

dearly loved Florence, nineteen years which saw one hope after another of salvation for his country dashed to the ground, as he thought he recognized in some famous warrior or sovereign, the expected deliverer of Italy and time after time found his expectations vain. He has told us how bitter those years were, "exul immeritus," an exile without cause, he pathetically calls himself, and his exile ended only with his death in 1321. He never saw Florence again. Bitter years which tried his brave heart to the uttermost, but to those years we owe the *Divina Commedia*, the noblest work ever written, a work which today is as vivid and real, as full of grandeur and truth, as full of beauty and pathos as it was six hundred years ago. I hardly know where to begin in speaking of it. Into it Dante put his very soul. The dreadful scenes were true and living to him, they had left their trace on his worn and melancholy face—"Eccovi l'uomo che é stato nell'inferno," said the people as they looked at him. This is the man who has been in Hell." How strong must have been his faith who could believe through all in the love of God, could believe that Love had formed even the place of punishment and despair.

Dante himself tells us about the plan of the *Divina Commedia* in a letter to Can Grande, by most authorities considered authentic. "Let us consider," he says, "the subject of this work according to the letter first, and then according to the allegorical meaning. The subject of the whole work then, taken literally, is the state of souls after death, as a matter of fact, for the action of the whole work is about

this. But if the work be taken allegorically its subject is Man, in so far as by merit or demerit in the exercise of free will he is exposed to the rewards or punishment of justice." For lack of space I must pass very briefly over the subject-matter of the poem, and proceed to give some explanation of Dante's conception of the universe, which I perhaps can do with the help of the accompanying charts. In Dante's day the Pythagorean system of astronomy was still universally received, which makes the earth the centre of the universe, round which the sun revolved, and this accounted for the apparent movement of the celestial bodies. The lower hemisphere, Dante supposed, according to the common belief of his day, was uninhabitable, and save for the Mount of Purgatory, nothing but a wild waste of waters, and he makes Ulysses lose his life in his bold attempt to venture upon its depths. In the centre of the habitable earth, that is the upper hemisphere, Jerusalem was placed, according to the Scripture, "I have placed thee in the midst of the earth." Here fell Lucifer for his pride, and displaced huge masses of earth as he fell, which, forced before him, rose up on the other side of the earth, as the Mount of Purgatory, Lucifer himself being fixed by the laws of gravity, in the central point of the earth. The vast chasm left behind him became the Pit of Hell. Here the impenitent wicked are punished by suffering suited to their crimes, while in the Mount of Purgatory those sinners who died repentant suffer the purifying punishment which prepares them for their entrance to the Earthly Paradise, at the top of the Mount, which