

**THE PURGATORY OF
DANTE ALIGHIERI. PART II.
THE EARTHLY PARADISE
(CANTOS XXVIII-XXXIII)**

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The Purgatory of Dante Alighieri. Part II. The Earthly Paradise (Cantos XXVIII-XXXIII) by
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THE
PURGATORY
OF
DANTE ALIGHIERI

PART II. THE EARTHLY PARADISE
(CANTOS XXVIII-XXXIII)

*AN EXPERIMENT IN
LITERAL VERSE TRANSLATION*

BY
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WITH AN INTRODUCTION

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PREFACE

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THE time which has been spent upon the remaining six cantos of the *Purgatorio* has given me the opportunity of reconsidering the crude views expressed in the Preface to my earlier translation: and I owe a great debt to my friend, Mr. Earle, who, in his article on the *Vita Nuova* (*Quarterly Review*, July, 1896) and in the essay which he has allowed me to use as the introduction to this volume, has thrown a new light on the structure of the whole allegory of the *Commedia*.

Nothing could be further removed from Dante's conception of his work, than to regard the cantos treating of the Earthly Paradise as an episode distinct from the main plan. They find their best explanation, when they are considered as essential parts of the central allegory, of which

the *Inferno* and *Purgatory* are subordinate though necessary illustrations.

But even such a statement as this must not be pressed too far. Dante's conception of representing in a figure the scheme of man's redemption is, in his own phrase, polysensuous. On one side, it classifies and exemplifies all human passions, all human aspirations and desires, all the hindrances and all the helps which delay or assist man in fulfilling the law of his being. The *Inferno* shows how each evil passion indulged in brings its own appropriate punishment: the *Purgatorio* shows by what painful discipline it may be subdued and eradicated. These lessons are not wholly new: they are a part of pagan morality: and they are illustrated from the teaching of pagan philosophers, and from the examples of pagan lives. Here it is appropriate that Virgil, the typical representative of unassisted human wisdom, should be the pilgrim's guide and teacher, the exponent of pagan morality.

But this ethical exposition is introduced as a part of the experience of a Christian's pilgrimage. As in the simple allegory of Bunyan, the passage from the death of sin to the life of righteousness proceeds under the direction of divine grace. The difficulties and dangers that beset the path, the City of Dis, the Slough of Despond, the Demons

of Malebolge, the Castle of Giant Despair, are only passed or overcome by the intervention of spiritual assistance, by reliance on the promises of Scripture, on the consolations of Catholic devotion. There are times when Virgil is at a loss, when human philosophy supplies no answer, when the pilgrim's courage fails, and when the only hope of escape lies in supernatural support. Whether by direct resort to the divine word, or by humble obedience to the teaching of the Church, man is enabled to face the obstacles that stand in his way, and by a strength not his own to proceed on his heavenward journey.

This conception of life as a pilgrimage is common to both the allegories. But in Dante's story it is made more vivid by the identification of the pilgrim with the narrator himself. He stamps upon the face of the *Commedia* a character of emphatic reality. The examples of sin, of holy life, of the life in which good and evil passions contend for the mastery, are not abstractions, but real men and women, many of whom the poet has himself known; and the central figure is himself, an actual figure in the politics of the day, whose name, whose country, whose career, is known to his contemporaries. To give this reality to the leading character in the allegory, the symbol of the Church's teaching, he has iden-

tified her with an earthly lady, who had in his own early life inspired him with the passionate devotion of a lover.

But beyond this threefold purpose, the ethical treatise, the exposition of the Christian life, the disclosure of the poet's own personal experience, the *Commedia* is intended to be a monument of Catholic doctrine, a *Summa Theologiae*. The *mater scientiarum* adopts and co-ordinates all human knowledge, moral and physical, and comprehends it under the scheme of God's government. The riddles of the Schools, the mysteries of nature, the problems of ethics, find their solution when read as parts of an universal order. Disquisitions in the *Paradiso*, which seem to us uninteresting and inappropriate, are nevertheless an integral part of Dante's design, a part of the promise made at the close of the *Vita Nuova*, to write of his lady something greater than had before been attempted by any one.

No one of these threads of the labyrinth can be left out of sight in following the course of the allegory: and it is Dante's sustained grasp of all of them that exhibits his marvellous constructive power. His words are charged with meaning that cannot be interpreted from a simple point of view; *ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως οὐ γίνεται*.

It results from this understanding of the com-

plex purpose of the poem, that such a distinction as was crudely suggested in my earlier volume, between the last six cantos of the *Purgatory* and the rest of the *Commedia*, must be condemned as inadequate. Undoubtedly, the Earthly Paradise occupies a separate place in the poem: a new page is turned, a new chapter is begun. But it is not an episode, which can be omitted without loss to the whole structure; and I went too far when I called it an interruption of the allegory, a passage of personal interest only. I trust however that—

Quando scoppia della propria gota
L'accusa del peccato,

some mitigation of sentence will be accorded me in the court of criticism.

My error has at least had this fortunate result that it has led Mr. Earle to examine into the whole allegory of the Earthly Paradise, and to contribute to this volume an exhaustive explanation of its symbolism, for which I feel sure that all students of Dante will feel grateful.

Many, and for the most part friendly critics, have declared themselves not satisfied with the choice of Andrew Marvell's metre for the rendering of Dante's *terza rima*; and much of this criticism may be justified by the imperfection of