

precision of Dante's own style. Because of this precision no author suffers more by translation. Throughout the whole extent of his poem there is not a random word. He held every expression under complete control. Well might Dante himself say that "never for the sake of a rhyme had he said other than he meant to say." No literary monument has ever been so consistently realized. His is the masterly grasp of genius over words and forms of expression. As a model of style he ranks with his guide and master, Virgil. According as occasion requires, he is tender and pathetic, or harsh and severe, sweet, musical and elegant, or rude and strong, always suiting language to sense. He that would learn the mode of condensing great thoughts in words few and simple, should make a careful study of the *Divina Commedia*.

Nor is Dante to be overlooked as an educator. He who had wandered from university to university—who had been in Paris and sat at the feet of those who had themselves received the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas from his own lips; who had probably been in Oxford and passed from hall to hall in School street,—with his observant eye must have noticed differences in educational methods, and held to the best. And so, from the pedagogical point of view, a complete educational method may be constructed out of his great poem.

VII.

The student would now like to know the books that will best serve as an introduction to the study of Dante. Here I shall confine myself to those that are most accessible. Macaulay's brilliant essay on Dante is deserving of mention. It was one of his first literary achievements, and was actually the first note of praise introducing Dante to modern English readers. The essay is fervid and replete with enthusiasm, but lacks historical accuracy and critical discrimination. Dean Church published an essay on our poet in the *Christian Remembrancer*, January, 1850, and republished it in a separate form in 1879, under the title *Dante*. This essay gave impulse to the study of the great Florentine. It is a model piece of criticism. It is only lacking in one thing to reach the level of Dante's greatness, and that is, possession of the fulness of Dante's faith. This lack leads the Dean to a misunderstanding of the attitude of Dante towards the Church. Otherwise it is one of the most scholarly, reverent, and sympathetic studies of Dante that we possess in English.

Mr. J. A. Symonds in *A Study of Dante*, has given us a pleasing introduction replete with suggestive thoughts and happy remarks. But he leaves much to be desired. He attempts to present us only with the artistic side of the poem. Its philosophical depth is beyond his reach; he sometimes misses its allegorical meaning; he

is lacking in sympathy with the poet and his epoch; the poet's allegory he calls "frost-bitten;" his theology he calls "a rigid methodistical theology." Now, the man who so talks knows not whereof he speaks. He is at sea without chart or compass or rudder to guide his ship. He is certainly not a trustworthy guide. Miss Susan E. Blow of St. Louis has written another volume bearing the same title, *A Study of Dante*, which the student will find helpful in interpreting the moral sense of the poem. Miss Blow has many beautiful thoughts concerning Dante and his religion, and though not a Catholic herself, she has led many a wandering soul by the hand to that home of safety and rest, the Catholic Church. Another lady who is more Catholic still, and who has written about Dante in a more helpful spirit, is Maria Francesca Rossetti. Her *Shadow of Dante* is a charming volume well calculated to lead one to the substance. You will find some quickening thoughts in Carlyle's lectures on the poet in his *Heroes and Hero-worship*. More lengthily drawn out, with much that is clever, and some fine-spun threads of thought, and an occasional misapprehension, is James Russell Lowell's essay on Dante, which is to be found in his *Among my Books*.

The work which Catholic students should make their handbook is *Dante's Divina Commedia*, by the late Monsignor Hettinger. This volume has been elegantly done into English and edited by Father Sebastian Bow-

den of the Brompton Oratory. And though liberties have been taken with the German text, and portions omitted that had better be retained, still the book is invaluable for the Catholic reader who could not master it in the original. Cardinal Manning wrote to Father Bowden upon the completion of his task: "You have conferred a true benefit upon us by publishing Dr. Hettinger's work on Dante. It will be not only a signal help to readers of the *Divina Commedia*, but it will, I hope, awaken Catholics to a sense of the not inculpable neglect of the greatest of poets, who by every title of genius, and by the intensity of his whole heart and soul, is the master-poet of the Catholic faith." This is deserving commendation of Father Bowden, and censure of our Catholic writers. We are grateful in having within reach so safe a guide as Mgr. Hettinger's book. It is scholarly, and a model of scientific criticism. The only book approaching it in merit is Ozanam's *Dante et la Philosophie Chrétienne*, an English version of which was prepared several years ago, but still remains in manuscript for want of a publisher. *

There are various biographies of Dante in English, but there is only one that I can recommend with any degree of safety. Even that one is not all that it

* [NOTE.—This version, made by Madame Lucia D. Pychow-ska, is now (Dec. 1893) publishing in serial form in *The Seminary* of New York, and will later be issued in book form by the Cathedral Library Association.—J. H. M.]

should be to be truly worthy of the man. It is Count Cesare Balbo's *Life of Dante*, which has been translated into English by Mrs. Bunbury. Scartazzini, who is shary of his praise for any but a German, and who has himself written a most exhaustive biography of the poet, pronounces Balbo's work "hitherto the best of this kind," and considers its success "great and well-deserved." Scartazzini's *Dante Handbook* as translated and supplemented by Professor Thomas Davidson, is a valuable aid to the student, no matter how advanced his studies may be.

VIII.

Taking for granted that the student has prepared himself by a course of preliminary reading to enter upon the study of Dante, it may be asked how shall he best and most profitably go about his work? To this I would reply, presuming that the Circle is reading the poet in English:

1. Take up some good translation. Longfellow's will be found the most satisfactory as a handbook.
2. Let there be at least one member in the class who is familiar with the Italian, and let that member have the original text with which to compare the translation, and by which to give the exact literal rendering where there is question of making the interpretation of the allegorical expression. I would recommend Bianchi's text, the eighth edition of 1885, as clear, simple, and

handy. It is the outcome of a lifetime of reading and study. The notes in it will be found most helpful.

3. Keep in view the meaning of each canto in itself and in relation to the whole.

4. Where the passage is obscure, refer to one or other of the literal translations already mentioned. Even these should be compared with the text.

5. Seek to explain Dante by his other writings. Have by you especially the translations of his letters, the *Vita Nuova*, the *Convito*, the *De Monarchia*.

6. Remember that in every translation the music of the original is lost; therefore, that one of the chief poetical attractions having disappeared, the reading of the poet must needs be dry and wearisome. Even in the original, Dante no more than our own Browning, never intended that his poem should be a substitute for a game of cards or an after-dinner smoke. He wrote with a serious purpose, and he is to be read in a serious and a studious spirit.

IX.

Let us take a random glance of a few English versions of Dante. Here is a bran-new translation of a large portion of the *Purgatorio*, which Mr. Walter Pater commends as breathing the atmosphere of Dante. The translation is from the pen of Mr. Charles Launcelot Shadwell. Mr. Shadwell makes the experiment of rendering the *terza rima* of Dante into the stanza employed

by Andrew Marvell in his Horatian *Ode to Cromwell*. Both metres he considers not unlike. He finds in both a common principle of structure; their capacity is, in his view, about equal; that capacity, be it remembered, consisting of the number of syllables contained in a line—as though the capacity of languages as distinct as the English and Italian could be measured by syllables!—and furthermore Marvell, like Dante, introduces “images and ideas which belong to learning and science.” Here is an anomaly in literary criticism. Think of Marvell airing his pedantry in an ode on a popular subject, compared to Dante inditing a grave and all-embracing poem that includes both heaven and earth, the plainest truths with the sublimest doctrines ever reached by the human reason. Starting out with a theory so fundamentally erroneous, the translator must needs land in disaster. But we may best judge of his work by some specimens. Let us take the opening lines of the *Purgatorio*.

To traverse fairer waters the bark of my genius now hoists sail, leaving behind her so cruel a sea:	Per correr miglior acqua alza- le vele omai la navicella del mio ingegno, che lascia die- tro a sè mar sì crudele:
And I shall sing of this second realm wherein the human spirit is cleansed, and be- comes worthy to mount to heaven.	E canterò di quel secondo regno, ove l'umano spirito si purga, e di salire al Ciel diventa degno.

Now here is Mr. Shadwell's rendering of this simple introduction:

O'er fairer flood, with sail on high,
My fancy's bark her way doth ply
That cruel sea *unkind*
Forever left behind.
With that next realm my song begins
Where human souls are purged *from sins*,
And, *all their guilt forgiven*,
Grow fit to mount to heaven.

This is a feeble translation. The word *fancy* does not express the great creative mind of Dante. When the poet called the sea *cruel*, he called it more than *unkind*. Unkind is superfluous. There is no mention in the text about leaving that sea *forever*. Only sin can stain a soul; and Dante leaves as much to be inferred. Note the wordiness and the tautology introduced into the next line—

And, *all their guilt forgiven*.

It is an interpolation of the translator. If Mr. Walter Pater finds this translation Dantesque in any sense, it is to be feared that his idea of Dante is anything but adequate.

Turn we now to another version of the same passage. Mr. John Augustine Wilstach about five years ago issued a rhymed translation, “governed by the conviction,” he modestly tells us, “that only thus can one hope to approximate a reproduction of the effect created

by the original; that the form is so inseparable from the soul of the work as to compel the translator to accept all the risks involved in the effort to represent it." Now let us note the flavor of Mr. Wilstach's translation:

"And now o'er better waves directs its helm
The light bark of my genius, glad to sail
Far from a sea where horrors such prevail.
Shall sing my *grateful notes* that second realm
Wherein itself the human soul doth purge,
And then its flight to heaven *doth worthily urge*."

These lines are written with spirit and freedom. There is little lost in the translation beyond the terseness of the original. The substitution of the *helm* for the *sail* does not weaken the figure. The same is true of the rendering of the words *mar si crudele*, by "a sea where horrors such prevail." The terseness is lost, but the effect remains. Even the introduction of the word *grateful notes* makes pleasant reading. It is only in the last line that there is a falling off. Dante knew his theology too well to represent a soul in purgatory urging its flight to heaven. The soul may yearn for heaven, but it is in a state completely resigned to the will of God, and would not leave its place of suffering till it had become worthy of admission to the Divine Presence.

Now, let us read Cary's version in blank verse:

"O'er better waves to speed her *rapid* course
The light bark of my genius lifts the sail,
Well pleased to leave so cruel sea behind;
And of that second region will I sing,
In which the human spirit *from sinful blot*
Is purged, and for ascent to heaven prepares."

Here we have a nearer approach to the original text. The word *rapid* weakens the first verse; the words *from sinful blot* are, as has been seen already, needless, still the passage reads smoothly. Let us see how Longfellow translates the passage:

"To run o'er better waters hoists its sail
The little vessel of my genius now,
That leaves behind itself a sea so cruel;
And of that second kingdom will I sing
Wherein the human spirit *doth purge itself*,
And to ascend to heaven becometh worthy."

This is very literal; it is almost stiffly literal. The inversions are too numerous. In neglecting the theological sense, the translator makes a grave blunder. Apparently the words *si purga* might be rendered "doth purge itself." But no; the one thing that the soul is unable to accomplish in purgatory is the purgation or cleansing of itself. It *is purged*; but not by its own merits or its own efforts: only by the assistance of the faithful on earth and the saints in heaven.

The results here obtained from a random specimen will hold good throughout the translations we have been

considering.* Another thought occurs. If in the introductory lines these eminent scholars so easily go astray from lack of theological knowledge, how must they not err in those abstruse passages that are almost literal translations of a Bernard and an Aquinas? If this is done in the green wood, what must it not be in the dry wood?

* [NOTE.—On a scrap of paper Brother Azarias had written the subjoined passage as a further illustration of the weakness of Shadwell's translation.—J. H. M.]

Now is the hour when de-	The hour was come that on
sire returns to those at sea,	the sea
and the heart becomes tender	Softens the heart <i>with mem-</i>
what day they said good-bye	<i>ory,</i>
to fond friends;	The day on voyage sped
	Farewell to friends was said;

The hour that pricks the	Then, if he hear the distant
new-bound pilgrim with love,	bell,
if he hears the vestry-bell from	That seems the dying day to
afar tolling the knell of the	knell,
dying day.	Its sound hath power to
	move
	The new-bound pilgrim's
	love.

The unity of design is broken in this version. You do not see what the poet is aiming at. He is at once reduced to the level of a second-rate versifier. Dante's sweet thoughts preparatory to the sweeter song that is to enrapture him, are all lost in this version.

X.

A relish for Dante and an appreciation of the beauty and grandeur of his noble poem form the high-water mark of culture. The human intellect has no more sublime truths to feed upon than those growing out of the underlying conceptions of the *Divina Commedia*. Language conveys no sweeter notes than those that Dante sings betimes. Words never reached the heart of a subject more readily than did his words. Human conception was never more clearly unrolled; human genius never soared into sublimer regions; human vision never saw more distinctly; human expression never portrayed the spiritual and the invisible in firmer lines. Well and aptly has the poem been called divine. Its influence is far-reaching. Dante has become an educator of Italy as Homer had become an educator of Greece. He has molded Italian literature, Italian thought, and Italian politics. Revolutionists have pored over his words, and have fancied that these words spoke to them in the accents of revolt. Men of law and order have made his pages their own, and have imbibed from them a deep and an abiding love of Italy in keeping with the fundamental principles of right and justice. Popes have honored his memory, and established chairs for the expounding of his poem. Pius IX. in 1857, placed a laurel wreath upon his bust. Leo XIII. has an unbounded admiration for the poet, and is said to know the *Divina Commedia* by heart. Last year, His Holiness,

in a Brief, commended the poem. Would that his enthusiasm were to overflow and fill the heart of every Catholic student!

It is not to be forgotten that from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century the *Divina Commedia* was all but a sealed book to the generations that lived and read and wrote. It was so in Italy, as well as in France, Germany, and England. Only with the dawn of the present century did men awaken to the true grandeur of the cathedral of song that had been erected on the basis of philosophical truth and divine faith. We are told that over two hundred editions of Dante have appeared in this century. (Ferrazzi: *Manuale Dantesco* t. v., p. 700.) French criticism has been especially slow to understand the genius of Dante, for the reason that French criticism has not yet shaken off the thralldom of Voltaire's spirit. Now, Voltaire regarded the *Divina Commedia* as a bizarre work, sparkling indeed with natural beauties, but in which the author only occasionally rises above the bad taste of his time and of his subject; a work which will be hardly read, and which will therefore continue to be praised.¹ Chateaubriand rises no higher in his conception of the poem; indeed, he only repeats Voltaire. He speaks of "the bad taste of the author," and calls the poem a bizarre production—*une production bizarre*. He inspires the reader of his *Génie*

¹ Sa reputation s'affirmira toujours parce qu'on ne le lit guère. Dictionnaire Philosophique. Art. *Dante*.

du Christianisme with greater esteem and more enthusiasm for Milton than for Dante. Chateaubriand never understood the great Italian. Lamartine never understood him. He regarded him solely as "a personal and local poet." Lamennais never understood him. The introduction Lamennais placed before his translation of the *Purgatorio* is lamentable reading to the Catholic heart, and unworthy of the structure it would grace. Even Sainte-Beuve never understood Dante. He failed to grasp the intenseness of the spirit and genius that inspired the *Divina Commedia*. Consult the *Encyclopédie Catholique* and you will find the Voltarian epithet *bizarre*. The first French critic strong enough and learned enough and broad enough to raise himself above Voltaire's estimate into a clear conception of Dante's greatness was Frederic Ozanam. That Dante now finds not merely admirers, but appreciative readers throughout Christendom, is an encouraging sign of the elevation of good taste and serious scholarship.

I would add one more remark. If I have succeeded in impressing you with a sense of the intense force of Dante's genius and the numerous difficulties that are to be overcome in order to appreciate his masterpiece; if, furthermore, I have taught you to become impatient of any man or woman who, upon a superficial reading of an imperfect translation of the great Florentine, will tell you there is nothing in him but obscure names and scholastic hair-splittings; and if, finally, I have nerved

a single person now listening to me, to undertake a careful study of the *Divina Commedia*—and let me add that no poem will stand minute investigation and grow upon one's affections with careful study more rapidly than will the *Divina Commedia*—and to make the poem and its epoch a familiar subject, then, I have not given this chat in vain to-night.

THE MOTIVE OF GEORGE ELIOT'S NOVELS.

BY BROTHER AZARIAS.

It is a matter comparatively easy of accomplishment to create a taste for reading. But to direct that taste in the right channels is a task delicate as it is difficult. What shall we read? What shall we not read? These are questions that can only be answered individually, and the answers are determined by environment, temperament, actual state of intellectual development and personal character. What were food to one mind may be poison to another. What were pleasant to one palate may be disagreeable to another. Now, in these days of promiscuous and desultory reading, there are few who do not read novels. Generally, each has his own favorite author. There are still to be found men possessing the heart and spirit of youth, who enjoy the Leatherstocking series of Cooper with all the relish of their boyhood fancy. There are others who with Ruskin never outgrow their love for the Waverley Novels. Others again never weary of finding pity in their hearts for Little Nell, and Paul Dombey, and Little Dorritt, and so many other pet characters in Dickens. And there are others still who find nothing in modern fiction to compare with Colonel Newcome and Major Pendennis