

# DANTE

AS A  
POLITICAL  
THINKER



A. P. d'ENTRÈVES

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BY

Passerin  
A. P. d'ENTRÈVES

Serena Professor of Italian Studies  
in the University of Oxford  
Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford

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rank of stuffed animals or cardboard monsters that can at best amuse the modern reader and make him smile. As far as Dante's political thought at any rate is concerned, I have no doubt that a knowledge of allegorical language is essential. I would in fact suggest that the first and preliminary task of the interpreter should be to sort out the allegories that are derived from the stock-in-trade of medieval political theory and can be traced in the *Commedia* and in Dante's other works as well. They should be distinguished from those in the poem that are entirely the creation of Dante and constitute the riddles to which I have just referred.

I shall endeavour to do justice to Dante in this way too, even though I have little or nothing original to contribute in a field which a number of better scholars than I have covered with painstaking accuracy. But in this connexion I must record my indebtedness to one very important contribution which has of late been made to the study of Dante's use of allegory—the distinction, that is, which Professor Gilson has recently drawn between the *deux familles de symboles* that are to be found in the *Divine Comedy*. There is no doubt in my mind that this distinction has immensely enhanced our appreciation of the wealth and variety of Dante's world of thought. To resort to Mr. Lewis's terminology again, it is both allegory and symbolism that Dante uses. He does not only invent *visibilia* to express his abstract conceptions. He also employs real historical characters to exemplify the truths he has mastered and the message he intends to convey.



of its historical significance. I am well aware of the objections that can be raised against an undue stress on the autobiographical side of Dante's views on politics; it would hardly be possible, in any case, to cover the whole development of Dante's personality and thought within the brief compass of three lectures. However, in the study of Dante as a political thinker, one idea has occurred to me as a guide in the treatment of my subject. Dante's interest in politics seems to me to be determined by three main factors or possible sources of inspiration: the City, the Empire, the Church. That inspiration, I would add, does not only correspond to the major problems which faced Dante in his day. It also explains and illustrates the different layers or themes, as it were, which it is possible without too much effort to trace in the development of his thought. I have accordingly chosen these three problems—*Civitas*, *Imperium*, *Ecclesia*—as the heading of these lectures: but I am anxious to make it quite clear that this is no cut-and-dried definition of the successive phases of Dante's political theory, nor would I like the division which I have outlined to be taken in a strictly chronological sense, whatever its bearing upon Dante's biography.<sup>1</sup>

Of the three layers or themes which I have mentioned there is one, at any rate, which cannot but appear, beyond any possibility of doubt, the oldest and the deepest. It is Dante's notion of the city-state or *civitas*, the corporate unit in which he was born and which provided not only what would be called nowadays his 'back-

<sup>1</sup> See note III.

ground', but also the stage on which he actively took part, during what was after all the longest span of his life, in the turmoil and ever-shifting fortunes of medieval politics. To suppose that Dante's political doctrine is summed up in the dream of the universal Empire, to describe his ideal merely as that of *il ghibellin fuggiasco*,<sup>1</sup> are errors of perspective of which we must try and rid ourselves if we want to determine the full range of his outlook on politics. Dante was and remained to the end—as every reader of the *Comedy* knows—a proud Florentine, a son of the greatest and proudest of medieval Italian cities. Born and bred in the bosom of a flourishing city-state ('nel quale nato e nutrito fui in fino al colmo de la vita mia' are his words in the first book of *Convivio*), Dante is first and foremost a citizen of Florence, and Florence is the root of his knowledge of and interest in politics. It is the name of Florence that we read inscribed on the front page of the poem: 'Incipit Comedia Dantis Alagherii Florentini natione non moribus'; the allegiance is there, notwithstanding the judgement. In the highest glory of Paradise, when he is nearing the goal of his journey and the fulfilment of his quest, it is still Florence that Dante has in his heart of hearts: the only place on earth where he could ever have proclaimed, in the words of another great poet: 'hier bin ich Mensch, hier darf ich's sein'.

Se mai continga che 'l poema sacro  
al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra,  
sì che m'ha fatto per più anni macro,

<sup>1</sup> Foscolo, *I Sepolcri*, l. 174.

philosophy remained essentially *civic*. Cosmopolitanism was forced upon him by the bitter lesson of exile. It was never anything more to him than an aspiration, a cloak to conceal his scars.

But we, to whom the world is our native country, just as the sea is to the fish, though we drank of Arno before our teeth appeared and though we love Florence so dearly that for the love we bore her we are wrongfully suffering exile—we rest the shoulders of our judgment on reason rather than on feeling. (*De Vulg. Eloq.* I. vi.)

If we want to know what Dante's real feelings were we have only to read the next sentence: 'As regards our own pleasure or sensuous comfort there exists no more agreeable place in the world than Florence.'

If then the municipal spirit pervades the whole of Dante's work, with only some few exceptions, it is no paradox that the idea of the city should provide the basic assumption of his reflections on politics. The word *città* is a keyword in the *Comedy*. There is not only the opposition between the City of the Damned and the Heavenly City. The word is used to denote the fundamental and 'typical' form of human association.<sup>1</sup> Retracing the growth and development of man, Marco Lombardo, in the sixteenth Canto of *Purgatorio*, indicates the setting up of *la vera città* as the primary imperative, even though of the true city men discern only the tower. In the eighth Canto of *Paradiso*, Carlo Martello asks Dante the direct question: '“Or dì: sarebbe il peggio / per l'uomo in terra, se non fosse cive?”'; and

<sup>1</sup> See, however, the remarks on p. 19, n. 1.



the answer comes back without a shadow of hesitation: ‘“sì” rispuos’ io; “e qui ragion non cheggio”.’<sup>1</sup> The great Cantos of Cacciaguida are a celebration of city life and of citizenship: it is Florence again, though the Florence of old, *dulcis memoria*. It is well to read these Cantos with the invectives of *Inferno*, xvi, of *Purgatorio*, vi and xxiii, in mind, to realize that Cacciaguida’s description is not only an idealization, but a lesson.

‘Fiorenza dentro da la cerchia antica . . . si stava in pace, sobria e pudica.’ The pattern of the ‘good city’ gradually unfolds before our eyes: one could almost take it for a complete political programme. The good city is limited in size: Florence was happy within the precincts of her old walls; would God that she had not expanded, and that she had preserved the ‘purity’ of her population. The good city is moderate in wealth: Florence of old was *sobria*; the sudden riches (‘la gente nova e i subiti guadagni’) were the cause of her degeneration. The good city is based on sound morals: *pudica*, like the virtuous women of old, so different from *le sfacciate donne fiorentine* of the present. Above all, the good city is based on concord and on the absence of internal strife: so was Florence before the rift between Guelf and Ghibelline, when the lily had not yet been stained with the blood of factions. Surely the good city is the only place for a man to live: fortunate the old Florentine who could be a good citizen as well as a good Christian!

<sup>1</sup> ‘Now tell me, would it be worse for man on earth if he were not a citizen?’ ‘Yes’, I replied, ‘and here I ask no proof.’

tributed to *digrossare* the Florentines and to teach them to guide and to rule their republic *secondo politica*—it is from him that the young poet may perhaps have learnt the first definition of the city as ‘uno raunamento di gente fatto per vivere a ragione’.<sup>1</sup> And it is very probably in the philosophical studies which he began after the death of Beatrice that Dante must have discovered—in the *scuole de li religiosi* and in the *disputazioni de li filosofanti* to which he refers in *Convivio*, II. xii—that notion of the positive value of the State which was to form the keystone of his political doctrine. One point, at any rate, can be made with almost absolute certainty: viz. that Dante’s views on the ultimate basis of the State and on the nature of politics are derived from the Thomist, and indeed from the Aristotelian teaching, and remained faithful to it down to the end. The *qui ragion non cheggio* of *Paradiso*, viii. 17, finds its explanation in *Convivio*, IV. iv, and in *Monarchia*, I. iii, the two basic passages in the whole of Dante’s theory of politics. To be a citizen is not only good, it is necessary: for man is by nature a political animal—*compagnevole animale*. It follows that man can find the ‘good life’ only in the State, and that the State is the end, and as it were the crown, of the true nature of man.<sup>2</sup>

Thus Dante’s experience of the Florentine background could be supplemented with the teaching of the most up-to-date political philosophy of his day: for that philosophy was comparatively new and was just

<sup>1</sup> *La ‘Rettorica’ italiana di Brunetto Latini*, ed. Maggini, 1915, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> See note IV.



beginning to be diffused through the lecture-rooms of medieval Europe. It was a philosophy of optimism, in harmony with the new optimism of the age; a philosophy admirably suited to enhance the confidence of men whose experience of the State had such strange similarities to that of the ancient Greeks, and one that was ever after to leave a lasting mark upon the political consciousness of the West. Did Dante derive his notion of the State directly from Aristotle's *Politics* or indirectly through the channel of Aquinas? The question is irrelevant to our purpose.<sup>1</sup> What is infinitely more important is to notice that Dante, like St. Thomas, has no use for the older and traditional view of the 'conventional' origin of the State, *poena et remedium peccati*. The establishment of law and order among men, with the setting up of authority, is not the outcome of dire necessity or of mere lust for power. It springs from the very root of human nature, whose end is *bene sufficienterque vivere*, the attainment of that 'vita felice, a la quale nullo per sè è sufficiente a venire senza l'aiutorio d'alcuno'.

This conviction Dante sets forth as a self-evident truth in his answer to Carlo Martello; but it must have been formed by the Poet at a very early stage of his reflections on politics, and this can be shown from two among the most interesting autobiographical passages in his later works, where in fact he is at pains to correct his earlier views on the subject. In the *Monarchia*, where the emphasis is no longer on the city but on the

<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 35-36.

*Monarchia* that in those references Dante had in mind an earlier stage of his reflection on politics, when he was not yet aware that the rational justification of the particular State could equally well apply to a supra-national authority. In other words, the Aristotelian argument, which fitted the city, stopped short of the Empire: the one was the outcome of nature and reason, the other merely of force. To provide a rational justification of the universal Monarchy was the task that Dante set himself in his later days, the enterprise 'maxime latens et ab omnibus intemptata' which he prided himself on having achieved. He did not think it required a similar enterprise to prove that life in the city is rational and natural, as is shown clearly enough by his answer to Carlo Martello.<sup>1</sup>

If then both the *Convivio* and the *Monarchia* bear witness to Dante's wholehearted allegiance to the Aristotelian and Thomist notion of the State, it must be noticed, however, that on one point their evidence seems to contradict the conclusions so far stressed, viz. that the city was and remained to Dante the fundamental and 'typical' form of human association. The reference is in fact not to the city alone; like St. Thomas, Dante in the *Convivio* (iv. iv. 3) and in the *Monarchia* (I. v. 8) breaks away at one juncture from the Aristotelian argument, or, to speak more exactly, both Dante and St. Thomas correct or extend that argument in one very important and substantial respect. The end of *bene sufficienterque vivere* is achieved not only in the *civitas*, but also in the

<sup>1</sup> See note V.

*regnum*. *Civitas et regnum* is Dante's version of πόλις. The difficulty is a serious, though not an unsurmountable one, at least from a theoretical angle. The extension of the Aristotelian notion of the State to square with the new and different types of political organization of contemporary Europe is a common feature of medieval political theory: the relevant point is that the essence of that notion, with its stress on the autonomy and autarky of the political unit, is fully grasped and maintained. Both cities and kingdoms are to Dante 'typical' forms of human association, 'States' in the Aristotelian sense. In the language of the *Commedia* the two expressions, *città* and *regno*, are used as equivalent even in a larger sense, to describe any kind of human fellowship and organization.<sup>1</sup>

However, in this particular context, Dante's mention of the *regnum* raises one further problem which has recently been the object of much discussion among students of Dante's political thought. It has been maintained, notably by the Italian historian Francesco Ercole, later supported by the great Dantist Michele Barbi, that Dante conceived of the whole of Italy as a *regnum*, in fact, as a 'true, autonomous and unitary State on its own'. Should this be so, it is clear that the *regnum Italicum* would constitute, as it were, a mediating element in Dante's theory and allegiance, between the emphasis laid on the city on one side and on the Empire on the other. At any rate the municipal element and

<sup>1</sup> Thus, for example, in *Inf.* i. 124-8; iii. 1; viii. 68-69; xxxiv. 28; *Purg.* i. 4; xiii. 94-95; *Par.* i. 23; xxxi. 25. In these cases, however, the words are clearly used only in a metaphorical sense, and *città* is certainly more reminiscent of the Augustinian *civitas* than of the Aristotelian πόλις.

Emperor's was now claimed by cities and kingdoms; it had been claimed by the King of France, as it was later to be claimed by the King of England. The Guelf cities of Italy were not behind the European courts in clamouring for the spoils of the Empire.

Whether or not the proud assertion had already been couched in the appropriate legal terms is less important than the fact that, in the vindication of state-sovereignty, Florence had been at once a forerunner and a champion. 'Nunquam Comune Florentie fidelitatem fecit alicui imperatori . . . quia semper vixit et fuit liberum.' 'The Commune of Florence has never given allegiance to any emperor: it has always been free.' The answer given by the Florentines to the Vicar of Rudolph of Habsburg in 1281 was a clear statement of policy. It is this policy which Dante himself upheld during his term of office as a Florentine magistrate. Now the liberty of the city was impugned from a different side. It was a Pope—and that Pope was Boniface—who attempted to curb the will of the Commune. He claimed the right to do so because of the vacancy of the Empire and in the name of his newfangled *plenitudo potestatis*. The quarrel in which Dante found himself so deeply involved may at first have been nothing more than one of those typical 'jurisdictional' quarrels which fill the records of medieval chanceries. It was soon to become a test-case not only for the loyalty of the Guelf city to the interests of the Papal Curia, but for the very principle of communal independence and sovereignty.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See note VII.



an impression probably dating back to the year of the Jubilee, with its crowds thronging the bridge at Castel Sant'Angelo (*Inf.* xviii. 28-33). The very stones of the Holy City had spoken to the heart of the Poet (*Conv.* iv. v. 20). The grandeur to which the ruins bore witness was further revealed by the reading of the Classics—by the reading of Virgil above all, 'lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore'.

I am greatly indebted to my friend Mr. Hardie for calling my attention to the gulf that separates the Virgil of the *Vita Nuova* from the Virgil of the *Comedy*. If Virgil was to Dante at first only an example of consummate and conscious poetic artistry, surely he appears in the end to have become to him much more than merely the 'symbol of reason'. It is the prophetic—I think Mr. Hardie would say almost the visionary—side of Virgil that must be kept in mind if we are to understand what he finally came to mean to Dante. Perhaps more than any 'Ghibelline' argument in favour of the Empire, the teaching of Virgil may account for Dante's discovery of the 'providential' mission of Rome and for that recantation of his earlier views on the subject which, as I have pointed out in my preceding lecture, marks a decisive step in the ripening of his theory of politics. If Dante had started from the 'Guelf' belief that the foundation of the Roman power was violence, it was Virgil who helped him to reach a different interpretation. It was Virgil, indeed, who bore witness to the historical necessity of that perfect monarchy which, by ensuring universal peace, had made the

If a lesson can be derived from Croce's gross overstatement of the case, it is that the interpretation of Dante's allegories should be considered as a means to an end, not as an end in itself. This view, if I am not mistaken, clearly inspires the two works to which I refer in the context, viz. C. S. Lewis's *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford, 1936) and Professor Gilson's *Dante et la Philosophie* (Paris, 1939).

### III

The importance of chronological data for the reconstruction of Dante's political thought was first emphasized by E. G. Parodi in an essay entitled 'La data della composizione e le teorie politiche dell' Inferno e del Purgatorio' (in the vol. *Poesia e storia nella Divina Commedia*, 1921). But the first carefully thought out attempt to evince the different phases of Dante's attitude to political problems is that of F. Ercole, 'Le tre fasi del pensiero politico di Dante' (in the vol. *Il pensiero politico di Dante*, ii, 1928).

According to Professor Ercole three phases are clearly distinguishable. The first corresponds to the fourth book of the *Convivio*, to the whole of the *Inferno* and to the first fifteen Cantos of the *Purgatorio*. Dante at this stage is an imperialist, but in a traditional and still orthodox sense. He hopes for the restoration of imperial authority (the prophecy of the *Veltro*), but he has no clear notion of its real implications, and has not yet reached a full conception of the complete independence of the Empire from the Church. The second phase in Dante's political thought is represented, in Ercole's view, by Cantos xvi-xxxi of the *Purgatorio* and by the three political Epistles. They reflect the immense expectations aroused in the Poet's mind by Henry VII's Italian expedition. The third phase is that of the bitter disillusionment caused by the treachery of the Papacy and the failure of the *restauratio imperii*. It comprises Cantos xxxii-xxxiii of the *Purgatorio*, the whole of the *Paradiso*, the *Monarchia*, and the Epistle to the Cardinals. Dante at this stage has completely revised his attitude to politics: not only the Empire but the Church must be restored and purified if the world is to be saved from utter disruption.

Ercole's reconstruction was subjected to close scrutiny and stringent criticism by Professor Nardi ('Tre pretese fasi del pensiero

politico di Dante', in *Saggi di filosofia dantesca*, 1930). Nardi himself accepts Ercole's view that Dante's political ideas altered considerably, and should be studied in the process of their development. But he suggests a different interpretation and grouping, based on a careful sifting of evidence both external and internal. My own indebtedness to Nardi will, I trust, appear clearly enough from these lectures.

### IV

The question of Dante's Thomism has often been raised and discussed. There are two studies of the subject in English: Liddon, 'Dante and Aquinas,' in *Essays and Addresses*, 1901, and Wicksteed, *Dante and Aquinas*, 1913; see also Vossler, *Medieval Culture. An Introduction to Dante and his Times*, vol. i (1929), sect. ii, 'The Philosophical Background'. It was due, however, to no less a scholar than Professor Gilson that the myth of Dante's unwavering reliance on St. Thomas for his philosophy was exploded. I am referring to his work *Dante et la Philosophie*, which I have already mentioned; but see also Nardi, 'Dante e la filosofia', and 'Il Tomismo di Dante', &c., in the vol. *Nel mondo di Dante*, 1944.

The question has a special importance for Dante's political thought. Once again, the merit of having defined the main terms of the problem goes to F. Ercole. In his two essays 'Per la genesi del pensiero politico di Dante' (1. La base aristotelico-tomistica e la idea della 'umana civiltà'; 2. La base cristiano-patristica e la idea dell' Impero universale: the essays are included in vol. ii of *Il pensiero politico di Dante*) Professor Ercole maintained a sharp division between two different currents of thought which are traceable in Dante's conception of politics: the one, the Aristotelian and Thomist, is used by Dante to justify the *civitas* and the *regnum*; the other, more properly Christian, is used to justify the Empire. According to Ercole, Dante fully accepted the notion which St. Thomas derived from Aristotle, that political organization is natural and rational. But he subjected it to one important qualification. To show the insufficiency of the 'particular State' and to prove the necessity and the providential character of the universal Monarchy, he returned to the notion of the 'sinful origin' of the



State, to the notion, that is, that political authority originated as *remedium peccati*.

This ingenious theory was challenged by a number of Dante scholars. Parodi ('Del concetto dell' Impero in Dante', &c., in *Bullettino della Società Dantesca Italiana*, Nuova Serie, vol. xxv), Nardi ('Il concetto dell' Impero nello svolgimento del pensiero Dantesco', in *Saggi di filosofia dantesca*), Solari ('Il pensiero politico di Dante,' in *Rivista Storica Italiana*, 1923), all pointed out that Ercole's interpretation, though shedding much light on the possible derivations of Dante's political thought, unduly simplified a complex pattern into an almost mechanical combination of different, and indeed opposite, themes.

Personally, I believe that there is much truth in the contrast which Ercole outlines between the two main sources of Dante's inspiration. I think, however, that their interplay can be adequately understood and appraised only by distinguishing the several problems which in turn focus the attention of the Poet. No overall formula can be found to cover the whole of Dante's political philosophy. It is the result of a gradual evolution and growth.

## V

On the 'sinful origin' of political authority and of the 'State' in general the words of Gregory VII's *Letter to the Bishop of Metz* (A.D. 1081) are often instanced: 'Who does not know that kings and leaders are sprung from men who were ignorant of God, who by pride, robbery, perfidy, murders—in a word, by almost every crime at the prompting of the devil, who is the prince of this world—have striven with blind cupidity and intolerable presumption to dominate over their equals, that is, over mankind?' (quoted from H. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, p. 147, Oxford, 1946). A very similar view is re-echoed, among Dante's contemporaries, by Aegidius Romanus, one of the most forceful supporters of Boniface VIII. In his *De Ecclesiastica Potestate*, lib. I, cap. 5, he states that civil power, unless it is set up *per sacerdotium*, is 'magis . . . latrocinium quam potestas'. 'Nam in lege nature, ubi fuerunt regna gentilium, omnia quasi huiusmodi regna per invasionem et usurpacionem habita sunt.'

The 'Guelf' doctrine that the Roman people conquered the world 'non aliter quam per armorum fortitudinem solam, et sic de facto potius quam de iure' is clearly set forth by the thirteenth-century South-Italian jurist Marino da Caramanico (quoted by Calasso, *I Glossatori e la teoria della sovranità*, 1945, p. 118). It was largely used by French and Italian writers alike, and it proved a valuable argument at the time of the quarrel between King Robert of Naples and Henry VII. See on this point the excellent article by Ullmann, 'The development of the medieval Idea of Sovereignty', in *The English Historical Review*, 1949.

## VI

Ercole's theory of the *regnum italicum* in Dante was set forth in a number of articles now collected in vol. i of *Il pensiero politico di Dante* (see esp. I, 'L'unità politica della nazione italiana e l'Impero nel pensiero di Dante'). That theory was widely discussed at the time, and on the whole not very favourably received by Dante scholars. A close and, to my mind, final criticism of it can be found in Sumner, 'Dante and the "Regnum Italicum"' (in *Medium Aevum*, vol. i, 1932). On the Italian side a balanced assessment of the theory is that of Solmi, 'L'Italia nel pensiero politico di Dante', in the vol. *Il pensiero politico di Dante*, 1922; and, more recently, that of F. Battaglia, *Impero, Chiesa e Stati particolari nel pensiero di Dante*, 1944.

It is certainly remarkable that Michele Barbi, in his review of the literature on Dante's political thought to which I have referred in note I, should have lent the weight of his great authority to Ercole's theory. He does not, however, implement his view with any critical discussion of the several historical and legal arguments which were adduced against that theory. Students of medieval political thought will find it difficult—*inter alia*—to accept Barbi's remarks on the real meaning of Henry VII's coronation in Milan, as assessed by Solmi: 'queste sono precise nozioni che può posseder, oggi, dopo tante ricerche, un dotto giurista com'è il Solmi. Nel Trecento si sapeva, della storia di certi istituti, meno assai di quanto se ne sappia ai nostri giorni, e si consideravano le cose più alla buona.'



As Sumner has pointed out, Ercole's identification of the unity of Italian nationality with the political organization of the *regnum italicum* relies mainly on two passages. One of them occurs in *Ep.* v. 6, 19, and I have quoted it on pp. 37-38, above. The other passage—from *De Vulg. Eloq.* i. xviii. 5—is the subject of my essay on the *gratiosum lumen rationis*.

## VII

On the origins and growth of 'State-sovereignty' in the later Middle Ages, Gierke's analysis—in his *Political Theories of the Middle Age*, trsl. by Maitland, Cambridge, 1900-22—remains unsurpassed. A brilliant survey of the manifold aspects of the question is in G. de Lagarde, *La naissance de l'esprit laïque au déclin du Moyen Âge*. I. *Bilan du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1934); and, more specifically for the Italian side, in Ercole, 'Impero e Papato nel diritto pubblico italiano del Rinascimento' (in the vol. *Dal Comune al Principato*, 1929). Among more recent works, those by Calasso and by Ullmann, cited in note V, are particularly valuable.

The draft of the Florentine protest against the demand of an oath of fealty to Rudolph of Habsburg can be read in Kern, *Acta Imperii, Angliae et Franciae, ab A. 1267 ad A. 1312* (Tübingen, 1911), p. 12, no. 21 a. The words I have quoted should be compared to the answer given to the summons of Henry VII, as quoted by Compagni (*Cron. Fior.*, iii): 'fu loro risposto per parte della Signoria da messer Betto Brunelleschi, che mai per niuno signore i Fiorentini inchinarono le corna.'

For the legal or 'jurisdictional' side of the quarrel between Boniface VIII and the Signoria I have followed Ruffini, 'Dante e il protervo decretalista innominato' (in the vol. *Scritti Giuridici Minori*, ii. 1936). The documents concerning Dante can be found in the *Codice Diplomatico Dantesco*, ed. by Piattoli, 1940.

## VIII

Dante's acquaintance with the law is an object of much controversy. The little book by Mr. Williams James, *Dante as a Jurist* (1906), may provide English readers with a useful guide to the study of the question.