

IV

DANTE'S IDEA OF IMMORTALITY

AS Dante paced the streets of Verona, the garrulous housewives observed his face, dark as it were with infernal fumes, and whispered to each other, "See, there is the man that was in Hell." To the random reader the "Divine Comedy" is the Inferno, and even beginning students of Dante are likely to confess a lagging interest in the Mount of Purgatory and the Ten Heavens, as compared with the Cavern of Hell. Now, no doubt, the sacred poem is immeasurably richer in content and in form finer than any other vision of the Hereafter that charmed and harrowed the medieval mind. But is it really different in kind as an expression of the human spirit? Ever since Ulysses sought the counsel of Tiresias under the shadowy darkness, Western fancy, pagan and Christian, had peered across the portal of death and sought a glimpse of the Beyond. Its visions revealed and reflected its view and its estimate of this life on earth.

The Greek was a citizen of this world. Hades was to him a region barren and desolate. The sweet smell of the sacrificial blood brings the shades eager and trooping around the son of Laertes: it is the smell of this earth and of the life they crave. Tyro, Antiope, Alcmene, Iphimedia recall their earthly amours with the Olympians; Agamemnon bewails his own piteous death; Ulysses' mother tells him about his home in Ithaca; Tiresias forecasts his future adventures. They are all like far-away exiles; their thought, their in-

terest is in the world of Ulysses. Their presence in Hades is to them nothing. "Nay, speak not comfortably to me of death," Achilles cries out. "Rather would I live on the ground as a hireling of another, with a landless man who had no great livelihood, than bear sway among all the dead."

Dante honored Homer without knowing him. Virgil he loved through lifelong study and worshiped as guide and master. But it is not from Virgil that Dante learned the ways of eternity. As a spiritual document the sixth book of the *Æneid* is no different from the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*. *Æneas* voyages to the silent empire of ghosts, like *Ulysses*, on a necromantic mission, to inquire into terrestrial lots and destinies. The stage-craft is more elaborate here than in Homer; the play enacted is the same. The whole span of Greek civilization separates Virgil from Homer, and the fruits of Greek philosophy are gathered by the Mantuan; but his poetry has not been nourished on them as has the poetry of Dante. Hence the profound difference between the two in the very spirit of the poetic action, even if we take no account of the absence in Virgil of that divine wisdom that leads to Paradise.

Nevertheless, in spite of Dante's radically different attitude toward the Hereafter, as compared with Homer's and Virgil's, external similarities in the landscape are not lacking. Tityus is stretched over nine acres and a vulture with a horned beak is pecking at his immortal liver (Homer has two vultures). Tantalus stands in a lake up to his chin and forever reaches out for fruits forever beyond his reach; Sisyphus vainly rolls an enormous stone uphill that keeps rolling down again. Is not this the same sort of thing that we find in the "Divine Comedy"? In a sense it is, and the resemblances in the scenery of the Hereafter become even

more striking if we compare Dante's vision with those of medieval saints and friars.

St. Brandan and his crew sail to "an ylonde full derke and full of stencche and smoke," and there they hear "grete blowynge and blastyng of belowes"; sinners tormented by fiends, and Judas lying in Hell "in ful brennyng fyre with Pylate, Herode, and Cayphas." The priest Walkelin beholds in midwinter the ghastly pageantry of the Hereafter; in his report he does not shrink from the gruesome, nor is he very reluctant in noting the tortures of his contemporaries, some of them bishops and abbots and noble ladies of his former acquaintance. Frate Alberico, when but ten years old, is taken to Hell by St. Peter and two angels. In a terrible valley they see adulterers, plunged in frost and ice which consumed them like fire. Women who had refused pity to orphans are transfixd through their breasts on spiked branches of trees. A serpent of infinite magnitude sucks souls like flies at each breath, and then blows them out scorched to sparks. Over a burning pitchy river a broad bridge extends, like the Kinvat of the Zoroastrians. As the sinner crosses over it, the bridge narrows down to a thin thread, and the polluted soul falls headlong into the boiling waves.

Nightmare of this general character is not unfamiliar to readers of the "Inferno." It possessed the medieval mind. Imagination fed in unrestrained piety on the horrible and the obscene: the painter's brush and the sculptor's chisel vied with tongue and pen in producing the more profound impression. Plumptre reads in Labitte that the architecture of France alone supplies not less than fifty illustrations of the "Divine Comedy" by way of anticipation. The sinner shrank in holy horror from the visions of Hell, to con-

template in wistful repentance the penances of Purgatory and the bliss of Heaven.

Out of this wild chaos of vulgar nightmare and monastic vigil, Dante, as Professor Grandgent says, "constructs an architectural Hades on a philosophical plan." The architecture of the Hereafter in the "Divine Comedy" reflects Dante's imaginative genius; against the vague, or naïve, or disordered visions of his predecessors, his three canticles reveal a universe conceived in order and perceived with a clarity which Ruskin significantly contrasts with the vagueness of Milton. Far more important to us is the philosophical plan of the structure, Dante's philosophy of life. For to understand Dante's poetry, we must understand his ideas. In his philosophy of life Dante has precursors, just as he has precursors in his delineation of the landscape and the architecture of the Beyond. In both respects he has not only possessed himself of the treasures of others, but has transfigured and sublimated them. Let us examine, then, as briefly as we must, the doctrine of the soul in the philosophy and the theology which commanded the attention and the devotion of our poet.

What is the nature of the soul, its relation to the body, its origin and final destiny? Medieval thought in this entire field of inquiry may be traced back to Biblical-Christian and Greek-philosophical originals.

Like the Homeric Greek, the Hebrew was a citizen of this earth, of this life, but his conception of life was rigorously moral-religious: on this earth he was a chosen son of God. Confusion in dealing with Old Testament ideas may be avoided if we remember that life and death, to the believer in Jehovah, were terms preëminently ethical in connotation, not terms descriptive of physical states. Life is a certain state of relation to God, a prerogative and a

privilege of man as compared with the beasts that perish. As Salmond puts it, "Life . . . is identified with God's favour and with righteousness." Death is the result of man's departure from God; it is sin, disobedience that "brought death into the world, and all our woe." Sheol is the shadowy underworld to which man is condemned by his sins and departure from God. As the prophets elevate the Hebrew religion from a ritualistic cult of a tribal, national deity to the moral worship of a universal God of righteousness standing in personal relation to each man, Israel's yearning for the restoration of Jehovah's favor finds ever more exalted expressions. Perhaps even death and Sheol, the valley of dry bones which Ezekiel saw in his vision, shall not prevail against God's power and God's infinite justice. Jehovah is the judge universal; by Him will the righteous be vindicated; He will bring to life His own; indeed, He will bring all to final judgment.

These two doctrines, of the Resurrection of the Dead and the Last Judgment, are central in the more definite and solemn New Testament pronouncements on the final destiny of man. God is a spirit. The Kingdom of God is spiritual and not of this earth. Christ has come to save men and has returned to the Father. But on the Last Day (and who knows how near it is!) He will come back to judge the living and the dead. The tombs will be opened; saint and sinner shall stand before the Son of God, and be judged, each according to his deserts. This doctrine of the resurrection of the body is reiterated in the Gospels, but it is in St. Paul's Epistles that it finds its most elaborate and positive statement. Christ rose from the dead, Paul declares; in Christ we shall all rise and live forever. This body is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. In a

moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. A note of supreme assurance dominates Paul's dark utterances. That the dead shall rise, he has no doubt whatever; how they shall rise, in what precise manner, what the particular form and nature of the resurrection body, Paul does not state explicitly. "Behold, I tell you a mystery," he declares.

Satisfactory to the unspeculative or mystical mind, this doctrine was bound to stimulate and challenge the intellectually-minded. The resurrection of the body was an idea most fertile in implications for the general doctrine of the soul, and in the light of this new idea the doctrine of the soul had to be reformulated by the Church Fathers. The entire course of Greek speculation on the subject was involved in this reformulation. Here, as in so many other cases, Catholic theology issued from the union of the Christian heart and the Hellenic intellect.

Wicksteed has well distinguished two lines of thought which the Greek mind followed in its conception of the soul and its relation to the body. The one proceeds from primitive notions to Orphic and Pythagorean speculations, and finds its sublime expression in the philosophy of Plato. It views the soul as an entity animating the body but itself incorporeal: a shade, a ghost, a spirit, an immaterial, purely rational soul. It is not subject to the limitations and imperfections of the body; the bodily life is but an episode in its eternal career, which precedes birth and proceeds after death. The body is to it a prison, a shell of impermanence and of illusion. Real life is life eternal, the life of the immaterial, purely rational essences.

The positive advocacy of the idea of immortality in Platonism, and the Platonic preoccupation with the life of the

spirit, were elements of kinship with Christianity which the Apologist recognized from the outset. But the Christian doctrine of life eternal was specifically a doctrine of the resurrection of the body, while the Platonist treated the body as impermanent appearance and a mere shadow shape. Moreover, Platonism, especially in the Neoplatonic form in which it presented itself to Christian minds, leaned to emanationism and pantheism, and was accordingly regarded with suspicion by orthodox theologians.

The other general Greek conception of the soul views it as somehow identical with the body's life or motive power, the vital principle,—material or perhaps immaterial, but in any case essentially bound up with the body. It is the breath of life, the life-giving blood that courses through the body, warm moist air, fire, the form or active principle of the body. So we find it in the Pre-Socratic naturalists and materialists, and, on an immeasurably higher plane, as a criticism of Plato's dualistic leanings, in the Aristotelian doctrine of the soul. Man is an organic unity, a living body, not a body *and* a soul. The soul is the form of the bodily material; it is the life of the body. The two are ever one in reality; only in abstract thought may they be distinguished. Now, while Aristotle thus treats the soul as the vital principle of the body, he recognizes in man another factor which really makes him the person he is; the factor, namely, of reason, the intellect. This is the distinctively human prerogative; plants and animals have souls; only man has reason. Unlike sensibility, the intellect has no direct dependence on the body; indeed, it is one with the rational principle of the universe.

The Aristotelian doctrine that soul and body are one and make up the whole man was a doctrine which the theist was not likely in the long run to neglect. But there were real

difficulties in the way of the Christian schoolman who leaned toward Aristotelianism. The immortal soul which he hoped to save could not be that vital principle, the life of the body, which every animal and plant had just as well as man. When, as a Christian, he spoke of his soul, he was clearly bound, as an Aristotelian, to think of his intellect, which was indeed the distinctively human faculty by virtue of which he was a person. But what of this intellect? Could *it* be regarded as distinctively personal?

Aristotle's doctrine on this point has been the subject of endless dispute. Is the active intellect, in its creative capacity, cosmic and impersonal? Then, if acting in a human individual, it would operate as a person, as potential intellect, realizing as full a measure of rationality as the conditions of human life allow. Reason would then be God-in-us. So Dante writes in the "Convivio": "The soul of man which is endowed with the nobility of the highest faculty, namely, reason, participates in the divine nature under the aspect of everlasting intelligence." But to say this is virtually to identify man's mind or intelligence with the divine. Dante, commenting on his canzone, "Amor, che nella mente mi ragiona" ("Love, who in my mind discourseth to me"), goes on to say: "We can now see what is mind, which is that end and the most precious part of the soul, namely, deity." This position, however, has pantheistic implications, and, besides, casts doubt on personal immortality. For the persistence of the active intellect as a person would depend on the persistence of the human organism in which it operates. When a man dies, the personal functioning of the active intellect in that man would end. So we might say: The work of God is eternal. Man has an opportunity to share in that work during his brief span of life. But it is, after all, God's work, not man's.

Arabian commentators went to great lengths in expounding these aspects and possible implications of the peripatetic philosophy. Christian orthodoxy was repelled in many ways by Aristotelianism. The speculations in the "Convivio" and reminiscences in the "Paradiso" register Dante's struggle with the doctrine. Christendom was unpleasantly impressed by the predilection of Mohammedan, Jewish, and heretical minds for it, and regarded with great suspicion their versions of Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*. In 1209 the provincial council of Paris prohibited the public or private reading of Aristotle's books on natural philosophy and commentaries thereon ("nec libri Aristotelis de naturali philosophia nec commenta legantur publice vel secreto"). In 1215 the University of Paris, while ordering the study of Aristotle's logic, reaffirmed the prohibition of his natural philosophy and proscribed the *Metaphysics*. Pope Gregory IX in 1231 ordered that Aristotle's *libri naturales* be not used until examined and purified of error,—a sign that a "true" Aristotle, acceptable to orthodoxy, was on his way. In 1254, the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle were part of the Paris curriculum, and the time came when to contradict Aristotle was to contradict the Church.

With this great victory of Aristotelianism, the outstanding philosophical achievement of thirteenth-century scholasticism, the Dominican order is associated, especially as represented by Albert the Great, who collected and surveyed the ideas, and St. Thomas Aquinas, who systematized the doctrine, infused it with the spirit of Christian tradition, and translated it into the language of Church orthodoxy. This work is accomplished, so far as concerns our present inquiry, by regarding the active intellect and the potential intellect of Aristotle, not as two activities, the one cosmic

and impersonal, the other individual, but rather as two faculties of the human intellect. The pantheistic and absorptionist implications of Aristotelianism are thus ruled out, while the doctrine of the organic unity of soul and body allows ground for a philosophical formulation of the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body.

Fix now in one glance the essential features of the doctrine of the soul and its destiny to which Dante subscribed. It is a doctrine emphatically Christian. It involves the separate existence of the soul after the dissolution of the body; it likewise requires the resurrection of the body at the end of time, and its reunion with the soul to all eternity. Now to think, with Aristotle, of the soul as essentially united with the body, provides you with a philosophical basis for the doctrine of the resurrection, but it embarrasses you when you come to maintain the existence of disembodied souls in the Hereafter until the Last Day of Judgment. On the other hand, to maintain, with Plato, that the soul is a being in its own right, capable of existing independently of the body, involves you in the disturbing idea of the soul's *pre*-existence. Thirteenth-century scholasticism, while professedly Aristotelian, as a matter of fact exploited both Plato and Aristotle in the interest of Christian belief, since there was much Platonism in its understanding of Aristotle. So, for instance, in Dante's words, "Man is compounded of soul and body; but to the soul . . . belongs that excellence which is, as it were, the seed sown by the divine virtue." But how may we think of the soul as in organic relation to the body at the beginning of its existence and throughout life, and yet as capable of existence after death apart from the mortal body, the while requiring the resurrection of the body at the end of time? We could read the schoolman's answer to this triple question out of St. Thomas or St.

Bonaventura; naturally, however, we turn rather to Dante himself.

And now I feel great misgiving. There are thirteen ways of going wrong in setting out to interpret a poet worth interpreting. How Dante must have smiled at the thought of all his future commentators!

O ye, who in some pretty little boat,
Eager to listen, have been following
Behind my ship, that singing sails along . . .

It were impertinent to recall Dante's plea to Virgil:

Honor and light of other poets, now
May the long study and great love avail me,
Which made me search thy volume . . .

But one may in any case follow humbly

Dietro alle poste delle care piante.
(After the prints of his beloved feet.)

Man's soul comes into being together with his body, Dante declares, rejecting Plato's doctrine of the soul's pre-existence as given in the *Timæus*, probably the only Platonic dialogue he knew. ("Convivio," IV, 21; "Purgatorio," XXV; "Paradiso," IV.) In the process of conception, as a result of the commingling of the father's active and the mother's passive blood, coagulation and vivifying of matter take place, and the embryonic career of a new living individual begins. The future child ascends the scale of being: it is first plant-like in character, then like unto a sea-fungus, then distinctively animal. The time comes when the embryo has ripened and is ready to assume a human character. Up to this point nature has done her own work. Now, however,

The Primal Motor turns to it in joy
Over such art of Nature's, and inbreathes
A spirit that is new, replete with power,
Which draws all that it finds active there
To its own substance, making all one soul,
Which lives and feels, revolving in itself.

Thus, in due time, is born a human being, an essential unity of soul and body, yet, in a mortal body conceived and generated according to the processes of nature, bearing an immortal soul infused by God. Consider the subtlety and the ingenuity of this doctrine which speaks with the voice of Aristotle and utters the words of St. Paul. Man's soul is one with the body, but it is not of the body; it is the body's entelechy and form, but is no mere bodily product. It issues from God, even as wine issues from the sun's heat when joined to the juice that distills from the grape.

By distinguishing the soul from the intellect, Aristotle and Averroës had cast doubt on personal immortality. In opposition to them, Dante maintains in the "Convivio": "The soul as soon as ever it is brought forth receives the potential intellect from the virtues of the mover of the heaven; and this in itself potentially introduces into the soul all the universal forms so far as they exist in the Producer of the intellect, and in a lesser degree in proportion as this intellect is remote from the Primal Intelligence." Furthermore, the soul, while having manifold faculties,—vegetative, animal, rational,—is nevertheless in its essence unitary. Through a multiplicity of faculties it acts as one. It has its seat in the blood; the brain is its treasury; as Ozanam, whom I follow in the order of my discussion at this point, well puts it, the soul "fashions the flesh to render it transparent to the interior lights of thought"; it utters itself in physiognomy and facial expression; with infinite delicacy

it moulds the features; the eyes and the mouth, as Dante says, are the two balconies on which the soul shows itself, veiled. Throughout life it acts and must act in a bodily medium. In that medium it stoops to vice; in that it ascends to virtue. It reaches the normal height of its being in its thirty-fifth year, and its usual course is run in threescore years and ten, or, if there be strength, fourscore years. Old age sets in, and death, and the grave, and dissolution. And is this, then, the end?

"Of all brutal opinions that is the most foolish, vilest, and most pestilent which holds that there is no life after this." So Dante declares in the "Convivio," in ardent opposition to the materialists of his day. This opposition was very real in Dante's time. Italy was full of Epicureans who declared that man's soul was material, generated with the body, and with the body perishing at death. Villani writes of Florentines fighting in the streets over this momentous question. To deny the immortality of the soul meant to lump spirit with the flesh, to treat man's reason as a gross product of material nature. As Dante saw it, human wisdom and philosophy recoil from this amazing error. Man's firm hope of immortality, were it baseless and futile, would itself prove human life the ghastliest irony, and existence the reverse of rational. The experiences of dreams and visions bear evidence to the reality of the Hereafter; and the most veracious doctrine of Christ confirms it, itself making us certain above all reasoning. "We behold the immortal perfectly by faith, and by reason we behold it, touched with the shadow of darkness which falls upon it owing to the mixture of mortal and immortal: and this ought to be our strongest argument that both one and the other exist in us. Thus I believe," Dante concludes, "thus I affirm, thus I am assured, that I shall pass to another better life after this." And in the

sixth circle of Hell, as Sir Thomas Browne somewhat ironically observes in his "Urn Burial," "Epicurus lies deep in Dante's Hell, wherein we meet with tombs enclosing souls which denied their immortalities."

No, life is not ended with death: "The soul which is departed lives on without a break in a nature which is more than human." So Dante exclaims also in the tenth canto of the "Purgatorio":

Do ye not comprehend that we are worms
Born to bring forth the angelic butterfly?

This career of man beyond the grave Dante traced from the forest dark, savage, rough and stern of this world, to the nethermost pit of Hell, and up the arduous Mount of Purgatory to the Ten Heavens of Paradise. We have now reached close to the heart of our theme.

When death comes to the body, the soul departs, bearing with itself what to it appertains. Memory, intelligence, and will are enhanced; but the faculties of mere sensibility are mute. Thus moving, the soul, if unrepentant, is translated to the dismal bank of the sad river Acheron. The old boatman Charon appears with his boat. The sinful soul is ferried across, and, all hope abandoning, goes to its appointed circle in Hell, there to suffer forever the consequences of its sins. But if, even at the last moment of life, man repents him of his sins and turns to God, his soul after death is assigned to the realm of expiation. As the sweet singer Casella explains to Dante, the penitent souls assemble at the mouth of the Tiber, and are by the grace of God transported across the seas to the Mount of Purgatory, there to expiate laboriously their iniquities, to be purged of their sins, and be made fit for the sublimities of Heaven.

When Dante has the souls ferried across to the Here-

after, he is following old tradition. Thus souls were transported across the Channel to Britain, the land of death. As the live oarsmen begin their voyage from the French shore, the vessel lies low in the water, freighted with the souls which the flesh-and-blood boatmen, of course, cannot see. They reach the British shore; a voice is heard, calling out the names of the ghostly passengers. As they alight, the boat rises in the water. This notion of heavy invisible spirits is not Dante's. His account of the soul in the Hereafter, and the manner of its existence, is given in the twenty-fifth canto of the "Purgatorio." As soon as space encompasses the soul that has reached its destination, in Hell or in Purgatory, it radiates a formative activity in the air about it, just as it radiated it in the living body. Sunlight, shining through air saturated with rain, forms a rainbow.

So here the neighboring air will shape itself
 Into that form, which by its virtue now
 The soul that stops there like a seal imprints.

A subtle body is thus formed, responding to the soul's sensible needs as did the earthly body. The inhabitants of Dante's regions of woe and expiation, like dead leaves fluttering in the wind, are strange compounds of the material and the immaterial, ghostly shades with shapes visible and recognizable, like unto Dante in their sense-reactions to light and sound, heat, and cold, and pain, and yet so utterly unlike him that throughout Hell his living body makes him instantly conspicuous. The boat of Phlegyas does not seem freighted until Dante steps into it; and in Purgatory he, alone of all the laboring throng of penitents, so obstructs the rays of the sun as to cast a shadow.

Thus the souls pursue their appointed careers, suffering the torments of punishment or the labors of expiation.

Their mode of existence and their capacities are often perplexing. The heretics Cavalcanti and Farinata know the past and the future, while ignorant of the present. Some of the sinners recognize Dante's features; some hear his Tuscan speech, and call to him to stop and listen to them. But the misers and the prodigals are so darkened by their ignoble life on earth as to be unrecognizable in Hell. Ordinarily they are all human in appearance, though sometimes distorted and mutilated. Soothsayers, for instance, have their faces turned around, and walk backwards. Evil counselors in the eighth pouch of the Malebolge are entirely wrapped up in tongues of flame; sowers of scandal and schismatics, in the ninth pouch, are unspeakably mangled and mutilated. Suicides are turned into trees, gnarled and knotty; dark are their leaves and thorny their branches; the Harpies build their nests in them. When Dante breaks a branch, from the broken splinter words burst forth, and blood.

In Purgatory invisible shades move along with the visible. Voices speak to Dante out of the empty air; from amidst the leaves of a tree laden with sweet fruit are heard the praises of temperance. The penitents pursue the path that leads to their release. The course is long or brief, depending upon the sinfulness that is expiated. Repentance too long postponed in life, as in the case of Belacqua, lengthens the stay in Antepurgatory. So the repentant sinners ascend from terrace to terrace, pilgrims bound for Paradise. And in the vast sweep of the Ten Heavens, which defy speech as they ravish the imagination, the souls of the saved abide starlike in their radiance, in the serenity of their bliss.

The souls in Purgatory, to repeat, are obviously souls in transit; but while the souls in Hell and Heaven have reached their final destination, they have not reached the

full measure of their destiny. Not forever will the Mount of Purgatory be peopled. When the last penitent has mounted to Heaven, the end of time will be in sight, the day of Final Judgment and eternal confirmation of the destinies of men.

Each one shall find again his dismal tomb,
Shall reassume his flesh and his own figure,
Shall hear what through eternity re-echoes.

For the shadow must yield to the full reality; the subtle body formed by the soul in the air surrounding it, which has served its purpose heretofore, must now be replaced by the old body in which the soul lived its life on earth, in which it sank to vice or rose in virtue. Created by God a unity of soul and body, man will rise on the last day once more complete, body and soul. From Heaven and Hell the souls shall gather and, united to their bodies, shall throng into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, to hear their eternal destinies proclaimed by the Eternal Justice. The woe of the damned and the joy of the blessed will then reach their utmost measure. The opened tombs will receive the souls and bodies of the Epicureans who denied the immortality of the soul and will then close forever. Forever will be sealed the consummation of bliss and woe in Heaven and Hell. The end will come of time, the end of becoming, of striving, of attaining. "The portal of the future shall be closed." This is the celestial vision of the aspiring saint:

As long as the festivity
Of Paradise shall be, so long our love
Shall radiate round about us such a vesture.
Its brightness is proportioned to the ardor,
The ardor to the vision; and the vision
Equals what grace it has above its worth.

When, glorious and sanctified, our flesh
Is reassumed, then shall our persons be
More pleasing by their being more complete.

At this stage it might appear strange that such a vision of human destiny should have made Dante a guide of the modern spirit in the ways of eternity. For, grant the living power and glory of Dante's speech and imagery, the glamour of his spiritual romance, his religious ardor, and his deep moral earnestness,—grant all this, and it remains true, nevertheless, that if the final word of Dante is the word we have heard so far, then the hold he has on our minds is indeed a mystery. Look for the river Acheron on your maps; you will not find it there; nor the Mount of Purgatory, either; nor is the earth, as Dante believed, immovable and at the center of the universe. The topography of Hell, the Terrestrial Paradise, the Ten Heavens, Cocytus and Empyrean,—all this is imagining, awful and splendid, but scientifically and philosophically deficient, or even crude and naïve. As Grandgent reminds us, Dante believed that seven thousand years separated the first day of Creation from the Last Day of Judgment. We have come to the last age of our world, he said, and expected the end of time to come in about five hundred years after his day. We are this year commemorating the six hundredth anniversary of this visionary. On the Last Day of Judgment he expected that the suicides, changed to gnarled and knotty trees, would hang their resurrected bodies on their thorny branches, and would thus wear them to all eternity!

Now Dante's outworn medievalism cannot be ignored, for it is no mere scaffolding in the house of his spirit. The final essence of Dante's poetry is not in his words; it is in what he thinks. His ideas are poetry, as Professor Santayana observes. By his ideas, by his ideal vision, must he

be finally judged; by this, whether he can really teach us "how man becomes eternal."

O ye who have sound intellects, observe
The doctrine that is here, hiding itself
Beneath the veil of the unwonted verses!

Unwonted, strange, and mysterious are the verses, stranger by far than the real doctrine which is uttered in Dante. The "Divine Comedy" is a myth and a parable, like unto the parables in the Gospels, like the Myth of the Cave and that strange and unwonted vision of Er the Pamphylian in Plato's "Republic." Count it not a digression if I now turn aside from Dante to refer to this last myth with which Plato concludes his greatest dialogue. I can think of no better way to make this matter clear than thus to elucidate Dante by Plato.

Plato tells us in the myth of one Er, a Pamphylian, who was slain in battle. His body does not decay, and twelve days later he returns to life and narrates his vision of the other world. His soul had gone in company with others to a place of judgment. Er is told to observe what he may, for the enlightenment of mankind. Punishments he observes, and sufferings; likewise corresponding rewards and joys. Seven days he tarries; on the eighth the pilgrims resume their journey, and in five days they reach the column of light which binds together the universe. Here Fate gives the souls opportunity to choose their lives anew. The life which the soul chooses will be its destiny. "Let not him who chooses first be careless, and let not the last despair." The recital of the choices made would take us too far afield. The choices are made, the Fates confirm them; the souls are sent up to earth, to be reborn into the lives they themselves have elected.

This is the vision: a myth of preëxistence and transmigration, beautiful to read and imagine; but who would mistake it for the truth? And yet it is very truth of very truth; for, as Plato tells us, "the tale has been saved, and has not perished, and will save us if we are obedient to the word spoken." This word, this central, saving idea in Plato's vision, is the same as the central idea in Dante's vision. Heaven and Hell are in man's grasp; life or death are offered him, himself to choose his destiny. This choice of man's spirit, how solemn, in consequences how irretrievable; this the supreme opportunity, this the supreme peril of our human state!

The myth is about Er's vision of the other world; the truth is about our life here and now. So Dante's vision also is about Hell, Purgatory, and the Ten Heavens; but the immortal truth of Dante likewise is in his vision of life here and now: his insight disclosing the forces in us that make for eternal worth, and the forces that defeat man's attainment of the ideal goal, that thwart and negate the human spirit. How does man become eternal, how is the eternal in his nature disclosed and attained?

Virgil describes Dante's journey as undertaken "to procure him full experience." Dante's supreme achievement is to be sought precisely in this: in his spiritual insight, in his revelation of the immortal values within the reach of man, and in his ardent espousal of these values. Thus, speaking the language of thirteenth-century scholasticism, he utters the truth of life, which is not merely medieval, but a truth for all time; just as Plato utters it while speaking the language of Greek myth and cosmology. Dante's doctrinal structure is medieval; the truth that lives in it transcends the boundaries of time. It is no arrogant assertion, but simple verity, to maintain that the full measure of Dante's

spiritual message is clearer to our intellects to-day than it was to the medieval mind; clearer, perhaps, to our intellect than it was to Dante's own. It is of the very essence of supreme genius to perceive more of the spirit of man than it can intellectually grasp or formulate. To Dante we may say, in all humility, what Statius says to Virgil in Purgatory:

Thou didst like one, who walking in the night
Carries a light behind, not for himself,
But making wise those that do follow him.

In his letter to Can Grande della Scala, Lord of Verona and his friend and protector, Dante writes with reference to the "Divine Comedy": "The subject of the whole work . . . taken in the literal sense only, is 'the state of souls after death' . . . allegorically the subject is 'man as, by good or ill deserts, in the exercise of the freedom of his choice he becomes liable to rewarding or punishing justice.' "

By his very nature and by his relation to God, man is predestined to high things. As Ulysses urges his crew, so Dante pleads with mankind:

Consider of what origin ye are;
Ye were not made to live as do the brutes,
But to seek virtue and to learn the truth.

This is truly human life, a life of rational activity, revealing to man the goal of his being and directing his energies to the attainment of this goal. This is man's high destiny, to aim at the Divine, to reach unto God, and "of all his loves to reserve for God the highest." This is Heaven. And Dante saw all about him Hell. The Inferno is a miserable gallery of men who have failed as men. Dante is not drawing pictures of distant terrors. The very fact that he filled Hell with his contemporaries, with Florentines of his own generation, made Hell real, "immediate, actual, bodily . . .

more distinct and natural," as Milman says. Boniface VIII is still Pope in Rome, and already the simoniacs in the third pouch of the Malebolge, in the eighth circle of Hell, are looking for his arrival. It is a harrowing idea, and the effect is one of overpowering immediacy. As we read Dante's "Inferno," we feel Hell all about us, right here and now.

In this main point Dante's Hell differs from the Hells of his predecessors. Even St. Thomas is content to exhibit Divine Justice by showing that the sinner *deserves* the punishment he receives. But when Dante reads on the gates of Hell, "Justice incited my sublime Creator," his conception of Divine Justice is at once simpler and more profound. Hell is what the sinner himself *chooses*. The "Inferno" is not so much an account of how sin is punished; it is fundamentally a revelation of what sin *is*: essentially and in the full measure of its fruition. The wages of sin is death, we have been told. Dante's truth is deeper. Sin *is* death, he declares in true Biblical manner. He recalls Aristotle's words that, in man, life is the use of reason, and that for a man to part with this use of reason is the same as to be dead. So he writes, in the canzone interpreted in the Fourth Tractate of the "Convivio," of a man "who while he doth walk the earth is dead,"—dead as man but surviving as beast. Frate Alberigo treacherously has his brother killed. His soul goes to the traitor's pit in Hell, and goes there instantly. Above, on earth, his body continues its soulless existence; a demon takes possession of it until the time of its dissolution. The hideous degradation, the tragic horror of this death-in-life, Dante exhibits in his portrayal of Hell.

What is sin? It is man's great refusal to enter upon his divine inheritance, the betrayal of his high trust, the wilful rejection of God's love. So Christ charged the dealers in

the temple: "My house shall be called a house of prayer; but ye make it a den of robbers." The luke-warm, Laodicean soul, lacking vigor to espouse actively either good or evil, is not admitted even to Hell; it is outside the dread portal, in nondescript aimless confusion. After all, as Ibsen tells us in "Peer Gynt," "Both vigor and earnestness go to a sin."

Sin is by Dante viewed as threefold, and these three kinds of sin are exhibited in the three great divisions of Hell. The high destiny of man is to pursue virtue and knowledge, rational devotion, love of God. Now, man's emotions, instead of being guided and moderated by reason in the desire for earthly things, may be fired to excessive passion by unenlightened impulse and instinct. This is *Incontinence*, and in four circles of Hell we find the souls who have chosen to waste themselves in lust, in gluttony, in avarice and prodigality, in anger.

Lower sinks human nature, when instinct and impulse, instead of flaming in excessive passion for things unworthy, are employed to defeat the end of love. This is double negation of the soul's true humanity: reason is scorned and love is absent. These are the *Violent*; a high cliff separates them from the *Incontinent* in Hell. In three rounds we find the souls violent against their neighbors' persons and possessions; against their own persons and possessions; against God, Nature, and Art. Here are the murderers, robbers, tyrants; here are suicides; here the blasphemers, sodomites, usurers.

A still vaster chasm of spiritual downfall marks the descent to *Fraud*. Here sin reaches its depth: intelligence is here bedeviled; malicious craft is employed to defeat the ends of love. Triply damned is the soul in this third division of Hell. Dante distinguishes *Fraud Simple* or *Deceit*

from Treachery, which he regards as the devil's pit of sin. Deceit is lodged in the ten evil pouches of the Malebolge, in the eighth circle of Hell. Here are the seducers and panders, flatterers, simoniacs, soothsayers, barterers, hypocrites, thieves, evil counselors, schismatics and scandal-mongers, falsifiers. The very heart of Hell holds the traitors of their kindred, of their country, of their guests and companions, and of their benefactors. Judas Iscariot, Brutus, and Cassius are at the very pit of the pit, writhing in the three jaws of Satan.

Now observe the moral consistency of Dante's treatment. The sinners are all at home in their proper circle in Hell; their punishment exhibits in sensible terms their inner character. According to the old Indian doctrine of transmigration, a swine's body awaits the swinish soul. So in the *Inferno* we see, not the punishment of the lustful, of the murderer, or the traitor: we see lust itself, or murder, or treachery; the sinful soul itself is disclosed to our view, and its very character is its punishment. In this exhibition of the real Hell, Dante's genius is marvelous. The misers and the prodigals spend all their strength rolling heavy weights against each other in the muddy marsh of the Styx. The wrathful souls tear and bite and smite each other. Murderers are clear up to their necks in the boiling, bloody river Phlegethon, and tyrants clear up to their eyebrows. Flatterers are immersed up to their lips in filth. Hypocrites, with painted faces, have to walk under the weight of hooded cloaks of lead, gilded on the outside. The cold, loveless souls of the traitors are at home plunged in the frozen lake of Cocytus, frozen tears blinding their eyes. But perhaps the subtlest exhibition of Dante's profound insight is to be found in his incomparable account of the adulteress Francesca da Rimini and her lover Paolo. What is their punish-

ment? Eternally to be driven through the air by the violent whirlwinds of passion, eternally in each other's arms. How many readers of Dante perceive damnation in Paolo and Francesca's lot? Eternally in the arms of love: is this Hell? Even so, answers Dante, himself a high priest of love. "Unlawful love . . . is condemned to be mere possession—possession in the dark, without any future. . . . A love that is nothing but love" is "in hell already." So Professor Santayana interprets Dante. "Only an inspired poet could be so subtle a moralist. Only a sound moralist could be so tragic a poet." Not only as poetry but as a revelation of spiritual insight, the canto of Paolo and Francesca is the jewel of the "Inferno."

This is Hell: the abode of sin, the absence of God and of the love of God. What are we to do, then, to be saved? A repentant will is the first condition. The sinner is in Hell because he has chosen to be there: God Himself cannot save him against his free will. The malicious soul actively rejects God, and malice is beyond God's saving grace. To be saved, man must eagerly turn to Christ in prayer and repentance. Be it even at the last breath of life, as in the case of Manfredi, God will not reject the penitent sinner. Once repentant, the sinner has rejected malice; but much purging is needed before he attains the purity and saintliness toward which his will has so ardently turned.

Of the three parts of the "Divine Comedy," the "Purgatorio" is perhaps the most human. Virtue is forever beyond the reach of the sinner in Hell, forever attained in Heaven. Purgatory alone is a scene of moral endeavor after virtue. The Mountain of Purgatory is the visible exhibition of the soul's mounting from sin to Heaven through purgation and expiation. How does the soul mount from sin to salvation? How are the brands of the seven deadly sins blotted out

from the brow of man, until he stands at the threshold of Paradise, stainless and saved forever? Dante answers: By vigorously negating the sins to which, before repentance, the soul had yielded. In the seventeenth canto of the "Purgatorio" Virgil expounds to Dante the manifold nature of sin that is expiated on the Holy Mountain. Love alone is good, love well directed and in right measure. Man's love may be misdirected to evil; this is the case in the sins of pride, envy, and anger. Or else man may love the good, but not with sufficient ardor. This is sloth, spiritual sluggishness. Or, again, man may love excessively things that deserve only moderate attachment. This is the case in avarice and prodigality, gluttony, and lust. From these seven vices the soul must be delivered through expiation and hard discipline.

On the first terrace of the sacred mountain, the soul is purged of pride, by bowing down in humility under heavy burdens. The envious, covered with sackcloth, lean against each other, thus lending the mutual support they had refused during life. On earth their eyes could not endure the sight of another's happiness; so here their eyelids are transpierced with iron wire. Those who expiate anger are blinded by a thick veil of smoke, blinded as they had been by wrath. The slothful have to run the good course at top speed:

Swift, swift, that no time may be lost because
Of little love . . .

The misers and the prodigals are in tears, lying with their faces to the earth, to keep in mind their former depravity in devoting their lives to earthly things. The gluttons, pallid, withered, and emaciate, with deep-sunken eyes, throng about a fruit-laden apple-tree, but cannot satisfy their hun-

ger. The lustful are purged in flames hot as their consuming passions. And while the sinners are thus being purged, all about them they see and hear praises of the respective virtues they seek to attain, and the air is sweet with the Beatitudes.

In Purgatory, as in Hell, the souls of men are where they belong, where by their own will they have chosen to be. So Wicksteed observes: "Never did Dante pierce more deeply into the truth of things . . . than when he told how the souls in Purgatory do not wish to rise to Heaven till they have worked out the consequences of their sins." For until that time the soul, feeling itself short of the mark, is possessed with the torment and the longing of one repentant but not yet sanctified. It craves God, but has not yet attained unto His presence. But joy universal breaks forth when the sinner is at last purged and ready to ascend to Heaven. He drinks of the waters of Lethe and Eunoë; the memory of his sins is no more, but doubly blissful is the recollection of his virtue. No more is he repentant, no more struggling with evil. He can now take his own pleasure for his guide, since all his pleasure is in God.

There is spiritual gravitation in the Universe. As St. Augustine tells us, "The soul is moved by love as the body is by its weight." So Dante, in the "Convivio": "The soul of man naturally desires with boundless longing to have being . . . and since God is the first cause of our souls . . . the soul desires most of all to return to Him." The soul of Beatrice goes to "the only home that most be-fitteth her," Dante sings in the "Vita Nuova." Only in attaining unto the Divine Presence is real joy and peace possible for man, for only with God is the human soul really at home. His will is our peace, *E la sua volontate è nostra pace*. This peace passeth all understanding and cannot be

attained by human wisdom unaided. The wisest pagans are in Limbo, and at the portals of Heaven Virgil leaves Dante. His knowledge may lead to the attainment of those virtues which St. Augustine called splendid vices, but the full measure of faith, of hope, of Christian love that leads to God, is forever beyond him.

The ascent of the Ten Heavens in the "Paradiso" brings to a sublime climax Dante's return from the earthly love of the *donna gentile* to the heavenly love of Beatrice, from secular learning and knowledge to the divine wisdom of faith. It solemnizes Dante's recognition of an Infinite center of supreme, ineffable perfection, of a Value Absolute which the human soul perceives and worships, in which it finds its peace and its eternal home, but which transcends the capacities of reason to analyze and formulate. This transcendent sense of the Divine strangely challenges Dante's intelligence; humble in accepting the truths of faith, he is ever insistent in his effort to understand the mysteries of religion. Heaven is to him indeed the great adventure of the spirit. The "Paradiso" seems—only seems—imaginatively austere as compared with the first two canticles. Even more sublime than the marvelous play of imagery which holds us spellbound in the "Inferno" and the "Purgatorio," is the play of ideas and living conceptions in which we now may share. The ascent from Heaven to Heaven is an ascent in spiritual vision. At every step Beatrice charges Dante to rise above his mortal, temporal outlook and to survey things in the light of the Eternal.

Spinoza speaks of the intellectual love of God, *amor intellectualis Dei*, which enables a man to see all things under the pattern of eternity, *sub specie aeternitatis*. So the love of God exemplified for Dante in his devotion to Beatrice reveals to him more and more completely, and with ever

more immediate certainty, the living presence of God in each passing moment of mortality. Love of God is not only the saving force in man's life, it is the eternal dynamic in the universe. The truth of truths about the world is that it is attuned to *Good*, to God's love. So Plato taught when he found the supreme reality in the Idea of the Good. The whole world is but the reflection of God's beaming love; creation is the Divine Idea. In mastering the forces of evil in his nature, in yielding reason the victory, in pursuing virtue and knowledge, man attains the only real happiness which this our mortal life affords. But he attains more: in godliness, in truth, in love, man allies himself and is one with that in the universe which alone is eternal. Love discloses to man goals of aspiration that defy the vicissitudes of time:

Light intellectual replete with love,
Love of true good replete with ecstasy,
Ecstasy that transcendeth every sweetness.

In love of Good and godliness even this mortal body is made to participate in the immortal concerns of the spirit. In this sense perhaps even the resurrection of the body in Dante may have allegorical significance. Our body, our every moment of mortality, is bound up with immortal possibilities; the eternal is here and now and is ever being realized in us.

Love of God leads man to scale heights which the intellect cannot reach. Again and again Dante is blinded by the luminous sublimities of Paradise, but love and Beatrice help him attain the brighter vision. There is no monotony of blessedness in Heaven. Each soul in Dante's Paradise attains eternally its utmost of bliss in the presence of God, but some souls are capable of more bliss than others. The Ten Heavens represent accordingly a sublime gradation of

beatitudes, a gradual approach to unqualified perfection. The nun Piccarda, in the first Heaven, of the moon, has been inconstant in her saintliness; the great lawgiver and statesman Justinian, in the second Heaven, that of Mercury, was ambitious; the ardor of the good lovers, in the Heaven of Venus, inclined to sensuality. The shadow of earth falls on these three Heavens, and a touch of the earthly is in their celestial bliss. The next four heavens subtly exhibit Dante's scale of spiritual values. The theologians and the learned saints are in the fourth Heaven, of the Sun. Here is intellect directed to the understanding of the Divine. Higher than the wise theologian, in the Heaven of Mars, is the brave soldier of the faith, the holy crusader, who battles for God and righteousness. Higher still, in the sixth Heaven, of Jupiter, are the kings who rule righteously, in the spirit of divine justice. But even more exalted than the wisdom of the theologian, or the fortitude of the holy crusader, or the justice of the righteous ruler, is the contemplative insight and intuition of the mystic, sublime in the seventh Heaven, that of Saturn.

Thus it is that the soul becomes eternal, and aspires to topmost Heaven through the attainment of virtue. In their several spheres of beatitude, the souls of the blessed are all in the presence of Infinite Love, for all Paradise breathes the immediacy of the Divine. Love is exalted throughout, but clearly there is no detraction of intelligence here. Socrates had said, "Virtue is knowledge," and, as we see, Dante ends with a pæan of mysticism, with an exaltation of the higher intelligence more important even than love to the soul in quest of the eternal;

Blessedness

Is founded in the faculty which sees,

And not in that which loves, and follows next . . .

Dante has come from the human to the divine, from time to the eternal. In the presence of God, in the Empyrean "where every *Where* and every *When* are centred—*Dove s'appunta ogni ubi ed ogni quando*"—the language of intelligence fails, but in immortal clarity the passing confusions of his soul are transcended, and he sees things face to face, sees them with St. Bernard, in the light of mystic contemplation. In the passing flow of time and mortality he had sought the immortal. Athirst for God, he had sought the Divine Presence, had sought to learn how man becomes eternal. And he had seen how man is eternally damned, and how he is purged to the attainment of eternal blessedness. His soul had sought to penetrate "the Truth in which all intellect finds rest."

Too high was that for mortal wings to glide—
Till, stricken by a sudden-flashing ray,
My reason found its longing satisfied.
My soaring fancy here at last gave way ;
But, like a wheel whose motion nothing mars,
Already wish and will, in even sway,
Were turned by Love, which moves the sun and stars.

RADOSLAV A. TSANOFF.