

DANTE ALIGHIERI.

1321-1921.

AN APPRECIATION : IN COMMEMORATION OF THE SIX-HUNDREDTH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE POET'S DEATH.

BY THE EDITOR.

IT was at Ravenna, on the 14th day of September, 1321, that Dante "rendered up to his Creator his toilworn spirit," in the fifty-seventh year of his age.

He was buried with great honour in the Franciscan Church of San Pier Maggiore (now the Chiesa di San Francesco), by his friend, a noble knight named Guido Novello da Polenta, nephew of Francesca da Rimini, whose intention it was to erect a sumptuous tomb to his memory. Unfortunately, Dante's patron and admirer was soon afterwards betrayed and driven from Ravenna, losing thereby his estates and his life, so that his project was for the time defeated.

A century and a half later, however, in 1483 to be exact, Bernardo Bembo, the father of the celebrated cardinal, gave effect to the design by commissioning a superb monument, the work of the artist Pietro Lombardi bearing the following inscription, by some authorities said to have been dictated by Dante on his death-bed, or to be based upon some earlier epitaph, perhaps the original one referred to.

(The accompanying paraphrase is by James Russell Lowell.)

Jvra monarchiæ Sþperos Phlegethonta lacvsqve
Lvstrando cecini volvervnt Fata qvovsqve
Sed qvia pars cessit melioribvs hospita castris
Avctoremqve svvm petiit felicior astris
Hic clavdor Dantes patriis extorris ab oris
Qvem genit parvi Florentia mater amoris.

The rights of Monarchy, the Heavens, the Stream of Life, 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.

DANTIS ALIGERII POETAE
FLORENTINI INFERNI CA-
PITVLVM PRIMVM INCIPIT.



Nel mezo del chamin di nostra vita
mi trouai per una felua fchura
chella diritta via era smarita
Ah quanto adir qual era echosa dura
questa felua feluagia sgra e forte
che nel pensier rinnova la paura
Tanto e amara che poco e più morte
ma per tractar delben chio ui trouai
diro delaltre chose chio uochorte
I non so ben ridire chenno entrai
tanto era pice di sonno in su quel punto
chella ueracite uia abandonai
Ma poi chio fui al pie dun cholle giunto
la oue terminava quella ualle
che manca di paura squalor chompunkt
Guardai in alto e uidi le sue spalle
ueltite gis di ragi del pianeta
che mena dritto altri per ogni challe
Allor fu la paura umpochio cheta
chenellaglio del chiuor mera durata
la note chi passi chontant pietra
E chome que che con lena affanata
uicto fuce del pelagho al riva
Involge alegria periglio e guata
Cheli lamento mio chanchor fugia

Si uolse in drecto arimirar il paollo
che non lascio già mai persona usua
Poi chebbi ripolato il chorbo lasso
riprestia per la piaggia deserta
si chel pie fermò sempre il più basso
E echo quasi al chominciar dellerta
una leonza legiera e presta molto
che di pel machilato era choperta
E nomisi partia dinante al volto
anzi impeditus tanto il mio chamino
chi fu per ritornare più volte uolto
Tempo era del principio del matino
el sol mentaua in su chon quelle stelle
cheran chelli quando lamer divenio
Nelle diprime quelle chose belle
sicha bene sperar mera chagione
di quella fiera lagietta pelle
Lora del tempo ella dolcie fragiōne
ma non si che paura non midesse
la uista che mi parise dun lione
Questi parca che chontro ame uenisse
chella testa alta e chon abioſi fame
si che parca chelare netemelle
E dunia lupa che ditate brame
sembrava charcha nella sua magreza
e molte gienti fe già uuer grame
Questa mi pose tanto dgraveza
chella paura chafeuia di sua uista
chio perdet la speranza dellalteza
E quale e quel che colontieri acquista
e giungie il tempo che perder lo facete
etentuti i suoi pensier piange et trista
Tal mi fuce la bedita sanza pacie
che uenendomi ichontro apoco apoco
mi ripingica la dou il sol tacie
Mentre chio risuaua intasse lecho
dinari aglioni misi fu oferto
che per lungo silenzio parca fiedeo
Quando uidi chelui nel gran deserto
misterio dme gridai allui
quel chi tu sia ombra ohemo cierto



DANTE: "COMMEDIA". MANTUA, 1472.
(From the copy in the John Rylands Library.)

Nel mezo del camin di nostra uita
mi ritrouai per una selua oscura
chela dirie la uia era smarrita
Et quanto a dir q'lera cosa dura
esta selua seluagia aspra e forte
chenel pensier renoua la paura
Tante amara che poco piu morte
ma per traçtar del bendhi uitrouai
diro del altre cose chi uo scorte
I non so ben ridir come uentrai
tanterapien de sonno isu quel punto
che la uerace uia abandonai
Ma poiche fui apie dun colle giuò
ladoue terminaua quella ualle
che manea di paura el cor compunto
Guardai inalto & uide le sue spalle
uelite gja de ragi del pianeta
che mena drichto altrui per ogni calle
Allor fui la paura un poco cheta
che nellaco del cor mera durata
lanocte chio passai cõtata pietà
Et come quei che con lena affanata
uscito fuor del pelago ala riua
si uolge al acqua peligrosa & guata
Così l'animo mio ancor fuggiuoa
si nolsi arrieto arimirar lo passo
che non lascio giamai persona uiua
Et riposato un poco el corpo latlo
represi uia per la spiaggia deserta
si chel piu ferro sempre il piu baso
Et ecco quafi al cominciar del ertia
una leonza assai legiera & prestamolto
che di pel macolato era couerta



DANTE: "COMMEDIA". JESI, 1472.
(From the copy in the John Rylands Library.)

These Latin lines have been regarded by some writers as unworthy of Dante, just as Shakespeare's doggerel English epitaph has been thought unworthy of him. On the other hand, the rudeness of the verses has been put forward as a proof of their authenticity in both cases.

The Bembo tomb was restored by Cardinal Domenico Maria Corsi, the Papal Legate in 1692, and finally rebuilt in its present form by Cardinal Gonzaga, in 1780, each of whom in turn commemorated themselves in Latin inscriptions. It is a little shrine covered with a dome, not unlike the tomb of a Mohammedan Saint, and is now the chief Mecca which attracts pilgrims to Ravenna.

It follows then, that the present year, 1921, marks the six-hundredth anniversary of this outstanding event, and by reason of the prominent and honoured place which Dante occupies upon the shelves of this library, we claim the privilege of collaborating with Italy in commemorating the death of the most eminent of her many brilliant sons, by adding our modest tribute of homage to the countless number of similar tributes of more enduring worth which will be offered at the shrine of his genius during this anniversary year.

In the course of the six centuries that have elapsed since Dante's death men of great and enduring talent of all nationalities have helped to swell his praise and to immortalize his fame.

In this country, especially during the last hundred years, the study and appreciation of Dante has been second only to the homage of his own countrymen. Two of our greatest poets, the one living in the fourteenth and the other in the seventeenth century, both exercising an enormous influence on their own and succeeding generations, were diligent students of Dante and transfused into their work much of the form and spirit of the "Commedia". In the "Canterbury Tales," and in "Paradise Lost," there are many passages which would have been impossible but for the influence of Dante. It was a proof of Chaucer's critical judgment that he calls Dante "the great poet of Itaille". And yet, after being canonized, as it were, by Chaucer and by Milton, Dante was allowed to sink into an oblivion of forgetfulness, by the neglect of almost all Tuscan literature among English readers, down to some hundred and twenty years ago. It is true that he was mentioned from time to time, but mostly from hearsay only ; Spenser shows that he read his works closely ; Sackville may

have read the "Inferno"; and it is certain that Sir John Harington had done so. He has had, however, a noble revenge; Shelley, Byron and Tennyson have led him back with chants of recognition; Carlyle and Ruskin have set forth his praise in impassioned prose; Boyd, Cary, Longfellow, Okey, Plumptre, Norton, Stanley, Shadwell, Wright and Wicksteed have translated him; whilst a host of other scholars such as Coleridge, Vernon, Moore, Gardner, and Toynbee have made Dante more widely known to English readers by commenting upon and elucidating the works of the poet.

To Ruskin Dante was the "central man of all the world, as representing in perfect balance the imaginative, moral, and intellectual faculties, all at their highest". To Carlyle his book was the sincerest of all poems; "he was the spokesman of the middle ages; the thought they lived by stands here in everlasting music; his 'Divine Comedy' is the most remarkable of all modern books; and one need not wonder if it were predicted that his poem might be the most enduring thing our Europe has yet made".

Among the more recent of the offerings at the shrine of Dante's genius we cannot refrain from quoting the ode written by Tennyson at the request of the Florentines in 1865, on the six-hundredth anniversary of his birth:—

King that has reign'd six hundred years, and grown
In power, and ever growest, since thine own
Fair Florence, honouring thy nativity,
Hath sought the tribute of a verse from me,
I, wearing but the garland of a day,
Cast at thy feet one flower that fades away.

What was true in 1865 has become more true to-day, for the realm of the poetic monarch has grown still greater both in power and in extent.

Many attempts have been made to account for this supremacy of what may be termed the Dante cult, and to determine what were the abiding qualities of genius which have secured for Dante the fame he has won and worn for six hundred years, and which give him to-day a claim for such study as only a few world classics deserve.

James Russell Lowell, in that remarkable essay of his entitled "Dante," written in 1872, which Dr. Wicksteed describes as: "a sufficient introduction to the study of Dante, and by far the best thing

on the subject in English"; and which Professor C. E. Norton also refers to as: "the best introduction to the study of the 'Divine Comedy,' which should be read and re-read," asserts that: "Almost all poets have their seasons, but Dante penetrates to the moral core of those who once fairly come within his sphere, and possesses them wholly. His readers turn students, his students zealots, and what was a taste becomes a religion." ". . . if Shakespeare be the most comprehensive intellect, Dante is the highest spiritual nature that has expressed itself in rhythmical form. Had he made us feel how petty the ambitions, sorrows, and vexations of each appear when looked down on from the heights of our own character and the seclusion of our own genius, or from the region where we commune with God, he had done much. . . . But he has done far more; he has shown us the way by which that country far beyond the stars may be reached, may become the habitual dwelling place and fortress of our nature, instead of being the object of its vague aspiration in moments of indolence."

In another passage Lowell declares that "among literary fames Dante finds only two that for growth and immortality can parallel his own: Homer and Shakespeare". And it was evident to all scholars, as soon as comparison by the critical method was attempted, that the Florentine must be given rank with Homer who chanted the heroic world of Hellas in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and with our own pre-eminent poet who held the mirror up to nature in such a way that he promised to be the universal poet of mankind.

But the great Italian singer apparently yields the palm neither to Homer nor to Shakespeare when he is judged from the bibliographer's standard, in other words, by the number of literary accretions which have surrounded the creations of these three most immortal of poets, or as one writer has described them: "the first three, chief among the captains of world song".

Dante's reputation and influence, like those of every other great writer, have not been without their periods of decline.

As a young man he was recognized quite early as a scholar and a poet. Immediately after his death he was lauded by such judges as Villani, Boccaccio, and Petrarch as a master of thought and style, and as a marvellous artist in the use of the hardly formed Italian language. Indeed, it is proof of the natural instinct of Dante, and of his confidence

in his own genius, that he should have chosen to write all his greatest works in what was deemed by scholars to be nothing more than a "patois," but which he, more than any other man, raised to the dignity of a classical language. In other words, he is not only the first great poet but the first great prose writer to use a language not yet subdued to literature.

Dante was the first influential poet in the "lingua rustica". To quote Boccaccio : "he was the first to elevate vulgar poetry among us Italians, and to raise it to a position of honour, just as Homer and Vergil did with theirs among the Greeks and Latins".

It is true that the work of popularization, in the true sense of the term, can be effected only by speaking to the people in their own language, and that was Dante's work. His aim, as he tells us in the "Conveto" (i. 8), was to give useful things to many, and, in the words of Dean Milman : "it required all the courage, firmness, and prophetic sagacity of Dante to throw aside the inflexible bondage of the established hierarchical Latin of Europe".

Not content with proving to all the world the fitness of the Italian language as a literary vehicle by the practical example of his own work, Dante planned a theoretical exposition of this fact in his "De vulgari eloquentia". The modern student of Romance philology must feel a special satisfaction in being able to date the commencement of his science from the appearance of his work, which is conceived and executed in the modern scientific spirit. Dante begins by telling his readers that he was the first to treat the subject.

It should be noted, however, that whilst Dante recognized the importance of a national language and literature, he was at the same time keenly alive to the necessity of classical studies for all who would attain proficiency in their own tongue. He chose for his models of composition the learned Roman poets. Indeed, Vergil, who was his master and guide on the unearthly pilgrimage, taught him in the sixth book of the "Aeneid" what that supernatural world was like.

His references to ancient literature have been collected and classified, and it will help us to appreciate the extent of his indebtedness to these classical writers, if we show approximately the number of times each of the respective works or authors are cited by Dante : the "Vulgata" 500, Aristotle 300, Vergil 200, Ovid 100, Cicero 50, Statius and Boethius 30 to 40, Horace 7, Livy and Orosius 10 to

20. Dante knew practically nothing of Greek, so that he was in bondage to the Latin translations, and when he quotes Aristotle it is the Latin Aristotle he is employing.

The perfection of the "Commedia," and above all the style, which Macaulay describes as "unmatched," are the first fruits of classical studies in modern Europe. It was Dante who first aroused a general taste for classical learning, and for that reason he may be fittingly described as the first humanist.

He was a born student and on the authority of Professor Norton we have it, that if Dante had never written a single poem, he would still have been famous as the most profound scholar of his times.

Within two generations of Dante's death no fewer than eleven commentaries on the "Commedia" had appeared, and Michael Angelo had not only sketched designs to illustrate the divine poem, but had written sonnets in praise of its author. As time passed, however, the atmosphere changed, and the glory faded, but it was only like nature's sleep before spring, the winter rest, which causes the shoot to be greener and the blossom to be more fragrant.

With the Florence of Michel Angelo he seemed to die, and when the Risorgimento dawned, he, too, rose from the grave. He rose by reason of some divine power persisting within his works, defeated but unconquerable. First, however, like the corn of wheat, he seemed to die.

Whereas, twenty editions of the "Commedia" were printed and published in Italy between the years 1472 and 1500, and forty editions in the sixteenth century, there were but three editions printed in the seventeenth century. This was due, no doubt, to the persecution by the Jesuits of the poet's works, and the writings they called forth. One of their principal aims was to make all literature Latin, and they felt that their plans must needs be thwarted, if they allowed so mighty a work in the vulgar tongue to run the land unchallenged. But all these schemes and machinations were of no avail. A voice so mighty as that of Dante, was sure to make itself heard, and no sort of intrigue was able to stifle its powerful note for any length of time.

The eighteenth century was not quite so barren of interest as the preceding one; but it was not until the beginning of the nineteenth century that a real revival of interest for Dante was noticeable. Between the years 1800 and 1865 upwards of one hundred editions of

the "Commedia" are recorded as having been published in Italy alone, and since that date the increase of Dante literature has been quite phenomenal.

In our own country the light of the genius which had impressed Chaucer and Milton burned but dimly in the eighteenth century. Appreciation of Dante was immensely advanced, however, by the publication in 1805 of Henry Francis Cary's translation of the first seventeen cantos of the "Inferno," and in 1814 by his complete translation of the "Commedia," of which numerous editions were called for between the year of its first appearance and 1844, the date of the translator's death. Critics are unanimous in its praise. Macaulay went so far as to say he knew no version of a great poem so faithful, and none which so fully showed that the translator was himself a man of poetic genius. It still holds its place in our literature, and Cary's well-deserved niche in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey with its simple inscription "Translator of Dante," will remain as a lasting monument of this Dante revival in England.

In an earlier paragraph we have ventured to quote the opinion expressed by Professor Willard Fiske, in that very suggestive and scholarly introduction to the "Catalogue of the Dante Collection" which he himself presented to Cornell University Library, that Dante yields place neither to Homer nor to Shakespeare when judged from the bibliographer's standard, and it may not be out of place to examine the considerations which led Mr. Fiske to arrive at such a conclusion, and to endeavour to justify it.

It is true that in point of bulk the achievements of Dante are greatly exceeded by those of the two older writers. Shakespeare claims pride of place in this respect with 110,237 lines, even when the doubtful plays assigned to him are deducted, as compared with 27,793 verses in the two epics with which the name of Homer is associated (15,693 in the "Iliad" and 12,100 in the "Odyssey"), and 14,333 in the "Divina Commedia". When, however, we seek to estimate the number of their readers by the frequency with which their writings have been reproduced Dante appears to hold his own. This is the more surprising when we consider that Shakespeare in his vernacular appeals to a world far vaster than that which Dante addresses in his natural tongue.

Another point to which Mr. Fiske calls attention and which is

certainly worthy of notice is the advantage which the dramatic art possesses over the epic in its methods of giving publicity to a production. Epics are no longer recited in public, and were never recited with the attractive accompaniments of moving figures and varied costumes. The dramatist on the other hand, speaks to and through double audiences, one of readers, the other of hearers. This is no slight advantage, and it becomes a question whether the general acquaintance with Shakespeare would not be greatly diminished were his plays never acted. Furthermore, this two-fold character of dramatic poetry increases its literature, for the theatre demands frequent separate reprints of the texts of popular plays.

In the case of Homer, since the days of the revival of classical studies, his works in the original Greek have been in constant educational use, such as the two other writers can hardly claim for theirs. His epics are repeatedly printed as school texts in every civilized land, and in great editions, with more or less of comment and other literary apparatus. Even so, it is doubtful whether the two most popular of the world's epics have appeared in more versions than has the immortal poem of Dante.

But the real test of a man's universality as Willard Fiske has pointed out, is decided by a man's standing outside his own country, or in the case of a writer beyond the limits of his own speech. The breadth of a writer's renown is measured by the reproductions or translations of his creations into other languages. In the case of Dante it may be said that since the end of the eighteenth century he has become the most passionate study on the part of the master poets of Europe. His marvellous style, his manifold exquisite images and similes, have become a never-failing source of inspiration.

Let us now see how Dante stands in this respect when compared with his two peers.

In English, commencing with the version in blank verse by C. Rogers of the "Inferno" in 1782, there are twenty separate and distinct translations of the "Divina Commedia," one of which, Cary's, has appeared in no less than thirty editions, as compared with about twelve of Homer, from that of Chapman appearing in 1598, down to the present day; whilst Italy has but three complete renderings of Shakespeare. This is the more noteworthy because of the Italian origin of Shakespeare's finest creations.

In French the "Divina Commedia" has been fully rendered by sixteen different translators, commencing with that of Grangier, which appeared in 1596, but the study of Dante struck no root in French soil until the latter part of the eighteenth century. It was Rivarol, by his translation of the "Inferno" in 1783, who was the first to attract general attention to the "Commedia" in that country, and Chateaubriand, though far from appreciating the work at its true value, made the cult general. Hugo regarded Dante as having hated all evil, not only evil in high places. And if we turn to French literature to-day, with its various schools, symbolists and others, we are struck with the fact, that they, too, continue to derive much of their inspiration and support from Dante's work. As compared with the sixteen translations of Dante into French, we find only twelve versions of Homer, and eight of Shakespeare.

It is surprising that for so many centuries Dante should have been little more than a name in Germany, especially when we consider the close relations in which that country stood to Italy at repeated intervals in her history. The first German translation of the "Commedia" was that of Bachenschwanz, which appeared between 1767 and 1769. Versions of Kannegiesser, Streckfuss, Kopisch and Prince John of Saxony followed. Goethe seems never to have given that attention to Dante which might have been expected. Schlegel speaks of Dante as his favourite poet, and from the date of the appearance of Schlegel's translation of parts of the "Commedia" in 1791, we may trace the influence of the form and spirit of Dante's poetry on German literature. Against nineteen versions of the "Commedia," in German, we can only set ten of Homer, and eight of Shakespeare.

In Spanish Dante's masterpiece has been translated six times as against half that number of versions of Homer and Shakespeare. The very first translation of Dante was into Catalan in 1428. In Dutch it has been rendered four times, a number not equalled either by Homer or by Shakespeare. In modern Greek there are two renderings to one of Shakespeare, and two of Homer. Russia boasts of two versions, whilst Hungary, Portugal, and its linguistic daughter Brazil, have each just as many; and there is a single interpretation in Bohemian, in Polish, in Roumanian, and in Swedish. Not all the last-named languages have versions of either Homer or Shakespeare.

In Latin the "Divina Commedia" has been printed in four different renderings, Homer only in two.

Translations of the "Divina Commedia" either in whole or in part have appeared in twenty-six languages, and in eleven of the dialects of Italy, a figure which is not reached either by Shakespeare or by Homer.

It is computed that since 1800 the average annual issue of editions of the "Divina Commedia" in the original has been more than four, and it is doubtful whether during the nineteenth century anything approaching four hundred editions of Shakespeare were issued.

In the Italian lands, throughout which Dante enjoys an immortality both of affection and acquaintanceship, such as no other of the great intellects of the modern world has succeeded in gaining among his countrymen, the number of independent Dante publications yearly exceeds one hundred and twenty-five. If to these are added the privately printed monographs, and the really important contributions to reviews, and transactions of various societies, the annual total will probably exceed two hundred. How many important publications having reference to our own master poet can we reckon up every twelve months among English-speaking peoples, who out-number the Italians by at least four to one?

There is little doubt that the sources of this literary flood are to be found in the encyclopædic character of the great poem. If we examine Dr. Paget Toynbee's "Dante Dictionary" we shall find that the poet has touched upon, or treated, a surprising number of themes. His allusions to persons and places, and his references to scenes and events, which may be numbered by the hundred, have served as so many pegs upon which students of research have been enabled to hang scholarly dissertations. His mysticism and symbolism, his allegories and analogies, and the many fascinating problems scattered through his text have not only challenged the faculties of the more speculative of the scholars, but have quickened the fancy of the poet, the novelist and the dramatist. Scientific minds also find subjects for meditation in his astronomical features, and in the topographical word pictures of the circles of Hell, the terraces of Purgatory, and the planetary spheres of Paradise, which he has sketched for us.

Such are only a few of the topics which constantly seem to demand the investigation of critics, quite apart from the ambitious attempts

to expound the "Divina Commedia" as a whole, the interpretation of its loftier meanings, the estimate of its relations to its author, to his age, to his fellowmen, and to spiritual things; aspirations which have evoked the labour of so many intellects, and such learning as the world must always admire.

Turning now to a more detailed consideration of the printed edition of the original text of the "Divina Commedia," it is a matter of strange coincidence that the three first editions should have appeared in the same year (1472); and still more surprising is it that two of them were printed in the comparatively unimportant towns of Foligno, and Jesi, whilst the third appeared in Mantua.¹

The natal place of the poet, Florence, holds the first rank as to the number of editions produced from first to last by the printers of a single city. These have reached the figure of eighty, whilst those printed at Venice number only fifty-five, Mantua fifty, Naples thirty-five, Turin ten, and Rome ten.

Outside Italy, Paris is easily first with thirty editions of the Italian text; London has something like a dozen to her credit, the first no earlier than 1778.

The first Florentine edition appeared in 1481, and was the first illustrated edition; but it was a quarter of a century before a second edition was printed there (1506), and sixty-six years elapsed before the third appeared in 1572, yet again twenty-three years before the fourth appeared in 1595. Throughout this period Venice was issuing a new edition every five years, twenty-five in all between 1477 and 1596. Subsequent to the edition of 1595 no Florentine edition appeared until that with the commentary of Venturi in 1771-1774, being a period of a century and three-quarters, and that remained the only edition issued from the poet's natal place in the eighteenth century.

In 1813 the text again accompanied by the commentary of Venturi appeared with a Florentine imprint, but these years of dearth came to an end in 1817 with the first of the four pretentious and profusely illustrated folios, of the so-called "Anchor edition," which appeared between 1817 and 1819. Since then one yearly edition has been the result.

This appreciation of Dante would be obviously incomplete without

¹ Facsimiles of the first page of each of these three editions, from the copies in the John Rylands Library, are published with this article.

some reference to the touching love story which he has enshrined for us in his "Vita Nuova".

It is generally admitted that in the domain of love literature Petrarch's sway is unequalled. It is claimed for him that he was the inspirer of most of the love poetry of modern Europe; and yet it must be said that Petrarch's "Canzoniere" would have been impossible if Dante's love for Beatrice had not been there to serve him as guide.

According to Boccaccio's "Life of Dante," quoting from Dr. Wicksteed's translation: "While his [Dante's] tears were still flowing for the death of Beatrice, about in his twenty-sixth year, he put together in a little volume which he called the "Vita Nuova," certain small things as sonnets and odes, which he had made in rhyme at divers seasons theretofore, marvellously beautiful, placing at the head of each severally and in order the occasions that had moved him to write it, and adding the divisions of the poems after them."

Dante without doubt idealized Beatrice, and in the end employed her as a symbol, but that does not imply that she was not, in the origin, a real creature of flesh and blood, and the object of his genuine love. In her loveliness and purity the heroine becomes an image upon earth of the Divine Beauty and Goodness, and the poet's love to her is the stepping-stone to love of the supreme God.

It is suggested that by the title "Vita Nuova" Dante probably meant to intimate the renewal or transfiguration of his life by his love for Beatrice.

He himself tells us that he acquired the greater part of his learning after the death of Beatrice, with the purpose of composing a work in honour of his beloved, in which he was to say things, which had never before been said of any woman.

It was a preparation for the "Commedia" inasmuch as it tells us how the singer became poet, and how the woman, who was to be his spiritual pilot over the ocean, crossed his path.

Dante regarded love as the origin of all things, good and evil, and sets forth his theory at full length in the seventeenth canto of the "Purgatorio". This elevating influence of love had formed one of the chief themes of the troubadours and their disciples when Dante came and set the stamp of immortality upon the conception. This is the love that the best and greatest of our poets still hold up as the ideal to which all must strive, the love which is found in Shelley, the Brown-

ings, and Tennyson. It may be said, therefore, that these minor poems of Dante served as a land mark between mediæval and modern love poetry.

Professor Gardner describes the "Vita Nuova" as the most spiritual and ethereal romance ever written, but its purity is such that comes not from innocent simplicity of soul, but from self-suppression ; and suggests that we should take the "New life" not as merely meaning the poet's youth, but as referring to the new life that commenced with the dawn of love, the regeneration of the soul.

Dante tangled various threads in his enchanted web, seizing hints from all he came across. He was not merely a singer of love songs, or a weaver of dreams, but a seer of things hidden from mortal sight. His utterances are the utterances of one who has himself been close to those aspects of life of which he speaks. He has looked at them with his own eyes, by the keenness of his vision and by the strength of his insight he has seen more deeply into things, and has appreciated their meaning more powerfully than the common race of men. Above all he possessed the wonderful faculty of making us see and feel with him. All his works with the possible exception of the "De vulgari eloquentia" are component parts of a whole duty of man mutually completing and interpreting one another.

His spiritual message is love, but love tested and sanctified by the grace of Christ the Redeemer.

We can but admire the miracles of construction which make his "Vita Nuova" correspond after a way of its own to St. Augustine's "Confessions," and his "Divina Commedia," where the strange title conceals a resemblance of design and of treatment, to the "Civitate Dei," each a design of infinite detail, complex and opulent as a Gothic Cathedral.

Dante will be always the greatest of dramatic poets, by his blending into a single work of the charm of nature, the power of the supernatural, and the pathos of human joy and sorrow, with justice over all ; and we may safely predict that he will never again pass under eclipse as long as our civilization endures.

Truly may it be said that the nation that had a Dante could not perish.