

Virgin and Mother, Queen of Heaven, and lastly the supreme glory of the saints, the angels and the redeemed; to which the infernal abyss forms a terrible contrast, with its angelic and human inhabitants forever damned; and, as a middle world between heaven and hell, the purgatory of souls destined, after expiation, to supreme blessedness.

Defender of Dogma.

"It is a wonder, the way in which, in all the three canticles, he knows how to intertwine these and other dogmas with sapient design. And if the progress of astronomic sciences showed afterwards that his conception of the world had no foundation, and that the spheres supposed by the ancients did not exist, since the nature, the number and the course of the stars and heavenly bodies are quite different from what they thought, the fundamental principle never failed, that the universe, whichever may be the order that sustains it in its parts, is work of the creating and preserving action of God Almighty, Who moves and rules everything, and whose glory 'shines in one place more and less elsewhere'; and this earth that we inhabit, although it is not the centre of the universe, as once it was believed, nevertheless was the theatre of the primitive happiness of our forefathers, and witness of the fatal fall as well as of the human redemption, effected by the passion and death of Jesus Christ.

"Therefore, the Divine Poet explained the three-formed life of the souls imagined by him, so as to illustrate, before the final judgement, the damnation of the wicked, the purgation of the good spirits, as well as the eternal happiness of the blessed, with a light that was derived from the Faith.

"Thus among the truths illustrated by Alighieri in the three books of his poem, as well as in his other works, we believe there are many that may serve as teaching to the men of the present time. That Christians owe the greatest reverence to the Sacred Scripture and that they must accept what is contained in it, Dante expressly affirms when he writes that 'although many are the writers of the divine word, He who dictates is One—God, who has designed to signify to us His pleasure by the pen of others.' (De Monarchia III, 4.) Magnificent expression of a great truth! Thus also, when he affirms that the Old and the New Testament, which are prescribed for ever as the Prophet says, contain spiritual teachings which transcend human reason, imparted by the Holy Ghost, who, through the Prophets and the sacred writers, by Jesus Christ co-eternal Son of God, and by His disciples, revealed the truth supernatural and necessary to us. (De Monarchia III, 3, 16.) And very justly he says regarding the future life 'he accepts for it the most true doctrine of Christ, which is Way, Truth, and Light; Way, because through it we go without hindrance to the happiness of that immortality; Truth, because it does not suffer any error; Light, because it illuminates us in the darkness of the world's ignorance.' (Convivio II, 9.)

"Scarcely less reverence does he show to those venerable principal councils at which no faithful Catholic doubts that Christ was present; and he holds in great esteem the writings of the Doctors, of Augustine and others, of whom, he who doubts that they were assisted by the Holy Ghost, never saw their fruits, or, if he saw them, never tasted of them. (De Monarchia, III, 3).

Respect for the Church.

"It is not necessary to recall the consideration in which Alighieri held the authority of the Catholic Church, and how he respected the power of the Roman Pontiff, as that on which every law and institution of the Catholic Church itself is founded. Hence the emphatic admonition to Christians: 'You have the old and the new Testament and the Pastor of the Church who guides you; let this be enough for your salvation.'

"He felt the evils of the Church, as if they were his own, and while he deplored and execrated all rebellion against her Supreme Chief, he thus wrote to the Italian Cardinals during the stay of the Popes in Avignon: 'We therefore, who confess the same Father and Son, the same God and Man, the same Virgin and Mother; we for whom it was said to him who was thrice interrogated on charity: "Go Peter and feed the sacred fold" we, who on Rome

(on that Rome, to which after the pomp of so many triumphs, Christ with words and acts confirmed the empire of universe, and which Peter and Paul, the Apostles of the peoples, consecrated with their own blood as apostolic see), are obliged with Jeremias, not complaining for the future but for the present, to weep as on a widow and derelict, we are sorely grieved in seeing her reduced in such a condition, no less than in contemplating the deplorable sores of the heresies. (Epistle III).

"For him the Roman Church is the most pious mother, the Bride of the Crucifix; and to Peter, the infallible judge of revealed truth, the most perfect submission is due on every matter of faith and morality. Therefore, although he believes that the authority of Emperor derives directly from God, he asserts, however, that this truth must not be so strictly understood, that the Roman Prince be not subject in any thing to the Roman Pontiff; because this mortal felicity, is in a certain way subordinate to the immortal felicity. (De Monarchia II, 16). Excellent, indeed, and wise principle, which, if it were still observed as it ought to be, would certainly bring to the States rich fruits of civil prosperity.

Man Battered by Fate.

"But, it will be said, he railed with insulting acrimony against the Sovereign Pontiffs of his time. It is true; but against those who differed from him in politics and whom he believed to be on the side of others who had driven him out of his own country. But one must pity a man, so battered by fate, if sometime, with ulcerated mind, he broke into invectives which exceeded all limits, and the more so, as, to exasperate his anger, false statements were artfully spread, as it often happens, by political adversaries, ever inclined to interpret malignantly every happening. On the other side, who can deny that in those times there was much to be blamed in the clergy, and a spirit so devoted to the Church as Dante's was, could not but be disgusted; and we know that other men, eminent for holiness, loudly reproved them.

"But although in his violent invectives he fell, rightly or wrongly on ecclesiastical personages, he never failed in the respect due to the Church and in 'the reverence to the Supreme Keys'; wherefore in his political work, he purposed to defend his own opinion with that obsequiousness that must be used by a son pious towards the mother, pious towards Christ, pious towards the Church, pious towards the Pastor, pious towards all those who profess the Christian religion, for the protection of truth. (De Monarchia III, 3).

"Therefore, having based on these strong religious principles all the structure of his poem, it is not to be wondered if in it a treasure of Catholic doctrine is to be found; that is to say, not only the essence of philosophy and of Christian theology, but also the compendium of the divine laws much must preside over the order and the administration of the States; because Alighieri was not a man, who, in order to enlarge his country or to gratify the princes, would assert that the State has the right of denying justice and right, which he well knew to be the chief foundation of all civil nations.

Poem that Made Converts.

"It is impossible, then, to express the intellectual enjoyment procured by the study of the Supreme Poet; but no less is the advantage that the student derives from it, of perfecting his artistic taste and kindling him with zeal for virtue; with the condition, however, that he be free from prejudices and open to the influence of truth. And while the number of Catholic poets who unite utility with pleasure is not small the singularity of Dante consists in this, that delighting the reader with the wonderful variety of imagery, the brilliant dazzle of colors, the grandiosity of expression and of thoughts, he entices him to the love of Christian wisdom; and nobody can forget that he openly declared that he composed his poem, to give everyone 'vital nourishment.' And, in fact we know, that even recently, some men, not contrary, but far apart from Jesus Christ, studying with love the Divine Comedy, through the grace of God, began first to admire the truth of the Catholic Faith, and at the end threw themselves enthusiastically into the arms of the Church.