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DARIUS THE MEDE

It is about six years since my first volume of *Studies in the Book of Daniel* was published; and now that the second volume is about to appear, it seems like an opportune time to reply to some of the criticisms of the reviewers of the first. The most elaborate of the criticisms was one by Professor Kemper Fullerton of the Oberlin Graduate School of Theology which appeared in the Bulletin of my alma mater, the Western Theological Seminary, at Allegheny, Pa., for October 1918. Had Professor Fullerton's criticism been confined to myself, I would have forever held my peace; but inasmuch as I am merely the occasion for a violent onslaught on the veracity of the book of Daniel, I shall be excused for referring at length to his strictures. It is high praise, though intended as blame, to be spoken of by him as a "bringer-up-to-date" of the work of such men as Hengstenberg, Keil, Pusey and Green, with whom I am classed as a belated example of the same anti-critical animus and unscientific method.

And, first, let me say, that I do not deem it a reproach to have produced "a typical example of the harmonistic method," which is one of the most serious charges brought against me by Professor Fullerton; but that I fail to see that I have used this method as distinct from the "historical" method, whatever that means. Words break no bones, it may be; but since Professor Fullerton evidently aims to put me in the wrong at the very start and, by necessary implication, all through my studies, by affirming that in my method I am harmonistic as distinct from historical, it is well to pause just here in order to come to an understanding

DANTE SIX HUNDRED YEARS AGO AND NOW

The sympathetic commemoration of Dante on the six hundredth anniversary of his death, 1921, is to be explained chiefly by the *Divina Commedia* of which Dante was the author. Although it is a difficult work to read—as mountains are usually difficult to climb,—it is perhaps more widely read than any other book of its century or, for that matter, of the group of centuries of which Dante's age was the centre. And of the literary works of that group of centuries it is the only serious one which is read by the general reader. As is the case with few other great works of the pen, its perusal, if persisted in, easily begets a passion for its author. The greatness of the poem depends not upon any influence it had in starting new conceptions. It fixed no new belief. Its value lies in the work itself,—its contents and its constructive art. If the *Divina Commedia* stood alone, dissociated from the events of Dante's career, it would offer a spectacle as imposing as an obelisk rising alone in the desert. However, elements in Dante's biography impart romance to Dante's composition, although they are not necessary to give immortality to the poet's name. The same is true also in the case of Milton, but not of Homer or Shakespeare. Milton's blindness and his mental struggles in the period of the Commonwealth enhance the interest of his poetic and prose works. The disappointments of Dante's political career and his exile, the figure of Beatrice and Dante's theory of government, set forth at a time of great social unrest, offer an attractive setting for his poem as they are an indispensable aid to the understanding of it.

For the Italian people Dante means more than Shakespeare means for the English-speaking world. Dante is the representative of the Italian spirit. He is easily one of the foremost champions of political freedom. Till these modern times, Italy had no one—unless it be pope Julius II—who was quite so much a national patriot. Arnold of Brescia

had preceded him as an ecclesiastical reformer and Dante did not revive Arnold's theory of apostolic poverty for the clergy. Cola da Rienzo came a generation after him and Dante did not advocate the restoration of the old Roman republic. And yet, Dante was preëminently a patriot through his love for Florence, his advocacy of the independence of the civil sphere and the freedom with which he dealt with all characters high and low, spiritual and secular. Moreover, Dante was the creator of the Italian language. He did not do for it what Luther through his New Testament did for the German language, permanently fixing its idiom and style. Dante's Italian is arduous reading today. Dante's service to his native tongue was chiefly another. He broke the monopoly of the Latin language as a vehicle of thought. As for Shakespeare, we do not think of him as a champion of freedom or place him among the eminent patriots though he was certainly to the full an Englishman and a lover of his country. Nor is the English language under debt to him in the degree the Italian is under debt to Dante, master of the English tongue though Shakespeare be and as no other has been. English in Shakespeare's time was in use by a coterie of contemporary English writers and Wyclif's English Bible had preceded them by several centuries.

As the precursor of a new age, Dante also had a distinction which does not belong to the English poet. The Florentine opened the door into the period of the Renaissance. With Petrarch and Boccaccio, his juniors in years and genius, he revived the study of mankind and opened the way to the era of intellectual freedom. Passing outside the limits of ecclesiastical biography and the Legends of the Saints, he called forth the figures of classical mythology and reopened the pages of the history of the nations of antiquity. Irrespective of the offices they held, he dealt freely with man as man, cleric and layman, pontiff and prince, man and woman, monk and nun. On the other hand, as an independent thinker Dante is beneath Shakespeare in eminence. Dante was the mouthpiece of his age and its institutions.

To be adequately understood he must be read with the aid of a manual of mediaeval theology as a book of constant reference. Shakespeare is understood by all men, men who know the movements of the human heart. The opinions he sets forth he got from no book. Dante no less than Shakespeare belongs to all the ages. He too went beyond what was provincial and of his time. He walked in the paths of his own age, but he saw also into the sphere of the eternal ages into which sooner or later all men must enter. Shakespeare was concerned with human passions and ambitions, good deeds and bad deeds as issuing in the laughter, joys and satisfactions or the disappointments, calamities and remorse of the present time. Dante went beyond "the bourne from which no traveller returns" and explored the regions of endless destiny, retribution and saintliness. The dramas of the one and the panorama painted by the other alike belong to all the generations.

Of Dante's parental home and early training our knowledge is scant. Nor does the little we know give any explanation of the poet's later career. His father died when he was young. The teacher of his youth whose name he records, Brunetto Latini, Dante found in hell—a strange anomaly, seeming to indicate something very stern, if not abnormal in the poet's spiritual processes. The pupil recognized Brunetto behind "his parched looks, smirched with fire." Dante pursued studies at Italian universities and was in Paris and may even have visited Oxford. At nine he saw Beatrice, several months his junior. After Beatrice's death he married. That was in 1292 when he was twenty-five. To his wife and children there seem to be no allusions in his great poem.

Public life had much attraction for Dante. He entered into the violent political discussions which at that time were rending his native city, Florence. As things went, Florence, like the Italian cities further north, was captivated by theories of democracy. The municipality had excluded the grandees from public position and confined the privilege

of holding office to members of the seven crafts or avocations one of which, the medical craft, Dante joined. He was elected to municipal office and seems to have represented his city on several occasions abroad, as notably in an embassy to the court of Boniface VIII. There is every reason to believe that he was a fiery and uncompromising partisan. In the deadly feud which broke out in Florence between families and parties, Dante espoused the cause of the losing faction and was sent into exile, with the added sentence that in case he dared to reënter Florence, he should be burnt alive. The feeling against him must have been very bitter, for in 1311 and again in 1315 the decree of exile was repeated and, twenty years after his death, he was spoken of in the Florentine records as a rebel and an exile.

Never again after 1301, did Dante walk the streets of his native city. For twenty years he wandered to and fro like a bark, as he said, "without rudder and sails" and "going up and down other men's stairs." He was much in Verona until he found a last refuge in Ravenna where his dust reposes to this day,—still an exile from Florence. Its great poet Florence banished, its great preacher, Savonarola, it burnt.

Perpetual honors awaited the poet's memory. A few years after his death commentaries began to be written on his chief literary production. In 1373 Florence created a professorship for its study, with Boccaccio as its first incumbent. Within a century of the poet's death Bologna, Venice and Pisa had also dedicated chairs to the same study.

The two decisive events in Dante's career were his meeting with Beatrice and his exile from Florence. The meeting with Beatrice awakened within him a quenchless spiritual passion. Dante's forced absence from his beloved city, like Milton's blindness, confirmed him in profound meditations upon the theory and vicissitudes of human government and the appointments of man's lasting destiny. If we follow Scartazzini, he did not take up his poem till 1313.

The age in which Dante lived was the watershed between

the universal acceptance of the mediaeval theological system and the modern method of thought, the connecting link between the time when theology, based largely upon processes of reasoning, was the supreme theme of interest and the time when men began to open their eyes to the wonders of the visible world and study with absorbing interest the activities of man in all fields.

In the domain of theology there seemed to be nothing left to be said. The future world had been mapped out with exactness and classes assigned with confidence, each to its final abode. The schedule of sacramental grace and sacramental acts had been fixed. Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventura, the former the chief master of the Scholastic speculation, died in 1274. Dante was then in his tenth year. There seem to be traces of Duns Scotus' determinism in the *Divina Commedia*. That subtle doctor was a contemporary with the poet, but is not mentioned by him.

In the realm of the papacy great changes had come during Dante's lifetime. Older than the Schoolmen were the popes and older than Christian theology was the papacy. The Apostolic See had fallen from the high estate it had reached under Innocent III (1198-1216) and the prestige it had won through the defeat of the House of the Hohenstauffen was lost. Frederick Barbarossa had been humiliated by Alexander III; Frederick II died in shame leaving Innocent IV the victor. Conradin, the last of the house, had been executed on the gallows in 1268, three years after Dante's birth. But the stars had begun to fight against the papacy. Coelestine V abdicated the papal office in 1294 after having in vain tried for a few months to administer it. His successor, Boniface VIII, a reminiscence of great popes, dragged it into disgrace by his craft and nepotism and left Philip IV, his antagonist, the victor. Dante not only lived through these scenes but saw the papal residence removed to the banks of the Rhone and was contemporary with the first two of the Avignon popes.

In the third realm, the realm of civil society, conditions

were most unsettled. Dante was more than actor in the government of his city. He dwelt upon the theory of civil government in his treatise *On Monarchy* which was burnt by John XXII and remains on the papal index to this day. Here, with arguments, Dante contended for the independence of the imperial prerogative as emperors in the preceding century had contended for it with the sword. The corruption prevailing in the church he traced to the intrusion of the papal power into the civil domain and, with unheard of courage, he dared to set aside the reputed gift which Constantine made of the government of Rome to Sylvester and his successors. In Milton's translation his famous words run

Ah! Constantine, of how much ill was cause
Not thy conversion but those rich domains
That the first wealthy pope received of thee.

And again he set forth his views in the lines

The Church of Rome
Mixing two governments that ill assort
Hath missed her footing, fallen into mire
And, there, herself and burden much defiled.

Of the two leading experiences in Dante's life the more important was the meeting with Beatrice. Seldom, perhaps, has mortal exercised upon fellow mortal so complete and benign an influence as the Florentine maiden exercised upon the poet. "The ideal passion," says Charles Eliot Norton "begotten at their first meeting, lasted from Dante's boyhood to his death, keeping his heart fresh, in spite of the scorchings of disappointment, with the springs of perpetual solace." Beatrice's personality continues to be a subject of discussion. Was she a real being or a symbolic creation of Dante's brain? The former view is taken by almost all Dante students. The immediate and ultimate meaning of Beatrice's entrance into the sphere of Dante's thoughts the German poet Uhland has set forth in a graceful poem whose opening lines run:

Was it the gate of Florence city
 Or gate of heaven itself
 Where the joyous company met
 On that clearest of Italian mornings?

The poet continues

Dante, there, a boy of nine
 Stood beneath a laurel tree
 Gazing upon purest face of maiden
 In whom at once he saw his angel.

Dante saw Beatrice a second time and then no more on earth. No words passed between them here below. She died a married woman, 1290.

In his work, *The New Life* (*vita nuova*) the poet described their meeting as children: "It was given to me" he wrote "to behold the very wonderful vision which I saw, things which determined me that I would say nothing more of this blessed one until such time as I could discourse of her more worthily. And to this end I exert myself all I can, as she well knoweth, whereof if it be His will through whom is the life of all things, that my life continue a few years longer, it is my hope to write concerning her what hath not before been written of woman and then to behold her." This purpose Dante accomplished in the *Divina Commedia*.

After Beatrice's death, Dante turned to the study of philosophy, giving himself up to the guidance of reason—an experience he set forth somewhat dimly in his treatise, *The Banquet* (*il convito*). The third period of Dante's intellectual and spiritual life began with what Dante scholars are accustomed to call Dante's conversion, when the poet again took the hand of faith and followed divine revelation.

Under the form of a pilgrimage among the spirits of the future world the *Divina Commedia* sets forth the philosophy and meaning of human life here below. As a body of religious truth it adds nothing to the theological system constructed by the Schoolmen. It is a faithful mirror of their teachings. On the other hand, its method differs from the method of the mediaeval theologians. It is not a

body of speculation confirmed by reasoning processes. It follows the accepted theology and upon that basis gives in dramatic form a series of actual experiences in which the final destinies of single men are observed and the operation of God's justice and mercy in the eternal assignments to individuals justified and all applied as a warning to the godless and an encouragement to the good in this present state of existence.

The work is not a tragedy for tragedy ends with disappointment and disaster. Nor is it a comedy in which the sportive element has play. Following the words of which *commedia* is composed, it is a village song, a popular representation as Dante himself described it. In the work itself, the poet calls it a "sacred poem" (*Parad.* 25: 1). Not till the Venice edition of 1555 was it entitled "the Divine Comedy." However, three quarters of a century before, the title "divine" had been coupled with the poet's name. With only two Christian mortals before his time had the title been joined,—St. John who most fully lays stress in his Gospel on Christ's deity and Gregory of Nazianzum whose addresses on the Trinity delivered at Constantinople were so famous.

The Divine Comedy describes the three realms of damnation, discipline and bliss into which according to the cosmography of the Schoolmen the future world is divided. The realms of damnation and bliss have no ending: the realm of discipline will some day be emptied and pass away. Thirty-three cantos are allotted to each of the three domains, the first canto being an introduction to all that follows.

For the poet, his production was not an intellectual recreation. It was a solemn enterprise. It was not a body of speculation: it was an experience of things seen and felt. His was a moral aim, to induce men to fall in with the appointments of God and, while the light of the stars is given here, to walk in the glow of the effulgence which streams from the throne of God. In a letter written to Can Grande the poet himself set forth as its object to

"withdraw from the state of sinning those who live in the present life and to guide them to the state of peace and bliss." In a sense, it was a missionary effort and, in making it, the poet moved among the hosts of demortalized spirits of all ages, Pagan as well as Christian, Hebrew as well as contemporary Italians, devils as well as saints. Event after event of history passed before him from the siege of old Troy to the battle of Tagliacozzo which witnessed the fall of the last of the Hohenstauffen.

In entering upon his journey, Dante, with the aid of Beatrice, secured the guidance of Virgil whose Aeneid the poet said he knew by heart,—the Virgil who was the representative during the Middle Ages of enlightened human reason and who had foreseen the coming of a Messiah. "I thy guide," the Mantuan poet promised,

Will lead thee hence through an eternal space
Where thou shalt hear despairing shrieks and see
A second death and those next view, who dwell
Content in fire, for that they hope to come
Whene'er the time may be, among the blest.

Further than the realm of purgatory Virgil could not go, "debarred forever as a rebel from heaven."

The place from which Dante represents himself as starting was a dark forest.

In the midst of this our mortal life
I found me in a gloomy wood, astray,
Gone from the path direct..

This forest, the recollection of which filled him "with dismay not far from death" stands for the poet's period of doubt, when renouncing faith, he was under the control of philosophic speculation. Viewing with fear "the straits that none hath passed and live" and as "one escaped from sea to shore," he was attempting to "ascend" when he was met by a panther, richly striped, a lion hunger-mad, and a lean she-wolf, the three beasts conjoined by Jeremiah v. 6. As he was about to be forced back by them, Dante's eye caught sight of the shade of Virgil to whom, weeping, he cried for help.

So, in company, the two poets proceeded downwards through the domain to which Micah's expression might be applied the domain "of doleful lamentation" or Job's words, "the land of darkness as darkness itself." Dante who employs neither of these expressions speaks of it as the realm of the "truly dead" and as the "doleful kingdom" (*doloroso regno*). As they moved on, they kept turning to the left as later in the sphere of purgatory they kept constantly turning to the right.

Could any writing be conceived more terrifying than the inscription written over the gateway of hell:

Through me you pass into the city of woe
Through me you pass into eternal pain
Through me among the people lost for aye
All hope abandon ye who enter here.¹

Dante's hell is funnel-shaped, growing smaller in circumference as it descends from the earth's surface to its centre. The further hemisphere of the earth the poet conceived of as having covered itself with water when Lucifer was plunged down from heaven, the earth trying to hide her shame. A part of the land in this attempt shrank back and, pushing up, formed Mount Purgatory.

The infernal cavity consists of nine circles, some of them subdivided into numerous wards. The sufferings endured by the inmates increase with the descent. Here are crags and steep declivities. Here are Charon and Minos, the Minotaur and Geryon and Lucifer. Here are horned devils with scourges and serpents with venomous sting. Lagoons of mire, ponds of boiling pitch and pools of blood interrupt the solid pavement. Here arise fetid exhalations, and here are scorching plains and fires that never go out. Storms of hail beat, tempests of wind and hurricanes of flame. The denizens—multitudes upon multitudes in numbers such as gathered at Rome in the Jubilee Year of 1300 appointed by Boniface VIII—are always conscious and

¹ *Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrante*. The quotations are usually from Carey's translation; otherwise from J. A. Carlyle's prose version.

never masters of themselves. An unchangeable destiny holds them. Their laments and agonizing wails fill the dismal regions. Tears of pain coursing down their cheeks turn to blood or ice. Hatred and merciless cruelty are in ceaseless action. No ray of light enters. No word of hope, no whisper of peace, interrupt the constant exercise of malignity, agony and despair.

On this side of Acheron the poets found those whom heaven could not receive and lowest hell was unwilling to accept,—the cowards, among them Coelestine V who in abdicating the papal office had made the great refusal (*che fece per viltate il grand refuto*). They are drawn hither and thither by a flag ever flapping and whirling about and are stung

By wasps and hornets which bedewed their cheeks
With blood that mixed with tears dropped to their feet.

An almost endless train they were, even more than the whole number the poet thought it possible for death to have despoiled.

Ferried by Charon over the stream beyond which is hell proper, Dante is appalled by the wild shriek of the boatman announcing to the wicked spirits that they must abandon all hope of ever looking upon the sky and light again. Charon's boat is always full. In the first region, limbo, the people of the Old Dispensation and John the Baptist were detained till Christ's descent into hades during the time immediately after his burial. Some of the Apocryphal Gospels of the fourth century revelled in the accounts of what occurred in hades, when Christ appeared as deliverer. Here also in limbo the entire Pagan world and all unbaptized children dying in infancy are kept forever. To this otherwise universal rule the mediaeval view made a single exception, the good emperor Trajan. This fortunate mortal had been prayed out of purgatory by pope Gregory the Great. Seven centuries later Wyclif, not doubting the tradition, used the decree of predestination as the explanation of Trajan's salvation. Dante makes a second exception,

exempting Cato as a champion of liberty from hell and putting him in the entrance of purgatory.

It is because they "had not served God aright" Pagan poets and philosophers were remanded to hell

Only so far afflicted that we live
Desiring without hope.

Among those whom Dante recognized were Aristotle, Socrates and Plato, Seneca and Galen. Homer also was there "the most cherished of the nine" whose epic Dante could not read for, like Petrarch, he knew no Greek. As for the unbaptized children, they suffer no conscious pain, though they are deprived through unending years of the sight of God. This view of Augustine, adopted by Thomas Aquinas, was carried down into the Protestant churches where it was held with some modifications till the nineteenth century. Isaac Watts, to escape the view of infant damnation, argued that children not born of Christian parents and dying unbaptized pass entirely out of existence. In New England the noted poem of Michael Wigglesworth reaffirmed, as did Jonathan Edwards, that some children who have had no opportunity to hear the Gospel are forever lost. It may be that the dogmatic statement of the Westminster Confession, as revised in 1902, goes too far when it declares that "all children" dying in infancy are saved. Perhaps it was to quiet some lurking doubts that in the highest heaven Dante was reminded by St. Bernard that

without baptismal rites
In Christ accomplished, innocence herself
Must linger down below.

The succeeding eight circles of hell Dante found "full of spirits accursed," each occupied by sinners of a kind. The lustful, epicures, the prodigal and avaricious, and the wilfully unconcerned are placed in the second, third, fourth and fifth circles. To lower hell, the realm of Dis or Lucifer belong those who sin monstrously against their neighbors and God,—blasphemers, tyrants, sorcerers, counterfeiters, makers of strife, traitors and also suicides. And in the deepest circle Lucifer, the arch-traitor himself.

The punishments are accordant with the sins committed. The lustful are swept about in total darkness by stormy blasts, their lusts burning and never satisfied.

The infernal hurricane that never rests
Hurtles the spirits onward in their rapine
Whirling them round and smiting them, it molests them.
It hither, thither, upward, downward, drives them.

Among those whom Dante recognized were voluptuous women of the ancient world, Semiramis, Cleopatra and Helen of Troy and his contemporary Francesca da Rimini, who married to a deformed prince, committed adultery with his brother. Her "sad fate moved the poet to tears and pity." Epicures lie on the ground, pelted with streams of hail and foul water and bitten by Cerberus. The haughty with loud howlings incessantly roll rocks with their chests and butting one against the other, the rocks fall back and the process is gone over again and again. In this realm Dante recognized cardinals and popes.

The fifth circle contains the unconcerned, besmirched with mire and beating each other in rage, not only with their hands, and cutting each other piecemeal with their teeth. Or, else submerged beneath the lagoon their existence is revealed only by the moans which gurgle forth out of the thick ooze.

And I, who stood intent upon beholding,
Saw people mud-besprent in that lagoon
All of them naked and with angered look.
They smote each other not alone with hands
But with the head and with the breast and feet,
Tearing each other piecemeal with their teeth.

Arrived at the awful realm of Dis and getting access through its mighty gates, the poets found the company of the heretics interned in red hot tombs, around which flames continually play, their forms unseen but their moans emerging without stop. To their other torment is added the pain of knowing future events without knowing anything about present happenings. Here are the blasphemers who lie supine in a plain of burning sand while sparks of flame,

falling like flakes of snow on the Alps, slowly drop upon their naked bodies. Those given to flattery are immersed in ordure and gibber in low melancholy tones,

One with his head so grimed, 'twere hard to deem
If he were clerk or layman.

Those who rifled sacristies have serpents biting at their throat. Sorcerers and diviners with their heads turned about walk to and fro, not knowing where they go. Counterfeiters and those guilty of barratry suffer dropsy and quenchless thirst and are encased in pitch. Simonists, selling religious place and privilege for gold, are sunk with their heads downwards in holes while the soles of their protruding feet are scorched with perpetual flames. To their other agony is added the sting of arrows shot by centaurs. Among this class of malefactors Dante recognized Boniface VIII. No less than nine times again does the *Divina Commedia* return to this pontiff who entered upon the papacy "like a fox and reigned like a lion," heaping bitterest reproof upon him for his abuse of his high office which he confesses:

Heaven, as thou knowest, I have no power to shut
And open. And the keys are twain
The which my predecessor meanly prized.

What more fearful could be imagined than the fate of the hypocrites who wear leaden mantles and metallic hoods coming down over their faces like the hoods worn by some of the monks of Cologne,—mantles and hoods faced with dazzling gold! As the poet watched them moving about "with steps exceeding slow, weeping and in their aspect tired and overcome" he compared their vestments to the mantles with which Frederick II was reported to have clothed traitors before they were burnt, and thought the latter but as straw compared to the weighty cloaks worn in hell.

The ninth and lowest circle of the Inferno, enclosed around with giants "half their length uprearing and terrible," holds traitors who have betrayed their prince or

rebelled in heaven against God. As the poets were about to enter its wards, a song was heard,—the first they had heard,—a parody of the old Christian hymn of *Fortunatus* and the dark region resounded with its malice:

The banners of the king of hell go forth.

The giants are immersed in part entire in Cocytus frozen to its depth. Further down, Lucifer himself was seen standing, interned up to his loins in ice and munching in his three-fold maw Judas, Brutus and Cassius while the tears of these three most depraved traitors turned to ice on their cheeks. What a different picture of Brutus from Shakespeare's Brutus, "the noblest Roman of them all!"

Lucifer, who "scowled upon his Maker" as seen by Dante, was "as hideous now as he once was beautiful." The poet's spirit of all evil and author of our misery is stolid ugliness mixed with beastly cruelty from which the poet shrank with loathing and dread. Milton's Satan is an altogether different creation. His untamed ambition and unrepentant defiance of heaven, as Milton depicts him, fairly awaken admiration as he cries

Better to rule in hell than reign in heaven.

One must be on his guard lest he shout bravo at determination which heaven's sentence cannot break.

If we compare the religious poet of Italy and the chief English religious poet, it will be found that both in their method of treatment and in the impression their treatments leave, they have little in common. In his *Paradise Lost* Milton looked, as it were afar off, at the performance of a distant tragedy when he portrayed Satan's fall from heaven, and the wiles Satan used in serpentine form to compass the disaster of our first parents. Dante mingled with the lost. He walked in hell. His feet touched the slimy floors and scorching pavements of the infernal regions. His eye beheld the serpents and the devils. He looked upon its sluggish, oozing currents, upon its pools thick with mire and blood. His ears heard the wails of the hopeless sufferers. With

his hands he touched the hairy backs and arms of demons. He smelt the fetid swamps and the fumes of burning flesh. Milton deals in lofty conceptions and records soliloquies. Dante records his own experiences of horrid scenes and, with journalistic detail, reports conversations carried on between himself and Virgil and between himself and the lost inhabitants of hell.

Milton's *Paradise Lost* is the drama of the angelic revolt in heaven, the temptation to which our first parents yielded, their expulsion from the garden and the temptation of Christ. Dante's poem is an experience. Dante saw hell. He talked with the damned in hell. He felt hell. He does not portray the process going on in the soul whose end was pain and death. No time is taken to record the rebellion of sin far back. Evil, which is the abuse of freedom, the deliberate forfeiture of the chief good, is exhibited as evil in the torments the ungodly endure. The *Divina Commedia* is a terrible commentary on the words "By their fruits ye shall know them." It says

Their eyes expressed the dolor of their hearts.

Dante nowhere uses Paul's words which Paul seems to be saying to the modern reader of the "Inferno" over and over again, "And sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Hell is not so much a divine sentence as it is a termination, following as inevitably as a wound follows the blow. For evil done and unrepented of there could be no other destiny. One who walks with Dante is not moved to ask the question whether the doom of the lost is compatible with the goodness of the Creator. Their misery scarcely awakens pity. In hell blasphemies continue to go out against the "good power of heaven." Christ's name is never mentioned. No desire of repentance shows itself. If the despair is sullen, it is not so much because the decree is irrevocable. It is because the issue is the only one that could have been. As the waters pushing down in the river dash irretrievably into the pitiless gorge, so an evil career in this life is the

Niagara current which hastens on to the pitiless doom of the eternal abyss.

The solemn scenes which Dante witnessed, in his dusky pilgrimage, so tradition goes, left such marks on his face that when the women of Verona saw him approach they whispered "there goes the man who has been in hell."

Following a glimmer of light and making haste to escape from the "climate ever vexed with storms and where no light ever comes," Dante and Virgil ascended "towards the stars." The passage through Purgatory, which was then begun, is a constant "ascent" along seven terraces corresponding to the seven sins, pride, envy, anger, unconcern, avarice, gluttony and incontinence. In contrast to these, the Schoolmen taught, Mary possessed seven opposing virtues. Purgatory is the realm of discipline and all who pass into it from earth finally reach heaven. Here there are no complaints and no fear. The tears are tears of joy and gratitude. The fires that play are penal flames and, though they are material, yet they cannot singe a hair of the head. The joy of assured deliverance and of expectation is the portion of all. Purification, as Dante put it, "rectifies what the world makes crooked and depraved" and is accomplished through disciplinary suffering and through meditation upon the careers of pure and virtuous people. The suffering is welcome on account of the purpose it serves. Songs of deliverance and gratitude fill the air such as "Blessed are the merciful" and "Glory to God in the Highest." As Dante started on his journey through this middle realm his forehead was marked with seven P's, the first letter of the Latin word for sins *Peccata*, which, one by one, were effaced as he passed on from terrace to terrace. These letters recall the letters which were sometimes branded in England and New England on the faces of religious and moral offenders. Strange that Dante makes no reference to the name on the foreheads of the redeemed of which the Book of Revelation says "His name shall be on their foreheads."

Frequently the poet was given by the spirits in purgatory messages of warning and encouragement intended for friends on earth. One of the striking addresses delivered to him concerned the fashions of Florence and entreated him to urge the preachers in Florence to speak out boldly to the unblushing dames who bared unhandkerchiefed bosoms to the common gaze.

Beyond the confines of the intermediate realm Virgil could not go and of the heavenly region he knew nothing. Again and again the poets had conversed of Beatrice and before they come to the end of purgatory, she appeared, her face covered with a veil. "Come ye blessed of my Father," "Blessed is he whose transgression is hid" and other melodies had already come floating down from the heavenly realm. As Dante became aware of Beatrice's presence every fibre of his being quivered, the sentiment "of love swaying his soul as it had done in the years of the past, the days of his childhood."

I am in sooth,—I am Beatrice.

she assured him.

Beatrice was Dante's guide through the nine circles of heaven. She kept her gaze fixed on the brightness of the ultimate empyrean, while he kept his vision on her. In these nine domains Dante found distributed according to their different grades of merit and perfection, the saints of all ages, theologians and martyrs, monastics and mystics, Apostles and Crusaders, the elect of the old dispensation and the redeemed of the new dispensation. Among those whom he recognized were the founders of the two mendicant orders a century before, St. Francis who appeared as an Ardor inflaming the world with love and St. Dominic as a Splendor filling it with light. Among princes he noticed David, Charlemagne and Godfrey of Bouillon. Adam as well as Anselm was there. St. Thomas explained to the poet the mystery of creation. St. John discoursed of love and the sufferings of Christ. St. Peter, bearing in mind the papal commission, conversed about the evil days into

which the papacy had come and complained bitterly of Boniface VIII,—his successor in name, a usurper in fact who had made the place of Christ's vicar void. In one of her conversations Beatrice castigated the preachers who were filling the pulpits of Florence, preaching not the Book of God but inventions of their own, and seeking by gibes and jests to win applause.

Finally Beatrice, unable to go further put the poet in charge of St. Bernard and leaving him took a seat just below Mary and Eve, Rachel and Rebecca and

the gleaner maid
Meek ancestress of him who sang the songs
Of sore repentance in his sorrowful mood.

Bernard who dwells in the ninth circle of heaven pointed out the boundless circle of the empyrean where dwell the persons of the Trinity surrounded by thousands of angels resplendent with light. That highest sphere of paradise is bright with—

a light whose goodly shine
Makes the Creator visible to all
Created, that in seeing Him alone
Have peace: and in a circle spreads so far
That the circumference were too loose a zone
To girdle in the sun.

To measure what the poet saw and trace the form of that celestial sphere geometric science, such as Dante was acquainted with, was inadequate. Strength failed him to follow the towering fancy

While the will rolled onward, like a wheel
In even motion, by the love impelled
That moves the sun in heaven and all the stars.

Reading these concluding words of the *Divina Commedia*, we stop to ask ourselves many questions. How, for example, did mortal man dare to explore the gloomy abodes of hell and locate one by one his fellow mortals doomed to endless pain? How was it possible for him to keep on gazing at their awful agonies? Was Dante without human sympathy? Had the disappointments of his own life

hardened his soul to the sight of sorrow? This seems scarce to be the case, if we look for proof only to the pages of the *Inferno*. In the moving picture he gives of Francesca Dante represents himself as fainting through compassion and falling in pity like a corpse to the ground. At other times he was "grieved even to tears" by the afflictions of the lost (*Infer.* 5:138; 6:60). On the other hand, he shows no pity when he looks upon his old teacher. And without a quaver he gives the most repulsive pictures of the spirits munching on one another's heads and bloody with their blood.

There is little in the poem to suggest that Dante could have penned lines like those of Shakespeare beginning with the words "The quality of mercy is not strained." Dante may not have been indifferent to sorrow, but he was stern through the influence of his theological heritage. The Schoolmen had marked out hell and assigned to it material fires which burn on and are never extinguished. Dante's age and Dante himself had fallen heir to these views. Nor may we forget that the punishments for civil offences in Dante's day were merciless and that in the penalty meted out to heretics the heart of the church seemed to give way to a relentless logic.

At any rate, in his *Purgatorio* Dante by showing gladness at the escape of souls to that realm seems to prove that he was not without compassion. Nor will we forget that in these more recent days Jonathan Edwards combined the deepest sympathies with visions of the tortures of the lost of the most harrowing sort.

As indicated in the letter already quoted Dante was preaching a sermon to his age. Sin and crime abounded and the vices of society were matched by the corruptions of the hierarchy and the papal palace. Italy as a whole he described as "hostelry of war, a ship without a pilot, tempest tossed and swarming with despots" (*Purg.* 6). Had Savonarola only been living in Dante's day and thundered forth the prophetic messages in the cathedral of Florence

which Pico della Mirandola listened to, perhaps Dante would have felt more hope for Italy even if no less severe on the rebel against the church. At least he would have felt that he had a companion in his zeal for righteousness. But the surgeon must not show pity while he leans over the patient. Dante, however capable he may have been of compassion, did not give way to it. His letter to Can Grande laid down the principle that for actions of merit and demerit, through the freedom of the will, man justly deserves reward or punishment. In the nature of things, sin which is rebellion against the sovereign Creator and Governor of the universe has in the doom of eternal exclusion from God and hopeless misery its proper sequence. And yet in Dante's theology grace superabounds. No offence is so heinous that it cannot be forgiven. A sufficient proof of this principle the poet gives in his delineation of the brilliant but profligate Manfred. Manfred, whom Dante put into purgatory, says:

. . . I betook myself
Weeping to him, who of free will forgives.
My sins were horrible; but so wide arms
Hath goodness infinite, that it receives
All who turn to it.

The use of the will explains all. Hell is the penalty for its abuse: in Purgatory purification comes through the will: the essence of heavenly bliss is conformity to the will of God (*Purg.* 21: 60; *Parad.* 3:90).

Conscience does not in Dante seem to have the function it has in Shakespeare. Dante speaks here and there of its sting but he has no statement corresponding to the English poet's words "conscience makes cowards of us all" nor is there any scene in the *Divina Commedia* which could remotely suggest the picture of Macbeth. In fact the function of conscience does not seem to have had its proper place in the writings of the Schoolmen. It remained for Wyclif and Huss to give to its separate function full emphasis. It was a question with Dante whether it was wrath that smote Boniface VIII or conscience. The sufferings of Dante's hell

are outward and material rather than of the mind. However, it must not be overlooked that Francesca speaks of the plague of memory when she says:

No greater grief than to remember days
Of joy, when grief is at hand.

The idea of an offended deity seems to have no place in hell.

It would seem that Dante in writing the *Divina Commedia* had his own devious course in mind as well as the sins of his time. In this regard he also spoke from experience. After Beatrice's death he had turned aside to deceitful pleasures and deceitful paths

Following false images of the good that make
No promise perfect.

Ofttimes he had wailed his sins and smote his breast (*Purg.* 30: 120; 31: 27; *Parad.* 22: 100). From these paths light from above, the remembrance of Beatrice and penitence had rescued him. And so in a certain degree the *Divina Commedia* is Dante's Confession.

Flacius Illyricus was wrong when he placed Dante among those who before the Protestant Reformation showed the spirit of the Reformation. Dante called for reformation of papal manners and a change in civil government. Further he did not go. He had no intimation of the meaning of election as contrasted with the sacramental grace of baptism and as expounded so urgently by Wyclif fifty years after Dante's death. He had no suggestion—and the suggestion with Zwingli amounted to a conviction—that children dying without baptism might have admission to heaven. Dante censored popes and put them in hell, but the bishop of Rome was still for him God's vicar on earth. Purgatory was as real a domain for him as it had been to Gregory the Great and the mediaeval theologians after him. The suffrages of the living modify its sufferings and duration. Religious vows are all most sacred and unchastity in nuns cannot be forgiven except when it is forced. As for the virgin Mary, she is the queen of heaven. In pur-

gatory and in paradise her praises are continually sung and the Ave Maria awakens peace and love. It is the all efficient petition. Even St. Bernard supplicated her grace before showing Dante the divine brightness. She is "the queen" who "canst do what, thou wilt."

As for the Scriptures, Dante speaks with all respect of the "Book of God." Nevertheless there is little to show that he was familiar with the text of the Bible and read it for himself. Had he done so, it is almost incomprehensible that he quotes scarcely a single text of Scripture. Passages which would, so we think, be so pertinent are not remotely alluded to as the passage, "where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." In this respect Shakespeare displays a marked contrast to the mediaeval poet who lived before the interest in modern Bible translation had begun. Bishop Wordsworth showed that at least four hundred different passages of Scripture are directly cited or alluded to in Shakespeare's plays. With Dante the imagery of the Aeneid abounds. He got his knowledge of the Scripture from the Breviary and the Schoolmen.

The impression with which the careful reader rises from the perusal of the *Divina Commedia* is solemn and distinctly religious. The reality of the future world is made more certain. One does not leave the *Divina Commedia* as one leaves the performance of Händel's *Messiah*, closing with the hymns, "Worthy is the Lamb" and "Amen and Amen." From the oratorio we pass out with the feeling of exultation added to the feeling of solemnity. Pure as is the heaven of Dante, you pass away from it thrilled, awed but not fully satisfied. It leaves one with the question how endless beatitude can be satisfying where there are praise and vision but no service.

Dante is the interpreter of the endless things,—endless retribution, endless jubilee. He is the preacher of righteousness and of repentance and, as Thomas Carlyle said, "repentance is the grand Christian act." Dante's poem is more than a cathedral whose massive proportions, lofty

spires and mysterious spaces arouse admiration and reverent awe. It is a pulpit whose message stirs like a trumpet and summons this age, as it was meant to summon Dante's own age, to live well the life here below for for all things done here God will bring thee into judgment. As Longfellow puts it, "Thy sacred song is like the trump of God."

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