

which must govern the attitude of Great Britain's representatives with the considerations which must govern the attitude of Ireland's representatives."

The day-lie men cannot understand that language. Of conduct according to right and justice they have no knowledge. Expediency is their law. And so, once more, these hirelings will denounce as idealists and fanatics men whose feet they are not worthy to wash. But in every man who thinks right and justice worth dying for Ireland's noble defiance of British frightfulness will awaken wonder and admiration. As for us here: remember that self-determination is the right principle, the Christian principle; and remember that whether it involves a Republic or not Ireland alone is to decide, and that unless we back her to the end we are throwing in our lot with the Brithuns and the supporters of the doctrine that might is right: we are either with her or against her.

NOTES

The Dante Centenary

On September 21, 1321, Dante died in exile at Ravenna, and was buried with public honors in the Franciscan convent in the city that sheltered him when Florence drove him from its streets. Florentine politics were confused by a family feud between the Cherchi and the Donati (the Bianchi e Neri), and when the Donati overcame their opponents in 1301 Dante and four other prominent "Whites" were banished from the city. Fourteen years later, when Dante was famous, Florence intimated that the illustrious exile might return on conditions which Dante found too humiliating for acceptance. He curtly sent his refusal: *Nunquam revertar*, and went on as before climbing the steep stairs in the house of a stranger and eating the bitter bread of exile. Can Grande della Scala and Guido Novello were proud to protect him: but notwithstanding their kindness he was a lonely man, walking the streets aloof while men and women pointed at him and said: *Ecco l'uomo chi è stato nell' Inferno*—behold the man who saw hell. Amid Ravenna's immemorial groves he died at the age of fifty-six, six hundred years ago now. He made the Italian language, and wrote in it the great poem that made him lean, in fulfilment of his promise that he would sing of Beatrice as no man ever sang of mortal woman before. How he put not only his heart and soul, but the heart and soul of Catholic Europe into the *Divina Comedia* the world knows to-day, especially the Catholic world which alone is able to appreciate his work and to comprehend how its weft and woof are proof of his saturation with the Catholic culture of those Middle Ages which only the ignorant now dare describe as "dark ages."

"Onorate l'altissimo Poeta!"

Honor the supreme poet! The Pope might have taken Dante's own words as the inspiration for his recent pastoral urging us all to unite in paying due honor to the memory of the immortal Florentine. Rome has never ceased to remember that he was not only a great poet but also a great theologian. Students of the Roman Universities will recall how often and how aptly the professors used to illustrate difficult dogmatic questions by a stanza from *Il Paradiso*; and among many philosophers who made frequent reference to the poet's sound views we might mention the late Cardinal Lorenzelli. Of course *La Divina Comedia* is the work by which he is best known, and undoubtedly it is his masterpiece. In it he set himself to remove (as he says in a letter to Can Grande) those living in this life from the state of misery and lead them to the state of felicity. He felt that he had a divine inspiration to proclaim God's goodness and mercy to mankind, and, as Dean Church says, "to stamp a deep impression on men's minds of the eternal issues of good and evil-doing in this life." Doing this he became, as Carlyle says,

the voice of twelve silent centuries, and gave us not only the story of his own life, of his hopes and fears and pains and consolations; of his deathless and ideal love for Beatrice; of his opinions concerning literature, history, politics, and art; but also a record of the profound learning and the true culture of the teachers and thinkers of those far-away years which benighted ranters still, in defiance or ignorance of the testimony of the scholars of Europe, call the "dark ages." The poem is so wonderful, so rich, so profound that a lifetime of study is necessary for a right appreciation of it; and indeed nobody who is not acquainted with Catholic philosophy and Catholic theology can ever master it. No translation can do justice to its stately music, and therefore a knowledge of Italian is also required for its proper study. Yet, though so much is lost in translation, English readers of Longfellow or Cary can get a fair grasp of the work and understand, even though it be as through a glass darkly, the excellence of the whole poem. Besides it is full of passages of great beauty and appeal which any man of taste can admire although that perfect union of sound and sense be lost for those who do not understand the beautiful *juvella toscana* of the original.

Minor Works

Besides *La Divina Comedia* Dante wrote *La Vita Nuova*, *Il Convivio*, and several political and philosophical treatises in Latin. Of the minor works the one that best repays study is *La Vita Nuova*, of which there are good translations in English. It is a charming book, with its clear, simple style, its tender references to Beatrice, and its jewel-like lyrics. Readers whose ideals of love are derived from Protestant poets will find it hard to understand Dante's pure and elevated stanzas, saturated with Catholic thought and mysticism, but they who wish to become acquainted with his lyric poetry must turn to *La Vita Nuova* for a right insight into his art and its inspiration. Rossi thus describes the philosophical background of the lyric poetry of the early Catholic Italians: "The principle of a spiritual love, so he [Guiccellini] reasoned, treading in the footsteps of St. Thomas Aquinas, is the contemplation of spiritual beauty or goodness, imagined, seen in glimpses, or perceived by intuition through the veils of the body." Needless to say it is an entirely different principle from that which inspired the verses of Byron, Burns, and Swinburne; and if anything of it is saved, for later Europe it is found in the poems of the modern Celts who put on a higher plane than that of modern pagans love such as Yeats had in mind when he wrote of the love of the pilgrim soul within. In Rossetti's translations we get the nearest thing we have to Dante's lyrics. A few stanzas will serve to reveal their spirit—all those we quote refer to Beatrice:—

My lady is desired in the high Heaven;
Wherefore it now behoveth me to tell,
Saying: Let any man that would be well
Esteemed keep with her: for as she goes by,
Into foul hearts a deathly chill is driven
By Love that makes ill thought to perish there;
While any who endures to gaze on her
Must either be made noble or else die.
When one deserving to be raised so high
Is found, 'tis then her power attains its proof,
Making his heart strong for his soul's behoof
With the full strength of meek humility.
Also this virtue owns she by God's will:
Who speaks with her can never come to ill.

Another beautiful poem is the following:

For certain he hath seen all perfectness
Who among other ladies hath seen mine:
They that go with her humbly should combine
To thank their God for such peculiar grace.
So perfect is the beauty of her face
That it begets in nowise any sign
Of envy, but draws round her a clear line