

system the dualism of the present and the future life, the Church and the world, faith and reason, is already stated in its most uncompromising form.

Now Dante is the champion and exponent of this dualism, and yet he seizes it at the moment when it is passing away. His theology is Christianity speaking in terms of Neo-platonism and Aristotelianism. His passion for political freedom is Germanic, but it utters itself in the language of imperial Rome. His impassioned zeal for the regeneration of society is half concealed in his vivid picture of the horrors of Hell, the expiatory punishments of Purgatory and the glories of Paradise. The spirit of the coming age speaks through him, but it clothes itself in the forms and the language of the past. In coming to the study of such a writer we must seek to do justice both to what he explicitly affirms, and what he unconsciously suggests. The spell of Dante's genius is so potent that there is danger of our attributing to him ideas beyond his age. This danger we must endeavour to avoid, but we must also beware of the more serious mistake of narrowing down the large suggestiveness of his poetic intuitions to the Procrustean bed of his explicit logic. What Goethe says of Byron is in some degree true of every poet, that "when he reflects he is a child." This is especially true of Dante, who like all medieval thinkers proceeds from preconceptions which we cannot accept, and moves to his conclusions by a method of ratiocination which to us seems almost childish. To do him justice we must fix our attention upon the perennial truths which these preconceptions and artificial forms of reasoning merely indicate. Much of the interest of Dante lies in the conflict between the old and the new, a conflict which was on his part largely unconscious. By the force of his genius he holds together discrepant elements which can only be reconciled in a higher synthesis. The movement towards a more comprehensive view of life, which he never himself explicitly reaches, is partly indicated by the way in which he makes Bonaventura and other mystics supplement the deficiencies of Aquinas. He follows the great schoolman as far as the critical intellect enables him to give a clearly formulated theory, and when he is seeking to express the Unity of all things as summed up in God he falls back upon the mystics. Within the limits of medieval thought Dante's sympathy is wide and flexible :