

little of Beatrice, or Bice, as Boccaccio calls her, giving her the still common abbreviation of her name in Italian. We know that she was lovely, sweet, and noble, that she lived through the early years of Dante's life, was married, and died soon after. Dante only records one other meeting, when he was privileged to speak to the lady of his affections. She was walking in a public place with her two companions, this time dressed "in most spotless white," and exchanged with Dante a few words of courteous greeting. Dante's heart was again stirred, and he wrote soon after the first of the sonnets still left to us. The *Vita Nuova*, or *New Life*, was the earliest result of this love, giving the story of their brief interviews and occasional meetings, and some other details, far too few, of her short life and early death. The narrative is interspersed with the lovely poems and sonnets she inspired. We do not know if they ever came closer together than in that one "gracious salutation," but we know that his love for her, and her unfading memory were the greatest influences of his life. In the last division of the *Vita Nuova*, he, evidently feeling that the story just closing was insufficient to express his love for her, and his sense of her sweetness and purity, expresses his intention of writing of her "what ne'er was writ of woman." The thought of the *Divina Commedia* was even then in his mind, and in this poem the intention was nobly fulfilled. This passion then, we may consider as one of the two great motive powers of his life. The other we shall find later came from his political views. Soon after Beatrice's death Dante was married to Gemma

Donati, by some identified with "the gentle damsel" who he tells us in the *Vita Nuova*, sought to comfort him after the death of Beatrice. I may remind you that this chivalrous love for some idealized woman, who perhaps never came into any closer relationship with her lover than in the present case, was quite a feature of the Middle Ages, and did not interfere with marriage, or a happy domestic life. It was, I think, one of the results of the exaltation of Woman which had grown up in Christendom, and which found its expression, sometimes even to the point of absurdity, among the Minnesingers.

Of Gemma we have scarcely any notice, except that she and Dante lived together until his banishment and had several children. As long as Beatrice lived all Dante's thoughts centered round her, and she was a Divine message to him of God's presence on earth, and of His love for His creatures. After she was taken, he seemed for a time to have lost his hold on heavenly things, and to be as it were, wandering without a guide away from the light. He had now reached the age of thirty-five years, "the midway of the path of Life," as he calls it, and appears to have drifted hopelessly into the tangle of political disorder in which the country was then enveloped. But his was not a nature to give way to despair, or indolence. Through strife and trouble of soul he fought his way back to a consciousness of his place in his country, and to freedom of spirit, and it was then, when his studies in philosophy were taking definite shape, that he again found in the idealized and glorified image of Beatrice, the inspiration he needed.