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Dante

From D. G. Rossetti's Drawing of "Dante's Dream"

THE TEACHINGS OF DANTE

BY

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TO MY WIFE

WHOSE DEVOTION HAS MADE POSSIBLE THESE STUDIES

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

PREFACE

One hot summer's morning several years ago, wishing to make more enjoyable a day of leisure, I searched through a friend's library for an interesting book to take into the woods. Most of the volumes, being upon theology and philosophy, appeared too dry and heavy. Finally, I selected Longfellow's translation of Dante's "Inferno," for the three-fold reason that I had little knowledge of the illustrious Italian, the book itself was attractive, and the title seemed to accord with the heat of the day. No sooner, however, had I begun to read than indolence changed to an absorbed attention. The uniqueness of the theme, the vividness of Dante's pictures, the beauty of Longfellow's translation fascinated me. The book became a constant companion during the summer, and when the work of the year began the spell of Dante's great personality was upon me. Again and again I turned from him, fearing that I could

not afford the time and energy required truly to appreciate his thought. It was like trying to escape the law of gravitation. Irresistibly I was drawn back to one who not only gave the intellect rest by leading the thoughts into times so different from our own, but also girded the mind with power by bringing it into the presence of exalted ideals, intensest passions, and elemental truths.

De Quincey divides literature into the literature of knowledge and the literature of power. Surely in the literature of power the "Divine Comedy" is unsurpassed. Dante makes a continuous and irresistible appeal to the imagination, compelling it to range through strange, soul-stirring experiences, stimulating it with pictures of rarest beauty, taxing it to the uttermost to conceive that which no thought can grasp. He carries the mind at once into the region of the loftiest and most commanding truths, and in that invigorating moral atmosphere it comes to a new consciousness of itself and its possibilities.

The study of such an author as Dante is valuable in enabling one to organize his knowledge and to resist the insidious evil of reading disconnectedly many themes and writers. Mr. Lowell's experience, which he gave in one of

his unpublished college lectures, is most interesting.

"One is sometimes asked by young men to recommend to them a course of reading. My advice would always be to confine yourself to the supreme books in whatever literature; still better, to choose some one great author and grow thoroughly familiar with him. For as all roads lead to Rome, so they all likewise lead thence; and you will find that in order to understand perfectly and weigh exactly any really vital piece of literature, you will be gradually and pleasantly persuaded to studies and explorations of which you little dreamed when you began, and will find yourselves scholars before you are aware. If I may be allowed a personal illustration, it was my own profound admiration for the 'Divina Commedia' of Dante that lured me into what little learning I possess. For remember that there is nothing less fruitful than scholarship for the sake of mere scholarship, nor anything more wearisome in the attainment. But the moment you have an object and a centre, attention is quickened, the mother of memory; and whatever you acquire groups and arranges itself in an order which is lucid because it is everywhere in intelligent relation to an

object of constant and growing interest. Thus, as respects Dante, I asked myself, What are his points of likeness or unlikeness with the authors of classical antiquity? in how far is either of these an advantage or a defect? What and how much modern literature had preceded him? How much was he indebted to it? How far had the Italian language been subdued and suppled to the uses of poetry or prose before his time? How much did he color the style or thought of the authors who followed him? Is it a fault or a merit that he is so thoroughly impregnated with the opinions, passions, and even prejudices not only of his age but his country? Was he right or wrong in being a Ghibelline? To what extent is a certain freedom of opinion which he shows sometimes on points of religious doctrine to be attributed to the humanizing influences of the Crusades in enlarging the horizon of the Western mind by bringing it in contact with other races, religions, and social arrangements? These and a hundred other such questions were constant stimulants to thought and inquiry, stimulants such as no merely objectless and, so to speak, impersonal study could have supplied."

It is certainly of inestimable advantage to

come under the influence of one of the imperial minds of the race, who challenges every lover of his to high thinking and lofty feeling, and who, embodying in himself the life of so many centuries, readily charms the mind into various fields of knowledge, and reveals to us our own time by unveiling a mighty past.

Dante is so rich in suggestive symbolism that the temptation is constant to read into his imagery meanings entirely foreign to his thought, and to obscure his most important teachings by mingling them in a mass of instructive but subordinate details. Both of these temptations I have endeavored to resist, striving honestly to interpret Dante's conceptions, and seeking to secure clearness by disclosing only the framework of his thought.

My indebtedness to Mr. Charles Eliot Norton is very great. A new zest was given to my studies when I became acquainted with his translations of "The New Life" and "The Divine Comedy." Although Longfellow's version of the "Comedy" is a marvel of accurate and comprehensive scholarship, and is ingeniously true to Dante in metre and style, yet it is impossible to render a foreign tongue into English verse without losing much of the flavor of the

original and obscuring the sense. Mr. Norton's prose translations avoid these defects. He fits our English words to Dante's thought so closely that we feel the beauty and vigor of the original, and more easily grasp the author's unfamiliar teachings. When the substance of some of the following chapters appeared in the "Atlantic Monthly," Mr. Norton wrote of his satisfaction in the justness of the interpretations and the quality of the work, and expressed a wish that the studies be gathered into a book. On the completion of the volume he suggested the title and generously offered to read the proofs. I certainly do not seek to add the weight of his authority to any comments I have made on the value of mediæval or modern religious doctrine, or to commit him to the approval of every detail of the exposition; but the fact that this interpretation of Dante's thought has won his commendation is a sufficient guaranty of its accuracy.

I wish also to express my obligation to the Rev. Wilbert L. Anderson, whose fine literary taste has saved me from many infelicities in expression; and to Mr. William B. Parker for much encouragement during the early days of my Dante studies.

The prose quotations from the "Comedy" which appear in the book are taken from Professor Norton's translations; the metrical versions are Longfellow's unless otherwise indicated.

CHARLES ALLEN DINSMORE.

Boston, July, 1901.

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DANTE

"The central man in all the world, as representing in perfect balance the imaginative, moral, and intellectual faculties, all at their highest, is Dante." — JOHN RUSKIN.

"The secret of Dante's power is not far to seek. Whoever can express *himself* with the full force of unconscious sincerity will be found to have uttered something ideal and universal." — JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

"There are few other works of man, perhaps there is no other, which afford such evidence as the Divine Comedy of uninterrupted consistency of purpose, of sustained vigor of imagination, and of steady force of character controlling alike the vagaries of the poetic temperament, the wavering of human purpose, the fluctuation of human powers, the untowardness of circumstance. From beginning to end of this work of many years, there is no flagging of energy, no indication of weakness. The shoulders, burdened by a task almost too great for mortal strength, never tremble under their load." — CHARLES ELIOT NORTON.

I

MODERN INTEREST IN DANTE

The last century has witnessed a remarkable awakening of interest in the study of Dante. It may have been true in Macaulay's day that the majority of young people who read Italian would "as soon read a Babylonian brick as a canto of Dante," but to-day multitudes are learning Italian to enjoy the sweetest poet who ever spoke that tongue. This increasing appreciation is favored by a peculiar sympathy between the poet and the spirit of our age. These are the days of the microscope, the etching tool, and the specialist. We delight in minute investigation and exact scholarship; we believe in realism and in details. A poem whose structure is as delicate and minutely exact as a rare Florentine mosaic, and which, though touching the heights of idealism, is realistic to the last degree, cannot fail to challenge our attention. It was different in an age which looked up to Dr. Johnson as a model in composition, and delighted in pompous amplitude of diction. This is a time when popular rights are much

vaunted, and Dante, aristocratic and disdainful though he was, unhesitatingly ascribing the evils of Florence to the boorish plebeians, now is counted a champion of the people's rights. The tremendous emphasis he placed upon the worth of the soul lifted the individual man above all titles and claims of blood, so that free Italy found in him its prophet, and his writings proved an armory filled with keenest weapons for the destruction of the claims of the Church to temporal dominion.

Again, the nineteenth century was distinctively scientific. We gave over a hundred years to the investigation of nature; and the price has been slight compared with the victories we have won. But a too steady gaze at the natural has made dim the supernatural. The soul is beginning to cry out fiercely against its bondage. The prophets of materialism and agnosticism have had their day, and now the clearest voice that in modern times has spoken the soul's deep consciousness of its mastery over matter and fate is being heard. To Dante the physical is fleeting, the spiritual is the real. He saw time under the forms of eternity. The seen is the stepping-stone into the unseen. This is the steadily growing conviction of the world. In a time of vanishing materialism, with its attending fatalism, we exult in this superb reassertion of the freedom of the will, by one whom Lowell calls "the

highest spiritual nature that has expressed itself in rhythmical form."

The great revival of interest in him is also due to the splendid sincerity of his convictions, which quicken those moods that our minds, troubled with doubt, crave. We are living in a time of intense spiritual desire. We are stretching out hands toward the gloom and calling into the unknown. Our representative poets are struggling for a faith, and the strong tide of interest in our best literature is toward spiritual problems. Our greatest writers are not engrossed with the actions of men, as was Homer; they are not absorbed in delineating their passions, as was Shakespeare; but are turning their thoughts into the deeps of the soul to learn the meaning of life and the realities confronting it. Of this realm of the spirit Dante is preëminently the prophet. His robust faith makes to us a mighty appeal. We receive immense inspiration from one, who, instead of leading us from doubt to faith, begins with faith and leads us up to God. We most clearly discern the needs of our own age when we see them mirrored in our most characteristic poet, and contrast his mental attitude with that of Dante. Tennyson, in "In Memoriam," says: —

> "I falter where I firmly trod,
> And falling with my weight of cares
> Upon the great world's altar stairs
> That slope through darkness up to God,

"I stretch faint hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope."

Dante did not stretch out faint hands, but with sublime and confident faith he put his feet on the great world's altar stairs and steadfastly followed Reason and Revelation until they led him through darkness into the perfect light.

The best religious life of our day is flowing in channels not of contemplation, but of philanthropy. Our saints linger longer over their frater-nosters than over their pater-nosters. Dante is certainly not the prophet of socialism or of humanitarianism. To him the noblest form of religious activity was the absorption of the mind in pondering the deep things of God. "They shall see His face" was to him a more significant description of Heaven than "His servants shall serve Him." In this he does not reflect our age; but in his impressive assertion of the reality and supremacy of the spiritual, in his passionate desire to know, in his conception of the strenuousness of life, and the austere rigors of the moral law, he finds a response in many hearts. We have a deep need of just what this Tuscan prophet can give. Into our feverish life he brings the silence of the centuries, and as we enter the mystic cathedral of his thought, —

"The tumult of the time disconsolate
To inarticulate murmurs dies away,
While the eternal ages watch and wait."

To our easy tolerance he opposes the austerities of the higher law. . When we confound moral with natural evil, he quickens our perception of how voluntary and damnable it is, and he answers our feeble agnosticism with a tremorless assurance that the Infinite is the mystery of light and not of darkness, and that man can know.

Dante is the greatest prophet of the Christian centuries because he has given utterance to the largest aggregation of truth, in terms of universal experience, and in a form permanent through its exceeding beauty. That so many minds are turning to him for light and vigor is most significant and hopeful.

II

THE OUTWARD LIFE

Of his appearance Boccaccio gives a graphic description — "Our poet was of middle height and stooped when he walked, being now of mature years; his aspect was grave and quiet, and his dress seemly and serious as became his age. His face was long, his nose aquiline, his eyes rather large than little, his nostrils large, and the underlip a little prominent; his complexion was dark, his hair and beard thick, black, and curling, and his countenance always melancholy and thoughtful." [1]

Giovanni Villani, a contemporary, furnishes in his chronicle a most interesting glimpse of how Dante appeared to those who knew him: "This man was a most excellent scholar in almost every branch of learning, albeit he was a layman; he was a most excellent poet and philosopher, and a perfect rhetorician alike in prose and verse, a very noble orator in public speaking, supreme in rhyme, with the most polished and beautiful style which in our language ever was up to his time

[1] *Vita di Dante.*

and beyond it. This Dante because of his knowledge was somewhat haughty and reserved and disdainful, and after the fashion of a philosopher, almost ungracious and not easy in his converse with laymen: but because of the lofty virtues and knowledge and worth of so great a citizen, it seems fitting to confer lasting memory upon him in this chronicle, although, indeed, his noble works, left to us in writing, are the true testimony to him, and are an honorable report to our city." [1]

The events of his life are soon told. He was born in Florence in 1265, of the ancient and knightly house of the Alighieri, whose arms were a golden wing on a field of azure, a fit emblem of that daring genius that soared into the height of the unseen. He was also fortunate in his name, Dante, a contraction of Durante, the "enduring one." Whether his parents, of whom we know little, detected any unusual ability in their proud and reticent boy, it is impossible to tell; but they certainly spared nothing to make his education complete, according to the standards of the day. He came under the influence of Brunetto Latini, "the first master in refining the Florentines," who taught the ambitious lad how a man makes himself eternal. Dante must have been an apt pupil, for had he never immortalized himself as a poet, he would have been known as

[1] *Croniche Fiorentine*, B. IX. § 136.

the most learned man of his day, his insatiable mind appropriating all the knowledge of the time. He was married about 1291 to Gemma dei Donati, and through her became connected with Corso Donati, one of the most powerful nobles of Florence. Whether their married life was happy or not is a matter of conjecture. Boccaccio insinuates that it was not, and one can easily imagine that the poet was too preoccupied and imperious to make an ideal husband. Through this union several children were born.

In the stormy controversies that distracted the city Dante seems to have been the recognized leader of the moderates, and being, as Villani tells us, "a perfect rhetorician" and "a very noble orator," he is said to have been sent on many important diplomatic missions. The government of the city was intrusted to seven officials, — six priors of profession and one gonfaloniere of justice, who held their office for only two months. In 1300 Dante was elected one of the priors, and in a letter now lost, but a part of which is preserved in the Life of him by Leonardo Bruni, he says, "All my woes and misfortunes had their cause and beginning in the unlucky election of my priorship. Though I was not, on the score of wisdom, worthy, nevertheless on the score of faith and age, I was not unworthy of it." The lack of wisdom which the reflection of after years detected in

his official conduct may have been the opposition of himself and his colleagues to Cardinal Matteo, whom the Pope sent as his legate to pacify Florence, and who, failing in his mission, departed in anger, leaving the city excommunicated and interdicted.

It was probably during his priorship that the leaders of both contending parties were banished. Machiavelli cites this as a proof of Dante's prudence and courage, but the poet may have felt otherwise in after years.

Poets are not usually good road builders, but a curious document has quite recently come to light showing that the writer of the "Vita Nuova" was a practical man of affairs. In April, 1301, a petition was presented to the Committee on Streets, Squares, and Bridges, asking that a certain road be widened and mended. The committee ordered the work to be done, and Dante was appointed to oversee the whole matter.

Angered by the failure of Cardinal Matteo's mission, the Pope called upon Charles of Valois to bring Florence to her senses, and gave him the title of "Pacifier of Tuscany." Dante was sent to Rome to avert, if possible, this dire calamity; but while he was there Charles occupied Florence, and the poet's enemies, being in possession of the government, passed sentence of exile against him on the 27th of January, 1302, with a heavy fine

to be paid within two months. Dante proving contumacious, a second sentence was pronounced in less than two months, condemning him to be burned alive if he should ever set foot within the jurisdiction of Florence. Thus did the unhappy city pass judgment upon herself.

During the remaining nineteen years of his life he was a wanderer. In his own pathetic words he says: "Through almost all parts where this language [Italian] is spoken, a wanderer, almost a beggar, I have gone, showing against my will the wound of fortune. Truly I have been a ship without a sail and without a rudder, borne to divers ports and bays and shores by that hot blast, the breath of doleful poverty: and I have appeared vile in the eyes of many, who perhaps through some fame may have imagined me in other form. In whose view was not only my person debased, but every work of mine, whether done or yet to do, became of less value." [1]

For a few years he was identified with his fellow exiles in attempts to reinstate themselves. He was one of their council of twelve; but finally, disgusted with their folly, he withdrew and formed a party of himself. His wanderings after this are quite obscure. Villani says he "went to study at Bologna, and then to Paris, and into several parts of the world." In the year 1310, when Henry VII. of Luxemburg arrived in Italy, the

[1] *Convito*, Tratt. 1, Cap. iii.

hopes of the exile were raised to the highest pitch, for he thought that it was this prince who would restore order to the frenzied state, and realize the ideal universal Roman Empire. Hearing that the Florentines were preparing to resist Henry, he wrote them a wrathful letter, reproaching them bitterly for their rebellion against the lawful Cæsar. For reply his beloved city reaffirmed the previous condemnation against him, and with the untimely death of Henry Dante's political hopes forever vanished.

In 1316 the gates of Florence were opened to him on condition of his paying a fine and doing penance, but with noble dignity he refused. "Is this, then, the glorious recall of Dante Alighieri to his country after having borne exile for nearly fifteen years? Is this the reward of innocence patent to all? Of perpetual sweat and toil of study? Far from a man, the familiar friend of philosophy, be the reckless humility of a heart of earth, that would allow him to make an offering of himself as if he were a caitiff! Far be it from a man, a preacher of justice, to pay those who have done him wrong as for a favor!

"This is not the way for me to return to my country; but if another can be found that shall not derogate from the fame and honor of Dante, that will I take with no lagging steps. But if by no such way Florence is to be entered, then Florence I shall never enter. And what then!

Can I not everywhere behold the mirrors of the sun and stars? Contemplate the sweetest truths under any sky, without first giving myself up inglorious, nay, ignominious, to the populace and the city of Florence? And bread, I trust, shall not fail me." [1]

The weary exile, ever hoping honorably to return to the fair fold in which he slept when a lamb, continued his studies and his wanderings. His longest stay was at Verona, where he was received and nobly entertained by Can Grande della Scala. His last refuge was at Ravenna, where he died in 1321, shortly after completing the Sacred Poem, to which heaven and earth had set their hand. Thus was fulfilled the wish of his life, as expressed in the closing words of the "Vita Nuova," that he might go to behold the face of his lady when he had said that of her which was never said of any woman. Death was a merciful release. Having looked into the face of God he was not compelled to tame his

> "mind down from its own infinity —
> To live in narrow ways with little men,
> A common sight to every common eye."

He was buried with honors suitable to his lofty genius under a monument bearing an inscription which he is said to have written upon his death-bed. The paraphrase is Mr. Lowell's.

[1] Letter to a Florentine Friend. The authenticity of this letter is much debated.

"The rights of Monarchy, the Heavens, the Stream of Fire, the Pit,
In vision seen, I sang as far as to the Fates seemed fit ;
But since my soul, an alien here, hath flown to nobler wars,
And happier now, hath gone to seek its Maker 'mid the stars,
Here am I Dante shut, exiled from the ancestral shore,
Whom Florence, the of all least-loving mother, bore."

III

THE LIFE WITHIN

But if the external events of his wanderings furnish but a meagre record, there was taking place in the soul of the great idealist an experience of such mingled pathos and beauty that it has held the fascinated attention of the world for nearly six centuries. We know as little of the outward life of Dante as of that of Homer or Shakespeare; but of his spiritual struggles, the motives which governed him, the judgments he formed, the passions that at one moment glowed hot with righteous fury and the next burned with a seraphic love, we have a most noble disclosure. In the fine words of Martineau, "the best end of all a [man's] work is to show us what he is. The noblest workers of our world bequeath us nothing so great as the image of themselves." While the personalities of his compeers in song are lost in their work, Dante has thrown the shadow of his image on this world and on the world that comes hereafter. The most reticent of men has given us the clearest revelation of himself.

When he was nine years of age, he tells us in his quaint language, "the glorious Lady of my mind, who was called Beatrice by many who knew not what to call her, first appeared to my eyes." Her coming was the awakening of love, and the beginning of that new life which was to ascend continually —

> "unblasted by the glory, though he trod
> From star to star to reach the almighty throne." [1]

Who this Beatrice was is a matter of much dispute. The statement of Boccaccio, who wrote some thirty years after Dante's death, that she was Beatrice Portinari, the daughter of a near neighbor, who afterward married Simone de' Bardi, and died in 1290 at the age of twenty-four, has usually been accepted. But it seems more probable that she was some maiden to whom Dante gave the name of Beatrice, *the blessed one*, to hide her identity.

When he was eighteen, they again met and she saluted him with such ineffable courtesy "that it seemed to me that I saw all the bounds of bliss." To her the poet gave all the chivalrous devotion of his heart. She became to him the embodiment of everything divine, and under the sweet influence she exerted over his soul, he lived an innocent life of simple religious faith, undisturbed by mental struggle and unshadowed by doubt.

[1] Byron, *The Prophecy of Dante*, canto i.

With the death of Beatrice in his twenty-fifth year the first great sorrow came into his life. The blow staggered him. His serene faith became clouded. He began to question and to doubt, entering upon that chill, foggy land of mental and spiritual uncertainty, which for all earnest souls lies between the simple faith of childhood and the assured convictions of maturer years. To assuage his grief he began the study of philosophy, and threw himself into the active political conflicts of his time. Many go so far as to assert that he yielded to sensual lusts, sinking far below the moral elevation of his youth. It is not improbable that the year 1300, when, as he tells us in the opening of the "Divine Comedy," he found himself in a dark wood, marks a real epoch in his life, and explains why he chose it as the time of his wonderful journey. Pope Boniface VIII. proclaimed a jubilee at Rome, to extend from Christmas, 1299, to Easter, 1300, and the pilgrims who visited continually for fifteen days the churches of St. Peter and St. Paul were "granted full and entire remission of all their sins, both the guilt and the punishment thereof, they having made or to make confession of the sins. And for consolation of the Christian pilgrims, every Friday and every solemn feast day, was shown in St. Peter's the Veronica, the true image of Christ, on the napkin." Dante may have snatched time from his engrossing pub-

lic duties to make this pilgrimage, not as a mere on-looker, but as a believer who felt the need of the forgiveness promised. The sight of the vast throngs of eager pilgrims, the beholding of the true face of his suffering Saviour on the sacred cloth, the hours spent in meditation and worship, evidently made a deep impression upon his ardent and sensitive spirit. Florence, with its distractions and ambitions, seemed far away, while the eternal world, with its solemn and imposing realities, reasserted its supremacy over his hushed and humbled mind. He realized that in the fervor of his patriotic devotion to his city, in his zealous study of a worldly philosophy, in his intense occupation with temporal things, and perhaps in sensual indulgence, he had wandered from the true way and become lost in an entangling forest. In the stillness of those days of thought and prayer he resolved to seek a worthier success. He would climb the sunlit mountain by putting forth all his powers; he would live more nobly and valiantly.

On his return to Florence he is drawn into the political struggles of the day, he becomes prior, is sent on his fruitless embassy to the Pope, is exiled, and tries vainly to reënter his native city. In the chagrin of defeat and in the bitterness of his disappointment he perceives that he has been seeking the unattainable. Then it is that he hears a voice that through long silence

seemed hoarse. It is the calling of reason, awakened in his bewildered soul by divine grace approaching him through its supreme revelations; and the courteous Mantuan spirit — a type of that right reason which apprehends the nature of sin and its penalties, and points out the paths of virtue and liberty — leads him into the better way. Thus he returns to the faith of his boyhood, and gladly yields himself again to the sway of those transcendent truths which to him found their fittest symbol in Beatrice.

These three distinct periods of his life — that of child-like faith and joy; succeeded by doubt, worldliness, and intellectual pride; and ending in triumphant religious assurance — find expression in three works of marvelous beauty and power, which together give us an unparalleled revelation of God's way with a soul.

The first, the "Vita Nuova," or the New Life, deals with the youthful period, briefly mentions the lapse, and closes with an account of a vision of Beatrice which caused him to resolve to say of her "what was never said of any woman." This book is one of the sweetest love stories in the world. No fairer figure is enshrined in literature than that of Beatrice as her lover paints her. She has a delicacy of reserve, an unconscious dignity, a grace and courtesy, which give her an ineffable charm. Read as plain prose the tale seems bizarre enough, and Dante

appears almost ridiculous, so shaken is he by his passion; but as Mr. Charles Eliot Norton has so well explained: "The story based upon actual experience, is ordered not in literal conformity with fact, but according to the ideal of the imagination: and its reality does not consist in the exactness of its record of events, but in the truth of its poetic conception. Under the narrative lies an allegory of the power of love to transfigure earthly things into the likeness of heavenly, and to lift the soul from things material and transitory to things spiritual and eternal." [1]

The period of his lapse from his high moral elevation finds its monument in the "Convito," or Banquet. During the earlier part of this experience Dante had written many canzoni, all of them of great beauty and two of them at least strongly expressive of earthly passions. Finding himself in this dark wood and wishing to redeem his reputation from the charge of fickleness, he resolves to allegorize these poems, showing that the philosophy in which he is now absorbed is one with the Beatrice of his younger days. But the task proves too great, some of the canzoni breathe a spirit altogether alien to the lofty purity of the blessed one. They are not to be explained away, but to be repented of. His study of philosophy, beginning as mere worldly wisdom, has

[1] *The Warner Classics.* Poets, p. 83.

led him up to divine truth, and Beatrice touches his soul again with all her former beauty and power. She becomes to him the symbol of God's revelation of Himself to men, the embodiment of those radiant truths which lift the soul to eternal blessedness. With the enthronement of his old faith and love in more than their original glory, he abandoned the "Convito" and resolved to speak no more of this blessed one, until he could more worthily treat of her. Thus he entered upon the last period of his life, when his enkindled faith "is the spark which afterwards dilates to vivid flame, and like a star in heaven" will shine forever in the "Divine Comedy."

IV

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROPHET

Like all men who ever cut their names deep in the world's memory he had unswerving confidence in his own powers. With perfect assurance he numbers himself with Homer and Virgil and the illustrious poets of antiquity as the sixth amid so much wit. "Follow thy star," says Latini, "thou canst not miss the glorious port." [1] "My name as yet makes no great sound," [2] he declares in "Purgatory," but he everywhere assumes that his verdict will confer immortality of honor or shame, and that he has but to utter his vision for the world to listen. He is at peace because his life has a future far beyond men's perfidies.

The popular notion of Dante has been created by the pictures which his death-mask inspired, and by the mistaken idea that he roasted all his enemies in Hell and enthroned his few friends in Heaven. It is not strange, therefore, that the common idea is that he was a volcano in a constant state of eruption, forever pouring hot lava

[1] *Inf.* xv. 55, 56. [2] *Purg.* xiv. 21.

on the many objects of his wrath. It must be confessed that a superficial reading of the "Comedy" does leave this impression. Dante appears to be a spirit, grievously wounded by its wrongs, that turns upon its injurers with a ferocity of resentment and an almost superhuman intensity of vindictiveness dreadful to contemplate. One has a feeling akin to horror at seeing him sitting in his boat on the Styx, gloating over the sufferings of Filippo Argenti, and remarking: "I saw such rending of him by the muddy folk that I still praise God therefor, and thank Him for it." [1]

We seem to witness the cold drip of his malignity as, in the pit of the barrators, with fiendish composure, he calls one by one the travestied names of the Florentine authorities by whom he was banished.[2]

There seems to be a pitiless savagery of soul, for which we can scarce forgive him, when in the depth of Hell, where the cold congealed the tears of the sufferers, hearing one pleading that the veil of ice be lifted a moment from his eyes that he might have the poor consolation of grief unchecked, Dante promised on condition that the lost soul reveal its identity. Not only did the wretch tell his name, but also his story; yet

[1] *Inf.* viii. 58–60.

[2] *Inf.* xxi. 118–123; *vide* Moore, *Studies in Dante*, second series, p. 232.

when he begged for the fulfillment of the promise, the poet turned away. "I opened them not for him, and to be rude to him was courtesy." [1]

But Dante seems to carry this fierceness of personal hatred into Purgatory. On the ledge of the envious he delivers perhaps the most stinging invective that was ever pointed at one's fatherland. One of the shades describing the course of the Arno says that in the valley from the river's spring to its mouth, "virtue is driven away as an enemy by all men, like a snake." The people dwelling at the source are "foul hogs, more fit for acorns than for other food;" coming down to Arezzo, it finds "snarling curs;" the dogs are changed to "wolves" when Florence is reached; while at Pisa it finds "foxes full of fraud." [2]

Even in Paradise there seems to be a rancorous spot in his heart, unpenetrated by celestial light. With fierce disdain he speaks of his companions in exile, as "all ungrateful, all senseless, and impious." [3] In the Empyrean the splendor of God and the high triumph of the kingdom are insufficient to divert his mind from his enemies, for the sight of the vacant seat where Henry VII. is to sit causes him to turn his thoughts to the Pope who had betrayed the hopes of Italy, and he makes the last words of Beatrice, "sweet guide and dear," a damnation of this Pope to a hole in

[1] *Inf.* xxxiii. 149, 150. [2] *Purg.* xiv. [3] *Par.* xvii. 64.

the third bolgia of the eighth circle of Hell, where he shall push Boniface VIII. down a little deeper![1]

"Merciful heavens!" we exclaim, "has this man no heart! Is Lethe sufficient to make him forget his own sins, but ineffective to wash out the memory of the sins of others!"

But a deeper study of this prophet of the fiery heart shows that the case against him is not so bad as the first reading would indicate. Part of the explanation of his apparent cruelty undoubtedly lies in the fact that the poet would teach us that character is influenced by environment. In the circle of wrath he is wrathful, in the pit of traitors he is false. He may also have sympathized with the Jesuitical casuistry that no faith need be kept with traitors, and that with the froward it is right to show one's self froward. We must remember, what the vividness of the poem causes us easily to forget, that we are reading not a description of actual events but of imagined incidents, all of them having a symbolic meaning. We are to recall also the doctrine of the Church that the very saints in glory have no charity toward sinners under the condemnation of God. Dante undoubtedly laid to heart Virgil's reproof when he wept at the sad punishment of the soothsayers: "Who is more wicked than he who feels compassion at the Divine judgment?"[2] A man is not to be more just than God. Moreover, we

[1] *Par.* xxx. 145–148. [2] *Inf.* xx. 29, 30.

must constantly bear in mind that he felt himself to be a prophet of justice. He is making no idle journey to the throne of the Almighty, that there he may be rapt in a swoon of mystic delight. He stands before the Ineffable Glory, that from that lofty height, and in the clear light that streams from the Eternal Fountain, he may better behold the needs and conditions of earth. No splendor of supernal brightness for a moment makes him forget his mission. As God's prophet he will hate sin as God hates it; he will abhor evil with all the ceaseless loathing of the Most Holy. He will be as "harsh as truth and as uncompromising as justice." If Divine Justice and Love ordained the supreme penalties of Hell, then he will rejoice in them. His unfaltering heart does not shrink from the task of seeking to love as God loves and to hate as God hates; and so in his immortal poem he has revealed to the world a passion of hatred, a magnificence of wrath, an indignation so profound and monumental that he shocks our shallow kindliness unspeakably. Probably that is exactly what Dante meant to do. "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? Yea, I hate them with perfect hatred. I count them mine enemies." [1]

Yet it is perilous for a man, however preternat-

[1] Ps. cxxxix. 2, 22.

urally endowed, to lift the thunderbolts of the Almighty. To break the commandment "judge not" must inevitably bring its penalty. When one identifies himself with the judgment seat of God he is prone to mistake personal sentiment for holy anger, and to smite where he should heal. We can no more justify Dante for many of his venomous sentences on the ground of his strenuous moral earnestness than we can excuse Wendell Phillips for calling Lincoln "the bloodhound of slavery," or Garrison as with benignant smile he describes the church as "the spawn of Hell!"

Samuel Johnson has said that a man cannot love well unless he is a good hater. No one disputes the stinging ferocity of Dante's hatred; but few appreciate that his love was as sweet and beautiful as his wrath was bitter. There was in his passionate heart affection immeasurable in its wealth of exquisite tenderness. Lord Byron in his diary makes this comment on Frederick Schlegel's statement that "Dante's chief defect is the want, in a word, of gentle feelings:" "Of gentle feelings. And Francesca of Rimini, and the father's feelings in Ugolino, and Beatrice, and the Pia! Why, there is a gentleness in Dante above all gentleness when he is tender. Who but Dante could have introduced any gentleness at all into hell? Is there any in Milton? No: and Dante's heaven is all love,

and glory, and majesty." Stern and forbidding as this austere prophet often seems, no soul in literature has been more completely and continuously dominated by love. Love first woke his spirit to life, and ruled all his earlier years. One cannot read the "New Life" even casually without being impressed with the constant recurrence of the words, "sweet," "blessed," "gentle." After the death of Beatrice the ardent affection of his heart went out toward Philosophy, and he began "to feel so much of her sweetness that love of her chased away and destroyed every other thought." When he found that this love of truth merged itself through divine philosophy in the old affection for the blessed one, he came under the sway of powers which lifted his soul to such heights of thought and feeling that he wrought that which will ever stand as one of the noblest expressions of the mind's power. If the wrath of this censor of mankind is unsurpassed in strength, the purity, tenderness, sublimity of his love is equally conspicuous. Only a mind of singular beauty could have conceived a Purgatory, not hot with sulphurous flames, but healing the wounded spirit with the light of the shimmering sea, the glories of the morning, the perfume of flowers, the touch of angels, the living forms of art, and the sweet strains of music. Only a spirit of majestic purity and love could have thought out a Heaven, unstained by one sensuous

line, revealing glory upon glory until the ascending soul is lost in the splendor of incommunicable truth and the ardor of unutterable love.

Out of this loftiness of soul there came a chivalrous devotion to truth that elsewhere finds no such rapturous expression. The beauty of truth is the smile of Beatrice, and its demonstrations are her eyes. But as by faith he gazed on the beauteous orbs he seemed to touch all the depths of grace, and he needed the admonition that there are services to be rendered as well as truths to be contemplated.

> "Turn thee about and listen;
> Not in mine eyes alone is Paradise." [1]

The glory of the truth grew so insufferable as he ascended that at last Beatrice could not smile, lest at the effulgence his mortal power should be as a bough shattered by the lightning; and this knightly soul could imagine no greater bliss than to behold forever the essence of truth with eyes unveiled, and thus to glow eternally with love.

But Dante felt that he did more than love truth in the abstract; he loved it in men.

> "The leaves wherewith embowered is all the garden
> Of the Eternal Gardener, do I love
> As much as he has granted them of good." [2]

Moreover it was a love so genuine that it did not exhaust itself in mere rhapsody, but became the fountain of his splendid courage. He loved

[1] *Par.* xviii. 20, 21. [2] *Par.* xxvi. 64–66.

truth so earnestly that to proclaim it he was willing to sacrifice all. Every man who attains eminence prizes most highly the recognition given him by his native place; and it was the constant hope of Dante that he might return to Florence, and receive the laurel crown by the baptismal font where he first entered into faith. Yet not to gratify these desires will he blur a single truth. He will "make the whole vision manifest," and let the "scratching be ever where the itch is." He will be no timid friend of truth, but like the wind will strike heaviest the loftiest summits. He will seal his loyalty by making a willing offering of all that is dear to him. Above all things Dante loathed a coward. He showed his contempt by spewing all craven, shame-laden souls out of both Heaven and Hell. He feared to make the great refusal. With deliberate resolve he put aside all personal considerations and wrote the bravest, most unsparing denunciatory song in any language. It takes a high-souled man to give all for righteousness' sake. This unflinching and sustained devotion to his ideal made it possible for him to undertake the most tremendous task ever attempted by a poet. He would have failed in his high endeavor had not the fibre of his manhood equaled the quality of his genius. It was not enough that he have rare artistic skill and poetic gifts of superlative merit. Others have had these and have fallen short of the noblest eminence.

He has taken his place among the preëminent poets of the world because he held his brilliant intellectual endowments, his enormous erudition, and the glowing ardors of his temperament in bondage to a spiritual integrity and heroism of soul which enabled him, through long years of suffering, dolorous poverty, and arduous labors, to keep himself steadily to one almost superhuman task. This capacity of complete absorption in one prodigious work, this fusion of his whole being in his mission, this power of unfaltering concentration upon one masterly achievement, is as conspicuous a characteristic of Dante — "the enduring one" — as his masterful genius. This self-sustaining quality of his manhood, permitting him to make his work vital by sinking his whole life in it, has made him a most distinguished illustration of the fundamental law of success in all lines of endeavor; "whosoever will lose his life shall find it." He welded himself to his task as by fire, and there came into his heart a mysterious strength and into his mind a supernal illumination.

If to Dante's volcanic wrath, his beauty of spirit, his rapturous love of truth, his unwearied loyalty to his duty, we add a pity which, as Carlyle has said, was as tender as a woman's, and a patrician pride which in Purgatory made him bend low under its weight, we have a fairly accurate portrait of this strangely fascinating man,

who exercises such an irresistible attraction upon those who come within the circle of his influence.

Dante doubtless felt that his life had fallen upon evil times, and that he was fortunate only in that he had been born when the sun was in the sign of the Twins, which stars, being impregnate with great virtue, had given him his lofty genius; but he was in reality singularly fortunate in the conditions of his life. Had he been popular and prosperous his energies might easily have been dissipated by a multitude of distractions. Had he become a fad, his light would soon have failed. But he was stripped for an herculean task; poor, homeless, relieved of most of the duties that would have diverted him, he was free to turn all his powers into one channel. Had he been of a slighter spirit he would have been broken by his burden and the hardness of his surroundings, and have wasted his life in wailing and satire, like many a fierce genius to whom the world has been rough. But his dauntless soul turned vigorously upon the hostile circumstances and conquered them. It was through suffering that he became a perfect artist. His proud and sensitive nature, bruised and wounded as it was, must perforce question life to its depths. He was driven into the heart of truth for his consolation. He was great as an artist because he suffered greatly as a man. His very destitution gave him his opportunity. If

Michael Angelo could have devoted all his vast energies to the rearing of one immense cathedral, conceived in every detail from foundation to turret by his own majestic mind, adorned with statues to which his skilled hands had given the breath of life, all the pictures that ever came glowing and terrible from his brushes ornamenting its walls and ceilings, and the whole crowned with a dome as stately as St. Peter's, he would have wrought in stone what Dante accomplished in the "Divine Comedy." But Michael Angelo had no opportunity to give his whole life to one grand achievement; he was at the whim of cities and popes, and could only work upon scattered fragments. It was Dante's rare fortune that for years he could brood continuously over one colossal theme, and, unhindered by a clamoring public, gather into one monumental whole all the results of his splendid genius and energy. Thus his poem is a solemn memorial of the mind's power when the eye is single, the purpose clear, and powers of supreme brilliancy and magnitude are concentrated upon one endeavor. The "Divine Comedy" is unique as the complete expression of superlative genius, given wholly to its task, and glowing with a steadily increasing splendor until its work is done.

V

HIS PLACE IN HISTORY

DANTE was exceedingly fortunate in the epoch in which he lived. His was the rare opportunity of standing at one of the pivotal points of history. It was given to him to be the morning star that closed the millennium of darkness and ushered in the new day. Ruskin bears this testimony: "All great European art is rooted in the thirteenth century, and it seems to me that there is a kind of central year about which we may consider the energy of the Middle Ages to be gathered; a kind of focus of time, which, by what is to my mind a most touching and impressive Divine appointment, has been marked for us by the greatest writer of the Middle Ages in the first words he utters, namely, the year 1300, the '*mezzo del cammin*' of the life of Dante."[1] In a similar strain is the judgment expressed by Frederick Maurice: "His poem, coeval as it is with the great judgment of the papacy under Boniface, with the practical termination of the religious wars, and with the rise of a native literature, not only in the

[1] *Stones of Venice*, ii. 342.

south, but in the north, is a better epoch from which to commence the new age of European thought than the German reformation of the sixteenth century." [1] And so this sad-eyed prophet, who compared himself to a bark without a rudder, driven about by hostile winds upon a stormy sea, was in reality the mountain peak separating the old from the new, with sides sloping toward the past and the future.

With the fall of the empire of Charlemagne, Europe was given over to two centuries of disintegration and chaos. After the year 1000 had passed, and the world, contrary to a general expectation, had not come to an end, the hopes of men revived, and they set about making this earth a fit place to dwell in. The fresh inflow of life expressed itself in many forms. The crusades opened up a new world of thought, and afforded a vent for military enthusiasm; Hildebrand, with splendid heroism and extraordinary ability, sought to bring purity out of the general corruption, and restore order by bringing a disrupted society under the supreme control of the Church; monasteries became more than ever the seats of devotion and learning; the monks redeemed the wilderness and restored agriculture over a great part of Europe; the universities started into life; and those vast cathedrals, which have been the admiration of subsequent times,

[1] *Mediæval Philosophy*, p. 253.

began to rise; St. Francis enkindled a new enthusiasm of humanity; the Dominicans established the dogmas of the Church in the universities and in the minds of the people; Thomas Aquinas, than whom Europe has never produced a more profound, subtle, and lucid mind, essayed the gigantic task of combining the religious thought of those analytical and audacious centuries into a perfect system, and accomplished it. The end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century was the flood-tide of the Middle Ages. There was what had never been before and has never been since, a European consciousness; there was one Church everywhere present, one language spoken by all educated people, one faith and philosophy of life universally accepted. But by the end of the thirteenth century the tide was rapidly ebbing. Dante was born in 1265. Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventura died in 1274, Albertus Magnus passed away in 1280, and Duns Scotus in 1308. With their going scholasticism became a spent force, for they left no successors of equal power. The same century saw the utter defeat of the house of Hohenstaufen, and the close of that obstinate conflict between Church and Empire, which had engrossed the thoughts of Europe for five centuries. The year 1300, when Dante saw his immortal vision, was the one appointed by the Pope to celebrate the victory of the Church.

Of this world of chivalrous love, clear thought, astute speculation, ardent piety, and tumultuous, fierce, barbaric energy, Dante is the complete representative. With a genius so universal that he seemed to touch and penetrate every part of its seething and deep-flowing life, he compressed all into his strange "mediæval miracle of song." In his lifelong devotion to Beatrice we see the incarnation of that romantic conception of love which was the knightly ideal of the Middle Ages; in the Inferno we have a graphic and powerful delineation of their fears; in the Purgatorio there is a lucid exposition of their scheme of salvation; in the Paradiso their crude system of astronomy is made the stairway up which their glowing faith mounted to the throne of God. The theology of Thomas Aquinas and the philosophy of Aristotle are the structural principles of the poem; while the unearthly spirituality which breathes in the art and poetry of the time and culminates in the ecstatic visions of the mystics here find noblest expression. Here also we see portrayed with unequaled beauty that ideal of the Holy Roman Empire, as familiar to those times as it is alien to our own. The craving of that period was for unity. Charlemagne had sought it in the State, Hildebrand would organize it through a sovereign Church, Aquinas had brought thought into one harmonious system, Dante conceived it

to be found in a regenerated society, ruled by Pope and Emperor. The prayer that came up from every earnest heart in those turbulent and warring times was for peace and unity. To answer that ceaseless aspiration Dante felt to be a great part of his holy mission.

But while the seer is thoroughly mediæval in theology and philosophy, in chivalrous and romantic love, in his conception of a world-wide empire, and in his quenchless yearning for unity, he is unconsciously the warder of the gates leading into a far different future. In the fine words of Shelley he "was the first awakener of entranced Europe, the congregator of those great spirits who presided over the resurrection of learning, the Lucifer of that starry flock that in the thirteenth century shone forth from Republican Italy." Standing completely in the circle of mediæval conceptions he was the tallest mountain peak, and thus first caught the light of the coming day. The deep spirit of the centuries preceding him had sought truth supremely, and had delighted to express it in symbolism; the period immediately following rejoiced more in form and symmetry: before him was the age of faith, after him came the age of taste. Beauty, that heretofore had been feared as sensuous and evil, now became of commanding importance, and æsthetic perfection and proportion in the last detail were carefully studied. While Dante com-

pletely mirrored the old spirit he became a model for the new, enshrining truth in beauty, and combining faith with taste.

The "Divine Comedy" also ushers a new force into literature. It brought thought out of the stilted and unnatural Latin tongue, and committed it to the living and flexible language of the common people. It was the first work of a great literature, the creator of a national tongue, and the boundary between ancient and modern speech. From the days of Rome's magnificence the Latin had been the vehicle of all worthy prose and verse. It was the language of educated minds everywhere, and in its stately forms were written all the masterpieces which Dante revered. He himself yielded it the first place for nobleness, power, and beauty. It required a daring soul to break all traditions and intrust the labor of a lifetime to the shifty bark of the Italian vernacular. None knew better than he, who made the first critical study of languages in modern times, how limited in range it yet was, and how liable to fluctuation and corruption; but by the magic of his regal genius he extended the common speech to contain his thought, moulded it into dignity and strength, and first revealed its marvelous charm and capacity, so that after six centuries his native tongue is contemporaneous with the Italian of our own day. It is no ordinary mind that dares to be a Colum-

bus on an untried sea, or a Prometheus bringing fire from the stars for the common use of men. He fulfilled the prediction which Byron made him utter five centuries after: —

> "My bones shall rest within thy breast,
> My soul within thy language." [1]

Dante was also distinctively modern in his theme. His many predecessors, who had written of the adventures of the soul in the eternal world, made the form of his poem belong to the mediæval times; but his thought is essentially modern. The journey he described really takes place in one's own soul. Hell is the dark cavern within us, Paradise the heavenly disposition of the mind, Purgatory the way of salvation. He portrayed God's way of dealing with a human life. The vision turned within, beholding the fears and hopes, the faith and failure, the defeats and possibilities of the soul as it faces the mysteries of God and works out its destiny, is characteristic of our own day. In thus singing of the conditions of the soul, rather than of arms and adventure, Dante gave voice to the new epoch and became the leader of a noble company of poets.

He would be considered rash indeed who claimed this grim prophet as in any way an exponent of the newer religious thinking, which has broken with the stern and mechanical dog-

[1] *The Prophecy of Dante*, canto ii.

mas of the old theology. Yet it is exceedingly interesting to note how nearly every truth which has been prominently asserted in our times by the leaders of thought has found expression in Dante. He emphasized as strongly as did Channing or Phillips Brooks the essential divineness of man.

> "And it is nature which, from height to height,
> On to the summit prompts us." [1]

Evil choices are not the result of total depravity; it is through lack of knowledge that evil appears the good. He taught the coördinating and co-operating power of spirituality and reason, a truth which we are reviving to end the chronic warfare between science and religion. No modern evangelical preacher lays more weighty stress on the sovereign freedom of the will. He differs widely from those Puritan rationalists who constructed theology almost wholly out of the analytical faculty and distrusted spiritual vision. He anticipates the faith of Horace Bushnell in the trustworthiness of the intuitions; it is after theology personified in Beatrice has done its best that by direct vision he sees the ultimate mysteries. The immanence of God is the fundamental doctrine of the best religious thought of our day. It is a truth which is commonly supposed to have been lost during the period of Romanized thought, which prevailed from Augustine down to the middle of the nineteenth century. Undoubtedly

[1] *Par.* iv. 127, 128. (Cary's trans.)

Dante did not give it the prominence we accord it, but he recognized it, and clearly stated it in the first line of the "Paradiso." "The glory of Him who moves everything penetrates through the universe;" and elsewhere "it irradiates everything," and "naught can be an obstacle to it;" and in the beatific vision, when he beheld reality, he saw God in all things and all things in God.

The services of this mediæval seer to modern times cannot well be estimated. Besides being the never-failing fire in which lofty minds of subsequent generations have kindled their torches, he took the initiative in popularizing literature, and gave form to a most noble language; he elevated to an almost unattainable height the standard of literary form and beauty; he has indelibly impressed upon the world's thought the worth of the individual man, lifting the most insignificant to inconceivable greatness in the decision of eternal issues amidst the contention of supernal forces; he has helped to terminate the debate between Church and State by pointing out that the happiness and unity of mankind come not through the supremacy of either, but through a regenerated society where the people are served by both. Greater than all else, his most memorable service has been that over those hot, stormy, creative centuries — centuries which, with all their crudeness and barbarism, followed

the highest spiritual ideals with a passionate enthusiasm which has never been equaled, and, with vision clearer than our own, realized the presence of the eternal — he pondered until he caught their spirit, incarnated it in a form of deathless beauty, and left it as a perpetual standard to reveal the greatness and the littleness of subsequent ages.

THE BURDEN OF THE MESSAGE

"An odd poem, but gleaming with natural beauties, a work in which the author rose in parts above the bad taste of his age and his subject, and full of passages written as purely as if they had been of the time of Ariosto and Tasso." — VOLTAIRE.

"The 'Divina Commedia' is one of the landmarks of history. More than a magnificent poem, more than the beginning of a language and the opening of a national literature, more than the inspirer of art and the glory of a great people, it is one of those rare and solemn monuments of the mind's power which measure and test what it can reach to, which rise up ineffaceably and forever as time goes on, marking out its advance by grander divisions than its centuries, and adopted as epochs by the consent of all who come after. It stands with the 'Iliad' and Shakespeare's plays, with the writings of Aristotle and Plato, with the 'Novum Organon' and the 'Principia,' with Justinian's 'Code,' with the Parthenon and St. Peter's. It is the first Christian poem ; and it opens European literature, as the 'Iliad' did that of Greece and Rome ; and, like the 'Iliad,' it has never become out of date ; it accompanies in undiminished freshness the literature which it began." — DEAN CHURCH.

I

THE CALL OF THE PROPHET

The great Florentine was profoundly convinced that he was a prophet sent from God with an imperative communication for the world. The very stars had foretold it. When he first felt the Tuscan air the sun was in the sign of the Twins, in the heaven of the Fixed Stars, presided over by the cherubim, who look into the face of the Most High and spread a knowledge of Him to all beneath. To the prenatal influence of these stars, "impregnate with great virtues," Dante ascribed his rare intellectual insight and his extraordinary powers of expression. They gave him his ability to penetrate the Divine mysteries and his commission to coöperate with the cherubim in diffusing the truth. He spoke in the vulgar tongue that his word might come to all. Even Isaiah, after his exalted vision in the temple, had not a more urgent sense of mission than had this rugged soul as he wandered about the world experiencing and working out his "mystic, unfathomable song." He too had had a vision. In closing the "Vita Nuova" he says: "It was

given unto me to behold a very wonderful vision; wherein I saw things that determined me that I would say nothing further of this blessed one until such a time as I could discourse more worthily of her. And to this end I labor all I can, as she well knoweth." From our knowledge of Dante we may well believe that this was more than a beholding of the ascended Beatrice, whom he had loved in the flesh. It was a vision of that which she symbolized to his mind, namely, the Divine Wisdom and its dealings with the children of men. He too would justify the ways of God to men; and his whole after life was a training,

> "So that the shadow of the blessed realm
> Stamped in my brain I can make manifest." [1]

Down through the world of endless bitterness, and over the mountain from whose fair summit the eyes of his Lady had lifted him, and afterward through the heavens from light to light, he had learned his message. Not for a moment does he forget that this high privilege is given to him that he may throw the blaze of things eternal upon this life. Beatrice, St. Peter, Cacciaguida repeatedly charge him to make known the whole vision. When he reaches the very heaven of heavens he does not permit himself the swoon of infinite delight, which has been the aspiration of mystics; but seeks yet more eagerly for truth, that he may turn the glory of the supernal splendor upon the reeking corruption of the papal

[1] *Par.* i. 23, 24.

court; and his final prayer, as he joins his look unto the Infinite Goodness, is that he may not fail of his lofty mission: —

"O Supreme Light, that so high uplifted Thyself from mortal conceptions, re-lend a little to my mind of what Thou didst appear, and make my tongue so powerful that it may be able to leave one single spark of Thy glory for the future people; for, by returning somewhat to my memory and by sounding a little in these verses, more of Thy victory shall be conceived." [1]

Dante was one of the three preëminent poets of the world, because first of all he was a seer.

"He saw through life and death, through good and ill,
He saw through his own soul.
The marvel of the everlasting will,
An open scroll
Before him lay." [2]

"The more I think of it," says Ruskin, "I find this conclusion more impressed upon me, — that the greatest thing a human soul ever does is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think; but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion, — all in one." No eye ever saw more clearly the heart of man and the grandeur of the moral law than did this world-worn prophet. What he saw so vividly he could state vitally. He was a poet, because the heart of all truth has rhythm and poetry in it.

[1] *Par.* xxxiii. 67–75.

[2] Tennyson, *The Poet.*

II

THE MESSAGE

What was the message this poet-prophet sought to deliver to the world? Let us use his own words in his letter dedicating the "Paradiso" to his friend and protector, Can Grande: "The aim of the whole and the individual parts is twofold, a nearer and a farther, but if we seek into the matter closely we may say briefly that the aim of the whole and the individual parts is to bring those who are living in this life out of a state of misery and to guide them to a state of happiness." How the soul of man, lost in the mazes of life and defeated by the fierceness of its own passions, can learn its peril, escape from the stain and power of sin, and enter into perfect blessedness, — this is his theme. He sets it forth in three works which are distinctively religious, the "New Life," the "Banquet," and the "Divine Comedy." The last is the completest and fullest statement of what is vital in the first two.

III

ITS POLITICAL ASPECT

Although the main current is religious there flows through the "Comedy" another stream of thought which is political. The author has an ideal civil polity to advocate, as well as an ideal righteousness to impress. Like the stern Hebrew prophet, whom he so much resembled, this Tuscan seer was an ardent patriot. He never divorced his religion from his politics, but brought both under the same august moral order. He loved Florence and his native Italy with a love that was notable, even in those days of intense feeling. And because he loved them he felt the steady pressure of a great duty to rebuke their sins and point out the way of political stability and peace.

The fierce debate between Church and State during the Middle Ages was in large part over the right of investiture. The Emperor claimed it as essential to all orderly civil government, while the great Hildebrand and his successors asserted that it must be in the hands of the Pope to preserve the purity and unity of the Church.

In the incessant and bitter clash of these two colossal powers Italy was at once the stake and the battle ground. She became a land of walled cities, local pride and jealousy grew intense and masterful, partisan feeling ran high, and factional lines were strict and pronounced. By siding now with one party and now with the other, the cities obtained their liberties. Domestic industry and foreign commerce made them rich; the conflict between the mitre and the crown made them free. In the joy of freedom life within the walls grew robust, self-reliant, fertile of vast enterprises. Like overgrown boys just released from leading-strings they were vigorous, boastful, insolent, fickle, lavish in expenditure, quick to draw the sword, and overflowing with a lusty exuberance of vitality. The cities were unwelcome anomalies in mediæval Europe. Society had been clerical and aristocratic; with the rise of the municipalities a new class came into prominence. The citizen order, upon which our modern civilization is based, now for the first time became a force; it could maintain itself, however, only by constant fighting, and ceaseless strife bred a temper that was a source of perpetual internecine feud. The implacable and rancorous party spirit engendered by the long wars of investiture was an unmitigated curse to Italy, and a great price to pay for freedom. We search in vain to find any consistent principle

dividing the contending factions. The terms Guelf and Ghibelline, that in a rough way distinguished the partisans of the Church and the partisans of the Empire, came to be symbols of deep-seated jealousies, and altered their meaning with time and place. The real cause of the frightful internal strife was the struggle of the contending forces of the old social order based on the force of the few, and the new based on the strength of the many. The growing towns were communities with an intense spirit of rivalry, and, therefore, they fought for existence, for command of harbors, for keys to the mountain passes, for leadership in commerce. Moreover, the same unbridled passions that swept Italy with a steady storm of battle divided the cities themselves into turbulent factions, filling the streets with constant brawls, carousals, family feuds, and justifying Napier's characterization of their life as "one universal burst of unmitigated anarchy."

The deep, persistent prayer of Dante, as of every lofty soul, was for peace. But where was peace to be found? The law-making and law-abiding power was not to be sought in the fickle people, and therefore the poet turned to that brilliant illusion whose glory so enslaved the imagination of the Middle Ages — the Holy Roman Empire. The most significant political phenomenon of the three preceding centuries had been

the formation of the nationalities of Europe. Their growth and expanding power was a source of perpetual war, and the idealists of those restless and battling centuries longed for some supreme power, which should express the political unity of Christendom, be the ultimate tribunal of appeal, the fountain of law, and the administrator of impartial justice. Hildebrand had attempted to realize this splendid ideal in the universal Church, whose head should be the arbiter of the nations, the source of authority and order. To establish this conception, which in unapproached grandeur makes the dreams of empire of Charlemagne and Napoleon seem paltry, he had given all his vast ability and the superb energy of his stormy life. It was a noble theory worthy of his statesmanlike mind; but in practice it had failed, because the seven mortal sins were as strong in the hearts of popes and cardinals as in those of kings. When the corruption of the Roman court filled Europe with its stench, the thoughts of many minds turned to the earlier conception of the Empire as it had existed before the sword was joined to the crozier. This dream of the Middle Ages finds its loftiest expression in Dante's treatise on the "Monarchy." He maintains that universal peace is essential to freedom. Peace can be attained only under a monarchy whose head seeks the good of all alike. As man has a corruptible and an incorruptible nature, he

therefore has two ends, active virtue on earth and the enjoyment of the sight of God hereafter. Temporal happiness is gained by the practice of the four cardinal virtues, and spiritual blessedness through the theological virtues. Two guides are needed, the emperor and the pontiff, the one supreme in temporal things, the other in spiritual, both equally ordained of God, and co-operating for the common good of man. Dante believed that the chief source of the corruption of the Church was its assumption of political power, and with sentences that flashed fire he sought to restore the ancient order.

This political ideal, mingling with his ideal righteousness, dominated his whole life. He named one of his daughters Beatrice, and Dean Plumptre[1] states on the authority of Passerini that he named another Imperia. In the "Vita Nuova" we see the beginning of the stream of the poet's religious life; in "De Monarchia" the flow of his political aspirations. The two currents unite in the "Divina Commedia." The one is typified in Virgil, the other in Beatrice. One leads to peace on earth, the other to felicity in heaven. The political ideal blends with the religious in the opening canto of the "Inferno," where Virgil's voice is hoarse through long silence, because, being the poet of the ancient Roman Empire, his message has so long been unheard.

[1] *Studies*, p. 361.

The wanderer cannot climb the shining mountain, which represents an ideal policy as well as an ideal blessedness, on account of the incontinence of Florence, the pride of France, and the wolfish avarice of the Papacy; but a hound shall at last come who will drive the wolf into Hell. Dante predicts this hound in the same prophetic spirit that possessed Isaiah when he foretold the Messiah. Later, in "Purgatory," he speaks of the expected one as the Dux, who shall slay the thievish harlot of the seven hills, and Beatrice strictly charges him to report what has been revealed to him. In the "Inferno" he discovers Brutus and Cassius, traitors against the Empire, as well as Judas, the traitor against the Church, in the bloody maw of Lucifer; and in "Paradise," as all heaven turns red with just indignation, St. Peter pronounces judgment upon the rapacious wolves who wear the garb of a shepherd, enjoining the poet to conceal nothing; and even the last words of Beatrice are a condemnation of Pope Clement V. to the eternal pit, for his treachery to Henry.

Dante's ideal polity was utterly impracticable; but his essential aspiration is that of many minds to-day, and we are beginning to see its realization. The code of international law is a source of universal order; the recent Peace Congress at the Hague, in establishing an international tribunal, took a long step toward extending the area

of peace for which Dante's soul longed; in America the Church is separated from the State, a precedent which is exerting a wide influence in Europe.

IV

ITS RELIGIOUS TEACHING

Important as this ardent patriot thought his political message to be, it is of value to us largely as a study of mediæval conceptions. The perpetual interest of the poem lies in the charm and power of its religious teachings. Following his great master, St. Thomas Aquinas, Dante believed that the final end of all right endeavor is happiness. There is a twofold happiness for man because he is a dual creature. He has a corruptible and an incorruptible nature. As a citizen of this world he attains happiness by obeying reason and practicing the four cardinal virtues, prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. This gives to the natural man perfect temporal felicity. For the spiritual nature the supreme beatitude is the Vision of God. This lies beyond the capacity of the natural reason ; therefore Revelation, whose channels are the Scriptures, the teachings of the Fathers, and the decisions of Councils, makes known the mysteries of God. By practicing the theological virtues, faith, hope, love, man becomes a partaker of the divine nature and

enters into eternal blessedness, — partially in this world; perfectly, according to his capacity, in the celestial Paradise.

But men miss the true way. They desire happiness. Love for the objects which seem good is implanted in the soul, even as zeal in the bee for making honey, yet man tastes the inferior good and is led on toward evil; —

> "Of trivial good at first it [the soul] tastes the savour;
> Is cheated by it, and runs after it,
> If guide or rein turn not aside its love."[1]

This passion for the lower pleasures is no excuse, for men should bring their desires to the reason, which winnows the good from the evil, and then by the power of the will they can restrain the baser loves. They permit the reason and the will to slumber, and thus lose the way of happiness and wander into paths of misery. A fearful vision, even of Hell and the awful consequences of sin, is needed to keep back their feet from evil. The method of relief from the thrall of iniquity and the entrance into moral and spiritual joy Dante graphically describes in the story of his own soul's experience. Midway in the journey of life he found himself lost in a dark wood; coming to the foot of a high hill he looked upward and saw its shoulders clothed with light. Then was his fear quieted and he strove to ascend the desert slope. Almost at the beginning of the

[1] *Purg.* xvi. 91, 93.

steep three beasts attacked him, a she-leopard, a lion, and a she-wolf. As he was falling back before them there appeared to him Virgil, who conducted him through the deeps of Hell, and up the steeps of the mount of Purgatory, leaving him in the Terrestrial Paradise. Here he met Beatrice, who led him through the ascending heavens until he looked into the Fountain of Eternal Light.

Thus Dante would teach us that men often unconsciously go astray and awake to find themselves lost in the tangled labyrinth of the world. Coming to themselves they resolve to escape and achieve some worthy end. Trusting in their own resources, they confidently seek to realize some resplendent ideal; but the task is hopeless. The leopard of incontinence, the lion of violence, the wolf of avarice, cannot be overcome. They drive the despairing spirit back "where the sun is silent." Man's extremity is God's opportunity. Divine Grace quickens their reason to lead them in a better way. It shows them the nature of sin and its terrible effects. It next guides up the steep path of purification and freedom until their souls are brought back to the stainlessness enjoyed by the first pair in Eden. Reason and the practice of the moral virtues can do no more. Spiritual life in this world and the world to come is the gift of God, made known through Revelation. Therefore, Beatrice, the Divine Wisdom,

ushers the redeemed spirits into the celestial mysteries, lifting them from glory to glory until they touch the height of bliss in a rapturous vision of God.

V

THE VALUE OF HIS THOUGHT

Is Dante a safe guide? Has he pointed out the way of life? In his view the ultimate goal which all men seek is happiness; but we are accustomed to consider the pursuit of happiness misleading. A better term than happiness is well-being; happiness is a consequence of a fully developed life, not an end to be sought. In the "Paradiso," as his thought ascends, he drops the infelicitous term as insufficient. Henceforth his favorite expression is *beatitude*, a nobler, more significant word, undegraded by unhallowed associations. The supreme beatitude he unhesitatingly affirms to be the Vision of God. To know God, to love Him perfectly, to be like Him in holiness, this is life eternal; and the statement is unassailable. How shall the perfect blessedness be attained? In answering this question modern theology differs radically from Dante both in statement and in point of view.

One of the priceless legacies left by the nineteenth century is its impressive assertion that we are living in a universe. There is —

"One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves." [1]

We have hardly thought this stupendous truth through in all its bearings, but it is revolutionary. The supernatural is but the natural passed beyond our sight; time is that spot of eternity which we are now touching; the temporal is that part of the everlasting that sweeps for a moment into the circle of time. Life is all of a piece, and we do not understand it unless we look at it whole. In separating it mechanically and studying dissociated processes we get an erroneous impression.

Now the Middle Ages, with all their passion for unity, were essentially dualistic. They divided the sovereignty of Europe between the Church and the State; they considered that man had a twofold end, temporal and spiritual felicity. The Emperor was the guide to one, the Pope to the other. Reason teaches man how to live amid things temporal, and revelation amid things eternal. The cardinal virtues distinguish one, the theological virtues the other. When St. Thomas Aquinas attempted to gather into one comprehensive system all religious and ethical truths, his work had the fatal defect of dualism; and when Dante made the philosophy of Aquinas the fabric of his great poem, he

[1] Tennyson, *In Memoriam.*

incorporated the flaw along with the truth. A philosophy of salvation cannot be perfectly true that sets reason so distinctly over against revelation, and so completely divorces the ethical from the religious process. In actual life there is no such separation. The moral rests upon the spiritual, with no such chasm as the broad division between "Purgatory" and "Paradise" would seem to indicate. A careful observer said that the Wesleyan revival improved the broadcloth of England. Character usually grows out of faith: it is not the pedestal upon which faith plants its feet. We generally consider that the initial step of the right life is an act of faith. The soul realizes its condition, trusts itself to God, and by a spiritual energy takes hold of the divine life. "Faith," says Horace Bushnell, "is a transaction. It is the trusting of one's being to a being, there to be rested, kept, guided, moulded, governed, and possessed forever." Faith is that supreme energy by which the soul attaches itself in vital union to God. Through this union the life of God enters into the soul, causing a divine regeneration and making the man a new creature. This new spirit changes his purposes, ennobles his loves, purifies his feelings. He is transformed by the renewing of the mind.

Our modern orthodox view, beginning with faith, emphasizes the redemptive grace of God, and insists that man is saved, not by what he does for

himself, but by what God does for him and in him. The thought is constantly coming out in our hymns and sermons that the first step in the way of salvation is the vital union of the soul with God through faith. We measure progress by our deepening consciousness that our lives are "hid with Christ in God," and out of this sense of intimate relationship grow all Christian joy and peace and hope.

Coming to Dante from the atmosphere of the modern pulpit, we are surprised at the utter absence of this feeling of the union of the soul with God during the process of salvation. The redeemed look continually into His face and are sensibly one with Him; but the toiling spirits who climb the Mount of Purification have no sweet sense of the indwelling Christ; no "joy in the Holy Ghost;" they do not "dwell in the secret place of the Most High;" they would apparently not understand what Paul meant when he said, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ that liveth in me."

We shall recur to this thought in our study of the "Purgatorio." It is enough now to point out the fact that Dante's dualism causes him to give an imperfect and thoroughly inadequate impression of the power of the religious faith and affections in promoting moral purity.

Another characteristic continually manifests itself. One cannot fail to note how conspicuously

Christ is absent from this mighty drama of salvation. His work of atonement is assumed, His deity is fully recognized, but He Himself is rather a celestial glory in the background than a pervasive presence on the scene of action. In Dante there is not the faintest intimation of the thought, so prominent in these days, that Christ is Christianity. His is distinctively a gospel of a system, ours of a person. To him the truth came through many channels, the Scriptures, the Fathers, the Councils; we study chiefly the truth as it is in Jesus. He emphasized the fathomless mysteries of truth; we call attention to the simplicity that is in Christ. With the Catholic of the Middle Ages faith was usually conceived as belief in a system of dogma; with us it is trust in a person. Dante the scholar was in sympathy with the conception of his time, but Dante the poet felt his heart crying out for the personal element, which he satisfied in personifying religious truths in the fair form of Beatrice. She occupies the position which a religious genius of a different type, such as St. Francis or Thomas à Kempis, would have given to Christ.

But while the form into which this "Lord of the song preëminent" threw his message is alien to many of our modes of thought, the substance changes not. The materials with which he wrought his monumental work are essentially the same in all ages, and what this vivid man, with his

preternatural insight into the heart of things, saw, — this is his enduring word to the world. Such stuff as his dream was made of is permanent, and what he saw in his raw material is the real burden of his prophecy. His subject-matter, as he himself stated it, is "Man, subjected, in so far as by the freedom of his will he deserves it, to just reward or punishment."[1] The accountability of man, the supremacy of the moral law, and the certainty of its rewards and punishments, — these truths, profoundly conceived by a master mind, and set forth with extraordinary dramatic power, can be written on no sibyl leaves, easily blown away. They command the attention of all times. Of these eternal verities Dante is the most powerful prophet in the Christian centuries.

He differs from nearly all preëminent preachers of righteousness in his starting point. He begins with man, they with God. Among the austere Hebrew prophets Dante most closely resembled Isaiah in majesty of thought and vigor of language; but the theme of the Jewish statesman was the awful holiness of Jehovah. Among modern seers Jonathan Edwards is most nearly related to our poet in subtilty of intellect, intensity of conviction, and terrific power of imagination. The New Englander saw God, high and lifted up. Before that august vision man shriveled into nothingness. He is a worm of the dust,

[1] Letter to Can Grande della Scala.

depraved to the core, and if he is saved, it is through no merit of his own, but through the elective mercy of the Almighty. God, His glory, His decrees, His compassion ; and man, a sinner "saved by grace," — this is most often the message of the foremost teachers of Christianity. It seems impossible to have a majestic consciousness of the greatness of God without having man appear a pitiable creature. Dante began with man rather than with God. He riveted his gaze on the sovereign power of the human will instead of on the decrees of the Omnipotent. He stood at the opposite pole of thought to Calvin and Edwards. He could never say, with the celebrated French preacher, " God alone is great ! " Man is great, too ; he is no mere worm, plucked by a mighty hand from destruction, and changed into celestial beauty by irresistible grace. He is an imposing figure, master of his fate, fighting against principalities and powers, strong through divine help to climb the rugged path of purification and achieve blessedness.

Not only was Dante antipodal to many illustrious religious teachers in his point of view, but he differed radically from the great dramatists in his conception of the regal power of the will to conquer all the ills of life. Free will is the greatest of God's gifts, as Beatrice informs the poet. This potential freedom, that in every right life is continually becoming actual, makes man superior

to disaster and every hostile force. Dante called his greatest work a comedy because it had a happy ending. There is a deep reason why it had a happy ending. It is because man can be a complete victor in life's battle. Our poet leads the spectator through fiercer miseries than does Æschylus or Shakespeare; but their immortal works are tragedies, ending in death, while his is a comedy, issuing in triumphant life. Two apparently antagonistic elements enter into our lives, — Necessity and Freedom. The great tragedies of literature have been built upon necessity. Dante has reared his monumental poem upon freedom. Notice the fundamental conception of Shakespeare in his masterpieces. Since he is looking at this life only, its happiness, its titles, its successes, he declares that man but half controls his fate. Mightier powers are working upon him, in whose hands he is but a plaything. The individual, foolishly dreaming that he is free, is but a shuttlecock, tossed about by other spiritual forces. Hamlet wills with all his soul to kill the king, but he cannot do it: he has a fatal weakness which he is unable to overcome. Macbeth does not wish to commit murder: he is a puppet in the grasp of a stronger, darker spirit. Othello, blindly led on to his own undoing, enters his hell through no will of his own: a craftier will controls him. The hero of modern tragedy is under the dominion of his chief characteristic. Given this nature of his,

with certain untoward events, and his doom is sealed.

The leading Greek dramas still more impressively interpret man as a grain of wheat between the upper and nether millstones of adverse forces. The characters appear to be free, but if one looks deeper down, he perceives that they are the representatives of vast world powers, while the tragedy is the suffering of the individual as the two malign energies crush against each other. The classic tragedy is commonly constructed on the essential antagonism between the family and the state. The necessity of such collision is no longer apparent to us, and we have changed the names of the colossal powers that make sport of human life. For family and state we read heredity and environment, — taskmasters as exacting and irresistible, — which allow even less room for the freedom of the individual will. About three hundred years ago more than a thousand ancestors of each of us were living. Their blood mingling in us determines by an inexorable law what we are. Environment completes the work heredity began, making our characters and careers the inevitable resultants of these two forces. In their clashing life finds its sorrow and perhaps its tragic destruction.

With any such philosophy Dante might have written out of his own bitter experiences one of the world's darkest tragedies, rather than its

supreme comedy. He had certainly been the sport of hostile forces. Born of knightly blood, possessed of brilliant genius, cherishing pure aims, sensitive to the sweetest affections and noblest ideals, loving righteousness and hating iniquity, an unsullied patriot, by the fickle passions of a turbulent mob he was deprived of city, home, family, position, property, and made a lonely exile, condemned to a horrible death should he return to Florence. If tragedies grow out of the losses of the individual held in the grasp of relentless and uncontrollable energies, then Dante had in his own life the materials for as black a drama as was ever played on ancient or modern stage.

But the immortal Florentine had no such fatalistic message for the world. Stripped of those very things, the loss of which the immortal poets have held made life a disaster, he turned his thoughts inward, and in his soul won a victory over malignant fate to which he reared an imperishable monument. He planted himself firmly on the Biblical teaching of the inherent greatness of man. He believed with Christ that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth," and with Paul that he could lose all things and still be more than conqueror. "And free will, which, if it endure fatigue in the first battles with the heavens, afterwards, if it be well nurtured, conquers every-

thing." [1] His is not only the first great Christian poem, but it is distinctively the Christian poem of the world in its majestic conception of man and his possibilities. Shakespeare's religious instincts compared with Dante's were weak. He was "world-wide," while Dante was "world-deep" and world-high. The Englishman held the mirror up to nature; the Italian looked into the face of God, and beheld all things with light of the eternal world upon them. Tennyson had no such triumphant evangel for sorrowing humanity. He had a message of faith and hope for an age of doubt, but he utters no such stirring notes of victory as Dante. His friend, Aubrey de Vere, once remarked to him that "In Memoriam" was analogous to the "Divina Commedia." It was the history of a soul contending with a great sorrow. It began all woe, it had its Purgatorio abounding in consolation and peace, why not add a Paradiso of triumph and joy? The poet answered, "I have written what I have felt and known, and I will never write anything else." [2] Dante's poem is an autobiography; but he passed beyond "consolation and peace" to a victorious joy. From the heaven of the Fixed Stars he looked back

> "and saw this globe
> So pitiful of semblance, that perforce
> It moved my smiles: and him in truth I hold
> For wisest who esteems it least." [3]

[1] *Purg.* xvi. 76–78.

[2] *Alfred Lord Tennyson;* a Memoir by his Son. Vol. i. p. 294.

[3] *Par.* xxii. 130–133. (Cary's trans.)

In the insufferable Light he saw his life and knew that the Primal Love shone through it all. We know that in thought, and believe that to a large degree in experience, he had that *visio Dei* which made him the exultant and confident prophet of man's possible victory. That every life can turn the darkest tragedy into glorious comedy, that the dread foes of man are not belligerent circumstances, but the riotous passions, — the leopard of incontinence, the lion of violence, and the wolf of avarice, — this is the ringing proclamation of this mediæval prophet. No other masterpiece in literature, excepting the Bible, gives such an impression of the actual and potential greatness of man. What was probably Dante's last poem clearly shows that he had won in his own heart the victory he declared possible to all.

"The king, by whose rich grace His servants be
With pleasure beyond measure set to dwell,
Ordains that I my bitter wrath dispel
And lift mine eyes to the great Consistory;
Till, noting how in glorious quires agree
The citizens of that fair citadel,
To the Creator I His creature swell
Their song, and all their love possesses me.
So when I contemplate the great reward
To which our God has called the Christian seed,
I long for nothing else but only this,
And then my soul is grieved in thy regard,
Dear friend, who seek'st not thy nearest need,
Renouncing for slight joys the perfect bliss!"[1]

[1] To Giovanni Quirino, trans. by Rossetti.

THE VISION OF SIN

"Wherewithal a man sinneth, by the same also shall he be punished." — Book of Wisdom.

"Which way I fly is Hell, myself am Hell." — Milton.

"Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
To one self place: but where we are is Hell,
And where Hell is there we shall ever be.
And, to be brief, when all the world dissolves,
And every creature shall be purified,
All places shall be Hell which are not Heaven."
— Marlowe.

"We cannot doubt that Dante, in recording the vision vouchsafed him by the Spirit of Truth, was moved by more than the overmastering impulse to create; surely his desire was set to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. But so far as the action of the poem is concerned, it centres in the salvation of his own soul alone. He accepts, with deep, speechless sorrow, yet seemingly with no instinct to bring succor, the agony which he beholds. Doubtless profound reverence keeps him silent, yet one can imagine no modern man passing through those piteous shades without at least one heart-wrung cry: 'Would God I had died for thee!' The austere silence of Dante is for a reader of to-day the most awful thing in the 'Inferno.'" — Vida D. Scudder.

I

THE DARK SPOT IN THE UNIVERSE

Boccaccio is the authority for the following familiar Dante anecdote: "It happened one day in Verona (the fame of his work being already known to all, and especially that part of the 'Commedia' which is called the 'Inferno') and himself known to many, both men and women, that as he passed before a door where several women were seated, one of them said softly, but not too low to be heard by him and those who were with him: 'Do you see him who goes to Hell and comes back again when he pleases, and brings back news of those who are down below?' To which another of the women answered simply: 'Certainly you speak the truth. See how scorched his beard is, and how dark he is from heat and smoke!' When Dante heard this talk behind him, and saw that the women believed entirely what they said, he was pleased, and, content that they should have this opinion of him, went on his way with a smile." [1]

If the "Inferno" were what it is commonly believed to be — a horrible and minutely elaborated picture of a vast prison-house of torture to frighten

[1] *Vita di Dante.*

timid souls into larger gifts to the church — even the superhuman genius of the sweetest of singers could not have saved it from oblivion. Its pictures of gloom and of fiery horror must reveal enough truth that is ever contemporaneous to account for its enduring power. Dante, being the child of his time, undoubtedly believed in a literal Hell, hideous as a nightmare haunting the sleep of devils. The place as well as the truth was a reality to him. We may reject the dogma of an eternal prison of torment; but to our peril do we neglect the truth of which the darkness and the fire are symbols.

There is a shadow cast by the world's sin. As long as there is evil there will be a dark spot in the universe, and that spot is Hell. While sin is, Hell must be. This gloom must be a place of woe and bitter anguish. Love, as well as justice, ordains that sin and its pestilential shade be a place of sorrow, fierce pains, and revolting death. Into this murky darkness, where are to be heard the sighs, laments, deep wailings, strange tongues, horrible cries, words of woe, accents of anger, voices high and hoarse, all born of the world's sin, Dante, with his "head girt with horror" and with compassionate heart, entered. He went down deep into the world's iniquity. He penetrated into those caverns of woe which lie far down in the soul, that he might know what sin is in its nature and consequences. The "Inferno" is Dante's conception of sin.

II

THE INFERNO AN EXPERIENCE

We must remember also that Dante did not write the "Inferno" to glut his malignant spite on his enemies by revealing them in torment. Walter Savage Landor but showed abysmal ignorance when he described the "Inferno" as the utterance of "personal resentment, outrageous to the pitch of the ludicrous, positively screaming." Much truer is Mazzini's statement: "Dante had too much greatness in his soul, and too much pride (it may be) to make revenge a personal matter; he had nothing but contempt for his own enemies, and never, except in the case of Boniface VIII., whom it was necessary to punish in the name of religion and Italy, did he place a single one of them in the 'Inferno,' not even his judge, Cante Gabrielli." [1] Undoubtedly he met many people in that dreadful lazar-house of torture whose fate weighed heavily upon his heart. But his poem is largely autobiographical, and perforce he must describe sin as he himself had seen it, and must place the people in the "Inferno" whom he had found suffering in the hell which sin always creates. He did

[1] Moore, *Studies in Dante*, second series, p. 219, *n.*

not wish to find Francesca wrapped in that frightful doom. Her torments made him sad and piteous to weeping, yet he had no alternative. Probably in his impressionable boyhood he had heard the pathetic story of her fateful passion. In her tragic experience he had learned that illicit love, though for a moment it may seem innocent and sweet, will become a whirling and smiting tempest tormenting forever. He could not help meeting her in the nether gloom, because in this life, when she had come within the circle of his knowledge, he had found her in Hell. Brunetto Latini was one whom Dante loved, and upon whom he pronounced the loftiest eulogy that can be given a friend: "For in my mind is fixed, and now fills my heart, the dear, good, paternal image of you, when in the world hour by hour you taught me how man makes himself eternal." [1] Surely it afforded the poet no pleasure to meet him, a baked and withered figure, on the burning sands. But Dante knew the man's besetting sin. Perchance from what he had seen in Latini's sufferings on earth he had learned its scorching, deadly nature, and he had no choice but to find him enduring the consequences of his transgressions.

The "Inferno" represents his experience with evil in himself and others, where the sins appear in their ultimate results, and the people are fully given over to the wrong they loved.

[1] *Inf.* xv. 82–85.

III

THE THREE DEGREES OF SIN

What did this deep-souled, clear-visioned man find out sin to be as in dolorous journey he went through the nether gloom?

In the architecture of the infernal region he sets forth his conception of the different degrees of iniquity. Sitting behind the great tomb of Pope Anastasius, while they were becoming accustomed to the horrible excess of stench which was coming up from the deep abyss of the pit, Virgil unfolds to Dante the structural plan of Hell. It is so constructed that those who have sinned most heinously are the deepest down, and thus farthest from God, for sin separates from the Most High. There is, moreover, a broad distinction between sins of impulse and those of settled habit. Of all the dispositions which heaven abides not, incontinence is the least offensive. Therefore the outbreaks of the turbulent and untaught passions — carnality, gluttony, anger — are punished in the upper circles; the pit of Hell is reserved for sins of malice. Malice wins the hate of God because it

seeks the injury of others, either by force or fraud. Of the two, fraud is the worse; therefore, the fraudulent are in the lowest circles and more woe assails them. Thus the great Tuscan passes judgment upon the fundamental divisions of wrong-doing: incontinence, violence, and fraud.

We make the same general distinctions. Sins of the flesh are less culpable than those of the spirit. Warm-blooded, impetuous faults are not so damnable as reptilian craft and sneaking deceit. The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom before the Pharisees. Dante differs from our modern thought, however, in this. We consider that guilt lies in the intention rather than in the act; he adopts the elemental principle of Roman jurisprudence that punishment shall be proportional to the evil effects upon society from wrong-doing. The individual is accountable, not for the nature of the crime *per se*, but for the injury done to others. Hence treachery, being the most contrary to the love of man and of God, is the blackest of all sins, and the arch-traitors against Church and State are feeding the insatiable mouth of Lucifer.

IV

THE NATURE OF SIN

All definitions of sin seem bald and utterly inadequate. To call it "folly," "missing the mark," "the gap between the real and the ideal," "losing the good of the intellect"—all this is tame enough. Definitions make little impression. Sin must be seen to be shunned; and only the novelist, the artist, the poet, can set forth transgression in its monstrosity and naked hideousness. Michael Angelo's "Last Judgment" and George Eliot's "Romola" are more powerful deterrents from evil than any definitions of the theologians. But although the seed of sin is sown in this life, the harvest ripens in the next. Any adequate revelation of iniquity must have its scene laid in the future world. The seer must go among the "truly dead" to make known the full proportions of his dark and lurid truth.

Dante employs three distinct ways of revealing the nature of each sin. It is symbolized in the repulsive monsters presiding over the circles; in the environment in which the sinner is punished; and in the condition and torment of the sinner himself.

V

SIN PERSONIFIED IN DEMONS

The different kinds of sin are usually typified by a demon. The first one to be met is Minos, not the august judge of mythology, but a fiend, it being an accepted notion of the Middle Ages that all the gods of the heathen were devils. Sitting at the entrance of Hell he represents in a striking manner all sin when it comes to judgment. It confesses itself, it condemns itself, it snarls at itself. In a stenchful region, whose putrid smells forcibly remind us of the diseases of the glutton, is Cerberus, a personified belly, quivering for food, filthy, greasy, insatiably gnawing the howling spirits with his three barking mouths, and becoming quiet only when his ravenous gullets are filled with mud. Pluto, the wolfish god of avarice, raises a cry of alarm when Reason enters his realm, and falls like a mastless sail when he hears the decree of God. Phlegyas, who had fought in impious wrath against the gods, in stifled anger ferried Dante over the river of Hate. The Furies, representing the pride of intellect which makes men hostile

to God, are guardians on the glowing towers of the city of Dis; even Virgil cannot conquer these stubborn wills, but must rely on some heavenly messenger of grace to open the way. Violence is figured in Minotaur, biting himself and plunging in fury. Geryon is the "loathsome image of fraud," having "the face of a just man, so benignant from its face outwardly, and of a serpent all the trunk beside." The giants, guarding the circle of the lowest abyss, and appearing like enormous towers in the gloom, are emblematic of the enormity of crime.

But it is Lucifer himself, at the very bottom of the pit, at the centre of the earth, and therefore at that point in the universe farthest removed from God, who is the most complete type of the real nature of sin. Huge, bloody, loathsome, grotesque, self-absorbed; not dead nor yet alive; having three faces, one fiery red, one between white and yellow, one black — indicating the threefold character of sin as malignant, impotent, and ignorant; every moment sending forth chilling death, making others woeful in his own woes; punishing his followers with frightful torture, and thus undoing himself; the tears of the world flowing back to him as their source and becoming his torment; the movement of his wings, by which he seeks to extricate himself, freezing the rivers and thus imprisoning him, — what more fitting personification could

this seer have devised to show evil in its real deformity and folly? The hideous and self-centred Lucifer is perhaps the truest characterization of sin in literature.

There is an interesting, although entirely unconscious corroboration, in the recently published life of Francis Parkman, of Dante's fidelity to experience in representing Satan as bound in a stagnant pool. It is quoted to prove that the Italian was true to life, both as a prophet and artist in his delineation of abject misery. Mr. Parkman says: "From a complete and ample experience of both, I can bear witness that no amount of physical pain is so intolerable as the position of being stranded, and being doomed to lie rotting for year after year." Vassall Morton — the hero of Parkman's only novel, into the sketch of whose character the historian threw so much of his own life — cries out from his Austrian dungeon: "It is but a weak punishment to which Milton dooms his ruined angel. Action, enterprise, achievement, — a Hell like that is Heaven to the cells of Ehrenburg. He should have chained him to a rock, and left him alone to the torture of his own thoughts; the unutterable agonies of a mind preying on itself for want of other sustenance. Action! mured in this dungeon, the soul gasps for it as the lungs for air. Action, action, action! — all in all! What is life without it? A marsh, a

quagmire, a rotten, stagnant pool." It is singular that both Dante and Parkman should figure the depth of wretchedness as the bondage of a quagmire.

Milton has chosen another way to portray the ultimate vulgarity and contemptibleness of sin. In the beginning of "Paradise Lost" Satan appears as a majestic being, titanic in force, possessing still some of his original splendor like the sun seen through the misty air. He is an archangel ruined, and full of primal energy is capable of putting to proof the high supremacy of heaven's perpetual King. Suddenly out of the infernal deep Pandemonium arises; seated on his throne of royal state Satan unfolds to his peers in words of lofty eloquence his vast plans of rebellion. Passing beyond the gates of Sin and Death he works his grievous way through chaos till he comes in sight of Eden. Here he falls into many doubts, but unwilling to submit to the will of God, he confirms himself in evil. As craft and serpentine deceit take the place of open war, the deeper sin brings the deeper ruin to his nature. Returning to his followers he ascends the throne from which but a short time before he had spoken such heroic words. Refulgent with permissive glory he begins to recount his exploits: but pausing to receive the expected applause of the Stygian throng he is amazed to hear —

"from innumerable tongues,
A dismal universal hiss." [1]

Not long did he wonder; his face began to draw sharp and spare, his arms clung to his ribs, his legs entwined each other, and his noble eloquence changed into a hiss!

"Down he fell
A monstrous serpent on his belly prone,
Reluctant, but in vain: a greater power
Now rul'd him, punish'd in the shape he sinn'd,
According to his doom; he would have spoke,
But hiss to hiss returned with forked tongue
To forked tongue, for now were all transform'd
Alike to serpents all." [2]

Thus does Milton teach the impressive truth that while sin at its beginning may have something of the grandeur of rebellion and the fascination of daring, in the end it loses all attraction and becomes reptilian, loathsome, deceitful, a thing of the slime, whose proper language is a hiss! With equal clearness he asserts that the followers of evil will inevitably change from fierce conspirators to the viper's brood.

We read the same lesson in even more powerful colors in the experiences of Him who knew sin as none other has ever known it. He who would save the world must know what sin is in its height and depth. He must feel the burden of it on His own soul, if He would make an atonement for the people. What did He find it to be? He first met it in its nobler aspect. In the

[1] *Par. Lost*, bk. x. 507. [2] *Ibid.* 513–520.

wilderness He was tempted by the Prince of this world, and the issue was a world-wide and an age-long empire. It was a contention with colossal powers for imperial results. As He lived down more deeply into the world's sin, evil changed its form; it expressed itself in the craft of the Pharisee, the fickleness of the people, the treachery of friends, and the viperous cunning of the priests. Judas and not the great hierarch of darkness now became the type of evil. He goes more deeply yet, even to the bottom of the abyss, and knows sin in its most dismal woe, feeling the utter horror and God-forsakenness of it. This experience, I believe it was, that explains the agony of Gethsemane and the despairing cry of Calvary. Dante, as he entered the stupefying pit of the uttermost sin, hid himself behind Virgil, knowing not in its paralyzing air whether he was dead or alive; the Christ as He sank down into the murky blackness of the world's transgression sweat great drops of blood, and in the gloom of the biting darkness that encompassed Him, He discerned not a ray of Divine light. To Him sin was a stupendous burden, a horror, a night where no glory of God shines.

We in our easy tolerance think of sin as some "soft infirmity of blood;" but those master-minds that have gone down the deepest into the heart of evil have felt that they were entering a dismal world of chill fog and sick poison, a place

of squalor, dull misery, and benumbed wretchedness; and He, who most of all the sons of men tasted its true character through his own purity, found it to be paralyzing, horrible, God forsaken.

VI

THE ATMOSPHERE SIN CREATES

It was a favorite thought with Dante that the soul creates the atmosphere in which it lives, and builds for itself a mansion or a dungeon according as its deeds are good or evil. Sin makes the air which the soul breathes black with its own folly, hot with its own passion, penurious with its own sterility, while hope causes it to have the roseate colors of the morning, and love makes it effulgent with celestial light. To live and move and have one's being in the environment one's self has formed is Heaven or Hell. Naturally, therefore, we look with interest upon every new setting to learn the poet's conception of the inner nature of the evil deed.

As he has divided sin into three grand divisions, incontinence, violence, and fraud, we are not surprised to find that the three are distinguished by characteristic environments. The incontinent are punished in murky gloom, for lust darkens the mind; the violent suffer in circles where the perpetual shadow is lighted by the flames decreed by One who is a flame of fire

against the rebellious; the treacherous are in a zone of squalor and of arctic cold, because sin at its lowest is a sorry, stupid, paralyzing thing, congealing all flow of human sympathy and chilling life into a stagnant, sterile marsh.

This general thought Dante refines to set forth the quality of particular sins. I know not in all literature where the inner spirit of paganism, of culture without faith, is more nobly and truly expressed. Its woe is its hopelessness, it has "no plaint but that of sighs which made the eternal air to tremble." In Dante's time the age of faith was rapidly passing away; a strong taste for classical culture was taking possession of men, presaging a new day. In the rich treasury of ancient learning he who was the morning star of the Renaissance could not but delight, yet his penetrating vision saw that the new culture without the spirit of the old faith was the mind's Inferno.[1] In a picture of profound pathos he has recorded his judgment; and whenever since his day culture has been divorced from religious truth its devotees bear "a semblance neither sad nor glad;" they make no plaint, but without hope they live in desire.[2] Gluttony is a benumbing, coarse, swinish infamy, prolific in stenchful diseases, and is punished with "rain eternal, accursed, cold, and heavy."[3] Coarse hail, and foul water, and snow pour down through the tene-

[1] *Inf.* iv.

brous air: the earth that receives them stinks." [1] The river of hate, where the wrathful smite each other, is purple-black [2]— the color of an enraged countenance. The heresy that denies immortality is a real entombment of the soul; it virtually cabins and confines life to a narrow dungeon, and in the end closes the lid and shuts out the heavens as well as the future, — a fiery tomb is thus its most appropriate symbol.[3] Treachery separates a man from his fellow, freezes the current of human kindness, chills the traitor's own heart, and makes his face currish; hence in the pit upon which rests the weight of all other crimes, the distorted, livid countenances of traitors leer at the shuddering poet from the frozen pool.[4] The part the environment has in typifying and punishing sin is stated in a poetic conception of rare suggestiveness. The tears and blood of the earth Dante tells us flow down into Hell, forming its four rivers, in which the evil-doers are punished. The brown waves of Acheron, Styx darker than perse, Phlegethon of boiling blood, all unite to form the frozen Cocytus, in which Satan and the traitors are imprisoned.[5] Thus the misery he inflicts returns upon the evil-doer to be his torment.

[1] *Inf.* vi. [2] *Inf.* vii. 103. [3] *Inf.* ix.
[4] *Inf.* xxxiv. [5] *Inf.* xiv.

VII

THE EFFECT OF SIN ON THE SOUL

The condition of the sufferers is perhaps the most graphic portrayal of the nature of the sin for which they are in woe. Dante believed that the penalty of sin is to dwell in it. Man is punished by his sins rather than for them. Hell is to live in the evil character one has made for himself. "Wherewithal a man sinneth, with the same also shall he be punished." Therefore we have but to observe the appearance, the action, the feelings of the doomed, to know the poet's conception of sin. He affirms that the delights of illicit love seem sweet; but in reality are a smiting storm, whirling and driving onward the shrieking and blaspheming spirits forevermore. Sullenness is stagnant anger; it is letting the sun go down upon one's wrath, giving place to the Devil, until wrath becomes a sluggish fume in the breast, at last submerging the gurgling soul in its own oppressive slime. Flattery is a sickening filth; hypocrisy is a gilded cloak, heavy as lead, a wearisome mantle for eternity; thieving is a hideous, reptilian sin, and as the

thief changes disguises that he may ply his sneaking trade, so at last his soul will repeatedly turn from human to snaky form, hissing and creeping. Violence against the divine order is most powerfully painted. On a floor of dry and dense sand, as sterile as a life hostile to God, blasphemers are lying supine and looking up into the heavens they defied, all the while weeping miserably; usurers, who by overvaluing material things became sordid and obscured the divine lineaments past all recognition, are crouching, mere wretched lumps of selfishness; sodomites are raging ceaselessly in their carnal passion, — while "over all the sand, with a slow falling, were raining down dilated flakes of fire, as of snow on Alps without a wind," for against the doers of such deeds the Eternal is a consuming fire.[1]

By such terrible nocturnes does this grim painter portray sin's essential nature and its inevitable consequences.

[1] *Inf.* xiv. 19–42.

VIII

AN INTERPRETATION OF DANTE'S CONCEPTION OF SIN

The ethical teaching of this austere prophet regarding the true character of sin may be briefly summarized. The first step into the soul's Inferno is most clearly indicated by the condition of the weary and naked crowd that gathers upon the banks of sad Acheron, which forms the rim of Hell. Gnashing their teeth, "they blasphemed God and their parents, the human race, the place, the time, and the seed of their sowing, and of their birth."[1] In the denial of his responsibility, by casting the blame of his evil deeds and woeful condition upon others, man enters the region of hopeless and dismal wretchedness. His punishment, instead of cleansing the heart, hardens it, and fills it with all bitterness, wrath, and violence. Purgatory is pain borne in resignation to the will of God: Hell is pain endured with a rebellious heart. A sense of the divine justice in retribution lifts the suffering spirit from the nether gloom to the mountain of hope;

[1] *Inf.* iii. 103–105.

but to view trouble as the whip and sting of an outrageous fortune is to put one's feet in the way that leads to death. It is forever true that to embark on the river of sorrow with a blasphemy upon the lips and bitterness against human kind in the heart is to pass straight to the abyss of woe.

This bears out Dante's main contention that Hell is atheism in any of its many forms. When they reached the entrance of Hell, Virgil said to him: "We have come to this place where I have told thee that thou shalt see the woeful people who have lost the good of the understanding."[1] It was the prevalent belief of the Middle Ages that the highest good of the mind is the contemplation of God. To know Him is life eternal. To have the intellect and the heart rest serenely in the sweet sense that divine compassion and righteousness are pervading all the processes of nature, the unfolding of history, the disciplines of life, and that all things are working together to carry out a benign will,— this is the highest beatitude of earth and the rapture of heaven. The good of the intellect is to see God in the events of individual life and history; the good of the heart is to realize His comforting presence in all sorrow; the good of the will is to feel His strengthening power in every temptation.

[1] *Inf.* iii. 16–18.

Hell, both here and hereafter, is blindness to the presence of God in His world. It is to be unable to see reason in the trials of life, justice in its penalties, and righteousness in the foundations of the social structure. It is to be convinced that nature is soulless, the heart comfortless, life worthless, and the will powerless amid forces whose cruel interactions represent nothing but a high carnival of unreason. This practical atheism is the world's Inferno. It is the gloom and horror of the soul; not a place so much as a condition of life. "All hope abandon, ye who enter here," is a warning both for individuals and nations. It is a condition first of mental darkness; then of lawless, fiery passion; ending in useless weeping, paralyzed despair, and benumbed wretchedness.

Sin is a bondage. Whoever committeth it is first its servant and then its bond-slave. When one enters it he puts himself into a dungeon from which there is no escape without divine aid. Francesca cannot fly from the never-resting blast; Filippo Argenti cannot extricate himself from the muddy river of wrath; the hypocrite is powerless to lay aside his leaden cloak; the ice does not give up its dead, nor Satan free his victims. Sin is forever a tyranny, a weight, a chain. Hence Dante, with a keener insight than that of the Greek poets, places no Cerberus at the mouth of Hell. The gravitation of evil is

downward toward a deeper death. The Holy City in the Apocalypse suffers no violence, though its gates are unguarded and no visible barrier keeps out the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators. The gates of Heaven can be left open toward sin, and no vile person will enter in thereat. The way to purity, truth, holiness is always accessible; yet the impure, the false, and the treacherous need no barking Cerberus to keep them from thronging the entrance to a better life. They keep themselves in the land of evil.

How steady and tremendous is this downward pressure of sin Dante further intimates in his graphic description of the great toil with which he and Virgil emerged from the hemisphere of darkness into that of light. Lucifer was at the centre of the earth. It was necessary to go by him and take the passage to the other side of the world. To cross the centre of gravity, and pass from the attraction of sin to the attraction of God required a mighty effort. "When we were where the thigh turns on the thick of the haunch (the body of Lucifer was in one hemisphere, his legs in the other, and his middle at the centre of the earth) my Leader, with effort and stress of breath, turned his head where he had his shanks, and clambered by the hair as a man that ascends, so that I thought to return again to Hell. 'Cling fast hold,' said the Master, panting like one

weary, 'for by such stairs it behooves to depart from so much evil.'" [1]

Sin is unreasonable. After he has once passed into the gloom of the pit the poet carefully refrains from speaking the name of Virgil. One can give no valid reason for sinning, though he may deck the deed with fair excuses.

But while sin is the abnegation of reason, it still yields to human wisdom a cringing obedience. The power and the limitations of a reasonable man surrounded by sin is an interesting study. The wise man can make an angry one both furious and consequently powerless, as Virgil did Minotaur by his taunts; [2] he can make fraud his servant,[3] can rebuke its demons; [4] and if some malign Medusa would harden his heart he can turn away his eyes.[5] There is one thing, however, that reason cannot do, — it cannot persuade a perverted and violent will.[6] Its unaided words are futile in the presence of headstrong maliciousness. This only the grace of God can overcome.

Dante was certainly no believer in the popular modern teaching that the rejection of God ultimates in the annihilation of the wicked. Sin demonizes but does not destroy the strength of the will. This is taught in many lurid pictures. When Farinata rose in his burning sepulchre

[1] *Inf.* xxxiv. 76–84. [2] *Inf.* xii. 16–25. [3] *Inf.* xvii. 91–99.
[4] *Inf.* vii. 8–12. [5] *Inf.* ix. 55–63. [6] *Inf.* viii. 115 ff.

and "straightened himself up with breast and front as though he held Hell in great scorn," and in his disdainful patrician pride first asked the poet, "who were thy ancestors?" ere he entered into conversation, he certainly showed no abatement in the force of his imperious will.[1] In this Dante agrees with Shakespeare and Milton. Villainy did not weaken the intellectual cunning of Iago nor cripple the rebellious will of Satan.

It is also suggestive that Dante represents the lost as punished for but one sin. The evil-doer may have broken every commandment, and been adept in all villainies; but he is punished for only one offense. He remains in one circle, and there is no hint that he passes to any other. Punishment is for a single root sin out of which all others have grown. The inevitable tendency is for a man to give himself over to one besetting passion and to become absorbed in it and dominated by it, while right living expands all the faculties, enlarging and enriching the whole nature. Bad men grow intense in certain faculties. Their stringent selfishness binds them down to littleness. They grow imperious, jealous, petulant. However great and dazzling their achievements may appear, in the midst of their conquered worlds, they are continually tapering down to be sharp, brilliant, little men. This is

[1] *Inf.* x. 31 ff.

the popular conception of a fiend — one whose energies burn hot at a single point, who is the slave of one devilish passion, — sin's final issue as Dante paints it. The gravitation of a lost soul is toward a single demonized activity.

One of the most striking features of the Inferno is the total absence of the feeling of remorse within its caverns. According to the common conception the pain of Hell is the agony of conscious guilt. This is the worm that dieth not and the fire that is not quenched. Nowhere does Shakespeare disclose a more lurid magnificence of power than in his delineation of the pangs of an outraged conscience. His villains are steeped in no deeper Hell, and apparently he conceived of no retribution more inevitable and dire than the scourgings of an aroused moral sense. No sooner does Macbeth commit his atrocious outrage than he hears the calling of a voice, the air is filled with clutching hands, the blood-spot is on his palm, and the "Amen" sticks in his throat. King Richard's Inferno flamed with remorse : —

> "My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
> And every tongue brings in a several tale,
> And every tale condemns me for a villain." [1]

All his crimes, threatening dreadful vengeance, thronged the chambers of his soul, and filled him with despair.

[1] *Richard III.*, V. iii.

Byron draws a vivid picture of the soul's fiercest torment, when he likens it to the writhings of a scorpion girt by fire, who to end her pain strikes into her brain her own venom.[1]

The smiting wrath of an outraged conscience is the deepest Hell into which most of our great poets and prophets penetrate.

All the more remarkable is it that from the gloom and agony and chill of Dante's Inferno there comes up not one cry of remorse; not a single soul feels the rankling of conscience or the sting of guilt. Not until the summit of Purgatory is reached and it confronts Beatrice does the soul feel a shrinking horror of itself. It is her presence that causes the writhing of guilt and the torment of an embittered memory. Only the light of God can quicken conscience unto life, and when the soul feels the searching of this clear light it is not in the blackest gloom of Hell, but just outside the gates of Heaven.

In placing remorse upon the top of the mountain rather than at the bottom of the pit, the poet is strictly true to his philosophy. The soul enters the hopeless shadow of spiritual death when it loses the good of the understanding. The ultimate penalty of sin is to be deprived of the consciousness of God. Heaven is to know God and dwell in Him: Hell is to know sin and abide in it. But remorse implies a flaming reali-

[1] *The Giaour.*

zation of the divine. It is the feeling aroused when the sin-stained memory faces an overpowering revelation of the Eternal Majesty. Its pangs, therefore, are always felt in the presence of Beatrice and not in the grisly horror of the under-world. There is hope for one who is startled by the voice of God, and trembles before the intolerable glare of His revelation. He has not yet reached that state where hope never comes because the voice of God is stilled in the soul and the darkness is undisturbed by the light of His presence.

Milton in the general scheme of his thought upon this subject concurs with Dante ; although his descriptions of Hell in the soul place him with Shakespeare and Byron. When Satan first alights upon the untempted earth his tumultuous breast boils with doubt and horror.

> "Now conscience wakes despair
> That slumbered, wakes the bitter memory
> Of what he was, what is, and what must be,"—

and from the bottom stirs the Hell within him. Remorse assails him for his rebellion against heaven's matchless King, and he exclaims, —

> "Which way I fly is Hell ; myself am Hell ;"

so near he comes to the verge of relenting and of submitting to the Omnipotent. Never again was he so near Heaven as in that moment of aroused conscience. What he called the Hell within him but bespoke a chance of Heaven.

But when he said, —

> "Farewell, remorse : all good to me is lost;
> Evil, be thou my good," —

he entered the hopeless land, the region Dante calls Hell.[1] Jean Valjean was in his Inferno when he left the galleys with his mind hot with the fire of a malignant hatred : in the face of the good bishop he saw his degradation and wept scalding tears. His remorse was suffered at the entrance of a holy life.

Hell is not the anarchy and chaos of the soul, as we usually conceive, when light and darkness, good and evil, are mingled in desperate battle ; it is ordered death, when the conflict has ceased and the spirit dwells wholly in the domain of evil.

The vision of Sin is not a fiction, created to delight or terrify. Neither is it a nightmare dream of horror, born in an age of superstition, and fated to pass away with the creed that gave it birth. It is sober reality. We have all beheld in a lesser degree what Dante saw with his keener sight. We, too, have seen the unstable blown about "like the sand when the whirlwind breathes," stung by the pestering gad-flies and wasps of petty passion and annoyances. We have seen "people of much worth" carry intellectual culture to its highest point, yet, lacking Christian faith, live without hope in a limbo where "sighs made the eternal air to tremble."

[1] *Par. Lost*, bk. iv. 1–110.

We have seen the slaves of anger with look of hurt smiting one another as they stand in the foul fen of the river of hate. We have seen the violent shut the gates of the city of Dis in the face of Reason, but open them at the touch of some heavenly messenger of grace. We have seen flatterers wallowing in their own filth; and many an Alberigo whose body lives, but whose soul is shrouded in icy death. All these woes and many more have we seen in our own experience, and perhaps we have felt them too; for who is he who has never put his feet into the ways of death, and walked in the paths of darkness and of fire? Happy have we been if Reason has led us out of sin to behold "those beauteous things which heaven bears," and we have come forth to see again the stars, and have humbly washed the grime from off our faces in the dews of repentance. We have all had our visions of sin, but it was reserved for one rare and solitary spirit, exiled from his beloved city, stripped of all deadening luxuries, kept by dolorous poverty near to the deep heart of reality, to have his sight so clarified by years of study, of wandering, and of bitter disappointment that he could comprehend the sin of the world in all its dark horror, its fiery lawlessness, its cold monstrosity, and then with almost superhuman genius set forth the vision, burned upon his brain, in a picture so lurid and darkly magnificent that it never could fade from the thought of man.

THE QUEST OF LIBERTY

"And to his dignity he never returns, unless, where sin makes void, he fill up for evil pleasures with just penalties." — DANTE.

"I do not believe that it would be possible to find any joy comparable to that of a soul in Purgatory, except the joy of the blessed in Paradise; a joy which goes on increasing from day to day as God flows in more and more upon the soul. . . . On the other hand they suffer pains so great that no tongue can describe them." — ST. CATHERINE OF GENOA.

I

THE VITALITY OF THE "PURGATORIO"

Dean Stanley, fresh from the study of the "Divine Comedy," declared in his enthusiasm that the "Purgatorio" was "the most religious book he had ever read." While it lacks the dramatic force and the vivid coloring of the "Inferno," and comes short of the blazing glories and the heights of vision of the "Paradiso," it still touches life as we know it more intimately than either of the other portions of this strange mediæval poem. The poet describes those things which we know in our own experience. We are familiar with the trembling of the sea, the silent splendor of the stars, the burdensome weight of pride, the harsh irritation of envy, and the blinding smoke of wrath. The characters are neither demons nor glorified beings, but human spirits who are being made perfect through suffering. Our own disciplines are here portrayed, and the resistless power of the book lies in its penetrating insight into the struggles of the soul and the forces by which it wins its liberty.

It is, perhaps, the most autobiographical of

the trilogy, although it is in the "Paradiso" that the rare sweetness of Dante's spirit and the strength of his moral indignation find their highest expression. When we see him bending low among the proud, as if already the load weighed grievously upon him, we know it to be a confession of his besetting sin. He acknowledges his imperious temper by suffering from the acridity of the smoke, black as the gloom of Hell. He confesses that he cannot see the beautiful eyes of Beatrice until he has plunged into the fierce fires that cleanse the soul of lust. There are delicate touches which reveal that he had St. Francis's love for birds, and an artist's delight in natural beauty; while music such as he must have heard in the old churches when he went to worship, and which rested like a benediction on his hot and wounded spirit, is constantly stealing into his song as a potent healing. Here Dante is seen to be a man — unlike the stern and gloomy poet of popular conception — of noble tranquillity, delicately sensitive to all the finer impressions of beauty.

Marvelous it is how the dream of one steeped in mediæval lore has survived the lapse of centuries. The huge tomes of the master-minds over which he pored with such eager interest lie neglected on the shelves, or are translated merely to interpret his weird and mystic poem; but the weighty truths they held, sinking into the pas-

sionate heart of this incomprehensible man, and distilled in the alembic of his fiery sufferings with his own life's blood, became instinct with perennial vigor. Carlyle calls Dante "the voice of ten silent centuries." Those ages may have been dumb, awaiting their interpreter, but their heart was hot, passion-swept, fermenting with intense aspirations, and he who could comprehend and utter the deep things of its spirit must speak words which the world will always gladly hear. Deep ever calls to deep. Heine has said that every age is a sphinx that plunges into the abyss after it has solved its problem. Dante heard the secret of the Middle Ages from the lips of the mighty creature ere it leaped into the dark below. What he heard he told, and his message is of enduring interest because it is the breaking into song of the deepest life of a great epoch. Certainly the conception of religion held in the most distinctively religious centuries in history, the centuries that built the cathedrals and produced spiritual geniuses of enduring lustre and power, cannot be unattractive. The soul changes not, neither do the powers which ransom it.

The book is vital, because life is purgatorial. Dante asks a question old as the race and deep as the human heart: How can a man be freed from his sin? He answers it, too, in the way earnest and clear-seeing minds have often answered it. This grim and saturnine poet does not

use the same terms which our modern thinkers employ, but he felt the steady pressure of the same sins, and he laid hold substantially of the same sovereign remedies. He placed more emphasis on the human side of the problem than we, and for this reason he deserves attentive study, having portrayed most powerfully some truths which our age, so eager to break with the narrowness of the past, has overlooked in its haste. We sometimes call the Middle Ages dark, but he whose spirit brooded over its tumultuous and valorous life until he became its prophet can turn rays of the clearest light upon many of our unsolved enigmas.

II

THE RETURN TO EDEN

The main purpose of the "Purgatorio" is to point out the way to achieve the primal virtue which was lost in Eden: it is to teach us how to repair the havoc wrought by sin, and to return to the estate surrendered by the Fall. The master-minds of the early Church pondered much on how a man can become what Adam was, pure, happy, free; how efface the guilt, the power, the stain of sin, and restore the individual to the Edenic liberty. They solved the problem by the doctrines of Baptism, Penance, and Purgatory. Baptism washed away the guilt of original sin, saved the individual from its eternal consequences, and made him a recipient of divine grace. The sins committed after baptism are expiated and purged by the sacrament of Penance, the integral parts of which are confession, contrition, and satisfaction, the form being the absolution pronounced by the priest. This "satisfactory punishment both heals the relicts of sin, and destroys the vicious habits acquired by an evil life, by contrary acts of virtue." But life is short and men die before the

footprints of evil are rubbed out. They are not fit for Heaven, they are not subjects of Hell; there must, therefore, be an intermediate state where they are cleansed from all unrighteousness. In Purgatory retributive sufferings are designed both to satisfy a violated moral order and to become remedial toward the sufferer. Yet the sinner need not bear the full recoil upon himself. Intercessory prayers and deeds of love on the part of others take the place of punishment without weakening justice, for one act of love is dearer to God than years of penalty. This purgatorial process not only completely cleanses the soul; it restores it to its normal vigor by reviving all the good which sin had weakened or defaced. Dante accepted these teachings of the Church, heart and soul, and they are the architectonic principles of his wondrous poem.

III

THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

The form and location of Purgatory appear to have been the poet's own invention. When Lucifer was hurled from heaven the soil which fled dismayed as he struck this planet was piled up on the other side of the globe in the form of a mountain, flat upon the top, and lying opposite to Jerusalem in the hemisphere of water. This mountain is divided into three sections. The first is Ante-Purgatory, where are found those who died in contumacy of the Church, and the negligent who either put off repentance till the end of life, or were cut off by violent death while presuming upon a long existence, or failed to fulfill the highest mission to which they were called.

Above this and separated from it by a steep cliff is Purgatory proper, with its seven ledges, on each of which is purged one of the seven mortal sins of the Church.

Upon the flat summit of the mountain is located the ancient garden of Eden, the Earthly Paradise, typifying the highest temporal happi-

ness. Here Dante meets Beatrice, comes to a profound consciousness of his sin of unfaithfulness to her and to God, sees in splendid apocalyptic vision the history of the Church in its relation to the Empire, and is washed in Lethe and Eunoë, thus purging his memory and restoring his soul to full vigor.

In passing into the "Purgatorio" out of the "Inferno" one draws a sigh of immense relief. It is leaving a dungeon of sulphurous gloom and deadly cold for the sweet morning light, the sparkling sea, the blue sky, and infinite hope. It is a proof of the good sense of Dante that he rejected the vulgar conception of his time that Purgatory was a place of fire separated from Hell only by a partition wall, and refused to believe even with Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventura that its purifying flames were material. He anticipated the modern philanthropist in teaching that the soul is best saved in an atmosphere charged with hope. It must leave the filth, the lurid darkness, the chill despair of the infernal valley, and dwell in a land where the stars shine and the sun makes all the Orient to smile, where art and music and flowers minister to man's higher needs, and where visions of coming blessedness never fade. His Purgatory is not a place of fiery horror, but a privilege for which to pray.

IV

TRUTHS TAUGHT IN ANTE-PURGATORY

Before the lustral discipline begins Dante teaches some wholesome truths in Ante-Purgatory. When he sought to climb the sunlit mountain, described in the opening pages of the "Inferno," his disposition was one of belligerent self-assertion. This proved ineffective against the lion, the leopard, and the wolf. Having learned by sad experience, he essays to ascend this second mountain in an entirely different mood. Following Virgil to a shady spot where the dew still lingered, he stretched toward his teacher his tear-stained face that the grime which had gathered, simply from being in the atmosphere of Hell, might be washed away by the dew of repentance, and submitted to be girded with a reed, type of humility, for it is by self-surrender to higher powers that spiritual liberty is won.

Moreover, there must be an insistent purpose. One cannot even linger to hear Casella sing one's own sweet songs, but must be given wholly to the task of salvation. On the way of life one must not loiter. Our grim poet might have

sympathized with the severe resolution Jonathan Edwards made upon his twenty-first birthday: "I will make the salvation of my soul my life-work."

Reason, which is amply able to make known the nature and consequence of sin, is not always sufficient to lead the way to liberty. Virgil needs continually to inquire the path, gladly accepting the guidance of Sordello in Ante-Purgatory, of Statius in Purgatory, and resigning his charge to Matilda in the Terrestrial Paradise. Dante evidently believed that the poets are our best instructors in the ways of liberty and happiness, for he accepts the leadership of three poets up the holy mount.

Here is taught again the truth so vigorously declared in the "Inferno," that men are punished in the respect they sin. The negligent are neglected as many years as they delayed repentance, and the contumacious reap thirty-fold from the seed they sowed.

V

THE WAY A SOUL IS CLEANSED

Lifted by the divine grace over a steep he could not well scale, Dante is now ready to climb the Mount of Purification. How shall his sins be purged away? It is assumed that having been baptized he is freed from the penalties of inherited guilt. From the power and stain of personal sin he is to be cleansed by a thorough application of the sacrament of penance. He must be contrite, he must confess his sins, he must render complete satisfaction, and he must be absolved. The process by which a soul becomes purified from personal sin is most exquisitely put in miniature in Canto ix. Following Virgil he moves to a cliff which rises sheer before him, where in a rift, he says, "I saw a gate, and three steps beneath for going to it of divers colors, and a gate-keeper who as yet said not a word. . . . Thither we came to the first great stair; it was of white marble so polished and smooth that I mirrored myself in it as I appear. The second, of deeper hue than perse, was of a rough and scorched stone, cracked lengthwise

and athwart. The third, which above lies massy, seemed to me of porphyry as flaming red as blood that spirts forth from a vein. Upon this the Angel of God held both his feet, seated upon the threshold that seemed to me stone of adamant. Up over the three steps my Leader drew me with good will, saying, 'Beg humbly that he undo the lock.' Devoutly I threw myself at the holy feet; I besought for mercy's sake that he would open for me; but first upon my breast I struck three times. Seven P's upon my forehead he inscribed with the point of his sword, and 'See that thou wash these wounds when thou art within,' he said."

The three stairs are the three steps one must take in penance, namely, confession, contrition, and satisfaction. The angel is the type of the priest who administers absolution. The breast is struck three times to denote sincere repentance for sins of thought, of word, of deed. The seven P's — Peccata — signify the seven mortal sins which must be purged away. They are not evil deeds, but the bad dispositions out of which all sin springs; it is what we are, as well as what we do, that makes us sinners in the sight of God. It is exceedingly significant that all of the P's were incised on Dante's forehead. He may not have been guilty of every kind of sin; but in him were the potentialities of all, and he has come to a full consciousness of them. He now

passes within the gate, the symbol of justification, and the healing process begins. Having been justified, he is no longer the servant of his evil dispositions, but their stain is still on his soul and their power is not all gone. A noble type of humanity is this sombre figure, as with the seven scars of sin on his forehead he begins to climb the rugged and toilsome mountain in quest of liberty! The first note he hears is "Te Deum laudamus," chanted by sweet voices, for there is joy among the angels over one sinner that repenteth. The Catholic Church has enumerated seven evil dispositions which exclude God from the life and thus deliver man unto death. They are pride, envy, anger, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust. Upon each of the seven ledges of the purgatorial mountain the scum of one of these mortal sins is dissolved from off the conscience, and the lustre of grace and reason is restored by enduring the sacrament of penance.

Two thoughts occupied the mind of this singer of eternal truth as he drew his pictures of the soul's experience upon each of the ledges. One was to reveal the nature of the evil disposition and its effect on the individual spirit; the other was to describe the means by which the evil disposition could be changed and virtue restored. This makes the characterization of sin in the "Purgatorio" differ widely from that of the "Inferno." In the latter the aim was to show sin

in its true nature, to reveal in form and color and action its essential hideousness. In the "Purgatorio" the poet puts forth the wealth of his genius in painting the effect of sin on the soul. He portrays the disposition, and not the deed; sin in its stain, and not in action. With fervid intensity this vivid prophet sought to make enduring in the thought of the world what sin is in its causes, what those evil dispositions are which shut out the divine ardor from raining its fire into the mind. He would depict the atmosphere which these tempers create about the soul, and the results they make inevitable. Among the woeful people he taught what sin is when given over to its penalty; on the Mount of Purgatory we see it as a disease, a deformity, a discoloration of the soul. Wrath in the "Inferno" is described as a dismal marsh, through which flows the river of hate, and the punishment is to be given over to one's rage; on the holy mountain wrath is a blinding smoke, black as night, and harsh of tissue, since the effect of anger on the soul is to irritate and blind it. In the "Inferno" gluttony is filth, and the glutton wallows in the mire; his god is his belly, and his punishment is to serve his god. But in the "Purgatorio" gluttony is portrayed as striking leanness into the soul, a "dry leprosy" which consumes, but does not nourish.

The restoration of the soul to its primal virtue

is effected through the sacrament of penance, consisting of contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Evil being in the disposition, or as Dante affirms, in love, excessive, or defective, or distorted, the right love requires for its creation the clear realization of truth. After truth has begotten pure affections, the affections become habits, and the habits character by constant practice. "There are two things," says Hugo of St. Victor, "which repair the divine likeness in man, the beholding of truth and the exercise of virtue." This relation of idea and will is in accordance with our new psychology. Professor C. C. Everett in unfolding its teaching declares: "We know that thought tends to transform itself into deed. If we had in mind only a single idea, and this represented some act, the act would at once be performed. The same would be true if the idea of the act were sufficiently intense to overpower all inhibiting ideas that might be present. The will addresses itself not to acts but to thoughts. It holds an idea before the mind until the idea becomes intense enough to carry itself into activity." Dante employs this principle when he asserts that sins of habit are overcome by substituting virtuous habits, and sins of temperament by good thoughts, created by the ardor of love which truth sends into the soul. To be free the sinful soul must know the truth. The proud see it bodied forth in the visible

language of sculpture; the envious learn the nature of their guilt by hearing voices proclaim the worth of love and the fell results of envy; the wrathful, in the midst of their blinding smoke, behold the truth in vision; the slothful shout it as they run day and night.

But the truth must not only be known, it must be wrought into habit and character. The proud purge out the old leaven by continuously exercising a humble disposition; the envious habitually speak well of others; the slothful "fasten upon slothfulness their teeth" with unremitting energy; Pope Martin by "fasting purges the eels of Bolsena and the Vernaccia wine;" the avaricious ripen their good will by gazing constantly at the dust to which their souls had cleaved, piteously praising examples of poverty and bounty, and lamenting the evils of the accursed thirst for gold. Our Puritan Dante, Jonathan Edwards, quaintly prescribed the same medicine: "Great instances of mortification are deep wounds given to the body of sin: hard blows which make him stagger and reel. We thereby get strong ground and footing against him, he is weaker ever after, and we have easier work with him next time."

The activities and sufferings of Purgatory Dante represents as the satisfaction of a violated moral order, and as purifying to the penitent. Their expiatory character is nearly always defi-

nitely declared in words. On the ledge of Pride this is stated repeatedly: "And here must I bear this weight on her (Pride's) account till God be satisfied," "of such pride here is paid the fee," "such money doth he pay in satisfaction."[1] The avaricious lie prostrate; "So long as it shall be the pleasure of the just Lord, so long shall we stay immovable and outstretched."[2] The gluttonous "go loosing the knot of their debt."[3] The lustful are in the flames because "with such cure it is needful, and with such food, that the last wound of all should be closed up."[4] The expiatory penalties, however, are not vindictive or arbitrary, but are adjusted to the purification of the soul. While they are a satisfaction rendered to a violated moral order they are remedial to the penitent by confirming him in right habits of thought and action. Absolution is pronounced on every ledge by the act of the angel removing a P. from the poet's forehead, and assurance is made complete by hearing the sweet words of an appropriate beatitude.

Thus according to Dante is the soul cleansed from the guilt, the power, the stain of sin. God in Christ has made an atonement for the guilt of the world, which man appropriates in baptism. This saves him from eternal condemnation. The dread power is broken when with humble, repent-

[1] *Purg.* xi. 70. 71, 88, 125.
[2] *Purg.* xix. 125, 126.
[3] *Purg.* xxiii. 15.
[4] *Purg.* xxv. 138, 139.

ant mind and firm purpose the sinner stands at the door of the Church to pray for pardon and healing grace. He has been born into a new world where hope, art, music, light, right, reason, and divine love may minister to him. The stain is washed away when through penance, thoroughly applied, the moral law has been satisfied by just retributions, which, endured in a penitential spirit, have broken down the bad habits by substituting good ones, and have driven out the evil dispositions by love of the truth as seen in the lives of the good and holy.

From the beginning to the end of this toilsome climb divine grace helps the weary penitent over the hard places, and guides him in moments of doubt, until at last, when all wounds are healed, the whole mountain trembles with sympathetic joy, and the enfranchised spirit, crowned and mitred over himself, roams in the ancient Paradise in all "the glorious liberty of the children of God."

VI

WHERE THE SENSE OF SIN IS KEENEST

As the exulting poet wanders at ease through the groves of Eden, he meets her who had inspired the dream of his youth, commanded all his maturer years, and was to him the revelation and the power of salvation, Beatrice. Virgil does not linger to attest the beautiful eyes that, weeping, had sent him on his arduous journey, for divine wisdom is self-revealing to the prepared soul. What indescribable beauty as well as deep religious significance Dante puts into this account of their meeting! "And my spirit that now for so long a time had not been broken down, trembling with amazement at her presence, through occult virtue that proceeded from her, felt the great potency of ancient love. . . . 'Dante,' she said, 'though Virgil be gone away, weep not yet, weep not yet, for it behooves thee to weep by another sword.' . . . Royally, still haughty in her mien, she went on, as one who speaks, and keeps back his warmest speech: 'Look at me well: I am, indeed, I am, indeed, Beatrice. How hast thou deigned to approach the mountain? Didst thou not know that man is happy here?' My eyes fell down

into the clear fount; but seeing myself in it I drew them to the grass, such great shame burdened my brow." But when he heard the angels sing their compassionate song "the ice that was bound tight around my heart became breath and water, and with anguish poured from the heart through mouth and eyes." [1]

It seems singular that Dante, purified by the fire, and with brow cleared of every scar, should shrink back with great shame when he beheld himself in the fount, and that Beatrice should seem sternly proud. He had been cleansed from sin, why should he be so abject in the presence of glorified truth? It may be that the poet is speaking of his own individual sins rather than as a representative man; still it is more probable that he seeks impressively to teach that the supreme sin is faithlessness to revealed truth, "following false images of good, which pay no promises in full," [2] and that "the high decree of God would be broken, if Lethe should be passed, and such viands should be tasted without any scot of repentance which may pour forth tears." [3]

It is with true insight into Christian experience that Dante does not place the most poignant consciousness of sin at the base of the purgatorial mount, when he first sets his feet in the way that leads upward, and merely washes his face in

[1] *Purg.* xxx. 34 ff. [2] *Purg.* xxx. 131, 132.
[3] *Purg.* xxx. 142–144.

the dews of repentance and is girded with the reed of humility; or later when he strikes his breast three times; but on the summit in the stern presence of the veiled Beatrice. Then great shame burdens his brow; he dares not behold his true image in the water at his feet, and in utter misery pours forth copious tears. Nowhere is the poet more truly a representative man. The keenest sense of sin comes when the penitent soul first confronts the perfect righteousness. When the pure in heart see God they recognize the foulness of their past, and what before appeared only to be a slight lapse is now seen as an affront to God. "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned" is the final view of personal wrongdoing. John Henry Newman, in his noble poem "The Dream of Gerontius," makes the soul's sharpest Purgatory to be the meeting with Christ.

"The sight of Him will kindle in thy heart
All tender, gracious, reverential thoughts.
Thou wilt be sick with love, and yearn for Him,
And feel as though thou could'st but pity Him,
That one so sweet should e'er have placed Himself
At disadvantage such, as to be used
So vilely by a being so vile as thee.
There is a pleading in His pensive eyes
Will pierce thee to the quick and trouble thee.
And thou wilt hate and loathe thyself, for 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."

Remorse is the feeling of the penitent at the gate of heaven, and not the torment of the lost.

VII

THE MIND PURGED FROM AN EVIL CONSCIENCE, AND ENDUED WITH POWER

Dante now confronts one of the deepest of all spiritual problems: How cleanse the mind of a bad memory? One cannot enter into everlasting felicity unless he is in harmony with God, himself, and with his own record. Must an ugly crime always throw its black shadow on celestial light? Must the memory forever hold its haunting spectres to bring regret amid heavenly joys? Every deep religious thinker, every aroused conscience, has eagerly asked these questions. The Persian Omar gives a well-nigh hopeless response: —

> "The Moving Finger writes; and having writ,
> Moves on; not all your Piety nor Wit
> Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
> Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it."[1]

The startled mind of Macbeth, girt with horror as he peers into the future, asks of the physician: —

> "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd,
> Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,

[1] *Rubáiyát*, lxxi. fifth edition.

> Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
> And with some sweet oblivious antidote
> Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
> Which weighs upon the heart ?" [1]

He, too, is hopeless and feels that the one ruddy drop of his sin will incarnadine the sea.

The penetrating and comprehensive mind of Paul perceived and resolutely grappled the difficulty. Christ may justify us before God, but who is able to justify us before the bar of our own conscience? God may forgive, but the soul will still remember. To relieve the memory of its burden of sin is speculatively impossible; but practically Paul felt that he had solved the enigma. He wrenched himself so completely from his old life that he was dead to it. He was a new creature. "It is no longer I that live, but Christ that liveth in me," he exclaimed. The fact of sin might remain, but he had changed his relationship to it; repentance had modified the effect of it upon his spirit; and his new purpose, his changed environment, his vivid consciousness of the breadth and length and depth and height of Christ's love had merged his memory in a sea of new life and joy, so that the unsightly record was really lost like a pebble in the ocean. Edwards with his lofty sense of the divine sovereignty went even further, and asserted that the recollection of a godless past would be sweet to

[1] *Macbeth*, Act V. Sc. iii.

the redeemed, as through it all could be seen the shining of divine grace.

Dante embodies his solution in a scene of remarkable beauty.[1] When he recovered from the swoon, into which he had fallen at the reproach of Beatrice, Matilda drew him into the river Lethe, while sweet voices from the blessed shore sang: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean." When he had drunk of the strange waters all memory of his former sins vanished, indicating that a life of active virtue leads to a forgetfulness of past evil. He would have come much nearer the Biblical solution, if Beatrice, the Divine Revelation — rather than Matilda, virtuous activity — had plunged him into the magical wave. It is the realization of divine mercy and not absorption in work that draws the sting from the past.

One more experience awaits the redeemed soul ere it is fit to wing its flight to the stars. The Catholic Church teaches the doctrine of "reviving merit." The good which men have done lives in them. The fair as well as the foul is written on the tablets of the mind, and what is good, God never allows to be blotted out. And so into the river Eunoë, flowing from the same source as Lethe, the poet is led, and takes of that sweet draught which revives his powers crippled by sin: "I returned from the most holy wave,

[1] *Purg.* xxxi.

renovated as new plants renewed with new foliage, pure and disposed to mount unto the stars."[1] Whatever one's philosophy the fact remains that in the human spirit there is an immense power of recovery, amounting practically to the wiping out of the old and the creation of the new, to a Lethe and a Eunoë.

[1] *Purg.* xxxiii. 142–145.

VIII

THE DOCTRINE OF EXPIATION

In pondering the way of life by which this high-priest of the Middle Ages proclaims that men attain perfect liberty, one cannot but remark the stress he lays upon a principle which has well-nigh faded from the Protestant mind. It is that of expiation. Dante elsewhere very tersely states this satisfaction which one must render to the moral law: "And to his dignity he never returns, unless, where sin makes void, he fill up for evil pleasures with just penalties."[1] Sin cleaves the moral order as lightning does the atmosphere, causing an inevitable reaction to restore the equilibrium of forces. This inexorable setting in of the moral energies to fill the void made by evil doing we call retributive justice, or the wrath of God. Indignant righteousness is the same wherever found, whether in an individual, in a community, or in the Almighty. By one of two ways only can it be propitiated; either by a restitution equal to the injury, or by a full realization of the sin and an adequate contrition

[1] *Par.* vii. 82–84.

therefor. A perfect amendment of the havoc wrought by iniquity is impossible; the soul must seek justification by the alternative path. It must enter the gate of justification by treading each of the three steps upon which Dante pressed his feet. The sinner must see himself mirrored as he is, he must be completely contrite, and then bring forth fruit meet for repentance, atoning as far as in him lies for the evil he has done.

Expiation is no musty dogma of the schoolmen, but a living truth. Sin can be completely pardoned only when there is a full-souled confession, contrition, and such measure of satisfaction as the wrong-doer can render. Dr. Johnson, going in his old age to Lichfield, and standing all day in the market-place, amid sneers and rain, to expiate his refusal to keep his father's book-stall upon the very spot where he had once made the refusal, is a pathetic illustration that man cannot forgive himself until he has made public confession of his repentance and done something to prove his sincerity. The prophet Hosea could not take his faithless wife at once to his bosom: —

> "In silence and alone
> In shame and sorrow, wailing, fast and prayer
> She must blot out the stain that made her life
> One long pollution."

This stern and august conception of the retributive recoil of the moral order upon sin has

grown somewhat dim in the modern religious consciousness. We emphasize the fatherhood rather than the justice of God. We make the penalties for crime corrective, rather than punitive, and rightly; nevertheless, we must reinstate in our thought in something of its former grandeur and power the unvarying law, which to the swarthy Florentine prophet works through all life: "Where sin makes void," man must "fill up for evil pleasures with just penalties." Nemesis was no idle dream of classical antiquity, and the doctrine of expiation which has loomed so large in the thought of the profoundest minds of the Church, while it may need restatement, will refuse to be so jauntily rejected as it is by much of our newer theology. Neglected in the religious teachings of the day, it is reappearing as the dominant truth in the masterpieces of fiction. But although it needs fuller recognition than it receives, there tower above it other monumental verities, whose shining glory neither Dante nor our modern novelists have beheld.

IX

THE ABSENCE OF CHRIST

It is doubtless true that the "Purgatorio" is one of the most deeply religious books in the world. Yet it still comes far short of embodying the loftiest spiritual ideals. Its way to liberty is not the path pointed out by Him who said "I am the way." Christ laid emphasis on the intimate relationship of His disciples with Himself as the power to redeem them from sin. Their love for Him and His presence in them was to free them from the bondage and relics of evil. Paul faced identically the same problem that confronted our austere prophet; but his answer was far different: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death."[1] He did not think of himself as creeping up some almost inaccessible height. A stupendous power of life had gotten hold of him, mastered him to his being's core, and was working out its own purpose. The love of Christ constrained him rather than a desire for personal salvation. John Wesley felt he

[1] Rom. 8 : 2.

had not been converted until he had given up "will-work" and "self re-generation," and trusted in the indwelling Christ for his sanctification. Dante is not merely the child of his time in thus seeking liberty; he is the child of his temperament. St. Francis, whom he praises so ardently in the "Paradiso," was loosed from the bondage of his sin through his rapturous love of an ever present Saviour. He repented of his sins and confessed them in genuine contrition, and then brought forth fruit meet for repentance; but he was conscious of no long sad years of dreary labor in order to fill up the void made by evil pleasures with just penalties. His thoughts were not centred upon his own sufferings, but upon Christ's, until the very print of the nails appeared upon his hands and feet. He did not set himself resolutely to break down evil habits by a toilsome building up of virtuous ones. His ceaseless activities sprang spontaneously out of his fervent love for his divine master, and this made his earthly purgatorial life exultant with a joy that is wanting in Dante's "Purgatory."

St. Bernard, whom Dante so reverenced as to choose him as interpreter in that supreme moment when he was about to look upon God, could not have left a sense of sweet personal communion with Christ so completely out of the "Purgatorio" and "Paradiso." He said to

the people who flocked to his cloister: "If thou writest, nothing therein has savor to me unless I read Jesus in it. If thou discussest or conversest, nothing there is agreeable to me unless in it also Jesus resounds. Jesus is honey in the mouth, melody in the ear, a song of jubilee in the heart." [1] Horace Bushnell in his impressive sermon on "The Lost Purity Restored" considers the same problem that interested Dante, but his solution is far different. "It is Christ beheld with face unveiled, reflecting God's own beauty and love upon us, as in a glass, that changes us from glory to glory. If by faith we go with Christ, and are perfectly insphered in his society, so as to be of it, then we shall grow pure. The assimilating power of Christ, when faithfully adhered to as the soul's divine brother, and lived with and lived upon, will infallibly renovate, transform, and purify us. The result is just as certain as our oneness or society with Him. We shall grow pure because He is. The glorious power of His character and life will so invest our nature, that we shall be in it, and live it. . . . Having that faith to which Jesus is personally revealed, you can be conscious of a growing purity of soul, and I know not any other way. . . . When a soul is there enfolded, hid with Christ in the recesses of God's pure majesty, O! what airs of health breathe upon it

[1] *Bernard of Clairvaux*, by R. S. Storrs, p. 17.

and through it! How vital does it become, and how rapidly do the mixed causes of sin settle into the transparent flow of order and peace!"[1]

[1] *Sermons for the New Life*, p. 276 ff.

X

THE SEPARATION OF MORALITY FROM RELIGION

This omission of the presence of a personal Redeemer is partly due to Dante's emphasis upon God's manifestation of Himself in a system of theology rather than in a Saviour, — Beatrice, not Christ, was the supreme revelation of the Father, — and partly to the vicious and artificial distinction which the schoolmen made between the moral and the religious. St. Thomas sought to draw a line between what a man can know and attain through the exercise of his own faculties, and what must be disclosed to him. He recognized a gulf between the natural and the supernatural. Man's native reason is able to show him the nature and consequences of sin, and to lead him to temporal felicity and purity of heart. But God, immortality, and high spiritual truths are beyond reason and must be revealed. Upon this distinction are built the "Purgatorio" and the "Paradiso;" yet it is hurtful. It is the old baneful separation of the ethical and spiritual life. Cardinal Newman has said that the atonement should not be preached to

the unconverted, but that the preacher should mark out obedience to the moral law as the ordinary means of attaining to the Christian faith. That is, first moral purity, then religion. Paul's programme was different; when he went to Corinth he preached first of all the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection. He brought the repentant soul, not through a long process of moral purgation, but face to face with the living Christ; this infuses a new life and calls forth an answering love. The expulsive power of this ardent affection makes a new creature, who does not set himself doggedly to break down old habits and form better ones, but constrained by love gives himself to grateful service. This is the way to the "glorious liberty of the children of God," and it is a diviner way than that over which this sad-souled prophet, who had not yet caught sight of the robes of Christ, or seen the beautiful eyes of Beatrice, pressed his weary feet. Yet Dante's way of life is a true way, traveled often by men in all communions who purify their souls by beholding truth in the lives of others, by the constant practice of virtue, and by patiently following reason, instead of joyfully serving Christ.

XI

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

THERE is a second principle that formed a very prominent part of Dante's thought. He asked Virgil in Ante-Purgatory how intercessory prayer could bend the decree of heaven. The reply was: "For top of judgment vails not itself, because a fire of love may, in one instant, fulfill that which he who is stationed here must satisfy." [1] That is, love can take the place of punishment without weakening justice. Prayers and good deeds of the innocent are accepted in lieu of the expiatory punishment of the guilty. It is notable that Dante does not lay stress upon masses and almsgiving, though once he seems to hint of the efficacy of both words and works. "How much may be said or done by us to help them purge away the stains." Doubtless the wild excesses into which the doctrine of supererogatory merits was being carried in his day held him back; but he puts repeated emphasis on the value of intercessory prayer and the grace it works on the soul of the one for whom prayers are offered.

[1] *Purg.* vi. 37–39.

In Purgatory proper the prayers of the living have for their object the tempering of the mind of the sufferer that he may the more speedily be made perfect through his sufferings : —

> " Well may we help them wash away the marks
> That hence they carried, so that clean and light
> They may ascend unto the starry wheels ! " [1]

With this thought we are familiar in so far as it applies to this life. Protestants have almost universally refused to pray for the dead because, in their rejection of the Catholic dogma of Purgatory, the Reformers asserted that the dead went immediately to their final state, and against this irrevocable doom all petitions were unavailing. Now that the prevailing conception is that there may be a progressive development after death it is not impossible that prayers for the departed may yet be heard in Protestant pulpits.

[1] *Purg.* xi. 34–36.

XII

A SELF-CENTRED SALVATION

DANTE'S way of life is susceptible to this further criticism. It is too individualistic. His souls are in a sort of moral gymnasium with thoughts centred on their own salvation. They render no service, if we except the occasional prayers offered for those on earth. He who would save his life must lose it. Vicarious suffering is the chief redemptive force in life. We save ourselves in self-forgetful deeds for others. Souls in Paradise indeed grow brighter when they are pleasing others, but in Purgatory we find a conscious self-redemption that is painful and unreal. Blessedness is achieved by working at duty rather than at goodness. However, Dante does not forget to mention that strong bond of sympathy which always unites those who have fellowship in suffering in hope of a common reward. While he and Virgil were advancing along the road upon the ledge of the Avaricious, the mountain shook violently as with an earthquake, and all the imprisoned spirits lifted their voices in praise, saying: — "*Gloria in excelsis*

Deo." Thirsting to know the cause of this strange event, Dante was making his way along the encumbered road when the shade of the poet Statius appeared, who explained that when a soul felt itself pure, and, impelled by a strong inclination, moved upward, then the whole mountain trembled in sympathetic joy, and every spirit joined in a hymn of praise.[1] This beautiful expression of the unity of the sufferers in joy almost atones for the lack of any intimation that they had learned the New Testament injunction to bear one another's burdens.

[1] *Purg.* xx. 124 ff.

XIII

PURGATORY IN LITERATURE

PURGATORY is a process rather than a place. We may deny the place, but the process is life itself, which no one can ponder deeply and describe without picturing a "Purgatorio." Most of the masterpieces of fiction are but a restatement of Dante's task. Their problem is to show how sins are expiated and souls purified by pain and toil. Purgatory banished from theology has made its home in literature, yet in this metamorphosis from a dogma of the theologian to the plot of the novelist its essential character is unchanged. The purgatorial process portrayed in literature comes much nearer the standard of the Tuscan poet than the ideals of the New Testament.

I can find no indication in Hawthorne's life that he ever read a canto of Dante. "The Scarlet Letter" was written before he learned Italian, but the similarity between this powerful novel and the "Purgatorio" is very striking. The scene of one is in Boston, and of the other on the Holy Mountain; but in both the interest centres in

tracing the rugged and fiery path by which liberty from the stain and power of sin is attained. The weird and gloomy genius of the Protestant has drawn even a more terrible picture than did the Catholic of the Middle Ages. Hawthorne's purpose was to show how Hester Prynne, who for the sin of adultery was condemned to wear the scarlet letter A exposed upon her bosom, and Arthur Dimmesdale, her unrevealed partner in guilt, purified their souls through purgatorial sufferings. So closely do the minds of these two powerful writers keep together in unfolding their common thought that sometimes almost identical forms of expression and experience are used. In one place Hawthorne employs a sentence to describe the lot of his hero that reminds us very forcibly of Dante's famous account of his own experiences. Mr. Dimmesdale had chosen single blessedness; therefore he is compelled "to eat his unsavory morsel always at another's board, and endure the life-long chill which must be his lot who seeks to warm himself only at another's fireside." [1] Very similar is Dante's statement of his own homeless condition in the well-known prophecy of Cacciaguida: —

> "Thou shalt have proof how savoureth of salt
> The bread of others, and how hard a road
> The going down and up another's stairs." [2]

[1] *The Scarlet Letter*, chap. ix.

[2] *Par.* xvii. 58–60.

The sweetest passage in the "Inferno" is the poet's recital of his meeting with Francesca da Rimini. Leigh Hunt calls it "a lily in the mouth of Tartarus." The only consolation left to poor Francesca, as she was swept about on the never resting blast, was that from Paolo she would never be separated. Their sin had made them one forever. Hester had been carried into the same Inferno by the impetuous rush of the same passion, and while there her solace was also the same. She might have fled from the Puritan colony and thus have escaped part of her penalty, but she refused, because "there dwelt, there trode the feet of one with whom she deemed herself connected in a union that, unrecognized on earth, would bring them together before the bar of final judgment, and make that their marriage altar for a joint futurity of endless retribution. Over and over again, the tempter of souls had thrust this idea upon Hester's contemplation and laughed at the passionate and desperate joy with which she seized, and then strove to cast it from her. She barely looked the idea in the face, and hastened to bar it in its dungeon." [1] Thus did Hester for a moment taste of the sweet comfort which was Francesca's sole alleviation in torment, but she escaped from her own Hell into Purgatory because she thrust it from her, and with acquiescent mind endured her punishment.

[1] *The Scarlet Letter*, chap. v.

Dante's problem was to erase the seven P's from his forehead; Hawthorne's was to let the scarlet letter A burn on the breast of Hester until it purified her soul. Each shows that the way to absolution is up the three steps of contrition, confession, expiation. True contrition there was in the hearts of both Hester and the clergyman, but the latter's life was a sickening tragedy because he lacked the courage to confess his crime. He would have two steps rather than three by which to enter into the gate, but he learned that there can be no true contrition without a confession. "Happy are you, Hester, that wear the scarlet letter openly upon your bosom! Mine burns in secret! Thou little knowest what a relief it is, after the torment of a seven years' cheat, to look into an eye that recognizes me for what I am! Had I a friend — or were it my worst enemy! — to whom, when sickened with the praises of all other men, I could daily betake myself and be known as the vilest of all sinners, methinks my soul might keep itself alive thereby. Even this much of truth would save me. But now it is all falsehood! — all emptiness! — all death!" [1] And it is not until he makes a public confession on the scaffold that he dies in hope. In that last tragic scene he attests that God's grace working through the stern and indispensable trinity, confession, contrition, satisfaction,

[1] *Ibid.* chap. xvii.

which Dante recognized, had ransomed his soul: "God knows; and He is merciful! He hath proved his mercy most of all in my afflictions by giving me this burning torture to bear upon my breast! by sending yonder dark and terrible old man to keep the torture always at red-heat! by bringing us hither to die this death of triumphant ignominy before the people! Had either of these agonies been wanting I should have been lost forever!"[1] But the absorbing interest of Hawthorne's powerful story lies in the revelation of how expiatory sufferings cleanse Hester's soul. The shades whom Dante saw upon the mountain preferred to remain constantly in their torments that they might the sooner be purified. Hester abode near the scene of her guilt that "perchance the torture of her daily shame would at length purge her soul, and work out another purity than that which she had lost; more saintlike, because the result of martyrdom."[2] These continual sufferings, at once expiatory toward the moral sense of the community and remedial to herself, finally changed the scarlet letter from a badge of shame to a symbol of purity and holiness.

We miss in Hawthorne what we missed in Dante. There is no strong sense of the forgiveness of God, no mighty and triumphant love healing the soul and urging it to joyful service. The cross is but a dim light in the background, not a

[1] *Ibid.* chap. xxiii.

[2] *Ibid.* chap. v.

living reality changing a vague hope to love. The novelist doubtless portrayed common life, but Mary Magdalene, with her loving devotion to Christ, walked in a better way than Hester Prynne.

Tennyson's "Guinevere" embodies the same truths and the same radical defect as the "Purgatorio." The queen by her sin with Lancelot had stained her own soul black with guilt, had spoiled the purpose of King Arthur's life, and brought "red ruin and the breaking up of laws" into the kingdom. Is it possible for her to so purify herself that she may be reunited to the king? "Perchance," says Tennyson: and in the dialogue between Arthur and the queen he describes the identical purgatorial process which the laureate of the mediæval church has laid down. King Arthur could say to his guilty spouse: —

> "Lo! I forgive thee, as Eternal God
> Forgives: do thou for thine own soul the rest."

Her part is to fully know her sin.

> "Bear with me for the last time while I show,
> Ev'n for thy sake, the sin which thou hast sinn'd."

She must repent: —

> "prone from off her seat she fell,
> And grovell'd with her face against the floor."

Her own deeds must supplement the grace of God: —

> "Let no man dream but that I love thee still.
> Perchance, and so thou purify thy soul,

> And so thou lean on our fair father Christ,
> Hereafter in that world where all are pure
> We two may meet before high God, and thou
> Wilt spring to me, and claim me thine, and know
> I am thine husband."

Thus did the queen fit herself for the bosom of Arthur. Shut in by "narrowing nunnery walls" she wore out in

> "almsdeed and in prayer
> The sombre close of that voluptuous day,"

ministering to the hearts of others and thus healing her own, until she

> "past
> To where beyond these voices there is peace."

All this is rigidly true of life, but one coming fresh from the pages of the New Testament cannot read this story without feeling that the sombre evening of the queen's voluptuous day lacked certain sunset clouds of glory which are so clearly promised to those who have been forgiven much. What is true of the "Scarlet Letter" and of "Guinevere" is true of most of the great works of modern fiction. They are Dantean rather than Christian.

XIV

CONCLUSION

THERE are certain ineffaceable impressions made upon the mind of every earnest student of the "Purgatorio." One is that the soul begins the upward way of liberty and power when it recognizes the justice and wisdom of God in its punishments, and by acquiescing in them makes them disciplinary and cleansing. The consciousness of God determines whether life is a Hell or a Purgatory. Without this recognition of the divine order all pain is torment; with it suffering becomes corrective and purifying.

Most powerful also is the teaching that it is sin rather than punishment from which men need to be delivered. The problem of much theology, both Catholic and Protestant, is to shield the soul from the penalties of its wrong-doing; the aim of the Scriptures is to save man from sinning. Tetzel would release tortured spirits from purgatorial fires; Luther fiercely challenged the righteousness of the procedure: "If God has thought fit to place man in Purgatory, who shall say that it is good for him to be taken out of it? Who

shall even say that he himself desires it?"[1] Dante in this agreed with the reformer. He represents the spirits as singing in the fire; the slothful were so eager to work out their sloth that in their haste they seemed churlish; the lustful would not come out of the flames lest for a single moment the refining should stop; the gluttonous eat the wormwood of their torments as a sweet morsel; and the prayers of others are invoked not to draw them out of pain, but to help them out of sin.

Equally impressive is the statement of the inevitable and fearful consequences of sin. In the "Inferno" we were appalled by a vision of sin in its essential nature. Here we behold it in its terrible effects. It is no slight thing easily overlooked. It is a crime against God. It creates a void in the moral universe which must be filled with just penalties. It is a blow at the divine order, and the recoil is as sure as the decrees of the Almighty. Moreover, it is an injury to the individual. No slightest evil temper can be indulged without a black registry upon the soul itself. The blow anger aims at another falls upon one's self and the lust that burns toward others kindles a fiercer fire in the sinner's spiritual nature.

Yet it is impossible to enter into life and joy until these effects are expunged. The debt must be paid in full to an outraged moral order; there

[1] Moore, *Studies in Dante*, second series, p. 51.

can be no shuffling. It may demand the death of the Son of God, and the unspeakable sufferings of the race; but cost what it may in pain and tears and passionate love, the scales of God's justice must balance. The scars also which sin has made upon the soul must all be erased, though the price paid be a millennium of wandering upon the Mount of Pain.

Almost fiercely does Dante assert that while the divine love works upon a man in a thousand ways, yet human coöperation must be continuous, absorbed, energetic. The stain of sin is no trivial thing, easily wiped out by a prayer. Salvation is no ready-made article which man has but to accept. The soul is not saved unless it keeps thinking. It drives out bad thoughts by good ones. Constant contemplation of virtue creates love for it, and hate for the opposite sin; the new thought and the new love being converted into character by ceaseless practice. Very different as well as much inferior is the common Catholic conception, so admirably expressed by Newman, that the soul is passive in Purgatory: —

> "Be brave and patient on thy bed of sorrow;
> Swiftly shall pass thy night of trial here,
> And I will come and wake thee on the morrow."[1]

To Dante's clearer vision the prisoner of hope must needs strive mightily. He must work out his salvation with trembling eagerness and win his liberty through fiery conflict.

[1] *The Dream of Gerontius.*

Ineradicable also is the conviction produced that liberty comes only with moral purity. When the prophets of modern democracy first spoke, they proclaimed liberty to be the solvent of most of the evils of the world, and the nineteenth century gave itself heartily to the work of enfranchisement; but the last decade of that wonderful century witnessed a startling decline in its faith in universal freedom. Dante teaches us that liberty is a more comprehensive and significant word than democracy has dreamed. The brain and the heart of man must be free as well as his hands. Liberty is not a donation; it is an achievement. It dwells on the summit of the mountain and not at its base. It is no easy thing granted by a legislature, but must be attained by infinite toil and suffering.

These truths the swarthy prophet learned upon the Holy Mountain. In words of sweetest music and pictures of imperishable beauty he wrote them upon tables of stone, and then with face shining from his vision, he brought them down to the people upon the plain who heedlessly feasted and danced about their golden calf.

THE ASCENT TO GOD

"I know not in the world an affection equal to that of Dante. It is a tenderness, a trembling, longing, pitying love ; like the wail of æolian harps, soft, soft ; like a child's young heart ; — and then that stern, sore-saddened heart ! These longings of his toward his Beatrice ; their meetings together in the Paradiso ; his gazing into her pure transfigured eyes, her that had been purified by death so long, separated from him so far : — one likens it to the song of angels ; it is among the purest utterances of affection, perhaps the very purest, that ever came out of a human soul." — CARLYLE.

"Even as the atmosphere, when flooded by the light of the sun, is transfigured into such clearness of light that it does not so much seem to us to be illuminated as to have itself become elemental light, so it is needful that in the holy every human affection should in some ineffable way clear itself from itself, and become inwardly transformed into the will of God." — ST. BERNARD.

"It was for this supremest experience that Bernard labored and prayed ; that he might know, in some measure, while on earth, the holy joy of saints in light. When such a final, transfiguring love should be vitally present God would be revealed not to the soul only, but within it. It would have the immediate intuition of Him, as declared in its ecstatic consciousness ; and in that would be perfect felicity. . . . With him the only perfect attainment of the soul was its union with the Divine, while personal consciousness was to be maintained even in that ecstatic tranquillity. Toward this he aspired and constantly labored, seeking to arise, by contemplation, prayer, assiduous self-discipline, noble service, to a point where, by God's grace, through the indwelling of His Spirit, he might discern Him in the soul, become a partaker of the Divine nature, be filled even unto His fullness." — R. S. STORRS.

I

THE SUBLIME CANTICLE OF THE COMEDY

The "Inferno" is the most widely known portion of the "Divine Comedy," and the "Purgatorio" the most human and natural because it best describes the present life in its weaknesses and its disciplines; yet Dante undoubtedly considered the "Paradiso" to be the supreme triumph of his prophetic and artistic genius, as well as the culmination of his thought.

His theme here reaches the fullness of its grandeur, and to rise to the height of his great argument he realized that he taxed his powers to their utmost. In his dedication of it to Can Grande he called it "the sublime Canticle of the Comedy." He felt that he was constantly struggling with the ineffable, that the vision hopelessly transcended his speech. Into this consecrated poem he threw his whole soul. "It is no coasting voyage for a little barque, this which the intrepid prow goes cleaving, nor for a pilot who would spare himself,"[1] and he pleads that he may well be excused, if, under the ponderous

[1] *Par.* xxiii. 67–69.

burden, his mortal shoulder sometimes trembles. Greater task, indeed, never essayed poet or prophet. He sought to combine in a form of perfect beauty the Ptolemaic system of astronomy; the teachings of Dionysius the Areopagite regarding the celestial hierarchy; the current astrological dogma of stellar influences; the guesses of the crude science of the times; the cumbrous theology of Aquinas; the rapt vision of the mystics; his own personal experiences; his passionate love for Beatrice the Florentine maiden, and Beatrice the symbol of divine revelation; the whole process of the development of a soul from the first look of faith to the final beatitude; and even to symbolize the Triune God Himself as He appears beyond all space and time. No wonder that as he embarks on the deeps of this untried sea he warns the thoughtless not to follow him.

"O ye, who in some pretty little boat,
Eager to listen, have been following
Behind my ship, that singing sails along,
Turn back to look again upon your shores;
Do not put out to sea, lest peradventure,
In losing me, you might yourselves be lost.
The sea I sail has never yet been passed;
Minerva breathes, and pilots me Apollo,
And Muses nine point out to me the Bears."[1]

How well he succeeded in this most hazardous voyage is a matter of diverse opinion. Leigh Hunt, who was quite incapable of appreciating justly such a nature as Dante's, and such a poem

[1] *Par.* ii. 1–9.

as the Divine Comedy, in his little book entitled "Stories from the Italian Poets," says: "In 'Paradise' we realize little but a fantastical assemblage of doctors and doubtful characters, far more angry and theological than celestial; giddy raptures of monks and inquisitors dancing in circles, and saints denouncing Popes and Florentines; in short, a heaven libelling itself with invectives against earth, and terminating in a great presumption." It must be confessed that there is much in this canticle that on first acquaintance strikes one as ridiculous. When we behold the flaming spirit of the venerable Peter Damian, whirling like a mill-stone, making a centre of his middle, we are far more inclined to laugh at our own crude conception of the grotesque figure he makes, than to picture the beauty of the swiftly circling flame and marvel at the vigorous spiritual life which his cyclonic gyrations were intended to suggest. Doubtless also the many quaint mediæval discussions regarding the spots on the moon, the influences of the planets on human destiny, the language Adam spoke, and the length of time he spent in Eden before he ate the fatal apple, have little immediate interest for us, and are endured as one traverses the desert for the good that lies beyond. Yet we must remember that Dante distinctly states in his dedication of this portion of his work to Can Grande that when he deals in speculative philo-

sophy, it is not for the sake of the philosophy, but for practical needs.

Notwithstanding all that is scholastic and strange to our notion in the "Paradiso," its most careful students are generally agreed that it is the fitting crown of the great trilogy. "Every line of the 'Paradiso,'" says Ruskin, "is full of the most exquisite and spiritual expressions of Christian truths, and the poem is only less read than the 'Inferno' because it requires far greater attention, and, perhaps for its full enjoyment, a holier heart."[1] In this wonderful book, which to Carlyle was full of "inarticulate music," poetry seems to reach quite its highest point. "It is a perpetual hymn of everlasting love," exclaims Shelley; "Dante's apotheosis of Beatrice and the gradations of his own love and her loveliness by which as by steps he feigns himself to have ascended to the throne of the Supreme Cause, is the most glorious imagination of modern poetry."[2] Not less pronounced is Hallam's judgment that it is the noblest expression of the poet's genius. Comparing Dante with Milton, he says: "The philosophical imagination of the former in this third part of his poem, almost defecated from all sublunary things by long and solitary musing, spiritualizes all that it touches."[3]

[1] *Stones of Venice*, ii. 324. [2] *Defense of Poetry*.
[3] *Literature of Europe*, vol. iv. chap. v.

II

THE THEME OF THE PARADISO

In this canticle Dante seeks to describe the nature of the religious life, its dominant truths, its felicities, and its ultimate beatitude. He is not painting a rapturous picture of bliss to comfort and lure the soul of the believer, but is making a sober attempt to show the spiritual life in its meaning, development, and final glory. As he could not make known the true hideousness of sin without following it into the future where it made the full disclosure of itself; as the purgatorial process, although taking place in this world and in the next, has the scene laid after death that the completed work may be revealed; so the true life of man is delineated against the background of eternity. This affords a canvas large enough to portray the spiritual life when it has come to the perfection of its stature. It is not Heaven he is describing, but the religious life. These temporal experiences he lifts into the eternal light and displays the fullness of their glory.

III

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The first steps in the religious life find their descriptions in that wonderfully beautiful and significant scene in "Purgatory" where the poet meets Beatrice in the Terrestrial Paradise. When the soul comes face to face with the revealed truth of God, it sees its sin, repents of it, confesses it, and looks toward Christ for atoning mercy. Now it is ready to enter the way that leads toward the Highest. The penitent soul begins the spiritual life when it centres itself upon God. "Man," says Horace Bushnell, "finds his paradise when he is imparadised in God. It is not that he is squared to certain abstractions or perfected in his moral conformity to certain impersonal laws; but it is that he is filled with the sublime personality of God, and forever exalted by his inspiration, moving in the divine movement, rested on the divine centre, blessed in the divine beatitude."[1] Thus a New England preacher, though little familiar with Dante, describes exactly the experience the poet went

[1] *Sermons for the New Life*, pp. 41, 42.

through, when after squaring himself to the impersonal laws of Purgatory, he fixed his eyes upon the Sun — the symbol of God. With this steady gaze there came into his soul a new power, and day seemed to be added to day. Having centred his life on God, he now turns his gaze to Beatrice, the revealed truth. In this most impressive way does Dante give us his definition of faith. It is the look of the soul toward divine truth; it is that spiritual energy by which man commits himself to truth; it is a look that trustfully, without analysis, receives its object as a whole into the soul.

Yet it is a look into the eyes of Beatrice, those eyes which typify the demonstrations of truth. Here again we come upon the thought that it was truth in its many manifestations which was dear to Dante's soul. If Christ was not supreme in his religious thinking, the fault was due to his temperament rather than to any mediæval dogma. The faith of St. Francis had a different quality. When, struggling in his early days to enter the peace and joy of religion, he was praying in the Chapel of St. Damian, before the crucifix; "little by little it seemed to him that his gaze could not detach itself from that of Jesus; he felt something marvelous taking place in and around him. The sacred victim took on life, and in the outward silence he was aware of a voice which softly stole into the very depths of his heart,

speaking to him an ineffable language. This vision marks the final triumph of Francis. His union with Christ is consummated; from this time he can exclaim with the mystics of every age: 'My beloved is mine, and I am his.'"[1] Spurgeon's experience was similar: "I looked at Christ, and He looked at me, and we were one forever." That peculiarly fervent religious temperament Dante did not have. His mind rested in the truth, while his heart was satisfied with its personification in one whose memory was to him a religion.

[1] Sabatier's *St. Francis of Assisi*, p. 55.

IV

THE ASTRONOMICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE POEM

The idea of describing the development of the Christian life as an ascent from star to star was a sublime conception of artistic genius. According to the Ptolemaic system of astronomy the earth was the centre of the universe, being encompassed by a zone of air and that by a zone of fire. Beyond the sphere of fire were seven planets, each revolving within a heaven of its own. These seven encircling heavens were those of the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn; above were the Fixed Stars; then came a crystalline heaven, originating all movement and called the Primum Mobile; and surrounding all was the Empyrean, — the place of eternal, unchanging peace.

As the Catholic Church taught that there were seven virtues, Dante employed the seven planets to represent them. The prevalent belief that the earth cast a shadow on the first three planets enabled him to mark the distinction between the three theological and the four cardinal virtues. It is only vaguely hinted that the first three stars

typify faith, hope, and charity, since these virtues do not come to their full vigor except through moral discipline;[1] but the last four clearly indicate the cardinal virtues prudence, fortitude, justice, temperance. Dante believed that the penitent having begun to live the blessed life by faith, hope, and love, which are necessarily imperfect, is trained by the moral virtues into robust character. After the perfected character, and resulting from it, comes a completed faith, hope, and love. Having done the will he can know the teaching; therefore after ascending through these seven planets, in the eighth and ninth spheres Dante learns the loftiest truths revealed to the faithful. In the eighth he is taught the important truths of redemption, and in the ninth the celestial mysteries. Being now faultless in character and creed, the tenth heaven receives him into the ultimate blessedness. Thus the astronomical order proved a most serviceable framework for the poet's symbolism.[2]

[1] Many of the best authorities question whether the first three planets have any reference to the theological virtues.

[2] I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to *Dante's Ten Heavens*, by Edmund G. Gardner, M. A., for valuable suggestions regarding the structure and significance of the Paradiso.

V

TWO FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS

The prevailing system of astronomy also enabled one so adept in allegory to give singularly interesting expression to two most important truths. The three shadowed stars suggest that the shadow of earthly sins falls upon Heaven, in accordance with the immemorial faith of Christian thinkers that men are rewarded in the hereafter according to their fidelity here. This shadow of time upon eternity has no other influence, however, than to affect the capacity for bliss, since all dwelling in the celestial sphere are perfectly happy. "Everywhere in Heaven is Paradise, although the grace of the Supreme Good rains not there in one measure." [1]

The four unshadowed planets he uses to teach that there are many ways by which men come to God, and that the conditions of the journey profoundly influence one's destiny. The warrior on the battlefield moves by as direct a road as the scholar in his study; the just ruler is as sure of salvation as the wan hermit in his cell. In the

[1] *Par.* iii. 88–90.

Terrestrial Paradise four beautiful ones covered Dante with their arms and led him to Beatrice as she stood by the Griffon, saying: "Here we are nymphs; in Heaven we are stars,"[1] symbolizing that the four cardinal virtues bring one into the presence of the truth as it is in Christ. The same teaching is here elaborated. The nymphs are now stars, typical of the virtues which must adorn him who would understand the redemptive and celestial mysteries to be revealed in the eighth and ninth heavens. The way to the ultimate beatitude is along this four-fold road, and the final felicity is shaped and colored by that virtue which is most characteristic. Thus time again projects itself into eternity, and the condition of one's mortal warfare affects his final destiny. Each of the four greater planets stands for one of the cardinal virtues: the Sun for prudence; red Mars for fortitude; the white Jupiter for spotless justice; and Saturn, calm and cold, is typical of temperance or contemplation. The spirits appear in that planet by which they have been most influenced, and whose virtue has been most conspicuous in their lives. They do not dwell there, but have come down to meet Dante that they may instruct him. In the sun flame forth the spirits of the men of understanding and wisdom, the renowned scholars, and distinguished theologians, whose presence was apparent in

[1] *Purg.* xxxi. 106.

that great orb by a lustre more brilliant than its own; in Mars the brave warriors of the faith range themselves into a fiery cross, the symbol by which they conquered; in Jupiter just rulers, moved by a concordant will, even as a single heat comes from many embers, form themselves into a colossal eagle, ensign of empire; and in Saturn there shine in ineffable light the clear, radiant spirits of the contemplative, who mount to the Highest up the golden stairway of meditation.

It was clearly in Dante's thought to teach that these four virtues differ in their worth, that when one passes from prudence to fortitude he comes nearer to God, and that the saint rapt in mystic contemplation of divine truth is closer to the ultimate joy than the just ruler upon his throne. This is in perfect harmony with the deep-seated conviction of the times, in this respect so unlike our own, that a cloistered life of ecstatic communion with God is holier than one spent in active benevolence. But this ascending series of virtues involves us in a perplexity. The light of Dante's mind, as Beatrice was the glory of his soul, was St. Thomas Aquinas. He is appropriately placed in the sun, the sphere of wisdom and truth, ranking thus below Cacciaguida in Mars, and William of Sicily and Rhipeus the Trojan in Jupiter. The most satisfactory explanation is that though justice is a nobler virtue than prudence and the just ruler walks in a diviner way

than the profound scholar, yet there are different degrees of glory in the same realm, — and he who shines with the full brightness of the sphere of the sun may be nearer God, and more filled with the light eternal, than most of those who inhabit a higher circle. That there are various gradations of bliss in the same planet is declared by Piccarda when she says that Constance "glows with all the light of our sphere."

The grand divisions mentioned are marked in the poem by the termination of the earth's shadow, — a long prologue also prefacing the ascent to the sun, — by the ladder of gold leading to the eighth and ninth heavens, and by the essentially different character of the Empyrean.

VI

LIGHT, LIFE, TRUTH

Not the least proof of Dante's extraordinary creative power is the simplicity of the material which he uses in the construction of this immense spiritual edifice. Three leading ideas only he employs, light, life, and vision of truth. Hallam finds them to be light, music, and motion;[1] but music occupies only a subordinate place, while the growing knowledge of truth is an organic thought. Motion is but another term for life, and by rapidity of movement Dante would symbolize abundant life. With rare artistic skill and spiritual discernment he chose his materials; the religious life is the life with God, and God is light, life, and truth.

No poet has been more keenly sensitive to light in all its manifestations than he. Light itself dissociated from all forms afforded him distinct pleasure, and was to him a rich fountain of poetic suggestiveness. The serene splendor of the stars seems to have been one of the chief consolations in his exiled and passion-swept life.

[1] *Literature of Europe*, vol. iv. chap. v.

"What!' exclaimed he in his letter declining to return to Florence on ignominious terms, "shall I not everywhere enjoy the light of the sun and of the stars? And may I not seek and contemplate, in every corner of the earth, under the canopy of heaven, consoling and delightful truth?" Light and truth! these are his Heaven in this world and in the world to come. Such solace has the shining of the stars been to his homesick heart that in gratitude he ends each canticle with the word "stars." Hell is to be shut out from this calm radiance; the beginning of hope and purity is to come "forth to see again the stars;" the symbol of Purgatory is the morning and evening light; Heaven is to mount from star to star, and its gradations are known by the increasing glory of the light, while the bliss supreme is to fix his eyes on the Fountain of Eternal Light. Dean Church has finely pointed out how significant and beautiful light was to Dante's passionate soul, and how he studied it in all its forms. "Light everywhere — in the sky and earth and sea — in the star, the flames, the lamp, the gems — broken in the water, reflected from the mirror, transmitted pure through the glass, or coloured through the edge of the fractured emerald — dimmed in the mist, the halo, the deep water — streaming through the rent cloud, glowing in the coal, quivering in the lightning, flashing in the topaz and the ruby, veiled behind the

pure alabaster, mellowed and clouding itself in the pearl — light contrasted with shadow — shading off and copying itself in the double rainbow, like voice and echo — light seen within light — light from every source, and in all its shapes, illuminates, irradiates, gives glory to the Commedia." [1] Small wonder is it that in his thought Heaven is a place of unshadowed, eternal, ever deepening light. The more joyous the spirits are the brighter their splendor, which glows with a new effulgence as their love manifests itself. Justinian is especially honored by being twined with a double glory.

Motion, indicative of the abundant life Christ promised to give, is also employed to make known the different degrees of blessedness. According to Aristotle natural motion is either in a right line, in a circle, or mixed. The circular is the perfect form; it alone is continuous, and is that of the Prime-Mover. The impulse of motion is love, and the cause of love is vision; therefore the spirits move more or less rapidly in the measure of their inward vision of God. From the Seraphim downward, all the angels, heavens, and ranks of the redeemed are woven in one cosmic dance, and the celerity of their movement is always determined by the clearness of their sight into the nature of the Eternal Light. The mystic dances are Dante's method

[1] *Dante and other Essays*, p. 164.

of expressing joy in the Divine Will, and even Peter Damian, whirling like a millstone on its axis, is not as ridiculous as he seems, for thus only can he express the ardor of his love, and the energy of his exultant life. In thus describing a palpitant world of ceaseless activity, Dante has anticipated the modern discovery of a universe throbbing with the perpetual whirl of atoms.

But the most commanding idea of all is vision of the truth. It is a somewhat difficult task for us to enter into perfect intellectual sympathy with Dante in his confidence in the power of the mind to know the truth. By a strange paradox the present generation has learned so much, and accumulated such a fabulous wealth of knowledge that our minds quail in the presence of their riches and distrust their power to know. We delight in the investigation of truth, but lack faith in our ability to know it. The word that is oftenest upon our lips is Life, while the supreme word of the Middle Ages was Truth. The modern feeling is well expressed by Richard Watson Gilder : —

> "I know what Life is, have caught sight of Truth :
> My heart is dead within me ; a thick pall
> Darkens the midday Sun." [1]

Dante would have said that the pall and darkness resulted from our dim apprehension of truth.

[1] *Five Books of Song*, p. 42.

The Middle Ages believed implicitly that man can know, and that perfect happiness consists in perfect knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. The vision of truth stimulates the ardors of the mind, so that love is proportioned to the clearness of sight into the truth. God is the Truth behind all phenomena, the approach to Him is through the truth; in knowing the truth and resting in it the mind has peace; to the beauty of truth the affections of the heart respond; and through the truth divine power comes into the will.

> "Well I perceive that never sated is
> Our intellect unless Truth illume it,
> Beyond which nothing true expands itself.
> It rests therein, as a wild beast in his lair,
> When it attains it; and it can attain it;
> If not, then each desire would frustrate be." [1]

There are three writers in the Bible who make religion to consist in a knowledge of God; the author of Deuteronomy, Hosea, and St. John; with them Dante is in accord.

Holding such a noble and scriptural conception of the nature and goal of the spiritual life, Dante naturally traces its development by progressive knowledge of the truth, and makes the glories of Heaven to consist in the beauty of truth "enkindled along the stairway of the Eternal palace."

Thus the vision of truth is the structural idea

[1] *Par.* iv. 124–128.

of Paradise. Its glory is the splendor of truth, its progress is the enlarging perception of truth, and its blessedness is the ardent love inflamed by truth. By a poetic conception of peerless beauty Dante measures his ascent, not by conscious motion, but by the radiance on the face of Beatrice. From the very first her glory dazzled his eyes; as they mounted upward she irradiated him with a smile such as would make a man in the fire happy, and finally her beauty became so intolerable that she durst not smile lest his sight be shattered as a bough by the lightning, until his eyes were strengthened by having beheld Christ and his triumphant followers.

He finds that the merits of the redeemed determine the measure of their penetration into truth, and that the love born of sight gives them their sphere of blessedness.

His own power of vision grows stronger as he ascends. At first he beholds the blessed ones as mirrored semblances, then as flames of fire and orbs of light, whose real forms cannot be seen. When he had mounted so high that the vivid light enswathed him and by its own effulgence blinded him, his mind seemed to issue out of itself and was rekindled with a new power of vision. Seeing before him a stream of light like a river, he bathed his eyes in it; then did he look no more through a glass

darkly, but face to face. Beatrice — revealed truth — is no longer needed; St. Bernard — type of intuitive insight — takes her place, and Dante reaches the final bliss by gazing with unquenched sight into the Fountain of Light Intellectual full of Love.

God is Light, God is Life, God is Truth; the spiritual life is to know God, and to receive His light, life, and truth. These were the only elements out of which the divine poet could construct his stately Paradise.

VII

TRUTHS TAUGHT IN THE LOWER HEAVENS

As the religious life is nourished and developed by its ever deepening insight into truth, Dante undoubtedly sought to crowd his successive spheres with weighty spiritual teachings to encourage and guide men who were seeking to climb —

> "the great world's altar stairs
> That slope thro' darkness up to God."

a. *The shadow of earth*

In the infra-solar heavens — the Moon, Mercury, and Venus — certain basal and preliminary truths are set forth which are of superlative importance to those entering the kingdom of heaven. The most prominent teaching in these shadow-dimmed stars is, as has already been indicated, that the effects of the earthly life reach into the heavenly, and that the consequences of time extend through eternity. Each goes to his own place and feels more or less of the eternal breath according to the capacity of his soul and the merit of his life. While this thought meets us

at the very threshold of Heaven it is constantly recurring, Dante taxing his genius to its limit to vary the expression of it. In four principal ways he discloses the inequalities of bliss: the sphere in which the spirits appear, their quickness of movement, the glory they radiate, and the clearness of their vision into the Eternal Light.

b. *God's will is our peace*

With fervent enthusiasm, at the very beginning of the upward flight, Dante seeks to make it clear that contentment with one's lot, growing out of perfect acquiescence in the will of God, is indispensable to the religious life. The first spirit he meets in the very lowest sphere is Piccarda. He asks her if she is happy here and desires no higher place. "With those other shades she first smiled a little: then answered me so glad that she seemed to burn in the first fire of love; 'Brother, virtue of charity quiets our will, and makes us wish only for that which we have, and for aught else makes us not thirsty. Should we desire to be higher up our desires would be discordant with the will of Him who assigns us this place, and His Will is our peace.' Clear was it then to me, how everywhere in heaven is Paradise, although the grace of the Supreme Good rains not there in one measure."[1] Indeed, God's justice in thus adjusting the wages

[1] *Par.* iii. 67 ff.

to the desert is part of the joy of the blessed ones. Dante utters no truth more insistently than that the human will must be perfectly submissive to the will of God. "Nay, it is essential in this blessed existence to hold ourselves within the divine will." [1]

In the heaven of Jupiter the spirits of the Just, speaking through the voice of the eagle, exclaim, "For our will is perfected in this good, that what God wills us, we also will." [2] After he has mounted from star to star, has looked into the deepest light, and has learned all that the celestial realm can teach him, with beautiful simplicity of expression he sums up the effect of all this glory and truth upon his soul by declaring that it has made his heart and will one with God. "But now my desire and my will, like a wheel which evenly is moved, the Love was turning which moves the sun and the other stars." [3]

This is the *summum bonum*. Beyond this life has no beatitude, and greater truth than this the eager prophet did not urge in his "mediæval miracle of song."

c. *The influence of the stars*

In the three shadowed stars Dante gives great prominence to the influences of the heavens

[1] *Par.* iii. 79, 80. [2] *Par.* xx. 137, 138.
[3] *Par.* xxxiii. 143–145.

on the genius and destiny of men. To us this seems quaint enough and almost childish, but to him it was of the first importance. As soon as man began to think he asked himself why children of the same parents differ radically in disposition, talents, and career. Being as ignorant as we of the law of variation, it was natural for him to attribute the cause to those mysterious stars that so absorbed his wondering mind. Since the little light they gave did not account for their being placed in the sky, what could be the purpose of their strange movements and marvelous conjunctions, but to exercise some potent influence upon mankind? Surely "the generated nature would always make its path like its progenitors," sons would be exact copies of their fathers, did not "revolving nature, which is the seal of the mortal wax, perform its act well." In common with his time, Dante found two formative elements in man, Nature and Will. One's nature is moulded by the stars, but the will is free, either to resist or consent to natural tendencies. The good and evil qualities we refer to inherited blood, Dante ascribed to the influences which the moving heavens sent down. Yet we fail to do him justice if we do not constantly bear in mind that the stars to him were not soulless orbs of fire. He believed that over each of the nine heavens presided one of the nine orders of angelic beings, who, dwelling in the Empyrean, looked

into the face of God. According to the clearness of their vision they glowed with love, and the ardor of their love determined the swiftness of their movement. The life they received from the immediate presence of God they radiated down upon the heavens over which they ruled, and the heavens sent the vital beams to mortals. Thus the universe became palpitant with life of God and flooded with his light.

Shelley, who owes much to Dante, has beautifully rendered the poet's thought in language which well expresses our modern faith, —

> "the one Spirit's plastic stress
> Sweeps through th' dull dense world, compelling there
> All new successions to the forms they wear ;
> Torturing th' unwilling dross that checks its flight
> To its own likeness, as each mass may bear ;
> And bursting in its beauty and its might
> From trees and beasts and men into Heaven's light." [1]

This conception of a vast system where every order of the celestial hierarchy looks up to God for power and life, and reflects the divine energy downward through the spheres as light, motion, and spiritual influences, making the creature's vision of the Eternal Truth the medium of God's communication of Himself to a universe that everywhere throbs with His life and is everywhere drawn toward Him, is not only one of sublime religious significance, but is a thought august and majestic quite beyond the power of speech.

[1] *Adonais*, xliii.

d. *The freedom of the will*

Great as the emphasis is which he places upon these supernal influences — divers virtues making divers alloy, so that some natures have more of celestial brightness than others — Dante never for a moment suffers them to obscure his superb assertion of the untrammeled freedom of the will. This lifts man out of the tyranny of the natural order and makes him a supernatural being, akin to God and master of his own fate.

> "The greatest gift that in his largess God
> Creating made, and unto his own goodness
> Nearest conformed, and that which he doth prize
> Most highly, is the freedom of the will
> Wherewith the creatures of intelligence
> Both all and only were and are endowed."[1]

This is sovereign and is compelled by no external force. "If all Hell, all the world, even all the hosts of Heaven," says Hugo of St. Victor, "were to come together and combine in this one thing, they could not force a single consent from free will in anything not willed." And Dante emphatically declares: "Ye who are living refer every cause upward to the heavens only, as if they of necessity moved all things with themselves. If this were so free will would be destroyed in you, and there would be no justice in having joy for good and grief for evil. The heavens initiate your movements; I do not say all of them;

[1] *Par.* v. 19–25.

but, supposing that I said it, light for good and for evil is given to you; and free will, which, if it endure fatigue in the first battles with the heavens, afterwards, if it be well nurtured, conquers everything. To a greater force, and to a better nature, ye, free, are subjected, and that creates the mind in you, which the heavens have not in their charge. Therefore if the present world goes astray, in you is the cause, in you let it be sought." [1]

[1] *Purg.* xvi. 67–84.

VIII

THE TRUTHS DECLARED IN THE UNSHADOWED PLANETS

In the four succeeding heavens, whose planets, — the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, — represent the four cardinal virtues, Dante beautifully symbolizes three structural truths. He evidently would teach that the religious life must be eminently virtuous, that moral character influences destiny, and that fidelity to one's endowments and duty is the gate by which he enters into eternal life. That we have come upon a distinct phase of thought is noted by a prologue of rare beauty, remarkable for its compendious and poetic expression of the doctrine of the Trinity, the influence of the heavens, and his own sense of mission which wrested from the poet all other care. The truths promulgated in these four heavens partake of the nature of the sphere in which they are taught.

a. *The Sun*

In the Sun occur the justly famous narratives of the lives of St. Francis and St. Dominic,

which in comprehensiveness, beauty, and truthfulness have never been surpassed. In making a Dominican recount the work of St. Francis, "who rose a Sun upon the world," and a Franciscan tell the story of St. Dominic, "who through wisdom was a splendor of cherubic light," Dante sought to teach to the two orders a lesson of mutual respect. Nevertheless, there is in this sphere some profitless and arid exposition. It seems strange that when Dante meets his great master, St. Thomas Aquinas, he makes the sage speak so largely of what to us seem unimportant scholastic subtilties. Even his prudential counsels seem trivial compared with what the profoundest, most capacious mind of the Middle Ages might be supposed to say.

The truth that in this heaven receives most prominence is that of the Trinity. In beginning his description Dante states the dogma in a passage of exquisite grace: the supreme object of contemplation is the Father, "looking upon his Son with the Love which the one and the other eternally breathe forth."[1] The dances used are expressions of the same truth: "those burning suns circled three times around us;" it is given voice in song: "the One and Two and Three which ever lives, and ever reigns in Three and Two and One, uncircumscribed and circumscribing everything, was thrice sung by each of those spirits

[1] *Par.* x. 1, 2.

with such a melody that for every merit it would be a just reward." [1] In the realm of the wise whose pursuit is truth, it is fitting that the ultimate truth of the one God in three persons, which is the object of the beatific vision, should be given commanding importance.

In this planet there is a fine description of a moment when gratitude to God overcame his delight in truth.

"And Beatrice began: 'Give thanks, give thanks
Unto the Sun of Angels, who to this
Sensible one has raised thee by his grace!'
Never was heart of mortal so disposed
To worship, nor to give itself to God
With all its gratitude was it so ready,
As at those words did I myself become;
And all my love was so absorbed in Him,
That in oblivion Beatrice was eclipsed.
Nor this displeased her; but she smiled at it
So that the splendor of her laughing eyes
My single mind on many things divided." [2]

There is another very satisfactory passage which perhaps indicates that even in his day a scholar must leave a vast host of authors unread. This excess of riches overcame him, but his consolation was that he held the truth, even though he could not trace it through many books. Beatrice and the poet were in the centre of two circles of sempiternal flames, representing learned theologians who had been his teachers.

"And lo! all around about of equal brightness
Arose a lustre over what was there,

[1] *Par.* xiv. 28–33. [2] *Par.* x. 53–63.

Like an horizon that is clearing up.
And as at rise of early eve begin
Along the welkin new appearances,
So that the sight seems real and unreal,
It seemed to me that new subsistences
Began there to be seen, and make a circle
Outside the other two circumferences.
O very sparkling of the Holy Spirit,
How sudden and incandescent it became
Unto my eyes, that vanquished bore it not!
But Beatrice so beautiful and smiling
Appeared to me, that with the other sights
That followed not my memory I must leave her." [1]

b. *Mars*

Fixing his eyes upon Beatrice he is "transferred to higher salvation," the ruddy planet Mars, where in answer to his sacrifice of thanksgiving he saw, constellated in its fiery depths, a white cross, flashing with the glowing spirits of old warriors of the faith; through the cross there swept a melody "which rapt me, not distinguishing the hymn." Mars is the star of Fortitude, the cross is the symbol of the Christian warfare, and rapturous is the joy of faithful service. Here Dante meets his crusader ancestor, Cacciaguida, who denounces the luxury of Florence and urges the necessity of returning to the chaste and valiant simplicity of former days. In their conversation the character of the poet is brought out in strong colors. Being in the planet of Fortitude, he feels himself "four-square against the

[1] *Par.* xiv. 67–81.

blows of chance" and asks that his destiny be revealed to him. The flaming spirit of the warrior, looking into that mirror where past and future are reflected, foretells Dante's exile. "Thou shalt leave everything most dearly loved. Thou shalt prove how the bread of others savors of salt, and how the descending and the mounting of another's stairs is a hard path. And that which will heaviest weigh upon thy shoulders will be the evil and foolish company with which into this valley thou shalt fall; which all ungrateful, all senseless, and impious will turn against thee, — so that it will be seemly for thee to have made thyself a party by thyself."[1] Yet, bitter as these wanderings were to be, the fame that was to come would more than atone for all sufferings, for "even as sweet harmony comes to the ear from an organ, comes to my sight the time that is preparing for thee."[2]

In the spirit with which he first meets this announcement of his wrongs this stern prophet seems to fall somewhat below the moral stature of his predecessors who for truth's sake forgot themselves. His consolations are not as lofty as one could wish. The first comforting thought that came to his mind was that he had a "future far beyond the punishment of their perfidies;"[3] then came a fear lest his message have "a savor keenly sour, and if I am a timid friend to truth

[1] *Par.* xvii. 55–69. [2] *Ibid.* 43–45. [3] *Ibid.* 98, 99.

I fear to lose life among those who will call this time the olden." [1] Nevertheless he will make the "whole vision manifest, and let the scratching be even where the itch is, for if at first taste [his] vision shall be molestful, afterwards, when it shall be digested, it will leave vital nourishment." [2] One can scarcely conceive of Isaiah or Paul being so solicitous for personal renown. They would be content to be forgotten, if the truth they proclaimed should be received. For a moment the passion of the artist for enduring fame seems to overcome the self-forgetful consecration of the prophet. And yet it may be said in behalf of Dante that the permanency of his work depended on the permanency of his poem. But he seeks a nobler solace when his guide said: "Change thy thought; think that I am near to Him who lifts the burden from every wrong." [3] Turning to her holy eyes, all present ambition vanished; "again beholding her, my affection was free from every other desire." [4] In his consciousness of the sovereignty of God and in his passionate love of truth, the bitterness of exile is at last forgotten. Beatrice never seems so fair to him as now, and, vanquished by her smile, he must needs be gently reminded that joy is in imitating the valor of the brave as well as in the contemplation of truth, for "not only

[1] *Par.* xvii. 117–120.
[2] *Ibid.* 128–132.
[3] *Par.* xviii. 4–6.
[4] *Ibid.* 14, 15.

in my eyes is Paradise." [1] After this Dante seems to have passed beyond all thought of personal fame. As he approaches the Ultimate Salvation the glory of the laurel shrivels in the blaze of the divine splendor, and his fervent prayer to the Supreme Light is, "make my tongue so powerful that it may be able to leave one single spark of Thy glory for the future people." [2] This frame of mind became habitual in his later years, for in his poem to Giovanni Quirino, probably the last he ever wrote, he says: —

> "So when I contemplate the great reward
> To which our God has called the Christian seed,
> I long for nothing else but only this."

c. *Jupiter*

Turning toward Beatrice he beheld her eyes so clear and joyous and her countenance so pale that he knew they had ascended to the whiteness of Jupiter. This is the star of Justice, and holy splendors at his coming arranged themselves in a sentence — the commanding truth this realm delivers to the world — "Love righteousness, ye that be judges of the earth;" [3] then instantly more than a thousand lights form the image of an eagle, symbol of empire and justice. This heaven being the source of all earthly justice, here Dante would teach that the authority of the Empire as well as the Church is from God. Under

[1] *Par.* xviii. 21. [2] *Par.* xxxiii. 70–72. [3] *Par.* xviii. 91–93.

the ideal Roman Empire there is individual liberty, each spirit flashing with its own light; there is also perfect unity, for one song goes up from the concordant spirits in the eagle. This unity of all men in the single State as well as in a united Church, which was one of the sovereign themes of Dante's life, he expresses again and again in similes of rare beauty. It is like the single heat coming from many embers; it is as the one odor that exhales from many flowers.

The further teaching of this sphere is that God's judgments are past finding out, for although Dante hungers from his great fast, not having found equity here on earth, he learns that mortal vision penetrates the eternal justice no further than the eye can peer into the sea. But as the little stork looks up to the mother bird and takes the food she gives, so he gratefully and with docility receives the judgments of God as just and righteous.

d. *Saturn*

Fastening his eyes again upon Beatrice he rises to the seventh splendor — the cold, serene Saturn, symbol of the fourth cardinal virtue, Temperance, whose benign influences continually check his impulsiveness. This lucent star, so high and far withdrawn from the world, is also typical of contemplation, and contains the radiant souls of the contemplative, who, withdrawing

from temporal affairs, gave themselves to such profound meditation of spiritual realities that thought changed to vision, and rapturous intuition beheld things not lawful to utter. Here no music is heard, and Beatrice dares not smile because the glory and sweetness of the truth, as revealed to devout and perfect contemplation, is intolerable to those proficient in the more active virtues. Here is disclosed the golden ladder up which thought can mount to higher heavens, so effulgent with descending splendors that Dante conceived that all the stars of heaven were there diffused. Being in the realm of deep brooding abstraction, his questions are naturally upon themes which engage the speculative thinkers in the cloister, and he learns that even the Seraph who has his eye most fixed on God cannot fathom the way of the eternal purpose in election; that the sword of heaven cuts not in haste, nor slow, except to mortal eye; and that the schoolman's passionate yearning to behold the Supreme Essence is impossible of satisfaction until spiritual vision is perfected.

Here also the concordant love of redeemed humanity and the ease with which they coöperate and organize, in contrast with the selfish individualism of earth, already taught in the preceding stars by the flaming circles, the cross, and the eagle, are represented by the lucent splendors upon the golden ladder becoming more beautiful with mutual rays.

IX

THE TWO HEAVENS OF REDEMPTIVE AND CELESTIAL MYSTERIES

As the celestial hosts like a whirlwind passed up the ladder Dante followed, for only by scaling the height of spiritual vision can he penetrate the mysteries of Paradise. This ladder marks the ascent to a new realm of thought and experience, and makes as clear a division in the poem as did the termination of earth's shadow. The four planetary heavens just traversed have revealed the way of life through the practice of the four cardinal virtues; but virtue leads to truth, he who doeth the will shall know of the doctrine, is Dante's continuous affirmation. Having walked in the way he can know the deep mysteries; therefore, in the two succeeding heavens are set forth the truths of redemption. In the eighth, that of the Fixed Stars, are made known those saving facts and forces which intimately touch human life: in the ninth, the crystalline, heavenly mysteries are revealed, such as God's way in creation and the nature of angels. In the Terrestrial Paradise the four cardinal virtues

had led him to Beatrice, the revealed truth, and now those nymphs, which in Heaven are stars, completely fill him with their light, and fit him to know the immutable truth of God's dealing with men in redemption. This is made known in the heaven of the Fixed Stars where he finds himself. Here for the first time he sees Christ in his glorious aspect as the incarnated redeemer of men: —

> "Saw I, above the myriad lamps
> A Sun that one and all of them enkindled,
> E'en as our own doth the supernal sights,
> And through the living light transparent shone
> The lucent substance so intensely clear
> Into my sight, that I sustained it not." [1]

This lucent substance was the humanity of Christ, and the truth of the Incarnation became so wondrously beautiful that his mind dilating issued out of itself and he beheld the smile of Beatrice. Thus nobly does the seer teach that it is after looking upon Christ that one may behold the full grace of truth, — even a moment's intuition of incarnate love affording him a new understanding of theology, — and that personal Christian experience leads into the richness of the Church's teaching. Later he will dispense with Theology and look more immediately upon Christ. His brows being too feeble to gaze upon the glories of the ascended Redeemer, he fixes his eyes upon Mary as the brightest star he can be-

[1] *Par.* xxiii. 28–33.

hold. After the assumption of the Virgin, St. Peter himself examines the poet concerning faith. Dante replies by giving the classic definition found in Hebrews xi. 1. To him faith was not the acceptance of an unproved dogma, but a settled spiritual assurance of the soul produced by the self-evidencing power of religious truth. The facts and teachings of the Scriptures he believed to be so permeated with divine light that they became self-affirming and able by their grace to work within the heart a sweet persuasion. As it is upon this faith that all our high hopes are founded it is their substance. This spiritual conviction is also the evidence of the reality of truth, as Anselm had stated before him.

The supreme truth in which faith rests is the Trinity. The doctrine in its self-revealing power "ofttimes sets the seal upon my mind. This is the beginning: this is the spark, that afterwards dilates to vivid flame, and like a star in heaven scintillates within me." [1] To St. James he declares that "Hope is the sure expectation of future glory, which divine grace produces and preceding merit." [2] No son of the Church militant has more than he, and being full he showers down the rain upon others.

When St. John appears, clothed in a glory that would turn night into day, there occurs a

[1] *Par.* xxiv. 145–147. [2] *Par.* xxv. 67–69.

most interesting episode. Dante gazes into this light that shone with the splendor of the sun, not to learn profound religious truths, but to ascertain whether John had carried his mortal body up to heaven. The dazzling brightness overcomes his sight: "Ah! how greatly was I disturbed in mind, when I turned to see Beatrice, at not being able to see her, although I was near her, and in the happy world!"[1] This seems to be a hint that curiosity, too intently peering into trivial tradition, blinds one for a moment to the glories of truth.

After having satisfied St. John that he loved God as the supreme good and as the chief object of love, both for what He was and for what He had done, he sees again the radiance of truth, as to his restored vision the eyes of Beatrice shine "resplendent more than a thousand miles."

In the midst of his inebriation, through gladness so ineffable that what he sees seems the "smile of the Universe," he does not for a moment forget for what purpose he is in Paradise. Many a saintly mystic had sought heavenly visions for the ecstatic raptures they gave; not so this austere Tuscan prophet. The vision wonderful has been given to him that he may make known the judgments of God, and this solemn commission is never for an instant absent from his mind. Willingly he cuts short his

[1] *Par.* xxv. 136–139.

ecstasies to hear St. Peter's terrible denunciation of degenerate Popes.

In the ninth heaven, which surrounds all the others and from which all movement descends to them, called in consequence the Primum Mobile, are revealed celestial mysteries. The truths disclosed are not those which enter into redemption, but those which constitute the joy of Paradise. Here are reiterated in clearest and most forcible language the dominant truths of the "Paradiso;" that nearness to God determines the degree of bliss; that movement is swift in proportion as love is burning; that spirits are exalted in so far as they see God; that "all have delight to the degree that their vision penetrates into the True in which every understanding is at rest;" and that merit determines the measure of this seeing.

But the intense interest in this highest of all the heavens centres in the marvelous symbol by which the Deity is represented. We have seen truth embodied in many significant forms in our ascent through the lower heavens, the knightly cross, the Roman Eagle, the golden ladder, now Dante with audacious thought will essay to image the Invisible Himself! What symbol can be appropriate to represent the Eternal, Incomprehensible Being who fills all things! Dante is too sagacious to make the mistake of seeking something infinitely large. With a rare sense of both beauty and truth he selects the infinitesi-

mally small! "I saw a Point which was raying out light so keen that the sight on which it blazes must needs close because of its intense keenness."[1] Ozanam, in his very suggestive book on "Dante and the Catholic Philosophy of the Thirteenth Century," has an illuminative passage on the wisdom of this symbol. "God reveals Himself as necessarily indivisible, and consequently incapable of having ascribed to Him the abstraction of quantity and quality by which we know creatures: indefinable, because every definition is an analysis which decomposes the subject defined: incomparable, because there are no terms to institute a comparison; so that one might say, giving the words an oblique meaning, that He is infinitely little, that He is nothing. But, on the other hand, that which is without extension moves without resistance; that which is not to be grasped cannot be contained; that which can be enclosed within no limitations, either actual or logical, is by that very fact limitless. The infinitely little is then also the infinitely great, and we may say in a certain way that it is all."[2] What better type is there of the Indivisible, Limitless, Incomprehensible, Irresistible, Soul and Centre of all, than a Point of intensest light?

[1] *Par.* xxviii. 16–18.

[2] *Dante and the Cath. Phil.* pp. 307, 308.

X

THE ULTIMATE BEATITUDE

Turning his vanquished eyes toward Beatrice, whose indescribable beauty only God, who above sees the full glory of the supreme doctrines, can comprehend, the two pass into the Empyrean. They have left behind the lower heavens where truth had been made known to them in symbols, and have come to the realm of pure light where they can behold reality. We shall see no more rhythmic dances, whirling saints, and spirits indistinguishable in their own splendor, but with clarified vision shall behold things as they are. Movement has given place to serene, eternal peace; the countenances of the elect are seen in their unveiled glory; no sound of earth's warrings, no wrath for human sin disturb their sacred, everlasting calm; all things are now known to be in God and God in all things, and the vision brings perfect joy and love.

As Dante enters the pure light, spaceless, timeless, "light intellectual full of love; love of true good full of joy; joy that transcends every sweetness,"[1] he is carried above his own power and

[1] *Par.* xxx. 40–43.

has his sight rekindled. The blinding flash that comes upon him, first vanquishing his eyes and then wonderfully increasing their wonted strength, probably indicates that he has passed from his normal condition into one of ecstasy; contemplation has given place to direct vision, and he sees what the redeemed behold by immediate intuition. That Dante even here is describing the heights of spiritual experience possible on earth is proved by his statement that Bernard "in this world, in contemplation, tasted of that peace."[1] Professor Tyndall gives a most interesting account of a conversation with Tennyson, in which the latter recounts his sensations in a similar state into which he could throw himself by thinking intently of his own name. "It was impossible to give anything which could be called a description of the state, for language seemed incompetent to touch it. It was an apparent isolation of the spirit from the body. Wishing apparently to impress upon me the reality of the phenomenon, he exclaimed, 'By God Almighty, there is no delusion in the matter! It is no nebulous ecstasy, but a state of transcendent wonder, associated with absolute clearness of mind.' Other persons with powerful imaginations have had, I believe, similar experiences. Walking out with a friend one evening, the poet Wordsworth approached a gate, and laying hold of its

[1] *Par.* xxxi. 110, 111.

bars, turned to his companion and said, 'My dear sir, to assure myself of the existence of my own body, I am sometimes obliged to grasp an object like this and shake it.' The condition here referred to appears to be similar to that 'union with God' which was described by Plotinus and Porphyry." [1] This phase of emotional experience is uncommon in the hot and mercenary rush of modern life; but in the days when great spirits sought solitude as the very audience chamber of God, and pondered long and deeply upon the mysteries of the Divine Being, it was considered a sure flight to the apprehension of the highest knowledge.

At first, being not yet perfected, Dante sees only foreshadowings of truth, but having drunk of the river of light he beholds the courts of heaven manifest in the form of a rose. The lake of light that formed the centre was circular, to teach the eternity of God, who is the source and end of all things, Himself without beginning or ending. Above the light, ranged round and round about on more than a thousand seats, were mirrored all who had returned on high. The figure of a rose served Dante's purpose well. It is a true type of a divine society whose centre is God and all of whose members are mutually dependent; Mary's emblem is the rose, and she, the Mystical Rose, is the symbol of the Church.

[1] *Alfred Lord Tennyson*, by his Son, vol. ii. pp. 473, 474.

Turning to question Beatrice he saw by his side an old man, robed like the people in glory. It is St. Bernard — the figure of mystic faith — for amid the highest truths and in the immediate presence of God, theology gives place to intuition. Revealed truth is no longer necessary, the redeemed see His face. After Bernard's prayer to the Virgin — which in lyrical beauty is unsurpassed in poetry — for the dissipation of every cloud of Dante's mortality that the Supreme Pleasure may be disclosed to him, the poet draws near to behold the beatific vision. "Bernard was beckoning to me, and was smiling, that I should look upward; but I was already, of my own accord, such as he wished; for my sight, becoming pure, was entering more and more through the radiance of the lofty Light which of itself is true. In its depths I saw that whatsoever is dispersed through the universe is there included, bound with love in one volume; substance and accidents and their modes, fused together, as it were, in such wise that that of which I speak is one simple Light. In that Light one becomes such that it is impossible he should ever consent to turn himself from it for other sight; because the Good which is the object of the will is all collected in it, and outside of it that is defective which is perfect there. Within the profound and clear subsistence of the lofty Light appeared to me three circles of three colors and of one di-

mension ; and one appeared reflected by the other, as Iris by Iris, and the third appeared fire which from the one and from the other is equally breathed forth. That circle which, thus conceived, appeared as a reflected light, being somewhile regarded by my eyes, seemed to me depicted within itself, of its own very color, by our effigy wherefore my sight was wholly set upon it. As is the geometer who wholly applies himself to measure the circle, and finds not by thinking that principle of which he is in need, such was I at that new sight. I wished to see how the image accorded with the circle, and how it has its place therein ; but my own wings were not for this, had it not been that my mind was smitten by a flash in which its wish came.

"To my high fantasy here power failed ; but now my desire and my will, like a wheel which evenly is moved, the love was turning which moves the Sun and other stars." [1]

"No uninspired hand," says Cardinal Manning, "has ever written thoughts so high in words so resplendent as the last stanza of the Divina Commedia. It was said of St. Thomas, 'Post Summam Thomae nihil restat nisi lumen gloriæ!' It may be said of Dante, 'Post Dantis Paradisum nihil restat nisi visio Dei.'" [2] "The perfect happiness of man," writes St. Thomas, "consists in a vision of the Divine Essence, for the intellect

[1] *Par.* xxxiii. 49 ff. [2] Quoted from Dean Plumptre.

cannot be perfectly happy until it reaches as far as the essence of the First Cause."[1] This is the eternal life which John declares consists in knowing God and Christ. "We shall be like Him," exclaims the apostle, "for we shall see Him even as He is."[2] Through the power of this vision Dante represents himself as having attained that perfection which is possible in this life, — the charity which in the thought of St. Thomas excludes from the heart what is contrary to charity, and all that hinders the entire concentration of the heart upon God.

[1] Rickaby, Aquinas Ethicus, p. 24. [2] 1 John 3 : 2.

XI

A STUDY OF SPIRITUAL VALUES

To criticise this vision of God, which in majesty of thought and sustained beauty of expression is unrivaled in all the literature of the spirit, and beyond which the wing of genius cannot fly, is an impertinence; but a reverential study of it is amply rewarding.

These last cantos of the "Paradiso" set forth a conception of Christian experience, possible even on earth, that is far more exalted than the one commonly held. The end to be sought in Dante's mind was something more than the satisfaction arising from right living, more than the paroxysmal and transient elevation of the emotions, more than the complete development of all those noble and beautiful elements of our nature which constitute Christian character. His thought swept beyond all these, even to a superhuman exaltation in which the soul, above the limitations of the flesh and escaping its bondage, should habitually dwell in the presence of eternal realities, illumined by the divine light, exultant with celestial joys, and consciously one with God Himself in purpose and in desire.

This is the mystical ideal of the religious life; but Dante held it in a thoroughly rational way, shunning the follies into which religious genius has so often fallen. Mysticism is the outgrowth of the effort of the mind to apprehend the Divine Essence, and to enjoy the blessedness of actual communion with the Most High. It differs from the ordinary religious feeling only in its intensity. Its chief danger is that this vivid consciousness of God will overwhelm the soul's sense of its own personality, and lead it to seek a union with the Highest which shall be an absorption, a fusion, of the individual in Him. Dante in the blaze of the Light Eternal never for a moment suffers a sense of diminished individuality, or loses sight of his rational and structural thought that the end to be sought in all visions and raptures is ethical harmony — not identity — of his life with God. He teaches that the way to the Throne is walking under the perfect light of the seven stars, mounting from virtue to virtue, and from truth to truth, until into the soul, made capacious and pure by thought and achievement, the light of the glory of God shall come.

There is a wealth of religious significance in the fact, not often noted, that when Dante looked deep into the lofty light and saw the symbol of the Trinity, there appeared within the circle of reflected light, representing the Son, our effigy,

which wholly engrossed his attention. The final revelation, the ultimate truth, out of which grows the supreme beatitude, is that in God there is the eternally human. That in the Infinite there is the prototype of mankind, that humanity is rooted and grounded in the divine, and that the Highest is in a real sense like us; this is the truth of truths, primal and coronal in all religious thinking. It is the heart of the Christian revelation. The humanity which was in Christ is a disclosure of what is forever in God; what Jesus was on Calvary in the compassion of His heart, the Father upon His Throne is eternally. The proclamation of the humanity of God conquered the cold abstractions of Greek philosophy, and satisfied the starving heart of Rome. The cross is the power of God unto salvation because it is the embodiment of this truth. This divine sympathy and love, based upon community of nature, is Christianity's noblest thought and greatest consolation. Browning well shows how it is at the heart of all religion: —

"'T is the weakness in strength that I cry for; my flesh that I seek
In the God-head! I seek and I find it, O Saul! it shall be,
A face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me
Thou shalt love and be loved by forever; A Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new Life to thee! See the Christ stand." [1]

It is perfectly characteristic of Dante that,

[1] Saul.

having beheld this transcendent truth, he should press on in the true spirit of the schoolmen to understand how Christ's humanity could coincide with His divinity.

One cannot help noting again how Christ was to Dante the second person of the Trinity, a function, a metaphysical problem, rather than Immanuel, a Saviour, a friend, to know whom is life eternal. Contrast Dante's thought of Heaven with that of a modern theologian.

"From the lowly manger to the loftiest heights of adoration, He is still to me the personal man, distinct forever from the personal God, the one man in whom dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead bodily. The vision of his face is the only vision I ever expect to have of God, as Philip saw in Him the Father. But that vision I confidently look forward to. I shall see Him, the fairest among ten thousand, the first born of every creature, the Lord of men and angels, the eternal High Priest of my redemption, who bore my sins and conquered death. And I think, I think, that were I to see Him only once, the gladness of my heart would wake an everlasting song!"

When Dante penned these closing cantos of his immortal work he was nearing the end of life. He had lived deeply, both in experience and in thought. He had gone into the depths of the world's woe, and found that behind all

its horrors and fierce penalties were divine justice and love. He had felt within himself the weight and the burnings of disciplinary punishments, and doubtless he firmly believed them to be the instruments of the Supreme Benignity. In his growing life he had passed from truth to truth, and when he wrote the last verses, radiant with celestial light and throbbing with unspeakable joy, he unquestionably set down, not the dogmas of his day, but the living faith of his own heart and the assured conviction of his own mind. Wherever he had gone in his strange pilgrimage, he had learned that he was living in God's universe, and when he came to stand face to face with the Final Mystery, he found that it was a mystery of light, and not of darkness. His experience had given him an unalterable conviction that, when the mind follows thought to the end, it will rest with perfect peace in knowable Truth, even as a bird in its nest; he believed that the soul's "concreate and perpetual thirst" for God would be satisfied by drinking of the never failing River of Life; and that the scourged and lacerated heart, when it pressed through to the Source of all things, would find itself in the healing presence of Compassionate Love. This vision glorious was to him the splendor of certain truth. It was an experience born of his own life, and he felt that he was a representative of humanity.

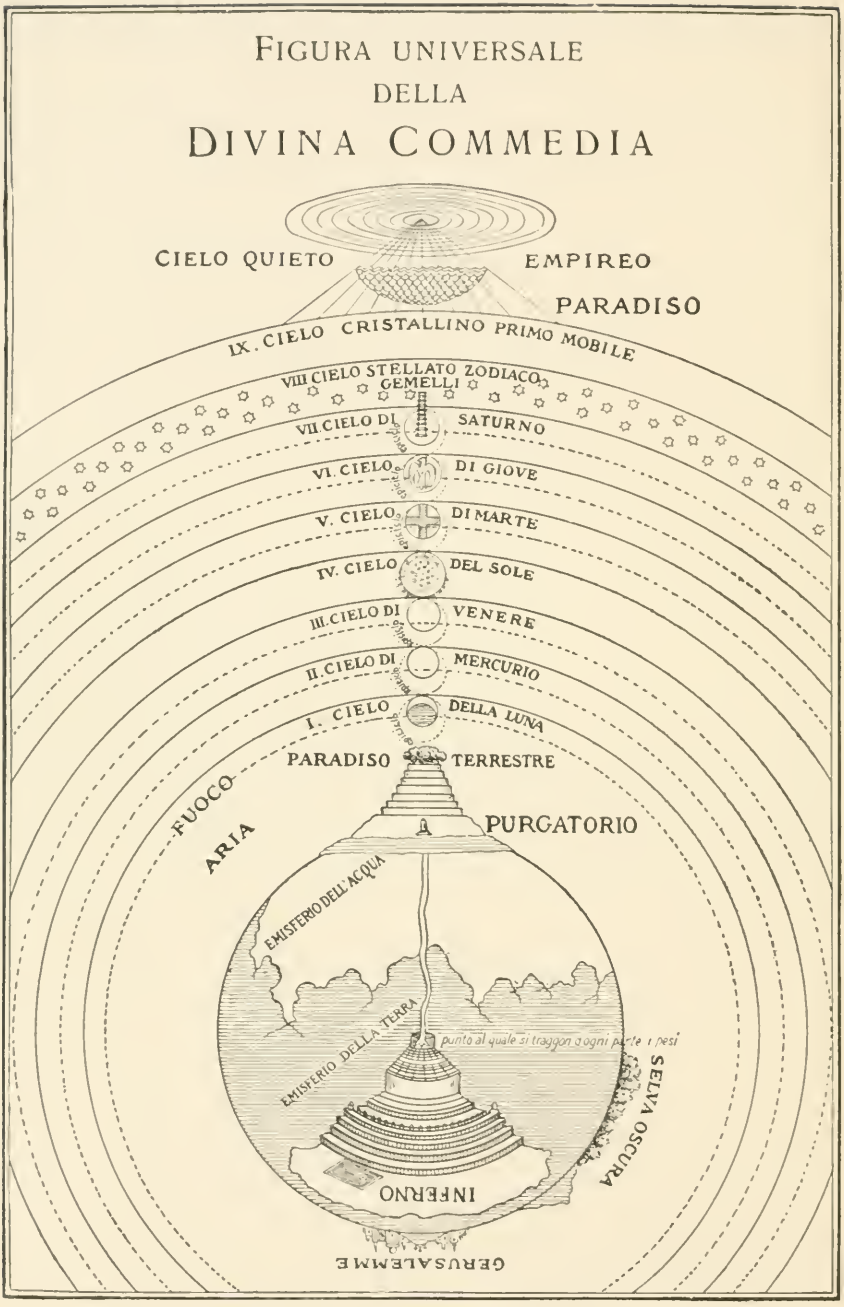
Many also of the most distinguished and illuminating thinkers of the generation just passing away have followed eagerly their thought to the Ultimate Mystery, and have found only the horror of utter darkness. They have recognized the spirit's "concreate and perpetual thirst," and in the chill of the great void they have reared an altar to the Unknown. This very denial of the Primal Light is a most eloquent witness to its existence.[1] Herbert Spencer would slake this thirst by cherishing a feeling of awe and reverence in the presence of the Encompassing Darkness. Frederic Harrison, just as truly an agnostic, vigorously denies that the soul's religious instinct can be satisfied by prostrating itself before the Unknown ; it craves the Known, and so Humanity is chosen as the fittest object of worship. Matthew Arnold finds a Tendency working for righteousness ; with this tendency indwelling in us and others we must ally ourselves. But what is Spencer's Unknown but the Infinite and Eternal Father, the Abyss of Being, out of whom all things have proceeded? And what is Frederic Harrison's craving for the Known in humanity but a vague reaching out for God manifest in the flesh? And what is Matthew Arnold's Tendency but the Spirit working out the will of the Father? Each has laid hold of a partial truth, each ex-

[1] *The Witness of Denial.* V. D. Scudder.

presses one phase of humanity's ceaseless hunger for God. He who would represent humanity as a whole in its quest for truth must find the Triune God, the Infinite, the Known, the Indwelling. Thus do the three schools of modern Agnosticism bear most forcible testimony to the craving of mankind for that Fountain of Eternal Light which Dante found. We are surely making no reckless leap of credulity when we assume that this profoundest yearning which Nature has created in her children, as she has moulded them during countless ages, she will fulfill, even as she has satisfied all the other appetites she has made, and that the goal of life is the Beautiful Vision and not the gulf of darkness. Dante's vision splendid will not fade into the light of common day, because —

> "There is a light above, which visible
> Makes the Creator unto every creature,
> Who only in beholding Him has peace."

APPENDIX



THE SCHEME OF DANTE'S UNIVERSE

From "La materia della Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri dichiarata in VI. tavole. Dal Duca Michelangelo Caetani di Sermoneta."

APPENDIX

THE TOPOGRAPHY OF DANTE'S SPIRITUAL WORLD

Dante did not follow the schoolmen in his conception of the form and location of the three kingdoms of the eternal world, but constructed a topography of his own. He maintained that the earth is round, having a hemisphere of land, in the centre of which stands Jerusalem. The other hemisphere originally contained land; but when Lucifer, hurled from Heaven, was about to fall upon it, the soil "veiled itself with the sea" and came to the other side of the globe, making a hemisphere of land and a hemisphere of water.

The interior of the earth also retreated before the descending Lucifer, leaving a vast conical-shaped cavity, which extended from the centre of the globe to the surface of the inhabited hemisphere. The void which evil made in the world is the abode of lost souls, and is divided into nine circles, of which the seventh is subdivided into three smaller circles, the eighth into ten ditches, and the ninth into four belts. At the centre of the earth, and thus at the point farthest from God, is Lucifer, with his head and body in one hemisphere, and his legs in the other, so that when Virgil and Dante turned upon his haunch, they passed the centre of gravity and emerged from one hemisphere into the other.

According to Dante's thought, the soul naturally mounts upward to God; but sin is a weight, dragging the sinner downward toward Satan. Consequently he represents the lighter transgressions as receiving retribution in the upper

circles, and the more offensive deeper down ; the very worst of all, treachery, being punished by Satan himself, at the bottom of the Pit.

The soil, displaced by the presence of Lucifer, rushed upward into the hemisphere of water, forming a mountain, a truncated cone in shape, and antipodal to Jerusalem. It has three grand divisions: Ante-Purgatory, a place of expiation only; Purgatory proper, divided into seven ledges, upon each of which one of the seven mortal sins — ranged according to their offensiveness to God, the worst, pride, being on the first ledge — is both expiated and purged away; and the Terrestrial Paradise, the original Garden of Eden, situated on the summit of the mountain, the place where the memory is purified, and the nature crippled by sin is restored to its primal energy. Here Dante meets Beatrice, and begins his upward flight.

The Ptolemaic system of astronomy considered the immovable centre of the universe to be the earth. Encircling it is the sphere of air, which lies within the sphere of fire. Beyond these are seven heavens, in each of which moved one of the seven planets, the order being the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Above these is the heaven of the Fixed Stars, and encompassing all is the Primum Mobile, the source of all motion.

It was the common belief of the time that the nine heavens were ruled by the nine orders of angels; but Dante went further, and affirmed that each heaven was under the care of one rank of celestial intelligences. The Moon he assigned to the Angels; Mercury to the Arch-angels; Venus to the Principalities; the Sun to the Powers; Mars to the Virtues; Jupiter to the Dominions; Saturn to the Thrones; the Fixed Stars to the Cherubim; and the Primum Mobile to the Seraphim. The Angelic Hierarchy look continually upon the face of God; the nearer they are to Him the clearer their vision, and the depth of their insight determines the swiftness of their motion and the rapture of their love. The

energy they receive from God they transmit to the heaven over which they preside. The Seraphim, being nearest the Source of Life and Light, fly with swiftest movement, and therefore communicate most vigorous motion to the Primum Mobile, each interior sphere revolving more slowly than the one above it, the heaven of the Moon moving the slowest of all. The heavens stream down upon the earth their divine influences, powerfully affecting material things, and the dispositions and destiny of men.

Surrounding all the heavens is the Empyrean, the timeless, motionless abode of God, the Angels, and the Redeemed. The spirits who meet Dante in the different heavens do so to reveal their degree of blessedness, and to teach him important truths ; their permanent dwelling place is above the revolving spheres.

"My Soul, an alien here, hath flown to nobler wars." — DANTE.

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