

poems, he said, were intended to set forth the excellence of Love and Virtue, and they were to be accompanied by the Bread of exposition in order to constitute a banquet. His plan was to be that of an encyclopædia, embracing the whole range of contemporary learning, written in a language that could be understood by common people.

Thus (i. 1) he remarks: O happy those few who sit at that table where the bread of angels is eaten, and miserable those who partake of food in common with the beasts! Yet as every man is naturally the friend of every man, and every friend grieves over the defects of one whom he loves, those who are banqueted at so high a table are not without pity for those whom they see in the pastures of cattle, feeding upon grass and acorns. And inasmuch as pity is the mother of kindness, those who know give always liberally of their riches to the truly poor, and are thus a living fountain from the water of which the natural thirst of which we have spoken is quenched. I therefore, who do not sit at that blessed table, but yet, having fled from the pasture of the vulgar, placing myself at the feet of those who sit there, gather up of that which falls from them . . . and so propose to make a general banquet of that which I have acquired . . . The viands of this banquet will be set forth in fourteen different manners, that is, will consist of fourteen canzoni, the materials of which are love and virtue. Without the bread that accompanies them, they would have had some shade of obscurity; but the bread that is the present exposition, will be the light which will make apparent every colour of their meaning."

Of these fourteen canzoni, as remarked, only three were written, preceded by one book, and each followed by a book; so that four books (Trattati) in all were written.

The discussions in these books are often fanciful, mystical and disconnected. They belong to what we may call the second period of Dante's literary life—the period of criticism and doubt, lying between the simple spontaneity of the *Vita Nuova* and the artistic greatness of the *Commedia*. It corresponds with a period in his own life, when, without perhaps having abandoned the Christian faith, he yet went through a phase of doubt and unrest represented by the beginning of the *Commedia*, out of which he was conducted by divine grace to the solid faith which comes of higher illumination and deeper experience. The *Convito* has been, with justice, described as the first model of classical Italian prose.

The canzoni in the *Convito* are longer, less spontaneous, and more laboured than those in the *Vita Nuova*; yet they are full of thought, energy, and force. The first takes up the conclusion of the *Vita Nuova*. Speaking of the footstool of God, he says:

"There I beheld a Lady hymning praise,
Of whom to me were spoken words so sweet
That the rapt soul exclaimed, I long to go!
Now one appears who drives that thought away,
And with such great might lords it over me
That my heart trembles and reveals its fear.
Me he compels a Lady to observe,
And says; who seeks true blessedness to see,
Let him the eyes of this blest dame regard;
Unless he dread the anguish of deep sighs."

So far the meaning is tolerably clear. The first Lady is Beatrice in glory. The other who appeared is the Gentle Lady. But here the mystical element predominates, and we are

informed that the Lady is a 'Secular Philosophy, which is threatening to displace divine revelation and grace. This is one of the passages over which controversy has arisen. We must repeat that we can see no reason for abandoning the real existence both of Beatrice and of the Donna gentile, although it is often difficult to assign the limits of the real and the ideal.

We should here draw attention to a remarkable passage (ii. 9) on the Immortality of the Soul. The arguments employed by Dante were mainly those of his period, and some of them have been supplanted by others which to ourselves are more satisfactory; but the passage is characterized by great beauty and elevation. The second canzone is remarkable inasmuch as the first line of it,

"Amor che nella mente mi ragiona," is quoted in *Purgatorio*, ii. 112, by Casella, who had probably set the poem to music. Here again, love is discussed in a mystical and allegorical manner.

The third canzone introduces the fourth and last Trattato. He says he now forsakes the pleasant rhymes of love which he was wont to seek in his thoughts. He now discusses the nature of nobility in man. He examines the theory which maintains that aristocracy is plutocracy, that the principle of nobility is wealth, and declares it false and vile.

Why was the work here broken off? Was Dante dissatisfied and did he therefore stop here? Possibly, or even probably. But a greater work was now rising before his imagination, perhaps had risen some years before, and now was engrossing all his thoughts. In the greater work that which had been contemplated in the lesser one might be better done. Yet the *Convito* is not unworthy of study, and shows how the poet accumulated material for the *Divina Commedia*.

DE VULGARI ELOQUENTIA.

The work *De Vulgari Eloquentia* or *Eloquio* (the former seems the original word), the latter the more common in later times), was produced about the same time as the *Convito*, and was also left unfinished. According to the author's plan, it was to consist of at least four books, but only two were written; the first on Language, the second on Prosody, Rhetoric and Poetry. Naturally, as the treatise was addressed to scholars and in commendation of the *Vulgar Tongue*, it was written in Latin.

The writer begins by distinguishing between grammatical and popular languages. The latter were learnt in the nursery insensibly, the former by grammar and with great labour. He then discusses the origin of language as a necessity for man, who alone could use it.

Inquiring into the nature of the first language, he bursts into a beautiful passage about Florence, and decides that Hebrew was the first. But soon the languages became divided and especially in Europe. The Romance languages parted principally into the three great divisions, the *Langue d'oc*, the *Langue d'oïl*, and the *Langue de si*. The *Vulgaris Eloquentia* was that language which was common to all the Italian dialects, and ought, he says, to be called the Latin vulgar tongue. The first book, which ends here, was probably intended to be an introduction to the whole.

The second book opens with the question, Who ought to use the cultivated vernacular? "Not all writers or versifiers," says Dante,

"ought to use the nobler language, but those only who are distinguished by capacity and scientific knowledge, and not any chance subject, but only the best things should be treated of in this nobler Italian." These things, he says, are love, virtue and arms. First, we remember, it was love in the *Vita Nuova*; then love and virtue in the *Convito*; now we have arms added. But later, in the *Commedia*, no subject is too high or too deep for him. Heaven and earth, God and man, time and eternity are all sung in the language of the people. And it is the great poem, more than this treatise, which has vindicated the use of the *Vulgar Tongue* in Italy.

DE MONARCHIA.

The treatise on the Empire has for its subject, as Plumptre remarks, "the ideal polity which should guide men to righteous government and therefore to blessedness on earth, and to the reward of righteousness in heaven." We cannot give more than a sketch of the treatise here. But it may be mentioned that a careful analysis is given by Hettinger (pp. 368 ff.), and an excellent brief account in Bryce's "*Holy Roman Empire*" (pp. 265 ff). There is also a good account in Scartazzini's *Manual*, Butler's Translation (pp. 318 ff).

The treatise is divided into three books: Book I. asserts the necessity of monarchy and of one empire: (1) because thus universal peace will be secured; (2) the Emperor is an image of Divine unity; (3) every organization must have a centre; (4) justice will in this way be best secured. More particularly, the Emperor, having no rival, will be under no temptation to do wrong.

Book II. proves that dominion belongs to the Romans; and this is shown by their history, by their virtues, by the right of war. He quotes the noble words of Virgil:

"Romane, memento:
Hæ tibi erunt artes; pacis imponere morem,
Parcere subjectis, et debellare superbos."

Book III. seeks to prove that the Imperial power was immediately dependent on God, and directly derived from Him. Here is the point at which he separated off from the Guelfs, who held that the Emperor derived his power from God through the Pope, and that he held it of the Vicar of Christ. Assuming the truth of Constantine's donation (long now disproved) he declares its illegality. Moreover, he pointed out that Leo III. had no power to confer the empire upon Charles the Great. This, of course, is another disputed question as to the matter of fact.

Finally, he urged that man's nature being twofold, he needed two guides. The principles of the *De Monarchia* were the principles of Dante's whole life, perhaps those which were always most consciously present with him. It is possible that some personal feeling entered into this theory. Dante had such experience of the evils of a more uncurbed democracy that he longed for a master who would reduce those selfish, turbulent elements to order. But, apart from this, he had a sincere belief in the monarchical and imperial principle. He lived to maintain it, and was probably willing to die if he could thus establish it.

WILLIAM CLARK.

Exact justice is commonly more merciful in the long run than pity; for it tends to foster in men those stronger qualities which make them good citizens.—Lowell.