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THE 'BATTIFOLLE' LETTERS SOMETIMES ATTRIBUTED TO DANTE.

IT will be within the knowledge of all students of Dante that about twenty-four or thirty years ago there broke out a kind of epidemic of scepticism in regard to his works, and also (as we might add) to the authorship of many of the Books of the New Testament. It became a kind of fashion¹ to raise ingenious critical objections which often represented merely subjective impressions of the writer dogmatically propounded. These being often as incapable of formal refutation as of formal proof, were claimed by their authors to be unanswered and therefore unanswerable. It is quite notorious that the tide has turned in the field of theological criticism, but of that we have nothing more to say now. It has also turned very remarkably in respect of the works of Dante. It is not surprising that such negative criticisms as those of Dr Prompt now only provoke a smile, when we find him boldly enumerating not only the *Quaestio* and the Epistles, but even the *De Monarchia* among 'Les œuvres apocryphes de Dante,' and describing the author of the last named work as 'the personage who composed this barbarous and abominable book.' So again a certain Canonico Moreni is quoted as rejecting, in addition to all the works above mentioned, also the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, as 'stuff (roba) written in a barbarous style, and including words not even found in Ducange'! It is difficult now to imagine how such criticisms could ever have been taken seriously. They are scornfully, but aptly, described by Novati as 'incredulità aprioristica, e scetticismo elevato a sistema.'

But in regard to the genuineness of the Epistles there are some special considerations to be borne in mind and admitted. It must not be forgotten that the external evidence for the minor works of an author of distant date, especially those of a local, personal or ephemeral interest, such as his letters, is liable to be slender, and often can scarcely be otherwise. Thus the field is left open for the display of

¹ It has been well characterized by a recent writer as 'quell' andazzo di una ventina di anni fa.'

literary and critical ingenuity on grounds of internal evidence. It is a very cheap and easy exercise. It is scarcely possible to imagine any process of argumentation more perilous and untrustworthy, unless it be the much abused 'argumentum e silentio,' which is indeed but one familiar form of it. At the period to which I am referring, the defence of all but three of the Epistles commonly ascribed to Dante was very generally abandoned. This wholesale 'slaughter of the innocents' was confidently insisted on as altogether necessary by (among others) Bartoli and Scartazzini. A reservation was indeed generally made in favour of Epistles VI, VII, and VIII, on the ground that they were attested by Villani. But even here Scartazzini saw a possible way of escape by suggesting that the mention by Villani may have itself prompted the ingenuity of a forger to compose those which have come down to us, the original letters known to Villani, together with others that he mentions, having probably been lost!

The total number of letters attributed at one time or another to Dante is fourteen. One of these, written in Italian, and professing to be addressed to Guido da Polenta, is still, I believe, universally rejected. But there would probably be no strong protest raised now against admitting as many as ten to be at least within the possibility, not to say probability, of genuineness. In some cases there is indeed little or no evidence beyond a vague prevalent tradition; yet on the other hand positive adverse evidence on internal grounds is in no case strong enough to justify the unqualified rejection of any of them.

We may be content to admit them at any rate as *ἀντιλεγόμενα*, remembering that that term when applied to several Books of the New Testament did not involve their exclusion from the Canon.

There remain then the three so-called 'Battifolle' letters, which have generally been rejected unhesitatingly. But when we find so distinguished a Dante scholar as Prof. Novati demanding a reconsideration of the question, we can scarcely regard it as finally closed. It should also be noticed that the probable genuineness of these letters was vigorously maintained by Corrado Ricci in his elaborate work *L' Ultimo Rifugio di Dante*, published as long ago as 1891 (pp. 17, 18). I have lately found that earlier still, in 1882, Scheffer-Boichorst expressed a very strong opinion in favour of the Dantesque authorship of these letters, 'ich muss mich durchaus für Dantes Autorschaft erklären.' He even goes so far as to say 'sowohl *Sprache* wie *Gedanken* lassen mir keinen Zweifel¹.'

¹ *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, vi (1882), p. 645.

At the same time they have been so almost universally rejected by editors of Dante's works that they are rather difficult of access. They have been very rarely printed: only so far as I know by Torri in 1842 (a work now out of print and very difficult to obtain), and by Giuliani in 1882. We have now, however, the advantage of a critical text published by Dr Toynbee, but this is at present only to be found in *The Modern Language Review* for January 1912¹. But it appears necessary to reprint the Letters here, since the discussion which follows would be quite unintelligible to any readers without the actual text before them. The following is Dr Toynbee's critical text, with the orthography of the MS. modernized, and punctuation supplied, as is usual in the printed editions of Dante's Epistles and other Latin works.

LETTER I.

Gloriosissimae atque clementissimae dominae, dominae .M., divina providentia Romanorum Reginae et semper Augustae, .G. de Battifolle Dei et adiuvalis magnificentiae gratia Comitissa in Tuscia Palatina tam debitae quam devotae subiectionis officium ante pedes.

- Gratissima regiae benignitatis epistola et meis oculis visa laetanter et manibus fuit assumpta reverenter ut decuit. Cumque significata per illam mentis aciem penetrando dulcescerent, adeo spiritus lectitantis fervore devotionis incaluit, ut numquam possint superare obliviam, nec memoria sine gaudio
- 5 memorare. Nam quanta vel qualis ego? Ad enarrandum mihi de sospitate consortis et sua (utinam diuturna) conjunx fortissima Caesaris condescendat? Quippe tanti pondus honoris neque² merita gratulantis neque dignitas postulabat. Sed nec etiam inclinari humanorum in graduum dedecuit apicem, unde
- 10 Dignas itaque persolvere grates non opis est hominis, verum ab homine alienum esse non reor pro insufficientiae supplemento Deum exorare quandoque. Nunc ideo regni siderii justis precibus atque piis aula pulsetur, et impetret supplicantis affectus quatenus mundi gubernator aeternus condescensui tanto praemia coequata retribuat, et ad auspitia Caesaris et Augustae dexteram
- 15 gratiae coadiutricis extendat, ut qui Romani Principatus imperio barbaras nationes et cives in mortalium tutamenta subegit, delirantis aevi familiam sub triumphis et gloria sui Henrici reformet in melius.

LETTER 2.

Serenissimae atque piissimae dominae, dominae .M., coelestis miserationis intuitu Romanorum Reginae et semper Augustae devotissima sua .G. de Battifolle Dei et Imperii gratia largiente Comitissa in Tuscia Palatina flexis humiliter genibus reverentiae debitum exhibere.

- Regalis epistolae documenta gratuita ea quae potui veneratione recepi, intellexi devote. Sed cum de prosperitate successuum vestri felicissimi cursus familiariter intimata concepi, quanto libens animus concipientis arriserit, placet potius commendare silentio tamquam nuntio meliori: non enim verba
- 5 significando sufficiunt ubi mens ipsa quasi debria superatur. Itaque suppleat regiae celsitudinis apprehensio quae scribentis humilitas explicare non potest. At quamvis insinuata per literas ineffabiliter grata fuerint et iucunda, spes amplior tamen et laetandi causas accumulatur, et simul vota iusta confectat.

¹ *Modern Language Review*, VII, pp. 19-24.² MS. *atque*.

- Spero equidem, de coelesti provisione confidens, quam numquam falli vel
 10 praepediri posse non dubito, et quae humanae civilitati de principe singulari
 providit, quod exordia vestri regni felicia semper in melius prosperata
 procedent. Sic igitur in praesentibus et futuris exultans de Augustae clementia
 sine ulla haesitatione recurro, et suppliciter tempestiva depono, quatenus me
 15 sinistationis ab aestu sim semper et videar esse secura.

LETTER 3.

Illustrissimae atque piissimae dominae, dominae Margaritae, divina provi-
 dentia Romanorum Reginae et semper Augustae fidelissima sua .G. de Battifolle
 Dei et imperialis indulgentiae gratia Comitissa in Tuscia Palatina cum promp-
 tissima recommendatione se ipsam et voluntarium ad obsequia famulatum.

- Cum pagina vestrae serenitatis apparuit ante scribentis et gratulantis
 aspectum, experta est mea pura fidelitas quam in dominorum successibus tam¹
 subditorum fidelium collaentur. Nam per ea quae continebantur in ipsa, cum
 5 Augustae feliciter adimplebat. Proinde gradum meae fidelitatis experta petentis
 audeo iam inire officium. Ergo ad audientiam vestrae sublimitatis exorans et
 suppliciter precor et devote depono quatenus mentis oculis intueri dignemini
 praelibatae interdum fidei puritatem. Verum quia nonnulla regalia clausura-
 rum videbatur hortari ut, si quando nuntiorum facultas adesset, celsitudini regiae
 10 aliquid peroptando de status mei conditione referrem, quamvis quaedam
 praesumptionis facies interdicat obedientiae, tamen suadente virtute obediam.
 Audiatur ex quo iubet Romanorum pia et serena maiestas quoniam tempore
 missionis presentium coniunx praedilectus et ego, Dei dono, vigeamus in-
 columbes, liberorum sospitate gaudentes, tanto solito laetiores quanto signa
 15 resurgentis imperii meliora iam saecula promittebant.
- Missum de castro Poppii xv. Kalendas Iunias faustissimi cursus Henrici
 Caesaris ad Italiam anno primo.

The problem of these three 'Battifolle' letters is quite different from that of the others. The evidence for them is extremely slender. It really amounts only to this, that they are found in a single MS. (Vat. Palat., 1729), which contains six of the commonly received Epistles of Dante, in the midst of which, not after or before them, these three 'Battifolle' Letters are found embedded. The MS. is a fairly early one, dated 1394, and so just within the limits of the fourteenth century, and only about seventy years after Dante's death². The nine Epistles or Letters occur in the MS. in the following order: (1) Epist. VII (to Henry VII); (2) Epist. VI ('Scelestissimis Florentinis intrinsecus'); (3) (4) (5) the three Battifolle Letters; then the four Epistles usually numbered II, III,

¹ There is evidently some corruption here. It looks as if a short-sighted copyist, mistaking the meaning of *quam*, thought to emphasize the antithesis of *dominorum* and *subditorum* by inserting *tam*. Somehow the subject of *collaentur* seems to have dropped out. *Pectora, corda* and *animi* have been suggested *e conj.*, but none of them seem to have any relation to *tā*.

² The whole contents of the MS. are as follows (auct. Witte, *de Monarchia*, p. lviii). See also *Dante-Forschungen* I, p. 474):

- (1) Twelve Eclogues of Petrarck.
- (2) *De Monarchia*.
- (3) Nine Epistles attributed to Dante.

i and v, in this order. Now observe (a) the three Letters in question are introduced without note or comment, but from the position they occupy, and the company in which they occur, the copyist evidently had no doubt they were to be attributed to Dante. (b) There is nothing in any of the letters to suggest any connexion with Dante as their author, or any relation to anything in his life or history. (c) Further than this, the writer of the letters distinctly professes to be some one else. They are written in the name of the Countess Gherardesca di Battifolle, not Catarina, as printed by Giuliani, since the initial letter, which alone is found in the MS., is clearly a G. (There were two Counts Guido di Battifolle, the wife of one was Gherardesca, and the wife of the other Catarina¹.) The letters are addressed to Margherita di Brabante, the wife of the Emperor Henry VII.

All this makes the insertion of these letters in the MS., without note or comment, in the middle of six others indubitably presented as written by Dante, very surprising. How came this about in the teeth of such very strong *prima facie* evidence to the contrary presented by the letters themselves? It seems only accountable on the supposition of the existence of a strong backing of tradition, though we have no other trace of this. Indeed, the greater and more obvious the *prima facie* difficulties, such as we have already pointed out, the stronger is the case for the existence of such a tradition to overbear them. Its existence must be presupposed as has been that of an unknown and invisible planet to account for some otherwise unexplained action of other visible bodies. This consideration at least contributes something to reinforce the scanty evidence otherwise adducible for these Letters. For, after all, *any* tradition, however weak, is an asset to be reckoned with, as far as it goes. It is not to be summarily dismissed as worthless without some reason appearing against it beyond its weakness. It at least holds the field till it is overthrown. Tradition is not itself a zero, or still less a minus quantity, as would seem to be assumed by the practice of some critics, which has been thus characterised by Bishop Creighton:—‘We have been taught (he says) by a long series of sceptical inquiries to take almost for granted that if according to an ancient tradition a famous event happened in some particular spot, it must really have happened somewhere else; unless, indeed, it never happened at all.’

The problem presented by these letters then is a very peculiar one, and indeed unique in another way. There is no question of deliberate forgery, for they do not claim or pretend to be written by Dante. The

¹ Ricci, *Ultimo Rifugio*, p. 17.

circumstances under which they were written by him (if at all) are thus explained. In the spring of 1311 Dante was in Tuscany, following with eager anxiety the progress of Henry VII in Italy. That, at any rate, is certain. Also, more definitely, that he was in the Casentino is proved by the colophons to his Epistles VI and VII, both of which are stated to have been written 'sub fonte Sarni' in March and April of that year. That he was there definitely as a guest of a branch of the Battifolle family, is also assigned to tradition by some writers¹. But I have not been able to trace the existence of such a tradition independently of these letters. His probable hostess, the Countess Gherardesca di Battifolle, having the privilege of writing on friendly terms concerning her family affairs to the Empress, naturally desired that her communications with so exalted a personage should be couched in the most respectful and formally correct terms. She is thought therefore to have availed herself of the help of her distinguished guest in the composition of these letters. Some writers have sneered at the idea of Dante acting as 'secretary' to this lady, as though it were altogether *infra dignitatem* for so great a man; as if he were to be imagined as a sort of Hercules spinning wool for Omphale. But to him the task of writing these letters would be no piece of literary drudgery, but rather a congenial work, as bringing him into some kind of relation with the great Emperor, for whom his adoration was so profound, that, as we know, he addresses him in language that we can scarcely conceive to have been applied to any merely human being without profanity (see Epp. v, VI, VII). We may also be allowed to suppose that the good Countess would not be so familiar with Latin composition (which was naturally to be employed in a letter to such high quarters) as to be indifferent to such a unique opportunity of getting the work executed in the best possible style. We remember how in the *Vita Nuova*, § 25, ll. 45 seqq., Dante attributes the habit of writing love poetry in the Volgare instead of Latin—a practice (he adds) not yet a hundred and fifty years old—to the consideration that the language had to be intelligible 'a donna, alla quale era malagevole ad intendere i versi Latini.' Besides it was not only a question of writing in Latin, but also in the courtly language and style required in addressing royalty. There would probably be, in the quaint language of Bishop Latimer, 'a plentiful lack' of any such 'ready writers' in the recesses of the Casentino. For in the language of Dante:

Non era impresa da pigliare a gabbo.

¹ E.g., Witte, *Dante-Forschungen*, I, p. 487.

The question now arises whether there is anything in the internal evidence of the letters themselves either favourable or adverse to the tradition of their Dantesque authorship.

It is obvious to remark at once that if these letters were composed in the manner and under the conditions already described, we cannot expect much help from internal evidence either favourable or adverse. Let us take first the considerations commonly urged as adverse.

In regard to general objections such as these, viz. (a) that there is nothing to connect these letters as they stand with Dante in any way whatever; and (b) further, that they definitely profess to be written by some one else, we may point out that the former objection would apply precisely to the three Epistles numbered I, II and III; and indeed both would apply to Epistle I, which is addressed to the Cardinal Nicholas of Ostia in the names of Alexander, the 'Captain,' and the Council and general body of the party of the Bianchi at Florence.

But more definitely it is urged:

(1) That the style is pompous and fulsome and the expressions of the writer almost grovelling in their humility. But in regard to this and all similar objections it is obvious to reply that Dante here is not supposed to be speaking for himself, but writing 'to order,' and expressing 'by desire' the feelings and sentiments of another. Further that he is bound (as we said) to adopt the conventional and artificial language of a courtly document. But it is not uninteresting to observe that the same criticism has been urged with a view to the rejection of Epistle x. There Dante is confessedly speaking in his own name and describing his own feelings towards his patron Can Grande. Now Can Grande with all his greatness, and however highly Dante estimated both his public services and his private friendship, stood on a much lower level than the Emperor and his Court. Yet there is not much to choose between the humble language of these letters and that of the first four sections (the dedicatory portion) of Epistle x. Courtly language is as artificial and conventional as that of literary dedications, so that we might take refuge, if necessary, in the defence made by Dr Johnson of the recognised style of dedications—'Sir, the known style of a dedication is flattery, it professes to flatter.'

(2) It is objected that the occasion and contents of the letter are altogether trivial and commonplace and unworthy of the pen of Dante. The same answer as before might suffice for this too, but as the objection has also been urged with more force against others of the Epistles purporting to be written by Dante, and in his own name (notably

No. III, that addressed to Moroello Malaspina) one may say a few more words about it.

There must be large tracts of commonplace in the most exalted lives in all the paths and positions of life, even for the greatest names in politics, religion, literature. Sydney Smith once made the calculation of the months or years occupied in any life of about seventy years in sleeping, dressing, eating, walking, gossiping, and even, as he added, in his own case, shaving. It is curious to find this argument from triviality or commonplace in details urged in early Christian ages (and noted, though of course not accepted, by St Jerome) against the admission to the Canon of the second and third Epistles of St John and the Epistle to Philemon. Also some passages in the Pastoral Epistles were subjected to a similar censure; such as 'Prepare for me a lodging'—'Bring the cloak which I left at Troas'—or again, 'Use a little wine for thy stomach's sake,' etc. Nor, in the last mentioned instance, is the difficulty removed, perhaps it is even increased, if the teetotal lecturer's exegesis be accepted, that the word 'use' implies that it was to be limited to 'external application only'! We may readily then grant that even in his own ordinary correspondence and familiar intercourse with friends Dante could not be expected (or desired) to have maintained the *Divina Commedia* level of style, or what we might perhaps call the 'Ercles' vein.' Indeed the context of that expression contemplates the possibility of even the lion 'roaring like a sucking dove.'

Still (3) it is somewhat absurdly asked, why or how should such trivialities have been preserved? The obvious answer is, By pure and blind chance. We are all familiar with the survival of scraps of what we call utter rubbish among our possessions, just as we know only too well the capricious freaks of our memory both in 'what it takes away, and what it leaves behind.' We know too how some of 'the treasures of Egypt' consist of *δοσπρακα*, whose interest both for their writers and recipients was so transient that they were deliberately thrown away. Yet after 2000 years and more they have an interest which has no relation to their intrinsic value at any time.

There is unhappily no 'Natural Selection' or 'Survival of the Fittest' to be looked for in regard to the letters of Dante. There was never any attempt at collecting or editing, much less at selecting from, his correspondence, which on the authority of his biographers was somewhat copious. Boccaccio states that several of his letters were still extant, and Lionardo Bruni, who died in 1444 (as much as fifty years

later than the date of this MS.), says he had seen several autograph letters of Dante and he describes minutely the character of his handwriting. It is quite likely that, among so many, some of little value or interest should have chanced to survive. It must be confessed that in some modern biographies of great men letters are published, even after the power of selection has been, or may be supposed to have been, exercised, where a similar estimate of the value of their contents might incline the enlightened critics of future generations to dispute their genuineness.

The contents of the MS. in which these letters are found appear to be the nearest approach to a 'collection' of Dante's correspondence extant. The copyist seems to have had access to a packet or bundle of letters attributed to Dante, for there are gathered here as many as nine. No other MS. existing has more than three, viz. one in the Laurentian Library (marked xxix, 8) which contains those numbered iv, viii, and ix, none of them corresponding with any in this Vatican MS. or indeed in any other existing MS. There is happily a prospect of this Laurentian MS. being published in a photographic facsimile very shortly, but only in fifty copies. It has been proved to be in the handwriting of Boccaccio, and the reproduction now promised is in honour of the sixth centenary of his birth, which occurred in the year 1913.

To return now to the question of internal evidence. Here again we cannot expect much help if we seek for positive traces of Dante's style, though I think we may confidently say that it yields no adverse evidence of any relevancy. The 'native hue' of Dante's writing is disguised by the admittedly conventional style (as we have noted already) of complimentary and official Court language, the adoption of which was almost as much *de rigueur* as the technicalities in the composition of a legal document. We can scarcely imagine even a Ruskin betraying the characteristic richness of his style in drafting a lease or a legal bond. But there are some small touches even here in which we may perhaps detect echoes of Dante's language, just as even in a purposely disguised handwriting some peculiarities of the writer often betray themselves. And at any rate there are, I think, at least three arguments of a somewhat substantial character: (1) from the titles of the three Letters; (2) from the colophon of the third Letter; (3) from a clear reminiscence of a passage of Virgil in the first Letter.

I would first notice that for some unexplained, and to me unintelligible, reason Torri (who is followed by Giuliani) alters the order of

the Epistles as found in the MS., the only MS., it will be remembered, in which they have been preserved. Instead of the MS. order 1, 2, 3, they are printed in the order 3, 1, 2. They have been given above (pp. 175, 176) in the order in which they occur in the MS.

(1) It should be observed that in the case of all the Epistles of Dante the titles are of two kinds. First, those which are in the language of the author of the Epistle itself, and secondly those which are obviously prefixed by the scribe. The former have an authority equal to that of the letter to which they are attached: the latter have none, any more than the subscriptions to some of the Epistles of St Paul.

The titles to the three letters before us belong to the former class, and so also do those which introduce the following among the Epistles as usually printed:—Nos. I, IV, V, VI, VII, and X. But Nos. II and III clearly belong to the latter. Epistle VII is preserved in three MSS¹, of which two have the author's title, and the third, viz. this Palatine MS., only a scribe's title. Now let us refer to the title of the first Letter. It ends with the words '*officium ante pedes*,' without any verb. The omission of a main verb in such epistolary formulae is extremely common. (It occurs for instance in the three Pastoral Epistles in the New Testament.) We find such an omission in all the titles of the three Letters now before us. So it is again in the title of Epistle IV of the Oxford Dante, and in fact also in that of Epistle VII, when the reading of the two MSS. in which that Epistle occurs is restored, as it should be, viz. '*osculum ante pedes*,' instead of the arbitrary alteration of editors, '*osculantur ante pedes*.' But further, with this corrected reading, we have a very close parallel to the title of this first Battifolle Letter. In Epistle VII we have '*osculum ante pedes*,' in this Letter '*officium ante pedes*.' Reasons may easily be suggested for the variation '*officium*' in this very humble and dutiful address of the Countess. Also *osculum* in the other case corresponds with ll. 42, 43 in the body of that Epistle.

(2) Next as to the colophon attached to the last of these three letters.

We have already referred to the colophons of Epistles VI and VII as evidence of the presence of Dante in the Casentino at this date. They are dated March 31 and April 17 respectively*. Now the third of the

¹ Viz. 'Vat. Palat. 1729,' Rome; 'Pantaleo,' Bibl. Vitt. Em., Rome; 'Marciana, Cl. Lat. xiv Cod. 115,' Venice.

² In the case of Ep. vii this MS. (Palat.) has no colophon. Codd. Ven. and Pant. have distinctly xv (and not xiv) for the day of month, and there is no numerical date for the year, which would be clearly superfluous. (Frat. and Giul. have such a date, and

Battifolle Letters is dated May 18. So not only do these three dates very closely correspond, but it is remarkable that the date of the *year* is given in precisely the same terms in all these three cases, viz.: 'faustissimi cursus Henrici Caesaris (or divi Henrici) ad Italiam anno primo.' We may note that 'felicissimus cursus' occurs also in the body of Letter II *sub init.* Indeed the similarity of the terms of the colophon is the only direct correspondence in these Battifolle Letters with a recognised Dantesque formula. Now if the question of forgery were at issue, such a marked correspondence would clearly be liable to a suspicion, which cannot be held to attach to it when the motive for any such imitation is entirely absent. But if Dante were composing a letter in set terms on behalf of, and in the name of, his hostess the Countess, it does seem quite natural that he should suggest, instead of the prosaic date, the formula which he had adopted in two other letters written in the previous few weeks by himself. It was expressed in terms relating to the stirring events by which his own mind and that of his hostess were entirely obsessed, and which are conspicuous in the subject-matter of the letter itself. It was a formula that would appeal both to the sender and receiver of the letter as being most appropriate. The date is given as though it had relation to a new Anno Domini, starting from the Advent of him whom Dante elsewhere, with questionable reverence, greets as a new Messiah. The date was the inauguration of 'meliora saecula,' as we read in the last words of the letter. We are reminded how with similar hopes the French Revolutionists in 1793 began to date their years from the inauguration of the new régime. Now this identical formula for the date could not possibly have occurred to any other writer, unless to one who was consciously endeavouring to imitate or personate Dante, of which there is no trace or motive here discernible.

(3) Another passage of even greater weight—since there can be no possible suggestion here of any deliberate copying of a definite formula existing elsewhere—is found in the first of these letters (ll. 10—14). Indeed I may say that it was the occurrence of this passage that first made me suspect that these letters might perhaps after all be genuinely attributed to Dante. After describing in flattering terms the honour done and the extreme condescension shewn by the Empress to the writer in her friendly communications, she proceeds:—'*Dignas itaque persolvere grates non opis est hominis; verum ab homine alienum esse* also 'xiv' as *supra*. Witte, who omits the date of the year, reads 'xi.') I have already noticed that in *this* MS. Ep. vii has only a scribe's title, so that the regular title and colophon are for some reason both absent from this MS. in the case of Ep. vii.

non reor, pro insufficientiae supplemento, Deum exorare.....quatenus mundi gubernator aeternus condescensui tanto praemia coaequata retribuat.' Who can fail to recognize here the familiar Virgilian passage in *Aen.* I, 600—605:

Grates persolvere dignas
Non opis est nostrae, Dido, nec quidquid ubique est
Gentis Dardaniae, magnum quae sparsa per orbem.
Di tibi, si qua pios respectant numina, si quid
Usquam iustitia est, et mens sibi conscia recti,
Praemia digna ferant.

Now we can scarcely imagine that such a classical allusion should have occurred spontaneously to the Countess. On the other hand, we do know that this passage was very familiar to Dante, for it is quoted, or distinctly recalled by him in at least two, and I think we may say three, places in his works. They are these:

Ep. I, ii, ll. 39—44: Quis vobis dignas grates persolvere attentabit? Nec opis est nostrae, pater, nec quicquid Florentinae gentis reperitur in terris: sed si qua coelo est pietas quae talia remunerando prospiciat, illa vobis praemia digna ferat.

This is quite a complete and explicit quotation slightly adapted.

Then again *Par.* iv, 121—123:

Non è l' affezion mia tanto profonda
Che basti a render voi grazia per grazia;
Ma quei che vede e puote a ciò risponda.

Naturally here the verbatim reproduction is less precise, but in both cases the twofold divisions of the original passage are clearly marked: (1) the inadequacy of the speaker's expression of gratitude; (2) the pious wish that a Higher Power would supply that deficiency.

But besides these two passages we may notice yet a third in which the expression 'praemia digna' occurs, viz. in Epistle II, l. 8, where Dante says of the lately defunct Alexander Count of Romena, 'super astra nunc affluenter *dignis praemiis* muneratur [*or remuneratur*].'

Returning to the passage in this first Battifolle Letter, the indirect reminiscence of the Virgilian passage seems to me even more significant than a formal quotation. The writer's mind was so familiar with the words that his own thoughts tended spontaneously to express themselves in its terms. And this, as we have shewn by other references, would certainly be characteristic of Dante. We may also perhaps note that the other most explicit reproduction of the passage occurs in that Epistle I, which, just like the present letters, has been traditionally ascribed to Dante though written in the name of others. Thus there can be no suspicion in either case of the quotation possibly serving the purpose of a forger.

Next there are several words or expressions which seem to me to have a Dantesque flavour, but I hesitate to lay too much stress upon them as I am not sufficiently familiar with the style of contemporary Latin writing to know whether they are at all distinctive. But if not distinctive, they are at least such as would be natural to Dante, as appears from their occurrence in the other writings attributed to him.

These at any rate are some that have struck me.

(1) In the third of these letters (l. 8) there is a word the meaning of which I at first rendered quite wrongly, and indeed the Italian translation by Torri does the same, viz. 'praelibatae.' We observe that at the beginning of the letter the absolute sincerity of the writer's devotion to the Empress is insisted upon; and in the middle of the letter the subject is reintroduced with the words 'praelibatae fidei puritatem.' I did not at first realize that 'praelibatae' here means simply 'afore-mentioned,' or 'before touched upon.' Dante so uses it in Epistle VIII, 63: 'Quod si de *praelibato* precipitio dubitatur'—'If there is any doubt as to the above-mentioned overthrow.' The word occurs again in this sense in *V. E.* I, iv, 49, 'contra superius praelibata'—'contrary to what has been indicated above': and again, in *V. E.* II, viii, 9, 'si bene comminiscimur omnia praelibata.' I observe that Ducange gives 'supradictum' as one meaning of 'praelibatum,' with an example from some formal document, but there is nothing to shew whether it was a common usage in ordinary writing. Dante at any rate so uses it three times elsewhere.

(2) Then again the word 'Augusta' for the 'Empress' occurring in all these three letters. This may not perhaps be uncommon, I do not know. At any rate Dante applies it to the Virgin, as the 'Regina Coeli' in *Par.* xxxii, 119:

Per esser propinquissimi ad Augusta.

Also 'Augustus' is applied to Henry four times in Dante's Epistles. Note especially v, l. 27: 'Henricus, Divus et Augustus et Caesar.' So here in the third of these letters we have 'Vota Caesaris et Augustae.'

(3) The expression 'mentis oculis' (Letter 3, l. 7) occurs twice again in the Epistles ascribed to Dante, viz. v, 163 and II, 30. It is also found in *Mon.* II, i, 17. So that it occurs at any rate three times elsewhere in his reputed works, and we may also add, as similar, *Conv.* II, v, 117, 'soverchia gli occhi della mente umana,' and *Par.* x, 121,

Or se tu l'occhio della mente trani.

The expression perhaps may hardly be considered distinctive, but at any rate it is thoroughly Dantesque.

(4) Next, at the end of Letter 1, we read 'delirantis aevi familiam sub triumphis et gloria sui Henrici reformat in melius.' Compare with this the description of Henry as 'delirantis Hesperiae domitorem' in Epistle vi, l. 87.

(5) There is a curious expression in the third letter (l. 8) where the writer, referring to the royal letter already received, says 'nonnulla regalium clausurarum videbatur hortari.' With this we may compare Epistle ix, l. 25, 'literae discretius et consultius clausulae.'

(6) We may perhaps notice 'quanta vel qualis ego' in the first of these letters, l. 5: for a similar combination is found in *Par.* ii, 65; xxiii, 92; xxx, 120, in the Italian, and in Epistle i, l. 7, and Epistle x, l. 585, in the Latin works.

(7) At the end of the third Letter we have the words 'signa resurgentis imperii meliora jam saecula promittebant.' Compare with this Epistle vii, l. 20, 'nova spes Latio saeculi melioris effulsit.'

(8) Again we may note the phrase 'humanae civilitati' in the second letter (l. 10), and compare *Mon.* i, ii, 50, 'finis universalis civilitatis humani generis'; and again in the following Chapter, l. 3, 'finis totius humanae civilitatis.' Further not only the phrase but also the sentiment expressed in this passage of the letter resembles *Conv.* iv, 4 *init.*—'Lo fondamento radicale della Imperiale Maestà...è la necessità della umana civiltà.'

(9) The passage last quoted (from Letter 2, l. 10) contains apparently a somewhat strange use of the preposition *de* with 'providere': 'humanae civilitati de principe...providit.' We may compare *V. E.* i, 2, l. 35, 'Animalibus...de locutione non oportuit provideri.' In the previous sentence (l. 9) we have another rather singular combination: 'de coelesti provisione confidens.' The same construction is found in *V. E.* ii, 4, l. 78, 'de solo ingenio confidentes'; and in *Mon.* i, i, ll. 36, 37, 'non tam de propria virtute confidens quam de lumine Largitoris illius.' Possibly we might also note *Mon.* iii, 3, 57, 'de illarum praevalentia...sperantes.'

(10) The use of the word *insinuare* which we find in Letter 2 (l. 7) in the sense of to 'set forth' or 'communicate' = *ἐμφανίζειν* (as Ducange says), may possibly be too common in medieval Latin to lay much stress upon, but at any rate Dante thus employs the word no less than three times in Epistle x, viz. ll. 538, 548, 577¹.

¹ See note on this word in *Studies in Dante*, iii, p. 886.

(11) The same consideration may perhaps have to be applied when *quatenus* is used in the sense of *ut*, as it is in each one of these letters, viz. in 1, l. 13; in 2, l. 13; and in 3, l. 7. Anyhow Dante so uses it elsewhere at least three times, viz. Epistle I, l. 63; II, l. 38; and *De Mon.* I, i, 6.

(12) Then in ll. 4, 5 of Letter 2 we have some thoroughly Dantesque thoughts, viz. (a) the inadequacy of language to express thought; and (b) that this is because sometimes the mind is so elevated as to be, as it were, 'inebriated' by the strain put upon it.

For (a), see *Par.* xxxiii, 54, 'il mio veder fu maggio che il parlar nostro,' and Epistle x, l. 575, 'multa per intellectum videmus quibus signa vocalia desunt.' Add also *Canz.* II, 1—18, prefixed to *Conv.* Tratt. III ('Amor che nella mente,' etc.); and the commentary on this in Chapter IV, ll. 16—22; especially l. 38, 'la cortezza del nostro parlare, lo quale dal pensiero è vinto.' The thought is too familiar to need further references; but a remarkably close parallel to the words (Letter 2, l. 4) 'placet potius commendare silentio tanquam nuntio meliori' may be found in *Conv.* IV, v, ll. 140 *seqq.* in the apostrophe to Cato: 'Chi presumerà di te parlare? Certo maggiormente parlare di te non si può *che tacere.*' Then Dante goes on to quote St Jerome's language about St Paul, of whom he declares 'che meglio è tacere che poco dire.'

(b) As to the metaphor of an 'inebriated' mind (which Dante probably borrowed from the Vulgate in *Ps.* xxxv, 9), comp. *Conv.* III, viii, 133, 'quivi s' inebria l' anima.' Add also *Inf.* xxix, 2, and *Par.* xxvii, 3. Also *ib.* l. 5:

Mia ebbrezza
Entrava per udire e per lo viso.

(13) Note further the expression 'de principe singulari' in Letter 2, l. 10 for a Universal Monarch, and compare this with the title to Epistle VII, 'Domino singulari, domino Henrico.'

(14) Lastly, we might perhaps notice the phrase 'Romanus Principatus' in Letter I, l. 15. Compare 'sacratissimi Caesaris Principatus... Vicarius' in the title to Epistle x. 'Principatus' is common in the *De Mon.*, and the actual expression 'Romanus Principatus' occurs there twice. Also Dante appears to use the word 'Principatus' in a sense oscillating between the concrete and abstract, Prince and Principedom, Emperor and Empire. Sometimes too we find the abstract term when the concrete would seem more natural, as distinctly in *Purg.* x, 74, 'l' alta gloria Del roman principato' (i.e. Trajan). Here, as might be

expected, the inferior and slightly supported variants 'Principe' and 'Prince' are both found as *lectiones faciliores*. There seems to me to be a curious parallel to this in Cowley's *Discourse concerning the Government of Oliver Cromwell*, where the 'strange and terrible apparition' visiting him is made to announce himself thus: 'I am called the North-West Principality, his Highness the Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland and the dominions belonging thereunto.' Ducange does not mention any such use of 'Romanus Principatus' for the Emperor or Empire, nor is the expression apparently to be found in Classical Latin, though 'principatus alicujus' (e.g. Neronis) for *the reign of* is natural enough. The only recognition of the word by Ducange is as the title of one of the orders of Angels. We might perhaps, I think, infer from this that the title 'Romanus Principatus' for the Emperor or Empire was not in ordinary use.

We may now perhaps sum up the arguments so far offered from internal evidence under four heads:

1. The language of the titles to the three letters.
2. That of the colophon to the third letter.
3. The distinct Virgilian reference in the first letter.
4. The correspondence of words, expressions and thoughts with those occurring in other works of Dante, or such as are generally attributed to him.

Many of these last parallels, taken separately, may seem weak and inconclusive, but we can scarcely ignore the cumulative force derived from the occurrence of so many similarities of expression within such narrow limits; especially if we take into account that both the subject-matter of the letters and the conventional character of the composition, tend to throw some disguise over the writer's ordinary style. Some of them, it is true, may very likely be nothing more than 'terms of speech commonly used in those days.' But at least they are such as are found elsewhere in Dante, and therefore are quite consistent with his traditional authorship. On the other hand, there is I believe nothing that can be pointed out as inconsistent with it, either in language or in sentiment.

The same may be said of the regular observance of the rules of the *Cursus*. For whether the letters are genuine or not, this is nothing more than was to be expected at that time. It is not a discriminating test, though the disregard of such rules would have formed a serious objection.

It must be regretfully admitted that the letters, even if genuine, have scarcely any intrinsic value or interest. They throw no light on Dante's history or character. But it is absolutely futile (as Novati protests) to argue '*indegna di Dante e quindi apocrifa*.' Their main interest is that which attaches to any personal relic (if such they be) of so great a man. And we know that some other relics are very highly prized by those who are assured of their genuineness, for which no intrinsic value can be claimed, or any scientific interest.

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