



Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century (Classic Reprint)

Frédéric Ozanam

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Excerpt from Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the Thirteenth Century

Desirous of enlightening those who lived in the shade or in the gloom, Dante chanted the grandest of poems in a vulgar tongue. Even the lyre of his Master, Virgil, seemed too small for him who aspired, through a perfect art, to be a perpetual and universal teacher of Christian truth. Putting aside Latin, and choosing Italian as the medium of his verse, the poet did wisely; and yet the use of a living language has not made him a poet of the people. We have all read the pretty tales, recounting how the simplest of Italian folk were wont to please themselves as they labored, and, at the same time, to astonish ingenuous barbarians, by singing intelligently whole cantos of the Divine Comedy; but vainly shall we seek the names of these intellectual proletarians. Boccaccio would not risk an interpretation of Dante's masterpiece, before invoking, with the greatest humility, the assistance of the God of Light. Five centuries have passed since Boccaccio's famous and imperfect essay.

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