

St. Alphonsus Club:

Rev. Father Ryan, Rector of St. Michael's Cathedral, lectured last evening on "The Catholic View of Dante," in the Hall of St. Alphonsus Club before a crowded audience.

After a few pleasant introductory remarks very complimentary to the gentlemen of the St. Alphonsus Club, and expressing the deep interest he took in this work, the Rev. lecturer said in part.

It may be asked why he had selected Dante as his subject, and who is Dante anyhow? Answering the last question first the lecturer said, Dante is one of the greatest poets that ever lived. Macaulay says: "Dante was the earliest and greatest writer of his country." He may be called the creator of modern literature, and the greatest writer of any country. Therefore it is fitting that the members and friends of a literary club shall know something about him. But even if Dante was not the greatest, he was a poet of the Catholic Church, and hence a Catholic literary society should know much about him. And this more especially as the great Catholic poet had been claimed by non-Catholics as their own. When Protestants, Agnostics, Infidels and Pagans, lay claim to him it is a sign he must be worth having. Catholics alone have a right to him, for he is essentially and emphatically a Catholic poet, and this the lecturer would briefly prove.

One of Dante's latest and best commentators Dr. Hettinger says: "He anticipated the most pregnant developments of Catholic doctrine, mastered its subtlest distinctions and treated its hardest problems with almost faultless accuracy. Were all the libraries in the world destroyed, and the Holy Scriptures with them, the whole Catholic system of doctrine and morals might be almost reconstructed out of the Divina Comedia." And Cardinal Manning says: "I hope Catholics will awaken to a sense of the not inculpable neglect of the greatest of poets, who, by every title of genius, and by the intensity of his whole heart and soul, is the master-poet of the Catholic Faith. It may be said that after the Paradise of Dante, nothing remains for us but the Beatific Vision."

Surely such a poet and such a work are well worthy the attention and study of a Catholic Literary Society.

The lecturer would not consider Dante as a poet merely, or as a philosopher, much less as a politician or a historian. He would consider him only as a religious teacher, as a theologian: and he would show from a brief summary of his great poem that Dante's teaching was thoroughly Catholic. Taking the poem in its three great parts the lecturer went on to prove with cogent argument and abundant illustration that Dante's Inferno was the place of eternal punishment of unrepented mortal sin, the creation of the retributive justice of God, that the Purgatorio was the intermediate state of satisfactory penance, and intercessory prayer, and that Paradise is the everlasting dwelling place where the eternal God manifests Himself to the angels who remained faithful, and to the glorious company of the saints who, while on earth, by Faith, Hope, and Charity, by prayer and good works, by sacraments and sufferings merited the kingdom and crown in heaven.

The strongest argument given to prove that Dante was a Protestant and precursor of Luther is, that he places a Pope in hell. Such reasoning shows an utter misconception of Catholic teaching regarding the Pope. The successor of St. Peter is infallible, but he is not impeccable. As Vicar of Christ and divinely appointed guardian of Christian Faith and morals, he cannot in his official capacity teach what is erroneous. But he can commit sin, and if he die in a state of mortal sin he is condemned to hell. Such is Dante's teaching as a matter of Catholic faith. As to the matter of fact that Pope Boniface VIII. did deserve to be so condemned it was simply Dante's private and prejudiced opinion in which the poet was wrong. Dante was a great Catholic poet, but he was not infallible in matters of historic fact.

Two hundred and fifty-eight Popes have sat in Peter's chair; many of them were martyrs; many, saints and doctors, and all can compare most favorably with any line of rulers that ever lived.

In concluding, the rev. lecturer drew a striking contrast between the religious teaching of Dante's great poem and Tennyson's "In Memoriam." The last word of the religious teacher of Protestantism is:

"So runs my dream—But what am I:
An infant crying in the night,
An infant crying for the light;
And with no language but a cry!"

While the great Catholic poet leads the soul through prayer and penance to the realms of Light Eternal, and eternal rest.

"It may not be
That one who looks upon that light can turn
To other object, willingly, his view.
For all the good, that will may cover, there
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