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REPORT OF THE DANTE
SOCIETY (CAMBRIDGE,
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DANTE SOCIETY

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ACCOMPANYING PAPERS

THE CHOICE OF A THEME

By Charles H. Grandgent

"IL CHI È IL QUALE"

By Ernest H. Wilkins

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"IL CHI E IL QUALE"

ERNEST H. WILKINS

Lines 11-18 of the second canto of the *Inferno* are as follows:

Tu dici che di Silvio lo parente,
Corrutibile ancora, ad immortale
Secolo andò, e fu sensibilmente.
Però se l'avversario d'ogni male
Cortese i fu, pensando l'alto effetto
Che uscir dovea di lui, e il chi e il quale,
Non pare indegno ad uomo d'intelletto.¹

Of the commentators who discuss the words "il chi e il quale" all except Passerini and Grandgent, I believe, regard these words as indicating the quiddity and the quality of the "effetto." As to just what quiddity and just what quality are meant there is much difference of opinion.

Passerini has the following note:

e il chi, e il quale: "quis et qualis." Il fondatore di Roma e l'autorità imperiale.²

Grandgent has the following note:

Il chi e il quale (quis et qualis), 'who and what he was': Father Æneas, founder of Rome.

Passerini and Grandgent then agree in applying "il chi e il quale" to Æneas, not to the "effetto." They take the sense as being: "pensando (1) l'alto effetto ch'uscir dovea di lui, (2) chi fu, e (3) quale fu."

That they are right in applying the phrase to Æneas, and that the words have a connotation different from and more definite than that suggested in their notes, appears on consideration of the third chapter of the second book of the *De Monarchia*. In that chapter Dante, in order

¹ I quote from the edition of C. H. Grandgent, Boston, 1911.

² Edition of G. L. Passerini, Florence, 1897.

to prove the nobility of the Roman people, asserts and proves the nobility of Æneas, the father of the Roman people. Lines 35-60 are as follows:

Qui quidem invictissimus atque piissimus pater, quantae nobilitatis vir fuerit, non solum sua considerata virtute, sed progenitorum suorum atque uxorum, quorum utrorumque nobilitas hereditario iure in ipsum confluit, explicare nequirem, sed summa sequar vestigia rerum.

Quantum ergo ad propriam eius nobilitatem, audiendus est Poeta noster, introducens in primo Ilionem orantem sic:

Rex erat Aeneas nobis, quo iustior alter
Nec pietate fuit, nec bello maior et armis.¹

Audiendus est idem in sexto, qui quum de Miseno mortuo loqueretur, qui fuerat Hectoris minister in bello, et post mortem Hectoris, Aeneae ministrum se dederat, dicit ipsum Misenum 'non inferiora sequutum,' comparisonem faciens de Aeneae ad Hectorem, quem prae omnibus Homerus glorificat, ut refert Philosophus in iis quae de moribus fugiendis ad Nicomachum.

Quantum vero ad hereditariam, quaelibet pars tripartiti orbis tam avis quam coniugibus illum nobilitasse invenitur.¹

In the first of the three paragraphs quoted, Dante asserts that Æneas possessed a double nobility: a nobility proper to himself, and a nobility of inheritance, derived from ancestors and wives. In the second paragraph Dante proves that Æneas possessed a nobility proper to himself, alleging the qualities of justice and prowess ascribed to him by Virgil, together with Virgil's statement that Æneas was not inferior to Hector.

In the rest of the chapter Dante proves that Æneas possessed a nobility of inheritance, the inheritance being itself double — through ancestors and through wives. Each type of inheritance came to Æneas from each of the three continents. As to ancestors, Asia ennobled him through the more recent, such as Assaracus and others who ruled Phrygia; Africa through Electra and Atlas; and Europe through Dardanus. As to wives, Asia ennobled him through Creusa; Africa through Dido; and Europe through Lavinia.

The chapter ends as follows:

His itaque ad evidentiam subadsumptae praenotatis, cui non satis persuasum est, Romani populi patrem, et per consequens ipsum populum, nobilissimum fuisse sub coelo? Aut quem in illo duplici concursu sanguinis a qualibet mundi parte in unum virum, praedestinatio divina latebit?

¹ I quote from the Oxford Dante.

In view of the distinction so clearly made in this chapter between the two types of nobility possessed by Æneas, and the extensive treatment of each, it seems to me evident that when Dante wrote the words "il chi e il quale" he had in mind the same distinction; that by the words "il chi" he meant to suggest the nobility of Æneas by inheritance; and that by the words "il quale" he meant to suggest the nobility of Æneas in personal qualities.

Just as "l'alto effetto ch'uscir dovea di lui" refers to the descendants of Æneas, so "il chi" refers by implication to those from whom he derived inheritance, and "il quale" refers to the man himself. The two lines constitute another of Dante's swift surveys of past, present, and future.

The phrase "il chi e il quale" thus affords a notable instance of Dante's habit of endowing common words with rich and specific meaning.

THE CHOICE OF A THEME¹

By C. H. GRANDGENT

Sumite materiam vestris qui scribitis aequam
Viribus; et versate diu, quid ferre recusent
Quid valeant humeri.

Horace, *Epistola ad Pisones*, 38-40

"Before all things," declares Dante in his treatise *On Vernacular Composition*, "before all things it behooves everyone to adapt to his own shoulders the weight of his theme, lest one be forced to stumble into the mire, because the strength of his shoulders is overladen. That is what our master Horace counsels, when he says at the beginning of his *Poetics*: 'choose your theme.'" It is not without interest to ask what Dante had to choose from, when he started his literary career. What possibilities were suggested to him by the literature he knew? To answer this question, we must ask another: what literature did he know in the years when, having studied out for himself the art of verse-making, he began to compose songs of his own? His earliest poem, as far as we are aware, is that first sonnet of the *New Life*, written when he was seventeen and, having received a greeting from Beatrice, became conscious of love:

On every captive soul and gentle heart
Before whose eyes the present screed may go,
Greetings from Love, their master, I bestow,
And beg, their judgment they to me impart.
Of all the time when stars display their art
The hours bethirded were, or nearly so,
When Love appeared before me, nothing slow.
At thought of him I still with horror start!

¹ A lecture delivered at Yale University on January 29, 1918. Most of the translations are taken from three of my books: *Dante*, Duffield & Co., 1916; *The Ladies of Dante's Lyrics*, Harvard University Press, 1917; *The Power of Dante*, Marshall Jones Co., 1918.

Joyous to see was Love, and he did keep
My heart within his hand, and in his arms
My Lady, lightly wrapt, in slumber deep.
Then on this burning heart, aroused from sleep,
He poorly fed her, deaf to her alarms.
And as he went away, I saw him weep.

(*The Ladies of Dante's Lyrics*, 137-138)

This poem he sent "to many who were famous composers at that time," and answers came "from many people, and of different opinions; among which answerers was he whom I call the first of my friends, and he then wrote a sonnet which begins 'All that is good, I think, hast thou beheld.' And this was almost the beginning of the friendship between him and me, when he learned that I was the one who had sent it to him." This "first friend" is Guido Cavalcanti, somewhat older than Dante and already a man of considerable note. His reply is preserved, as are two others: one by a minor poet named Dante da Maiano; one sometimes ascribed to a lad who later became a great jurist and a close friend of our author — Cino da Pistoia.

Now, when we look at Dante's verses, we find in them, first, the idea of a prophetic dream or vision, which is too general to point to a definite model; it may be Biblical or classical. Then we see the figure of Love as a god, common in the Provençal poets, who derived it in the first place from Ovid; Dante probably knew it in both sources. From either, or from both, he may have got the sad note at the end — the expectation of sorrow from love. More specific is the rather gruesome theme of a lady compelled to eat her lover's heart, a legend told in various quarters (not figuratively, as here, but literally), and attached especially to the troubadour Guilhem de Cabestaing. The figurative devouring of a heart occurs also in a striking poem by Sordello, a famous Italian who wrote in Provence, and who appears as a noble figure in the *Divine Comedy*. Furthermore, there is in the Bible (Revelation x, 10) a passage that may have colored Dante's thought: "And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter." The little poem seems to indicate, then, familiarity with Provençal verse, with the Bible, and perhaps with Ovid. These Dante presumably knew; and he must have known Virgil, the writer most studied in the schools.

There is more to be noted. Dante's poem is a sonnet, a form unknown to the poets of southern France, being an invention of the Sicilian School, freely used, after the Sicilians, by the early songsters of Tuscany and Bologna.

Furthermore, the sonnet by Dante and the responding sonnets of other authors form together a composition termed in Provence *tenso*, in Italy (where it was imitated by the earliest writers) *tenzone* or *contrasto*. It is a real or fictitious debate between two or more poets, in stanzas of the same structure; among the Italians, the stanzas have always been sonnets. Here are a couple of strophes of a Provençal *tenso* between the famous troubadour Giraut de Bornelh and the scarcely less renowned Count Raimbaut of Orange, nicknamed Linhaure, on the respective merits of a clear and an obscure style:

*
Giraut de Bornelh, I would know
Why you persistently refuse
To praise th' obscure style poets use.
Now tell me why
You glorify
A verse for which all men may care:
Shall everybody have a share?

My lord Linhaure, even so.
'T is right each one should have his views
And suit himself, but my poor muse
Knows well that I
Am rated high
When I the easiest verse prepare.
To blame me, then, is hardly fair.

(Dante, 115-116)

It may be noticed that the rimes in the two stanzas are identical. This was regularly the case in Provençal, and often in Italian, where the practice of replying with the same rimes that were used by the first poet was called "rispondere per le rime."

As an example of a literary debate in early Italian we may take an exchange of sonnets between Bonagiunta Orbiciani of Lucca and Guido Guinizelli of Bologna, both of whom appear in the *Divine Comedy*, the first as an inquirer into the new style, the second as Dante's master in Italian verse.