

this with a closeness and interest which egoism had never permitted before. He is struck by the degradation and misery of the bulk of mankind, upon which the power and happiness of the few are built. He perceives that the masses are too wretched and too undeveloped to embody his conceptions. His instrument must be improved before he can use it. He thus arrives at the truth, that his own happiness,—the realization of his own personality, is inextricably connected with the well-being of his fellow-men. He and they are really one. The tie that unites us with society is so close that it must be regarded even by intelligent egoism.

Thus Sordello had found that the first step towards carrying out the plan of life which he had proposed for himself, was to improve the condition of the people at large. But how? That is a question which the inexperienced poet finds it difficult to answer. Nor can the men of action, the leaders of great parties, help him to a solution. They have never even given it a thought. Guelfs and Ghibellines are not, apparently, divided about any great principle. Everyone seems bent only on the blindest and narrowest self-seeking. Yet in Sordello the need of action has been awakened; his interest in mankind, once roused, gathers strength. His egoism is yielding before contact with human life.

At length he frames an ambitious scheme for the social and political regeneration of Italy. But no sooner is it formed than he reluctantly abandons it; for observation convinces him that the populace are not sufficiently advanced to profit by it. Then comes home to him the truth that the development of mankind must be gradual. The institutions and refinements of advanced civilization are worse than wasted on a barbarous people. Each advance must be but a step, and the nature of that step must be determined by the condition of society at the time. Slow progression is the law of man's nature.

What then, Sordello asks himself, is the advance possible to my age to which I may contribute? His thoughts naturally turn to the great struggle which was rending Italy