

He awoke to a sense of his country's needs and the year 1300 found him in his place among the rulers of Florence.

The Italy of Dante's day was a disjointed one. To Dante, as to other patriots from age to age, the unity of Italy was a glorious ideal. But it is only within the last forty or fifty years that this ideal has become a reality. From the time of the Lombard invasion, and the subsequent conquest of many parts of Italy there had been no central point of government, but separate and independent kingdoms had existed within her bounds, and each state and city had a separate and independent interest. Thus Dante was born into a land of strife and disorder, and Florence in particular was torn by the two great opposing factions of the Guelphs and the Ghibellines.

Roughly speaking we may say that the Ghibellines were a party who stood for an aristocratic principle of order, who looked to the German Empire as the heir of the Empire of Rome, and espoused the Emperor's cause against the Pope—their danger was a tendency to oppression. The Guelphs represented a democratic principle of progress and supported the Pope in his struggles with the German Emperor, their tendency being towards chaos and license. Dante, who was by birth and tradition a Guelph, had at first fought on that side, but as in later years he pondered the state of his country, he gradually embraced the conception of the Holy Roman Empire, as the expression of perfect government, and thought he saw in the Ghibelline cause an escape from the woes which had be-

fallen his country. Those who are interested in this point will find a very clear account of it in Bryce's *Holy Roman Empire*. It is sufficient here to say that Dante, impressed by the grandeur and glory of the Empire of Rome, believed that God had committed to her the dominion of the world. To the Roman empire, the temporal power, now vested in the German emperor, was given, to the Church, through the Pope, the spiritual dominion; and the two forces working side by side, each in its own sphere, formed a perfect government, and a type on earth of the Divine rule. Dante considers rebellion against either as of equal sinfulness, and I have mentioned this point here because those wishing to read the *Divina Commedia* intelligently, will find in the recognition of this thought in Dante's mind running continuously through the poem, a clue which will make many points clear, that seem obscure. Take the final scene in the *Inferno*, Lucifer champing in his jaws his three victims, Judas, Cassius, and Brutus, the two latter, the traitors and rebels against Caesar, the head and representative of God's temporal power on earth, the former the traitor against his Divine master, the supreme Head of the spiritual power.

We have no time to follow his efforts, as Prior of Florence, to hold the helm, to put down factions, to serve his country to the best of his power. It was while he was absent at Rome on a painful and fruitless errand to the Pope, that the cruel sentence of banishment was pronounced upon him in 1302. For nineteen years he was banished from his