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DANTE AND MEDIEVAL THOUGHT.

I.—THE THEOLOGY OF DANTE.

THE Middle Ages may not inaptly be regarded as the period in which a preparation was made for the wider and freer life of modern times by the gradual appropriation of the culture of the past, as illuminated and transformed by the spirit of Christianity. When we consider the complexity of the material, we cannot be surprised that the process of assimilation was incomplete. Judea, Greece and Rome may each be said to have concentrated itself on a single task: it was the problem of the Middle Ages to combine into a whole the religion of Christ, the philosophy of Greece, and the law and polity of Rome: and to harmonize these various elements with the powerful individuality and love of freedom characteristic of the Germanic peoples. The imperfect fusion of these factors is shown in the series of antagonisms, which rule the whole of medieval thought: the future life is opposed to the present, the sacred to the secular, faith to reason. But, it was the church, and the church alone, which preserved the germs of a speculative view of the world, and made possible the rise in due time of modern philosophy. In the dissolution of the old order of society, and while a new order was gradually shaping itself, it developed from the invisible beginning of a small religious community into a compact and powerful organization. In its office of teacher of Europe, the Church employed the system of doctrine which received its final form at the hands of Augustine, its great speculative genius, and in that