

doctrine of *original innocence*, of *original sin*, man's fall and sin's transmission, is sung in *Purgatorio* xxviii.—

The Sovereign Good, sole source of our own peace,
Made man sublime and gave him this high seat,
An earnest of the joy that ne'er shall cease.

Not long man stayed there, through his foul defeat,
By his own fault he into toil and woe
Changed laughter innocent and past time sweet.

The doctrine of the Freedom of the Will, on which many a heretic has stumbled, is thus poetically described in *Paradiso* v.—

The gift which from our Maker's bounty flows
Most precious, most resembling His own good
And that for which the most regard He shows
Is *liberty of will*, a gift bestowed
On creatures who possess intelligence,
For they and only they are so endowed.

And as the greatest gift of God—of course in the order of nature—is freedom of the will, so the greatest sacrifice a human creature can make is to bind himself by a vow and make a sacrifice of his will's liberty. And here the theologian poet takes occasion to expatiate on the vows of the Church and taken by her religious. He dwells on the conditions necessary for valid vows, for their dispensation and permutation, and hastens to assure his readers that all these things are subject to the ecclesiastical authorities. In reading this treatise of his on vows one would imagine to be attending a lecture in the theological halls of Mosgiel College. The Church to him is the *spouse of Christ*. "Whom He espoused and with His blessed blood poured forth, did bind secure and faithful as His plighted bride." She is Peter's barque succored by St. Francis and St. Dominic in perilous times.

Think now what colleague ought to hold the helm
Of Peter's barque with him (viz. St. F.), when on her way
O'er the high seas which threatened to overwhelm.

Paradiso XI., 31.

The Church, in fine, it to Dante infallible. "The holy Church that cannot speak a lie." *La Santa Chiesa che non puo dvi menzogna*.

Faithful to Rome

His veneration, respect for, and his attachment and obedience to Rome and the Chair of Peter; his belief in the supremacy of the Sovereign Pontiffs, who, he attests, are Peter's successors are found scattered broadcast throughout the pages of his works. Rome is the city of Peter's successor and Peter received the keys.

U'siede il successor del maggior Piero,

"Where reigns the successor of the great St. Peter."

In the realm of purgatory, Dante met a shade and questioned him his name. The shade replied: "Understand that It was the successor of St. Peter." *Seias quod ego fui successor Petri*. It was Adrian V, and immediately hearing this, Dante, out of respect for the *supreme keys*, falls upon his knees before the Pontiff, as one of us would to-day before the person of Benedict XV in the throne-room of the Vatican palace.

In fact, the foundation of Rome, and its mighty Empire were in the Providence of the Almighty, ordained with a view to Rome one day being the See of the Popes and the holy city, like unto heaven, itself another Rome—where Christ Himself is Roman.

E sarai meco, senza fine cive

Di quella Roma, onde Christo è Romano.

Purgatorio XXXII., 102.

The Pope, with Dante, is ever the Vicar of Christ, no matter what one may think of his private life, no matter how Dante may dislike his political views. Though he entertained little love for Boniface VIII as a private individual, for he thought him a party to his exile, yet, when this Pope was brutally assaulted and imprisoned at Anagni, by Philip the Fair of France, Dante, the poet

of the Chair of Peter, forgets his personal feelings towards Boniface and sees in the ill-treatment of the Pontiff the Passion of Christ repeated in the person of His Vicar:

Entering Alagna I see the *fleur-de-lys*,
And in His Vicar Christ again o'erthrown
A captive and enduring mockery:
With vinegar and gall, betwixt a pair
Of robbers murdered *Him*, I see.

These are but a few instances culled here and there, more or less at random, to show what Dante's opinions were regarding the Church and its Supreme Head, the Roman Pontiff, and they are sufficient to convince any unbiassed mind that he sincerely revered, loved and believed in the Catholic Church, her infallibility, and the supremacy of the Roman Pontiff.

No subject, perhaps, receives more mention in the *Divina Commedia*, than prayers for the dead. Throughout Purgatory we find the shades begging him to remember them when he returns to the upper light, the world of the living. King Manfred dies under censure of the Church, but repents of his contumacy and is saved at the last moment by the mercy of God. He explains to the poet how those who die in enmity with the Church, even though saved, must dwell on the threshold of Purgatory 30 years for every year of their disobedience to the Church; unless, he adds, the prayers of the living—and they, he says—are very helpful—abbreviate the time.

The Sacrament of Penance is dealt with in his *Purgatorio* under an allegory. An angel symbolising the Catholic priest, sits with drawn sword at the entrance to the real Purgatory, the sword being figurative of Divine Justice. The three steps leading up to the door, which represents the Sacrament of Penance itself, are types or figures of the threefold requisites on the part of the penitent—viz., Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction. The first step is of limpid, translucent white marble, or the heart truly contrite and brilliant in God; sanctifying grace, the second step, a stone of inky purple, rough and calcined, split both lengthwise and athwart, represents by its inky color the oral confession which reveals secrets hidden in the darkness of the heart and rends asunder the stubborn pride of man. The third step is of porphyry, as flaming red as blood that spurts forth from a vein. *Come sangue che fuor di vena spiecia*: and it symbolises the burning ardent charity that urges the penitent soul to penance and to the works of satisfaction imposed by the priest.

I am compelled to omit for the sake of brevity, his references to Baptism solely remarking that he places the unbaptised in Limbo. I pass over in silence his doctrine on the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Redemption, all in conformity with the Church's teaching.

Then there is his veneration of images. He had been to Rome for the jubilee of 1300 and had seen Veronica's towel with the imprint of Our Lord's countenance, and he speaks of it thus:

Like one, perhaps, who from Croatia strayed.
Our Veronica hither comes to see
Whose ancient fame, long as it is displayed
Makes him insatiate, so that inwardly
He says: "My Lord, Christ Jesus, the true God,
Was this your form and aspect really."

I pass over also his veneration for the saints and the many beautiful lines he has written in his *Paradiso* of St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Bonaventure, St. Bernard, and others, but I cannot omit without doing an injustice to Alighieri his sweet references and hymns in honor of the Saint of Saints the Virgin Mother of God.

Dante and Our Lady

No poet has sung of Mary as Dante has. No theologian, no Doctor of the Church, no mystic writer has risen to such lofty heights and has written in such sublime, tender, and loving words of Mary's virtues, Mary's privileges, and Mary's glory in heaven as Dante Alighieri. The Madonna is all in all to Dante—Mary is the name he invokes both morn and night:

The name of that fair flower which I invoke
Both morn and evening ever.