* XXXIII. 145.

of the first cantos becomes intelligible and consistent. The opening line, "Midway upon the journey of our life," is an echo of King Hezekiah's dirge as he felt himself drawing near to the gates of death. *In dimidio dierum meorum vadam ad portas inferi.** Like the Hebrew king, Dante, in the midst of his days, at the midpoint of life's journey, is going in spirit on the same dark journey. He has reached his thirty-fifth year. His life has reached its meridian. He has spent the half—perchance the best half—of the allotted three score years and ten. Thereafter man begins to decline, and life is but death deferred. Then, "for the first time, the man finds himself looking into the eyes of death, and the commonplace 'We must all die' transforms itself into the acute consciousness 'I must die.'" The theory that the *Divina Commedia* is the inner history of Dante's moral aberration and conversion finds it hard to account for the selection of his thirty-fifth year as the date of his journey, and refers it to the circumstance that in that year—the year 1300—the papal Jubilee

* Isaiah xxxviii. 10. (Cf. Ps. cii. 25. *Ne revoces me in dimidio dierum meorum.)*

made a deep impression on Western Christendom, and possibly on Dante himself. But how far he was moved by it is an open question, which there is no direct evidence to decide. Knowing, however, as we do, his intense aversion from the venality and corruption of the Papal Court, we may think it not improbable that he regarded the whole business as a whitening of ghastly sepulchres. If indeed the *Divina Commedia* were nothing more than the autobiography of the particular man Dante, some such external accident might have been the turning-point in his life. But if, on the other hand, the writer of the Epistle to Can Grande is right, and the subject is man in general, as well as Dante in particular, we may reasonably ask what common ground there is for marking out the thirty-fifth year as specifically appropriate for repentance and conversion. "Now is the appointed time." If, however, the Fear of Death is the primary emotion of the first canto, that year is right enough; for it is then, perhaps, that, for the first time, the average man begins to realize the brevity and bitterness of life, and the familiar proposition, "Man is mortal," ceases to be a

truism, and comes home to him with a pointed personal application.

A deeper import may be read into these cantos if we suppose with Dr. Scartazzini that Dante's absorption in philosophic studies during the years immediately following the death of Beatrice had deadened his interest in Christianity. It is a noteworthy fact that in the sorrow portrayed in the *Vita Nuova*, he draws no consolation from religion. Beatrice, it is true, is in high heaven, but Dante's bereavement seems irreparable. She becomes a memory and at last an inspiration, but re-union with her is not the aim of his striving. There is no sure and certain hope founded on faith in the resurrection. Had Dante during those dark years no clear vision of a future life? Possibly we may not be far wrong if we accept the late Dean Plumptre's suggestion that at this period Dante "had made shipwreck of his faith and was tossed to and fro in the deep waters" of doubt. It must be confessed that in his writings he has left few, if any, positive traces of such an experience. In the *Convivio* (IV. 1) he tells us that he had questioned "whether the original matter of the ele-

ments had been created by God," and from this we might perhaps infer that he had at one time hovered over a materialistic conception of the Universe. Elsewhere in the *Convivio* (II. 16) he speaks of doubts with an exquisite sympathy as of one not unversed in them. "They are," he says, "but the cloudlets of the dawn gathering over the face of the sun, and dissipated as the sun continues to shine, so that the air is purged and illuminated by his mid-day beams." It is hard to believe that the man who wrote thus had known nothing of the clouds of doubt dispelled by the clear shining of the sun of truth.

Dante lived in an unbelieving age. Averrhoism was in the air, and was a growing power. Two of its chief seats were at Padua and Paris, where Dante may have studied. "The Averrhoistic theory of the unity of the immaterial and immortal intellect in all men, whereby individual immortality was rendered impossible,"* had already been condemned by Thomas Aquinas "as an *error indecentior* which had for some time

* Ueberweg, *History of Philosophy*, Eng. Trans., I. 450—460., II. 12.

been acquiring influence with many minds." Dante was an admirer, and presumably had been a student of, Averrhoes,* from whose Pantheistic teaching he may, like so many of his contemporaries, have been infected with this "error indecentior." Further, as Dean Plumptre has observed, it would not have been strange if he had heard debated in the Schools the more tremendous question *Utrum sit Deus.* To Dante such questions were no idle abstractions for ingenious intellects to play with. If God and immortality were empty dreams, what hope was there of re-union with Beatrice? Hence, perhaps, the bitterness of his fear.† *O mors, quam amara est memoria tua!*‡ "O Death, how bitter is mindfulness of thee!" Unrelieved by faith and hope, his bitterness was as of death itself. Like Hezekiah in his lament, he seems to cry out *Amaritudo mea amarissima.*§

Striking as are the coincidences between

* *Inf.* IV. 144. † *Inf.* I. 7.

‡ *Ecclesiasticus* XLII.—Bitterness in the Old Testament, which Dante knew so well, is associated with death, not with sin.

§ Is. XXXVIII. 17.

the first canto of the *Inferno* and Hezekiah's prayer, they would be still more remarkable if we could suppose that Dante read into the Vulgate version the full sense of the original. He tells us that in his bitter experience he found good.

La paura!
Tanto è amara che poco è più morte:
Ma per trattar del ben ch' i' vi trovai
Dirò dell' dell' altre cose ch' io v'ho scorte.

"The fear!
So bitter is it, death is little more;
But of the good to treat which there I found,
Speak will I of the other things I saw there."*

Dr. G. A. Smith thus translates the words of Hezekiah. "Behold, for perfection was it bitter to me, so bitter."† To monarch and poet alike the bitterness was the foretaste of death. To each it was premature. Hezekiah exclaims, "I am deprived of the residue of my years."

* *Inf.* I. 6—9.

† For comparison the words of the Vulgate (which was Dante's Bible) should be quoted. They are:—*Ecce in pace amaritudo mea amarissima. Tu autem eruisti animam meam, ut non periret; projecisti post tergum tuum omnia peccata mea.*—Is. XXXVIII. 17.

Further on in the *Inferno*, Dante tells Brunetto Latino.

Lassù di sopra in la vita serena—
Rispos' io lui—mi smarrì in una valle
Avanti che l'età mia fosse piena.

"Up there above us in the life serene,"
I answered him, "I lost me in a valley,
Or ever yet my age had been completed."*

Hezekiah had never known, and Dante very possibly had lost, the Christian hope of immortality. But after their darkness both found good. We need not linger over the perfection which Hezekiah perceived to be the end of his affliction. But to Dante, the first good was the sun as it dawned upon the hill tops and upon "the lake of his heart." But what the sun stands for is not clear. Commentators are content to quote a sentence from the *Convivio*, that God is the intelligible and spiritual sun. *Lo sole spirituale e intelligibile, ch' è Iddio.*† The quotation is misleading, for a little further on in the first canto, Dante, by including the sun among created things, distinguishes it from the Divine love *i.e.*, from the Creator.

* *Inf.* xv. 49—52. † *Convivio* III. 12.

E il sol montava in sù con quelle stelle
Ch' eran con lui quando l'amor divino
Mosse da prima quelle cose belle.

"And up the sun was mounting with those stars
That with him were, what time the Love Divine
At first in motion set those beauteous things."*

More likely is it that the sun is that light of truth which dispels the darkness of error, and that the hill on which its rays fall is the returning hope of immortality, with all its possibilities of happiness and perfection. *Sperabam usque ad mane.* The morning has come at last. Once let Dante's opening description of the dark valley —so rough and thickly wooded—symbolise the blank negation of all his hopes, and then its horror, its bitterness and sorrow, come home to the hearts of the men of the nineteenth as they did to the heart of the lonely exile of the fourteenth century. "The very thought of it renews our fear."

The journey began on Good Friday. On the eve of Good Friday the Saviour was in Gethsemane and Dante was in the dark wood. On Good Friday Christ died, and on Good Friday Dante passed through the portal and

* *Inf.* i. 38—40.

entered the regions of the dead. On Holy Saturday Christ descended into Hell and preached to the spirits in prison, and on Holy Saturday Dante is himself exploring the secrets of the prison house, and hearing and seeing memorials of the "potentate" who had preceded him. On Easter Sunday at early dawn, Christ burst asunder the bars of death, and, having tasted of death for everyone, delivered all men from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. On Easter Sunday, likewise at early dawn, Dante emerges from the underworld; his "dead song" has its resurrection,* and he sets out in quest of "liberty which is so dear."† The coincidence in time, place and circumstance, is striking and deliberate, and is redeemed from blasphemy only by Dante's intense earnestness of purpose. Not even the stigmata of St. Francis are a more obvious imitation of our Lord's passion.

This evident association of the *Divina Commedia* with the season of Christ's death and resurrection fits in admirably with Dante's own scheme of interpretation. Death, like the Exodus

* *Purg.* I. 7. † *Purg.* I. 71.

which Dante expounds,* and which it resembles, has many meanings. Like the Exodus it can, in Dante's old-world language, have its literal, its allegorical, its moral, and its anagogical signification. The departure from Egypt, according to Dante, stands not only for a fact of history; it symbolises our redemption by Christ; our conversion from sin to grace; and our transition from the bondage of corruption to the freedom of eternal glory. Dante's conception of Death —the universal Exodus—must have been equally rich in suggestiveness. In it may easily have been contained the physical fact and man's fear of it; Christ's death when "all died;" the Pauline death to sin and life to righteousness; and the second death of Christian Eschatology, to which Dante very distinctly refers towards the end of his first canto. If, as the Epistle to Can Grande says, and as we can so easily see for ourselves, the subject of the *Divina Commedia* is the state of souls after death, what more natural than that it should begin with the state of souls before death, viz., Fear, which, however often and easily overcome, is the most nearly

* *Convivio* II. 1. Cf. *Ep. to Can Grande*, 7.

universal of feelings? "Men feare *Death*," says Lord Bacon, and Dante, to use Bacon's words, shews how "a Minde fixt and bent upon somewhat that is good, doth avert the Dolors of *Death*."

The upward path is barred by a leopard, a lion, and a wolf. All three are deterrents. They keep Dante back from the realization of that nascent faith in God and immortality, which is symbolised by the sunlight on the hilltop. The leopard does so by its beauty and by the beauty of its environment, on both of which Dante dwells with delight. It represents his sensuous enjoyment of things seen and temporal and their power to charm the soul and to dull its appetite for the unseen and eternal. It is the world in the acme of its beauty, in the witchery of its springtide. It is that joy of living which St. John calls the lust of the eye and the pride of life. The leopard is the Circe of the soul.

This interpretation helps us to understand a most difficult line in a later canto of the *Inferno*, which has indeed been a crux to the commentators. Arrived at the summit of the precipice, below which are the circles of the

fraudulent, Dante, at Virgil's command, unlooses the cord with which he was girt around, "and with which," he says, "I thought at one time to capture the leopard."* Virgil casts it down into the abyss, in order to attract the attention of the monster Geryon, on whose back they are to be borne down into the depths below. The meaning seems plain. A cord, like a vow, is that wherewith a man binds himself; and, in descending to the regions of fraud and treachery, Dante has reached a stage in his journey where vows are no longer binding—are, in fact, a snare and a deceit. A vow implies sincerity and good faith, and these are precisely the qualities that are wanting in the remainder of the *Inferno*. Hence, the cord can be cast away as superfluous. It has been supposed that at one time Dante served his novitiate to the order of St. Francis. If so, the cord would stand for the vow he then took. It was a vow of unworldliness; it made a deadly breach with the world, and the man who took it was henceforth not to live as other men lived. This vow, then, was Dante's attempt—futile, as it

* *Inf.* xvi. 108.

proved—to overcome the world or, as he puts it, to capture the leopard. But the leopard is still uncaptured; the fascination of the world still holds him and he cannot set out on the upward path of faith.

On any theory the lion is, it must be confessed, of more difficult interpretation. He appears and disappears with equal abruptness and gives us absolutely no clue to his errand. Altogether he occupies only four lines of the canto, and if we may reverently say so, Dante, like the commentators, hardly knows what to make of him. Not without hesitation and at the risk of multiplying vain interpretations, it may be suggested that he represents the devil. He holds his head high and is rabidly hungry—that is to say, he has the proverbial pride of Lucifer and the hunger of a "roaring lion seeking whom he may devour." The air fears or trembles before him as if it had found a master in "the prince of the power of the air." In the Middle Ages, Satan loomed big in men's thoughts of the hidden world, and was certainly a power to be reckoned with. Death might mean falling into his clutches and, unless men were sure of

escaping them, immortality were a doubtful boon. It might mean a "boundless worse" instead of a "boundless better," and if so, extinction once for all were better than an eternity of woe in a world of demons. Thus, the fear of the devil would be a second deterrent which "must give us pause" in our quest of immortality.

We are all familiar with that trinity of evil —the world, death and the devil. If the leopard and the lion stand respectively for the world and the devil, what more natural than to suppose that in the she-wolf we have the third member of the trio. She has all the Scriptural marks of Death. Her one attribute is hunger, insatiable as the grave. She has "the dreadful appetite of death" growing by what it feeds on. Like Sheol the devourer, she consumes the hungry generations. From her rapacious maw none escapes. As man's last enemy she bars the way and drives him back into the dark wood of fear. Even so, death and the crude reality of the grave seem at times to give the lie to all our resurgent hopes of immortality. Death still reigns, as it reigned from Adam. *Mors depascet eos.* Death devours us all.

This identification is not a matter of mere vague conjecture. Dante makes Virgil expressly declare that it was envy that first sent the she-wolf from hell; and in the *Book of Wisdom*, which Dante is here undoubtedly quoting, we read that "by envy of the devil *Death* entered into the world." Unless Dante, quite contrary to his custom, was taking a great liberty with what he held to be Scripture, it seems impossible to doubt that in Virgil's speech the she-wolf symbolises death.* To Hell the greyhound shall chase her back, and if, as the earliest commentators held, the greyhound stands for the Lord Jesus Christ, the episode of the she-wolf is rounded off and completed. Man's last enemy is destroyed—cast into that lake of fire which is the Second Death.†

* *Invidiâ autem diaboli* MORS *introivit in orbem terrarum.*—*Wisdom* II. 24. Cf. *Inf.* I. 110—117.

† Those who still adhere to the political interpretation, which makes the wolf stand for Rome, might quote the lines of St. Peter Damiani, *Roma vorax hominum*, etc. But these lines refer to the deadly climate and not to the greed of Rome. See Mr. Bryce's *Holy Roman Empire*, London, 1889, p. 133.

Thus regarded, the first canto works out as follows :—

I.—Man's dread of death as "an utter quenching and extinguishment"—symbolised by the dark valley or wood of fear.

II.—Intimations of God and immortality, and consequent aspiration and effort—symbolised by the rising sun, the sun-lit hill and the attempt to climb.

III.—Deterrents.

(*i.*) Sensuous delight in the present—the Leopard.

(*ii.*) Dread of something after death, Satan or a demon world which may claim the soul—the Lion.

(*iii.*) Death or the grave as a blank negation and universal doom from which we cannot escape, and beyond which we cannot penetrate—the Wolf.

IV.—Virgil and Beatrice reveal the true inwardness and meaning of death. Man's fears are misplaced. Their causes and objects are not really fearful—*non son*

paurose. Virgil, who is Dante's guide through Hell, and his companion up the Mount of Purgation, can, as the impersonation of the highest human wisdom, discern the necessity of retribution to the wicked and of purification for the penitent, but only that heavenly grace and divine illumination which Beatrice brings can disclose those things which have not "entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

Thus taught by natural religion and divine revelation, man learns what life and death are, is emancipated from the tyranny of things present and becomes conscious of himself as an heir of immortality. This view; it may be remarked in conclusion, is not wholly irreconcilable with the other and more generally accepted interpretation. Those who find in the *Divina Commedia* the story of man's conversion from sin rather than the story of his deliverance from the fear of death and the bondage of corruption, are still free to remind us that the sting of death is sin, and that, until redeemed from sin, man can-

not escape from his fears and hindrances. Nevertheless, it seems more correct to say that the *motif* of the poem is the conquest of the fear of Death, and that Dante's supreme lesson is that only the impenitent and unbelieving need quail before the King of terrors. To the believer life is a comedy and not a tragedy, for it ends well. *In fine prospera, desiderabilis et grata.* The *via dolorosa* of death, the *calcanda semel via leti*, leads to everlasting light and love, to that radiant empyrean which is the throne of God and home of all his saints.