

DANTE

THE DIVINE COMEDY

The Carlyle-Okey-Wicksteed Translation Unabridged



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The

DIVINE COMEDY

of DANTE ALIGHIERI

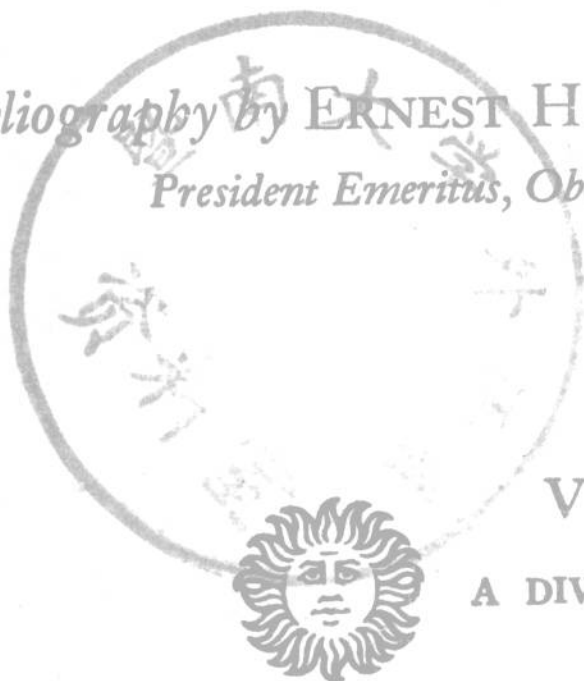
THE CARLYLE-OKEY-WICKSTEED TRANSLATION

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Introduction

By C. H. GRANDGENT

"THE COMEDY OF DANTE ALIGHIERI, a Florentine by birth but not in character" was the title given by the author to his work, if we are to believe the letter to Can Grande della Scala, written presumably by Dante and sent to his famous patron with the first canto of the *Commedia*. The epithet "divine" was not attached to it until centuries later, and was used to express the feeling of the reading public for Italy's great masterpiece. From its first appearance it was a "divine" poem, and so it has remained even to our day—"divine" for its sacred subject, for its wisdom, for its power, for its superhuman beauty. But what shall we make of the phrase "Comedy of Dante Alighieri"? Does it indicate Dante merely as the author, or does it designate him as the subject, the protagonist of the poem? It might mean either, with regard to language or to fact; and it probably means both; for Dante surely wrote the *Comedy*, and wrote it about himself. And the work is a "comedy," as the aforesaid letter states, because it begins in disaster and ends in happiness; if the first *cantica* is named "Hell," the third and last is entitled "Paradise." Furthermore, it is written, not in the sustained loftiness of tragedy, but in the middle style which lies between the highest and the lowest. It is, in fact, composed in the author's native Florentine, in which, as he says, "even females communicate." Elevated in many parts by exalted thought and abundance of Latinisms, it sinks at times into the plain vernacular. It must be remembered that the terms "tragedy" and "comedy" had in the Middle Ages no necessarily theatrical associations: the former meant the story of the downfall of a great personage; the latter is the narrative of a happy escape from misery.

"Florentine by birth" Dante certainly was. The Alighieri had for generations dwelt in the city by the Arno, people of some importance but not rich. Dante was born there in 1265, probably in the latter part of May. He associated with the best society, and was in early boyhood affianced

to a daughter of the aristocratic Donati clan, whom he eventually married. His schooling must have been as good as could then be had; he was fond of music, addicted to art, and participated in the sports of gentility. While still very young, he took part in two military campaigns. We find him mixing in municipal politics by the time he was thirty and in the summer of 1300 he was for two months a member of the council of six which had the highest administrative authority.

But to the epithet "Florentine by birth" Dante adds the bitter modifier "not in character." In a passage of the *Inferno* the inhabitants of the Arno Valley are compared to various beasts: in the upper Casentino they are "pigs"; in Arezzo, "curs"; in Pisa, "foxes"; in Florence, "wolves." Not wolflike, as his countrymen are, Dante declares himself in his dedication. In a notable phrase of the *Paradiso* he calls himself a "lamb" whom wolves attack. A victim, then, an innocent victim, of wolflike fierceness and rapacity: such was the author of our poem. His repudiation of Florence, and the hatred upon which it is based, can hardly be a result of his closer personal relations. We know really nothing of his matrimonial experience; but his references to children and to family life, rather numerous in the *Comedy*, are singularly sweet and tender. Although he was reputed haughty, he seems to have been on good terms with his neighbors. The rich, talented, and proud Guido Cavalcanti he calls his "first friend." His early poetic efforts were evidently well appreciated. He was appointed ambassador, for an important mission, to the neighboring hill-town of San Gimignano, the city of towers, whose proudest possession today is the town hall, where Dante once appeared to present his case (successfully) before the council; the hall being now restored to its 13th century aspect, so that one can almost imagine Dante standing there.

His subsequent experience, however, was not so happy. Political strife, the bane of Italian city life, embittered his career, cut short his activity, made him an exile, a wanderer, a dependent. The more than nation-wide quarrel of Guelfs and Ghibellines did not rage long in Florence, where

the Guelf party, defeated by the Sienese and the Ghibelline exiles in 1260, five years before Dante's birth, at Montaperti, was victorious six years later at Benevento, and Florence was thenceforth a Guelf city. Theoretically, the Guelfs were Pope's men, the Ghibellines Emperor's men; but cities adopted one side or the other according to their own immediate advantage, and individuals followed the party of their family, with little more discrimination in principle than exists here between the Republicans and Democrats. The Alighieri were Guelfs, although for some reason Dante's father was not banished during the Ghibelline supremacy of 1260-66. A new cause of strife soon arose in the unified Guelf community. Florence had under her control the city of Pistoia, which came to be rent by a bloody feud between two branches of the Cancellieri clan; and, to break up the enmity, Florence took out of the rent town the leaders of both branches and made them dwell in her own midst. The result of this well-meant action was a division in the new home, where the leading families took sides with the two branches of the Cancellieri, who had come to be known as Blacks and Whites. Although the grounds of partisanship are confused, one may say, in general, that the Black party in Florence came to represent the old feudal aristocracy, largely of Germanic origin, while the Whites stood for the industrial and new-rich class. Doubtless the principal cause of antagonism was social rivalry. The Blacks, who, in their pride, were relatively poor, drew closer and closer to the Pope, hoping to be restored to their ancient leadership; the Whites, on the other hand, cultivated a spirit of municipal independence.

The Pope, Boniface VIII, had a certain ancient claim on Tuscany, and wished to bring it under his power. He made on Florence certain demands, which the Whites rejected; we hear that Dante took part in the objection. Finally, on a May Day, open hostility broke out between the two social parties in the city, and blood was shed. It was in that summer that Dante, in accordance with the custom of rotation in office, was elected one of the six Priors. This council opposed the claims of the Pope and, to stop the scandal

in the city, voted to banish the leaders of both the Blacks and the Whites.

Dante's one desire was to keep the peace. His sympathies must have been divided. The Donati family, to which he had become allied, was foremost among the Blacks, while Guido Cavalcanti, his "first friend," was prominent among the Whites and was among those sentenced to banishment. Furthermore, Dante was a strong supporter of independence for Florence; he was naturally inclined to aristocracy; but he belonged to a Guelf family and had much in common with the Whites. With one or two others, he was sent to Boniface, to attempt a reconciliation. During his absence, the Pope induced Florence to accept a "mediator," no other than that royal adventurer, Charles of Valois, brother of Philip IV, King of France. No sooner were the gates opened to him and his troops, than he turned over the city to the Blacks, who set up a Black government and proceeded to persecute their former opponents. Against many of these, including the absent Dante, suits were brought, charging malfeasance in office and various specific offenses; and they were summoned to appear for trial. Knowing what the outcome would be, they refused to go, and Dante was condemned in contumacy. His property was confiscated, and he was condemned to death by fire if he ever should be caught in Florentine territory. That was in 1302. From that time on, he never saw his city. His family—his wife and four children—remained behind; but he became a wanderer, lonely and poor. For a while he consorted with his fellow-exiles, Guelf and Ghibelline, who were straining every effort to regain admission. In a couple of years he fell out with them, and stood alone. At some time—we do not know exactly when—he inhabited the great university town of Bologna. Verona, under the rule of the della Scala family, was an early refuge. Henceforth his doings are little known to us. He was with the Malaspina house in Lunigiana, in northwestern Italy, in 1306. We hear of him in the Casentino, in Padua, in Lucca, but we have no details. His last years he spent in Ravenna with Guido Novello da Polenta, a nephew of the Francesca da Rimini he had immortalized. There he was

joined by his two sons, Pietro and Jacopo, and by a daughter; his wife remained in Florence. He died in 1321, on September 14.

One great hope and great excitement Dante experienced during his exile. He had adopted the idea (rather Ghibelline than Guelf) that the Emperor should be independent of the Pope, the two being coördinate powers, both ordained by God and both answerable only to Him. The evil condition of the world is due mainly to neglect of Italy by the Emperors and the usurpation of Imperial authority by the Popes. Now, when Henry of Luxembourg, an idealistic reformer, holding these same views, was elected Emperor with the title of Henry VII, and descended into Italy to restore the balance, establish justice, and win over the rebellious cities, Dante's spirits rose to a high pitch of exaltation shown in several letters he wrote at that period. One was a letter of bitter rebuke to the Florentines, who stubbornly resisted Henry VII. At some time of his life, Dante wrote a Latin treatise, *Monarchia*, in which he clearly exposed his political views. Unsuccessful in his enterprise, Henry died in 1313, thus apparently quenching all expectation of reformation and of Dante's restoration. Crushing as this failure must have been, Dante did not lose courage. In God's own time and in God's own way, justice must eventually be restored; that serene belief permeates the *Paradiso*.

It is easy to understand, however, that Dante cherished his indignation against his fellow-townsmen. A modest hope he had had, almost to the end: that the glory of his great poem might induce them to restore and honor him. But their recognition came too late. Wolves they were and wolves they remained, until his death.

Quickly, however, the masterpiece imposed itself. Boccaccio was invited to expound it publicly to the Florentines, and the city vainly implored Ravenna for the transfer of his remains to his home. The *Commedia* was, and has always remained, the world's great poem of sin, reparation, redemption, and beatitude. It is in the form of an autobiographical narrative. The poet comes to himself, in the midst of a dark, wild wood, on the night before Good

Friday, 1300. Beyond the trees he catches sight of a mountain whose summit is already gilded by the rising sun. This height he determines to scale; but when the ascent is scarcely begun, his way is barred by three beasts, who, one after another, come to block his way: a leopard, a lion, a wolf. Reduced to despair by the persistence of the last, he is about to turn back, when a mysterious figure comes to his rescue. This turns out to be the ghost of Virgil, the great sage of antiquity, who has been sent to help him by three heavenly ladies,—the Blessed Virgin, St. Lucia, and a certain Beatrice whom Dante has loved and celebrated in her lifetime. She was probably Beatrice Portinari, married to a banker, Simone de' Bardi. For her Dante had written many beautiful lyrics and a little autobiographical work, in verse and prose, the *Vita Nuova*, which had won him renown. A later and much bigger book, autobiographical and philosophical, the *Convivio* or *Banquet*, in prose with bits of verse, the author had never finished. Neither had he carried to completion a great Latin treatise on versification, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, or *On Vernacular Composition*, which contains an interesting preliminary discussion of dialects and their possible use in literature. Even before the *Comedy*, then, Dante was a man of note, and in some way a disciple of Virgil.

His ghostly rescuer explains to him that he cannot escape by climbing the mountain; his only way lies through the earth, from side to side, traversing the whole of Hell, after which he is to ascend the mountain of Purgatory, which lies in the middle of the great ocean, on the side of the earth just opposite Jerusalem. Thence he is to be lifted up to Heaven. Under the wise Virgil's guidance, after some trepidation Dante starts on his fearful journey, which takes him through all the punishments of the damned. These pains are distributed over the nine circles of the inverted cone of Hell, eight of them on circular shelves which surround the pit; the ninth, on the bottom of the pit itself, at the center of the earth. Each penalty is appropriate to its sin, and all are grouped according to a philosophical plan. The nine circles fall into three great groups: **first**, the sins of "incontinence," or lack of self-control;

second, the sins of violence, or beastliness; third, the sins of malice, or fraud. Guardians or tormentors, in the various regions, are the demons, or fallen angels, some of them taken out of classical mythology. At the center of all is Satan, imbedded in a round plain of ice—a three-faced, six-winged, hideous monster, whose three mouths are crunching the three arch-traitors. After inspecting the various inmates of Hell, and conversing with some of them, Dante is carried by Virgil down the shaggy side of Satan into a cavern beyond the earth's center; after which the two travelers climb in some fashion out to the other side, where they emerge, on the early morning of Easter Sunday, on the shore of the island, which contains the huge mountain of Purgatory. The upper part of its conical surface is cut into seven terraces, where repentant souls are doing penance, or discipline, for the seven cardinal vices from which all sins spring. Below the terraces, on the lower slopes, are held those who, on account of some negligence or insubordination, are not yet admitted to the disciplines which they are eager to begin. At the very top of the mountain is the Garden of Eden, with its woods, birds, flowers, and streams. There Dante, having accomplished his ascent still under tutorship of his guide, is met by an imposing procession—a pageant of the Church, or Triumph of Revelation, the central figure of which is the same Beatrice who has come to his rescue before. She it is who leads Dante up through the revolving heavens of the Ptolemaic skies into the real, eternally motionless heaven of God, the angels, and the blest. On the way up, he has encountered, in appropriate skies, the variously happy souls of the elect. The climax of all is the vision of God himself.

As may be readily guessed, the whole story is an allegory, representing "mankind, as, by its merits or demerits, it exposes itself to the rewards or the punishments of Justice." One might have guessed it, even if the allegorical intention and its purport had not been expressly stated in the letter to Can Grande. The punishments in Hell represent the sinful life on earth, each penalty being a symbol of the sin itself. The pains in Purgatory stand for the disciplines undergone by the penitent sinner, on his way to

T H E E I V I N E C O M E D Y

reformation and salvation. The heavens with their inhabitants are the life of contemplation and righteousness. The narrative shows the progress from sin (the dark wood), the vain attempt to escape by mere human effort, barred by the opposition of wicked habits (portrayed in the three beasts). The long climb from the center to the island is the laborious and uneventful process of breaking away from sinfulness; the ascent of the mountain shows the disciplines needed to rid the soul of all evil inclinations, every one of the sufferings representing a cure of one of the capital vices. The Garden of Eden is the state of innocence, regained by the faithful. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The sundry types of virtue appear in the several heavens. The final vision is the consummation of the pure heart's desire. Virgil, the guide through the first two stages, is human reason, which reveals the true nature of sin, in all its hideousness and folly and hatefulness, and shows also the real meaning of reformation. Matilda, the lovely guardian of Eden, is the perfect life of innocent activity. Beatrice, or Revelation, makes clear the truth. St. Bernard, who takes her place when the presence of God is reached, is intuition, higher than reason, higher even than revelation. Each of these characters is a real person, called from his or her immortal seat to perform an appropriate function; the poet himself is in his symbolic experiences the real Dante, representative of mankind but at the same time a distinct individual personality.

Such symbolic representation is not an arbitrary and artificial device; it is a part of the medieval conception of life and the world. For, to the Middle Ages, all things, without ceasing to be literal realities, are symbols of other things. The qualities of stones and beasts have a moral meaning, intended by their Creator. The events of history, likewise, in addition to their actual happening, serve as prophecies of things to come. Virgil, the great poet and sage of antiquity, is, to his understanding disciple, an inspirer of wisdom. Beatrice, from her first appearance to Dante at the age of eight, in the home city, had always impressed him as a revelation of the heavenly on earth. So she appears even in the youthful *Vita Nuova*. The two significances,

I N T R O D U C T I O N

literal and allegorical, are so perfectly adjusted that the one seems a necessary and inevitable complement of the other. A modern reader, uninformed, could peruse the whole *Commedia*, satisfied with the mere literal story, and entranced by its unparalled beauty of language and imagery; but he would miss the inspiration of that higher message which so clearly merits the name of "divine."

Perhaps no other work of pure literature has aroused so much admiration in so many countries and so many readers as *The Divine Comedy*. And it is quite likely that the majority of all these readers—at least, of those foreign to Italy—have derived their enjoyment and admiration from translations. In a version in another tongue one of course misses the magic of Dante's verse; but one may find, if the work is well done, Dante's thought, his emotion, and his imagery. This consideration has moved the publishers of [Vintage Books] to make easily available an English version of the poem.

After careful consideration of all the English translations of Dante, the work of John Aitken Carlyle, Thomas Okey, and P. H. Wicksteed was chosen. It is a translation that is clear, dignified, and accurate, in simple, idiomatic prose. It can be readily followed without any reference to the original Italian text. Its scholarly notes cover all obscure points more than adequately.

This [Vintage] edition of *The Divine Comedy* is destined to reveal the full scope of Dante's work to thousands of readers who are ignorant of Italian.

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E.H.W.

Publisher's Note

For this Modern Library edition of Dante's Divine Comedy the best translations have been followed: Inferno, by John Aitken Carlyle; Purgatorio, by Thomas Okey; Paradiso, by Philip H. Wicksteed. The Notes (edited for this edition by Julie Eidesheim) follow, in the main, the excellent notes for the Inferno and the Purgatorio by Dr. H. Oelsner, and those prepared jointly by Dr. Oelsner and Philip H. Wicksteed for the Paradiso.

THE TRANSLATORS have attempted to satisfy themselves first as to the author's exact meaning, and then to express it (1) precisely, (2) with lucidity, (3) worthily, (4) with as close adherence to the vocabulary and syntax of the original as English idiom allows. They have consciously adopted a happy turn of expression in one passage from Mr. Norton's translation of the *Paradiso*, and in two cases borrowed words from Mr. Butler. The many other coincidences with these (and doubtless other) translations arose, to the best of their belief, independently.

The skill of a translator is shown in his power of so pursuing any one of the objects he has in view as to make it at the same time advance, or at any rate not obstruct the others; but wherever he fails in this, his principles of translation will declare themselves in the conscious or unconscious scale of equivalence whereby he adjusts their rival claims. What gain in one direction will he consider the equivalent of a given loss in another? Such a scale cannot be drawn out in words, and therefore no translator can accurately define his own principles of translation; but the order in which the objects aimed at have been enumerated above will indicate the translator's general conception of his task.

That translator of Dante, and particularly of the *Paradiso*, is not to be envied who can issue his work without a grieved sense of something near akin to profanation, in that he has striven, counter to Dante's own protest (see *Conv.*

i. 7), to "expound the sense of his poems where they themselves cannot take it together with their beauty"; and, moreover, in the *Paradiso*, if anywhere, the beauty is itself at once an integral and an untransferable part of the sense. The translators' hope is that all who read the translation may find their eye turning from time to time to Dante's words, till they are insensibly taught to understand and love them; and that, in the great majority of cases, the work from the first may be taken only as a help to the understanding of Dante's words, not as a substitute for them.

The Arguments have been prepared with special care, in the hope that they may be helpful to the beginner, and of interest to the more advanced student, as an attempt to facilitate the perception of the perspective, the articulation, and the wider significance of the several portions of the poem.

The notes at the end of each Canto are to be taken in close connection with the Arguments, which, when carefully read, will be found to contain, directly or by implication, many explanations that the reader may perhaps have looked for in vain in the notes.

In the notes an effort has been made to give all possible help to the reader unacquainted with the classics, both by marking quantities and by explaining, as far as space allowed, even the more obvious classical allusions, but by no means so uniformly or fully as to supersede the constant use of a classical dictionary.

References are given throughout to the most important illustrative passages from the Bible, but have seldom given the words. We have also assumed that the reader who is desirous of further information has access to all Dante's works, to Gardner's *Dante Primer*, to Wallace's *Outlines of the Philosophy of Aristotle*, and to Selfe and Wicksteed's *Selections from Villani's Chronicle*. In references to other writers, their own words are generally given, merely adding the author's name without more specific reference. The references to Dante's works will be found in Dr. Moore's *Oxford Dante*.

Obligations cannot be acknowledged in detail. They include the generally accessible commentaries and other sources of information. Mr. Paget Toynbee's *Dante Dictionary*¹ has been specially useful. Many dates and some historical and biographical details have been taken direct from it.

Questions of disputed readings have not been dealt with in any systematic or consistent way; and controversial matter and æsthetic points or allegorical refinements, have seldom or never been touched upon but in addition to explaining references, an effort has been made to deal, however concisely, with the more serious difficulties of the thought and teaching of the poem, so as to make the Commentary, within its limits, as complete as possible. But in these weightier matters the reader must, after all, be his own commentator; for, as one of the earliest and best of Dante scholars (Benvenuto da Imola) has remarked: "It is rather great wit than great learning that is needed for the understanding of this book."

¹ *A Dictionary of Proper Names and Notable Matters in the Works of Dante*, by Paget Toynbee, M.A. Oxford.