

# **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE DIVINE COMEDY**

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Introduction to the Study of the Divine Comedy by Francesco Flamini & Freeman M. Josselyn

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**FRANCESCO FLAMINI & FREEMAN M. JOSSELYN**

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BY  
FRANCESCO FLAMINI

TRANSLATED BY  
FREEMAN M. JOSSELYN

TRANSLATION REVISED AND AUGMENTED  
BY THE AUTHOR

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## PREFACE

This little book, although it is meant especially for young students and beginners in Dantesque studies, is not a work of compilation. I have aimed to blend in a new synthesis, with appropriate and necessary emendations, the data offered by tradition concerning the genesis of the *Commedia* and its doctrinal content, basing myself on the points which I have discussed at length in my work, now nearing its termination, *I significati reconditi della Commedia di Dante e il suo fine supremo* ("Hidden Meanings of the Divine Comedy of Dante and its Supreme End") (Leghorn, Giusti).

I do not consider it a useless undertaking to try to restrain the interpretative caprice of the many who, without adequate preparation, entertain themselves with the symbols, the allegories, the philosophical concepts expressed or suggested in the poem. To fish up this or that concept out of the church fathers or out of the *mare magnum* of the *Summa theologica* of Aquinas, in order later to discover it in the *Commedia*, is the easiest thing in the world! Hence the wild wood of arbitrary interpretations, in which one goes astray if there be no guiding criteria. We need an organic and simple system of general interpretation, by means of which the individual allegories may cease to be susceptible of dissimilar or contradictory explanations. And I offer such an interpretation epitomized in these pages, — very far from pretending to have resolved every difficulty, but thoroughly convinced of being on the right course.

Since Dante was both orthodox and Aristotelian, it is natural that he should have followed the ethics of the Stagyrte (*his* ethics) according to the one who knew how to reconcile them so admirably with theological doctrine. Now, I have meditated over St. Thomas Aquinas's commentary on Aristotle's "Ethics," and a vivid light has come therefrom, illuminating to my eyes the sacred poem. This is the true source of the moral thought of Alighieri, abundantly put to profit in the *Convivio* as well. This is the guiding thread which should lead us in our study of the *Summa* in relation to the *Commedia*. Only by interpreting the doctrine enclosed in the letter and in the "hidden truth" of the poem according to the maxims of the Philosopher, elucidated and completed by the greatest of theologians, will it be possible for Dante students who have not a preconceived idea or the presumption to pose as innovators, to form an opinion regarding the questions which are most important for the understanding of the work, — an opinion which, like that of Aristotle and the Peripatetics, shall be "almost catholic."

This is what its readers will see attempted in this little volume, in which I have made use of every means to be clear and simple (including those of the graphic arts), even when I had to say things "hard to think on." Finally, I have added a chapter in which the fortunes of the *Commedia* are touched on, and an appendix which gives the fundamental bibliographical suggestions for the study of the poem.

FRANCESCO FLAMINI

MARINA DI PISA, ITALY



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE TRANSLATION

The new system of Dantesque interpretation, epitomized by me in this *Avviamento allo studio della Divina Commedia* ("Introduction to the Study of the Divine Comedy"), has had a very favorable reception in the calm, judicious, impartial minds of American students. And I am very much beholden to my colleague, who, by his careful and very faithful translation (in which my thought appears at times clearer than in the original itself), has made its understanding easier and its diffusion wider among his compatriots.

The revision of the original and of the translation, which the translator and I have done together, has here and there suggested some change or correction in the text, and some additions, especially in the notes. I have also verified all the references with care, and the same may be said of the quotations from the poem, taken from the admirable translation of Norton.

In the last chapter and in the appendix I have brought the bibliography up to date, and in this the English translation is superior to the original version, and may be profitably consulted even in my own country. But especially is it my wish to be able to render some service to the compatriots of Longfellow, as well as to those of Shakespeare; so that, having overcome the grave difficulties in the way of penetrating the secret of the meanings and thoughts of Dante, the path may thereby be made plain for them to enjoy his superhumanly marvelous art.

FRANCESCO FLAMINI



## PREFACE BY THE TRANSLATOR

The importance of the work of Professor Flamini as a foundation for the understanding of the Divine Comedy has suggested to the translator the desirability of presenting it to those who love and study the poem, but are without the knowledge of Italian necessary for following his exegesis in that language.

It has been translated with more attention to fidelity of rendering than to literary elegance, and the translation may be taken as faithful, since it has received the very careful revision of the author. The few notes of the translator are put in brackets. In all cases the titles have been left in their original form, as have Latin words or phrases.

In the appended bibliography the translator has added a short list of books in English, useful for the beginner in Dante study.

Thanks are due to the Houghton Mifflin Company for permission to use the late Charles Eliot Norton's admirable translations in all quotations from the *Commedia* and from the *Vita nova*. The quotations from the *Convivio* and *De monarchia* are given from the translations of Mr. Philip H. Wicksteed, and thanks are due to him and Messrs. J. M. Dent & Co. for permission to use them.

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